the weekly
Standard

THE NEXT WAR
FREDERICK W. KAGAN

JULY 2 / JULY 9, 2001

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Summer Fiction

Reviews of

David Lodge • Philip Roth • Richard Russo
John Updike • Donald Westlake

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the weekly Standard

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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The Post-Clinton Era

For six months THE SCRAPBOOK has tried to pretend that this is the Bush Era. But let's face facts: We're really just in the early stages of the Post-Clinton years. Looking back on Bill Clinton's presidency, THE SCRAPBOOK admits that it was as guilty as anyone of portraying our former president as a chiseling, megalomaniacal horndog. But we recognize that in the cool repose of retirement a former commander in chief can elevate himself above contentious political battles and reacquaint himself with his better angels. Indeed, in Mr. Clinton's case, he is . . . well, he's still a chiseling, megalomaniacal horndog. Here, then, to tide you over during our week off (we won't be publishing next week) is a survey of Clinton-related activities:

Ben Lack

Clinton, sightseeing in England

★ The latest *National Enquirer*, which skeptical readers should note has accurately reported everything from Jesse Jackson's love child to the Puff Daddy/J-Lo breakup, reveals that Hillary Clinton has banished her husband from their Washington home. Looking sleep-deprived in the accompanying photographs (THE SCRAPBOOK wouldn't sleep easy, either, if the ex-president were trying to sneak into our bed), Hillary reportedly told "pals," "It makes my skin crawl at the thought of him touching me again." According to the *Enquirer*, New York's junior senator is convinced her husband is still sweet on Monica Lewinsky. Coincidentally, Lewinsky is cooperating with HBO on a documentary about her affair with the Big Creep. "It's all she eats and sleeps," said a pal.

★ Speaking of large, friendly women, the photograph below was taken at a wedding during Clinton's recent buck-raking tour of the U.K. (So eager is Clinton for gigs that one celebrity booker described him as the only ex-president "who might show up at your bar mitzvah if you paid him.") Clinton appears to be ogling the woman. But a "pal" tells us it's more innocent than it looks. Clinton was merely asking her views on the peace process in Northern Ireland.

★ While Clinton has recently been booed at everything from corporate speaking gigs to the Belmont Stakes, some receptions are friendlier than others. At game three of this month's NBA finals, *ESPN* magazine's Ric Bucher spotted Clinton posing near a loading dock at Philadelphia's First Union Center with "two provocatively-dressed girls who had been hanging around the Lakers' bench all night." Bucher was baffled that a man with Clinton's history wouldn't avoid "a photo-op with a bare-midriffed, hip-hugger-wearing tall blonde falling out of her halter top. You can bet the *National Enquirer* would pay a handsome price for those pics." Or—THE SCRAPBOOK is shameless—send those photos to us, and we'll give you all the glory this page has at its disposal.

★ The life of an ex-president, of course, isn't all six-figure paydays and full-figured groupies. There's also the beloved children—like the ones Clinton went to see June 13 in Chicago at City Year's annual Convention of Idealism. So idealistic were these kids that they didn't even seem to mind that Clinton kept them waiting for an hour-and-a-half in 100-degree heat (earning him a down-arrow in *Newsweek*'s Conventional Wisdom box: "No apology from Narcissus"). But THE SCRAPBOOK thinks Clinton should be cut some slack, as he re-acclimates himself to the rules of polite society that the rest of us follow. At least he's trying. As Julia Payne, Clinton's spokeswoman, said of the ex-president's now-smaller motorcades: "We stop at red lights, usually. It depends where we are."

★ A blue ribbon to *Newsweek*, by the way, which also reports that Roger Clinton may have been involved in schemes that promised the possibility of pardons and other favors in exchange for cash. There is always one advantage to being Bill Clinton: Roger is your brother, and it's hard not to benefit by comparison.

★ Amidst all this controversy, two rays of sunshine. Last Wednesday, Clinton went to Ohio to accept the first annual "Dayton Peace Prize," one of the two or three most prestigious international diplomacy awards that Dayton, Ohio, offers. Sure, it's not a Nobel, but if the Nobel committee didn't appreciate Clinton's efforts, his daughter surely did. Just graduated from Stanford, Chelsea included interviews with her father in her 150-page senior thesis on the Northern Ireland peace process (which last week gave way to the worst rioting in years). And proving it's never too late to suck up to the Clintons, her thesis adviser, Jack Rakove, gushed to the *New York Times* that though Chelsea hadn't settled on a topic until this past winter, "She did an absolutely prodigious amount of work. . . . If you talk books with her, you can be blown away by how much she knows."

Sounds like someone's angling for a lifetime sinecure from the Clinton Library. ♦

America Held Hostage

There is news from Beijing, all of it bad, concerning the case of Li Shaomin, profiled in a recent WEEKLY STANDARD editorial ("Dear Mr. President," June 18). Professor Li is among the group of American academics who have been incarcerated—and denied contact with their families—by Communist China's infamous Ministry of State Security. On June 18, officials of that agency telephoned Li's father in Hong Kong to inform him that his son had been indicted on charges of spying for Taiwan. The indictment carried no public disclosure of evidence against Li Shaomin (none exists), and after more than four months, Chinese authorities have still not allowed him access to an attorney. But they now seem intent on bringing him to trial, perhaps as early as this week.

Responding to international press inquiries about Li's treatment, a foreign ministry spokeswoman in Beijing (the same one whose jokes about the one-child policy were described in William Kristol's piece last week) says only that "China is a country ruled by law." That's not reassuring: Under Chinese "law," Li Shaomin faces a closed-door kangaroo court—and a sentence of life in prison or death by pistol shot.

There is at least a glimmer of hope on the home front, however. Li's wife, Liu Yingli, was the star witness at a House International Relations Committee hearing June 20, and the committee unanimously approved, and sent to the floor, a resolution of congressional support for all American political prisoners in China. That legislation, sponsored by Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, calls on President Bush to make release of those prisoners his highest foreign policy priority. We wholeheartedly endorse the bill. But we like to think the president doesn't need such prompting. The stakes are plainly very high. And time is short. ♦

Death by Therapy, cont.

Last week saw the sentencing of Connell Watkins and Julie Ponder, the two Jefferson County, Colorado, "therapists" who smothered 10-year-old Candace Newmaker during an April 18, 2000, "rebirthing" therapy (see Christopher Caldwell's May 28 cover story, "Death by Therapy"). The two were convicted of child abuse resulting in death, which carries a penalty of 16 to 48 years' imprisonment. Judge Jane Tidball chose the minimum. "The crime itself was horrible," Tidball said. "However, there was no evidence at the trial that the defendants wanted to harm Candace."

THE SCRAPBOOK is open to the argument that 16 years is a sufficient sentence. But Tidball is wrong to claim that there was no evidence of intended harm. Jurors were showered with such evidence, including videotape of the pair goading young Candace Newmaker to "go ahead and die." That they didn't really plan to kill her is beside the point. They were convicted of child abuse, not murder. It is one of the hallmarks of child abuse that it spirals out of control, and turns from "teaching a kid who's boss" into something no one intended. That's why there are laws against it. ♦

Casual

We're All Philadelphians Now

Some personal history: In 1973, the year before I was born, the Philadelphia 76ers went 9-73. It remains the worst single-season record in professional basketball. In 1983, I sat hypnotized in front of the television as the Sixers won the world championship; everyone I knew had a God-mad obsession with them. In 1984, my mother took me to the Spectrum for the first time to see the Sixers play the New York Knickerbockers. Dr. J, Julius Erving, shook my hand, gave me a grin, and signed my autograph book. I loved Doc and the Sixers instantly and deeply. Since that night, matters have been difficult for us.

In 1986, the team traded all-world center Moses Malone for Cliff Robinson and a fat guy with a bum knee named Jeff Ruland. The year after that, Dr. J retired. In the late '80s, the Sixers had a few entertaining seasons. One night Charles Barkley and Rick Mahorn, weighing the better part of a Buick between them, cracked several ribs after bumping chests in celebration. Then management traded Barkley for Jeff Hornacek. For six consecutive seasons, the Sixers got worse. I watched in disbelief as they drafted Shawn Bradley, Sharone Wright, and Jerry Stackhouse, passing up Penny Hardaway, Eddie Jones, and Kevin Garnett. In '96 I sat in surly resignation as they came perilously close to breaking the 1973 record. They won 18 games. That winter I drank like a Russian infantryman. When I came to, I looked around and realized that no one loved the Sixers anymore but me; I was Heathcliff, wandering the moors alone.

Three weeks ago a plucky Sixers squad clawed their way into the NBA Finals, only to lose to the Los Angeles Lakers. It was the most exciting five-game series in the history of sports. The Lakers are the closest thing basketball has to the Yankees. I hate them with the fire of a thousand suns.

Los Angeles relies on the double threat of Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant. O'Neal is an oversized puppy who is difficult to dislike. But Kobe Bryant is everything that is wrong with professional sports: He's a snide, pre-packaged PR concept who plays basketball only as a means to cultivate his public image. He yearns to be loved and wants so badly to be Michael Jordan that it's hard not to be embarrassed for him.

The Sixers, of course, are a high-top Horatio Alger tale, and their virtues shine so bright that it's impossible for any romantic soul to see their faults. Just glance at their summer-league-style roster. There's Aaron McKie, a hard-working, lunch-pail player, Todd MacCulloch, a cerebral giant who plays within himself, Dikembe Mutombo, a defensive maestro with deep roots in his African homeland, and Allen Iverson, a pro-life, pro-marriage, Second Amendment enthusiast whose period of unfortunate incarceration left him with a profound respect for law and order. I like to think of him as a national-greatness two guard.

My relationship with Iverson—or Answer, as he's known on the mean streets—was troubled from the start. I wanted the Sixers to draft Shareef Abdur-Rahim in 1996 when they picked Iverson. It wasn't his talent that bothered me, of course, it was his character—and the fact that he's six feet tall and 165 pounds after dinner at Morton's. Iverson curses, spits, makes rap records, and hangs with his high school friends. He doesn't get many sneaker commercials, and it doesn't seem to bother him. This season the little guy led the league in points, steals, minutes, and neck tattoos. I admit that I was spectacularly wrong about Answer: He is a prince whose sweat smells like lavender.

But even though he smells good, I sure wish Iverson could have dropped 45 a game on L.A., because no matter what George Will or the editors at *Southern Partisan* say, there's no nobility in losing. When people look back at the 2001 NBA season, they won't remember Eric Snow hobbling on a broken ankle, yet playing like a lion. They won't remember Iverson running into the maw of a defense as fearlessly as anyone since Isiah Thomas. The history books will say that the rusty Lakers were careless and lost game one, before returning to form and pounding an overmatched Philadelphia team. It's not true, and it cheapens what the Sixers did.

There was, however, one small moral victory. At some point in the last three months, the rest of America fell in love with my 76ers. Sportswriters all over the country testified admiringly to their grit and professionalism. In every bar east of Los Angeles, people cheered Philadelphia and hissed the Lakers. And Kobe Bryant, the man who most craves our adoration, was shunned, while Allen Iverson, the man who couldn't care less, was canonized. It's not a championship, but it was nice to watch the rest of America swoon over my boys the way I did when Doc first smiled at me.

