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Illustration: Jack Sherman

The Outsider

GENET: A BIOGRAPHY
Edmund White
Knopf, 736 pages, \$35.

Lynne Diamond-Nigh

In Jean Genet's *Miracle of the Rose*, the narrator says:

But the life I lead requires that same abandonment of earthly things demanded by the saints of the church and all churches. Then this sanctity opens, it forces open a door which leads to the marvellous. Indeed sanctity can be recognized again in this way: it leads to Heaven by the path of sin.

As a transparent persona of the author, the narrator reveals here the very essence of the life that Jean Genet created for himself, one built on paradox and the subversion of common sense, culminating in an opening onto a transcendent world "completely outside daily reality, which is given in the religious world this strange name: the *sacred*."

It seems misplaced to speak of the sacred in conjunction with a name commonly associated with a host of vices: thievery, betrayal, obscenity, callousness, even cruelty, and for some (including himself), homosexuality. But the pedigree is long and distinguished, particularly in French literary history: Villon, Sade, the *poètes maudits* Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, Gérard de Nerval, the Uruguayan Lautréamont, Céline, Pauline Réage, and that theoretician of the sacred and cruel quoted above, Georges Bataille. What they have in common is the changing of polarities, the voiding of the content of evil and its metamorphosis into not merely the good, but the sublime, aesthetically and morally; thus for Genet, the Trinity becomes treason, theft, and homosexuality.

Genet's biographer, Edmund White, guides us in staggering detail through a life defined by constant change

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The Outsider

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and flux, a willed process of becoming, whose tragedy is that this process never culminates in a *being*. The work teems with people and events, chaotically accumulating and then disappearing from the reader's awareness, leaving one somewhat dazed and disoriented—the only “fault” I was able to find with a work which compellingly transcends traditional biography. Upon further reflection I realized that what I first considered to be a flaw was not that at all, but simply the book's method, mirroring the variety, intensity, and yet sometimes ephemeral quality of the world Genet experienced; the most heartrending example of this is the suicide of one of his most passionate and loyal lovers of whom Genet had simply grown tired, psychologically abandoning him.

While some reviewers place Genet's homosexuality at the center of his world, I would rather suggest that what he saw as the basic illegitimacy of his existence does more than his sexuality to explain a life which, in the end, must remain unexplained; that, and the necessity, either willed or not, of continual personal creation/metamorphosis. Like that of a medieval knight in a romance, Genet's life is a quest, for he is a creature with no origin, no gender, and no fixed identity. But in this romance there is no happy ending, for he denies the very idea of expiation and sin, of redemption and integration; more than just reversing polarities, he subverts the very idea—in the established orders at least—of opposition. And so it is not at all strange that late in his life, during the time which I will later describe as the third metamorphosis, he links up with peoples who too lay claim to legitimacy, who are in the process of forming an identity, consolidating a self and a nation, either literally or figuratively: Palestinians without a homeland, America's Black Panthers, the Baader-Meinhof gang.

Jean Genet was born in 1910 to an unwed mother who abandoned him before he reached his first birthday. He was placed in a foster home, where he was apparently quite well treated, and attended school, where he distinguished himself. Nonetheless, as a ward of the state, he believed himself to be an object of suspicion in his village; this was at the root of his sociologically classic transformation: if he was perceived as a criminal, he would become one. At the age of ten he began to commit small thefts. When he reached thirteen his legal status changed, he became a “domestic servant” and was taken out of school. Because he had done so well there he was sent away to apprentice as a typographer, but ran away after 10 days. Thus began a pattern of thievery and escape which was to continue throughout his life. In 1926, he was sent to the children's prison, Mettray (a utopian agricultural penitentiary which had been degraded to the starkest brutality), where he experienced the power

struggles, dialectic of domination and submission, sexuality as economics (Genet was “sold” several times during his stay at Mettray), feudal sensibility, overt and sometimes (com)passionless homosexuality, and liberation of the transformative powers of his imagination which came to characterize both his life and his production. It was from this experience that Genet developed his belief that only the aesthetic had any moral claim. As White notes, for Genet, Mettray

embodies the violence not of the prison administrators but of the boys themselves. Cruelty and violence are the poetic expression of the youngsters' affirmation of Evil and rebellion.... At every point Genet speaks as a poet and bases his defense of Mettray on an aesthetic appreciation of evil and crime.

Genet also credits Mettray with his becoming a writer, not only because there he read some of France's great writers, but also because

if to write means that you feel emotions or feelings so strong that your whole life is shaped by them, if they're so strong that only by describing them or evoking or analyzing them can you understand them—if so, then it was at Mettray that I started, when I was fifteen—it was then that I started to write.

This indeed was an astonishing statement for someone whose first serious literary undertaking took place at the age of 30.

Genet managed to leave Mettray by way of the army, from which he would eventually be dishonorably discharged. The following were years of vagrancy, vagabondage, and prostitution. He travelled extensively, through Europe and the Middle East, beginning a lifelong association with Arabs, but eventually returned to Paris, where his thievery took on a more intellectual tinge. He stole literature, history, and philosophy books from stores and kiosks along the Seine, but, as he later told a judge, he returned them to bookstores so that others could nourish themselves as he had. It was through one of these booksellers that Genet met Jean Cocteau, his “discoverer,” who, in 1949, along with Sartre, Beauvoir, Claudel, Colette, Picasso, and other well-known intellectuals, signed a petition imploring the President of the Republic to grant Genet a pardon.

During the next seven years, beginning with Cocteau's realization of the importance of “The Man Condemned to Death” and *Our Lady of the Flowers*, Jean Genet stopped being the outsider and became the darling of the French literary establishment. He wrote five novels, several plays including *The Maids*, and his entire poetic *œuvre*. But without the status of “outsider,” Genet's imaginative powers decayed and died, leading to a period of literary silence which last-

ed six years, punctuated but not broken by the desperate crisis precipitated by the publication of Jean-Paul Sartre's monumental introduction to volume one of Genet's complete works, *Saint Genet*, where Sartre depicts Genet as having undergone three spiritual conversions: from criminal, to aesthete, to writer. (Sartre also viewed Genet's homosexuality as being chosen, which Genet violently disputed.)

Genet's second avatar began in 1955 and lasted until the 1968 May riots in Paris. This incarnation was fueled perhaps by an epiphany he had experienced in 1953, during the time of silence:

Then one day in a train compartment while looking at the traveller seated across from me I had the revelation that every man is worth every other.... What I experienced I could only translate in these terms: I was flowing out of my body and through my eyes into the traveller's at the same time he was flowing into mine.”

And later:

Thus each person no longer appeared before me in his total, absolute and magnificent individuality, but rather as a fragmentary appearance of one sole being, which only sickened me all the more.... I was sincere when I spoke of a search starting from this revelation “That every man is every other man and I as much as the others”....

This revelation opened the door to the politicization of a man who had cultivated the myth of the outsider, leading to a series of overtly political plays which won immense critical acclaim as well as notoriety: three of these, *The Balcony*, *The Blacks*, and *The Screens*, continue to be considered masterpieces. In these works Genet translates the concerns played out on the personal level in his novels into the public sphere. During this time, he also frequently visits the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, who was, he said, the only man he had ever admired, and about whom he writes one of his most famous essays, “The Studio of Alberto Giacometti.” Also at this time, Genet has one of the most important love relationships of his life with the circus acrobat Abdallah Bentaga, a man who kills himself in 1964 over Genet's desertion. Reacting to the suicide, Genet announces that he is renouncing literature forever, and is plunged again into a desperate depressive crisis which culminates in a 1967 suicide attempt.

Genet's third metamorphosis is not as radical as the first two and is actually a logical outgrowth of the second: he transforms himself from a committed writer to a political activist, using language only as an expository tool to further his causes. His first political tract, in support of the leader of the

see The Outsider, page 16

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Contributors:

Gunilla Feigenbaum, Chris Furst, Nick Gillespie,

Janice Levy, OSIP, Mark Shechner,

Jeff Schwaner, Michael Serino

Art:

Milly Acharya, Mary Hood,
Joanna Sheldon, Jack Sherman, Susan Titus

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Hello Dali, Part 2

A Ride on a Unicorn

Gunilla Feigenbaum

[Continued from the February issue.]

I modeled for Dali almost every day. Sometimes I posed, but just as often the occasion turned out to be social. His odd, labyrinth-like house in Port Lligat enjoyed a stream of guests. A movie, starring Melina Mercouri and James Mason, was being shot in Cadaques, and the actors, the director, and the screenwriter all came. In the presence of luminaries, the often indifferent Gala would transform herself into a gracious hostess—Dali, on the other hand, always remained the same, giving his performance as vivaciously to an audience of one as he did to a full house. Visitors were usually invited during the day, and we'd sit in lounge chairs in the garden, drinking copious amounts of pink champagne, all the more potent in the heat of the sun. Olive trees provided a dappled shade and the air carried a distinct fragrance from Gala's herb plants which rimmed the terraces. Sitting on an immense carved stone throne, cooling himself with a huge Japanese fan, Dali would give his discourses about himself. Often the only sounds you heard were those of the small waves on the beach below, the birds in the trees, and Dali's voice, interspersed with appreciative laughter from his audience.

While guests arrived from Paris, Rome, and New York, there were a few permanent fixtures. Bill, the young American Gala and Dali had brought with them from New York, graced most social occasion with his vacant stare. Dali said he and Gala were fixing up a permanent room for him in the house. For awhile, Gala had a constant companion, a lugubrious young Russian named Dimitri. He was supposed to be a poet and, when he was present, he didn't leave Gala's side. He had black hair, eyes obscured by immense eyebrows, and a face that looked like it had been gently flattened by a rolling pin. He never smiled. He always carried a pack of Tarot cards which he and Gala frequently consulted.

Some visitors were promised, but never materialized. One was a French lesbian Dali said was the most beautiful woman in the world; no one—man or woman—failed to fall in love with her. One day a woman from Paris came, and for some reason I thought it was the famous lesbian. All through lunch I couldn't take my eyes off her. To my knowledge, I had never seen a lesbian before. She was pretty, but not astonishingly so, which was a bit disappointing. She talked about her husband—a quaint way, I thought, of referring to her probably more masculine lover. I worried that I too would fall in love with her. After watching her carefully, I found no stirring in my heart and I was relieved (I had already started to wonder how I was going to present her to my parents), but by this time she was staring

at me. I thought to my horror that she had fallen in love with me, and I'd have to break her heart by rejecting her. The whole lunch took on an almost operatic quality of passion and pain, all played out in my mind.

After she left, I told Dali that indeed she was pretty and charming but, even so, I hadn't fallen in love. He was completely uncomprehending. This woman, it turned out, was a French book editor married to a rich architect. I spent a sleepless night in agonized embarrassment, wondering how this woman had interpreted my scrutiny of her.

Another person I couldn't wait to meet was an attractive Italian woman who, Dali claimed, had agreed to have her nose replaced by her ear for two months. He had found a French surgeon who would perform the operation. She didn't show up either.

I never met any Spaniards at the house. It surprised me; after all, Dali had grown up in the area, he must have known many of the local townspeople since childhood, and it was curious that not one of the friendships had survived. His family lived in Figueres, not far away. I asked Dali about them and he replied that Gala was his mother and his father.

Of course, Cadaques was Catalan and Catalonia was steeped in traditions. When I lived on Formentera—which back then was very isolated, accessible only by a small boat from Ibiza—women still wore the ancient costume of long, black pleated skirts and short black jackets. For Sunday Mass, they all braided their hair and tied brightly colored ribbons at the end. I once saw an old woman penitent painfully crawling to church on her hands and knees; a black figure stirring up a cloud of yellow dust in the gravel on the hot, sunny square before the white-washed church steps, the red bow at the end of her long, grey braid like a trickle of blood on her back. It's hard to imagine that Dali's antics would win any admiration among such people.

Cadaques was certainly more modern, but still, Dali's excesses were clearly not locally appreciated. Etherington-Smith writes that Gala, when they first started to live in Port Lligat, used to walk around bare-breasted, clad only in boy's shorts. The religious Catalans must have been offended.

There was an absurd picnic on the beach one day, attended by me and Lorna, the 19-year-old daughter of the screenwriter for the movie that was being shot, both of us in bikinis, admired by Dali, who wore a heavily embroidered western shirt and a wig, and made configurations around us—and on us—with stones, shells, driftwood, and garbage found in the sand. Bill lay like a dead fish in the shadow of a rock, sleeping the entire time, and Gala, oblivious to the rest of us, in silk and jewelry, carefully strolled on the sharp rocks, aided with conspicuous tenderness by a profusely sweating Dimitri, uncomfortable in

his heavy black poet's garb. (Whenever Dali, Gala, Dimitri, Bill and I did anything together, there was an odd symmetry: Dali ignored Dimitri, Gala ignored me, Dimitri and I ignored each other, and Bill ignored everybody.)

Some fishermen sat at the end of the beach, mending nets. Dali told me they were old friends of his. He greeted them enthusiastically, calling out in Catalan. They barely nodded in response, continued their net mending, talking in low voices to each other and occasionally glancing at our group. It was obviously a slight. Dali pretended not to notice.

It probably wasn't just Dali's and Gala's exhibitionism that offended. Cadaques—along with the rest of Spain—had suffered during the civil war, while Dali had been gallivanting in Paris and New York. Furthermore, he was a supporter of Franco and opposed the independence from Spain that Catalonia was hoping for.

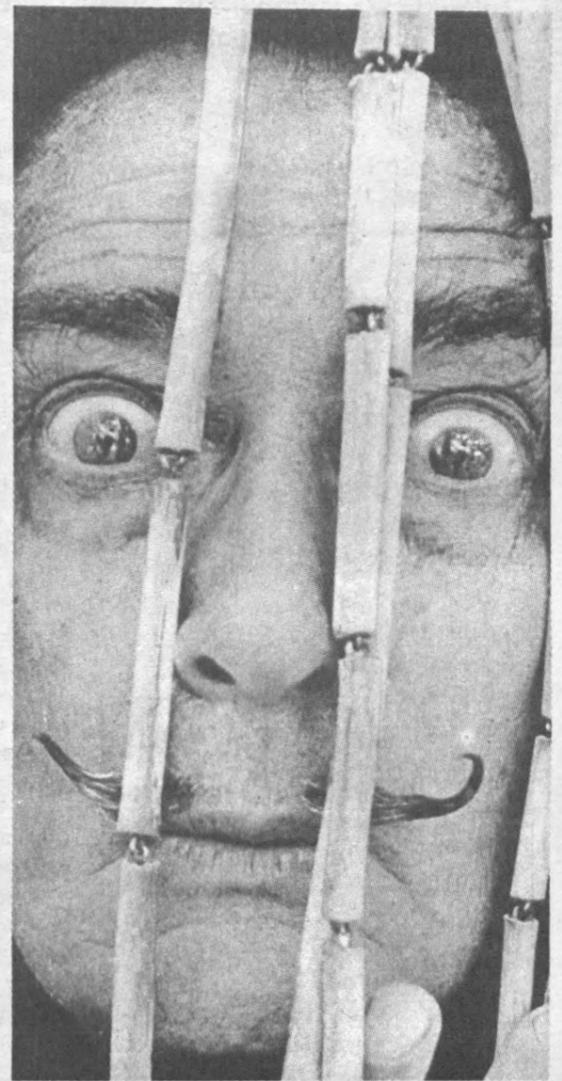
As for religion, while Dali claimed to be a fervent Catholic, his was a different brand of religion from the rest of the Christian world.

He once drew me as a Christ.

"In zee communion," he said, "you eat zee Christ. Who wants to eat zee Christ that looks like zee old chicken? I, Dali, make one Christ looks very edible!"

He had me lie on the floor naked, arms outstretched for a crucifixion. While he drew me, he told me an anecdote.

There was a church in New York, he said, that had an interesting gilded fish on the altar. Some years ago, he continued, he had purchased a toy fish in New York for a woman friend. The fish had a mechanically wiggling tail and his friend, an avid masturbator, found the fish to be her perfect pleasure device. After only a few weeks, she'd worn out the fish and asked Dali to get her another one. Not only that, she had told all her friends, and they all wanted fishes too. The word of the wondrous fish spread far and wide—all the 5th Avenue matrons were masturbating with the fish, as were women from Paris to Buenos Aires. The toy manufacturer, who was a devout Catholic, had been close to bankruptcy before the rush on his fishes, but now he was pulling in a fortune. As a thanks to God, who'd listened to his prayers, he had the fish cast in gold and donated it to his church, which gratefully accepted it, since one of the symbols for Jesus is a fish. His friend who'd received the first fish, said Dali, attended the



Photograph: Les Waldman

same church and she'd been thrilled to see it on the altar.

Etherington-Smith reports that in the '50s Dali was actually granted an audience with the pope. I can't imagine what he discussed with His Holiness—certainly not his notions of Christian imagery.

Over time, Gala warmed up a bit to me. For her birthday, I fretted over a present and finally settled on a small pillow made of antique brocade. She seemed pleased and thanked me. The next day when I was posing (after breaking the now customary piece of pottery), Dali said that she was more than pleased—she was deeply moved. He said that, as a small girl in Russia, she used to ride around in a troika, wrapped up in furs and resting against pillows like the one I'd given her, so it reminded her of her happy childhood. He went on to say that it was also a very good present because she couldn't eat it. Once, he explained, someone had given Gala a pet monkey. The monkey was wild and bit everybody, but Gala didn't want to get rid of it since it had been a gift. Consequently, she had the monkey killed and cooked into a stew which she ate, thus

see *A Ride on a Unicorn*, page 17

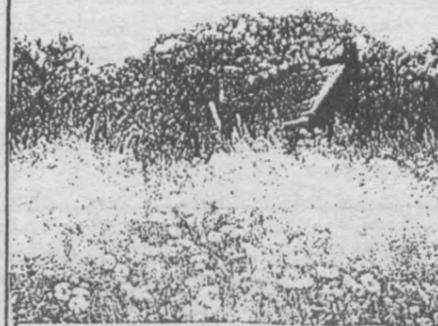
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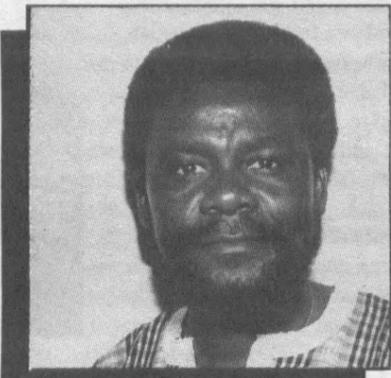
**Dan Schwarz,**

Professor of English at Cornell, will speak about his new book *Narrative and Representation in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. In his book, Schwarz shows that Stevens' poetry needs to be understood in terms of a number of major contexts: the American tradition of Emerson and Whitman, the Romantic movement, and the modernist tradition.

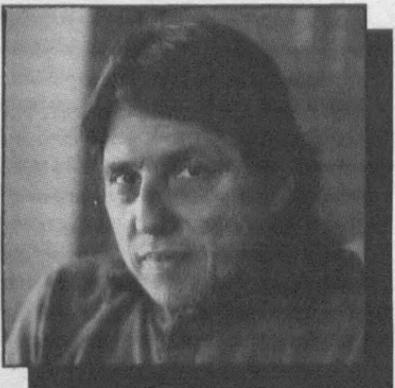
March 13

Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo

will give a talk entitled "Why Should Africa Be Politically Redefined?" drawn from his new book *POLITICAL REMAPPING OF AFRICA: A Transnational Ideology and Redefinition of Africa in World Politics*. Lumumba-Kasongo is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Wells College and a Visiting Scholar in the Department of City and Regional Planning and Government at Cornell.



March 20

**José Barreiro**

will talk about and read from his recently published historical novel entitled *The Indian Chronicles*. This novel recounts the Indians' discovery of the ways of the Europeans as seen by Christopher Columbus' adopted Indian son. Barreiro is the editor-in-chief of *Akwe:kon*, a Native American press and journal at Cornell University.

