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ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT

How the New Right Is Destroying the Safety Net

John P. Wolff

Rep. Clay Shaw, one of Newt Gingrich's Republican lieutenants, bangs his gavel to call the House Ways and Means subcommittee to order. Shaw has been appointed to shepherd the Republican-sponsored welfare reform bill through the committee. Democrats listen in disbelief as Robert Rector, a fellow at The Heritage Foundation, an ultra-conservative think tank, testifies that "welfare" cost the American people \$234.3 billion, or 15.6 percent of the federal budget in fiscal year 1993. Since the War on Poverty began in 1965, Rector continues, the federal government has spent over \$1 trillion, yet poverty persists. He concludes that the only solution is to stop wasting money on an ineffective program; the bill before the committee is a step in the right direction.

The Republicans on the committee listen intently to their prophet, while livid Democrats wait for their turn to ask questions. They are allowed one minute each, and they try to use their time to expose Rector's false statements. When his figures are questioned, Rector admits that he has included in his definition of welfare virtually every social program, including those that have nothing to do with poverty. Many of the programs he has grouped under the banner of welfare serve entirely different populations, from disabled children to middle-class families.

One Democratic member points out that annual spending on Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), the cash assistance program most commonly referred to as welfare, actu-



Jack Sherman

ally costs only \$14.3 billion, less than one percent of the federal budget. Taking into account all the programs that serve some portion of the welfare population, such as food stamps, public housing, and Medicaid, the total federal

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Writers and Readers

TESTAMENTS BETRAYED

Milan Kundera
HarperCollins
\$24 cloth, 280 pages

Jon Michaud

In a section of this book called "Paths in the Fog," Milan Kundera says of Robert Musil's essays: "How heavy they are, boring and charmless! For Musil is a great thinker only in his novels." Kundera, too, has shown himself to be a great thinker in his novels — for proof, we need look no further than the opening paragraphs of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* — but there the similarity ends; for the essays collected in this book are anything but heavy, boring and charmless.

There are nine essays in all and each of them is an argument mounted in defense of an idea, an artist, or a work of art Kundera sees as having been misapprehended or unjustly attacked. The first, "The Day Panurge No Longer Makes People Laugh" is an argument against the notion that the novel is dead. Kundera draws connections between the early history of the form (Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*) and several novels by contemporary writers (Salman Rushdie, Carlos Fuentes), arguing that there is an enduring tradition that can be traced between them, that these recent books show the same vitality as their predecessors, the same unpredictability — in short that the novel is as alive as ever. The second essay, "The Castrating Shadow of Saint Garta," (Kundera has an undeniable affection for long titles) is a call for an end to what he terms "Kafkology" or the practice of viewing Kafka's life as more important than his work. Kundera lists what he sees as the basic tenets of Kafkology (a refusal to see Kafka's work in the broad context of modernism and literary history; a tendency towards hagiography instead of biography; a focus on the religious aspects of Kafka's work rather than its aesthetics; a preference for exegesis over criticism) and one by one dismantles them. Other essays in the book rise to the defense of Igor Stravinsky, Thomas Mann, and Leos Janacek, all of whom Kundera believes to have been misinterpreted or unfairly maligned.

In the final essay, "You're Not in Your Own House Here, My Dear Fellow," the full meaning of the book's title and its central theme comes clear. The testament betrayed is the artist's wish to have total control over his work even after his death. Kundera writes:

Author's rights are starting to lose their old aura. When a conflict arises in this new climate, those who violate authors' moral rights (adapters of novels; garbage can scavengers who plunder great writers with their so-called critical editions; advertising that dissolves a thousand-year old legacy with its bloody saliva; periodicals that reprint whatever they want without permission; producers who interfere with filmmakers' work... and so on) have general opinion on their side, whereas an author claiming his moral right risks winding up without public sympathy and with judicial support that is rather grudging...

He cites Stravinsky, Kafka and Beckett, all of whom have had their specific instructions about their work disobeyed: Stravinsky by Leonard Bernstein and other conductors who have changed the arrangements of his composition; Kafka by Max Brod who published his unfinished work instead of burning it as instructed; and Beckett by various direc-

tors who have not obeyed his very explicit stage directions.

To his credit, Kundera never deals with these matters simply. Even though he condemns Brod for publishing Kafka's unfinished work (which included *Amerika*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*), he admits that he would have done the same: "Yes, because of those three novels I admire boundlessly, I would not have found the strength to carry out fully Kafka's 'testament.'" This might be seen as a flaw in Kundera's argument, but I would call it a strength. Kundera is not afraid of irony, of paradox, of contradiction. Like any good artist, he embraces these difficulties. Time and again, he examines the flipside of his arguments. He praises Brod for his total devotion to both Kafka and Janacek; he praises Theodor Adorno's knowledge of music even as he criticizes his arguments about Stravinsky. Kundera is not a polemicist but a thinker, always looking for ways to revise himself, for a better means of approaching a subject. He frequently admits that he doesn't have the answers: "Brod the enigma," he writes. "...I will never get to the bottom of the Brod mystery."

What makes this book of thrusts and parries such a pleasure to read is the combination of its deft style and intriguing substance. Not only is Kundera an excellent critic (he offers engaging close readings of a number of texts including *The Castle*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Joseph and His Brothers*, and Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants") but he writes a sinuous and lively prose. Like his novels, *Testaments Betrayed* is epigrammatic, full of entertaining anecdotes and *bon mots*. He tells the story of Musil, acting as the editor of a literary magazine, agreeing to publish Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" only if Kafka shortens it. "Ah, sorry encounters between great writers!" Kundera exclaims parenthetically. Elsewhere, criticizing the over-use of synonyms and the refusal of many translators to repeat the same word in translation even though it is repeated in the original text, he writes: "O ye translators, do not sodonymize us!"

There are also frequent and entertaining conceits. In the third essay, Kundera suggests that the history of the novel can be seen as a soccer game — divided into two halves, with halftime coming just before the start of the 19th century. A little later in the essay, he adds a finishing touch by suggesting that, since the time of Musil, we have been in the third, or "overtime" period. This is the kind of throwaway remark that makes this collection so much fun to read. Kundera knows he's on stage; he knows he has to keep us entertained. The soccer game analogy might not stand up to too much

scholarly inquiry, but it is a playful and sometimes illuminating notion to have in your head when thinking about literary history.

Structurally, these essays work in much the same way as Kundera's novels: they follow a musical rather than a linear structure. Instead of announcing a thesis, developing it by exposition, and concluding with a summation (the way we were taught in school), Kundera builds arguments by approaching his subjects from a number of angles. It is an artistic approach that allows him to display a remarkable virtuosity with form. In any one of these essays, he is able to deploy a wide range of argumentative styles. A brief personal essay is followed by a biographical sketch of the author whose work he is considering, which is followed by a satirical digression, which, in turn, is followed by a straightfaced discussion of aesthetic philosophy, and so on. It doesn't hurt that Kundera seems equally comfortable in all modes, and moves from one to the other with great ease. This polyphonic approach to the essay relies on an ability to harmonize the themes from one moment to the next. Kundera manages this not only on the small scale — that is, within each essay — but also on the large scale, drawing connections between the essays so that the entire book resonates with a unified set of concerns. The fig-

ures of Rabelais, Kafka, Stravinsky, Janacek, Broch, Musil, Mann, and Rushdie recur like motifs in a musical composition, and each time they recur, they appear surrounded by a new set of concerns; they are shown in a new light.

For this reason, *Testaments Betrayed* is a much more cohesive book than Kundera's last non-fiction work, *The Art of the Novel*, which was no more than a collection of random essays and interviews, assembled with only the broadest sense of commonality.

Finally, the best thing that can be said about Kundera is that his enthusiasm is contagious. Reading his essay on Stravinsky, you want to run out and buy a recording of *Le Sacre du printemps*. Reading his thoughts on Rabelais, you want to dust off your long-forgotten copy of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, unplug your phone and settle in for the night. These are difficult works by rigorous artists, but Kundera makes the prospect of this difficulty seem like something we should relish. And we should. Here is the greatest defense of all: By rescuing these artists from other people's opinions Kundera directs attention back to the works of art themselves and gets readers and listeners — you and me — to look closely and decide for ourselves.

Jon Michaud is a writer living in Ithaca.

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From the Inside

ZOMBIE
Joyce Carol Oates
Dutton
\$19.95 cloth, 181 pages

Russell Underwood

My name is Q__P__ & I am thirty-one years old, three months. Height five feet ten, weight one hundred forty-seven pounds. Eyes brown, hair brown. Medium build. Light scattering of freckles on arms, back. Astigmatism in both eyes, corrective lenses required for driving. Distinguishing features: none.

So begins *Zombie*, Joyce Carol Oates' new novel chronicling the inner life of a serial killer. The son of loving, if self-deluded middle-class parents, Quentin P__ is an unexceptional student at a community technical college in Michigan and, ironically, the caretaker of a residential property owned by his professor father.

Q__P__, as he calls himself, is on parole for a misdemeanor sex offense committed against a black minor, a crime which has both scandalized his family and galvanized them in their support of his recovery. He pays weekly visits to a psychiatrist, to whom he is polite and formal, and participates in group therapy, where he studiously avoids all eye contact and says little except to mimic the presumably genuine expressions of remorse given by his fellow participants.

For five years, Q__P__ has been obsessed with creating, by means of frontal lobotomy, his own personal "ZOMBIE," a willing slave of sorts over whom he could exert absolute control. Twice during the course of the novel, Q__P__ describes what his Zombie would be and do:

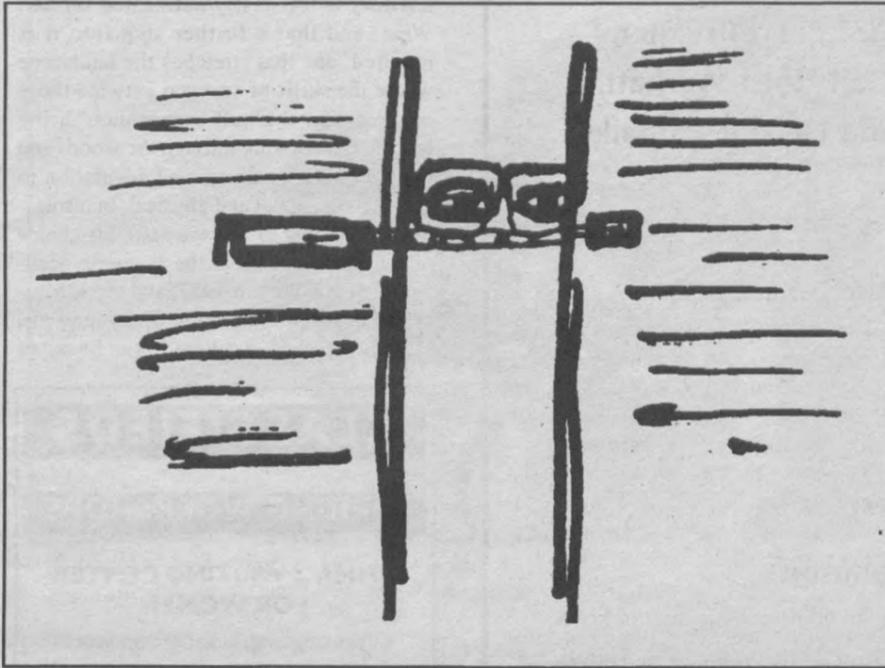
A true ZOMBIE would be mine forever. He would obey every command & whim. Saying "Yes, Master" & "No, Master." He would kneel before me lifting his eyes to me saying, "I love you, Master. There is no one but you, Master."

& so it would come to pass, & so it would be. For a true ZOMBIE could not say a thing that was *not*, only a thing that was. His eyes would be open & clear but there would be nothing inside them *seeing*. & nothing behind them *thinking*. Nothing *passing judgment*...

He would rest his head on my shoulder like a baby. Or I would rest my head on his shoulder like a baby. We would lie

beneath the covers in my bed in the CARETAKER's room listening to the November wind & the bells of the Music College tower chiming & WE WOULD COUNT THE CHIMES UNTIL WE FELL ASLEEP AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT.

Despite his mad fantasies regarding the results of his private surgeries, Q__P__ is shrewd in his selection of "specimens" and the procedures by which he collects them. Eschewing local university students, who are "forbidden to him" by virtue of their connections to friends and family, he searches either in the "black projects" or on lonely highways outside of town,



Reprinted from *Zombie*, Dutton, 1995

picking up hitchhikers and drifters ("Somebody nobody gives a shit for. Somebody never should have been born"). Q__P__ calls each potential zombie by a "pet" name (BUNNY-GLOVES, RAISINEYES, BIG GUY, and finally, SQUIRREL), based usually on some aspect of their dress or appearance. Their real names are immaterial and, according to Q__P__, "rarely suit them"; he rarely wonders about *their* inner lives. They are empty vessels, collections of variously appealing and unappealing characteristics judged only in terms of their suitability to the purposes of their "master."

