

The BOOKPRESS

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE LITERARY ARTS

Volume 11, Number 6 September 2001 Ithaca, New York FREE

Trauma and Justice: The Misremembering of Vietnam

Paul Sawyer

Dispatches

By Michael Herr
Vintage Books
\$12, 260 pages, paper, 1991

The Trial of Henry Kissinger

By Christopher Hitchens
Verso Books
\$23, 160 pages, cloth

Our Vietnam

By A.J. Langguth
Simon and Schuster
\$35, 770 pages, cloth

The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam

By Jerry Lembcke
New York University Press
\$18.95, 280 pages, paper

Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy

By Telford Taylor
Quadrangle Books
Out of print

Echoes of Combat: Trauma, Memory and the Vietnam War

By Fred Turner
University of Minnesota Press
\$16.95, 228 pages, paper

On April 29, 2001, *The New York Times Magazine*, concurrently with the CBS program *60 Minutes II*, reported that Bob Kerrey, former Democratic senator from Nebraska and now president of the New University for Social Research, took part in the massacre of at least a dozen unarmed women and children 32 years ago in a hamlet in Vietnam. The news—raising again the question of war and criminality—broke at the same time as the successful extradition to Belgium of Slobodan Milosevich, the first sitting head of government ever to be indicted by an international tribunal for crimes against humanity. For Ithacans, these stories intersected with still another event at home—the first local appearance of the Moving Wall, a simulacrum of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington.

The old saw about historical memory—those who do not remember the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them—has been often amended to, even those who remember the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them. But there is a form of memory that acts in the same way as forgetting, so that in certain cases, the more thoroughly we immerse ourselves in the past, the more likely we are to repeat it. The reason is that to learn from the past, we must be

able to abstract something from it and “transport” it accurately into the future. But no event recurs in all its complexity and in all its concreteness; the visible details that for most of us stand in for historic events mark the pastness of the past, not its ability to recur. And it is possible for certain important functions of memory—mastering trauma, for example, or memorializing the dead, or pursuing the guilty, or getting “closure”—to take place in relation only to the past and not to the forms that the past events would take if they recurred.

The point is obvious in relation to the Holocaust. The act of learning, even in the fullest and most minute detail, about the

causes and scope of that catastrophe is often said to be essential to prevent its happening again; yet a number of leading scholars have insisted that the Holocaust was historically unique. If that claim is literally the case, then all comparisons are false, even trivializing—on the same order as George Bush’s propaganda claim that Saddam Hussein is “worse than Hitler.” Instead, “Hitler” becomes the sign, not of a danger perpetually to be avoided but of an ultimate horror, manifested once in a past moment.

Few people would deny that we have spent a great deal of time remembering the Vietnam War—or at least that the past quarter of a century has witnessed a countless

series of returns that look very much like memory. The event has been researched, recounted, re-visited, re-fought, and re-visualized. Between 1980 and 1995 alone, about a thousand books were published on the war; a filmography contains six hundred entries. It is the wound that cannot heal, the nightmare that does not go away. Students at Cornell who take my course on the 1960s were born after the Vietnam War ended; they may have only the wispiest memory of the Gulf War and know nothing at all about the Korean War, but they are all curious about Vietnam, the look and feel of it, and may

continued on page 6



Landscape of Loss

Edward Hardy

On The Night Plain

By J. Robert Lennon
Henry Holt and Company
\$23.00, 256 pages

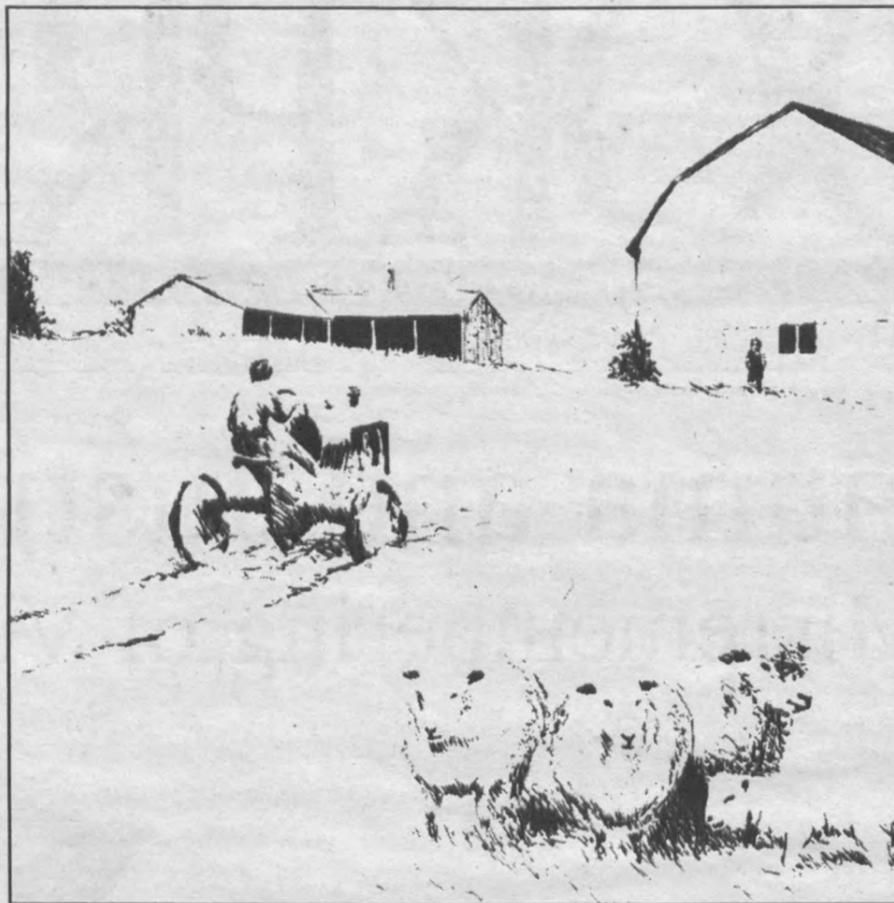
J. Robert Lennon's compelling third novel, *On The Night Plain*, brings us back to the western landscape of his first book, *The Light Of Falling Stars*, which won Barnes and Noble's 1997 Discover Great New Writers Award. While *The Light Of Falling Stars* encompasses the spiraling stories of five characters whose lives are touched by an airplane crash in a small Montana town, *On The Night Plain* centers instead on a single coiled narrative. It's the story of Grant Person, who leaves his family's Montana sheep ranch just after World War II, only to be drawn back and entwined again by his family's sad history.

As the novel opens Grant is riding off the ranch to catch an east-bound train in the abandoned town of Grissom. He is the second in a line of six brothers, all of whom except Max, one of the youngest, have died, either through accident or illness. One younger brother, Thornton, lost his life on a troop transport in the South Pacific. Grant's father, John who was raised in England and came to Montana at the end of World War I, is a talkative but mediocre rancher, while his Icelandic mother, Asta, is distant and somewhat imposing, though she is clearly the center of the family. It was Grant's parents who chose to send Thornton to war in Grant's place, deciding that their oldest remaining son needed to stay behind to help run the ranch.

Grant is both quiet and brooding, a character who seems to have difficulty imagining a life beyond the borders of the one he already knows. His modest goal at this point is to walk barefoot into the Atlantic, leaving his shoes behind on the beach. On the train, guilt-ridden by Thornton's death, Grant decides that if anyone asks if he was in the service, he will give the impression that he fought in the Pacific and came home with a leg wound.

Grant finds his way to Atlantic City, where he briefly works along the boardwalk, before signing on with a fishing trawler. He remains at sea for nearly three years, ever fearful that one day his crewmates will eventually discover that he is not the war hero they believe him to be. One day he wakes to see his father's face in the cabin mirror and, realizing that his new life is somehow false, he decides to return to Montana.

Stopping at his old boarding house in Atlantic City to pick up any stray mail, Grant learns that in his absence his mother has died. The following morning, Grant



Don Karr

goes to the beach to pay his final respects to the ocean, but instead finds the body of a man in a gray pin-striped suit, with three bullet holes in his chest and another in his forehead. It's an image that will haunt him throughout the novel.

Still grieving the loss of his mother, when Grant reaches home he discovers that his father has disappeared, the ranch is in debt, the flock in disarray, and his brash, but somewhat inscrutable, twenty-year-old brother Max is about to leave. In the face of all of this, Grant refuses to blink. With the help of Cotter and Kittredge, two hands who agree to stay on, he spends his savings from his years on the trawler to pay down the debts and revive the ranch.

Lennon does a mesmerizing job of describing life on a Montana sheep ranch in the early 1950s. He convincingly details Grant's sense of isolation, the difficulties of dealing with the land and the weather, and the seasonal rhythms of shearing and lambing, broken only by brief trips to town or to the high pastures to check on Murray the herder, who takes care of the flock. As Grant turns twenty-seven, he appears, finally to be both at ease with his past and comfortable with his inheritance. The future seems to be rolling forward like one long, level plain.

This serenity turns out to be short-lived when Max, who had become an artist in New York City, unexpectedly returns with

his lover, Sophia. "The girl was barely there," Lennon writes, "a bending branch wrapped in a twist of a rag." But Sophia, with her dark eyes and long hair, carries a kind of cool determination to try life in this new world and her presence immediately begins to knock Grant off balance.

To Grant's surprise, Max and Sophia are determined to stay on. Max paints in the barn with Sophia as his model, and they both weave themselves into the rhythm of ranch work. Though it is a little predictable, a slow romantic tension soon evolves between Grant and Sophia, only to be heightened as Max folds himself further into his work. This, combined with Grant's already spiky relationship with his brother and the sudden discovery that their missing father has died in Idaho, speeds the pace in the novel's second half. The tangle of relationships continues to tighten until we witness a surprising death and Grant's resulting breakdown.

At the book's close the narrative leaps decades ahead and we meet Grant again, only now in his seventies. He's been married and widowed, his own children have grown, and he continues to work a small farm he bought after the ranch was sold. Still, he remains gripped by the long string of losses, from childhood on, that have tied him to this particular corner of the world.

Lennon's style brings with it an echo of

Hemingway and a little of Cormac McCarthy; many of his images convey an almost Edward Hopper-like spareness. He is adept at folding his sentences around shards of surprising imagery. At one point he describes a character entering a room but "hesitating like a spun dime." Or this description of a clear spring evening: "The light was like an heirloom taken out of storage and spitshined." Later in the book Lennon describes Grant's thoughts on the differences between cattlemen and sheep ranchers:

The sheep was not an intelligent beast but in great numbers achieved a kind of elemental dignity, like an air mass. Once he'd seen a flock move across a hillside and mistook it for the shadow of a cloud. He had watched sheep gather where they once found a salt lick years before, even the lambs who hadn't been alive to see it. A sheepflock seemed to pulse with purpose almost as if it was one creature, a vast and simple mind that understood the relationship to the land and to man, while a herd of cattle was nothing more than a vegetable garden with hooves, a lowing orchard, inefficient and dumb.

On The Night Plain is a memorable story about a man haunted by the loss of his family and a woman he loved, but it is Lennon's spare yet lyrical voice that remains with this reader.

Edward Hardy is the author of the novel *Geyser Life*, and though he grew up in Ithaca, N.Y., now lives in Cranston, R.I.

Garrison Keillor returns to Lake Wobegon, where the women are strong, the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average

Garrison Keillor

GARRISON KEILLOR

Lake Wobegon Summer 1956



Lake Wobegon Summer, 1956

"What makes Keillor a special writer ... is his capacity to examine the ordinary doings of life and somehow extract little stories that say more about human nature than an institute full of psychiatrists."

—Philadelphia Inquirer

Viking ♦ 336 pages ♦ \$24.95 cloth

The BOOKPRESS

PUBLISHER & EDITOR
Jack Goldman

MANAGING EDITORS
Barbara Woltag & Elizabeth Herrington

FICTION EDITORS
James McConkey & Edward Hower

POETRY EDITOR
Gail Holst-Warhaft

ILLUSTRATORS
Don Karr & Jack Sherman

CONTRIBUTORS
Edward Chase, Edward Hardy, Walter LeFeber,
Scott Minar, Joel Savishinsky, Paul Sawyer,
Emoretta Yang

The entire contents of The Bookpress are copyright ©2001 by The Bookpress, Inc. All rights reserved. The Bookpress will not be liable for typographical error or errors in publication. Subscription rate is \$12.00 per year. The Bookpress is published eight times annually, March through May and September through December. Submissions of manuscripts, art, and letters to the editor should be sent, SASE, to:

The Bookpress
DeWitt Building
215 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 277-2254; fax (607) 275-9221

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE BOOKPRESS

Enclosed is my contribution to
FRIENDS OF THE BOOKPRESS.

\$25 \$50 \$100 other \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Please keep my contribution anonymous

Please send my complimentary subscription to THE BOOKPRESS as a gift to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

THE BOOKPRESS is a non-profit organization

Profile in Hesitation

Walter LaFeber

In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy

By Joseph A. Palermo

Columbia University Press
\$32.50, 349 pages

Thanks in part to Cornell Government Professor George Kahin, Robert Kennedy began to learn a lesson in 1964-1965 that many in the 1960s only learned later: coming to terms with the decade's political hurricanes was a considerably more complex and tragic process than the era's old politicians or new music let on. It often did no good even to be a weatherman to discern which way the wind was blowing, because it came from so many directions and causes that neither weathermen nor those who sang about them understood what was happening. The 1960s was by no means a low-down, dishonest decade, as Auden labeled the 1930s, but it was a highly complex time when history finally caught up with Americans, and they, being largely naive about their supposed exceptionalism and straight-line progress, had little sense of irony, let alone tragedy, to comprehend what was occurring as decades of Cold-War policies, and centuries of racial hatreds and class divisions, reached a simultaneous climax.

Joseph Palermo's superb account of Robert Kennedy's final four years hammers home the complexity and tragedy. Palermo takes on a well-worked-over subject that has inspired some recent first-rate work by such accomplished authors as Ronald Steel, Evan Thomas, and James Hilty. But *In His Own Right* deserves close attention not only because Palermo exhaustively researched the available primary documents and secondary literature, but because, for all his admiration for the way Kennedy turned himself into a different person and politician by 1968, he understands the harsh choices the New York senator had to make after 1964, then explains those choices with both a sure grasp of the politics and an admirable succinctness.

