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## In Praise of Cassandra

Arno J. Mayer

There is no understanding the infernal Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio and its worldwide repercussions without exploring the dialectics of the vexed "Arab Question" in the unfolding and consummation of the Zionist project. For Martin Buber this question concerned, in essence, "the relationship between Jewish settlement and Arab life, or, as it may be termed, the intra-national (intraterritorial?) basis of Jewish settlement." From the outset in the 1890s, eminent Zionist voices in both the Diaspora and the Yishuv criticized the Zionist movement's principal leaders for their benign but stubborn neglect of this problem. Eventually Judah Magnes sadly concluded that the failure to make Arab-Jewish cooperation a major policy objective was Zionism's fatal "sin of omission."

Rather than take the true measure of the majority Arab Palestinian population most Zionists of the first and early hours ignored, minimized, or distorted its reality and nature. Above all, with time they either denied the potential for an Arab awakening or dismissed Arab nationalism as an inconsequential European import.

Martin Buber is emblematic of the critics—Ahad Haam, Yitzhak Epstein, Chaim Kalvarisky, Judah Magnes, Ernst Simon—who from the creation of modern Zionism insisted on the weight and urgency of the Arab Question, and on the importance of not only addressing the fears and anxieties of Arab Palestinians but also respecting their political aspirations. Buber became ever more convinced that the Arab Question would be the supreme test and ultimate "touchstone" of the Zionist project. He deplored the early settlers' "initial failure" and "basic error": by neglecting to "gain the confidence of the local Arabs in political and economic matters...they gave cause to be regarded as aliens, as outsiders" disinterested in "achieving mutual trust."

Buber took to task Zionism's "political leadership" for "paying tribute to traditional colonial policy" and being "guided by international considerations" to the exclusion of attention to "intra-national" affairs. On the whole, Zionist policy not only neglected Arab-Jewish relations inside Palestine but also outside, where it failed to "relate the aims of the Jewish people to the geographic reality in which these aims had to be realized." As a consequence, the nascent Jewish commonwealth in Palestine became ever more "isolated from the organic context of the Middle East, into whose awakening it [needed to] be integrated."

As early as February 1918, Buber demurred when Zionist maximalists advocated "creating a majority [of Jews] in . . . [Palestine] by all means and as quickly as possible." Fearing that "most of today's leading Zionists (and probably also most of those who are led) were thoroughly unrestrained nationalists," he forewarned that unless "we succeed in establishing an authoritative [Zionist] opposition, the soul of the move-

ment will be corrupted, maybe forever."

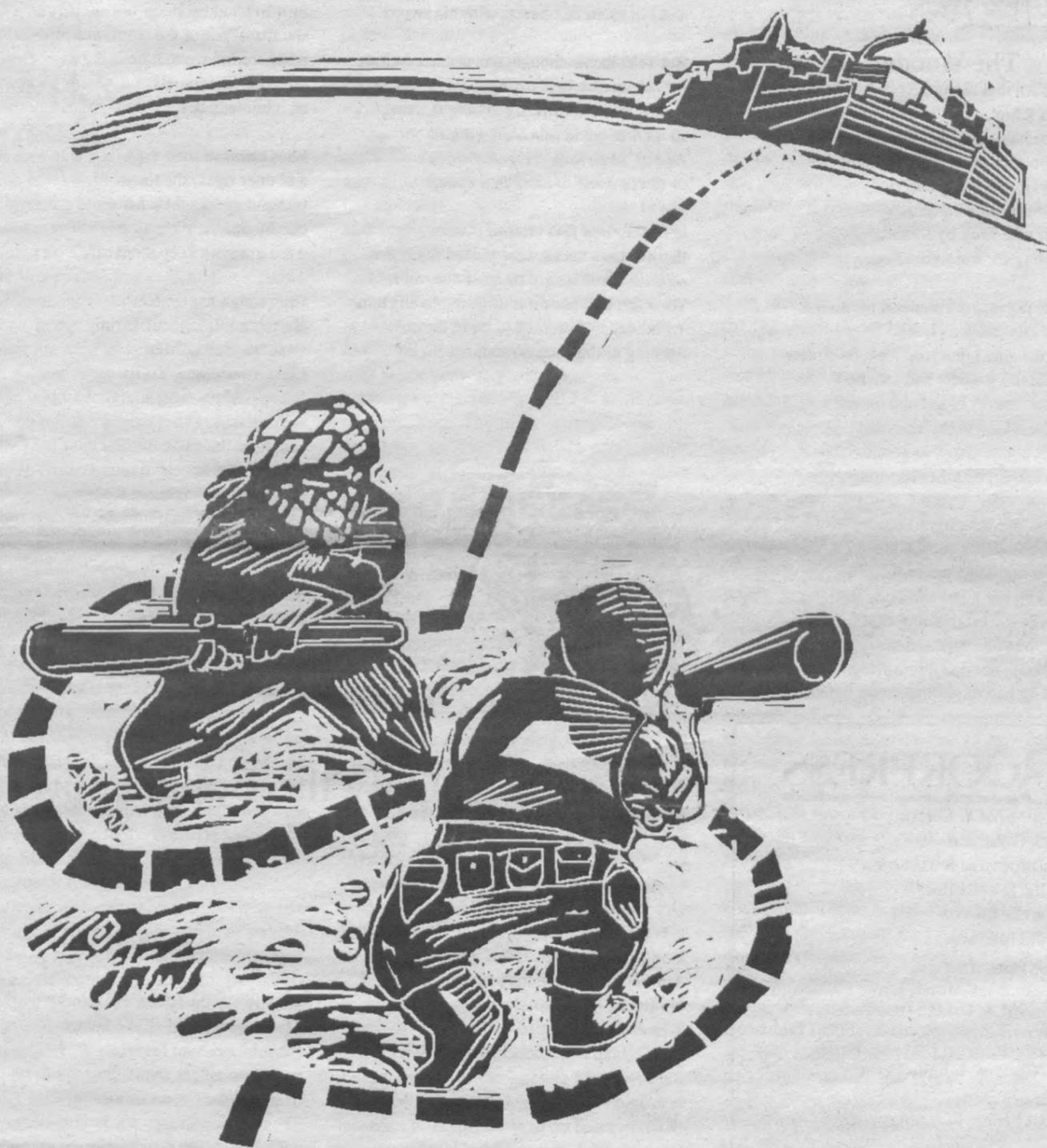
This spur-of-the-moment reaction carried the germ of the idea that informed the foundation of Brit Shalom (Alliance for Peace) in 1925, later renewed by Ihud (Union). The members and fellow travelers of these two societies of dissidents formed an influential but powerless opposition focused on the Arab Question, and emerged as the racked conscience first of Zionism and then of Israel. By virtue of being severely marginalized, these faithful critics were unable to inspire and encourage their Palestinian and Arab counterparts, who were as weak and beleaguered as they were themselves.

In 1947-48, at the creation of the problematic and contested all-Jewish state, Buber reflected on the creed and role of those public intellectuals who, "equally free from the megalomania of the leaders and the giddiness of the masses, discerned the approach-

ing catastrophe." He claimed that as the embodiment of "Cassandra" in their time this "spiritual elite . . . not merely uttered warnings but tried to point to a path to be followed, if catastrophe was to be averted." In "speeches which were so many deeds" it indicated an alternative road likely "to lead to a Jewish revival in Palestine" and to the "rescue of the Jewish people." The far-sighted "spiritual elite," of which Buber was one of the most forceful voices, put forward a program for "a bi-national state" aiming "at a social structure based on the reality of two peoples living together." Buber and his companions, supported, among others, by the left Zionist Hashomer Hatzair, advanced their binational scheme as an alternative to the "Jewish state," as envisaged by Theodor Herzl and his political heirs. They cautioned that "any [Jewish] national state in the vast and hostile [Middle Eastern] surroundings

would be the equivalent of suicide," largely because "an unstable international basis could never make up for the missing intra-national one." Alone an "agreement between the two nations [in Palestine] could lead to Jewish-Arab cooperation in the revival of the Middle East, with the Jewish partner concentrated in a strong settlement in Palestine." Ironically, Buber expected the logic of the "geopolitical situation" to favor the reemergence of "national universalism," the Jewish people's "unique truth," to fire the "struggle against the obstacles chauvinism places in our way."

In October 1948, in the midst of the first Arab-Israeli war, Buber questioned the credo that since the Jewish State had been attacked it was "engaged in a war of defense." Ever attentive to the "Other," Buber asked,



Jack Sherman

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# Penelope's Confession

These poems are from a longer cycle of poems called *Penelope's Confession* that I began writing before the invasion of Iraq. As the war continued, and those of us who had opposed it felt increasingly impotent, the Penelope poems were a way of keeping a sense of outrage alive. As the poems progressed, I found myself re-reading and translating passages from the last books of the *Odyssey*. Some of these passages I later incorporated in the poems.



## The Wooden Horse

Before that night the horse was a high-point of minstrel's tales, especially that part when the belly splits and instead of entrails the Greeks spew out into the sleeping streets and take Troy by stealth, ending the nine-year siege.

The poets don't mention the sound the city made as it died or the smell that rose from its streets after the soldiers had satisfied their lust for blood and turned to sex. Last night her house was a mini-Troy, its rooms shrieking, its killer her spouse.

Next morning by the sea she raises her sticky shift over her head and swims, letting her mind and body drift under the brightening sky. At the sea's edge she stands rubbing her body, removing the stench of her husband's hands.

## The Twelve Women

While she lay in a drugged sleep, like a lion that has killed a farmer's ox, its chest spattered by the blood that drools from its jaws, Odysseus stood, monstrous, mired in gore from feet to armpits. The women were told to clean up.

They entered the great hall keening, and wept as they dragged the bodies outside. Next he told them to soak sea sponges in water, clean the tables and chairs soiled by the blood of men they'd known as lovers, boors, gluttons, friends

and carry out the filthy scrapings from the floor. When the room was cleaned to his satisfaction he told his son to take twelve women who had slept with the suitors to a narrow place between two buildings with no escape and kill them like beasts with his sword

But Telemachus thought this death too clean for the women and strung a ship's hawser across the courtyard tightening it enough so no foot could touch the ground. And as when long-winged thrushes or doves come to roost in a clump

of bushes and find instead a snare, the women's necks were placed in nooses so their death would be most miserable. Their feet twitched for a while reminding him of how they'd seemed to tread the air dancing to the flute on summer nights.



## Athena's Bargain

She had always thought it strange Athena should be a goddess of war and weaving, of craft and carnage. Now, Penelope woke from muffled sleep and understood

she'd been shielded from the worst. How could she look him in the eye otherwise? The slaughter of the suitors was work of man and goddess who held the world in balance;

men at war, women weaving, knitting, making bread, babies, fingers busy, eyes averted. Are the gods to blame?

She'd quietly kept his house, preserving the wisdom of a bargain struck in her name. She'd surrendered to the pleasure of her craft, a mastery that matched his with the bow.

Should she have refused to keep her half of the bargain? Defied Athena? An owl hooted outside her window, waiting for a reckless mouse to move.

Penelope took the shuttle thrust it across the loom, back and forth, weft piercing warp, fingers faithful servants of her anger.

—Gail Holst-Warhaft

## A Souvenir

Still fuddled by sleep she walks out of the courtyard to where the woman lie threaded like linnets on a hunter's belt.

Flies crawl in their nostrils and open eyes; she tastes bile and speaks their names one by one, as if naming were a way to keep them safe

from rough hands: Hero, Hermione, Iphigenia, Eirini, Phaedra, Batia, Marpessa, Leda, Leucothea, Eryso, Europa, Maia - soft souls

caught in the snare of their own desires. She kneels to remove a slipper that has taken the shape of a foot, each toe mounded as if by a burrowing mole.

This is all that will last of pretty Maia, a shoe that danced the night away, a slipper whose mate no prince will seek: Penelope's keepsake



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## Only the Bought Have Access

Dry winds rub the edge of dawn.

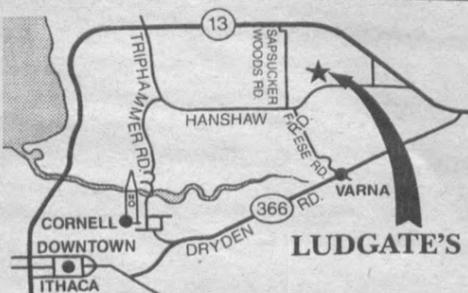
One year the snows failed and the rivers ran empty in Spring. No floods brought new lining. Womb strains slipped of the egg. Seed rots in burlap dockside. Sages have all gone silent, consigned to the wings like unwanted items at auction. Deserts crawl into wheat fields. Corpses ripen, swell with gasses in an air too thick to escape, made thicker by spasms, bile and the last of bile. Abominations too great for telling poke through the thin shell of comfort; dawn disturbs a drunkard's dreamless sleep.