Jonathan V. Last

Correspondence

Doctor of Our Dreams

I AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY with both Max Boot's depiction of Henry Kissinger's central arguments concerning U.S. foreign policy and his more principled alternative to Kissinger's realpolitik ("The Unrealistic Realism of Henry Kissinger," June 18). I think, however, that Boot stopped short of what seems to me an obvious conclusion one can draw about Kissinger and his ilk in the foreign policy establishment on the issue of China. Basically, they are sentimentalists.

For the sake of argument, let's say that the Nixon-Kissinger policy toward China was a brilliant geostrategic move that drove the Kremlin to distraction. But the circumstances in Asia and elsewhere that dictated that policy have changed drastically. Despite its retention of large numbers of nuclear weapons, Russia is not a credible near-term military threat in Europe or anywhere else. China, our former partner in triangulation, now criticizes the American presence in East Asia, sternly warns us against putting on any hegemonic airs, and feverishly works to improve its military and space capabilities, improvements plainly directed at countering American military power.

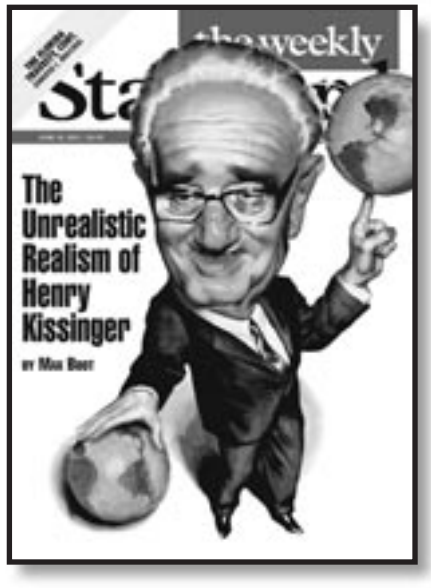
You would think, therefore, that true cold-eyed, cold-hearted practitioners of realpolitik would recommend that we reinforce our military presence in the Pacific, bolster our strategic partnerships with Japan and South Korea, and develop a new one with India—all in order to stymie Beijing's ambitions. Instead, what these alleged heirs of Bismarck give us are soft words about the need to avoid confrontation with the Chinese, handwringing about the possible disruption of trade, and dismissals of those who urge a harder line with Beijing.

Some might assert that there are legitimate reasons that these Metternichian wannabes counsel caution on China. Yet their reluctance has nothing to do with concerns about the Asian balance of power or some sly masterful plan to "keep our friends close and our enemies closer." Instead, although they would be loath to admit it, Henry Kissinger and others like him can't bear the thought that the United States might throw on the ash heap of history what has become known as their greatest accomplishment: Nixon's opening to China. Call that ego, or nostalgia, but don't call it realpolitik.

SCOTT E. BELLIVEAU
Lexington, VA

MAX BOOT WRITES of his subject that "It is hard to think of any other major living American foreign policy figure who writes so elegantly or with such erudition." The one name he summons is Richard Holbrooke's. Still very much alive and a writer superior to both, as well as a diplomat far more significant than Holbrooke (and perhaps even Kissinger?), is George Kennan.

MARK FEENEY
Cambridge, MA



Don't Call Me a Boor

BECAUSE I WAS OUT OF TOWN, I missed Andrew Ferguson's taking me apart limb by limb, chewing me up, and spitting me out piece by piece in a review of my book *Tell Me a Story* ("Television Journalism as Oxymoron," June 4).

Now, having read it, I would appreciate your allowing me to say publicly that I have no problem with Ferguson or any other reviewer putting on paper whatever it is he thinks about anything anybody else has put on paper. That is as it should be.

But I do wonder why a man I have never met, whose prose, more often than not, I admire, felt compelled to use the pages of a magazine I read every week to label me "a boor and a vulgarian."

I can only conclude that what distinguishes people like him from people like me is that, as I stated in my book, "I don't hold in disdain the people I disagree with. I merely disagree with them."

Try it, Mr. Ferguson. You might like it. It's a kinder, gentler way of life and may even inspire someone to say something nice about you when it's over.

P.S. You're also wrong, Mr. Ferguson, about my being a genius. So you're wrong on three counts.

DON HEWITT
Executive Producer, 60 Minutes
New York, NY

Stopping Justice

I APPRECIATED THE PERSPECTIVE that William Tucker provided in his article "The Tragedy of Racial Profiling" (June 18). As an African-American male and a political conservative, this is a topic that I find very perplexing.

I believe in the rule of law and want to see our law enforcement officials armed with the procedures necessary to preserve life and welfare within our society. Individuals or groups of individuals who engage in criminal conduct should be apprehended. Those who seem prepared to do so should be monitored closely. However, to sanction the practice of preemptive stops, searches, and detentions of any group of people in the name of acting on the odds threatens the foundation of the freedom we cherish in this nation.

Allowing the constabulary to routinely stop individuals they believe represent a high-risk criminal element puts too much power in their hands. The power to stop and detain is the power to punish—a power our legal system does not confer upon the police. The concept of a police force singling out members of targeted groups conjures up visions of totalitarian regimes like Stalin's Soviet Union or Hitler's Third Reich. Once such behavior is accepted by a society, can anyone in any group or even profession be considered safe from this kind of assault? I wonder how William Tucker would feel if his local police suddenly decided journalists needed to become the target of routine criminal profiling.

We must prevent the sanctioning of

this manner of profiling, for it inevitably affects the minds of our law enforcement officials. Once we allow them to see whole groups or categories of people as "suspected criminals," we expose everyone in these groups to unacceptable risk. The logic is very simple. If one is seen as a crime risk, there's a higher chance this individual will be stopped, detained, confronted, assaulted, and exposed to deadly force. The entire concept runs contrary to the presumption of innocence we espouse.

Though the statistics behind racial profiling may have shown some crime-lowering benefits, the price our society pays is too high. We should increase police presence. Let them be omnipresent and vigilant, but profiling on the basis of race, ethnicity, income, religion, age, gender, or sexual preference cannot, and must not, be tolerated in a nation which purports to be free.

WALT SEARS
Pleasanton, CA

DESPITE THE TITLE "The Tragedy of Racial Profiling," William Tucker's piece is not about racial profiling at all; it's about how crime rates for minorities are higher than for whites. Nowhere does Tucker address stopping potential suspects on the basis of race, which is what I thought we meant by racial profiling. Perhaps he fails to address this issue because disproportionate racial representation of criminal wrongdoers does not of itself justify the use of profiling on the basis of race. Instead, the number of wrongdoers within a certain group has to be high enough to make profiling useful. Tucker inadvertently shows us it is not.

Let us assume that Tucker is correct about crime rates and his conclusion that certain minorities commit disproportionately more crimes. But unless the crime rate among minorities is absurdly high, making searches or arrests purely on racial grounds will have only a minuscule effect on law enforcement efforts. For instance, Tucker cites that in 1999, the murder rate for black offenders was seven times that for whites. But Tucker states that even for blacks it was a mere 25.5 out of 100,000, or less than 3/100 of a percent. If the rate is that low and the police profile for murderers purely on a racial basis, then the police would have to stop a phenomenal number of innocent blacks to catch the few guilty ones.

This would be a tremendous waste of law enforcement resources, not to mention the negative effect it would have of antagonizing a community whose cooperation one would prefer to have.

Ignoring possible constitutional questions, the important statistic is not whether perpetrators are disproportionately of a certain race; it's whether the offense rate is high enough within a certain population to make profiling within that population justifiable.

Using Tucker's own numbers for murder, the answer is clearly "no." I suspect that it is similarly so for any other crime Tucker wishes to name.

DANIEL A. SIMON
New York, NY

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL misses the mark in his analysis of the Schundler/Franks primary battle ("The Jersey GOP's Family Feud," June 18) by not properly explaining the genesis of the Franks candidacy.

Former New Jersey representative Bob Franks became the darling of the Republican center and state media because of their obsession with Jon Corzine's wealth in the 2000 campaign, but that does not translate into a GOP victory in 2001. Franks lacks any persuasive central message and cannot play victim to the dollar advantage Corzine exercised in his victory last year. Franks is to the left of most GOP primary voters and offers no compelling message on any issue that will ensure victory come November.

Franks, like his predecessor and lame duck colleague Donald DiFrancesco, would rather support liberal Democrat Jim McGreevey than see a Schundler victory. The fact that the primary process was hijacked by DiFrancesco and his legislative cronies to create the Franks candidacy after the filing deadline speaks volumes to the status-quo, rudderless Republican leadership that has controlled all three branches of New Jersey's state government since 1994.

The notion that Franks would even consider calling himself an "outsider" confirms how detached from political reality this myopic odyssey has become.

While Caldwell emphasizes so-called moderate strength in a primary, he fails to mention that only two Republicans since 1981 have been elected to statewide office, and two of the three races were decided by fewer than 50,000 votes.

New Jersey Republicans have nominated moderate after moderate for the U.S. Senate, only to be vanquished by a more left-leaning Democrat. Bret Schundler's candidacy is not only in touch with GOP voters, but it reaches out to Independents and Reagan Democrats in a state starved for fiscal responsibility, lower property taxes, and quality public schools. Schundler presents voters with a live option and not a "Democrat lite" approach to governing New Jersey.

NICHOLAS J. ANTONICELLO JR.
Marina del Rey, CA

THE *TIMES* THEY AIN'T

WHEN THE SCRAPBOOK advised those who must have their texts in "modern language" to stick to the newspapers (June 18), it forgot to mention that if you are reading *The Federalist Papers*, you are reading what were originally newspaper columns. So much for progress in education: Language understandable to the average reader two hundred years ago is now considered "complex." On the other hand, perhaps Hamilton, Madison, and Jay expected too much of their contemporaries. At least we don't make that mistake anymore.

THOMAS SPENCE
MITCHELL MUNCY
Spence Publishing Company
Dallas, TX

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the weekly Standard

For a Total Ban on Human Cloning

About the horror of creating human beings by cloning, there is wide agreement among the American people—and in Congress as well.

But about the extent of the necessary ban on cloning—whether it must outlaw all human cloning or only cloning that aims explicitly at bringing a cloned child to birth—controversy has arisen. It was on this issue that Congress's attempt to prohibit cloning foundered in 1998. And now, in 2001, Congress faces the issue once again with a pair of competing bills. The first is a complete ban on the cloning of human beings, sponsored in the House by Florida Republican Dave Weldon and Michigan Democrat Bart Stupak, and in the Senate by Kansas Republican Sam Brownback. The second is a partial ban, prohibiting for ten years only so-called "reproductive" cloning, sponsored by Pennsylvania Republican James Greenwood and backed by the biotech lobby.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD has editorialized before about the practical impossibility and moral fecklessness of trying to ban cloning only for certain purposes. Greenwood's bill permits and even encourages scientists to create cloned embryos, and then attempts to prevent them from inserting those embryos into a womb. This is unenforceable, since only a judicially ordered abortion could eliminate the result of violating such a law. It is unprosecutable, since it would require an unattainable knowledge of a scientist's intention in creating a clone. And it is unethical, since it would establish, for the first time in federal statutes, a class of embryos that it is a crime *not* to destroy, a felony *not* to treat as anything except disposable tissue. A ban solely on "reproductive" cloning will prove nothing more—and nothing less—than a license to clone. There is, in truth, only one anti-cloning proposal before Congress: the Weldon-Stupak bill.