March 27

Zillah Eisenstein,

professor of politics at Ithaca College, will give a talk drawn from her new book *The Color of Gender: Reimagining Democracy*. Beginning where she left off in her award-winning book *The Female Body and the Law*, Eisenstein travels from the thicket of recent abortion decisions to the histrionics of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings, seeking to redirect our thinking about democracy away from universal conceptions that mask racial and gender oppression to the specific realities of women and people of color.

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Department of Dead Souls

WEINSTOCK AMONG THE DYING

Michael Blumenthal
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Mark Shechner

Taking potshots at social institutions has become a major national sport, and anyone with a grievance to unload is queued up at the firing line to squeeze off a few rounds, as though life had nothing more delectable to offer than ammo. The culture of complaint is in high gear, and you can hardly pass a book stand, watch TV, or see a motion picture without coming face to face with an exposé of the police, the medical and legal professions, the American corporation, or the film industry. Only the library and the nursing profession seem to have been spared, and what do you bet that someone is fixing to blow the whistle on them, too?

No institution, however, has been so consistently ripped as the American university, for the simple reason that so many writers earn their keep in the halls of ivy and are confronted daily by all the folly and vanity coiled in among the vines. The academy is especially vulnerable to satire, because its hypocrisy is hard-wired in. Masquerading to the world as a refuge of immutable verities beyond the tug of fashion, the university is no less volatile than the women's apparel industry.

Academic novels, then, are perpetually on tap, and skewering the professoriate is always good for a laugh, if not a whole career, as the anti-feminist feminist Camille Paglia has lately demonstrated. And you can hardly pick a better object for your satire than Harvard University, as Michael Blumenthal does in his novel, *Weinstock Among the Dying*—for if the academy is a ship of fools, then Harvard qualifies as the Queen Mary. The book sports some of the broadest satire I've ever read of academic existence—Blumenthal would never stoop to calling it "life"—and is as fizzy with one-liners as a George Carlin HBO special.

According to Michael Blumenthal, or rather his stand-in, Creative Writing instructor Martin Weinstock, Harvard is the University of Death. Among friends, he calls it Thanatos U., and quips, upon receiving the death announcement of a colleague, "Why, after you've been at *this* place for thirty-seven years, death is a mere formality." On the subject of his colleagues:

It wasn't merely the fact of being surrounded by the dead, the dying and those who aspired to those conditions that began to depress and confuse [me] upon arriving at Harvard. It was also the fact that they were, for the most part, so hard to tell from the pasty, expressionless faces of the living.

The early pages of *Weinstock Among the Dying* ripple with savage epigrams, like the description of Weinstock's predecessor, the rueful novelist and Pirandello scholar Morton Gammon, who is "like six depressive characters in search of a smile." Elsewhere, "People in Cambridge don't have friends—they have appointments." Of the endowed chairs at Harvard: "I haven't seen so many goddamned chairs since the Salvation Army came to a building demolition in Detroit in 1967." Blumenthal even has fun at Weinstock's expense, quoting from a review of his poetry by one Professor Harold Blumberg, the "Charles Emery Eagan Visiting Professor of Deconstructionist Countertextualism": "The rhythmic equivalent of the mountains of Holland."

Were it only this, *Weinstock Among the Dying* would be no more than a satire on an easy target, a university famed for wearing its dignity like a shroud. Blumenthal is trawling for a bigger fish, however, the mor-

bid imagination itself, which his hero turns out to share in common with the academy. As the spotlight turns back upon Martin Weinstock, we discover him to be a sex-obsessed, parent-haunted, over-analyzed depressive.

Little wonder: he has grown up in a strange household, the adopted son of Heinz and Bettina Weinstock, Jewish refugees from Germany. He calls them Mother and Father, though they are actually his aunt and uncle, who acquired him in a trade with Bettina Weinstock's brother and sister-in-law, Berthold and Meta Loeb, who needed money to buy a chicken farm in New Jersey. It was a straight cash deal, he notes, "carried out as cleanly as the trade of my boyhood hero, Duke Snider, from the Dodgers to the Mets—I, too, exchanged 'uniforms,' and Berthold and Meta Loeb, my natural parents, because my aunt and uncle . . . and Heinz and Bettina Weinstock became my father and mother."

Death is the steady topic of household conversation, a presence in the home, in fact, like another member of the family. "In my family, we had the shiva stools out so often, visitors thought they were the regular furniture." But death is more than just the family's version of small talk; it is a visitor, and Martin is hit hard by his mother's (that is Bettina Weinstock's) death when he is ten, and is haunted ever after by the memory of her body: "her eyes, glazed as if they were coated with shellac, were wide open, staring up at me."

Later, her body taken away, his father takes her pink nightgown from her drawer, kisses it, and holds it to the 10-year-old Martin's lips, whispering in German: "Gib unser Mama einen letzten Kuss"—give our mother a final kiss. As an adult, Martin confesses, he can't look into a woman's eyes in kissing: "I didn't want to gaze into a living woman's eyes ever again and see that pink nightgown rising toward my lips."

Such a fellow will have needs: 1) a lot of blank paper for his poetry; 2) a psychoanalyst, and 3) a bevy of women, all of whom are supposed to play the role of lost mother, for Martin has lost two: Meta Loeb by trade and Bettina Weinstock by death. Martin works his ways through the ranks of the professoriate and the students: Deirdre MacAllister, whom he woos and weds and abandons; Alexis Baruch, who submits in the library stacks at closing time; Rae Beth Shintow, who leaves Cambridge to become a punk rock star; Laura Bromwich, a visiting Petrarch scholar; Anne Bristol, who takes him on a tour of an anatomy lab and winds up pinned to the floor; and Beatrice, who never gets a last name but gets Martin.

Like all academic novels, *Weinstock Among the Dying* is talky. Academics have a lot to say: they brood, bitch, grieve, whimper, snarl, bite, bark at the moon, lament, bemoan, bewail, smirk, sneer, backbite and bite back, accuse (oh, do they accuse), theorize, philosophize, analyze, and vaporize. And in therapy, Lord knows they do twice as much. Weinstock's Dr. Greenblatt has his hands full in this book.

So does the reader. A novel that begins in academic comedy veers off into melodrama and Freudian parable: in this case a death and rebirth fable. For it is Martin Weinstock who has died and must be reborn. Through a woman of course. At times that makes for heavy slogging and only hard volleys of wit save it from sinking beneath the analyst's couch. A reviewer of one of Weinstock's own books called it "a bleak and unrelenting darkness masquerading as laughter." Blumenthal's novel is cheerier than that: call it unrelenting laughter masquerading as darkness.

Mark Shechner is a regular reviewer for The Bookpress. He lives in Buffalo.

Bringing the War Home

Robert Rebein

THE PUGILIST AT REST

Thom Jones
Little, Brown, 230 pages, \$18.95.

It's been roughly two decades now since the last US helicopter, loaded to the gills and shedding human beings like flies, lifted off from the embassy in Saigon; yet the memory of Vietnam still haunts our culture—and especially our literature—in ways we are only beginning to understand.

In *Re-Writing America: Vietnam Authors in Their Generation*, Philip Beidler argues that the war and its aftermath have irrevocably altered the American literary landscape. Far from having been forgotten, Vietnam may be the single most important cultural referent in our writing today. The Vietnam veteran, for years a sort of Bartleby the Scrivener roaming our collective conscience, has since become not only a persistent protagonist in American fiction, but frequently the author of some of our most compelling and important books. The works of Michael Herr, Tim O'Brien, Philip Caputo, Ron Kovic, Wallace Terry, and Robert Stone come immediately to mind. To these nearly household names we might add a second wave of writers, some of whom never served in the war at all: Larry Heinemann, James Webb, Robert Olen Butler, David Rabe, Tobias Wolff, and Bobbie Ann Mason, to name only a few. Taken together, Beidler insists, the work of these writers constitutes "nothing less than a whole vast heterotopia," a major reorientation of "the very myth of national culture itself."

For better or worse, this is the initial context in which we must consider Thom Jones's excellent debut collection of short stories, *The Pugilist at Rest*. A finalist for the National Book Award, Jones's collection comes into print with dust-jacket praise from both Michael Herr and Robert Stone. Herr speaks of Jones's Hemingwayesque subject matter, "the codes and rituals of what we call American manhood," Stone of his style, which mixes "knowledge and skill" with "terror and release." Neither writer mentions the war; but *there it is*, as they used to say in Vietnam, like the smell of napalm above a burned-out forest.

Jones, a former Marine and a boxer with over 150 fights, has recently remarked how intimidated he felt by the prospect of writing about the war. "There has been such superlative work written about Vietnam that I never considered writing about that war until the Persian Gulf War...coincided with the birthday of a Marine buddy who died in Vietnam." At that point, says Jones, he sat down and wrote his most famous short story, "The Pugilist at Rest," essentially in one sitting. Jones's statement speaks volumes about the continuing power of Vietnam as a subject. The Gulf War, as immediate and unreal as it was, is by comparison relegated to the status of mere reminder, a kind of Proustian tea-biscuit to a larger experience that is past but far from forgotten.

Indeed, the first three stories in Jones's collection, "The Pugilist at Rest," "Break on Through," and "The Black Lights," deal directly with the experience of the gung-ho "recon" foot soldier in Vietnam. These are both brutal and moving. In the title story, which won an O. Henry Award and was included in *The Best American Short Stories* for 1992, the narrator survives three tours in Vietnam, exorcising along the way all the "malice, poison, and vicious sadism" in his soul, only to get his brains hopelessly scrambled in a boxing match upon his return to Camp Pendleton. Punch-drunk, suffering from recurrent bouts of left-temporal-lobe epilepsy, he becomes introspective and timid. He reads Schopenhauer, learns to love the pair of Staffordshire terriers that keep him from swallowing his own tongue, and comes finally, like the epileptic Dostoyevsky, to see through the "veil of illusion which is spread over all things."

You lose your health and you start thinking this way... The world is replete with badness. ... Twentieth-century America is one of the most materially

see *Bringing the War Home*, page 19

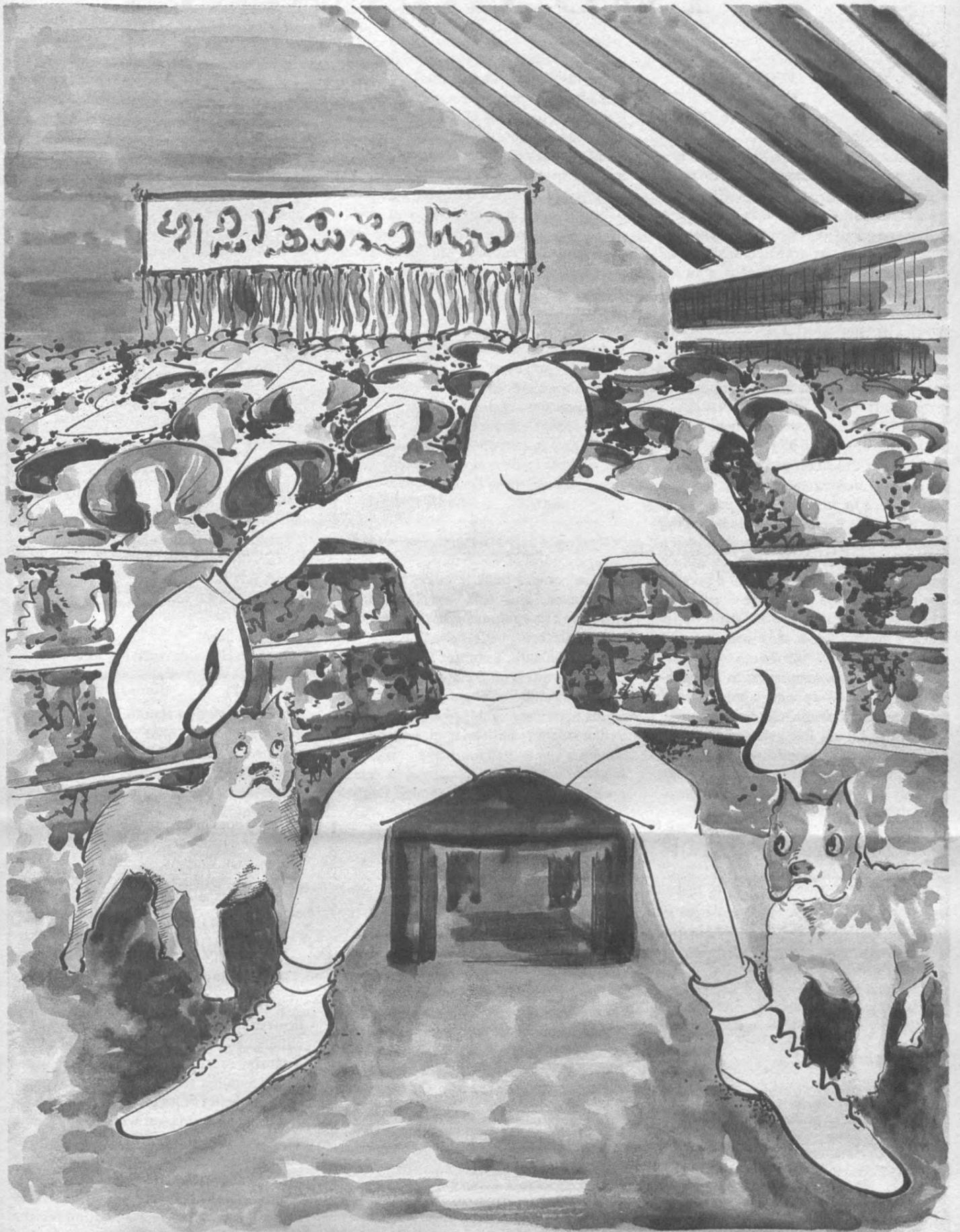


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This book takes us to the heart of Italian immigrants' experiences through their own words:

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Poetry from OSIP

Two Bosnian Poets

Wayles Browne

Some of the contributors to OSIP's series of poetic translations are professional translators. They are capable of taking a whole book of an author's poetry or prose and providing English versions of all of it. As an amateur, I need not do that. When helping people with their foreign-language business letters or architectural monographs, I have rendered what was set before me; but when sharing verses with my OSIP colleagues I choose only pieces which I like and which I see a satisfactory way to put into English.

"Satisfactory" here means to me that the version should sound like the original. A proper phrase for an amateur, perhaps—"sound like." My version can never come out like the original in all respects. But as a linguist, this time a professional linguist, I am ready to make a try at saying what the respects are in which the one can sound like the other. Poems are made by taking clever advantage of the material which a language offers, as when a gardener trims a boxwood bush into the shape of a poodle. The result conveys a message—"poodle." But it also inspires appreciation of its maker's deed—"Look, they made it out of a bush."

A language has more layers to its make-up than a bush—speech sounds, word forms, choice of words, sentence structure, semantics. All are fair game to the poet, and any can contribute to what I call the way a poem "sounds." A poet may make patterns with the single vowels or conso-

nants of a language; Poe did that with English in his "Bells." The accents or the syllables of words may recur to make rhythms. But so may the forms of words. The refrain to Rubén Darío's "Song of Autumn in Spring" starts out with nouns in the first line but from then on they disappear and the rest of the verses make do with negatives, adverbs, prepositions, and infinitives. They make do.... But they make patterns as these "subordinate" parts of the sentence come back over and over again, in the second grammatical person and then in the first.

*jjuventud, divino tesoro,
Ya te vas para no volver!
Cuando quiero llorar, no lloro,
Y a veces lloro sin querer.
"Youth, o divine treasure,
Now you leave to come again no more!
When I wish to weep, I cannot,
And sometimes I weep though not wishing to."*

Next, we may find patterns made by recurring items of vocabulary. Poe's "Nevermore" comes back in every stanza of "The Raven," and "bells" even more often, since one of his refrains goes "Of the bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells."

As I translate, I am not likely to find English words with the same distribution of vowels and consonants as the foreign words before me, and if that's what a particular poem is built around, I do best to admire it and let it alone. Rhythm with syllables or accents can sometimes be reproduced in a new language, though English

words have a nasty habit of being shorter than anybody else's in Europe. Grammatical forms can often carry over (but it depends—the language I'm working from may have a richer spectrum of them); recurrent vocabulary still more readily, especially since English stylistic doctrine doesn't insist as strongly as do some languages on avoiding repetition of a word.

The easiest pattern of all to put into English, at least for a linguistics-minded reader, is artful deployment of ideas in sentences. My chosen group, the Slavic languages, are accustomed to putting the new and vital information at the end of their sentences, and I find my English sentences "sound like" their model when they, too, progress from preamble to a denser center—and save the punch line for last. If I were trying to translate Pushkin's title "Ja vas ljubil," I might make it "I loved you" or, if I think the past tense of "ljubil" is worth reinforcing a little, "Once I loved you." But when I look at the rest of the first line and its continuation in the second line, I can see that *ljubil*, "loved," is carrying extra weight as the end of the first sentence, just as *ne sovsem*, "not entirely," is at the end of the second.

*Ja vas ljubil
Ja vas ljubil; ljubov' ješče, byt' možet,
V duše mojej ugasla ne sovsem;...*

So my translation should begin: "I loved you once" with "once" in a position of heightened contrast. I then need an English rendering of "not entirely" which can not only bear an accent on its last syllable (the verse rhythm needs this), but bear the strongest accent of its sentence. Not every English adverb can! Words of similar meaning don't have to have similar accentual capabilities. So I propose:

*I loved you once; perhaps that love has not
yet burned out in my soul for good....*

While working in Yugoslavia (as it was then) in the 1970s, I made several visits to colleagues in Sarajevo, the capital of the Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Every Sarajlija seemed ready to discourse on the esthetics of his city, proud of its cobblestoned Main Market whose craftsmen's shops came straight down from Turkish Empire days, of its mosques, churches, and synagogues, of its architecturally distinctive neighborhoods stretched neatly out along the shallow river and climbing the hills on each side.

I acted as guide for an even-more-foreign scholar on a visit to a publishing house, and there we met my first poet, Izet Sarajlić. He had come to Sarajevo as a boy in 1945, though his surname suggested family connections with the city.

Critics seek to discover a writer's "poetic world." Sarajlić's poetic world, less hidden in its expression than most, is peopled with all the poets of Europe and the globe. Witness two of the three poems he sent me in 1989, in answer to a letter about OSIP: "Change of Address" and "Raymond Peterson's Daughter." The third, "Danilo the Postman," introduces another prominent profession in Sarajlić's world, as well as a favorite theme—a plain-language version of *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*.

Not included below are several other important poems. "Switzerland" and "Modern Romeo and Juliet," Sarajlić wrote to me, are poems he includes in all his editions of selected verses. "Switzerland" dates to 1960. (Apologies to all Swiss readers; we may be more conscious now than Sarajlić was then of the virtues of having one non-

turbulent country to balance all the turbulent ones.) It is another piece in prose rhythms but with artful recurrences of phrases and ideas. This writer with the Moslem name and heritage can rely on the association "Communion—First Communion—little girl's new dress" in his poetic world, reflecting in miniature a Sarajevo put together out of Moslems and Jews, Orthodox and Catholics.

"Romeo and Juliet" were "modern" in 1977. Popović and Jovanović are two of the commonest family names one can find, so the poem truly sought to generalize: self-destruction was passé, young people had found better ways to be romantic. Fifteen years later, the family quarrel is back, rekindling the romanticism of violence. Nobody asked the young people's preferences. I wish the old association between poetry and prophecy could have been more effective in the case of these lines.