And no eye describes. No mind remarks. The emperor sold all the books - schoolrooms and libraries traded for a next campaign to stiffen the stature of wealth. The cosseted shogun strokes his cock. And as numbers speak volumes on price, mathematics can't count the sorrows. Death cries ascend, echoes resound, stone blinks away tears.

And the glazed eye blinks into faith as arms merchant pitchmen disguised as pundits heap nonsense on nonsense - talk shows drone through the day, news shows drone through the night. Gossips kneel and kiss the glass.

And the marketplace for gunnery hums a dirge for brotherhood. Lubricious futures, high aspirations - peddled for a few photographs smooth with concepts and pride no kin to the beak-pecked faces gleaned of meat as of meaning - a pipeful of lies for an age mortgaged like oaths and all the blistered tomorrows.

—Jamie Cavanagh



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# Seeds of Dissent

Emelie Peine

On September 14, trade and finance ministers from all over the world shook their heads in a mix of frustration and relief as the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico came to an abrupt and bewildering close. As reported by Martin Khor of the Third World Network, after 3 days of wee-hour negotiations, what was supposed to be an opulent and celebratory closing ceremony was moved to an alternate venue, far too small to hold the more than 3,000 delegates attending the meetings, and the ministerial was unceremoniously terminated. Many of the delegates who were kept out of the closing ceremony clamored at the door for news of the aborted 11th-hour meeting in which a handful of countries engaged in a last-ditch effort to save the round. Confusion reigned and blame was thickly apportioned as it became clear that another WTO ministerial had passed and the signatories had not even succeeded in agreeing to begin negotiations on the many contentious issues that lay before them.

So what went wrong? Why does the most powerful multilateral organization in the world continue to spin its wheels and deepen the divide between the competing interests of its members? Surely some credit should be given to the hundreds of thousands of activists who have tirelessly voiced their opposition to free trade as an end in itself, decrying the lack of adequate safeguards for labor and the environment. While these protests certainly contributed to the collapse of both meetings, possibly the biggest contribution of the protests in both Seattle and Cancun was to embolden the countries of the global south to call for equal participation in the drafting process. It is crucial to recognize the intimate connection between the protests in the streets and the power struggles in the conference rooms.

The Cancun ministerial saw the emergence of the "Group of 20" (then 21, 22, and now known as G-23), a coalition of countries from the global south. This group, led by Brazil and including India, China, South Africa, Argentina, and Egypt, joined forces to leverage power from the US and the European Union (EU) in the heavily biased negotiating process. One of the widely touted features of the WTO is that it is a "rules-based system" that, in theory, prevents economically stronger countries from pressuring weaker ones. All countries, even the US and EU, must pledge to reduce tariffs and trade barriers at comparable rates, and the "least developed countries" (LDCs) are granted more generous "schedules" to implement WTO rules. If rules are broken, all countries are equally subject to review under the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) before punitive measures are levied. The system is designed to be neutral and unbiased, though not exactly transparent since all of the dispute settlement proceedings are conducted in closed tribunals. Still, this "rules-based system" is widely argued to be fairer than a "power-based" one.

Evidence has shown, however, that poorer countries remain severely disadvantaged. The cost of merely having a delegation present at the meetings is sizable. Even more expensive is the stable of lawyers necessary for any country to navigate the DSM. While all countries technically have access to the mechanism, there is no provision for assisting developing countries in covering legal costs. The Advisory Center on WTO Law (ACWL) was established in July, 2001, but it acts only as an information and training center. The record shows that many countries of the Global South lack the political and financial resources to take advantage of WTO rules. WTO supporter

Bernhard Speyer admits, "The DSM is used actively by all member states, with the notable exception of the poorest, especially African, countries".

Even if a poorer nation succeeds in bringing a complaint against a wealthier one, if the defendant fails to comply, the final recourse of the complaining nation is to suspend privileges or levy sanctions against the offender. Imagine that Sierra Leone wins a suit against the US. The last resort, should the US fail to comply, is for Sierra Leone—not the WTO—to suspend concessions or impose trade sanctions on the US. Kind of like a gnat in a lion's ear. Of course, in the opposite scenario the US could conceivably devastate the economy of such a small country, leaving the Sierra Leones of the world no choice but to comply with WTO findings. The four most powerful actors, the US, EU, Canada, and Japan—affectionately known as the Quad—do have a choice, and often delay compliance indefinitely. In cases between members of the Quad this system may be more effective, but it also has the potential to create a quagmire of cross-retaliation.

The root of the conflict between the Quad and the rest of the world that has stymied every meeting since Seattle is embedded in the anatomy of the organization itself. Anyone who has ever tried to achieve consensus in a business or community meeting can imagine the task infinitely compounded. With so many signatories and competing interests the goal of achieving true consensus is almost laughable. Perhaps inevitably then, in what became known as the "green room" tactic, the majority of countries represented at the Cancun meeting were excluded from drafting the agreement that would set the new round of negotiations in motion. In the end, the "green room" became the principle battleground and probably contributed more than anything else to the walkout by the G-23.

What are the major issues behind the present stalemate at the WTO? The economic theory upon which all free trade agreements are based is the theory of comparative advantage, according to which each country should concentrate on producing the commodities that make best use of its resources, and then trade for everything else. That way, goods are produced and traded at the lowest possible prices and everyone is better off. Seems like a win-win scenario, so why is it so passionately contested?

To begin with, the theory of comparative advantage ignores the major role of politics in trade—especially when it comes to agriculture: no country wants to be solely dependent on imports for its food supply. If an importing country were to run afoul of a major exporting country, its food security could be severely threatened, leaving poorer, food net-importing countries in a vulnerable position. Agriculture is the very sector in which many poorer countries do have a comparative economic advantage, but the Quad enjoys almost total market dominance due to its overall economic strength and political power.

Much of the conflict between the G-23 and the Quad centers on agricultural issues. The US won't discuss reducing its disproportionately high domestic supports if the G-23 won't discuss lowering many of its members' disproportionately high tariffs. On the other hand, the G-23 has refused to agree to reduce its market barriers without a restructuring of the current WTO Agreement on Agriculture that includes loopholes big enough for the US to drive its \$40 billion Farm Bill through unscathed.

With each successive ministerial these positions appear to become only more entrenched and a functioning agreement seems more out of reach. At Cancun, the G-23 walked away from the table, citing the Quad's unwillingness to accommodate the basic requirements of developing countries.

While the G-23 took the opportunity presented by the failure of Cancun to point out the myriad unfulfilled promises of greater democracy and transparency in the negotiations, the Quad derided the G-23 as shortsighted and naive for its role in derailing the very process that would eventually lift the people of the global south out of destitution.

Despite the characterization of the G-23's position as progressive and the Quad's as protectionist, in truth both equally serve the larger neo-liberal project of which the WTO is currently the most prominent regulatory mechanism. Although the G-23 is demanding greater democracy and transparency in the process along with lowering of agricultural protections in the Quad, the main goal is to facilitate the exploitation of these countries' "comparative advantage," which usually means low-value, labor-intensive agricultural commodities, light manufacture, or low-skilled services. For those behind the wheel of the neo-liberal vehicle, democracy and transparency in the WTO are the necessary means of meeting these objectives.

On the other hand, the Quad seeks to maintain its current level of support for its agricultural sectors while at the same time forcing developing countries to lower tariffs and import quotas in order to open vast potential markets for the government-subsidized and therefore artificially cheap agricultural commodities produced by agribusiness. Due to tariffs and subsidies enacted by the US and the EU, agriculture may be the only sector in which world market prices are generally well below the cost of production. The most extreme example, according to Daryll Ray, an agricultural economist at the University of Tennessee, is cotton, with a world market price 57% below the cost of production.

Yet organizations such as the National Farmers Union, the Nebraska Farm Federation, the Soybean Producers of America, and the National Corn Growers advocate a proposal authored by Ray and his colleagues that focuses on bringing price levels up to and above the cost of production so that farmers can actually make a living selling their produce rather than depending on government support. According to Ray, this would preempt the political rancor over the bloated farm budget by eliminating the need for costly income-support programs, thereby alleviating a major drain on American taxpayers. Such measures could also resolve the conflict over agriculture in the WTO by eliminating the need for many of its most controversial policies.

In order to achieve planned price stability, agricultural exporting nations would have to agree to control production. The current agricultural equivalent of OPEC, the Cairns Group (plus the US which is not currently a member), would have to agree to expand or contract production based on fluctuations in market price. Farmer-owned grain reserves could be established in order to ensure a steady food supply and to help stabilize prices in times of feast or famine, thereby mediating the vagaries of unpredictable weather conditions.

So why isn't this seemingly well-reasoned solution on the table at the WTO? To answer this question one must look at who benefits from the farcically low prevailing prices for agricultural products. Certainly not the farmer, since most farmers are barely staying out of debt even with government loans and income supports. Certainly not the state, which is hemorrhaging funds in this sector at a rate second only to the military. Many argue that the consumer benefits from "cheap food" in the grocery store, but a box of shredded oat cereal still costs almost four dollars, while the commodity value of the oats in that box is about nine cents.

The fact is that most agricultural products, with the exception of the vegetables sold at farmers markets, are bought, not by

the end consumer, but by an agribusiness company that either stores, trades, processes, or packages that product (some large companies do all four). The low commodity price doesn't necessarily mean cheaper corn flakes, but it does translate into higher profits for General Mills, Kellogg's, ADM, or Cargill. Agricultural commodities like corn, soybeans, tomatoes, feeder calves, cotton, sugar, rice, etc., are "industrial inputs" for these companies, and so it is in their interest to keep prices for these products as low as possible. For this reason these firms vigorously oppose production control programs that pay farmers to idle land or store grain in order to prop up prices.

In fact, the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act effectively dismantled land set-aside programs that had long supported agricultural prices in the US. As Ray has shown, within the next four years, world prices plummeted 40%. It was this collapse in prices and farmer income that triggered ballooning subsidy payments required to keep the entire American farm sector afloat. Today, the US exports commodities at these record low prices to the tune of about \$53 billion. Because the US dominates the market for most traded commodities, low prices here have the power to drive prices down all over the world, which has resulted in the devastation of farmers worldwide.

In Mexico, corn prices have plummeted, driving waves of farmers off the land. At the same time, government deregulation has caused a spike in the price of corn tortillas, resulting in widespread food crises in both rural and urban areas. This pattern has been repeated in countries all over the world that lack the resources to provide the kinds of income supports that keep (a handful of large) US farmers on the land. Agribusiness does not care which farmers in the world are the most efficient as long as commodity prices remain at rock bottom.

So, while US taxpayers finance the profit margins of companies like Cargill and Kellogg, the members of the WTO play chicken with agricultural agreements. Regardless of who goes first or what the final agreement looks like, the fact is that this is not really about free trade. Liberalization is the goal only to the extent that it keeps proposals like Ray's for production controls off the table. Opening markets in the south and reducing protections in the north would probably maintain prevailing prices as lower-cost producers enter the market. However, maintaining northern supports would serve the same purpose, since northern policies are what brought prices down in the first place. In the end, then, the arguments of both the Quad and the G-23 would likely lead the world to similar prices for agricultural products, but while the Quad advantages agribusiness, the G-23 speaks to the needs of all but the largest farm operations, in the US as well as in developing countries.

The failure of Cancun energized the global justice movement and made businessmen and financiers nervous. Not only does this rift open space for alternatives to be heard, but it undermines the political legitimacy of the WTO itself. In the meantime, however, US agricultural policy remains business as usual, and farmers around the world continue to lose their land. The failure of the WTO may be an opportunity, but it can also be an excuse for maintaining the status quo. The protests are over for now. It's time to build our own green room.

—  
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# Globalization and

## Susan Buck-Morss

In memory of Edward Said, 1935-2003

The staging of violence as a global spectacle separates September 11 from previous acts of terror. The dialectic of power, the fact that power produces its own vulnerability, was itself the message. The attackers perished without making demands. They left no note behind, only the moving, deadly image, which the cameras of those who were attacked themselves supplied, as they did the fuel-loaded, civilian planes that mutated suddenly into self-annihilating weapons. A mute act, played and replayed before a global audience a message, sent by satellite to the multitude a diversity of peoples who, witnessing the same cinematic time-image, the same movement-image, exploded into enemy camps.

