

## The World According to GOP

Milton J. Esman

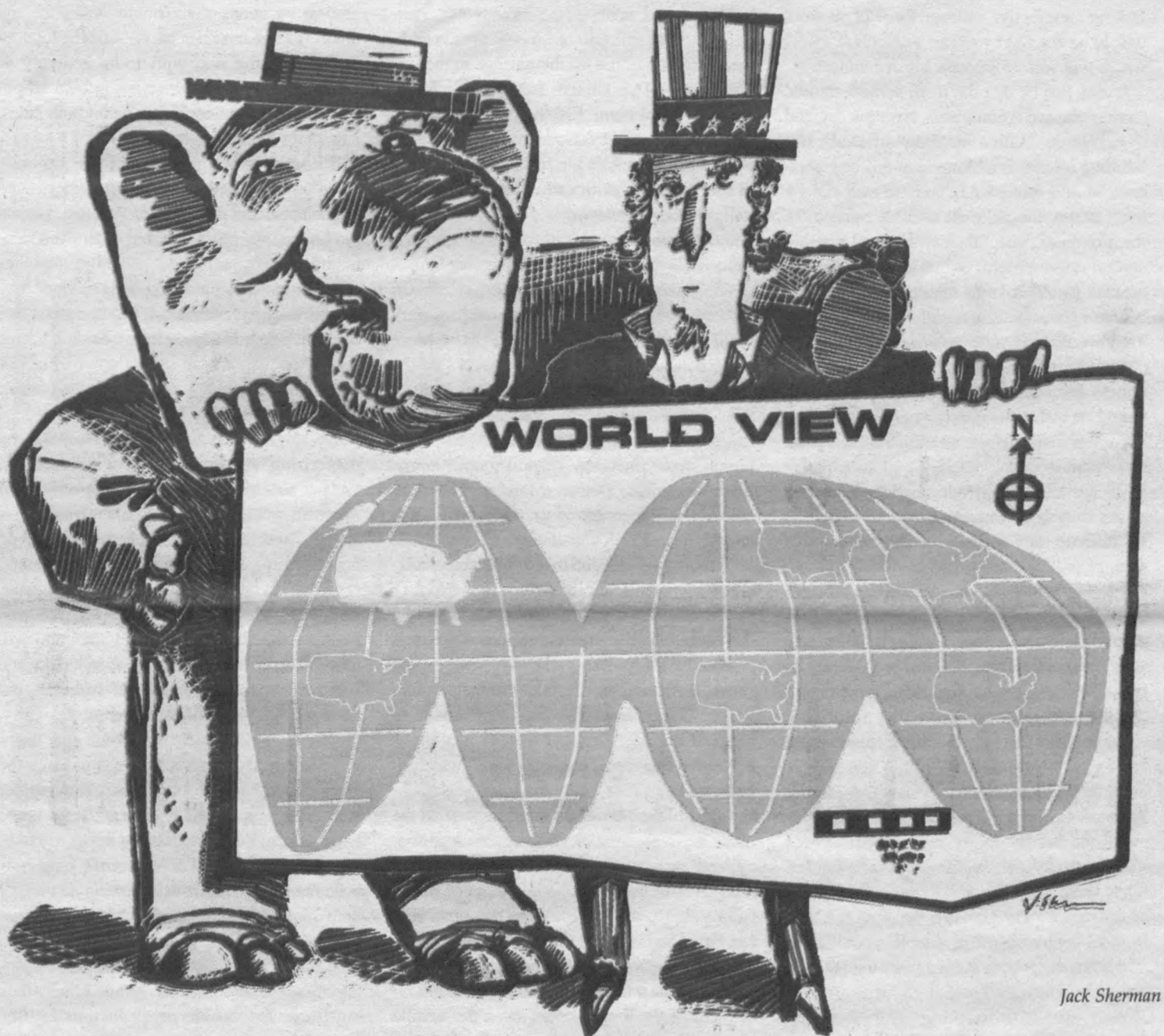
"...Other countries see this war as solely American"

This headline highlights the tepid responses by other governments, with a few notable exceptions, to appeals for assistance in the current U.S. campaign against the perpetrators of the September 11 atrocities. Though the war in Afghanistan has been going well, thanks largely to effective leadership by the President and the skill of U.S. airmen, U.S. Special Forces, and Afghan fighters on the ground, there have been painfully limited offers of tangible assistance from other countries. Why this undercurrent of sentiment that the U.S. brought this disaster on itself by its arrogant displays of power? Having thrown its weight around with respect to a number of important international issues in defiance of the views of other governments, what help should Washington expect from them in its hour of need?

The tendency of the United States to go it alone in its foreign relations has come to be known as "unilateralism." Unilateralism implies that the U.S. government does what its interests require; because of its wealth and power it neither needs nor seeks the approval of other governments or of international organizations, nor is it constrained by their disapproval. Its advocates are allergic to international agreements and distrustful of international organizations.

Military and economic superpowers can expect to be envied and resented—and today the U.S. is the world's only superpower—by many who convince themselves that American power is excessive, undeserved and misused, and that its culture is coarse and materialistic. Because the U.S. deploys such power, it is believed to be endowed with the ability to control events. Thus any undesired event, from the collapse of the Russian economy to Israel's West Bank settlements and the prohibitive cost of medications for AIDS victims in Africa, can be attributed to the intentions of the U.S. or its calculated unwillingness to act.

Beginning in World War II when Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Republican moderates such as Henry L. Stimson, Wendell Willkie, and Arthur Vandenberg defeated the isolationist Fortress America/American Firsters, the U.S. has taken the lead in building the institutions of international cooperation. These began with the 1944 Bretton Woods agreements that established the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and culminated in the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Under President Truman the U.S. launched and financed the Marshall Plan which rebuilt the shattered economies of Europe, and organized the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Under President Eisenhower the U.S. took the initiative in establishing the International Atomic Energy



Jack Sherman

Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. President Kennedy inspired the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress to promote the development and modernization of Latin America.

All these instances of American leadership in international cooperation were bipartisan undertakings, recognizing, even during the Cold War, that increasing interdependence among nations required institutions that facilitate international cooperation. The enlightened self-interest of the U.S., the ability to achieve our own goals of security and prosperity, demanded leadership and active participation in these institutions, including the give-and-take with other nations that is the essence of effective diplomacy. International agreements necessarily limit our freedom of action, but they likewise constrain the freedom of others. This serves our interests by producing greater stability, predictability, and the rule of law in international affairs. From time to time, circumstances that threaten our basic interests or values may require us to go it alone, an example being the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>2</sup> But normally, the U.S., following its

post-World War II tradition, should be the leader and consistent supporter of international cooperation, because it is in our own national interest to do so.

Yet, the Fortress America/America First version of isolationism, though eclipsed, never disappeared. It surfaced in 1952 with the Bricker Amendment, promoted by Midwestern isolationist Republicans. This was a proposed Constitutional amendment that would have severely limited the treaty-making power of the President and Congress. The capture of the Republican Party by its Goldwater faction in 1964 shifted control of the GOP from its Eastern internationalist wing to the South, Southwest, and Rocky Mountain states dominated by newly-rich entrepreneurs with little international experience or interest, distrustful of foreigners, and confident of U.S. superiority and ability to go it alone. The Reagan victory in 1980 brought into both houses of Congress a large contingent of America First Republicans who regarded the U.N. and its associated agencies, though financed in large measure by U.S. taxpayer dollars, as hotbeds of socialism and anti-Americanism. America First isolationism evolved over the years into the current ideology of heavily armed unilateralism.

provided military assistance to the Nicaragua *contras* in their campaign to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government. The World Court held that by interfering in the internal affairs of another state the U.S. was in violation of international law. The Reagan administration brushed aside the World Court's ruling, claiming that the Court had no jurisdiction in this case. When they won control of Congress in 1994, several unilateralist Republicans assumed chairmanships of committees and sub-committees that were in a position to influence American foreign policy. Most prominent among them was the scourge of the United Nations, Jesse Helms, who became chair of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Because the Clinton White House chose to accommodate rather than challenge the Republican Congressional leadership on matters of international cooperation, Helms and his associates maintained an effective veto on U.S. foreign policy. With the accession to the Presidency of George W. Bush, a man with no experience, little knowledge, and even less apparent interest in foreign affairs, but with views quite similar to those of the Congressional Republican leadership, for the

2. Cited by Joseph Nye, "Between Concert and Unilateralism" in *The National Interest*, Winter 2001-02; 5-13



## Letters

### Pyrrhic Victories?

To The Editor:

In the Orwellian world, war is called peace, slavery freedom, and in general everything is named by its opposite. In the real world, things do sometimes change, so that apparent victory becomes defeat. We are seeing that now in Afghanistan. What now appears to be an obvious victory will almost certainly turn into a defeat as Afghanistan crumbles into a motley of overlapping fiefdoms impervious to American influence.

The talks in Bonn have created a semblance of a central government for Afghanistan, but without a viable army it will be a government in name only, whose chief purpose is to receive any aid forthcoming from the rich countries. This aid will vanish into the pockets of the warlords. We are already seeing food aid appearing for sale on the streets of Kabul. This expropriation is all but inevitable, since the government, lacking an effective military force of its own, will be at the mercy of the warlords, each of whom will seek to increase his own power.

It may just be that the Bush administration, having crushed Afghanistan, has now decided to engage in "nation building" after all. But building a long-term American military presence in and around Afghanistan will not by itself ensure the political stability needed for the growth of peaceful enterprise and a viable central government. Americans and their proxies would have to maintain the peace—becoming a police force rather than an army. They would have to leave their bases to patrol the streets, making them vulnerable. Because armies do not make good police forces, they would be bad at the job. It would be a morass from which the Bush administration would soon want to extract itself.

Because the Bush administration has no taste for such an enterprise, and because it is so difficult and politically dangerous, this attempt will be halfhearted at best. Although extracting oil from the bordering former Soviet Republics is certainly part of the agenda, doing that can wait for some future date when the political situation is more stable. The bases will assure the American government that they can get the oil when they want it.

Aside from being a possible future route for an oil pipeline, Afghanistan has almost nothing. It will continue to be lawless, forcing Pakistan to maintain a continuous force to patrol the border. Every imaginable form of illegal activity will be run across the border. Since these activities will be lucrative, it will be difficult for Pakistan to keep its own forces from taking part in the profits. It is not hard to find a few for whom money talks louder than national loyalty.

With an ever-warming war between Pakistan and India, India will seek ways to weaken Pakistan and will find opportunities in Afghanistan. India will support warlords

who are now part of the Northern Alliance in opposition to the southern Pashtun who are more likely to seek Pakistani support. Iran, which also has a long border with Afghanistan, will also find allies among anti-Pakistani forces. Arms will flow to both sides and a continuous civil war will boil.

All this will be bad for Pakistan and will undermine the stability of its government. Musharraf, its dictator, gained power through a military coup, but had to purge many of his coup mates to maintain his support for the American war. He also had to abandon the Pakistani creature, the Taliban who had successfully stabilized Afghanistan as a Pakistani ally. The remnants of the Taliban and these former generals are still in Pakistan and there may be some who would challenge Musharraf directly. If the United States abandons Pakistan when it abandons Afghanistan, he will have little good and much harm to show for his political about-face.

The United States will probably not abandon Pakistan entirely, but it has already indicated that it will not tip the balance in the war with India. The United States has rejected release of Pakistani F16 fighter planes as a *quid pro quo* for Pakistani complicity in the war. It has also assured India that it is not going to aid Pakistan significantly. The United States will now be stuck trying to prop up Musharraf without strengthening him too much vis-à-vis India. This will be a difficult balancing act.

The Pakistani economy is also weak. On December 7, 2001 the International Monetary Fund approved a new loan to Pakistan. More loans will be made available, but even so the IMF is pessimistic about the outcome. Most of this money will go to prevent default on Pakistan's external debt of an estimated \$32.7 billion, not to actually rebuild the economy. Eduardo Aninat, Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chairman of the IMF, said while announcing this loan: "Pakistan's economic outlook is now clouded by considerable uncertainty in view of the impact of September 11 events and the ongoing slowdown in world demand, which adversely affect Pakistan's prospects for growth, exports, and capital flows. Achieving the objectives of the program will be highly dependent on a rapid return to regional stability."

Not likely given the condition of the neighborhood.

With political chaos on one side, war on the other, a government of questionable legitimacy, and an economy in need of IMF "help," Pakistan still might not be in danger of political instability if it were not for one other factor. Pakistan is a poor country ruled by a tiny elite for its own benefit. This elite is highly cohesive and it is not likely that any impoverishment of the lower orders, even the middle class, will seriously affect its rule. The war with India, which redirects hostility that might have been aimed at the elite, could actually strengthen it. And the elite will certainly find a way to profit from the trade in contraband that will flow through Afghanistan. Only a split within this elite would seriously threaten Pakistan with Afghanistan's fate.

As part of the war on terrorism the Bush administration has rounded up Middle Eastern students, detaining some and interrogating others who were not detained. Many, if not all, now feel unwelcome in the United States, and many have left to return to their home countries. With the end of their fun in America is likely to come the realization that their ultimate interests will no longer be served by obedience to American wishes. Loyalty to the old school and its pleasures could be replaced with loyalty to Islam. In any case the practicality of acquiescence to American wishes will now seem far less obvious.

No doubt their parents, with cooler heads, will try to assuage their bitterness and sense of betrayal. After all, to oppose the United States is to commit suicide. But I suspect that it will not be easy to persuade these humiliated young students that the accommodating luxury of their parents is a worthwhile life, especially with the example of Osama bin Laden before

them. If this is so then a split, along generational lines, will occur within the elites of these countries. Since to oppose the United States directly is madness, new well-funded clandestine terrorists will be created from within these elites. This is especially likely in Pakistan, where accommodation to American wishes is likely to prove unrewarding, but Saudi Arabia, Egypt, certainly Iraq, and many other Islamic countries might be sources for future bin Ladens. Of course, Pakistan is of utmost importance because it has nuclear weapons.

A split within the elites will not only produce more terrorists. It will also undermine the stability of the governments themselves. For this split will be a deep one and will affect policy vis-à-vis the United States. It is hard to know what will happen in Saudi Arabia if the young princes, no longer welcome in the West, become disgusted with their parents' subservience to the United States. However, it is Pakistan, with its instability and its nuclear weapons that should worry us the most. If Pakistan falls into political chaos all restraint in the war with India is likely to evaporate. If this war develops into an all-out conflict, with nuclear weapons on both sides, it will not remain regional.

