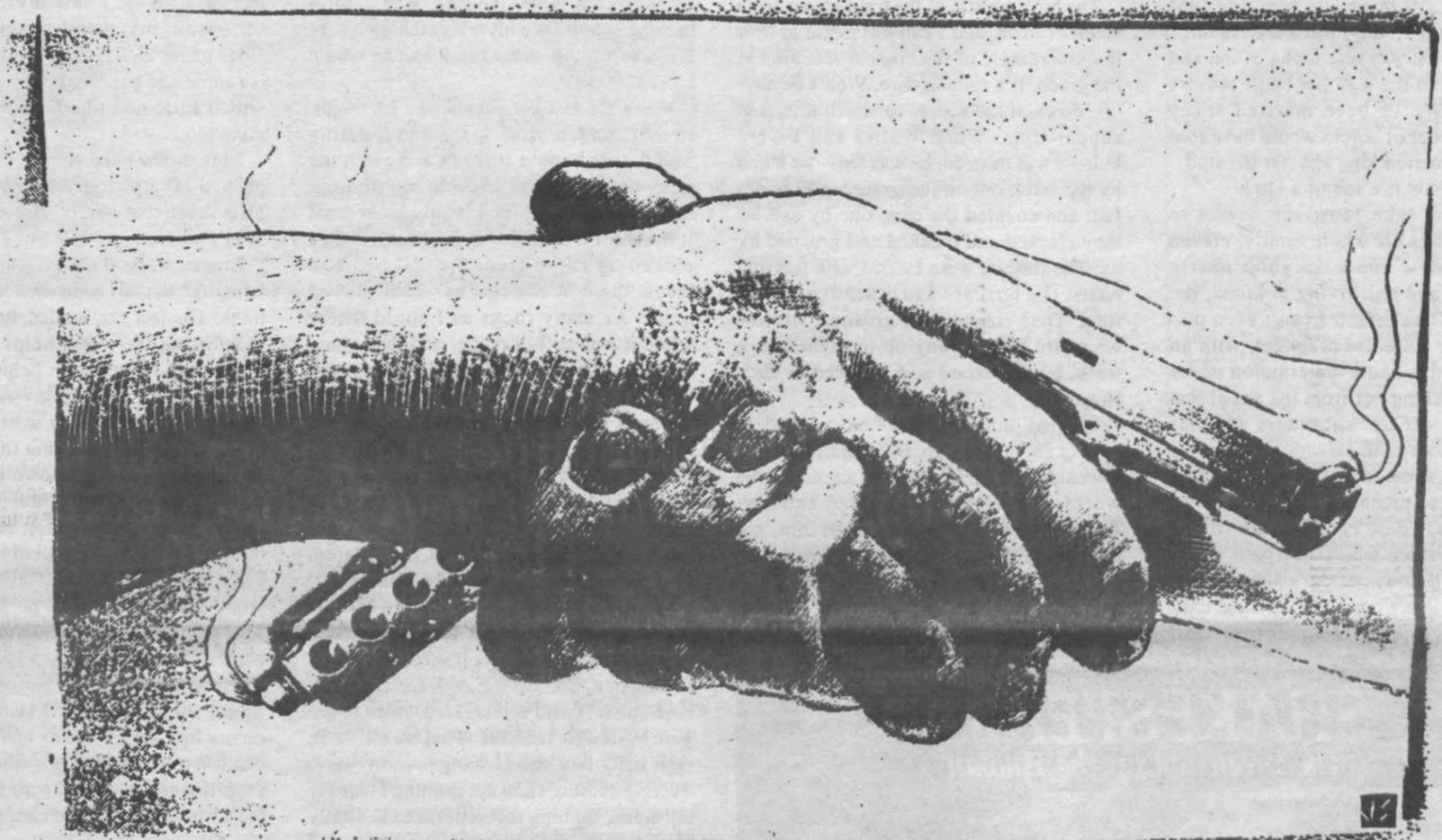


The BOOKPRESS

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE LITERARY ARTS

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Irish Journal



Jack Sherman

Kevin Murphy

I. Carlingford

Carlingford is a small jewel of a town in Louth, itself the smallest county in Ireland. It is located on the east coast just off the Irish sea in a protected harbor whose inlet, or lough, extends upland the ten miles into County Down. It sits at the foot of a 3,000-foot mountain, Slieve Foy, whose peak is often as not covered with clouds moving in from the west, and whose hills and slopes are dotted with sheep grazing the grass and heather. It's more a village than a town, with a population under 1000, and if you want to go shopping in department stores or larger outlets, you have to travel to Dundalk about 8 or 9 miles south around the peninsula, or 7 or 8 miles up the lough road to Newry, which is just across the border with Northern Ireland.

I'd first come to Carlingford over 20 years ago on something of an unexpected sidetrip. I had been best man at my brother's wedding in Paris that summer, and there had been a sale price on a Paris-Dublin-Paris roundtrip which would allow me an excursion to explore my roots, or tubers as I liked to say, given my fondness for potatoes. At the time I knew almost nothing about my connection to Ireland. My father had emigrated from this part of Ireland in the 1920's, following his brother, my Uncle Barney, who had come over the year before. Since my father died just after my fifth birthday—a freak appendicitis mishap—I have almost no memory of who he was, other than a few images, mostly in his New York City policeman's uniform. He had been in America for over 10 years when he met and

married my mother, so most of her recollections had to do with what had happened since he had been in the U.S. One of Barney's sons, though, my cousin Donald, had told me we had relatives in Carlingford, and that I should be sure to look up the McKevitts if I ever got to that town.

That initial visit is now part of the town legend. The bus conductor, worried that the young Yank on the bus with the broken suitcase wouldn't find his way to the McKevitts, had the driver redirect the bus from the town station to the door of their grocery store. Joe McKevitt, standing in the store in his apron, looked sternly dubious as I entered. But when I introduced myself as his wife Lily's cousin from America, he immediately extended his hand with a bright smile and said, "Well then, welcome home!" He took me into his house, which connected to the store, sat me in the parlor, and set his children running. Dan was to get a steak from the shop for my tea; Elizabeth Ann was to fly upstairs and start a bath to take the dust off my travels. A few minutes later, when Lily herself arrived, the welcome was complete. A woman with bright red hair and a wonderfully infectious smile, she was delighted with everything I had to say. She couldn't get over discovering that she had another first cousin sitting in front of her.

It was later that day, though, that I came across the other side, the underside, of this familial Eden. Lily had to pick up some of the bulk goods for the grocery shop and asked me if I wanted to accompany her to Newry, which was just a few minutes up the road. The scenery along the road was spectacular, with the Cooley mountains rising just off to the left and Carlingford lough, which was about a half mile wide at that point, separating

this side of the land from the Mourne mountains which were rising on the far side of the water. Looking a bit mischievous, Lily casually asked me if I were carrying any political papers. I didn't have a clue as to what she was talking about; the Vietnam War was over, and no one burned their draft cards anymore. Then I noticed two things at once. In the water was an enormous British gunboat, or at least it looked enormous in the inlet, and its guns seemed pointed at the road we were on. And ahead of us was a fortified roadblock with machine gun towers. A very young soldier with an M-16 was directing automobiles, one by one, into a central area where the driver would get out, walk to a concrete bunker, and slip some identification in through the slit in the fortification. Lily turned to me and said, "Those are the visitors."

I'd come back to Ireland and Carlingford a number of times since, and this summer I had a grant from Ithaca College to attend the Yeats International School in Sligo. That initial visit had intensified an interest I had in modern Irish literature, and for the last eight or nine years I had been teaching more of it in my courses. My last time over had been in 1993 as part of a sabbatic to research the Field Day Theatre Company in Derry (*Bookpress*, Summer 1993). Using my father's thatched-roof cottage which my cousins still owned in nearby Whitestown as a base of operations, I drove up to Derry and down to Dublin (or as the Irish insist, down to Derry and up to Dublin).

At that time, the political and economic scene was dismal. Ireland was in the tailend of an extended recession, which produced layoffs in Dublin and Galway, especially in the

high-tech, high-paying sectors. The Provisional IRA was still squared off, as they had been for over 20 years, against the Protestant paramilitaries and the British Army. For all the talk of compromise and reconciliation, the Major government hadn't shook itself free of the Thatcher legacy ("No, no, no") which refused any recognition of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provos. Gerry Adams's books were banned in the Republic, and hopes of peace talks foundered with each new act of violence. In the two weeks I was there, there were three assassinations, and things got much worse in terms of bombings and killings before they got better.

Clearly, I was now returning to a changed country. For the past five years, the Celtic Tiger had come to life. The GNP of Ireland had grown the fastest of all the countries in the European Union, and the Republic had sustained low unemployment and low inflation. In terms of politics, too, there had at last been what everyone hoped was a breakthrough in the north.

In April, after four years of broken cease-fires, walk-outs, and endless political posturing and in-fighting, George Mitchell had, just before Easter, facilitated a peace accord to which all the significant parties had signed on. (Interestingly enough, this was called the Mitchell Accord for a day or two to acknowledge Mitchell's role as a neutral American arbitrator, but almost immediately it was anointed the Good Friday Agreement, reminding everyone that psychic calendars in Ireland, north and south, are ecclesiastical.) More importantly, in a general referendum held simultaneously in the north and south on

continued on page 6

Fiction

Snapping the Heartwood

Gary Guinn

Each time I bring the ax down and the red oak wood pops open and the chunks fall off the sides of the block, I think of my brother Walter. Sweat drips off the end of my nose and my eyes sting and my shirt sticks to my back. The sun, rust-colored, just touches the hilltop off the meadow's edge.

Naomi, my wife, is sitting at the kitchen table looking at her hands. She's been there since Emma left. Over an hour. Hasn't done a thing about supper, and it's almost dark.

Emma's always coming and going. That's natural. She's Walter's wife. I should have seen it coming. Emma has, from the beginning, shared the pregnancy with Naomi. Morning sickness, the first movement in her belly. But I see Naomi's eyes, the quick way she looks at me and then away, and the way her smile wavers and fades. We've been married seven years. A breeder of horses would have sold the mare at auction long ago. Or the stud.

Jake Morrison is a son of a bitch.

Every time Jake Morrison comes to town, he brings his whole family, eleven kids, the oldest one a daughter nearly twenty-five and still living at home, the youngest still an infant. I can't even picture his wife Kate not pregnant, with an enormous belly like a watermelon under her dress, sticking out from the shawl that drops down off her shoulders and lies along both sides of it.

I cross the street to avoid them whenever I can. But sometimes I'm trapped in one of the stores. There is no escape from a family of thirteen when they pour into a store and spill down all the aisles. Even if Jake or Kate don't see me, one of the children is sure to sing out "Mornin' Mr.

Bass," and then Kate will swoop down on me with that missionary smile dripping with compassion and stand there bouncing the latest shoat on her shoulder and ask after Naomi, that damning hopeful note in her voice as she looks at me with her face turned slightly to one side.

And something rises from my belly, some blind perversity, and I want to say, "Since Naomi and I aren't having carnal relations at present and they don't look likely in the near future, you might as well stop asking." I want to see the smile drop off her face at the words, the infant suspended in her mute surprise. But instead I say, "Oh fine, we're both fine. And your family? All well, I hope." And I disengage myself as politely as I can and slip out the door cursing under my breath the easy plenitude of people like the Morrisons.

The high whistle of the train comes from south of town, and I can just begin to hear the low rumble of the engines straining at the grade. It's running late. Won't be anyone down at the square to watch it pass at supper time. When Walter and I were kids—I was thirteen, he was ten—we stood by the track out on the grade up Piggot's Hill and counted the cars, one by one, as they clacked and creaked and groaned by us. The flatcars were loaded with ties and posts, the boxcars had a handrail and a rung. They creaked and groaned, so slow we could have swung up onto them at a walk, but we stood and watched as they slipped by.

We had jumped it there before, rode a mile or so, just for fun. But this time, when it would have made all the difference in the world, Walter folded. Turned and ran. Right before he ran, I smiled at him, my heart beating so fast I thought it would come out of my throat. But I knew as soon as I saw his face. He wouldn't hardly look at me, wouldn't look at the train. Just stood

there with his hands together in front of him, eyes on the cross-ties at his feet. I knew it was over. Knew it was no use to say anything. But I said it anyway. Come on Walter, let's go, I said.

We'd had enough of Virgil and Mama. I was sick of her whimpering, of her taking it the way she did, her poor-baby hands fluttering around my face when Virgil was through with me, and her cooing over Walter in the rocker as he cried. It was her that Walter couldn't leave. He was running back to her instead of getting on the train. A mama's boy.

So I stood there and watched the cars go by. And in the heavy smell of creosote, diesel, and hot metal, the ground vibrating under me, our clothes in a gunny sack in my hand, I reached out and touched each car, the warm moving metal of it. The hot air, stirred by their passing, was hard to breathe. I could see myself grabbing a handle, stepping up onto a rung. The air would be cool there.