Which brings us back to George Kahin. As a young dean of Southeast Asian experts, by the mid-1960s the Cornell professor knew about difficult choices and the courage necessary to make them. In the 1950s, writing about the inevitability of colonialism's death in Asia, Kahin had been hounded by McCarthyism. The irony was wonderful and completely escaped the humorless McCarthyites, since Kahin was staunchly anti-communist. Because of his vast experience in Asia, however, he had concluded by 1964 that American presidents from Franklin D. Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy had tragically confused Asian nationalism with Soviet- (or Chinese) inspired communism, and had thus taken Americans into a needless, apparently never-ending war (it had already gone on for twenty years), in Vietnam.

As Palermo demonstrates, Robert Kennedy was beginning to understand this awful involvement, but he had also experienced first-hand the commitment to that war of his late brother, whom Robert served and venerated. Like all Kennedys, moreover, Robert had a keen sense of political survival. Taking on a sitting president who had won by a landslide in 1964—and even provided the

needed coattails on which Robert rode to victory in his U. S. Senate race in New York—was not the preferred way to win important Democratic Party support for a planned presidential run in 1972. As it was, Kennedy and Johnson already hated each other. In 1960 RFK had tried to keep the Texan off the ticket as vice-president. During his brother's presidency, Robert had gone out of his way to humiliate Johnson. For his part, Johnson, whose well-developed paranoia was buttressed by the realities of Kennedy's ambitions after 1963, instantly identified the new senator as his most dangerous enemy in the Democratic Party, and, possibly, outside of it as well.

Kahin offered Kennedy a possible way out of the Vietnamese mess, although not a way out of the senator's larger problems with Johnson. In a series of letters (apparently the two never personally met), the professor advised Kennedy to urge the inclusion of the National Liberation Front in a South Vietnamese coalition government. Kahin fully understood that including the Communists could mean the end of the weakening, corrupt southern government that was wholly dependent on the United States. But the solution also recognized the power realities in South Vietnam, and it could avoid the further slaughter of American and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. Kahin especially realized that the driving force in Vietnam's war first against France, then the United States, was not communism, but nationalism. In his assessment, which proved to be correct, there was no danger that the Vietnamese, who had fought China for a thousand years, would become the falling domino that would bring down all of Southeast Asia into Chinese Communist hands. Quite the contrary; an independent Vietnam could well become the cornerstone of a wall keeping Chinese Communist influence out of the vast region.

In 1965, Senator Kennedy began moving toward Kahin's formula. He did not do so because of any grass-roots anti-war movement. Teach-ins had begun at Michigan, Cornell, and other universities, but the anti-war groups were not nationally organized. Those nascent forces, in any event, were only intensifying Johnson's determination to win the war on his terms. Two other events, Palermo demonstrates, finally led Kennedy over to Kahin's views.

The first was Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic in May 1965 to prevent, so the president claimed, the establishment of a communist regime. This invasion, now too-little remembered, was a major turning point of the 1960s. When journalists on the scene proved that no communist threat existed, and suggested that Johnson had misled the American people about the danger, powerful Washington voices that had supported the president's foreign policies began to turn away. Senator J. William Fulbright, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, was one new dissenter. Kennedy was another. Johnson, "hunkering down," in his words, against the attacks of former allies such as Fulbright, determined more than ever to win a foreign policy victory in Vietnam regardless of the cost. In July 1965, the president began rapidly escalating the number of U.S. troops in the war until, by mid-1968, some 500,000 American soldiers were trapped in the morass.

The second event that triggered Kennedy's opposition was the Watts riot in Los Angeles. Thirty-five people died; twenty-eight were African-American. Some 12,000 National Guard troops deployed to stop the bloodshed and looting. The explosion of the black inner-city area came five days after Johnson had signed the historic Voting Rights Act that aimed to assure African-Americans and others the franchise. The problems of race, however, had moved beyond the ability of Johnson's policies to deal with them. In actuality, the war had come home. Kennedy warned that to give the Vietnam conflict preference over making radical, and expensive, changes domestically "would be to invite the very internal conflagration of which we have been warned" and indeed to create "a society so irretrievably split that no war will be worth fighting, and no war will be possible to fight."

Johnson, whose credo was to get both mad and even, never forgave Kennedy's turn against the war. The President viewed it as sheer hypocrisy. After all, as he told Kennedy to his face, he was taking advice from "your State Department," that is, the advisers inherited from John Kennedy. Johnson, moreover, did not want to be reminded, least of all by a Kennedy, that he was subtly but surely becoming trapped by his own assumptions. In 1964-1965, the president had believed he could not pass his Great Society programs through Congress to bring parts of America (especially minorities, the poor, and the elderly) into the mid-twentieth century unless he appeased conservative congressional power brokers who much preferred to fight the Cold War abroad (say, in Vietnam), than change conditions at home. By 1967, however, he was beginning to sacrifice parts of the Great Society in order to cover his bet in Vietnam. As his commitment to realize the Great Society declined, riots in urban areas and protests on college campuses accelerated.

Kennedy was becoming the most notable politician to point out this fatal turn in Johnson's policies. The president's determination to "stay the course" consequently hardened. Undersecretary of State George Ball, the leading opponent within the government of escalating the conflict, later testified that the growing anti-war movement only stiffened the President's will to prevail. U.S. policies in Vietnam between 1964 and 1967 were not limited by anti-war voices, especially when they had Kennedy accents, but by Johnson's well-founded fear that if he went too far—as Harry Truman had in Korea during late 1950—he, like Truman, would suddenly face war with China.

In this Alice-in-Wonderland world, therefore, the anti-war voices of Kennedy, Rev. Martin Luther King, Senator Fulbright, the Watts (and other) rioters, college teach-ins, and growing mass protests seemed to accelerate the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In his willingness to go-it-alone, moreover, Johnson's provincial unilateralism was supported by his and his advisers' badly mistaken conviction that the closest American allies in Europe and Asia were either appallingly ignorant of, or unwilling to stand up to, the Communist threat. Meanwhile, Johnson's fear of China, the communist power whose influence he was supposedly attempting to defeat in the region, actually restrained him. The irony of all this would have been won-

derful had it not turned into tens-of-thousands of body bags returning to the United States and millions of dead Vietnamese who were the victims of an American bombing that finally reached the level of dropping a ton of bombs each minute of the war during the administration of Richard Nixon.

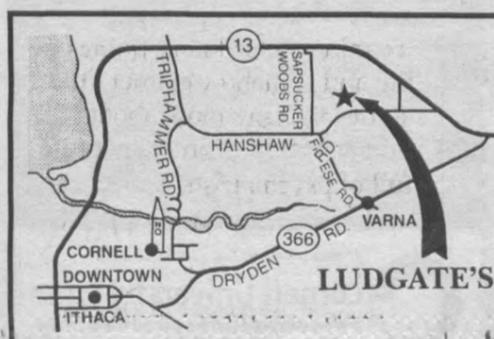
A major strength of Palermo's account is his emphasis on Kennedy's inability to escape the contradictions of his own political situation. The New York senator condemned Johnson's escalation of the war and de-escalation of the Great Society agenda. But Kennedy also lusted to become president, and to achieve that he believed he needed LBJ's help. Johnson would probably run and win in 1968, then have a major say in determining the party's nominee in 1972. Before becoming president, John Kennedy had published a prize-winning book, *Profiles in Courage*, that analyzed American leaders who had endangered their own political careers by taking principled stands. In 1967 into early 1968, Robert Kennedy's reaction to his own political dilemma hardly made him worthy of being the subject of a new chapter in his brother's book. Behind the scenes he courted those long-time Kennedy family friends, the big-city machine politicians exemplified by Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. Many of these leaders, especially Daley, were becoming known for their support of the war and hatred of anti-war protesters. RFK was highly realistic about political power, and in 1967 this meant working with some of the most ardent pro-war politicians in America.

On June 3, 1967, Kennedy went the extra mile. At a New York Democratic Party banquet, he introduced Johnson by declaring that the definition of "greatness," according to Webster's, "could have been written" precisely to describe the president. "The height of his aim, the breadth of his achievement, the record of his past, and the promises of his future," Kennedy grandly announced, demonstrated that Johnson "came to lead this nation at a time of uncertainty and danger, pouring out his own strength to renew the strength and the purpose of all the people of this nation." Extreme flattery in the pursuit of the presidency, even amid the carnage of inner-city riots and Vietnamese battlefields, was no vice for Robert Kennedy.

At least not in mid-1967. Throughout 1966-1967, Kennedy did criticize Johnson not only about the war, but for moving to the right on issues of race and law-and-order—so much so that FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, who followed Kennedy's movements with the obsession of an inept stalker, concluded that the senator's criticisms smacked of some hidden communists within the Kennedy camp itself. But publicly debating the president on policy was quite different than once and for all challenging him for control of the White House. Despite the pleas of anti-war leaders such as Allard Lowenstein, Kennedy was not ready to take that too-often politically fatal leap.

Until, that is, the Tet offensive seemed to change everything in late January 1968. Palermo's superb brief account of Tet and its effect on U. S. politics deserves close reading, especially by the growing number of revisionists who have concluded in recent years that, far from being a disaster for the United States, Tet

continued on page 5



THE
GOURMET FARM STORE
the most unique farm market in the county

Open 365 days a year
9 A.M. TO 9 P.M.

1552 Hanshaw Road
257-1765

Estate-Grown Olive Oils
Fresh Cut Flowers • Fresh, Organic Fruits & Vegetables •
Coffee Beans • Gourmet Specialty Foods • Local Baked Goods
Beans, Rice, Grains, Nuts • Dried Fruit
Specialty Flours • Nutritional Supplements



Zen Masters and Master Planners

Joel Savishinsky

Being contradictory in modern America is no longer a monopoly of the young. While older people commonly like to be thought of as being wise, some take a perverse pride in openly questioning their own wisdom. Alan Freudenberg liked to tease himself, and others, with this kind of humor. He had spent much of his adult life teaching government and civics at the local high school, and devoted years of after-school hours to the planning board of his village's Common Council. He advocated learning from the past, assessing the present, and managing the future. But when it came to preparing for his own retirement, he reflected on what he called "the fallacy of mis-placed prudence," proclaiming that "life is what happens while you're out making plans."

At the age of sixty-three, Alan became one of twenty-six participants in a long-term study of retirement that my students and I have been conducting in Shelby, a rural community in upstate New York. We have been following a group of thirteen women and thirteen men as they anticipated and experienced the early stages of this period of life. Beginning six to eight months before their formal retirement, we first spoke with them about what they expected their lives to be like after leaving full-time work, and then followed the changes in their lives over the next five years as they faced decisions about where to live, how to live, and what to live for.

Underlying our approach was a view of retirement as a process rather than a single event. It is more than just a last day at work or a first pension check; it is a period of creative adjustment that may take months or years. The importance of this experience is also rooted in the fact that retirement itself—as a novel "stage of life"—reflects a new American model of the life course, one in which "life after work" can account for a quarter of our lives.

Furthermore, because our society lacks a standard path for entering this phase of maturity, people end up making the journey in different ways. A critical factor is the extent to which individuals plan, or believe in planning for, their transition out of the work force. We found two contrasting approaches to this process. Some retirees, whom Alan called the "Zen Masters," emphasize an attitude of unscheduled openness and unformulated expectations about what the future might bring; others, the "Master Planners," stress a carefully thought-out agenda of activities, resources and priorities around which to organize retired life.

Master Planners

The first time I met Ed Trayvor was in the comfort of his study. As his wife Harriet served tea, he tried to serve up answers to my questions about what he expected from his forthcoming retirement. He started several answers, but dropped each in mid-sentence, and then said, "Wait. I'll show you." He left the room, and returned in a minute with a long legal pad which he placed in my lap. On it were four pages of neat, densely packed handwritten notes that comprised a detailed list of all the things Ed did (and did not) want to do when he left work the following month. Intending to avoid boring meetings and equally boring people, and abjuring the dry professional literature from his career as a lawyer and fund-raiser, the positive part of Ed's ledger mentioned: devoting more energy to public service, getting involved in community education, spending more time with the grandchildren, and refitting the sailboat. "You need to have a plan," he emphasized, using the same word that other retirees invoked, "otherwise," put in Harriet, "life gets away from you." Ed continued, "you wake up, and hours, days, a whole week is gone... and you don't know what happened to them. We've waited too long to do too many things to let that happen."

This proclamation was not couched in the form of a complaint. At sixty-four, Ed acknowledged a good life so far, but because he felt he

had deferred a number of gratifications, he had taken great pleasure in carefully compiling a list of what he hoped to enjoy next. It had made the last year of work go by quickly.

A year later, when we took stock of the first phase of retired life, Ed took pride in his progress report. Pulling out the pad again, he spoke about his recent election to the YMCA's Board of Directors, the tedious (and indecisive) people he no longer had to sit across from at business meetings, and the summer weekends spent on the lake with his granddaughters. "Look," he confessed, "there are still lots of things I haven't gotten to, I know. But it's a start. We're under way." What made Ed happy was not some claim that the list had been completed, but that the plan itself was working.

Zen Masters

For other people, the prospect of retirement yields a radically different picture, one that is clear but empty, list-less but not pointless. Close to finishing a long phase of adult life characterized by work, schedules, family commitments, and other domestic or community responsibilities, these individuals do not want retirement to be filled in—before it has barely begun—with scripts, agendas or pad-fulls of priorities crowded with other people's figures and dutiful details. They have decided to plan not to plan.

One who embraced this approach was Sandra Golecki, a retired 68-year-old music educator who spoke of "the excitement of emptiness." Settled into the comfort of a Bach cantata and her living room couch one morning, Sandra reached to a shelf behind her, and pulled down a large artist's sketchbook. But instead of showing me another detailed list, she turned back the cover and proudly displayed a completely white surface. Fanning her fingers over the vacant paper, she said retiring "was an unexpected invitation, something akin to the childhood dream of walking through a hidden door and stepping into... what?... some strange, magical land."

Sandra did not have a lot of support for taking the step into retirement in that spirit of wonderment. She had watched her own mentor hang on as a teacher and performer well beyond the tenure of his talent. Her co-workers at The Conservatory did not question Sandra's decision to retire, but they were puzzled—some to the point of disbelief—that in leaving work she was also effectively leaving music. It was not that Sandra disliked music, but she was tired of building her life around it. In recent years, teaching had turned predictable and repetitious, the educational bureaucracy increasingly petty and irritating, and too many of her colleagues wrapped up in committees, gossip, and their small triumphs and defeats. With her children grown and gone, and her husband still working part-time in a nearby city, Sandra's family and commuter marriage placed few demands on her daily life. As she approached the decision to retire, she recalled saying to herself: "Yes, music is wonderful. But there has to be more to life than this."