On June 19 and June 20, a pair of hearings were held in the House of Representatives—one by a Judiciary subcommittee, chaired by Lamar Smith, and the other by an Energy and Commerce subcommittee, chaired by Michael Bilirakis—on the Weldon-Stupak and Greenwood bills. From a political perspective, the most important testimony at these hearings came from Claude Allen, the deputy secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, who presented, for the first time in an official setting, the Bush administration's position: strong support for a ban on "any and all attempts to clone a human being" and complete rejection of pseudo-compromises like the Greenwood bill.

"The administration favors the passage of specific legislation to prohibit the cloning of a human being," Allen told the Energy and Commerce subcommittee. The Weldon-Stupak bill, he added, "is consistent with [Health and Human Services] secretary [Tommy] Thompson's and the president's views."

The administration deserves credit for taking an unequivocal position against all human cloning, in the face of pressure from some in the biotech industry. This issue, however, will require personal leadership from President Bush—and sooner rather than later. He will have to help educate the American public about cloning and work to move the ban through the House and Senate. (The House leadership intends to seek a vote on Weldon-Stupak as early as next month.)

The president will be aided in his task by the extraordinary testimony of many distinguished witnesses at last week's hearings. They ranged across the political spectrum, and the moral seriousness and eloquence they brought to the halls of Congress was striking. (We encourage our readers to take a look at their complete statements at *www.house.gov/judiciary* and *www.house.gov/commerce*.)

Consider the testimony of social philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago:

> The path down which we are headed unless we intervene now to stop human cloning is one that will deliver harm in abundance—and harm that can be stated clearly and decisively *now*—whereas any potential benefits are highly speculative and likely to be achievable through less drastic and damaging methods, in any case. The harms, in other words, are known—not a matter of speculation—whereas the hypothesized benefits are a matter of conjecture, in some cases rather far-fetched conjecture. . . .
>
> The hope of genetic fundamentalists is that we can increas-

ingly control for that which is deemed desirable and eliminate that which is not. The aim in all this is not to prevent devastating illnesses but precisely to reflect and to reinforce certain societal prejudices in and through genetic selection. There is a word for this so-called "genetic enhancement." That word is eugenics. Human cloning belongs to this eugenics project.

The always-thoughtful Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins added:

> Cloning represents the opening wedge for a series of future technologies that will permit us to alter the human germline and ultimately to design people genetically. . . . It is therefore extremely important that Congress act legislatively at this point to establish the principle that our democratic political community is sovereign and has the power to control the pace and scope of such technological developments. . . .
>
> Opponents of a legislative ban frequently argue that such a ban would be rendered ineffective by the fact that we live in a globalized world in which any attempt to regulate technology by sovereign nation-states can easily be sidestepped by moving to another jurisdiction. . . . This is part of a larger widespread belief that technological advance should not and cannot be stopped.
>
> I believe that this is a fundamentally flawed argument. In the first place, it is simply not the case that the pace and scope of technological advance cannot be controlled politically. . . . Second, to argue that no national ban or regulation can precede an international agreement on the subject is to put the cart before the horse. Regulation never starts at an international level: Nation-states have to set up enforceable rules for their own societies before they can even begin to think about international rules. . . .
>
> If we can establish a general consensus among civilized nations that human cloning is unacceptable, we will then have a range of traditional diplomatic and economic instruments at our disposal to persuade or pressure countries outside that consensus to join.

Another witness in support of Weldon-Stupak was Judy Norsigian, executive director of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and coauthor of the latest edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the most widely distributed feminist text in America. As she noted, her organization has "a long track record" of support for legalized abortion. But, as she explained,

> Cloning advocates are seeking to appropriate the language of reproductive rights to support their case. This is a travesty. There is an immense difference between seeking to end an unwanted pregnancy and seeking to create a genetic duplicate human being. . . .
>
> The [Boston Women's Health Book Collective] joins many other national and international organizations in calling for a universal ban on human reproductive cloning. To allow the creation of human clones would open the door to treating our children like manufactured objects. It would violate deeply and widely held values concerning human individuality and dignity. It would pave the way for unprecedented new forms of eugenics. And it would serve no justifiable purpose.

Important testimony was also offered by Alexander Capron, a Clinton appointee to the National Bioethics Advisory Commission and professor of law at the University of Southern California, by Gerard Bradley of the University of Notre Dame law school, by Richard Doerflinger of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and by Stuart Newman, professor of cell biology and anatomy at New York Medical College and co-founder of the Council for Responsible Genetics. But perhaps the most ringing words came from Leon Kass of the University of Chicago:

> As has been obvious for some time, new biotechnologies are providing powers to intervene in human bodies and minds in ways that go beyond the traditional goals of healing the sick, to threaten fundamental changes in human nature and the meaning of our humanity. These technologies have now brought us to a crucial fork in the road, where we are compelled to decide whether we wish to travel down the path that leads to the Brave New World. That, and nothing less, is what is at stake in your current deliberations about whether we should tolerate the practice of human cloning. . . .
>
> [Cloning] constitutes unethical experimentation on the child-to-be, subjecting him or her to enormous risks of bodily and developmental abnormalities. It threatens individuality. . . . It confuses identity. . . . It represents a giant step toward turning procreation into manufacture. . . . And it is a radical form of parental despotism and child abuse. . . . A majority of members of Congress, I believe, are, like most Americans, opposed to human cloning. But opposition is not enough. For if Congress does nothing about it, we shall have human cloning, and we shall have it soon. Congress' failure to try to stop human cloning—and by the most effective means—will in fact constitute its tacit approval.

There was a revealing moment in the question period that followed the testimony—one of those brief flashes that expose our current situation—when Congressman Ted Strickland of Ohio complained, "We should not allow theology, philosophy, or politics to interfere with the decision we make on this issue."

If we do not allow theology to inform our political decisions, if we do not allow philosophy, if we do not allow even politics, what remains? Only the final paralysis of government and the final paralysis of thought—which is to say, the inevitability of cloned human beings and the degradation of human liberty and dignity.

—J. Bottum and William Kristol

The Social Security Election

Was last week's GOP victory in Virginia good news or bad news for Bush? BY FRED BARNES

AP / Wide World Photos

Randy Forbes with wife Shirley, Virginia Gov. James Gilmore (left), and Tom Davis.

REPUBLICAN Randy Forbes won a Democratic House seat in Virginia in a special election on June 19, even though he failed to gain a mandate on the issue that mattered most nationally in the race, Social Security reform. Instead, Democrats came away from Forbes's 52-48 victory over Louise Lucas encouraged to attack Republicans vigorously in 2002 if they embrace President Bush's partial privatization idea for Social Security or anything like it. And Republicans were left arguing over whether the Democratic strategy might work.

In Washington, the GOP debate is between Karl Rove, Bush's chief political adviser, and Tom Davis, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee. They've disagreed for months about the Social Security issue, Rove insisting that Bush's initiative won't hurt Republican candidates, Davis worried it may cause the GOP to lose the House next year. After a chat following Forbes's victory, they disagree as much as ever.

The important thing, in Rove's view, is that Forbes was zinged in three different Democratic TV ads for backing Bush's plan, but won anyway. The district in southeast Virginia was "tailor made" for attacks on Social Security, Rove says. A centrist Democrat, Norm Sisisky, held the seat for 18 years until his death in March, but it's essentially a swing district. President Clinton won it twice, Bush squeaked by last year. The electorate is disproportionately old, and most of the elderly are the sort of middle- and low-income folks likely to be leery of tinkering with the Social Security system. And the campaign was short, giving Forbes less time to answer charges that he'd put Social Security benefits at risk. "The longer you talk about Social Security," says Rove, "the better off you are." In the end, Forbes's victory was not just proof the Social Security offensive "didn't work." Rove also believes the outcome shows it's politically safe for Bush to propose legislation reforming Social Security later this year.

Davis is skeptical. He thinks Forbes dodged a bullet in the special election, and other Republicans might not be so lucky in 2002. Forbes had a relatively weak opponent, a black state senator who had difficulty discussing national issues. Yet when Democratic ads on Social Security aired, Forbes dropped 10 percentage points among seniors and 11 among "near seniors" over 55 years old. Mark Nevins of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee said Lucas came from a dozen points down to a few points behind by emphasizing Social Security. When spots defending Lucas's record on taxes and crime replaced Social Security ads, Forbes regained the ground he'd lost among seniors, at least white seniors. Davis's conclusion: A better Democratic candidate could have made more headway on Social Security. "We won round one," he says, "but there are many rounds to go."

It's notable that Forbes rarely mentioned his support for partial privatization during the campaign, while Democrats dwelled on the subject. They suggested in their TV ads that Forbes favors *full* privatization with all Social Security funds invested in the stock market. These ads forced Forbes to put a response spot on television. Its message was that Forbes would never cut anyone's Social Security benefits. He did not mention partial privatization or Bush in his ad.

Nonetheless, Rove insists the Bush plan remains popular, consistently getting majority support in national polls. Both he and Bush believe the old adage about Social Security—it's the "third rail of American politics, touch it and you die"—is obsolete. Younger voters, especially, fear the system is so shaky that it won't finance their retirement. Bush outlined his idea for using

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Social Security funds for "personal retirement accounts" during the campaign last year. As president, he's appointed a commission to flesh out the plan. The commission's report is expected late this summer. As things now stand, Bush would seek congressional approval of partial privatization in 2002.

This timetable makes sense for Bush, but Davis and other congressional Republicans aren't sure it works for them. Most support Bush's bold and overdue reform plan. But 20 of the GOP's Senate seats and all 222 of its House seats are at stake in the 2002 election. Even before the Virginia race, Democratic strategists said preserving Social Security in its current form would be the centerpiece of their campaigns next year. They were heartened by a CBS/*New York Times* poll last week that found "the public's anxiety about the future of Social Security" at its highest point in 20 years. Of course this worry could cut in Bush's favor, prompting support for his plan as the solution to the potential insolvency of the Social Security system. In any event, if Republicans on Capitol Hill balk, it will be hard for Bush to pursue Social Security reform in 2002.

Forbes probably won't have to worry one way or the other. His biggest problem in the special election was the black vote. Thirty-seven percent of the district's voters are black. But their turnout was so large they made up nearly 40 percent of the electorate. And 97 percent of the black vote went for Lucas (Forbes won 87 percent of the white vote). In one predominantly black precinct, Forbes lost 1,446 to 8. Next month, however, the Virginia legislature will reapportion the state's 11 congressional districts. A sizable chunk of the black Democratic vote is certain to be shifted to another district, probably to Democrat Bobby Scott's. This will give Forbes a safe seat—safe enough even to hold forth about bringing change to Social Security. ♦

Michael Ramirez

Single Father's Day

Newspaper editors celebrate *some* fathers.