A poem from 1964 offers regrets to the Archduchess Sophie, assassinated along with her Archduke in Sarajevo fifty years earlier. In the imaginary conversation Sarajlić introduces himself as a poet precisely to dispel her apprehensions ("From Sarajevo? ... He must have a revolver in his pocket.") I wish that the practice of poetry were always a guarantee of harmlessness. But we now know that Dr. Radovan Karadžić, psychiatrist and leader of the Bosnian Serb forces destroying Sarajevo with daily artillery fire from the surrounding hills, has been composing poetry since his medical-student days. What is more, the authorities in Karadžić's native Yugoslav republic of Montenegro awarded him a literary prize for the year 1993, whereupon (according to the Belgrade opposition newsweekly *Vreme* for September 20) two previous Montenegrin recipients sent their prizes back. *Vreme* quotes from Karadžić's poem "All-autumn," not exactly with celebratory intent:

*... Autumn will come again, and rains will
pour
on the diseased mind of the world.
They will waterlog every human word
and all firm faith.*

My second Bosnian poet is Saša Skenderija, a freelance writer and editor, and a graduate in comparative literature from the University of Sarajevo. Born in 1968, he lived in Sarajevo for the first spring, summer, and fall of the war. He is now a graduate student in library science in the Czech Republic. His book reached me through a mutual acquaintance, with a letter inquiring about the possibilities for translating it for an American readership. (My answer was, in true amateur style: I see how to do some poems, I don't see a way to do others.) Skenderija has authorized me to pass on some excerpts from his letter by way of commentary to the two poems presented here, "Blackout" and "Master Craftsmen."

Prague, December 16, 1993.

...My little book, *Nothing's Like It Is On Film*, was printed here in Prague in 220 copies as a Christmas gift for the Bosnian refugees housed in Czech refugee centers. Most of the texts (some 80%) originated in Sarajevo right before and during the siege of my city, and the collection ripened and took shape in Zagreb and Prague in 1993. It makes no journalistic claims...., does not interpret or verify the TV pictures and reportage from Sarajevo. Nor is it a diary of the siege. Essentially, it seeks to be a book about love as such and about the city as such. It is highly intimate, and thus I hope a little universal as well. It was written amid a complete collapse of values and meaning, when man was left without the slightest possibility of

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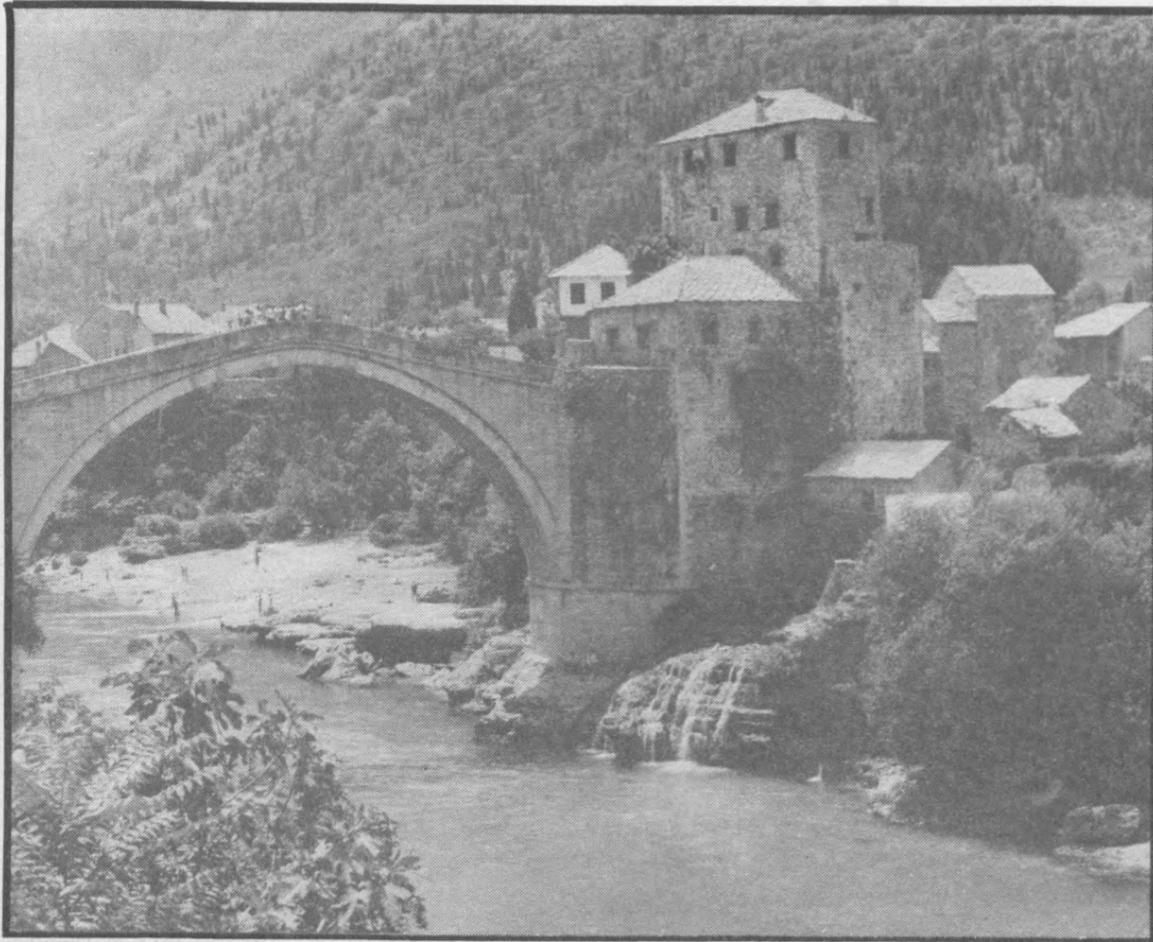
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The bridge at Mostar, 1979

Photograph: Laurie Ray

making sense of his own suffering and death. It...is an attempt to give *dignity* to the existential paroxysm I was (we were) caught up in. It seeks to answer the "grammatical" questions, "Who? What? To whom?..." and oppose the "tyranny of images" and the "dictatorship of their literalness" [from "Ventriloquists," one of the poems]. I will paraphrase the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, who writes that the zeroes at the end of a total of casualties make their suffering into a pure abstraction. Or Sartre, who when asked if literature could change the world, answered that it could not, but without literature the death of a child from hunger somewhere in Africa would be a mere piece of statistics. "Literature," he said, "makes the death of a child into a *moral problem!*" I would add that in today's world, where *moral* is a very problematic and relative category, literature should at least make a child slaughtered in Bosnia, Somalia, or Israel into an *esthetic problem*. The hundreds of thousands of people dying senselessly in Bosnia can no longer believe in any sort of morality proclaimed and prescribed by the civilization of the West, by your country above all. Now it is only a problem of *good taste*, which the world's TV networks and humanitarian and other institutions have violated by their actions. Most of what the world has undertaken in Bosnia is at the very least repulsive and perverse. And most of all cynical! Therefore, if I have sought here and there in *Nothing's Like It Is On Film* to make my family's suffering, my girl's, my friends', my own into an *esthetic problem*, I think I have succeeded. But others must judge. If there are no more people in the world with refined moral senses (are there any?), I hope there are some with refined esthetic senses. This book would wish to communicate with them. And so I send it to you, to the United States, for I believe that the liberal American tradition has given rise to the largest number of freedom-loving individuals, capable of communicating honestly with the world around them. Unfortunately (or is it fortunately?) my book, written in Croatian about Sarajevo (Bosnia), cannot expect understanding or support from either the Croatian or the Bosnian state, for the monstrous policies of both have led the victims of this war, the Bosnians and the Croats, to try to exterminate one another. My voice has now become even more lonely, but, I hope, added one more note of universality.

I know Mr. Sarajlić indirectly. We lived in the same neighborhood in Sarajevo. I know a shell made a direct hit on his apartment and he was slightly wounded, but recovered. So he is alive, in the special Sarajevo sense of the word.

Change of Address

*My friends
are changing their addresses
more than ever.*

Take Alfonso Gatto.

*Till yesterday he dwelt
in a lively Roman street
the Via Margutta.*

*Now he's dwelling
in the cemetery
in Salerno.*

*This is the worst
of all twenty-eight addresses
he's run through.*

*Even the one
under Mussolini was better:
Alfonso Gatto,
Central Prison,
Milano.*

—Izet Sarajlić

The Romance of Danilo the Postman

*Once he
would bring
love letters.*

*To the same addresses
now he brings
pension checks.*

—Izet Sarajlić

Blackout

*We've doused all the lights, stuck
three layers of wallpaper on the broken win-
dows
(last night a patrol came because
we had a light bulb showing). We're cut off
from people,
from neighbors hiding in the cellar,
by fourteen storeys of fear. Cut off from
animals
cannonading us from the hills
by a sound-screen of Ramirez's Missa
Criolla.*

*It lends our love-making
on top of the punctured skyscraper
a note of the astral, of divine epiphany.*

—Saša Skenderija

Master Craftsmen

For S. Sontag

*The analogy of photography and dying,
the death of the moment, or freezing it
is all too obvious, even banal.
A sniper and a photo reporter
on the corner of Marshal Tito Street and
Maxim Gorki*

*in the same way make an abstraction
of my fate, reduced to a dozen
metres of street I must traverse.*

*The craftsmen, skilled in their trades, are
waiting.
My hesitation fills them with*

*a professional nervousness, which
is certainly in my favor, increases
my chances. Here we are at the heart of the
matter:
murderers, like artists, are prone
to romantic exaggeration,
to mutual glorification, striving for effects.
They shoot past the mark. The sniper and the
photographer.
The cross is the same in the center of their
sights.*

—Saša Skenderija

Wayles Browne is an associate professor
in the Department of Modern Languages
and Linguistics at Cornell University.



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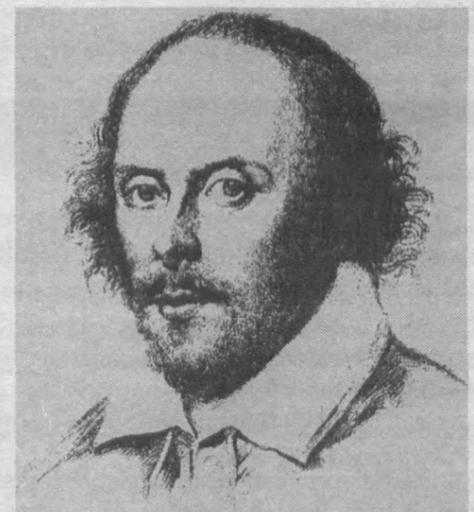
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It Can't Happen Here

CASE CLOSED

Gerald Posner
Random House, 608 pages, \$25

Jules Burgevin

A few weeks ago, Byron De La Beckwith, 73 years old, ex-Marine, life member of the National Rifle Association, avowed racist and member of the Ku Klux Klan, was finally convicted by a jury of eight African-Americans and four whites of the June 12, 1963 murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

According to the February 6 story in *The New York Times*, De La Beckwith "showed no emotion" as he was sentenced to life imprisonment, but his lawyers plan to appeal the verdict. After 31 years, this case is not closed.

The killing of Evers was only the opening shot in the bloody half-decade, 1963-68, which saw the assassinations of—in chronological order—John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.

In each of these cases, the official investigations concluded that they were the work of deranged individuals and that no conspiracy was involved.

Case Closed, by Gerald Posner, attempts not only to reinforce this line of reasoning regarding the Kennedy assassination, but to render a final judgment that precludes further argument. Weighing in at 607 pages, with 2,175 citations and hundreds of one-, two-, and three-asterisk footnotes, Posner's book is a fascinating, thoroughly researched document that delves deeply and critically into the Warren Commission Report and the report of the House Select Committee on the Assassinations, bringing us up to date with recent interviews of numerous witnesses who either knew Oswald or Ruby, witnessed Kennedy's assassination or Oswald's murder, or were part of the subsequent investigations.

Since he cannot, of course, interview Lee Harvey Oswald, Posner devotes the first 250 pages of his book to a reconstruction of Oswald's life, using as his sources the Warren Commission, Oswald's diary and correspondence, information from his KGB file, and recent interviews of people who knew him.

After the bitter divorce of his parents, Oswald lived with his "overbearing" mother, and was in and out of nine schools by the age of thirteen. Posner cites the report of Dr. Renatus Hartog, who spoke with Oswald when he was in his early teens and found him to be "intensely self-centered, filled with anxiety, with feelings of awkwardness and insecurity." Others who knew Oswald saw a pent-up anger within him that was often directed at his mother. By the time he was sixteen, Oswald and his mother, Marguerite, had moved 21 times, he had learned the Marine Corps Handbook by heart, and he was interested in communism.

Following the example of his brother Robert, whom he idolized, Oswald joined the Marines when he was seventeen, to escape the "yoke and oppression" of his mother.

In the Marine Corps he became a sharpshooter. According to Sgt. James Zahm, the NCO in charge of marksmanship training, Oswald was "a good



Illustration: Benn Nadelman

shot—slightly above average. And, if we compare him to the average US male, he is an excellent shot."

Sent to Atsugi, Japan, a base for the U-2 spy plane, he studied Russian, and was seen by his fellow Marines as "emotionally unstable. a pathetic person." He was court-martialed twice and had a nervous breakdown.

After his dishonourable discharge and his return home, Oswald defected to the Soviet Union in 1959. Denied Russian citizenship, he tried to commit suicide. In his hotel room on the table near his bed, he left a note written in English: "Did I come here just to find death? I love life." Russian psychiatrists found him "mentally unstable" but "harmless," and they decided to let him stay. He found a job in a factory in Minsk and occasionally went hunting with his fellow workers, some of whom reported to the KGB: "Oswald is a poor shot, especially with the pistol." After marrying

Marina and fathering a daughter, Oswald became dissatisfied with life in the Soviet Union and applied for permission to return to the US.

Posner quotes a memo from the State Department saying, "it is in the interest of the United States to get Lee Harvey Oswald and his family out of the Soviet Union and on their way to this country soon. An unstable character, whose actions are entirely unpredictable, Oswald may well refuse to leave the USSR or subsequently attempt to return there if we should make it impossible for him to be accompanied from Moscow by his wife and child." Left unanswered is why the US wanted an unstable character like Oswald back in this country. Why not let the Russians keep him?

When Oswald arrived back in the US on June 13, 1962, the CIA decided not to interview him because he was of "marginal importance." But by June 26, after he had moved to Fort Worth, Texas,

the FBI questioned him for two hours, leaving him, says Posner, "furious and nervous about the confrontational interview with the FBI." On August 16, 1962, just after Oswald and his family had moved into a small bungalow on Mercedes St., two FBI agents, John Fain and Arnold Brown, waited in their car for him to return from work. In the rear seat of the car they "quizzed him for an hour." Shortly after that Fain recommended that the case be closed.

At this point in the documented account of Lee Harvey Oswald as Posner has shaped it from the primary sources, there is, in my judgment, a major shift in momentum.

Lee and Marina were friendly with the Russian emigré community in Fort Worth-Dallas. And, according to Posner, many of the emigrés had a problem with this "unstable" fellow. Then, quite suddenly, a very unusual man appeared in *see It Can't Happen Here*, page 16

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Ulrike Ottinger's
TAIGA: A JOURNEY TO THE NORTHERN LAND OF THE MONGOLS

In her new documentary, Ulrike Ottinger demonstrates how one can treat a distant people and a country without falling into unreflective anti-modernism. Like Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, *Taiga* takes the director on a journey...The film captures a society in transition, and what appears at first a folkloric dream, underlined by the ornamental character of information captions laid out on fabric, is actually patient observation which allows contradictions.

The nomadic people of Mongolia may hold shamanistic rituals today as they did hundreds of years ago, but progress has long since reached them in the form of schools or a commercial economy—a fact neither Ottinger nor her protagonists, who willingly present themselves to the camera, seem to regret very much. The film's restrained procedure, refuses to glorify pre-civilized ways of life. If you want an ecological idyll, look elsewhere. In recording a tradition threatened by oblivion, Ottinger hones our consciousness of the 'other' without positing it as necessarily better."

—Sabine Horst, *Frankfurter Rundschau*

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Death in the Afternoon

Stephen Kuusisto
and David Reilly

In a hastily called press conference, Professor Antti Airola announced that he has uncovered new evidence that solves the mystery surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. According to Professor Airola, President Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy of characters created by Ernest Hemingway.

Airola, 56, revealed that the Italian-made Mannlicher-Carcano rifle allegedly used by Lee Harvey Oswald to kill the President in Dallas was the same gun used to kill a dilettante big-game hunter named Francis Macomber. "In fact," Airola says, "the rifle was a gift from Macomber to his wife Margaret."

In Hemingway's story, Mrs. Macomber uses the Mannlicher-Carcano to defend her ineffectual husband from a charging water buffalo, but because the rifle had a crooked telescopic sight she accidentally shoots her husband in the back of the head, an act which many critics have misinterpreted as murder.

"In fact," said Airola, "the bent sight is crucial, since it demonstrates that Macomber's gun is the same rifle which Dallas Police found hidden behind a crate of *Viking Portable Hemingways* on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository."

The link between the deaths of Francis Macomber and President Kennedy was confirmed when Airola was contacted by a retired big-game hunter named Wilson who now lives in Boca Raton, Florida, where he repairs vending machines. Wilson's career as an expeditionary guide was ended by the scandal caused by Macomber's death.

In a notarized statement, Wilson reveals that after being exonerated by African authorities of charges that she murdered her husband, Margaret Macomber returned to the US with both her husband's money and the gun. Wilson says that, after hearing that MGM was planning a movie version of her husband's short, happy life, Mrs. Macomber took up residence in Hollywood, hoping to play herself in the film.

At a party thrown by Sam Goldwyn, Mrs. Macomber met a young congressman from Massachusetts named John Kennedy, who at the time was sharing bachelor quarters in Hollywood with actor Robert Stack. Kennedy told Mrs. Macomber that his father owned a movie studio and that he could get her a screen test. The ensuing affair was abruptly broken off when Kennedy realized that Margaret was a fictional character to whom her author had given no more than a vengeful sex life, and that she didn't exist without her clothes.

Kennedy told Stack, "Every time I got her in the sack, she was nowhere to be found."

Wilson told Airola that, after the affair ended, Margaret continued to be obsessed with Kennedy. "She's really a one-dimensional character," Airola said, "and gets fixated easily because of that."

After following Kennedy to Palm Beach and being rebuffed by him, Margaret drifted down the

Florida coast, finally turning up in Sloppy Joe's, a Key West watering hole, which, Wilson insists, was frequented by many embittered Hemingway characters.

Wilson says that he personally saw Robert Jordan, Nick Adams, Lady Brett Ashley, Jake Barnes, and an old Cuban exile with grotesque rope burns on his hands, as well as several huge Swedes with cauliflower ears, all drinking heavily together in the summer of 1963.

The characters had been drawn to Key West by their creator's inability to write a decent novel after *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Wilson says:

"Papa began to obsess on past glories, and we, as the products of his good and fine days when he could write the good words, kept reappearing in his thoughts. We couldn't escape. We hated him for it."

According to Wilson, Robert Jordan, the hero of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, was especially angry because he thought he had died gloriously at the end of that novel. But then, in a moment of desperation, Hemingway contemplated a sequel, and Jordan found himself rescued from the loyalists and returned to Maria, but with his gangrenous broken leg amputated. "And as every college sophomore knows," Airola reminded reporters, "a physical deformity in a Hemingway character is a symbol of sexual impotence."

No longer able to make the earth move for Maria, the despairing Jordan took up espionage. He was recruited by Howard Hunt to help train exiled Cubans for the invasion that culminated in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Wilson says that Jordan never forgave Kennedy for failing to provide air support.

Margaret Macomber then saw in Jordan a potential ally in her plans to revenge herself against the President.

By the summer of '63, with Hemingway dead, the assorted characters were feeling betrayed by both their creator and President Kennedy. Those characters who didn't care about the President's Cuban policies couldn't forgive him for having invited Robert Frost instead of Papa to read at his inauguration. Wilson says that Nick Adams was especially contemptuous of Frost and used to go about sneering that Frost, like all poets, "couldn't fight worth a damn."

