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Frankenstein's Children

Carrie Laben

When Mary Shelley first penned his name, she most likely had no idea that she was creating the "mad scientist" archetype. After all, she was drawing very openly on the legends of Faust and Prometheus, both of whom paid hideously for their pursuit of knowledge; but unlike his forebears, Victor Frankenstein didn't need the help of supernatural entities to get himself into trouble. As Ms. Shelley was revising her novel into its final form, the question of the origin of life was shifting from the domain of theologians to that of the naturalists. By the time she put the final revisions to her masterpiece in 1831, the first edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* was only 28 years off.

Since then, science has been all you've needed to get yourself into trouble; and plenty of mad scientists have appeared in popular culture to show us how. Often, in fact, they have pointed the way decades in advance of their sane real-life confrères.

Robert Louis Stevenson, for instance, dreamed up (literally) Dr. Jekyll and his alter-ego, Mr. Hyde, in 1886. Though the tale drew on both Calvinistic theology and the question of humanity's animal nature as raised by Darwin, Freud's *Ego and Id* would not see light until 1923 to provide what most readers now see as the key to this story.

Ten years later, H. G. Wells imagined a scientist who would combine man with beast and wrote *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, perhaps never suspecting that in just over a century the most pressing question on his native island would not be the morality of splicing man and beast, but that of splicing fish and tomato. The next year Wells published *The Invisible Man* and became the only author to give the world two indelible images of the mad scientist in two years.

In 1921, the great Weird Tale artist, H. P. Lovecraft, made his only venture into the world of the mad-scientist story, and produced *Herbert West: ReAnimator*. Despite the lowly place of this story in the Lovecraft canon (it performs poorly both in literary merit and plausibility, and it is frequently ignored altogether by critics annoyed that it fits into neither the Cthulhu mythos nor the Dream-cycle), it marks an early instance of a storyline in which the realities of modern academic politics interfere with the activities of the budding mad scientist, a motif that would reappear with greater and greater frequency as the tendency grew to give mad scientists motivation based on personal pride and revenge in addition to sheer intellectual lust.

Then came the movies. 1927 marks the first notable appearance of the mad scientist on the big screen, in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Rotwang, the mad-scientist character, is a clear link between the past and future of this figure. He touches on Faust, bringing his evil robot to life within a pentagram. But he is also the first mad scientist to demonstrate

the transformation of inert matter into a living creature, performed with all the jolts of electricity, towering metal conductors, and apparatus that subsequently became *de rigueur* for such scenes—he was in fact a direct inspiration for James Whale's interpretation of Frankenstein.

Less obvious but more noteworthy, Lang expands and deepens the understanding that Lovecraft had begun of the mad scientist's

role in an evolving world where, increasingly, even un-mad scientists were no longer independent scholars, men of means and leisure following their own curiosity, but simply another class of employee. Rotwang works for the plutocrat who stole "his" woman and the junior plutocrat who killed her in being born. When he creates his evil (female) robot he is both following orders and wreaking revenge. This tension between

intellectual pride and the demands placed by serving an even greater villain has been a major theme for the stereotypical mad scientist ever since.

The motif of the mad scientist who loses or is rejected by "his" woman before embarking on the worst part of his career is a major departure from Shelley's vision, in



Jack Sherman

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Letters

Pro-Israel Bias

To the editor:

Jeremy Alderson's recent letter to the editor demands an evenhandedness from the left that he does not himself display with respect to Israel, nor did he when he was the host of the "Nobody Show" call-in program on WEOS radio.

The fact is that for every Israeli death at the hands of Palestinians during the current intifada, the Israeli military has killed at least three Palestinians. So it is even more true of Israel than Palestine that the suffering is more exploited than borne. When you consider the sizes of the two populations, plus injuries, beatings, house demolitions, etc. done to Palestinians, this disparity is magnified. The words "despair" and "desperation" have different meanings even if they have the same root.

What is the despair or desperation currently felt by the Israeli government which causes its murderous policies? The current policy of targeted assassinations is in violation of international law as is the Israeli occupation itself.

That a country that reserves the death penalty for convicted Nazi war criminals only, has resorted to extrajudicial executions rather than bother with arrest and trial shows how low Israel has sunk under Sharon. Mr. Sharon holds Palestinian life so cheaply that in three months of 1982, as Defense Minister, he was responsible for as many Palestinian deaths as all the Jews killed in the holy land in the past century.

As a listener to the "Nobody Show," I was impressed by Jeremy's almost psychotic paranoia about the persecution of Jews. Jeremy feels we need Israel as a refuge to flee to when the United States starts rounding up all the Jews and killing us. Thus being an anti-Zionist equates in Jeremy's lexicon with anti-Semitism. He also had several programs about the need to tear down the Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques and build a Third Temple.

I well remember when Jeremy devoted two of his two-hour radio programs to the Six Day War. His war was a little different, in that it started on May 18, 1967, when Egypt asked the U.N. to withdraw the U.N. Emergency Force from the Egypt/Israel armistice line; a clear act of war to Jeremy. On May 22, 1967 Egypt blockaded Israeli ships from passing through the Strait of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat.

This was another act of war, or as Israel's then Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol called it "an act of aggression against Israel." Somehow,

Jeremy spent most of his four hours covering these eighteen days in which no shots were fired and gave virtually no mention to the six days of June 5 through 10 in which Israel, defending itself of course, destroyed its enemies' air forces on the ground and then proceeded to seize all of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Israel even attacked the U.S.S. Liberty killing over 100 American servicemen on June 9, 1967.

When Jeremy made his points, I, like most of his listeners, saw the blockade of the strait as a clear act of war. I have since read more about the history of Israel and discovered that the port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba wasn't part of Israel until 1956. During the Suez Crisis, (when Egypt was besieged by France and Britain) the Israeli army under Moshe Dayan seized the entire Sinai Peninsula and refused to give it back until they were given this port.

I also discovered that the original U.N. Mediator, Count Folke Bernadette of Sweden, (nephew of the King of Sweden and head of the Swedish Red Cross during World War II, when he saved many Jews from the holocaust) had not wanted the Negev to be part of Israel. He announced his decision on September 16, 1948, and was assassinated by the Stern gang of Zionist terrorists on September 17. The Stern gang was headed by Menachim Begin. Count Bernadette's successor, Ralph Bunche, subsequently drew armistice lines for Israel's territory that included the Negev. Even a decade later, Israel was still subduing the inhabitants. Today the Negev is the southern portion of Israel, that portion that connects the rest of Israel to the Gulf of Aqaba. In the many old bibles and encyclopedias that we have in the house there are maps of the Holy Land during the time of David, the time of Jesus, etc. In none of these maps does Israel include those lands of the

Negev or approach the Gulf of Aqaba.

So in his own four-hour-long presentation, Jeremy failed to mention that Israel hadn't had the port of Eilat until 1956, that they had had opportunistically seized it from the Egyptians, and that the Israel of biblical times never extended that far south to include the Negev.

Jeremy faults the left for rationalizing monstrous attacks against Israelis, yet seems unfazed by Israel's monstrous attacks against Palestinians, bloodier both in terms of absolute numbers of people killed or wounded and as a percentage of the total population. Jeremy faults the Palestinians for attacks against civilians, yet ignores Israel's attacks against civilians. He faults the Palestinians for not stopping or prosecuting the terrorists among them, yet Israel has never stopped or prosecuted the members of the Stern gang or its current crop of assassins.

Daniel Cook
Alpine, N.Y.

Eight Ways of Looking at an Oak Tree (with apologies to Wallace Stevens)

I.

When I was a child, I gathered acorns
In my backyard—whole piles of them,
But only the sturdy ones, without
Holes, and with the acorn cups
Still intact. These days, I rarely exert myself
So much for something I can't even eat.
In the meantime, I have left a lot of squirrels
Sorely disappointed.

II.

When I was still quite young, I decided
I would someday be married beneath
A spreading oak tree, at the edge
Of a hillside pasture. Recently, I found a black oak
That would do nicely. It stands
In a fencerow, at a place where three hayfields
Meet. I could take you there—
It isn't far away. But the rest?
Ah... that is more difficult.

III.

I don't know the best way to say goodbye
To an oak tree. Miss Manners
Is singularly silent on the matter.
Should I imagine the rounded lobes are fingers,
And gently shake one of the leaves? But what if
The branches are too high? Is it too presumptuous
Of me to hug a trunk? Perhaps I ought
To stand patiently beneath the tree, hat removed,
Until autumn brings a falling leaf,
To touch my forehead in blessing, and send me
On my way.

IV.

I have walked among the oaks of Fischer Woods—
A wild place of mighty trees, which were seedlings
Long before the Sullivan campaign laid waste
The Finger Lakes, and drove the Iroquois away.
Shagging bark and fluted bases, draped in moss,
Revealed the vastness of their age—as if their height and girth
Were not enough to tell me they had already lived more years
Than I will ever know. Among them, I felt so much
A novice of this world. After all, they have found contentment
Rooted deeply in one place, witnesses to bird flight,
Tree fall, winter wind. I have come so far, passed through
So many places, only to pause in this grove and realize
That I have not yet begun to see.

V.

At the Blue House building dedication,
We planted a scarlet oak. I didn't
Know it at the time, but each of its acorns
Takes two years on the tree
Before it is fully ripe. So the new crop
Of adolescents can monitor their progress
By watching the acorns on the tree
Outside their window.

VI.

My tree guide lists three-dozen kinds
Of oak. Naming them, I recall
The many woodlands I have traveled,
And realize how many other forests
I have yet to visit: northern red,
Scarlet, pin, blackjack, willow,
Chinquapin, chestnut, white,
Cherrybark, overcup, myrtle,
Scrub, shingle, black,
Oglethorpe, swamp white, turkey.

VII.

Although the leaves are too small to discern,
I have decided that the spreading tree
On our school's logo must be an oak—
Modeled, perhaps, on some old specimen,
A shade tree in a farmer's pasture, with limbs reaching
Outward to touch the sunlight, roots
Extending far into the earth. In the same way,
Our school, deep-rooted, offers shelter and home,
Embraces sons and daughters, community and world.

VIII.

I keep an oak tree on my desk—
A white oak, nestled beneath the rigid shell
Of last year's acorn. I am reluctant to plant it—
I'd rather carry it away with me,
In my shirt pocket. Only in its acorn form
Can I hold an oak so close—after this time,
We must grow apart. But I do not have the heart
To make the oak tree wait much longer to emerge.
Its time is soon at hand, and so is mine.
Once more, we'll walk the forest paths together.

—Clifford Blizzard was a teacher until
recently at the Montessori School of Ithaca.

Grief

All things begin in darkness. Bursting
into light they drag the dark behind.
And so throughout the world there grows
a heavy sense that something is very wrong.
And folded in all thought is time's cold womb.

Now an odd weight on all that moves.
Life careens as though drawn by a wound.
The flowers must force up their heads.
Simple light grows grey, as the night wind lifts.
And the wild hours come, swinging a savage stick.

—James Scofield

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Consolation

Brian Hall

Ignorance

By Milan Kundera

tr. from French by Linda Asher

HarperCollins

195 pp.; \$23.95, cloth

Epicurean wisdom has a melancholy backdrop: flung into the world's misery, man sees that the only clear and reliable value is the pleasure, however paltry, that he can feel for himself: a gulp of cool water, a look at the sky (at God's windows), a caress.

This passage, taken from his 1995 novel *Slowness*, bears a number of Milan Kundera's hallmarks: aphoristic philosophizing; a concrete simplicity of image; a dash of traditional Czech metaphor (the Czechs say that a vagabond bedding under the stars is "gazing at God's windows"); an iron belief in the individual's solitude; that final, unfortunate caress. I say "unfortunate," because Kundera has always given too prominent a place in his fiction to sex: sex as metaphor for connection; as wordless consolation for sunless existence; as convenient plot-driver and scene-closer. His sympathies and insights on the subject have also largely been limited to the male's (his female characters annoyingly cooperating). The "man" who is seeing, feeling, and reaching is emphatically a person with balls.

For a writer who takes such obvious pleasure in philosophy, it's significant that Kundera neglects to acknowledge any such consolation in this passage. The implication is that the author's pleasures may include those of the mind, but his readers' are confined to those of the flesh. Indeed, alongside Kundera's too-large devotion to sex, his fiction has displayed a tad too much condescension to his readers. Perhaps he thinks of us more as an audience. It's worth remembering that he began his career as a professor, lecturing to film students. The sleek, lapidary essays that hold up his novels like Brancusi caryatids are really too simple for fully satisfying reading; but they "hear" well. If you were a twenty-year-old film student on a hot afternoon, listening to the smart old professor fashion his little pearls about *nostos* or Nietzsche, perhaps you'd agree that knowledge isn't the pleasure you seek; rather, it would be to have great sex with the other twenty-year-old half-doing beside you.

Kundera is now 73, and the good news about his latest novel, *Ignorance*, is that he gives evidence of a growing impatience with sex, as opposed to the far more interesting, sticky, and slippery subject of love. His ambivalence in earlier novels was largely about the conflict between commitment (weight, female) versus freedom (lightness, male) that the sexual act entailed; now he seems skeptical about the importance of the act itself. In one passage, a character listening to her lover trade smutty stories with her mother is visited with "the sense that eroticism had once and for all turned into childish clowning." In another, the narrator muses about how differently humans might assign meaning if they lived, on average, twice as long as they do now: "What would become of the erotic relationship between a man and a woman? Would it vanish? Or, on the contrary, would lovers consider the sexual phase of their lives to be the barbaric pre-history of real love?"

Welcome, too, is his main character: a fully imagined human being and partial stand-in for the author who not only is not the swath-cutting philanderer of much of his earlier fiction, but doesn't even have balls.