Or did they? Sympathy was expressed generally by the global public sphere. Is the adequate word for the global reception, rather, "implosion," as a global terrain means by definition that there is no outside, at the same time that there is, tragically, no cohesion among the multitude who inhabit it. All the forces of global society, however radically incompatible, are immanent within this over-determined, indivisible terrain.

Terror produces terror, as observers have long noted. Bin Laden and his supporters indeed pose a threat, but that threat doubles when it is countered in kind. A "fundamental paradox" of the paranoid style in American politics, wrote Richard Hofstadter in 1952, the era of the Cold War, "is the imitation of the enemy." Now, as on that occasion, the acts of enemies reflect each other. The engagements of war cannot exist without this mirroring, which ensures an overlapping of the military terrain. In this terrain, we, the hijacked multitude, the vast majority, have been subjected to the common paranoid vision of violence and counter-violence, and prohibited from engaging each other in a common public sphere.

The U.S. national security state is a war machine positioned within a geopolitical landscape. It must have a localizable enemy for its powers to appear legitimate; its biggest threat is that the enemy disappears. But given a war, even a Cold War, and now given an ill-defined yet total war on terrorism, the declared state of emergency is justification for suspending the rights and freedoms of citizens. It justifies arresting and holding individuals without due process. It justifies killing and bombing without oversight or accountability. It justifies secrecy, censorship, and a monopoly over the accumulation and dissemination of information. All of these state prac-

tices are totalitarian, of course.

In 1927, Stalin in his struggle for power took advantage of an almost hysterical fear in the Soviet Union that the Western powers would invade, declaring: "We have internal enemies. We have external enemies. This, comrades, must not be forgotten for a single moment." The perception of a total threat legitimated the implementation of total, extralegal power both domestically and abroad. The word "terror" is used to describe the execution or imprisonment in the USSR of thousands of purged party members in the 1930s, and we are accustomed to equating this terror with Stalin's name, as if one evil individual were responsible, rather than the logic intrinsic to the whole idea of terror. But Stalin justified his actions because the citizenry felt threatened, a state of mind that is fertile ground for abuses of power. According to one participant: "In the thirties we felt we were at war, at war with the entire world, and we believed that in war you should act like there is a war on." The consequence was that popular support existed for Stalin's regime, precisely because he was not squeamish about rooting out the evil source. The language, the thinking, has begun to sound unpleasantly familiar.

The unlimited, unmonitored wild zone of power is not unique to the United States. It is a potential of every state that claims sovereign power, and with it, a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. Two consequences follow. The first is that no matter how democratic the constitution of a state regime, as a sovereign state it is always more than a democracy, and consequently a good deal less. The second is that human rights, human freedom, and human justice cannot be exclusive possessions of one nation or one civilization. They must be global rights, or they will not be rights at all.

The problem is not that the West imposes its democratic values on the rest of the world, but that it does so selectively. It is inexcusable that rights be applied with a double standard, and then justified by calling it respect for cultural diversity. Samuel Huntington, no radical, describes Western duplicity: "Democracy is promoted but not if it brings Islamic fundamentalists to power; nonproliferation is preached for Iran and Iraq but not for Israel; free trade is the elixir of economic growth but not for agriculture; human rights are an issue with China but not with Saudi Arabia; aggression against oil-owning Kuwaitis is massively repulsed but not against non-oil-owning Bosnians." We can add to the list: the killing of innocent civilians in New York City is a terrorist act, but Afghani and Iraqi innocents killed and wounded are merely unfortunate, while the multiple disruptions of their daily

existence are for their own good.

As participants in a global public, we cannot allow ourselves, cynically, to accept such double standards. Humanity is the subject of the global public sphere, not the United States. No individual nation, no partial alliance, can wage war in humanity's name.

World Wars, the particular insanity of the twentieth century, were struggles for territory. Sovereignty was a geopolitical concept. The enemy was situated within a spatial terrain. In this context, "defending the free world" meant, physically, pushing the enemy out, setting up lines of defense, deportation of sympathizers, pursuits into enemy territory, geographic embargoes—in short, spatial attack and isolation. The overthrow—"destabilization"—of nation-state regimes from within was a clandestine action, best done by indigenous forces, so as not to challenge the terms of legitimation of the sovereign-state system in which wars took place.

In today's global war, conflict cannot be discretely spatialized, a fact that has enormous implications in terms of the imaginary landscape. Because the enemy does not inhabit a clear territorial space, there is nothing geopolitical to attack. The fact that the United States has nonetheless attacked, first, the geopolitical territory of Afghanistan, and then, the Iraqi nation (far less plausible as a terrorist base), is indicative of its self-contradictory situation. Its superpower strength is still envisioned in traditional military terms. But the new global immanence means that there is no spatial other, a fact that the terrorists operating on September 11 exploited with brilliant brutality. In contrast, the United States is manifesting dinosaur-like symptoms by compulsively repeating its old tactics of massive, military response.

Global immanence has changed the role of the media most especially. In world wars, the news was directed to distinct audiences. Radio and movie newsreels reported the war unapologetically as propaganda, editing and interpreting events to rally the home front and demoralize the enemy. But when a global audience makes it impossible to separate home and enemy populations, when the vast majority of human beings who are tuned in can be defined as neither "us" nor "them," when audiences do not sit in spatially isolated bleachers, there is no way of controlling the propaganda effect. The media, rather than reporting the war, is inextricably entangled within it. It is a deterritorialized weapon among diverse populations, which it can both harm and protect.

Globalization is not new, but global "immanence" is. I use this term to refer to the fact that in our era of global capital, global production, global labor migrations, and global penetration by technologies of communication, there is no "other" of peoples, territory or environment against which some of us could conveniently define ourselves and, holding ourselves apart, control our fate. The global space that we share is contradictory, and intractably diverse. Our lived experiences are simultaneous and incongruous, resisting division into distinct nationalities, pure ethnicities, or racial differences. We are morally accountable in a multiple world where no religion monopolizes the virtue that would be needed to fight evil in its name, where there is no value-free, objective science that could ground universal, secular truth—just as there is no universal law of the market that can guarantee us a benevolent future.

Those who deny these everyday realities of global immanence fuel fundamentalism, of which there are as many types as there are intolerances. The mark of fundamentalism is not religious belief but dogmatic belief, that refuses to interrogate founding texts and excludes the possibility of critical dialogue, dividing humanity absolutely into pre-given categories of the chosen and the expendable, into "us" and "them." And whether this is

preached by a head of state, or in a place of worship, or at the IMF, no cultural practice—religious or secular, economic or political, rational or romantic—is immune to fundamentalism's simplifying appeal.

To equate the politicization of Islam with fundamentalism is as unjustified as to equate it with terrorism. Islamist politics is a broad and varied social movement, the voices of which span the entire known political spectrum, including a radical, progressive Left. Much of the movement is more fruitfully seen as a continuation of anticolonial struggles against Western imperialism, the secular, Marxist leadership of which was discredited in the Islamic world by, among other things, Soviet Russia's aggression in Afghanistan. Islamist political debates share with those of minorities within Western nations the struggle to forge political identities as they challenge hegemonic definitions, and they share the dilemma of identity politics as well: the pitfalls of essentialism and claims to authenticity on the one hand, and, on the other, integration into a dominant culture (or dominant world order) that denigrates the traditions of the collective.

Abdul-Kabir al-Khatibi, the Algerian-born, French-trained sociologist, has written of the necessity of a "double critique" practiced by Arab theorists to criticize their own societies from within, and at the same time to criticize, from without, the Western concepts used to describe them. The late Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, has been, at least in the West, the most widely discussed account of the mythic nature of Western understanding of the Arab world, laying the ground (with others, like Talal Asad) for the argument that Orientalist "science" reveals more about the colonizers than the colonized.

Such literature that criticizes the criticizers warns us, in fact, to qualify the claim that global immanence is something new in history. In fact, throughout the modern colonial period, Western hegemony produced global immanence in a one-sided fashion. The immanent superimposition of conflicting values was the contradictory and unavoidable state of the colonized, but not the colonizers, whose very identity as "modern," historically in "advance" of the rest of the world, was their claim to legitimacy as a colonizing force. Other cultures, those of the colonized, existed as objects of anthropological investigation, or as "civilizations" accessible to historical study—that is, as vestiges of the past—coeval with, but not immanent to "modernity," a word and a concept which as critics have noted was in fact Europe's way of defining itself. To "modernize" meant to Westernize, an alien task, in an exemplary case, for "Oriental" subjectivities who, described as inscrutable, irrational, emotional, unscientific, and personalistic, were the quintessential other of enlightened, modern man.

Within the Orientalist context, Arab consciousness was by definition overdetermined: both immanent and transcendent, a discourse within the West and a discourse from without. But a critical stance within one discourse did not necessarily include a critical stance in the other. What was called, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Great Awakening of Arab intellectual life employed an apologist discourse, justifying Arabic traditions of religious and secular thought precisely because they were compatible with modern Western values of scientific positivism, democratic reasoning, and the rule of law.

Kemalism, the modernizing ideology of Mustafa Kemal, who led the Turkish movement of nationalist liberation, broke from Western colonialism by literally copying its legal, political and cultural forms. The Turkish leader ridiculed traditional Islam as a "symbol of obscurantism," the "enemy of civilization and science," and "a corpse which poisons our lives." When Arabs adopted

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# the New Orientalism

Western discourse in the Marxist mode as a secular critique of imperialism, this absence of a double critique tended to be just as prevalent, as Arab Marxists were similarly adamant that their own societal and religious forms were vestiges of the feudal past.

Interestingly, it was Islamism that inaugurated an autonomous tradition of immanent critique within the Middle East. The influential Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb, a contemporary of the Frankfurt School theorists, critically attacked Islamic regimes as a return of the condition of ignorance—the “Jahiliyyah” of pre-Islamic times. Hence present-day Islamic society (Egypt) was un-Islamic. The strategy precisely paralleled the argument of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that Western reason, which emerged from myth, had itself turned back into myth. The difference, of course, was Qutb’s move to positivity, his affirmation of a return to Islam as stated, literally in the Qur’an.

This affirmation of the true Islam can be seen to mark a definitive break from Western-defined “modernity,” allowing for an Islamic model to replace it. But what is striking about Qutb’s understanding of the “self-evidence” of Qur’anic thought, is that it, too, was dependent on the West, in the dialectical sense of critical negation. Islam—the true Islam—appears in Qutb’s work as the inverted other of Western modernity: spiritual where the West is materialist; communal where the West is egoistically individual, socially just where the West is greedy and competitive, morally disciplined where the West is negligently libertine. This was, of course, the antithesis of the apologists’ strategy of redeeming Islam within the value categories of the West.

Now, the Western modernity that Qutb and others attacked was in fact the impoverished tradition of instrumental reason, possessive individualism and lack of social consciousness that the members of the Frankfurt School and other European Marxists were criticizing from within. It would have taken a radical cosmopolitanism far in advance of what was possible at the time for both sides (German Jewish and Arab Muslim) to join forces in a critique of Western reason in its impoverished, neo-liberal, instrumentalized form. But the very thought of such an alliance, an attack launched from both inside and without, suggests the power that a new Left in a global public sphere might begin to have today.

If we are interested in the genealogy of a global public sphere, we will need to note that the first radically cosmopolitan critique of Western-centric thought did not come from the Islamic world. It came from the French-speaking Caribbean, via secular, Marxist transport with a detour to Algeria—and when it appeared it came with a Western wrapping. I am referring to Frantz Fanon’s remarkable book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which (paradoxically introduced by the European, existentialist Marxist Jean-Paul Sartre) called on the non-Western world to leave Europe “behind”—that is, to produce a modernity that transcended the European model, which had proven itself bankrupt. Fanon’s gesture suggested an intellectual liberation of a totally new order because while his politics was still identifiably Marxist, his approach refused submission to any ideology. It resonated with the actually lived experience of much of the colonized world that modernity had meant decline rather than progress—what Aijaz Ahmad has described as “the descent into bourgeois modernity” that marked the era of European imperialism. It received brilliant rearticulation in a 1967 article by the Lebanese poet Ahmad ‘Ali Sa’id (Adonis):

We no longer believe in Europe. We no longer have faith in its political system or in its philosophies. Worms have eaten into its social structure as they have into...its very soul. Europe for us—we

backward, ignorant, impoverished people—is a corpse.

Here the very words used by Kemal in rejecting Islam are turned against the post-colonial West. But Adonis is a secular thinker, who has no desire to posit, as did Sayyid Qutb, an inverted West, Islam, as the road to the future. The Fanonist critique was, however, taken up by Islamists, by Ali Shariati, for example, whose thought and writings would play a leading role in the Iranian revolution, and who was influenced as well by the Cuban Marxist, Ché Guevara, and by Latin American liberation theology, an eclectic theoretical mix held together by the object criticized—world imperialism, racism and class exploitation—rather than any ideological form.

