

The BOOKPRESS

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The Impossible Country

Nicolas Vaczek

In spring and summer of 1991, Ithaca's Brian Hall traveled through the former Yugoslavia, witnessing the onset of civil war. One of the last foreigners to have traveled there unhindered, Hall in his new book, *The Impossible Country* (David R. Godine), has captured the voices of the prominent and the unknown, from Slobodan Milosevic to a wide variety of "real, likeable people" throughout Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia. In addition, the book provides indispensable historical background, showing how Yugoslavia was formed after World War I, and explaining why every attempt at political compromise has been met with suspicion and resistance.

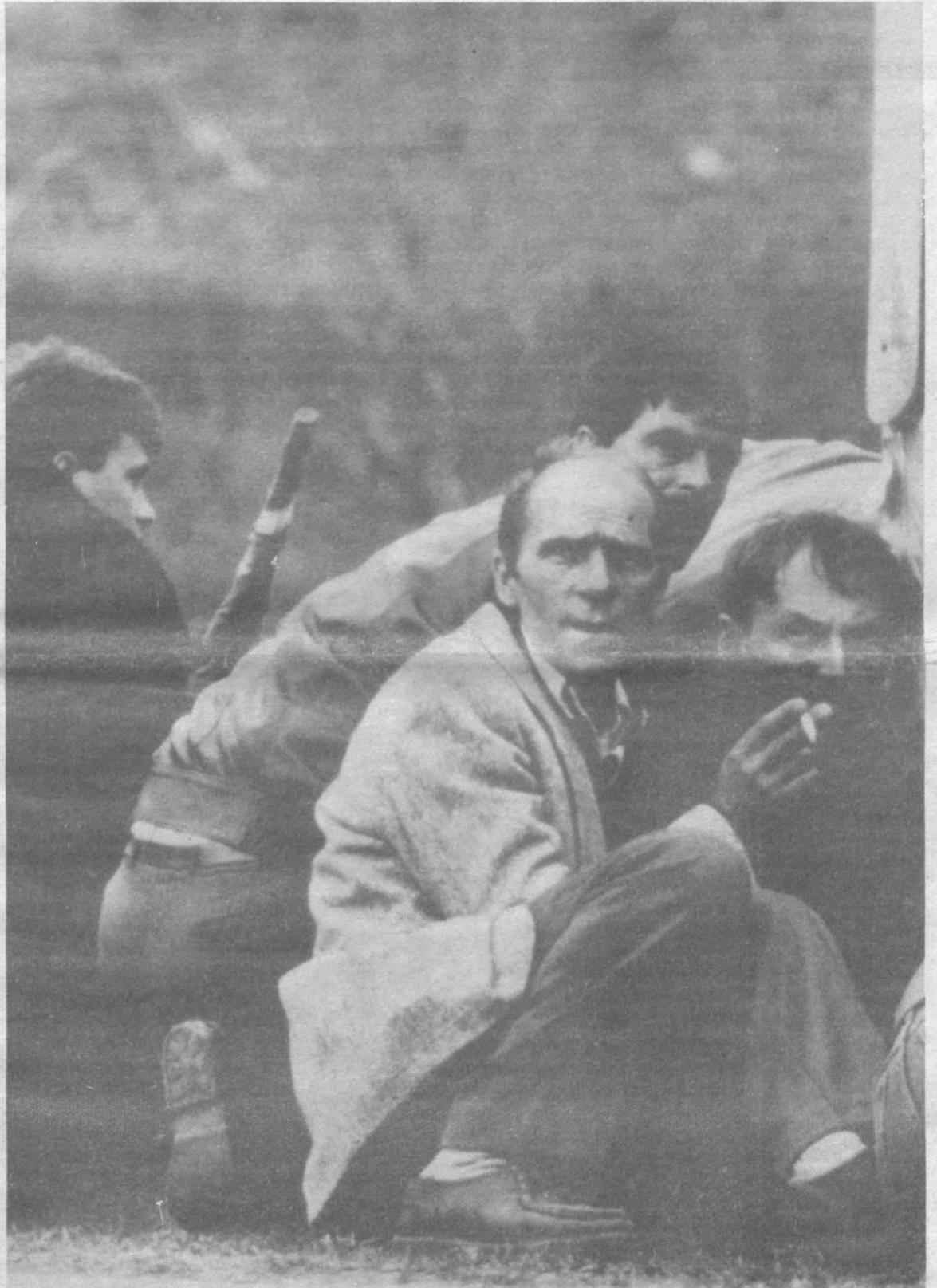
Nicolas Vaczek recently interviewed Brian Hall in Ithaca.

NV: Anyone writing in the travel mode on Yugoslavia has Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* to contend with.

BH: Yes. It's a fabulous book. One of the greatest travel books ever written. She was there in 1937, though it's not clear how much time she spent. If you read between the lines it doesn't seem long. World War II is on the way. She's writing from 1939 to 1940, and then she could retroactively put in some of her awareness. By 1940, she's getting bombed in London by the Germans. By that time, Yugoslavia has become for her the symbol of a certain kind of decent civilization, represented by the Serbs under siege by the barbaric Germans.

By the time I started writing my book, the war had begun in Bosnia. I would write during the day and listen to the news at night. The things I chose from my notes were affected by what I was hearing every day. Since it takes a while to write, things that happen later affect the way you write. Writers try not to do this dishonestly.

see *Impossible Country*, page 10



Sarajevan demonstrators take cover from Serbian Snipers firing from the windows of the nearby Holiday Inn.

Photograph: Ron Haviv

Rear Guard Scientists

Inside

- Dan Finlay on Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*
- Robert Rebein on Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*
- Nicholas Nicastro on "Spartacus"

**HIGHER SUPERSTITION:
THE ACADEMIC LEFT AND ITS
QUARRELS WITH SCIENCE**
Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt
Johns Hopkins University Press
314 pages, \$25.95

Ann Druyan

Science has no equal as a revolutionary force in human experience. Under its unblinking gaze, the "divine right of kings" is revealed to

be an artifact of unreconstructed primate behavior—an institution somehow less likely to inspire a catch in the throat when observed in our closest relatives, the chimpanzees. Science storms the palaces of our pretensions and drags us, kicking and screaming, from the center of the universe where we feel comfortable and large, to the galactic boondocks where we really have been all along. These Great Demotions, these intimations of our true tiny-

ness, rattle the absolutists and gnaw away at their authority. Even leaving aside the world-shaking properties of its by-product, technology, science's awesome powers of demystification have toppled more princes, freed more slaves and emptied more churches than all the armies of bandilleroed zealots combined.

Hierarchy, superstition, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism; these mainstays of the right-wing owe see *Scientists*, page 2

Scientists

continued from page 1

no debt to science. Our ancestors were guilty of all of the above long before we walked upright. But the goals of social and economic equality, human rights, internationalism, and the perspective of our species not as the crown of creation, but as a part of the greater fabric of life, are as much a by-product of the Scientific Enlightenment as the telescope and the pendulum clock.

That is why the central thesis of "Higher Superstition" comes as something of a surprise. "To put it bluntly," Gross, a professor of life sciences at the University of Virginia, and Levitt, a mathematics professor at Rutgers, write, "the academic left dislikes science."

When I read this I found myself wondering how Karl Marx would have reacted to it. His earliest scholarly writings were about the pre-Socratic philosophers, the inventors of the scientific method. When he wrote "One law for science and another for life is a priori a lie" he was acknowledging the wellspring of his inspiration. It was his intention to dedicate "Das Kapital" to someone he revered as an even greater troublemaker—Charles Darwin.

Who, exactly, then, are Gross and Levitt talking about? "We are using *academic left*," the authors state, "to designate those people whose doctrinal idiosyncracies sustain the misreadings of science, its methods, and its conceptual foundations that have generated what nowadays passes for a politically progressive critique of it." Oh.

As convoluted as the preceding quotation is, the next chapter, one on the history of science and political philosophy, begins as a little gem, a model of clarity and scholarship. Gross and Levitt's poetic powers reach their height here, as they glide from Freemasonry to Newtonian physics. We're soaring along with them, until boom, suddenly we're brought down in mid-flight by ugly mutterings about "the changing demography of the American population." That's quickly followed by a wholesale dismissal of feminism as having "long since wandered into its own discursive universe." And finally they blurt out the real hurt that informs and corrodes this work: "New candidates for veneration—writers, artists, musicians, philosophers, historical figures, non-Western 'ways of knowing'—are put forward not for what they are but for what they are *not*—white, European, male." A hundred pages later, they are still licking those same wounds: "it seems to us quite unsporting not to praise male college presidents, deans, vice-presidents for student affairs, and affirmative action officers...But then again" they smarm, "'sporting' is an encomium of male provenance." And, "What are the realities of discrimination against women

in science today, at least in the American universities?...the only widespread, *obvious* discrimination today is against white males."

So that's it.

Recent attempts to redress the inequities and exclusions of millennia have loosed a new species of kvetch on the land, of which this book is a prime, but hardly unique, specimen. They frequently begin, as do Gross and Levitt, anxious to establish bona fides for reason and fairness. Yes, slavery and segregation must have been awful. Don't get them wrong. Excluding women from virtually every profession or from having any say in their own fates was unjust. All that ridicule and ostracism of the homosexual or the halt and the lame were probably harrowing. But, once that's out of the way, lip service duly paid, they launch into a tirade against the notion that these acknowledgments of longstanding injustice should have any operational consequences.

Proposals to compensate these inequalities or to heighten sensitivities are, these days, often derided under the rubric of political correctness. They are dismissed with bitter scorn. I'm not making a pitch for humorlessness here. But if relatively small, mostly symbolic steps in the direction of a more equitable society can evoke such shrillness, it makes you wonder how Gross and Levitt and the like-minded would react if actually forced to walk in the pinching shoes of the oppressed.

The meanness of spirit in this book is a pity when you consider how knowledgeable, talented and perceptive its authors sometimes are. Gross and Levitt do some persuasive debunking of deconstruction. *Higher Superstition* is richly embroidered with entertaining references to Goethe and Blake. I appreciate the way they don't allow their love of science to blind them to its misuse. There is much here that is trenchant and free of self-interest. And yet, despite their erudition and ambitious use of language, like Dr. Strangelove's irrepressible "heil," their affronted entitlement, their mysogyny, their pique at being forced to share the world of ideas with their presumptive inferiors, breaks through with tiresome frequency, spoiling everything.

Gross and Levitt's antagonism is boundless. A case in point is their repeated griping about the whimsical dedication of a book on popular culture and science by Andrew Ross, a "glamorous" Princeton English professor. "This book is dedicated to all the science teachers I never had," Ross writes. "It could only have been written without them." But Levitt and Gross can only see this laudible act of self-deflation as more ammunition. Aha! He even admits he doesn't know any science! Such crabbiness emboldens me to say what I gathered from the dedication of *Higher*

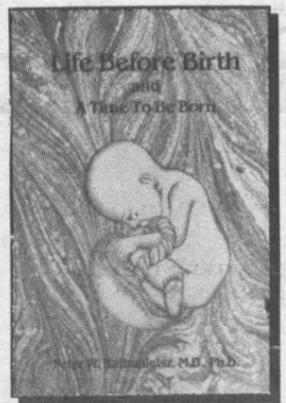
Superstition. It goes in its entirety, "To our wives, our children, and our students, with gratitude." Is it my imagination or does this sound less like a loving tribute and more like the passenger manifest of a Scythian royal tomb? The possessive refrain and the generic quality transforms the dedicatees into so many anonymous retainers. It smacks of the same paternalism that mars the substance of this book.

The notion that there might be something to be learned from "*feminism and the history of science*" strikes them as being so ludicrous, it curdles their very typography from roman into italic. Italics abound in this high-pitched polemic and there are more exclamation points than are usually found in a kidnapping note.

We may ask: Against what grave threat do these authors sound so strident and panicky an alarm? What juggernaut approaches? Sloppy scholarship and trendy thinking in academe? Can these distinguished historians of thought actually believe this is something new? Or peculiar to the left? Doesn't the much more lavishly funded, more widely heard antipathy to science of the Christian fundamentalists and the rest of the radical right pose a graver danger to our society? Have they never heard Rush Limbaugh on the environment or Pat Robertson on evolution? Could the authors have been caught off guard by the very human resentment of those who have been systematically excluded from science? Are they really surprised that some of the aggrieved make unsubstantiated boasts that this or that great scientific or technological achievement really belongs to them? Can Levitt and Gross have failed to anticipate the far extremum of the pendulum's arc?

I share their impatience with the anti-scientific. But I cannot sympathize with their anguish and resentment over these small and imperfect remedies to bring about a long overdue inclusion—especially because it was their beloved scientific method and its imperative to question all things that doomed the continued monopoly of an almost exclusively white, European, male endeavor. It wasn't the small targets of this book that routed those over-privileged alphas from pride of place at the center of the universe. It wasn't the academic left that handed out those Great Demotions. It was science.

Ann Druyan is Secretary of the Federation of American Scientists and author or co-author of several books, popular articles, and television documentaries on the effects of science and technology on our civilization. Her most recent book, written with Carl Sagan, is *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors: A Search for Who We Are* (New York: Random House, 1993).



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Breaking the Circuit of Violence

DEAD MAN WALKING: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Sister Helen Prejean
Random House, 192 pages
\$21 cloth, \$12 paper

Dan Finlay

In 1972, the United States Supreme Court, in *Furman v. Georgia*, stopped executions of prisoners sentenced to death, on grounds that the implementation of the death penalty was arbitrary and capricious. The Court did not declare that capital punishment itself was unconstitutional; it only rejected the manner in which it was being applied. Since 1972, in response to this ruling, 37 states have created guidelines which are meant in theory to satisfy the requirement that they be even-handed in applying the death penalty. Executions have resumed in 23 states.

New York State has been in a special position on this issue. From 1974 to 1994, Governors Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo have opposed the death penalty and have blocked resumption of its use. This situation is unlikely to last. The odds are good that whoever succeeds Cuomo will favor executions, and at that point the State will resume killing on behalf of its citizens. This likelihood should make us pause and think. As Clinton Duffy, a former warden at San Quentin, used to say about Californians who visited his prison, "when anybody comes in here and wants to see the gas chamber, I correct them. I say, this is your gas chamber."

The best-known essay in opposition to the death penalty is Albert Camus' "Reflections on the Guillotine," still very much worth reading. But a recent book, *Dead Man Walking*, by Sister Helen Prejean, has received national attention. Like Camus, Prejean opposes capital punishment. But whereas Camus gives a passionate philosophical argument, Prejean leads us into the theoretical debate with a personal narrative covering a decade in her life (1982-92). Her arguments come alive because they are life-and-death issues in the relationships and interactions that develop as she meets and becomes a spiritual advisor to two different men who are executed, and also engages with the families of the victims these men killed.

This weaving of narrative and argument allows Prejean to cover the main debate. Thus, when she travels to death row with a lawyer she takes the opportunity to discuss the legal system with him, and we get a review of Supreme Court decisions. Preparing for a pardon board hearing, she digresses to tell us the methods politicians use to distance themselves from personal decisions on executions. As she reads her first letter from a death row inmate, she notices that "he never talks about the death the state has in store for him," and she describes what death by electrocution—initiated "in 1890 at Auburn Prison in upstate New York"—is like. Her book is, as the subtitle indicates, an eyewitness account of the death penalty in the US. Its eloquence comes from the honesty and directness with which she reports her experiences and successes and mistakes.

The heart of *Dead Man Walking* is the political and spiritual transformation of the eyewitness. Prejean sees herself not as the "extraordinary person...plunged into the commonplace" but rather as the "ordinary person [who] gets involved in extraordinary events." She sketches her movement from a sheltered middle-class life to teaching and living with five nuns in a housing project in the inner city of New Orleans. This move radicalizes her in the tradition of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Living in the

midst of the poor, seeing daily the injustices they suffer, she begins to perceive life differently. It is impossible to live by choice in such circumstances and not have one's outlook changed. The unexamined assumptions of life in mainstream America are called into question. Statistics become living people. The media-otic view of the inner city is revealed as shallow, one-dimensional—superficial and sensational about what it focuses on, ignorant of what it misses.

Prejean spends very little time on the impact of her move, which is only background to her main story. But it is significant: it is because of

neglect.

Patrick Sonnier was 27 at the time of his arrest. He and his 20-year-old brother Eddie, posing as security guards, kidnapped a young couple. One of them raped the woman. Both victims were shot to death—"three times at close range in the back of the head." As Prejean reads the file for the first time she writes that "the details of the depravity stun me." The brothers were found guilty of first-degree murder and were sentenced to death. Eddie Sonnier's sentence was commuted to life (he was considered "not as culpable"). Patrick Sonnier's

to death, Vaccaro to life in prison, a good example of the arbitrariness of retribution.

These cases are perfect examples for proponents of the death penalty. Neither Sonnier nor Willie had major new constitutional issues to raise, or the issue of race. Neither one denied his participation in the crimes, though each denied he was the murderer. Both crimes were violent, senseless, and devastating to the victims' families, who experienced the special tragic loss of a young adult's death.

How does Prejean present her view that these men should not be sentenced to death? In part she educates us about the standard sociological, moral, and theological arguments against capital punishment: bias runs deep in the application of the death penalty (it is used essentially against the poor); defendants who have no resources for good legal help often are inadequately represented in the first trial and have no money for the appeals process; lawyers who are assigned to indigent defendants often have no experience in criminal law or in death penalty law, which is specialized; in some states the funds available to the defense are so low that attorneys have no interest or cannot afford to give adequate representation.

These inadequacies have two consequences. First, the principle that every defendant should have fair representation before the law is ignored. Second, the chance of executing an innocent person rises dramatically. Anyone who doubts this should read the 1993 staff report of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights ("Innocence and the Death Penalty: Assessing the Danger of Mistaken Executions"), which studied the cases of 48 people who were sentenced to death in the last twenty years and released after they were found innocent. The report demonstrates "that innocent people are being sentenced to death," that their innocence, when proven, is established in spite of the system, and that the criminal justice system is flawed by "poor representation, racial prejudice, prosecutorial misconduct, or simply the presentation of erroneous evidence."