When the last car passed and I thought, in that sudden open space and quieting sound, that I could still run and catch the train, but didn't and knew in my stomach that I wouldn't, I think I finally knew what it meant to be a Bass in Delaney. And I picked up rocks from the rail bed and threw them at the last car as it moved away. As many rocks as I could throw while it was still in range, and then some more, into the emptiness, the silence it left behind.

Emma was wearing her maternity dress, six months pregnant. She's so little it don't look like much, but it's there, the swelling pushing out the cloth enough to see. They were drinking coffee in the kitchen when I got home from work. I must have stared, because Emma giggled like a little girl who's wearing a new dress to the end-of-school exercises. And the look on her face, a little shy, like she was trying not to look so satisfied. It made my stomach churn.

"Emma," I said and nodded, "nice to see you." Nice to see you. That swelling in your belly is a loaded shotgun in my face. There's nothing I can do, nothing I can say to Naomi, nothing that will make her belly swell that way. There's nothing I can do. I left them there and came out back and started splitting wood, not bothering to change clothes.

When Emma left, they came out the

back door. Maybe she wanted to see me stare again. But when she said I'll see you later Henry, I didn't look up, just said yep sure and split another piece of wood. Naomi went right back into the kitchen.

Then I looked. I watched as Emma walked around the side of the house and out to the road. Like a little porcelain figure. Straight, breakable. I almost expected a hand to reach down out of the sky and move her along.

I went up on the porch to the screen door. Naomi sat at the table like an old, old woman propped up in the corner waiting to die. I opened my mouth to say her name. Naomi. It's Hebrew, she once told me, for "my pleasantness." But it stuck down in my throat, and my belly seized up like I was trying not to laugh. Or maybe it was swelling, pushing out my shirt like Emma's dress. I saw myself with Kate Morrison, my shawl hanging down the sides of my belly. Kate smiles that sheepish smile and pats her belly and looks at me with a little nod like I'm supposed to pat mine too.

I bit down hard there at the door and pushed my lips together, but I laughed, a little laugh that barely snorted, and Naomi didn't move.

Emma walked away, humming a low hum, like the last train car rolling down the track. The last car, loaded, heavy, leaving.

Splitting the wood helps. Thinking of Walter as I swing the ax helps. The ax pops through with a "chuck." A gnarled and knotty piece refuses to split, grabs the ax head, and I have to swing the whole thing up over my head and down onto the block with a heavy "clump" three times to make it yield. I think of Walter, standing by the tracks, head down, not getting on the train. I grunt when I bring the stubborn lump of wood down and the ax pushes farther in. The wood splits and falls away, and the pieces hang together by a spindly string of heartwood stretched across the block. Sweat stings my eyes. I taste the salt of it on my lips. I raise the ax and bring it down one last time, putting my weight into it, and snap the heartwood like a match and bury the ax head deep in the chopping block.

Gary Guinn has lived in the southern Ozark Mountains all his life. He teaches literature at John Brown University in Arkansas.

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CORRECTION

In the March, 1998, *The Bookpress* printed an article by Jascha Kessler entitled "Midnight Special," describing an evening spent with James Dickey and several other poets in 1969. In the article, Mr. Kessler mistakenly identifies the poet Robert Sward as a principle player in the evening's revelry. Mr. Sward was not present at this event and any reference to him in "Midnight Special" is incorrect. We extend our apologies to Mr. Sward. Readers interested in the correspondence between Mr. Sward and Mr. Kessler regarding this error should visit our Website at: www.thebookery.com/bookpress.

—The Editors.

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Hearing Voices



Carole Maso

Destiny Kinal

Carole Maso is the author of the novels *Ava*, *The American Woman in the Chinese Hat*, and *Aureole*. Now on maternity leave from her position as director of Brown University's Creative Writing program, Maso recently spoke with Destiny Kinal about her newly released novel *Defiance*, which, some critics are saying, establishes Maso as one of the important writers of her generation.

Kinal: You've said that "the nature of language and desire has been a constant obsession with me, *how* we tell a story." That it's crucial that we make those two meld and marry more, crucial to the reader's understanding of the *meaning* being conveyed, largely through language and syntax.

Maso: Yes. I think that every project presents itself uniquely. Perhaps you've got a strand of narrative, perhaps you just hear a voice, but after a point it becomes clear how the story is to be told, in what kind of language, and what sort of shape the project wants to take. All of these things are not casual relationships but the actual stuff that makes a book really resonate.

In *Defiance*, there are two very divergent

strains: the lyrical and the narrative, moving the story forward. An excruciating tension for me, this friction between the narrative and the lyric impulse. And I think this is part of why you feel the predicament of the narrator. The book was all about prison. Somehow the form itself suggests this.

K: Did you engender the idea of Bernadette all at once? Was the idea in you when you started to write the book or did she grow into this monster?

M: She had a sound to her. When I could hear the way she spoke, I knew that she would reveal herself through her voice. When she first came to me, she was rather frightening and distant, and I just knew if I let her go on, she would become for me complex and interesting.

You know, I put the book away several times. But after being relatively free for most of my life just having odd silly jobs, now suddenly being a teacher, and a full-time respectable member of society, I felt like my life was over. I felt like I was in a prison. And so I tapped into that.

Though I haven't written anything political since *Ghost Dance*, I felt very keenly the death penalty coming back in New York State. All of a sudden there were many concrete things starting to play into this. I've never written in rage either and I found that that was something that Bernadette and this book were demanding.

K: I remember your being concerned about *Defiance*, that you wanted to subvert the convention and yet you knew that you were working within the convention. And that was part of the prison idea.

M: And part of the tension. You know, I wasn't happy with it for a long time. I got the galleys back from the publisher, and at that point, they expect you will make few changes. Instead, I rewrote the whole thing; it cost me a zillion dollars. Oh well.

K: I can imagine what the publisher thought: "the difficult, but amazing, Carole Maso."

M: But I knew! I didn't care if I spent my whole advance; I had to do whatever needed to be done. And now I'm actually very happy with it.

K: Have you ever read Susan Dodd's book *Mamaw*? She told me that she was sort of horrified with the character she'd brought into being. But she realized then that it was a part of her and it strengthened her a great deal to have found that. I'm wondering how you feel about Bernadette finally?

M: I never think of my characters as people, but as intensities on a page, events. Events of language. And so I've never had a character overtake me, really. I don't have that relationship to my characters for some reason. To me, Bernadette's a compilation of language and pressures; I hear her and I feel her rhythms. She's a part of me in my fear, in my vulnerability, in my mixed emotions but she's not a real person—she's just a kind of language. It's a peculiar thing to say because I always hear about characters taking over writers' lives and being in the character all day long, et cetera. Yet I've never had that, I don't know what that is.

K: Where did you find Bernadette's voice? How did it come to you?

M: I had begun reading and also seeing productions of Shakespearean tragedies and I started hearing this inflated, slightly pretentious, raging voice. "Appalling ruin of another afternoon," she says. In a line like that, I knew everything else there was to know, even though I hadn't written a word.

K: You said that *Defiance* really began in music.

M: I write all my books to music. And with *Defiance* I used a lot of rock and roll. Which is different from my ordinary...well, there's no typical music that I use but I needed something harder-edged and louder

continued on page 10

Defiance.
Carole Maso.
Dutton, 1998.
264 pages, \$23.95.

"It seems to me rather pointless to compare writing by women published in the mainstream and writing by men published in the mainstream," Carole Maso's letter to the editor in November's *Harper's* began, "as all writers, both male and female, who publish there must by necessity mimic the dominant forms in order to be published at all."

Carole Maso loves a mess—documents flawed and alive. She disdains the pursuit of the airtight, the deadliness of perfection.

Her new novel, *Defiance*, is a story of imprisonment. Its narrator, Bernadette, is a genius, warped by the events of her childhood. This misfit, who has come into her own as a mathematics professor at an unnamed university that grooms the children of the elite, has been inspired to shape herself into the instrument of a strange and ritualistic revenge. "I cannot stress enough my dismay at the peculiar behavioral habits of the heterosexual.... Their tonguing... Their betrayals and ruptures. How these men disgust me—their punches and winks, their subtexts."

Tension immediately establishes itself in style; *Defiance* strains against two traces. A lyrical voice in italics sets up against a circular narrative, iterative and feminine. Together, language and form conjure the actual prison where Bernadette awaits execution after being convicted of the slaughter of two of her male students. We are sobered when the text begins to mimic prison bars, narrow stripes falling across the page.

By the time the sheer monstrosity of Bernadette's algebraic constructs begin to reveal themselves to us, in all their compulsive unreasonable logic, we have already begun to vibrate sympathetically with the character, first as a child, in the poignancy of her relationship with her brother Fergus, killed in Vietnam, and later with her capacity to long for normalcy, to imagine that it can still be achieved.

After putting *Defiance* down, I have begun to think in the language of mathematics: let $t =$ all the trees in the world.

"Three will equal six. Six will be red. Fusion of purple and afternoon. And seven will equal darkness tinged with blood. And x the scalloped panty he moves toward. And eight years old could equal magenta or no or stop, couldn't it? Don't. Wait."

Carole Maso has breached the mainstream.

—Destiny Kinal



Ben Shahn

BEN SHAHN

AN ARTIST'S LIFE

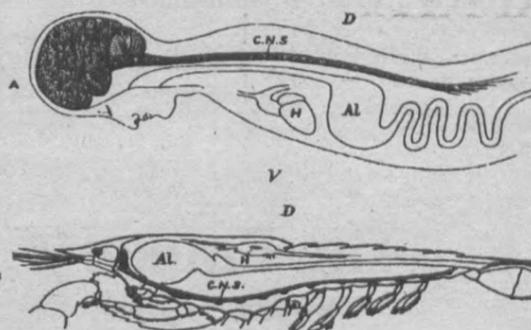
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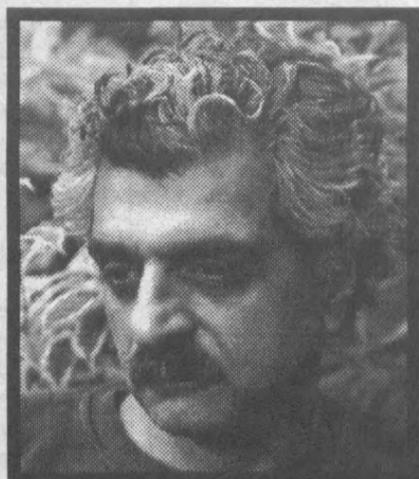
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Saturday, November 7, 4:00 p.m.

Tariq Ali

Writer, filmmaker, and political activist Tariq Ali will read from his historical novel, **The Book of Saladin**, which explores the world of twelfth-century Cairo. The novel is the imagined biography of the Sultan Salah al-Din, his rise to power, his relation to Islam, and his quest to recapture Jerusalem from the Crusaders. While the novel is a medieval tale, much of it will be recognizable to those who follow contemporary political and cultural debates in the Middle East. Tariq Ali is the author of numerous books on politics and world history, including **1968: Marching in the Streets**, and four novels. **The Book of Saladin** is the second in a planned quartet of novels depicting confrontation between Islamic and Christian civilizations.

This event is co-sponsored by THE BOOKPRESS.

Sunday, November 8, 3:00 p.m.

Bunny McCune & Deb Traunstein

In their new book, **Girls to Women, Women to Girls**, psychotherapists McCune and Traunstein discuss the rites of passage and rituals that are paramount in a girl's difficult transition to womanhood. They will be joined at this event by many of the women who contributed their stories, experiences, and revelations to this important collection.

Sunday, November 29, 4:00 p.m.

Benedict Anderson

Renowned scholar Benedict Anderson discusses his new collection, **The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World**. The "Spectre of Comparisons" arises as nations stir into self-awareness, matching themselves against others, and becoming whole through the exercise of the imagination. Anderson explores these effects as they work their way through politics and culture. Benedict Anderson is the Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor of International Studies at Cornell. He is the author of **Java in a Time of Revolution, Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia**, and the classic study, **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism**.

This event is co-sponsored by THE BOOKPRESS.

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The Fax

is the vagabond in a black coat
with a secret. Touch a button and wait.
Try not to confuse it
for something else, although

like sex, the body politic, we drop
a fax on someone as we would
our tongue or a bomb. Dynamics shift
and influence expectations. Once

we've faxed another it's difficult
to return to phone. India and Pakistan.
We test who's beyond our vision
while the paper negotiates the slot.

What's the likelihood of faxes interruptus?
What words will excite the Palestinians
and not upset the Jews? All of us
moving from lover to lover, from fax

to nuke, determined to get there first.
Because it's possible that history
is only the perpetual relay
of invention, Eros and power,

and our task is to wait on the street
for the vagabond to hand us
the glossy page, that message we sent
to warn ourselves of what we might become.

—Thom Ward

Thom Ward is a poet and an editor at BOA Press.