Q__P__'s descriptions of his invariably unsuccessful attempts to transform his specimens (using an icepick and following the instructions contained in a fifty-year-old medical textbook) are as bland as his more mundane observations regarding the rest of his daily activities. This sameness of tone results in a kind of

desensitization of the reader — at least until the extended and repulsive description of Q__P__'s abortive capture of Squirrel near the end of the novel. This matter-of-factness works to rob these scenes of their shock value.

Oates seems interested here in destroying the idea that Q__P__ and those like him are very different from the rest of us. Q__P__ merely exemplifies the worst in a human nature common to us all. If our shared society has not exactly "produced" him, Oates seems to argue, then certainly by virtue of its indifferent and "non-judgmental" social institutions, it has allowed him to function as a serial murderer more or less without impediment for several years.

Indeed, Oates seems to fit Q__P__ into a tradition of legitimized cruelty also carried out in the name of scientific experimentation — from the crude and horrific practice of lobotomizing mental patients in the 1940s and '50s, to the Cold War radiation experiments carried out on minorities and other socially disenfranchised persons under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission. Toward the end of the novel, Q__P__'s father is devastated by allegations that his mentor, a noted scientist, engaged in such experiments during the mid-1950s, allegations Professor P__ denies, despite considerable evidence, just as, significantly, he has refused to believe the truth about his son. In an early scene, Professor P__ pays an unexpected visit to his son's apartment, during which he notices a suspicious and unpleasant smell coming from a locked trunk. He questions Q__P__ briefly on the matter but finally "gives up," for, as

Q__P__ puts it: "*he does not want to know.*" Nor does Q__P__'s therapist or overworked parole officer seem to want to know that anything is the matter. Drugs are prescribed and attendance recorded, while Q__P__ continues his quest.

Like his therapists and (perhaps by association) the rest of the current psychiatric community, Q__P__ sees little use in assigning or accepting guilt or blame, concepts he views as "superstitious & retro." Vaguely, he justifies his actions by virtue of the seemingly random and unexplainable nature of the universe. (Indeed, he hints that the idea of creating a zombie first occurred to him during a lecture given by his father on the subject of black holes, a lecture in which his father asserts: "Most of the universe is ... undetectable by our instruments & does not 'obey' the laws of physics as we know them.") Later, Q__P__ watches coverage of the Shoemaker-Levy comets hitting Jupiter, an event which he believes confirms his perspective: "How is there BLAME in those fireball plumes. If they explode on Jupiter or Earth. If they are fated by the Universe since the beginning of time or man-made." He later refers to himself as Comet Q — the product of forces outside himself, his actions destructive yet blameless and perhaps in some way pre-ordained.

It seems less clear whether and to whom Oates assigns blame for her monster. Although Q__P__'s therapists, parole officer and family are clearly indicted by virtue of the ease with which Q__P__ manipulates and deceives them, there is little to adequately suggest that Q__P__ is a product, or is even in some way representative of the larger society, despite his addiction to fast food and bad TV. In the novel's most biting and ironic scene, Q__P__ goes to dinner with his sister (a vice-principal) and her upscale, educated friends. As the other dinner guests debate their choices for what is "the number one issue of our time" — candidates are health care, crime, and religion — Q__P__ ponders how he might approach his next victim. Society, to Oates, is less at fault for "creating" Q__P__ than for fostering him. In *Zombie*, she seems to suggest that by letting go of traditional notions of blame and guilt, by denying the worst in our shared human nature, and by failing to accept or assign responsibility for our actions or the actions of others, we allow the truly monstrous among us — and within us — to remain undetected and unchecked.

Russell Underwood is managing editor of *The Bookpress*.

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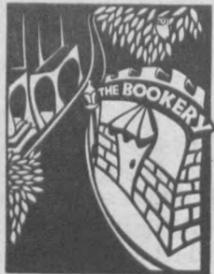


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Where Is Nanking?

THE TENT OF ORANGE MIST

Paul West

Scribner

\$22 cloth, 263 pages

Jeff Schwaner

Paul West's previous book, *A Stroke of Genius*, explored the symbiotic relationship between the body's particularities and the creative drive. In West's case, everything from the migraine headaches he's had since childhood to a stroke suffered in the middle of his sixth decade has proven to be stimulus to a self-examination resulting in the imperative to express (in West's case artistically, in the case of many of his characters behaviorally) that weird harmony which characterizes the individual soul. But I get the sense writing the above that its territory is too neatly delineated for Mr. West, and that a further step into it is required, one that stretches the landscape where the skills of survival entwine those of expression; the "self-examination" being less a leisurely walk through the woods and more a bodily response and adaptation to events both mental and physical. In his new novel, *The Tent of Orange Mist*, his choice of setting and scale — the Japanese occupation of Nanking in 1937, and the spiritual and physical maturation of a young girl forced to become a whore in the house of

her childhood — is masterful in both exceeding and upending one's expectations of historical fiction. As a customer here in Charleston told me after reading a few pages, "He's no Alexandra Ripley, is he?"

That would be correct. Equally correct would be the idea that *The Tent of Orange Mist* is not a novel about Nanking, at least no more than *Rat Man of Paris* was "about" France, *Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* was "about" Germany, *Love's Mansion* was "about" World War II, or *Place In Flowers Where Pollen Rests* was "about" Native American culture in a way that would facilitate a discussion on the cultural merits of World Series team monikers. All these books assumed as given the various horrors the main characters must endure, in some cases fall victim to, in others adapt and continue to grow through. Meet Scald Ibis, adolescent daughter of a sociologist, trained in the arts and philosophy, whose life of ideas and calligraphy has been mostly lived within the walls of her home. Now those walls house a brothel for officers of the conquering Japanese, and Scald Ibis finds herself confined within its new incarnation, called by its manager (the stamp-collecting Colonel Hayashi) the Tent of Orange Mist. She is unaware of the decapitated body of her brother lying in the yard beneath a foot of snow; unaware of the brutal fate of her mother; and unaware, for most of the novel, of the whereabouts of her father, drafted by the Chinese government to help in the war effort. Trying to maintain the spirit of her earlier role in the house, she attempts to concern herself with the arts of the geisha, and tutors the other girls with stories remembered from her studies, notably those of one Sandro Somatti, S.J., a sixteenth century Jesuit missionary.

Somatti reflects on Scald Ibis and her condition as she reflects on him, and on her self-appointed missionary status in the Tent. By the time her father re-enters the story, in a way that further complicates the dynamics of his daughter's relationship with her keeper Hayashi, we begin to see West's use of traditional storytelling elements only makes this "historical novel" even less traditional and more surprising. I don't want to say too much about the book's last third, because throughout *The Tent of Orange Mist* — but especially in its last eighty pages — the twists in the plot take us further and further from a view of history we can grasp or master with an easy sentence or two. In fact, West could be arguing that the type of wide-angle cinematic perspective contemporary historical fiction presents creates a false sense of social consciousness, or social "morality," that is really only a highly structured but foundationless elevation of "taste" over morality. Near the book's end, one of the characters is struck by the "demoralizing notion" that "the butchering of women and children was somehow not as evil as teatime coprophagy." The thought's impact is intensified by its placement in the book, by which character it occurred to, and under what circumstance. I found this novel, written as it is in an uncharacteristically weightless yet still potent style, ultimately made me question what *home* is — a place, a synaptic tangle of memory, a few people and material objects? To get here from there, from the city of Nanking in 1937 to the idea of *home*, takes more than a pair of ruby slippers and a *Gone With the Wind* view of history; it takes a mind writing at the exploratory edge of biological and aesthetic striving, at the point where the two are arriving at the same demand. I haven't read another book which so closely apprehends and so implicitly understands this strange territory, a *terra incognita* at the heart of much of the debate over what makes us human.

Jeff Schwaner lives in Charleston, South Carolina.

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Rock and Revisionism

ROCK SHE WROTE

Eds. Ann Powers
and Evelyn McDonnell
Delta Trade Paperbacks
\$15.95 paper, 320 pages

Bridget Meeds

Cyndi Lauper was wrong. Girls don't "just wanna have fun"; they also want to read books about girls who wanna have fun. At least, that's what I surmise after having had to wrestle from my best friend her copy of *Rock She Wrote*, the new anthology of music criticism by and about women. This friend, a musician herself, had recognized that the book (graced with a lovely photo of Leslie Mah of Tribe 8 and her "Queer Nation: Assimilate My Fist"-stickered guitar) was of more than passing interest. We had to play "My mother and your mother were hanging out clothes" to determine who got to read it first. Lucky for you, I won.

Rock She Wrote is edited by two talented journalists, Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers. Powers is music editor of *The Village Voice* and a critic for *The New York Times*; McDonnell's work appears in *Interview*, *The Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Ms.*, *Billboard*, and *Option*.

In choosing pieces to reprint, McDonnell and Powers have cast their net widely. The book features essays written by heavy-hitting cultural critics, such as Susan Brownmiller on Yoko Ono and bell hooks on Madonna; fine pieces from hard-working music journalists like Mim Udovitch on k.d. lang and Deborah Frost on heavy metal music; and fringe writers like Patti Smith on Bob Dylan and the poet Tracie Morris on the history of hip-hop. Poems, press releases, and 'zine excerpts are given equal weight with essays from *Rolling Stone*.

Offering a distinctly feminist take on popular culture, *Rock She Wrote* focuses on women's issues or music made by women, providing a counterbalance to other histories of rock music, which tend to be monopolized by male voices and stories. The editors prefer a biting, satirical tone, most evident in the insightful and energetic excerpts from an '80s 'zine called *Bitch*, written and edited by Lori Twersky.

On the downside, few essays in *Rock She Wrote* are written by working musicians, and those that are spend little time discussing music-making. Patti Smith and Kim Gordon (bassist for Sonic Youth) discuss social and sexual issues, rather than sonorous ones. Also, the book is weighted towards music and writing from the last two decades, favoring rock and pop music over jazz or rhythm and blues.

Despite these shortcomings, *Rock She Wrote* has much to say, especially about the libidinal role of women in the world of contemporary music, from musicians to fans to critics. With all this in mind, I recently met with editor and journalist Evelyn McDonnell in New York City to talk about the book and her career as a music journalist.

Bookpress: So, tell me about your guitar.

McDonnell: It's a Sears Silvertone. I got it last year right about this time, for my birthday. It's red and has lipstick pickups. I'm really into the whole idea of lipstick pickups.

BP: Are you a musician yourself?

EM: No, I'm really not. I've fooled around a little bit with it. I had guitar lessons as a kid, so I know how to play, but I've never really played in a band.

BP: In the introduction to *Rock She Wrote*, you explain why some women choose to be rock 'n' roll writers by saying "You love rock 'n' roll.... [But] the more you got into the music, the more you saw that your options were limited. You could be a musician: get dicked around by business people, be treated like a sex object, then succumb to the drug culture that keeps artists under control... You decide to become a rock critic, so that you can speak your mind, maintain your independence, try to confront men at their own level." You go

on to explain why you decided to be a critic. Do you think that more women write music criticism than play?

EM: If anything, it goes the other way. However limited, I think there are models for female musicians. You can be a folkie and follow the Joanie Mitchell thing, for example. But there really hasn't been a model for the female rock critic. So there have been fewer women critics than musicians. Of course, some women, like Deborah Frost, choose both.

BP: You once wrote, "While no forms or styles are essentially 'feminine,' there are ways in which women approach listening to music and writing about it that are often explicitly shaped by gender. Most importantly,



Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers

women bring a heightened sense of subjectivity in their writing." Do you still believe that women have certain feminine insights that aid their critical writing?

EM: This is incredibly difficult ground. The danger of talking about "feminine qualities" is that they are exactly what have tended to limit women's roles and involvement in things like criticism. People believe that women are predisposed by biology to certain things and not others. But, while some social roles may be related to biological processes like childbearing, others have more to do with the fact that women have lacked economic and political power.

BP: Do your subjects tell you secrets because you are a woman?

EM: One can play that card, but it depends on the individual. When I interview other women, they sometimes look at me as a fellow woman, on the same side, while some men will look askance at me because I'm a woman critic and they don't understand why I'm there. On the other hand, there are men who let their guard down because they don't feel they have to compete with me the way they would with a male interviewer; and some women are defensive with me. It depends on the individual.

BP: Do you think that rock music is misogynistic?