It is worth noting that the issue of evenhandedness is a key aspect in Justice Blackmun's recent dissent on denial of review in a death penalty case. He writes (*New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1994):

Twenty years have passed since this Court declared that the death penalty must be imposed fairly, and with reasonable consistency or not at all, and, despite the effort of the states and courts to devise legal formulas and procedural rules to meet this...challenge, the death penalty remains fraught with arbitrariness, discrimination, caprice and mistake.

Blackmun sees a major contradiction: consistency requires firm guidelines, which ensure that people are treated the same way, yet any decision on a capital sentence must be made with the "degree of respect due the uniqueness of the individual." These principles are contradictory. That is why he states "a

step toward consistency is a step away from fairness" and why "the death penalty experiment has failed."

Although neither of the men Prejean ministers to is African-American, she examines the racial bias in death penalty cases, which provides an especially striking view of discrimination in the judicial system. There is no rational basis for denying that the death penalty is applied in a racist way. In *McCleskey v. Kemp* (1987), where the question of race was argued,

see *Breaking the Circuit*, page 10

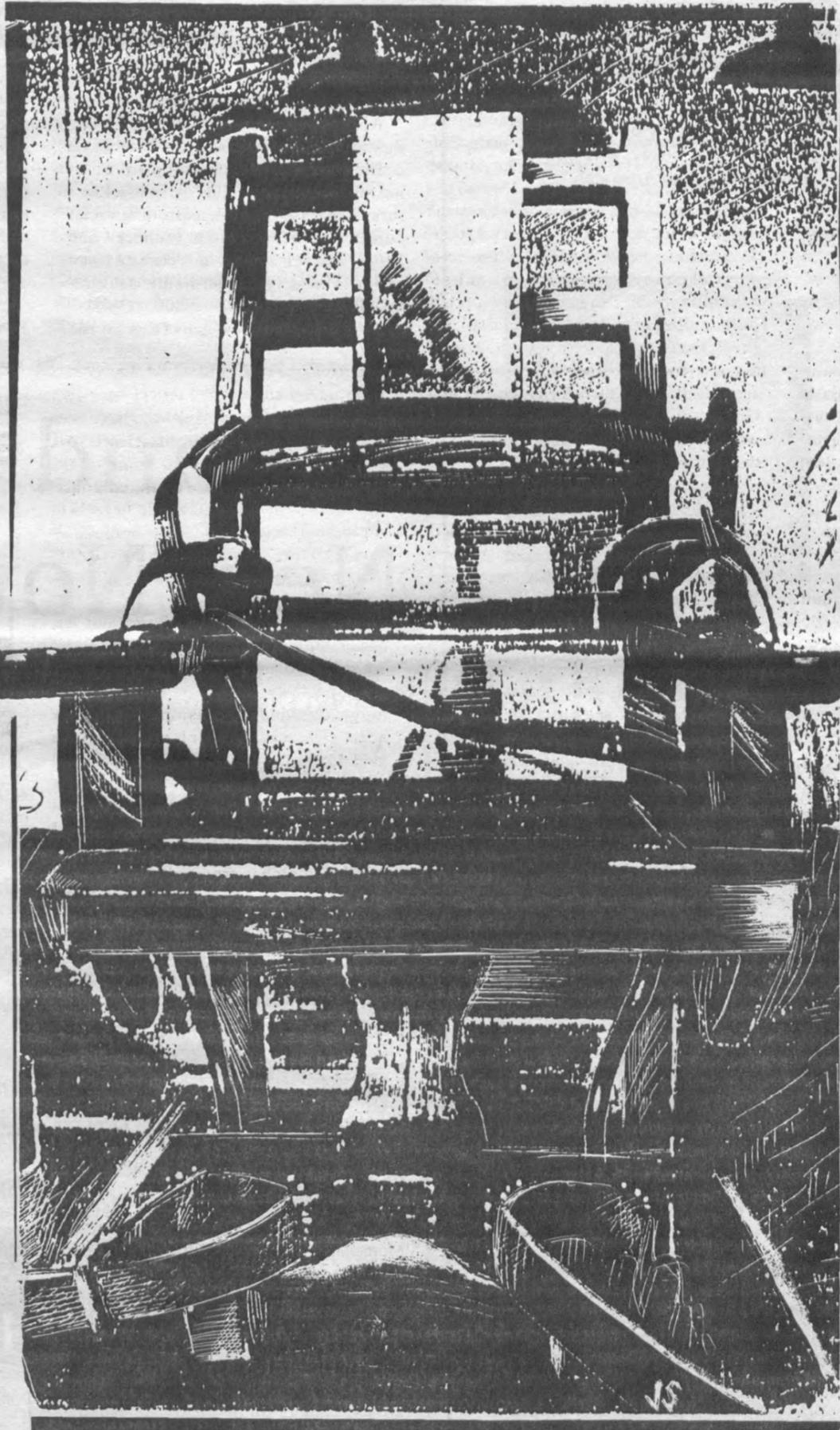


Illustration: Jack Sherman

where she is that she gets involved. The disconnection of most of America from the life of the poor is what informs public moods of unconcern, hopelessness, impatience, hostility. It is a part of what makes the call for the vengeance of the death penalty as easy as it is and as politically acceptable.

The two men whom Prejean meets on Louisiana's death row are Patrick Sonnier and Robert Willie. Both are white, both are Cajun, both have a history of crime, and share backgrounds of poverty, childhood abuse, and

sentence was overturned, then reaffirmed a second time. It is clear from subsequent information that the younger brother committed the murders.

Robert Willie and his partner Joseph Vaccaro were convicted of killing an 18-year-old woman while both men were on an "eight-day rampage across several states" in which another teenage girl was raped and her boyfriend paralyzed. Willie and Vaccaro had a history of serious violent crimes before these events. Both were tried "in the same courthouse at the same time on separate floors." Willie was sentenced

Off Campus

At The Bookery

The Bookery continues its 1994 lecture series
in the lecture space in Bookery II

September 11



A. Manette Ansay, who teaches creative writing at Vanderbilt, will read from her new Viking novel, *Vinegar Hill*, a story about the consequences of a family's move to a small Midwestern town in the '70s, and one woman's journey to self-affirmation. Reminiscent of Jane Smiley's work, *Vinegar Hill* is the debut novel of a writer who has won numerous awards for her short fiction. A novel marked with the integrity of "an original

and powerful voice," according to James McConkey, who believes Ms. Ansay is "destined to be a major presence in American Literature."

Alison Lurie,

a Pulitzer prize-winning local author considered "one of this country's most able and witty novelists" (*New York Times*), has most recently applied her gifts to the ghost story, with her newly released collection called *Women & Ghosts*, tales of hauntings both literal and metaphorical. She'll read from this new work, and we will also have copies on hand of her *Oxford Book of Modern Fairy Tales*, now available in paperback.



October 2

At 3:30 p.m. on October 6th,
Marcelle Lapow Toor

lecturer in the Department of Communication at Cornell, where she specializes in teaching graphic design to non-designers, will conduct a workshop. In keeping with the philosophy of her new book, *Graphic Design on the Desktop*, Ms. Toor will aim to demystify the design process. This event should interest and inform novices, who may not know a serif from a dingbat, as well as those already exploring the sophisticated computer resources now available to the desktop publisher.

On October 23rd at 4 p.m.

To celebrate the publication of
The Best American Poetry 1994,

series editor

David Lehman

and

Archie Ammons,

editor of this year's collection, will join a group of the contributors for an afternoon of readings at the Bookery.

Those who have already agreed to participate in the event include:

Burlin Barr	Cynthia Bond
Roald Hoffmann	Phyllis Janowitz
Fred Muratori	Angela Shaw

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Good Fellas

SAVE ME, JOE LOUIS
Madison Smartt Bell
Penguin, 351 pages, \$10.95

Gordon Sacks

Like *Moby Dick*, this novel begins with the protagonist alone in Battery Park, but MacRae, unlike Ishmael, does his swash-buckling ashore. AWOL, he finds himself passively sucked into in a string of increasingly brutal robberies, beginning with a simple and oddly gentle mugging, and ending in murderous armed robberies. He follows the Falstaffian lead of Charlie, matching Charlie's meanness with his own indifference. The anti-Raskolnikov, MacRae is fairly content with his career as a criminal.

When the pair is forced to flee New York, they travel south, and encounter Porter in the course of a crime spree in Baltimore. Pushing further south, they hide out in MacRae's rural Tennessee home, occasioning racial conflict between various rednecks and Porter, who is black. But this element is not central to the story, despite the title's suggestion to the contrary.

Instead, the domestic ritual of robbery and

hideout comes to implicate standard, ostensibly honest, work as the same kind of empty necessity. The reader is lulled into identification with the gang of criminals because Bell has taken down the conventional moral road-signs, complicating or even eradicating the distinction between right and wrong. Without these indices the reader, like MacRae, is adrift.

The writing is vivid, and the road and action sequences convey immediacy without acceding to the clichés of the action genre. The climactic battle becomes almost supernatural, as Charlie and MacRae elude the police in characteristic styles: Charlie by absolute velocity and MacRae by total inaction.

Save Me, Joe Louis is a desolate but ultimately level portrait of an underclass differing only by degree from the mainstream of society. Bell's dialogue and style command the reader's attention throughout, though the theme of racial conflict is only exhibited, not really examined. Overall this is a moving, unsentimental novel.

Gordon Sacks is an editor living in New York City.

Art and the New Novel

John Diamond-Nigh

A three-day conference called "The New Novel and Its Extensions: Literary and Visual" will begin Sunday, October 16, at Elmira College. Participants from more than a dozen American universities, joined by colleagues from Canada, Mexico, England, Scotland, France, Germany, and Switzerland, will explore the connections between the visual arts and contemporary writing.

The main focus of the presentations and discussions will be on what in France and Latin America is termed the New Novel, sometimes referred to as Surfiction or Metafiction in the US, Canada, and England. Notable practitioners of this form have been the Latin American writers Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, and Alejo Carpentier, and in France, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Samuel Beckett, Marguerite Duras, Robert Pinget, and Claude Simon.

Co-organizers Lynne Diamond-Nigh of Elmira College and Lois Oppenheimer of Montclair State University have invited the noted French author Michel Butor to be the major keynote speaker at the conference.

Many years ago, Butor abandoned the writing of novels to produce poetry, prose, and essays inspired by the paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings of different artists. Though Butor's texts are usually written as responses to the art forms, the written word and visual images join to constitute the final work. A famous example of this kind of collaboration is the work titled *Traces Suspects en Surface* by Robert Rauschenberg and Alain Robbe-Grillet, which is part of the print and art book collection at the Museum of Modern Art.

Beginning the same day as the conference, an exhibition titled "Art and the New Novel: Parallels and Generators" will be open to the public through October 30 at the Arnot Art Museum in Elmira.

The exhibition, curated by John and Lynne Diamond-Nigh and Arnot Museum Director John O'Hern, includes not only lim-

ited-edition books by artists like Pierre Alechinsky and Rauschenberg, but art ranging from the elegant penciled marginalia of writers like Robert Pinget, to the laser-printed concrete poetry of Raymond Federman. Also featured are a splendid suite of paintings by Rafael Ferrer illustrating *A Hundred Years of Solitude*; a set of "Black and White Numerals" by Jasper Johns to a 16th-century painting by Francois de Nome, "Asa Destroying the Temple"; and a suite of watercolors by Francisco Toledo illustrating Jorge Luis Borges's *Bestiary*.

For more information about the conference and exhibition, contact Lynne or John Diamond-Nigh at Elmira College, (607) 735-1898.

John Diamond-Nigh is a sculptor living in Elmira. His upcoming one-person exhibition will be held at the George Waters Gallery at Elmira College, October 14 to November 7.

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THE FABER BOOK OF MOVIE VERSE
Philip French and Ken Wlaschin, eds.
Faber and Faber, 458 pp. \$24.95

Debra Fried

This is the super-jumbo popcorn with extra butter. In a big, messy bucket of mostly little poems, by mostly minor, mostly younger poets, film historian French and poet and film programmer Wlaschin have gathered into a sifted garland but a mixed, if largely British, collection of poems about the movies. Nostalgia, gossip, worship and parody, ponderous cinematic conceits, frivolous anecdotes, and 'zine-worthy squibs jostle together in this generous volume. The poets have drifted into the bijou on a variety of pretexts, and the editors have grouped them into loose sections, from poems on the silents to a closing cluster on "TV and the Afterlife of Movies." The core of the anthology is the three heftiest sections, "Movie Houses and Moviegoing," "The Stars and the Supporting Cast," and "Films and Genres," each an anthology in itself. These groupings make it possible to read the volume through as a quirky, partial history of the movies as reflected in poetry. But the sequences and subdivisions of *Movie Verse* make it even more instructive as a sampler of late 20th-century poets, where a line-up of hopefuls gives one-shot read-throughs of a series of verse occasions or scenarios (the poem on Garbo, or Bogart, or horror films; watching a movie with my lover/mother/child; lament for a demolished movie palace; my visit to Tinseltown).

Unlike John Heath-Stubbs's demolished local "odeon...In which no ode has ever been recited," *Movie Verse* resorts with odes, elegies, sonnets including two double sonnets, a song in subtitles, a raga, and a villanelle, with room to spare for free verse. True wit, near-doggerel, and sober iambics are all represented. A couple of poets have painted themselves into the corner of having to find a rhyme for "Los Angeles" (Neil Jordan's "you're melting slowly in the haze/ that typifies Los Angeles" is not much of an improvement on Morris Bishop's "Its endless reels of rancid agonies.") The editors announce in the introduction that they have reluctantly excluded song lyrics, though a few offerings seem to be lyrics in search of a melody. Many selections are unapologetically light verse, such as C. A. Lejeune's witty putdown of *Aloma of the South Seas*: "Extensive tour / of D. Lamour. / Nearly all / Of J. Hall." More unabashed still are a hilarious "Hollywood Jabberwocky" and Alexander Scott's retellings of *King Kong* in a Robert Burns brogue. But that still leaves room for scads of unmetred poems. A slack, offhand free verse outnumbers the numbers, for this is, inevitably, an anthology of modern poetry. Its topic lends it a relatively unvaried sheen because all its entries are from the past one hundred years, and the bulk from the last twenty.

If there are any "classics" in the genre of poems about movies, they are here: Frank O'Hara's catalogue of star vignettes, "To the Film Industry in Crisis"; John Hollander's urbane elegiacs, "Movie-Going"; Hart Crane's "Chaplinesque"; and the longest selection, Randall Jarrell's sketches of his Hollywood boyhood, "The Lost World." Practically every American heavyweight who ever framed a lyric around a film reference is included: four of John Berryman's "Dream Songs" surface under assorted rubrics; both Robert Lowell and Jack Kerouac address poems to Harpo Marx; Carl Sandburg, Theodore Roethke, and Edmund Wilson have small walk-ons; and even Robert Frost appears in a brief cameo with "Provide, Provide," teaching the old lesson of mutability from the new exemplum of the decline of "the picture pride of Hollywood": "No memory of having starred / Atones for later disregard, / Or keeps the end from being hard," sounding a bit like Ogden Nash (also well represented).

Along with the obvious selections—"Ode to Groucho," "Ode to Felix" (the cat, that is), "Ode to Fellini on Interviewing Actors for a Forthcoming Film," or a "Patriotic Ode on the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Persecution of Charlie Chaplin"—are poems spun from invented B-movies (Leon McCauley's "Snow White Meets the Wolfman," Michael Ondaatje's "King Kong Meets Wallace Stevens") or movie lines (Tom Raworth's "You Were Wearing Blue").

Although the best-known contributors are Americans, and homages to Hollywood dominate, this is nonetheless a notably British anthology (French is British, Wlaschin, an American working as a film programmer in London). For British poets, it is often crucial that the movie camera showed up in time to record two world wars—there are poems about soldiers on leave looking for a movie, newsreels bringing war to the home front, stars felled by war (Leslie Howard), the mismatch between onscreen death throes and a veteran's memories. The combined backward glances of the war-related poems, the laments for dead starlets, and the volume's rough chronology from silent screen to VCR makes this, for all its hijinks and fond lore, an elegaic book, as though movies were already memories, not just *like* memories.

Mortality, the threat of fade-out, comes into play when French and Wlaschin's sequencing of poems borrows from montage technique. Berryman's fantasy blue movie in "Dream Song 363" of Shirley Jones and George C. Scott ("off stage moans, / we begin with them in bed") cuts to the shot-by-shot breakdown of Roger McGough's "The death of John Berryman in slow motion" where "We open on a frozen river" until "Now the body comes into the shot. / Falling, blurred, a ragged bearskin. / The shadow opens its arms to greet it." In a number of poems, exiting a movie theatre into daylight or night is an available everyday epiphany, but it makes poets ask if they wake or sleep, and reveals movies as delicious but deceiving visions. By setting lovers or father and son to watching a movie together—or apart—other poems become handy shortcuts for talking about domestic tensions.

How good are movies as a metaphor? James Kirkup ventriloquizes an aging star dogged by visions "from the black / projection-room of time" and by hope-filled faces already dealt with "in the cutting room of fate, that fabulous two-timer." But the mask slips; Kirkup's "The Fallen Star," like others in "Movies as Metaphor" and throughout the volume, leaves us uncertain whether the mind that clings to such figures is pedestrian or perceptive, poisoned by the light or simply drawing on a new technology to talk about old conundrums. Fate, memory, and death will survive any allegorical dress, and when some contributor to *The Parrot Book of Bodybuilding Verse* introduces the Nautilus machine of fate, who will be surprised? Movies teach us to take our emblems where we find them.