BY DAVID POPENOE

THIS FATHER'S DAY, the stories in the national press had a curious twist. They featured almost exclusively one relatively small group of dads: single fathers. A perusal of newspapers ranging from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to the *Chicago Tribune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Boston Globe* yielded precious little mention of the great bulk of fathers, who are married. Indeed, it seemed that in order to be fêted on Father's Day 2001, a man had to be either not married to his child's mother, or married but biologically unrelated to his child. While there may be many good reasons to recognize such men, singling them out to the exclusion of all others suggests that editors had some agenda besides a simple tribute to fathers.

The *New York Times* set the pattern with a front-page article by reporter Carey Goldberg. Noting that the number of single fathers increased by 50 percent in the 1990s, Goldberg's piece suggested that a "revolution" was afoot. The story quoted a men's rights advocate saying, "In their quiet, harried, domestic way, all those single fathers are waging as much of a revolution as the 20th Century women who flooded into the workplace." The piece went on to describe the lives of several harried dads who, despite society's view that men cannot be good nurturers, are in fact doing a wonderful job of parenting (or so they assured the reporter).

But these stories didn't quite level with the reader about what kind of revolution today's single fatherhood represents; nor did they make a convincing case that we should celebrate it. A glance backward reveals that in 1900 a much higher percentage of children in single-parent households lived with their fathers (27 percent) than do today (17 percent). Of course, single fatherhood in 1900 was mostly involuntary, necessitated by the death of the mother. Today, only a tiny percentage of children living with one parent are raised by widowers; the vast majority live in families shaped by divorce or out-of-wedlock births.

Alan LaBranche and his daughter Julian, 8, of Methuen, Mass., are part of a major trend for the American family: a striking rise in the number of single fathers with primary custody of their children. Such families have increased by more than 50 percent in a decade.

Single Dads Wage Revolution, One Bedtime Story at a Time

By CAREY GOLDBERG

METHUEN, Mass., June 13 — Alan LaBranche reads "Dr. Mouse, Bungle-Jungle Doctor" with his 8-year-old daughter, Julian, for about the 43,000th time. He discusses his 13-year-old daughter Eleanor's plea to go to a weekend evening party that might, she admits when pressed, include boys. He slices cantaloupe in a kitchen where the calendar on the refrigerator door is packed with roller skating and soccer and chorus dates.

In all this, Mr. LaBranche is living out one of the most striking trends to emerge from recent census data: the number of men who flooded into the workplace, said Warren Farrell, the San Diego-based author of the book "Father and Child Reunion" (Tarcher Putnam Penguin, 2001).

"Fathers' desire to be involved with their children is to the 21st century what women's desire to be in the workplace was to the 20th century," Dr. Farrell said. And the analogy goes deeper, he

DADS OF ALL STRIPES

The 2000 census reports there are more single fathers and fewer traditional ones. What do they say for themselves? Sunday Styles.

New York Times

Or consider this: Unlike single moms, a majority of single dads looking after children are single only in the sense of not being married. Somewhere on the scene, typically, there is a woman who is helping them. It is common for a single father to have a live-in or live-out girlfriend who contributes to the child-rearing and housekeeping. Furthermore, single fathers have higher incomes than single mothers and therefore can, and do, more frequently hire help. Finally, non-custodial mothers often lend a hand; as a group, they remain more involved with their children than do non-custodial fathers.

Any celebration of single dads, then, that goes beyond an entirely appropriate recognition of individuals striving to do the best they can by their kids, amounts to a celebration of divorce and other causes of non-marital child-rearing. This is ill-considered, to say the least, in light of the abundant evidence that children are better off being raised by two parents than by one. Moreover, some studies suggest that children are no better off, and are in some ways worse off, being raised by single fathers than by single mothers. It is hard to see what possible social gain could come from shifting the care of children from mothers to fathers.

One is left wondering what explains the media's infatuation with single fatherhood. A troubling possibility is that some on the left, having won the battle for public opinion that has made marriage no longer a prerequisite or even particularly important for child-rearing, are now carrying their campaign to reshape public sentiments a step further—so that eventually a mother's remaining with her children will also come to be regarded as optional and unimportant.

David Popenoe is co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University and the author of Life Without Father *(Harvard, 1999).*

The *Times* article provides some support for this line of thinking. It notes, quite reasonably, that the growth of single fatherhood is explained not only by the new desire of men to be hands-on fathers, but also by "the loosening of bonds on women." And this loosening of bonds, the writer adds, "may help explain another aspect of single fatherhood: that fathers often get custody of their children belatedly, when the mother decides they would be better off with him."

Fatherhood has undergone two great and contradictory changes in recent decades. The first is that more fathers than ever before in our history are now absent from their children's lives. The second, and smaller, change is that some fathers are now more motivated than most were in the past to provide hands-on care for their children. It is to be expected that as we advance the laudable involvement of fathers in caring for their children from birth onward, more fathers will want some form of custody of their children after a divorce or unmarried birth.

But the media weren't applauding the "new fatherhood" this Father's Day; married fathers, after all, are full participants in that. The underlying purpose of the coverage seems to have been different: to consolidate mainstream acceptance of the decline of marriage, along with the concomitant freedom to choose "alternative family forms"; and to legitimize, in particular, a mother's freedom to have her children not live with her, if this suits her needs and the father is accommodating.

But the freedom of adults to suit themselves does not always promote the welfare of children. All too often, "alternative family forms" introduce into children's lives revolving-door "parental" figures who in the end supply nothing remotely resembling the unconditional love, unwavering dedication, steady nurturing, constant attention, and thoughtful guidance required of true lifelong parents. Odd—I didn't read a word about parents like that this Father's Day. ♦

Pirates of the Future

Can intellectual property still be protected without invading privacy?

BY JAMES D. MILLER

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY rights will soon come under increasingly severe attacks from Internet pirates. These digital assaults should concern all those who believe that secure property rights provide the foundation for a prosperous society. Unfortunately, the best methods for protecting intellectual property should be anathema to conservatives.

The Internet already makes it easy for the well-wired to copy music illicitly. The likely growth of broadband Internet access will soon make it possible for many to pilfer movies as well. Anything we can watch, read, or listen to over our computers can be copied. Limited Internet connections currently make it time-consuming for many of us to download music, and nearly impossible for most of us to download movies. But this barrier against theft will soon crumble as cable and telephone companies rapidly increase Americans' Internet access speeds.

Napster showed that people who wouldn't even consider shoplifting would readily download pirated music. I once asked my intermediate microeconomics class at Smith College if morality would prevent any of them from using the Internet to steal copyrighted content. Out of about 40 students, only one confessed to unfashionable ethics. (Many colleges did prevent their students from using Napster, not because it was being used to violate copyright laws but rather because its overuse was clogging up their computer networks.)

If Americans are willing to steal intellectual property, and if increased access speeds will soon enable us to do so almost effortlessly, then a large part of our entertainment-based economy is in peril. Just as people have less incentive to work if high tax rates appropriate the fruits of their labors, so media companies would have less incentive to produce intellectual property if it is easily stolen.

In response to Internet piracy, the gut reaction of most conservatives would probably be to defend the imperiled property rights. Alas, to protect the property rights of media companies, the privacy rights of individuals would have to be sacrificed. Sure, for-profit firms like Napster can be sued for copyright infringement and either induced to mend their ways or forced into bankruptcy. But stopping individuals from violating copyright laws is much harder.

Imagine millions of computer users sharing files directly from each other's hard drives. This is the essence of peer-to-peer computing, and it may become a big part of the Internet's future. With peer-to-peer computing, users could search through other people's hard drives for songs or movies without needing to utilize a central firm's computer. There would be no Napster-like company for copyright enforcers to attack. To stop piracy in a peer-to-peer world, media companies would have to target individuals.

In a sense, catching copyright offenders is like catching drug sellers. When illegal drugs are sold or a song is illegally copied, there is no victim present to report the crime—as there would be in, say, a car theft or armed robbery. Nabbing copyright offenders, therefore, requires secretly watching them.

James D. Miller is an assistant professor of economics at Smith College.

To do this, law enforcement would need laws that force computer users to "keep their blinds open" so that monitors could ensure they weren't violating copyright laws. Imagine a group of college students who set up their computers so they can all copy each other's files, without allowing access to people outside of their circle. In this situation, no one would be able to tell if these students were illegally copying movies. The only way to watch them would be to make it illegal for groups to shut out copyright monitors.

But even if a monitor had access to the students' hard drives, the students could still encrypt their movies. Then the only way piracy could be stopped would be to ban encryption. Totalitarian governments would undoubtedly restrict peer-to-peer usage to prevent political debates. Unfortunately, the United States might have to do the same to protect property rights.

And even if individual copyright violators were caught *en masse*, what could be done to them? It would be politically infeasible to impose jail terms or crippling fines. It would be unwieldy for media companies to sue a massive number of copyright violators for small amounts. Perhaps, however, we could have reverse class action suits where one plaintiff sues many defendants. This would allow trial lawyers to feast on millions of American copyright violators.

Internet service providers like America Online could be held responsible for the copyright infringements of their users. But this would just shift the problem to these providers and force them to monitor users. If they were unable to stop most piracy, then they would presumably be sued and forced to pass on their legal costs to customers. This could actually limit copyright violations by making Internet access too expensive for many Americans.

Conservatives unhappy with the current state of popular culture might welcome a piracy-induced decline in music and movie production. They should beware, however, because Internet piracy might soon strike books. As computer screen quality increases and e-books become more popular, many people will be downloading books. Internet piracy could threaten the market for the written word.

If piracy can't be stopped, then government subsidies might be needed to make the commercial production of movies, books, and music profitable. Many types of intellectual property would then become like public parks: free goods subsidized by the government. This would change what kinds of products were produced. Movie studios would make movies to please the bureaucrats who distribute the subsidies, without regard for how much the American public enjoyed their product.

If government subsidies were not provided, then media companies might be able to profit only by selling product-related merchandise or embedding commercials in their content. A future *Star Wars* movie might revolve around whether a Jedi Knight could pass the Pepsi challenge. Of course, hacker pirates could deprive this film of its Pepsi revenue by altering the movie and digitally renaming the Jedi Knight's task.

When Odysseus was returning from the Trojan War he faced a tragic choice. He had to sail past either Scylla, a beast with six snaky heads, or Charybdis, a whirlpool monster that swallowed ships whole. Odysseus chose to save most of his crew and went past Scylla, losing one man to each head.

The United States faces a similar dilemma in deciding what to do about Internet copyright infringement. There will be far-reaching negative consequences regardless of our choice. By necessity, our goal must be to limit the damage rather than find an easy solution. ♦

The Next War

If you want peace, prepare for two wars.

By Frederick W. Kagan

Make no bones about it, there will be another war. We have entered what should be thought of not as the "post-Cold War" era or the "New World Order" or least of all the "End of History," but an interwar period, the tenth the United States has faced as a nation. In all the others save the Cold War, we have failed to prepare ourselves for what lay ahead. The evidence is growing that we will fail in this one, too.