EM: We live in a misogynistic society. Because it is very emotional, rock music can bring out the worst, as well as the best aspects of society. For instance, Axl Rose is very misogynistic, and rock music has given him the power to wield that misogyny. But someone like Little Richard really confounded a lot of gender stereotypes. And he's an archetype of rock and roll. It has been an incredibly male-dominated form of music, so misogynistic themes are often emphasized. Still, rock music does allow men to express their feminine sides, and women to express their masculine sides, and that's very liberating.

BP: How did you get into music journalism?

EM: Well, I had written journalism since I was in junior high, and I've loved music since I was a kid. In college, I wrote for the student

paper and a local weekly, the first place I got paid to write a review. After I graduated, I eventually moved to New York, where I started writing for a newspaper. But I had to support myself with a lot of other jobs.

BP: Do male rock critics follow a similar path?

EM: Male rock critics definitely have it a lot easier, no doubt about it. So many men who started out in my circumstances have surpassed me. Maybe I'm being immodest, but I can't think it's just about talent. I think they have it easier.

BP: Why is that?

EM: It's a boy's club. There are so many

EM: Absolutely. I've talked with many of them about her.

BP: In a review of a book about women in rock, you write "...a chronicle of female role models in pop music is being constructed, brick by brick." Why is it important for us to have — and for you to take a part in creating — this history?

EM: The tendency to write women out of rock history has become a self-fulfilling situation, allowing rock to be seen as a male medium. That can only change by rewriting rock history to include the important roles played by women, whether as fans or artists.

BP: Do you see rock music as a folk art form?

EM: Yes, it's music that reaches a lot of people, and is not caught up by academic constrictions. It's all about expressing individuality. Look at Bikini Kill. Kathleen Hanna has a lot to say about this.

BP: What are you trying to accomplish with your recent long essays in *Interview*, which are not reviews or profiles but rather extended commentary about the role of the pop artist in society?

EM: As a writer, you tend to get pigeonholed. In the *Interview* columns, I write about things that I don't usually get to write about, like Tupac Shakur. Just the fact that I am a woman writing in the first person about music, in an unapologetic way, is a feminist act.

BP: You are one of the first, and one of the few, journalists to write about the Nuyoricans, a group of poets from New York City who emphasize the performance of poetry. Why do you write about them? And how does a critic affect the emerging wave of an art form?

EM: I was definitely the first person to write about them, so on the one hand, I feel a little pride — I was the first! I feel that my career is mixed up with theirs. A lot of those people were very inspiring to me, so I want to see them do well. I'm very proud of the profile I did of Paul Beatty. He's a great talent, and I discovered him! But the story I did about the Nuyorican Cafe was different. It was then that I realized what little influence the *Village Voice* has on the New York media. That story came out, and it was another two years before others picked up on it. My coverage gave validity to the scene and the poets involved, but I don't think it affected the media coverage that followed. Some of it has been O.K., and some has been really bad, focusing on the wrong poets and the "New Beats," as if the only poetry is beatnik poetry.

BP: What is the role of libido in feminist rock criticism?

EM: Rock is very much the music of the libido, the gut, the raw emotional expression. Rock criticism has been inevitably infected, or inspired, by that. Rock writing by women is so amazing because we're writing from this very pure place within ourselves. Libido is a powerful thing, and in rock criticism it's not being filtered through the usual layers of "being right" and "being a good girl." Just as rock music by women is incredibly exciting to me, so is the writing.

•••

At this point my own libido got the better of me and I had to wrap up the interview to be on time for the John Linnell show at the Mercury Lounge. But I left convinced that McDonnell and Powers have provided us with a valuable resource. *Rock She Wrote* is a limited book, as any book edited from a polemical viewpoint must be. But it contains some very good writing and historical information, and is well worth giving to the favorite Riot Grl in your life, be she fourteen or forty.

Bridget Meeds is a writer living in Ithaca.

BP: Is she an important figure for many of the writers in your book?

**PAST IMPERFECT:
HISTORY ACCORDING TO THE MOVIES**
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Cushing Strout

Writing history is not the oldest profession, but it is old enough to take for granted that it is a constant. A few decades ago, however, Hayden White was working out his attack on historians for anachronistically being wedded to the linear narrative conventions of 19th-century novelists. In a quantitative version of structuralism, the French historian LeRoy Ladurie wrote confidently in 1972:

Present-day historiography, with its preference for the quantifiable, the statistical and the structural, has been obliged to suppress in order to survive. In the last decade it has virtually condemned to death the narrative history of events, and the individual biography.

By the end of the decade, however, the English historian Lawrence Stone was welcoming a new and growing trend among historians in which

the culture of the group, and even the will of the individual, are potentially at least as important causal agents of change as the impersonal forces of material output and demographic growth.

There was, in fact, "a broad cluster of changes in the nature of historical discourse," but he roughly summed them up under the heading of his article's title, "The Revival of Narrative."

Like novels, motion pictures have always treated history in terms of narrative. The revival of narrative among historians has led to their taking an interest in other makers of historical narratives, especially when increasingly, as Brent Staples pointed out in a column in the *New York Times* on the movie *Jefferson in Paris*, "historical adjudications are becoming largely the territory of screen-writers." At the same time, according to a recent gloomy article in *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life*, college history enrollments have suffered a drastic drop of 45% from 1971 to 1991. It stated that, in order to retain the interest of contemporary-minded students, "many history departments are now being pressed into becoming de facto departments of *contemporary history* — not quite a contradiction in terms but hardly a healthy situation." Scholarly obsessions with contemporary issues of race and gender reinforce student inclinations to see the past as (to use Carl Sandburg's metaphor) "a bucket of ashes."

In this climate, it is much to the credit of the Society of American Historians that they have sponsored *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, edited by Mark C. Carnes along with Ted Mico, John Miller-Monzon, and David Rubel. Sixty writers (mostly accomplished academic historians but also a few prominent journalists and two novelists) assess seventy-five historically oriented movies.

One of the book's pleasures is reading about movies the reader is likely to have seen in the recent past — such as *Black Robe*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Glory*, *Malcolm X*, *Matewan*, *Mississippi Burning*, *JFK*, or in the previous decade, *Reds*, *Gallipoli*, and *Fat Man and Little Boy*. The articles are arranged according to the chronology of the subject matter, not the year of the film's production, so that we are brought up to date only as far as the time of *All the President's Men*.

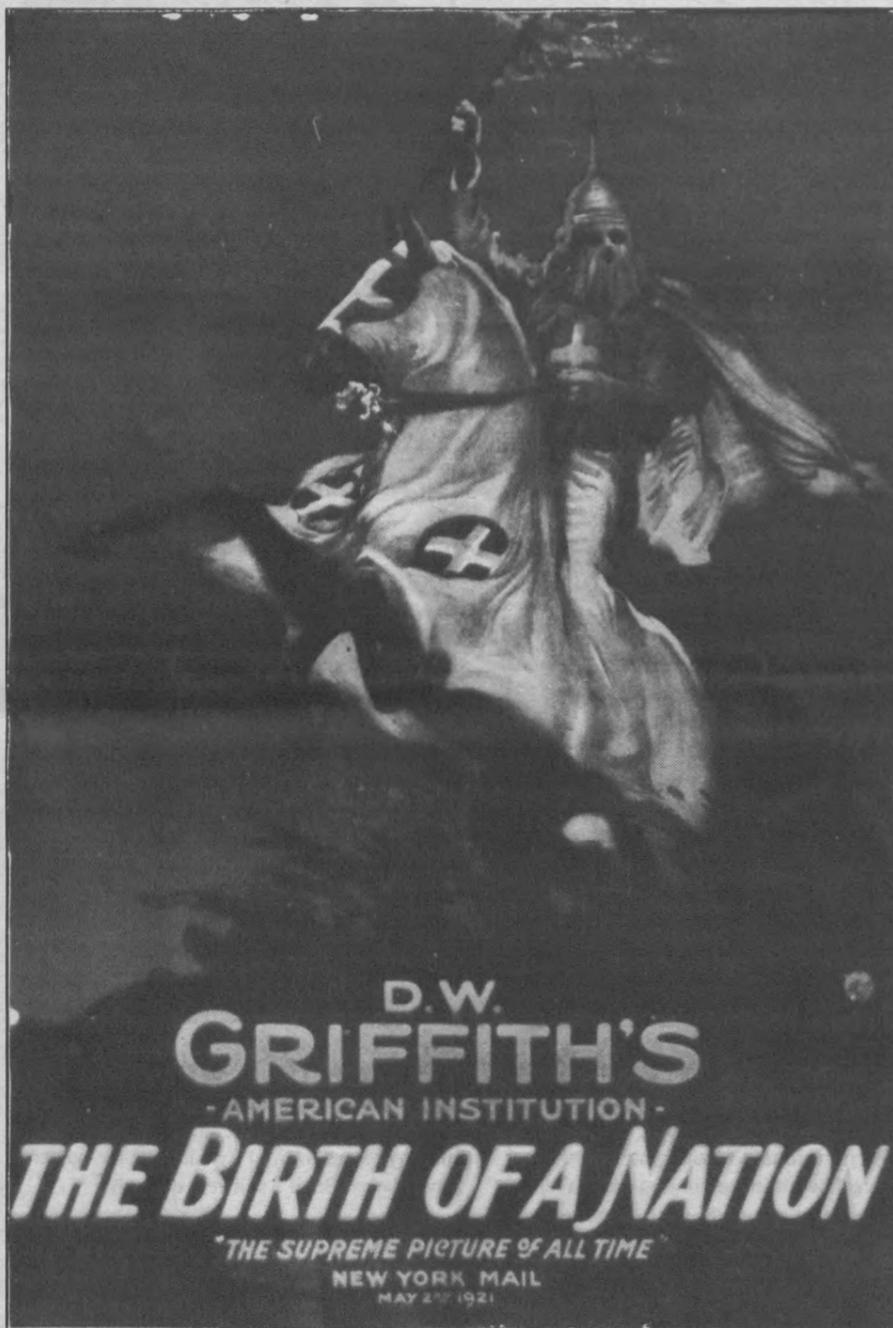
The majority of the films discussed are American with the exception of two French, eight British, two West German, one Spanish, one Australian, one Japanese, and two binational films (USA/Japan, *Tora, Tora, Tora!* and Canada/Australia, *Black Robe*). The

great Italian postwar neo-realist films are ignored, as is the subject of fascism itself. (Perhaps *Schindler's List* came out too late for the book's deadline.) No documentaries are discussed, thus leaving out such brilliant examples as Ken Burns's *Huey Long*, *The Brooklyn Bridge*, and *The Civil War*, which historians have honored.

Some of the editors' eccentric choices for what counts as a historical film suggest that the tripod of their camera for screening history is very wobbly. But given the explosion of social and cultural interest by historians in everything, including matters once restricted to the bedroom, the nursery, and the bathroom, the editors might reply in defense that the wobble is in the contemporary category of history itself.

Chicago?

Similarly, doubts arise about the inclusion of *Tea and Sympathy*, based on a play that was written contemporaneously with its subject, "male tribalism, conformity, and homophobia in Eisenhower's America." The film doesn't work as "common critique of McCarthyites" for being bullies with the "same totalitarian instincts and techniques for which they vilified Communists," and for that purpose it would have made more sense to include *The Front* (1976), which includes several participants who had actually been blacklisted in the fifties. Seven films about Wyatt Earp are discussed, even though the biography that became an authority for nearly all of them was "an imaginative hoax, a fabrication mixed with



Reprinted from *The Movie Poster Book*, E.P. Dutton, 1979

Nevertheless, it seems more than passing strange to me that *Jurassic Park*, a piece of science fantasy about natural history and molecular biology, should be placed first in the chronology of this collection because of the age of dinosaurs, while the remarkable *Lawrence of Arabia* and the powerful *Breaker Morant*, closely based on actual incidents of Australian participation in the Boer War, are ignored. Surely, too, *The Killing Fields*, *The Right Stuff*, and *The Leopard* have a better right to be included (but are not) for their historical and dramatic merits than the thoroughly distorted and conventional *Houdini* or the melodramatic Holmes-Watson pseudo-historical *Murder by Decree*, which is based on a book about Jack the Ripper that was informed by a man who fabricated his whole story. *The Front Page* is a wonderful movie because of its rapid-fire dialogue and exuberant farce, as the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. is well aware, but why should it be included when it doesn't matter at all that most of the characters were based on real reporters in

just enough fact to lend it credibility." (Appropriately enough, the real Wyatt Earp spent his last years hobnobbing with cowboy film stars.)