But apocalyptic speculation is fruitless. What is clear is that the war has destroyed Afghanistan and destabilized Pakistan. Osama bin Laden may be caught, but other even richer anti-Americans will be created in the elites of several Middle Eastern countries. Since they may already have embraced bin Ladenism, we could not now easily welcome these students back. How can we trust them now? Thus our break with the elites of the Middle Eastern countries is not easily repaired.

We might hope to suppress terrorism by pulverizing any training camps future bin Ladens set up. Unfortunately, the attacks of September 11 show that such training is already obsolete. Middle class terrorists do not need to rush around with automatic weapons to produce a devastating result. They can use the tools of peace for war. Besides, the CIA trained bin Laden and will train others to act as our proxies in local wars.

American military power is supreme, but all it seems able to do is pulverize a country, producing political chaos. Blunt and unsophisticated, American rulers plan to bully the world, but the world comes apart like a spider web in a cruel child's hands. The Islamic elites, whom the United States needs to establish control in several oil rich areas, have now been humiliated and must question just where their long-term interests lie. Their cohesiveness as a ruling class may be undermined, and their countries put in greater danger of disintegrating. That aside, as future allies, they must now be considered of dubious loyalty, even if for practical reasons nothing changes on the surface. Thus American influence and security diminish as victories multiply. President Bush has promised us a long war, and I think he will keep his promise.

—  
**Michael Doliner**, an Ithaca businessman, was a student on the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. His thesis advisor was Hannah Arendt. He has taught at Valparaiso University in Indiana and part-time at Ithaca College.

### Time and Again

To the Editor:

I appreciated the article in the December 2001 issue, invoking *Moby Dick* as a comparison for our country's obsession with victory in Vietnam. Literature may indeed have a prophetic function. See how Melville's narrator places his embarking on the ship in a modestly small type font, in between two large-type world events [ed. note: *verbatim* from Chapter 1]:

"But wherefore it was that after having repeatedly smelt the sea as a merchant sailor, I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling voyage. this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influ-

ence me in some unaccountable way—he can better answer than anyone else. I take it that this part of the bill of these three mysterious ladies must have run something like this:

### 'Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.

'Whaling Voyage by One Ishmael.  
'BLOODY BATTLE IN  
AFFGHANISTAN.'

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts of high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces—though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment."

Wayles Browne

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### Preserving Liberties

To the Editor:

As we take steps to increase national security and mourn the loss of the thousands killed in the September 11 terrorist attacks, I am deeply concerned about recent government actions. These actions threaten our fundamental Constitutional guarantees and protections that set our nation apart from others. While every step must be taken to protect the American public from further terrorist acts, those steps must not trample on the Constitution and on those basic rights and protections that make American democracy so unique and precious and give us needed legitimacy within our country and in the world.

The Department of Justice is engaged in a critically important law enforcement effort. I fully support efforts to identify, prosecute, and bring to justice the perpetrators of the heinous crimes of September 11, 2001. However, the arrest and continued detention of more than 500 noncitizens in the wake of September 11 concerns me. Reliable reports of due process violations—failure to provide access to counsel, constant delays in hearings, failure to release in a timely fashion individuals for whom an immigration judge has set bond, hearings conducted in secret in the name of "protecting the public interest" for individuals who are only charged with technical immigration violations—are heightened by the failure of the Department of Justice to provide even basic information about the detainees. Who is being detained? What is the nature of the charges? How many detainees remain unrepresented by counsel? These and other questions remain unanswered two months after the initial arrests and despite repeated inquiries and the filing of formal requests under the Freedom of Information Act. This silence is unacceptable.

The announcement by President Bush that military tribunals will be convened to try suspected non-citizen terrorists, both in the United States and abroad, is alarming and unprecedented in the absence of a Congressional declaration of war. Moreover, with no input from Congress, it appears to be an end run around the legislative branch of government. The democratic institutions of a democracy have time and again proven themselves strong enough to prosecute and bring to justice drug traffickers, Mafia kingpins, terrorists like Timothy McVeigh, and those responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Our insti-

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# The Merit and Meaning of Photographs



Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake, Alaska, 1948 (print 1949)

Ansel Adams



Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake, Alaska, 1948 (print 1978)

Ansel Adams

## Neil Orloff

### Ansel Adams at 100

By John Szarkowski  
Little, Brown & Company  
\$150.00, 192 pages, cloth

One life's work in photography—and two dramatically different views of the photographs in that life's work.

The life's work is the *oeuvre* of Ansel Adams. During his approximately 60 years of active photography, he made tens of thousands of negatives and printed several thousand of them. While many of these negatives were printed only once or a few times, he continually returned to his favorites and printed them over a period of decades. Ansel Adams' life's work consists of perhaps ten thousand or more individual prints.

The two dramatically different views of these prints are by John Szarkowski and Ansel Adams.

The "Dean of American Photography" during much of the second half of the twentieth century, John Szarkowski was the director of the department of photography at The Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1962-1991. During this thirty-year period, he authored more than a dozen books in the field of photography, including several single-photographer monographs (Atget; Lee Friedlander; Irving Penn; Gary Winogrand), several anthologies of photographs (*American Landscapes: Photographs from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*; *From the Picture Press*; *Looking at Photographs*), several books on the theory of photography (*The Photographer's Eye*; *Mirrors and Windows*), and a book on the history of photography (*Photography Until Now*). He curated dozens of photography exhibitions.

This past fall, Szarkowski's book *Ansel Adams at 100* was released. This oversized book contains 114 tritone plates printed on heavyweight 14"x12" paper—and is a beautiful object. The book and slipcase are bound in a natural linen cloth made in the Netherlands. The book was published in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ansel Adams; and, according to Szarkowski, "it is the product of a thorough review of work that Adams, at various times in his career, considered important . . . The book is an attempt to identify that work on which Adams' claim as an important modern artist must rest." In short, it is Szarkowski's collection of the best of Ansel Adams.

Yet, this book has a silent competitor: *The Portfolios of Ansel Adams*, published in 1977—seven years before Adams' death. It brought together the individual photographs in the seven different portfolios Adams issued between 1948 and 1976, covering almost

exactly the same period as the images in *Ansel Adams at 100* (1920-1968 for the *Portfolios*, and 1918-1968 for *Ansel Adams at 100*). In issuing his portfolios, Ansel Adams repeatedly examined his oeuvre, selecting what he thought were his best prints. Altogether, *Portfolios* contains 90 photographs—compared to the 114 photographs in *Ansel Adams at 100*. At the end of the preface to *Portfolios*, Adams wrote: "With these 90 photographs I must stand...."

A comparison shows that the vast majority of the images in the two books are different. Approximately 80 percent of the images in *Ansel Adams at 100* do not appear anywhere in *The Portfolios of Ansel Adams*. This difference is not an oversight. John Szarkowski wrote the introduction to *Portfolios*, and accordingly, was familiar with Adams' selections. Szarkowski has commented that Adams probably would have disagreed with many of the choices made for *Ansel Adams at 100*.

How are we to understand these two different perspectives? While it would be easy to explain the different judgments as simply a matter of different aesthetics, such an explanation would not be illuminating. It also would obscure two of the readily apparent differences between the two collections of photographs.

First, the subject matter of the two books is different. *Ansel Adams at 100* consists almost entirely of images of nature: mountain ranges, waterfalls, rock faces, trees, rapidly flowing streams, grass and water, leaves on pools, snowfields, surf sequences, wood details, saguaros, lakes, geysers, thunderclouds, sunrises, sunsets, moonrises, buttes, and fog. While *Portfolios* contains many images from nature, it also contains many photographs of other subjects—including ancient Indian ruins, pipes and gauges, a graduation dress, a still life of eggs and kitchen utensils, a white post and spandrel, a portrait of Gottardo Piazzoni, boards and thistles, a cemetery statue and oil derrick, arches at a Mexican mission, churches, and temples. Adams viewed his best images as spanning a much broader subject matter than does Szarkowski.

Second, and more importantly, the feel of the two sets of images is different. During the period when Ansel Adams was issuing his portfolios, he printed many of the individual images in such a way as to imbue them with a sense of grandeur and majesty. Two of his most popular prints, "Clearing Winter Storm" and "El Capitan Sunrise, Winter, Yosemite National Park," reflect this strong thread in his work. To help convey this drama, he often printed the images in sizes up to 40"x60." In contrast, the images in *Ansel Adams at 100* are softer and quieter—and much smaller. Most of the original prints from which they were taken are no larger than 8"x10." These prints encourage introspection rather than awe.

Which selection has greater merit? In my

view, the merit of a particular work of art is a concept that only makes sense as an individual's judgment. The concept is strongly tied to the degree to which that work of art speaks to the individual. This commonplace notion is no better illustrated than here, where Szarkowski and Adams—both highly respected observers of photography—strongly disagreed with each other's selections. Szarkowski preferred images that, while not readily accessible, reward sustained viewing. Adams preferred images that connect with a large, general audience.

The meaning of a particular work of art—the specific idea or emotion conveyed—also only begins to make sense from the perspective of the individual viewer. Many photographers have faced the question of where the meaning of a photograph comes from—the subject, the photographer, the viewer, the formal qualities of the print, or exogenous factors such as the space in which the photograph is exhibited. Adams did not wrestle with such questions. For him, the photograph was not a literal rendering of a subject. It was an expression of his experience. The photograph was a representation of what he felt at the time of the exposure.

Adams coined the term "previsualization" to describe his thinking process in the field for translating what he saw to what he felt. Adams imagined how he would like the final print to look, and this drove numerous decisions including the decision on the use of filters, to modify the manner in which colors would be recorded on the black and white film, and the decision on an increase or decrease in the normal development time of the negative to modify the overall contrast of the scene. According to Adams, the viewer either responded to the resulting photograph—or didn't. "Either the photograph speaks to a viewer or it does not. I cannot demand that anyone receive from the image just what was in my visualization at the time of exposure. I believe that if I am able to express what I saw and felt, the image will [be successful]."

Szarkowski's book demonstrates, though, that wholly apart from Adams' diminution of the importance of the viewer to the meaning of the photograph, Adams did not adhere to his oft-repeated philosophy of establishing the meaning of the photograph at the time of exposure.

*Ansel Adams at 100* includes, for two different images, two different prints of each. On facing pages, Szarkowski shows "Aspens" as it was printed in 1958 and, again, as it was printed in 1976. The 1958 version shows a lonely aspen tree, apparently at the twilight hour, amidst a stand of other leafless trees whose outlines are only faintly lit by the setting sun. The image is one of repose.

The 1976 version shows a very brightly lit aspen tree that sparkles with joy. The background stand of trees are like attentive sol-

diers supporting the shining performer. One negative—two very different prints by Adams—twenty years apart.

*Ansel Adams at 100* also contains two different prints of "Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake." The first print is dated 1949; the second print is dated 1978. The first print is quiet and pensive. The second print speaks of majesty and awe. One negative—two very different prints by Adams—thirty years apart. John Szarkowski makes clear that he prefers the earlier print. According to Szarkowski, "[t]he change imposed on Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake thirty years later is not easy to understand... Why this radiant peak, a reflection of our highest and purest aspirations, should have been transformed into a dirty snowdrift is a mystery to this viewer."

Many observers of the changes made in the darkroom by Adams during the later years of his life have asserted that Adams steadily migrated to much higher contrast prints. But this would be a vast oversimplification. In "Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake," the 1949 print has almost identical light gray tones in both the upper right portion of the lake and the upper right portion of the sky. Yet, in the 1978 print, the light gray tone in the lake has become almost white, whereas the same light gray tone in the sky has become almost black. There are other non-symmetrical changes between the two prints, which are striking when looked at in the book (and even more so when looked at in the traveling exhibition). In complex ways, Adams reshaped, over his lifetime, the prints from his negatives, and thereby changed the meaning of his images from how he previsualized them at the time of their initial exposure and printing to how he printed them several decades later.

These differences between Szarkowski and Adams—and even within Adams over time—should not be surprising. Indeed, what would be surprising would be either a single or a fixed reading of an individual image. Each viewer brings to the interpretation of a photograph his own growing personal experiences and changing ways of looking at the world.

A photograph ultimately serves as a springboard for the observer's imagination and reflection. Each of us understands the world in a slightly different way, and each of us responds to a particular image in a slightly different way. With *Ansel Adams at 100*, John Szarkowski has given us an elegant, graceful, slightly irreverent, and ultimately idiosyncratic view of Adams' lifetime work. In one sense, then, the book is as much about John Szarkowski as it is about Ansel Adams. We could hardly find a better guide.

Neil Orloff is a photographer in Salt Lake City. Last fall, he was a visiting professor in Cornell's Art Department, where he taught a course on documentary photography.



# Speaking the Untellable

Brian Hall

## In the Shape of a Boar

By Lawrence Norfolk

Grove Press

\$25.00, 336 pages, cloth

"Here is the time for the Tellable. Here is its home. Speak and proclaim." This line paraphrase of Rilke, spoken and proclaimed at various moments by all three main characters of Lawrence Norfolk's *In the Shape of a Boar*, might have served for the book's ironic epigraph. Norfolk, a 38-year-old British novelist much celebrated in his own country, somewhat less known in the U.S., is concerned here in his third novel with what, in the wake of the nightmare eruptions of history, is *not* tellable: his characters, two men and a woman, Jews from Romanian Bukovina who managed in different and mysterious ways to survive the Nazis, intone the line as though clearing a podium of ghastly debris. But then they neglect to mount it; they have only untellable things to say. Norfolk has set himself a daunting challenge: to evoke horror from the standpoint of participants so traumatized by their suffering, and by the choices they made to reduce it, that they can hardly bear to think about what happened, let alone speak of it. To this task, he brings a great deal of inventive intelligence, and a narrative method that stalks and circles its hidden quarry with enormous patience (which, to be fair, is required more of the reader than the writer). He also brings a stylistic tendency toward portentousness and posturing that, unfortunately, does full justice to his Rilke paraphrase.

The epigraph that Norfolk actually uses is taken from a letter the poet Paul Celan wrote to the classicist Walter Jens in 1961: "I've often asked myself where I might have got my 'boar.' Boars, my dear Walter Jens,—such things do exist." The context for this remark was an unfounded plagiarism charge (the image of a boar in an early poem being one of Celan's alleged borrowings) that stung the poet so badly it helped unbalance him in later life. I can imagine Norfolk, who has a classics degree from King's College in London, stumbling on this incidental detail some years ago and crying "Eureka!", because it gave him the pretext to yoke a fictionalized portrait of Celan (a Jew born in the Bukovina in 1920, whose parents were deported by the Nazis to Transnistria in 1942, where they died, who himself remained in Romania at various labor camps and never gave a clear account of his wartime experiences) to something I suspect he wanted to write anyway: a refashioning of the hunt for the Calydonian Boar.