To judge from the section "Films and Film Genres," most poets find their inspiration in Westerns and monster flicks, with film noir, melodrama, musicals, and spy films running close behind. A few poets are caught watching blue movies, newsreels, documentaries, and home movies. Poems in which the monster is given his own say make up their own sub-genre—King Kong seems as vatic as Kubla Khan—yet other personnel go unmentioned. "Behind the Camera" groups poems about directors, but no others behind the scenes: someone has yet to sing an ode to Edith Head, or to stunt doubles, editors, and set dressers. The film fan often speaks, but is never honored in a poem; similarly, links between cinema and gay culture are everywhere evident in this anthology, but you already have to know who belongs to the club. The over-generosity of Philip French's notes (more on that in a moment) bespeaks a community of buffs that's missing as a recognized topos in the movie poem. The post-movie chat, the comradeship of analysis, or even of sitting through

a movie together, surely could occasion a contemporary aubade, a new kind of intimate afterword. Only a few poets refer to conversations they have with friends about movies, although some poems seem to be occasioned as casually as such after-the-show chats ("Great moment in *Blade Runner* where Roy Batty is expiring," Tom Clark starts "Final Farewell"—the notes sketch the film and cast, and obligingly identify and construe "the proud android Roy Batty (the name suggesting a mad king), played by Rutger Hauer.")

Philip French's notes supply, as few poems do, the tenderly acquisitive drive of the buff, the ideal of after-movie talk where the thrill of the chase beats cutting to the chase. Frank O'Hara's smitten litanies of Hollywood idols come closest to the glee of the annotator as pack-rat:

the Tarzans, each and every one of you (I cannot bring myself to prefer Johnny Weissmuller to Lex Barker, I cannot!), Mae West in a furry sled, her bordello radiance and bland remarks, Rudolph Valentino of the moon, its crushing passions, and moonlike, too, the gentle Norma Shearer.

Printed between sections, the notes—chat, meticulous, and both ticklish and poker-faced—are among the delights of the collection. More than glosses to the individual poems, they are like a maven's enthusiasm spilling out as you duck for the lobby together. They mix common knowledge and inside dope. Occasionally the notes are oddly reticent—why tell us she was born Theodosia Goodman without adding that Theda Bara unscrambled yields Arab Death? Sometimes French seems to add a note largely for the kick of mating film trivia with donnish cadences ("She was especially noted for her extravagant

headgear featuring exotic tropical fruits"). The notes build predictable but democratic pantheons ("Chaplin, the greatest movie star of all time"; "The first great canine star, Rin-Tin-Tin was a German Shepherd born in Germany in 1916").

The notes pretend that movies poems are about movies, and spring solely from movies, rather than from other poems. Literary allusions are left to themselves. When Mae West inspires Ogden Nash to pronounce, "Westward the course of vampire moves its way," the notes inform us, "The Brooklyn-born West (1892-1980) attained considerable notoriety on Broadway before coming to Hollywood in 1932 to make a series of risqué comedies," but not that Nash is doing a number on a line by Bishop Berkeley; when Nash admires "the pace that launched a thousand hips," French doesn't direct us to Christopher Marlowe's Helen, the first vamp. Roy Fuller's "Rosebud" prompts French to explain that "Stewart played the smarmy European valet at Xanadu," but he has no comment on Kenneth Fearing's line in "Continuous Performance" about staying through a movie he's already seen the end of in order to "learn how Alph the sacred river flows, in Xanadu, forever to a sunless sea." French's road to Xanadu never gets past the Hollywood sign.

To judge from this compilation, it is harder to write a poem about the dangers of movies than about their delights. Lamenting the fall of movies and stars is a very different matter from lamenting the ingrained lies that movies may tell. Perhaps it's simply that in an anthology, light verse can tend to drive out heavy. In some sections of the book, Frank O'Hara seems the keynote speaker, and his sunny irreverence and lovable shtick of fan-as-goof-ball makes even lesser celebrants seem to be

see *Brits' Picks*, page 12

SUNY Press



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"Here comes a walking fire," the Fool says to Lear as he sees Gloucester walking across a heath carrying a torch. This novel opens in fall, 1988, as Cora, an anti-war activist, returns to the U.S. from Canada where she has lived for twenty years. A college student in the mid-sixties, Cora becomes politically curious, then joins the anti-war movement. Based on King Lear and written from the point of view of Cordelia, the book weighs definitions of patriotism and loyalty. In her return as in her past, Cora is testing borders between suffering and virtue, idealism and commitment, self and family, and exploring possibilities of change.

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—Janette Turner Hospital, author,
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Cormac McCarthy Crosses Over

THE CROSSING, VOLUME II
OF THE BORDER TRILOGY

Cormac McCarthy
Knopf, 426 pages, \$23

Robert Rebein

Longtime fans of Cormac McCarthy's fiction like to separate his readers into two distinct groups: those, like themselves, who were reading McCarthy back when he was the "ghost of American letters," the "best American writer nobody ever heard of"; and those of us, johnny-come-latelies by comparison, who have merely leapt aboard the McCarthy bandwagon since *All the Pretty Horses* won the National Book Award in 1992.

"Go back and read *Suttree* or *Child of God*," these oldtimers tell us. "That's the real McCarthy, the true McCarthy." It's a little like listening to the Asbury Park crowd of Bruce Springsteen fans—the private god promulgated to the unknowing masses.

We bandwagoners blink, not believing what we're hearing.

"I thought that old stuff was all incest and necrophilia," we say. "Claustrophobic and messy, is what I heard, Erskine Caldwell on crack."

"Well then," the oldtimers reply, "read *Blood Meridian*. Now there's an anti-Western for you."

We sigh, give up the ghost. Maybe someday we will read the early novels—some dark, rainy day when the apocalypse seems to have us by the throat. But not today. Today we are reading *The Crossing*, volume II of McCarthy's "Border Trilogy," and we are not alone.

At last glance, the book was number three on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Three hundred thousand copies have been printed to date. According to *Newsweek*, one of these copies has even found its way to O. J. Simpson's cell in the L. A. County jail. Said an exec from International Creative Management, which represents both McCarthy and Simpson, "We thought *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing* might be good selections for O. J."

One can almost hear the oldtimers groan. After all, McCarthy was once cherished as the greatest of all writer-recluses, a man so effective at avoiding publicity that he wasn't even famous for it. By all accounts he's still a recluse, shunning reporters at every door; but now, like Thomas Pynchon, he's famous for it. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* have run profiles showing the author sitting in an El Paso pool hall wearing a tweed jacket and looking for all the world like a dark version of a Ralph Lauren ad. "In El Paso," reads the caption below his picture, "McCarthy lives on Coffin Avenue, plays golf, shoots pool, eats at a cafeteria—but doesn't talk to reporters."

McCarthy's biography has always been by design both succinct and elliptical. He was born in Rhode Island in 1933, the son of a prominent lawyer, but grew up a Southern Catholic in Knoxville, Tennessee. He dropped out of the University of Tennessee twice, with a stint in the Air Force in between. He's been married twice, divorced twice, has one son. Far more interesting than these tidbits is the McCarthy Legend, that portrait of the artist spread by word of mouth during the lean years. He lived alone, it was said, chiefly in hotels, banging away at successive drafts of



Illustration: Milly Acharya

his novels on an Olivetti manual typewriter. He had no agent, gave no interviews, considered the profession of teaching creative writing a kind of "hustle."

"We lived in total poverty," his second wife has said of the eight years they spent in a barn outside Knoxville. "We were bathing in the lake. Someone would call up and offer him \$2,000 to come speak at a university about his books. And he would tell them that everything he had to say was right there on the page. So we would eat beans for another week."

Asked, in the only interview he has ever given, if he paid any alimony during these years, McCarthy snorts, "With what?" His income was mainly the result of grants from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Rockefeller Foundation, the William Faulkner Foundation, and the committee in charge of the MacArthur Fellowship—the so-called "genius grant"—which McCarthy received in 1981. Slowly but steadily the books appeared: *The Orchard Keeper* in 1965, *Outer Dark* in 1968, *Child of God* in 1973, *Suttree* in 1979, *Blood Meridian* in 1985. Sales for each of these novels would approach, at best, three thousand copies. Then came the breakthrough of *All the Pretty Horses*, which sold 180,000 copies in hardback, 300,000 in paperback. With the money from the movie rights, McCarthy bought a new Ford pickup and set to work on volume II of the trilogy.

With the exception of Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times*, who found the book to be "derivative, sentimental and pretentious all at once," reviewers of *The Crossing* have been nearly unanimous in their praise. In a long piece in *The New Yorker*, Charles McGrath called McCarthy "the last of the great overwriters," a "pre-modernist" with roots in the fabled American tradition of Melville, Twain, and William Faulkner. "His style," McGrath wrote, "is so old it looks

new." Richard Ryan, writing in *The Christian Science Monitor*, proclaimed the novel "a masterpiece." "The Crossing," Ryan wrote, "meditates compassionately on the short and violent lives of its characters and over the enigmatic and inevitable passing of life itself."

For the bandwagon McCarthy reader, the book must be reckoned both a pleasure and a disappointment. Anyone expecting that *The Crossing* would take up the story of John Cole Grady where *All the Pretty Horses* left off will have to think again. *The Crossing* begins in 1939, roughly ten years before the previous book, and it does so with a whole new cast of characters—the teenage brothers Billy and Boyd Parham, their doomed rancher parents, a half dozen family horses, and, nearly stealing the show entirely, a fierce Mexican she-wolf. As most reviewers have noted, the book reads like a more somber retelling of volume I. Again we are on the US-Mexican border; again we have a series of literal crossings by mid-century teenage boys; again we are to read these crossings as a metaphor for the borderline between adolescence and manhood, that crucial literary realm populated by neither man nor boy but "kid," as in Billy the Kid, Melville's Billy Budd, Twain's Huckleberry Finn, and Faulkner's Ike McCaslin.

But whereas John Cole Grady emerged from *All the Pretty Horses* as a seasoned yet still romantic adult—a hero if there ever was one—Billy Parham ends up as a man who has lost everything and learned little beyond the hard facts of *The Road*. It is as if McCarthy weighed in his hands the two most persistent forms his recent writing has taken—the Bildungsroman and the picaresque narrative—and decided that, try as he might, he simply could not balance the impulse toward development in the one with the impulse toward sheer movement in the other. He would have to choose the road, and in doing so, cast his

hero out into a vagabond existence on the high plains, a place from which no man can return whole. As a Mormon hermit tells Billy early in *The Crossing*:

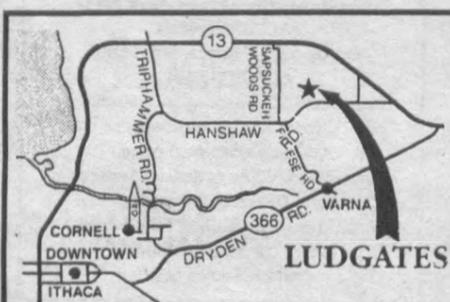
Such a man is like a dreamer who wakes from a dream of grief to a greater sorrow yet. All that he loves is now become a torment to him. The pin has been pulled from the axis of the universe. Whatever one takes one's eye from threatens to flee away. Such a man is lost to us. He moves and speaks. But he is himself less than the merest shadow among all that he beholds. There is no picture of him possible. The smallest mark upon the page exaggerates his presence.

At its most basic, *The Crossing* is a book about this open road—its lure, its perils, and ultimately, its emptiness. Longtime McCarthy fans will no doubt relish this, finding in the novel a certain bleak majesty said to be missing in *Horses*. Conversely, those who loved *Horses* for its unexpected tenderness—for John Grady's romance with the beautiful, headstrong Alejandra or for the blue stem heaven of Don Héctor Rocha y Villareal's hacienda in Coahuila—these readers will find *The Crossing* to be rather tougher riding than volume I.

One of the great pleasures of McCarthy's writing in the trilogy so far has been his deft descriptions of animals, especially horses, and their complex relationships with man in nature. Consider, for example, the following from *All the Pretty Horses*:

In the days to follow the hacendado would come up to the corral where they'd shaped the manada and he and John Grady would walk among the mares and John Grady would argue their points and the hacendado would muse and walk away a fixed distance and stand looking

see *Crossing Over*, page 15



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Arts in Crisis

ARTS IN CRISIS: THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS VERSUS AMERICA

Joseph Wesley Zeigler
A cappella Books, 184 pages
\$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper

Beatrice McLeod

In a foreword to Joseph Wesley Zeigler's book "Arts in Crisis," Garrison Keillor points out, charmingly, that "today, no American family can be secure against the danger that one of its children may decide to become an artist"—or an actor or a director, a playwright, or perhaps a critic. We whose concern for the theater prompts us to wire Congress of our objection to NEA budget cuts need to know the enemy—even when it is us.

Zeigler's account of the relationship between government and the arts is history which reads as compellingly as any fictional thriller. When and how did Washington become involved in the arts, how has the relationship fared, and what are the future problems and possibilities?

From the 1965 passage of Public Law 209, which initiated the birthing of NEA, to the present budget-whittling, progress has been a teetering see-saw. From the beginning, the Camelot coterie cheered on the legacy of an assassinated Kennedy, who had spoken unequivocally: "I see little of more importance to the future of our country...than the full recognition of the place of the artist.... Society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him." On the other side thundered the roar of conservative budget-watchers like the Representative from Iowa who dismissed the idea of direct government support of the arts as "a monstrosity."

Observing from the pivot, Zeigler the historian applauds the moments of balance, while acknowledging the significance of personalities in leadership. As in any movement for social change, heroes, heroines and villains emerged—sometimes dramatically. In the beginning, the Endowment had more prestige than money, its legitimacy enhanced by the distinction of its Council members—including such accomplished artists as Isaac Stern, Helen Hayes, John Steinbeck, Leonard Bernstein, and others who functioned as advisers under the chairmanship of Roger Stevens.

Prestige itself, however, has its hazards, and the cry of "elitism" could only complicate the knotty problems of choosing award recipients—individuals versus institutions, the established versus the innovative, literary versus visual versus performance arts, and so on. It's not surprising that many should have considered the idea absurd and impossible.

The first chairman to achieve acceptable balance between the agency's supporters and detractors was Nancy Hanks. A political genius of irresistible charm, she successfully worked the halls of Congress, man by man, not excluding the Executive (Nixon, at the time). She survived unscathed the first attack by Senator Jesse Helms. She established the system of Challenge Grants, bringing non-federal money into arts support on a systematic basis, and through an Expansion Arts program drew in ethnic minorities and rural communities. She brought the nation's orchestras and other high-profile arts efforts into the fold. By the end of her term, as Zeigler points out, "the NEA was politically connected everywhere, and its operation was superbly balanced."

Under her successor, Livingston Biddle, and in subsequent administrations (Frank Hodsoll, John Frohnmayer and Anne-Imelda Padice), political battles grew, while the see-saw's critical balance became increasingly precarious. Stories of the major and inevitable "crises"—the Serrano "piss Christ" photo, the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition in particular—make fascinating reading-by-Zeigler. But the end result, transferring the determination of obscenity from the courts to a government agency, was a major change. The balance was tipping badly, and some in the arts

community rallied with an advocacy movement. Jessica Tandy, for instance, testifying before a Congressional committee with her personal evidence ("Driving Miss Daisy" was an NEA-supported play): "I am here because I believe in the wisdom of Congress in starting and supporting the Arts Endowment.... Our government's support of free expression is one of the triumphs of our democracy."

Censorship versus freedom of speech was an issue eagerly co-opted by political conservatives, particularly the religious right and the American Family Association. Here the desirable balance (we're now in the '90s) went wildly out of kilter as the National Association of Arts Agencies moved into the action. Zeigler's reportage here becomes almost visual, as the embattled Endowment is attacked by foes and should-be friends. A quote from Peter Zeisler, director of Theater Communications Group, concludes almost bitterly. "One hopes that the arts world has learned once and for all that it cannot delegate primary responsibility to bureaucrats; artists must take it upon themselves to control their own destiny."

In his latter chapters, Zeigler's own views are given visibility. The denial of a grant is not censorship, he says, but rather a legitimate refusal to pay for what the giver considers inappropriate. This of course most often applies to individual artists, where the fostering of quality is most difficult to judge. "Creativity", he concludes, "is not a function of government." But support of that creativity most definitely is.

Moving from the historical record to some fresh ideas for the future, Zeigler explores and rejects three options for future planning and funding. His first of two positive suggestions is "The Audit Allowance," which would disperse support based on a formula derived from the audits of non-NEA giving to all like institutions for a 5-year period. His own preference, however, is for an ingenious and "imaginative manipulation of the machinery of taxation." As he explains it, the "10 percent Benefit can do more for the arts than it can in any other way." However one values these suggestions, they imply a need for "a comprehensive, careful, insightful and challenging analysis of the Endowment... not only on behalf of the arts, but on behalf of the American people."

One of the most devastating of funding cuts was the elimination, last January, of funding for professional Theater Training. Arts education had already been slashed, leaving clear indication of our government's lack of faith or even interest in the arts component of American culture.

"Arts in Crisis" throws down a gauntlet. Will we who love and live in the arts world accept it as a challenge to action?

Beatrice McLeod is a regular reviewer of theater for the Ithaca Journal.

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Dividing the House of Feminism

WHO STOLE FEMINISM? HOW WOMEN HAVE BETRAYED WOMEN

by Christina Hoff Sommers
Simon & Schuster, 320 pages, \$23

Rohan Maitzen

Christina Hoff Sommers is no stranger to controversy. An associate professor of philosophy at Clark University, Sommers has made herself known as an outspoken and indignant dissident among contemporary feminists, engaging in numerous spirited exchanges with other feminist philosophers. Her new book continues her crusade to expose what she considers pernicious trends in much current feminist theory and practice. Covering topics from Women's Studies curricula to domestic violence, from epistemology to self-esteem, *Who Stole Feminism?* is the impassioned testimony of "a feminist who does not like what feminism has become."