However, it is helpful of the editors to define history so as to include a past milieu or process, even if the characters are all fictional, as in *Hester Street*, adapted from a story by Abraham Cahan about the process of Jewish acculturation in New York. Paul Boyer even defends the inclusion of the hilarious, ominous, over-the-top satire, *Dr. Strangelove*, because it "faithfully mirrors this historical epoch in which the world's fate often seems hostage to accident, miscalculation and human fallibility." The film, he argues, has "historical resonance." But this criterion easily turns into a black hole because many movies have such resonance, even if their main ambition is to adapt a novel or a play, as with movies about E. M. Forster's novels; and our interest may be even more concerned with the success of the adaptation than with the historical resonances of the texts.

Clio

Many of the historical films in this collection are adaptations, like the all-time blockbuster, *Gone with the Wind*. (The commentator, however, never mentions the impressive epic filming of the battle of Atlanta, which marks the end of the first half of the film. It so impressed me that I walked out of the theater without realizing that a second half was yet to come.) Given the number of adaptations of prior literary forms in *Past Imperfect*, it would have been wise to have solicited more articles from fiction writers who have themselves (as in the case of Thomas Fleming and Gore Vidal in this volume) struggled with the problem of dramatizing history.

An interesting feature of the format of the book is the illustrated sidebars, which also include brief comments about the making of the film or its historical referents. One of them, for example, acutely notes the brilliant use of costuming and interior set design in *Reds*: "If the Great Depression happened in black and white, then after seeing this film you'll know the 1910s occurred in rich browns, mauves, and creams." A sidebar also comments helpfully about the film's innovative device of using voice-overs or talking heads of "witnesses" as a kind of chorus. Of the more than thirty witnesses, only two or three actually figured in the lives of Louise Bryant and John Reed, while the one who was closest, the painter Andrew Dasburg, Reed's friend and Bryant's lover, never mentions his intimacy with her, as if it might have "disturbed the symmetry of the film's Bryant/Reed/O'Neill triangle."

"Historians love movies about the past, and this book proves it," the editor Mark C. Carnes begins his introduction. More accurately, it proves that, on celluloid, the muse Clio constantly disappoints their love. Either the film gets its details wrong, or it gets them right, as in the latest version of Wyatt Earp, but "tells viewers far more than they ever wanted to know about Earp" and "finally has nothing important to say." One gets a glimpse of the problem in the dialogue that begins the book between the historian Eric Foner and the independent director John Sayles. Sayles has rooted *Eight Men Out* and *Matewan* solidly in historical time, place, characters, and events, yet he says that he does not use historians for "the big picture" but only for matters of detail. But making sure that nobody in the cast wears a wristwatch, which had not yet been invented at the time of the movie's setting, is the least of the problems of making a historical movie.

Sayles himself makes the essential point when he says that he has often had "the experience of seeing a historical movie and then reading some history — and thinking that history is a better story, a more interesting story, and certainly a more complex story." The usual movie trouble, as he says, is that "the mindset is wrong," a failure to recognize that "people's thought processes were different at different times." The sensibility of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, for example, was "very 1970s," like the characters in *Easy Rider*, and it was acceptable because it was only "an entertainment." But anachronism really matters in the musical *1776* in which Benjamin Franklin, as Thomas Fleming observes, is full of "sly winks and leers" while being quite without "the bitter seriousness with which Franklin backed independence" as "an angry man, out to even the score with a British government that had hauled him before the Privy Council in 1774 and called him a liar and a thief."

Glory performs a service in recovering the lost story of the influential courage of black soldiers in the storming of Fort Wagner, and it magnificently films the battle, but the brashly rebellious Private Trip is a character out of the modern black liberation movement, as is some of the slang in the dialogue. Moreover, the film suggests that they were former slaves when in fact the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment, led by Boston's Col. Robert Gould Shaw, was made up of freemen.

at the Movies

Sayles remarks that the struggle in making historical films is often between "how much you want people to think about what's going on" and "how much of a viscerally page-turning, emotionally stirring story you want." In the visual and voyeuristic medium of the movies, this struggle is not likely to be an even match except in the best examples. Historicity, as in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, is too often only "a prop man's concern rather than a scriptwriter's." Historians are right to complain when Hollywood history (as Richard Marius says about *A Man for All Seasons*) or its audience is "unable to bear ambiguity, incapable of thought, self-righteous, and transfixed by appearances." John Sayles is also right to claim that "if you're true to the spirit of the story, you don't have to get all the facts exactly right." Gerda Lerner, for example, concludes that the Danish director of the silent film about Joan of Arc "comes closest to conveying the historical truth" by "using film poetically and metaphorically."

Yet this method cannot be counted on to be one size that fits all. On the contrary, in one of the sharpest and best commentaries, at the other, factual end of the spectrum, Frances Fitzgerald finds a "perfect metaphor for the whole Vietnam experience" in the failure of *Apocalypse Now*. It splices together "a daring and stylish satire on the American army in Vietnam" and "Coppola's misguided attempt to translate Conrad's novel [*Heart of Darkness*] into film." She sees that the more the movie "strays from the realities of Vietnam ... the worse it gets as fiction." When Coppola starts to make up the geography, "it's a sign of his more general retreat into abstraction and solipsism. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), when we finally meet him, has nothing to say. He is merely a symbol: Colonel Thanatos, Mr. Death Wish. There is nobody home."

She thinks all the other ambitious movies about Vietnam also suffer from falling into "facile mythmaking ... decked out in special effects and extravagant Technicolor gore." In this sense, they reflect the tragic fact that for most Americans, "Vietnam was an abstraction — a symbol, not a place — and the American troops who went there suffered as a result." Would that our post-modern theorists of history as mere fiction, as well as our historical film-makers, had Fitzgerald's tough-minded sense of history.

One of the most visually impressive and historically accurate historical films is *Black Robe*, with a script written by Brian Moore, who previously wrote a novel of the same name about Jesuit attempts in the 17th century to convert the Hurons of Canada to Catholicism. Unlike so many inferior historical films discussed in *Past Imperfect*, Moore and director Bruce Beresford display an "evenhanded depiction of the baffling otherness of both native and French culture. Neither culture is morally privileged; each is presented to the viewer in its undiluted strangeness, as it was to the other in 1634."

Hollywood loves love stories, and it is historically legitimate to make a film about the Bohemian Left that focuses, as *Reds* does, on the love affair between Louise Bryant and John Reed. The film is also unusually concerned with connecting them accurately to the political events of their time. However, it is not easy to balance the historical with the romantic. The first half of the film ends in St. Petersburg with Bryant and Reed making love to the strains of "The International." I saw *Reds* at a screening for a historians' convention in Los Angeles, and during the intermission I ran into Robert A. Rosenstone, the author of the biography of Reed on which the film was based. We were shaking our heads over the way the romantic love scene seemed to trump the major historical events that were taking place at the same time. But then, in the second half, I was mesmerized by the film's taking on the task, as Christine Stansell notes, of "representing the internecine fights of the Left into which Reed plunged himself in 1919." The pace of the film then "inevitably slackens," but it is admirable and unusual that

we are given a riveting glimpse of actual ideological debate, a rarity in any movie.

Stephen Jay Gould, in his essay on *Jurassic Park*, concludes that "we cannot hope for even a vaguely accurate portrayal of the nub of history in film so long as movies must obey the literary conventions of ordinary plotting." That is because, as an evolutionist, he is a critic of "purpose and directionality as motivating and predictable forces of history" and wants movies that take contingency seriously, as paleontology should. Fair enough for natural history, but chance cannot become the major theme of human history without it falling into another form of determinism as unhistorical as casting everything into the form of necessity. Purpose and direction, however encouraged, deflected, or even stymied by chance, are precisely what interest us in both history and novels. They are what make stories meaningful instead of being "just one damn thing after another."

The other major commentator for this book is the historian Simon Schama, who, for some inexplicable reason, is given pride of place at the end to discuss — out of the book's chronological sequence — Abel Gance's classic silent movie *Napoleon*. Schama is an imaginative, wide-ranging, and eloquent historian, but in this anthology he is too clever by half in subordinating the content and method of the French film to his own comic dialogue about it as conducted between a Hollywood type, Fiscal, and a stand-in for Napoleon, Goodpart:

Fiscal: So, Goodpart, whatdya think, an outstanding spectacle, no? A must-see for the technical wizardry alone: Polyvision, Russian montage, crazy hand-held shots — really, you've got to call this film a revolution.

Goodpart (wearily): It's a bloody mess, yes.

Schama amusingly has the movie's subject jealously condemn Gance for wanting to be "the Napoleon of the film" with an army of cameramen and actors and makeup women in order "to make a conquest." How Gance succeeds or fails historically and artistically is lost in Schama's witty byplay with his own fictional creation. He seems to want to become a scriptwriter himself, rather than a critic.

If movies really are the place where historical issues are being adjudicated for most people, serious historical criticism is more necessary than ever. This book is welcome, though it demonstrates that only a few historians as yet have the ability to pay attention to the dramatic form of the film, its historical content, and the interaction of these elements.

Some will wonder what all the fuss is about. What does it matter if film-makers get it wrong? It's only a movie. The general editor of *Past Imperfect* says that "for many, Hollywood History is the only history. They could do worse." They could also do very much better. It doesn't much matter that *Houdini* or the various versions of Wyatt Earp are hoked-up and falsified commercial entertainment. Even so, our sense of history can be usefully challenged as well as perniciously perverted by historical films.

The French take their Revolution very seriously, and Robert Danton's brilliant essay on *Danton*, directed by a Polish anti-Stalinist, shows how, in 1983, it shocked the French Left by presenting Robespierre as neurotic and inhumane. But already the French historian François Furet had attacked the anti-Danton myth of the Revolution that for long had been "perpetuated in the cause of Stalinism." The intense controversy, led by the offended Socialists who denounced the film's unorthodoxy, showed "how much they remained prisoners of their own mythology."

The Birth of a Nation, based on Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s *The Clansman*, has its high place in the technical development of making films, and is one of the first and greatest box-office attractions in the history of motion pictures. It is also the purveyor of historical myths about Reconstruction and of white-supremacist stereotypes of the black man as a creature hiding beneath his grinning, obsequious mask the

vicious brutality of the rapist. "Few if any films in the history of the cinema," as Leon Litwak observes in a trenchant commentary on the movie, "had such tragic and far-reaching consequences." The people of Chicago, one observer wrote, "saw more in *The Birth of a Nation* than a tremendous dramatic spectacle. They saw in it the reason the South wants to 'keep the Negro in his place.' They saw in it a new contemplation of southern problems." The late Ralph Ellison lamented that "the Negro as a scapegoat could be sold as entertainment, could even be exported. If the film became the main manipulator of the American dream, for Negroes that dream contained a strong dose of such stuff as nightmares are made of."

As *Past Imperfect* makes clear, the confusion of history and entertainment is one of the perpetual risks in making historical films. It is worth taking the risk, however, when the reward, which is rare, is to give us a fusion of an artist's sense of form with a historian's sense of truth. More often, the historical sense in film is likely to find a home when it is a feeling for period and place rather than for actual persons and events. The scriptwriter, the director, and the producer of *Howard's End* and *A Room with a View* did well with the Edwardian time of Forster's novels. It was only when the Merchant-Ivory team confronted history directly, without the mediation of a novelist, as it did in *Jefferson in Paris*, that their collective historical sense succumbed to vulgarization. While getting many details right, it bungled the larger truth by substituting the dubious legend of Jefferson's sexual liaison with his teenaged slave for the rich subject of his political ties with French liberals and his eager absorption of European husbandry, science, architecture, and art. Once again, to borrow Pauline Kael's metaphor, Clio lost it at the movies.

Sigfried Kraacauer, a historian and theorist of film, also wrote a philosophy of history, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, suggesting that analogies with cinematic narrative would afford opportunity for enlightening comparisons, but, disappointingly, he made very few of them. He was critical of films that were either adapted from plays or novels, or modeled on them in terms of structure and meaning. This type of film is not, in his view, truly cinematic because instead of "rendering transient impressions and unforeseeable encounters," it "sacrifices porosity to dense composition." Consequently, given this premise, he discusses no examples of historical films, because they are often adapted from literary models. It is a pity because his proposal for comparison of cinematic and historical narratives has the promise of finding more common ground between historians and film-makers than most of the commentators in *Past Imperfect* have been able to find.

Cushing Strout is an emeritus professor of American Studies at Cornell University.

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Ending Welfare as We Know It

continued from page 1

dollars spent on the AFDC population is \$49 billion, or about three percent of the federal budget. Committee Republicans, however, are not interested in facts. They share Rector's view that any social spending is welfare.

The Republicans' denial of the facts underscores an alarming trend in public policy. Welfare is no longer a public expenditure that can be debated rationally in terms of costs and benefits. It has become a rallying cry for right-wing ideologists who perceive a moral breakdown in society to be of primary importance. In this view, poverty is due to the moral deficiencies of the poor, induced by government welfare policies.