My goal is not the retelling of intellectual history. Rather, it is to contribute to a discussion regarding a very specific, very political question: How today, in what intellectually critical idiom, might a global Left learn to speak together? In this context, intellectual history undergoes a transfiguration, no longer a story of specific civilizational continuities, be they Western or Arabic or Islamic, but an archaeology of knowledge, to use Foucault’s term, of a present global possibility.

We are looking for a route that will connect critical discourses that have evolved in partial contexts, in order to make them useful for a yet-to-be-constituted, global, progressive Left. We will not be satisfied with the realists’ maxim: The enemy of my enemy is my friend—as this will not support global solidarity in a meaningful way. We also suspect that the splintering of the Left along the lines of discrete identities has run its course as a progressive form of critique, at least in its Western form, where identity politics now threatens to work to the advantage of anti-immigration nativism rather than the protection of cultural minorities. In its Islamist form, identity politics is indeed a powerful force, a constituency within civil society of over a billion people, connected in a global network of mosques. But those who desire (or fear) the crafting of this public into a uniform Islamist, global view do a disservice to the richness of debate that informs Islam, which not only allows critical thinking but requires it as a duty. If there are Islamist politicians who think they can count on support from a monolithic, unquestioning Muslim bloc, then these politicians are no less cynical and no less manipulative than their Western counterparts.

As critical Muslims, critical Israelis, critical Americans and Europeans, we cannot allow our identities to hold us apart. We recall Gramsci’s insight that hegemony depends not on the absence of oppositional discourses but, rather, on the disorganization of dissent. We are indeed traveling a difficult road. But let us at least agree to eliminate false steps along the way.

There is the view, held by many serious and critical writers, particularly by those from former colonies living in (or writing for) Western audiences, that Samuel Huntington’s prediction of a “clash of civilizations” has cleared the way for a counter-hegemonic challenge. Although Huntington, a realist, was describing a gloomy scenario of global struggle, his acknowledgement that civilizations other than the West have a role to play in a modernizing project (i.e., that Westernizing and modernizing are not synonymous), posits the coevalness of civilizations, that do not have to give up their identities in order to be full participants in progress. But Huntington is not radically critical in either the immanent or the transcendent sense, and his affirmation of other civilizations is more apparent than real.

The Turkish intellectual, Ahmet Davutoglu, speaking specifically to Habermas’s claim that modernity is an “unfinished project,” asks, then, “who shall complete it? ...[W]hat will be the role of non-Western civilizations,

which have been the object of this project, in the next phase?” Now this might have led Davutoglu to a radical, cosmopolitan position, if he had allied himself with the original impulse of Habermas’s statement, its immanent critique of the Enlightenment project that holds Western modernization accountable for its own shortcomings. Instead, Davutoglu drops the burden of double critique and falls into Huntington’s fantasy of separate civilizations—as if any civilization could remain separate within the immanent global sphere. The West’s self-critique, he asserts, becomes “an inter-civilizational crisis in response to the resistance and revival of the authentic self-perceptions of non-Western civilizations.” But a clash of civilizations cannot perform the critical, counter-hegemonic task at hand, which is not to replace one dominating civilization by another, but rather, to put an end to the structures of cultural domination.

The recognition of cultural domination as just as important, and perhaps even the condition of possibility of political and economic domination is a true advance in our thinking. Moreover, if the West does not have a monopoly on the future’s meaning, then where else but the discarded past are we to look to imagine a future that does not yet exist? But—this is crucial—it is to the cultural imaginaries of past civilizations that we must look for inspiration, not the power realities. In other words, cultures must be understood as always radical, in the sense that they are always negotiations between the real and the ideal, hence at least potentially in protest against the societies and power structures in which they emerge. The cultures that defenders of tradition look back to with such nostalgia are the dream-form of the societies that gave them birth. Precisely for that reason, in their time they functioned ideologically, covering up the inequities and iniquities of minority rule, patriarchal domination, class domination—all forms of the violence of power that deserve to be called barbaric.

Culture and barbarism—the barbarism of power that at the same time provides the control, the law and order, that allows culture to flourish—these are the two sides of the Golden Age of every civilization, whether it is called the Pax Romana, or Pax Britannica, or Pax Americana, or the Classical Age of Islam, or the heights of civilization of the Aztecs and Incas. No great civilization has been free of this contradiction. This was the tremendous insight of Walter Benjamin when he insisted:

Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate.... There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

In revering and desiring within changed current conditions to salvage our different cultural traditions (and Marxism is one of them, as is Islam’s Golden Age and the European Enlightenment) we would be well advised not to confuse the dream of the past with its reality. As we value the former, we must continue to criticize the latter. Such redemption of past culture would rip it out of its ideological role of justifying not only past violence, but new violence committed in its name.

The goal of a global Left cannot be reduced to the meaningless project of changing the religion, or skin color, or ethnicity of the exploiters. Whenever a social system produces a wealthy and powerful few on the backs of the many, a culture worth defending cannot be identified with its justification. Confucianism and Islam may point to the development of a different kind of capitalism, but it is not enough if this difference remains at the level of ideological justification, while the exploitation of human beings’ creative labor and nature’s creative labor remain the

foundation of the production of social wealth. What is needed is not theological exegesis, but critical analysis of the world’s problems in a way that might actually solve them.

What I am suggesting here is that a truly global public sphere might liberate thinking so that we are not compelled to take sides—“us” v. “them”—or limit ourselves to an exclusionary paradigm of thought—religious or secular, postmodern or modern—in a way that stunts our capacity for critical judgments, leads to false intellectual and political conclusions, and prevents us from identifying similarities among fundamentalist positions—which must include the self-understanding of the United States as the Chosen Nation and the neo-liberal fundamentalism that leads to blind faith in the market mechanism, to name only two of the most blatant, non-Islamic examples. American hegemony is constitutive of the fundamentalist Islamism that opposes it; U.S. and Israeli state terror is not only the effect, but also the cause of the terror that resists it. These are the truths that need to be expressed by a global Left.

Are we witnessing the emergence of a New Orientalism? In honor of the memory of Edward Said, we need to struggle now, more than ever, against the disparity between US global power and US ignorance and dismissiveness of the rest of the world, onto which it projects its own identities and prejudices. This occurs not only in Washington and Hollywood, but in high-culture institutions as well. At Cornell University, Islam is defined as religion, not politics, and delegated to the Department of Near Eastern Studies (in spite of the fact that four-fifths of the world’s Muslims are non-Arabs). Critical discourses in the Arts College are full of left-liberal laments about colonialism, neocolonialism and “empire,” but few theorists bother to read the work of Muslim intellectuals, secular or religious, who remain “others” to be examined anthropologically, and not to be actually engaged. These “others” have been speaking back for decades, however, demanding not merely inclusion in existing cultural practices, but transformation of their very structures. They have been doing so non-violently. And we have not been listening.

Susan Buck-Morss is a Professor of Government and Director of Visual Studies at Cornell University. This essay is based on material from her book *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*. London and New York: Verso, 2003.

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## Wendy Jones

**Collusion: Memoir of a Young Girl and her Ballet Master**

Evan Zimroth  
HarperCollins, 1999  
\$23

**The Four Temperaments**

Yona Zeldis McDonough  
Doubleday, 2003, paper  
\$13.95

It is December 8, 2002, and I am in the auditorium of Canandaigua High School where I am taking warm-up class with the Ithaca Ballet before we perform Nutcracker that afternoon. I am not the Sugar Plum Fairy (soloist), or even a snowflake (member of the corps de ballet), but rather the grandmother at the Christmas party, a small character part of the kind that usually goes to retired dancers. Although I never danced professionally, I danced seriously, majoring in ballet at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City (better known as the Fame school) and taking class at various schools throughout the city. When my daughters began studying dance about two years ago, I returned to ballet myself after a hiatus of fifteen years since having taken class at all, and even longer since I had danced with any regularity.

As I look around at the people doing warm-up, I am amazed at this enterprise. Everyone wants to do their best, and so we strive for proper technique and body placement on a floor that is raked, while holding on to the backs of seats rather than a ballet barre (this isn't easy). Here we are in a town that rarely sees any live dance, but that will give us an incredibly appreciative audience, an index of how receptive people are to the arts despite our culture's constant undervaluation of them. I am amazed at the unity among these dancers, of how what is in many ways the most narcissistic of arts also demands a kind of selflessness, an awareness of other bodies and spaces and a giving over of oneself to others without which we can't have a ballet.

As dancers, each day our bodies struggle to do what bodies were never meant to do. They are figures that become figures, an allegory of our attempts to transform ourselves into expressions of a larger artistic vision—of the composer, of the choreographer, of the particular dance teacher whose class we take, of our own internal image of what we might become. What is ballet but a perpetual effort to replicate a purity and grace lurking somewhere deep in Plato's cave, a perpetual attempt to capture an ideal that must always differ from and defer (to) its original? Perhaps it isn't all that remarkable that the adults in this production are capable of making this attempt, even as our aging bodies make it unlikely that we will succeed! I'm one of several ballet parents who dances regularly and who is performing today, all of us fairly driven people whose idea of a good time is to work equally hard at something other than what we do for a living (a nurse, a contractor, a lawyer, a scholar). But the young people—and it is a very young company—are indeed incredible in this respect. Like superheroes, who also don'tights to assume alter egos, these mild-mannered, seemingly ordinary tweens and teens attend to their education for part of the day, later transforming themselves into beings whose concentration, dedication, and determination exceed that of most people of any age.

This is not news. This kind of absorption is what any art or sport demands of those who do it with intensity. But there is some-

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Adrienne Sharp  
Ballantine Books, 2002, paper  
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Colum McCann  
Metropolitan Books, 2003, cloth  
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Ellen Pall  
St. Martin's, 2002, paper  
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thing unusual about this company and its school that I am suddenly able to articulate to myself, something that I've been observing in the last few years as I've taken classes of all different levels, with my eleven-year-old daughter, with members of the company, with other adults. This school and this company function by different rules than the ones I learned so well as a young person. Most ballet schools, especially company schools, promote a form of pedagogy that is linked inextricably to a system of favorites. A teacher or other mentor (company director, choreographer, etc.) chooses the best in the class with whom he (more often a man, but not always) develops a strong cathexis, erotic in the broad sense that Freud uses it, although the relationship is sometimes sexual as well. This chosen one has talent and potential the other students lack, which is ratified by the teacher's love and attention. Although the teacher obviously has the greater share of power, the relationship is reciprocal; the special student's love affirms the teacher's importance.

This form of mentorship gives rise to an insidious definition of success: anything less than stardom is failure. I'm not talking about the need to achieve the level of technical excellence that it takes to dance professionally, nor do I mean to invoke the dancer's quest for perfection that this extremely difficult art demands. I am also not suggesting that dancers don't take what work they can get or that people in other professions aren't disappointed when they achieve less than they expected—indeed this is the very definition of a mid-life crisis, and it extends to more than ballet. But other arts, professions, and disciplines are more forgiving, and the people who practice them often find at least as much pleasure and self-esteem in the doing as in recognition. While ballet dancers certainly love their art (who could make such sacrifices where love is absent?), for most, the pleasure is tainted by failure—failure to be the teacher's favorite, to get into the right company, to be more than a member of the corps, to be less than the public's darling of the moment. Dancers are so often anorexic and bulimic not only because they must be thin but also because they have appropriated the available cultural vocabulary of punishment and self-hatred. Is it any surprise that for many, ballet digs in deep and leaves its scars?

This paradigm of mentorship is historically specific. Emerging in the milieu of Russian ballet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was both intensified and popularized in this country by George Balanchine, whose choreography, pedagogy, and personality have continued to exert an incalculable influence on American ballet in the twenty odd years since his death. Replicated in schools and companies across the country, it is a model that the professional ballet dancer will confront at some point in her career. It has become an accepted way of producing great dancers, but does this have to be the case? Is this an essential aspect of the art? If not,

what does it take to be a great dancer? The books I will be looking at, a memoir and four novels, explore this question in various ways.

*Collusion: Memoir of a Young Girl and Her Ballet Master* by Evan Zimroth is a frightening account of the ballet world, enough to send any mother of young girls fleeing to soccer camp. It begins with the disturbing confession "I was raped." But this rape turns out not to be a violation "in the criminal way of terror and police reports, but a description of Zimroth's first love affair. She recalls watching her lover finger the rim of his wine glass at dinner the first night they make love, "a gesture that [meant] Later we'll make love, whether you want it or not." Zimroth both does and doesn't want it, and her resistance becomes part of a power play between partners that she equates with love itself. When her lover asks afterward, "Did it hurt? Do you want it again?" she suddenly realizes she has heard these words before from her ballet master F, after the first time he had struck her with his thin leather cane because of sloppy technique. This uncanny repetition gives rise to the epiphany that structures the paradigmatic insight of this memoir: the relationship between ballet master and pupil is "a love story."