Irena left Prague for Paris in 1969 with her husband (who has long since died), and has since struggled to raise her two daughters alone. But now comes the Velvet Revolution, and her best friend, a Frenchwoman, is indignant:

"What are you still doing here?" . . .
 "Where should I be?" Irena asked.
 "Home!"
 "You mean this isn't my home anymore?"

Ignorance is about exile and how it changes you; the false promises of nostalgia; the mysteries of attachment to place; and the painful ambiguities of human interaction. A better title would be *Identity*, but that was what Kundera called his last book (in his 1990 novel *Immortality*, he lamented that he couldn't title it *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*; like not a few authors, and in his case to largely good effect, Kundera keeps writing the same book). Or *The Enigma of Arrival*, except that Naipaul already used it. Or *Loneliness*, which Kundera defines for one of his characters in *Ignorance* as "going through life without drawing anyone's interest; talking without being heard; suffering without stirring compassion."

Loneliness: on one of her trips to Prague (Irena has allowed herself to be cajoled into at least visiting) she explains to an old Czech acquaintance why her French friends never inquired about her experiences in her native country:

Oh, the French, you know—they have no need for experience. With them, judgments precede experience. When we [émigrés] got there, they didn't need any information from us. They were already thoroughly informed—that Stalinism is an evil and emigration is a tragedy. They weren't interested in what we thought, they were interested in us as living proof of what they thought. So they were generous to us and proud of it . . . They saw me as the embodiment of an émigré's suffering. Then the time came for me to confirm that suffering by my joyous return to the homeland. And that confirmation didn't happen. They felt duped. And so did I, because up till then I'd thought they loved me not for my suffering but for my self.

This passage is an apt example of what is so good about Kundera's writing. He fashions his ironies about human behavior so lightly he can stack them like pancakes, but the airiness only makes more vertiginous one's perception of the void that yawns beneath. "When people spend a lot of time together," Irena tells her acquaintance (there are no real friends in Kundera's novels), "they assume they know each other. They don't ask themselves any questions and they don't worry about it. They're not interested in each other, but it's completely innocent. They don't realize it."

As often in Kundera's fiction, the plot of *Ignorance* is a dance of two couples: a centrifugal movement, a circling, a regrouping. Irena's lover in Paris is the genial, passive Gustaf, Swede. On one of her trips to Prague she meets Josef, another Czech émigré whom she remembers from a single, charged evening in a bar more than twenty years ago. Meanwhile, Irena's domineering mother is slowly entrancing Gustaf, who once worshipped his own mother, now dead (the novel helps him confuse the issue by never naming Irena's mother; she is always "the mother").

Yes, sex is still the hinge on which the plot swings, and in the consummatory scene between Josef and Irena some of the old Kundera returns; but Irena is too thoughtful-

ly, soulfully alive to be reduced by this one scene to the sex-waif straitjacket that, for example, Tereza in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is forced to wear. And Josef, mercifully, has long outgrown (like his creator?) his days of casual, callous conquests. In fact, his strongest attachment is to his dead wife, his greatest temptation to renounce the world and retreat to the house in Denmark he shared with her, to water her memory.

This time around, Kundera has foisted the "fear of women" trope he often reserves for his main characters onto the slightly pathetic Gustaf. As usual, Kundera is funny and perceptive about it:

[Irena] was dazzled by [Gustaf's] goodness, which everyone saw as the main trait—the most striking, almost unbelievable trait of his character. He charmed women by it; they understood only too late that the goodness was less a weapon of seduction than a weapon of defense. His mother's darling boy, he was incapable of living on his own without women's caretaking. But he tolerated all the less well their demands, their arguments, their tears, and even their too-present, too-expansive bodies. To keep them around and at the same time avoid them, he would lob great artillery shells of goodness at them. Under cover of the smoke he would beat his retreat.

Perhaps the best thing about *Ignorance* is Kundera's slyly celebratory cameo of Irena's mother, which from the first word to the last is perfectly executed. "You don't look too bad," she tells her daughter, when they meet in France after seventeen years' separation by the Iron Curtain. Then laughing, she added: "Neither do I, actually. When the border policeman looked at my passport, he said, 'This is a false passport, Madame! This is not your date of birth!'"

And:

She was fully aware that her mere presence flattened her daughter, and I won't deny that she took a secret pleasure in her own physical superiority. So? What was she supposed to do? Vanish into thin air in the name of maternal love?

Kundera rewards this *mater superba* with by far the better of the novel's two sex scenes—sexier, funnier, and truer—when she masterfully orchestrates the seduction of the unwitting Gustaf, from libational bath (with the door open), to donning of robe (with the sash loose), to serving of a "digestive," to faux-parodic dancing in front of a mirror, to the calm placement of her hand like a victor's wreath on Gustaf's crotch.

His first reflex is to lift her hand away; yet he does not dare; a commandment is graven in him since his childhood: Thou Shalt Not be crude with a woman; so he goes on making his dancing motions and staring in stupefaction at the hand set between his legs.

Her hand still on his crotch, the mother rocks in place and keeps watching herself in the mirror; then she lets her robe gape open and Gustaf glimpses her opulent breasts and the dark triangle below; embarrassed, he feels his member swelling.

Without taking her eyes from the mirror, the mother finally lifts her hand away, but only to slip it into his trousers and grasp the naked member in her fingers. It grows harder and she—still continuing her dance movements and gazing at the mirror—exclaims admiringly in her vibrant alto voice: "Oh, oh! Unbelievable! Unbelievable!"

Like his last two novels, *Slowness* and *Identity*, which Kundera also wrote in French rather than Czech, *Ignorance* is brief. With their one-word conceptual titles, these novels appear to signal his conscious adoption of a French classical model of the *philosophe's essai* (toward which he was leaning, in any case). Some readers will surely miss the more expansive grounding in the "real" of his earlier works. And the professorial condescension is still there: "The Greek word for 'return' is *nostos*. *Algos* means 'suffering.' So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return." (Excuse me, will this be on the test?) Not just frequently, as before, but continually, Kundera breaks the rule of Show, Don't Tell.

But who handed down that rule anyway, if not some other condescending professor? Kundera tells us what his characters are like, what we should think of them, what their actions mean; like the music of Vivaldi, his prose is provokingly bare-boned and obvious. And yet (like Vivaldi's music) it works, because Kundera, like Vivaldi, has a good ear. And as he's aged, Kundera's ear has become more tuned to the longer questions; questions of value, attachment, and meaning that not only are impossible to answer (a given for any good novelistic question), but are hard to frame; that in fact can't be framed without sounding banal. But theirs is the banality of the essential.

Experience, like Irena's mother, is the victor; age is celebrated for its blemishes, like the mother's

powerful thighs padded with cellulite; that cellulite enchants [Gustaf] as if it expressed the vitality of an undulating, quivering, speaking, singing, jiggling, preening skin.

Josef's choice, after his night with Irena, is not between the "weight" of commitment to her and the "lightness" of the roving male predator, but between that weight and something weightier: a life devoted to an ongoing relationship with his dead wife. For Josef, her memory is enshrined in the mental image of the home he made with her:

The low wooden fence with its little gate; the garden; the fir tree in front of the dark-red brick house; the two facing easy chairs they'd sit in at the end of the working day; the window ledge where she always kept a bowl of flowers on one end, a lamp on the other; they would leave that lamp on while they were out so they could see it from afar as they came down the street back to the house.

Bits of that image keep flashing in Josef's mind. This, Kundera seems to be saying, is the great Odyssean return: the cycle of memory. At the end of the novel, Josef flies back to Denmark:

The plane took off toward a dark sky, then burrowed into clouds. After a few minutes the sky opened out, peaceful and friendly, strewn with stars. Through the porthole he saw, in the depth of the sky, a low wooden fence and a brick house with a slender fir tree like a lifted arm before it.

The quiet invocation of a port, the mysterious peace, the wordless comfort: for Kundera, the unbearable lightness of being is giving way to the consoling gravitas of age.

—
 Brian Hall's novel about Lewis and Clark, *I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company*, will be out from Viking in January.

Frankenstein's Children

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which Elizabeth's avid desire for matrimony is not entirely reciprocated by Victor Frankenstein. She loses him for good once he creates his monster and thwarts its desire for a mate. Of course, by Lang's time the brooding intellectual was no longer considered the universal standard of attractiveness—thus Rotwang had what would become the stereotypical mad-scientist look, wild-haired and nocturnal. This let the character in for a lot of abuse, but also positioned him to re-emerge as an underdog and subversive figure down the line.

1931 was the hundredth anniversary of Mary Shelley's final, revised version of her book. It also marked the release of James Whale's *Frankenstein*, the work that made Boris Karloff a star, thunderstorms a necessity, and the cry "It's alive!" one of the most instantly recognizable film quotes of all time. The film was a massive hit, followed four years later with *The Bride of Frankenstein*, firmly establishing Whale's version of the monster in the public imagination.

Later, *Son of Frankenstein* and *House of Frankenstein* almost killed the genre. Moreover, attention (and the family name) came to the monster, made poignant by Karloff, rather than the hammily played Dr. Frankenstein and his assorted successors. Dr. Pretorius, featured only in *Bride*, was a much more engaging mad scientist and had a wonderful picnic scene in a crypt, but unfortunately spawned few imitators in the short run.

For the next several decades mad scientists were merely accessories before the fact to the mutated rodents or evil computers that were the real stars of tales of science angst. That they were most often killed by their own creations, ceased to appear as a form of poetic justice demanded by the censors and soon seemed merely indicative of their decided unlikeability.

In the 1970s, the mad scientist, like everyone else, started swinging. Theoretically, of course, the potential for the mad scientist to be read as a sexual or gender transgressor had been in place for quite some time. Science and logic were traditionally male domains, but at the same time the intellectual or "geek" figure was considered less than completely manly, especially in America. Though this was generally interpreted as a form of asexuality or repression (complete with the notion of being "married" to science or to one's work,) undertones of homosexuality were not absent. Moreover, the mad scientist often participated in the cre-

ation of new life—God's domain, but also that of the female.

1971, though, brought the gender-bending mad scientist out of the closet with Roy Ward Baker's *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, a variation on Stevenson in which the doctor turns himself evil and female at one stroke. Interestingly, the female Hyde still elects to perform Jack-the-Ripper style slayings of women, ostensibly because female hormones are needed for the transforming elixir.

Then, in 1975, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* appeared. Though louder and livelier than his more traditional, a-sexual, and sometimes androgynous mad science brethren, Frank N. Furter did indisputably bring dead flesh to life in this film. The flamboyance and explicitness of this camp version made it a hard act to follow, and once again the genre lapsed into a kind of suspended animation.

It was a corpse that was begging to be re-electrified, and in 1985 the neglected *Herbert West* provided a jolt when it was released in film form as *Re-Animator*. Like nearly all films of Lovecraft's work, this outing would no doubt have caused the author to roll over in his grave, but unlike some of the others it is not a wholly bad film when judged independently of the source. Jeffery Coombs plays young Dr. West with frenetic intensity, refusing to be out-acted by his unnatural creations even if they were a gang of lecherous, insane, half-rotted zombies.

Within the confines of its cult status, *ReAnimator* was regarded as simply the best mad-scientist film ever, and it returned the focus firmly to the character of the scientist himself. Though his creatures tried to kill him, Herbert West hung on and was there to cash in with a sequel.

Presently, the mad scientist appears to be entering an era where he (and increasingly she) is becoming more relevant and interesting than at any time since Mary Shelley's original conception. The misgivings and potential threat engendered by the human creation and manipulation of life have been a topic of vigorous controversy ever since a Scottish sheep was successfully cloned in 1997. The notion of artificial intelligence and a machine-controlled world (à la *The Matrix*) seem to hint that the only danger to the genre now may be from reality ultimately overtaking the insane schemes of the mad scientist.

—
Carrie Laben is a student at Cornell University.

Ithaca Reads Frankenstein

Mary Shelley has captured the imaginations of Ithacans this fall, as incoming Cornell freshmen and reading groups sponsored by the Tompkins County Public Library gather to discuss *Frankenstein* and its ramifications for today's society.

Events connected to the city-wide readings include scientific lectures, theater performances and children's activities. From talks on "Frankenfoods" and the ethics of cloning to public readings of the novel and Friday-night screenings of monster movies, Cornell and the public library are teaming up to explore the mythological, artistic and ethical aspects of science (both sane and mad) and the creation of life.

The Kitchen Theatre is presenting a new treatment of *Frankenstein* by playwright Rachel Lampert from September 19 through October 12. Set in New York City, the play integrates the themes that weave together in the original story into a modern-day amalgam, both ordinary and magical.

Crowning the events will be "Frankenstein—Penetrating the Secrets of Nature," a traveling exhibition developed by the National Library of Medicine and the American Library Association, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Open September 30 to November 15 at the Tompkins County Library, the exhibition encourages audiences to examine the intent of Mary Shelley's novel and to discuss Shelley's and their own views about personal and societal responsibility with particular regard to the uses of science in contemporary life.

Opening receptions for the exhibit are scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, October 9 and 10, at 6:00 p.m., and will feature a guided tour given by Susan E. Lederer, Medical Historian, Yale University School of Medicine, and Curator of the Exhibit.

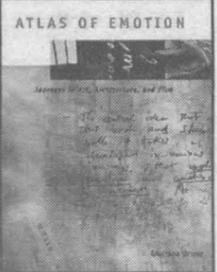
See <http://www.tcpl.org/Frankenstein/> for more information and a calendar of events.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BOOKERY

Giuliana Bruno

Giuliana Bruno delivers the keynote speech in the Cornell Department of Architecture lecture series, and will be signing copies of her new book, *Atlas of Emotion*, a highly original endeavor to map a cultural history of spatio-visual arts.