Research evidence that contradicts the New Right point of view is routinely dismissed as the product of a biased intelligentsia. This response is indicative of the conservative attitude toward research in general; it is a political tool to be manipulated in support of policy objectives.

The Non-Marital Birthrate and The Destruction of the Traditional Family

A key policy consideration for these right-wing members of Congress is the effort to link the issue of non-marital births with welfare reform legislation. Welfare is viewed as a cause of this trend and therefore a threat to traditional two-parent family structures. The solution, to them, is obvious: cut welfare benefits. As the argument goes, the increase in out-of-wedlock births is caused by the increasing size and availability of welfare benefits. According to New Right ideology, welfare is an economic subsidy of dysfunctional and anti-social behavior.

Conservatives note that nominal dollar spending on AFDC has increased since 1970 (\$4 billion in state and federal dollars in 1970, compared with \$22 billion in 1993), coinciding with an increase in the out-of-wedlock birthrate. However, while the average size of benefits has increased in terms of nominal dollars since 1970, their cash value in real dollars, adjusted for inflation, has decreased by 47 percent. Further, the current average monthly benefit of \$377 for a family of three in 1994 is virtually unchanged from the average level of \$374 in 1990, yet the nonmarital birthrate has continued to climb among all sectors of society. If there were a direct correlation, we would expect to see vast differences in the birthrate among states, because AFDC cash benefit levels vary widely among states. Yet despite differences in maximum benefit levels between Alabama and New York (\$577 and \$164 respectively) their nonmarital birthrates are the same.

In addition, the increase in the non-marital birthrate is a society-wide trend, and is not limited to the AFDC population. In fact, this rate is increasing among educated and economically independent women. While many families that enter the AFDC rolls are female-headed households, many of these families enter the rolls due to death or separation of a spouse, job loss, or the birth of an additional child. Likewise, many families that result from nonmarital births never enter the AFDC program. This point escapes the New Right due in part to the fact that their primary concern is the breakdown of the traditional two-parent family structure. For them, the phenomenon of female-headed households, whether or not they participate in AFDC, is symptomatic of moral breakdown in society.

The bill proposed by the House

Republicans includes provisions to deny aid to mothers under 18. It also includes provisions to deny aid to children born to families receiving public assistance, a policy known as a family cap that, at full implementation, would deny cash assistance to 2.4 million children. Further, the bill would deny cash assistance to families that have received 60 cumulative months of aid. States would have the flexibility to limit aid even further. Assuming states were as generous as allowable under the provisions of the bill, 3.9 million children (or 33 percent of the caseload) would be denied aid. Should states choose to impose a two-year time limit on cash assistance, the number of chil-

American, 38 percent are white. The percentage of blacks in the AFDC population has been decreasing in recent years, due primarily to the increase in poverty and a concomitant rise of AFDC usage among white families. Other demographic characteristics also defy New Right misrepresentations. Roughly half the AFDC population consists of the rural poor. Only 7.6 percent of AFDC mothers are 20 years old or younger; most are between 30 and 39. The average size of the AFDC family is 1.9 children, less than the average for the overall U.S. population. Seventy-two percent of AFDC families have two or fewer children. Most striking of all, estimates show that a sub-

stantial number of AFDC families combine work and welfare (estimates range from 6.9 percent to 13.8 percent of AFDC families). That is, many families work part of the year but fall on economic hard times and require public assistance; other families work part-time while receiving benefits. AFDC is essentially an unemployment insurance program for the working poor. This suggests that problems with welfare dependence may be due in part to the structure of the economy rather than to recipient behavior. Ignoring all evidence to the contrary, most Republicans in Congress remain convinced that welfare causes dependence rather than acknowledge that chronically high unemployment rates and other economic conditions, especially in urban areas, are responsible. This logic is equivalent to saying that firemen cause fires, and therefore reductions in fire stations will decrease fires.

Perhaps most misunderstood is the frequency with which families utilize welfare programs. The vast majority remain on welfare for surprisingly short periods. Research has demonstrated that 76 percent of the families who enter welfare leave within two years. Despite this fact, misperception persists. Consider a hospital ward with 20 patients. At any point, perhaps fourteen of the patients have remained hospitalized for over two weeks, the other six patients are new arrivals. A casual observer would conclude that nearly 75 percent of the patients stay in the hospital longer than two weeks. However, over the course of several weeks, a more accurate observation would demonstrate that, while the same fourteen patients remain in their beds, several dozen new patients arrive, are treated, and leave after a brief visit. In reality, the overall percentage of patients who remain in the hospital for a lengthy stay is small. The same logic applies to the welfare population. At any point, a majority of those on the rolls have been there for more than two years. However, over the course of several years, families who enter the rolls and leave within two years constitute an overwhelming majority of the overall caseload (76 percent). This process further underscores AFDC's role in support of working poor families. Many families re-enter the labor force but soon cycle back on to the AFDC rolls due to lay offs, loss of a partner, or changes in the family size. Often, when families do find ways to leave welfare, they lack supportive services, such as safe and affordable child care, access to health care, and job security. The main problem with welfare is not the program itself but the volatility of the labor market; real welfare reform would address the needs of people for effective training and job opportunities.

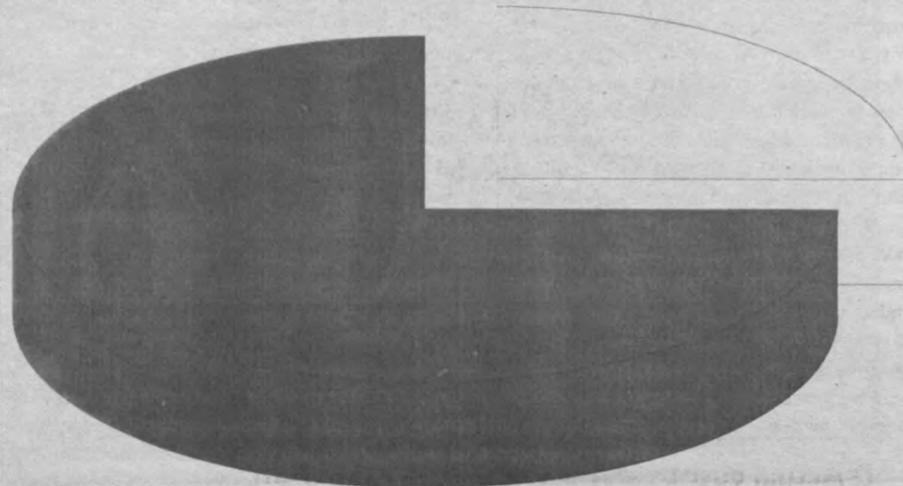
While most families successfully leave the AFDC program via employment or marriage, some recipients lack the ability and self-confidence to attain self-sufficiency. Further, the sudden loss of cash, medical, and child care benefits can disrupt families' attempts to enter the workforce. Despite the decreasing benefit levels of the AFDC program, the alternative of low-wage jobs and economic insecurity is a false choice; medical benefits are as important as cash assistance to some families, especially those with members who are chronically ill. Analysis prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services found that an estimated one million families would leave the AFDC rolls if alternative health coverage were available. This suggests a much different solution than the cut-off advocated by the GOP; a system of transitional support that enabled families to acquire and retain employment had been the goal of President Clinton's original welfare reform proposal.

Due to the scarcity of jobs for unskilled workers, a policy that would limit support in order to force people into the labor market would not be successful. Recent structural changes in the economy, most notably globalization, have created complex labor market dynamics that are beyond the reach of welfare policy alone. Working poor families are already absorbing the brunt of these structural changes in the economy. A time-limit welfare policy that simply ignores the need for adequate private sector jobs would only increase the economic strain on low-wage families; competition for the few remaining jobs would become fiercer. The GOP desire to impose time limits is not based on a consideration of the labor market; it is designed to make welfare seem as unattractive as possible, regardless of the adverse impact on working poor families.

Elements of the Plan and Its Fiscal Impact

The GOP welfare reform plan is nothing short of an all-out assault on the poor. While conservatives accuse Democrats of resorting to class war rhetoric, they pursue class war policies with a vengeance. The sums of money involved in cutting aid to the poor are

Impact on Children



Under the proposed two-year time limit, 9 million of the 12 million children currently receiving AFDC assistance will be cut off.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — ASPE.

dren denied aid would exceed nine million. Ironically, if this bill becomes law, it will have little or no effect on the rate of non-marital births. It will, however, cause severe hardship for countless families with children.

Time Limits and Forcing Lazy Mothers to Work

In addition to the old stereotype of inner-city black families living parasitically off society, the New Right portrays welfare recipients as ignorant victims whose dependence on welfare makes them virtual slaves to the poverty "industry." By this logic, the most effective way to reduce dependence is by imposing time limits on benefits, thereby forcing recipients to seek employment. The underlying assumption is that adult recipients fail to work by misguided choice; appropriate behavioral inducements will result in virtuous outcomes. Another assumption is that all welfare families share the same circumstances, characteristics, and needs.

But the welfare population is not homogeneous and its needs with regard to the AFDC program vary widely. Of the 14.3 million recipients in 1994, 9.6 million were children. The New Right promulgates the stereotype of welfare recipients as primarily inner-city black mothers who don't work and remain dependent on welfare for their entire lives. In fact, very few individuals fit this stereotype. While 36 percent of adult AFDC recipients are African-

stantial number of AFDC families combine work and welfare (estimates range from 6.9 percent to 13.8 percent of AFDC families). That is, many families work part of the year but fall on economic hard times and require public assistance; other families work part-time while receiving benefits. AFDC is essentially an unemployment insurance program for the working poor. This suggests that problems with welfare dependence may be due in part to the structure of the economy rather than to recipient behavior. Ignoring all evidence to the contrary, most Republicans in Congress remain convinced that welfare causes dependence rather than acknowledge that chronically high unemployment rates and other economic conditions, especially in urban areas, are responsible. This logic is equivalent to saying that firemen cause fires, and therefore reductions in fire stations will decrease fires.

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small compared to proposed cuts in Medicare and Medicaid (\$50 billion versus \$470 billion respectively over five years), but each policy represents a shift of benefits from the most vulnerable population to the most affluent. The savings achieved will be used to finance a tax cut that largely benefits the wealthiest in society. The fiscal effects are also the same; costs and responsibilities are being shifted from the federal government to state and local governments. The welfare reform plan recently passed by the Senate (the version most likely to reach President Clinton's desk) would end the federal guarantee of AFDC benefits for poor families that meet eligibility requirements. The AFDC program would be replaced with a block grant program in which states receive a fixed sum of federal dollars to design and operate a workfare program. In order to maintain the present level of services over time (especially if a recession occurred), states would be required to increase their funding by raising state taxes. Otherwise, states would be forced to reduce services to poor families by \$50 billion.

The Senate bill would require states to place all able-bodied adult recipients into a workfare program as a condition of eligibility for receiving federal benefits. The required participation rates in the work program are so high that 41 states would have to place twice as many recipients (or more) into a work program than are currently being served in state-run job training programs. Subsidized work slots are far more costly and difficult to supervise than job training and education programs. It takes time for local service agencies to develop sufficient community ties to coordinate work slots. This problem is compounded by the traditional resistance of local businesses to employing welfare recipients. More importantly, as the work slots are filled, it would become fiscally impossible for a state to generate enough new slots to accommodate the numbers of poor families requiring assistance.

The Senate's work program requirement is essentially an unfunded mandate, underscoring a general trend of cost shifting from the federal level to state and local governments. The amount of the block grant to states, based on fiscal year 1994 spending, would remain unchanged. Within five years, this equates to a \$11.7 billion reduction in federal funding for cash assistance and job training. New York, for example, would lose \$1.75 billion in federal funding for such programs. Including cuts in related programs under the GOP proposal, New York would lose \$6.8 billion in total federal funding. Like the rest of the states, New York will face the dilemma of either reducing services or making up shortfalls through increases in state spending. Given the condition of the state budget, maintaining services would require an increase in state taxes, most likely property taxes. States, faced with unachievable objectives and competing budget pressures, will inevitably resort to the solution of cutting families from the assistance rolls.

The GOP rationale for their bill is that they are not dismantling the welfare system, but simply handing the program over to the states, which, they argue, are in a better position than the federal government to address the needs of their residents. This process, known as devolution, has provided protection for the GOP from charges that their proposal is harsh on children.

However, block grants are extremely problematic for a variety of reasons. The stated intention of block grants is to achieve savings by permitting states the flexibility to design support systems that meet the needs of their residents. In reality, the fiscal effects of block grants, combined with new federal strings included in the GOP plan, completely undermine the notion of state flexibility.