Several scenes in Oliver Stone's film, "JFK," depict scruffy hoboes climbing from box cars in Dallas and walking through town on the day of the assassination. These men without women were the Hemingway characters, Airola stated, including Jordan, Barnes, and Adams.

According to Wilson, Margaret Macomber and Lady Brett Ashley had arrived in Dallas earlier in the week in a car driven by a mysterious European aristocrat, known only as "the Count." Witnesses later said that they'd seen two women and a man with a monocle parked by the grassy knoll overlooking Dealey Plaza. The proof that these were probably the Hemingway characters, Professor Airola argues, is that the two women were absolutely indistinguishable from each other. Airola points out that every man who saw them thought that the women were the answer to all his dreams, while female witnesses reported that the women were completely transparent and an inch

deep. "Nothing more than repositories for my husband's most adolescent fantasies," said one woman witness.

Airola insists that "because no Hemingway woman is believed capable of decisive action, no one would have seen Margaret Macomber fire the Mannlicher-Carcano, even though it was broad daylight and she stood on the grassy knoll in full view of hundreds of potential witnesses." By November of 1963, Mrs. Macomber had mastered the rifle's bent sight. Moreover, Wilson told Airola that Mrs. Macomber chose the grassy knoll not only because it gave her the best vantage of the Kennedy motorcade, but because it reminded her of the green hills of Africa.

Jake Barnes was also supposed to have fired at the President from a position in the Texas School Book Depository. But once again Hemingway's sexual symbolism undid him and his shots went wide.

Wilson says that FBI sharpshooters were never able to duplicate Mrs. Macomber's rifle work because they had to fire the gun in "real" as opposed to "fictional" time.

After the shooting, Jordan was given the job of hiding the rifle in the School Book Depository and all the characters easily vanished across the river and into the trees.

Professor Airola told reporters that he had first found Wilson's story incredible. "But," Airola said, "I have always been bothered by the inexplicable Hemingway-Kennedy connections."

"It's never made any sense to me," he continued, "that Hemingway's papers are deposited in the Kennedy library. I had been pursuing a theory that President Kennedy himself was a Hemingway character. How else to explain the President's simplistic notions of machismo, vigor, and courage? After all, Fidel Castro is clearly a Hemingway invention, so why not J.F.K.?"

But the fact that the President was killed by a conspiracy of Hemingway characters explains why the Kennedy family has sealed up Hemingway's papers, Airola explained.

Professor Airola was further convinced of Wilson's veracity when his own Hemingway studies led him to the suitcase full of manuscripts that Hemingway's first wife left on a train in Paris in 1923. Airola claims that one of the stories in the suitcase is about a macho film director named Stone.

"Stone was also a minor character in Hemingway's last book, *The Garden of Eden*," Airola asserts, "and this explains his obsession with the Kennedy assassination."

"As one of the characters, Stone would have been in on the beginnings of the conspiracy," Airola argues, "but he was edited out of the final version of the novel before the details of the conspiracy were finalized by Jordan and Mrs. Macomber. So it's no wonder that in his movie, Stone gets small things right but everything else so marvelously wrong!"

Many Hemingway experts agree that Airola's new theory on the assassination makes perfect sense. In fact, Hemingway manqué Norman Mailer says that the surviving Kennedy men are of course in on the cover-up. "No Hemingway male can afford to admit that one of their number could be killed by a woman," Mailer said in a phone interview, "and a fictional one at that."

Neither Robert Jordan nor Margaret Macomber could be traced by Professor Airola, since another periodic academic trend to overvalue the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald has caused the books containing Jordan and Macomber to be replaced by *The Great Gatsby* on most undergraduate reading lists. Calls to Jordan and Macomber by Airola have been answered by Daisy Buchanan.

Jake Barnes, interviewed at his favorite clean, well-lighted place in Madrid, said of Airola's theory that he doubted it was true, but added wistfully, "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

Stephen Kuusisto and David Reilly are real characters who live in Ithaca.

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THE GOTHIC SUBLIME Vijay Mishra

This book reads the Gothic corpus with a thoroughly postmodern critical apparatus, pointing out that the Gothic Sublime anticipates our own doomed desire to pass beyond the hyperreal. A highly sophisticated theoretical reading of key texts of the Gothic, this book allows the reader to re-live the Gothic, not simply as a nostalgic relic or a pre-romantic aberration, but as a living presence that has strong resonances with the postmodern condition.

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—Rob Wilson, University of Hawaii
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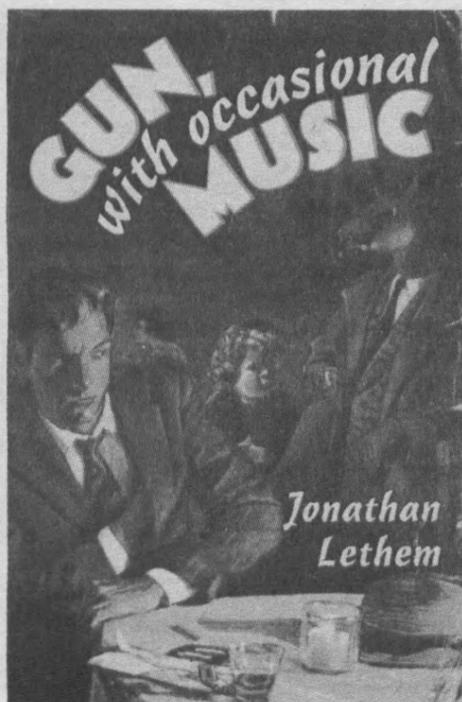
THE GOLDEN MEAN James S. Hans

The Golden Mean reappraises the relationship among the three forms of good that exist in modern Western thought: the good of aesthetic beauty and performance, the good of right and wrong, and the forces of social resentment that shape the public debate about what is appropriate to society's needs.

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HARCOURT
BRACE 272 pages
\$19.95

Madagascar:

Photographs by Janice Levy

Text by Michael Serino

The dominant metaphor in writings about Madagascar seems to be "a world." The clichés were already there, looking for a home; they have established a circulation sufficiently wide that you may have come across them: "a world like our own," "a world out of time," "the world that time forgot." Madagascar, located some 200 miles off the southeast coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean, is the fourth-largest island on earth. With its striking natural beauty, its unique assembly of biological species, and its comparative historical isolation, the island seems rapidly to be assuming a romanticized role as one of the last natural paradises.

Now—again?—paradise is being threatened by ecological disaster. We open a magazine or turn on the television and see pictures of gorgeous landscapes, unsullied by human beings, with lemurs opening their big round eyes and silently pleading, "Won't you save us from the horrible people who want to destroy our world?" and we want to say yes, yes, yes, what can we do to help? But the story only convinces when we agree to forget about the people who actually live on the island. When we look beyond our fantasies of what we want the Third World in general and Africa in particular to be, when we forget about novels and remember newspapers, we come upon the struggle of real people trying to come to terms with real problems. Oh, that again. You'd think we'd have figured it out by now.

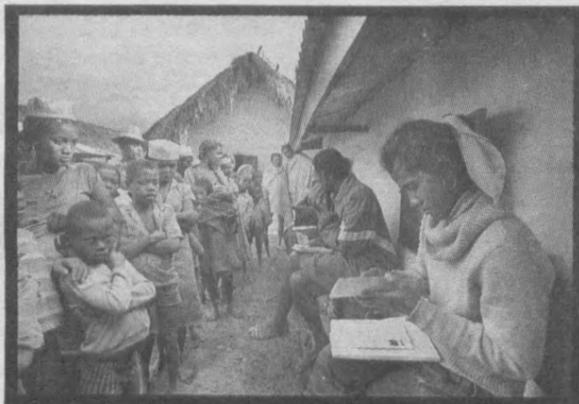
Madagascar is not an "island paradise," nor a mere travel adventure, nor even an enormous floating nature preserve, but a country inhabited by people attempting to cope with some of the most daunting challenges human beings can face: hunger, population control, establishing a stable government, long-term economic growth, survival.

Most of the inhabitants of Madagascar are of Maylasiatic and Indonesian descent; their ancestors migrated, via Africa, less than 2,000 years ago. The population is increasing at a frightening rate: infant mortality may be high, but so is fertility. There is not enough to eat, not enough medical care, not enough work. The primary form of livelihood is agriculture: clear a field and plant it, plant it again until the soil wears out, move on to the next field and clear it. Slash and burn, slash and burn. Most of us remember reading somewhere that this is not a good idea. Those books, apparently, haven't made it into the hands of Malagasy peasants. They continue to clear fields for planting; they continue to chop down trees and burn them for charcoal. The island, which once was covered with evergreens and deciduous forests, is now 80 percent man-made prairie. At this point, not much more than 10 percent of the land is arable. Trouble in paradise. Not the battle we are accustomed to—technology vs. nature—but a more basic struggle, a more primitive fight for human survival.

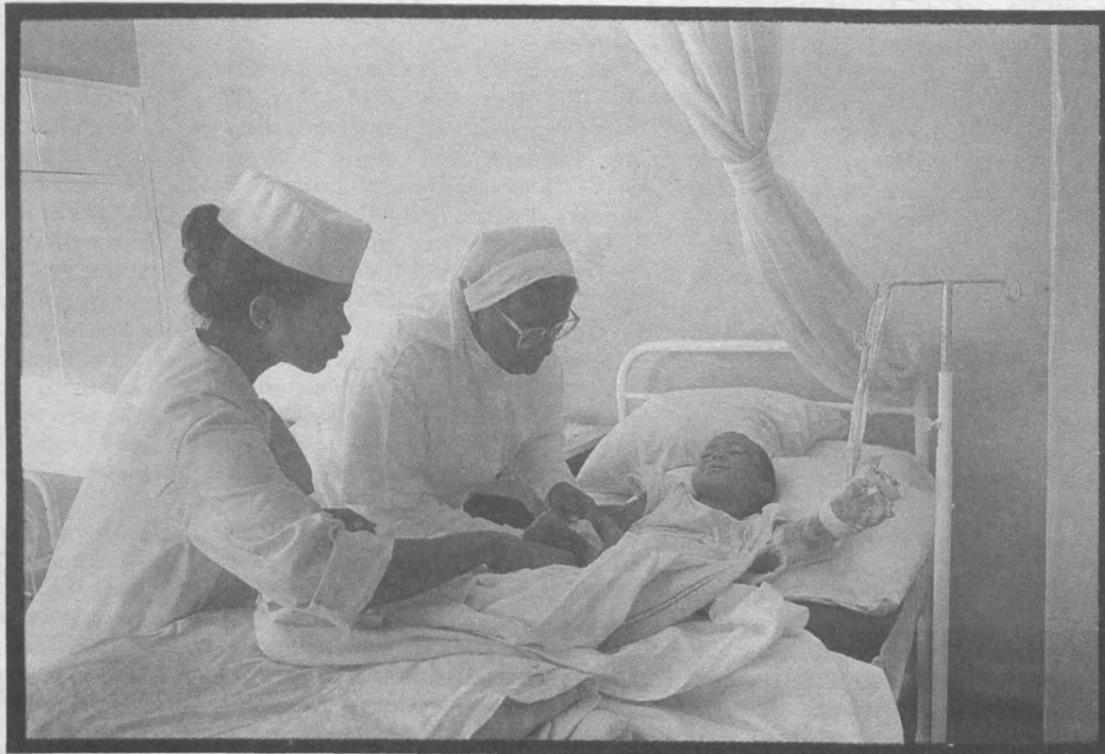
The Malagasy have endured hundreds of years of competing native kingdoms, 60 years of French colonialism, and 15 years of a managed socialist economy. Last year, they "threw the rascals out" and now are taking a stab at economic and political democracy. International conservation and development groups are attempting to help define a path that balances the needs of the people with the uniqueness and fragility of the environment. The road to be taken is far from clear.

Janice Levy's photographs are not lush images of beautiful animals leaping from tree to tree. Yes, those animals are there, and yes, they are beautiful. But so are the people. You can see that here.

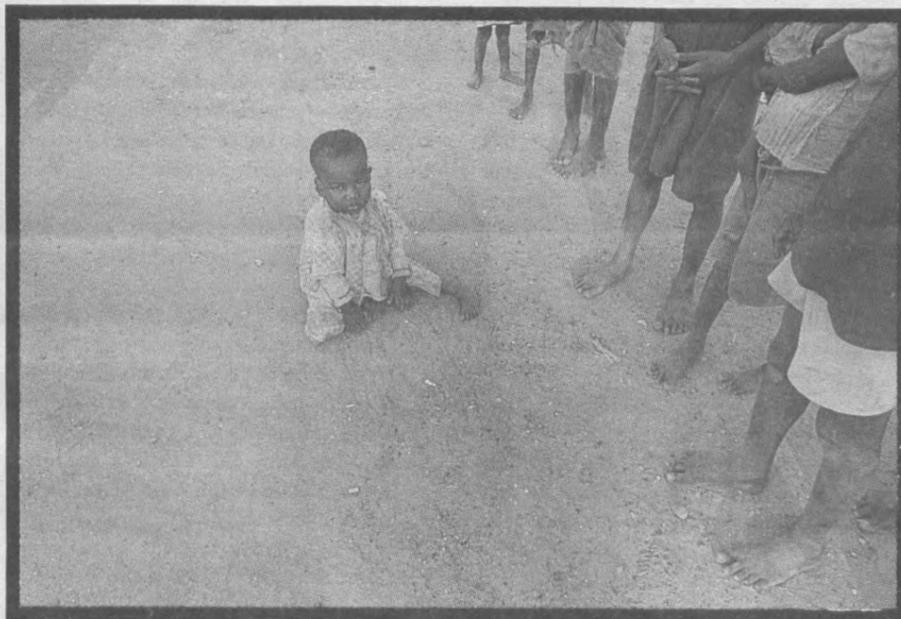
Photographer *Janice Levy* and writer *Michael Serino* live in *Ithaca*.



In a remote village, a nurse and a midwife prepare to administer inoculations. The pair are part of a child vaccination program sponsored by the Ranomafana Park Project, an American-funded integrated conservation and development effort administered by Professor Patricia Wright of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. The health-care component of the project provides primary health care, medication, and vaccinations for 28 remote and off-road villages within the perimeter of the 200-square-mile park.



At a private clinic in Antananarivo, a nun and an attendant care for a five-year-old burn victim. The nun, Sister Marlene Long, is an American plastic surgeon who primarily treats burn victims and performs reconstructive surgery on lepers. The government-funded public health system in Madagascar is ill-equipped and understaffed; hospitals suffer from shortages of such essential items as rubber gloves, sutures, and penicillin. Adequate care, by Western standards, can be found only in private clinics, which have access to alternate sources of funding and materials.

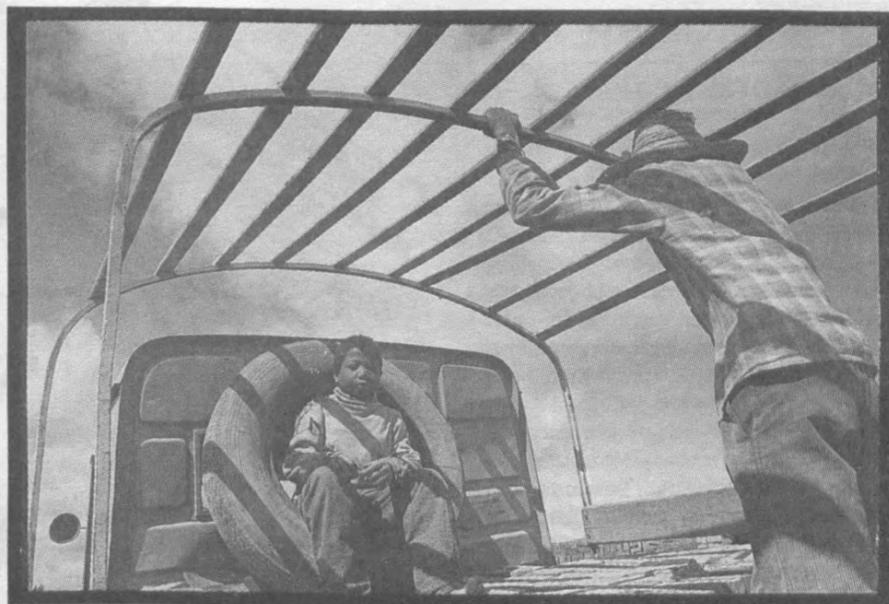


A three-year drought that began in 1989 devastated the southern part of the island. Many people died; many more went without adequate food for long periods of time. Organizations such as the World Food Program mounted relief efforts; the United States was among the countries donating the thousands of tons of rice and grain distributed to the inhabitants. Shown here is one small victim of the famine living in a tent city set up outside a hospital in Amboasary.



The Ranomafana Park Project's educational component has included outreach education to villages and the construction of three rural schools. Native tradition requires the appeasement of ancestors by sacrificing a cow before moving into a new building. This one was ceremonially killed in front of a new elementary school. A large group of natives, park personnel, and American and Malagasy officials were in attendance.

A Troubled Paradise

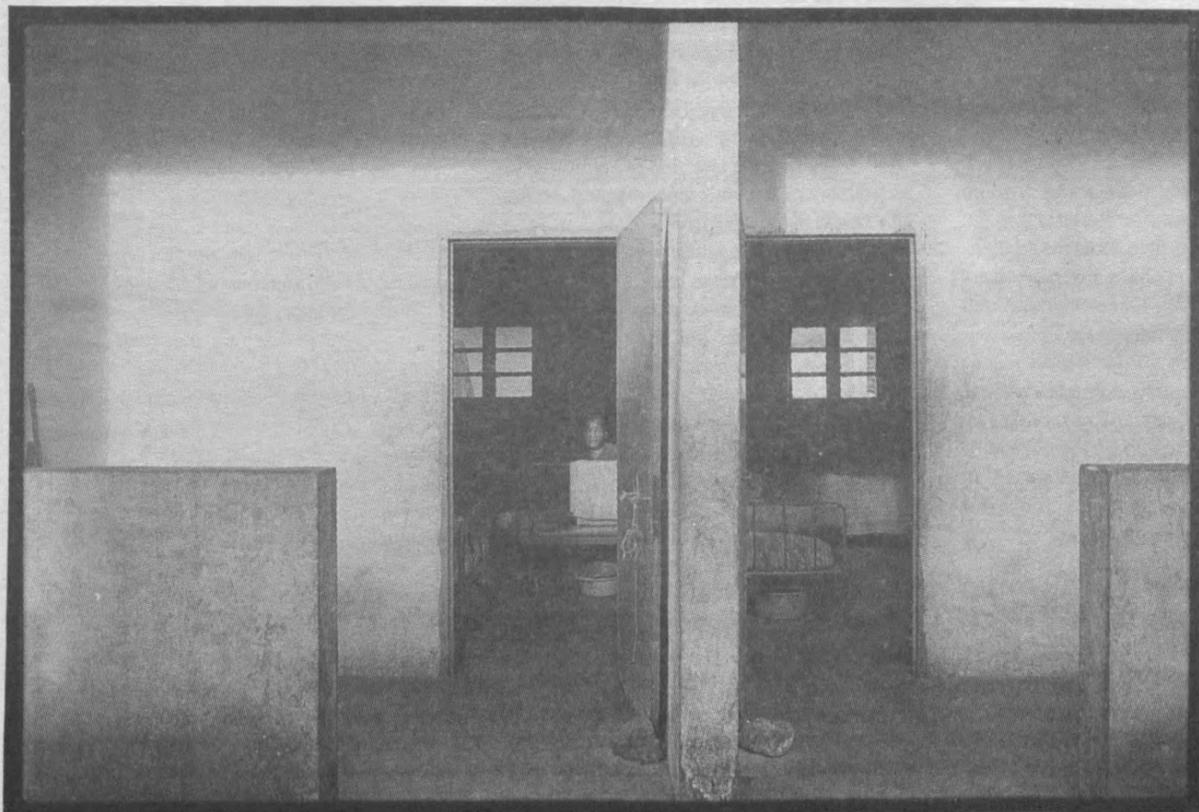


A brickyard at Ambitatafky, a suburb of the capital. Many peasants have turned to brickmaking in lieu of farming, which has become difficult due to a shortage of arable land. Peasants lease parcels of clay-rich land from property owners along the miles-long site. Men dig out rubbery, black clay from six-to-ten feet below ground. Women mix

that clay with red surface clay and water, form bricks by hand, and line them up to dry. Once the bricks have dried, the women carry them to the ovens in piles—often as high as four feet—on their heads, cushioned by nothing but a rolled-up rag. They move beneath their burdens with remarkable grace and agility.