In an interwar period, there are two great challenges. The first is to take seriously that war will occur again. This is especially hard when the international situation is superficially benign, as it is today. The second is to recognize the importance of active engagement in support of the international order. Liberal democracies find this nearly impossible. They almost always forget that peace must be vigorously defended by the powers that have the greatest stake in it, and that nations can accomplish such defense only by maintaining powerful armed forces and demonstrating willingness to use them to deter and defeat aggression. America is failing to meet both of these challenges.

For years already, the leaders of our armed forces have testified that the services are funded below the level needed to sustain them, that training and readiness are declining, that critical maintenance is being neglected, and that modernization is underfunded. Anecdotes abound of soldiers running out of bullets to train with. Observers report that units rotating through training centers do not emerge from them ready to go to war. And senior leaders testify before Congress that the U.S. armed forces could not reasonably be expected to fight and win two nearly simultaneous wars, as they are committed to doing. That is the state of affairs under the current budget.

Now, the Bush administration is on the verge of proposing to reduce the size of the services—formally abandoning the longstanding two-regional-wars strategy, cutting combat units accordingly, transferring much of the money saved to a missile defense program, and seeking to rely on high-tech, long-range precision strike systems to fight and win the nation's wars. This program is a recipe for failure to deter aggression, for unpreparedness for war, and for the collapse of America's armed forces.

Setting aside for a moment the fact that since 1991 America has not actually maintained a force capable of fighting and winning two nearly simultaneous major regional wars, let us review the logic behind the two-regional-wars strategy.

Consider the position of a president who has at his command only a one-war force. War is threatened somewhere. Does he deploy his force? If he does, he leaves every other region of the world open to aggression. If he does not, he cannot deter the aggressor. Let us say that war breaks out, and the president decides that he must fight. He must commit the great majority of America's combat power to a single theater. If things go poorly in that theater, there are no reinforcements. Even worse, the visible commitment of the nation's combat power in one region is likely to encourage would-be aggressors elsewhere to attack.

It was precisely such a situation that drew together two unlikely allies, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, in 1941. Had the British maintained adequate armed forces both to handle Germany and to defend the Far East, it is unlikely the Japanese would have been so quick to attack. The fact that Britain was completely committed in Europe, however, meant that the Japanese had only America to fear—and America was unprepared for war. We should keep in mind, too, that the decisions that led to this weakness were made in the 1920s—when Japan was friendly and Germany weak. By the time the danger became apparent, it was too late to remedy that weakness.

The truth is that no president is likely to run the risk of leaving one or more theaters entirely exposed to potentially hostile states. Like the British in the 1930s, an American president facing this choice would likely be paralyzed and take no effective action. America would become not the deterring power, but the self-deterring power, for a one-war force is really a no-war force. It will not deter aggression, and it will not win wars.

Frederick W. Kagan teaches history at the United States Military Academy at West Point. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not purport to express the views of any department or agency of the United States government.

If the United States is to have the ability to deter or defeat aggression, therefore, there can be no thought of cutting combat units out of any of the services—which already fall short of a two-war force. The force we maintain today is the product of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's Bottom-Up Review of 1993. It is a force that could fight one war at a time—what Aspin earlier described as a "win-hold-win" force. Formally replacing the two-war strategy with a strategy skeptics in 1993 dubbed "win-hold-oops" and "win-lose-lose" might justify leaving the current force as it is, but would certainly not justify reducing it in size, nor would it be strategically sound.

And even apart from strategic considerations, further cuts would probably kill the services. There is a minimum size below which a military organization cannot maintain itself. Today's armed forces are highly specialized, with a very limited number of people in numerous critical specialties such as military intelligence, communications, and foreign area expertise. Army units about to deploy abroad or to training centers often must grab individuals, sometimes by name, from other units to carry out their mission. The deeper the cuts, the more acute the problem. Then there is morale. It is already difficult to convince young men and women to join the armed forces and stay there. It will become much more so as the services are cut. Would-be recruits will see that a smaller force will have to work harder and longer, and will achieve lower standards of performance and readiness. Who will want to join such an organization?

Further cuts in force structure will present policymakers with a choice between evils: pull back from overseas positions and commitments, reducing our ability to preserve the peace, or spread the already overextended services even thinner. The amount of time the average member of the services spends abroad or on assignment is already at a record high. This partly accounts for the large numbers who have fled the services or avoided joining up in the first place. It is impossible to imagine continuing the current load of missions with a smaller force.

Withdrawing from overseas stations and commitments, however, would be the height of folly. Policymakers in Washington are not free to determine American interests. American interests are what they are—and what they become when reported in the media and perceived by the American people and foreign leaders—for reasons beyond the control of government officials. It is not possible to say in advance, "We have interests in this region but none in that one." The world is an unpredictable place. Even an isolationist policy such as the United States pursued in the 1920s brought no divestiture of interests, as we learned painfully in the 1930s. It is hard to believe that any rational person could advocate a return to that policy, even if America's enormously increased global commitments and ties to the global economy did not make such a policy simply impossible.

Still more basic is the fact that our overseas stations and our commitments to critical regions of the world are essential to keeping those regions peaceful and stable. U.S. withdrawal would undermine peace and stability. Nations that now look to us to keep the peace would have to look to themselves. Americans who favor this have not considered the consequences. Our weakness in the Far East (revealed again in the recent crisis with China) has already encouraged the Japanese prime minister to endorse the elimination of any restrictions on Japan's armed forces. Such a policy would probably encourage rearmament in the many Asian nations that fear a renewal of Japanese aggression. Thus it seems that American withdrawal, even to the small extent that it has occurred in the Far East where we still retain forward-deployed combat forces, has already contributed to actions likely to destabilize the region.

The consequences of fuller disengagement would be exponentially greater. America threatens no peace-loving state. Our presence, which is not suspected of preparing the way for aggression or manifesting aspirations to regional hegemony, allows other states to maintain nonthreatening armed forces of their own. Once we leave critical regions, the powerful states in those regions, forced to undertake their own defense, will almost inevitably be seen as threatening by their neighbors, who will respond in kind. American interests and security are powerfully served by maintaining forces abroad to prevent the regional arms races and instability that are likely to follow our withdrawal.

Finally, our forces deployed abroad send a message to those few states that seek to destroy the international status quo and are willing to use force to do it. The message is: The United States will stop you. With our forces maintaining the peace in vital areas, we can deter would-be aggressors. When we withdraw those forces, we not only cease to deter, but we actually invite aggression, for the act of withdrawal is seen as an expression of weakness and unwillingness to fight. This is much worse than if we had never been in the region at all, and may precipitate what we are so eager to avoid. Our interests in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East will not go away just because we pull our forces out, and once we withdraw them, we may find it very difficult to send them back again when we need to.

For all these reasons, the proposal to reduce the size of

Patrick Arrasmith

our armed forces by cutting combat units should be rejected out of hand. So should the plan to fund missile defense by starving combat forces.

Building a missile defense system is an admirable project. The present vulnerability of the continental United States and our forces abroad to missile attack is one of the most important problems America must solve. No effort should be spared to develop adequate defenses against ballistic missiles, theater missiles, and cruise missiles. The Bush administration's willingness to meet that challenge and take the political heat for renegotiating or abandoning the ABM treaty is admirable. But the money to fund missile defense cannot be taken out of other Defense Department programs. The threat of missile attack is serious, but it is not by any means the only threat we face. If we gut our armed forces to pay for missile defense, we will lose our position in the world and our ability to maintain the peace at least as rapidly and surely as if we had no missile defense. We must pursue missile defense, as the administration seems to desire, and find additional funding to pay for it.

As for the last major element of the current defense reform proposals—that we rely on high-tech, long-range precision weapons systems to win or deter wars—it has very serious drawbacks. First, we do not yet have long-range "smart bombs" and are unlikely to for a long time. Most of the precision weapons we now have must be launched from platforms in or near the theater of war; they cannot be launched from North Dakota to hit Iraq. And there are other limitations on their capabilities. Their effectiveness depends on the quality of our intelligence about the enemy. During the air attack on Serbia in April 1999, we destroyed many a haystack disguised to look like a tank with multi-hundred-thousand-dollar missiles. And such weapons have other inefficiencies. They can destroy many enemy tanks in close formation, but if the enemy disperses, we are reduced to hitting tanks and guns one by one. In many cases, the missile costs more than the target. It is desirable to force the enemy to concentrate his ground forces, but that is best achieved by ground forces, which will be unavailable if we have cut them to the bone.

Ground forces operating in tandem with precision strike weapons are much more effective and efficient than precision strike systems alone. The whole history of warfare confirms that success lies in integrating all of the assets at your disposal as effectively as possible, whether they be pike, horse, and arrow, or bomber, tank, and rifleman. Only in recent years have techno-enthusiasts forgotten this lesson and begun once again to imagine that a single type of weapon by itself can dominate the battlefield.

It is well to remember here that today's techno-enthusiasts had their counterparts in earlier times. After World War I, some in Britain proclaimed that the new technologies of their day, tanks and aircraft primarily, would revolutionize warfare and make it possible to maintain much smaller, cheaper, and more lethal forces than the armies of the past. A critical cabinet decision of August 15, 1919, declared, "In order to save man-power, the utmost possible use is to be made of mechanical contrivances, which

should be regarded as a means of reducing Estimates" for defense expenditures. Another report of the same time declared, "Man-power in its war use will more and more tend to become subsidiary and auxiliary to the full development and use of mechanical power." Sir Hugh Trenchard, the first chief of staff of the Royal Air Force, repeatedly declared that airpower alone would not only win Britain's wars, but also conduct the peacekeeping operations then known as "imperial policing" that were so enervating to Britain's ground forces in the 1920s. He frequently demanded that funds be transferred from the Army to the RAF to support this program.

But Trenchard and the British cabinet misunderstood the significance of the new technology. They were right that it would transform warfare, but wrong that it would lead to smaller, cheaper forces. On the contrary, all of the major belligerents in World War II deployed multi-million-man armies, and they fought the bloodiest and most expensive conflict the world has ever seen—equipped with the latest technology. There is every reason to suppose that the current claims for silver-bullet technologies will prove equally unsound.

Even if such claims proved correct, however, there would remain the serious problem that years will elapse before we can "revolutionize" our forces. In the meantime, we seem to be relying for our safety on the notion that the world is in a "strategic pause"; that there will be no major aggression before we are ready for it, whenever that may be. Unfortunately, our unreadiness is likely to bring on aggression. If, as we transform our armed forces, we pull back from the world, we will only encourage those who seek to destroy the international order to do so rapidly, before we are ready for them. Hitler was aware that the British rearmament program would be near complete by 1942—so he attacked in 1939. One of the most dangerous things we can do is create a window during which it will be relatively safe to attack our interests, and after which it will be impossible. Instead, we must maintain our armed forces and our global commitment even as we transform our forces.

One more historical parallel may be in order. After the First World War, the British drastically cut their forces, encountered great difficulties in recruitment and retention, concentrated on peacekeeping and homeland defense to the exclusion of warfighting, withdrew as far as possible from overseas commitments, and generally ran down both their military establishment and their foreign policy. And they paid a high price.

In 1933, with Hitler in power in Germany, and Manchuria under the control of a suddenly militant Japan, a committee of the British cabinet described the defenses available for deployment in the first six months of a hypothetical war:

> Our present resources do not permit us even to aim at anything better than to place in the field single divisions in each of the first two months of the war, a third at the end of the fourth month, and the remaining two divisions at the end of the sixth month.