The thoroughly unmusical and unacademic nature of what Sandra got engrossed in surprised even her: instead of creativity, pedagogy and performance, she got hooked on polo and politics. Both developments emerged within the first few months. A neighbor invited her to a polo match, where Sandra quickly became fascinated by the sounds and choreography of the sport, and by people's unexpected enthusiasms and skills. She soon found herself engrossed and engaged in a part of life, and a social circle, she had never dreamed of stepping foot in before.

The politics surfaced when Sandra was putting away a box of musical scores in her attic, and came across a carton of old campaign materials from her work in the Kennedy-Nixon contest of 1960. Sandra suddenly remembered a promise she had made to herself then: that when the time and opportunity came, she would try to understand her own political past, and make something of it in the future. By the one-year mark of her retire-

ment, she had attended a local party convention and was giving serious thought to getting involved in the next year's election. "If you're open to life," she reflected, "this is the kind of thing that happens."

Companions for The Journey

The point of these two tales is not so much the merit or purpose of polo or politics, community service or sailing, or whether people's pursuits are new, resurrected, deferred or newly discovered forms of fulfillment. Rather, it is the realization that the approach that works for *some* people lies in not planning, whereas for others the satisfaction lies in knowing that the route and itinerary are clearly laid out, that there are known and worthwhile goals to be pursued.

The distinct strategies that Sandra and Ed represent are, admittedly, those of middle-class people who have given retirement a good deal of thought. They have made conscious, albeit different decisions, about how to handle it. But their positive experiences indicate that these alternative approaches work equally well for different people, given the distinct kinds of values, work histories, role models and family circumstances that they bring to this new stage of life. As a sizable body of research has now shown, most Americans do not engage in extensive preparations for retirement, and yet they find this transition to be relatively untraumatic. As the retirees of Shelby suggest, there is also considerable diversity in how the journey is made: all roads may or may not lead to Rome, but there are several that lead into retirement. And people should know whether they want a legal pad or a sketchbook for company.

Reader's Guide:

There are now a large number of books on the aging experience, and a host of "how to" volumes for achieving financial security in late maturity. But much less has been written about the social and emotional transition to retirement as a new stage of life. Readers concerned about the rights and the rites of this passage, including both current and prospective retirees, might find the following of value:

- Dorothy and David Counts: *Over The Next Hill: An Ethnography of RVing Seniors in North America*. (Broadview, 1996). When the Canadian anthropologists Dorothy and David Counts retired, they joined those of their peers and compatriots who had chosen to spend their retirements 'on the road.' Their account examines this new form of nomadism, and reveals how RVers have managed to create a sense of community for themselves even in the absence of a permanent address.

- Nancy Dailey: *When Baby Boom Women Retire*. (Praeger, 1998). With the increasing presence of American women in the work force during the last half century, discussions about retirement have begun to pay more attention to issues of gender and equity. Dailey's book draws heavily on quantitative

data to show why women's educational and work histories, their access to home ownership, and their marital status, are likely to leave many of them in vulnerable economic situations in later life.

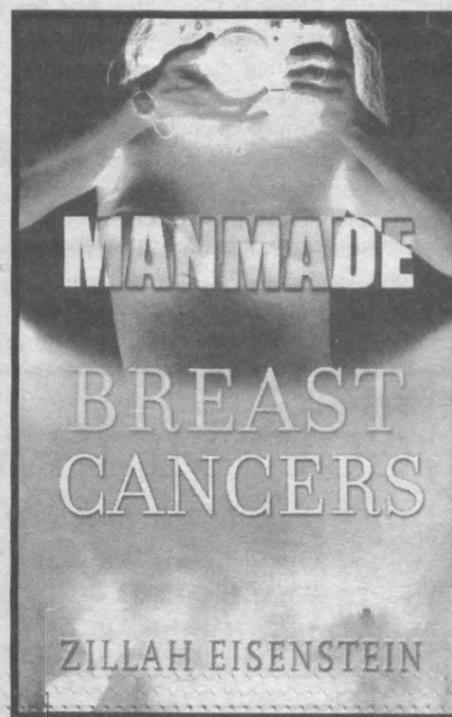
- William Graebner: *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of An American Institution*. (Yale University Press, 1980); and Dora Costa: *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History 1880-1990*. (University of Chicago Press, 1998). Formal retirement is a very modern phenomenon, and Graebner provides a helpful social history of this new phase in the life-course. He centers his account on the moral and ideological as well as political forces that have given it shape. Costa's book is a more recent account that focuses on the economic, policy, and demographic factors that continue to affect debates about Social Security, pensions, Medicare, and other benefit programs.

- Carl Klaus: *Taking Retirement: A Beginner's Diary*. (Beacon Press, 1999). A master of the personal narrative, Klaus takes on his own retirement from the University of Iowa with candor, humor and insight, documenting the emotional ups and downs of his first year away from the college classroom. A graduate of Cornell, Klaus even provides readers with some Ithaca flashbacks and reflective moments.

- Joel Savishinsky: *Breaking The Watch: The Meanings of Retirement in America*. (Cornell University Press, 2000). Sandra and Ed, whose stories appear in this article, are two of the twenty-six people featured in this book on how people in one New York community try to make a life, not just a living, in retirement. From their farewell parties to their new passions, from their friendships and travels to their sense of humor and their sense of responsibility, this book uses the life-stories of older women and men to explore why the search for meaning does not end with the end of work.

- Jeffrey Sonnenfeld: *The Hero's Farewell: What Happens When CEOs Retire*. (Oxford University Press, 1988). Following business executives as they move away from positions of great power and visibility, Sonnenfeld finds that they tend to model their new lives on leaders from other sectors of society: namely, monarchs, generals, ambassadors, and governors. Even for those of us who lack this kind of corporate 'right stuff,' there are lessons here about the struggle between holding on and letting go.

—
Joel Savishinsky is the Charles A. Dana Professor in the Social Sciences at Ithaca College, where he teaches anthropology and gerontology. His previous book, *The Ends of Time: Life and Work in A Nursing Home* (Bergin and Garvey, 1991) won the Gerontological Society of America's Kalish Award for Innovative Publishing. He can be reached at savishin@ithaca.edu.



"[Zillah Eisenstein] views breast cancer through a personal and a feminist political lens. Although she and her mother survived their breast cancers, two of her sisters died of the disease. These personal losses led her to theorize about the impact of patriarchal societies on the prevalence and treatment of breast cancer. She believes that the current emphasis on the role of genes and estrogen is simplistic and overstated. Eisenstein is passionate about her ideas and offers many provocative theories that will engage readers interested in the politics of illness."
 —Publishers Weekly

"Brilliant...scientifically accurate and emotionally compelling. It should be read by everyone who is concerned about women's health in general, and breast cancer in particular."
 —Christiane Northrup, M.D., author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*

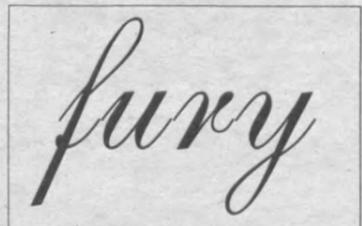
\$39.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper

At bookstores, or call (800) 666-2211



Cornell University Press
 www.cornellpress.cornell.edu

SALMAN RUSHDIE



From the author of *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*

From one of the world's truly great writers, a wickedly brilliant and pitch-black comedy about a middle-aged professor who finds himself in New York City in the summer of 2000.

Random House ♦ 272 pages ♦ \$24.95 cloth

Bobbie Ann Mason



Zigzagging
Down a
Wild Trail

**Bobbie Ann Mason
Zigzagging Down
a Wild Trail**

In this remarkable book, the author of *Shiloh and Other Stories*, *In Country*, and other award-winning books gives us powerful new stories that capture the restless energy of life in contemporary America.

"Bobbie Ann Mason's genius only grows stronger and wiser and funnier with every new book, and *Zigzagging Down a Wild Trail* is my absolute favorite so far. What an ear she has for the telling phrase, what an eye for the heartbreaking detail. These new stories are stunning."

—Josephine Humphreys,
author of *Nowhere Else on Earth*

Random House ♦ 224 pages ♦ \$22.95 cloth

Profile in Hesitation

continued from page 3

was first and foremost a massive defeat for the Vietnamese enemy—and might even have been a fatal setback had not the American media, led by the respected Walter Cronkite of CBS television, wrongly concluded that the offensive vividly proved the failure of Johnson's policy. The debate over Tet might have had less impact if Johnson and General William Westmoreland, the U.S. commander in Vietnam, had not during the preceding months constantly promised that victory was just around the corner. In New Hampshire, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, who led the anti-war movement's effort to defeat Johnson in the state's presidential primary election, observed that "only a few months ago we were told that 65 percent of the population was secure" in Vietnam, but now after Tet, "we know that even the American Embassy is not secure." McCarthy was being advised by several former members of Kennedy's staff who had left him out of frustration that he, unlike McCarthy, would not challenge Johnson for the biggest prize.

Communist forces did suffer massive casualties, and they failed to trigger a massive anti-U.S. uprising. But over nine weeks of fighting, some 4,000 American soldiers died, the largest number lost in such a short period of the war. When Johnson responded with massive bombing, Kennedy correctly warned that "the widespread use of artillery and air power in the centers of cities may hurt us far more in the long run than it helps today." But the same day the Tet offensive had begun, Kennedy again declared his support for Johnson's reelection.

Tet and McCarthy's startling near-defeat of a sitting president in the New Hampshire primary finished Johnson. On March 16th, Kennedy finally moved to take personal advantage of McCarthy's audacity and the presi-

dent's failure by declaring that he was a candidate for the presidency. On March 31st, Johnson appeared on television to announce he would seek fresh talks with the communists, then shocked the nation by adding he would not run for reelection so he could devote full-time to achieving peace. On April 4th, Rev. Martin Luther King, who had forcefully argued that justice in America could never be realized while Americans fought an unjust war in Asia, was murdered in Memphis.

King's assassination was a final step in redefining what the presidential campaign was to be about. Months before, it had appeared that the campaign would be fought over Vietnam policy. Johnson's peace initiative and his removal from the race, escalating urban riots, anti-war protests that disrupted campuses and cities, and then King's murder forced Americans to wonder where they had gone wrong not in Vietnam, but at home. Kennedy's candidacy further confirmed this turn away from foreign policy and towards an intense debate over how the American dream had become so corrupted. Eugene McCarthy eloquently opposed the war, but he made relatively little effort to deal with the domestic failures of the Great Society or to reach out to minority groups. Kennedy, on the other hand, stressed his belief that only by including African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans (he had become especially close to César Chávez, who led the United Farm Workers), could he win the presidency and carry out the changes required to rebuild the country.

In 1970, Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg published *The Real Majority*. This classic account argued that Richard Nixon's 1968 victory had been determined not by the anti-war movement in the streets but, as they phrased it, the young housewife in Dayton who feared for her family that had to go out on those streets. Palermo apparently did not use the

Scammon-Wattenberg account, but his evidence and, especially, the way he constructs the last section of his book agree with their counter-intuitive argument. Vietnam begins to drop out of Palermo's narrative as Kennedy rapidly tries to piece together a highly unlikely coalition of minority groups, anti-war leaders, and big-city white machines. While dramatically bringing blacks and Hispanics into his campaign, Kennedy also stressed law-and-order issues, especially in Midwest primary states where the Dayton housewife wielded considerable power. His great loss in the primaries, indeed the only loss any Kennedy had ever suffered in an election, came in Oregon, where McCarthy defeated him in a campaign where the war was an issue and no sizeable minority community was present to pull Kennedy through. But then came the New York senator's greatest victory. In the California primary, race trumped the war as the leading issue. "Some prowar Democrats were apparently so fearful of Kennedy's strong identification with minorities," Palermo writes, "that they backed the peace candidate McCarthy rather than help Kennedy advance the causes of blacks and browns." Their ploy did not work.

On the night of his California triumph, Kennedy was assassinated in the kitchen of Los Angeles's Ambassador Hotel. He left memorable legacies. His solution for the war, shaped in important parts by George Kahin, appears in retrospect to be one of those turning points in history at which far too few turned. His example as a profile in hesitation during 1966-1967, when he refused to come out fully against a sitting president, exemplified the realities of American politics for even a Kennedy. His entry into the race after Tet, and after McCarthy cleared the way, demonstrated an opportunism that is not only a judgment on, but a requirement for, certain kinds of political success. And his final attempt to piece together a new political coalition of deeply frustrated minority groups and increasingly angry big-city machines promised a new American politics.

It was a promise that was not realized. At the time of his death, Kennedy was far behind Humphrey in the quest for Democratic Convention delegates, and it would probably have been impossible for RFK to have claimed his party's nomination, especially as Johnson, despite his assurances to Kennedy to the contrary, secretly did all he could to help Humphrey. In any case, the American political landscape finally was changed not by Kennedy's new coalition, but by Richard Nixon's so-called "southern strategy" in 1968 and 1972 election victories that made Republicanism triumphant where southern Democrats once reigned. Kennedy, as Palermo's fine book exemplifies, is still revered as what-might-have-been. Nixon's southern strategy, however, became what is, a result few weathermen would have predicted in the mid-1960s.

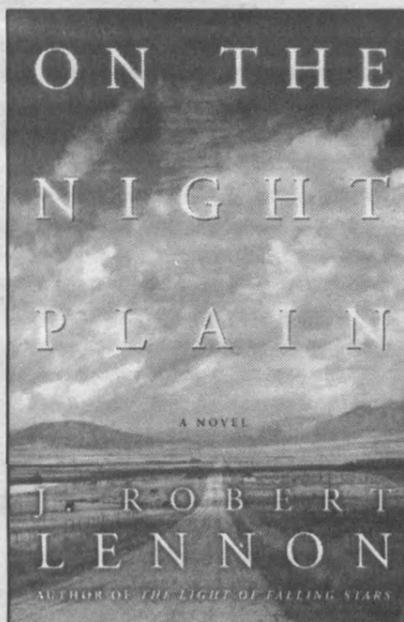
Walter LaFeber is a Professor of American History at Cornell University.

**ON THE
NIGHT PLAIN**

BY J. ROBERT
LENNON

A brave, beautifully written story about a man who reluctantly accepts his birthright in a hard-luck Montana sheep-ranching family, from the critically acclaimed author of *The Light of Falling Stars*

Henry Holt ♦ 256 pages ♦ \$23.00 cloth



Listen to

WEOS
89.7 FM/90.3 FM
Geneva/Ithaca

for
progressive
and
alternative
news programs

Democracy Now! with Amy Goodman, M-F, 9-10 a.m.