Norfolk's plot is complicated. His poet is Solomon Memel, whom we first meet as a serious, callow young man in 1938, in the Bukovinan capital, Czernowitz, with his two friends: a playful, perhaps manipulative actress, Ruth Lackner (the namesake of a real-

life friend of Celan's) and the taciturn and vaguely resentful Jakob Feuerstein. Memel perhaps loves Ruth; Jakob might also; the two men argue about which of them Ruth loves; the reader suspects Ruth loves both; or perhaps she loves no one. The mystery has begun.

The Russians take the city in 1939, then are chased out in the summer of '41 by the Germans. Deportations of the Jews begin. When Memel is warned of a coming "action" against his family, he cannot convince his parents (he is an only child) to hide with him on the night in question. When he returns in the morning, they are gone. Ruth helps him flee; Jakob is supposed to go also, but he is arrested the night before. On his own, Memel undertakes a tremendous odyssey (whose extremely sketchy evocation indicates the author's awareness of its implausibility) southward through Romania and Bulgaria into Greece, where he collapses in the mountains of Aetolia and is found by Greek partisans. There, he becomes a dazed witness of the nasty complications of Greek resistance and civil war, which culminate, during the German retreat in '45, in *something important happening*: the details are not clear (not even the outlines are clear), but it seems to involve a female partisan named Thyella, a German officer named Eberhardt, a dark cave, and a butcher's hook.

After the war, Memel writes the poem that makes him famous throughout Europe, *Die Keilerjagd*, or *The Boar Hunt*, in which he mixes the ancient legend of the hunt for the Calydonian Boar with the modern story of the partisans' hunt for Eberhardt. ("Eber" is the other German word for boar.) In the poem, Thyella becomes (partly) Atalanta, the virgin huntress of the original legend; there is also a hinted-at love triangle between Atalanta, Meleager, and Meilanion, that might (or might not) reflect doings among the partisans. In 1952, Memel claims in an interview that the events described in his poem actually happened (the reader has not seen his poem, and so does not know what Memel is claiming). A mysterious edition appears out of Tel Aviv, in which the poem is annotated in such a way as to gradually call into question its factual accuracy, and thus, more insidiously, the authenticity of Memel's wartime experiences. The editor is Jakob Feuerstein (whom Memel thought dead). Ruth reappears as well; at the end of the war she married an American army major, then divorced him and took his money ("It's the American way," she cheerfully reports. In 1970, she is making a film inspired by *Die Keilerjagd*, and she and Memel meet for the first time in twenty-five years, in Paris, where Memel is living near the Pont Mirabeau (from which Celan jumped into the Seine, in that same year). Ruth and Memel commence another round of wary circling, of misunderstood questions and silences: what happened? what does the other know, or suspect? and what happened to Jakob?

Norfolk is addressing profound ideas: the

human need for myths (or poems, or films, or novels) that make more "sense"—and thus, arguably, are more "true"—than the patternless, unsatisfying material of the lives out of which they rise; the ugly truth that victimhood rarely ennobles, but scars and deforms. He wants to make his Boar into a Moby Dick: a malignant shape that is hollow, like the cave the animal hides in, so that it may contain whatever evil humans need to inject into it. (He has good precedence for this from classical sources, where the Calydonian Boar looms like a fire-breathing dragon, a Force of licence and destruction that is defeated by a gathering of heroes second only to the one that would lay siege to Troy a generation later.) Had Norfolk pulled this off, it would have made a great novel; as it is, there's enough that's good to make a reader lament what doesn't work.

But his central conception, I think, is flawed. The trauma (we may guess) at the heart of Paul Celan's experience was simple and devastating: he survived the war, and his parents did not. Worse: two of his friends accompanied their parents to the camps in Transnistria, and returned with them alive to Czernowitz after the German retreat. Celan presumably had to live (until he committed suicide) with the thought that by hiding out in a cosmetics factory on the night his parents were taken, he helped doom them. There is nothing wrong, of course, in changing the facts for his novel, but Norfolk replaces this core trauma with one that is comparatively trivial. Memel's parents disappear and die, as did Celan's, but he subsequently never thinks of them (one might argue that he has suppressed them; but if so, he's done it too well for the novel's good; one may note, by contrast, the recurrent and heartbreaking figure of Celan's mother in his early poetry). Instead, Memel's memories focus on a Greek partisan woman with whom he never exchanged a word, merely glimpsed at certain charged moments. In other words, Norfolk has replaced a universal human nightmare with what is basically an adolescent vision: the sexy, mysterious woman. We even get to see Thyella's breasts pop out when she is captured by the Germans; later, a Thyella-double exposes herself to Memel on the Métro; later still, a Thyella-triple falls to her knees, almost out of a blue sky, and fumbles at his fly.

Norfolk has a weakness for Mystery Women, as readers of his first novel, *Lemprière's Dictionary*, might have noticed. Here, he has also been led astray by something extrinsic to his Celan-material: his enthusiasm for, and very detailed knowledge of, classical writings. So the yoke drops over the neck of the novel: Memel makes his improbable odyssey into Greece; the heart of the story is uprooted from home, and replanted in Hellas, where it finds stony ground. Norfolk expends much ingenuity in constructing reasons why Memel is not shot the moment he is discovered by the partisans, nor later by the Germans, and why this physically wrecked

man who cannot speak Greek should be brought along to witness the denouement in the dark cave. On a second reading, one can see where the secret traps of the plot are sprung; the confusion largely dissipates, but the multiple implausibilities remain. Perhaps Norfolk was aware of the problem. Certainly the fractured manner in which he unfolds his complex plot, leaping forward and backward in time, withholding crucial information from the reader often long past the point where everyone in the novel knows what in the hell they're talking about, has the advantage of forestalling reasonable questions. But in pursuing this strategy, Norfolk has corrupted his promising theme—the profound mysteries of history, human behavior, epistemology—with his technique, which creates superficial mysteries through authorial sleight-of-hand.

I haven't yet mentioned the oddest thing about this novel, which is its first hundred pages. Surely that position should be occupied by Solomon Memel's *Die Keilerjagd*, with Jakob's serpent-subtle annotations. The rest of the book, after all, is built on this foundation. Instead, Norfolk gives us a version of the Calydonian Boar hunt that bears little resemblance to the little we know of Memel's poem. It is in prose; it is much longer than Memel's work seems to be; and though it does depart from classical sources in the fate it assigns to most of the participants, it at no point refers to occurrences during the Second World War. This is such a strange decision, with such jarring consequences for the novel, I can only assume that Norfolk, faced with the Medusan prospect of composing a poem that is supposed to be the fictional counterpart of Celan's celebrated and endlessly-quoted *Todesfuge*, put down his pen and turned to stone. Or in other words—to mix ancient metaphor with modern—he punted. Well, I can sympathize. But that doesn't absolve him of the charge that he should have faced this problem squarely before he began.

It often happens that a weak thematic choice forces a writer into bad prose. In this regard, *In the Shape of a Boar* is particularly instructive, because Norfolk's writing in the latter two-thirds of his novel is exemplary: energetic and sharp, catching interplays of emotion, dialogue, and sudden, shocking images with vividness and conviction. But the hundred pages describing the boar hunt are clotted, verbose, and often vacuous. I assume Norfolk is aiming for an epic style, but the result is far too many sentences like this one: "Atalanta heard the men's breathing, which rose around her in little towers of sound whose collapses were soundless dispersals, the plumes of dying fires whose smoke rises and disassembles in still air." (This would be snoring.) Or this one: "Theirs was a zone of abeyance, an anomalous interruption between the earth's slow churn and the air's unbodied exposure, an eventless enclave." (A walk in the woods.) Or this: "Then, after the interval which corresponded to the separating distance between her self and her shadow, her every act and its repetition, Meilanion too picked an unsteady path across the treacherous surface and came after them again." As far as I can tell, this means that Meilanion followed Atalanta and Meleager at the distance at which he followed them. Prose only sweats this much when it's trying to hold up a sagging edifice. (It's worth comparing Celan's mesmerizing *Todesfuge*, which is all of a page-and-a-half long.)

There is no doubt that Norfolk has a genuine and appealing passion for the heroic age about which he writes. But passion, of course, is sometimes a weakness. These hundred pages sink the novel. They are the love-song of some Hephaestian robotic bard, with a brain of steel, a heart of bronze, a tongue of brass, and ears of tin.

Brian Hall is the author of *The Saskiad*. His novel about the Lewis and Clark expedition will be coming out next January from Viking. He lives in Ithaca.

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# A Writer, in Particular

## J. Robert Lennon

### Samuel Johnson is Indignant

By Lydia Davis

McSweeney's Books, 2001

\$17.00, 201 pages, cloth

Maybe you've seen Charles and Ray Eames's famous short film "Powers of Ten," or thumbed through the abbreviated flip-book version that's been popping up on bookstore counters lately. There isn't much to this movie: it begins out in space, with the camera focused on the superstructures of the universe, unimaginably huge things nonetheless represented by little dots on a screen. And then the camera zooms in, and zooms and zooms; we descend through galaxies and stars to earth, to a park in Chicago, to a picnic scene where a man and woman sleep in the sun; soon the man's hand fills the screen, and then we are in the hand, in its cells, in its molecules and atoms. The film's single shot manages to encompass exactly everything in the universe.

The short stories of Lydia Davis are similar. By focusing upon the smallest of details—emotional, linguistic, circumstantial—Davis implies the hugeness of perception, and, like the Eameses, fills the reader with not only delight, but awe.

So why is it you haven't heard of her? Good question. Among those who have read her, Davis's excellence is a foregone conclusion; through three collections of stories and a novel, she has accreted a small but fanatically dedicated audience, many of whom are writers themselves. That brings up the unavoidable classification of "writer's writer," a term unfortunately burdened by elitist associations, a term that causes editors and publicists to visibly recoil. This is a shame, because there is nothing "difficult" about Davis. Her language is simple, her characters are ordinary. But Davis's perspective is truly unusual—she notices things other writers don't—and to appreciate her requires a similar shift of perspective on the reader's part. Considering what the careful reader gets out of such a shift, it isn't a lot to ask. Here's a perfect example, from *Samuel Johnson is Indignant*:

#### Examples of Remember

Remember that thou art but dust.  
I shall try to bear it in mind.

That's a whole story, from beginning to end. The impatient reader might dismiss it as pretentious or trifling, but in the context of this new collection, the story is a fine example of Davis's brilliance, and of the way her attention to a single datum—a word or idea or event—can open up extraordinary imagina-

tive worlds.

To explain: here, we are being asked (in between two much longer, slightly more traditional narratives) to consider the word remember and its implications. "Remember that thou art but dust." There is a fact—our mortality—being brought to our attention, and dutifully, we remember. And then we read a response: "I shall try to bear it in mind." Here we are given a synonym: to bear in mind is to remember. But bear in mind itself is a reminder: that memory is a burden, that it is something that must be carried, in the mind. And there is a lot to bear along in our minds, and not all of it is good.

In itself, this is a clever trick, a fine semantic game. But like the fact of our mortality, this little story lodges in the mind; it is with us when we read the next story in the collection, "Old Mother and the Grouch," a sad and hilarious series of encounters between a middle-aged married couple:

The Grouch is exasperated. Old Mother has been criticizing him again. He says to her, "If I changed that, you'd only find something else to criticize. And if I changed that, then something else would be wrong."

The Grouch is exasperated again. Again, Old Mother has been criticizing him. This time he says, "You should have married a man who didn't drink or smoke. And who also had no hands or feet. Or arms and legs."

"Examples of Remember" has framed our perception, asking us to concentrate on the burden of knowledge; we are fully primed to appreciate the Grouch's burdens: not just Old Mother, but his own paranoia, his own passive-aggression, his self-loathing. It's all in there, but if not for the previous piece, we might miss it.

There is a lot to miss in Lydia Davis's fiction, which is to say that there is a lot to find, as well. She is masterful at mapping the convolutions of casual friendship, as in the very funny "Thyroid Diary," the musings of a woman whose underactive thyroid is confusing her thoughts. Here, the narrator's husband has a student in his painting class who is also the wife of the narrator's dentist:

I have always been puzzled, anyway, by the economics of the thing, because I would pay the dentist, and he would presumably give his wife the money for her courses at the college, she would pay the college, the college would pay my husband a separate fee for her tutorials, and then my husband would give me money for the dentist, I would pay the dentist, the dentist would give money to his

wife, and so it would continue.

Davis is attracted to these circles, these feedback loops of cause and effect. In "The Patient," a doctor is enraged by his inability to cure a patient, and so beats her to death. "Company" describes the burden of answering letters, only to be sent replies, which must themselves be answered.

Davis also likes to write about absence, about the hole created by a thing that failed to happen. The Barthlemethian "Jury Duty" tells, in question-and-answer fashion, the story of a woman's failure to be chosen to serve on a jury. In "Happiest Moment," a Chinese student describes the happiest moment of his life: "...his wife had once gone to Beijing and eaten duck there, and she often told him about it, and he would have to say the happiest moment of his life was her trip, and the eating of the duck." In "Her Damage," a woman takes a series of photographs without first putting film in the camera.

This is a writer who loves language; some of these stories are about nothing else. "Marie Curie, So Honorable Woman" is an episodic literal English translation of a (possibly imaginary) badly written French text. The point of the story is the sound of the words, the weird life of this cracked, in-between language: "Together they speak enormously." "...the sun, so wounding when in oneself everything is black...". Another story, "A Double Negative," reads, in its entirety, "At a certain point in her life, she realizes it is not so much that she wants to have a child as that she does not want not to have a child, or not to have had a child." The clever "A Mown Lawn" seems to mirror the swirling of sound and association in the moments before sleep, breaking open the words "mown lawn" and examining their contents: a *long moan*, a *woman*, a *law*, *law and order*, *lawn order*, a *lawn mower making more lawn*. And the very funny "Oral History (With Hiccups)" inserts, into a mock-serious monologue about the problems of adopting two grown women, large spaces, to indicate the hiccups of the narrator: "We will try to be firm but f air, as we always were with our older b oy before he left h ome."