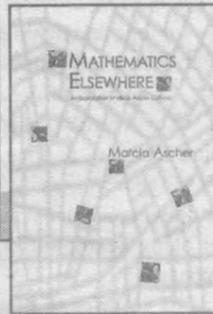
Friday, October 4th, 6pm at Goldwin Smith Hall, Cornell University



Marcia Ascher

Ithaca College mathematics professor Marcia Ascher will sign copies of her new book, *Mathematics Elsewhere*. Presenting mathematical ideas from a variety of cultures, this book humanizes our view of mathematics and expands our conception of what is mathematical.

Saturday, October 5, 2:30pm at the Bookery



Peter Lovenheim

Peter Lovenheim will read from his new book, *Portrait of a Burger as a Young Calf*. His quest to find out where our food really comes from gives us this story of one man, two cows, and the feeding of a nation.

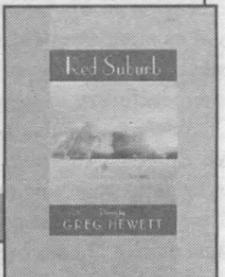
Sunday, October 6, 2:30pm at Tompkins County Public Library



Greg Hewitt

Signing copies of his new collection of poetry, *Red Suburb*. Originally an Ithaca native, Hewitt portrays the neurotic beauty of a generation squeezed between the Baby Boomers and Generation X.

Saturday, October 12, 2:30pm at the Bookery.



Joyce Hackett

Reading from her debut novel, *Disturbance of the Inner Ear*. With dazzling musical language and a startling mix of intimacy and edgy evasiveness, Joyce Hackett creates a spellbinding voice that pulls the reader into the book's hypnotic internal logic.

Sunday, October 13, 2:30pm at Tompkins County Public Library



Marjorie Agosin and Emma Sepulveda

Marjorie Agosin and Emma Sepulveda will be discussing their long friendship and working relationship, focusing on their recent collaborations, *Amigas* and *Friendship and the Geography of Hope*.

Wednesday, October 23, 7:30pm at the Women's Community Building



Events at the Library are co-sponsored by Tompkins County Public Library.

Books are available at 10% off the day of the reading.
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A Plea For Mercy in a Time of War

Paul Sawyer

In the center of the workshop, three pale, massive wooden shapes hover together, bound by iron. They are shackled by hoops, pierced by spikes, garlanded by chains, overtopped by clamps and a shape that looks like a scythe. One of the tree trunks has been sawn asunder, its two halves standing eternally ajar. The sense of constriction is reinforced by the base: six visible iron wheels enclosing six others within, which if they moved could only move in an endless circle, like an infernal machine.

More than any of his other works, this sculpture reveals John Lyon Paul's gift for endowing abstract forms with metaphorical richness and uncanny affective power. The iron elements seem to gesture to all experiences of public torture and huddled pain. One thinks of Northrop Frye's catalogue of demonic imagery in literature:

...engines of torture, weapons of war, armor, and images of a dead mechanism which, because it does not humanize nature, is unnatural as well as inhuman... Here too are the sinister counterparts of geometrical images: the sinister spiral... the sinister cross, the sinister circle, the wheel of fate or fortune.

By contrast, the three shapes, sanded smooth and gently undulating, seem to be made of human flesh (even the knots look all-too-human, like blemishes or bruises). Are they victims bound on a cart headed for the guillotine? Or are they enduring an endless imprisonment? When only two shapes are visible, they unmistakably resemble the Twin Towers.

In fact John conceived "Many Thousands Gone" during a visit to New York City—but eighteen months ago, well before September 11. As the accompanying sketch shows, he scribbled out the basic design on hotel stationery. His title is the famous, haunting refrain of the Negro spiritual "No More Auction Block"; the primary reference, therefore, is to the American national tragedy of slavery, and the trunks suggest a family shackled together. Thus, while the iron elements suggest all forms of bondage and torture, the whole structure suggests the public side of victimization—the body offered up to view. Most broadly, as John describes the work in a portfolio, it stands as "a remembrance of and tribute to all those named and unnamed individuals who were victims of another's violence."

In its emotional eloquence, "Many Thousands Gone" recalls a number of John's earlier works. Next door, for example, is "Momento Mori" ("moment of death")—a pair of rough-hewn beams mounted on an iron platform and secured at the ends by iron hoops; there, too, the pathos derives from the formal contrast between iron and wood (see *Bookpress*, February 2002, pp 6-7).

And in The St. Francis' Shrine, the central figure—constructed, among other things, out of a target used for rifle practice, with an exploding crimson orbiting the area of the heart—confronts the viewer who in turn confronts the saint through a glass plate etched with cross-hairs. Subtly, John positions the viewer as potential participant in the endless cycle of violence. (The shrine, though dedicated to peace, bristles with arrows and dances with the red dots of the stigmata.)

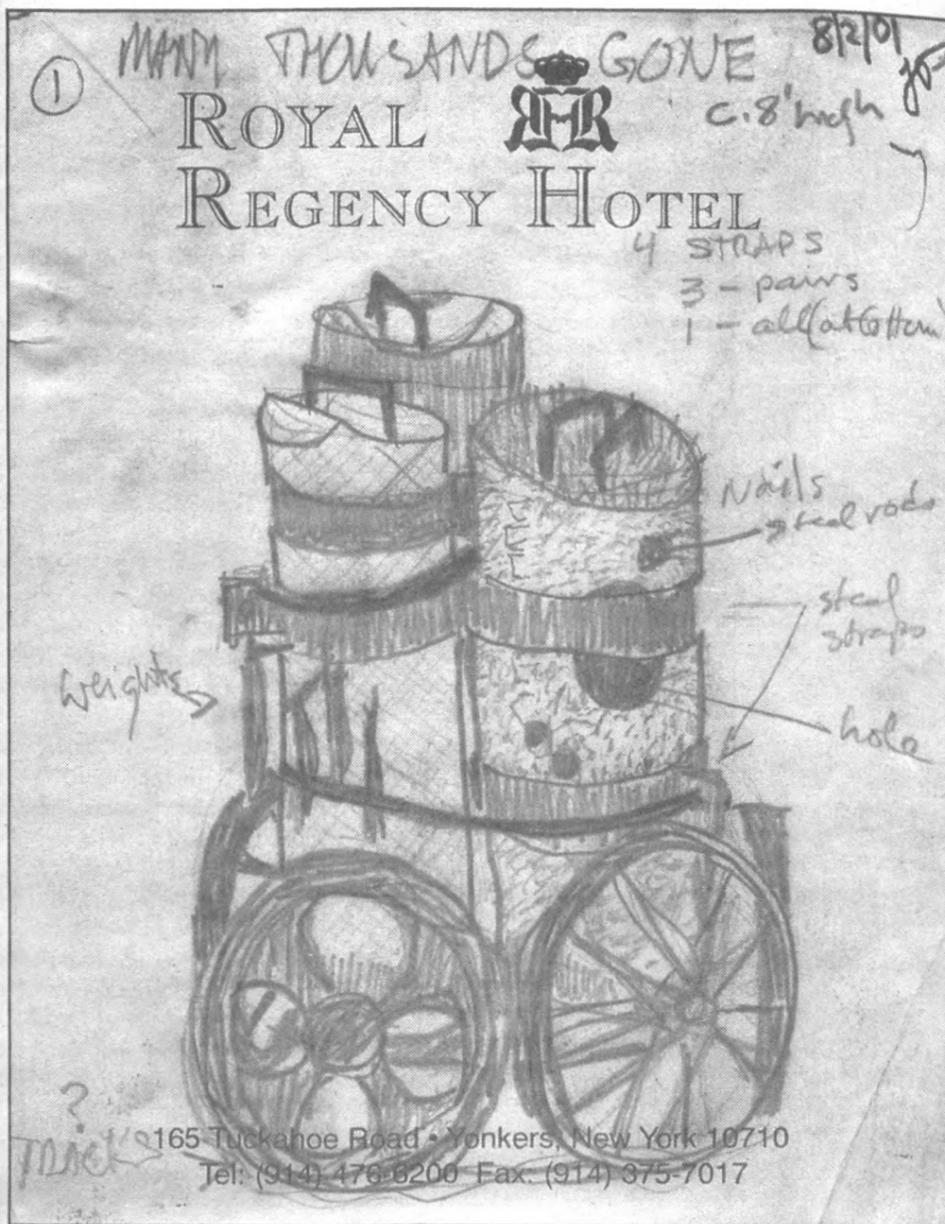
"Many Thousands Gone" also positions the viewer, but in a more dramatic way. The work is in fact unfinished. In its final form, the bare tree trunks will be covered with a ruddy pelt of nails. John is inviting each visitor to his studio to drive a nail into the wood using specially prepared hammers, to be forged from actual artifacts of violence—handguns, land mines, animal traps, a shard from the World Trade Center, a piece of a Nazi submarine, and so forth. Visitors will therefore participate in a double action: completing the sculpture, and performing a ritual that is central to the total aesthetic experience. That gesture is as rich in metaphor suggestion as the artwork itself. The act of hammering a nail into flesh obviously recalls the Crucifixion, but at the same time, the vast number of nails needed to cover the work—about half a million—points not to a single emblematic event but to the sheer multitude of history's victims, the unnumbered who have gone before. John writes "Each nail may be driven as a prayer, a blessing, a vow, or in remembrance of an individual, a group, or an event in which there was a willful violation of another being." Thus, in its monumental simplicity, "Many Thousands Gone," like the St. Francis Shrine, focuses on the intersection of love and destruction; violence, symbolically re-enacted, turns into its opposite, and a monument to pain slowly metamorphoses into a prayer for peace. The work therefore surveys all time but belongs urgently to our dangerous present moment. The words incised on the steel base read: "May the closed fist of violence become the open hand of mercy."

Several people have begun to record the strong emotions evoked during their visits. Helene Hembrooke wrote: "The physical force and motion [of the hammer], coupled with my own anger, felt momentarily like retaliations... which was at once both sickening and satisfying. Those blows were for my pain. With successive blows I was reminded of all the others who would drive their nails to represent their stories of violence... Driving my nail was a statement of permanency, recognition, and, ultimately, forgiveness." Carrie Jean, another visitor, wrote: "Blow after blow I felt some sense of atonement as the nail pierced deeper and deeper into the soft tissue of the massive trunk. Acknowledgement. Sadness. Release. Relief. Like a deep cry all cried out that leaves nothing left, but room for Grace."

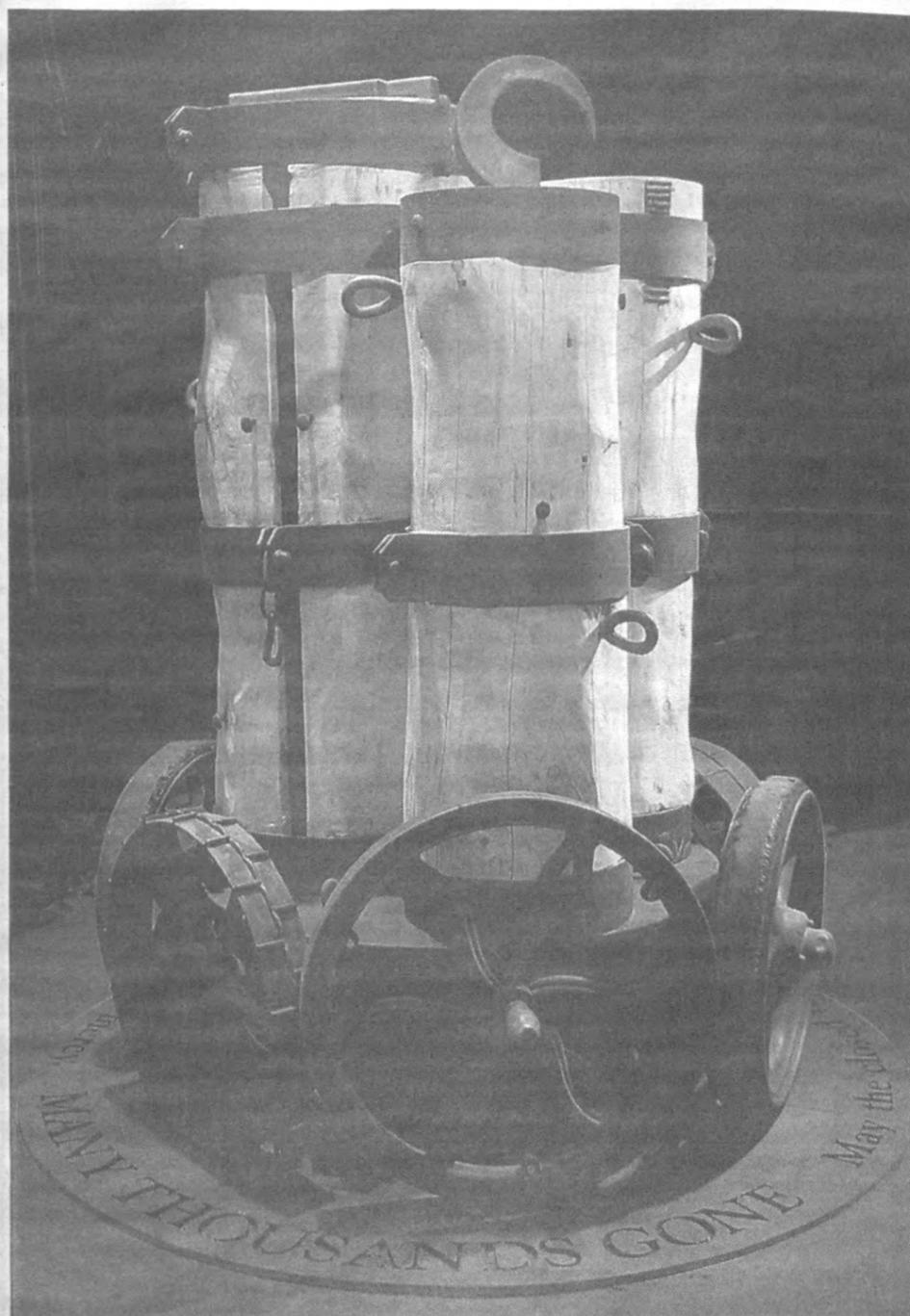
In its final form, John plans to surround the present structure by six "witness" figures of similar design, also perhaps covered by nails, in a hexagonal room whose walls will bear five "Peace Tablets" (a door will be in the sixth wall). The tablets are already in place. These five low-relief sculptures of black concrete, shaped like gravestones and decorated with varying patterns of circles and extending rods, form a stark contrast to the overpowering expressionism of the central group. In their somber beauty and classical understatement, the "Peace Tablets" seem at once to denote and confer the peace that passeth all understanding.