The Nobody Show
your unabashed voice
of the left and left out
Wednesdays,
7:30-9:30 p.m.

Unwelcome Guests
a program about wealth,
power and people's
resistance to the
New World Order
Sundays, 9-11 p.m.

THE BOOKPRESS
welcomes
COMMENTS, SUBMISSIONS,
and
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Visit us on-line at
[www.thebookery.com/
bookpress](http://www.thebookery.com/bookpress)
or call us at:
(607) 277-2254

Trauma and Justice: The Misremembering of Vietnam

continued from page 1

even have taken a course on it in high school. Only the Civil War seems to be remembered with such intensity. (In some ways the memory of the Civil War has even acted as a template for memories of Vietnam: both are remembered as civil conflicts, something that happened to Americans, in which the defeated army is connected with a historical crime that is at least partly canceled by the extraordinary valor of the men who gave their lives for a lost cause.) All this fascination works to confirm the uniqueness of the Vietnam War. It is as though the excess of memory is the penance we pay for going about our foreign policy today as if Vietnam had never happened. For every succeeding American military venture, we have been assured that it is not "another Vietnam."

If there is a consensus about Vietnam among Americans, it would run something like the following: Once upon a time, our leaders—either out of good intentions or out of an inexplicable pattern of error and folly—gradually involved us in a quagmire, in a distant Asian country composed of rain forest and rice paddy, from which we could not extricate ourselves; the result was a protracted, inconclusive, deadly episode, neither victory nor defeat, for which we sacrificed 58,000 American lives—either because the war was by its nature unwinnable or because we somehow lacked the will to win ("fighting it with one arm tied behind our back" is the phrase popularized by George Bush). This consensus has at least produced a lesson: never again to risk American lives in a protracted struggle abroad; never again to risk losing. But what lies concealed behind this notion of a tragic mistake—and partly concealed even by the admirable concern to spare the next generations of young Americans—is what many would consider the essential nature of the war, which is that it was an aggressive and illegal action, the most massive act of destruction committed by one nation against another since the end of World War II. This is the aspect of the war which, having officially forgotten it, we have condemned ourselves to repeat.

For twenty years the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has moved, consoled, and even changed the lives of the many millions who have seen it. In their seemingly endless march, the names produce the phantom of presence—a permanent rescue from the ultimate meaninglessness of oblivion—and also a mathematical recognition. Enumerated name by name, fifty-eight thousand is a very great, an ungraspably great number. But in my mind's eye another wall, ghostly and far vaster, stretches out behind the one in Washington: the Vietnamese wall we cannot see because it was never built. And who could have built it? How far would two million names stretch? Across how many panels? How long would it take to scan them, to walk beside them, to take their measure? At what point would the mind totally give way?

The sheer brutality of the war still has power to boggle the mind. If, as I have said, an estimated two million Vietnamese died, most of them civilians, the kill ratio of the war becomes thirty-five to one. No one has completely assessed the environmental damage. In a British documentary made in 1988, I saw teams of workers organized by the government hacking away at a thick, tall, tenacious, inedible weed. It is the only vegetation that can grow on the earth devastated by American chemicals—a useless religion covering over a fifth of the entire land mass of Vietnam. The weed has been nicknamed "American grass."

This forgetting of the other side of the war—their side—was not a feature of public discourse in the 1960s, which is full of

records of outrage and despair systematically supported by facts. In one famous speech—it may be the most ferocious sustained verbal assault on American policy ever uttered—the speaker built his case by imagining our soldiers from the alien perspective of Vietnamese peasants. The phrase "what liberators" repeats like a sarcastic mantra through a catalogue of horrors:

[The Vietnamese] move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps . . . They know they must move or be destroyed by our bombs. . . . They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas preparing to destroy the precious trees. . . . So far we may have killed a million of them—mostly children. They wander into the towns and see thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. . . . What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. . . . We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men. What liberators!

As for the American soldiers,

what we are submitting them to in Vietnam is not simply the brutalizing process that goes on in any war where armies face each other and seek to destroy. We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. . . .

Somehow this madness must cease. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. (italics in original)

The mainstream press predictably attacked this speech for, among other things, its "facile" fusion of Vietnam and the cause of Negro equality (*Life* said it sounded like Radio Hanoi in its call for "abject surrender"). Public memory has effectively reghettoized Martin Luther King, with endless re-broadcasts of "I Have a Dream" every January 15; but in the sheer comprehensiveness of its indictment, not to mention its factual accuracy, the speech he delivered against the war on May 4, 1967 at Riverside Church is one of the central political statements of the time. One reason is that he attacks not only the present crime but what he considers its underlying cause—the American determination to stand "on the wrong side of a world revolution" in order to protect a widespread system of investments:

if we ignore this sobering reality we will find ourselves organizing clergy- and laymen-concerned committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa.



Jack Sherman

This was the war King saw and decried, and this was the grim future he wanted his fellow-citizens to prevent. But today, even young people who are open to learning about the monstrosity of a war fought before they were born still find their responses peculiarly blunted. Students who take my class on the 1960s are simply puzzled by films of protesters shrieking at cops or throwing bottles or vandalizing automobiles. It is hard for them to grasp how it felt to know that even as you slept, villagers were being bombed or burned to death in the name of your country, and therefore in your own name—and that you couldn't stop it by any means, legal or illegal. Yet thirty years later, when President Clinton finally named Vietnam a trade partner of the U.S., the act was controversial because of this question: Should we or should we not recognize an old enemy before it has returned our MIAs? As some Germans are said not to have forgiven the Jews for the Holocaust, many Americans have still not forgiven Vietnam for the war we brought there. In the BBC film I mentioned above, a woman, crippled and in constant pain from dioxin poisoning pleads, with the American people for the money to send her to Europe for medical treatment. I have not met any American who heard that plea; I saw the film only because I was living in England in 1988, the year it appeared.

At the end of Peter Davis's documentary *Hearts and Minds*, a former helicopter pilot named Randy Floyd, thinking about the children burned and gunned down by chopper attacks like his own, breaks into silent weeping before the interviewer's camera. "Have we learned anything from all this?" the director asks. Floyd answers: "I think we're trying not to." What are the specific ways we have tried not to learn from Vietnam? How did this war get forgotten, amidst what the journalist Fred Turner calls the war's "memory industry"? This forgetting is not, of course, a passive phenomenon but a repeated action in which filmmakers, government officials, journalists, the general public, and even those speaking from "personal" memory come together to reproduce the war in the form of stories and images that repeat and reinforce each other, with a set of dominant aims and tendencies. In what follows, I am not interested in the versions of the war produced by the self-identified right or left, important as these are, but rather in the

"mainstream" view—a version so widely accepted that it doesn't seem to be produced at all and so can be invoked unconsciously and dogmatically, as the way things "simply were." My aim is to show why the Vietnam War was a criminal action under international law; how official memory has blocked awareness of this fact; and why that still matters today. My specific subject is four of the key images, or moments, in that composite false-memory: the war as metaphysical conundrum, the discourse of national healing, the imagery of protest, and the rehabilitation of our leaders. At the end I will return to Bob Kerrey and the issue of war crimes.

I. Heart of Darkness

"We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war."
—Michael Herr

In 1967 Michael Herr went to Vietnam for nine months as a correspondent for *Esquire*. He recorded his experiences in a set of articles he eventually published in 1977 as the bestselling *Dispatches* and which he drew upon for his contribution to the film *Apocalypse Now* and his screenplay for *Full Metal Jacket*. Paul Fussell, the literary historian, has remarked that as both screenwriter and best-selling journalist, Michael Herr has fixed the image of Vietnam for most Americans. *Dispatches* is therefore a good place to begin our understanding of the Vietnam memory industry.

Dispatches is a stylistic tour de force, characterized by long, free-associative sentences, fragmented organization and extremely intense imagery that conveys an impression of overwhelming sensory immediacy and disorientation not unlike the experience of combat itself—an experience which Herr (and the soldiers he liberally quotes) often liken to the intensity of sex, drugs, or rock 'n' roll. Daily episodes of inflicting or risking sudden death induce a hyper-awareness, a point where "sur-reality" touches on hallucination and life turns into a movie, requiring a journalist of remarkable sensitivity to the sheer variety of sensation in war: "There were all kinds of people who knew the background, the facts, the most minute details, but only a correspondent could give you the exact mood that attended

each of the major epochs: the animal terror of the Ia Drang or the ghastly breakdown of the first major Marine operation, code-named Starlight" (226). This unflinching bluntness, which gives Herr his authority as a writer, fulfills the promise he implicitly made with the grunts to return home and tell their story. By the same token, he refuses to make excuses or judgments:

Disgust doesn't begin to describe what they [the grunts] made me feel, they threw people out of helicopters, tied people up and put the dogs on them. Brutality was just a word in my mouth before that. But disgust was only one color in the whole mandala, gentleness and pity were other colors, there wasn't a color left out. I think that those people who used to say that they only wept for the Vietnamese never really wept for anyone at all if they couldn't squeeze out at last one for those men and boys when they died or had their lives cracked open for them (67).

The "color" of disgust is therefore not dominant in *Dispatches*; yet the book has its villains—not the fighting men on either side but the information officers, the spooks, the planners of war. Thus, although Herr disclaims political opinions in the usual sense ("we all had roughly the same position on the war: we were in it, and that was a position"), the book's relentless attempt to write from the trenches, from the grunt's point of view—to find a way, as he puts it, to "write meaningfully about death"—has a strong polemical thrust: "It seemed the least of the war's contradictions that to lose your worst sense of American shame you had to leave the Dial Soapers in Saigon and a hundred headquarters who spoke goodworks and killed nobody themselves, and go out to the grungy men in the jungle who talked bloody murder and killed people all the time" (42).

To the murderous abstractions of the Dial Soapers Herr opposes his own brand of truth—descriptions that are concrete, precise, unflinching, and unambiguous—which for most readers are stunningly persuasive. But alongside the brutal factuality stand experiences that are the apparent opposite of the concrete—evocations of the intangible, ambiguous, elusive. The book opens with an italicized meditation on the old French-made map Herr found in his hotel room, with the

names of places and even countries obsolete and all but illegible. The map functions obviously as a metaphor, compressed and complex, of the American state of mind—both the experience of combat in an Asian jungle and the folly of the war planners; but almost immediately one notices a new ambiguity, not in the subject but in Herr's own language:

It was late '67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore: reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war (3).

This may seem like simply a colorful way of representing a foreigner's point of view (if you can't speak Vietnamese, the people will seem unreadable to you), though the stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental rises disturbingly, barely disguised. And what can it mean to say there was no longer a country there? Or what can it mean when, referring to a beloved fellow-correspondent, Herr writes: "Just hearing the way Flynn pronounced the word 'Vietnam,' the tenderness and respect that he put in it, taught you more about the beauty and horror of the place than anything the apologists or explainers could ever teach you" (225-226). Herr does not simply convey the American soldier's point of view of a distant land, he lives within that point of view so thoroughly that one can no longer distinguish a reality separate from American experience: "Vietnam" becomes the name of that experience (composed of beauty and horror), an experience which contains, among other things, distant and silent people with unreadable faces. As it turns out, this description of the war as dream-like, eerie and depopulated of foreigners (natives) opens the way to a kind of running fantasy about the war which Herr does not hesitate to call "mythical." This comes clearest in his brilliant description of the landscape around Khe Sanh.

General Westmoreland massed American troops near the hamlet of Khe Sanh in the mistaken belief that the North Vietnamese were similarly massing their forces in the surrounding forest in preparation for a Dienbienphu-like assault. Herr captures

American apprehensions through an orotund evocation of the surrounding and (in the only overtly racist passage in the book) of the ethnically unique inhabitants of the region, called by the French "Montagnards":

Their nakedness, their painted bodies, their recalcitrance, their silent composure before strangers, their benign savagery and the sheer, awesome ugliness of them combined to make most Americans who were forced to associate with them a little uncomfortable over the long run. It would seem fitting, ordained, that they should live in the Highlands, among triple canopies, where sudden, contrary mists offered sinister bafflement. . . . The Puritan belief that Satan dwelt in Nature could have been born here, where even on the coldest, freshest mountaintops you could smell jungle and that tension between rot and genesis that all jungles give off.

Oh, that terrain! The bloody, maddening uncanniness of it! . . . Not even the Cav, with their style and courage and mobility, were able to penetrate that abiding Highland face (94-96).

From "you were there in a place where you didn't belong" to "even if there had been no war," the passage—like the book itself—vacillates between placing the "sinister bafflement" of Vietnam in the minds of the besieged Americans (who re-live the Puritan warfare against the Indians) or in the place itself.

The image is haunting, but Herr is not the inventor of it. Exactly here, in a passage that seems to be written out of a great weight of observed experience, Herr is actually viewing the landscape of Vietnam through the spectacles of literature. The strained rhetoric, the slightly delicious playing with supernatural dread, even the phrasing, are those of Marlowe, the narrator of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, while the jungle of Herr's Vietnam is also the jungle of Conrad's Africa. The analogy between the American experience in Vietnam and the colonized Africa of Conrad is by now a commonplace, at least since the novella's plot was transported intact by Francis Ford Coppola into *Apocalypse Now*. (In the film, a copy of the book even appears in Marlon Brando's compound, which is guarded by savages clearly derived from Herr's Montagnards.) The parallel I want to point out is not the attack on imperialism, which Conrad shares with the film and which many have noticed, but the treatment of landscape, which Conrad shares with the book and which few have noticed.* For both writers,

the jungle stands in as a symbol of evil. The symbol is part of a cultural logic that can acknowledge European "mistakes"—or even worse—while simultaneously imagining evil as something inhering in a distant place rather than in us.

Herr's personal intoxication with war is idiosyncratic, though no doubt shared by many other aficionados of Vietnam then and later (at one point he calls the war "merely wonderful"). At the same time, his narrative contains all the elements that have since become commonplace notions of the war. For most Americans, as for Herr, the war was essentially men humping in the jungle—a dangerous, dark, tangled environment where one lost one's way. For Herr, Vietnam is not a country but an experience of ours, the kind of ordeal that makes a man—and his job is to describe "the beauty and horror of the place." He can only do this by making "the place" semi-allegorical and draining it of Vietnamese, who lurk as silent background figures. In an irony that is far from accidental, our warmakers acted out the statement "there was no longer any country here but the war" by attacking the countryside itself as if it were the literal enemy: Vietnam underwent more ecological damage by widespread use of bombs, defoliants, and other chemicals than any nation in human history.