Meanwhile, the men stoke the fires and bake the bricks. Boys and men alike then take part in loading the bricks onto trucks for transport and sale. They throw them to each other two at a time, relaying them in lines eight or nine people long.

On the train from the capital city of Antananarivo to Tamatave, a port town on the northeast coast. The trip, which is 14 hours long, passes through beautiful countryside and along the coast of the Indian Ocean, as well as through some of the more severely deforested areas of the country. The train stops frequently at small stations to pick up passengers. The arrival of a train in a small village is a form of entertainment, often attracting crowds of people.



Inside a leper colony a few miles from Ft. Dauphin, one of the largest cities in the south and the main point of entry for French influence during the 19th century. The colony, which houses approximately 100 lepers, is a self-contained community run by Spanish Catholic nuns. While some of the more severe cases have been residents of the colony for as long as 30 years, other patients with milder cases of the disease visit as outpatients, receiving medication and returning to their villages.

Corpus Delicti

**BODIES THAT MATTER:
ON THE DISCURSIVE LIMITS OF "SEX"**

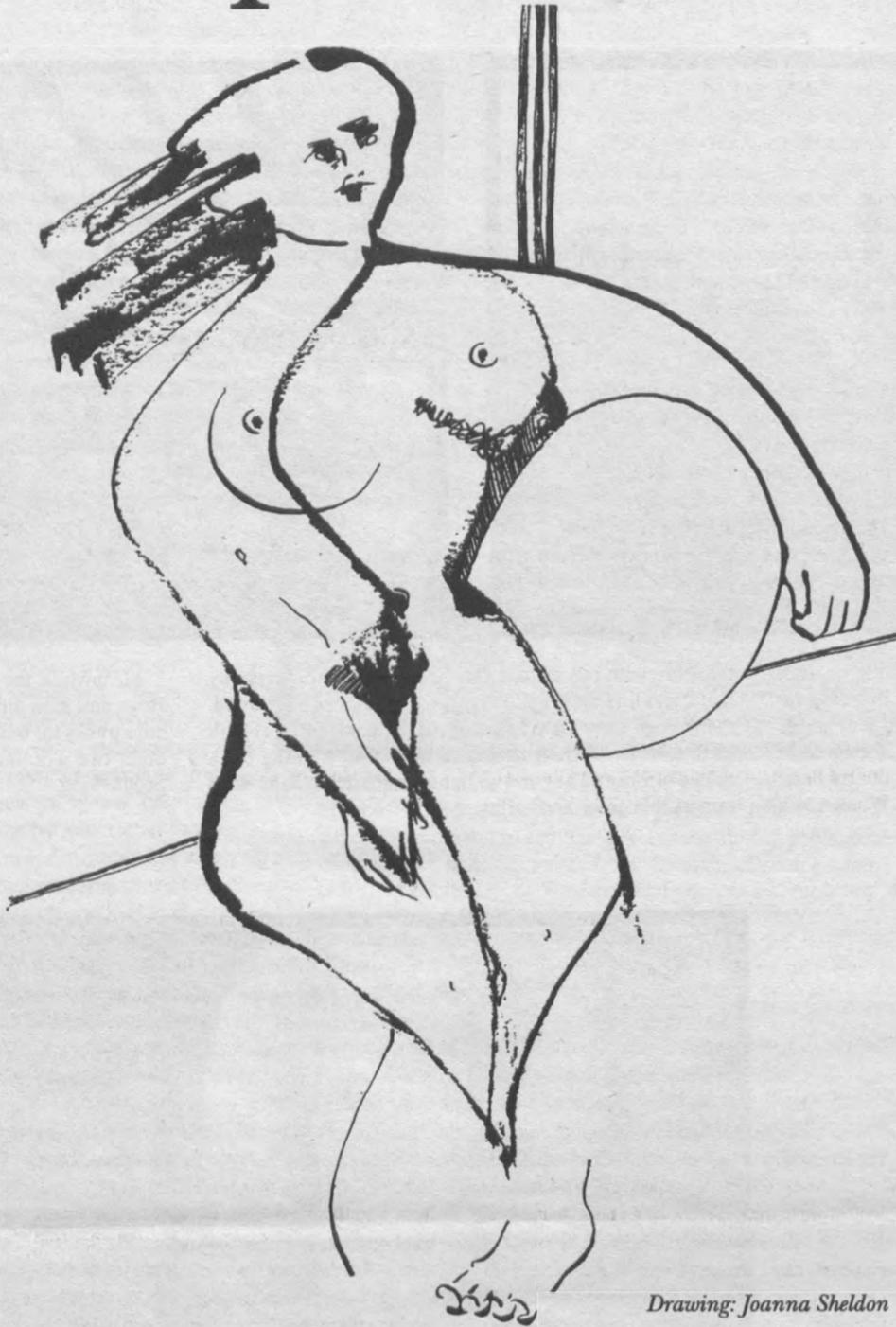
Judith Butler
Routledge, 288 pages, \$15.95 paper

Chris Nealon

Poor Judith Butler. In the three brisk chapters of her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, she critiqued the history of the feminist use of the category "woman," exposed beneath Freud's insistence on an incest taboo another, more compelling taboo against homosexuality, and decisively redescribed both gender identity and physical sex as the effect of perpetually repeated "performances" of bodily integrity. But no one believed her. As if she had performed a traumatic magic trick, for the next year and a half the demand her interlocutors placed on her was, "Would you do that again?" In seminars, in interviews, at conferences and in print, Butler had no rest from the flurry of tortured objections *Gender Trouble* prompted among well-meaning academic lefties—not to mention the horror it produced in her home discipline, philosophy.

The objections to the book were actually resuscitated from another debate which had surrounded the arrival of deconstruction, the work of Foucault, and Lacanian psychoanalysis on American shores fifteen or twenty years ago. The emphasis those theories each placed on the power of language or "discourse" to shape the world led to violent denials and anti-intellectual dismissals, the variations on which roughly boil down to, "Oh, so the world is made out of language? Well what about reality?" Depending on what they thought of the use of language as a social tool, opponents of the various post-structuralisms and of Lacanian psychoanalysis objected either that the linguistic emphasis of those theories erased the human power to change the world, or that they offered a too-optimistic vision of language's ultimately limited capacities.

The debates over *Gender Trouble* followed these contours precisely. Admittedly, now there are two or three generations of intellectuals who are friendly to such work, and these people have long ago embraced in various forms the idea that we are "constructed" beings. From these scholars, the objections were much more fine-grained, and had to do with the *degree* to which Butler seemed to be pressing her account of "construction." But even the responses to *Gender Trouble* that were attuned to the book's vocabulary tended to play out in miniature the terms of the ongoing debate about "reality"—and thereby continued to focus on a presumed opposition between matter and language. And so the questions emerged along these lines: OK, gender identity is perpetually performed, however involuntarily; OK, we make use of our bodies in those performances; but isn't there, underlying all our acrobatics, still a brute materiality, flesh and bone, something out of which gender is made? Isn't biological sex, after all, still biological? The implication was that, at some level, Butler was forsaking something



Drawing: Joanna Sheldon

important, perhaps even betraying something, in her laudable but perhaps too-idealistic attempt to convince us all that our bodies are constructed—not just our "gender," our femininity and masculinity, but our *bodies*, our arms and legs, our skin, our sex organs. The thing she was supposedly forsaking was the body itself.

Perhaps the most painful phrasing of this accusation came from some lesbian and gay activists who otherwise would have wanted to claim Butler as their own—from those quarters, the objection was put thus: how can you subject "the body" to frivolous deconstruction at this crucial moment in history, when it is exactly our lesbian and gay bodies that are perpetually subject to violence, when so many of our bodies are being ravaged by an immune deficiency that no one seems to want to fight? Are you so callous as to take from us by means of "theory" the very bodies we need as weapons? Perhaps even bitterer than the debates in the academy about the function of theories like Butler's was the revival of the age-old debate about the relationship of the academy to politics, this time raised in the voices of an only recently articulated community, desperately hungry for allies.

Bodies That Matter, Butler's most recent book, is therefore almost as much a patient recapitulation of the arguments of *Gender Trouble* as it is an attempt to extend or modify those arguments. The title itself is a frank assertion of *relevance*, and Butler makes clear again and again that it's exactly because of our painful, exhilarating attachments to our bodies, and to the bodies of those whom we love, that they must be made available to theory. I would argue, in fact, that one thesis of the book is that we need theories to remain alert, to remain engaged, to remain *alive*. In this regard, the epigraph to Butler's first chapter, a quote from Gayatri Spivak, is worth citing in its entirety:

If I understand deconstruction, deconstruction is

not an exposure of error, certainly not other people's error. The critique in deconstruction, the most serious critique in deconstruction, is the critique of something that is extremely useful, something without which we cannot do anything.

The passage implies a thousand points. One of them is that deconstruction's insistence on exposing the unfounded nature of claims to origin (claims that say, "the truth can be found here" or "reality lies yonder") is not based on a gleefully nihilistic desire to snip the ropes on our trapeze. It's one thing to expose the circular nature and the infinite regress behind philosophical claims to truth—that, one hopes, is a political project—and another to valorize the lack of real origins for the sake of it. An affiliation with deconstructive techniques is neither a rejection of "the real world," as the activists want to claim, nor a rejection of "philosophy," as so many of the philosophers assert. It is an attachment to the world as unfinished, as possible, as worthy of struggling over. Perhaps that's why *Bodies That Matter*, tonally at least, reads like *Gender Trouble* once more, with feeling.

The book is divided into eight chapters: four of them provide arguments about philosophical and psychoanalytic texts, and three of them take up literary and cultural objects (the work of Willa Cather and Nella Larsen, and Jennie Livingston's film "Paris Is Burning"). One final chapter, "Critically Queer," addresses the political stakes of thinking about "queer" sexualities through psychoanalysis and deconstruction. As a continuation of the work in *Gender Trouble*, this new book is particularly brave in two respects. For one thing, Butler does not back down from her original positions in the least; the five theoretically oriented chapters not only constitute a defense of those positions, but do a great deal of work to establish more thoroughly a political context for them. And the three literary-cultural chapters, meanwhile, together

make up a step into the vexed arena of "cultural studies," indicating Butler's eagerness to demonstrate the indissolubility of the relationship between "theory" and "culture," to situate theory more centrally in our daily lives, and to position culture as a legitimate object of critical thought. The chapters bump up against each other slightly uncomfortably; you can feel, reading them in sequence, the differences in generic history that they're trying to subsume. And that unease is exciting.

One index of Butler's success in straddling the discourses of theory and of cultural observation is the aptness of her title. The book really is about "bodies that matter": bodies that win and lose struggles for cultural recognition, and bodies that are always coming into material being—into Being, even. And Butler refuses to succumb to a merely culturalist understanding of those bodies, an understanding that would leave a little space upon our skins or in our skull where theory couldn't go. Such a version of what bodies are would accede to their "constructed" nature, accepting that we can only understand them through a grid of socially generated practices (hairstyles, sexual "roles," types of dress and posture, the pitch and cadence of our speech)—but would draw the line at brute materiality, insisting that all the cultural varieties of bodies, however "constructed" by that inchoate force, "society," are still, finally, made of the same stuff—flesh.

It's the persistence of that "finally" that Butler resists; and she's perfectly aware of the stubbornness required to resist it. In her introduction, she rehearses the argument that her "radical constructivist" position so often sparks:

Certain formulations of the radical constructivist position appear almost compulsively to produce a moment of recurrent exasperation, for it seems that when the constructivist is construed as a linguistic idealist, the constructivist refutes the reality of bodies, the relevance of science, the alleged facts of birth, aging, illness, and death. The critic might also suspect the constructivist of a certain somatophobia and seek assurances that this abstracted theorist will admit that there are, minimally, sexually differentiated parts, activities, capacities, hormonal and chromosomal differences that can be conceded without reference to "construction." Although at this moment I want to offer an absolute reassurance to my interlocutor, some anxiety prevails. To "concede" the undeniability of "sex" or its "materiality" is always to concede some version of "sex," some formation of "materiality." Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs—and, yes, that concession invariably does occur—not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes?

In other words: the people who want to preserve some small space of pure physical materiality, a materiality that is "real" and not "constructed"—these people inevitably demand, at some crucial point in their arguments, that we all just shut up about the body. The gesture that says, innocently, "Come on. You must believe that there's such a thing as flesh, don't you?" is a gesture that's also saying, *there are some things we shouldn't talk about*. There are some things, that is, that are simply "real." The body. Death. When Butler suggests that conceding to this move is "formative" of what it concedes, she's saying that all the shrugged shoulders and thrown-up hands that force the "constructivist" to say, "OK, OK, death exists, the body exists"—those concessions themselves become the thing we call death; or the body. How so? Simply by becoming an absolute Outside, a region of discussion that's deemed too "stupid," "obvious," or "irrelevant" to bear on serious thought about the body.

Two points are important here. The first is that what the body is, and what death is, are entirely up for grabs. Are transplants, implants, prosthetics, prescription drugs, half-digested food, asbestos in our lungs, part of "the body"? The antibodies that we produce to match the "foreign" material our immune systems encounter, are they "the body"? And as for death—well, Freud got so confused writing

see *Corpus Delicti*, page 20

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IN THE PALACE OF THE MOVIE KING
Hortense Calisher
Random House, 423 pages, \$25

Gonchev, the director, will not leave his Elsinore in Albania. Not until the Americans snatch him to our shores to be the latest dissident on the lecture circuit. But Gonchev is not really a dissident. In fact, his liberators have given him a concussion that renders him aphasic in every language except Japanese. He is an outsider wherever he is, a dissident in whatever locale, a "prison person" inside the territory of his own skin. The *Hamlet* allusions are no accident in this novel. Gonchev questions everything in this new American reality, for "freedom here carries a strong dose of cant." Calisher portrays Gonchev's feints and hesitations in sentences that work from strange angles, and demand careful reading.

Why is that the *New York Times Book Review* seems to specialize in damning with faint praise the very kind of work that quickens the life of English prose? Once again it pretends to parse a good novel, and finds it lacking. The reviewer's enervated phrases would have us believe that Calisher's very contemporaneity, her selection of American reality, lessens the book. Here is English that is awake and uses everything at its disposal. But it's easy to see what kind of mind is at work here: "Such hothouse prose is always a gamble, one that I think Ms. Calisher loses a bit more often than she wins." Hothouse prose, eh? The unpardonable sin, apparently. For the *Times* would have us glean the roadside weeds of plain prose rather than read a cultivated style. Why, it's just not American. And of course it's a gamble when a writer chooses to work new ground rather than retil the same exhausted acres. Calisher tells us at the outset that the novel deals with dissidents who come to America and get caught up in the publicity circuit. "What is it that keeps them heroes? What's so familiar about them? Is it that they resemble us—as we were, once?" Although her character "feels himself being leached of all meditation," Calisher rewards the reader with one of the finest meditations on what it means to be an artist in a world of facile responses.

—Chris Furst

LITTLE KINGDOMS: 3 NOVELLAS
Steven Millhauser
Poseidon Press, 240 pages, \$21

Leave it to Steven Millhauser to show us what meticulous storytelling can do. Described on the cover as "novellas," the three pieces in *Little Kingdoms* might better be called simply "tales." They're a purer strain of story, not concerned with fulfilling (or questioning) a specific form or function of fiction; they're stories that seem to have fallen in place on the page because they simply had to, like a fine spring rain.

The themes of love and betrayal, technology and enterprise direct "The Little Kingdom of J. Franklin

Payne," about an animator defending the slow and painstaking realization of his art against the growth of the early cartoon industry, intent on reducing the process of animation to a quick, inanimate mechanics. The middle story, "The Princess, The Dwarf, and the Dungeon" is a paragraph-by-paragraph apostrophic variation on the medieval romance and its themes and props. And we read "Catalogue of the Exhibition" as if it were a document found outside a museum, describing paintings we won't have the opportunity to see; but from those unseen scenes our anonymous narrator recreates a painter's life and death. It's a fine example of how one might occasionally prefer those few thousand words a picture's supposedly worth.

Millhauser deserves a larger general readership. His admirers in print perhaps admire him too much, casting a wide net of adjectives over the back of the current book that could make any potential reader feel like a tuna surrounded by Japanese fishing boats. Don't read them. Go right to the first page and begin. To recast a word I've already used, the painstaking aspect of Millhauser's writing is not just "of taking pains" but also of "staking pain," or that part of our lives we spend in meaningful suffering, to live in a state of heightened awareness. The rewards of Millhauser's own subtle gamble with language are well within the reader's reach.

—Jeff Schwaner

GOING NATIVE
Stephen Wright
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
304 pages, \$22

Don't judge this book by its cover, even if you like detergent boxes. In fact, don't judge it by its plot or structure either, the sole proof of the existence of both in this novel's eight chapters being the consistent appearance of "an unwashed, unwaxed, decidedly unnew green Ford Galaxie," which leaves in its violent wake truck drivers, death metal wannabes, young female sidekick types, visitors to Borneo, and numerous name changes for the characterless main character, who leaves the iconography of one cultural watering hole (9-5 middle class suburbia) and ends up, despite a rhetorical slalom course of American chaos that lasts three hundred pages, smack in the middle of another dead end role, the psycho-killer-existential-hero-on-the-road-guy, complete with a climax straight out of *In Cold Blood*.

Going Native is one of those books it is impossible to "judge" because it employs so infuriatingly well all the cultural types it seems to align itself against, including the *Fast Sofa* type novel Farrar Straus's cover artist wants consumers to believe it is: one woman in a diner is reading "the critically acclaimed fiction *In Your Face*, stopping dutifully at the conclusion of each chapter to connect the dots of the accompanying illustration." In the end I had to give up with the judging; what I recommend you do with Mr. Wright's book is simply read it, read without ceasing or thinking, read the peculiarly American sentences of his, long and sinewy but not overly muscular. Wright's compound complex constructions are beautiful but not built for display purposes only. They're built to move and surprise, as in this

description of carrot peels: "strips of orange vegetable matter stuck to the window above the sink in random crisscross like an entire box of desperately affixed Band-Aids." A few of those bandaids, or perhaps an editor, could have staunched the sanguine flow of Wright's words in other instances, such as "Everyone...was engaged in intense involvement with a cigarette...." If "engaged" does not quite imply intensity, it certainly states involvement; such redundancy hulls all three words of their meaning, and this tendency in a larger sense threatens the reading experience of the whole novel. To Wright's credit, though, a reader's engagement in this troublesome work will most likely result in involvement all the way to its intense, anticlimactic end. So peel out, man, but keep the bandaids handy.

—JS

VARIOUS ANTIDOTES
Joanna Scott
Henry Holt & Co., 240 pages, \$20

Joanna Scott is superb at finding the exact tangle of details that will bring her characters horribly to life. Her imagination ranges into the history of science and medicine for some of its most powerful and disturbing images. For Scott means to disturb that embalmed view of the past which ignores the mess of blood and cadavers and madhouses. Her world is not the antiseptic one delivered in movie biographies of famous scientists. In the story "Nowhere," a professor of anatomy laments the lack of dead bodies for his students to dissect, and makes arrangements with a couple who will supply him. "He hadn't suspected that the couple who called themselves resurrectionists were, in fact, in the business of murder, and that the body on his dissecting table belonged to a young man who surely had more of a right to the future than the anatomist did."