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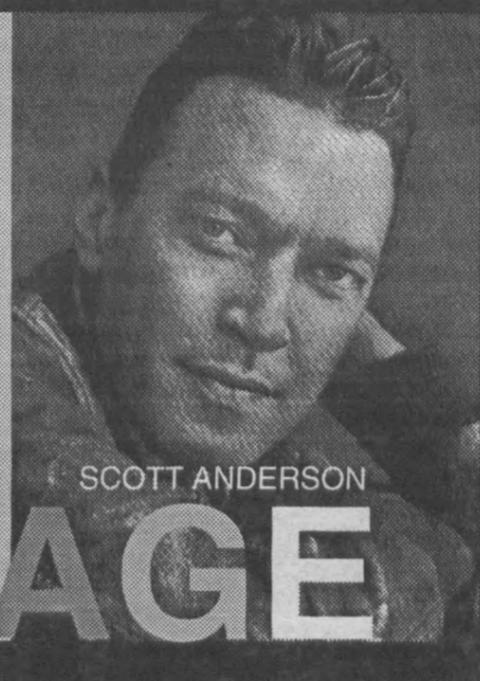
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Shadows of Jerusalem

The Book of Saladin.

Tariq Ali.

Verso, 1998.

367 pages, \$25.00.

Jason Cons

In the introduction to his novel, *The Book of Saladin*, author and filmmaker Tariq Ali writes, "Any fictional reconstruction of the life of a historical figure poses a problem for the writer. Should actual historical evidence be disregarded in the interests of a good story? I think not. In fact the more one explores the imagined inner life of the characters, the more important it becomes to remain loyal to historical facts and events..." This is a particularly difficult task when exploring historical events as far removed and as disputed as the Crusades. For Mr. Ali, this literary problematic is further complicated by a predetermined, ideological objective. *The Book of Saladin* is the second in a planned quartet of novels re-exploring various historical conflicts between the Muslim and Christian faiths from the perspective of the Islamic "Other."

These novels are decidedly postcolonial in scope, exploring such historically infamous events as the destruction of Islam in Spain, in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, and the reclamation of Jerusalem after the first Crusade in *The Book of Saladin*. Tariq Ali self-consciously steps into the discourse of recasting Western imperialism. His novels explore these conflicts not as righteous Christian conquest, but as attacks on and defenses of the empire of Islam. Thus the "imagined inner lives" of their central characters take on allegorical import as they are cast in the light of history. Not only do historical events become important to the lives of the characters, they become the vehicles through which these imagined inner lives are understood.

The Book of Saladin is the fictional biography of the Salah al-Din (Saladin), the twelfth century Sultan of Egypt and Syria. The biography is related through the Jewish scholar, Isaac ibn Yakub, who the Sultan chooses as his personal scribe. The text is a distillation of the history of the Sultan as told by himself, his advisors, his friends, and his wives; the central events surrounding his jihad to drive out the Franj (Crusaders) from what we now know as the Middle East and the campaign to recapture al-Kadisiya (Jerusalem); and the story of the scribe himself. The epic historical events of the text are juxtaposed with Ibn Yakub's own interpretations of history, his removed relation, as a Jew, to Muslim governance, his personal successes and tragedies, and his developing relationship with Salah al-Din and the various members of his court.

As Ibn Yakub accepts his charge as scribe, he warns that most biographies are either written by enemies or sycophantic chroniclers. "When truth and untruth lie embracing each other in the same bed," he

observes, "it is difficult to tell them apart." The Jewish scholar demands access and the freedom to inquire as preconditions to writing his biography. But, in presentation, the scribe, and perhaps Mr. Ali himself, is somewhat daunted by the supreme presence and power of the Sultan, both as a historical figure and as a fictional character.

Ibn Yakub traces the Salah al-Din's early years, from his grandmother's prophetic predictions of his rise to power to his first entrées into the world of sex, his youthful explorations of drinking and defiances of authority, and his rise to power in the service of his uncle's army. Where the Sultan's selective accounts avoid the more scandalous episodes of his past, Salah al-Din's perpetual servant and advisor, Shadhi, gladly and often humorously retells them to the faithful scribe.

Through these tales the reader arrives at an understanding of Salah al-Din as a benevolent and wise ruler: good to his soldiers, just in his pronouncements, simple in his tastes, and wise in his personal, political, and military decisions, and even, in a somewhat bizarre twist, a limited feminist. Taken at face value, Ibn Yakub's tale appears to present an overly simplistic picture of a powerful and authoritative ruler. But Mr. Ali's understanding of power and politics in medieval Islam is more complex than the scribe's narrative suggests. Shadhi takes on the image of Ibn Yakub's personal confidant, yet the Sultan is always aware of his disclosures. Salah al-Din ensures that his scribe is present to observe particular affairs of State, and is absent for others. The reader becomes aware that, despite the Sultan's promise, Ibn Yakub is privy to only a part of the Sultan's biography.

In these omissions, subtly and not so subtly hinted at throughout the novel, a more complex tale arises as a backdrop to the text and *The Book of Saladin* becomes a rich exploration of the maintenance and affairs of a twelfth-century Islamic state. We learn of the constant political balancing act between the Kadi al-Fadil, who is the administrator of religious and political justice, and the Sultan; the deft yet brutal control of public criticism, as seen in the execution of a political satirist; the volatile hierarchy of power in the Middle East; and the complex political factions which have historically divided Islam. As Salah al-Din observes, these forces conspire to prevent a unity to defend against Western invasions. "This permanent state of uncertainty is the devil's curse against the Believers. It is almost as if we are destined never to be one against the enemy."

The Book of Saladin, however, does not confine itself to affairs of state. Mr. Ali is particularly interested in the sexual politics of the Sultan's Court. "Women," as he writes, "are a subject on which medieval history is usually silent." Consequently, *The Book of Saladin* confronts the politics of prostitution, both male and female, the

alienation of the Sultan's wives, who compete with each other for his affection, the role of eunuchs as servants, confidants, and lovers of the courtesans, and the sexual relations between wives. In an early episode, the Sultan adopts Halima, a wife accused of adultery, into his harem. Halima develops a relationship of intellectual and sexual independence with another of Salah al-Din's wives, Jamila. The two adopt Ibn Yakub as their personal confidant and, through him, explore the role, or absence, of women in the Islamic conception of paradise. "Both our Book and the hadith are silent on the question of what will happen to us women. We can't be transformed into virgins. Will there be young men available to us, or will we be left to our own company?"

Most central to the text, however, is the role of religion in affairs of state and the ultimate clash between Muslim and Christian worlds. In a key passage, Salah al-Din explains the polluting force of Christianity on the Islamic faith.

It was the Franj who, over a hundred years ago, during a siege, had roasted their prisoners on an open fire and eaten them to assuage their hunger. The news had travelled to every city, and a sense of shock and shame had engulfed our world. This we had never known before. Yet only thirty years ago, the great Shirkuh had punished one of his emirs for permitting the roasting of three Franj captives and tasting their flesh. The ulema had soon been prevailed upon to acknowledge the practice and denounce it as a sin against the Prophet and the hadith.

For Mr. Ali, the invasion of the Crusaders introduces a volatile, profane element into the Middle East. Cannibalism here becomes a metaphor for the cultural intrusions and obscene violations of the Crusades. While their behavior both shocks and shames the Islamic world, it also subtly changes it, forcing it to create rules and definitions where there were previously none. This barbarism and violation serve as the cornerstones both of Salah al-Din's jihad and Mr. Ali's critique of Western religious imperialism.

This critique is more complex than a simple binary reversal of Western colonial discourse. Mr. Ali writes from both within and against this tradition. *The Book of Saladin* accepts the Middle East as a stage on which characters who are greater than their immediate selves rise to represent the larger whole. But while this stage does enclose the action of the novel, disparate elements from other lands wander on and off the stage to challenge fixed notions of religion, both Islamic and other.

In his classic study *Orientalism*, Edward Said identifies one of the central, and early, tenets of "Orientalism" as a view of Eastern cultures as mimics of Western Christendom. "If the mind must suddenly deal with what it takes to be a radically new form of

life—as Islam appeared to Europe in the early Middle Ages—the response on the whole is conservative and defensive. Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity." Thus Islam becomes a bastardized version of Catholicism and Mohammed, a pretender to the throne.

Rather than simply relocating privilege in Islamic thought, *The Book of Saladin* imagines the Middle East as a rich patchwork of religions and ideas. In a text where Christianity, Judaism, and Islam exist in such close proximity, Mr. Ali creates a dialogue which, rather than assigning value, opens a discussion on the central political relations between all religions in the Middle East. The appearance of a heretical Templar Knight, for example, presents the opportunity for a forum on fluidity in religious doctrine.

'Of course I have studied the Koran, and there is much in it with which I agree, but, if I may speak frankly, it appears to me that your religion is too close to earthly pleasures. Because you realized that you could not live by the Book alone, you encouraged the invention of the *hadith* to help you govern the Empires which you had gained....'

'We have scholars who work on nothing else but the *hadith*,' replied the Sultan quickly.... 'I agree with you. They are open to many interpretations. That is why we have the ulema to ascertain the degree of their accuracy. We need them, Bertrand of Toulouse, we need them. Without these traditions, our religion could not be a complete code of existence....'

'Can any religion ever become a complete code of life when, within the ranks of the Believers, there is such disparity in interpretation? The followers of Fatimid Caliphs, to take the most recent example, do not share your beliefs or those of the Caliph in Baghdad. The same applies to our religion or that of the Jews. He who rules, makes the rules.'

Ultimately, *The Book of Saladin* is the story of the reclamation of al-Kadisiya. Salah al-Din's youth, his political negotiations, his sexual appetite, his modest vanity: all are intimately connected to this central event. The conquest of Jerusalem flows backward through the text—the end of the first Crusades are the historical events through which Mr. Ali must create the Sultan's imagined secret life. While the Sultan's life is an explanation of his jihad, the jihad is also an explanation of his life. If, at times, this dynamic leads to a somewhat linear development, it also yields a rich, complex, and engaging picture of medieval Islam. *The Book of Saladin* is a powerful retelling of this historical conflict between East and West.

Jason Cons is a writer and managing editor at The Bookpress.

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Irish

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May 22, the citizens of both Northern Ireland and the Republic overwhelmingly approved the terms of the agreement. Next, on July 3, the elections which were held as part of the agreement took place without a hitch, and Sinn Fein won 18 seats in the new Assembly which was to have limited self-government in the north. All of this seemed near-miraculous in light of the decades of violence and animosity, but, as I found out when Joe and Lily picked me up at Dublin airport, things in Ireland were considerably more volatile than they appeared abroad.

Life had changed for the better for the McKeivitts as well. Joe had sold the grocery store the year before and retired, so he and Lily had more time, as he said, just to enjoy life. Dan and Elizabeth Ann were all grown up, with Dan working as a salesman in Dublin and Elizabeth Ann as a community health organizer in Drogheda. They'd be up (or down) for a visit before I left for Sligo. In the ride from the airport, and, over the next several days either during a walk or over a drink, I heard from each of them about some of the real problems left unresolved by the Agreement.

One of the reasons for the rush to get the accords signed before Easter was the fact that marching season in the north would begin shortly after—that season where the Protestant Orange Order would commemorate the victory of the Protestants over the Catholics some three hundred years earlier. The marches and the parades occurred throughout the spring and summer and culminated with coordinated parades on July 12, the day commemorating the victory of William III over the Catholic forces of James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1691. These parades have been an open boil on the skin of the northern body politic, a constant source of provocation and retaliation. As it happened, they were the occasion of the first dramatic test of the Agreement.

The Parades Commission set up specifically to deal with these exercises of free speech, as the Orange Order perceived them, had banned a planned Orange march from Drumcree Church in Portadown. This parade, passing down the Gavaghy Road through the Catholic section of town, had provoked extensive riots and counter-riots in the past. This summer the Orange Order decided to test the resolve of the British government by staging increasingly violent protests which involved, among other things, the firebombing of Catholic homes and churches. Three years earlier there had been a similar ban at Portadown, but violent protests on the part of the Orange Order forced the British government to lift the ban. There was on Irish television a now-infamous clip of Ian Paisley and David Trimble skipping hand-in-hand down the Gavaghy Road to celebrate their victory. Thus it was no surprise that the Orange Order assumed a similar British capitulation this July.

This time, though, the British did not back down; in fact, on July 11, just as the rioting at Drumcree once again seemed to be getting out of hand, they brought in units of the First Parachute Regiment, the Special Air Services regiment responsible for the killing of the 14 civilian protesters on Bloody Sunday back in 1972. The Widgery Tribunal, appointed by the British government, exonerated the regiment completely, much to the dismay and outrage of Irish and international observers, and, as part of a reconciliation process, Tony Blair has authorized Lord Saville of Newdigate to reinvestigate the Bloody Sunday killings. The deployment of the First Parachute was an irony lost on no one, north or south. As Elizabeth Ann drily observed, "Those lads would shoot their own grandmother, so the Orangemen knew they weren't going to get a free ride this time."