John Lyon Paul's studio at 174 Sodom Road will be open during the two weekends of the 2002 Art Trail, October 12-13 and 19-20.

Paul Sawyer is a Professor of English at Cornell University



Pencil sketch of "Many Thousands Gone"



"Many Thousands Gone"

Photos by John Reis

Regional Reluctance

Shibley Telhami

The international crisis over Iraq has changed drastically in the past weeks. After months of talk of unilateral American action against the government of Saddam Hussein, including a possible war to dislodge it from power, President Bush, in an important speech, took the issue to the United Nations. Within days, Iraq accepted the unconditional return of international arms inspectors.

Although the possibility of war with Iraq in the coming months remains high, these recent events have altered the calculations of the United States, Iraq, the Arab states and the United Nations. They have increased the chance of a broad international coalition for a possible war, in case Iraq defies international resolutions, while at the same time making such a coalition less likely if Iraq continues to cooperate.

And that has complicated matters for the Bush administration, which still wants a strong U.N. resolution holding out the threat of war, but is running into resistance from allies. Included in that group are Arab states that could be key to the U.S. ability to wage war, if it comes to that. Despite Vice President Dick Cheney's recent statement that "moderates throughout the region would take heart" at an Iraqi "regime change," the strategic reluctance of Arab states to support an American-led war on Iraq should not be underestimated.

Arab countries did, in the end, reportedly prod Iraq to accept inspectors, and Saudi Arabia went so far as to say it might allow the United States to use bases there to launch a war if Iraq defied the United Nations. But

the reality is that the leaders of those countries remain terrified of war. Arab leaders do fear Saddam, as the Bush administration has said. But they fear even more their own people's opposition, possible postwar chaos in Iraq, and increased American power in the region.

The rapid-fire changes in the Iraq crisis started after influential GOP leaders—including former Secretary of State James Baker—urged U.N. involvement. Some congressional leaders also began pushing publicly for a multilateral approach. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan increased the pressure when he warned, just before Bush was to address the United Nations, that there is no substitute for the legitimacy bestowed by the Security Council.

Political calculations

Speaking only one day after the emotional anniversary of the Sept. 11 horror, the president in turn challenged the United Nations to enforce its resolutions. Although he issued no ultimatum to Iraq, he clearly laid the ground for a new U.N. resolution in the coming weeks that would give such an ultimatum, backed by the threat of force.

The president's speech had an impact on the calculations of many members of the Security Council and others with special interest in the Iraq issue, such as the Arab states. The strongest case that the United States could make against Iraq was not that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Others in the international community have more advanced capabilities, including India, Pakistan and Israel. The difference is this: Iraq contracted to remove its weapons of mass destruction after its 1991 defeat, and was obligated to cooperate with U.N. inspectors and to implement U.N. resolutions.

By focusing this time on Baghdad's violation of these resolutions, President Bush succeeded in challenging the Security Council into action. But some of the countries that eventually lent the United States support may have acted not because the president convinced them Saddam was an immediate threat, but because they were frightened by the prospect of a unilateral American military campaign without the cover of international legitimacy.

While the United States stands to lose much international support if it acts alone, the authority of the United Nations would also be severely undermined.

In the days that followed President Bush's U.N. speech, the pressure on Iraq to accept the return of inspectors without delay mounted. Security Council members, such as France and Russia, which had been urging multilateral action to end the crisis, found it harder to resist introducing a new tough resolution that could lay the ground

for possible war with Iraq. And Arab leaders, who had been universally opposed to a unilateral American campaign against Iraq, also felt they could not resist U.N.-mandated action. These changed positions, coupled with extensive diplomatic efforts to persuade Iraq to readmit inspectors quickly, may have convinced the government of Saddam Hussein that the tide was shifting.

Saddam then said the inspectors could come back unconditionally, and the surprise move led to almost immediate squabbling between America and its allies about whether any new resolutions were needed.

Regardless of the outcome of that debate in the coming weeks, it is important to understand that opposition in the Middle East to war with Iraq—whether U.N.-sanctioned or not—is widespread and is based on strategic and political calculations. Arab leaders worry above all about the possible disintegration of Iraq, or continued instability emanating from Iraq, and they do not find American assurances to the contrary credible. They see the task of maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and preventing meddling by regional rivals as potentially overwhelming.

While most in Iraq may be happy to rid themselves of Saddam, others may not; no ruler governs alone, and many in the state's extensive power structure and the factions associated with them will be fearful if the government falls. The prospect of revenge by repressed segments of society will be high, and the factionalism that characterizes Iraqi society will most likely be accentuated.

The Kurds in the north will push for maximum autonomy, and the prospect of a Kurdish state would concern Turkey, which has its own large Kurdish population. The majority of Iraq's Shiites, meanwhile, would want friendly religious and cultural ties with Iran. That could clash with U.S. objectives of confronting Iran and add to Iraq's instability.

But Arab leaders' worries don't stop there. They also fear a sustained U.S. presence meant to prevent such chaos. If the United States commits to the deployment of the necessary military, political and economic resources to assure Iraq's stability, many of Iraq's neighbors, and others in the region, fear a possible American military and political dominance that would then include Iraq in a way that alters the strategic picture to their disadvantage.

Governments in the region generally favor preventing Iraq from becoming a nuclear power, especially under Saddam. Even gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates that fear Iran more than they fear Iraq and worry about weakening Iraq too much, support measures to limit Iraq's nuclear capabilities, including reinstating international monitors.

But some of those same states also worry about overwhelming American power in the region (and in Syria's case, Israeli strategic dominance).

One of the biggest reasons for regional reluctance to support an American military effort to topple Iraq's government is concern for public opinion. Although states in the region remain very powerful in their domestic control, no state can fully ignore public sentiment in the era of the information revolution. What is the public sentiment in Arab countries?

First, most people don't understand that U.N. resolutions are the basis of the policy to prevent Iraq from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, so they see that policy as an American strategy intended to prevent only Arab states from acquiring such weapons.

Second, those who understand the role of U.N. resolutions raise questions about "double standards" in applying them, always with examples from the Arab-Israeli conflict. And they ask, in any case, why it is that the United States, not the United Nations, should make the ultimate decision authorizing a war.

Third, while some almost wish for an Arab country to have a nuclear deterrent, even if it is possessed by Saddam, most don't believe that it is likely. They see Iraq to be helpless, and see the entire focus on this issue as tactical, intended to justify America's desire to keep Iraq in a box, or to justify a possible war on it. This view has intensified in recent months, with the public in the region increasingly resentful of American policy, and seeing the United States as dominating the decisions at the United Nations.

Fourth, there is continued empathy with the suffering of Iraq's population and a prevailing assumption that U.N. sanctions, not the Iraqi government, are to blame.

Weighing interests

Ultimately, most states in the region do not see Iraq as currently posing a serious enough threat to them to warrant a war that could significantly alter the regional environment and present them with hard choices internally and externally. Certainly not all of Iraq's neighbors have the same calculations, and the interests of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council—including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates—are different from those of Jordan, Turkey, Syria and Iran. And there are differences even within the GCC. Most Arab states, however, see U.S. policy on this issue as being driven by domestic politics, or by strategic designs to consolidate American dominance or secure Israeli interests. The real issue is whether they have to accommodate the United States, because opposing U.S. actions could leave them at a disadvantage if war becomes inevitable. They expect the United States would inevitably score a military victory, and no one wants to be on the losing side.

Even if some Arab states ultimately decide that joining forces with the United States is in their best interest—despite the risks—we should have no illusions: Most states and publics in the region dread the prospect of war. If it is waged, they prefer that it has international cover, but they prefer that it not be waged at all.

Shibley Telhami is Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland and senior fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution. His newest book, "The Stakes: America and the Middle East," will be published in November. He wrote this article for The San Jose Mercury's "Perspectives" section.

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BOOK SALE
 The Binghamton University Libraries announce their annual book sale:
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 The sale will take place on the 2nd floor of the Glenn G. Bartle (main) Library.

Noam Chomsky on Iraq

Michael Albert

The prospect of a pre-emptive attack against Iraq by the United States has raised many questions among people worried about war. Last month Michael Albert, editor of *Z Magazine* and author of the recent book, *The Trajectory of Change: Activist Strategies for Social Transformation* (South End Press, 2002), interviewed Noam Chomsky on this topic, via e-mail. What follows is an excerpt from this interview which will appear in its entirety in the October issue of *Z Magazine*.

MA: Has Saddam Hussein been as evil as he is made out to be by the mainstream media? Domestically? Internationally?

NC: He is as evil as they come, ranking with Suharto and other monsters of the modern era. No one would want to be within his reach. But fortunately, his reach does not extend very far.

Internationally, Saddam invaded Iran (with Western support), and when that war was going badly turned to chemical weapons (also with Western support). He invaded Kuwait and was quickly driven out.

A major concern in Washington right after the invasion was that Saddam would quickly withdraw, putting "his puppet in [and] everyone in the Arab world will be happy" (Colin Powell, then Chief of Staff). President Bush was concerned that Saudi Arabia might "bug out at the last minute and accept a puppet regime in Kuwait" unless the US prevented Iraqi withdrawal.

The concern, in brief, was that Saddam would pretty much duplicate what the US had just done in Panama (except that Latin Americans were anything but happy). From the first moment the US sought to avert this "nightmare scenario." A story that should be looked at with some care.

Saddam's worst crimes, by far, have been domestic, including the use of chemical weapons against Kurds and a huge slaughter of Kurds in the late '80s, barbaric torture, and every other ugly crime you can imagine. These are at the top of the list of terrible crimes for which he is now condemned, rightly. It's useful to ask how frequently the impassioned denunciations and eloquent expressions of outrage are accompanied by three little words: "with our help."

The crimes were well known at once, but of no particular concern to the West. Saddam received some mild reprimands; harsh congressional condemnation was considered too extreme by prominent commentators. The Reaganites and Bush #1 continued to welcome the monster as an ally and valued trading partner right through his worst atrocities and well beyond.

Bush authorized loan guarantees and sale of advanced technology with clear applications for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) right up to the day of the Kuwait invasion, sometimes overriding congressional efforts to prevent what he was doing. Britain was still authorizing export of military equipment and radioactive materials a few days after the invasion.

When ABC correspondent and now ZNet

Commentator Charles Glass discovered biological weapons facilities (using commercial satellites and defector testimony), his revelations were immediately denied by the Pentagon and the story disappeared. It was resurrected when Saddam committed his first real crime, disobeying US orders (or perhaps misinterpreting them) by invading Kuwait, and switched instantly from friend to reincarnation of Attila the Hun.

The same facilities were then used to demonstrate his innately evil nature. When Bush #1 announced new gifts to his friend in December 1989 (also gifts to US agribusiness and industry), it was considered too insignificant even to report, though one could read about it in *Z Magazine* at the time, maybe nowhere else.

A few months later, shortly before he invaded Kuwait, a high-level Senate delegation, headed by (later) Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, visited Saddam, conveying the President's greetings and assuring the brutal mass murderer that he should disregard the criticism he was hearing from maverick reporters here.

Saddam had even been able to get away with attacking a US naval vessel, the USS Stark, killing several dozen crewmen. That is a mark of real esteem. The only other country to have been granted that privilege was Israel, in 1967. In deference to Saddam, the State Department banned all contacts with the Iraqi democratic opposition, maintaining this policy even after the Gulf war, while Washington effectively authorized Saddam to crush a Shi'ite rebellion that might well have overthrown him—in the interest of preserving "stability," the press explained, nodding sagely.

That he's a major criminal is not in doubt. That's not changed by the fact that the US and Britain regarded his major atrocities as insignificant in the light of higher "reasons of state," before the Gulf war and even after—facts best forgotten.

MA: Looking into the future, is Saddam Hussein as dangerous as mainstream media say?

NC: The world would be better off if he weren't there, no doubt about that. Surely Iraqis would. But he can't be anywhere near as dangerous as he was when the US and Britain were supporting him, even providing him with dual-use technology that he could use for nuclear and chemical weapons development, as he presumably did.

Ten years ago Senate Banking Committee hearings revealed that the Bush administration was granting licences for dual-use technology and "materials which were later utilized by the Iraq regime for nuclear missile and chemical purposes." Later hearings added more, and there are press reports and mainstream scholarly literature on the topic (as well as dissident literature).

The 1991 war was extremely destructive, and since then Iraq has been devastated by a decade of sanctions, which probably strengthened Saddam himself (by weakening possible resistance in a shattered society), but surely reduced very significantly his capacity for war-making or support for terror.