Van Leeuwenhoek, the father of the microscope, "displace[s] all other appetites" in his search for fresh wonder. But in order to extract a tear for his specimen slide, he kisses his daughter "like the devil kisses." The marvelous universe in the tear justifies all: "To the mad lens-grinder of Delft, there was hardly a difference between discovering life and creating it."

Scott's gallery of obsessive searchers carry with them hallucinatory anti-selves. Dorothea Dix's life of prim rectitude and humanitarian aid is haunted by a naked madwoman in an East Cambridge cell. Dix's hard-won routine cannot hold this spirit at bay. "I won't scream, it's too risky. I am and will remain Dorothea Dix, America's most useful and distinguished woman."

Scott recaptures these voices in an imaginative and unsettling collection. Readers of her novel *Arrogance* will have another reason to cheer.

—CF

NEW & COLLECTED POEMS 1952-1992
Geoffrey Hill
Houghton Mifflin, 232 pages,
\$29.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper

If you go to Boston University and ask just about anyone who the Big Poet on campus is, you're likely to be directed to Derek Walcott; but if you ask



somebody smart, you just might be led quietly to the Department of Religion and the office of Geoffrey Hill. Readers familiar with Hill's "Mercian Hymns" will recognize the above as more a statement of fact than hyperbole; others who pick up *New & Collected Poems* out of curiosity will feel the landscape of postwar verse shift as quickly as their eyes can read. If this review be considered a public service announcement rather than a psalm or spasm of positive or negative criticism, so be it; there is no greater living British poet, and no book of collected verse currently in print by any poet in English is as powerful and important as Hill's *New & Collected Poems*.

Collected verse in this century has been an interesting form of indirect biography or confession, differing from "selected poems" in that it gives the complete narrative of a poet's growth and development. Sometimes its value derives from the complete reprinting of a watershed volume long out of print; sometimes a reader's favorite poem may not be among those "selected" by poet or editor. But one cannot imagine a "selection" of Hill's verse; he just doesn't write that many poems, and those are presented to us full-grown and of themselves complete. Hill's book does not allow us that Darwinian reading for which many collected works exist almost solely. It's strictly creationist; Hill naming a poem into existence before its time would be like imagining Adam naming the protozoa.

Contemporary English poetry, as well as American poetry considered formal, has long been a song hard to hear without wincing for many of us in the colonies. This is due in part to the fact that much of it seems to have the iambic pentameter looking over its shoulder, Americans having shrugged off that chip back at the mending wall. And rhyme has been utilized in American language mostly for either coy or blatant effect. But there is in Hill's verse neither the sideways Anglo glances of Larkin nor the inyer-face-mate Saxonness of Hughes; the tools of his versification, like the bones within us, are invisible to the eye, but proportional to the body of work they support, and indivisible from it. In "Old Poet with Distant Admirers" the narrator tells of his fragmenting, yet not lost memories,

Old age

Singles them out as though by first-light,

*As though a still-life, preserving some
Portion of the soul's feast, went with me
Everywhere, to be hung in strange rooms...*

We should be thankful for whatever daily bread has nurtured this great poet and the feast he's left for us, who has reached such heights already that, if anything is looking over his shoulder, it is nameless and beyond review.

—JS

Illustrations: Mary Hood



THE HIGH FRONTIER

Exploring the Tropical Rainforest Canopy

MARK W. MOFFETT

FORWARD BY E. O. WILSON

In *The High Frontier*, Mark W. Moffett does for the tropical rainforest canopy what Jacques Cousteau did thirty years ago for undersea life. Donning rock-climbing gear to join researchers working 150 feet and more above the ground, Moffett photographed strangler trees in Borneo, giant squirrels in India, and canopy bears in Colombia. He entered the terrifying world of arboreal spiders and ants, photographing them under extreme magnification. His coverage of this new science is unparalleled.

"This book is a tour de force of scientific journalism as well as the visual and literary expression of an experienced and deeply caring naturalist."

—E. O. Wilson

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Redeeming Himself



Gilles, Antoine Watteau

GHOSTS

John Banville
Knopf, 246 pages, \$21

Julia Hawkins

Ghosts, the Irish writer John Banville's sequel to *The Book of Evidence*, locates the narrator on a northern Atlantic island working for a reclusive art historian, after having served time for the murder of a young woman servant, which took place in the earlier novel. In *The Book of Evidence*, the narrator is an unrepentant and self-indulgent young Irishman who lives in California and then Greece, where he dishonorably contracts a debt involving the underworld that causes him to return to his mother's house in Ireland in search of funds.

Ghosts continues the story a decade later, and the narrator describes the changes his years in prison have wrought in him, and his desire to make restitution for his crime. Out on parole, he is working with Professor Kreutznaer, an old, weary art historian with a seamy past who is writing the definitive book on the life and art of the fictional painter Jean Vaublin, a work for which, the narrator says, that part of the world that cares about such things has grown tired of waiting. Living with them is the slightly daft assistant, Licht, who, like them, is excited by the arrival of visitors when a pleasure boat runs aground.

Among the passengers is Felix, unsavory, yet appealingly Mephistophelian, who knows both the professor and the narrator from their earlier criminal days. He, like the other men, is attracted to fellow passenger Flora, a beautiful young woman who had been hired by the mainland hotel to supervise the guests' children, three of whom accompany her here: Pound, who is fat; Hatch, who has no mother; and Alice, who cries easily. Filling out the cast are Croke, an elderly vaudeville actor, and Sophie, a sullen, somewhat famous photographer who wears a black leather jacket and smokes constantly. When the passengers leave the island, only Flora, who has the flu, remains behind.

In an interview in the *New York Times Book Review* (11/28/93), Banville says he was struck by "the ravishing image" of people walking out of a painting, which he saw on a British television show, and that he strove for the same effect in *Ghosts*. "I wanted these still figures on a landscape to come alive briefly when the narrator turned the spotlight of his attention on them." "Here they are," the narrator says in the opening passage of *Ghosts*, "There is no elsewhere, for them."

The epigraph of *Ghosts*, from Wallace Stevens's poem "Large Red Man Reading," presents one of the themes and adds to the story line: "There were ghosts that returned to earth to hear his phrases." The poem describes ghosts who came from the "wilderness of stars" to hear a reading from "the poem of life./ Of the pans above the stove, the pots on the table...." They were "those that would have wept to step barefoot into reality...."

Here, as in Banville's earlier novels, *Kepler* and *Mefisto*, there are innumerable references to angels, angels' wings, and flight: "Licht...stopping now and then to listen...for the crackle of wing cases, perhaps, for the sounds of the new life..."; Flora "stood in the doorway as if enveloped in some dark, flowing stuff, an angled shape flexing behind her shoulder like a wing being folded..."; Alice "imagined...she had sprouted little wings now,...at ankle and wrist...bearing her aloft."

The characters' fusion with angels refers to Banville's espousal of the artist's role as expressed in Rilke's Ninth Elegy in the *Duino Elegies*:

Praise this world to the Angel, not the
untellable: you

can't impress him with the splendour you've
felt; in the cosmos
where he more feelingly feels you're only a
novice. So show him
some simple thing, refashioned by age after
age,
till it lives in our hands and eyes as a part of
ourselves.
Tell him things.
...These things that live on departure
understand when you praise them: fleeting,
they look for
rescue through something in us, the most
fleeting of all.
Want us to change them entirely, within our
invisible hearts,
into—oh, endlessly—into ourselves! Whoso-
ever we are....
Are we, perhaps, here just for saying: House.
Bridge, Fountain, Gate, Jug, Fruit tree, Win-
dow,—
possibly: Pillar, Tower... but for saying,
remember,
oh, for such saying as never the things them-
selves
hoped so intensely to be.

Banville's own "saying" invests objects with an energy that seems to spring from agencies independent of, but related to the mortal, capturing an expectancy in material things, mingling the domestic and natural worlds: a "scrumbling of ochreous pinks," "shadows thronging on the stairs," a "wash of sunlight swept the yard," a "box kite of sunlight across the floor," "pale swoops of sunlight."

Banville says, "It is out of the tension between the desire to take things into ourselves by saying them, by praising them to the Angel, and the impossibility finally of making the world our own, that poetry springs.... Hence the note of solitude, of stoic despair, which great art always sounds." The artist creates in the face of mortality. As Stevens puts it: "From this the poem springs: that we live in a place/That is not our own, and, much more, not ourselves/And hard is it, in spite of blazoned days."

Art's note of solitude and despair lives also in the paintings of Watteau, in which courtly figures disport in glades that are surrounded by dark woods. In *Ghosts*, the fictional artist Vaublin, on whose biography the narrator is working, is similar in many details to Watteau—origin, early death, subject matter, uncanny ability to express motion and feeling. The narrator describes the tension in one painting:

Such stillness; though the scene moves there is no movement; time has come to a halt: what other painter before or after has managed to illustrate this fundamental paradox of art with such profound yet playful artistry? These creatures will not die, even if they have never lived. They are wonderfully detailed figurines, animate yet frozen in immobility....

The description characterizes the figures in the novel—detailed, animate, frozen, immortal though, because invented, without mortality.

The narrator's description of Vaublin's (Watteau's) "Pierrot" also describes the design of *Ghosts*:

The design of the work, the strange yet strangely pleasing asymmetry in the placing of the figures within the enveloping frame of trees and clouds and hazy, far-off sea, which strikes the viewer as at once arbitrary and inevitable, generates an air of mystery over and above the question of what it is that is happening and who or what the figures may be meant to represent—beyond, that is, their *commedia dell'arte* roles.... Evidently there is an allegory here, and symbols seem to abound, yet the scene carries

see *Ghosts*, page 18

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Conquest and Survival

THE INDIAN CHRONICLES

José Barreiro

Arte Público Press, 304 pages, \$19.95

Tony Del Plato

Originally, says José Barreiro, he had intended to write a historical account of the first fifty years of contact between the Spanish and the Taíno people of Hispaniola after Columbus' landing in the New World, as fulfillment of his work for a PhD. His aim was to take a detailed look at the colonization of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola. "I wanted in particular to write of the impact of the Taíno upon the early waves of migrants. The impact on agriculture and its lore was especially important." But as he was researching the subject in the West Indies, the archives in Seville, and elsewhere, he repeatedly came upon the name of an Indian man known as Diego Colón, and gradually the historical account evolved into a narrative in which "Diego's voice took over. Finding the voice to write is delicate work. I'm lucky this voice found me."

In the resulting novel, *The Indian Chronicles*, Diego Colón is a Taíno, named Guaikan, who was twelve when Columbus landed. He becomes Columbus' interpreter, travels to Spain with him, and is adopted by him at the urging of Queen Isabella. Forty years later, after he has witnessed the virtual decimation of his people, he has retired to a monastery and, at the behest of the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, is writing down his memories of this momentous period in the history of the modern world.

Barreiro begins his novel with a clever and fitting literary deception. In an introduction, complete with footnotes, he relates how, when he was researching in Cuba, he heard a story about a fabulous manuscript hidden away with a family "of Amerindian descent" in the remote town of Baracoa.

My friend, an archaeologist of Indo-Cuban descent himself (from Santiago), insisted that the manuscript was a long-lost set of notes made by Father Bartolomé de las Casas in preparation for his historic book, *Brevísima historia de la destrucción de las Indias*, sometime during the 1530s. He said two investigators from the University of Havana had visited the family in the early 1980s, but had only been allowed to view portions of the manuscript. "The family is very guarded," my friend said.

As the introduction recounts it, Barreiro travels to Baracoa and is eventually allowed to see the entire manuscript, which turns out to be a journal of 440 pages written by Diego Colón. He realizes that this is not a Spaniard speaking, but an Indian who has learned to speak and write Spanish.

Diego's words resonated in my ears with a vibrancy that is a researcher's dream. Diego's journal narrates a moment in that early history...when for a brief decade the Taíno people regrouped under the leadership of the young chief, Guarocuya (Enriquillo's Taíno name), and actually won a war against the Spanish crown, one that resulted in capitulations that constitute the first treaty between a European power and an American indigenous people.

What follows, then, is a novel in the form of Diego's journal entries, written from 1532 to 1539, followed by two letters of Las Casas and a postscript by the author. Barreiro has created in this journal a vivid and poignant recapitulation, grounded in extensive historical research, of the destruction of the Taíno in Hispaniola and of the overwhelming of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

"That is the undercurrent of the novel," says Barreiro. "It is a mix of horrendous racial and ethnic war and moments of total destruction of cultures. Despite the ethnocentrism, though, the real thing is the commonality among people. I wanted to work with the distinctiveness and commonality at once. They're both very important for societies, for prosperity and peace."

The two chief characters in the novel, carrying its two synchronous themes, are Las Casas and Enriquillo. Las Casas was part of a movement within the Catholic Church for just treatment of Indian people. His name is memorialized in the Mexican town of San Cristobal de Las Casas, where Zapatista rebels have recently confronted the Mexican government with its continuing maltreatment of the Indian population. While he relentlessly proselytized and was uncompromising in his belief that it was Christianity's destiny to rule the world, Las Casas tried to be tolerant of Taíno culture and its varied expressions. He was the good cop of Christianity, says Barreiro, "not a radical ideologically but a liberal activist. He endured starvation and persecution by the conquistador class, and he crossed the ocean many times to plead the case of the Indians before the crown and the church hierarchy. His influence can be felt today in Mexico. Though the church has not supported the uprising in Chiapas, they have for years supported human rights in the area. Las Casas laid down a relationship for that regional church with the Indians that has been sustained. He was an ally in certain ways, and there are still debates in Spain over the positions he took." Chief among Las Casas' agendas was the ending of the encomienda or slave system.

In the novel, Las Casas pleads with Diego to accept his strategy to protect the native people by asserting to the Inquisition that Taíno beliefs are actually a form of Christianity. Diego responds:

"In truth I do not hold as much hope for that argument as you do."

The good friar meant to press on. "I may convince the monarchs by asserting that the religious beliefs you held before our arrival were not so different from the Christian catechism," he said.

Deep in my heart, I refuse to accept this argument from Don Bartolomé. I like what he tries to do, how tirelessly he argues on our behalf, but it angers something within me.

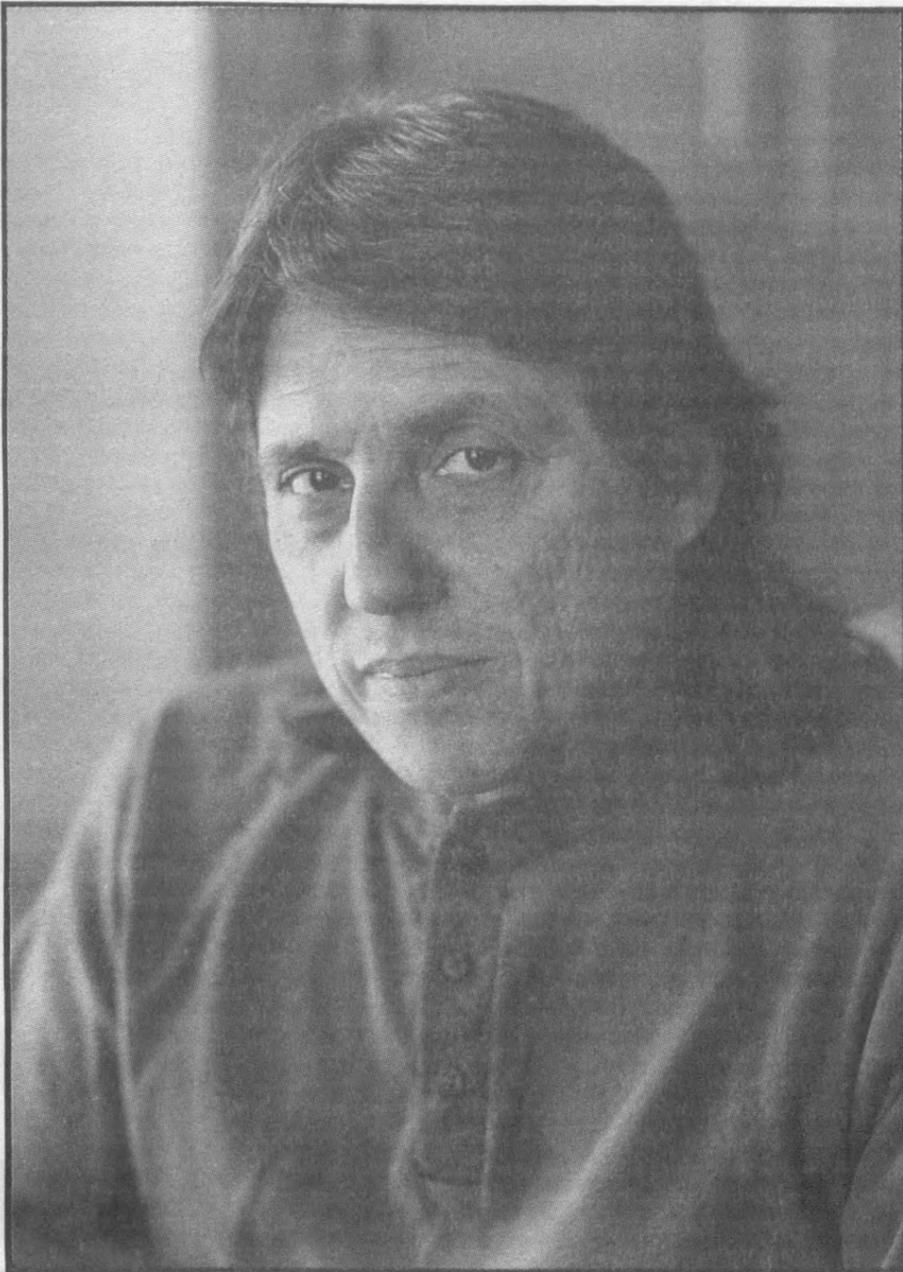
Though the two men have this continuing tension in their relationship, they care for each other and share many struggles in defense of the native people.

The other major character is Enriquillo, the guerilla leader who mounts a formidable resistance of Taíno people living in the mountains of Hispaniola from 1519 to 1534, and who eventually negotiates a peace with the Spanish crown. While Las Casas' aim is to end the slave system, Enriquillo's is to assure his people's survival. Diego recalls a meeting with him:

Enriquillo knows he can't win in the long run. Yesterday morning we walked his perimeter and he was very measured and determined. He started twice to talk, but ran out of words. "It happens like that," he said. "My thoughts of the future stop coming. I have fortified my ears and eyes over the years. I do not think so much but feel for danger. I am the hawk in the tree, watching. I am the caguayo lizard...spotting the flocks of shiny blackbirds that would eat the egg of my young...."

He had started by saying that he thought it best to settle for a peace, that it was better not to push the Castilla if the King actually sought peace. "I consider that I would bring my men in," he said. "I tell my warriors that the reason we are here is not to make war but to ensure the survival of our people. My warriors, you see, are trained for war. I demand a vigilance from them that is complete. We have put up a world here, in these mountains. Our hunters and guards are instructed, as in our Taíno times, to take seed pouches into the woods, to propagate the guayaba, the anón, the caimitu and the mamey; thus we have orchards in the forest whose location only we know. Preparation for survival from battle, the assurance that we will be attacked in our villages has been our constant idea. So, we have plantations, deep in the forest.