But what averted the predicted public cataclysm turned out to be a horrific act of individual violence. Early on the morning of July 12 unknown assailants, presumably on the side of the Orange protestors, threw a petrol-bomb through the window of Christine Quinn and

Raymond Craig, a "mixed" couple (read Catholic and Protestant), and in the conflagration that followed, three of their children, all under the age of 10, were burned to death. There had been literally hundreds of incidents of sectarian violence in the days leading up to the 12th, but the peculiar horror of the deaths of innocent children repelled the country, and in the aftermath the protests at Drumcree subsided.

Two events at the time seemed to illustrate the changed political landscape of the north.

The day after the death of the Quinn children, David Trimble, now the elected First Minister of the new northern Assembly, issued a joint statement with Seamus Mallon, the Catholic First Deputy Minister, calling for the Orangemen "to immediately end their protest and to return to their homes." Needless to say, a statement of this sort would have been unthinkable for the man who danced the victory jig with Ian Paisley on the same spot three years earlier. Even more paradoxical, at least in the political world of cause-and-effect in the North, Trimble's own constituency is the Protestant unionists of Portadown who had elected him on a hard-line, "no surrender" platform. The distance Trimble had to travel from the dance with Paisley to the statement with Mallon has earned him enormous praise



The Yeats House

Kevin Murphy

abroad, as witnessed by his recently being awarded, along with John Hume, the Nobel Peace Prize for 1998. But it has also generated enormous mistrust for him among unionists and nationalists alike, and the Peace Prize may oddly destabilize his role as peacemaker.

The same Parade Commission which had banned the Orange march down the Garvaghy Road in Drumcree, in an effort to strike a balance between the opposing sides, had allowed an Orange march down the Lower Ormeau Road in Belfast on July 13. This march, too, had been a scene of violence in the past, and, given the outrage and universal condemnation generated by the death of the Quinn children, I had pessimistically assumed there would be nationalist retaliation during this march. Once that fuse was detonated, the violence and hatred would explode throughout the north.

But the Lower Ormeau Road march went off peacefully. Nationalist organizers, assuring that there would be no violence, asked the police and army to pull back, which they did. Along the parade route, the nationalist protestors carried black flags and placards saying "Parade of Shame" and maintained complete silence as the Orangemen marched by. Joe McKeivitt, who backs Sinn Fein's position in the agreement, explained, "There wasn't a stone thrown in Northern Ireland that day; that was the discipline of Sinn Fein." While I wondered whether any group can exert monolithic control over a population filled with so many different degrees and forms of burning resentments, I agreed that Sinn Fein may have done more to break the back of bigotry by turning the other cheek that day than they had in 30 years of sectarian bombing.

II. Sligo

Sligo, like Carlingford, is a town in the Republic very close to the border with Northern Ireland. It's located on the other side of the island, in the northwest, right on the Atlantic coast, and therefore the most direct route from Carlingford is through the north. It's about the same size as Dundalk and about the same distance from the border, and therefore, as Joe informs me during our drive over, Sligo would be seen as a nationalist town. Joe proves something of a political and demographic guide as we pass through each town and county. One area, he says, is "true blue," meaning heavily unionist, while another is nationalist, and yet another mixed. It's hard for me to imagine having such familiarity with the political landscape of a place, or even to imagine the effects it has on day-to-day life. Living side by side in separate communities, according to Seamus Heaney, has produced in northerners a code in the way they talk, a way of indicating by reticence and indirection what they mean, summed up in the title of one of his poems: "Whatever you say say nothing." Joe and Lily drop me off at the Yeats Building in downtown Sligo, and insist that I come back in two weeks for a last visit before returning to America.

the forefront of Yeats criticism this summer. It's the Irish lecturers who prove most irreverent, though. Patricia Coughlan from University College Cork has no patience with Yeats's aristocratic posturing in the later poems, and Fintan O'Toole from *The Irish Times* archly notes that, since his death in 1939, Yeats is quoted more frequently by Irish politicians advancing their own agendas than by Irish poets interested in his anachronistic vision of Ireland.

In addition to the lectures, there are an array of one-week seminars devoted to individual topics and approaches. These meet daily in the late afternoon from 5:00 to 6:30, leaving the time between the lectures and the seminars open for reading, walks along the Garavogue quays, or naps to clear away the cobwebs resulting from late nights at the pub. The two seminars I sign up for are Bernard O'Donoghue's seminar on Yeats's early poems and Helen Vendler's "Yeats and Elegy," and both of them prove spectacular. O'Donoghue is an Irish poet who teaches medieval literature at Wadham College, Oxford. He is bilingual in Irish and English, an accomplished linguist and critic (he's written a book on Heaney's poetry), and winner of the Whitbread Poetry prize for his 1995 *Gunpowder*. In the seminar, he's encyclopedic in his knowledge of the poems, deft at teasing out semantic and prosodic nuances, and completely approachable, both in class and out. It's like having a poetry mentor for a week.

Vendler, probably the best known "close reader" of poetry on both sides of the Atlantic, proves vintage Vendler. Using Milton's "Lycidas" as the paradigm elegy for entry into Yeats, she ranges effortlessly over five centuries of poetry in English to provide clarifying models for Yeats's expansion and transformation of the genre. In the seminar, rather than the formidable authority many of the students were expecting, she's very funny and down to earth. She insists that the students participate in the discussion and presents the most subtle of readings as straightforward common sense, if you just take the time to look at the poem. Even so, it's breathtaking how much poetry she has committed to memory and quotes verbatim to support or contextualize Yeats's strategies in the shaping of his poems. In midweek she teaches right through a bout with bronchitis and finishes with a stunningly condensed reading of the elegiac poems in Yeats's last volume.

Throughout the two weeks of the School, too, there are poetry and fiction readings held in the evening at St. John's Cathedral, delivered from the raised pulpit which each of the writers has to ascend in order to read. Starting with Patrick McCabe, who reads from his *Butcher Boy*, each of the writers notes that it's the first time he's spoken from such an ecclesiastical height. After the readings, there are informal receptions for the writers at the School's Social Centre (read the Silver Swan hotel pub across the street from the Yeats Building). Since most of the lecturers and seminar leaders are also staying at the hotel, the pub becomes the place to gather in the evening.

Both the faculty and the writers seem to relish the informality. It's a touch intoxicating, over a pint, to ask Bernard MacLaverty what he thinks of my teaching his "Life Drawing" next to Joyce's "A Painful Case" since they both explore, as I see it, the myopic underside of an artistic sensibility. He's delighted to be placed in such distinguished company and fills in a few details that had occupied his mind when he was writing the tale Another time I get into a one-on-one with John Montague, who has joined one of the seminars for three days. I ask him about his last meeting with Beckett, which he'd written about in *The New York Times Book Review*, and the subjects range out from there. Montague, born in Brooklyn in 1929, was taken back as an infant to County Tyrone in Northern Ireland and fostered out to his mother's family, and his poems record the strange sense of coming into his Irish identity from such an alienated perspective. Sensing some kindred transplanted spirit, I tell him about an experience I had before coming over to the School.

The Yeats Building, where most of the seminars will be held over the next two weeks, is next to the Garavogue River which runs through downtown Sligo. It's there I meet George Watson from the University of Aberdeen, who is this year's director. Watson, to my delight, looks, talks, and even smiles like Seamus Heaney. As it happens, he is a northern Catholic from Portadown, and, as he playfully suggests at an opening session, this year he has packed the Yeats School with northerners. In fact, though, what he has done is gather a disputation of critics (if that's the right group word) from Ireland, north and south, Scotland, England, and the U.S. to review the current state of Yeats criticism. The study of Yeats's poetry has become something of a flashpoint in the Irish culture wars which have erupted, parallel to the political disruption, over the past two decades. The morning lectures, at 9:30 and 11:15 daily, constitute a kind of graduate course in Yeats.

Twenty different lecturers, over the course of the next two weeks, take a two-pronged approach to his work. Some address each of the individual volumes of Yeats's poetry in sequence as they were published in his lifetime, and the two-week trajectory thus constitutes a critical overview of his life and work. Others place Yeats in a variety of cultural and critical contexts which have emerged in the last decade—gender, the visual arts, politics, and nationalism, among others. The talks are absolutely first-rate, and, when the third or fourth lecturer cites Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, it's clear that post-colonialism has moved to

Journal

On the way to Carlingford from the airport, I stopped in to the county records center at Dundalk to get a copy of my father's birth certificate. Since my father was born in Ireland, I am eligible for dual citizenship if I can gather all the appropriate documents. The computer age hadn't descended on the Louth records office yet, so I waited while the clerk took down the huge ledger with the birth certificates for 1906, cracked open the book to the appropriate page, and copied out the document, entry by entry. When I read the handwritten entries across the page, though, I paused. They read: Name of Infant: Edward; Name of Father: Peter Murphy; Occupation: Farmer; Signature of Father: X. The X was placed between the words "His" and "Mark" which the clerk had copied at the top and bottom of the signature box.

Right away, Montague knows what's up; it isn't necessary to spell out all the ironies of starting from that mark and ending up at the Yeats School. He asks me if I'm going to write a poem about it. I say I want to, but haven't written for some time. He then adds, "If you're going to write it, here's the first line: 'This is a poem about a man who couldn't write.'" When I see him the next day, he asks me if I've finished the poem yet. I reply no, and he says only half-jokingly, "That's the amateur in you; old Yeats'd have it hammered out by now." It takes me a while to figure out the second piece of advice, at least in terms of my own writing, is more valuable than the first.

In the second week, though, the evening conversations turn more specifically to northern politics. Frank Ormsby, a Belfast poet, reads poems from his recent book *The Ghost Train*, and one sequence reflects his joy and anxiety in expecting a child against the background of alternate ceasefire and violence in the north. Later in the Silver Swan, when we talk more specifically about the peace agreement, he becomes very emotional in his opposition to the prisoner release program. I stayed up late one night with Dan McKeivitt back in Carlingford talking through the pros and cons of such a release program. Dan knew of the torture, the murder, the human violation that many of the prisoners, both Loyalist and Provo, had committed and been convicted of, but he couldn't see any way around such amnesty if there was going to be peace. For Ormsby, though, the release of the prisoners, especially those convicted of atrocities, means an utter abandonment of human principle.

Edna Longley comes over from Queen's University, Belfast, to give her lecture on the Irish context of Yeats. She examines—and skewers—the myopic and condescending assumptions of American and British modernist critics who fail to see Yeats's poetry in its specifically Irish social and political context. I had read a number of Longley's works—she's the principle critic of Ireland's Field Day and doesn't pull punches—and so am pleased to see her at the Silver Swan later in the evening. At first, Longley has much to say about the paralyzing dialectic the two communities in the north are caught up in, with each side reinforcing the fears and anxieties of the other. What starts out as a conversation on the possibility of peace ends up later in the evening surprisingly personal: I recount my own painful exit from the Church in adolescence, to which she responds with parallel stories from her own background.

The last night of the School is a late one at the Silver Swan. The singalong, which has become part of the evenings for both weeks, moves from the pub to the hotel lobby at midnight (thereby allowing drinks to be served to the guests), and everyone, faculty and student, joins in. There had been a group of local nationalists earlier in the week singing their songs, almost in contest with the foreigners—Irish and non-Irish alike—who had invaded the hotel, and so at first there's some diplomatic restraint to the songs. At one point I begin to sing a drinking song I learned in graduate school—a macabre round about people dying and worms eating them up and ducks eating up worms and us eating up

ducks and everyone eating up everyone else. One of the lecturers from Trinity turns to me and says, "Careful—that's a Yorkshire song," and I break off.

An hour later, and presumably a drink or two further on, he breaks into a full-throated version of the song himself, and, all factional concerns dissolved into ecumenical chorus, we join in on the refrains.

III. Carlingford

I left Sligo on the Dublin train in the early afternoon on the 15th, and about the time I was gazing at the purple heather growing on the peat in the Bog of Allen, the bomb exploded in Omagh. No one on the train, of course, knew anything about it, and when I got to Connolly Station in Dublin, everyone seemed concerned with his or her own business as the crowds moved through the station and out toward Grafton Street. I met up with Dan McKeivitt at the department store where he works, and we headed out together for the drive up to Carlingford.

Dan, as it happens, is something of a news junkie, so, in between telling me the latest clergy jokes circulating around Dublin, he pressed the radio station buttons in search of news or the many commentary shows that fill

were brought in to evacuate the wounded to hospitals in Belfast, Derry, Enniskillen, and Dungannon. By the end of the night the death count was 28, and one other victim would later die in hospital.

The circumstances surrounding the blast began to emerge. The group calling itself the "Real IRA" had telephoned in two warnings to Ulster Television and a third to the Samaritans, using the recognized codewords for that organization, and said that a bomb was going to explode at the courthouse in "Main Street" Omagh in 30 minutes. The television station instantly notified the police who in turn began an immediate evacuation of the area around the courthouse at the top end of the town's High Street. The police, assuming the bomb was near the court building, began evacuating people down to the bottom end of High Street, which runs into Market Street. The car bomb, however, had been parked at the junction of Market Street and the Dublin Road, and the police had unwittingly directed people toward rather than away from the bomb. Thus, there were hundreds of people in the very area of the bomb when it exploded, and the force was powerful enough to collapse three nearby buildings.