Furthermore, since 1991 his regime has been constrained by "no fly zones," regular overflights and bombing, and very tight surveillance. Chances are that the events of Sept. 11 weakened him still further. If there are any links between Saddam and al-Qaeda, they would be far more difficult to maintain now because of the sharply intensified surveillance and controls.

That aside, links are not very likely. Despite enormous efforts to tie Saddam to the 9-11 attacks, nothing has been found, which is not too surprising. Saddam and bin Laden were bitter enemies, and there's no particular reason to suppose that there have been any changes in that regard.

The rational conclusion is that Saddam is probably less of a danger now than before 9-11, and far less of a threat than when he was enjoying substantial support from the US-UK (and many others). That raises a few questions. If Saddam is such a threat to the survival of civilization today that the global enforcer has to resort to war, why wasn't that true a year ago? And much more dramatically, in early 1990?

MA: How should the problem of the existence and use of weapons of mass destruction in the world today be dealt with?

NC: They should be eliminated. The non-proliferation treaty commits countries with nuclear weapons to take steps towards eliminating them. The biological and chemical weapons treaties have the same goals. The main Security Council resolution concerning Iraq (687, 1991) calls for eliminating weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems from the Middle East, and working towards a global ban on chemical weapons. Good advice.

Iraq is nowhere near the lead in this regard. We might recall the warning of General Lee Butler, head of Clinton's Strategic Command in the early '90s, that "it is dangerous in the extreme that in the cauldron of animosities that we call the Middle East, one nation has armed itself, ostensibly, with stockpiles of nuclear weapons, perhaps numbering in the hundreds, and that inspires other nations to do so."

He's talking about Israel of course. The Israeli military authorities claim to have air

and armored forces that are larger and more advanced than those of any European NATO power (Yitzhak ben Israel, *Ha'aretz*, 4-16-02, Hebrew). They also announce that 12% of their bombers and fighter aircraft are permanently stationed in Eastern Turkey, along with comparable naval and submarine forces in Turkish bases, and armored forces as well, in case it becomes necessary to resort to extreme violence once again to subdue Turkey's Kurdish population, as in the Clinton years.

Israeli aircraft based in Turkey are reported to be flying reconnaissance flights along Iran's borders, part of a general US-Israel-Turkey policy of threatening Iraq with attack and perhaps forceful partitioning. Israeli analysts also report that joint US-Israel-Turkey air exercises are intended as a threat and warning to Iran (Robert Olson, *Middle East Policy*, June 2002). Israel is doubtless using the huge US air bases in Eastern Turkey, where the US bombers are presumably nuclear-armed. By now Israel is virtually an offshore US military base.

And the rest of the area is armed to the teeth as well. If India were governed by Gandhi, it would be developing weapons systems, probably well beyond what it can today. That would very likely continue, perhaps even accelerate, if the US takes control of Iraq. India and Pakistan are US allies, but are marching forward with the development of WMD and repeatedly have come agonizingly close to using nuclear weapons. The same is true of other US allies and clients.

That is likely to continue unless there is a general reduction of armaments in the area. Would Saddam agree to that? Actually, we don't know. In early January 1991, Iraq apparently offered to withdraw from Kuwait in the context of regional negotiations on reduction of armaments, an offer that State Department officials described as serious and negotiable. But we know no more about it, because the US rejected it without response and the press reported virtually nothing.

Could such negotiations have gotten anywhere? Only fanatical ideologues can be confident. Could such ideas be revived? Same answer. One way to find out is to try.

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The Patriotism of Refusal

David Regenspan

Dani Vos is an Israeli Army combat reservist who in 2001 decided to join a growing group of his colleagues who refuse on principle to serve in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, i.e. the occupied territories. Currently, he lives in New York City where he has enrolled at Columbia University to pursue a graduate degree in sociology. He recently came to Ithaca to speak about the "refusniks," and the "combatants' letter" that they signed, pledging not to obey orders to serve in the territories regardless of the personal cost. Today, the number of signers is approaching five hundred. It is, Dani explained, the desire of the refusal movement to let America know, and in particular American Jews, that they have taken their stand for the sake of Israel and its future, and that they especially hope for support from Jewish Americans.

I interviewed Dani at my home the afternoon of August 24 (he appeared for his talk the next day at Cornell's Anabel Taylor Hall). We spoke for more than an hour. I have edited the questions and responses for brevity and clarity, and have added explanatory comments in brackets where needed. My spouse, Barbara Regenspan, was also present and asked Dani some questions.

David R: When did you first know that you wanted to refuse to serve in the territories? Was there something that happened to you? Was it the influence of your friends?

Dani V: I grew up being involved in the peace movement in Israel. As a child I used to go to demonstrations. I had my critique of the occupation long ago. Nevertheless, it was extremely important for me to be a combat soldier and to get into a good unit. This is something that is hard to explain; I find it hard to explain to people who did not grow up in Israel. I grew up on a moshav [a farm community, somewhat like a kibbutz], a place from which everybody went [to serve in the armed forces]. The question of the day when you are sixteen is: where are you going to go? Later they judge you on how successful you were in enlisting into the highest unit possible. So somehow, it was maybe not quite coherent what I believed in. I didn't believe in military solutions, but still it was extremely important to go to a combat unit in the army and eventually that's what I did. I went into the submarines [note: the branches of service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are not as distinct as they are in the United States]. But this also led me to be in the occupied territories for short periods. I was there [in the submarine unit] for four and a half years. On the whole it was a very positive experience.

DR: How was it a positive experience?

DV: I served among very good people. Most of my friends now, my closest friends, are people that I met in the submarines. At times it was interesting and challenging, at times boring and disgusting, but I learned a lot [Dani went on to explain that he served as a mechanical engineer on his submarine, and later on became a commander].

But there were times that I was in the occupied territories. One of them was something that I really remember because I was so surprised, I think [it was] in the beginning of 1994, after the Oslo Agreements were signed [the agreements to phase out the Israeli presence in most of the territories and gradually establish Palestinian autonomy], when it was clear that the occupation was coming to an end. We were underwater when we heard... everybody was very excited. Everyone came from similar backgrounds, so it was quite a

liberal group... Later on I was sent to do a mini-course, so I was back in the big army. And then I was sent to the occupied territories. It was some routine guard duty some days, near Ramallah. It was not that I was exposed to any brutal, violent activity. Not at all. I was simply sitting in a tower for eight hours a day—more like twelve hours a day—it was very boring... in a suburb of Ramallah... I remember sitting in this tower knowing that peace already came and is here, the occupation has ended... every night there was a jeep patrol through the suburbs of Ramallah. Still, although the Oslo agreements were signed, the jeep was there... I didn't see any abuse, but to me it was shocking to be awake the whole night and to see the jeep patrolling with this very strong light, inspecting the houses, gardens and terraces. Even though presumably the peace has come, the people there are routinely inspected every night....

And I had some other encounters in the occupied territories that told me that something in this occupation drives, creates a brutal reality without the people involved in it being brutal. I think this is also something that is really hard to explain. Once you are standing near a roadblock, and you perceive yourself as a very moral and caring person... and you are supposed to decide who passes and who does not, and you perceive yourself as good... so you let people go, and you think that you are doing a good thing. And of course, some of the people, you prevent their movement, because that is what your command tells you to do. But it's a situation where you perceive yourself as being good because you let some [go], but actually you are like a prison guard... and it's a civilian population; they're not supposed to be regulated by guards. It's an impossible situation... They don't see you as a guard, as someone who has the right to tell them to stay home [Dani explained that there is a lot of "cheating" at the roadblocks, such as people pretending they are ill and in need of a hospital in order to pass through]... they try to cheat you, and you become angry, you become a "doctor," and you develop a kind of distrust...

DR: How did *ometz l'sarev* [Courage to Refuse, the organization of "refusniks"] come about? Was it your group of friends?

DV: Actually, no. The two officers who started it, Yaniv Itzkovitz and David Zonshein, they were both serving in the same unit. They were called for reserve [duty], they did their last reserve in the occupied territories in December '01. They were called to the Gaza Strip and did their reserve there... they felt that they did terrible things, things that are really wrong and do nothing to protect Israel, and treated the Palestinian population, according to the commands, very brutally. Not that the soldiers under their command did something illegal, or abused more than their commands told them to... The Palestinians were attacking [Jewish] settlements where they were at, and the next day the commanders called [in] bulldozers to clear the area around these settlements, thus destroying huge areas... and it was a matter of routine. Every day, they had to clear another area, making a kind of terrible desert around the settlements, to make them safer. And you have to let the settlers go in and out of their settlements, so you have to block the Palestinian transportation. For a long time, it's not allowed for Palestinians and Israelis to use the road at the same time, so of course Israelis have the priority.

They [Zonshein and Itzkovitz] felt that all those things are very unjust, but in order to protect their soldiers—they were officers; the first priority is to protect your soldiers, to bring them home safely. In order to protect their soldiers and the settlements, they had to

do it; it wasn't something that they could choose....

So they finished their reserve and decided they will not go again; it was a kind of private decision... They knew that things were deteriorating [in the territories] very quickly. They saw... how the Palestinians became more determined and more professional in trying to ambush. And they [the Israelis] had to take more and more extreme measures... They saw something that they had encountered before in Lebanon, that the Hizbollah in Lebanon became more and more professional, quickly; they learned fast....

They [Itzkovitz and Zonshein] were both students at Tel Aviv University, so they put up a sign asking, does anybody feel like us? They were very surprised that in less than a week there were fifteen or twenty people who supported it. I think it led them to understand they have a kind of responsibility. They are in a unique position... First they felt that nobody knows what really goes on there... they knew they would have a serious advantage over any other group, because when this information comes from *B'tzelem* [an Israeli human rights organization very critical of the occupation] it's generally pretty reliable, but most of the public don't believe them, because they know that "they love Arabs"... and when it comes from the Palestinians, it's obvious that nobody believes... so they realize that they are in a unique position to shout it out, and people will believe them. With combat soldiers it's obvious that they are committed Zionists, committed to Israel. They have a kind of ticket, very powerful....

So they started thinking about publishing an ad and starting some kind of movement, and started drafting the "combatants' letter"...and then making phone calls... Somebody called me. I asked please send me the letter. They sent me [on e-mail]... I felt uncomfortable with many things in the letter. I thought it was wrong to go to the occupied territories, but I wasn't sure that that's the way it should be done, in a public struggle or something open, challenging the army... I sent it [the e-mail letter] back with some curses. Later, I thought about some change they could put in the letter that I'll feel more comfortable with... so I thought of some minor changes... I'll suggest [them] and say I am signing the letter, and hopefully they'll accept it... that's how I ended up signing the letter. My propositions—no one took them

too seriously. The letter was published as is. And I'm very happy that I did it. It created a huge public debate...

The whole power of this struggle is that it's a struggle for Israel, not against...

DR: How did this work for you? Were you called up and you said no that time, or did you say, when I will be called up I'm not going?

DV: The way it works is you sign the letter, and they call you up when they call you up... so I was lucky. In prior times I said that I don't want to serve in the occupied territories... in the navy, it's more flexible... If they don't have a problem with it, they can simply position you within the Green Line [the original border of Israel as it existed up to the Six Day War in June, 1967]... that's what I did. And I wasn't sent to prison... For other units, the way it's built, it's less flexible.

So people start going to jail right after the letter was published. So it's published with fifty-one or fifty-two people signing it, and it creates such a huge impact that a week later we were a hundred, two weeks later two hundred, and we hope to keep on growing.

DR: It's about five hundred now, isn't it?

DV: Four hundred eighty-one, and it's pretty stable. The truth is that in the last few months, very few people joined us... The terror attacks [against Israelis] basically serve the occupation. That's the way I see it. It weakens any voice that opposes the occupation.

DR: What are the consequences for you, now? Because obviously you are in the position that if you go back, eventually...

DV: I'll be called. Who knows? The truth is that where I'm at, in the navy, it's the structure of this special unit that makes it pretty flexible. So I can estimate and say the chances that I will be sent to the occupied territories—and my commanders won't be flexible enough to let me do it within the Green Line—are low.

Barbara R: So signing the letter has no

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Combatant's Letter

- We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel, who have always served in the front lines, and who were the first to carry out any mission, light or heavy, in order to protect the State of Israel and strengthen it.
- We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty all over the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people. We, whose eyes have seen the bloody toll this Occupation exacts from both sides.
- We, who sensed how the commands issued to us in the Territories, destroy all the values we had absorbed while growing up in this country.
- We, who understand now that the price of Occupation is the loss of IDF's human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society.
- We, who know that the Territories are not Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated in the end.
- We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements.
- We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people
- We hereby declare that we shall continue serving in the Israel Defense Forces in any mission that serves Israel's defense
- The missions of Occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose – and we shall take no part in them.

Fiction

Algebra, 1978

Martha Engber

It's the first day of freshman high school algebra and only this Asian girl and I sit in the front row. Everyone else slumps in desks toward the back.

One glance and I know that the Asian girl is like me: of little social rank. She has a bad haircut, nondescript clothes and a too-round face that reminds me of a tan moon with two dark crater eyes. She doesn't carry a wood-handled purse, so she can't be a wannabe prep, and she's too alert to be a burnout.

There's a few minutes before class starts. "Hi," I say, smiling a little. "Hi." She nods. "What's your name?" "Lien-Huong." "What?" "Lien-Huong." It sounds like two breaths brushing against one another. "Lien-Huong," I say. It sounds like bricks dropping. "What your name?" she says. "Kat." "What?" "Kat, as in Katerina. Not like a cat with paws and stuff."