Due to inflation, the value of the federal grant to states will quickly erode over time. Further, there would be no adjustments to the state grant due to changes in population or other economic circumstances that affect the demand for services. States would be

objectives. Welfare recipients will not miraculously exit the rolls and enter the workforce. There are no jobs available for them, and there will be no education, or training, or transitional support services to help recipients enter the labor force. The welfare system will not be transformed into a workfare system; states will most likely pursue programs similar to those under current law, albeit serving fewer families and providing reduced benefits. Most state social service agencies lack the resources and political leadership necessary to implement anything profoundly different. But the unstated intention of the GOP proposal is not to serve recipients at all. By employing

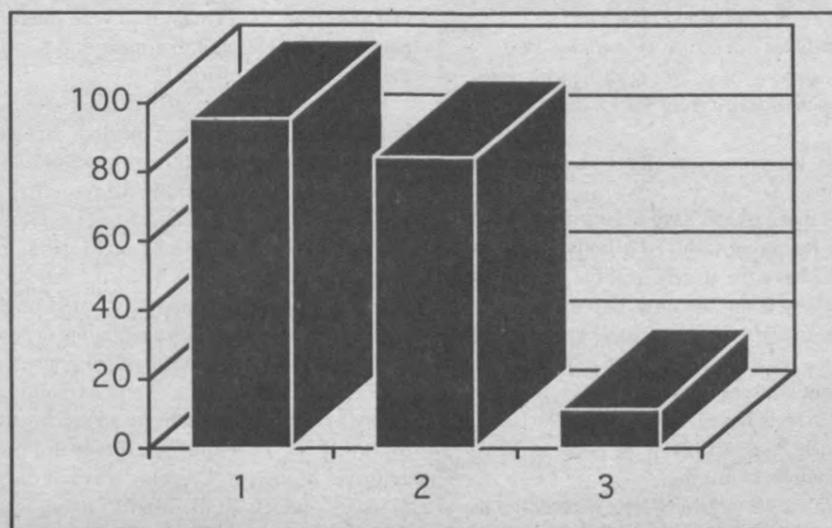
the GOP. This has created a dilemma for the President that the Republicans have skillfully exploited by making it appear that opposing the GOP plan is the equivalent of opposing reform entirely. In an effort to facilitate a Presidential veto, the Department of Health and Human Services developed analysis of the GOP bill that demonstrated its adverse effects on children. According to this report, from 3.9 to 9 million children would be denied assistance and left with no means of support if the Republican bill became law. An additional five million families would be forced into poverty as a result of decreased support from other programs. These numbers were quietly circulated among Senate staffers but the White House was unreceptive.

Congressional Democrats have been virtually united in their opposition to the Republican legislation. In the House, every Democrat voted for an alternative proposal that was nevertheless defeated along party lines. Very few Democrats voted for the Republican bill that eventually passed. Meanwhile, in the Senate, Majority Leader Bob Dole had difficulties holding his Republican colleagues in line. Senator Phil Gramm, Dole's rival for the GOP Presidential nomination, threatened to derail the process if concessions to conservatives were not made. Moderate Republicans counter-threatened to bolt party ranks if the bill became more conservative. The President, sensing an opportunity, struck a bargain with Senator Dole. The President would agree to support the Senate Republican bill if certain conditions were met. Dole, also in need of a victory to bolster his own Presidential ambitions, promptly agreed. Provisions were modified to require states to maintain a certain level of spending and some of the reductions in child care funding were restored.

A last minute plea from officials in the Administration went ignored. The analysis that had been prepared was suppressed. The President had made his decision to support the bill; evidence of adverse effects of the bill would only damage his position now. He telephoned the Progressive Policy Institute to be told what he wanted to hear; the HHS analysis had potentially overstated the effects on poor families and underestimated the number of families that would obtain employment. When word leaked that the fix was in, opposition to the bill evaporated. The Senate passed the bill with only twelve dissenting votes.

John P. Wolff is a former analyst in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Fiscal Impact



1=Actual cost to states of Workfare Program*
2=Amount of federal block grants
3=Shortfall to states

Numbers are in billions over 5-year period

*Assuming present levels of welfare assistance.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — ASPE.

required to make up any shortfalls in the funding of the programs they design. Even in the event of a recession, states will not receive federal support beyond the amounts fixed at 1994 spending levels. During times of economic downturn, welfare rolls swell and state revenues dry up. Thus fixed block grants, unlike current funding based on actual needs, will exacerbate the fiscal strain on states during a recession.

The GOP proposal, if passed into law, is doomed to fail in its formal

the rhetoric of reform, the New Right hopes to legitimizing the destruction of the safety net.

Afterword

Although there exists the possibility that President Clinton will veto the Republican legislation, he understands that his re-election hinges on the passage of some type of welfare reform. He is held hostage to his campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it," but having failed to introduce legislation of his own, Clinton has ceded the initiative to

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In Praise of Praise

Jeanne Mackin

Of all the complaints I have with the 20th century, let this one not be excluded from the list: It is dismally impoverished in its praise and flattery. Praise, especially high praise, has fallen out of fashion.

We no longer reach for disarming and winning compliments. Instead, we dutifully tell the truth and other atrocities. We minimize our sentiments till they are bare skeletons of what could have been said, by-passing golden opportunities to advance ourselves and to add a rosy glow to the day of the object of our praise.

I suspect this has something to do with the economy. Perhaps a certain tightness in the wallet is accompanied by a tightness of the heart and imagination, an unwillingness to overspend from an already meagre store of words. Never frugal, high praise is a big spender unrolling his wad on the gaming table of our affections, gambling on our credulity. But even when the big spender loses and the praise is totally off-mark, we enjoy the spectacle and adventure.

"Praise is always pleasing, let it come from whom, or upon what account it will," Montaigne wrote in his *Essays*.

Of course, credulity is a crucial part of our current "least-said-better-off" syndrome. In an age when we are asked to believe in so much that is incredible — politicians' promises, Elvis sightings, good and frequent sex well into our eighth decade of life — an urge to reserve at least one area of credibility is understandable. We seem to have chosen praise for that office. It is, I believe, a bad choice. Praise, like music, is meant to soothe and heal and please, not to provide an accurate report on our true merits. Let weather reports, financial aid packages, marriage vows and recipes be credible. But let praise be extravagant. Let

good will rule over the merely plausible.

Consider a Saturday evening some weeks ago. I had spent no little time performing the toilette of a special night on the town, time which could have been spent mucking in the garden, teasing the cat, or watching a *Star Trek* re-run. My hair was washed and even combed, my face was made-up, my nails were clean, and my dress was new and, I thought, rather-flattering. Such labors are not undertaken for merely altruistic purpose: They demand verbal rewards, a fact I made clear by blocking my husband's path in the hall until my appearance was remarked upon.

"You look nice," he said.

This, from my husband, counts as high praise indeed and I do not wish to appear ungrateful. But consider another Saturday night date's response upon seeing his beloved:

*O! she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
She shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
As yonder lady o'er her fellows show.*

Now Romeo was a fellow who knew how to praise.

Not that I would have believed such obviously hormone-induced effusiveness, nor should have the overly gullible Juliet. But credibility is not the most important part of praise. In fact, one might argue that credibility is the least important part of praise. One does not whisper or shout such sentiments in order to be believed. One hopes at the least to ingratiate, but possibly, if the praise is congenial enough, to inspire.

"We are all motivated by a keen desire for praise, and the better a man is, the more he is inspired by glory," Cicero explains in *Pro*

Archia. Praise, even in Cicero's time, was an effective form of popular psychology, good for maneuvering the praised one into yet grander exertions. With adequate praise, my husband can coerce me into spending an entire evening baking a double-chocolate cake. With the right form of praise, something on the level of how-strong-men-are, how-supple-their-wrists, I can maneuver my husband into spending Sunday afternoon raking leaves instead of playing golf.

Imagine the positive effects on society if we could carry this psychology into the public arena. "My! How nicely you arranged that troop pull-out! Such flair! Such *savior-faire*! Perhaps next time such a clever, morally righteous leader as yourself might even arrange it a little sooner?" Or, "Dear Bank President: I see my savings interest rate has increased dramatically from 2.5 percent to 2.9. You can't begin to imagine my gratitude that I had the foresight to deposit my meagre life savings in your prestigious bank! What a wonder you are, a veritable wizard of financial machinations! Perhaps next year, interest paid could be elevated to a mere one-fourth the rate of interest charged?"

For those of us reluctant to express admiration directly, there are other methods. In fact, Fanny Burney, the 18th-century English-woman who was, thankfully for posterity, a prodigious letter writer, paid her highest praise behind people's backs, so to speak, in letters addressed to others, knowing full well that such letters in that pre-MTV time would, most likely, be shared with a multitude of personages, including the object of her praise.

Hence, this letter to a friend explaining Fanny's precipitous wedding to a Frenchman, M. d'Arblay, of whom her father did not approve. Monsieur d'Arblay was not only French — which, to the English mind, was then and remains a heinous lapse in taste — he was a Constitutionalist in the age of

monarchies, a situation which in this century could only be compared to being a liberal in Texas. Fanny's father had grounds for his qualms, and Fanny had to praise her husband so highly that others would admit he was at least presentable. She wrote to a friend and hence the reading public:

What ever may be the general wonder, and perhaps blame, of general people, at this connexion, equally indiscreet in pecuniary points for us both, I feel sure that the truly liberal and truly intellectual judgement of that most venerated Character, would have accorded its sanction, when acquainted with the worthiness of the Object who would wish it.

In that same letter, she addressed the father who refused to attend her wedding as "dear" and paid him such diverse compliments and praise that within the year she had won him over and had not only a devoted husband, but an adoring father as well.

Compare Fanny's technique of conquering and reconciling with praise, to the modern, Mommy-Dearest, slash-and-burn technique of literary family revelations, à la the Cheevers. Considering our loathness to praise, our quickness to condemn, it is no wonder that so few people actually look forward to holiday family reunions and may even hesitate to open birthday gifts mailed in plain brown boxes. An inability to praise parents, however backward, cruel, miserly and manipulative they may be, can only result in armed camps within the family. I blame not the economy but Freud for this situation: He so convincingly pointed out that most of us wish those dear relatives dead. How do you praise someone you fantasize throttling? Kind and Gentle Reader: put aside such fantasies. Forget that Mother gave the last piece of birthday cake to Brother. Forgive Father for running over the pet turtle. Next opportunity, praise them to

Postscript to an Obit

Jascha Kessler

The obits in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* about the eminent American historian, Page Smith — who died of leukemia on August 28, just two days after his wife Eloise Pickard Smith had succumbed to cancer — startled me. They were a loving, utterly devoted couple; he, a scion of the Smiths of Long Island and Pages of Virginia, she, "po' white trash" who remembered herself as a girl sitting rocking beside her grandmother on a ramshackle porch at the wrong end of a small town in one of the Carolinas.

One doesn't think of one's old friends as old enough to die, of course. The Smiths had left Los Angeles in 1964 to help found Cowell College, the first part of the new campus of the University of California at Santa Cruz. Page had been teaching at UCLA until then, even experimenting with a lecture course taped for later simultaneous replay to several large classes. It was about 1972 when I drove up to stay with them on their quiet seven-acre place in Bonny Doon; by then Page was doing administrative work in his own inimitable style: usually riding the eight miles up to campus on horseback, where he'd dismount around 10 a.m., put in the necessary calls, sign a few papers, and ride off again by 1:00. Whatever talk that gave rise to, he shrugged off in his patrician way. The money was good, was what he thought of it. Vintage Page Smith. Real work was research; true work was thinking and writing. That first success, years before in 1962, those hefty Book-of-the-Month volumes of his now famous John Adams biography, confirmed him in his opinion; and he was soon to receive even greater renown for *The People's History of the American Revolution*, published in 1976 and 1980. Page certainly knew how to do good scholarship efficiently — and write it out with grace and clarity.

On second reading, I couldn't help but notice

in Page's detailed obituary the absence of one book, the existence of which, I surmise, I was the cause. That was *A Letter from My Father: The Strange, Intimate Correspondence of W. Ward Smith to His Son Page Smith*, edited by Page and published by Morrow in 1976. I wondered why it was omitted, and having forgotten its title, I checked the catalogue of UCLA's library, and found its author listed in this manner: W. Ward Smith (1893-1968). More surprising, though amusing enough, its subject category is given as... "Erotic Literature"! On this curious characterization hangs my brief tale.