These stories are populated by a diverse group of characters, but most of them fall into two categories. There are the people (generally narrated in the third person) who are driven to extremes by ideas, such as the murderous doctor of "The Patient," or Alvin, the failed comedian, in "Alvin the Typesetter." And then there is the first-person narrator: a polite, restrained, self-effacing woman seething with complicated ideas, who it is easy to imagine as a stand-in for the author herself. This character is the primary delight of Davis's work, a person of enormous wit that is rarely displayed in dialogue, of dark thoughts that other characters are never privy to. Her restraint itself is a wonderful joke that nobody else in the stories seems to be getting, especially in "The Meeting," where the narrator's calm exterior during a meeting with her boss stands in ridiculous contrast to the stream of nonsensical invective racing through her mind:

[Mother] would have given him a piece of her fist. See this?—shaking it right in his pan. Names for him. She doesn't come as a water-carrier for anyone. Annihilate him, Mother! Crush him! No more—Bam!—President of this place...Oh boy! Sock! You'll see, Mr. President! Summer-complaint! Dog's breakfast!

This narrator is also a champ of the self-negating banality. Here's a terrific one from the deadpan "Our Trip," a description of a tedious car journey in the company of husband and son:

...At that point, I started trying to identify the new trees I had learned on our vacation, and when I gave up on that I just watched the fat on my arm ripple in the wind from the open window.

The particular mental state Davis describes—this observant detachment, born of boredom—is something that no long car trip would be without, but I have never seen it described in fiction before. In addition, it is a rare narrator who will refer, without judgment, to "the fat on my arm." From anyone else, we might expect this sentence to be followed by a self-flagellating disquisition on personal appearance—this is, after all, what our literate culture expects of its female narrators. But Davis lets the moment stand, content to let the ripples of fat be interesting in and of themselves.

This is another thing I love about this writer—she has no truck with the pieties of the age, particularly those involving gender. She does not seem to feel any need to be a "woman" writer, simply, like the best writers of either gender, excellent. This doesn't seem to be out of any kind of defiance; it is simply the way the words have fallen. There is exactly one story in this collection that involves dating, and in it, a woman confesses to having once set up a blind date, then choosing not to answer the door when the date arrives, instead watching the disappointed young man from her window. Later, when she consults her journal to confirm the story, she can find no mention of it, but does discover, in a turn reminiscent of Alice Munro, "how much I wrote about boys...boys and books. What I wanted more than anything else at the age of sixteen was a great library."

This is not to say that Davis's writing is genderless; on the contrary, she revels in certain drab corners of femininity other writers ignore or dramatize excessively. Motherhood makes intriguing appearances in the aforementioned "Our Trip" and "A Double Negative," and in the bizarre "My Husband and I," a surreal riff on the physical connections among family members. This story also reminds me that Davis's stories are packed with husbands; "my husband" is a phrase that appears often, always saddled with a complex set of associations: love, sex, anger, obligation. One of my favorite Davis stories is "The Sock," from her first collection, *Break it Down*; in it, the narrator wearily refers to her ex-husband as "my husband," indicating the still-strong connections that form the fabric of the story. The femininity of these stories is that of the individual, not of the collective; it is like the masculinity of Nathan Zuckerman, rather than that of Mike Hammer.

Philip Roth recently said that the aim of twentieth-century fiction had been to explore the individual consciousness, and that this noble project had, sadly, fallen by the wayside in recent years. I tend to agree, though I would point to Lydia Davis as an important keeper of the flame. What she does is absolutely specific and wonderfully original; she is that rare writer distinctive enough to be identified by a single sentence. Like this one, for example, from "Right and Wrong":

If she praises herself, she may be correct in what she says, but her saying it is wrong, in most cases, and thus cancels it, or reverses it, so that although she was for a particular act deserving of praise, she is no longer in general deserving of praise.

Nobody else would have written that. In any case, Davis is indeed, in particular and in general, deserving of praise.

J. Robert Lennon is the author of three novels, *The Light of Falling Stars*, *The Funnies* and *On the Night Plain*.

## IRIS MURDOCH

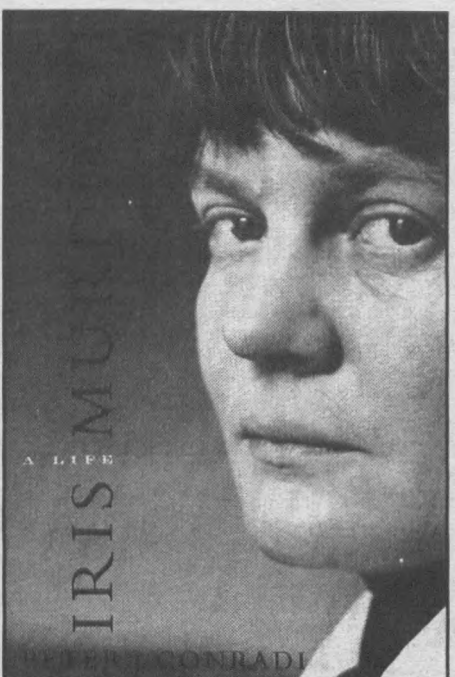
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# The Laughter at the Heart of Being:

Paul Sawyer

On the wall, a long stain of brilliant copper light, shaded and tempered by verdigris, surrounds and highlights a soaring shaft, capped at the top and bottom by identical copper pendulums. The upper one is mounted like a spear, the lower suspended freely. One thinks of Brancusi's "Bird in Space," except here the main thrust is downward: copper lines stream alongside the central spine, like a vertical wake, the entire plunging force concentrated delicately at the tear-shaped tip. The tip seems motionless though in fact it is all the time describing minute circles: it is a Foucault's pendulum, aimed at the earth's center (the seven feet of the central column is the minimum length for a suspended copper wire to register the movements of the earth). For all its blinding energy, the actual shape of the work is a rectangle, a stabilizing form that modifies the downward thrust and anchors it by a horizontal checkerboard of copper wires that rib the surface and lap gently over the central furrow. Is this mounted oblong a spear-tipped shield or body-armor for a god? Or is it a topography, incised with the four main directions? The sheer splendor of the work—classic in its economy and concentration of energy—makes one "hear" it like a hymn.

"Heart Sutra" is on the wall of the second studio if you enter the complex by the left porch. By this time you will have passed some two dozen sculptures in an enormous variety of forms, ranging from the figurative to the abstract and from the austere minimal to the intricate and ingenious. There are a hesitant but resolute child-ballerina, whittled out of rosewood; a pair of winged raptors—or rather, a single raptor and its reflection—seizing a fish in its teeth, pulling apart from its double yet still sealed at the wing-tips; an intricate copper construction called "Spirit Trembling Over the Face of the Deep." Seven "prayer tablets" of black concrete, shaped like grave-stones, range across an inner wall in solemn silence. On the outer wall, three constructions of ricepaper and wood ("Morning Star," "Sun," and "Evening Star") whirl playfully, like pinwheels or kites designed for giant children, though the third, with its repeated circles suggesting a star broken and reflected across spoke-like black surfaces, seems somber. In a corner is a three-wheeled cart bearing some kind of shrine, its interior dimly lit by the flicker of twenty electric candles.

Upstairs are the paintings—scores of huge canvases and smaller framed paperworks stacked in every available corner. (The unfinished "Pilgrimage" series now contains over ninety items.)

John Lyon Paul is an upstate New York painter and sculptor who lives with his wife Katherine Gottschalk at Frog Heaven, 27 acres outside of Ithaca that contain woods, three ponds, and the studio complex he built in the 1980s. How can one describe a body of work as prodigious and many-sided as his? The rigidities of the current art-system, dominated by competing signature styles and a rapid succession of trends, become apparent the moment one encounters an artist who does not define himself by a single variable image, and whose works belong to the nineties no more than the eighties or the seventies. He seems unmoved by the urgent, contradictory demand of today's art-world: to make something both "new" and commodifiable. Instead, his direction is inward—a long-term fidelity to the truth of his work as he sees it, which he calls "integrity"—though the works themselves look outward, as it were, eager to communicate. In some ways his art is traditional: it re-affirms the aesthetic values, subject to powerful challenge in recent years, of sensuousness and intimacy, and it uses materials that are pre-industrial and ready-to-hand (instead of, say, polyethylene or fluorescent tubing). Yet it is complex

and audacious enough to challenge and expand what one thought before about the possibilities of art. Moreover, John has so studied the achievement of sculptors and painters before him that his own work belongs, if not to a trend or a decade or a school, then very much to art history. And if one cannot locate a single signature style in this eclectic multitude, one can still describe some features of the imagined world they inhabit—a world that enlarges and interprets the world we know.

John's inventiveness obviously inherits the liberation of sculptural form at the beginning of the last century. In the years since Picasso and Duchamps and Nevelson and Beuys and Calder and Eva Hesse, sculptures are not (as they largely were in Rodin's time) limited to freestanding human figures; nor are they even limited to objects on bases. As John's work shows, they can hang on the wall like rugs, or belly out like three-dimensional paintings, or crank like machines, or hover in space. His own definition is appropriately wide: "Sculptures take their place among us in our world. We relate to them with our bodies. Mine are magnetized by silence. Their presence witnesses. Their stillness invites us to listen."

The stairway to the upper floor of the studio, a sign on one step announces: "Warning: Rude Mechanical at Work." The punning reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is especially appropriate since Shakespeare's tradesmen are of course crafting a play (one of them is even made love to by the Queen of the Fairies and plans to compose a poem on the subject, called "Bottom's Dream" because it has no bottom). Bottom would have enjoyed the first sculpture one sees on the top floor, "Five Crows Rumba with a Gibbous Moon." One winter, looking out at the nearby pond, John saw a crow flick snow on another crow, which began what was clearly an avian game; but the work this incident inspired bears little trace of the crows. Within a drably painted open box or case on the wall are five croquet mallets angled at each other beneath a toilet float "moon." The mallets come from an abandoned set John found among some weeds. The balls do not appear in this work, but all seven turn up in another—as the main spherical elements in "Laughter Prayer Net," in which objects are "written into" and suspended in a grid-like armature which is in turn encased in a glass box. John explained to me that this work captures the experience of coming out of a deep meditative trance—and bursting into laughter at the banality of the first thought that came to his waking mind. Combining a lost croquet set with the memory of crows playing in the snow and then again, using the balls to make a point about religious meditation, are both classic John Paul "strokes" (many of his works carry a double reference to the world without and the world within). By rewriting bird behavior as a human game (not to mention the lunar toilet float), he asks us to think of play as a law of nature, just as the oxymoron title "Laughter Prayer Net" asks us to think of laughter as a portion of the spiritual. Both works locate the child-like at the heart of artistic creation, in this case perhaps as a Whitmanic laugh at all human pretensions and decorums. To "read" these and other works like them is to participate in that Whitmanic spirit—one that is democratic, generous, and accepting—but also to understand looking in a new way: to grasp how reading a work of art is at once like entering a meditative trance and enjoying a good joke.

Literary theorists traditionally define "wit" as the faculty of seeing resemblances; it brings together differences on the basis of sameness, and re-contextualizes the old in order to make it new. The effect is always in some way surprising or startling—often comical, though it may be cerebral or even tragic. In the twentieth century, cubist and surrealist artists made sculpture a supremely witty



"Saint Francis' Shrine" (mixed media)

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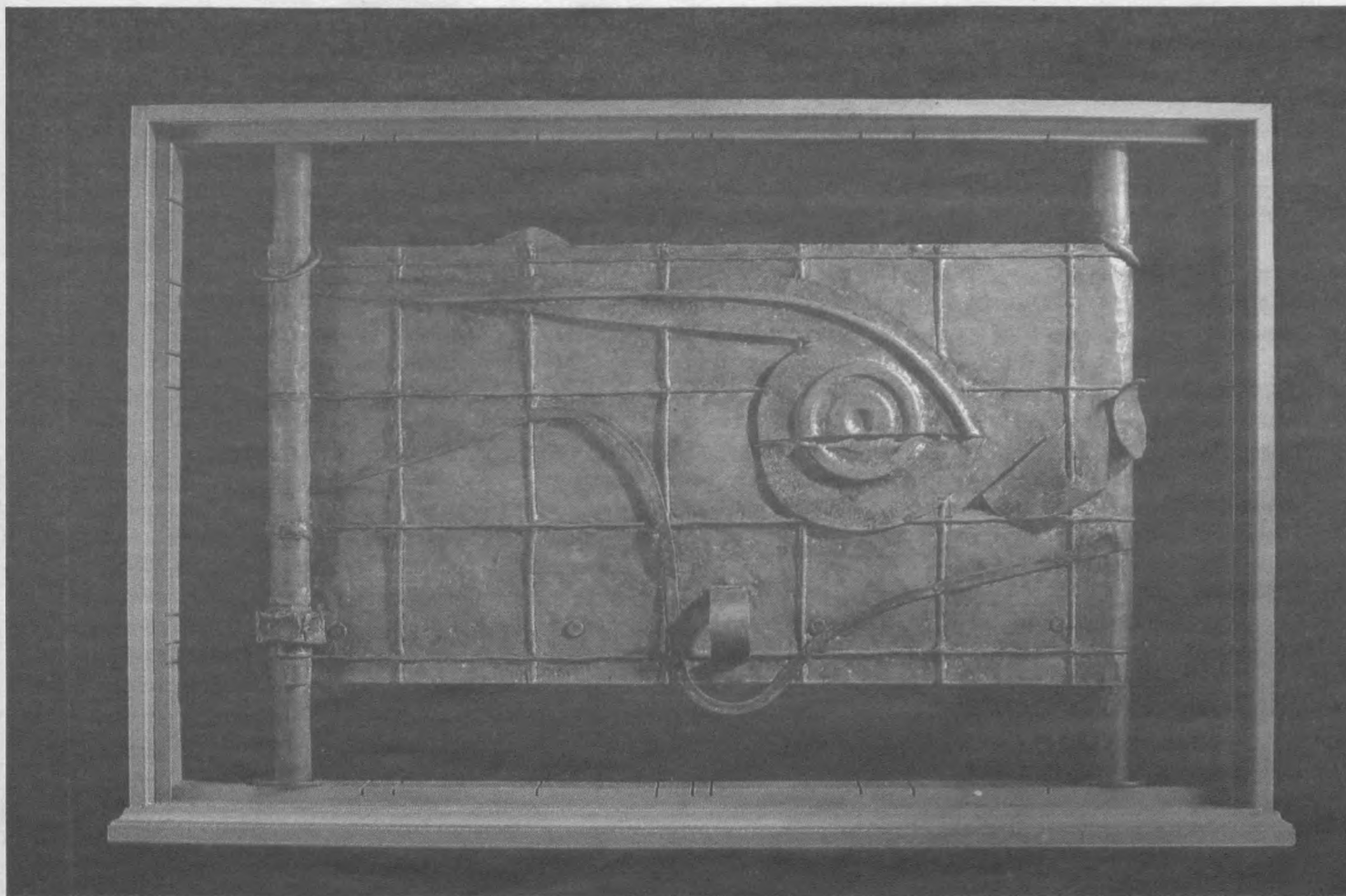
form; they played with volumes and shapes, heads and limbs and breasts and guitars, and made ingenious visual puns based on found objects (the famous toy car, for example, that forms the muzzle of the mother ape in the sculpture at MOMA). John Paul's found objects obviously belong to this tradition, but his wit works in other ways as well. Very typically, his works "pun" on their own forms by proposing resemblances between sculptures and other objects. The "Prayer Door (Mezzuzzah)," like the "Laughter Prayer Net," suspends objects in a metal grid, but here the "door" turns out to be a metal mattress-frame, strung with wires that are occasionally wavy, like script. John's three "Prayer Wheels" (objects for transmitting prayers to the gods) are mounted vertically on walls and can be cranked by brass wheels at the base, like barber poles; one of them produces a calligraphic infinite loop that ascends and descends as one turns the wheel. The "Prayer Rug" is not a wall-hanging but an intricate assemblage of sunny blond wooden puzzle-like pieces, knotted into semi-circles and drilled with holes and "cross-stitched" by undulating copper bands. One thinks of beaches and sunlight perhaps more than God, but also, as the eye moves over the voluptuous intricacies, of textile patterns, and then maybe of the idea of pattern itself. Art history is of course full of religious objects like prayer rugs (stoles, chalices, altars, grave-stones, censers, candlesticks, to cite only instances from the Christian tradition) which we do not normally think of as sculpture but which John joyfully appropriates to his own purposes. Strikingly, John sometimes calls his works "tools." In fashioning occasions for meditation out of cast-off objects (brass wheels, iron frames, rusty screens, lost croquet balls and so forth), John suggests another sense of the word "tool": something that aids reflection, that puts one into relationship with the spiritual world. The pendulum-like objects in "Heart's Sutra" are actually tools in the literal sense—they are plumbobs, which are weights suspended by construction work-