She nervously laughs and I can see her crooked teeth. Overlapping and gripping desperately to her gums, they look all shipwrecked in there. I run my tongue over my teeth, which are smooth and orderly from braces that came off last spring. "Where are you from?" I say. "Vietnam." It's a hum deep in her throat. Like that moment just after you've swallowed something delicious and still have the flavor in your mouth.

"Mm," I say, almost tasting it, too. The bell rings. Our new teacher, Mrs. Schuhan, looks up and in a June Cleaver way says, "Who can tell me what the word *algebra* means?"

Then she looks around, as though actually expecting someone to say something. When no one does, she smiles. "It's from an Arabic word meaning 'the science of reuniting.' I'm going to show you how that concept comes into play...." and she keeps talking, telling us to turn to page five.

Viet-num. I mouth it silently, trying to swallow the sound, too.

I gaze out the window, the dark, rainy October skies making the Chicago suburb in which I live look particularly drab. The cars swoosh by, one after another. The trees in the grove across the street are black skeletons.

I'm supposed to be writing an introductory paragraph, followed by three middle paragraphs and a conclusion. I know what Mr. Boskowitz wants: proper punctuation and nice handwriting. Maybe a little bit of intelligence, but that's asking a lot, because this English class is like my algebra class, except without Lien-Huong. I sit in the front, everyone else sits in the back.

Watching the rain fall, straight and lackluster as my hair, I think about the assignment. My mind moving kind of slow, I decide, in a lazy way, that instead of writing about my summer vacation or the street on which I live or why I'm ecstatic to be an American, I'll write about how I despise salmon patties because my mom never gets all of the bones out. Chewing on bones is nauseating; that and they poke the roof of my mouth.

Salmon patties. Just to see if Mr. Boskowitz is paying attention.

I slide my eyes to Mr. Boskowitz. He's reading a book at his desk, fingers cupping his chin. From the cover, I see that it's a nonfiction book about some war, but I'm not interested enough to read the title.

As the silent minutes tick by, I stare at the blank chalkboard and let my mind wander

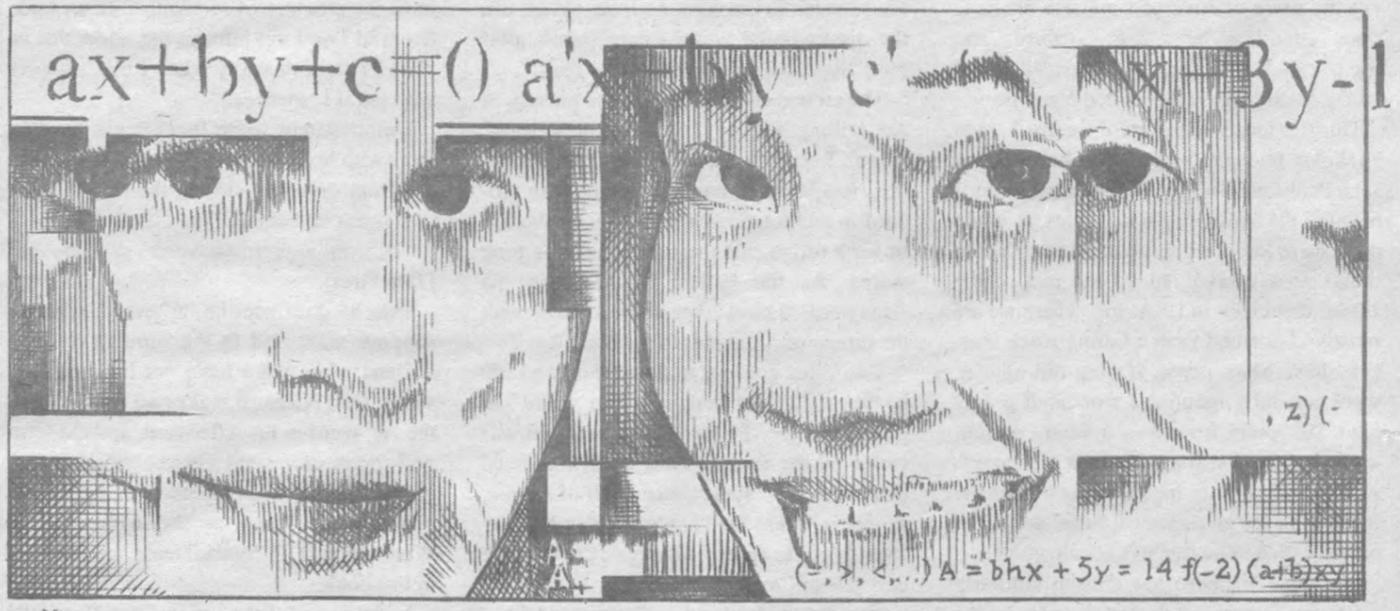
away from salmon patties. Zimbabwe. I roll the word over in my mind, having just learned it in social studies. It sounds more like a heavy wave than the name of an African country. Zimbabwe. Then I practice Viet-num, Viet-num.

As in the Vietnam War. "Ah."

Mr. Boskowitz's eyes shoot to mine and I realize I've spoken aloud. There's a snicker somewhere behind me, which I ignore. I smile briefly at Mr. Boskowitz before hunching over to write:

I have exactly two memories of the Vietnam War.

I read my one-sentence introductory paragraph several times, thinking it brilliant, then continue.



Don Karr

My first memory is funny because it's about how I once got my dad into trouble when I was a little kid. Basically, my dad picked up a hitchhiker while my two young and defenseless sisters and I were in the car, which we knew was a big no-no since the hitchhiker could turn out to be an ax murderer. Nobody ever told us about the ax murderer part, but we'd heard the stories about that guy in the city who hacked up a bunch of nurses. We knew that's why mom told my dad thousands of times, "Absolutely no picking up hitchhikers." But my dad went ahead and stopped anyway.

The hitchhiker was a tall, skinny, black soldier. He wore a green uniform and carried a huge duffel bag on his shoulder.

My dad has a uniform just like that, except his is from the Korean War.

I remember how the car door opened; wide, like a mouth. My middle sister and I cowered together in the back seat, as far from the open door as we could get, my oldest sister looking terrified for us from the safety of the front seat. Eyes round as cereal bowls, we three watched as the tall soldier bent his thin frame almost in half to get in. He didn't look at us or smile or say anything.

My dad asked the soldier where he wanted to go and the soldier replied in a deep, brief voice.

Then absolute quiet descended for what seemed a long, long time as the soldier stared ahead, while we stared at the soldier.

When the car stopped, I looked out the window at a small dark-brown brick house with black wrought-iron hand railings. Every house on the block looked the same and they were close together, each separated by the width of a driveway.

When the car door slammed shut, I looked toward the soldier, but he had already gotten out of the car. Bending down, his face appeared in the open passenger side window. Looking straight past my oldest sister, the soldier set his quiet, unsmiling eyes dead on my dad.

"Thanks," he said.

"Sure," my dad said. I realize I've stopped writing and am staring out the window at the black trees across the street. Glancing at the clock, I see that I only have thirteen minutes left, so I start to write again.

When we got home, I ratted on my dad. "Jim," my mother had said, her lips all hard and mad.

"He needed a ride home." Dad turned away and walked out of the kitchen.

I stare at my paper. It's a long moment before I start to write again.

My second memory could be titled "How the Vietnam War Helped Me Practice Multiplication and Division in Elementary School."

Before my mom got disgusted with how

shadow to match the color of your clothes. "No. I not going," she says. "Me, either. My parents are pretty strict." "My brother, he strict, too." "I can't date until I'm sixteen."

"Me, maybe I date never." She laughs, her head going up and down, shaking her shaggy black hair that tends to poof at the top.

I laugh, too, but it feels greasy. Greasy enough to slide me into my next question. "What about your mom and dad?" I say, glancing real casually at Lien-Huong.

But Lien-Huong simply shrugs as though I've asked her the time and she doesn't know. "They not here. Only older brother. He mean sometimes," and she sucks in her broad lower lip so that I know she's serious. "He never let me go out with friends."

the world was going, she liked to listen to the five o'clock news on television. Although I thought it was boring, it was nonetheless on every day so I came to know the routine. First came the depressing news about murders and fires, which was followed by sports and then weather. At the very end, the anchorman would read the names of soldiers from the Chicago area who had died that day in the Vietnam War.

Sad news, sports, weather, dead soldiers, in that order. Sad news, sports, weather, dead soldiers.

At some point I made up a math game where every day for a week I would write down the number of soldiers who died, then add them up and divide by seven to get the average for the week. I remember thinking that the numbers I wound up with were really funny: 7.3, 4.6, 5.2. After all, how could you have .2 of a person left over?

I chew on the skin next to my thumbnail, trying to remember at least one of the soldiers' names. I can't. The only thing I remember is that the dead were announced when I could smell dinner cooking, reminding me that I was starving to death and could you please hurry up, Mom?

"Hand your papers forward," Mr. Boskowitz says and there's a sudden snort as one of the boys in back wakes up. Several giggles erupt, along with a few overt laughs.

I fold my paper and slip it into my algebra text.

"Are you going to the Valentine's dance?" I ask Lien-Huong one late-January day as students file into the room before class. She sits with her ankles crossed, her shoulders stooped. She has acne, too, except that she never tries to cover it up with makeup like I do. She always wears plain white T-shirts and jeans that are either too short or too baggy for her thin frame; this when the fashion is tight black Van Halen concert T-shirts, beyond tight jeans, purple glitter nail polish and eye

"How come you live with your brother?" She shrugs again. "He save me." "He saved you?"

Mrs. Schuhan walks in and sets a pile of books on her desk, then glances at the clock on the wall.

"In Vietnam," Lien-Huong says in a whisper without looking at me, as if I'm unprepared and she's trying to be kind by giving me the answer. She turns her body forward in her seat and picks up her pencil. "In Saigon. He fly me off the roof."

"He flew you off the roof? What roof?"

Mrs. Schuhan clears her throat as she flips through the pages of her text. When she finds a certain page, she turns her back on us and starts writing problems on the blackboard.

Lien-Huong leans toward me, her whisper even lower. "In a helicopter. He fly me off the roof of the airport when the city bombed," and Lien-Huong scoops her hand up as if demonstrating a skier going off a ski jump.

"Okay," Mrs. Schuhan says and turns to the class. "Turn to page eighty-two."

Lien-Huong straightens up. I realize that I don't even know when the Vietnam War ended. Was it last year? The year before?

I open my book. Swooped off the roof in a helicopter during a war. I wonder if that was the first time Lien-Huong ever flew.

I stare at page eighty-two, thinking about the first time I ever flew. Last summer when I went to visit my grandma in New York State. The airplane had been big and air-conditioned and the snack peanuts salty. I marveled at the fold-down tray and the tiny bathroom. My flight took off on time and arrived on time and the gum really did work to relieve the pressure in my ears.

And it comes to me then, what it means, that term Mrs. Schuhan used in class recently: free of unknown variables.

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Restless Spirits

Stephen Poleskie

Between Two Fires

By Nicholas Nicastro

McBooks Press

384 pages, \$16.05, paperback

During the second week of September, 2002, three items offering a glimmer of hope to a chaotic world received scant notice in the nation's newspapers: the Sri Lankan government lifted a ban on the Tamil Tigers, pledging to begin peace talks with the rebels within the month; GlaxoSmithKline, a British pharmaceutical company, offered to cut the price of Aids and malaria drugs in poor countries by up to a third; and Switzerland, after decades of concealed isolation, finally joined the United Nations.

During those same two weeks I read Nicholas Nicastro's second volume of his John Paul Jones trilogy, *Between Two Fires*. I mention the above disparate events, as while they were of considerable importance to those closely involved, to the rest of the world, especially in USA, Inc. where we are mostly concerned with a falling stock market, these news items, if they did appear, were generally ignored. I wondered if perhaps 200 years from now a future author, assuming there still are humans and books, would find in these incongruous events the inspiration for an historical novel set in the period called "The Age of Globalization."

Nicholas Nicastro has chosen similarly divergent events, set during the time of the American Revolution, for his new novel. *Between Two Fires* weaves together episodes in the lives of "war hero" Jones, John Severence, a soldier of fortune with the Sullivan Expedition, and Joseph Two Fires, a Cayuga warrior still sorting out his relationship to the white men that have invaded his lands. Joseph Two Fires is one of the "two fires" in the title of this rather schizo novel. The other, I'm assuming, is the war raging, on two continents, during the American struggle for independence.

If you are expecting to discover the revolutionary origins of the "moral high road" our government is currently leading us down you will not find it here. There are no "good guys" in this book, at least not in the sense that we learned in high-school history class. And while this is a work of fiction, that has been in the author's own words "highly embroidered," the descriptions of the war, and the social conditions of the time, have been carefully researched. A few of the more gruesome battle scenes might offend some readers.

In *Between Two Fires*, author Nicastro reveals himself to be an effective storyteller, clever at developing the plot, while exhibiting a deft command of the language. He displays a love for the landscape with some vivid descriptions of what upstate New York and Pennsylvania must have looked like during the Revolution. Nicastro hints at his own sense of humor, and irony, in John Severence's description of the area that is now modern day Ithaca:

Our march down the eastern shores of Cayugah Lake proceeded without further incident....

The southern end of the lake is blighted by a swamp. With so little solid shore to build upon, the place will surely never fall under the improving hand of civilization. The eastern edge of the bog is marked by a chasm of gray stone ending in a wide and pleasing waterfall, beside which our party was delighted to camp for an evening. Fully seventy yards wide from top to bottom, the torrent exceeds anything I have seen in England or France. Even in late summer, a great volume of

water flows over this precipice. It is curious to think, in fact, that its remoteness is the whole cause of its anonymity. If it were in a hundred miles of London or Paris, poets would have sung its praise for centuries. Here, not even our native scouts have a name for it.