Sommers knows the risks of speaking out this way. An Op-Ed piece she wrote in 1989 for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* drew fire from many prominent academics, including a letter from the (then) executive director of the American Philosophical Association (APA) calling it an "intemperate diatribe." Philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky of the University of Illinois at Chicago tried to prevent the publication of an article Sommers was preparing for the *Atlantic Monthly*; after initially denying her interference, Bartky justified it with this analogy: "I wouldn't want a nut case who thinks there wasn't a Holocaust to write about the Holocaust." And in a long and heated exchange of letters with Sommers in the *Proceedings and Addresses* of the APA, various femi-

nist philosophers, including Alison Jaggar, Marilyn Friedman, Naomi Scheman, and, again, Sandra Bartky, accused Sommers of dishonest intellectual methods, inaccuracy, distortion, misrepresentation, and unsound scholarship. Anyone with a thinner skin, or less sense of mission, or without tenure, might have abandoned the field by now. Sommers, however, believes her interpretations are fair and her intervention important; in an interview for the *Boston Globe* she says, "If I thought they were right, I'd feel bad. But I think they're wrong, and I'm committed to telling it the way I see it."

Sommers's basic thesis is that liberal feminism, the kind of feminism that underwrote the Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848 and most of the feminist activism of this century, is being replaced, with devastating consequences, by what she calls "gender feminism." Sommers defines "gender feminism" as the view that women in our society are still universally subject to a "sex/gender system"—that male hegemony, or the "heteropatriarchy," still pervasively dominates them:

American feminism is currently dominated by a group of women who seek to persuade the public that American women are not the free creatures we think we are. The leaders and theorists of the women's movement believe that our society is best described as a patriarchy, a "male hegemony," a "sex/gender system" in which the dominant gender works to keep women cowering and submissive.... The "gender feminists" (as I shall call them) believe that all our institutions, from the state to the family to the grade schools, perpetuate male dominance.

see *Feminism*, page 11

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# Art and the Mechanical Image

## Arnold Singer

A magician is the supreme illusionist, and momentarily excites by subverting truth. The dramas of a Moliere or an Ibsen, besides being high theatre, are revelations of eternal truths. The love affair with photography on the part of the general public, as well as the tastemakers of our cultural establishments, is the result of an apparent merging of both magic and truth.

Photography is magical, of that there is no doubt. Press a button on an ingenious machine and, wonder of wonders, a mirror image of whatever its glass eye was directed toward is instantaneously or soon afterward manufactured. That a mechanically realized mirror image represents truth is accepted unconditionally by the public at large, which, it is unnecessary to point out, has never been particularly discriminating in distinguishing between its absence or presence.

That the culturally sophisticated whom we expect to be fastidious in matters of creativity accept the camera's mirror image as truthful and, consequently, possessing the capability of qualifying as art, represents a departure from time-honored norms. Never before has exact pictorial replication sans conceptualization and invention been accepted as art. The stage was set for this radical shift by a revolution in taste after the introduction of Impressionism.

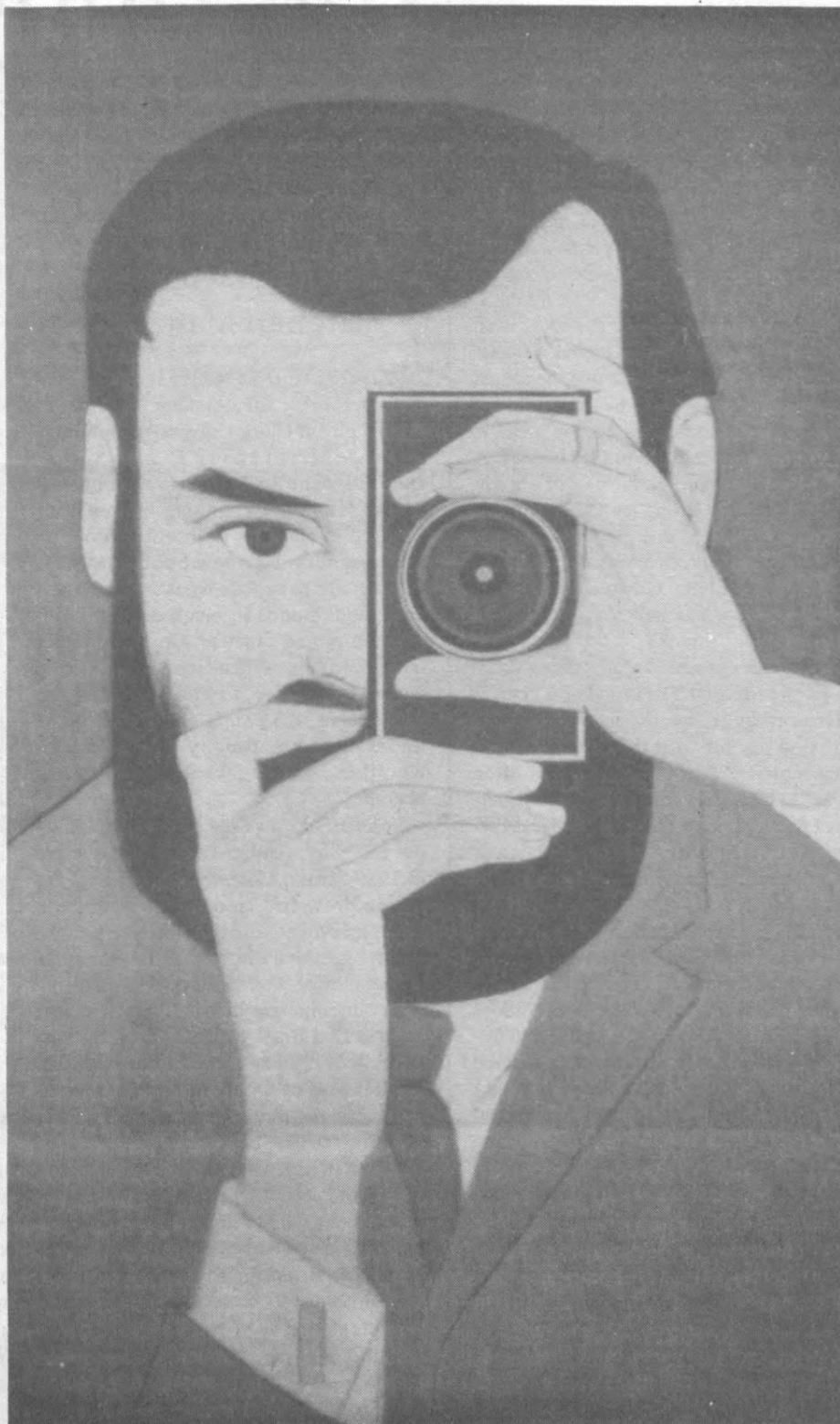
The three most popular forms of image-making in the modern era, Impressionism (as distinct from Post-Impressionism), Abstract Expressionism, and the various schools of photography have, despite external dissimilarities, a common dependency on immediacy and spontaneity. Impressionism was concerned with the visual moment; Abstract Expressionism with the emotional moment; and photography with the visual and/or emotional moment.

The history of modern art can in part be understood in terms of conflict between the permanent and the transient. Painters we identify as Post-Impressionists, Cezanne, Seurat, and Van Gogh, following a brief early interest, abandoned Impressionism because of its inconclusive, ephemeral nature, and Renoir in his maturity, for the same reasons, denounced it. In contrast, Monet became more radically impressionistic as he aged and as a result is the most popular of modern painters. Novice art students and dilettantes most frequently identify their favorite painter as Monet.

Abstract Expressionism was characterized by the compulsion to muscledly transmute intense emotional states or truths into paint. Expressionists, unlike Impressionists, often started a canvas with only a vague idea of what might evolve. Planning and research in the form of drawing was anathema to the Expressionists as it was to the Impressionists, for that time-consuming traditional procedure interfered with the urge to convert feeling into form as quickly as possible. Though boasting of liberation from academic constraints, Abstract Expressionists established their own hierarchy of absolutes. The kinetic brushstroke or the pouring or flinging of paint was *de rigueur* and the "drip," a natural desire of excess aint to succumb to gravitational forces, was obligatory. The Abstract Expressionist was not interested in externals; paint itself and its emotive potential was truth enough. Abstract Expressionism remains the most popular of painting styles since the fifties.

A minority of distinguished and accomplished painters rejected Abstract Expressionism as well as the short-lived movements which followed and paid the penalty of relative obscurity. Our novice art student, familiar with Jackson Pollock and William deKooning, will probably never have heard of Stuart Davis or Will Barnet.

In photography, the mechanical nature of



Portrait of Djordje Milicevic by Will Barnet

the image ensures a measure of truth. But it is a paradoxical form of truth, as Janet Malcolm points out in her survey of photography, "Diane and Nikon": "If the camera can't lie," Ms. Malcolm states, "neither is it inclined to tell the truth, since it can reflect only the usually ambiguous and sometimes outright deceitful surface of reality." Photographers by and large are either unaware of the implications of Malcolm's observation, or else deflect the charge by claiming ambiguity as a virtue.

As the old saying goes, "appearances are deceptive." In painting or any of the arts, transcending appearance requires a dedication few achieve. "Talent is long patience," Gustave Flaubert advised his protégé Guy de Maupassant. "You must scrutinize whatever it is you want to express so long and so attentively as to enable you to find some aspect of it which no one has seen before." Words such as "scrutinizing long and attentively" are not in the vocabulary of the Impressionist, Expressionist, or photographer.

Strikingly similar words are found in Le Corbusier's treatise *Creation is a Patient Search*: "when one uses one's eyes and draws so as to fix deep down in one's experience what is seen, to trace the lines, handle the volumes, organize the surface—all this means first to look, then to observe, and finally perhaps to discover." Observation in depth as called for by Flaubert and Le Corbusier, provided of course it is accompanied by good sense, insight, and the talent to

translate those intangibles into concrete form, is prerequisite to the highest levels of creativity.

Further confirmation of the necessity for contemplative, analytic study comes from an unexpected source. Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most gifted of contemporary photographers, now prefers to draw, and characterizes photography as quick-sketching—presumably the ten- or twenty-second exercises practiced in many art classes. Favored by Cartier-Bresson is the meditative, thoughtful expression offered by drawing which places no premium on speed and emphasizes objectives defined by Flaubert and Le Corbusier.

Apart from the compulsive spontaneity of the past half-century, Renaissance scientific illusionism has been a dominant presence in American art. Though the foremost Renaissance artists kept illusionism in check by maintaining an unwavering respect for classical concepts, and the Post-Impressionists and later the Cubists made a frontal attack upon it, photography, in its whole-hearted affirmation of illusionism, represents a retrogression, not the least of whose consequences is the blurring of the distinction between commercial and non-commercial art. Said Charles Baudelaire about the invention of photography and subsequent efforts to confer upon it legitimacy as art: "Art and progress are enemies, when they meet on the same road one must give way."

The anti-illusionistic nature of the new European painting from the mid-19th century

through the first decades of this century grievously offended American sensibilities. When the Philadelphian Albert Barnes exhibited the first sizable collection of Post-Impressionist work on this side of the Atlantic, the response was so hostile that he all but closed his galleries to the public.

The Post-Impressionists rejected that aspect of the Renaissance associated with illusionism. Cezanne, for example, worshipped Poussin, but that did not prevent him from evolving images that seriously violated Renaissance perspective, in the knowledge that Poussin's immense strength resided in attributes other than those associated with scientific illusionism.

Other Post-Impressionists and later the Cubists, as well as painters such as Matisse and Klee, found their spiritual and aesthetic roots in pre-Renaissance Europe, Africa, and the Near and Far East. The one exception was Degas who was influenced by photography and hence created more realistic, familiar images, though he was not by any stretch of the imagination a photo-realist.

Perhaps the most explicit definition of the means by which painters have resolved the problem of going beyond photographic illusionism is offered by Barnes in his 1936 study, *The Art of Cezanne*:

The characteristics which are absolutely indispensable in architecture—solidity, weight, equilibrium, balance of forces—are those most evident in his work. In a good building there can be no mass which is not supported, no thrust not taken up by some counter-thrust, no force exerted which is not planned and provided for: design is a practical as well as aesthetic necessity and improvisation in essentials is an impossibility.

It was Cezanne's insistence upon penetrating beyond appearances to the essentials of phenomena that made his images "difficult." For the photographer the full manipulation of form necessary for the task of going beyond externals is impossible. Photographers are of two minds whether it should even be attempted. The Winogrand-Frank school feel it to be an abuse of the medium. Others such as Adams, Weston, or Penn believe the framing of a motif plus darkroom adjustments will bring images up to the compositional level of good painting. Some photographers are better at this than others and succeed in producing pleasing images. But Barnes describes a process which goes beyond mere tasteful composition to the very heart of creativity in the plastic arts, namely finding the formal architectural equivalent of reality. For the serious painter it is difficult; for the photographer it is out of reach.

Arnold Singer is a painter and emeritus professor of art at Cornell University.

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# Of Time and the Artist

Kenneth Evett

One of the commonly revered precepts of the American Academy of The New has been the imperative that an artist must be "of his time." While the concept was an effective weapon in art world warfare, used to defend an ally or banish an enemy to outer darkness, in an era of great complexity and contradictions it imposed a difficult task on the artist, who had to figure out the meaning of his own brief moment in time, and then express it in a way that would conform to the subjective expectations of others.

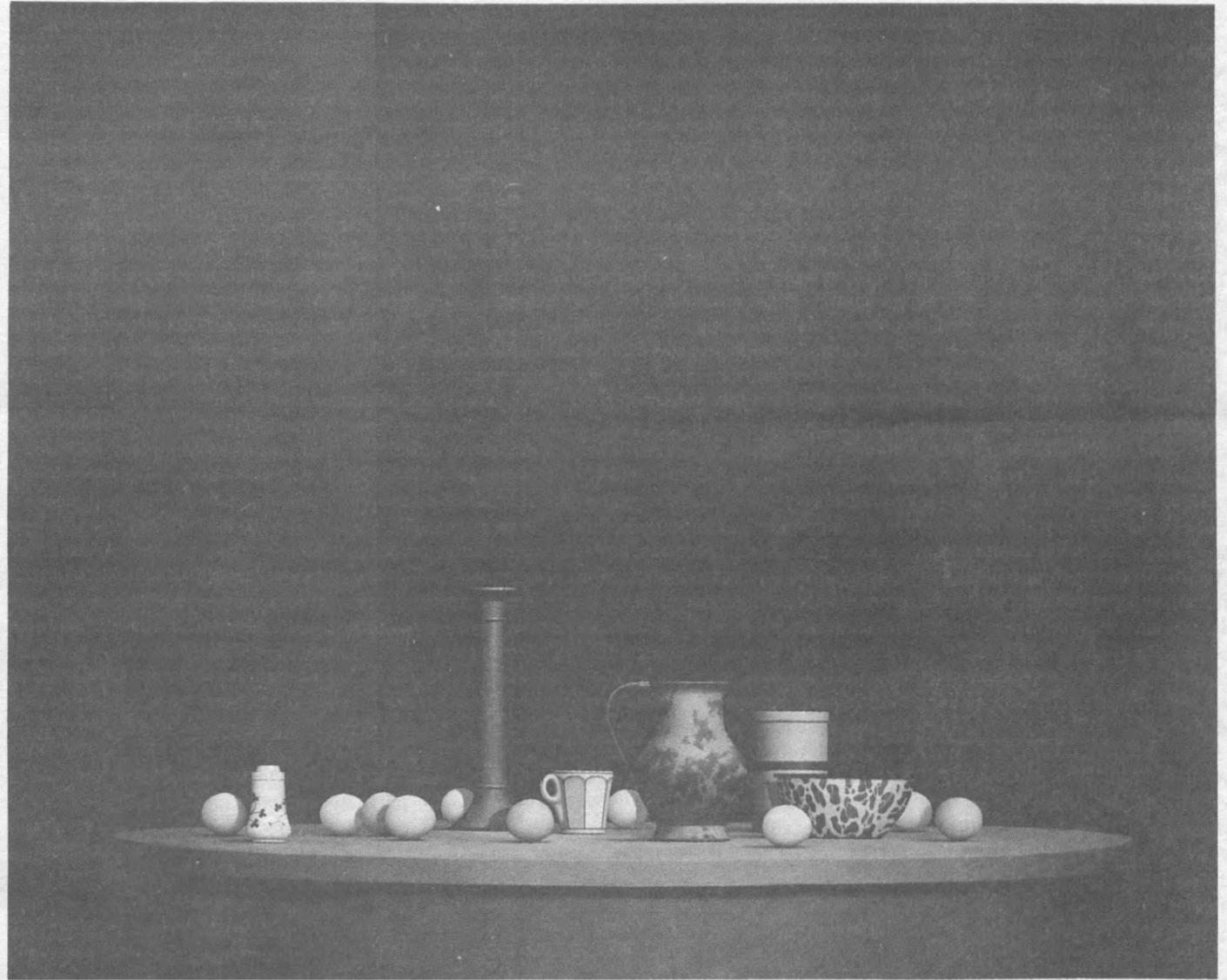
Artists of any sensibility are bound to be affected at all levels of their existence by the temporal environmental threats, technological miracles, global hostilities, and everyday cruelty and folly of the human race, but each artist responds to these realities in a personal way, and since anyone living and working at a given moment is, perforce, of his time, the precept was untenable on the face of it.

Another equally unrealistic and widely accepted Academy doctrine has been the conceit that contemporary art must be entirely novel. Artists were urged to stake out a claim "on the frontier," "break new ground," or work "at the edge." Driven by such admonitions, American artists responded with such a vast outpouring of inventive and idiosyncratic creations that at last the operative imperative became "anything goes," thus reducing the Academy itself to an anachronism, making it hard for any arbiter of taste to separate the saved from the damned, or for college art professors to maintain the myth of a disciplined approach to art. Ideally, whatever iconographic and formal system an artist may devise to project his awareness of existence should be respected and evaluated on its immanent qualities alone, without regard for stylistic, sociological, or art historical classification.