Moreover, once one comes to think of Americans as fighting disembodied forces rather than actual humans, one can excuse even the most fearful atrocities—going much farther than Herr himself. As the editors of *Time* remarked about My Lai, "The most pertinent truth is less accusatory and more difficult for the U.S. to accept: it is that Americans as a people have too readily ignored and too little understood the presence of evil in the world" (quoted in Turner, 42). Michael Herr may have let the American fighting man off the hook by evoking another war, an existential event darker, deeper and more mysterious than any merely factual history could locate—"the kind of mythic war you wanted to hear described" (225). But for apologists like the editors of *Time*, the soldiers are stand-ins for "Americans as a people": it is we who understand little about evil in the world, we who got mired in a distant quagmire, we who lost our innocence, and have been wanting to come home ever since.

II. The Wounded Nation

Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*—probably the best-known novel about coming home

continued on page 8

monstrous and free (NCE 1988, 37).

The surprise Marlowe pulls on his listeners is that the "monstrous" figures on the bank are not, after all inhuman—which prompts him to remark that "The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future . . . truth stripped of its cloak of time" (38). But if all men are capable of reversion into the savagery from which we arose—and even in that reversion of becoming worse than savage, as shown in the case of Kurtz, the European adventurer who ends his life by uttering the famous words, "The horror! the horror!"—the novella insists just as strongly on a distinction between the savage and the civilized. Marlowe, after all—and Kurtz before him—must travel there to find it. As recent readers of Conrad have noticed, Africa both is and is not the "heart" of darkness: although on the one hand the "darkness" is in all of us, on the other it belongs especially to a place—Africa—which combines all the novella's senses of "darkness" (evil, ignorance, and skin color).

*Drifting down the Congo in his search for Kurtz (Marlon Brando in the film), Marlowe in a famous passage apprehends both the jungle and the natives as savage, the state opposed to civilization:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steam toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? . . . The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing

Trauma and Justice: The Misremembering of Vietnam

continued from page 7

from Vietnam—concludes with a scene at the Vietnam Memorial, where a family broken by the war travels to find absolution. Samantha, Mason's heroine, is a seventeen-year-old girl whose father died in Vietnam before she was born; her uncle Emmet, also a vet, has remained a permanent psychic invalid, erratic and withdrawn, unable to hold down a job or love or form a family. Sam's curiosity about her father's experiences is doubly frustrated, first by the silence she meets among the vets she knows, all of whom appear wounded in some way (the veteran she dates turns out to be impotent), and second by the letters she discovers by her father, which among other things contains casual phrases about "killing gooks." Baffled by the unspeakability of male experience, Sam flees to a swampy reservation near home, where she spends a frightening night alone, in a sleeping bag, attempting to re-enact the last days of her father's life. But as Emmet tells her when he discovers where she has fled, the experience of Vietnam is incommensurable to anything in civilian life: "You think you can go through what we went through out in the jungle, but you can't." And it is unrepeatable: "You can't learn from the past. The main thing you learn from history is that you can't learn from history. That's what history is." In the face of this impossibility, Emmet, Sam and Sam's grandmother travel from East Kentucky to Washington, where the meaninglessness of the war and its losses is not explained (it cannot be, in the terms the novel sets up) but rather symbolically transformed. The three family members behold familiar names inscribed in the granite—names of Emmet's lost buddies, of Sam's father, and then of a soldier with Sam's name: "She touches her own name. How odd it feels, as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall." The smile that lights up Emmet's face in the end signifies that through the wall he has found peace at last.

I have always felt that the Vietnam Memorial is the finest cultural artifact to emerge from any American war. It is so powerfully understated a work of public architecture that it makes earlier examples seem hollow and bombastic—the nearby statue of Lincoln, for example, with the gigantic shoes and trousers, not to mention the Washington Monument, which has become the butt of a predictable joke. Because it does not "speak" in any other way than to present names, the Memorial allows the central fact about the 58,000 men and women—that they died and are here remembered—to stand uncluttered. In this way it grants mute absolution to the dead as well as the living. This accounts perhaps for the powerful emotional response the Memorial evokes even in people who are not veterans. I was not in Vietnam, and the three young men I knew who died there were not close friends; yet I know well the kind of cathartic rush reported by many others—a mingling of mourning, recognition, repentance and absolution. For some repentance is the most powerful emotion and works in various ways: repentance of a nation for sending its young off to die; of veterans for coming home alive; and of other members of the Vietnam generation like me—veterans of the war at home—who found alternatives to dying, and wish to pay tribute to those who did not.

However, the journalist Fred Turner takes a different view of that experience of absolution. In his neglected book *Echoes of Combat*, an important and insightful study of the war and memory first published in 1995, he looks at the sentence in *In Country* that I quoted last ("as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall") and remarks, alluding tartly to the blurb on the novel's paperback edition:

By suggesting that soldiers, civilians, and 'the soul of America' share the same disease, Mason echoes the inscription at the apex of the wall. Just as the dead were 'taken from us' in Vietnam, as if neither we

nor the dead themselves were agents in the matter, so the war has spread its suffering throughout American society, as if it were a sickness Americans had done nothing to catch. There is no room for debate, nowhere to point the finger of blame: "The healing has begun" (183).

In fairness to the novel, Mason's heroine retains her seventeen-year-old disgust with the American bullying of the Vietnam era; as a result, Mason's imagery sets the wall off from the Washington monument. The overall suggestion is that the teen-aged girl and the broken, feminized vet together represent a kinder, gentler alternative to the belligerence of her father's generation. Seeing the American flag and the Washington monument reflected in the wall, Sam thinks, "Both the monument and the flag seem like arrogant gestures, like the country giving the finger to the dead boys" (240). A look at the final shot of the movie, however, better illustrates Turner's point: there, Emmett (played by Bruce Willis) walks off in the distance, his arms around Sam and her grandmother . . . towards the Washington Monument, which rises above them in a glow of afternoon light. The values of the monument are implicitly redeemed in the movie but repudiated in the more tough-minded book; the phallus of the injured veteran can rise again.

That tableau could stand as a logo for Turner's argument. *Echoes of Combat* takes as its point of departure the haunting final words of *Dispatches* ("Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there") and traces in detail the ideological effects of conflating the entire nation with the soldier's experience in Vietnam. He notices that the first films about Vietnam vets, made at a time when the nation was repudiating the war, portrayed returning veterans as psychopaths who carried the uncontrollable violence of the war back into civilian life. But around 1980, when Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder became a certified medical category, the Hollywood vet becomes troubled, dysfunctional, in need of healing—a victim not so much of a ferociously aggressive war as of an uncaring society that afforded him no victory parades on his return. (The film of *In Country* was released in 1989.) Turner shows how a concern that is in itself worthwhile and compassionate—a concern for PTSD and other problems of returning to civilian life—turns into something far different when soldiers become symbols of "us."

To the extent that they have offered us a way to recall and live with an otherwise unbearably violent history, therapy groups and the most common postwar narratives have reduced the personal and political paralysis that can accompany recollections of Vietnam. But to the degree that they have helped us forget the political decisions that sparked the war, as well as the support millions of citizens gave to those decisions, such therapeutic constructions have also made it easier for us to make the same mistakes again (142).

Vietnam then becomes something that happened to Americans, not something Americans did to others; America is not an aggressor but a victim; the war (in Turner's words) becomes a medical problem, not a cultural problem. In a particularly convincing section, Turner shows how the broken body of the veteran in films becomes the symbol of a broken nation, its will paralyzed. In this frame of thought, to criticize the war becomes impossible, not because it gives aid to the enemy (as the political right would still claim), or even because it casts aspersions on the honor of the dead, but because it dredges up old wounds. According to Turner, in the Reagan-Bush years, the image of the wounded vet blurred with the Iranian hostage crisis and the imaginings of the M.I.A. lobby to form a fundamental part of the propaganda for the Gulf War—a war fought partly to prevent our troops from becoming hostages.

Turner's argument poses a powerful challenge to the sanctity most of us accord to individual experiences and memories by showing how our reconstruction of the past is collective rather than individual. One might say, using a different terminology, that Turner has begun to map a discourse about Vietnam—a set of assertions, assumptions, images and commonplaces that are repeated together enough times so that one element tends to call up the others and which, together, carries a usually unacknowledged ideological weight. The discourse on Vietnam I am describing here contains individual elements which, as we have seen, can be isolated and used for specific, even benign purposes (for example, to recognize medically the psychological suffering of returning vets); together, they work to obscure American aggression in Vietnam, to confuse the issue of responsibility, and ultimately—as Turner argues, and as I will continue to argue—to legitimize the American capacity to prosecute war.

To Turner's fine analysis of "Vietnam" as a trauma suffered by Americans, I would add a further element, which is contained in the cliché that Vietnam "tore the country apart." The most frequent story told about the Vietnam Memorial is that even veterans who hated the original design changed their minds when they felt its stark power; today it marks the place where national divisions are healed, where veterans and war protesters can come together. The language of trauma therefore conflates soldiers and civilians but also the war abroad and the war at home. Once again, the imperative to heal blocks any meaningful discussion of responsibility, since that discussion would open up the wound rather than heal it; the past, in this model, is something to be overcome, not examined. But in this ideal of concord, dissent simply evaporates—or else becomes the new enemy.

III. The Spitting Protester

"You might be right about the need to get involved, but I just can't approve of people going out and spitting on soldiers."

—A college student in the 1990s

A famous statistic about the antiwar movement comes from a poll taken the morning following the Democratic Convention of 1968, after Chicago police savagely beat unarmed demonstrators. The poll showed that of those Americans who saw the beatings on television, two-thirds approved of the behavior of the police. Since the war had become increasingly unpopular—somewhat over one-half of Americans believed the time had come to withdraw—the poll figures mean that many Americans who disapproved of the war disapproved of war protesters even more. The statistic is ironic for a second reason as well: because the case against the war was initially developed by protesters like these—people acting outside the political system, presenting accounts of the war more accurate than anything then reported in the mainstream media. The reaction is consistent with the widespread association of antiwar protest with violence, which blames the unarmed protester as the cause and embodiment of violence rather than the official perpetrator. (Violence at demonstrations was of course disproportionately committed by police, who beat unarmed people and used mace and tear gas; the most disruptive demonstrators typically attacked property or else reacted to police violence by jeering and throwing missiles.) No matter how strong the doubts about the war, many Americans seemed to have hated or feared the rupture of the body politic at home even more and looked to the "system" to heal itself from within—a healing that would mark the withdrawal of scenes of protest and a return to normalcy. This perceived rupture, probably explains the immediate source of the public's intolerance for dissent.*

The discourse on Vietnam, therefore, marginalizes the citizens' movement against the war, reducing it to an irritant or simply to

oblivion. Although mainstream American history preserves the names of many heroic rebels from long ago—from Patrick Henry to Thoreau and John Brown and Harriet Tubman to the civil rights marchers of King's time—no heroic opponents of Vietnam have entered the books of anecdotes, no names of resisters who went to jail or of veterans who tore off their medals and threw them into the bonfire. I was surprised to learn, when I first taught my course on the sixties, that most of my students—even those who had detailed knowledge about the history of the drug culture and the lives of classic rockers—did not distinguish between "activists" and "hippies." In popular memory, the second category subsumes the first: war protesters are either "hippies" or (the identifying mark of hippies) "long-haired," that is to say, rebels without a cause—vague exiles from the functioning world—rather than people outraged by a specific crime or impelled by a specific passion.

The point is well made by H. Bruce Franklin in his recent article, "The Antiwar Movement We're Supposed to Forget":

Visualize the movement against the Vietnam War. What do you see? Hippies with daisies in their long unwashed hair yelling 'baby killers!' as they spit on clean-cut, bemedaled veterans just back from Vietnam? College students in tattered jeans (their pockets bulging with credit cards) staging a sit-in to avoid the draft? A mob of chanting demonstrators burning an American flag (maybe with a bra or two thrown in)? That's what we're supposed to see, and that's what Americans today probably do see—if they visualize the antiwar movement at all.

In Franklin's account, the movement began in 1945 when hundreds of merchant seamen protested U.S. participation in the French War and was consummated "in a movement of tens of millions of ordinary American citizens spearheaded by soldiers, sailors, fliers, and veterans". The most potent part of it lay outside the campuses, among blue collar workers (who consistently opposed the war in greater numbers than the more affluent), in the African-American movement, and among soldiers themselves. (During 1971 alone 98,324 servicemen deserted, a rate of 142.2 for every thousand men on duty; from July 1, 1966 to December 31, 1973, there were a total of 503,926 desertions.)

The marginalization and demonization works most potently when fused with the therapeutic model of the war. If the traumatized soldiers are symbols of "us," and Vietnam is something that happened to us, then the antiwar movement was a vicarious insult to us. In the typical therapeutic narrative, assaults by

continued on page 10

* This view corresponds to Todd Gitlin's findings in *The Whole World Is Watching*, study of the media in the sixties that draws on the Chicago demonstrations (University of California Press, 1980); see especially Chapter 10. According to Gitlin, the mainstream press underreported antiwar protest in its early years, viewing it as a fringe phenomenon; then found it to be good copy and covered it fully, often sensationally; then finally underreported protests again in the belief that the war had ceased to be an issue. To account for such judgments on the part of editors and reporters, Gitlin proposes the concept of "media routines," a frame of mind that defines as "normal" or "routine" the ability of the political system to deal adequately with crises. The argument implied by the mainstream press's reversals of interest in protest is that the political system "solved" the problem of the war, and that the late sixties and early seventies were a temporary aberration in the normal functioning of the democratic process—a view probably shared by the majority of citizens who voted to re-elect Nixon after the so-called Vietnamization of the war.

Bleeding The Budget

Edward T. Chase

How the U.S. Bungled Its National Priorities from the New Deal to the Present

By Bruce S. Jansson
Columbia University Press
\$27.50, 496 pages

In *How the U.S. Bungled Its National Priorities* Bruce Jansson, who holds doctoral degrees from both Harvard and the University of Chicago, offers a detailed analysis of the debates over national budget priorities all the way from 1931 to 2001. There is no other book quite like this and it could hardly appear at a better time, as President Bush launches the most controversial budget in memory. This subject may sound dreary, but it is not. The book is accessible to non-specialists and its discussion necessarily involves value judgments not narrowly circumscribed by economics, because you can't debate national priorities out of context with the socio-economic political setting, the world.