F's question begins their strange and almost surreal intimacy that lasts from when Zimroth is twelve until she is fourteen. Not only does F lavish her with attention in ballet class, but there are frequent meetings in F's secret room, a place no one else ever visits. Here F feeds her (one time it is cheese laced with blood from an accidental cut with the paring knife) and talks to her, and in return, she gives him her largely silent but adoring company. She endures the continual violation of F's cruelty and control both in and out of ballet class, but in exchange she relishes her own power over him. He can force her to allow him to pierce her ears with a needle despite her unspeakable fear (she is paralyzed, unable to move or resist), but she can taunt and seduce him into action, as when she defies him by wearing make-up to class and he scrubs her face clean, a humiliating descent from the god-like surveillance and minimal physical effort with which he teaches his classes. Anticipating what she knows will be the objections of her readers (this one included), and against her own deployment of the word "rape," Zimroth takes responsibility for this relationship:

I took part freely, it was my fault, I liked it, I wanted it; in fact I sought it out and submitted to it again and again. . . I enjoyed the subtle eroticism of power, the delicate interplay of threat and surrender, of one person's possession, unquestioned, of another. . . Children can collude. I colluded. I loved him.

But however fixated she is on F, Zimroth is in love with more than her ballet master, and he is in love with more than a pupil: They are both in love with dance itself, and with her body in so far as it represents the chance for beauty and perfection. She confesses, "I allowed him to do whatever he wanted with me, to me, in the interest of artistic devotion." When Zimroth's parents demand that she take

fewer ballet classes because her schoolwork is suffering, F gives her an ultimatum, him or her parents, but really the choice is between what ballet dancers call "real life" and ballet itself. She channels the same force of will required to make the body do the impossible into getting what she wants: She chooses F.

A lyrical style that poignantly expresses Zimroth's feelings and perceptions with an almost palpable intensity defines this memoir; in our era of the memoir craze, this is one of the best. But if this book is expressive, it is also wrong, and



it knows it, undermining its own premises even as it asserts them. Early on, Zimroth tells us, "Ballet is a world in which 'normal values are reversed. Brutality is seen as a gift, fear as devotion, sadism as love." But this then gives the lie to the analogy between love and ballet that begins her account. That Zimroth's relationship with her mature lover is a "gavotte" of power and seduction proves not that she loved F, as one adult loves another, but rather that the abuse she suffered as a child influences her relationships later in life. And if this memoir is wrong as a model of love, it is equally misguided as a model of pedagogy. Zimroth herself knows this and eventually leaves F's school because she realizes that if she stays, she will not become a dancer but remain his disciple; F and ballet are not synonymous, in fact, they are at odds with one another. These inconsistencies suggest, against the grain of the rest of her memoir, that dancers become dancers not because of exploitative or abusive relationships with their teachers, but in spite of such relationships.

What then does make the dancer? In *The Four Temperaments*, Yona Zeldis McDonough locates that answer in the mysteries of personality rather than the erotics of pedagogy. In a novel whose lovely, sim-

ple prose style belies its intelligent and measured complexity, McDonough shows that dancers, especially great dancers, are born not made, or at least, their will to dance appears so strongly and so early that it appears that way. Such is true of the main character, Ginny Valentine, a talented young dancer who is passionately loved by two married men, Oscar Kornblatt and his son Gabriel. Father and son's passions are characterized by two symbolic analogues: the

obsessive compulsive disorder of Gabriel's wife Penelope and Ginny's will to dance. All three are

as great a place in his consciousness as his music. By contrast, every moment of Ginny's life has revolved in some way around her dancing; there is no other story to tell. And McDonough tells this story skillfully; no one is better at describing dance—what it feels like to do and to watch. Here is Ginny the first time she goes on point:

What a sensation. Ginny felt she was being lifted up to a place she had never been before, her whole body, legs, arms, everything, impossibly balanced on two small earthbound spots. The contact with the floor was so slight that she could fool herself into thinking she didn't need it at all, that she would rise right up into the air itself.

While the unhealthy aspects of the ballet world that we see in *Collusion* are not the primary focus of this novel, Ginny's story provides a subtle yet pointed critique.

Wes, Ginny's first ballet teacher who did so much to encourage and nurture her, also took her virginity in a hotel room on the way to an audition when she was fifteen. But this is an unimportant detail, and its insignificance is mirrored by its place at the periphery of the narrative. Unlike Zimroth, for whom dance and her teacher remain synonymous even after she leaves him (she never again feels the same intensity about ballet even though she dances professionally), the two are separate for Ginny. And it is telling that Ginny is not anorexic, that she has an uncomplicated and hedonistic attitude toward food. Perhaps given Ginny's immunity from the most damaging aspects of ballet, this is a utopian vision of a dancer's life. But what are utopias for if not to comment on better possibilities?

*White Swan, Black Swan*, Adrienne Sharp's exquisite collection of linked short stories, captures the dailiness of what it means to be a dancer. Written mostly in the first person or focalized through particular characters' points of view, these stories incarnate a psychology, an environment, a world. Here, for instance, is the decisive moment when Joanna, the main character of "Bugaku," decides to break up with her dancer boyfriend rather than commit herself to marriage and children as he wants her to do. He proposes after finishing his performance:

He makes me cling to him while he parades me about the small room, holding my mouth to his, his hands under my thighs, his body the axis around which all other objects rotate and blur. I've got my head back and I'm almost saying yes, and then I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, a woman in street clothes hanging on to a man in costume, and that's exactly what I'm afraid of.

It's all there: the erotic lure of the relationship that nearly convinces Joanna to make her boyfriend the center (the axis) of her existence, the temptation to commit herself to a "real life," and the moment of epiphany, when Joanna knows that her drive to dance would preclude her ever being happy with such a life. The collection

abounds with such moments of brilliantly articulated insight.

These stories do more than simply portray the world of dance; they criticize its pervasive ethos. "Don Quixote," a fictionalized account of George Balanchine, tells the story of an erotic mentorship from the man's viewpoint, explaining but not excusing such relationships. The title refers not only to the character part Balanchine dances (another part for aging dancers), but also to the way in which for him, art and eros are inextricably linked; as Don Quixote's imagination transforms the plain peasant Dulcinea into the beautiful lady whom he loves, Balanchine's choreography transforms his favorite dancers into his wives:

It happened again and again, without him willing it—the body, the desire to create for that body, the desire to possess that body, the marriages, four of them, each wife then disappearing from his life like vapor as he found himself drawn to the next.

His failure to win the love of Suzanne Farrell, one of his greatest dancers, constitutes a form of resistance not only to Balanchine himself, but also to the system he represents. This critique continues in "Willis," which is also a rejection of the paternalistic mentoring of women and the price it demands. Katie, a dancer with American Ballet Theater, betrays her boyfriend, another dancer who has been part coach and part lover for years, and who is still urging her to achieve. It is no accident that she has a fling with a man who calls her a lousy dancer and tells her she will never be more than a member of the corps de ballet; she wants to be desired as a woman who happens to be a dancer, and not as a dancer who happens to be a woman.

We meet Katie again a few stories later in "The Brahmins." She has quit ballet, having realized that she won't ever be good enough to be a soloist, and has gone to Los Angeles—the locale signals her inability to let go entirely of the idea of stardom—where she is making a documentary about young ballet students. The contrast of these dancers, full of hope and dedication and ambition, with the assortment of drifters she finds in L.A. enables Katie to acknowledge her desire to dance while letting go of her self-destructive envy and sense of failure. She reasons:

So maybe I wasn't of the highest possible Brahmin caste. So what? This was better than watching from behind the camera. And it was certainly better than working at Clifton's. At least at the Met there was a real paycheck and the fringe benefit of reflected glory. There was applause, when I took a bow with my forty sisters. I got to wear fake eyelashes and pretty costumes and to gaze at the likes of Baryshnikov and Godunov and Nureyev and Fonteyn at a range of two meters. And I got to dance. Okay, not with the big Brahmins. At the back of the stage. But hey, one could always look forward to reincarnation.

Katie rejects the twisted values of ballet *comme il faut*, with its denial of the achievements of all but the very best dancers (imagine how good you have to be to get into the corps at ABT), and repairs the damage they have wrought on her own life.

*Dancer*, a fictional biography of Rudolph Nureyev, also explores what it means to be a dancer, but unlike Sharp's stories, which imagine the thoughts of real historical figures at length, Colum McCann's book rarely portrays the world from Nureyev's point of view. Instead, we see Nureyev primarily through the eyes of other people in his life:

the elderly couple who first discover his tremendous talent when he is a young boy living in Ufa, a poor provincial Russian town; their daughter who befriends him when he comes to Leningrad to study at the Kirov; Nureyev's sister; the domestic who works for him after he has defected to the West; the shoemaker for the Royal Ballet; and his close friend, Victor Pareci, the celebrity cum drug dealer who often accompanies him on the sexual escapades that will eventually lead to their both being infected with AIDS. Moreover, while Nureyev's presence is felt in these narratives, they are really about the characters' own lives; written mostly in the first person, they reveal thoughts and feelings as well as events that have nothing to do with Nureyev. As the novel meanders from one character to the next, we begin to realize that it will be woven almost entirely of digressions. Even in the few sequences that Nureyev narrates or which are told from his point of view, we never get the kind of "apologia" that we expect from biography (fictional or historical). Nureyev himself implicitly accounts for his absence at the center of his own story in one of his reminiscences, characteristically about someone else's sentiments rather than his own: "In an interview Petit says that there are certain things that defeat themselves if they are said. That dance is the only thing that can describe what is otherwise indescribable." Nureyev himself is indescribable in print because he has no significant identity apart from dance, as the generic title suggests. McCann underscores this point ingeniously through his Joycean ability to completely inhabit his characters. Changing speech and psychology among a series of very different personalities and lives, he indicates a sheer pleasure in invention that parallels Nureyev's creativity as a dancer. Encoded in the book we read called *Dancer* is another one that might be titled *Author*. Artists show themselves through the forms they create.

Ellen Pall's *Corpse de Ballet* (groan if you like, but you have to admit it's clever) is a delightful mystery that will please even the most discriminating devotees of the genre. When Juliet Bodine, a writer of historical romances (as is Pall herself), attends ballet rehearsals to provide moral support for her best friend Ruth, a neurotic choreographer in crisis, one of the dancers is murdered. As mystery readers might expect, Juliet decides to play detective, becoming something of an expert on dancers in the course of her investigation. Indeed, part of the fun of this novel for those familiar with ballet is seeing that milieu through Juliet's eyes, as she learns about the paraphernalia of dancers' lives; this also makes the novel accessible for the uninitiated. Yet even in a novel in which a ballet company is ostensibly the setting, there is a serious discussion about what it takes to be a dancer. It does seem that you can't write about ballet without writing on this subject in one way or another. Juliet and Ruth argue whether ambition is fueled by "an irresistible inner drive to achieve excellence" or "a need for social recognition, a need to have their value authenticated . . . by other people." Far from being a gratuitous philosophical discussion, however, this conversation actually points to the motive for murder, which you've probably already figured out by now if you've read the rest of this review. Cherchez la danse!

\*\*\*

Ballet will never be a gentele art. It makes incredible demands—physical, psychological, spiritual—and those who pursue it seriously give up a normal life; they cannot be

*continued on page 11*

# Carrots

Thomas Eisner

Dinner was a social event in our family. My mother managed always to cook an exquisite evening meal, and the three of us—my father, my sister, and I—tried hard never to miss being present at the table. Dinner was a time for voicing enthusiasms and concerns, for exchanging ideas, and for enjoying one another's company. There were rules about table manners and interrupting, but enforcement was strictly by gentle admonishment. Speaking with a full mouth appeared almost to be tolerated.

None of us had allergies or any particular food aversions, except me. I had a phobia. I despised carrots. I was given to understand that they were rich in vitamins and indispensable, and that I would never be allowed to do without them. I tried every strategy, but the hideous roots managed always to find their way to my plate. And, alas, the rule was that if it was on my plate, I had to eat it. There was no way of bypassing that rule. I always hoped that I might be overlooked when the carrots were dished out, but no such luck. I experimented in countless ways to see if I could mask the carrots' flavor by mixing them with other items on my plate, but usually to no avail. Carrots were a staple, and they were a requirement. There was no honest way by which I could avoid them.