The group which made the calls and thereby claimed the responsibility for the bomb

on the Internet, pointed out, in all the newspaper and media accounts of the victims of the blast, there was no attempt to separate out the Catholic from the Protestant casualties, as in "x number of Catholics as opposed to y number of Protestants died in the blast"; they were all Irish citizens of Omagh, a mixed community. Exactly one week later, at 3:10 in the afternoon of August 22, hundreds of thousands observed a minute of silence at commemoration services all across the Republic and Northern Ireland.

Both the Irish and British governments introduced emergency legislation to crack down on terrorism, but the shock of the blast itself seemed to have jolted some of the paramilitary organizations. The Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) announced a permanent ceasefire, and the "Real IRA" announced a suspension of all military operations while it "was embarking on a process of consultation on our future direction." Gerry Adams, speaking the week before Bill Clinton made a trip to Ireland, condemned the Omagh bombing and stated, for the first time, that violence must be "a thing of the past, over, done with and gone." Shortly after that statement was issued, the Provisional IRA responded to the Real IRA's refusal to declare a permanent ceasefire.

On the evening of September 1, in a series of coordinated visits reminiscent of those orchestrated by Don Corleone, members of the Provisional IRA visited the homes of approximately 60 members of the Real IRA and the 32 County Sovereignty Committee associated with it. Within a 90-minute period homes were visited in south Armagh, Dundalk, Dublin, and other locations further south. As *The Irish Times* tersely put it, "Two unmasked men visited each house and read a statement from the Army Council. It demanded the Real IRA disband, the sources said, otherwise action would be taken against its members and against those who resigned from Sinn Fein last year." They were given a two-week period to make amends, with some simply warned that "action" would be taken, and others specifically told they would be shot. While there was some speculation concerning the Provisional IRA's intent as to its carrying out the threats, on September 8 the Real IRA announced a "complete cessation" of all hostilities as of the previous midnight.

In terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the Omagh bombing brought the volatile issue of decommissioning front and center, with the unionists insisting that the Provisional IRA must turn in its weapons before the peace process can continue. Part of Bill Clinton's trip to Ireland was to urge the negotiations to continue, and he appeared on a number of platforms with Tony Blair, David Trimble, and Seamus Mallon throughout his visit to Northern Ireland. This campaign was capped by an emotional visit with the survivors of the Omagh blast, some released for the day from the hospital for the meeting. But three weeks after the bombing, the American public had lost interest in the goings on in Ireland. Other issues had captured their attention in the latter part of August. Incurring the incredulous resentment of Irish journalists, the American media from Dublin reported one item over and over: Bill Clinton had used the word "sorry" in reference to his affair with Monica Lewinsky.

IV. Kilwirra

The last evening I'm in Carlingford, Lily and I go to Kilwirra cemetery, the place where our grandparents are buried. That day, a Sunday, is Cemetery Day in Ireland, which means that after Mass the parishioners follow the priest out of the church to the churchyard and say the rosary over the graves of those buried there. The McKeivitts know I'm a non-believer, but, in response to their announcement that morning that they are off to Mass, I say from the living room that I'm still working on the assignment John Montague had given me. Once or twice Lily has asked me if I ever pray, and I usually answer, noncommittally, that I do in my own way.



The Chapel at Kilwirra Cemetery

Kevin Murphy

the Irish airwaves. He had almost pressed another station button when the news broke that a massive bomb had exploded in Omagh some two hours earlier. There were many casualties, with some confirmed dead, and the property damage was extensive. Very quickly Dan searched through other stations for confirmation and follow-up, and, as we sped north, the death toll began to rise.

When a newscaster announced that the confirmed death total was now at 16, Dan said to the windshield, "O Christ, it's worse than Enniskillen." Dan was referring to the worst civilian bombing in the north over the past decades. In November 1987 the IRA had detonated a bomb at a Protestant Remembrance Day service commemorating the World War I dead. The blast killed 11 and wounded 63 Enniskillen residents, and given the occasion and the people attending the service, it was seen as a deliberate massacre of a civilian population.

When we got to Carlingford, the TV was on in the living room and stayed on for the rest of the day and night. The details of the carnage spilled out of the screen hour after hour, and the specifics were first nauseating, then numbing. The death count rose to 20; scores of people were injured and maimed. A boy's leg had been blown off, lying in the street with his shoe still on it, while corpses were strewn over the road. There was a horrific story of three generations of the same family being killed simultaneously in the blast: a grandmother, her pregnant daughter, and the daughter's eighteen-month-old baby girl. The local hospitals could not handle the number of victims, estimated now at over 200, and helicopters

was one of several groups which had splintered off from the IRA Provisionals and Sinn Fein as the peace talks had proceeded during the past several years. I had talked about these groups with Elizabeth Ann McKeivitt a couple of weeks earlier, and she said their main grievance was the concept of Partition upon which the peace accords were based. What the accord recognized, and what the subsequent elections ratified, was a concept that Irish Republicans had resisted since the Treaty of 1921. The accord guaranteed Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom, a status which would not be changed without the consent of the majority of people of Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein presented the agreement as a transitional phase toward the agreed-upon goal of a unified Ireland, but for the "Real IRA" it was a betrayal of everything the earlier IRA had stood for, of everything that the hunger strikers in the 1980's had died for.

This particular group, as it happened, was very close to home. A number of the IRA members who broke off from the Provisionals and Sinn Fein were from County Louth, and the leader of the group lived and worked in Dundalk. Joe McKeivitt, who's usually an ebullient, gregarious man, remained stunned and depressed by the events unfolding on the television and several hours later bitterly summed up the motive for the blast: "This is not about the Brits, Kevin; it's about who's the better Irishman."

In the days and weeks that followed the bombing, there was some small consolation to be found in the Irish response to the massacre. As Liam Ferrie, editor of *The Irish Emigrant*

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Irish Journal

continued from page 7

Throughout the day the television replays over and over the details of the carnage at Omagh. I keep thinking of the Oklahoma bombing back in the United States, and the utter exhaustion, emotional and physical, that enveloped the nation as everyone watched the scenes of destruction and the scores, then hundreds, of vignettes of human suffering.

The weather clears in the early afternoon, so Lily and I decide to take what has become our now-traditional walk across Slieve Foy, the mountain that rises up behind the small town.

Each time I come to Carlingford we find a morning or afternoon on which to take the hike, usually getting a ride over to the other side and walking up and over the mountain and back down into town. This day Lily and I assemble a small troop, Elizabeth Ann, her cousin Susan, and the family dog Lashes, and we are dropped over to the far side of the mountain where we make our climb. The ascent of Slieve Foy is always an exhilaration. You enter the sloping pastures of the grazing sheep, and hike uphill through the grass and heather. From the top you can see the entire Cooley Peninsula, as it curves out from Carlingford into the Irish Sea and back into Dundalk Bay. On a sunny summer day, or even a cloudy one, the landscape is green and gold, mottled with the pastures, barley fields, and small towns of the peninsula.

Even though it's hard to make out where everything is precisely, I know that the thatched roof cottage where my father and his brothers grew up is somewhere just beyond the steeple of the distant minuscule church, about a quarter of a mile up from the sea. In my visits I had learned a bit more about my father's life in Ireland. After their mother and father's early deaths, he and his brothers, still young children, had been raised by a woman in the village who had moved into the cottage. Why the woman chose to do that, no one seemed to know. Once, my cousin Peter, Lily's older brother, introduced me to a man in a pub who had played Gaelic football with my father as a teenager. He was then about 70 years old, and, holding his pint of Guinness in one hand, he stepped through a play with which my father had scored a winning goal in the county championship.

In the closer distance, at the bottom of the mountain, is Carlingford town, and its medieval castle and buildings seem miniature in the distance. At this height the distinguishing features of the townscape are the stone piers whose arms reach out from the two ends of the harbor, providing a sheltered anchorage for boats coming in from the sea. I remember that it was to that stone pier leading out from St. John's Castle that Lily had taken me, one night during that first two-week visit over 20 years ago. She said, out of nowhere it seemed at the time, that she had wanted me to know that she didn't think of me as a distant relative who had come back to Ireland for a visit. Instead, she thought of me

as a brother who had come home, and that I should always consider this area home, a place to come and be welcome.

Looking at Susan and Elizabeth Ann jumping over the rocks and small rivulets with Lashes up ahead of us makes me think that not much time has gone by at all since that first visit. When I say that to Lily, she says how much of your life and spirit is renewed in watching your children grow up, and that I must be feeling just that way watching my boys grow back in America. I know that for Lily there's a dark side to that lovely thought, because she had told me that the one enduring regret she lived with was that her father, my uncle Micheal, had never lived to see his grandchildren grow up. Life on the farm was rugged and demanding, and he had died unexpectedly of a heart attack in his fifties. But he was the kind of man who would have enjoyed watching Dan and Elizabeth Ann change and grow, and just take pleasure in who they were. She was sure of that.

It's then I remember it's my birthday. I forgot that I had one coming up for most of the time I was in Ireland, operating as I am on a different psychic time zone. But no sooner do I blurt this out to Lily than I realize I should've held my tongue. Given the track record of hospitality over the years, I should know that any mention of my birthday will have consequences. Predictably, when we descend back into Carlingford, Lily disappears into the shops. After dinner, she comes into the dining room with a cake and candles, and everyone round the table joins in for the birthday song. That's followed by gifts, books, and hopeless gags (I'm just not the type to use a bright yellow tablecloth covered with Murphy's Law cartoons).

It may be the swim of hospitality set off against the somberness of the weekend, or perhaps a lingering sense of deficiency, or more accurately disloyalty, that I hadn't gone to church with the family earlier. In any event, given the strange emotional logic of the day, I suggest a visit to Kilwirra.

The cemetery is out on the peninsula not far from the family cottage and the nearby working fields. The last time I had visited I stayed in the cottage, took long walks along the shore, and had come upon the cemetery off one of the roads I took doubling back. At the time I hadn't known my grandparents were buried there, and, since it was then undergoing restoration, I wouldn't have been able to locate them without help. We get to the cemetery just about sunset, and Lily takes me to the section where the Murphys of Whitestown are buried. The ruins of the Dominican chapel of which the cemetery had once been the churchyard stands in the midst of the graves, and the stones in the Murphy section have already been so weathered that you can only make out "M Murphy/Whitestown Shore" on one of them. The others seem a match for the eroded stones of the roofless chapel.

While Lily says a prayer, I take in the surrounding fields and see, in the distance, the summit of Slieve Foy where we were standing

earlier in the day. I wonder, naturally enough, what my life might have been like if I lived here, grew up here, worked here, rather than in the United States. It seems uncanny the way the Irish history of the last third of the century is repeating the violent convolutions of the first third. I realize, too, that Dan and Elizabeth Ann have grown up their entire lives as involuntary witnesses to the political and sectarian violence in the north. After walking round and through the walls of the chapel, we start back.

Since I might not be back for a long time, I ask Lily if we can stop at the lane that heads down to the four family fields. The last time, the only time, I had seen them was during my first visit. Peter, Lily's older brother, had been my guide for most of that time, and he himself had worked the fields until his mid-twenties, when he gave it up to be a lorry driver. Like his father, though, Peter had died young of a heart attack, now almost 15 years ago. While we walk down the lane, Lily remembers all the times she came down this path as a child bringing lunch to her father or coming to work herself. Once, when she was about ten, she tried to ride a cow and fell flat on her face. She still can see the worker in the nearby field laughing and laughing.

She points to two of the family fields which are nearby and indicates that the others are just over the hill at the far end of a barley field. The grain catches the last of the light, and beyond the field is the darkness of the Irish Sea. It's then she also points out at the side of the lane almost at our feet a large stone with a faded cross chiseled into its surface. "That's the Mass Rock," she says. During the period of the Penal Laws Catholics were not allowed to practice their religion, and priests were persecuted for administering the sacraments. There are traditions that the peasants gathered in the open fields to hear Mass secretly, though historians now question the image of fugitive priests officiating at rocks like these. Even so, as I look at the rock about the size of a large sleeping bag, a number of surreal associations begin to coalesce.

The cross on the rock produces an eerie echo of the X on my father's birth certificate, and the collected weight and grief of all those killed at Omagh the day before begins to rise.

I realize even now that in a short time these painful events will mean very little to Americans, even Irish-Americans. All of these people, too, my cousin Peter, my long-dead uncles, my unknown father, and, further back, my unlettered grandfather, his stone and story worn from the weather in an abandoned churchyard, are even now fading into a vast anonymity, the lost, unacknowledged voices and lives that never make the history books. But these ordinary people are the lifeblood, the foundation and support of a culture, even as they bear the burden of its excess and injustice. There's no way for Lily and me to bring back our fathers or our grandfather or the innocent victims of Omagh; there's no way for anyone to undo the horrible history of the twentieth century, in Ireland or Bosnia or Southeast Asia. But we can remember and respect their plain, related lives. At some level their distant experiences of love and work, of sex and death, pulse through our veins, and we must acknowledge the dark continuity of their lives, their meanings, and our own. They, and therefore we, are the folk of this planet.