These five divisions would have amounted to a force equivalent in size to the one the defense reviews of the 1990s expected the United States to deploy to a major regional war. Given the low readiness of U.S. units and the limited "lift" capacity available for transporting them, it is unlikely the United States could better the performance projected here by much. The British report continued:

> The demands for economy have prevented us from providing the modern equipment and the extremely important and expensive item of sufficient reserves of ammunition which would be necessary for war on the continent of Europe, and even for a major contingency on the Frontiers of India.

This is extremely important: Although British forces had been cut in accordance with plans drawn up in the early 1920s for reliance on new technology, little of the technology materialized. Although many weapons went through prolonged periods of research and development, and prototypes were designed, no usable systems were built. It should be underscored that the U.S. armed forces have not fielded a single new major weapons system since 1990. Indeed, more attention is now being paid to what current systems to kill than what new systems to build. Even if we choose to rely on technology in the future, there is no assurance that we will actually build the technology before the future arrives.

The British report concluded its discussion of readiness with a damning admission:

> The most we could do at present if called upon to intervene in Europe, and it is probably well known to both our friends and enemies, would be to provide a small contingent of, say, one or at most two divisions at the outbreak of war, equipping them to a certain extent at the expense of later divisions preparing to go overseas.

Great Britain was unable to deter the Second World War, and was humiliated in ground combat for the first half of the war, needlessly losing lives and territory, because it failed to maintain readiness in peacetime. If the United States reduces its armed forces along the lines currently proposed, there is every reason to suppose that a similar fate awaits us.

The British committee recommended an increase in defense spending of £71 million over five years, at a time when Britain's annual defense budget was £108 million. The Army was to receive £40 million of that increase. Yet one participant in the discussions evaluated the Army's needs alone at over £145 million. The price of repairing the neglect of the armed forces in a time of crisis was staggering—so much so that even the committee established to determine that price could not face it, and watered down its recommendation. In the end, politicians adjusted the figures in line with "political reality"—what they thought they could get through Parliament—and allocated only £20 million. But political reality bore no relationship to the real world, and the ultimate price proved much higher: Britain was nearly defeated, her cities were bombed, she took hundreds of thousands of casualties, and she lost her position as the world's leading power.

Exactly the same preoccupation with political reality at the expense of the real world can be seen in Washington today. Independent experts estimate the armed forces' needs at anywhere from $50 billion to $150 billion annually in additional spending. The cost of missile defense is on top of that. But the increases being proposed by the administration and its various study groups fall far short of these figures—not because those advancing them seriously dispute the forces' needs, but because higher expenditures on defense mean reduced tax cuts and less spending on health care and education.

Virtually no one in Washington seriously worries that we will one day have to fight a war again unless we deter it. It therefore seems easy and not too dangerous to cannibalize the armed forces to pay for domestic programs. But all experience argues that there *will* be another war—and that we, like many before us, will be unready for it. We will fail to deter it; we will endure reverses in its earliest phases; we will suffer from it grievously and needlessly; and we may not win it. The real world has a way of punishing those who ignore it. ♦

The Death of Compromise

There's no more middle in the Middle East.

By David Brooks

Jerusalem

For the past half century, most people thought the Arab-Israeli conflict was a fight over land. Leaders would propose slogans like "Land for Peace." Diplomats would draw lines on maps, hoping to find some territorial arrangement that would be acceptable to both sides. But the events of the last nine months—the failure of Camp David and the subsequent intifada—have transformed the Middle East as radically as the events of 1948 or 1967. They have stripped away the notion that this is a struggle about land and material things. They have revealed that it is a struggle over the assignment of historical guilt.

If the conflict were about land, it would already have been solved. At Camp David, Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak offered to dismantle over 100 settlements, return over 90 percent of the West Bank, large chunks of Jerusalem, and all of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians, and to swap other land to compensate them for the last few bits of territory that would remain Israeli. Arafat rejected this without even making a counter-offer because Barak's deal would have amounted to a step away from what Arafat and his people really care about. The Palestinians know that they cannot threaten the existence of Israel in a material sense. Israel's GDP per capita is over ten times that of its Arab neighbors, and its military might is unquestioned. But the Palestinians can hope to undermine the moral legitimacy of the Jewish state. More than anything, it now seems, this is what they want: for the Israelis to capitulate intellectually and morally; for the Israelis to admit that their state was founded on a crime; for them to apologize for what their existence has done to the Palestinians.

The Palestinians will not, it now appears, stop fighting until the Israelis acknowledge the justice of the Palestinian cause and absolve the Palestinians of all guilt for the terrorism perpetrated in their name. They're like a man in a bitter feud whose enemy's opinion begins to matter more to him than anything else: He craves his enemy's admission of guilt. To secure this, the Palestinians are willing to endure another century of refugee camps, road closures, violence, and conflict.

In other words, the Middle East conflict has been polarized and simplified. The whole dispute hangs on a simple question: Is Israel a criminal state? Arab populations have swung behind the idea that it is, and the Jewish population has swung behind the idea that it isn't. Not since 1948 has the issue been so stark and each side so unified. There is simply no middle position on this central question, and so all those who were trying to span the divide between the two peoples—the businessmen who want to trade with the other side, as well as the peace activists who want to build bridges—have found that the ground has vanished from under their feet.

It's interesting for Americans to watch the evolution of this conflict, because this is what happens when one state is militarily and economically dominant over its rivals. The rivals give up even trying to compete on the battlefield or in the marketplace. Instead, they challenge the very idea of the dominant power. And the people in that dominant power have to do something that is very difficult for a bourgeois democracy. They have to remind themselves of the ideals for which their nation was founded. They have to rally around those abstractions, enduring terrorism and fear for their sake, even when it seems easier to appease their rivals with apologies and other displays of post-colonial guilt or multicultural relativism.

America, the world's dominant power, may soon face this kind of challenge. If so, let's hope we behave as well as Israel, a regional power, is now doing. Almost all Israelis—of left, right, and center—are unified behind the proposition that Israel must fight to defend its moral legitimacy. The country that a few years ago seemed exhausted by conflict, enamored of the NASDAQ, and too rich and

David Brooks is a senior editor at The Weekly Standard *and the author of* Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There.

AP / Wide World Photos

A Palestinian family and Israeli border policeman at a checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem

sophisticated to bother with military service, is now thoroughly mobilized. Patriotic rhetoric rings in the most unlikely places, the politicians are actually working together, and the idealists who believed in reaching out to Yasser Arafat now acknowledge their past misjudgments.

If there is one person who can stand in for all the Israelis who have changed their thinking, it is Shlomo Ben-Ami. A distinguished academic, Ben-Ami is a historian of economic development and medieval Spain. He is a man, Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy jokes, who thinks in 55-minute soundbites. He is also a politician. He served as foreign minister under Ehud Barak and was Israel's chief negotiator at Camp David in July 2000. Ben-Ami went to Camp David believing that each side had made a big compromise to get the Oslo process started, and that now it would take one more big compromise to achieve peace. This was the conventional view among Israelis, and it still is the conventional view among most diplomats from Europe and the United States.

But the experience of Camp David transformed Ben-Ami's view. "[The Palestinians] came to the negotiation under the assumption that they had already made their compromise," he says. There would be no more. Their attitude was "We don't have a problem, you have a problem," namely, the crimes committed in the name of Zionism, especially the seizing of land in the 1967 Six Day War. The Palestinians' position, as Ben-Ami saw it, was to wait until Israel decided to satisfy their demands.

In an interview, one of the lead Palestinian negotiators, Abu Ala, confirmed that this was the Palestinian posture. Ala is as intelligent and sophisticated as Ben-Ami. He is no crude nationalist, no thunderer. But he insists that it is not up to his side to make counterproposals. "I cannot give proposals," he says. "It is impossible for now to 1,000 years that the Palestinians will decrease their size from the 1967 borders. . . . To ask me, is to ask how many kilograms I will cut from my own body. This will never happen."

Ala says that he and Arafat warned Bill Clinton of their position before Camp David, and Clinton promised that if the talks broke down he would never blame Arafat. But Clinton broke that vow. On the third day of the talks, Clinton finally exploded at Abu Ala. The Palestinian negotiator remembers, "He screamed, 'You have personal responsibility for the failure of the process!' He blamed me in front of the Israelis!"

But this was not simple Palestinian intransigence, Ben-Ami came to realize. Ben-Ami noticed that the Palestinians' real concerns were intangible. "You could see they were adamant to assimilate some of the mythological issues of Zionism," he says. In other words, the Palestinians could see that the Israelis had a moral vision that was half religious, half secular. They longed for their own all-embracing ideology.

Ben-Ami came to see that his opposite numbers had in fact developed such a vision, which he calls Palestinianism. It has a religious element, Islam, symbolized by the crescent, and a secular element, which Ben-Ami calls refugeeism, symbolized by the brass keys that Palestinians hold up at rallies, representing the keys to their original homes in what is now Israel.

AP / Wide World Photos

Historian Shlomo Ben-Ami

The talks at Camp David soon focused not on land, but on two core issues fraught with symbolic and moral significance. As Muslims, the Palestinian negotiators sought to gain control of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, or, as it is known in the Arab world, Haram al'Sharif, where the al-Aksa mosque stands. As believers in the creed of refugeeism, they sought to secure the right of refugees to return to their original hometowns. These issues—the Temple Mount and the Right of Return—have nothing to do with finding a place where Palestinians can live in peace and prosperity. If there were peace, Muslims could worship at the al-Aksa mosque today (as indeed they already do whenever the roads are open). And it's not clear how many refugees would actually take advantage of the right to go back to their original towns; if they did, they'd have to take Israeli citizenship. But it is supremely important for them to have control of the mosque and the right to move back, as symbols of their legitimate claim to the land and of Israel's corrupt birth.

Ben-Ami realized that this was not like haggling in a bazaar in order to reach a middle price. It was a contest between historical and spiritual visions. One day while talking about the disposition of the Temple Mount, the Israelis proposed that the Palestinians control the top of the mount, where the mosque is, but agree not to dig down into the earth below the mosque plaza. Jews believe that somewhere below the mosque lie the remains of the Jewish temples, and that in those temples was the Holy of Holies, the sacred spot where the ark of the covenant was kept. The Palestinians agreed never to dig. But then Ben-Ami asked them to put words into the agreement making clear why the Israelis didn't want the Palestinians digging, and the Palestinians vehemently refused. They could not sign a document that acknowledged even the possibility that the spot might be legitimately holy to the Jews. In fact, the Palestinian media regularly deny that there ever was a Jewish temple on the Temple Mount. This symbolic position could not be compromised because it goes to the core of the moral claims.

The Palestinians are paying an awful price for this position. The decision to shut down negotiations at Camp David last July and the subsequent intifada have been disasters, measured by any rational cost-benefit analysis. The resumption of the terror war with its attendant Israeli reprisals has caused the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians. The Palestinian economy is in near collapse as a result of the suffocating closures Israel has imposed on roads in the territories. The governing institutions of the Palestinian Authority barely function. Arafat's refusal to negotiate has cost him dearly in the court of world opinion (if Yasser Arafat wants to visit the White House, he'll have to buy a ticket and stand in the tourist line). The Palestinians have utterly lost the Israeli public; those who used to sympathize with the Palestinians and urge concessions are now quiet or shamefaced, and the center of the Israeli electorate has shifted behind Ariel Sharon.