Fate would have it, however, that I was once, and only once, able to avoid them, and that was by cheating. It was but a minor victory in the carrot war, but satisfying nonetheless, and I was able to keep the transgression secret for years. Circumstances, however, would eventually force me to divulge the truth. The occasion for the revelation, oddly enough, was my parents' silver wedding anniversary.

My sister and I were both home from college, and we decided that on such an important day we should take our parents out to dinner. My parents rarely left home at night. My mother had no driver's license, and my father, who had lost an eye to glaucoma, drove only in the daytime. Eating out was therefore to be a special event. We picked a nice little restaurant in mid-Manhattan, made our reservations, and on the festive evening drove into the city.

Everything went well. We were all in a splendid mood, and as usual, had much to talk about. My parents were genuinely fond of one another, and it was lovely to be treated to their reminiscences. The food was excellent, the setting hospitable, and the waiter attentive. In fact, the waiter, upon hearing us converse in German, himself

switched over to that tongue, in which he was evidently fluent.

From the very moment we were ushered to our table, I was struck by the fact that the waiter looked familiar. I couldn't help feeling that we had met the gentleman before, and I shared the thought with the family. "Do any of you remember where we might have met our waiter?" I asked. But none shared the recollection. My mother, who was very shy, and reluctant to strike up conversations with strangers, pleaded that I not make a scene. "Please don't embarrass the

searched for more permanent lodging. Hans had come into our lives at that time, albeit briefly, but on an occasion that was at once momentous and memorable.

The Pension Massen was like any other. The rooms were modest but comfortable, and the meals were communal, served family style in a spacious dining room. There was also a large garden with beautiful flower beds, beside which I sat for hours, keeping track of butterflies and other visiting pollinators.

The food was good and plentiful, and the



Thomas Eisner

man", she said. "You are probably imagining things." I kept silent, but not because I thought I was wrong.

And then, as he was tallying the bill, the waiter himself spoke up. "Excuse me," he said, "I don't want to be intrusive, but could it be that we met before?" I felt vindicated. I mentioned that I too thought that we had met, and I proposed that we should try to establish right then and there where our paths had crossed.

Easier said than done. His path had been just as tortuous as ours. We ourselves had left Hitler's Germany in 1933 for Spain, from where we fled in 1936 to France, to escape the Spanish Civil War. From France we eventually left for South America, where we established residence, first in Argentina for a period of months, and then in Uruguay for 10 years, before emigrating to the United States in 1947.

Hans, our waiter, had also been born in Germany. He too lived in France and elsewhere in Europe for a span, and then in South America, before moving to the States, where he joined the Army. He had seen action in France and after the war lived briefly in Paris, where he met his wife. He eventually returned to the United States, and had been in his present job for several years.

We compared our lives' trajectories and came to the conclusion that we could have met on any number of occasions, but exactly when and where seemed impossible to determine.

I don't know what finally did it, but the revelation came to me in a flash. It was in Argentina, in our first days in Buenos Aires, while we were booked in a pension in the outskirts of the town, the Pension Massen, which had provided a base as we

ambience generally cheerful. I was somewhat awed by the diversity of strangers that shared our table, but fascinated by the multilingual conversation. Most guests were refugees from Europe, as we were, and I took pleasure in confusing those within earshot by speaking alternatively in the three languages I knew. With strangers at the table, my parents were prone to be more finicky about table manners. Speaking with a full mouth was now strictly forbidden. However, rather than risk embarrassing me by scolding me verbally when I was in violation, they would simply fix their eyes upon me and frown. Faking incomprehension, I would make it a point to stare back quizzically with the most angelic of expressions.

I had hoped it would be otherwise, but Argentina was carrot country. The Pension Massen, in fact, seemed bent on a campaign to eliminate night blindness. Carrots were almost daily fare, and they seemed always to be served in the largest bowl. My mother made sure that I was never deprived of my share.

One day, on account of circumstances that I knew would never repeat themselves, I did get a break. The evening had started like all others. We had assembled for dinner, dished out the food, and were about to begin eating. Carrots were on the menu, and I had received my allocation. I had just begun deliberating whether I would eat the carrots outright, stir them into the mashed potatoes, or save them for last, when the kitchen door opened abruptly, to admit one of the waiters. The man was obviously distraught. He wore an agonized expression on his face, and seemed initially unable to speak. He looked around, sharing glances with those assembled and, as utter silence

descended upon the room, proceeded to make his announcement.

"We have just heard over the wireless that the Hindenburg blew up. The dirigible. In Lakehurst, New Jersey. Burned up. Lots of casualties..."

The news was devastating. Silence gave way to expressions of horror and disbelief, and eventually to agitated conversation, as the entire assemblage converged upon the kitchen, to be by the radio.

I was left alone, somewhat frightened, not knowing quite what to make of the tragedy. It didn't take long for me to realize, however, that I shared my solitude with my carrots, and that this presented a unique opportunity. I looked at the mound on my plate, and at the bowl from whence it came, and feeling not the slightest twinge of conscience, proceeded to return the former to the latter. It was just a matter of transferring the carrots with a spoon, and the whole operation took seconds. I proceeded to eat the remainder of the food on my plate, so it would not look as though only the carrots were missing. Everyone eventually returned to the table, still visibly shaken from the events. I was worried that my parents would take note of my transgression, but they didn't.

What had come to me in a flash as we were reminiscing with Hans, is that he and the waiter who announced the demise of the Hindenburg, were one and the same person. My recollection was vivid and I was certain I was right. Hans himself confirmed that he had been at the Pension Massen at that time of the tragedy, and he recalled waiting on my parents. We marveled that we should have solved the mystery, and talked at some length about shared experiences. My parents had never known of the trick I had pulled with the carrots, and they were not quite sure whether after so many years they should still take me to task. In the end, they had a good laugh, and seemed reassured when I told them I had no additional such dishonesties to report.

Funny how things turn out. I now love carrots.

Thomas Eisner is a biologist at Cornell and author of the new book, *For Love of Insects*.

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# Being and Nothingness

## Christopher Furst

### The Immensity of the Here and Now, A Novel of 9.11

By Paul West

Voyant Publishing, 2003, Hardcover \$23

A few years ago Paul West fired a warning flare with his essay "In Defense of Purple Prose," not just to signal what he saw as the descent toward minimalism in American writing, but to reassert the primacy of fiction that makes use of all the possibilities at its disposal.

I'm thinking of Virginia Woolf's jazz of consciousness, Proust's obsessive search for lost time, Roa Bastos's supreme improvisation, and Nabokov's secret nerves of art. Purple is not the sole color of West's prose, however; he ranges across the full width of the spectrum, pulling in all the hues of visible light, as well as radio waves, background radiation, and the most penetrating x-rays—like the Hubble Telescope and the Very Large Array rolled into one.

West's new novel, a threnody on the aftermath of 9/11, focuses on Shrop, a philosopher who has lost the woman he

loves in the collapse of the twin towers, and has had his philosophy (his civilized stuffing?) knocked out of him. "I think I was once a philosopher, who now can remember none of his concepts or precepts...It is no use even trying to move forward. Panic has wiped out the best of me." He lives in Zulu Time, zero hours, zero minutes, the aviation term for Greenwich Mean Time, but here a condition of perpetual midnight. In the vacancy after his double loss, Shrop seeks out his friend Quent, a psychiatrist who lost his lower legs and one eye in an earlier war:

Perhaps I am consulting the wrong man, the wrong one among many wrong ones, but it's friendship that draws me, the desire to hear the awful news from a friendly mouth. Trouble is, though, as I've said, he could equip me with someone else's system. Or, worse, re-equip me with my own without me ever recognizing it. Perhaps a few hints from my own system, proffered by him, would bring the whole thing back to me, as if you were to whisper "thrown" to Heidegger or "monad" to Leibniz.

Instead of forcing him to retrieve his memories, Quent feeds Shrop a substitute

biography filched from the life of Wittgenstein. Quent says, "Raw importunity assails him at every corner, and life is a jigsaw puzzle with no interlocking pieces. He takes it all on the chin."

Part I of the novel, "The Burial of the Dead" (a nod to the first section of T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland"), takes its epigraph from Flaubert: "Anyone's death always releases something like an aura of stupefaction, so difficult is it to grasp the irruption of nothingness and to believe that it has actually taken place." Shrop and Quent, West's modern update of Flaubert's duo Bouvard et Pecuchet, are drawn again and again to Ground Zero, America's embodiment of the abyss. "They call it Ground Zero," Shrop says, "though there is nothing zero-like about it except the absence of human life." Rather than inuring the men to the calamity, their visits to the pit keep their wounds open. Quent, too, becomes unhinged, and literally steps into the fire in an act of immolation. Shrop contemplates revenge against the destroyers of delight even as he conjures up the image of his beloved, whose name we learn on the last page.

Why have so few novels come out of the twin towers' destruction? In the face of such extremity do we remain silent out of pro-

found respect or out of profound poverty of the imagination? Where is the imaginative response to what West calls the "Meccanization" of Ground Zero? It's as if writers were waiting to see who would respond first before they, too, would commit themselves to print. In the past, poets had the "matter of Greece and Rome" to draw upon for inspiration. Why do we shrink from the matter of our own latter-day Troy? A lot of questions, which, if we answered them honestly, would reveal our odd squeamishness, our unwillingness to come to grips with catastrophe, with death. It's a curious lassitude. Of course there have been countless journalistic responses to the tragedy, from op-ed pieces to quick assemblages of eyewitness reports and news stories. But where are the fiction writers willing to take on such a major contemporary experience? Recent novels by Iain Banks and Nicholas Mosley come to mind, but Paul West's lyrical meditation on destruction and grief stands as a high watermark. His bold searching and refusal to shrink from tragedy make him rarer than radium.

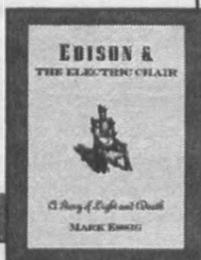
— Christopher Furst is assistant editor of Cornell Alumni Magazine.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BOOKERY

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Mark Essig reads from *Edison and the Electric Chair: A Story of Light and Death*. Technology, medicine, murder, gruesome experiments and an American Hero.

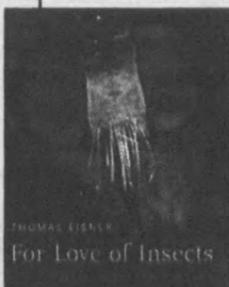
Sunday, November 2nd, 2:30pm in the Borg-Warner Room



### Tom Eisner

Imagine beetles ejecting defensive sprays as hot as boiling water; female moths holding their mates for ransom; caterpillars disguising themselves as flowers by fastening petals to their bodies; termites emitting a viscous glue to rally fellow soldiers...Tom Eisner details this tiny world in *For Love of Insects*.

Sunday, November 9th, 2:30pm in the Borg-Warner Room



### Chris Moriarty

Chris Moriarty reads from *Spin State*, the thrilling story of one woman's quest to wrest truth from chaos, love from violence, and reality from illusion in a post-human universe of emergent AIs, genetic constructs, and illegal wetware...

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## In Praise of Cassandra

continued from page 1

Socratically, "who attacked us?" His answer was that the aggressors were "those who felt that they had been attacked by us, namely by our peaceful conquest" under an imperial umbrella, and who "accused us of being robbers." Of course, Israelis and Zionists countered this charge with the claim that "this was our country two thousand years ago and it was there that we created great things." Though a sworn Zionist, Buber questioned the credibility of this claim: "do we genuinely expect this reason to be accepted [by the Arabs] without argument; and would we accept it were we in their place?" Besides, Buber recoiled at efforts to swathe the Zionist construction in religion, whose instrumentalization he reprobated as much as Sigmund Freud.

Buber was convinced that, short of a major change of policy especially on the Arab Question, any future peace would "be a stunted peace, no more than [a state of] non-belligerency liable to turn into war at any moment." Such a tenuous armistice could temper neither mutual "suspicion" nor "the thirst for vengeance." Besides, Buber argued, Israel would be "compelled to maintain a posture of vigilance forever," at the enormous cost of "occupying the most talented members of our society." In January 1949, when Israel was winning the war, he wistfully mused that, while "Everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon' (Nehemiah 4:11), you can build a wall, but not an attractive house, let alone a temple."

In their time the radical but loyal critics with a Cassandra-like sentience were, of course, "called defeatists . . . and were looked upon as quislings." But, in Buber's words, "they remained faithful to the ideal" and struggled against its being replaced "by the Asmodeus [evil spirit] of a political chimera." Contemptuously referred to as "certain intellectuals," they overcame "despair" by keeping the faith and by invoc-

ing the "helpful power of reason." So did Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt, who were among their countless soulmates and supporters in the Diaspora.