At the end of his poem, "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," Derek Mahon imagines the dispossessed, ordinary souls of history pleading directly with all of us, who, like voyeuristic photographers, witness these catastrophic events, near and far, from a position of relaxed detachment:

*Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!
"Save us, save us," they seem to say,
"Let the god not abandon us
Who have come so far in darkness and in pain
We too had our lives to live.
You with your light meter and relaxed itinerary,
Let not our naive labours have been in vain."*

I give Lily a hug, and, when she looks at my face, she asks if something's wrong. I say, "No, I was just praying."

*for my son Peter
summer 1998*

Kevin Murphy teaches English at Ithaca College. He is a frequent contributor to The Bookpress.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Paul West, local author, Friend of the Bookpress, and frequent contributor, recently received the Chevalier's medal (Order of Arts and Letters) from Mme Catherine Trautmann, French Minister of Culture. The following is an excerpt from his acceptance speech.

"In my student days, which of course aren't over, I was always being rebuked for reading Camus, Sartre, St-Exupéry, Gide, and Colette, Simone Weil and St-John Perse, instead of those English literary lions George Eliot and Percy Shelley, Sir Walter Scott and Sir Philip Sidney. I do not regret it. I had never dreamed of having a French audience, but now I do I have them in mind, the four-dimensional tesseract at the end of the tunnel, my secret allies, and I always look forward, as never here, to my French reviews: reasoned, daring, predicated on knowledge of literature."

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Goodbye To All That

Maureen Waters

He was a sturdy, purposeful man with blue eyes, black curly hair and a provoking smile. When he was about to tell us a terrible joke, the corners of his mouth would twitch, and we knew we were in for it. "Success to temperance," my father would blithely intone, swallowing a glass of whiskey. There was a ritual quality to these jokes which we came to expect along with regular meals and a certain testiness about the electric bill.

Not your typical Irishman, he peeled potatoes and scoured pots and pans as readily as he chopped wood or planted a vegetable garden. He seldom relaxed even with a book—he was a history buff—or newspaper and pipe in hand. He rattled the pages, thumped at the headlines, hunted through his pockets for matches or tobacco. The sheer vigor of his disposition, the peculiar brisk motion of his body suggested optimism, a certainty that things could be gotten done. It took us many years to discover the hidden vein of fatalism.

He was born on a "fair-sized" farm in 1904 in Sligo on the west coast of Ireland. Yeats's country, between the sea and the great heathery hump of Ben Bulbin. He used to climb to the summit as a boy to plant the Irish tricolor, which was predictably shot down by the local police and as predictably replaced by aspiring young republicans.

When he was eight years old he lost his father, a progressive farmer, whose family had prospered while he was alive, but whose widow was left with seven young children to raise. My father was the third child and the second son; there were five sisters. Relations stepped in, an uncle in particular, who put the boys, "humpty-backed rogues," to work in the fields while the girls looked after the chickens and geese. Their mother was explicit enough: unless everyone helped, they'd all be sent off to the poorhouse.

Despite the harsh facts of his early life, Father's stories were usually full of gaiety and adventure. He was fond of telling us about his own school years, mainly about tricks played on the way to school—like riding horses and donkeys belonging to neighbors until they were bucked off—and the perpetual skirmishing with the schoolmaster. A favorite joke was to bring in hazelnuts along with the daily offering of turf. In the midst of a fire they would burst, shooting through the room to provide a glorious climax to the lesson. Punishment was brisk: a rod smartly applied to the upturned palms of the usual culprits. But the undercurrent of rebellion was never checked. If the master routed them all one day, he found mysterious holes in his bicycle tires the next.

Judging from the family skills, lessons, when they could be gotten to, in an ordinary Irish classroom centered around poetry and math. At family parties, if they were not talking death or politics, it was not unusual for someone, adopting a formal rhetorical stance, to offer lines from a poem. Father preferred to regale us with favorite and lengthy passages, usually by Walter Scott, as an incentive to housework. The more inappropriate the occasion, the better he liked to play out the lines in curious, lilting mockery. Thus, peeling a mound of potatoes:

*The stag at eve had drunk his fill,
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill,
And deep his midnight lair had made
In lone Glenartney's hazel shade...*

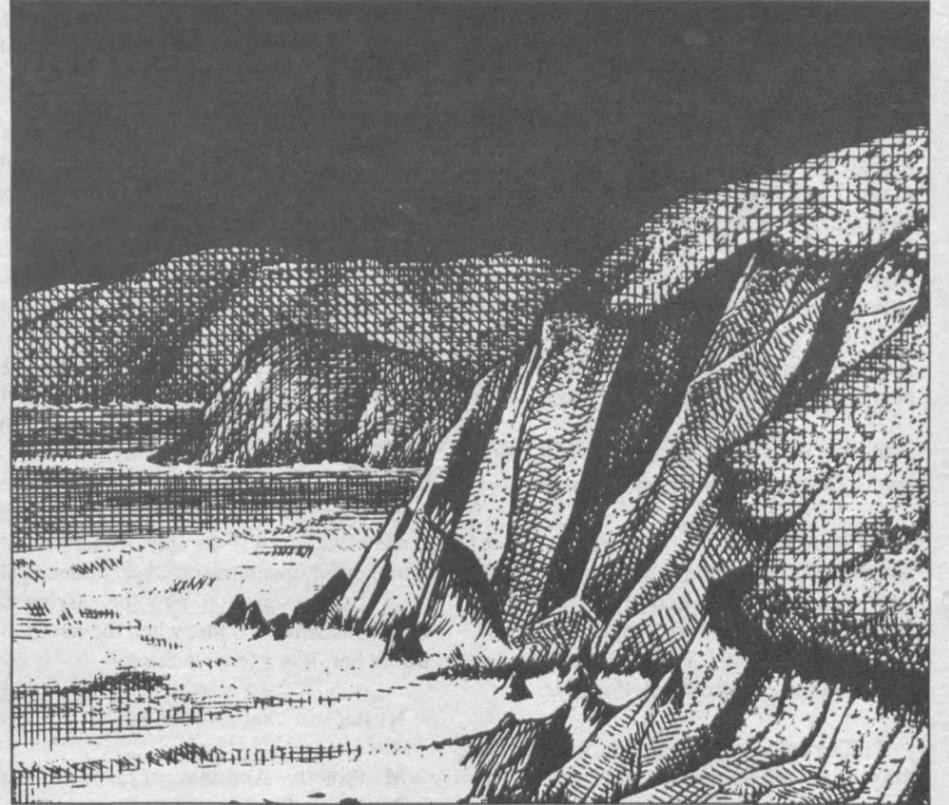
He also liked to recite certain prayers and humorous rhymes in English, Irish and Latin. He actually knew little Irish because the old language was disparaged in Sligo at the turn of the century. People were afraid it would put a "curwhibble" or twist in the tongue, spoiling their English. He recalled being challenged during the revolution by a very nervous Irish-speaking sentry. On a scouting mission and out of uniform at the time, he avoided being shot by summoning a few scraps of the native tongue: "*Cen chaoi a bhuit tu?*" "How are you?"

His feeling for the old language nonetheless ran deep, linking him perhaps to the voices of his childhood. When he was dying in New York in 1983, he prayed in Irish.

There was always a measure of dissent between our parents on the subject of the Old Country. Father liked to give us all the down-to-earth details. "Disgusting!" Mother would call them, yanking at the lace curtains. But Father would go right on talking about the bonhams—young pigs—snuggled in by the fireplace, or describe with relish some awful practical joke, like the time he and some friends found a neighbor in a drunken stupor with his donkey and cart in the middle of the road. With consummate patience they dismantled the cart and then reassembled the whole rig, the beast included, inside the man's house. As a parting gesture they covered the windows with sod, so the poor man woke up thinking he was in hell. "He was sober a long time after that one."

Father remembered shipwrecks off the western coast of Ireland during World War I. Timber and other useful articles would float in with the tide—once a big bay horse made it to shore still tethered to the heavy wooden stall: "Whoever got their mark on it before it touched dry land got to keep it, that is, if the police did not get there first—and they could not be everywhere..."

There were other sea stories, too, because some of the family had lived on Inishmurray Island, some nine miles off the coast of Sligo. A place of sudden, violent storms where a boat had to be maneuvered skillfully to avoid hitting the rocks where you went ashore at Clashmore Harbour. The island has a long, eventful history recorded in the annals as early as the seventh century. There is an ancient cashel on the island which may be pre-Christian in origin; the remaining artifacts reflect a curious admixture of Christian and pagan elements. The stone enclosure contains several buildings, two of beehive construction; there are chapels and a schoolhouse. Inishmurray was once a pilgrimage site; the stone stations and large "praying stones," some with curious holes in them, are still visible around the perimeter of the island. There are local accounts of miracles and Viking raids; certain marks near the main chapel are reputed to be the bloodstains of scholars killed by raiders in 802. In the 19th century, however, it was an ideal spot for poteen makers who lived comfortably in sturdy houses apart from the war and famine that periodically swept the mainland. Along with the "praying stones" on the



Illustrations by Don Karr

island, altars were still to be found on which "cursing stones" had been placed. According to the story, these were used against the odd tariff man who attempted to levy a tax on the islanders. Turning the stones counterclockwise and pronouncing the appropriate curses made it difficult for him to reach shore alive. It was a solution with ample precedent in Ireland:

*They loosed their curse against the King,
They cursed him in his flesh and bones,
And daily in their mystic ring,
They turned the Maledictive Stones*

These stories made a deep impression on us as children, linking us firmly to the Old Country, though our parents never went back in later years when they could afford to. We were early made aware of the perilousness of that old life. Gaiety would shift suddenly into sadness. Ireland was never simply the land of shamrocks and leprechauns or a memory celebrated on St. Patrick's Day. Too many had died, too many were disappointed. The hard fight for independence, the bitter aftermath of civil war, did not bring prosperity. Emigration went on. The old family home under Ben Bulbin collapsed in ruin.

Michael, my father's older brother, died at 17 from wounds received in a futile attack on a military garrison in 1919. A bomb he was carrying exploded in his hands. When he died a few days later, he was buried secretly in an unmarked grave, his name, along with my father's, still on a list of wanted men. The family feared reprisals. Their house might be burned like so many others in the village of Cloonelly; someone else might be killed. But we only learned this gradually. At first we heard Michael had died from a fall, and then that he had died of a weak heart, which is what they told the militia hunting for him after the attack.

There was a sister, too, whose story was always eclipsed by the story of Michael, to whom Father was deeply attached and for whom he always grieved. That was Ann. She was recovering from pneumonia when a storm came up while the hay was being gathered in. Because, at 15, she was the oldest and strongest child at home, she went out to help in the fields, suffered a relapse and died. No doctor would come because of the curfew. I know little else about her except that she could not be persuaded to stay inside. She had the family stubbornness all right. I think of her now as one of those anonymous women who stand in the gap just behind the front lines. About whom no songs are sung, though the war killed her just as surely as it killed her brother.

Father also fought in the Anglo-Irish war and was with the artillery unit that shelled the Four Courts at the start of the civil war. Thereafter he served as a medical corpsman, more and more troubled by the mounting casualties, the hatred and the waste of life. He served in the cavalry, nursed IRA prisoners on hunger

strike, was promoted to sergeant major and then landed in jail, having fired a shot that accidentally pierced the cap of a Brigadier McHugh. As he told it, it was a war that veered sharply in direction and intensity. There were pleasant lulls when the men took Irish dancing lessons in Castlebar. But his best friend was killed by a sniper as they walked together through that same town. It was guerrilla warfare marked by ambush, bloody reprisals, and a lot of dirty detail work. From one of these ambushes he once rescued his old schoolmaster, who had lost an arm but was still able to joke: "If you only knew it was me, Danny, you'd have taken much longer to get through."

After all this he never imbued us with any hatred of the English, but with a sense of his own gaiety and courage as a young man. I realize now that telling those stories, imprinting them on our minds as children, was his way of recuperating what was lost.

When he was not talking, Father appeared unassuming, even nondescript in well-worn blue or brown gabardine. In later years, earning a decent salary, he scarcely changed; he never developed the acquisitiveness of the middle class. Apart from books and a few pieces of clothing, his belongings, including the journal he left to us, could be fitted into one bureau drawer. But his modest manner concealed a fierce, fundamental pride. Though he was well-read and politically astute, he would listen deferentially to men in suits who had a better formal education. He was respectful toward nuns and priests. We knew, however, that beyond a certain point, moral or political, he would not budge.