I was aware during the first years of our acquaintance that Page avoided talking about anything to do with his father's side of the family. Eloise gave me a clue when she said more than once that she was always, "to this very day, y'all should know," amazed to think that a Smith had ever married someone who came from her end of town and her side of the tracks; it just went to show what a truly fine sort of man he was, if it needed showing at all. He himself remarked once, when he heard I'd lived on West 85th Street off Central Park during the mid-1950s, that he'd been shocked once when, visiting New York on reading break from Cambridge, he walked smack into his father strolling toward Broadway along that very street. Years had gone by since last they'd met: Page had been away at Dartmouth, and then there was the fighting in Europe with the 10th Mountain Division. His father had a "fast lady" on his arm, and they were both rather tipsy. Page had been awfully embarrassed by that encounter, though his father carried it off with his usual flair, insisting on taking him to dinner, and later seeing him off at Grand Central. The whole thing had been damned disagreeable, Page let me know. He was, and I took that by implication, a staunch defender of his mother, who many long years before had returned to her place among the Pages of Virginia, a refugee from New York, to live in exile, a grass widow, it was to be sup-

posed, for the rest of her days. But Page never said anything about who or what his father was, either from reticence or perhaps repressing his memory. That urge for repression was to return later on, and how!

On the day I recollect vividly, I'd spent the morning schmoozing with Eloise, as I am a late riser, especially after a late night of food and wine and faculty party rounds; Page had already ridden off somewhere, to exercise his horse. He came clapping back out of the redwood preserve around eleven; dismounting outside, he stopped to greet me. Afterward, we walked back to the barn, where the horse, still saddled, was waiting for him. Page seemed a bit preoccupied; finally, he came out with it: he wanted to ask my opinion on something that was troubling him.

It seemed that his father, who'd died a couple of years before, had for the last decade of his life been regularly getting in touch with his famous son, which wasn't something that made Page happy at all. Moreover, he kept telling Page that he was preparing his legacy, nothing less than the story of his life. As we walked into the shade of the stable out of the bright, warm coastal light, Page took my arm and turned me to look at a shelf on the right wall, where several trunks patched with ship labels from everywhere were ranged side by side.

"My father left his secretary — all right, his last mistress, I suppose — his estate, and willed me his autobiography. That's what I thought I'd ask your advice about."

I was nonplussed. Page continued, gazing past me and down towards the house, "He was failing for about ten years, heart, the consequences of a career of... well, it doesn't matter, you might call it dissipation, I guess. All that time he was dictating his life, having it typed up and bound in chapters, and indexed and all. Can you imagine! There it is," he said, pointing to an elegant, all-leather steamer, the kind of trunk one sees packed for people crossing in First

Class Cunard suites in 1930s movies. "That arrived a few months ago, after his affairs were settled. There must be fifty or so notebooks, I haven't counted. I did take a quick look at some of it when it came. Now I'm inclined to think the best thing is to just burn the lot."

"That boring?"

"That, no. He had rather a life; but really, it was just so damned..." Page's thin smile was inscrutable; but there was a pained, even haunted, look in his eye. He was a most upright man, reserved, tending towards the prudish, I thought, a type I'd never met except in fiction, a Jamesian character really.

We hauled the steamer trunk down. I brushed some dust and new cobwebs from it. Page stood by as I tugged at the straps and unclasped the buckles. Lifting the lid, I saw dozens of black binders, each fat with a hundred or so pages. I picked one up and opened it in the middle. White sheets, flawlessly typewritten.

"You take a look, while I go and rub down the horse."

I did take a look, more than a look. I sat and read avidly for an hour, flipping the pages of several manuscripts, taking in what I could, surprised and simply stunned. Henry Miller had nothing on Ward Smith, not even in his *Tropics*. Fitzgerald's notorious Long Island aristos, his Tom and Daisy Buchanan and their set, Nick Carraway's beautiful golfer, Jordan — they were insubstantial wraiths, mere imaginings of an outsider — compared to this narrator, who often read like Edmund Wilson's, in that grungy New York novel, *I Thought of Daisy*.

Page slapped his horse on the rump when he was done, and turned him out to the fenced pasture. Then he came and stood over me where I sat flabbergasted on a chopping block in the shade just inside the barn door. He looked down at me somberly and said, "So, you agree it ought to be burned. All of it." My jaw must have dropped like a dumbstruck clown's, because Page laughed aloud. "After what he has done to

the skies. First, though, if they are on heart medication, make sure it is within easy reach.

High praise is more than unnecessary stroking; it is a molding, through words, of events we would like to shape and help along. "We begin to praise when we begin to see a thing needs our assistance," Thoreau wrote in his *Journal*. To deny praise, or to offer it half-heartedly, is to deny much that needs to be improved upon, from untidy yards to banking practices to family dinners.

The truth is, we can use praise to get our way, much as we use other tools of manipulation, such as threats and blackmail. They are the two sides of the same coin, with this major exception: praise is pleasant, both for the praiser and the praised. Generally, praise does not end in litigation, ill will, or the jeopardizing of life and reputation. As Walter Savage Landor wrote in *Imaginary Conversations*, "The deafest man can hear praise and is slow to think any an excess."

Consider the dedication in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*:

If there be a pleasure in celebrating the distinguished merit of a contemporary ... where can I find one, in complimenting whom I can with more general approbation gratify those feelings? Your excellence not only in the Art over which you have long presided with unrivaled fame, but also in Philosophy and elegant Literature, is well known to the present, and will continue to be the admiration of future ages. Your equal and placid temper, your variety of conversation, your true politeness, by which you are so amiable in private society, and that enlarged hospitality which has long made your house a common centre of union for the great, the accomplished, the learned, and the ingenious; all these qualities I can, in perfect confidence of not being accused of flattery, ascribe to you.

And on and on, for another five hundred

words or so, goes Boswell's effusive, obviously flattering printed praise of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Sure, it's a bit much, considering Boswell probably wanted a discount rate on his portrait. But I'll bet it worked.

Compare that piece of prose to the current trend in book dedications, many of which sadly go something like: "For my wife, who typed the manuscript," or "For my husband, who did the dishes while I typed my manuscript." We traders in words need to be less miserly. These current dedications are reticent, to say the least, and probably do not earn the dedicator even one special meal, much less a lifetime of gratitude or a special rate on a portrait. Dedications so grudgingly made are the verbal equivalent of a sulk or pout — perhaps he didn't really do the dishes, perhaps her typing was atrocious — when what is called for is a cheer of thanks and gratitude.

Flattery may be the operative work in Boswell's dedication. We contemporaries are terrified of being called flatterers. We use harsh terms describing bodily functions to describe gestures once deemed graceful and even beneficial. Perhaps, however, it is not the time, but the place that so limits our impulse to praise and flatter. Flattery is the tool of the courtier, and we, moreover, are a country that gave a pink slip to its king and aristocracy. Consequently, having laid off the nobility and others who might have airs of superiority, we like to give the impression that we do not impress easily. Flattery, after all, demonstrates a willingness, even a determinedness, to be impressed.

This stubborn, adolescent rebellion against impressionability not only is winnowing out, in Darwinian manner, any praise genes left in the American biology, but is resulting in a number of unfortunate best-sellers, notably those about the royal family we fired. Secretly, we are very impressed by royalty. In fact, given the opportunity, we could curtsy as

deeply, and praise as extravagantly, as any dancing master being presented to the queen, should we ever be presented to a queen. Wouldn't it be wiser to simply give in to this impulse, to praise Lady Di to the skies for her beauty, her good will, her thinness, her hairdresser's skill, her stamina, her taste in punk rock, and get it over with quick, before yet another tacky best-seller must be written? Wouldn't praise, in the long run, be less painful to indulge in than guilty tabloid fantasy?

But praise, like energy, is never destroyed or created. It is always there in some form, whether we voice it or not. The reading public has decided that while it is not good manners to praise others, it is most certainly good manners, and even better psychology, to praise ourselves. This is called self-help.

"The advantage of doing one's own praising of oneself is that one can lay it on so thick and exactly in the right places," wrote Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh*. This belief has led to entire shelves of books dedicated to the proposition that while the purchaser of said books is all that is good and wonderful, everyone else is a mess and not to be tolerated.

But even here, alas, our attempts at praise fall far short of what others before us have achieved. I'm O.K. I run with the wolves. I do too much for others. I can't say "no." I learned a lot in kindergarten. Compare these paltry self-affirmations to one made by an expert self-praiser:

The gods have given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring ... I altered the minds of men and the colours of things; there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder.

Now that is self-praise indeed, made by the same man who declared to a flustered U.S.

customs inspector that he had nothing to declare but his genius. Oscar Wilde did a disservice to praise by refusing to be impressed by much except his blue and white dinnerware and Lily Langtry, but he was the guru of self-praise, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for his refusal to be humble or, worse, inarticulate about his own gifts.

The problem with such eloquent self-praise is that it may leave speechless those who would otherwise be tempted to give us a verbal pat on the back. "Generally, we praise only to be praised," said La Rochefoucauld, and saying for ourselves everything which we would have others say of us can lead to disastrous consequences, or at least stony silence. "I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility," admitted poor, boastful Oscar after his trial. While we generally praise others hoping and fully expecting that the favor will be returned, it is best to use a modicum of reserve when praising ourselves. Or, as Lord Chesterfield pithily stated, "Modesty is the only sure bait when you angle for praise."

There is, I am certain, an entire body of etiquette built around the rules of praise, an etiquette now as lost to 20th-century humankind as the dodo, a balanced national budget, and the fish knife. We can only flounder and guess our way through the labyrinths of what is praise, what is flattery, what is acceptable and welcome, what is ridiculous and laughable. If we are to praise intelligently and gracefully, most of us will have to make up the rules as we go along. Let us err on the side of generosity. Remember, gentle and intelligent readers, you who guide the masses out of their imprisoning darkness through your discriminating wisdom and shining goodness of spirit, Vaue-nargues' maxim: "It is a great sign of mediocrity to praise always moderately."

Jeanne Mackin is a writer living in Ithaca.

us, to have the gall to send me this, this..."

"Page! You, of all people! A historian! You'd destroy this mass of stories, this witness to the unknown life of the Twenties, the Thirties! Dos Passos can't hold a candle to Smith! New York, San Francisco, L.A.! Government, high life, low life! Who knows? How could you even...!"

"It's so ... scabrous. Call that a life! He disgusts me."

"Give it to me, then!" I cried. "Put it all in my car, if you can't stand to read it. I'll take it home. I'll take good care. I'm dying to go through it! It's marvellous. My God, at least for a novel, what source material! You can't just incinerate his life! It's your father!" I gasped a last appeal, to what I thought to be his conscience: "Page, goddammit, it's ... history!"

Page hummed a noncommittal "hmm hnn hnn." He took the half dozen loose-leafs I had on my lap and placed them back in the trunk. We strapped it shut and heaved it back between the others on the shelf.

That was the last time I knew anything of Ward Smith's legacy until a few years later, when I received a publisher's card, sent by Page, I guess, to announce the publication of *A Letter from My Father*, 472 pages, including an introductory essay by Page Smith. He had composed a good historical summary of the nature of the selected passages from his father's diaries, an essay that touched — albeit with the tongs of a cool "objectivity"

— on the scabrous and the scandalous, the wild sexual escapades, the 1920s boozing, but also on the politics of his father's times, and the vicissitudes of a life Page severely disapproved of. W. Ward Smith had been Governor Al Smith's secretary; he was privy to the post-War political scene of Tammany and New York State; he was a leading advertising executive in the days when advertising was going bigtime; he was a Lothario, a snob, an Episcopalian, a Republican, a WASP anti-Semite whose ancestors were on Long Island almost before it ever was Long Island; and he had produced and stage-managed that infamous America First Madison Square Garden rally that featured Father Coughlin and the Nazi-run and supported German-American Bund that fought Roosevelt's drift toward abandoning neutrality and entering the war on England's side. No wonder Page had been inclined to dispose of that whole damned and damning boodle of loose-leaf books.

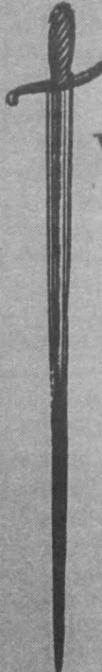
What he left out, I have no idea. All I wrote to Page about the book was that I thought he had done the right thing, that he had rescued a remarkable bit of history that neither social history nor contemporary history afforded, and that I liked his "judicious" introduction. I still hope the whole corpus is deposited somewhere, in the Page Smith Library at Santa Cruz, perhaps. But I fear not.

In the end, Page had it both ways: he had

excerpted what he could bear of his reprobate and unregenerate father's life and published it; and now he had obituaries that mentioned only his own triumphs: those works of fine, narrative historical prose. Still, it may be his father who had the last laugh. Surely it would delight that handsome rascal's heart to know

that librarians have classified his fascinating book — all too short at 400-plus pages — as "erotic" literature. Shades of Giacomo Casanova!