What does it say about our own historical moment that while the Middle East is afire, so few Jewish intellectuals have the learning, courage, and integrity to defy the "megalomania of the leaders and the giddiness of the masses"? Today's crisis demands not prosaic criticism but an alternative vision. It might be well to recall that bi-nationalism actually was a real historical possibility in Palestine until the use of the forcible declaration of Israel's independence on May 14, 1948. To renounce or ignore unorthodox but well-founded alternatives is to embrace a teleological and determinist view of history which precludes genuine debate about the past, present, and future.

— Arno J. Mayer is a Professor of History, Emeritus at Princeton University.

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# The River Runs Through Us

Jim McConkey

## Orioling

By Ann Silsbee  
Red Hen Press, 2003  
87 pages. \$13.95

## The Book of Ga

By Ann Silsbee  
Custom Words, 2003  
(Publication forthcoming)

Ann Silsbee, whose unexpected death on August 28 saddened all those who had come to know and admire her over the decades of her life in Ithaca, possessed a variety of talents. She was a painter, pianist and composer as well as a poet, though poetry—or so I judge from the artistry of the two books I've just read—must have become the dominant creative concern of her later years.

Only a few days before she died, I phoned Ann to say that I had agreed to review *Orioling*, which had won the 2001 Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award, for *The Bookpress*. During our conversation, she told me that a second book of her poetry, *The Book of Ga*, was about to be published. At my suggestion, she mailed me a copy of the manuscript so that I could review them together. I am glad that I asked to see that second book. Ann had been pleased that the first publisher to consider *The Book of Ga* had accepted it at once; having read it, I can see the reason for such a quick and affirmative response.

Structurally, the two volumes are quite different. *Orioling* is a collection of separate poems, each complete in itself. Some of the poems in *The Book of Ga* can stand alone (ten of them were published in magazines, and one of them was nominated for a Pushcart Prize). Nevertheless, the book itself is one long poem, all of its parts interconnected through its story of a life as well as through the river that is both a physical fact and the channel within which that narrative flows.

In his later years, William Butler Yeats wrote what most critics consider his finest poetry, including "Sailing to Byzantium." "Once out of nature," Yeats writes as the concluding stanza for that poem,

I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

My reading of Ann's two books led me to remember that stanza from "Sailing to Byzantium" for a number of reasons. One reason is that, like Yeats as an older poet, Ann demonstrates in these books the assurance

and mastery of poetic technique that time (which permits the maturity of both vision and skill) can bring to talent. Another is the mutual emphasis on song. And Yeats' golden bird is singing of past, present, and future—the underlying melody of both *Orioling* and *The Book of Ga*.

But even as I was thinking of those similarities, I was aware of the immense difference that separates "Sailing to Byzantium" from any poem in Ann's two books. That difference provides me a way to describe her song, her voice—that is to say, the interpretation she gives to our human existence. In "Sailing" and other work of his poetic maturity, Yeats conceives of an ideal completion denied us in our brief and fragmented span of living and strives to achieve it through imagination: his bird, gorgeous artifact that it is, sings of the passage of time from a remove, for the bird itself is immortal—beyond nature, beyond change. For Ann, change forms the very fabric of our living, and binds us to the changes of the weather, the changes of the seasons. We exist within, and are part of, the flux of nature itself. Her poems make many references to water: the word "flowing" often occurs, "river" even more frequently. In its ceaseless flow, time is conventionally referred to as a river; in Ann's poetry, we have our moment of time within the flow of nature.

The poems of *Orioling* are arranged not in chronological order of their composition but as a demonstration of the ongoing movement in us and all the phenomena of nature. How does one account for that mysterious impulse in humans to create, to sing, during the brief years that are granted us? The opening poem of *Orioling* provides the title for the collection. The orioles and thrushes that sing in that poem are not hammered from gold—they are real birds, and their song is not for our aesthetic pleasure but to claim territory and gain mates. The poem tells us that human song has a less obvious motivation, for (among other causes) it issues from the complexity of a mind aware of itself—from a consciousness always seeking to know how or why it came to be:

Human, you can't help trying to understand  
What stalk you flower from, what undertow  
rises in the flutist to quicken with breath  
the arcs and dips of prior minds, or mind  
itself, playing with fugue, with E=MC<sup>2</sup>,  
inventing wheel, organ, flute, B Minor Mass—  
Buddha—the bomb. The song you bear buds  
Under your mind's tongue like a first word.

Though it depends upon mind, human creativity is analogous to nature's creativity, as the references to "stalk," "flower" and "bud" imply. And clearly the repeated use of nouns and verbs beginning with "b" give these concluding lines of the poem the sound of one explosion after another: those bursts of energy mark the act of creativity itself, both in

nature and in the human mind. Nature destroys to create anew. The human mind is as capable of destroying—the nuclear bomb is the prime example—as it is of inventing useful objects and contemplating, or giving voice to, an encompassing spiritual insight. As for the "undertow" that "rises in the flutist" as she plays—does it originate in the unconscious mind, as a kind of genetic or biological memory of the human genesis in some unknown sea, a memory that, from this moment onward, participates in nature's flow? "Undertow" is a significant word, for it connects the flutist's mind to "prior minds," a phrase that no doubt includes the composer of the piece and previous performers of it and possibly others even farther back in time.

Later poems in the collection amplify what is implied in this opening song. For Ann, it soon becomes apparent, we sing not because we or our artifacts are immortal, but because, as mortal creatures, we respond to the immortality of nature as it flows through us, binding past and future to the ephemeral present. In Ann's own song, such insight has an intimate relationship with all that she values—love (particularly for husband, children, and kinfolk), affectionate relationships with many others, music, an appreciation of the natural environment, the pleasures of the body. (Her "Tryst for the Adams and Eves" is as sensual a poem as I have read in a long time.) The affirmation—the praise of life—in her poetry is anything but sentimental. Her poems acknowledge not only the bombs we make, but the prejudices we are capable of, and they take into account the barbarous acts that took place in Serbia and Afghanistan during the composition of *Orioling*. And they speak, as they must, of human endings. According to a very loose translation of the Roman poet Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, "Life lives on/ it is the lives, the lives, the lives that die." That is in harmony with Ann's voice; and so is this phrase from a poem by another long-time Ithaca resident, Archie Ammons: "[T]his is forever, we are now in it..."

Though I have devoted the majority of this review to the song I hear throughout *Orioling*, nearly everything I have said about that collection applies equally to *The Book of Ga*. As a narrative—ostensibly, the story of the life of Ann's grandmother Miriam Nye Loomis, "Ga" being the name given her by her young grandchildren—the book is immediately accessible to any reader. It has the appeal of a film by Ken Burns, for its story is carried by a number of voices that are speaking against a documentary background of photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, and a quarantine notice. From such evidence, Ann constructs her narrative. In it, Miriam grows up in a river town—Marietta, Ohio, at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers. She marries Charley, a photographer from Parkersburg, a nearby city on the other side of the river. They become a family with two children, both boys. Five years after the marriage, Charley dies, a victim of typhoid fever. With her boys, Miriam returns to her childhood home to live with her father, now a widower. A flood inundates much of Marietta. The father remarries; Miriam must be subservient to father and stepmother alike. She escapes to Boston with her children. Here she attends cooking school, to gain the credentials for a job—she gets one at a school for girls—that will support her and the boys. Miriam and the woman who teaches French at the school buy a summer home far from urban confinement. In that Maine farmhouse, close to rivers and lakes and surrounded by fields and woods, her life is happier than it has been since the death of Charley. Now grown, her children depart; then the French teacher marries, leaving her alone. Ultimately, Miriam enters a nursing home: her mind is failing. The moment of her death is not recorded.

It is a simple story, one similar to the lives of many others. And yet it held my attention

from beginning to end through the atmosphere it evokes and the poet's ability to convey sensations and emotions. As natural fact and as metaphor, the river runs through this story, and is given (much like the chorus in a Greek tragedy) its own voice, its own commentary. As Ann admits in the dedication honoring her grandmother, the story is primarily an imagined one: the intimate details, the feelings ascribed to Miriam, come from the poet's own life. It is true enough that anybody's life—what she or he is doing, feeling, or thinking during a day or a lifetime—is unknowable to another; we gain empathy and understanding of other people through the projection upon them of what we believe and feel ourselves. Miriam's story gains its authenticity through its creator's knowledge that the eternal river that runs through nature runs also, if much too briefly, through each one of us.

*The Book of Ga* is preceded by a poem that serves as overture to the narrative. It is titled "What Do You Mean, Praise?" I read that opening poem on the same morning that I heard of Ann's death. Its introductory stanza struck me as if she'd had a premonition of her death, for it begins this way:

Yes, we could die tomorrow,  
A two-car crash, a second's misjudging of speed.  
Another plane might ram our woods. Anthrax  
could do it, a heart attack, cancer, even a stupid  
fall down the back stairs.

But the second and concluding stanza is the answer given to the hard fact of death, an answer implicit in both volumes under review:

Haven't we always been in line  
for some kind of ending? It's enough for now  
that our son's on the phone, telling us today's  
griefs, yesterday's joys. What matters is to tug  
lightly on the thin line of his voice, stretch it  
over the hills and woods—what pulls between us  
will not break. This must be what praise is, singing  
the young men our bodies began, who go on  
in this world with their wives, girls, boys,  
the mothers and fathers who go on in us, too,  
and ancestors we never knew who dwell unsuspected  
in our corpuscles and ganglions, smiling us,  
weeping us, walking with us all our lives long.

Not everything carried along in our blood and nerves from the past is benign, of course. A single word in the opening stanza—"anthrax"—reminds us of the plagues we are capable of visiting upon each other. The affirmation at the ending encompasses that, though. Is this poem sufficient consolation, for those who knew and admired Ann? For her, it was; for us, it will have to do.

Jim McConkey is the author of several novels and memoirs.

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# Luminous Moments

Edward A. Dougherty

**Blue Hour**  
By Carolyn Forché  
Harper Collins, 2003  
73 pages, \$24.95, clothbound

In her notes about her previous book, *The Angel of History* nearly a decade ago, Carolyn Forché says that her early poetic "has given way to a work which has desired its own bodying forth: polyphonic, broken, haunted, and in ruins, with no possibility of restoration." Her new poems are still haunted with various voices and maintain her lovely lyrical, elegiac tone. They are paradoxically more broken yet more restorative. She writes in the title poem, "Even the most broken life can be restored to its moments" (2). As luminous moments accumulate across the eleven poems in this collection, a kind of affirmation is practiced that is spiritual, historical, and personal.

*Blue Hour* opens with a quote from Martin Buber: "These moments are immortal, and most transitory of all; no content may be secured from them....Beams of their power stream into the ordered world and dissolve it again and again." Forché's sense of these transitory experiences is that they are not snapshots, the flow of events is not frozen; they are built up to by history as well as revealed in memory. In this way, time is neither linear as usually conceived of nor dismissed as Romantics often do. But this other way of experience requires a no-longer and not-yet sense, a place between boundaries. In the title poem, Forché writes, "When my son was an infant we woke for his early feeding at l'heure bleue—cerulean, gentian, hyacinth, delft, jouvence. What were also the milk hours" (7). She defines term "blue hour" as "between darkness and day, between the night of a soul and its redemption, an hour associated with pure hovering" (71). The image of hovering, pause and motion held, recalls the spirit of the Lord in Genesis over the watery chaos, that moment of creation.

In Forché's liminal blue hours, time enlarges. For example, she reports that "My son rows toward me against the wind. For thirty-six years, he rows. In 1986, he is born

in Paris" (2). The moment of birth has its antecedent long before conception or even meeting the father. Notice that she uses the present tense: the child "rows" as if he is still approaching, still arriving.

The language is consistently rich. Even when conveying harsh content, the writing is elegant and musical: "Beneath the ice, open-eyed but absent, she who I was, with ribbon scars faint across her. Every tip of wheat-stalk lit by sun" (12), "...a broken clock, a boy wakened by his father's whip, then the world as if whorled into place—" (24), "so that the dead climb up out of the river to blacken its banks" (53). From her first book, Carolyn Forché has proven herself to be a poet of remarkable lyricism and imagery, but starting in *The Angel of History* and even more fulfilled in this collection, she makes language itself a voice among her many other voices, a presence and subject. With titles like "Sequestered Writing" and "Writing Kept Hidden" and even "Prayer" there is a concentration on the life-work of writing and language.