Chronicles is a study in comparative cultures and touches both on conflicts and similarities in values, religious beliefs, and sexual expression. "I try to observe and compare two distinct cul-



José Barreiro

tures during a major encounter in history," says Barreiro. In the Taíno, Columbus finds as peaceful a people as has been found anywhere, who generally withdrew from fights with other natives, and later with the Spaniards, in order simply to continue their lives. They survived generations of Carib attacks (indeed, Barreiro believes that the Taíno were gradually assimilating the Carib into their own body politic), and they developed a peace pacting ceremony called the *guatiao*, or giving of names, which was at the core of a ritual declaring friendship between groups. "They did not fight very often," says Barreiro, "and there were no wars going on at the time of the Spanish landing."

The Spanish, on the other hand, were a well-oiled fighting machine after having battled the Moors for 800 years. In considering the motives of these 15th-century Spanish, Barreiro says, "We're looking at a particular moment and situation. The soldier and adventurer, the man alone, was without a family on a mission to subjugate and convert non-Christians. There was both rape and intermarriage with Taíno women, and the intentional forging of the mestizo race by implanting 'the Spanish seed.'"

In the novel, Diego describes a different sense of sexuality among the Taíno:

They controlled human passion for its power to communicate and create. Their nakedness did not promote a tidal wave of lustful coupling. The coupling act was the energy of connection with the spirit world of the ancestors. But the elders taught that the urge of the loins and its act is disrespectful during preparation for prayer ceremonies.

Barreiro adds, "In the Indian context this was not repression based on shame...but discipline and abstinence at various points based on a commitment to spiritual results."

Barreiro's novel is a culmination of 25 years of work with indigenous communities in North and Central America. Currently Editor-in-Chief of *Akwe:kon Journal and Press* at Cornell,

which publishes a magazine, curriculum guides, and books, Barreiro was editor and writer for *Akwasne Notes*, an Iroquois journal devoted to the culture and survival of native peoples. He was born in Cuba, moved to Minnesota when he was twelve, and his first writings were on the issues surrounding the siege of Wounded Knee in 1973. His ancestry in the rural *guajiro* culture of eastern Cuba, and his memories of growing up there, support his belief that many elements of the Taíno culture, long thought to have been totally destroyed, have survived. "I wrote the book partially to answer these questions: Who were the Taíno? How are those ancestors in us? How are they around us in our culture?"

A movement to recreate Taíno culture has begun in the Caribbean and in the US, and Barreiro's novel is being taught in college courses and by a Taíno Nation group in New York City and Puerto Rico. "There is also interest in the mountains of Cuba, where small communities of indios exist," according to Barreiro. Some historians and anthropologists in Cuba and the US have argued that the Taíno people are extinct, that there is no way to revitalize the culture. But others, specifically Irvin Rouse, have pointed out that "a large proportion of the modern population of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Cuba is able to claim partial descent from the Taíno."

Part of Barreiro's work has been the study and support of indigenous and ecologically guided economic development. His experience from that work informed the novel's themes. "All people," he says, "at some time in their history have a distinctive indigeness, a spirit and sense of place. Industrial civilization has been uprooting this for over 200 years. But even in Europe, and certainly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America there are still varieties of pre-Christian land-based cultures, ecosystem cultures."

This is one of the points the novel makes about Diego's trip to Spain. "In 1493 if you

see Barreiro, page 19

The Outsider

continued from page 2

Parisian student protests, is published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1968. During this period of his life, which will last until his death from throat cancer in 1986, the writer must come to terms with a fundamental paradox of his existence: on one hand, the psychological need to remain an isolated outsider, and on the other, the need to demonstrate solidarity with oppressed and marginalized segments of society—even with terrorists (a result of his epiphany on the train). In his posthumous work, *Prisoner of Love*, about the Palestinians and the Black Panthers, Genet highlights this contradiction, says White: "he speculates that the real source of his favourite vice, betrayal, is the assertion of individualism against the collective, even a collective one *wants* to submit to and serve." He finally reconciles this with the understanding that he will never be able to support any group which has become institutionalized and has abandoned its status as outsider. Genet travels the world: to the US in support of Angela Davis and the Soledad Brothers; covering the 1968 Democratic Convention for *Esquire*; to Jordan and Lebanon, where he sees firsthand the Christian massacre of the Palestinian refugee camps at Sabra and Shatila and writes his most important political article, "Four Hours at Shatila." He also demonstrates in France with other intellectuals such as Marguerite Duras, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault about prison conditions and the plight of the North African immigrants. He experiences his final love relationship with Mohammed El Katrani and, at his death, is buried in an old Spanish cemetery overlooking the town of Larache, Morocco, close to the home of El Katrani and his son Azzedine. While Genet's death passes virtually unnoticed, Simone de Beauvoir's death, the

day before his, prompts a massive Parisian funeral.

Cocteau had called Genet the greatest writer of the day and his works miraculous; it is a commonplace now to rank him, with Proust and Beckett, as one of the three great French literary geniuses of this century. His works function as curious hybrids, somewhere between prose and poetry, crossing genre lines, subverting literary conventions, at some points heralding the anti-realist ruptures of the *nouveaux romanciers* with their dislocated sense of time and space, replaceable characters, and narrative self-consciousness. In the '50s, Genet worked on a book which he later abandoned and which was to combine all literary genres in one; his last work, *Prisoner of Love*, is, according to White, "a curious mixture of memoir, tract, stylized Platonic dialogue based on actual conversation, allegorical quest, epic." The most salient aspect of all of Genet's fiction is its very opacity, the surface which repels and makes definitive analysis impossible. We know his works are about death, about power, about domination and submission among other things, but we don't know precisely what they are saying about them. We know that they point to another reality, Bataille's sacred. Like Genet himself, they remain virtually unknowable.

And to me that is the most frustrating part of the adventure of reading this brilliant biography. Edmund White, himself a fiction writer, creates a multiple Genet that is part traditional biography, drawn through interviews, journals, police records, psychiatric reports and letters; part literary criticism, in which White masterfully analyzes the writing both as literature in itself and reflection of the person of Genet; and part moral apothegms. The research and data are exhaustive, the exposition is lucid, the prose limpid, unmarred by rhetorical difficulties. But at the end I still do not have Genet. It is clear that this is not the fault of White, who has made everything visible that could possibly be seen, separated fact from fiction, analyzed and synthesized. I can only conclude that the fault is my own: I cannot personally comprehend the aspects of Genet that are anti-Semitic; that abandon devoted and loyal lovers of decades standing through neglect; that support terrorism and violence; that destroy friendships of long duration over a misperception. I cannot join these with a Genet who financially supported not only his lovers but their families, including wives and children; who was often courtly and gracious; who had an enormous breadth of culture and brilliance of insight; and who believed in and quested for the spiritual, however idiosyncratically he defined it.

Lynne Diamond-Nigh teaches at Elmira College.

It Can't Happen Here

continued from page 8

Oswald's life. "It was...in mid-September (1962), that Oswald first met another of the emigrés, someone on the fringe of the Russian group, George de Mohrenschildt." What was extraordinary about their meeting and the relationship which developed was that they were each so completely different from one another. Why was de Mohrenschildt attracted to Lee and Marina? "Sympathy," says Posner.

Posner makes it clear that de Mohrenschildt (who had traveled extensively) had no KGB file and no "intelligence relationship" with the CIA. However, he had been interviewed by the CIA in 1957.

It was de Mohrenschildt who suggested to Oswald that "anyone who knocked off [General Edwin] Walker would be doing society a favor." Oswald had read about the "right-wing general" who had been fired from his post in NATO by President Kennedy and had returned to his home in Dallas. He began an elaborate mapping and photographic plan to kill Walker. The day after his Walker vigil, March 12, 1963, Oswald clipped a coupon from the February issue of *American Rifleman* and sent a \$21.45 money order to Klein's Sporting Goods in Chicago for a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle with a four-power (4x) scope.

On the evening of April 10, 1963, Oswald fired at General Walker as he sat in his home. The bullet struck the window frame and was deflected enough so that, instead of passing through the General's head, it passed through his hair.

Posner continues, "For two days after the Walker attack, Marina reported that Lee suffered convulsive anxiety attacks during his sleep.... Then, on the evening of April 12, 1963 there was a loud pounding at the Oswalds' door. They thought it might be the police. Instead it was George de Mohrenschildt, who looked directly at Lee and said in his deep voice, 'how is it possible that you missed?' It was de Mohrenschildt's idea of a 'joke,' writes Posner. That was the last time de Mohrenschildt saw Lee Harvey Oswald. He and his wife moved from Dallas to Haiti five days later and Lee went to New Orleans.

In a footnote, Posner reports that "On March 29, 1977, de Mohrenschildt told Edward Jay Epstein that the CIA had asked him to keep tabs on Oswald in Dallas during 1962." Several hours later, de Mohrenschildt killed himself with a shotgun blast to the head.

On September 23, 1963, after sending his wife and daughter back to Dallas, Oswald left New Orleans for Mexico City, where he hoped to obtain a visa to travel to Cuba, and from there, to go on to the Soviet Union. The visa was denied by the Cuban embassy and Oswald returned to Dallas on October 3. By October 19 he had a job working in the Texas School Book Depository.

Posner describes how, on the morning of November 22, 1963, Oswald left his wedding band and a sum of money on the dresser in Marina's room, went out to the garage where he put the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle in a long paper bag, then rode with his friend to the Texas School Book Depository. On the lunch break, he went upstairs, took out the rifle and its four shells, set up a sniper's nest of boxes in the corner and waited. As the President's car made the turn onto Elm Street, he fired his first shot. It deflected off a tree limb. The second shot passed through the back and throat of John Kennedy, then into the back, out the chest, through the wrist, and into the thigh of Governor Connally. The third shot struck Kennedy in the back of his head and blew out the right side of his brain and skull.

Two days after the President's assassination, the world saw Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald on television. From the moment of that fatal shot, millions of people believed that they had witnessed a conspiracy. As Robert Blakey, the chief counsel for the House Select Committee on Assassinations said: "The way Ruby killed Oswald... had all the earmarks of a mob hit." Posner, however, argues that the Mafia would never put out a contract on Kennedy, even though they hated him, because if it were ever found out that the Mafia had murdered Kennedy, it would ruin them.

The last three chapters in *Case Closed* are devoted to a major assault on the "conspiracy buffs" and the "conspiracy press." Actually, throughout his book Posner takes on virtually

every author who has written any major piece about a "conspiracy theory" as part of the Kennedy-Oswald assassinations. Yet, according to Burt Griffin, former staff lawyer for the Warren Commission, who was interviewed by Posner, "There is plenty of evidence in the testimony that would lead a reasonable person to pursue a conspiracy theory."

Certainly, world events that followed the assassination, beginning with the publication of the Warren Commission Report itself, seemed to enhance the plausibility of those who saw a conspiracy. The massacre of 600-800 children, women, and old men at My Lai by American soldiers (who stopped in the middle of the carnage to take a coffee break) was met with an official government denial. Attempts were made to prevent *Life* magazine from publishing the photographs. Then came the Watergate cover-up, and more recently the Iran-Contra affair revealed the existence of a shadow government operating in secrecy, hidden not only from the American people, but from Congress as well.

In 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence found that the CIA, with the assistance of the Mafia, had repeatedly tried to assassinate Fidel Castro, and that the CIA had not kept President Kennedy fully informed about these plots. Allen Dulles, the Director of the CIA and a member of the Warren Commission, also hid from the Commission his agency's efforts to murder Castro. Posner himself reveals that the CIA destroyed or withheld information on Oswald while the Warren Commission investigation was being conducted. He remarks, rather lamely, that the "CIA's failure to be forthright is an inherent part of the intelligence trade, and it is not unique to the handling of the Oswald case...." Similarly, when he acknowledges the destruction by the FBI of a possibly significant note Oswald had sent to one of its Dallas agents shortly before his death, Posner characterizes this as one of the worst breaches of trust in the case, evidence of the FBI's "negligence and impropriety," but "not evidence of conspiracy."

Posner rejects the idea that there was a conspiracy, and many who read his excellent book will find that the facts from the "credible testimony, the documents, and the latest scientific advances" offer sound reason to agree with him.

Still, if one looks more closely at Posner's arguments, his claim to have closed the case appears dubious at best. To take but a single example, toward the end of the book Posner attempts to deal with the question of the large number of people with important connections to the assassinations of Kennedy and Oswald who met premature deaths. This issue was first raised by Jim Marrs in his book, *Crossfire: The Plot that Killed Kennedy* (1989). Of the 101 deaths listed by Marrs, Posner removes 53 as having died from "natural causes," leaving 48 who died "unnatural deaths." Yet Posner does not mention Marrs' citation of "One recently declassified CIA document, a letter from an Agency consultant to a CIA officer," that states:

You will recall that I mentioned that the local circumstances under which a given means might be used might suggest the technique to be used in that case. I think the gross divisions in presenting this subject might be:

- (1) bodies left with no hope of the cause of death being determined by the most complete autopsy and chemical examinations.
- (2) bodies left in such circumstances as to simulate accidental death.
- (3) bodies left in such circumstances as to simulate suicidal death.
- (4) bodies left with residue that simulate those caused by natural diseases.

Gerald Posner, former Wall Street lawyer and conservative scholar, does a masterful job in trying to bring to an end the widely held belief that some form of conspiracy lies at the heart of the Kennedy assassination. But there are too many gaps, too many silences, too many lies, too many instances of missing evidence, too many unanswered questions in the story. Ironically, this important book—far from closing the case—succeeds only in reopening it.

Jules Burgevin teaches sociology at Ithaca College.

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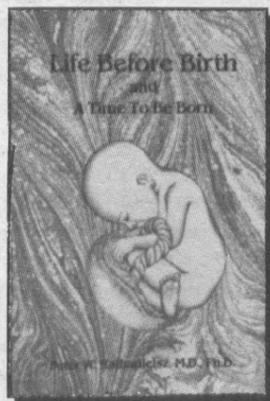
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A Ride on a Unicorn

continued from page 3

making the monkey live forever in her body. Dali was happy I'd given Gala a present she couldn't eat because the monkey stew had given her indigestion.

Dali's admiration for Gala was boundless. He never missed an opportunity to praise her. Often he'd take her face in his hands and exclaim: "Look at zee bones! Look at zee eyes! Gala eez zee most bootiful in zee world!"

Etherington-Smith describes Gala as almost pathologically cold and uncaring to everyone, including Dali. That wasn't my understanding of her. She was more pragmatic than Dali (who wasn't?) and she sometimes got impatient with him (who didn't?) and bored with the visitors he attracted, but she was always protective of him, his time, and his work. I thought Dali was essentially kind, generous, and easily distracted, and without Gala to organize his life, he would have probably slipped into utter chaos.

There was only one time when I saw Gala be truly unpleasant. An American was coming to visit—a rich American, said Dali, and more preparations had been made for this guest than was usually the case. Dali had been working on a small drawing, an *Ex Libris* for his books. Gala was dressed to the nines and there was an air of anticipation. The man arrived, too casual, I thought, in shorts and an American sports shirt, the kind that European men wouldn't wear past the age of twelve, and not even then for a luncheon. As usual, we sat in the garden drinking pink champagne. A table had been set in the shade of a tree. The cook had bought fresh fish on the beach. She had also gotten a small octopus, still alive, and Gala brought it out from the kitchen to show us. Dali got excited, fetched some drawing paper and poured ink into a saucer. The table was cleared and Dali dipped the octopus in the ink and placed it on the paper, where it made a blurred squiggle. Displeased with the result, he tore up the paper and repeated the process. The whole performance was conducted with Dali-esque drama and panache. The American was amused and I was feeling sorry for the octopus. When Dali pronounced a squiggle perfect, he signed it with a flourish. The paper was left in the sun to dry, the table was set again and we returned to our lounge chairs to wait for the lunch. It was a wonderfully bright, peaceful day. Gala playfully suggested to the American that he buy the drawing. He laughed and declined. She insisted. He refused again. Gala named a price. The American said it was ridiculous. She said the price was a favor—he said he simply wasn't interested and if he were to buy a drawing, it was to be a drawing by Dali, not by the octopus. Gala angrily claimed that it was a perfect Dali drawing, in fact, a Dali event, and since the American had been present at its creation it ought to be worth that much more to him. Throughout all this, Dali was silent. The American became more and more uncomfortable and seemed to find it increasingly difficult to maintain a pleasantly amused tone of voice. Gala wouldn't let up and the whole episode deteriorated into a nasty argument. The American walked out without lunch. Gala was furious and continued to argue with Dali. I left, wondering if Gala and Dali were hard up for money.

The American had obviously been a potential collector and many of the other visitors were illustrious enough to be interesting, but, at some moment of unusual lucidity, I asked myself what Dali and Gala wanted with me and Bill and their other young friends. However much it hurt me, I had to face the fact that I really wasn't all that pretty, nor as fascinating to anyone else as I was to myself. Why did they want me around? I often felt that Dali was testing me, pushing to find the limits of what I'd tolerate. The sense of walking on a tightrope never quite left me. I sometimes imagined that we were engaged in a silent contest of will—his to corrupt, and mine to stoically maintain a romanticism so blind that



Dali and Gala

Photograph: Les Waldman

it couldn't even acknowledge his efforts.

While posing, I'd told him a story about a girl who falls in love with a unicorn. Dali had liked the story and pointed out his own preoccupation with rhinoceros horns. One day, he conspiratorially drew me aside. "It's magic," he began. His monologues often began with "It's magic," pronounced "eez mashick." He said he had found me a man. His name was Eric, he was French, he had some minor title and a family crest and—"mashick!"—the crest featured a unicorn. Dali was going to bring us together.

Eric came to lunch and he was a bit short, but, as Dali had promised, very handsome. Unfortunately, he spoke no English at all, only rapid, slangy French, which was almost incomprehensible to me. Dali interpreted between us, the absurdity of which became apparent when, at one point, I actually understood what Eric was saying. Dali had translated a long statement about the similarities between eating lobster and performing cunnilingus. Eric had, in fact, been giving me advice as to when I should start getting massages and plastic surgery in order to preserve my skin, a subject he thought he knew a lot about because his mother owned a string of beauty salons. I was alarmed to think how my side of the conversation had been "translated."

Dali sent us down to the beach to go swimming. He took us out to dinner. I really wanted to oblige him by falling in love with Eric, but it was hard going. Away from Dali, we didn't seek each other's company. In the presence of Dali, Eric actually proposed to me. He must have been even more impressed with Dali than I was.

Dali continued to wax enthusiastic about my prospects. He wanted me to go with him on a trip to Barcelona, which I agreed to do. It turned out he'd also invited Eric. We went there by car, with a driver—I don't think Dali

knew how to drive—and Dali put us up at the Ritz in separate rooms. I had never before been outside the Cadaques area with Dali and I was amazed at the attention he attracted.

After we were installed in our rooms, Dali announced he was taking us to see a special sight. We were driven to a church. I worried that he'd arranged some kind of mock wedding ceremony, but instead he pointed out the art and architecture of the facade. There was a row of gargoyles and mythical beasts along the roof. "Ah," cried Dali, "eez mashick, eez one unicorn!"

And indeed, there was. As we looked up at it, a pile of coins came flying through the air, scattering on the pavement.

"Mashick, mashick," cried Dali. "Eez zee sign from zee heaven! Eez for zee loove!"

We collected the coins. I was touched by the trouble Dali had gone through to create his magic, and disgusted with Eric, who used the coins to pay for a coffee when we got back to the hotel.

In the evening, Dali dropped a number of hints about his expectations regarding the forthcoming consummation of the magic love. I got very nervous because I started to suspect that he wanted to watch me make love with Eric. I claimed a headache and went back to my room. Later, Eric knocked on the door. I didn't respond. He rang me and I hung up. Finally, I went to sleep, feeling unhappy and foolish.

The next day when we drove back to Cadaques, Dali told me that he had gone to a gypsy show, arranged especially for him. I should have been there, he said. It had been fantastic—four gypsies; two men and two women. One woman was a virgin in the anus, he said, and last night she had lost that particular virginity. She had been on all fours and the man had sodomized her from behind. In the moment of orgasm he'd stretched upward, growing like a tree from her in the most "boo-

tiful" way. Dali had applauded and immediately asked them to do it again, but unfortunately they couldn't, since the man didn't have his erection and the woman was no longer a virgin.