Even though the standards for determining timeliness or the degree of novelty in a work of art are only relative, the search for relationships between social conditions and art is a diverting pastime, particularly if a link can be found between art that is loved or despised and a social phenomenon that is admired or deplored. Luckily there is no known authority with the power to enforce a uniform interpretation of these relationships, and since no one of any visual or cultural acuity takes the Academy imperatives seriously anyway, we are all free to play that game for the fun of it.

I recently saw two shows in New York that presented a challenge to the speculative power of anyone interested in the harmless pursuit of finding connections between art and life. Both exhibitions consisted of recent work by living artists. Each show was presented in an eminent gallery situated on opposite sides of 57th Street, that long-established uptown arena for the display and promotion of contemporary American art. It would be hard to find a more unlikely pair of messengers for news of the temper of the times.

At the Pace Gallery at 32 East 57th, in the same space occupied by the Kraushaar Galleries in 1949 (where I had my first one-man New York show) was an entirely different kind of exhibition by Julian Schnabel. Schnabel's display consisted of large vertical rectangles, all the same size, all framed in wide convoluted moldings, each frame tinted in a kind of pale pink peach and banana ice cream tonality. All the marks in each painting were conventionally oriented to the flatness of the picture plane and on each surface, a piece of cloth, rag, bag, or banner was attached. Across this shallow protuberance and its surrounding clots of pigment and pools of



Plateau by William Bailey (Courtesy of the André Emmerich Gallery)

raw medium the words "Boni Lux" and fast-moving ribbons and sweeps of color rode across each canvas. As a prime example of the current fashionable taste for the charm of ineptitude, the entire exhibit seemed to me a calculated pose, a self-conscious glorification of bad taste and pretentious vulgarity, the ultimate fulfillment of the don't-give-a-shit approach to painting that has sustained one school of American art for the past forty years.

Given my political and aesthetic prejudices, my contribution to the game of finding revelations of timeliness is to suggest a connection between Schnabel's work and that period in the eighties when Reagan and Bush governed the country and Schnabel was granted all the rewards the art world had to offer: a one-man show at the Whitney, sales to provincial museums across the country, and his work sought after by status-minded international collectors. Though it may seem far-fetched to connect Schnabel's gross products to the glitzy vulgarity of Ron and Nancy, or the plodding country-club ordinariness of the Bush family, it seems to me that the childish intellectual level, hypocrisy, opportunism, and shoddy standards of the Reagan-Bush era are reflected in Schnabel's art and career.

But what can be made of the William Bailey exhibition directly across the street in the Emmerich Gallery at 41 East 57th Street? I can't come up with any contemporary examples of political or cultural conditions that relate to his work or indeed any evidence that it belongs in the conventional corpus of 20th-century art at all. Acting as though the ancient Greek precepts of moderation, clarity, and order were still valid, as though still-life content like that found on the walls of Egyptian tombs and Roman villas was still interesting, Bailey ignores the commonplace modern usages of ambivalent iconography and ambiguous space. Without shame, he employs the traditional Renaissance devices of volumetric modeling, perspective, and local color and

defines his forms with a craftsman's regard for the quality of his materials. As though these old-fashioned attributes weren't enough to bar him from the established precincts of Modernism, he depends on the pure abstract powers of symmetry and asymmetry, proportion, color, contours, and texture to provide drama for his work.

In a typical Bailey still life, ceramic household containers; cups, bowls, and pitchers are seen at eye level, lined up on a flat horizontal plane that is parallel to the lower boundary of the rectangle. The vertical axis of each container is maintained throughout, and the links, impingements, and openings between the objects are defined with unequivocal simplicity. This dense cluster of forms occupies a zone low on the rectangle, leaving a large open area above that generates a sensation of grand amplitude, dignity and a miraculous expansion of space beyond the boundaries of the rectangle. Because of Bailey's sovereign disregard of current formal clichés, his work assumes a distinctive authority; to come upon it immediately following a visit to the poisonously chic Schnabel exhibition across the street was to discover a revelation of classic grace and serenity.

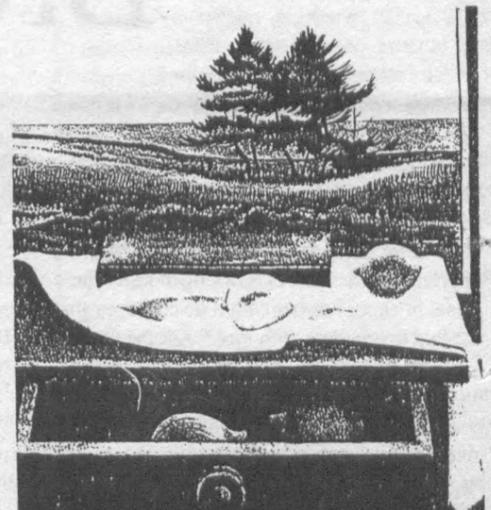
Such qualities seem to transcend what is merely up-to-date and to evoke an illusion of the timeless nature of great art, despite all the contrary evidence of fluctuating taste, accidental destruction, and losses in the past. And even though a moment's reflection on time, entropy, and the death of the sun reminds us of the ultimate fate of all the creations of mankind, our human longing for continuation and the approval of subsequent generations leads to a deluded preoccupation with posterity, a place in history, and, for the artist, the vain hope of reaching an audience that recognizes the hidden meaning and value of his work and grants him aesthetic justice at last.

So what does it matter and who is to say whether or not our era is best expressed in Pollock's "Blue Poles" or Picasso's

"Three Musicians," Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler," or "Four Minutes and Twenty Seconds of Silence" by John Cage, the short stories of Barthelme or V. S. Pritchett, or for that matter, the paintings of Schnabel or Bailey? While I have no doubt about which of these artists best represents what I value in the arts of my time, their social significance eludes objective definition.

What does matter is the existence of an open-minded audience that is liberated from the constraints of fashion and theoretical doctrine and is therefore capable of direct response to the pure abstract immanent power of the arts to provide coherent visions of form and feeling that can, like the brave music of Mozart, bring momentary joy, heartbreak, pride, and comfort to us humans before we, along with Prospero's actors, are all "melted into air, into thin air."

*Kenneth Evett is a painter and emeritus professor of art at Cornell University.*



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# Impossible Country

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**NV:** How would you describe the ratio of your experiences, notes, and final version?

**BH:** Travel writers may intentionally visit a place for a short time, in the belief that fresh first impressions are the most communicable to other people. The longer your stay, things begin to interest you because they reflect a longer background of knowledge. That may not interest the reader as much so you may use less of that material. The Zagreb part of this book is one quarter or so of the whole. I was there for two weeks and in the whole country for four and a half months. In total I've used maybe 10% of what I had. The beginning weeks are expanded while the end of the trip's material is less detailed. Of course, publishers care about book length. Rebecca West was already well known before *Black Lamb*, which was over 800 pages.

**NV:** You end the book in Kosovo. What is it like there now?

**BH:** A contact of mine there makes it sound like the end of civilization. Electricity one night a week in the capital. He burns three candles a night to get through, reading and drinking. A lot of Albanians have moved to Macedonia which is now being blockaded. Papandreou was angered by the US recognition of Macedonia. There always have been a lot of Albanians there, 25 to 40%, but there are more now—which may help to destabilize Macedonia, since they don't get along with the Slavs. I don't think anybody at this point would voluntarily go to Albania. For the last few years people were well aware that the Albania that exists now is nothing they'd like to belong to. The Serbs would always say the Albanians of Kosovo were separatists and as soon as there was a republic they'd secede and join Albania. The response to this argument, basically, was "C'mon, look at Albania.... Are we stupid?" Now, maybe, things are so bad in Kosovo that there may not be much difference. The impression I've gotten, though, is that in spite of the blockade, things are even worse in Albania.

There is a lot of movement among the Albanian families in Kosovo and Macedonia. They don't feel that there's any difference between them. That's a potentially dangerous situation. Fighting could start in Macedonia between Slavs and Albanians. This is more likely as the economy there falls apart or if the government collapses. Then the Kosovars may act in solidarity. Serbs tend to think of Macedonia as belong-

ing to them; they call it South Serbia. That scenario would be the really big Balkan war. Obviously one can never be sure, but the nightmare scenario people love to talk about, which is plausible, is that Bulgaria would also come in, because they believe the Macedonians are basically Bulgarians. Greece, of course, feels that independent Macedonia will inevitably lay claim to the northern part of Greece. That's the main argument they offer for their blockade. And then there's a possibility of Turkey getting involved, probably not as a real fighter, but its problems with Greece would only worsen. This is what everybody has been talking about for a long time now. People say, "Why didn't we do something before...if only...when a few thousand soldiers would have served, now we need tens of thousands." Which may turn out to be true. Six hundred Americans are there, but nobody seems to be paying any attention.

**NV:** You don't visit Macedonia in your book.

**BH:** From my own earlier travel experiences I knew that just talking about Serbs, Croats, and Muslims would be complicated enough if I really wanted to go into it at all deeply. Macedonia is equally complicated but a whole separate set of issues. I decided not to do Slovenia for the same reason.

**NV:** Your book gives the reader a real sense of histories and histrionics. It is a good antidote for our American ignorance about that part of the world.

**BH:** When I first started working on this the war hadn't started yet and so my background assumption was that Americans would not even know who Serbs and Croats were. Yugoslavia was just Yugoslavia. In 1989, when an editor from the *New York Times* assigned my first article on the rise of Serb nationalism, he asked me how I planned to get from Belgrade into Serbia. That geographical confusion was very common. Since the war, the geography has become part of our political awareness. But in picking up terminology, people have acquired preconceptions as well. My book tries to present each side from within its own viewpoint, so that if what they're doing seems unsympathetic, at least it's understandable.

My own impression has been that all three sides are capable of doing what the Serbs



Brian Hall crossing what used to be the bridge at Mostar.

have done in this war. It is true that this time around most of the violence has been perpetrated by the Serbs, probably because they happened to have the weapons, the opportunities, the numbers. I certainly don't pretend to be totally objective. My experience there, though it was over several years, is of course relatively limited. If I had been there for twenty years, perhaps I could be a little more confident about my opinions.

I tend to feel most sympathetic toward the Muslims. I think most people do, possibly because the Muslims are the most urbanized of the groups in Bosnia. They have tended to be more cosmopolitan, with a broader outlook than the average Serb or Croat. So the Bosnia that's referred to in the West as a multicultural entity, the ideal that the nationalist vision has destroyed, it is more a Muslim ideal.

Even though the news media has portrayed them as the main victims, many people in the West have a hard time identifying with Muslims. You have to wonder at the strength of the reaction in the press had the ethnic situation been reversed and Belgrade was perceived to be funding a territorial war of conquest against a population of Christians. There are those who argue that we would have flattened Belgrade a long time ago if it had been a Muslim city.

There are many different reasons for the paralysis in Bosnia. One of them might just be that hard issue of it being a problematic population for a lot of people. I tend to think of a possible analogy to the problematic population of Jews during World War II. There was a feeling: "What are they doing in Poland anyway—an Oriental population?" The lack of response to Nazi actions, despite good evidence then, has been well documented. You wonder about the things you can't put your finger on directly in the press, that add up.

**NV:** Are you encouraged by the new Bosnian Muslim-Croat Federation?

**BH:** It's only a small step. Everyone agrees that the Serbs have to be brought in on this for it to work out. But it's likely the Federation will continue purely as a Muslim-Croat one on 30 to 40% of what used to be Bosnia. The Serbs will eventually connect with a so-called larger Serbia. There isn't a big argument so much over where "Bosnia" was. What Serbs and Croats disagree on is whether this thing called Bosnia was part of Serbia or Croatia in the past. They both look upon it as a regional name, a region that was part of their state. They look back in their history to find associations.

One place I part company with a lot of the analysis in the West about what has happened in Bosnia is the picture of it as a multi-ethnic state that was invaded and dismembered by the Serbs. In my view, Bosnia as an independent state was a completely unworkable arrangement right from the beginning. Bosnia declared its independence because it had to after Croatia and Slovenia were recognized. After they were gone, the Croats and Muslims of Bosnia knew that they had lost their allies in any kind of decision about Yugoslavia's future. Yet Bosnian Serb reaction against an independent Bosnian state was completely foreseeable. It was clear that any decisions about Bosnia's future had to be made as agreements among all three groups. Serbs were not going to allow themselves to be detached.

You see many references to the victory of nationalism over multiculturalism. It's claimed to be a tragedy: a multi-ethnic state being cantonized. That is a misleading view. The multi-ethnic parts of Bosnia were largely in the cities. You didn't find a lot of inter-ethnic understanding in the villages. They certainly lived together. They didn't shoot each other, but they didn't love each other. There were large areas that were not in any way really Bosnian, except in name.

see *Impossible Country*, page 16

## Breaking the Circuit

continued from page 3

evidence showed that in Georgia homicide cases "the death penalty was eleven times more likely if the victim was white than if the victim was black and if the defendant was black and the victim was white, the defendant was twenty-two times more likely to get the death penalty." The Supreme Court has acknowledged that "there exists in capital sentencing a discrepancy that appears to correlate with race." But the Court's majority saw this as inevitable in our criminal justice system. As writer Guy Davenport has observed in a different context, "racism is a precise prejudice, you never know who a man might not be."

Prejean notes that a very small percentage of murderers are executed ("1 or 2 percent of the thousands who commit homicide every year"). The racist bias in the application of the death penalty combined with its exclusive use against the poor add up to a political policy. A former prosecutor, Andrea Lyons, has written: "the death penalty's purpose is primarily political, whatever it may seem to be in the individual

instance. In other countries, the political nature of the death penalty is more obvious and more clear....But you cannot forget this is a tool of repression."

Millard Farmer, a lawyer known for his work on death penalty cases, makes the same point: "the death penalty is part of the political process, it is not part of the criminal justice system." He notes that local district attorneys have a great deal of power over these cases through plea bargaining, but they are elected officials who can and do use the death penalty as a campaign strategy. This is true, of course, even in presidential campaigns. President Clinton flew back to Arkansas to ensure the execution of Ricky Rector, a man so severely brain-damaged from the shootout in which he killed a police officer, that he did not know what was happening to him. Prejean gives Farmer's summary of the sociological argument about the arbitrariness of capital punishment: "race, poverty, and geography determine who gets the death penalty—if the victim is white, if the defendant is poor, and whether or not the local D.A. is willing to plea

bargain."

If we accept the view that arbitrariness and prejudice exist in the application of the death penalty in our society, there is still a long way to go to acceptance of the abolitionist argument. In the current mood of fear, anger, and frustration about crime, it often seems that the real passions are about revenge and deterrence rather than fairness.

Advocates of the death penalty are convinced it is a deterrent. This position is a favorite of politicians who want to appear tough on crime—Clinton and Geraldine Ferraro just as much as Al D'Amato. There is no political cost to taking this position, but there is no convincing proof that capital punishment acts as a deterrent. No research supports it, and as Prejean notes, "in the US the murder rate is no higher in states that do not have the death penalty than in those that do." What seems to matter more are social and cultural conditions which create a climate of violence. Texas is a good example. It leads in executions and its murder rate remains high.

If deterrence falls away as a rational basis for

capital punishment, what is left to justify it? Actually deterrence retains tremendous emotional power in the debate in spite of insufficient evidence that it works. Susan Jacoby, in *Wild Justice*—a book Prejean refers to several times— theorizes that this power comes from the fact that we are not comfortable with advocating openly for revenge:

In a culture that regards "legalized revenge" as a term of opprobrium, there is a deep need to ascribe vengeance to other, more socially acceptable motives; rationalizing the death penalty as a form of deterrence fulfills this emotional need.

Jacoby, like Prejean, opposes the death penalty, but she argues for retribution even if it has no deterrent effect. It is necessary, she says, for social order, because justice cannot restrain revenge ("wild justice") unless there is certainty that it metes out retribution. This is the middle ground that Prejean agrees with—that an eye for an eye is excessive, but that a few short years

see *Breaking the Circuit*, page 14

# A Survivor's Testament

## WITNESS TO ANNIHILATION

Samuel Drix, M.D.

Brassey's (Macmillan), 249 pages, \$23

### Karey Solomon

Accounts of the Holocaust can be strangely abstract, catalogs of human suffering so vilely inflicted that the totality strikes its audience as unreal. We tend to forget that the whole horror didn't occur at once but built moment by fearful moment.

Dr. Drix remembers. In his memoir, *Witness to Annihilation*, he offers his first-hand experience, complete with gritty detail and an element too often missing from such recollections—the ability to take the reader back with him to the Lwów Ghetto in Poland, to the infamous Janowska camp, to a terrified life in hiding.

When Poland was conquered in 1939, Samuel Drix was already a physician and a newlywed. In 1940, his daughter Sylvia was born, a sweet, solemn-faced little girl shown in photographs being held between her smiling parents like the promise of a new world.

Wartime hardships were mitigated by a large and loving family, meaningful work, and the certain knowledge that war could not last for long. As for rumors of extermination filtering into the Jewish consciousness of early 1940s Poland—unthinkable. Would anyone in a position of power purposely wipe out a large skilled labor force? Anti-Semitism was pervasive, but it must have seemed for a time too unworthy a sentiment to become a reason for concerted action. Until, inevitably, the Nazi death machine met the Russian Army on the battleground of Poland.

Caught in the crossfire, Dr. Drix sometimes hid, or fled, or held his ground, as occasion demanded. He tells his story sequentially, with an exactness of recollection which later served to convict several of his tormentors in war trials. Here, his testimony vividly gathers the reader into the sights, sounds, and, most important, the emotions generated by the turmoil and uncertainty of that time.

We are there with his family in the ghetto in early 1942, cut off from all sources of food, yet trying to assuage the hunger pangs of two-year-old Sylvia. First, every material object of value was bartered for their lives ("I remember well how I gave a new, luxurious couch with a glass bookcase attached to the back for a not-too-great sack of potatoes.") Then, in a series of "actions," members of his family were apprehended and sent to several camps.