Though Jansson strives scrupulously to avoid partisan party polemics, on balance, Republicans come off worse in his account. He himself is careful never to state such a general conclusion, and his factual history certainly discloses Democrats' mistakes, too. He might well have quoted Alexis de Tocqueville's lines from *Democracy in America*: "This book is not decisively in anyone's camp; in writing it I did not mean either to serve or to contest any party; I undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties; and while they are occupied with the next day, I wanted to ponder the future."

No reader can escape noting the pervasiveness of waste and obvious missed opportunities in each and every administration Jansson discusses. Few should be surprised that President Ronald Reagan takes the prize here:

In 1981 Reagan managed to frame the policy agenda for the next seven years as well as for the presidencies of George Bush and Bill Clinton. His huge deficits trapped Congress in endless debates about how to diminish them that dominated the entire session in such years as 1985, 1990, 1993, and 1995. These huge deficits in turn placed advocates of domestic reform on the defensive for the next sixteen years until a budget surplus finally surfaced in the late 1990s. No other president has so decisively influenced the course of budgetary and political events for such an extended period. And no other president has wasted more than three trillion.

In the chapter on President George Bush, titled "A Dinghy in Reagan's Wake?," Jansson asserts, "I contend here that the Bush administration and Congress made fiscal and tax errors in excess of \$642 billion, lamentably huge but modest compared to Reagan's

gaffes, \$3.4 trillion total."

In the opening chapters, "Roosevelt as Magician" and "Roosevelt's Dilemma," Jansson reminds us that FDR had more than an inkling of the dire economic situation confronting him from his experience as Governor of New York, where state and local finances dependent on property and sales taxes had just been devastated. He had seen a third of New York State's private agencies go bankrupt after 1929, when there were relatively few federal programs to deal with widespread unemployment and hunger. The fear of actual starvation was in the air.

Jansson shows that, while government spending nowadays is usually equal to roughly 20% of the gross domestic product, in the 1930s it was only about 10%, and about one-third of that was devoted to military spending and veterans' benefits. In 1933 federal outlays totaled only \$4.2 billion, or 8% of the GDP (versus 19.7%, for example, in 1998).

But FDR knew in a hostile Congress he was vulnerable to Republicans' and conservative Southern Democrats' denunciation and defeat as a "big spender" if he advocated increased spending. Writes Jansson: "He resolved this dilemma by a mixture of illusion and artifice a combination that not only got him elected but protected him from political attack." The method FDR devised was suggested by Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, a canny scheme to segregate "emergency spending" from the "regular" or ordinary budget of the government.

Jansson considers this "political sleight of hand" as the key to FDR's early triumphs. FDR determined to finance this "still-undisclosed" "emergency" budget strictly by borrowing. Customary tax revenues meanwhile would fund the ongoing "regular" costs of government agencies and the military. This enabled FDR to cut government spending by 25% in order to balance the federal budget, which he rationalized by likening it to wartime budgets inevitable with military crises. All so-called "off budget" spending increases came strictly from the "emergency budget." To silence Republican critics, FDR stressed that this was the same tactic Hoover had used when he placed spending for the pioneering Reconstruction Finance Corp. outside his regular budget. Besides, FDR promised to end such spending as soon as the Depression ended.

When the Depression persisted in early 1933, Roosevelt established further credentials as a "frugal" president by cutting one billion dollars from the budget he inherited from Hoover. "He wanted to show that he meant to balance the regular budget *before* he initiated the emergency one, thus diminishing the political risks when Republicans would attack his spending increases," writes Jansson.

FDR emphasized that the money for such new programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps came not from general tax revenues but from borrowing. Furthermore, the federal government would assist states with their relief costs, he said, only when "localities, states, and private charities have done everything they could possibly do." By 1934, FDR had initiated a fiscal revolution that quintupled domestic spending. On his request he promptly received \$3.75 billion from Congress.

In his next chapter, "Roosevelt's Dilemma," Jansson spells out how, with the onset of World War II, the hard-pressed president built up America's military strength from a pitiful base to unparalleled power. FDR's political shrewdness in creating the domestic New Deal is duplicated in his military buildup. Horrified by Chamberlain's conceding Sudetenland to Hitler, Roosevelt stressed a "united" front, naming two prominent Republicans, Henry Stimson to head the War Department and Frank Knox the Navy. Roosevelt devised the "Rainbow Plans" to cope with worst-case scenarios of war in both the Atlantic and Pacific spheres. But to accomplish this, the president resorted to cutting back his own domestic programs. Jansson writes: "Several millions of

dollars of WPA funds were transferred [secretly] to start making machine tools for the manufacture of small arms ammunition. . . . Although the Neutrality Act forbade sales of U.S. military aircraft to foreign nations, Roosevelt secretly shipped planes to the French."

After Marriner Eccles, the Federal Reserve Chairman, protested cuts of \$500 million in work relief in December 1939, when more than eight million people remained unemployed, FDR replied:

You are absolutely right. But with the war in Europe likely to spread, we simply must get an increase in the military budget from last year's one billion to 1.5 billion [for] the coming year. To do this . . . the budget for relief is the only place from which I can transfer additional funds that are needed for the military . . . but even so, Marriner, despite the immediate decrease in relief appropriations, it is going to be extremely difficult to get Congress to pass the military budget.

From 1933 to 1939 federal domestic work and welfare programs received almost 50% of budget resources. "During no other period in contemporary U.S. history has domestic discretionary spending for social programs so dominated the federal budget; indeed later chapters will show that federal spending on education, training, and employment and social service programs never again rose above 4.5% of the federal budget during the twentieth century," writes Jansson.

But according to Jansson the New Deal was "on the ropes" even before World War II because "tiny federal tax revenues cramped military and New Deal spending. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, the nation collected only 7.7% of its GDP in taxes, compared to roughly 20% since the early 1950s." When in 1938 Republicans coined the term "tax-and-spend Democrats," FDR "should have countered with 'no-tax-and-starve-'em-out Republicans,'" writes Jansson. He contends that FDR made virtually no effort to raise tax revenues, except for such regressive taxes as beer and liquor levies.

According to Jansson, by funding more of World War II from borrowing rather than from tax revenues, Roosevelt caused postwar presidents to have to pay \$193 billion in excessive interest payments. He concludes that the nation wasted more than one trillion dollars from 1932 to 1945 because of inadequate tax revenues. Jansson states that Truman and Congress wasted \$1.17 trillion by cutting taxes excessively from 1946 through 1952, but he credits Truman with vetoing excessive tax cuts on three occasions. Eisenhower and Kennedy are also criticized, for a waste of \$633 billion due to manifestly inadequate federal taxes, at periods when 85% of the federal discretionary budget was being absorbed by military spending. LBJ and Congress are guilty again of clearly inadequate taxation to fund both the Vietnam War as well as his "Great Society." As noted, Reagan takes the cake for accumulating record huge deficits—plaguing the nation with massive interest payments well into the 1990s. But the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations are also faulted for mistakes wasting one trillion dollars, "and that figure does not even count porkbarrel spending, corporate welfare, excessive deregulation, or excessive tax concessions for affluent Americans," Jansson writes.

Clinton gets a very mixed appraisal from Jansson. He concedes that Clinton entered the presidency with little money in the federal till and the continuing shadow of the Reagan era that frustrated new shifts in national priorities. While giving him credit for some incremental domestic initiatives such as funding 100,000 police officers and 100,000 teachers, Jansson charges that Clinton was "tactically skilled but settled for a quarter loaf" in situations when he might

have and should have "obtained half a loaf." This criticism is exemplified, for example, by Clinton's failure to cut military expenditures sufficiently after the Cold War ended.

Jansson observes that in the decade he devoted to researching this book he found no book or study that "chronicles the transformation of the federal tax system from a relatively progressive system in the late 1940s and 1950s to the relatively regressive system in the 1990s."

Thus total Federal Tax Receipts as a percentage of GDP dropped from 6% and 5% in the late 1940s and 1950s to an average of 3.81% from 1960-1969, to 2.71% from 1970-1979, down to 1.70% from 1980-1989, and stayed at approximately 2% from 1990 on. The largest losses came from cuts in corporate taxes, with the rate dropping from 4.9% of GDP in 1956 to 2.6% in 1979 and thereafter. Individual taxes remained relatively constant as a percentage of GDP. Jansson calculates that had the federal government "kept corporate taxes at the rate that prevailed in 1956 (4.9% of GDP) through 2004, for example, it would have had \$5.8 trillion in additional resources."

Jansson arrives at the staggering figure of \$16 trillion in squandered resources during the period from the early 1930s to the present. He concludes that had this money:

been diverted to the domestic agenda, American society would have been dramatically transformed. For roughly \$2.15 trillion (in 1992 dollars), for example, the United States could have funded, from 1945 to 1996, free child care for women with the smallest annual incomes, substantially subsidized child care for women in the next two income quintiles, and funded one thousand primary-care health clinics to serve twenty-five million Americans in medically understaffed urban and rural areas. It could have increased funding for entitlements—such as food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, and the earned income tax credit—designed to assist (mostly working) people in the two lowest quintiles of annual income. The United States could have increased funding for social investment programs, here defined as certain education, social service, employment, and training programs, mostly funded by the discretionary budget. (These programs averaged less than 1 percent of the federal budget from 1944 to 1966, 3.7 percent in the 1970s, and 2.7 percent from 1980 to 1994.) It could have lowered taxes of low- and moderate-income people or granted them major tax concessions to help them buy houses, set up businesses, and further their education. Or it could have vastly increased the amounts spent on public transportation, environmental cleanup and protection, and programs to repair the nation's fraying infrastructure. The squandered resources would have provided \$15.78 trillion—more than sixty times the entire domestic discretionary budget of 2000—to more than double the U.S. discretionary budget each year since 1933. Or the United States could have substantially increased some of its entitlements, such as expanding Medicaid to cover everyone or almost everyone without health insurance, from 1965 through 2004.

Wasted resources diminish attempts to build a just society by taking resources from the people who most need them and placing these assets in the hands of military contractors, the affluent, special interests, and corporations.

Edward T. Chase is the former editor-in-chief of New York Times Books and senior editor at Scribner. He is a frequent contributor to The Bookpress.

PIANOS

- Rebuilt
- Reconstructed
- Bought
- Sold
- Moved
- Tuned
- Rented



Ithaca Piano Rebuilders
(607) 272-6547

310 4th St., Ithaca (Off Hancock St. 2 blocks from Rt. 13)
Complete rebuilding services.
No job too big or too small. Call us.

Trauma and Justice: The Misremembering of Vietnam

continued from page 8

activists follow upon the assault suffered in war and are part of the final assault by neglect. This is the plot, for example, of the play *Piece of My Heart*, produced last fall at Cornell, which uses four actresses to tell the collective story of women who worked as nurses in Vietnam. In a particularly dramatic scene, an Army nurse has just landed in the States after her tour of duty when a panicked friend stops her and begs her to take off her uniform. "They'll spit on you!" the friend warns, as the rest of the cast across the stage parades and shouts, "Hey, hey, LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?" The nurse refuses to back down and is forced to run the gauntlet of hate-filled protesters.

To a protester of the war like myself, scenes like this are baffling, not just because I never saw or heard of anything like this during the war (I could have missed it), but because the harassing of soldiers was completely inconsistent with both the ethics and the strategy of a large coalition whose leaders blamed the government, not the soldiers, for the war and who organized every event as a way of putting pressure on the government. Harassing soldiers at airports served no strategic purpose; the soldiers, after all, had finished their tour, whereas the government was continuing the war. Still, any mass movement attracts its share of crazies, and if there's one fact about the sixties that everyone "knows"—even people, it seems, who can barely find Vietnam on the map—it's that protesters spat on soldiers. The image casts soldiers as victims and the protesters as thugs, locking the two groups in an eternal, frozen opposition.

But what is the factual basis of this image? Was anyone ever actually spat upon?

In 1998 someone finally published a book attempting to answer this question. Jerry Lembcke, the author of *The Spitting Image*, is a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War with a long experience of warm relations with activists who were not veterans and who recounts stories of hostility and exclusion not from antiwar activists but from VFW members. Though openly skeptical of alleged reports of spitting, Lembcke admits the difficulty of proving that something never happened; he is able, however, to establish that there are no contemporary news reports of spitting on veterans. (As indeed there wouldn't be, since the incidents are usually described as isolated.) For example, a 1995 survey by three sociologists at Santa Barbara examined 495 news stories concerning veterans and demonstrations; the researchers found some evidence of hostility in 6 percent of the cases (with "troops" being liberally construed as anyone in uniform) but no cases of spitting. As for the many claims of having been spat upon, Lembcke notes that these tend to come years after the year, after the tradition of spitting had become a commonplace—a conclusion that raises the possibility of induced memory. He is particularly intrigued by a survey in which a number of respondents claimed that the spitter was a woman or girl—a gendering which in a later chapter leads him to discuss spitting in terms of a set of symbolic, psychological oppositions—hardness, maleness, and strength opposed to softness, femaleness and fluids. For example, when he was a Marine Corps chaplain, the late John Cardinal O'Connor referred in a book to people "spitting in the faces of soldiers guarding the Pentagon." Lembcke comments: "It would be ironic if it was during the 1967 march on the Pentagon because that occasion is best remembered through photographs that show protesters gently placing flowers in the rifle barrels of the soldiers standing guard" (81-82).