ers to assure that the building walls are "plumb." According to John, all tools are variations of the plumbob and its horizontal component, the spirit level—the vertical and horizontal axes by which humans locate themselves. In this sense, "Heart Sutra" is a mammoth compass, orienting the viewer to the earth's heart.

Some of these meditative aids illustrate the processes of meditation itself—another way John draws upon artistic tradition. Cubist and surrealist sculptors experimented with breaking up three-dimensional monumentality by suffusing objects with space: linking shapes along welded lines, like thought-associations, or creating scrawl-like strings in the air that resembled an aerial calligraphy (for example, David Smith's "Hudson Valley Landscape," also at MOMA). John's beautiful "Pilgrim Scroll" is an intensely lyrical example of mock-calligraphy. Mounted on a pedestal and enclosed in a glass box, like a display case from a museum of antiquities, the "scroll" is an unrolled copper sheet inscribed on both sides with flowing copper lines and geometrical ornaments. The shining surface is both a map and the record of a journey, which we may also think of as the journey of artistic creation. (The metaphor of creation-as-a-journey gives the "Pilgrimage" series of paintings its title.) An example at the opposite extreme—all heavy, murky, and enclosed—is a particularly audacious piece, called "Slipping Through Dream," in which John uses lead (of all media) to represent thought without an object. A pair of hollow gray masses, mounted on six poles and slightly waved like a half-open book (the color of the cerebral hemispheres), almost meet at their knobbed and knotted inner surfaces. But on the smooth outer surfaces, a series of puckered, raised elements flow and ripple in an endless circle—in ambiguous relationship to the inner gap from which they may or may not emerge. The viewing here is odd, because one circles the piece, enjoying the quiet surging of the dream-thoughts, but one can never see fully into the occluded inner surfaces.



# The Art of John Lyon Paul



*"Pilgrimage Scroll" (copper, wood, glass)*

copyright Jon Reis Photography

Thought without an object, as John told me, is the corollary of a fire without a wick. According to the "Snake Sutra," successful meditation is thinking that slips snake-like through the wall of the phenomenal world, as through the spaces between words or the pauses between breaths.

As the metaphysics of the "Snake Sutra" suggests, knowledge arises from meditative vacancy—just as creation arises from a void and as being itself, according to Buddhist scripture, is but a transient manifestation of nothingness. A fascination with negation, with the disembodied, even with non-existence, is the opposite pole of an artistic impulse that I have been describing as exuberant, abundant, and energized. John's few figurative sculptures are oddly reticent, tentative, blunt-featured. The most extreme example is the monk in "Catacomb Self-Portrait," whose limp and abject body all but dissolves into the clothes in which he hangs. But the most stunning representation in John's work of the nothingness just beyond life started with a pair of shoemaker's lathes he found in a ditch.

The lathes are sectioned frames that held polish, brushes, and other implements. John removed the sections, keeping the frames, and inserted steel rods to form a scaffold or support for a pair of white, tapered wooden slabs which he then suspended horizontally, about an inch apart. Somber, hushed, and mysterious, "Momento Mori (Moment of Death)" hovers weightlessly before us (a musician friend called it a single note sounded so deeply that one hears only its vibration). Ingeniously, the piece is shaped like a body on a bier, but it represents a motion or process which is almost the opposite: the loosening of the spirit from its bonds. The separation appears to yawn wider as we gaze, though still (for a second longer) bound by the pair of steel hoops that encircle the ends without touching them and so seem to float as well. The illusion is unearthly, yet the work is uncompromising in its absolute bareness. Like the rock cliff in New Hampshire that "looks" like a human profile, the sculpture is also just its material elements: rusty steel and rough-hewn wood.

"Momento Mori" is a severe visual reduction, apprehended all at once. The "St. Francis Shrine" is the most complex of John's works, in its detail and conception; it is also the only work in his oeuvre composed of an assemblage of images.

The cart bearing these images is, as John's

notes point out, at once "shrine, hearse, and circus wagon." The phrase that borders the bottom of its single glass wall—"an instrument of peace"—is derived from the famous prayer of St. Francis, mounted inside on its own frame ("Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace"). The first item for the shrine John found in the window of a gunshop: an outline of the human form, composed of concentric rings spreading from the heart, which is used by the police for target practice. The rings now form the torso of St. Francis, as is clear in the detail. The witty idea of saint-as-target generates a second transformation: birds, traditional symbols of peace that are associated with the saint because he ministered to them, now also appear as targets. John's notes read: "Inside is a kind of shooting gallery filled with targets of haloed danc-

ing figures, birds and animals, all of which appear ready to flip, spin or fall over if struck." The addition of crosshairs etched across the glass surface reinforces the implied analogy between shooting and seeing, but they also "line up the viewer's heart with the center of St. Francis' own heart." This puts the viewer in extraordinary relationship to the objects within, which "align" with us at the same time as they are open and vulnerable to the aggression of seeing.

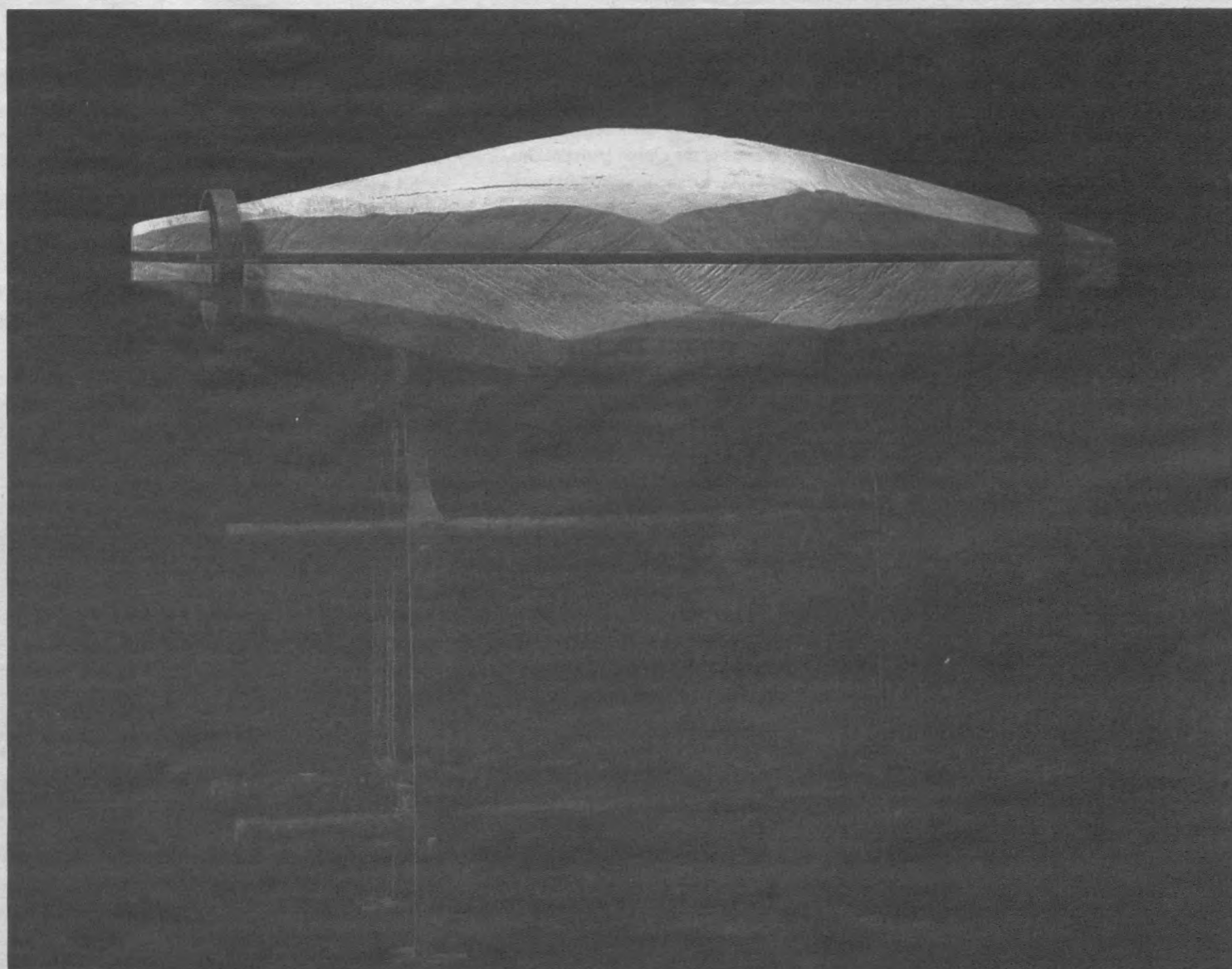
The figure of the circle organizes the interior. As the detail shows, the golden circles are both targets and haloes, but as globes they are also eggs, one of which hangs suspended above the heart of St. Francis. The birds in all their forms—the heavy wooden pigeon in the saint's hand, the skeleton in its "reliquary," the cut-outs spinning on the targets, and so

forth—link up with the series of seven dancing figures at the bottom of the shrine, a dance of death borrowed from the celebrated final image of Bergman's "Seventh Seal." Taking this all in, one seems to behold the cycling of biological life itself, from egg to charred relics, which is no longer a purely "natural" cycle but a self-destructive one, as the inconspicuous but ominous biomorphic mushroom cloud makes clear. The shrine, in short, is about "the availability of vision on a planet where mankind threatens to create the death it fears," offered as an "instrument of peace" for the world today.

There are obvious reasons why St. Francis should stand at the center of such an instrument. It was Francis who affirmed the unity of life by addressing the natural elements as family members (and death itself as a "little sister"); whose inner wealth grew from his physical poverty; who took upon himself the suffering of Christ by bearing His seven wounds. But John has radically re-conceived St. Francis for his purposes. The saint's left side, composed of wood, bears a bird and sprouts a massive wing; the right side, composed of masonite cut-outs, branches into seven arms like Shiva's with seven gestures with seven spiritual meanings. (The meanings John has given them are to shield, bless, suffer, receive, be paralyzed, pray, and soothe.) The hands, moreover, bear the red circles of the stigmata—the wounds, as it were, of the shooting gallery—which form their own poignant rhythm across the bodies of the birds and other figures. This Francis is a syncretistic angel-deity with, nevertheless, a human face which is also his most arresting element: the photograph of a black girl who confronts the viewer in a frontal stare. Her eyes "make no demand other than that you recognize her/his (our) humanity."

The paradoxes increase as we look above. The little wooden structures topped by egg-shaped domes may, as the notes say, be a "housing project for living birds," but this peaceful habitation bristles with "arrows" (flagsticks taken from cemeteries) that point outward. The lower part of the shrine is for aiming in, John explains, but the upper part

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*"Momento Mori" (bleached walnut, steel)*

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# Feminism and False Friends

## Zillah Eisenstein

As I try to think through these post-September 11 moments I feel compelled to locate and name the privileging of masculinist power with all its destructiveness. The silencing of women's unique voices—most especially the voices of Afghan women and feminists—who criticized the early U.S. support of the Taliban needs to be exposed.

Women have been fighting and resisting the Taliban as well as other forms of Muslim fundamentalist misogyny for decades. Fundamentalist misogyny has no one singular site or home. Women across the globe continue to resist gender apartheid and sexual terrorism in the diverse war-sites where they continually reappear: Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda, Algeria, Nigeria, and Palestine. The activist groups like "Women Against Fundamentalism," "Women Living Under Muslim Laws" (WLUML) and "Women in Black" give transnational voice to women struggling against the oppressiveness of misogynist law. They also indict the U.S. for supporting regimes which practice atrocities towards women. Yet, instead of seeing and hearing from these women activists, CNN only presents women as burqa-covered creatures in need of saviors. After the Taliban retreat from Kabul we were shown women's faces smiling as the air hit their skin as though most women had removed the burqa. In all this, we also need to be reminded that it has been women, since the Algerian revolution in that country, that have fought tirelessly for democratic rule. As well, it has been the women's vote in Iran that has allowed the more moderate Mohammed Khatami to be elected.