In the early days, he writes, "It was a tremendous help for my survival that I was a doctor, for I was spared physical labor and had a warm room to be in. I also took satisfaction in being able to help people some-

what in this awful time."

This situation was not to last. With a surplus of doctors, and as execution became the standard "treatment" for illness and injury, he was sentenced to grinding physical labor.

Like other camp inmates, Dr. Drix endured hunger, typhus, and the continuing emotional strain of watching others die, often at the whim of their captors. A minor infraction of camp order, a question asked, a stumble while marching off to work, a suspicion of working too slowly, even using the latrine at night could become the occasion of a beating, torture, or execution. Liquidation quotas provoked mass executions. Like others in the camp, Dr. Drix was a forced spectator to these events, ever wondering whether he was to fall the next victim. He reports several occasions when he himself was marked for death but circumstances somehow contrived to exempt him.

As news of the outside world trickled in, he learned of the gradual attrition of his family, sustaining himself in this sorrowful time by the knowledge that his young daughter needed him alive. Why else was he spared?

And then, the final blow. He learned that his daughter Sylvia had probably also died.

I drank my cup of bitterness to the bottom, to the very bottom. I did not have anybody anymore. The murderers took my last ones. I was left as just one, terribly lonesome....

My companions started to comfort me. "It can't be helped, nothing can be done, this is our fate. All this awaits us as well." These last words sobered me up. What? No, I would not go like a sheep to the Sands, I would break away!—not to live, for I did not care for living anymore, but I wanted to live in order to avenge the blood of the innocent ones, to pay for my mother and stepfather, for my sisters and brother, for my wife and child, for my relatives and friends, for all of them. And I knew that only a few would believe me. I knew, for I would not have been able to believe all these horrors myself, had I not lived through them.

The dramatic story of Dr. Drix's escape from the camp and his time in hiding is, like his camp experience, a series of miraculous near-death experiences. What seems most remarkable is that he not only survived, but that he did so with his humanity intact.

His story can be told because he somehow endured the war, remarried and had another child, and made his way west to set-



Samuel Drix and his wife Alice today, with their son Severin, his wife Pamela, and grandsons Julian and Nathaniel.

tle in New York City. How did he find the courage? One can only consider such a story with awe.

Especially because Dr. Drix is not one to continuously dwell on past hardships. He is a cheerful, smiling man, recently retired from medical practice, an opera buff, delighted grandfather, a person who appreciates fine art, chocolate, and the antics of children.

I met Dr. Drix long after our families had become close friends. When I came to know him a little, I was surprised that his attitude toward his wartime experiences was so different from anything else I'd encountered.

In other families of Holocaust survivors, one grows up to accept "don't ask" as an answer to questions, knowing that this relative could not have children, that others must take "rest cures," and that still others mutilated themselves and/or committed suicide, hounded by personal demons raised by the unspeakable offenses committed against them.

Dr. Drix remembers, feels the pain—and transformed his grief into a sacred duty to make his story and the story of the Jews of Lwów known to the world. He told me once that he lights *yartzeit* (24-hour memorial) candles and says *Kaddish* (prayers for the dead) for all those he knew who died.

*Witness to Annihilation*, like a *yartzeit* candle, is an aid to memory and a light in the darkness.

Karey Solomon is a writer who lives in Ithaca.

## How Witness came to be written.

When Ithaca High School math teacher Severin Drix was growing up, much of his family's history was unknown to him. In fact, with no grandparents, aunts, or uncles, he had little family at all except for a few distant relatives. "There never seemed to be time to tell the story from beginning to end."

That time came when his father, Dr. Drix, retired from medical practice and began dictating his memoir in Polish. Cassette tapes were sent to Poland to be transcribed, then roughly translated into English. Then Severin and his wife, artist Pamela Rozelle Drix, went to work.

Most evenings for 3 1/2 years, after their two children went to sleep, they booted up their computer and went to work on the manuscript. After the translation, "Some paragraphs were so rough we had no idea what they meant. They were in stilted English that didn't seem to be what Papa had intended. So we would go back to Papa with lists of questions—which often led to a whole different story. About a quarter of the book is based on these follow-ups," Severin says.

For Pamela, it was a painful process because some of the material was so harrowing. "I have a vivid imagination. I didn't want to become hardened to it," she says. "There was unbelievable violence done to these people." At times, she was so disturbed by the narrative that "The intensity was more than I could take in. I had to put the book down a couple of months. I needed time to heal from it."

But they kept going back to it. As Severin sums it up, "My father was anxious, I was overwhelmed, Pam said, 'Let's do it.'"

Putting together the past in this way increased Severin's admiration for his father and gave him something of his own as well. "My father has such a positive attitude toward life," Severin says. "He kept his sanity and his faith in goodness and God."

And in the course of preparing the book, he was shown the few pictures of his family for the first time. "It gave me something solid to hang on to," he says. "A sense of connection and being able to mourn. How do you mourn someone you never knew?"

# Feminism

continued from page 7

Unlike the liberal or "equity" feminist, who demands "for women what she wants for everyone—fair treatment, without discrimination"—the gender feminist rejects "Enlightenment principles of individual justice" as indelibly tainted with sexism (and racism) and views "women as a political class whose interests are at odds with the interests of men." Patriarchal oppression or discrimination is part of the structure of our society, not incidental to it, and thus piecemeal reform must give way to wholesale transformation. Gender feminists see the world "through the lens of sexual politics," a lens Sommers is convinced rather distorts than discloses realities.

Sommers's critics reject the term "gender feminism," calling it an invention designed to obscure what they consider significant differences among feminist theorists. In a letter to the *APA Proceedings*, Sandra Bartky lists no fewer than twenty varieties of feminism, including "Marxist feminists, socialist feminists, lesbian feminists, ...existentialist feminists, psychoanalytic feminists (be they Freudian, Jungian, Kleinian, Lacanian or object-relations oriented mothering theorists), ...post-modern feminists who follow Derrida, post-modern feminists who follow Foucault," and many more. Lumping them together as "gender feminists," Bartky contends, "facilitates the discretizing of feminist philosophy." Sommers, however, denies that all these distinctions really indicate diversity: "to me," she told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "it's just the gamut from A to B."

Because of its centrality to Sommers' argument, it is worth noting here that various feminist writings do, in fact, lend credibility to her taxonomy, not by confirming the unity of "gender feminism" as a theoretical entity but by consistently differentiating most of the admittedly numerous varieties of feminism from liberal feminism (which is apparently as far right on the political spectrum as feminist theorizing gets). Naomi Scheman asserts that "Most self-identified feminist philosophers would disagree" with "the agenda of...liberal feminism" ("The Unavoidability of Gender," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Fall/Winter 1990). Similarly, Louise Antony notes that both Sandra Harding and Alison Jaggar, two leading feminist philosophers, "have encouraged the idea that acceptance of mainstream epistemological paradigms is tantamount to endorsing liberal feminism," a conclusion meant to be a knock-down argument against such acceptance (*A Mind of One's Own*, ed. Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt, 1992). Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* examines four kinds of feminism: liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist. Although Jaggar explores many differences among the last three, liberal feminism is clearly the odd woman out. Sommers's term "gender feminism" thus legitimately distinguishes feminisms that reject liberal individualism and its associated values from liberal or "equity" feminism. That there remain theoretical differences within these general categories does not suffice to invalidate them.

Sommers herself spends little time in *Who Stole Feminism?* defending her vocabulary. After briefly setting up the (for her) crucial and undeniable distinction between gender and equity feminism, she devotes most of her book to tracing what she sees as the undesirable effects of gender feminism. Her first several chapters focus on feminist transformations within the academy, from curricular revisions to pedagogical practices.

In general, Sommers argues that current trends threaten the quality of education

see *Feminism*, page 13

# Hollywood on the Tiber

Nicholas Nicastro

Right up to its 1991 re-release in its full 197-minute form, "Spartacus" (1960) was a film defined mostly in negative terms. For auteurs, it represented the least Kubrickian of Stanley Kubrick's efforts, due mainly to the overriding influence of star-producer Kirk Douglas. For film historians, it marked the progressive development, but not the triumph, of the rising widescreen aesthetic. For reviewers, it was a technical achievement undone by the banal sentimentalities and uneven articulateness of Dalton Trumbo's screenplay. The picture's most enduring contributions to popular culture seems to lie in the winking homoeroticism of its gladiator scenes—and the oft-quoted refrain "I'm Spartacus!"

But nothing as big as this can be simple. Right on the surface, the film's assemblage of major stars (Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Charles Laughton, Peter Ustinov, Tony Curtis et al.) is little short of galactic: today, paying a cast of corresponding heft and box office appeal would, by itself, exceed the original \$12 million budget for the entire production.

More significantly, we are confronted with the relative brilliance of "Spartacus" supporting players, especially placed against the "punch the clock" mentality apparent in other star-studded epics. This probably had more to do with the producers' unorthodox casting strategy than with any desire to vindicate the dramatic possibilities of widescreen. According to Olivier biographer Anthony Holden, "All the film's stars...later learned that they had been sent different scripts in advance by their costar and producer, Kirk Douglas, in which their own part had been written up to tempt them to climb aboard the "Spartacus" bandwagon. By the time they arrived in Hollywood, their roles somehow seemed to have shrunk." All except for Olivier, it turned out: stealing a march on his rivals, he arrived a week early and impressed the writers into a further rewrite, this one enhancing his own part of Marcus Licinius Crassus.

The film is fortunate to have been stolen by Olivier. After all, Douglas' Spartacus might as well have been killed in the arena for all the dramatic excitement he raises following his escape from the gladiators' school. After that, he becomes an ideological mouthpiece, declaiming a credo of crypto-socialist gung-ho. In a sense the character *does* die, because he doesn't change. The virtuous may be intrinsically dull, but Trumbo and Douglas hardly help matters by giving Spartacus no other imperative than winning his physical freedom, then having him win it only an hour into the picture.

Olivier's choice to play a lovelorn Crassus (I say Olivier's because it's not clear how much of it is in the script) is smarter because his drive is, by its nature, unfulfillable. Whether it be Curtis' Antoninus, Jean Simmons' Livinia, or Rome herself, there's always another focus for Crassus' bottomless desire. Aptly, Olivier's line readings belie the appearance of smug aristocracy, adding layers of selfloating, omnisexuality, doubt. According to Holden, Douglas stood in awe of the way Olivier took a line like "Never have I faced a battle with such confidence" and "made it mean the exact opposite. He started off with a great firmness and ended hesitantly...and in one line had transformed complete self-assurance to complete insecurity."

Olivier's portrayal of a "hard-up" Crassus also serves to complicate his political rivalry with Charles Laughton's Gracchus. More than the latter's power, the ungraceful Crassus seems to covet Gracchus' effortless affability, the love of the mob the *optimatus* tries to convince himself he does not need. The maniacally-prepared Olivier was almost certainly aware that the historical Crassus wasn't just a snob, but a man whose hunger to match the popular renown of first Pompey, then Caesar, drove him to humbly solicit votes in the streets of Rome, exist on a first-name basis with thousands of clients, and to organize Rome's first private fire department (albeit at a considerable profit). Literally as rich

as the Roman treasury, Crassus met his end when he was defeated on a battlefield in Asia, captured by the enemy, and (according to one account) forced to drink molten gold.

More than vain spectacle, then, "Spartacus" did much to discredit the fashionable complaint that the widescreen format had rendered the close-up and the intimate performance impossible. The Technirama-70 system used by Kubrick was actually well suited to the stage-trained Olivier, since theatre, to an even greater degree than widescreen, has no close-ups, no way to force the viewer's attention to any particular detail. His work, along with the throwaway brilliance of Ustinov, and a silky and smart performance by Laughton, in fact leave us hungering for more of the "small stuff," and fewer galloping horses, surging crowds, and sun-splashed vistas.

If the humanist piety of Dalton Trumbo's script looks lame by our more cynical standards, it's probably because the writer had larger scores to settle. "Spartacus" was the first credit Trumbo received under his own name since he, along with nine other Hollywood "fellow travelers," was convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to answer questions posed by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947. Trumbo went to prison two years later, and was obliged to work under a pseudonym throughout the fifties (in 1956 he won, but did not collect, an Oscar for "The Brave One" as "Robert Rich").

In "Spartacus" there's an implicit invitation to replace the phrase "Roman tradition" with "the American way" in any of Crassus' reactionary excretions. The scene where the ancient McCarthyite boasts that "the enemies of the state are known, arrests are in progress, the prisons begin to fill" is a further gob of spit at the blacklist. While the film's righteous sanctimony is undeniable, Trumbo earned that right after years of involuntary creative silence and anonymity. Against this background, there is some poignance in the fact that while Crassus chooses to gainfully employ Antoninus as his personal tub slave, freedom-loving Spartacus lets him keep his profession as a "singer of songs."

Director Kubrick took over the production after Douglas fired Anthony Mann. Kubrick has since repudiated the film, but if anything, the restored version underlines his visual imprint. One spectacular low-angle shot of Spartacus framed against open sky, jumping and ducking on a piece of Roman-era Nautilus equipment, anticipates the odd-angle gymnastics of "2001" eight years later. The overabundance of shots of migrating refugees (over mountains, through deserts, in the snow) is clearly the work of a mind that later would believe ordinary moviegoers would sit through "Barry Lyndon." Interestingly, Kubrick didn't disown the film enough to refuse to direct, by remote control, Sir Anthony Hopkins' looping of Olivier's missing lines in the originally censored "oysters and snails" scene.

While it's hard to shed a tear for the bombast, waste, and outright distortion typical of "Spartacus" and its epic cousins, there's something inspiring about a medium confident enough in its interpretative powers to take on all of recorded time as its subject. Dedicated narrowly to the bottom line, most recent Hollywood "period pieces" are either about nostalgia ("Forrest Gump"), about reviving old genres ("Maverick," "Wyatt Earp"), or else true oddities ("The Age of Innocence," "Last of the Mohicans"). The dusting-off of "Lawrence of Arabia" in 1989, "Spartacus" in 1991, and "El Cid" last year are welcome celebrations, but there's a stale air of the museum around them, like that Saturn V moon rocket now tipped on its side at Cape Canaveral, forever earthbound. There's some question whether we'll ever reach that far again.

*Nicholas Nicastro is a writer who lives in Ithaca.*

(Cornell Cinema will be showing "Spartacus" in Willard Straight Hall in early October. Call (607) 255-3522 for more information.

# Brits' Picks

continued from page 5

the life of the poetry party. Charles Stetler offers "A Toast" "to nick and nora charles / pioneer hedonists who brightened the way / out of our grim cotton mather past," capturing the anti-puritanical pleasures with a telling movie line: "nick usually set the morning tone: 'how about a drop to cut the phlegm?'" With Asta wagging his tail a page away, it is hard to get into the spirit of Maya Angelou's bitter reminder of the cruelty of slavery elided in *Gone With the Wind's* adoration of the southern belle, "Miss Scarlett, Mr Rhett and Other Latter-Day Saints."

Angelou is not the only casualty of this muting effect: a hazard of anthologies of this kind is that black poets may tend to sound like sourpusses or literalists. "Movies as Metaphor" gathers amusing but predictable laments that relationships are not movie-perfect and first-person musings that begin "We met on the cutting room floor / Examining one / Another's rushes" (Israel Halpern) or "I look at our life together / as one watches a movie without sound" (David Kirby), or discovers "a heart is not / an editing machine—we can cut / out nothing" (Liz Lochhead). Among these chic unweeey Dear John letters, Ishmael Reed's "Poison Light" opens on a note that seems familiar, "Last night / I played Kirk Douglas to / Your Burt Lancaster," drawing out the comparison with the usual winking self-deprecation: "Ours as a bad performance / The audience, our friends / Panned it." Then comes the shock of Reed's warning: "We must stop behaving like / The poison light we grew on." For black poets, more is at stake in copying movie swagger and swoon than ending up with a lousy relationship, or an old age of censored footage instead of unblinkered memory. Among poems taking movies as metaphor for personal rather than collective life, it takes a deft touch to dump on Hollywood's minstrel show, but Patricia Jones has it. Her "Why I Like Movies" builds from flippant naivete to keen observation—"Those natives in Tarzan / movies with processes and straightened hair"—to stinging indictment: "I like movies because / I never saw myself in them."

Many women never saw themselves in movies. A number of women's elegies for female stars shatter the distorted mirror while admiring its sheen. Sharon Olds marks "The Death of Marilyn Monroe" by its effect on the erotic imagination of the men who handled the corpse. In Susan Griffin's "Grenadine" a mother subjects her grown daughter to the boozy confession that the movies ruined her life, while a George Sanders oldie droning on TV fills in the awkward silences. After "your father and I" went to a movie, the mother explains, "I'd come out / being Carole Lombard, / only he refused / to be Humphrey Bogart." Drowning over her bourbon, the mother is too late for Reed's caution against swallowing the toxins of Hollywood fantasies.

That kind of critical distance is a hard pose to sustain at Frank O'Hara's party. Sitting

through a morning of his son's TV cartoons shocks Howard Nemerov into unleavened editorial prose: "I am horrified / by the unbridled violence and hostility / of the imagined world he takes in stride." But his gruesome examples of cartoon butchery—"a tribe / of savage Negro mice is put through a wringer / and stacked flat in the cellar"—makes the cartoon so vivid that the father's carping can't find a language beyond griping.