As it turns out, another prominent eyewitness of the Pentagon march has given an account that resembles the cardinal's story but with a bizarre difference:

Girls were rubbing their naked breasts in the soldiers' faces. They're spitting on them; they're taunting them. God, it was a mess. . . . Had they retained their discipline, they could have achieved their ends. My God, if fifty thousand people had been disciplined

and I had been the leader, I absolutely guarantee you I could have shut down the whole goddamn place. You see, they didn't set up proper procedures.⁵

Robert MacNamara, Secretary of Defense and author of these words, was at that time famously divided—professionally devoted to order, power and efficiency yet privately anguished by his family's attitude to the war and given to open expressions of affection and weeping. The description does not, however, date from the time of the demonstration but from an interview with *The Washington Post* in 1984. Lembcke does not cite this passage, but MacNamara's gendered image of disorder—in the form of bare breasts and spitting, which could very well have been suggested by the famous photographs of flower power—fits nicely with Lembcke's account and gives credence to his hypothesis of induced memory.*

*My own small survey—a reading of the book that provides the source for *A Piece of My Heart*—turned up results similar to Lemcke's. Of the 26 women interviewed by Keith Walker for his oral history of women in Vietnam (Presidio Books, 1985), most discuss their return to the States without reference to war protesters, though several who turned against the war describe being verbally assaulted by supporters of the war. One of these adds: "Yet I received loving support and approbation but from the 'other side.' Those who felt as we had about the American involvement in the war . . . The rejection and anger they ran into undoubtedly came from the lunatic fringe of the antiwar ranks. Believe me, the majority of those of us who were against the American involvement in Vietnam held no animosity against the U.S. military as individuals" (Dot Weller, 188). Another speaks of her awareness "that people were not pleased with veterans who were coming home from Nam" and had come to hope that "people would not spit on you for being in uniform," but she gives no first-hand report (229). One Army nurse, however, reports getting off the plane at Fort Lewis, Washington: "Going through the airport, there were a lot of antiwar protesters in there throwing fruit at us and screaming obscenities and calling us all kinds of names" (270-271). Here at least is a memory of abuse, though it appears in only a single sentence in 335 pages and is recalled fifteen years after the time. Still no spitting: the scene in the play appears therefore to have been invented. The play in other ways is a clever twist on the discourse on Vietnam: it focuses on female medical personnel, thus avoiding representations of American aggression, and it follows the standard progression from exuberant innocence to traumatic shock to traumatic return to the beginnings of healing. Interestingly, the play strengthens the rigid distance between healing and protest: some of the women join an antiwar veterans' movement, an action represented as a quiet though somewhat vague process of healing and reflection that is completely separate from the hate-filled scorn of the protesters. The spitting then represents the only articulable threat to the play's ideological thrust, which—once again—portrays the war as a trauma visited upon Americans.

Though Lembcke's book is too unsystematic to be conclusive, his survey powerfully supports the view that cultural memory can be collectively produced even in cases when an individual claims to be reporting a personal experience. This point is more important than trying to prove that spitting never occurred. Lembcke unfortunately comes close to suggesting that all claims about spitting are suspect. I have no reason to doubt Col. Carl Steckler's statement, which he made to my class this spring, that he was spat upon in the Tompkins County airport while on furlough, in uniform, to attend his father's funeral. I therefore believe that spitting occurred, though in isolated and untypical instances. But myths grow from a germ of truth. In this case, spitting is still a myth, not because no such thing ever happened but because in the myth, it happened again and again, often enough to define the nature of the antiwar movement itself. The simple message encapsulated in the image renders dissent illegitimate: to dissent is to spit on all that is sacred. The myth erases our culpability in

Vietnam, not by refuting the war's critics but by demonizing them.

(End of Part I. To be concluded in next month's issue of The Bookpress.)

References

1. The speech can be found in *A Testament of Hope*, ed. James Melvin Washington (HarperCollins, 1991), 231-244.
2. Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country* (Harper & Row, 1985).
3. The remark appears in Paul Loeb, *Generation at the Crossroads* (Rutgers University Press, 1994), 97; quoted in Lembcke, p. 124.
4. *The Chronicle Review*, October 20, 2000, B7-B10; see also his *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (UMass Press, 2000).
5. Deborah Shapley, *Power and Promise: The Life and Times of Robert MacNamara* (Boston, 1993), 435-436.

Paul Sawyer is a professor of English at Cornell. His course "Politics and Culture in the 1960s" is offered in spring semesters.

upcoming readings at

THE BOOKERY



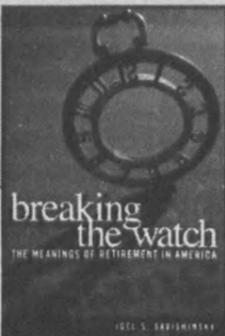
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2:00 P.M.

BEST FRIENDS FOR LIFE

Irene Zahava

Tompkins County Public Library

A reading by Irene Zahava: "Best Friends for Life: Stories from a Bronx Childhood." Irene Zahava is the Director of Emma's Writing Center. Her work has been published in numerous journals and anthologies. Join us for a treat as she shares stories from her childhood.



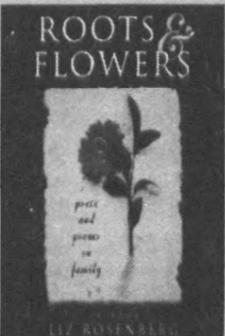
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2:00 P.M.

BREAKING THE WATCH

Joel Savishinsky

Tompkins County Public Library

"Breaking the Watch" examines the many ways of creating a life, not just making a living, as a retired person. This book follows women and men from a rural American community as they approach and experience the first years of retirement. Joel Savishinsky focuses on the efforts people make to find meaning in a stage of life American culture often views in a confused or disdainful way. These intimate glimpses into real lives allow a rare understanding of the retirement process.



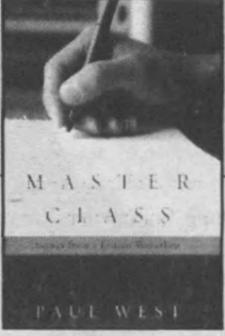
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2:00 P.M.

Five local poets!

Roots and Flowers

Tompkins County Public Library

Local poets Li-Shen Yun, Jerry Mirskin, David Bosnick, Antonio Vallone & Liz Rosenberg will read from *Roots and Flowers: Poets and Poems on Family*. *Roots and Flowers* features poems about all the transitions that come with being a family member, from watching your children grow to watching your parents age. An anthology that is as intimate and raucous, sweet and sad as any family!



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2:00 P.M.

Paul West

Master Class

Tompkins County Public Library

Paul West imparts the writing wisdom he has learned over the decades in the form of a memoir of his last writing class. Recapturing the semester, West brings the reader into the classroom and recalls, with perfect pitch, the hours of discussion and disputation. Each student comes to life, and the writing lessons are offered in various and wonderful forms.

Bookery events are co-sponsored with the Tompkins County Public Library. Books are available for 10% off on the day of the reading.

BRUNCH

CAFÉ DEWITT

Sunday
10-2

- Crispy Corn Fritters
- Lemon Soufflé Pancakes
- Farmhouse Breakfast
- Eggs Benedict
- Waffles & Compote
- Roasted Garlic Potatoes
- Chicken-Apple Sausages
- Specials Change Daily

Dewitt Mall, Ithaca
273-3473

From Baltic Marshland to Cape Cod

Scott Minar

Collected Poems in English

By Joseph Brodsky
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux
\$30.00, 540 pages

Watching a poet's evolution can be a profound learning experience. In the case of Joseph Brodsky's *Collected Poems in English* the journey is as complex as it is compelling. Brodsky writes with an Eliot-like density at times; at other points readers are reminded of Roethke's clever playfulness. Yet one reason Brodsky's work is so admired probably has more to do with the remarkable features of his life, and with his ability to make poems come alive through a prodigious attention to detail. It is impossible not to believe in the places and the people he writes about, and he does so with an unusual grace.

The politics of Soviet oppression serve as a backdrop for most of Brodsky's poems in more or less subtle ways. We are always aware in reading Brodsky that this is a poet in exile or *as* exile. For a long time, I have been fascinated by that moment in American literary history when James Baldwin left the United States to live in France during his self-imposed expatriation. Though there are obvious differences, Brodsky's experience holds a similar kind of poignancy. When artists flee their own countries, whether they choose or are forced to do so, something is glaringly amiss. Thus when one reads a Brodsky poem, the backstory is always the politics and pathos of Soviet culture.

The first book presented in *Collected Poems in English* is *A Part of Speech*. This collection includes poems written between 1965 and 1978, including a large number that were composed in 1972, the year Brodsky emigrated to the United States after being forced to leave the Soviet Union. *A Part of Speech*, then, provides the bridge between the author's country of birth and his adopted culture. Consider the ending of the opening poem, "Six Years Later," about the narrator's lover:

So long had life together been that she
and I, with our joint shadows, had composed
a double door, a door which, even if we
were lost in work or sleep, was always closed:
somehow its halves were split and we went right
through them into the future, into night. (4)

This poem was composed in 1968, but it is difficult not to see its prophetic side. Though the image of the closed "double door" is a rich metaphor for intimacy and the barrier lovers can erect between themselves and a harsh world outside of them, the ending couplet also shapes an interesting prediction for a soon-to-be exiled poet.

The poem that follows moves immediately into political concerns. In "Anno Domini," the poet writes of a "Governor-general" hosting a Christmas party from what may be his deathbed:

The Governor-general is ill. He lies
on a couch, wrapped in a shawl from Alcazar,
where he once served, and his thoughts turn
on his wife and on his secretary
receiving guests downstairs in the hall.
He is not really jealous. At this moment

it's more important to him to retire
into his shell of illness, dreams and the deferment of
his transfer to the capital. And since
he knows that freedom is not needed
by the crowd at all to make a public holiday—
for this same reason he allows

even his wife to be unfaithful. (5)

There is a mocking juxtaposition between the lovers in "Six Years Later" and the adulterers of "Anno Domini." The rich intimacy of the lovers in "Six Years Later" as they struggle against an oppressive world is set up in dramatic contrast to the affair between the wife and the secretary, despite that fact that the affair appears to be born out of a just disloyalty. But the most powerful lines in "Anno Domini" appear in subtle yet loaded political observations like "he knows that freedom is not needed / by the crowd at all to make a public holiday." The enjambment of the lines deals the reader a heavy double blow: the striking notion that "freedom is not needed" ironically amplified by the clever and startling notion that follows it.

Although Brodsky demonstrates his internationalism powerfully in poems like "Mexican Divertimento" and "The Thames at Chelsea," in the title poem of the collection, "A Part of Speech," he creates a deeper emotional connection to his subject. "A Part of Speech" is broken into thirteen untitled, unnumbered sections, each on its own page. These sections are relatively short, taking up approximately a third to half of a page. The white space surrounding them is quite effective, providing dramatic highlights for individual, linked poetic bodies.

The opening section sets a contemplative tone and shows the direction the poem will take:

I was born and grew up in the Baltic marshland
by zinc-gray breakers that always marched on
in twos. Hence all rhymes, hence that wan flat voice
that ripples between them like hair still moist,
if it ripples at all. Propped on a pallid elbow,
the helix picks out of them no sea rumble
but a clap of canvas, of shutters, of hands, a kettle
on the burner boiling—lastly, the seagull's metal
cry. What keeps hearts from falseness in this flat region
is that there is nowhere to hide and plenty of room for vision.
Only sound needs echo and dreads its lack.
A glance is accustomed to no glance back. (101)

This section is typical of Brodsky's depth. The stark beauty of his imagery carries the poem forward, yet the couplets amplify precisely because they are set against such strong ideas, images and emotions. The couplet about keeping hearts from falseness is the kind of unusually clear and honest observation for which many of us come to poetry. And the last two lines strongly imply the pathos of "sound" reaching out with the voice. Life is not a monologue: we need each other as sound "needs an echo." Finally, because rhyme has already been mentioned in the earlier lines, it seems as if Brodsky is suggesting that "echo," or rhyme, is representative of a kind of important or essential conversation, a dialectic or exchange.

Later in "A Part of Speech," Brodsky changes strategies. The voice in the third section of the poem is compellingly mad, something like Berryman's "Henry":

From nowhere with love the enth of Marchember sir
sweetie respected darling but in the end
it's irrelevant who for memory won't restore
features not yours and no one's devoted friend
greet you from this fifth last part of earth[. . .]
[. . .] snow writhing upon the stale
sheets for the whole matter's skin-
deep I'm howling "youuu" through my pillow dike
many seas away that are milling nearer
with my limbs in the dark playing your double.... (103)

It takes substantial faith in the interconnectedness of things along with an ambitious sense of poetics to write in "movements" this way, but Brodsky does it well. In the very next section, he returns to a more sober voice generating lines like "Man is more frightening than his skeleton" and "Fixed on an elbow, the body bulks/like a glacier's debris, a moraine of sorts" (104).

In the final two sections of "A Part of Speech," the author explains the poem's overarching concept:

... and when "the future" is uttered, swarms of mice
rush out of the Russian language and gnaw a piece
of ripened memory which is twice
as hole-ridden as real cheese.
After all these years it hardly matters who
or what stands in the corner, hidden by heavy drapes,
and your mind resounds not with a seraphic "do,"
only their rustle. Life, that no one dares
to appraise, like that gift horse's mouth,
bares its teeth in a grin at each
encounter. What gets left of a man amounts
to a part. To his spoken part. To a part of speech. (112)

This penultimate gesture returns the poem to its beginnings and to the purpose of the title. We were introduced to the idea that "sound needs an echo," and this is what poetry is: the re-spoken part of who we have been. This is poetry's paradox: how futile and how lovely to imagine that a man's or woman's time on this earth may be left behind as this "part" of speech.

Completing the transition from his Soviet life to the American one, Brodsky includes two tributes to his adopted country in the final poems of *A Part of Speech*: "Elegy for Robert Lowell" and "Lullaby of Cape Cod." In the latter, a longer poem in twelve numbered sections of five stanzas each, the narrator tells the reader, "It's strange to think of surviving, but that's what happened" and speaks of "switching empires." But it is the combination of an exile's perspective with a "camera's eye" for detail that drives the voice of this poem:

Being itself the essence of all things,
solitude teaches essentials. How gratefully the skin
receives the leathery coolness of its chair.
Meanwhile, my arm, off in the dark somewhere,
goes wooden in sympathetic brotherhood
with the chair's listless arm of oaken wood.
A glowing oaken grain
covers the tiny bones of the joints. And the brain
knocks like the glass's ice-cube tinkling.

It's stifling. On a pool hall's steps, in a dim glow,
somebody striking a match rescues his face
of an old black man from the enfolding dark
for a flaring moment (118)

At the center of "Lullaby of Cape Cod," literally section VI of XII, the narrator tells us, "I write from an Empire whose enormous flanks / extend beneath the sea. Having sampled two / oceans as well as continents, I feel that I know / what the globe itself must feel: there's nowhere to go" (122). This is typical of the complexity found in much of Brodsky's work. Often in his poems, one feels perfectly suspended between existential despair and Zen illumination. But all of these explorations in *A Part of Speech* are precursors to the most interesting experiment in *Collected Poems in English*: the book-length poem, *Gorbunov and Gorchakov*.

That the book that follows *A Part of Speech* is experimental suggests certain things about Brodsky's development as a writer. As a whole, *A Part of Speech* seems fully realized. But history demonstrates that artists are very detailed mapmakers: after exhausting the space they carve for themselves initially, they tend to explore further. In this spirit, *Gorbunov and Gorchakov* presents an unusual design: an extended dialogue between two schizophrenic parts of the same narrator, one who is hospitalized—probably for political rather than medical reasons—in a sanatorium in the Soviet Union.