Only after his death, I discovered that he had taken part in the army mutiny of 1924. After nearly five years of fighting to establish an Irish government, he took up arms against it. What were his motives? Outrage? Disillusionment? Loyalty to officers he served with? It appears that, with an end to civil war, many of the old social barriers were re-erected. Men who had fought well were cashiered, their places taken by the better-educated and those with family and political connections. Perhaps that was it. The fact remains that when his ambulance was used secretly by the rebels to ferry rifles and machine guns, he agreed to join them. After the mutiny collapsed, he was broken to the ranks and sent to the Curragh for "retraining." He received an honorable discharge—all the grievances to some extent recognized—but he was a marked man after that. In a sense I owe my existence to that mutiny. When the military hierarchy offered to review his case in Dublin, he turned them down. In 1927 he took the boat to America and never went back.

Maureen Waters teaches English at Queens College. This piece is excerpted from her nearly-completed book, *Crossing High-bridge*.



Hearing Voices

continued from page 3

and something to animate me more. My natural state isn't the state I needed in order to write this; I needed to constantly be turning up the notch, going up to the next place. I needed music to do that, to not become complacent or passive—you know—lovely really, to write against that, to really be where I needed to be. Particularly in the last section in which I had to try to imagine getting that close to the electric chair, to imagine what might really be happening to someone in that situation.

K: Did they really do that? Would they give someone electric shock therapy?

M: They would. If it is decided you are not mentally competent, they have to bring you back to competence to kill you. It's amazing. I'm not sure whether she, in preparing herself for the electric chair, imagined the electric shock therapy.

K: That whole sequence in which you play with—"Did she actually mutilate Beatrice?"

M: Right.

K: That was a very very chilling—

M: I'm glad.

K: ...in which she asked herself, "Is it possible that you could let her get away?"

M: I would say that for me that was one of the most disturbing moments of the book. I had no idea that this is what she was going to do, that this is what loving and being betrayed—in her mind, I mean nothing really happened at all, but in her mind. And to understand how a mind and psyche like this exists, how it is possible. I was very disturbed to see that.

Also there's another place, at her mother's funeral—did she really attend the funeral? Did they release her to attend? I doubt that they would. The things she needs are very very disturbing. And yet the way she tries so hard to live, she's really a very sympathetic character in some ways.

K: I know that you love to bring documents into your text. The self-help thing you brought into the text at the end really cranked it up a whole notch, the language so bland and accessible.

M: Her situation is hopeless, so hopeless, and yet there it is: "things I would have liked to have done in my life." I just found it very strange next to her own narrative. I didn't want to use it gratuitously or in a mocking way and so I was really careful that it would reveal its strangeness. She just wanted to be ordinary. And it was so hopeless.

K: Your choice of mathematics as a theme is unusual. Is the world of advanced mathematics easily accessible to you?

M: No, not at all. Often I find myself drawn to things that have always interested me—and that's the beauty of writing books too—but that I do not quite understand. Mathematics to me is its own language. And so I worked with a linguist and mathematician who really helped me with all of this. He's in my acknowledgements.

When I realized that no one would be interested in regular math in the book, I decided to work more with linguistics. So you could actually see those italicized sections, voices, whatever they are, parse into something that Bernadette's trying to make sense of. So even if we don't understand it (and I don't understand it) I do understand what she's trying to do, how she's trying to make this work. To me, when the numbers desert her, it is a terrible thing.

K: Because that's all she has.

M: Exactly. And that serves to further isolate her at the end.

K: But the numbers come back! And you have that whole page of one long formula.

M: Right, right. It seems to me that they come back when it's too late, when they can't help her anymore.

K: Once at MIT, I saw a student of advanced astrophysics write on the chalkboard the formula for the first instant of creation, which he called Tunneling from Nothing. And, like yours, it went on for half a page. He was so good that I followed his logic all the way through, as he spoke his way through the formula. And at the very end it vanished. I couldn't have explained it to anyone.

M: Well those last equations are about harmonics, and that's outside of most readers' regular knowledge, but it seemed important to me.

K: Important to what?

M: Important that—say, to mathematicians—it be readable, and they may realize, "Oh my God, this is a very simple equation for this." It probably comes from her childhood, I mean it's nothing fancy, it's one of her childhood ways of facing the universe, resisting disintegration, and it comes back to her in her last moments.

Destiny Kinal, of *Waverly, NY and points west*, has been publishing interviews for over 20 years. She's working on two novels and expects to complete one, *Silk Ribande*, this spring.

Magic Imperialism

The Magician's Wife.

Brian Moore.

Dutton, 1998.

230 pages, \$23.95.

Cushing Strout

In histories of conjuring, Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin (for whom Harry Houdini named himself) plays a large role as the father of modern magic, appearing as a performer in a gentleman's evening clothes instead of in the fancy robes and bizarre hats worn by earlier magicians. He also was a master clock-maker and inventor of ingenious automata and original illusions, such as androids who answered questions, singing birds, and butterflies who pulled a borrowed and vanished handkerchief from a sectioned orange. Such achievements were enough to justify his large place in the annals of conjuring, but his most remarkable performance took place in Algeria when he was on a political mission in 1856 for France. The French government hoped that by performing magic for the chieftains of the principal tribes he would counteract the influence of the Marabouts, a sect priding itself on its wonder-working powers, who were advising the tribal leaders to break their ties with France.

When he performed for the desert tribes, Robert-Houdin produced cannonballs from an empty hat, passed coins from his hands to a closed and suspended crystal chest, and by command, made it impossible for a muscular Arab to lift a wooden cash box from the floor. (Robert-Houdin was versed in electromagnetism and planted an induction coil in the metal handle of the box.) In the finale, a young Moor stood on a table (with a trapdoor) and was covered with a cloth cone. Then when a plank was slid under the cone and it was carried forward by the magician and his assistant, the cone tottered and fell empty to the stage. "There was pandemonium in the theater," writes Milbourne Christopher in *The Illustrated History of Magic*, "as terrified spectators rushed to the exits." Four days later, Christopher observes, the Arab leaders, wearing robes symbolic of their loyalty to France, presented the magician with a scroll extolling his magic. Two years later, Robert-Houdin wrote his widely-known memoirs, in which some sixty years ago, as a young informal apprentice to an older amateur magician, I first gapingly read about the Frenchman's Algerian triumph.

I was intrigued to discover recently that one of my favorite contemporary novelists had made this episode the centerpiece of his latest novel, *The Magician's Wife*. The Irish novelist, Brian Moore, who emigrated to Canada and now lives as a Canadian citizen in California, has written many compelling stories about the interrelationship between politics and religion. They cover a wide range, from the struggles of Jesuit Missionaries in the Canadian wilderness of 17th-century New France (*Black Robe*), to communist Eastern Europe and the political troubles of the Church (*The Color of Blood*). Moore has a gift for narrative suspense, and these novels often have the pace and intrigue of superior spy and mystery stories; but these qualities are seamlessly merged with moral and religious reflection in a way that readily explains why he is Graham Greene's favorite modern novelist. There is nothing conventional and orthodox in the religious dimensions of these stories, and they might all bear Jorge Luis Borges' epigraph to Moore's *No Other Life*: "God moves the player, he, in turn, the piece. But what god beyond God begins the round of dust and time and dream and agonies?"

It might seem odd that Robert-Houdin's theatrical story should become an occasion for the imaginative use of Moore's artistic talents. In the histories of conjuring the episode is given no deep implications whatever, but in Moore's telling it reveals meanings for a modern reader that are entirely missing from earlier accounts. At the end of his story, Moore notes that in the summer of 1857, French armies "subdued the tribes of Kabylia, thus completing the conquest of Algeria by France," while in the summer of 1962, "Algeria officially declared its independence, ending

the French presence in that country." These are like two strokes of a clock, not the ingenious and entertaining invention of Robert-Houdin, the son of a watch-maker and maker of "mystery clocks," but one made by Brian Moore that keeps historical time.

Moore's fictional couple, Henri and Emmeline Lambert, retrace the same expedition to Algeria as the one made by Robert-Houdin and his second wife. Like Robert-Houdin, Henri Lambert is an accomplished inventor of automata as well as a master magician, but it is Emmeline Lambert who occupies the moral center of the story. A provincial, no-longer-devout Catholic, who had worked before her marriage as a nurse in the clinic of her father, she finds herself circumscribed and isolated in marriage to a man who is absorbed in his work as a performer and inventor. After reluctantly agreeing to join her husband in the social life of the court, which his political mission has made available to them, Emmeline becomes aware of the erotically tinged attentions paid to her by a Colonel Deniau, chief of the Bureau Arabe. Gradually, the people and geography of Algeria have a seductive influence in separating her from her old moorings, and she becomes increasingly aware of the extent to which her husband's gifts are used, as her own beauty is, by those with political objectives of foreign conquest. Her faded youthful religious feeling is to some extent revived by her wonderment at the daily devoted prayers of the Muslims, whose God seems to be far more real to them than the Christian God is to the French.

Emmeline's awakening has reverberations for her conduct that give a new turn to the famous story of her husband's mission. As the plot unfolds, she becomes concerned about the impact of the mission on the Algerians and responds in a way that jeopardizes the mission. For his part, her husband, for all his skill and bravery amid challenging circumstances, cannot escape paying a personal physical price, which Robert-Houdin never paid. Without any overt editorializing, Moore explores the psychological, political, and moral dimensions of the famous episode that underlies his story. Henri Lambert performs exactly the same tricks in Algeria as Robert-Houdin did, but Moore's story transcends the magician's place in the annals of conjuring by viewing the magician's deeds within the historical context of French imperialism. Moore has mastered here, as in his other novels, the artist's difficult trick of marrying invention with historical credibility.

I can think of only one other novel that bears comparison with Moore's in quality as a historically serious story based on an actual magician: Frances L. Shine's *Conjuror's Journal: Excerpts from the Journal of Joshua Medley* (1978), a man described in the subtitle as Conjuror, Juggler, Ventriloquist, and Sometime Balloonist. Shine, a graduate of Radcliffe and Cornell, invented a character, as she explains, that "owes much to Richard Pote, the mulatto conjuror who was America's first native-born magician." He was born in 1783 of a slave mother and an unknown white father; made considerable money as a performer, and built a mansion on the site where he is buried at Potter Place, New Hampshire. Shine first learned about him from Robert Olson of the Old Sturbridge Museum; and Olson today performs (as I have seen) in costume at conventions of magicians, doing the sort of magic that Potter himself might have done. Shine's fictional account is much more humorous than Moore's, but it is infused with a serious concern for the magician's search for his parentage, his marriage to a white woman, his pietistic religion, and his embittered sensitivity to social exclusion because of his color, a betrayal in his eyes of the expectations nourished by the American Revolution. I had never heard of the novel until I found it in a bookstall at a magicians convention. It deserves to be known to a much wider audience.

Cushing Strout is Professor Emeritus of American Studies at Cornell University.

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FREIDRICH KATZ

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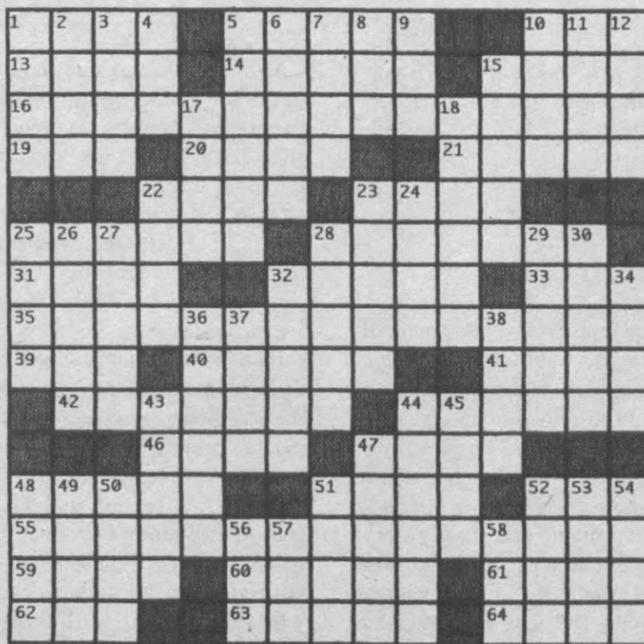
Were ever such great stags as these?
 How unafraid they look! Poised
 Whole for leap or clash, following
 Full autumn rut, antlers
 Bank like wings through yellow paint,
 Backs arch impossibly, hooves
 Touch no ground. The artist
 Caught the very image of might's
 Flight stilled mid-air.
 Their high moment sings in us,
 Lingers in the night for miles.

It's not such stags I see airborne
 from Burns Road's steep embankment
 but two live does, pinned
 in my headlights' beam, startling mid-
 leap. Their thin legs stumble,
 hitting the pavement hard. No way
 to stop, no way we'll miss. No way
 to guess that this time once more
 we'll slip behind their hoisted tails
 untouched, untouching, luck
 brushing us all with the painter's black.

—Ann Silsbee

Ann Silsbee is a composer by profession. Her poems have appeared in the Seneca Review, West Branch, Blueline, Bitter Oleander, and other journals.