This assemblage of poems teaches that mugging for the camera may be the best way to undermine its powers of fakery. One of the funniest poems in the book is at the same time one of the most cutting in its critique of American movies, prudery, and politics. The Glasgow-born Carol Ann Duffy puts on a Yank accent and does a better job than American poets' ponderous head-shakings. Duffy takes over for French in providing a headnote: "At a preview of *That Hagen Girl* in 1947, when actor Ronald Reagan became the first person on screen to say 'I love you, will you marry me?' to the nineteen-year-old Shirley Temple, there was such a cry of 'Oh, no!' from the invited audience that the scene was cut out when the film was released." Here is Duffy's "The B Movie":

*Lap dissolve. You make a man  
speak crap dialogue,  
one day he'll make you eat your words. OK?  
Let's go for a take. Where's the rest  
of me? 'Oh, no!'*

*Things are different now. He's got  
star billing,  
star wars, applause. Takes her in his arms.  
I'm talking about a real weepie. Freeze frame.  
'Oh, no!'*

*On his say-so, the train wipes out the heroine  
and there ain't no final reel. How do  
you like that?  
My fellow Americans, we got five minutes.  
'Oh, no!'*

*Classic. He holds the onion to  
water such sorrow.  
We need a Kleenex the size of Russia here,  
no kidding.  
Have that kid's tail any time he wants to. Yup.*

The audience cried "Oh, no!" because they knew how a Shirley Temple movie is supposed to go, and this wasn't it. It's fun to come to recognize the tics of a genre, the tricks or short-cuts that show up in films from different studios and directors, to know when the musical number is going to start, or to learn to predict that the cut to the ringing phone will be followed by a close-up reaction shot of the blond, then the phone again, then the man in the shadowy phone booth: the reliable grammar tells the story while reminding the viewer what kind of story this is. A marathon of

see *Brits' Picks*, page 15

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Ticket price \$4.50/\$4.00 students; \$3.50 matinee; \$9 for all three programs.

# Feminism

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and contribute to the continuing decline of academic performance among American students. For instance, while she readily agrees with other feminists that "high culture is largely a male achievement," she worries that feminist revisions of the canon and hostility to traditional standards of excellence throw the baby out with the bath water:

The evidence that women have been excluded, and their abilities as thinkers and writers demeaned, is everywhere. But once a woman appreciates the extent to which culture and civilization have been male-dominated, two roads lie before her. She can learn what can be learned about women's past achievements, and learn as well the reasons that their contributions to the larger enterprise were not greater; and she can then avail herself of the freedom she now has to accept the challenge to join with men on equal terms in the making of a new and richer culture. Or she can react to the cultural and scientific heritage as "androcentric" and move consciously to reconstruct the "knowledge base." It is at this juncture that equity and gender feminist academics begin to go their separate ways.

We can reform our view of the past, of literature, of the arts, of society, Sommers contends, "without deciding that the rational response is to overhaul the entire canon of Western experience."

Sommers rejects feminist calls to overturn supposedly patriarchal standards of greatness. "It is in fact true that the study of women's contributions to art has been neglected and that this neglect must be—and is being—addressed and repaired," she says. "But the loveliest quilt is plainly inferior to the canvases of Titian and Rembrandt in subtlety, complexity, and power"; why, Sommers wonders, are feminists "playing an undignified game of one-upmanship that we are bound to lose?" As a liberal feminist, Sommers opposes barriers that prevent women from pursuing artistic, literary, scientific, or any other goals—impediments to achievement, not *standards* of achievement.

Sommers is especially skeptical of feminist claims "that science itself—its methodology, its rules of evidence, its concern for empirical grounding, its ideal of objectivity—is an expression of a 'masculinist' approach to knowledge." Drawing on feminist theorizing about women's different ways of knowing, gender-feminist critiques of the physical sciences, mathematics, logic, and analytic philosophy reject so-called "vertical" approaches (methodical, precise, aiming at "mastery" of a problem or subject) in favor of supposedly more female approaches (connected, relational, inclu-

sive). Such views, Sommers argues, sound suspiciously like male-chauvinist generalizations about women "as the naive sex that thinks with its heart, not with its head." They excuse lack of rigor and precision, and, together with other transformations in education from elementary school to college, Sommers believes, they dilute scholarly standards and encourage self-indulgent and intellectually second-rate scholarship.

Sommers is equally critical of the "feminist classroom," which, she charges, "wastes [students'] time and gives them bad intellectual habits." She bases her complaints on what she sees as the highly ideological agenda of most feminist pedagogy and the overt commitment of many feminist educators to "recruitment" and consciousness-raising. Dismissing the familiar line that "all teaching is ideological," she insists that "objectivity remains the ideal toward which fair-minded teachers aspire." In contrast, many feminist teaching practices are characteristic, she says, of indoctrination rather than education. Again, Sommers fears that the real casualties are the students. "What has real feminism to do," she demands, "with sitting around in circles and talking about our feelings on menstruation?... While male students are off studying such 'vertical' subjects as engineering and biology, women in feminist classrooms are sitting around being 'safe' and 'honoring' feelings. In this way, gender feminist pedagogy plays into old sexist stereotypes that extol women's capacity for intuition, emotion, and empathy while denigrating their capacity to think objectively and systematically in the way men can."

In these early chapters, Sommers's rhetoric frequently betrays her anger and impatience, and her anecdotal approach, while entertaining, would be more persuasive if one had some way of ascertaining just how representative her examples are. Nonetheless, some of her anecdotes are certainly thought-provoking. Take the 1992 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference. Even if the incidents Sommers lampoons were only the worst of what went on, it should give us pause when we hear of a group of adult women holding sing-along sessions, talking about "ouch" experiences, hugging themselves, and being summoned back from a break by "two little puppets, a dog and a teddy bear." Or consider the "ground rules" used in some college courses around the country that require students simply to accept the highly debatable premise that "one of the mechanisms of oppression... is that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own groups and about members of both dominant and subordinate groups." Still more disturbing is the

feminist art project by nine women students at the University of Maryland: "[they] distributed posters and fliers all over the campus with the names of dozens of male students under the heading 'Notice: These Men Are Potential Rapists.' The women knew nothing whatever about the bearers of the names; they had simply chosen them at random." One such indefensible incident is one too many.

Even those unmoved or put off by Sommers's early chapters, however, should read on. Chapters 7 through 11 cover examples of what Sommers calls "advocacy research." The media have already widely reported some of Sommers' more remarkable examples of distorted or downright wrong information disseminated to a trusting public: for instance, oft-cited figures putting the death toll for victims of anorexia at 150,000 per year, when the actual number of fatalities is closer to 100. Or the "news" that violence against women goes up by 40 percent on Super Bowl Sunday (in fact, there is no perceptible change). Or the claim that domestic violence is the leading cause of birth defects (a statement by the March of Dimes comparing *screening* and *follow-up* procedures for both birth defects and battering was wildly misrepresented). Sommers' object in recounting these and other cases of inflated or false reporting is not to downplay the seriousness of problems like wife-beating or anorexia. Her concern is that policy-makers pick up on this kind of misinformation, which then guides their efforts, and the less accurate their information, the less good they can do. "In all we do to help," she states, "the most loyal ally is truth." Her analysis of "findings" about important social and educational problems suggests we may, some of us with the best intentions, be misallocating scarce resources by trying to solve problems that don't really exist (or which we haven't properly identified), in the process creating a climate of fear, hostility, and gender antagonism.

Sommers devotes two chapters to recent and highly publicized studies, one purporting to show a dangerous drop in girls' self-esteem when they reach adolescence, the other reinforcing the message that America's schools are short-changing girls. The basic argument is that low self-esteem adversely affects girls' achievement; the imbalance must be redressed to avoid depriving both the girls and America of their potential contributions (Sommers cites the Gender Equity in Education Act introduced before Congress in April 1993 as evidence of just how seriously these reports are being taken).

Sommers contends that "a most casual glance" at the self-esteem study, commis-

sioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), "suffices to raise grave doubts about its philosophy, methodology, and conclusions." For one thing, "the concept of self-esteem is generally considered to be unstable and controversial," and even if a definition of self-esteem were widely accepted, there are reasons to doubt whether the AAUW's survey measures it reliably. Sommers cites numerous experts on adolescent development and psychology who challenge the AAUW's findings as "inconsistent with the recent literature," or otherwise suspect. Even granting the AAUW the soundness of its research methods, Sommers finds the survey's actual figures somewhat different than reported. For example, while there is a wide gap between the number of boys and the number of girls who regard "I am happy the way I am" as "always" true (46% and 29% respectively, a gap of 17 points), when the responses "sort of true" and "sometimes true / sometimes false" are included, the gap narrows to 4 points (92% of boys, 88% of girls). Only "sort of false" and "always false," Sommers argues, really indicate dangerously low self-esteem, while "always" may indicate anything from high self-esteem to immature bravado or egotism. Further, girls actually score higher than boys do in some areas, such as the percentage who think the statement "teacher is proud of me" is "always" or "sort of" true (41% of girls to 36% of boys), and 17% of girls (compared to 16% of boys) are "always" proud of their work in school. Results were reported selectively, Sommers argues, in order to bolster the thesis that girls are losing out.

Sommers also questions the importance of self-esteem in the first place. Some of the experts she consulted point out that links between self-esteem and performance are hard to establish, and the AAUW findings in fact show an inverse relationship between self-esteem and achievement: "how is it," Sommers asks, "that those who score highest on the AAUW's self-esteem measure [African-American boys] are educationally at risk, while the group with the lowest confidence does so well?" This paradoxical result comports with international comparisons in which American children rate high in self-satisfaction and low in academic performance. The great danger of focusing on a (poorly established) gender gap in education, Sommers emphasizes, is that it distracts us from the real problem: we need to give all of our students not inflated egos but something *to be proud of*. And events like "Take Our Daughters to Work Day" wrongly single out girls for special treatment, leaving behind boys who, other research shows,

see *Feminism*, page 16

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# Breaking the Circuit

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prison for murder is wrong too and fuels public outrage. Her position on "measured retribution" relies on longer prison sentences:

Such measured retribution is attained, I believe, by sentencing which requires nonnegotiable long-term imprisonment for first-degree murder....At least forty states in recent years have revised criminal codes to require life without parole or lengthy mandatory minimum years served for convictions they deem most serious. In a growing number of states—twenty-five as of 1992, including Louisiana—life-without-parole sentences are true life sentences.

For Prejean, seeing the humanity of the criminal does not mean explaining away the crime. She challenges both Sonnier and Willie to take responsibility for their deeds. Nevertheless, Prejean also sees the human being in the criminal. This is her special contribution. Camus noted long ago that there exists a gap that cannot be bridged by reasoned argument between the two sides of the death penalty debate: "No fact, no reasoning can bring together those who think that a chance must always be left to the vilest of men and those who consider that chance illusory." Prejean's religious and moral values mean that from the beginning, even with the sense of shock at the crime, she relates to Sonnier as a person. She learns not only about "systems"—the prison, the judiciary—but also who this particular man is—the color of his eyes, his gait, the way he smokes, what he thinks, what angers him, his feelings of remorse.

Sonnier and Willie come alive in these pages. We prefer to keep such men anonymous, focusing only on the details of their crime, which highlights their inhumanity. They are thus easier to kill. This is an age-old process: make the enemy an abstraction. We saw no images of wounded Iraqi soldiers buried alive in sand, we will see no live executions on TV. The flicker of humanity in the object of hate complicates our response to the demands of justice. The title *Dead Man Walking* is a perfect example: it is the phrase San Quentin guards used to yell when a death-row inmate was let out of his cell. "Dead Man Executed" could just as easily be the standard AP dispatch or TV sound-bite, for all we know about whom we kill.

As Prejean's narrative describes the executions, it becomes a sustained reflection on one of the commonplaces of the anti-death penalty argument: that the special inhumanity of executions is their lengthy deliberateness and premeditation. Again Camus:

Many laws consider a premeditated crime more serious than a crime of pure violence. But what then is capital punishment but the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal's deed, however calculated it may be, can be compared? For there to be equivalence, the death penalty would have to punish a criminal who had warned his victim of the date at which he would inflict a

horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward, had confined him at his mercy for months. Such a monster is not encountered in private life.

All our media myths of justice as revenge know this truth: kill in the heat of the moment or the heroism of the avenger is jailed with the prisoner and dies with him. In fact many guards and wardens have difficulty with death row work (Arkansas has taken to executing several men at the same time to "reduce stress" on its staff) because they have to kill a man who is helpless and they have to do so after years of relating to him. Morris Thigpen, a commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections from 1987 to 1993 who witnessed eight executions, writes: "I have never heard anyone who has participated in an execution say, 'I would like to do that again'....The crimes they committed are heinous. However, I still feel compassion for them... I have found that the person we execute is not necessarily the same person he was when the crime was committed years earlier."

So it is with Patrick Sonnier. The details of his last moments bring home the deliberateness of the process. Prison officials emphasize good order and normality not just for security reasons but to keep emotions in check. The guards place black curtains over the windows so that other prisoners won't "see the lights dim when the switch is pulled." Coffee is brewed for the witnesses. They have forms to sign. Prejean is interviewed to make sure she understands "the event is to be carried out with as much dignity and respect as possible"—i.e., no scenes. She is asked to help plan "disposal of the remains" and she challenges the assumption behind this question—that the chaplain collaborates with the smooth planning of the operation.

These last moments also bring out the physical vulnerability of a condemned individual. Malraux once wrote of condemned prisoners of war, standing naked in front of a trench, about to be shot, sneezing in the cold before their death. The body's fragility and uniqueness is heightened. Prejean notices a tattoo on Sonnier's arm. She has the visual shock of seeing his head and eyebrows shaved (to reduce the risk of fire during electrocution). She notices he has one pant leg cut, for the electrodes. She watches his sense of humiliation as he is required to wear a diaper for his execution. She hears an exhaust fan come on "to get rid of the smell of burning flesh."

Sonnier writes a letter to his brother. He writes his name and his date of death in his Bible. Facing death, he opens up about himself:

his talk a torrent, a flood, all coming together now, snatches from his childhood and teasing Eddie and school and the sugar-cane fields gleaming in the sun and Star [his daughter], what will happen to her, and his Mama, to please see about his Mama, and Eddie, will he be able to keep his cool in this place, and if only he knew when the current first hit that he would die right away...

With his last words before his death, Sonnier chooses to address one of the two fathers of the

victims: "Mr. LeBlanc, I don't want to leave this world with any hatred in my heart. I want to ask your forgiveness for what me and Eddie done, but Eddie done it." He is executed. "Warden Maggio looks up at the clock and announces the time of death: 12:15 AM. His eyes happen to look into mine. He lowers his eyes." On the way home Prejean has to pull off the highway and vomit. This is the same reaction Camus described years ago in his father, a judge, upon returning from an execution.

By media standards, there is nothing spectacular in the physical deaths of Sonnier or Willie. Like all of us, condemned men face death alone, with the style of who they are and how they have lived. The intensity of the moment comes from witnessing the deliberate killing of a human being. Though Prejean's reactions to the second death are different, what changes most is her evolving relationship to family members of the victims. Our views of the relatives of victims are as stereotypical as our views of the criminals. Yet people have to respond as individually to tragedy as to death. Their lives are shattered. They are often isolated from friends who avoid them. They go through years of court proceedings that focus on the perpetrator. If they are poor and black, they are usually neglected by prosecutors and law-enforcement officials.

Initially Prejean makes the mistake of assuming that she will only hurt the parents of Sonnier's victim if she contacts them while she is ministering to Sonnier. But after a pardon board hearing where she and Lloyd LeBlanc testify on opposite sides, she meets him face to face on the way out:

My heart is pounding. I fumble for words. "I'm so sorry about your son," I say. LeBlanc says, "Sister, I'm a Catholic. How can you present Elmo Patrick Sonnier's side like this without ever having come to visit with me and my wife...to hear our side? How can you spend all your time worrying about Sonnier and not think that maybe we needed you too?" I thought I would only add to your pain," I say. I am shocked by what he is saying to me. I feel that I have made a terrible mistake and done what I was most trying to avoid—added to their pain.

From this point forward she tries to relate to both sides—no easy task, for Vernon Harvey, the father of Willie's victim, is a man who exults in the execution, who only wishes it had been slower and more painful, and who "when asked if he's happy [after the execution]...says, 'do you want to dance?'" Over time, Prejean establishes a relationship with the Harveys. They become public advocates on opposite sides and they encounter each other as they cross Louisiana. Neither persuades the other, but they find mutual respect. Harvey never gets over his daughter's death. "He had walked away from the execution chamber with his rage satisfied but his heart empty." He finds no peace of mind, but after Willie's death he shifts his energy to helping relatives of murder victims, and here he and his wife have common ground with Prejean, who

has built connections between her abolitionist group and Survive, a victim assistance organization.

It is with the families of the murder victims that Prejean faces the theological arguments most intensely. Where else could the exegesis of an eye for an eye be argued more fiercely? Here too the theme of forgiveness surfaces. "Forgiveness" may not be part of our political vocabulary, but it comes up naturally enough for all the participants in this book who share a religious language to debate it with. They take different stands: Sonnier seeks it. Willie is too busy defending himself to look for it. The Harveys are too pained to consider it. Prejean ends her book though with Lloyd LeBlanc, who values it. She had kept in touch with him over the years, and when she learns one day in a phone conversation that "he goes to pray every Friday from 4 to 5 A.M. in a small 'perpetual adoration' chapel," she asks if she can join him. They talk afterwards.

Lloyd LeBlanc has told me that he would have been content with imprisonment for Patrick Sonnier. He went to the execution, he says, not for revenge, but hoping for an apology. Patrick Sonnier had not disappointed him... He [LeBlanc] says that when he arrived with the sheriff's deputies there in the cane field to identify his son, he knelt by his boy—"laying down there with his two little eyes sticking out like bullets"—and prayed the Our Father. And when he came to the words: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," he had not halted or equivocated, and he said, "Whoever did this, I forgive them." But he acknowledges that it's a struggle to overcome the feelings of bitterness and revenge that well up, especially as he remembers David's birthday year by year and loses him all over again: David at twenty, David at twenty-five, David getting married, David standing at the back door with his little ones clustered around his knees....Forgiveness is never going to be easy. Each day it must be prayed for and struggled for and won.