Nonetheless, Arafat remains popular with Palestinians, and the intifada is the oxygen in the blood of Palestinian nationalism. Three American journalists and I recently toured Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and Israel on a trip organized by Satloff's Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Our Arab hosts were as committed to their cause as any people could be, and as determined to achieve final victory. There was almost no grumbling about Arafat and his methods. Everywhere we went we heard how the Israelis murder Palestinian children with F-16s and similar brutal firepower.

Israelis sometimes accuse Arafat of loving the Palestinian cause more than the Palestinian people. That's true, but by all evidence, the Palestinian people also love the Palestinian cause more than they love the Palestinian people. This second intifada may be different from the first one several years ago. It is organized instead of sponta-

neous. It is waged by soldiers using mortars and rifles, not boys throwing stones. But it's wrong to say that this is an artificial uprising imposed by Arafat and a few henchmen. To the highest government official and the poorest refugee alike, it seems, this is a crusade more important than money, comfort, opportunity, or life itself.

The fervor that fuels the Palestinian crusade is perpetually reinforced by pan-Arab satellite TV. The several Arabic-language satellite stations from the region offer blanket coverage of the intifada and the Israeli reprisals. Their ratings soar with each new incident. Some of the channels are quite professional and regularly beat Israeli stations to stories, but with their graphic shots and lurid commentary, they also serve to organize and stoke Palestinian hatreds. It's sometimes said that global communications will bring us all together, but in this case, the technology serves to whip up animosity. Even the Palestinian Authority's Abu Ala agrees. "The media in the Arab world have tied our hands," he says, not making clear that he would do anything differently if the media fell silent.

One night we sat in the home of a prominent Jordanian newspaper editor. His guests included several pillars of the Amman establishment, a former speaker of the parliament, a religious affairs minister, a former attorney general, and so on. They were men in their sixties and seventies, and anybody who saw *The Sunshine Boys* will get a sense of their posture and intonation. To me they looked like Upper West Side elderly Jews kibitzing. But the content was slightly different. The suicide bombing outside a disco in Tel Aviv that killed 21 young Israelis, most of them recent Russian immigrants, had just happened. We asked whether the Koran endorses that kind of violence. None of the men had any doubt about the legitimacy of murdering the young people. That wasn't even worth talking about. Only the fact that the bomber had killed himself in the process, thus apparently violating the Koran's prohibition of suicide, raised concerns. In the end, the men decided that given the evils of the Israeli occupation and the need to fight against it, the young suicide bomber was not really committing suicide but merely waging war.

AP / Wide World Photos

Egyptian writer Saad Eddin Ibrahim

This conversation—among the cream of Arab society, sophisticated, humane, and generous—is symptomatic of how the Arab world has closed ranks on the question of whether Israel is a criminal state. Anybody who dissents from this line, or who tries to have contact with Israelis, is known as a "normalizer," a status that can cost you your friends, your job, or your freedom. "I am ostracized, my father is ostracized," one Jordanian high-tech entrepreneur told us.

As a result, the range of debate across the region has narrowed. The Egyptian government recently arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a human rights activist and writer. He was thrown into jail on trumped-up charges of embezzlement and "defaming the state," though his real crime was uncovering fraud in Egypt's electoral system. But what has been striking since his arrest and conviction is how relatively few of his fellow human rights activists have leapt to his defense. "What did him in was his pro-Israeli stand," said one over dinner. "It made it difficult for people to support him." Saad Eddin Ibrahim's "pro-Israeli" position consisted of going to Israel to talk with the leftist fringe of the peace camp.

The human rights activists we spoke with note that it is becoming more difficult to recruit volunteers for their organizations on Egyptian university campuses. Many students do not want to work for such organizations because they view the whole idea of a human rights organization as a Western import, alien to Arab culture. Even among the students who do volunteer, there is a growing religious conservatism. Some of the young men in one office asked the young women to stop going to the swimming pool with them because they considered the women's bathing suits an affront to the modesty codes.

The consolidation of Arab opinion has also led to an upsurge of anti-Semitism in the government media. There have always been stories in the Arab press about Israeli merchants shipping bubble gum with the AIDS virus into Arab countries. But now anti-Semitic attacks are routine. In Egypt, for example, a prestigious commentator at a government-run newspaper twice wrote items lamenting that Hitler failed to finish the job. This rhetoric has become somewhat embarrassing for Arab elites, and so even before the subject is raised they are quick to reassure American visitors that they themselves are not anti-Semitic. The Nazi style of anti-Semitism has no roots in Egyptian society, the foreign minister told us. (The cynic in me wanted to say, "Congratulations—after 3,000 years of anti-Semitism, you've invented a new variety.") Some of these men do have records of fighting anti-

Semitism, and all of them recognize that the pervasive anti-Semitism in their official organs hurts them in the court of world opinion. Still, there is no sign of a let-up.

For all the pervasive anti-Semitism, and for all the admiration for the suicide bombers (polls show about two-thirds of Palestinians see heroism in blowing up teenagers), the Palestinians' commitment to their cause is striking. In America, people on average move every seven years; if opportunity is lacking in the place where we are, we move on. But after more than 50 years in refugee camps, in Arab-Israeli towns and in Jordan, the Palestinians remain committed to the idea of their struggle. In this day and age, it is rare to find a commitment that is more powerful than commercial calculation. We say we want people to believe in causes larger than their self-interest; the Palestinians do.

AP / Wide World Photos

Yasser Arafat: Why did he kill Oslo?

But in the end, the new Israeli patriotism is more admirable. For while Palestinian nationalism looks a lot like 19th-century blood and soil nationalism (laced with a large dollop of Islamic fundamentalism), Israeli nationalism is Lockean nationalism. It is a patriotism infused with democratic pride, and with respect for individual opportunity. Israel is an ever more individualistic country, ever more commercial and more affluent, yet the Israeli people, at this moment more than at any time in the recent past, seem able to be patriots as well as yuppies.

This is not to excuse the violent excesses Israeli troops commit against the Palestinians, or the anti-Arab prejudice that is on the upswing, only to note how difficult it is to infuse a self-seeking, affluent populace with a sense of national purpose. The Israelis have done that. One day we surveyed the central region of Israel with an Israeli Defense Force commander. He's in his mid-thirties and has a couple of young kids. Earlier in his career he was caught in a Palestinian ambush and spent a year in the hospital recovering from his wounds. Having lost sensation over large areas of his body, he is classified as 72 percent disabled. In the midst of the peace euphoria, he went back to school and got an MBA so he could be a businessman and live a normal life. But now that fighting has resumed, he's again chosen to spend his life away from his family, in the barracks and in the field, once again at constant risk of ambush.

This renewed commitment has changed the atmosphere in all sectors of Israeli society. The Russian immigrants feel thoroughly Israeli, having shed their own blood at the disco bombing. Even among politicians, there is relative civility. During Desert Storm, I recall watching two Israeli politicians, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir, bicker on the evening news. "You disgust me," Shamir said. "You disgust me and you frighten me," Peres responded. I remember thinking sarcastically, "Isn't it wonderful how Israelis have come together during the Gulf War." But this time they actually have. There is a national unity government led by Ariel Sharon that shows every sign of lasting for a while.

We met Sharon in the cabinet room Israeli founder David Ben-Gurion used to use in Tel Aviv. Judging by the shabby surroundings, they hadn't changed the furniture since. Sharon smiled through our entire hour-and-fifteen-minute meeting. He was grandfatherly and said nothing that any Israeli would have disagreed with. He used our meeting to announce Israel's acceptance of the cease-fire proposal hammered out with CIA director George Tenet. He was delighted, not only because he is now riding high, but also because he had just boxed Arafat into a corner.

The Israelis and Palestinians know they are in for another generation of warfare. Western diplomats, at least the smart ones, come to the Middle East merely trying to manage the conflict. The Israelis and Palestinians each try to negotiate cease-fires such that the other side will be forced to break them first. The day we met with him, Sharon knew that the Tenet cease-fire was wonderful from an Israeli perspective. It forces Yasser Arafat to perform a series of politically unpalatable tasks—like arresting terrorists and confiscating illegal weapons from his troops—before it forces Israel to do anything politically unpalatable, such as freeze settlement construction on the West Bank. Therefore, Arafat will have to break the cease-fire first and bear the brunt of the ensuing American disapproval.

Israelis are bitterly disappointed that the Oslo

process didn't work out; during the Rabin period they gave in to romanticized hopes. But they are also enjoying the fact that everybody blames Arafat for the talks' collapse. It's not often that Israel does so well in the propaganda war.

Still, their thinking has shifted. The first subject of conversation among Israelis is Yasser Arafat. How could they have been so wrong in thinking that he wanted peace? Why did he kill Oslo? What will he do next? Some people, like former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, believe that Arafat refused to make peace because he feared assassination. Others believe that he simply couldn't make the transition from PLO fighter to Palestinian Authority administrator, worrying about sewers and education funding. From the left, there are waves of self-castigation and bouts of rethinking. Avraham Burg is one of Israel's most prominent left-wing politicians, likely to be the next leader of the Labor party. "For many years the peace camp lived with a 1960s conception of 'Make peace, make love.' The question was, Did you hug a Palestinian today?" he says. But those illusions are gone. "At the end of the process, we found the Palestinians did not have a 1960s conception of peace," Burg continues. "The Palestinians are not ready to make a compromise on their dream of greater Palestine."

AP / Wide World Photos

The grandfatherly Ariel Sharon

The second subject of conversation is the future. "We are preparing ourselves and the IDF for years of struggle," says defense minister Benjamin Bin Eliezer. "I don't feel that there will be any serious breakthrough but with the next generation." So now there is a chance to think broadly. Some dream of an internationally imposed solution. The United States or the United Nations would come in and dictate terms for an end to the conflict. (We also heard this idea proposed on the Palestinian side.) Some want to destroy Palestinian television and undermine the Palestinian regime, feeling chaos couldn't be worse. Many Israelis are thinking of unilateral partition: Simply build a series of walls and fences to keep the Palestinians and Israelis apart. A few extremists (outside the government) talk of bumping off Arafat, or of exiling him, or of simply waiting for him to die. Then, they hope, the Palestinians would fracture into four competing emirates. They would be so weakened they would have to deal.

It's like being in a land of tinkerers—everybody has a scheme. Most of them are cockamamie. If Arafat goes, there is no indication his successor will be less radical. As for partition, a rising idea in Israel, especially in the Labor party, it is hard to see how it would work, because the populations are intermingled. Would Israel really build a Berlin Wall through the heart of Jerusalem?