The book begins in a charming and unexpected manner with John Paul Jones engaged in water battle. Just as we dig in awaiting the wide-screen action we realize it is only Jones, already the hero of the engagement against HMS Drake at Belfast, playing at combat on a pond with the boy Comte de la Rochjaquelein. Before the fray is ended, Jones is called away to his new ship the Bon Homme Richard, which has been named after Benjamin Franklin. As Jones strides off, the disappointed young count shouts after him: "But I have not yet begun to fight!"

The second chapter shifts to the present. "I am talking to you because I am dead," Joseph Two Fires tells us by way of introduction. Readers who prefer their stories to proceed in a chronological order should buckle in for a rough ride through Nicastro's time warps. As the author disclaims in his Afterword, "I have taken some liberties with the timing of . . . events in the book."

Two Fires goes on to detail the good life he lived, "at the center of the world" in Chonodote, or "Peach Town," before it was stolen by the State of New York. I guessed this place to be somewhere north of Aurora, as this is where the "No Sovereign Nation" signs begin to appear when you drive up the east side of Cayuga Lake.

Two Fires, having been murdered by a white man—I will not say who as it would give away too much of the plot—was not buried properly, and therefore not eligible for Indian heaven. The warrior's spirit goes in search of it anyway, only to wind up in Cleveland. There he rants about the tall buildings, and pollution from airliners, and white man sitting in a "suffocating town with your little hard white clothes and your bland white mush food." He makes no mention of casino gambling. The dead Two Fires warns that, "Someone else from across the ocean is coming (al-Qaida? Saddam?) to take what's left of Turtle Island from you. . . And you know what? I can't wait." Two Fires would be wise not to repeat this revilement in front of his mailman or meter reader; he could end up a referral to President Bush's inform-on-your-neighbors program.

We are told Two Fires learned English from his white mother. While Two Fires's use of the words "cock," "prick," and "balls" at times causes his dialogue to seem a bit too contemporary, a check of my slang dictionary reveals that these words have been employed to refer to male organs since the 16th century. Nicastro goes through pains in the Afterword to explain why he has Indians saying "okay."

Two Fires's mother also tried to teach him Christianity, as did Father Du Lac, the missionary at Chonodote. All the characters in the book, even such vile ones as General Sullivan, who had Indian skins made into boots, are shown to have a good side, if only for the odd moment. The single person depicted as truly evil—he was stripped naked and cast into the wilderness by Severence—is Father Du Lac.

When Two Fires's father falls into a deer trap and dies from the wounds he sustains, the son has to go and kill someone from the neighboring Shawnee, since it was men from that tribe who dug the trap. He kills a boy but brings the father back for his sister, Fallen Leaf, who will appear in a major role under a different name later on in the book. When Fallen Leaf rejects the Shawnee, Two Fires tortures him to death by roasting him while cutting off various parts of his anatomy.

To please his sister, Two Fires goes farther

afield and comes back with a white man, a survivor of a naval battle on Lake Champlain, which the warrior gets to narrate. The white man is too cowardly, and begins to whimper at the suggestion of torture, so is let go.

Two Fires meets his downfall on a walkabout to the Saint Lawrence River, at least for the second chapter. He will have many more, and a few triumphs before he gets to fly over Cleveland. It is the warrior's hubris that brings him down. While standing on shore admiring a large sailing vessel in the river, he is approached by a white man who says, "You speekee?"

One thing that drives Two Fires into a rage is to be addressed by a white man who doesn't use proper English. In a huff he replies, "Joseph Two Fires, sir. And to whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?" In an aside the dead Two Fires informs the reader that he "liked to talk this way when I met assholes who ask if I 'speekee.'"

Unfortunately, while Two Fires is standing there with his feathers ruffled, a rowboat puts out from the other side of the ship and six men sneak up behind him.

"Disarm nigger," a voice says behind [Two Fires].

Yes, he does use the "n" word, which I suppose was used at the time to refer to Indians, although I have not been able to verify this. Nicastro makes no reference to the "n" word in his Afterword, and the term will appear on several more occasions. More correctly, other titles offensive to the indigenous people, such as the name of the Washington D. C. football team, are not used in this book.

In the midst of the action, Two Fires tells us, "I noticed that one of the guys kicking me was barefoot, and that he had very ugly feet. They were knobby, they stank...." One wonders how someone so pawky he can detect stinky feet while being kicked in the "stomach, kidneys, balls," could have missed those same feet, along with five other pairs, when they were padding up behind him.

Shanghaied aboard a Dutch vessel, Two Fires becomes bored by the lack of action and swims over to Captain Jones on the Bon Homme Richard. During the battle against HMS Serapis, Two Fires is credited with dropping a grenade down the hatch of the British vessel, an action which dramatically influences the outcome of the battle. Nicastro tells us in his Afterword that this brave feat was actually accomplished by a Scotsman, William Hamilton, who "deserves to be remembered." I don't imagine we will hear any howls from the Scots. However, I could imagine the war parties that would be forming up in the Turning Stone Nation if the positions had been reversed, with Two Fires getting the pat on the head.

The most finely-wrought character in the book is John Severence—spelled with an "e." Here is a man the reader can identify with and get behind, which is what is supposed to happen. Skillfully depicted and believable, Severence clings to what he considers to be his moral high road, while still hoping to make a profit trading with the Indians.

Severence's tale unfolds in a series of letters to his sweetheart, Rebecca Shays, who is waiting for him back in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with her father, Elijah, a war profiteer who uses his ships for blockade running. Elijah, himself, devotes his time to studying his bowel movements. To this end he has purchased a porcelain chamber pot with the visage of the British monarch, George III on the bottom, and the words below it, *Pro Iustitia Sedeo*—I sit for justice. Shays laments that in his youth he could have covered the face easily with turds of the finest quality and quantity. Now, alas, the king is rarely more than slightly soiled. Shays's other *divertissement*, is snooping through his daughter's letters from her lover.

While Severence's chapters begin as letters, they soon segue into full-blown action scenes, with dialogue, and the sounds of musket shots, barking dogs, and dying Indians. This filmmaker's technique might be a bit disconcerting to a reader more accustomed to books such as George Cooper's *Lost Love*, where the story is told in letters that remain letters. Nevertheless, Severence's lengthy "letters"—some 15 pages or more in the text, that would probably have been 50 pages at least in their handwritten form—have the ring of truth about them, and the narrative drive of a well-plotted novel. Severence is a good writer.

The ever-waiting Rebecca is depicted as having the fortitude of a marshmallow. She does manage to shine in her two big scenes, and plays a large part at the end—which I shall not reveal. Finding herself out of laudanum, and the drugstore's stocks depleted by the British shipping blockade, she ferrets out the local drug dealer. In her other bit, Rebecca, believing she is pregnant by some form of immaculate conception, visits the local midwife. The woman convinces her that despite the pains in her stomach Rebecca is not with child. Toward the end of the book, Rebecca, with the same suspicion, goes to the home of the same midwife, but does not receive the same answer. I will not divulge who the father is.

Which brings us to our main hero, John Paul Jones. Having taken command of the Bon Homme Richard, Jones is on the high seas, accompanied by a small squadron of foreign vessels sailed by moody and recalcitrant foreign captains.

Also along is Henriette d'Barejou, a French artist, entirely the fabrication of author Nicastro. Having spent the better part of my previous life around art and artists, I can say he has done an agreeable job with Henriette, giving her a believable wit and substance that never falls into caricature. Her mission in life is to reconstruct the face of Christ. To this end she has sketched hundreds of faces looking for the ideal components from which to assemble her composite picture. She finds the perfect nose, detached from its face, floating across the deck during the battle with HMS Serapis. What becomes of the nose? For this too you will have to read the book.

There you have the heroes, with their feminine interests. So who are the bad guys? Of these there are a number in *Between Two Fires*. Even the sacrosanct "Father of our Country" does not come off well in his cameo appearance, being described in rather Reaganesque terms:

Washington ascended the mounting block and swept that great white pillar of a leg over his horse's back. . . the general's movements seemed calculated for effect, as if he expected the cant of his head or the way his wide rump filled his saddle to alter the course of empires. This made him seem more like an actor hired to play the part of a commander than a real soldier.

But the foremost "heavy" has got to be General Sullivan, leading his expedition north from Easton, Pennsylvania, to "pacify" the Indians—the word I recall from the many road signs that lined Route 309, The Sullivan Trail, as it wound its way through my youth. Back when there was no Route 81, I often took The Sullivan Trail on the trip from my home in Wyoming Valley to New York City. As I rushed my way to the Big Apple, looking for art and culture, but secretly hoping it would find me, I did not pause to think about the road I was on and how it had been made. "To pacify" was enough. Weren't the Indians mere savages, who when they weren't attacking "us" were ceaselessly fighting with

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Algebra, 1978

continued from page 9

"What do they mean?" I whisper to Lien-Huong. We're supposed to be working quietly on problems while Mrs. Schuhan is out of the room. Surprisingly enough, it is quiet, being Monday, March and sleeting.

"What?" she says.

"The letters? What do the letters used in algebra stand for?" I use my pencil to point to the equation in my book: $a + b$ divided by c .

"I don't know," she says, hunched toward me and whispering, too. "They supposed to stand for anything?"

"Doesn't it bother you not to know what exactly they're supposed to be? Are they pies or pencils or tickets, or what?"

Lien-Huong frowns, then shrugs. "They can be anything." She turns back to her work.

I glance around the room at bent heads and scribbling hands, everyone working with these letters that can mean anything.

Looking back at Lien-Huong, her dull black hair having fallen forward and closed off her face like a ragged sheet, I want to yell at her for what she's not telling me. For what she understands that I don't.

For what she understands so well that she doesn't even know she understands it.

Mr. Boskowitz left to "check on something," which means to have a smoke in the teachers' lounge. We're supposed to be writing, but as usual, the class has broken up between the flirts, the readers, the doodlers, the sleepers and the goody-two-shoes trying to decipher the essay question Mr. Boskowitz left on the blackboard for us. It's raining a May heavy outside and because of

the dark gray of it all against the shock of new green grass, the yellow light of the room feels dead.

I stare at my notebook. The blankness of a new page comforts me, it being a steady white in place of my thoughts, which are of false colors and wild, chaotic movement. Random and meaningless.

I think I know what I want, but I'm not sure how to get there.

So I close my eyes. I listen to the sound of the rain through the windows that have been cracked open to allow in a current of muggy air. I force myself to slowly breath in and out while in my mind I chant Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam until one by one, all other thoughts are drowned out leaving a broad, vacant place.

Now ready, I ask myself the question: What is it like to be Lien-Huong?

My hair black, my face brown, my body an unhealthy thin. I go to school, I study, I go home and eat. I don't shop much. Maybe only for food. Do I live in a house? No. An apartment. A small apartment, modest as the way I dress.

Do I have pets? No.

Do I have any relatives nearby?

No.

My life is calm. Now, that is. My life is calm now, but it didn't used to be, did it? No. It didn't used to be. When I was ten, maybe eleven... Say I am ten, maybe eleven. I live in my own country where I don't sound weird to anybody because everyone speaks the same language as I do. It's a beautiful language that sounds like a song. Nobody here gets braces. No braces, no snow, no sleet. In fact, I don't even know what snow and sleet are. Mine is a jungle country, the air being sticky with heat and rain.

How do I live? Where do I live? Who do I live with? What do I eat?

I don't know. I don't—

But suddenly I do know. I am from here. I am a kid and I am from this place. If I see something, if I hear it or I smell it, then it must be so—in other words, normal—because it's all I know.

Ah.

I am a kid—ten, maybe eleven—and it's come down to this one particular day. This one particular moment.

I see myself running, crouched, and the skies are gray and blowing, the humid air thick with smoke. Running, my feet splashing through the puddles on this airport roof, I hear the helicopter blades thumping above the shouting and the breaking and the bombing. Bent over and scrambling, I am intent upon the dark figure in the helicopter. The dark figure is not my mother. The dark figure is not my father. If I've ever had a mother and a father or aunts, uncles, cousins or any other family, they're gone now and there's no time to find out why or where or how or if ever we'll meet again; if ever we'll unite, there being no science about it, but rather only thin luck. They're all gone, yet none are gone. It's as though every one of my relatives has been pummeled, squashed down and stuffed inside that one dark figure, my brother, his mouth clamped shut to keep them locked inside until it's safe to come out. Many, and of such importance, hiding inside

one seemingly nondescript variable.

My brother is young, yet old enough to hold them and save me.

I am young and old, too, though too young to know it. I am running, but good at it. I'm starving, but used to it. I'm going somewhere, but don't know where. Somewhere which could be anywhere and might turn out to be nowhere.

Yet I question nothing.

Why?

My feet begin to slow as I look back over my shoulder at where I've come from.

Why don't I question what is happening? What will happen?

Because...

Because...

My brother shrieks. Hurry! The sound is a bullet sting that spins me back around, setting my skin on fire. I break into a run and this time it's all motion, no thought. To pause and wonder about what comes next is to die.

I open my eyes, sweating.

—
Martha Engber has had a full-length play produced in Hollywood, as well as fiction published in the Berkeley Fiction Review, Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, Massage Magazine and other literary magazines. She currently seeks a publisher for her literary novel, *Soul Winds*.

Restless Spirits

continued from page 10

each other? All we had done was establish a few "settlements" basically to trade with them, and bring Christianity to the heathens.