Gorbunov and Gorchakov is the kind of book that makes even well studied people wonder if they are smart enough to "get it." Its fourteen cantos of ten stanzas each (except for Canto V which has five stanzas double the size of those in the rest of the book) are a melange of intricate yet often playful dialogues. Spliced into and among these one finds the occasional monologue, fairly intricate philosophical arguments, a narrative about the sanatorium and its occupants, speculations about god and dreams, complex metaphors and imagery, impressive word play, and more.

The character of Gorbunov appears to be the primary personality. Gorchakov, on the other hand, plays a role somewhere between that of Judas (the betrayer) and Socrates (the "gadfly"), offering a running criticism of Gorbunov's more romantic sensibilities. In Canto IV Gorchakov is heard reporting to the doctors as a spy regarding Gorbunov's condition, which he states is one of "contravening the Party's views" (174). And when asked if Gorbunov is religious, Gorchakov replies that he is "relig-religious" (174), suggesting that Gorbunov is quite strong in his beliefs. Yet as the book progresses, Gorchakov undergoes a change: he grows closer to Gorbunov's sensibilities. While not entirely sharing those sensibilities, he nonetheless confesses a need to hear Gorbunov's "speech" and, at a number of points, the need for an "interlocutor," an interesting reprise of the "echo" theme in the earlier poem, "A Part of Speech." Like a kind of Judas, Gorchakov's betrayal of his "companion" changes to admiration, a need for the other, and, eventually, to love. The story of political oppression, an emptiness of spirit, and how the loss of loved ones drives the mind away from itself on to the breaking point is a powerful analog for the culture that had no use for its author and serves as figurative testimony regarding Brodsky's life and experience.

The last third of the *Collected Poems in English* is composed of the book *So Forth* and a section titled "Uncollected Poems and Translations." In these poems, Brodsky expands his political observations and criticism while demonstrating progress in integrating American subjects and themes into his poetry. There is a satisfying quality to these poems that contributes to the arc of the collection's development, a kind of inevitable clarity after the storm of his earlier efforts. This portion of *Collected Poems in English* is best characterized by Brodsky's tribute to the American jazz musician, Clifford Brown, who, in 1956, died in a car accident at the age of twenty-five:

In Memory of Clifford Brown

It's not the color blue, it's the color cold.
It's the Atlantic's color you've got no eyes for
in the middle of February. And though you sport a coat,
you're flat on your naked back on the ice floe.

It's not a regular ice floe, melt-down prone.
It's an argument that all warmth is foreign.
It's alone in the ocean, and you're on it alone,
and the trumpet's song is like mercury falling.

It's not a guileless tune that chafes in the darkness, though;
it's the gloveless, frozen to C-sharp fingers.
And a glistening drop soars to the zenith, so
as to glance at the space with no retina's interference.

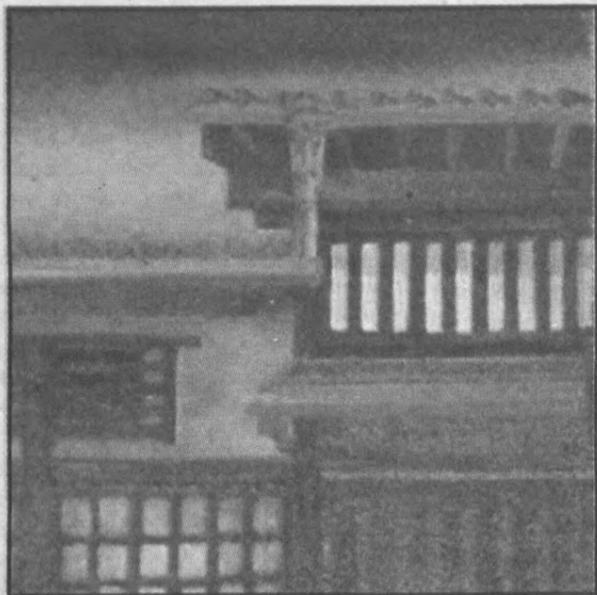
It's not a simple space, it's a nothing, with
alts attaining in height what they lose in color,
while a spotlight is drifting into the wings
aping the ice floe and waxing polar. (450)

The recurrent theme of color in this poem shows how well

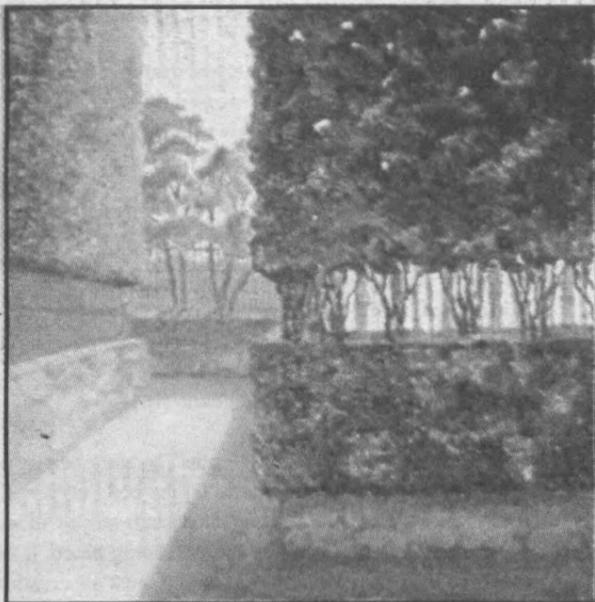
continued on page 12

Spirit of the Place

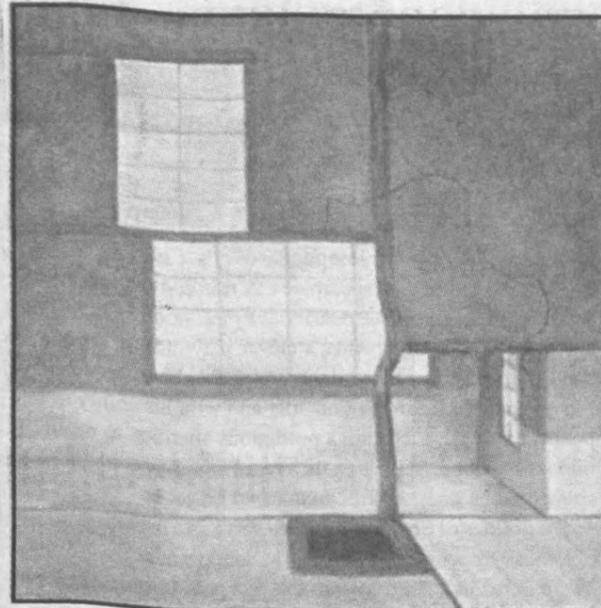
8 haiku* with moon-screen



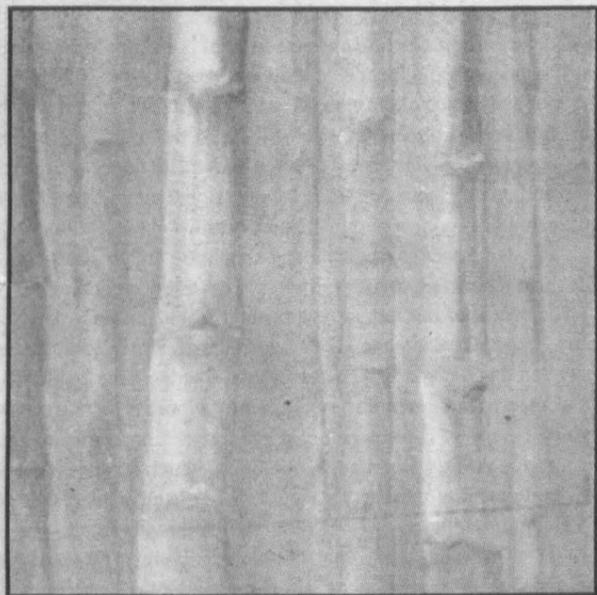
In the blue-dark sky,
does light from the top-floor room
speak of night? or day?



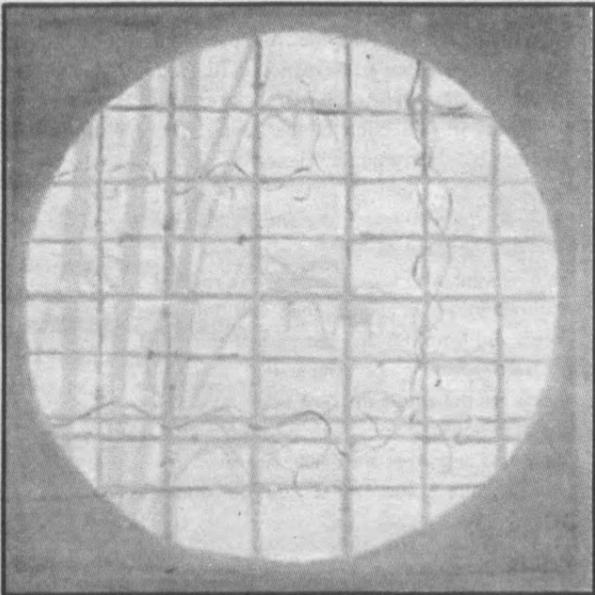
To see the sky gold
says that wealth will not be held:
Walk the lane with me.



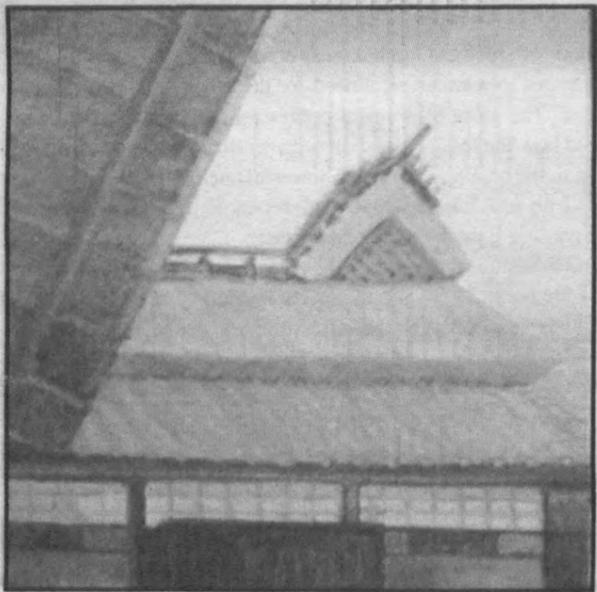
Whip the tea to froth:
steam annihilates the leaf,
leaves a pungent calm.



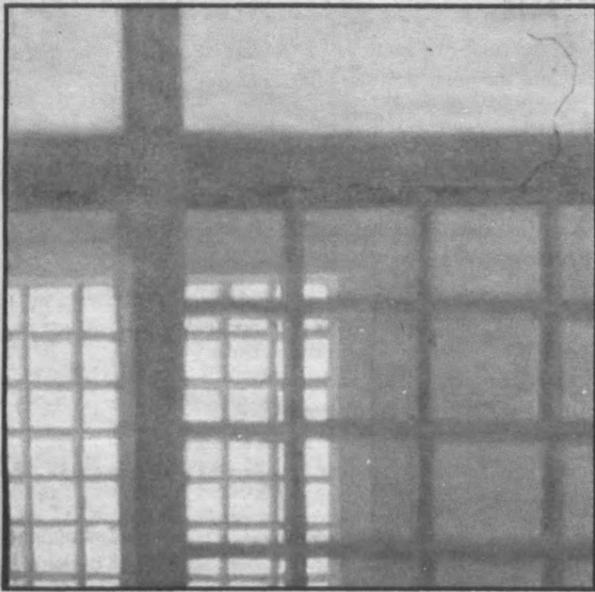
My bamboo bones grow
straight and strong. I cannot see
their roots, their green leaves.



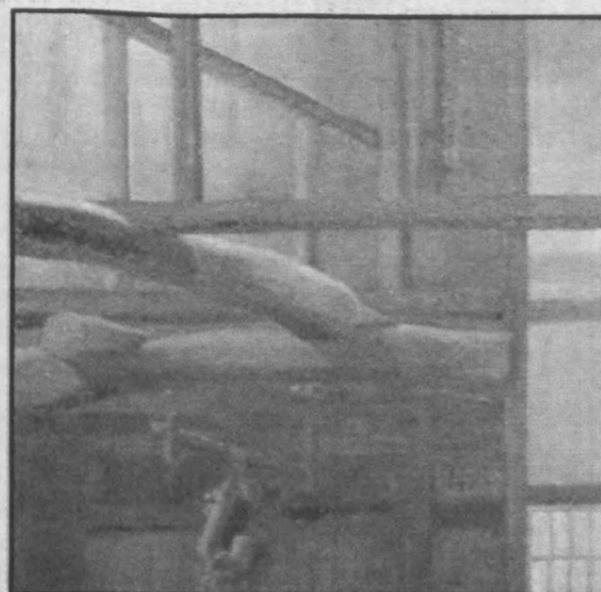
Water seeks flat peace,
reflection, not prediction:
willow, house, sky, blue.



From where I'm sitting,
the eaves above me, writing,
rise to surpass all.



My heart in hiding
burns from flame to frame, striving.
Outside, the world's gold.



The bones of a house
frame & stretch our love-struck hearts
to absent loves and manners.

EMORETTA YANG

*written in response to Screens and Spaces: Nine paintings based on Japan Sketchbooks 1980-1999, by Carol B. Skinner, from the exhibition "Variations on a Theme," at the Upstairs Gallery, Ithaca, June-July 2001.

From Baltic Marshland to Cape Cod

continued from page 11

Brodsky understands his new culture and the joy and plight of a musician like Brown. The ice floe suggests many things about music and race, as well as the mystery of who we are inside nature. The fact that Brown's notes or "alts" attain "in height what they lose in color" is a

direct criticism of racism and how music transcends the foolishness of a bigoted society. If the word "polar" in the last line of the poem is seen as double entendre, then an answering "light" flows from the musician himself back along the line of the spotlight. What better tribute could be offered to a performer?

What one sees in a poet like Joseph Brodsky

is a pilgrim in the global village, a writer who claims an inheritance from two countries, an unusual intimacy with two languages. This is, by any estimation, a remarkable achievement. Brodsky's poetry is aptly "worldly" and transnational, his art strictly humanitarian, an act of love. He lived as a worker, a prisoner, a teacher and a poet, and his poetry testifies to

that fullness of experience and to a complexity of mind tempered by compassion.

—
Scott Minar has previously written about Carolyn Forché for The Bookpress. He is an assistant professor of English at Ohio University Lancaster.