I do not agree with many of the columnists who reduce Sept. 11th to the anger of bin Laden and his troops towards the excessive greed and irresponsibility of global capitalism and its racist ways. Nor was it simply due to the ways that the global economy is displacing men from their earlier livelihoods. It is also to be viewed in relation to the way that male patriarchal privilege orchestrates this hierarchical system of domination. At this juncture, across the East/West divide, global capitalism unsettles the pre-existing sexual hierarchical order and tries to mold women's lives to its newest needs. Differing factions within the Taliban are fully aware of the stakes involved here and it is, in part, why they root their war-strategy in the active subordination of women.

When women in Afghanistan or Algeria are driven out of school and not allowed to hold jobs we should remember that women must

still continue to work as mothers and caretakers in desperate situations of famine and displacement and grotesque killing. Many of these women who are sick of the war are not obedient slaves. Women in countries throughout the Muslim world have been sorting out their own democratic conception of Islam for decades. They have not gone unnoticed by radical fundamentalist misogynists of all sorts.

In some sense the Taliban is not simply traditionalist and patriarchal because it is not always clear what this means, especially in terms of Islam. Although I am no friend of misogynist fundamentalism, wherever it thrives, demonization is not helpful. I rather choose to contextualize their masculinism as possibly as secularist as it is Islamic. Demonization leads us away from Islam to the "West"; where it is too easy to then think all women should "be free like me,"—whoever the "me" is.

Thinking these issues through is not easy given the polarized war-language being used by all sides. The selective use of terms like terrorism, democracy, civilization, modernity, traditionalism, and fundamentalism complicates the ability to think and see clearly. When U.S. officials are asked why they do not work more closely with other countries on the war effort they respond that they feel more comfortable with "our boys and our toys." Our president speaks of the war as "enduring freedom" and "infinite justice;" and the anti-terrorist bill is renamed the Patriot Bill. We are told to be alert, but not intimidated. Along with this elusive language the political discourses of the moment do not take into account the incredible stakes at issue for women.

The woman who is forced to veil and/or be covered by a burqa is used as representative of the 'backwardness' of Islam; and the naked porn model the modernity of the market. The choices here for women are not acceptable, and I do an injustice by using the term choice here at all. Where is the choice between sexual exploitation (commodification) and sexual repression (denial and seclusion) is no democratic choice at all. Neither form of masculinism—in the form of bin Laden's terror tactics or Bush's bombs—is good enough for women and girls across the globe. And Bush's bombs should not now be cloaked and

2. I am indebted to conversations with Asma Barlas for much of my thinking here, although she differs with my use of the term fundamentalist. See her: *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, forthcoming, 2001)vv

3. The same day network news programs broadcasted Afghan women removing their burqas, the first Victoria Secret fashion show debuted. See: Alex Kuczynski, "Victoria's Secret on TV: Another First for Women," *New York Times*, November 18, 2001, p. 1, section 9.

legitimized by a defense of women's rights.

On any given day women simultaneously appear in the media as passive burqa-covered creatures; fighter pilots (although I think there is only one at present); bereaved widows of the Sept. 11 carnage; pregnant wives of men who died in the towers; Pakistani women holding signs against the war; and the women of the Bush administration: Condoleezza Rice as national security adviser; Victoria Clarke as the hard-line Pentagon spokeswoman; and Karen Hughes, Bush's key aide, as the coordinator of wartime public relations. These women, along with the well-known conservative Mary Matalin, who is chief political adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney, contribute to shaping the words and images of the war.

Rice, Clarke and Hughes shore up white patriarchy by making it look gender/race neutral. Of course they represent change, but for themselves, not the rest of us. Coreene Swealty Palm, bomber pilot of an F14, speaks about her love of flying, even while dropping bombs—simply a misfortune of war. The distortion is even more corrupt as these women supposedly speak on behalf of women in Afghanistan and their "deplorable conditions" under Taliban rule. Mary Matalin ignores the fact that in 1979 Jimmy Carter played an important role in the destabilization of the very government which brought significant gains to Afghan women: literacy, medical services, prohibition of the bride price, and so forth. This secular government, the Progressive Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was credited with promoting the welfare and liberation of women. But it was this socialist government that the CIA targeted and overthrew with the help of bin Laden. Women become easy barter here. First their successes are smashed by U.S. policy, and then they are used in their smashed existence to justify yet another war on their behalf.

Even Laura Bush has found her voice. She delivered the president's weekly radio address—a first for a first lady—in order to speak on behalf of women's rights in Afghanistan. She said that the Taliban's treatment of women "is not a matter of legitimate religious practice;" that the plight of women and children is a matter of "deliberate human cruelty," and that the "brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists." But women's rights have never been a priority of U.S. foreign policy. It is easy to fear that this

newly emerging focus is simply an opportunistic effort to rally global forces for war.

It is worth noting that although U.S. foreign policy has never made the conditions of women's lives a key concern, our first ladies often speak on behalf of women in other countries. Hillary Clinton was well known for traveling abroad to speak on behalf of women's rights in Africa and India. Yet, here at home, she never chose to speak as a feminist or develop a women's rights agenda. I am reminded how she always turned the other way when issues of day care arose; or when confirmations of people like Lani Guinier or Zoe Baird got derailed. Yet, she recently sponsored a congressional panel on the condition of Afghan women.

Bush administration women do the same. Many speak negatively of feminism, and none has spoken on behalf of women's rights for prisoners, welfare mothers, day care, etc. None has shown outrage at the religious fundamentalists who bomb and kill women in our abortion clinics. None has spoken out against the terror of domestic violence. I am uneasy with a women's rights agenda spoken for others outside the U.S. while it is not used as a critique of our own society.

We must look elsewhere to find an honest embrace of democratic imaginings for women such as the "Proposal for U.N. Women's Strategies for Civil Conflict Resolution" drawn up by the Ugandan women's delegation, which calls for the creation of a World Security Council of Women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. On October 31, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 which states that "all actors negotiating peace agreements need to adopt a gender perspective which recognizes the special needs of women and girls." It is significant that the Bush women do not speak on behalf of these international women's groups but rather as women of the "West."

U.S. policy speaks against the Taliban's mistreatment of women at this juncture, while having condoned it earlier. The U.S. also supports Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, which all regularly violate women's rights. So what exactly is U.S. foreign policy towards women's rights? At least one senior administration official says that the U.S. can't make women's rights a part of the post-

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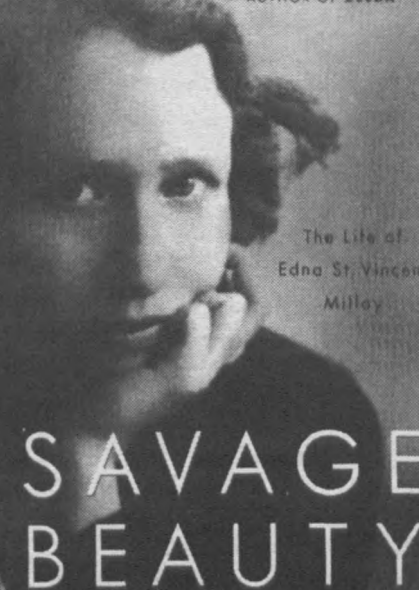
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 3:00 P.M.

**Beth Harpaz**  
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*The Girls In The Van* offers a behind-the-scenes look at Hillary Clinton's historic Senate run.

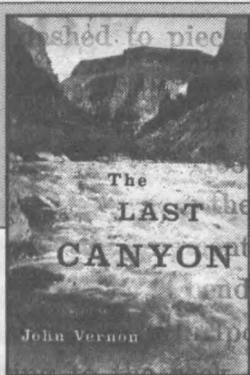
This funny, breezy chronicle is the ultimate press pass to the day-to-day gossip, political maneuvering, awkward missteps and inside jokes of the election. Veteran Associated Press reporter Beth Harpaz follows Hillary from the moment she dons a black pantsuit and Yankees cap and declares her love for a state where she has never lived, all the way to her historic victory as the only first lady ever to win elective office.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 3:00 P.M.

**John Vernon**  
*The Last Canyon*

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*The Last Canyon* brings to life one of the most treacherous river expeditions ever undertaken. In 1869 a one-armed Civil War hero named John Wesley Powell launched four boats on the Green River in Wyoming Territory to chart the remote and barren course of the Colorado River. Powell emerged from the Grand Canyon with two boats, not four, and five men out of the original nine. Powell's adventure is a story of triumph, hardship, bravery, and ultimate tragedy. The Great Unknown traces simultaneously a voyage of discovery and a chronicle of loss, an exploration of both unknown land and the human heart.



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 4:00 P.M.

**Cities Of Asylum Benefit  
with Russell Banks & Yi Ping**

First Unitarian Universalist Church

International Parliament of Writers' President Russell Banks welcomes Ithaca to IPW's Cities of Asylum Network. The International Parliament of Writers assists writers under threat in their own countries via this network. The Ithaca City of Asylum project will be able to host Chinese writer and democracy activist Yi Ping (pen name of Jianhua Li) and his family for 2 years.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 3:00 P.M.

**A Sand County Almanac**  
*Carl Leopold*

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*A Sand County Almanac* has enthralled generations of nature lovers and conservationists. This special edition features over one hundred beautiful full-color pictures by Michael Sewell, one of the country's leading nature photographers. Sewell walked Leopold's property in Wisconsin and shot these photographs specifically for this edition, allowing readers to see Sand County as Leopold saw it. This edition also includes two of Leopold's most eloquent essays on conservation, "The Land Ethic" and "Marshland Elegy."



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## Feminism and False Friends

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Taliban package because we have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them.<sup>10</sup> But who exactly is this official thinking of here? Hundreds of thousands of women abroad, as well as men, applaud the rights of women. Thousands of Afghan women were active participants in everyday life before the Taliban.

The anti-Taliban Northern Alliance has a female lobbyist in Washington and a position paper on women's rights, despite criticism by some Afghan womens groups that the Alliance has not been a friend towards women in the past.<sup>11</sup> The divide between "us" and "them" is no simple divide and should not be used to occlude the similar patriarchal roots/routes of global capitalism. If U.S. policy makers think they have a right to orchestrate aspects of a new Afghan regime, why are women's rights made to seem inessential to the core issues of democracy and political transition?

Supporting friendly regimes towards women has not been a foreign policy objective of the U.S. This is not to say that Afghan women are hesitant to see the Taliban fall, but that unless they are allowed meaningful participation in a post-Taliban government they have serious fears about what comes next. This position was voiced, November 15th, after the fall of Kabul, by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in their appeal to the United Nations. They state that the people of Afghanistan do not accept domination by the Northern Alliance. They "emphatically ask" the U.N. to send a "peace-keeping force" before the "Northern Alliance can repeat the unforgettable crimes committed" in 1992-96. They plead for the U.N. to "establish a broad-based government based on democratic values."<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International concurs here, making a public statement that the Northern Alliance has previously oppressed women, and should not be allowed to dictate their lives again.

Pre-Taliban Afghan women were partici-

pating in government, as well as schools and other civic institutions. Women accounted for seventy percent of all teachers, fifty percent of civil servants, and forty percent of medical doctors. Pre-Taliban Afghan women were active in most parts of life, much like women in Iran and Algeria, before the take-over by Muslim fundamentalists.<sup>13</sup> But now, after years of war, Kabul is home to some 70,000 war widows who live in abject poverty. Pregnant women throughout Afghanistan face grave risk of miscarriage and other obstetric problems.

The sheer misery of Afghan women's lives just now—especially given their lives in war—makes it hard to grasp the connections between them and women across the globe. Yet, this moment must uncover the similar and yet specifically different patriarchal politics practiced towards girls and women across the globe that contradict global capitalism's promise of democracy for all—including women in Muslim countries and women in the West.

The Taliban's restrictive policies towards women were in place while the U.S. supported their activities during the Afghan war against the Soviets. It was not our government but Afghan feminists—especially RAWA along with the activist group The Feminist Majority—who brought critical attention to abuses against women.<sup>14</sup> Sept. 11 brought Americans into the real globalized world of fear and misery. We must take this painful perspective to look at ourselves and come to know others more deeply as we recognize that women's rights are inseparable from human rights everywhere in the world.

*Zillah Eisenstein is feminist author, most recently of Global Obscenities (NYU Press, 1998) and Manmade Breast Cancers (Cornell University Press, 2001). She works with women in Cuba, Ghana, Egypt and India. She is professor of politics at Ithaca College.*

13. Kalpana Sharma, "A War...By Men," *The Hindu*, October 21, 2001, at: [www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2001/10/21/stories/13210618.htm](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2001/10/21/stories/13210618.htm); and Jan. Goodwin and Jessica Neuwirth, "The Rifle and the Veil," *New York Times*, October 19, 2001, p. A19.

14. For statements by Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan see: [www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org).

## Letters

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tutions are strong enough to bring to justice any terrorists responsible for the heinous crimes of September 11. The American people have demonstrated in the weeks since September 11 that they have ample courage to serve on juries and to prosecute and judge such acts. In the international arena, the United States has long supported international tribunals to try war criminals such as Slobodan Milosovic and opposed the use of secret military tribunals as they have been used by repressive regimes around the world. We should lead by example and strengthen international institutions, not undermine them.

The interim regulations the Administration has issued that provide for eavesdropping without warrant on protected attorney-client communication, and which also provide for automatic stays of immigration judge bond decisions, violate fundamental protections provided by the Constitution of the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, and the right to counsel.

Finally, the announcement that 5,000 individuals have been identified for questioning (males between the ages of 18 and 33 who entered the United States after January 1, 2000 and who came from countries where ter-

rorist acts were planned or committed) also is cause for concern. While this questioning may assist the Department of Justice to compile information critical to the current investigation, every care must be taken to assure that the questioning is voluntary, that individuals be afforded the opportunity to have counsel present if they desire, and that no aura of suspicion is cast that would instill fear and distrust within the very individuals and communities whose cooperation the Department of Justice seeks in its investigation. An over-wide net runs the danger of amounting to discriminatory profiling. Care must be taken to assure that the proper balance is maintained between legitimate law enforcement and overzealous sweeping fishing expeditions.

In the next months and years, our nation will face many challenges. We must stand vigilant and not compromise our freedoms. Doing so will damage our liberty here and our credibility in the world.