In those days, no one ever referred to General Sullivan's campaign as genocide. Sure a few Indian villages were burned. And a few Indians, as always mostly women and children, were "processed," the word used euphemistically, as in "meat processing plant." They had burned our settlements so we had to retaliate. They were "terrorists" who came without warning, retaliating for what we had done to them. They were on the side of the British, to whom we colonists were "terrorists" having done more than just dump a few sacks of tea into Boston Harbor.

Nothing has changed. We saw parallel situations in the Warsaw Ghetto, and in too-soon forgotten Sarajevo and Srebrenica, and Rwanda, and presently still in Israel and Sudan, and a list of other places much too long. Nicastro's novel, as all good history texts should, whether fiction or non-fiction, causes us to reassess where we stand as

human beings; to ask ourselves why is it always "them" or "us." Why can't we live in harmony with one another and with nature? John Severence asks himself this question as he moves with his troops to destroy yet another peaceful Indian village: "We march, it seems, in the center of some great hush. It is as if the land itself were waiting to see the end of the present struggle and hence perhaps its own fate."

Between Two Fires will have readers who have not read the first volume rushing back to get it. The first book, *The Eighteenth Captain*, should not be hard to find, as local publisher Alex Skutt of McBooks Press keeps his previous titles in stock, unlike the money-mad major houses which are all too eager to turn unsold books into pulp. A third, and final, volume of the John Paul Jones series is in the works.

—
Stephen Poleskie has had stories published in numerous literary journals. He has just completed a nonfiction book, *The Balloonist: The True Story of Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe*.

The Patriotism of Refusal

continued from page 8

direct repercussions. It's if you get called up...

DV: It varies. I'm not an officer. Officers were taken out of their positions and called for...

BR: Court martial?

DV: Not court martial. They have court martial once they are called into the reserve and say "I refuse." Beforehand, they were called to a meeting where they were told that it's not o.k. and were removed from their position. Many of them, not everybody.

BR: And then what are the repercussions of being removed from your position?

DV: It varies in units. Sometimes you're positioned in a commanding position in another unit. And sometimes they simply—it's a kind of humiliating procedure—they don't [necessarily] take [away] the rank, but they take [away] the position of commander. Some of the people have to face very harsh reactions in their workplace, or [from] their families. I'm quite lucky in this respect...

DR: Your stance, and those who signed the letter, is that you are truly being a Zionist in your refusal. That you are supporting your vision of Zionism. Say I am an anti-Zionist, and I tell you that I do not care about your liberal agenda, that Zionism is all the same whether it is in the territories or not, a taking of other people's land. You can you say that, o.k., we go back to the Green Line, and that solves it. But even then, the Palestinians would only get twenty-two percent of what was consid-

ered Palestine. What can you answer?

DV: The thing that I'm most concerned about is Israel. Israel and Israeli citizens, more than anything else. It's true to say that I'm also concerned about human rights violations in the occupied territories, but to me at least it's secondary to the security of the State of Israel. That's the reason I went to the army for such a long period. I'm willing to do almost anything for it.

It's completely clear to me that some, or maybe most, of the Palestinians, they want the whole land to themselves, as many Jews want. I don't know if my proposition—withdraw from the occupied territories now—will bring peace. And I don't know if—you know, there is a kind of debate—about whether there is somebody to talk to, or the whole Palestinian leadership is involved in terror and we shouldn't talk to [them], for me it's an interesting question, but it's secondary. That we withdraw from the occupied territories is necessary for Israel. Israel's interest, not the Palestinian one. For some Palestinian groups it's counter to their interests. The Hamas [the radical Islamist Palestinian faction] doesn't want a withdrawal from the occupied territories. To me it's pretty clear; they simply don't want it. They want the whole land to themselves.

And I think for the Israeli citizens, it's a clear interest. We'd enhance our security dramatically. I truly believe in it. I don't have any proof. Only history can tell that. But I believe it's necessary for our security. And therefore, it should be done.

—
David Regenspan, a former rabbi, is completing a novel about Jews and Muslims in medieval Spain, City of Pomegranates. He lives with his family in Ithaca.

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Entering the Lists

Kiko Nobusawa

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Alexander J. Morin, ed.
Backbeat Books, 2002, \$29.95

Classical Music: 100 Essential CDs

Joe Staines
Rough Guides, 1999, \$5.00

The Essential Canon of Classical Music

David Dubal
North Point Press, 2001, \$40.00

The NPR Curious Listener's Guide to Classical Music

Tim Smith
Perigee Books, 2002, \$13.95

The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs, 2002 Edition

Ivan March, ed.
Penguin, 2001, \$25.00

The Rough Guide to Classical Music, 3rd edition

Joe Staines, ed.
Rough Guides, 2001 \$23.95

When I was a child, I believed in lists. With great wonder, eagerness, and hope, I would scroll down any kind of compilation—first to ascertain what I might already have accomplished, then to seek out forgotten or unthought of thrills—and chart a course of avid pursuit. Whatever cultural literacy I may possess began with such lists during my wide-eyed, I'm-going-to-read-every-book-in-the-library years. However, at some vaguely adolescent point, the sheer geekiness of my idealized reading list got the better of me, and having to read Thackeray, ostensibly because it was in the high-school English anthology, dealt a significant if not ultimately mortal blow to my trust in expert compilers.

The field I eventually settled into, for daisy-gathering in a purportedly more professional capacity, was classical music. Now my obsession was not just about collecting records, but also about acquiring musical scores and mastering repertoire. In fact, contrary to most "lay" music fans, I tended to eschew record reviews and all reviewers in general, unless I knew they would extol what I already believed in. As with my childhood reading lists, though, my own stultifying seriousness wore me down soon enough. Still, like most people I know, I do carry my own yardstick, and a particularly idiosyncratic one when it comes to music. But to satisfy frequent requests for opinions and recommendations of music books and recordings, I began looking at lists compiled by "experts" for one that I could recommend without too many concessions.

I was further encouraged in this task by a fellow music collector who handily, if unknowingly, offered his own quirky yardstick toward this survey. Since this friend and I have fairly disparate tastes (we revel in airing out our respective musical demons), the combined measures should result in some sort of skewed balance. My friend's gauge, you see, is to first look up Anton Bruckner in the index of any book and see what it has to say about this composer he adores. I confess to a likewise initial judgement, my subject being the pianist Maurizio Pollini. My fellow index assessor and I are in the same boat, though, in that both artists seem to be acquired tastes as far as conventional wisdom goes.

Aside from our personal litmus tests, these canonical surveys are of course inevitably swayed by broader cultural prejudices, predominantly Anglophile in the case of classical records. Three of the six guides reviewed here are originally British publications (the Rough Guides and the Penguin guide), as are classical music periodicals such as *Gramophone* and *International Record Review*, available in this country. Also, for whatever reason, music reviewing is an overwhelmingly male-authored field: only 2 out of 55 reviewers in a recent issue of *International Record Review* are women, 4 or 5 out of 46 in *Gramophone*, 2 of 44 in *Fanfare* (a stalwart American periodical), and 3 of 54 contributors to Alexander Morin's otherwise progressive book. I have no profound insights, nor outrage as a female writer myself, to express regarding these numbers, but I do always remember the scene in "Diner" where Ellen Barkin gets chewed out for messing with the record collection.

After all is counted, indexed, Brucknerized and pulse-checked against tempi Pollini, I am not certain what exactly I offer here besides yet another list of lists. For whatever it's worth (Vladimir Nabokov once wrote, regarding literary critics, that "criticism can be constructive in the sense that it gives readers... some information about the critic's intelligence, or honesty, or both."), here are my picks and pans of some recent classical CD guides:

If you want to start, and even stop, at just 5 bucks, the *100 Essential CDs* pocket Rough Guide is actually quite decent, even adventuresome, and an unbeatable buy. It lists and discusses 100 CDs recommended in light of repertoire, performance, and availability considerations. Selections range broadly from conventional to challenging (Mozart, Stockhausen), old standards to fresher voices (Neville Marriner on one hand, but Argerich over Horowitz on another), and include non-hyped recordings (Haydn on the Naxos label). Keep in mind that the list is Anglophile (Turnage?) and period instrument heavy (Anner Bylisma on the Bach suites, yet oddly no harpsichord music), and also that it is not a review guide per se, so it does not list and compare different recordings of the same works. This little guide passes the Pollini test, by the way, even sneaking in his Boulez sonata under cover of Prokofiev.

The full-size *Rough Guide to Classical Music* is also quite recommendable, if you want to invest \$23.95. It includes a lot more repertoire, biographical and critical information, and comparative reviews of alternate CD selections. It presents many interesting and useful musical facts in readable sidebars, amusing anecdotes (Charles Ives sold insurance to Elliott Carter's parents), and Maurizio galore. Nice sympathetic spread on Bruckner, too, whose "music attests to the redemptive force of the divine." Do note the many Brits, and how Michael Torke seems to be included to match Mark-Anthony Turnage, while no Corigliano, Tower, Wuorinen, Sessions, or even George Crumb. If you start with the \$5 mini version above, I'd try my next \$20 elsewhere for variety, though it wouldn't necessarily be a loss here.

The 1500+-page Penguin guide is strictly a CD list. It is quite comprehensive but bone dry and difficult to read, and you already need to know what you are looking for in order to find it easily. It also lists only recommended CDs, no "disses," which makes for tiresome reading. It, too, includes Torke and not Corigliano, but "no work," to quote Charles Rosen, "can embrace the whole of music, and it is an unfair game to play with dictionaries and encyclopedias ... to see what is in and what is out."

On the U.S. front, my three-star endorsement goes to Morin's *Listener's Companion*. No Torke and Turnage, thank you, but many and most others from Arne to Zappa (and in defiance of Rosen's caveat above, Chicagoans will indulge in "the amusement of seeing that one's friends have been left out" by noting that Blackwood and Ran have entries, but not the late Ralph Shapey). The first and major section of the book is organized alphabetically by composer, where each entry includes an intelligent, concise biographical and critical essay that assesses the music's relevance for audiences today, then surveys a good number of significant CDs, whether in or out of print. The individual articles are written by over 50 different contributors and are full of character, wit, and personal takes, but without disintegrating into a *melée*. The back sections of this 1200-page volume offer general listings on instruments, performers, and genres such as chant, electronic, and holiday discs. No discernible color on the Bruckner dip, and mixed results for Pollini (especially in that the Chopin article makes no mention of him whatsoever, not even a scathing disavowal—pretty disquieting, I'm afraid), but great allusions to viola jokes: "the difficulty of playing an instrument... that's too big to hold on the shoulder but also too small to hold between the legs..." A highly entertaining guide all around.

The two other American publications I looked at were truly disappointing—the NPR guide annoyingly so, and the Dubal sadly so. I openly admit to being skeptically predisposed toward NPR-endorsed items—sort of like rap CDs bearing a seal of parental approval—but I was amazed at how quickly, expertly, and comprehensively this *Curious Listener's Guide* fulfilled my negative prophesy. Here is an idiot's guide to classical music if ever there was one. Sorry, but even idiots deserve better than this fishy emulsion of feel-good vapidity and bourgeois condescension. Its discussion begins with the clichéd whine about how classical music needs "saving" due to the "general dumbing down of culture," then proceeds to advocate for its position with namby-pamby double talk (classical music is "not necessarily better, but clearly aim[s] for something greater"), gross generalizations ("we in the Western world are connected to the roots of classical music, ... the same roots that have produced all of Western music [i.e., the same twelve tones]"), and inane proclamations ("classical music, like all great art, is self-evident"). Yikes. I couldn't bear to look at the glossary of musical terms, but noted that the CD suggestions were predictably

wallpaperish and studded with the usual media-packaged artists. This guide also has a glib list of 51 composers (why it includes Scott Joplin but not Duke Ellington, or Hildegard and Zwillich but not Janice for that matter, is beyond me) and a truly bizarre selection of 50 performers (Hans von Bülow, but no Abbado, Kleiber, Klemperer, Ozawa, Walter??). Needless to say, this travesty flunks the Pollini test big time, and I don't think my dear Brucknerian would take too kindly to how "the enormous length and organizational structure" of the symphonies "caused consternation" until their "sheer weight wore much of the opposition down." Egad. With guides like this, who needs idiots?

Contrary to the NPR idiot's guide, I truly wanted and expected Dubal's *Essential Canon* to succeed, especially after reading his intelligent and sincere introduction. So it was extremely disappointing to then find that the rest of the book reads like a polished up high-school term paper, complete with conscientious bibliographic citations of sources such as the 1964 *Grove's Dictionary*, and the 1953 Cross and Ewen *Encyclopedia of the Great Composers*. The composers are presented in strict chronological order by birth year, and this makes for abrupt, high-schoolish history in which eras begin and end at precisely designated points on a timeline. Thus, Debussy and Mahler fall into the Romantic Age, but Rachmaninov and Ravel into the Age of Modernism (I wouldn't use this book to study for a college music history exam). The prose is relentlessly monotone, even when spiced by high drama—"the next five years were crushing" (Beethoven), "only his death stopped the heavenly flow of music" (Schubert)—and the commentless CD suggestions are only helpful if you already know the performers. Sporting a confident white jacket and \$40 price tag, the *Essential Canon* is an embarrassing and expensive trap. I think my friend may have been taken initially by a rare instance of eloquence, occasioned by Anton: "in an era alienated from mystery and sacredness, his majestic compositions speak with a deep and humble reverence for life."

In conclusion, I should say that this study of new lists did stir me into actually listening to and ordering more CDs. However, I will also be honest and confess that none of the CDs I have been listening to are on any of the above lists, and the new CDs on order are all jazz.

Kiko Nobusawa is a recovering pianist. A former CD pusher at Buch Spieler Music in Montpelier, VT, she currently serves as music buyer for the Bookery in Ithaca, NY.



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