I laughed with the same appreciation that I usually showed for Dali's inventions, but I actually believed him and I was appalled. The vision of Dali sitting in some dingy room, caressing his mustache and twirling his walking stick, while some impoverished gypsies were sweatily fornicating for his entertainment, was grotesque. I was far more conventional than either Dali or I suspected. My unease was reaching a crisis point.

Not long after the Barcelona incident, while I was posing, Dali told me to hold the rhinoceros horn. After a few minutes, he asked me to change its position and hold it against my pubic hairs. I did—there was nothing to object to, although I felt silly. I realized that it was as if I were holding a fat, curved penis.

"Make zee noise," said Dali. "Say my name—say Dali."

"Dali?" I said, hesitatingly.

"Again," he begged. "Say Dali... Dali..."

"Dali... Dali..." I repeated.

Dali was partially obscured by the easel, so I couldn't really see him. He sounded like he was breathing heavily. I stretched a little and I noticed his arm moving rapidly up and down.

He isn't really masturbating, I thought. It can't be!

I couldn't be absolutely sure and I stood there for another minute, whispering "Dali" at his urging, before it was crystal clear that indeed, he was.

I wasn't really surprised or shocked—I was dismayed. I calmly considered what to do. It seemed to me that if I permitted this to happen, it would radically change my relation-

see A Ride on a Unicorn, page 20

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Weedsport Library

Ghosts

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a weight of unaccountable significance that is disproportionate to any possible programme or hidden discourse.... It is first of all a masterpiece of pure composition....

The location, the mystery and bizarre tension in this novel, the baffling choice of somewhat stock characters, the spaciousness of the air and the countless varieties and importance of sunlight, to list a few elements, point to Watteau's paintings.

Who are these people? Above all, who is this Pierrot? He is... palpably there... comes from nowhere, from a place where no one else lives; nor is he on his way to anywhere; ... he is wholly pose; we feel ourselves to be the spectators at a melancholy comedy.... He seems someone... who has done some terrible thing.... And from whom is he hiding, if he is hiding? That smirking Harlequin mounted on the donkey seems to know the answers. Is it he who has lent Pierrot his club? ... And whence comes this fierce luminescence falling full on Pierrot's breast... as if some radiant being were alighting behind us from out of the sky and shedding upon him the glare of its shining wings.

Like Pierrot, the narrator has done a "terrible thing." Felix is the Harlequin on the donkey (a motif that occurs early in the novel), and the wings are of the angel/ghosts, us mortals, who need Pierrot, Harlequin, the donkey, the painter's design, to feel how we are alive.

In the end, the narrator seems to make restitution for the life he took in *The Book of Evidence*. In the room where the slightly feverish Flora is resting, the narrator again experiences the impulse to murder. He has imagined this invented character so perfectly, has such an "extraordinarily vivid sense of her as she stood there... in all her wan, popliteal frailty," that he hungers to destroy her. (Among the "things" Banville's hero names are the pleasures in feeling terror and evilness.)

She has become so alive that she is humanly banal and this, in turn, is the irony for her creator. She is "a girl, just a girl, greedy and dissatisfied... but that is not what I would let myself see." As the narrator descends the stairs after resisting his craving for violence, he feels a disgorgement of his hideous feelings, an "unstanchable flood of gall and gleet, my whole life oozing out of me in a final, foul regurgitation."

Cleansed, albeit still ironical and mocking, he now feels like a hero in a knightly romance, charged with the duty of protecting the damsel, and challenging his dark brother, or evil self. At last the narrator/murderer accepts his role as creator, thereby absolving the author.

Julia Hawkins is a freelance writer who is completing a degree in comparative literature at San Francisco State University.

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Barreiro

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went to certain parts of the Iberian peninsula you'd find this indigenism, but because of the Inquisition it would not be prominently displayed—because the Inquisition was partly about destroying the village base and earth-centered spirituality, so-called paganism and family-based knowledge."

Related to this indigenism is the question of mythmaking as a way of harmonizing the past and present of a people. "I value the significance of sharing a common story," says Barreiro. "The more there is of that, the fewer rules are needed to govern a society. When it works well, there is an understanding of who one is and where one is situated in life. You're living out of a source which serves as a guide. It is different for Western societies where civil and criminal laws and regulations have mostly replaced this myth-based agreement that connected people to the natural world, to each other, and to natural things." In North America, these land-based myths have been displaced by technological myths of progress and the frontier that have been used to justify the removal of native people from their land, which continues to this day.

Referring to the fine line between truth and fantasy in writing a historical novel, Barreiro says: "I tried to immerse myself in the issues of the times, the sequence of events, and the personalities of the characters. I wanted to be thorough, not jumble things up. Yet even though I follow the historical sequence of events, there was a lot of room to fill in details. The material on Enriquillo is the most historically attuned because there is much more about him, his negotiations, the war—all of this is documented—even down to the fact that he was in cohiba [a religious ritual] when Barrionuevo, the King's representative, arrived for the negotiations. We don't have as much about the other Taíno characters, but we have lots about Las Casas. And Diego had a point of view; what he writes comes from what I could dream of his point of view 500 years later, based on the record and on experience.

"Writing can be a search for one's own voice and place in history, but here I am not interested in saying 'I am a voice of this culture.' I am uninterested in pronouncements from individuals who pretend to speak for a whole culture."

I asked Barreiro what stood out for him in writing this first novel—how was it different from nonfiction? "The imagination creates possibilities that are sometimes mysterious in ways that open up channels of perception. What has me hooked about writing is the rush of discovering something you didn't know you had. You track out a narrative to work with, and once in a while something clicks that you discovered in the mind of the characters. That's fun."

Tony Del Plato coordinated the Fall, 1992 State of Indian America Conference at Cornell University; he is a long-time supporter of rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas, and cooks for a living.

Bringing the War Home

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prosperous nations in history. But take a walk through an American prison, a nursing home, the slums where the homeless live in cardboard boxes, a cancer ward. Go to a Vietnam vets' meeting, or an A.A. meeting, or an Overeaters Anonymous meeting. *How shallow and unreal a thing is life, how deceitful are its pleasures, what horrible aspects it possesses.*

This bald assessment might be taken as the thesis statement of Jones's entire book. The world is a bleak, brutal place; people are both sadistic and superficial; unspeakable crimes are awarded with medals, while to seek the truth is to risk madness or lobotomy. Man, in the present configuration of his world, is utterly without hope. In addition to the three stories set in Vietnam and its aftermath, Jones takes his reader into the hostile territory of the hospital, the boxing ring, the broken American family. Just across the tracks, another world: the anxious world of neurotic plenty. While one character wastes away in a cancer ward, another sports "nine thousand dollars' worth of capped teeth and a heart colder than the dark side of the moon." Both are equally doomed.

On the face of it, this is the "Dirty Realism" of the Raymond Carver school, what Bill Buford, the expatriate editor of *Granta*, has called "the belly-side of contemporary life." Yet the overall attitude of Jones's writing, its texture, voice, and idiom, recalls not so much Carver as Hemingway, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer. Jay McInerney, Raymond Carver's most celebrated disciple, has said that the major contribution of Carver's brand of minimalism was that it "completely dispensed with the romantic egotism that made the Hemingway idiom such an awkward model for other writers in the late 20th century." Thom Jones, who like Carver studied at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, seems hardly to have heard the news. His characters, though downtrodden, remain heroic; though in a bad place existentially, they continue to bark their defiance. Facing desperate, last-ditch brain surgery to cure him of his recurrent seizures, the narrator of "The Pugilist at Rest" retains the humor and the bravado to say, "If they fuck up the operation, I hope I get to keep my dogs somehow—maybe stay at my sister's place. If they send me to the nuthouse I lose the dogs for sure."

In fact, the least compelling of Jones's stories, the long and mundane "Silhouettes," is also the most Carveresque.

Window fell for Catherine his senior year in high school when both were given special education assignments in East High School's laundry room. The job didn't pay much but it gave them a little spending money, which Catherine spent buying Marlboro cigarettes, Thunderbird wine, candy bars, blotter acid, and marijuana, and which Window spent on Catherine.

The low-rent characters viewed at a great distance, the self-conscious flaunting of brand names, the flat, detached, third-person narration—when handled by anyone but a master,

these become the bluntest instruments in the New Realist toolbox. Carver was a master. Jones is better off when he sticks to the "romantic egotism" of Hemingway and leaves the special ed. assignments to those with a lighter touch.

"Unchain My Heart," which appears towards the middle of the book, displays both Jones's verbal virtuosity and his uncanny ability, when dealing with the right material, to let a story unfold on the razor's edge of his reader's credulity. In the first paragraph we are introduced to Bocassio, a three-hundred-dollar-an-hour deep-sea diver with a powerful build and a thick, black beard. He has just come up from a dive, five hours on the bottom of the ocean. He's got a "cigarette jones moderate to medium-heavy" and is bitching that the crane operator, the stupid "motherfucker," nearly killed him when he moved a length of pipe too quickly. "If you ever fuck up like that again, you're through," Bocassio says. It is only in the second paragraph that we learn that this picture of absolute machismo is actually being narrated by a woman, Bocassio's lover, who is herself defiantly AWOL from her editorial job in New York. What follows is an account of one woman's addiction to a kind of caricatured, hard-core masculinity—her love for the tattooed, pock-marked Bocassio. At the story's end, another twist. When Bocassio dies in a deep-sea accident, as we know he must, the narrator aborts his baby, "unchains" her heart, and moves on to a Marine Corps fighter pilot. "I've learned deep," she says in the story's last sentence, "now I want to learn fast."

There is something very hard, almost cut-throat, about this woman's ability to move on so quickly after her lover's death. Yet while we might want to condemn her callousness, we are also compelled to admire her tenacity, the hard-won ability to survive in an essentially hostile world.

Not all of Jones's characters have redeeming qualities. A companion piece to this story, "Wipe Out," features a cocky, womanizing narrator and his admittedly shallow views of the world, what he calls "the philosophy of rock 'n' roll." "You have to know how to treat them," he says of the women he consumes like fast food.

You have to make them come to you and you just can't get emotionally involved. I mean, it's her ball game when you do that, when you start having pet names, knowing one another's favorite color, and she starts springing little anniversaries on you. The next thing you know, you're a daddy, with all that responsibility. You have to play that noninvolvement theme, and work that. Give them a little James Dean or Montgomery Clift or a little Rudolph Valentino action, and when they know they can't own you, they want you all the more and you're the victor. It's very simple. It's just a matter of style. And in this age of Prince and Michael Jackson, affecting the style of the old masters smacks of originality and flair. Rent a bunch of old movies. Check out some Jimmy Cagney, you'll see what I mean.

It is a slight story, a character sketch really, but it points up what some readers, especially women, might not like about this collection. One woman to whom I showed the story immediately curled her upper lip in disgust, condemning its narrator as "the most horrible fictional character since Faulkner's Jason Compson."

"Yes," I said. "But that doesn't make it a horrible story."

"I disagree," she said. "I absolutely loathe it." No doubt others will as well. Jones's male narrators—his soldiers, boxers, Emergency Room "blades"—speak in a style somewhere between Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and Norman Mailer's *The Prisoner of Sex*. Which is to say, a highly provocative style, a style diametrically opposed to what the narrator of "Mosquitoes" identifies as "Greenpeace" style.

Clendon teaches at Middlebury College in Vermont. Middlebury is a really beautiful place but it's that old bullshit: Greenpeace. You know, I don't want to overgeneralize but it's a style I find hard to take. They really let you have it up there. Throw it right in your face. Self-righteous do-gooders. I mean, I think we ought to save the dolphins, too. Torpedo those Japanese fishing boats if they don't lay off! But spare me the folksingers!

It struck me, reading this, that in some ways Jones's stories share a certain roguish adroitness with the radio antics of Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern. Certainly both spring from a common cultural moment—the ongoing war for the heart and soul of what Philip Beidler might call "American cultural myth." Perhaps this, more than anything, marks *The Pugilist at Rest* as a document of the post-Vietnam era in America, an era in which the folksongs of the politically correct continually collide with the "gangsta" rap of a more visceral American experience. Thom Jones talks tough, but whatever controversy might arise from the force of his words does little to diminish the significant contribution to our literature this collection represents.

Robert Rebein teaches in the English Department at SUNY Buffalo.

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A Ride on a Unicorn

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ship with him. Indistinctly, I felt I had enjoyed a slender pathway of freedom and choice by playing innocent to Dali's wishes, and that pathway would be closed to me from now on. I would somehow belong to Dali. Next, he might ask me to have my nose replaced by my ear.

I took a deep breath and let out a long, ear-shattering shriek. I attacked the table on which Dali kept his collection of enamel eyes and swept it clean with my arm. They scattered and rolled across the floor, hundreds and hundreds of eyes, staring in all directions. It was a histrionic display worthy of Dali. He had scrambled up from his chair and was zipping his pants and arranging his clothes while trying to hush me.

Gala and a housekeeper came running. I swept a sheet around me, grabbed my clothes, and stalked out of the house. Before I left the room, I glanced back at Dali. He looked like a terrified old man. I felt awful.

I never went back and Dali didn't try to look me up. I stayed in Cadaques for another month and celebrated my twenty-first birthday.

My only moment of regret came one day when I was having a haircut. All the stylists had gathered around a beautiful blonde who was having her hair put up in a complicated crown. She was telling them that she was on her way to Dali's house because he wanted to paint her like a Greek goddess. I was furious with envy—silently and

savagely judging her—she was too fat, she was too short, she was stupid, she was vulgar, she was silly, why did he want to paint her? It made me wonder if I really missed seeing him. I realized that my overriding feeling was



Photo: Les Waldman

one of shame—not for Dali, but for myself. I had been uncharitable, I had betrayed him. Why shouldn't he masturbate in front of me? Had I said or done anything that would have led him to think that it would offend me? How could it have hurt me? Then again, whatever made him think he could take such liberties with me? Why should the whole world be Dali's canvas, a crude pile of clay from which he could shape his experiences as he pleased?

Finally, I decided that Dali was a closed chapter.

I saw him one more time. It was an early fall evening in New York, four or five years later. I was walking with a boyfriend down 57th Street and far down the street I saw Dali, coming in my direction. He was in the company of another couple and so unmistakably Dali, in a wide red and black cape, his mustaches waxed to the sky, flowers behind his ears, swinging his beautiful walking stick.

My boyfriend got very excited. "It's Dali!" he said, "Look! You KNOW him! You have

to introduce me!"

"I don't want to talk to him," I whispered, and averted my face as we passed each other.

But Dali had caught a glimpse of me. He stopped. "Aah!" he cried. "Eez my beautiful angel! Eez zee eyes magnifique! How are you!"

"Uh, Dali, it's you," I stuttered to my greatest embarrassment. "I didn't recognize you!"

I asked him about Gala, and he invited me to a party that was being given for him that evening. I said I'd come.

I didn't go. I don't know if it was because I didn't want to repeat my experiences with Dali or because I didn't want to be scrutinized too closely by him. He had thought I had some magic at twenty. If I ever did, I knew for sure that, by now, it was gone.

Gunilla Feigenbaum lives in New York City and is a regular contributor to The Bookpress.

Corpus Delicti

continued from page 12

Beyond the *Pleasure Principle* trying to figure out what death "is" that he resorted to talking about the lives and deaths of individual cells—and then conceded that, at such a tiny level, it hardly makes sense to talk about "life" and "death" anyway, since the breakdown and assembly of matter is so perpetual there.

The second important point to draw from this confusion—and the point that Butler draws—is that our untheorized notions of "body," of "life" and "death" are not material notions. Biology itself has long ago made a material explanation of what we "are" impossible in any stable sense. Our default notions about these things are, rather, psychic. The body is what you *feel*; death is when you stop *thinking*. Which is not to say that the psychic *replaces* the bodily, but that the bodily is literally nothing without the psychic. The bodily, in this account, is a necessary effect of the psychic.

When we agree to demarcate an Outside to our arguments about the body, then, and call that Outside "the material," what we lose is a profoundly political vocabulary for understanding all the things "the material" does for us, all the things we need it for. And if Butler is right, and the category "the material" is to be understood as that which we agree not to discuss because of exhaustion, boredom, or exasperation, then that Outside is a political space—a space in which we are deeply complicit with the *status quo*.

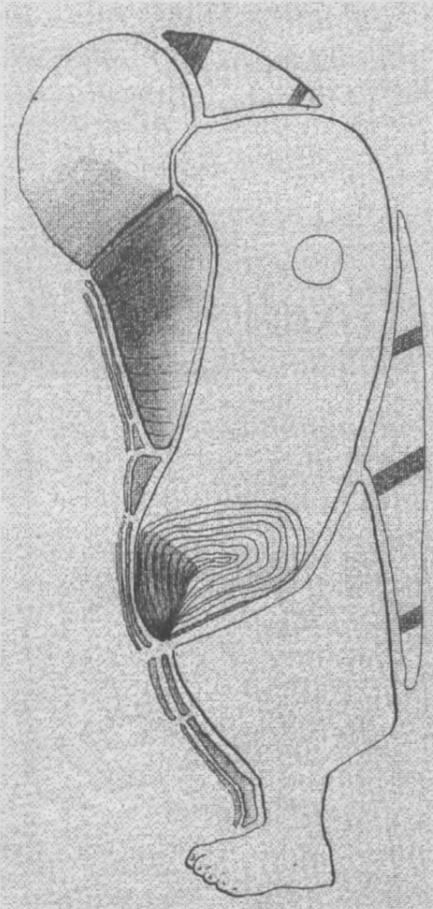
Enter psychoanalysis. A good deal of contemporary psychoanalytic thinking—especially the French variety—attempts to articulate the large-scale political consequences of establishing various Outsides. And as I've noted, Butler addresses the effect of psychic repudiations and rejections on the creation of gender. The specific project of *Bodies That Matter* is to establish the position of homosexuality as that which is impossible in psychoanalysis. Not just taboo; impossible. And Butler's persistent question is, what's the rhetorical and political function of establishing things as impossible? Her answer is, the notion of the impossible secures the workings of power.

As an intervention into the burgeoning field of lesbian and gay studies—or "queer theory," as it's being called this month—*Bodies That Matter* is a powerful corrective to some of that young discipline's weaknesses. In particular, Butler's book works to prevent a theoretical tendency to look for the "real" queers, and to ascribe subversiveness to queer sexualities on the basis of their queerness alone. Unlike other critics, then, Butler doesn't mourn the fact that Willa Cather could never express herself directly "as" a lesbian—instead, Butler shows how Cather's fictional techniques constitute a set of lesbian storytelling strategies specific to the time. Similarly, Butler doesn't concern herself

with the question of whether or not the drag balls in "Paris Is Burning" are subversive—that question has been beaten to death. She focuses instead on the possibilities offered by the drag performers' "houses," and how they begin to reconfigure notions of what a family is. In short, Butler's readings of cultural objects in *Bodies That Matter* refuse the romantic—which makes all the more impressive how genuinely impassioned the book is.

There's a passage in *Gender Trouble* where Butler describes male heterosexuality as explaining itself to itself with the phrase, "I never loved another man; I *am* a man." What makes homosexuality impossible in this sentence is a fantasy of Being as separate from love or identification—that is, a fantasy that we exist apart from our loves, that our loves are layered over a pre-given "Being" in just the way that others argue gender is layered over a pre-given "body." The exposure of the supposed impossibility of homosexuality thus functions in both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* to keep alive exactly the possibility of other bodies, other beings. And in the debates over what constitutes a body, a love, that "matters," what is that position if not a vital one?

Chris Nealon is a graduate student at Cornell University.



Drawing: Joanna Sheldon

Tennessee Williams

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