*Stephen Yale-Loehr teaches immigration law and refugee law at Cornell Law School, and is of counsel at True, Walsh & Miller in Ithaca, where he practices immigration law. He also is co-author of Immigration Law and Procedure, and co-writes a bi-monthly column on immigration law for the New York Law Journal.*



# Israeli Dissenters

Ami Kronfeld

*The following is a talk given by the author in Berkeley, California on November 18, 2001.*

Let me begin with a few words about myself. I grew up on a kibbutz in the center of Israel. I was drafted into the Israeli Defense Forces in January of 1967, and found myself fighting in Sharon's division in the Sinai during the '67 war. Later, in 1969, I spent six months in the Suez Canal during the war of attrition. As a soldier in the reserves, I did a tour of duty in Gaza, and in '73, during and after the war, I was mobilized for six months, first on the eastern border, then on the border with Lebanon.

I did refuse a direct order once (in 1967, when told to execute a captured Egyptian soldier), but I was never prosecuted. I did spend some time in jail: 24 hours, to be exact, after I was caught hitchhiking a ride home from my base while not wearing my beret. But apart from that, I was a very good boy. Did what I was told and more or less followed the path that I was expected to follow.

And yet here I am, in a benefit for New Profile and Yesh Gvul. Yesh Gvul supports soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories. New Profile, among other things, supports people who don't want to serve in the army at all. I did serve in the Israeli Army and I did serve in the occupied territories. So what am I doing here? That's the question I'll try to answer in the next 10 minutes or so.

We are always told that serving in the army and fighting wars are heroic acts. In fact, as any reflective soldier would tell you, the military experience and the willingness to "die for one's country" are in many cases motivated not by any high ideals but by a desperate need to conform and a great fear of being rejected and shamed by one's peers.

Let me give you some examples from my own experience. By the time I came out of the '67 war, I had seen enough to know that the slogan attributing "purity of arms" to the Israeli soldier was nothing but a propaganda tool. I saw dozens of captured Egyptian soldiers summarily executed after the battle in 1967; I saw Palestinian women and children shot at just because they were trying to return to their homes in the West Bank; I saw young Israeli soldiers in Gaza harass and humiliate Palestinian men old enough to be their grandfathers. Moreover, when the '73 war started and in the ensuing chaos I finally joined my unit, I was very much aware that this war was entirely unnecessary. I had known about Egyptian President Sadat's peace offer in 1971 and how the Israeli government rejected it. And when after the '73 war I was sent to Lebanon to fight the Palestine Liberation Organization, I knew very well that the PLO—far from being a bunch of fanatic terrorists—was the legitimate representative of oppressed and dispossessed people. And yet,

## Israeli reservists refuse to fight

Fifty-two Israeli reserve soldiers said they would no longer fight in the West Bank and Gaza Strip claiming military actions there had nothing to do with security for Israel and were meant to control the Palestinians according to an Associated Press article by Laurie Copans (January 25, 2002).

"We declare that we will not continue to fight a war for peace in the (Jewish) settlements" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, read the ad placed in Israeli newspapers.

"We will not continue to fight on the other side of the Green Line with an intent to control, expel, starve and degrade an entire people."

The Green Line refers to the line separating Israel from the territories it captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

I could not find it within myself to stand up and say hell no, I won't go. I felt isolated, fearful, very much alone and desperate. People I know were able to get out of the army by pretending to be mentally ill. I could not do that. Given the uniformity of the Israeli culture at the time, and my need to be part of it, there simply was no way for me (and people like me) to resist the overwhelming pressure to conform.

Our political leaders knew that, and took full advantage of it. As Israel became more and more powerful militarily, there was a growing tendency to use military force instead of alternative peaceful means. The occupation became harsher, and then harsher still; Lebanon was invaded in 1979, and then again in 1982. During the second, and larger invasion, the political leadership was so brazen about the use of force that the war was openly characterized as a "war of choice." "We know there are peaceful alternatives," the government, in effect, told its soldiers. "But we chose not follow them. And we expect you to shut up and do what you are told even though it may cost you your lives, not to mention the lives of others you are expected to kill."

This was the moment that gave birth to Yesh Gvul (There is a Limit/Border). The very first time in the history of Israel that soldiers dared question, collectively, the right of the government to use force whenever and wherever it felt like it. It was not a massive movement. It still isn't. But it was, and is, the moral compass of the entire nation. Yesh Gvul provides the absolutely crucial moral and social support for soldiers with conscience who, unlike me, dared to challenge the overwhelmingly powerful establishment. And when the First Intifada broke out in December 1987, when it became increasingly clear that the Israeli Defense Forces had very little to do with defense, Yesh Gvul was there to lead and

help the soldiers who could recognize a brutal occupation when they saw one and refused to take part in it. I am proud to say that I was a co-founder of Friends of Yesh Gvul in the U.S. and am very happy that I could lend a helping hand from here. I consider the soldiers of Yesh Gvul far braver than I ever was in any of the battles I participated in.

But Yesh Gvul's greatest achievement, perhaps, is to have made it possible for the general public in Israel to begin questioning the increasing militarization of Israeli politics and culture as a whole. This is where New Profile comes in.

I first heard about New Profile from one of the co-founders—Rela Mazali, a novelist who is an old friend from my undergraduate days at Tel Aviv University. In June 1999, she sent me e-mail with an attachment of what she called the founding document of New Profile. Let me read you a couple of paragraphs from it:

We, a group of feminist women and men, are convinced that we need not live in a soldiers' state... [Israel] need not be a militarized society. We are convinced that we ourselves, our children, our partners, need not go on being endlessly mobilized, need not go on living as warriors. We understand that the state of war in Israel is maintained by decisions made by our politicians—not by external forces to which we are passively subject. While taught to believe that the country is faced by threats beyond its control, we now realize that the words 'national security' have often masked calculated decisions to choose military action for the achievement of political goals.

We are no longer willing to take part in such choices. We will not go on enabling them by obediently, uncritically supplying soldiers to the military... We will not go on being mobilized, raising children for mobilization, supporting mobilized partners, brothers, fathers, while those in charge of the country go on deploying the army easily, rather than building other solutions.

The hegemonic culture in Israel nurtures admiration for might and physical prowess... Young people enlist, putting their trust in the wisdom and honesty of those who bid them to serve... Every parent takes an active part in educating sons or daughters to become soldiers. And yet, there are many women and men, parents and youngsters, who object profoundly, morally to Israel's continued wars-of-choice. We oppose the use of military means to enforce Israeli sovereignty beyond the Green Line. We oppose the use of the army, police, security forces in the ongoing oppression and discrimination of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, while demolishing their

homes, denying them building and development rights, using violence to disperse their demonstrations.

The document goes on discussing other issues, and then it concludes:

For our part, we refuse to go on raising our children to see enlistment as a supreme and overriding value. We want a fundamentally changed education system, for a truly democratic civic education, teaching the practice of peace and conflict resolution, rather than training children to enlist and accept warfare.

This was in June 1999—more than a year before the second Intifada erupted. Since then, New Profile has extended its activities—from supporting CO's, to distributing information from alternative sources, to helping starving Palestinians in the occupied territories, to organizing teach-ins at Israeli universities on the effects of the military on education, and many more. They are still doing it without a budget, without any formal structure, without a hierarchy of any kind. A true grass-roots organization, based on tireless voluntary work.

It is difficult for me to overemphasize how breathtakingly daring and encouraging the New Profile phenomenon is in the Israeli social context. You really had to grow up in Israel to realize that. It's not the first political movement in Israel that opposes the government, of course, not by a long shot. But it's the first to focus on militarism and the cult of power as a major threat to Israel's moral and political survival. It's also the very first movement with a well-articulated political agenda led by women. The mothers, wives and daughters of soldiers finally had enough.

And now, the men and women of Yesh Gvul and the women and men of New Profile are working together. They have a lot in common and have their work cut out for them. The last year was a true national tragedy for the Palestinians, but it was also a very difficult year for Israelis, particularly Israelis with a conscience. It's very very difficult for a soldier to confront the authorities head on and refuse to serve, especially when, out of fear and frustration, the majority of the country is seized with a jingoistic frenzy fueled by racism. It is very very difficult for a mother to confront the overpowering dominant culture head on and tell her son that she does not believe in what the state is asking him to do. These soldiers from Yesh Gvul and these women and also men from New Profile are Israel's true heroes. They are virtually alone in a country that is sinking into madness right before our eyes, but they are the beacons that may guide Israel back to sanity. They need all the help and support we can give them.

Born in Israel, Dr. Ami Kronfeld now lives in Berkeley, California. He has been active supporting Israeli peace groups since 1982.

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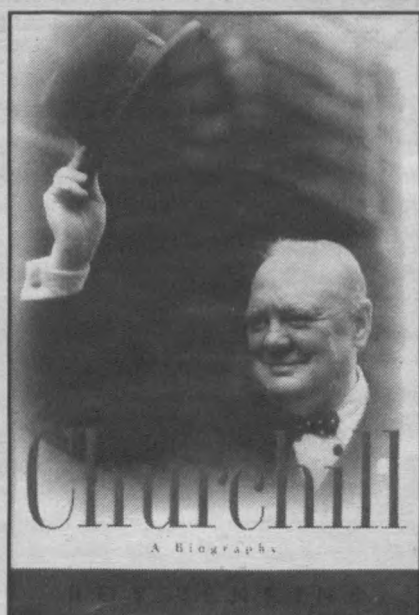


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# The World According to GOP

continued from page 1

first time committed unilateralists dominated the Executive Branch as well as Congress.

During the 1990s, Congressional Republicans rejected outright or refused even to consider a succession of treaty drafts carefully constructed and painstakingly negotiated by the great majority of the world's governments including our NATO allies. These deal in every case with an issue of vital importance to global security and welfare. The Kyoto Protocol to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and thereby protect the earth's vital ozone layer was rejected because it would require certain U.S.-based corporations to undergo the expenses of technological modification; and because poor industrializing countries, including China and India, which currently produce few greenhouse gases compared to the largest polluter, the U.S., would be exempt for an initial period of time.<sup>3</sup> Treaties outlawing the use of land mines and of biological weapons were rejected because they would limit their deployment by the U.S. military. The treaty banning further testing of nuclear weapons was rejected because other nations might cheat. U.S. membership in the proposed international criminal court that would try cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity was rejected because U.S. service personnel might one day be subject to its jurisdiction. A meeting to work out methods of enforcing the Chemical Weapons Treaty broke up because the Bush Administration was unwilling to tolerate international inspection of our CW facilities. An OECD-sponsored agreement to curtail the operations of international tax havens that harbor and launder the funds of terrorists, drug lords, and other criminals was summarily rejected because it might interfere with the right of wealthy Americans to evade federal income taxes.

In every case the rejection of these international initiatives addressed to serious problems of global security, survival, or welfare was based on the narrowest, short-term conception of American self-interest and unwillingness to assume leadership in forging mutually satisfactory outcomes. The only exception has been negotiations leading to the establishment of free trade regimes, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the World Trade Organization. Open markets, unrestricted trade, mobility of capital, and protection of intellectual property are actively pursued by corporate America, the principal financier and major constituency of the Republican Party. Once the world leader in providing assistance to the international campaign against poverty, ignorance, and disease, the U.S. now contributes a smaller proportion of its GNP (less than one tenth of one percent) in economic assistance to less developed countries than any other industrialized nation.

Throughout the 1990s, Congress refused to appropriate the dues owed by the U.S. to the United Nations. Partial payments were doled out, conditioned on the U.N. adopting reforms unilaterally demanded by the U.S. At one point the U.S. was delinquent by nearly two billion dollars, forcing the U.N. to cut back activities, to borrow, or to beg other governments to prepay future years' dues to make up the difference. Some U.N. members spoke of suspending U.S. membership and participation in the General Assembly until the deadbeat paid up. The climax came on January 20, 2000 when Senator Helms, addressing the Security Council, instructed his audience on how the U.N. must behave lest the U.S. with-

3. My colleague, Henry Shue, reminds us that the pursuit of self-interest by individuals or governments is ethically acceptable up to the point that it causes harm to others. Piercing the earth's ozone shield by greenhouse emissions threatens great harm to other peoples, not to mention ourselves. (Cornell University Arts and Sciences Newsletter, Fall 2001, page 5.)

draw from the organization. This spectacle highlighted the unilateralist hubris which became identified in international circles with official American policy. Shortly thereafter, the U.S., a member of the U.N. Human Rights Commission since its founding in 1947, was denied reelection to the Commission in protest against its refusal to ratify a series of agreements negotiated in the Commission, including those concerning the rights of women, of children, and of prisoners.

If the U.S. can demonstrate its contempt for the U.N. and cooperate with the rest of the world only on its own terms and at its own convenience, how much cooperation could the U.S. expect from others in its hour of need? The answer was not long in coming. After the atrocities of September 11, except for Britain and Australia, the international response was mostly limited to ritual condemnations of terrorism and expressions of condolence. This prompted President Bush, arguably a latter-day convert to international cooperation, to appear before the General Assembly of the U.N. on November 10, 2001, pleading with the nations of the world for tangible measures of cooperation with the U.S. in the campaign against global terrorist networks. Has our urgent need for international cooperation persuaded President Bush and his fellow Republicans that international cooperation must be a two-way street, that even a superpower may at times require assistance from others, and that their assistance may be contingent on our willingness to respect and accommodate their needs and preferences; in short, that unilateralism is a blind alley that foils our own enlightened self-interest?

Has that lesson been learned? While President Bush, under the pressure of events, may have begun to appreciate the need for international cooperation to combat terrorism, there is little evidence that this change of heart extends to other dimensions of foreign policy. Or that his fellow Republicans in Congress have been converted. The U.N. is now centrally involved in brokering a viable multiethnic regime and reconstruction program for post-Taliban Afghanistan, but even though Congress has finally agreed to pay our delinquent dues, it has voted to withhold \$244 million until the U.S. regains its seat on the Human Rights Commission.

National missile defense has become the 21st-century high-tech expression of Fortress America. Notwithstanding vigorous and unanimous international opposition, from all our allies, from China, and emphatically from Russia, the other signatory to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Bush administration persists with its obsessive commitment to national missile defense. It has given formal notice of its intention to withdraw from the treaty. That defense against intercontinental missiles is completely irrelevant to the kind of threat likely to be launched by international terrorist organizations seemed not to matter. So eager was the administration to begin deployment of this costly, technologically flawed, and potentially destabilizing weapons system that it chose to denounce the treaty at the very time it is attempting to consolidate Russia's participation in the coalition against global terrorism!<sup>4</sup> The United States thus becomes the first country since World War II to withdraw from a major treaty. Other countries now ask whether they can any longer count on the U.S. to honor its interna-

4. The Chinese government believes that national missile defense would give the U.S. a first strike capability that would enable it to intimidate China over such issues as Taiwan. It is therefore likely to respond by accelerating its current, very modest long-distance nuclear missile capability. This would, in turn, force its potential enemy, India, to follow suit and India's action would provoke a similar response from its enemy, Pakistan. Thus the reckless scrapping of the ABM treaty threatens to precipitate a nuclear arms race among some of the world's poorest countries.

tional obligations, should they be perceived by some future administration as limiting its freedom of action.