Lloyd LeBlanc's personal struggle to come to terms with forgiveness may seem impossible to translate to the public sphere. But we forget that voices like his have been heard in the past and are still heard today. Coretta Scott King, whose husband and mother-in-law were murdered, has written, "the truth is, we all pay for the death penalty, because every time the state kills someone, our society loses its humanity and compassion and we sow the seeds of violence." This fall in Georgia, Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation, a national organization, is sponsoring a two-week march and educational program called Journey of Hope. Members are "people who have had someone murdered in their family and advocate the abolition of the death penalty." Relatives of men executed can join.

The abolitionist argument needs to be urgently heard in this state. The death penalty debate can appear as polarized as the abortion debate, yet there is good evidence this is not so. Prejean observes that public support for the death penalty drops sharply in polls when an alternative is offered, such as long mandatory sentences combined with restitution. Nevertheless, this is fragile middle ground. As Michael White, an Australian psychotherapist, observes, "It is a cultural practice to strip problems from their social relations and assign them to persons." That practice is alive and well in the current political climate. It provides the illusion of addressing crime as a problem, but refuses to look hard at the roots of injustice. If the best of the pro-death penalty argument is a passion for justice, the worst is its passion for scapegoating. By what measure of justice does this society, neglectful as it is of its children, of basic human needs of the poor, and tolerant as it is of the glorification of violence and the ease of access to weapons, consider itself innocent enough to execute its criminals? If the death penalty returns to New York, it will be a solution to nothing, and it will do what it always does—widen the circle of violence.

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# Crossing Over

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back and nod and muse again and walk off with his eyes to the ground to a fresh vantage point and then look up to see the mare anew, willing to see a new mare should one present itself. Where he could find no gifts of either stance or conformation to warrant his young breeder's confidence John Grady would likely defer to his judgment. Yet every mare could be pled for on the basis of what they came to call la única cosa and that one thing—which could absolve them of any but the grossest defect—was an interest in cattle. For he'd broken the more promising mares to ride and he'd taken them upcountry through the ciénaga pasture where the cows and calves stood in the lush grass along the edge of the marshlands and he would show them the cows and let them move among them. And in the manada were mares who took a great interest in what they saw and some would look back at the cows as they were ridden from the pasture. He claimed that cowsense could be bred for. The hacendado was less sure. But there were two things they agreed upon wholly and that were never spoken and that was that God had put horses on earth to work cattle and that other than cattle there was no wealth proper to a man.

A ranch hand I know, who has to be hogtied to read anything, thought this passage the truest thing he'd ever read about horses and cattle. We get some of this crisp observation in *The Crossing*, but it comes mainly in the novel's long first section, which deals with Billy Parham's relationship with a wolf he captures and attempts to return to Mexico. The section is reminiscent of Faulkner's "The Bear," and like "The Bear," it is sure to be amputated from the novel and excerpted in all future anthologies of American literature. Indeed, it is almost as if McCarthy wrote the section with this in mind—as the one piece of work by which his reputation could stand or fall—for the rest of the novel, while full of wonderful McCarthy set pieces, pales in comparison to what he achieves here.

That night from the edge of the meadow where he made his camp he could see the yellow windlights of houses in a colonia on the Bavispe ten miles distant. The meadow was filled with flowers that shrank in the dusk and came forth again at the moon's rising. He made no fire. He and the wolf sat side by side in the dark and watched the shadows of things emerge on the meadow and step and trot and vanish and return. The wolf sat watching with her ears forward and her nose making constant correction in the air. As if to make acts of abatement to the life in the world. He sat with the blanket over his shoulders and watched the moving shadows while the moon rose over the mountains behind him and the distant lights in the Bavispe winked out one by one till there were none.

The situation, the sentiment, and especially the prose here shimmer with what we have long considered great in a certain kind of American writing. It is Whitman's open road, Melville's high seas, Huck and Jim's raft rapture transported to the high plains of fifty years ago. Reading the novel, we must work hard to remind ourselves that Billy and Boyd Parham are not 19th-century cowboys, but in fact of the same generation that produced the beat characters in Kerouac's *On the Road*. Which is to say, *The Crossing* is not so much about a recognizable place and time as it is about a timeless realm of human experience. We are never quite prepared when a pickup truck suddenly looms on this novel's horizons, radio blaring news of the day's cattle market.

What is tiresome about *The Crossing* is what is tiresome in all of McCarthy's work—the long, periodic digressions from the narrative itself into a gloomy brand of opaque philosophizing, what my ranching friend would call "big words that don't say nothing." In his travels, Billy meets up with a huge cast of McCarthy mouthpieces. There is the nihilistic old wolf trapper who tells him that "the wolf

is a being of great order and that it knows what men do not: that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there"; the wandering Mormon who tells him that this world "which seems to us a thing of stone and flower and blood is not a thing at all but is a tale"; the prima donna travelling with gypsies who tells him that the "shape of the road is the road. There is not some other road that wears that shape but only the one. And every voyage begun upon it will be completed. Whether horses are found or not." And so on and so forth. Passages such as these, which often stretch for pages at a time, cry out to be quoted in academic articles explicating the so-called hidden meaning of McCarthy's work. No doubt they will be quoted, at length. The general reader, however, soon learns to flip past them to the story itself.

That story, a good hundred pages longer than *Horses*, suffers at times under the colossal weight of his prose, but it is always lightened again by one of McCarthy's fine descriptions, improbable scenes, or wonderful pieces of tongue-in-cheek cowboy dialogue, such as the time Billy loses his horse taking the wolf back to Mexico and comes upon a pickup truck driven by a rancher and his hired man.

The boy stood holding the wolf. He looked off down the road in the direction the horse had gone.

Will that thing ride in a truck? the man said.

The boy gave him a peculiar look.

Hell, the man said. I want you to listen at me. RL can you take him in the truck to catch his horse?

Yessir. Is his horse hard to catch?

Your horse hard to catch? the man said.

No sir.

He says it aint.

Well unless he just wants to go ridin I reckon I can get his horse for him.

You dont want to ride with that wolf is what it is, the man said.

It aint that I dont want to. It's just that I aint goin to.

Well I was fixin to say that since it's liable to jump out of the bed of the truck why don't you take it up front in the cab with you and the boy can ride in back?

Passages such as these confirm what is rarely said about McCarthy: that, dark as he can be, he is also a very funny writer.

All the *Pretty Horses* ended with John Cole Grady riding into a desert sunset. *The Crossing* ends with Billy Parham watching the "godmade sun" rise in a similarly desolate place. Yet it is strange how the setting sun in the first novel seemed hopeful, almost prophetic, while the sun that rises at the end of *The Crossing* does so "for all and without distinction." What we are to make of this paradox is unclear, but it does create a certain anticipation for volume III of the trilogy. Will John Cole Grady return? Will he meet up with Billy Parham somewhere deep in Mexico? Will the novel accelerate past midcentury and show us these characters as old men? Or will we be given a new set of characters, a final variation of the trilogy's principal themes?

As with so many other things connected with Cormac McCarthy, there is simply no telling. A few things, however, are becoming apparent. When volume III of the trilogy does come out, two or three years down the road, it will sell in the hundreds of thousands and seal McCarthy's reputation as perhaps the greatest of contemporary American writers. Not long after, he will join the elite circle of Hemingway, Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Saul Bellow, by winning the Nobel Prize for Literature. When you think about it, nothing could make McCarthy's many fans, new and old alike, happier; especially when you consider that McCarthy, famous recluse that he is, probably won't bother going to Stockholm to pick it up.

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# Brits' Picks

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poems about movies yields favored techniques, too, but their repetition is less consistently satisfying.

The slip from lyric "I" to a more offhand, impersonal, or participatory "you" is a feature of modern poetry that movie verse finds it hard to resist. Never present to us, but powerful enough that we dream about them, movie stars inspire poets to feats of invocation. A bald cry of "Orson Welles, Are You Listening?" can be charming, but often it seems too easy for a poet to shift from the "you" of apostrophe or poetic supplication to the fantasy "you" of the desire to talk to a movie dream boat, and from there to what poet Jonathan Holden has called the "blurred-you" that is a lazy substitute for "I" or an easy grab at the reader's collar. In this context there's a refreshing literalness in Laurence Goldstein's poem about a Detroit audience addressing questions in person to a visiting legend: "I can't believe ('Yes, it's true, darling'), I can't believe / I'm talking to Bette Davis!")."

Narrative accounts of what appears on screen comment more incisively than attempts to address the screen or climb into it. Death was "All that they earned / for being perfect samples of their kind— / Black, Asian, White—blonde, redhead or brunette," Fiona Pitt-Kethley says of the girls in James Bond movies. Even more telling is May Swenson watching "The James Bond Movie":

*bubble-bath, room-sized, in which 14 girls,  
delectable*

*and sexless, twist-topped Creamy  
Freezes (their blonde,*

*red, brown, pinkish, lavender or silver wiglets  
all  
screwed that high, and varnished)*

None of this is as absorbing as what to do when "The popcorn is greasy, and I forget to bring a Kleenex," and the moviegoer has to "try / with the 2-inch-wide paper to blot butter off my fingers." Swenson's movie poem ends not with Bond's mission accomplished, but with her small, private one:

*I've got most of the grease off and onto  
this little square*

*of paper. I'm folding it now, making creases  
with my nails.*

It's a tidy ending. The fidgeting, gum-chewing viewer is fully aware of the patent fakery of the movie—she needs a Kleenex, unwraps "a Dentyne" after the popcorn, calls the hairdos Creamy Freezes and doesn't identify with those "nose-perfect replicas of each other." This is the side of movie-going that neither O'Hara's camp swooning nor the all-purpose "you" can make palpable. Some poets can do amazing things with a little square of paper, others need a Kleenex the size of Russia here, no kidding.

French and Wlaschin have poured with such a generous hand that there are more than enough drops of the good stuff to cut the phlegm. If the book had an index of movies or stars referred to (it doesn't have a proper table of contents, or an index of first lines or titles, just an alphabetical index by poet), it might be a handy addition to the shelf by the VCR, between Katz's *Film Encyclopedia* and Kael's *5001 Nights at the Movies*. On the poetry shelf, it testifies to the aptness of the epigraph, citing Ava Gardner getting a lesson from Robert Graves: "Poems are like people, he told me; there aren't that many authentic ones around."

Debra Fried is an associate professor of English at Cornell University.

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# Feminism

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are substantially more at risk in many ways: more boys drop out of school; more boys than girls are suspended, have disciplinary problems, or get in trouble with the police; boys commit robbery and other violent crimes more often than girls; and five times more boys than girls die by suicide. Sommers concludes that the "tribulations of schoolboys are not an urgent concern of the leadership of the AAUW."

Other chapters take a critical look at still more sensitive topics. Under the heading "Noble Lies," Sommers reveals inconsistencies and exaggerations in reports about domestic violence and argues against claims that "physical menace toward women is the norm." She cites figures showing that women commit as many violent acts against their spouses as men, although they inflict fewer serious injuries; she also quotes research about battering within lesbian relationships which controverts assumptions about the patriarchal or misogynistic underpinnings of domestic violence. Cynically, she points out the rewards reaped by researchers who report very high figures for violence against women (and the threats made against those whose figures come in too low), and she reiterates her concern that "sound public policy"

requires "credible and trustworthy information." She criticizes rape research for being equally unreliable and ideologically motivated; one of her more disturbing conclusions is that skewed studies and reporting mean "the attention and the money are disproportionately going to those least at risk"—women on college campuses instead of those in poorer urban communities with less effective lobbyists. The much-invoked "one in four" statistic, Sommers shows, is at best dubious.

In a chapter called "The Backlash Myth," Sommers disputes writers such as Susan Faludi who argue that, however better things seem to be for women, they are, if anything, worse: "It disturbs [the gender feminist] that the public may be lulled into thinking that women are doing well and that men are allowing it. The gender feminist insists that any so-called progress is illusory." Claims that women still earn only 59 cents to a man's dollar are just wrong, Sommers shows; in 1992, in fact, women were making more like 71 cents to the dollar. "By most measures," Sommers says, "the eighties were a time of rather spectacular gains by American women—in education, in wages, and in such traditionally male professions as business, law, and medicine." "This is not to say that there is no room for

improvement," she adds, but she rejects trendy, Foucault-influenced arguments that women have merely internalized their oppression. Feminists committed to this theory end up, as many of the rape researchers do, denying women's own accounts of their lives: disagreement with the feminist analysis shows how completely you have been taken in by, or have sold out to, the patriarchy. Sommers finds this attitude patronizing and disrespectful toward women, a protest she registers still more fully in her final chapter, "The Gender Wardens."

"An illiberal authoritarianism is implicit in the doctrine that women are socialized to want the things the gender feminist believes they *should not want*," Sommers argues. While "there is nothing intrinsically illiberal about seeking to make [women] conscious of their subjugation," Sommers believes that women today are not educated into subordination and so there is no good reason to consider their choices inauthentic. Feminist activists in many arenas, however, practice intolerance that Sommers considers simply censorship. Moderate feminists often hesitate to challenge them, rightly fearing that they will be labeled "right-wing ideologues" (as Sommers has been, even though she is a registered Democrat). *Who Stole Feminism?* ends with a call to arms: "Inside the academy, it

would take only a courageous few to launch the long overdue critique that will puncture the intellectual affectations of the gender feminists. Open criticism of an academic feminism that has subordinated scholarship to ideology would quickly halt the pretentious campaign to 'transform the knowledge base' and eventually open the doors to more representative, less doctrinaire, and more capable women scholars in the women's studies programs."

*Who Stole Feminism?* is bound to make a lot of people angry and defensive. If Sommers is right, though, a lot of people have gone unchallenged for too long and, as a result, a lot of damage has already been done. Her book invites those who really care about the issues she discusses—from education to violence against women—to exercise their critical faculties. At feminist conferences, Sommers says, "I find myself looking about for some innocent or intrepid soul who looks as if she might speak up and say what I, as an observer, must often refrain from saying." *Who Stole Feminism?* ought to persuade more people to be "intrepid"; the ultimate cost of timidity may be truth, justice, or, as Sommers fears, feminism itself.

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# Impossible Country

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NV: You are making some important distinctions here—just as you do in the book, via the voices and characters you interweave. These contentions of self-definition make it seem like an impossible country—and countryside.

BH: You can make the argument that the war in Bosnia is a war of the rural against the urban. It's certainly a good way to look at the siege of Sarajevo. Someone told me when I was there in 1991 that as bad as it got in the rest of Bosnia, the fighting would never come to Sarajevo because it was so ethnically mixed. That quickly turned out to be a profound misunderstanding. The ethnic identification that fuels a national war like this is not bound by respect for one's own ethnic group. In many ways, the biggest enemy of Serb nationalism is not the Croats, but Serb non-nationalists. Serbs in the hills above Sarajevo don't have any trouble blowing up the Serbs in Sarajevo whom they consider to be traitors to the Serb nation.

NV: You were recently back in that part of the world. What were your impressions?

BH: It's easy to see why lifting the arms embargo is the popular answer for this country and why Congress and Clinton want only that. We don't want to put troops in, even to enforce a peace agreement. Lifting the embargo would cause the fighting to escalate, making it unlikely that our troops could function as peacekeepers.

None of the parties has really wanted a negotiated settlement. It's all about holding land and territory. They don't pay attention to what they sign. The only way this is going to get solved is through power. They're just going to have to keep fighting it out for a while.

It would be Clinton's worst nightmare if there were a settlement. He would have to put up or shut up. I think he would shut up and not send 25,000 American troops. Referring to recent peace plans, a UN staff member said: "I don't know what depresses me more—the thought of all the parties saying 'No' or all the parties saying 'Yes.'"

The big danger in lifting the arms embargo is that it could break apart the Muslim-

Croat Federation. At the moment they definitely do have a cease-fire. They haven't gone much farther than that. They haven't made progress in building federative organs. The level of trust is absolutely zero. The last thing Croats really want is for the Muslims to get a lot of weapons. The Croats would of course shave off what they could.

The Muslims are in terrible shape as far as getting weapons clandestinely. Unfortunately for them, the Serbs have helped the Bosnian Serbs and other countries are strongly helping Serbia, breaking the UN sanctions.

If the so-called contact group—Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and the US—really wants to impose sanctions on Serbia, they will have to compensate Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Hungary—countries which are also hurt by those sanctions. However, it seems that even the current very leaky sanctions do exert pressure on Serbia, and Milosevic does want to end this. The contact group has disagreements over how to proceed since the Bosnian Serbs have rejected its proposals for a negotiated resettlement and Milosevic appears to support the UN on this.

I would be curious to see at what point the US would take real action in the Balkans. I think we would leave it up to the Greeks and Bulgarians to take care of the Serbs. The argument of "You know how they are. They've always done this. It's a complicated civil war, why should we get into it?" could be even more compelling if the war got bigger, spreading, say, into Macedonia.

NV: Savagery certainly has been chosen over and over again there.

BH: In the particular case of Yugoslavia, the baggage everyone brings is so violent. Much of the population who experienced World War II is still alive and family memories are very strong. People fighting this war are living under the same roof as the people who fought the last one and they have plenty of opportunity to talk about what the other side did the last time. When I first arrived, everybody there kept telling me: "When this war starts people are going to be amazed at how bad it is going to be." I kept thinking this was some kind of bravado. Quickly it



Photograph: Steve Connors

turned out to be true.

I have no answer to the question of where the violence is coming from. I think what's more important than the issue of brutality is the ways of thinking that help fuel it—the underlying feelings of absolute right and absolute wrong. I wonder where that comes from and whether it's stronger than in other places. Rules don't matter when there's that feeling of absolute righteousness.

NV: All this is going on next door to the budding European Union.

BH: There is the argument—"Oh, that's the way they are down there in the Balkans." The phrase you hear is that World War I

began in the Balkans and Europe was dragged in. That is pretty self-serving. People in the former Yugoslavia told me that what's happening there is just a harbinger of a new wave of nationalist aspiration that will sweep across western Europe. With the end of the bipolar world system and the form of stability it brought, and with the decline of socialism, maybe it will turn out that there is nothing "Balkan" at all about "crazy nationalism."

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