She remarks directly on this with "that ing-ing of verbs in an eternal present" (54) which reinforces her use of tense in other poems. Likewise, with the phrase "dreaming nouns remembered until a window" (38) condenses how remembered images give way to the present scene. In both examples, she makes plain how language merges with and influences the experience. As another way of expressing this, Forché includes throughout the book word lists like the types of blue cited above or like "keepsake, knell, Kyrie" (46). Never surreal, these elements intensify the real. The use of nouns slows the language from its flow in syntax to thing, thing, thing and draws attention to discrete images, either experienced in "the during of the world" (45) or in memory. Even as she affirms that writing is "the guardian of the past" (31), she also indicates the limits of expression, how it cannot carry the fullness of our lives when she writes "a word dissolved into the yet-again / a world set in language and deserted." Later, she writes that "resting language or language under surveillance / reverses itself as we read it" (51).

These examples come from the 46 page chant "On Earth." Formed entirely of phrases, like the ones quoted, arranged alphabeti-

cally, this poem fully embodies the spiritual hovering of time and the possibilities as well as shortcomings of language to mediate experience. In the list are indications of how to read it. The phrase "a litany of broken but remembered events" is one way to conceive of the fragments, but she writes that "meaning did not survive that loss of sequence" (47) as if to acknowledge that sense breaks down in some fundamental way without typical linear sequencing. Still, there is meaning, a knowing. The form itself enacts the liminal experience of no-longer being lyrical, linear poems but not-yet whole awarenesses. The mind seeks to unify the lines, particularly since they are set into stanzas. Notice how the following lines build in the sequence of sentence syntax then almost dissolve:

and it is supposed that we are describing the world  
and its corresponding moment in the past  
and night, a knock at the window  
and night, a storehouse

When the sequence becomes lists or as connections and contexts become harder to recognize, the mind is active, synthesizing, comparing, reversing and moving forward. The rhythm of this accumulation, according to Andy Fogle, the book reviewer for PopMatters, is "slow, hypnotic, gorgeous, and at times frightening." It is also terrifying because the book is full of refugees, graves, cities where "phosphorous fell" (60), razor wire, and the other personal experience of brutal history. This is territory one expects from this poet, but in the context of the blue hour, there is the possibility of restoration.

Not a book for bedtime reading and not poems for those who want narrative, *Blue Hour* is demanding, but its rewards are at a whole other level. It bodies forth what it says about the "world's ensouling in a gallery of sadness" (60). At first, the images and the lyricism of the rich language stand out, then the complexity of the awareness impresses, and finally the profound spiritual experience of living "in the bardo of becoming" (43) releases joy. It is a book that will open itself with each returning.

Edward Dougherty is a poet who teaches at Corning Community College. He and his wife were peace volunteers in Hiroshima, Japan, for 2 1/2 years. His poems have appeared in many periodicals in the U.S. and Japan, such as *Poetry East*, *International Quarterly*, *West Branch*, *SLANT* and *Cream City Review*.

## Mencken Solution



# The Agony and the Ecstasy

continued from page 7

ordinary people, as these books all show in various ways. And wherever there is competition (and none so fierce as in ballet), there will be hierarchies of talent and achievement. Be that as it may, I believe that we can have the achievement ballet demands and the competition it inevitably entails without the particularly unhealthy forms they have taken, especially for women. I see this at Ithaca Ballet, which has produced some fine professional dancers without the resources of major company schools, which can and do require that their students give up everything else in their lives, including serious schooling, to pursue their careers.

In "The Brahmins" Katie observes that those who continue ballet past the age of twelve are "haunted by dancing" the rest of their lives. This was certainly true for me for many years, even when I stopped taking class and thought I would never return. What Sharp is getting at here is that ballet is for many a traumatic experience—trauma is another thing that people don't get over, or do so only with great difficulty. And how do

you get over a trauma? You return to the scene imaginatively, in your therapy, so that you can bring the experience to a better resolution and achieve closure. Well, I've returned to the scene, not via therapy—a cognitive return—but in the way dancers do everything, with my body. Of course, I can't really redo it: I can't be sixteen again and take class as a teenager and see my leg extending above my head in second position and be a snowflake in *Nutcracker* and have a different experience with ballet than the one I had. But that's okay, it's enough to know that the possibility exists for my daughters. And as for me, I'm over it; I can take pleasure in dance without the pain (psychic pain anyway, the physical is another story). Anyway, as Katie says, "hey, one could always look forward to reincarnation."

Wendy Jones is the author of a critical study titled *Consensual Fictions: Women, Liberalism and the English Novel*, forthcoming from *The University of Toronto Press*.

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**cinema**

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Year in the life of Japanese village schoolteacher

**Nov 19, 22 & 23**  
**Stone Reader**  
A personal search for the writer and for other readers of *The Stones of Summer*. A book-loving film for book lovers. "A debut of enormous craft, surety and resourcefulness—a superlative, soul-bearing work of non-fiction." (*Variety*)

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Nicolas Philibert's lovingly filmed portrait of a one room school house in rural France. "The film invites the audience into the learning process, to re-experience what it's like to trace letters for the first time, put feelings into words, realize you can keep counting forever." (*eyeWeekly*)

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—Book Magazine

# My Red White and Blue Guts Uncoil

1  
My grandfather presented me with the gleaming bands  
of his cigars. I admired them looped on my fingers.  
One day he gave me an American flag ring.  
Some of the rubies and diamonds were missing from the stripes  
but the blue sapphire corner field was whole.  
We both knew they were rhinestones  
although I didn't know what a rhinestone was.  
They were and were not rubies diamonds and sapphires.  
It was make-believe jewelry  
to wear for pretend disguise.  
In that way I passed through my childhood

2  
My grandfather told me how he at 16  
and his little brother, Julius,  
ran away from the family tyrant  
and before being dragged into the Romanian army  
from which few Jews returned.  
They traveled through Europe with their stock in trade—  
the gold lions they stitched rearing on synagogue altar cloths,  
with big fake jewels sewn in for gorgeousness.  
He still sometimes made them on the dining room table—  
the needle's prick and pull through, stitching the stiff cloth,  
huge spools and monster scissors close at hand.  
He, Moritz, could even speak some French—  
Pomme de Terre, he announced, potato triumphant.  
I tucked away that nugget

3  
Grandpa told me how we had wandered in the desert 40 years  
and did not have what to eat  
and then down from the sky dropped manna.  
I guessed that manna was like macaroons,  
which I sometimes dropped, the soft  
upshaped little macaroons offered around on the holidays,  
but I never asked. Without Manna and America,  
how many birthday parties would I have? Not many, not any?  
So now from this hole in my stomach which I cannot plug—  
not with American History lessons showing the Founders  
and We the People and Lincoln's face, not with the shivery  
mountain folksongs and the calling beating blues  
and the brave lonesome moving on over yonder—  
my red white and blue guts uncoil.  
And I cry out for water and deliverance.

4  
OK America he often trumpeted  
before pushing up from his chair,  
and likewise Happy New Year after loudly blowing his nose.  
Now my grandfather has turned to dust,  
at least not out of season.

His bones thread through the soil that took him in, this  
sacred place, where he and my steely grandma engendered  
seven resemblances, six boys and last my princess mother.  
And all could go to a public school and make speeches.  
True, out of the city sometimes signs were stuck  
No Jews or Dogs Allowed but that  
was just how it was. Until another miracle.

His ground bones now embroidering  
his love for this miracle America

5  
It's a free country I learned to say  
if anyone tried to bully me. The boy pointing  
to the white prayer book which shows he said  
that you killed Christ.  
It's a free country and anyone can salute  
24 hours a day for the seven days in the week by wearing  
the American Freedom Watch, its face a flag,  
the National Anthem playing at the press of a pinhead.  
And with it you get an American flag pin free.  
Hand over heart, you pledge to each of the 365 days, allegiance  
to the year posted on a magnet mini-calendar flagging waves  
of the American flag from the fridge door.  
You can promote your product by sending customers  
a calendar with your logo and the flag  
heading each of the 12 months.  
If it isn't a free country, what on earth  
would become of me and my mouth?

6  
Congratulations! You  
are a winner, the letter on the package said.  
Here is your prize.  
Inside is a Teddy Bear, 12 inches high and jointed,  
cuddly with polyester fill. The tag says Pose Me  
to walk sit stand wave.  
Teddy wears a little navy shirt with an American flag  
knitted into its chest.  
The black button eyes swivel to follow me.  
Packed into his ears a Magni Ear  
brings every soundwave clear and close.

When he waves, he takes palm-size photos.  
When he walks, surveillance rays track and issue from his paws.  
When he stands, a motion sensor beeps a pitch unheard by us  
as from his furry belly button he signals your moves.  
When he sits, that hidden between his open legs  
widely records talk.  
If I fail to walk sit stand wave like him,  
this is at once computerized

7  
Poskuniok, rascals, horse thieves,  
my grandfather rasps. From his chair  
he waggles his cigar  
at the TV talking heads

8  
An ogre is abroad in the land he grabs  
and stuffs into his maw  
the figures reeling in his eye bulge  
  
He chews and swallows them while others pinioned  
dangle from between his blooded teeth soon each bit  
is picked out and bitten falling into the gorge

I know from fairy tales that the ogre  
later meets his doom  
toppling of his own weight and crashing

or slain by his former prey those barely breathing not to know  
when where freezing dread next would seize them  
therefore rejoicing dancing

no need now to huddle  
at that tread thundering  
shaking the countryside around

I know that the hero of the tale  
slays the ogre  
but this wily ogre grows each day more huge

stretching himself until unseen and soundless  
as his invisible net it traps his living food  
there is never enough

9  
The small Xmas ornament wreathes an American flag's ripples.  
This would go well with the birdhouse  
and its roof of American flags its sides a starry blue.  
Keyring necklace moneyclip earrings zipper pull  
are offered in flag motif from Dream Products  
and all the other catalogs clogging my mailbox. Flags  
link in bracelet formation, brooches and pins flow with flags.

Show your pride in America the ad says. Grinning, Santa  
waves holiday Old Glory wishes and brings flagwrapped parcels.  
Rompers for tots teeshirts in all sizes—all are flagged.  
These tell the world you know who you are.  
But I no longer know.

Why do I sorrow?  
My beloved proves false—  
his smile curves with make-believe,  
I can no longer trust his eyes, his practiced pretending eyes.  
I do not understand how his hollow  
words can escape can rule without shame.  
What will next betray the populace?

Why do I fear?  
I no longer know  
my beautiful my only America

—Carol Rubenstein

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13					14				15		16		
17				18						19			
20				21						22			
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47	48	49						50			51	52	53
54						55	56				57		
58					59						60		
61						62					63		

# Mencken

—puzzle by Adam Perl

**ACROSS**

- 1. Beginning
- 5. Soviet News Agency
- 9. Eager
- 13. Fla i r
- 14. Detox
- 16. Record
- 17. Start of Mencken quote
- 20. No alternative
- 21. "Double Fantasy" artist
- 22. "\_\_\_\_\_ Eleven"
- 23. Flowery co.
- 24. They're flicked
- 25. Part 2 of the quote
- 33. Not so well done
- 34. Kind of colony
- 35. Roman Kubrick classic?
- 36. Keep \_\_\_\_\_!
- 37. Suffered
- 38. Start to differ?
- 39. Highway Dept.
- 40. 60's Hoffman
- 41. Unfinished
- 42. Part 3 of the quote
- 45. Jeanne and others
- 46. Santa \_\_\_\_\_
- 47. Current

**DOWN**

- 1. Dare
- 2. Cosmetic additive
- 3. Clashes
- 4. NY to Boston dir...
- 5. Fashions
- 6. Dynamic beginning
- 7. Short
- 8. Undermine
- 9. Optimally
- 10. Bash
- 11. Tournament
- 12. Best bits
- 15. Like some lobsters
- 18. Motor \_\_\_\_\_
- 19. Take place
- 23. Guitarist's worry?
- 24. Well-known loser
- 25. Quality
- 26. Brood
- 27. Author Jong
- 28. Outs
- 29. Son of Suleiyman I
- 30. Permeate
- 31. End of a list
- 32. Kind of club
- 37. Cuts
- 38. New Rochelle campus
- 40. Elroy and Judy's dog
- 41. Get more Time?
- 43. Deadly insect
- 44. Subject of many a joke
- 47. Kind of bar
- 48. Step \_\_\_\_\_
- 49. Saving Private Ryan subject
- 50. Part of SATB
- 51. Funny ending
- 52. They may be tight
- 53. They may clash on stage
- 55. Alias
- 56. On the \_\_\_\_\_
- 57. Impediment

Solution p.11