Nor do the White House or Congress seem prepared to reconsider their dog-in-the-manger attitude toward any of the treaties they have previously rejected. Or to recognize that meaningful cooperation involves reciprocity and cannot be limited to issues where we need help from others and only on our terms.

Unilateralism in foreign affairs is at the core of the belief system of contemporary right-wing Republicanism. National emergency notwithstanding, there is little inclination among them to deviate from its strictures on this or any theme. More than two months after the tragic failure of private security arrangements to prevent the simultaneous hijacking of four aircraft from three separate airports, the House Republican leadership, clinging to their doctrine that government is bad but corporations are good, continued till the very last moment to resist the federalization of airport security. (The horrific prospect that the new federal employees might join labor unions and vote Democratic was believed to clinch the case against federalization!) Consistent with their conviction that cutting taxes for corporations and wealthy individuals is the medicine of choice under all economic conditions, for prosperity as well as recessions, House Republicans with the President's express approval, have voted to "stimulate" the economy by massive tax reductions for their favorite clients, including an estimated \$25 billion to a handful of large corporations in refunds for 15 years of payments of the Corporate Alternative Minimum tax. This tax was designed to insure that profitable corporations, after benefiting from loopholes in the tax codes, nevertheless pay at least some federal income taxes. So much for shared sacrifice in the war against terrorism!

The Republican Congressional leadership have proved to be true believers in their ideology, central to which is their attachment to a unilateralist foreign policy. The bankruptcy of this policy has been demonstrated in the wake of September 11 as President Bush scrambles to mobilize and maintain a fragile international coalition against the Al Qaeda terrorist network and its Taliban allies. But a commitment to international cooperation cannot be limited to crises where the U.S. needs assistance from other countries. To rediscover the benefits of cooperation in international affairs will require presidential leadership. Whether George W. Bush is equipped to turn his back on the cramped, mean-spirited doctrine of America First and to reengage American diplomacy with issues that link our security and well-being with the needs and concerns of other countries and with the survival of our species on this shrinking planet—that is an open question.<sup>5</sup> One encouraging sign is that the White House has deferred its earlier threat to withdraw American forces from the international peace-keeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. But unless Bush follows through with similar measures of international cooperation, for example on the control of chemical and biological weapons, we may look forward to three more years of failure to live up to the leadership responsibilities of our super-power status in an increasingly interdependent world.

Milton J. Esman is an emeritus professor of government at Cornell. His recent book, *Government Works: Why Americans Need the Feds*, published by Cornell University Press, expands on some of the themes in this article and is available at The Bookery.

5. Unfortunately, Democratic politicians have demonstrated little if any resistance to Republican unilateralism and have failed to provide an alternative perspective on foreign policy. They have, for example, abandoned their earlier opposition to national missile defense.



# The Laughter at the Heart of Being

continued from page 7

aims out. If the Shrine is an "instrument" for peace, it is not itself a peaceful object; if anything, it appears to stage a "scene" of explosive energy—attack, defense, suffering, bleeding, regenerating, propitiating. What is the function of the Saint in this scene? John has given him the traditional attributes of Christ, the martyr-god who is our victim, but also our judge, and our healer; one also recalls that Shiva in the Hindu religion is the diety of destruction. The enigmas deepen as we return, again and again, to the stare of the child, who inhabits a body at once vulnerable and monumental. "It makes no judgments, asks no questions, and takes no prisoners," John says of the figure. "Like a mirror, it leaves you to confront yourself."

Fascinating as these suggestions are, the Shrine is, finally, an experience of color and form. Its dazzling assemblage of objects and shapes vary and repeat, binding the disparate implications of the work into a densely energized unity. Circles and gold, as I have mentioned, form the main unifying devices, but another is the use of biomorphic cut-out shapes as a stylistic signature, visible here in the saint's tonsure and beard but also the arms and other figures, all of which contribute an undulating motion to the vertiginous energy of the circles. Seen under ordinary conditions, the electric candles "cause shadows to dance and the central figure to float"; but when John Reis backlit the structure in order to prepare his brilliant photograph, a surprisingly new effect occurs: the several planes of the interior flatten into a single surface, resembling in color as well as subject a "Late Gothic" painting. It is as though John has entered the mind of the late-medieval allegorical painter, producing for our times a loving meditation on an old artform.

(I have limited myself to sculpture in this essay only because the paintings depend on the resonances of color, which would be lost in any black-and-white reproduction. At their most ambitious, however, the swirling lines, swimming planes and symphonic color gradations bring an extraordinary number of ele-

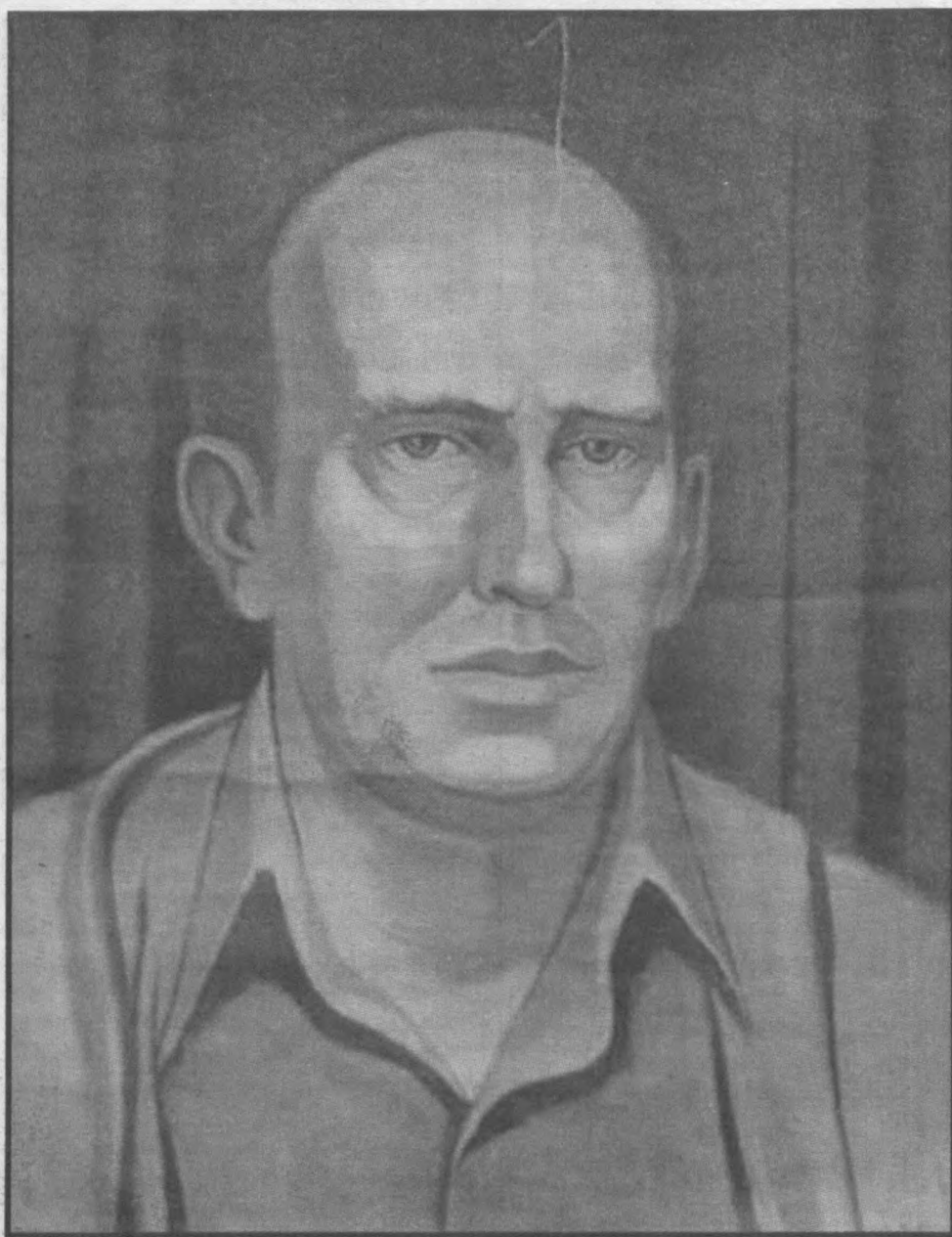
ments into an apprehensible unity. The effect is voluptuous, and at least one of the paintings—the third canvas of the "Pilgrimage" series—is, I will dare to say, a timeless masterpiece. Many in the series are priced within the range of local purchasers.)

It matters to me as an Ithacan that I can drive to the end of a country road in Tompkins County to a homestead called Frog Heaven, stop near a pond, and into a modest frame building to discover an entire imaginative world—and to leave it later with the mind dizzy with thought. As one enters the little upstairs bathroom and finds it cluttered with ready objects (a pair of king crabs in an unused urinal, an old telephone with its gracefully-hung receiver, a flamingo lawn ornament), they seem like beautiful raw materials about to enter another of John's visions, like the "gibbous moon"/ toilet float in the structure just outside the door, or the eerily haunting head of a "Muse"—her face a thin copper triangle, her hair blown by a silent storm—that broods above the staircase. If the closed eyes of this Muse were open, she could see beneath her the warning about the "rude mechanical." The two of them—sculpture and sign, the dream and the joke—suggest one of the fundamental polarities in John Paul's imaginative world (the impersonal, transcendent, and cerebral; the makeshift, witty, and down-to-earth), opposites that are two sides of the same vision. I like to think that the artwork I own myself embodies some of that complex vision in a way distinctive enough to conclude this essay.

"Krishna's Mouth" is a gaily-colored abstraction, dancing with gilt paper, pastel paper triangles, and other elements emerging from a radiant turquoise and overlaid by a cover of shattered glass—the visual equivalent, one might think, of a cry. The story goes that Krishna's human mother did not know her young child was anything but an ordinary mortal—until the day she began to spank him for some naughty deed. As he opened his mouth to cry, she looked in and saw the universe.

Paul Sawyer is a professor of English at Cornell.

# Portrait of a Poet



Kenneth Evett

## Kenneth Evett

As far as I know I am the only artist who ever painted an oil portrait of Archie Ammons from life. I did so 27 years ago. I had admired Ammons' writing, had bought a book of his poetry and had served with him on the missionary committee of the time that was dedicated to the promotion of the arts at Cornell. I thought he had a distinguished look about him and believed that I knew him well enough to ask him to pose for me. At that time the improvisational method of Abstract Expressionism was popular and I used it, while carrying on a challenging conversation with my smart sitter. When the work was finished I suggested to Archie that he take a look at his portrait. After one horrified glance he fled from my studio without saying a word.

About a week later he came to my classroom in Franklin Hall and asked if we could go upstairs to my studio and look at the portrait. He scrounged around the room, found the painting, held it up for his friend to see and said, "Isn't this dreadful?" I wasn't offended because I didn't think much of the painting myself (the head was way too big and the color morbid). But on this occasion I noticed that Archie's tonality was different. He was dressed in low-keyed tones of pink and blue and his face looked white, so I suggested that we might try again. "No way," said he, "and besides, I don't need you to make me famous." He was right. He moved on without any help from me and became famous.

After that, social contact between us came to an end. I took the canvas off the stretcher and put it with some other stuff in a corner of my studio and forgot about it until I learned that Roger Gilbert was writing an Ammons biography and it occurred to me that he might be interested in my old portrait of his protagonist, so I retrieved it from the shadows and invited Gilbert to come and see it. His response was polite but he had no use for it in his book.

By this time I realized that my perception of the portrait had changed. It now had the look of a monument, an image of power and pride. The structure of the head and features seemed to be delineated with rock-solid tonal modeling and the color had taken on an authentic North Carolina redneck aspect. There was a hooded expression in the eyes that suggested the mystery and vulnerability of all human beings. It dawned on me that the portrait might be of interest to Archie's literary admirers, but the thought of exposing it to public view gave me pause. Would it be grossly unfair to print an image of Archie that he hated? Would his surviving relatives be saddened by the sight of it? Should I destroy it or simply hide it away?

Finally I told myself that censorship was not the answer to such questions. So here is revealed the dreadful enigmatic image of a famous poet.

Kenneth Evett is a professor emeritus of art at Cornell University.

Ed. Note: Archie Ammons (1926-2001) is the subject of the April 2001 Bookpress.

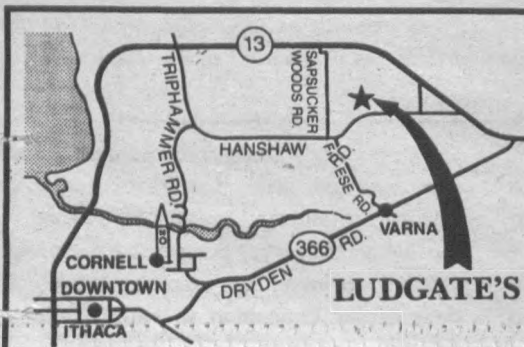
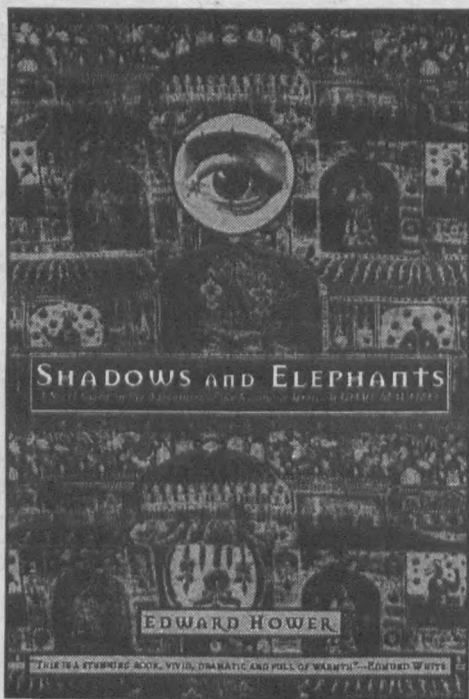
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