Crossword by Adam Perl



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Across</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Death in Venice" author 5. Sofa 10. Brylcreme unit 13. Part of et al 14. Swelling 15. Start to type? 16. Line from the Titanic 19. Afore 20. "You can say that again!" 21. "___ shrugged" 22. More than close 23. Concerning 25. Ridiculous 28. Triathlete 31. "If ___ the Zoo" 32. Ridge 33. Film Noir of 1940 and 1988 35. Line from Donne 39. Excessively 40. "I haven't had ___ all day" 41. Stravinsky or Sikorsky 42. Not natural 44. Blasphemy 46. Swiss river 47. ___ Raton 48. Dread 51. Phom ___ 52. "I" problem 55. Line from Bart Simpson 59. "___ of hope" 60. It's useful on some walks 61. Contemptible 62. Place for a pin? 63. Popular sauce 64. Drinks for stout-hearted men? | <p>Down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Title role for Rosalind Russell 2. Banned spray 3. Not quite perfect 4. "Unforgettable" singer 5. Judged 6. Hung out 7. Temperment 8. Bowling alley initials 9. Inverness negative 10. Give a hand? 11. ___ Vista 12. Gershwin heroine 15. Kind of pole 17. 60's Musical 18. Noble partner 22. Hot ___ 23. Good night girl 24. Reply to the little red hen 25. "___ Misbehavin'" 26. Halloween prop 27. Western ___ 28. Steaming 29. Saw 30. Taboo 32. Stage direction 34. "___ White Season" 36. Jet's Joe 37. Construction beam 38. Italian dough 43. Mean 44. Head ___ 45. Parrot 47. Love of Beauty 48. ___ Ant 49. Asta's mistress 50. No-see-um 51. Snow ___ 52. Author Jennings 53. Big wind 54. Part of a roll 56. Skier's challenge 57. Flying formation 58. PA neighbor |
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Answers to last month's Crossword



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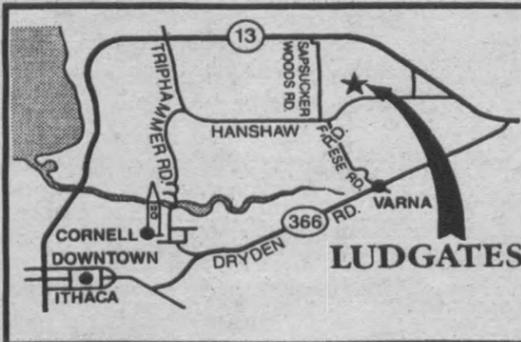
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We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with our Families: *Stories From Rwanda*. Philip Gourevitch. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. 353 pages, \$25.00.

Glynis Hart

I followed the reports of the genocide in Rwanda in Spring of 1994 as many people did, with an uneasy sense that we were not getting the whole story. An ethnic majority group, the Hutu, massacred one million people in an ethnic minority group, the Tutsi, and a mass exodus from Rwanda ensued. An extraordinary and ghastly story, for those of us in the West who had little knowledge of Rwanda, it required explanation; unfortunately, the news reports of the killings, rapes, torture, and other acts of hatred were repulsive to read, deeply upsetting, and left one with a feeling of helplessness.

Writing for the *New Yorker*, Philip Gourevitch produced some very good coverage of the Rwandan genocide by focusing on the question, "Why?" Although the *New Yorker* columns are not reproduced here, this book is organized around that question and offers the best layman's explanation of what happened. The first part focuses on the genocide—its political origins, how it was carried out, and its effects on the survivors. The second part deals mainly with the aftermath, the exodus, and how the international aid community's response allowed the killers to regroup and renew the war from a secure base in UN refugee camps.

Gourevitch's first job is to dismantle the myth that this was random African chaos—ancient tribal hatreds that spontaneously burst out in a river of blood. "Compared to much of the rest of postcolonial Africa, Rwanda appeared Edenic to foreign aid donors... it had nice roads, high church attendance, and steadily improving standards of public health and education." In fact, Rwanda before the genocide was a fairly well-organized realm. Too well-organized, as it turned out, for its own good. Rwandans had a reputation for being peaceable and respectful of authority—so much so that in 1988, Alex Shoumatoff, in his book, *African Madness*, dismissed the idea that Dian Fossey's murder by machete was done by Rwandans: "The Rwandans are a peaceful people who abhor violence. If a Rwandan wanted to kill someone he would use poison."

Gourevitch carefully traces the growth of the Hutu Power movement, from its pre-colonial roots in a strong centralized state, to injections of racism from European colonizers. "Genocide is," Gourevitch explains, "after all, an exercise in community building. ...in 1994, Rwanda was regarded in much of the world as the exemplary instance of the chaos and anarchy associated with collapsed states. In fact, the genocide was the product of order, authoritarianism, decades of modern political theorizing and indoctrination, and one of the most meticulously administered states in history. ...the spectre of an absolute menace that requires absolute eradication binds leader and people in a hermetic utopian embrace, and the individual—always an annoyance to totality—ceases to exist."

Massacres of Tutsi people had occurred in various places in Rwanda starting in the 1960's. Rwandan hate radio pushed extermination of the Tutsis as "the final solution" and told Tutsis they were going to die. Local youths were organized into Hutu militias, and popular songs celebrated hatred of the Tutsi people. As a result of this atmosphere, hundreds of thousands of Tutsis fled the country; these refugees returned *en masse* after the new government took over, some of them with an unsympathetic attitude toward the survivors of the genocide, as if to say, "What did you expect?" Hutu Power told the Tutsis what it intended to do with them. It told the world as well, if we had been listening.

Gourevitch seeks explanations for the genocide in the commonality of human experience, drawing an eloquent argument from the Biblical story of Cain, who murdered his brother: "Although we don't like to talk about it... we are all Cain's children." In effect, Gourevitch sees genocide as a universal problem that can occur at any time or place, depending on the historical circumstances. He denies us the comfortable refuge of defining the perpetrators as fundamentally different, reminding us that "ordinary people" can and do participate in crimes against humanity, whether in Rwanda, Yugoslavia, or Nazi Germany.

In the first part of his book, Gourevitch tries to assemble a picture of life before the genocide, but it soon becomes clear that the survivors do not want to recall the time when their slain families were still with them. One curious effect of torture, or trauma, is that the victim relives his or her traumatic experience over and over again, as if the mind were trying, by inspecting each minute aspect of the event, to make it come out differently. Therefore, it is fairly easy for journalists visiting a place like Rwanda to collect stories of the atrocities, but to ask, "Did your sister also like to read?" is to tread on a sacred space in the victim's

Genocide is, after all, an exercise in community building....In fact, the genocide was the product of order, authoritarianism, decades of modern political theorizing and indoctrination, and one of the most meticulously administered states in history. — Philip Gourevitch

mind, something unreachable that should not be violated. It is to Gourevitch's credit that he has avoided dwelling on the horrors (for those with strong stomachs, Fergal Keane's *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey* gives a harrowing personal account) or antiseptizing them with an overly academic analysis.

In his fine book on the Akhal-Teke horses of Turkmenistan, Jonathan Maslow observes: "Writers are becoming, willy-nilly, the anthropologists of our time... the societies on the margin of the developed world are being abandoned to gumptious journalists and dreamy scribblers. It is anthropology on the cheap ... for writers always have their own agendas, and make no pretense to objectivity."

Although I disagree with Maslow's claim for the objectivity of anthropologists, it's true that we are getting more of the news of faraway places from books like *We Wish to Inform You...* and that the writers have an obligation, if not to shed their subjectivity, to inform the readers where it lies. Writers like Fergal Keane, Redmond O'Hanlon, or Jonathan Maslow deal with this problem by describing themselves and their personal experiences of the places they're writing about, in effect adding themselves to the books as characters. Often as not, the author in such a case ends up the hero of his own narrative, which is all right as long as the reader gets enough information about the place or the people s/he picked up the book to find out about.

At the other end of the spectrum is the "objective" book which minimizes personal discussion, or those narratives, basically dishonest, which present the author as a sort of wandering eye who never ate the food and certainly didn't have to hire a dozen natives to carry his gear and set up his camp. Gourevitch aims neatly for the middle ground here, describing his depression and exhaustion in response to the sadness of Rwanda without making too big a deal of it. Describing the path of memory taken by a woman telling her story, he says:

"We are, each of us, functions of how we imagine ourselves and of how others imagine us, and looking back, there are these discrete tracks of memory; the times when our lives are most sharply defined in relation to others' ideas of us, and the more private times when we are freer to imagine ourselves. My own parents and grandparents came to the United States as refugees from Nazism. They came with stories similar to Odette's, of being hunted from here to there because they were born a this and not a that, or because they had chosen to resist the hunters in the service of an opposing political idea. Near the end of their lives, both my paternal grandfather and my maternal grandfather wrote their memoirs, and... both ended their accounts... with a full stop at the moment they arrived in America... Listening to Odette, it occurred to me that if others have so often made your life their business—made your life into a question, really, and made that question their business—then perhaps you will want to guard the memory of those times when you were freer to imagine yourself as the only times that are truly and inviolably your own."

The second part of the book addresses the issue of the UN refugee camps. After ignor-

Rwanda, they would take the cholera with them, but in his justified frustration at the impotence of the aid workers, Gourevitch possibly underestimates this practical impasse.

The last part of the book treats the problem of repatriation. The RPF finally applied force to empty the UN camps, bringing the refugees back to Rwanda. Since the *genocidaires* came with them—and a major point of the genocide is the oft-repeated "neighbor killed neighbor, teachers killed their students, doctors their patients, priests their parishioners"—this requires the survivors to live side by side again with people they knew well, who turned on them and murdered their families, attempted to kill them, mutilated and raped them. Because the killers are so numerous, justice is just not physically possible. Rwanda hasn't enough jail space, and even the United States, so the joke goes, hasn't enough lawyers.

In his interviews with Laurencie Nyirabura, a grandmother left without family, and former general of the RPF/Vice President Paul Kagame, Gourevitch raises the impossibility of justice. Like most Rwandans, Nyirabura is a subsistence farmer. As a survivor, she has

ing the slaughter in Rwanda, the international community bestirred itself to send food, blankets, plastic sheeting, and doctors to the mass of Hutus who had fled across the border into Zaire. The killers, or *genocidaires*, who organized, directed, and carried out the decimation of their fellows, lived intermingled with their families and resumed their leadership roles in their communities as these reconstituted themselves in the camps. That is, they taxed the refugees for portions of their food allotments, practiced "coerced impregnation" of all Hutu women old enough to conceive, and used the threat of physical violence against the refugees as leverage against the international aid workers. Gourevitch calls this a "rump genocidal state" and his account of its activities is horrifying. The Hutu militias roamed the Zairean countryside, raiding Tutsi homes and ranches for cattle. In league with the Zairean army, they continued their campaign of genocide during forays across the border. The cattle stolen from the Zaireans showed up in the market of the camp in Goma, while the "extra" food allotments for refugees—the *genocidaires* exaggerated their numbers, and prevented aid workers from counting—were used to engage in trade. Part of that trade was arms.

Gourevitch damns the bumbling—however well-intentioned it may have been—of the international aid community that led to this state of affairs. The different aid groups could not reach consensus on what to do. Further, their mandates forbade them to use force, which was necessary first to disarm the *genocidaires* as they entered the camps, second to prevent them from bullying the other refugees, and finally to separate them from the innocent. None of these aims could be achieved by peaceful aid workers dedicated to providing food and medical care. Nor could they bring themselves to shut down the camps, cut off the food supply, so that the refugees would be forced to return to their country. The camps created their own problems, such as an epidemic of cholera; if the sick were sent back to

been deprived of the extended family of children and grandchildren required to make this way of life work. She discusses the man who murdered, and ordered the murders, of her family members; his family is intact (along lines of his own drawing: his Tutsi wife lives, his Tutsi parents-in-law were killed) and his way of life secure. When the impossibility of righting those wrongs is mentioned, Nyirabura withdraws, and the author is unable to get much more out of her. Kagame, on the other hand, comes across as a soldier's soldier—just, brave, dedicated to his country. He has thought deeply about the problems facing his country, the difficulty of extending peace to people who continue to hate, and he has plans, but is frustrated in their implementation. He, too, becomes depressed at the thought of the impossibility of justice. Rwanda, like Hamlet, is in a state of despair because the country knows what must be done and cannot imagine pulling it off. The killers must be brought to justice. The victims must be compensated.

It seems to me, then, that this book poses a question to us reading it, the educated elite of a Western society; the very people whose money, whether through donations or taxes, went to support the UN camps and thereby the killers—the very people who ponder, on each new foreign crisis, whether it is right for us to intervene and when—and lays the argument clearly before us. We are all Cain's children; we stood by while the genocide occurred; we succored the *genocidaires*; the survivors continue to suffer; will we act?

(Philip Gourevitch is a Cornell graduate. He has given readings of his work at *The Nines*, and written book reviews for *The Ithaca Times*.)

Glynis Hart is a freelance writer living in Ithaca. Her work has most recently appeared in *The Ithaca Times*, *Ithaca Child*, and *Backwoods Home magazine*.