Jascha Kessler is an emeritus professor at UCLA.



Measure

FOR

Measure

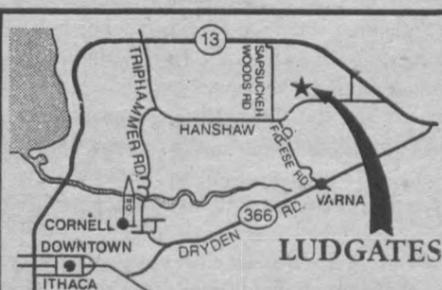
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What It Was Like

...continued from September issue.

Kenneth Evett

In Cambridge, my generous mother-in-law made room for all of us in her Follen Street home and we began a period of waiting; waiting for the arrival of an infant of the right gender to be named Elisa, or "Lizzy," after Mr. Bennett's favorite daughter in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and waiting for me to be drafted.

I found interim work teaching an evening class at the Vesper George School of Art and daytime employment as a frame maker in the Charles Street shop of a likeable lewd-talking rascal named Boris Mirski. His place consisted of a small art gallery in front and a work area in back that contained frame-making equipment, a chest filled with *objets d'art*, including a number of pornographic Japanese prints, and a large packing case in which he could quickly hide when irate customers came to pick up long-overdue frames. Mirski specialized in making fancy hand-decorated moldings for successful Boston artists such as Karl Zerbe, but his livelihood depended on producing horrendous red lead and gilt shadow-box frames for upwardly mobile suburban housewives. I became his accomplice in this depraved enterprise.

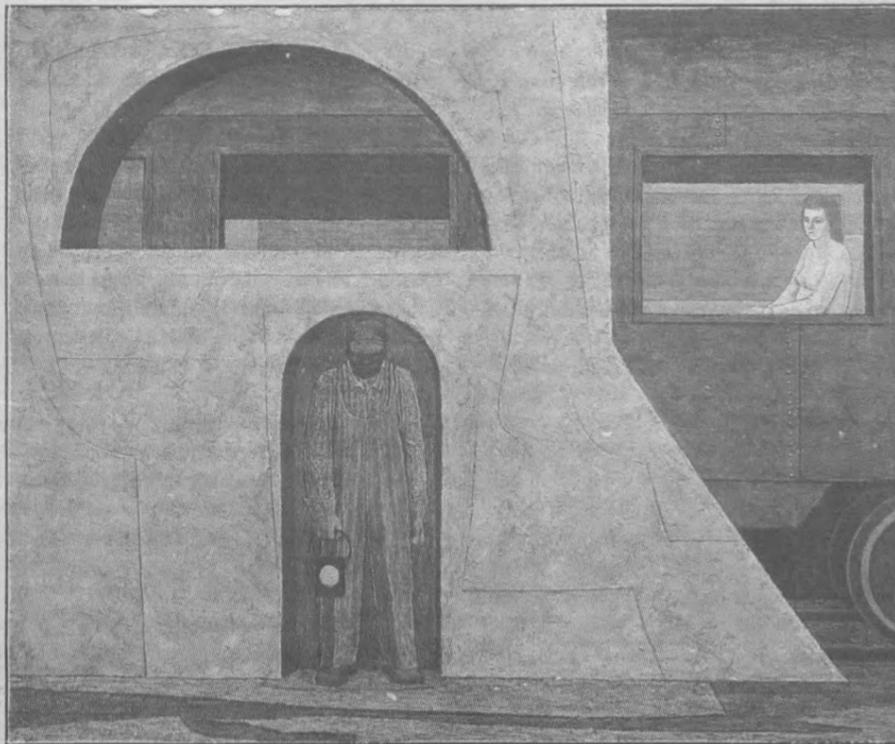
In those days, in addition to its usual self-proclaimed role as "the hub of the universe," Boston was the center for a group of nationally renowned expressionist painters; among them Hyman Bloom, Jack Levine, and David Aronson. There was also a subgroup of young expressionists in the area, including Seymour Swetstoff, Bernard Chaet, and Arthur Polansky, who exhibited in Mirski's gallery. Although these artists and I had little in common except a vestigial commitment to social themes, Mirski included one of my compulsively formal paintings of defense workers in a group show, and local critic Dorothy Adlow expressed surprise at finding such an anomaly in that company. The Boston Expressionists were soon relegated to obscurity as the more extreme New York modes began to dominate the art scene; those who did not withdraw into embittered isolation, either settled for teaching jobs (Chaet became an art professor at Yale and did a stint as Dean of the School of Fine Arts) or wound up among the eminent architects, fashionable New York artists, distinguished has-beens, and competent unknowns of the National Academy of Design.

Shortly after the birth of our second child, I was called up and accepted by the Army. However, the war was drawing to a close, and my draft board informed me that I should find some sort of defense work for the duration. In one of the strangest arrangements in the history of patronage, I was helped out by one of Mirski's customers, a wealthy junk dealer who specialized in collecting used car batteries, old tires, and art objects. For some reason, he liked my work and hired me to travel around New England in his junk truck, toting and loading old automobile parts for his profit and the war effort. Although the work was hard and dirty, I enjoyed the travel and my first exposure to New England architecture and landscape. I remember to this day the vision of summer cottages, seen from a distance, lined up along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean at Oquonquit. On a hot day in August, I was hauling tires around a stinking yard hard by a cod-liver oil plant, when the fearful news came over the office radio that our country had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. After the second bomb devastated Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered, the terrible "good" war was over, and my wife and I joined in the wild victory celebration on the Boston Common.

Following that event, for the first time in four years, we began to consider our plans

for the future. I registered with a teachers' agency, and was interviewed at a Boston hotel by the vice president of Salem College, a Moravian school for upper-class southern girls in Winston Salem, North Carolina. I was hired on the spot, and thus became a charter member of that post-war group of American artists who took up college teaching as a way of simultaneously supporting their families and leading a creative life.

When I went south alone to start my new career and search for a place to stay, I found myself in what seemed to be a foreign country. The refined red-brick buildings of the Salem campus evoked a sense of old-world culture. The luxuriant southern plants looked exotic, and the appealing sounds of local speech and the friendliness of the white southerners contrasted agree-



Underground by Kenneth Evett

ably with the hard, flat Boston dialect and the distant behavior of northern Yankees. But then there were the shocking spectacles of blacks struggling to get to the back of a crowded bus, black-white signs at segregated drinking fountains and rest rooms, and squalid shacks in the countryside that testified to the poverty-stricken state of both whites and blacks. These visual and social polarities generated an ambivalent perception of life in the South, a region that seemed both sensually attractive and repulsively sordid.

As a northern left-wing liberal, I found the proprieties and constraints of a Moravian church school somewhat oppressive, but I soon discovered a few kindred tennis-playing, liberal-minded spirits on the faculty who helped me to adjust to the environment. In addition to studio courses, I had the presumption to teach an art history course in which I barely managed to stay one jump ahead of my students each day. I also taught a weekly art appreciation course for the wives of local bankers and tobacco, and underwear tycoons, and soon became acquainted with a segment of Winston society that was not bound by the Moravian moral precepts imposed on the Salem community.

During my first year in North Carolina, W. W. Norton died. His widow, Polly, sent me her husband's collection of handsome neckties, and asked us to spend the summer at her modern country home in Wilton, Connecticut as caretakers of the place and as chaperons for her daughter Annie and Annie's friends when they came up from New York on weekend visits. Annie had become a disciple of Sir Bernard Pares at Sarah Lawrence, and his teaching seemed to intensify her rebellion against the economic and social values of her own class. She had assembled a multiracial crew of friends who came to Wilton for weekend gatherings during which we all drank beer,

palavered about political issues, sang folk songs, and took nude nighttime dips in the swimming pool. While our chaperoning may have been unorthodox, my wife and I enjoyed the company of these freewheeling young people.

That summer, New York art dealer Antoinette Kraushaar came to Wilton to look at my work. Her father had established a gallery that promoted artists of the "Ash Can" school, a one-time radical group of painters such as Sloan, Glackens, Luks, Prendergast, and my former teacher, Boardman Robinson, who had written to Antoinette on my behalf. She took me on as a member of her gallery group, and, being that rare creature, a competent and honorable art dealer, she held her own in the feral, competitive struggles of the New York art world, yet remained loyal to her

tine Kendall, who was Polly Norton's sister and a member of the wealthy New York-Boston Herter clan, asked us to come to her estate in Virginia to help establish a foundation for young artists. Kitty had studied at the Yale School of Fine Arts and had run away with the then dean of the school, William Sargent Kendall, to settle in the Virginia mountains near Hot Springs. There they built a board and batten mansion that contained three large studios, one for each of them and another for Kendall's artist daughter. They also constructed a covered riding ring for winter gallops on their Arabian horses and built two houses for their caretaker and servants. After Kendall's death, Kitty decided that this privileged enclave could be used as the physical locale for her foundation.

Both of the Kendalls were advocates of the theory of "Dynamic Symmetry," a popular concept at that time developed by their protégé, Jay Hambridge. Hambridge had formulated a system for making art that offered mathematical certitude. On the basis of his study of natural forms, he devised a method of organizing surface rhythms upon a structure of diagonal lines of force and their intersections. The Kendalls would import a model from New York City, place her in an outdoor setting (a risky business in a region inhabited by rattlesnakes), contemplate her bodily forms — eyes, nipples, navel, and pubic hair — and arrange them to comply with a pre-established geometric structure. This procedure made for a predictable order at the cost of imaginative freedom. It soon went out of fashion. On the other hand, the Kendall house was designed on the Hambridge system of proportion, and its chestnut-paneled dining, living, and music rooms were grand and serene.

At the outset, we persuaded artist friends from Winston to come to the Kendall estate as the first participants in our plan. Later, I traveled to New York to interview other possible customers. While in town I stopped by for a visit with my dealer at Kraushaar. As we were chatting, she received a telephone call from John Hartell, another member of her gallery group and chairman of the Art Department at Cornell. He asked if she knew of an artist who might be available on short notice to teach the spring term in Ithaca. Casually, she turned to me and asked if I was interested. I said yes. I called Kitty, who, recognizing that such an opportunity for future employment was more certain than anything she could offer at her foundation, released me from my obligation to her. Gilmore Clarke, dean of Cornell's College of Architecture, interviewed me in his New York office and, with a dispatch that would be unheard of in this day of search committees and affirmative action, hired me then and there.

After returning to Hot Springs to prepare for yet another migration, I took a train to New York and then boarded a Lehigh Valley sleeping car for the overnight trip to Ithaca. Next morning I was greeted by the sight of a grim February day — rolling hills covered with snow, a small town of ordinary buildings located on flat ground, and streets, blackened with cinders and flanked by mounds of dirty snow, that climbed a steep hill to an upland plateau cut by two deep gorges, their rocky walls interspersed with icicles that hung over the half-frozen waterfalls and pools of the stream below. Between these awesome chasms was a level area occupied by sturdy stone buildings. These structures, firmly planted on high ground, overlooked expansive upstate hills and the flat shining plane of Lake Cayuga; a dramatic site for a great university and a proper setting for the discoveries, creations, and contentions of academic life.

Kenneth Evett is an emeritus professor of art at Cornell and former art critic for The New Republic.

Her successor, Carole Pesner, has carried on the tradition of responsible dealing. Now in its 110th year, the Kraushaar Gallery has moved from lower Broadway to 5th Avenue, to 57th Street, to upper Madison Avenue, to its present site on 5th Avenue opposite the Trump Tower, where it stands for cultural values that contrast with those of that glitzy monument to the Reagan era across the street.

In Wilton, we met a friend of the Norton family who had a job with the *New York Times*, and through his efforts I learned about the workings of influence in the art world. When I had my first one-man show at Kraushaar in 1948, he mentioned my name to Howard Devree, the *Times* art critic, who gave me a good review and used an image of my work on the Sunday art page. Though I never met him, he subsequently wrote favorable notices about my work on three occasions, with reproductions of my paintings. Once he used a grand, large image of mine as an illustration at the top of the Sunday art section, well above a work by Jack Levine. Nowadays such coverage would be unusual, and, were it to happen, would probably make a name for the artist. In my case, very little came of it.

In addition to my chaperoning chores at the Norton house, I spent the summer painting oils of working-class people, and when we returned to Winston Salem in the fall, I took along my latest social-realist image of a carpenter, which I then entered in a juried exhibition at the North Carolina State Art Society. The jurors were curator Juliana Force and director Lloyd Goodrich of the Whitney Museum. In one of the classic examples of short-sighted art establishment judgment, they awarded my entry the top prize and granted a mere honorable mention to an emigré Black Mountain College art professor named Joseph Albers.

During my second year at Salem, Chris-