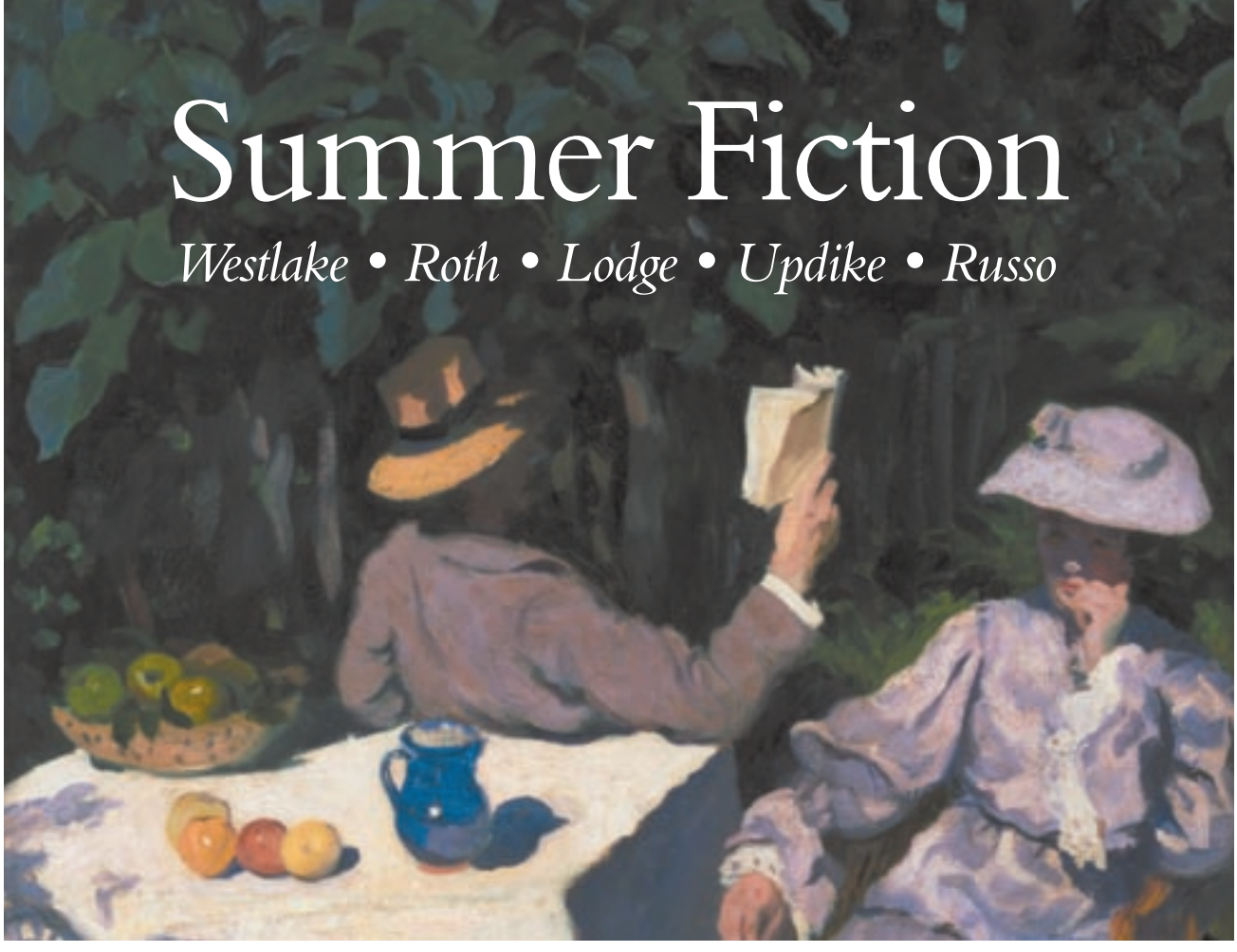
No, what the future holds is a war over intangibles. The Islamic nationalism of the Palestinians will go up against the Lockean nationalism of the Israelis. Israel's superior military and economic strength carries its own weaknesses. Israelis have the wherewithal to adopt the California lifestyle. Some may just opt out of this exhausting mess and move. Others may lose heart and try to buy some peace. Resolve hasn't weakened yet, but it might as the years go on.

The role for the United States is clear: to stand with the democratic nationalists over the blood and soil nationalists. Those are America's values as well as America's interests. On our trip, we met several U.S. diplomats in the region. A couple were caricatures of old-fashioned State Department Arabists. They'd served the bulk of their careers in Arab countries, and they'd never had a thought they hadn't picked up from some Edward Said essay. The bulk of the diplomats were intelligent, informative, honest brokers of information. But they certainly did not talk as if their role were to stand up for American values. On the contrary, they saw themselves as mediators.

The mediator role had value as long as the Oslo process was alive. But it's dead now, and what has taken its place is a war over moral visions. American diplomats will find, as the people in the region have found, that you can't hover impartially between moral visions, because there is no there there. The struggle will be long, and it will force the people in the area—and the American people—to come to grips with the full implications of their political ideals. ♦

Summer Fiction

Westlake • Roth • Lodge • Updike • Russo



Karoly Ferenczy, *Sunny Morning* (1905). The Bridgeman Art Library.

The American Comedy

Donald Westlake: mystery writer, wit, philosopher.

BY STEVEN LENZNER

Plato, as everyone knows, once defined man as a "featherless biped." His student Aristotle insisted instead that man is by nature a political animal, a being whose capacity for speech compels him to live with others.

So who's right, ironic Plato or solid Aristotle? I can think of only one living writer who might reconcile the two—and that's Donald E. Westlake, the author of the best crime-caper stories ever written. Indeed, properly read, Westlake has *already* reconciled Plato and Aristotle in his stories, by showing us man as the animal who can laugh at himself, use speech to explode human pretensions, and thus reach toward civilization. Donald Westlake is not only our finest living comic mystery writer, but perhaps one of our finest living philosophers.

Bad News
by Donald Westlake
Mysterious Press, 352 pp., $23.95

Flashfire
by Richard Stark
Mysterious Press, 304 pp., $22.95

The Hot Rock
by Donald Westlake
Warner, 288 pp., $12.50 paper

The bookstores nowadays stock an endless number of comic mysteries, the best known by Lawrence Block, Carl Hiaasen, and Gregory McDonald. Amusing as these writers often are, it is an injustice to place Westlake in their company. He is an author of a wholly different rank. His true peers are such great American humorists as Mark Twain and Ring Lardner and such great American crime novelists as Dashiell Hammett, Rex Stout, and Raymond Chandler.

You might not realize this if you go to see *What's the Worst That Could Happen?*, currently showing in theaters. Starring Martin Lawrence as Westlake's ill-starred thief (renamed from John Dortmunder to Kevin Caffrey), the film is the latest of Hollywood's generally failed attempts to present Westlake's crime capers—a series that includes Robert Redford in *The Hot Rock* (the best of a weak lot), George C. Scott in *Bank Shot*, Paul Le Mat in *Jimmy the Kid*, and Christopher Lambert in *Why Me?*

But you can't miss Westlake's skill in the recently published *Bad News*, the latest chapter in the comic saga of the inimitable John Archibald Dortmunder—master thief and American hero, a man whose bad luck is topped only (and barely) by his resourcefulness and determination. What's more, *The Hot Rock*, the first Dortmunder adventure, has just been reissued in paperback with a new pref-

Steven Lenzner is completing his dissertation in political science at Harvard University.

ace recounting the ambiguous genesis of this singular character. And finally, Westlake has just produced—under his pseudonym "Richard Stark"—the novel *Flashfire*, the nineteenth adventure of his master criminal Parker, the anti-Dortmunder and reigning champion in the amorality division of American mystery fiction.

Under his own name, Westlake has written forty-seven works over the past four decades. During that period, he's also written twenty-three novels under the name "Richard Stark" (four starring Alan Grofield, a charming actor and occasional thief who is worthy of revival). And under a cloud of pseudonyms—at least five, but it's a good bet there are more—he's written dozens more.

With characteristic irony, Westlake says of his crime-*noir* character Parker and his crime-*blanc* character Dortmunder: "It probably says something discreditable about me that I put the serious work under a pseudonym and the comic under my own name." But precisely the opposite is true: Westlake expresses his serious thoughts in comedy because it is truer and healthier to see what is laughable about the typical, the everyday.

Westlake was not originally a comic novelist. He was led to that path by the conventional mystery. Though his first novels, *The Mercenaries* and *Killing Time*, were well crafted, they remained within established boundaries. He then began experimenting with more unconventional perspectives. He wrote novels about suppressed rage (*361*), a young man corrupted by degrees (*Killy*), and the criminally insane (*Pity Him Afterwards*). Westlake's most impressive early work was *Levine*, a series of short stories about Abe Levine, a middle-aged homicide detective with heart trouble. What makes Levine such a compelling character is his very seriousness about that which is most serious: his mortality.

These early experiments didn't necessarily lead Westlake to look at criminal things comically, but their range prefigures the turn he made in 1965 with the story of Charlie Poole, *The Fugitive Pigeon*. (Westlake preferred the title *The Dead Nephew*, but was overruled by his editor, who forbade authors from employing "death" in a title.) Charlie is a master of the art of laziness, whose Uncle Al, a mid-level mobster, found him "the perfect job"—running a money-laundering mob bar. The mob expects Charlie to lose money, and he lives up to expectations. "My Uncle Al was right; it was the job I was born for."

Robert Redford, Paul Le Mat . . .

"Nephew" is a term of art for Westlake. A nephew is somebody irresponsible or incompetent for whom one grudgingly feels responsibility. Nephew Charlie's life takes a turn for the worse when two mob enforcers, Trask and Slade, enter his bar and show him a card with his name and an ink blot. They are incredulous at Charlie's incomprehension: "What a nephew. You are the biggest nephew that ever lived. You're all the nephews in the world rolled into one, you know that?" They had come to kill him, but through good fortune and ingenuity spurred by necessity, Charlie escapes. Thus begins Charlie's adventure and Westlake's career as a comic novelist.

In the following five years, Westlake wrote several novels exploring the genre, all of which stand the test of time. These include his worst-titled, *The Spy in the Ointment*, and his best-titled, *God Save the Mark*. The latter is the story of Fred Fitch, born victim and magnet to swindlers of all stripes. Though *God Save the Mark* is told from the victim's viewpoint, one senses Westlake's sympathy for the cleverness exhibited by Fred's foes. The novel relates Fred's problems upon inheriting $317,000 from black sheep Uncle Matt. "Every single relative [Matt] had reviled and snubbed him. . . . As Mother said, 'A lot of people would have treated Matt a heap different if they *had* known, believe you me.' I believed her." Unaware of Matt's existence, Fred avoided offending him with ease. So by default the inheritance went to the nephew.

Good as these comedies are, Westlake found his best vehicle with the Dortmunder saga. Dortmunder's own beginnings were remarkably unpromising: "Born in Dead Indian, Illinois, and abandoned at three minutes of age, John Dortmunder had been raised in an orphanage run by the Bleeding Heart Sisters of Eternal Misery." Only by virtue of dedication and native talent has Dortmunder risen to the top of his profession. Dortmunder works hard to earn what he steals.

Only slightly less challenging were the obstacles Westlake overcame to bring Dortmunder into being. Westlake conceived of *The Hot Rock*'s storyline as a Parker adventure: "What if he had to steal the same thing over and over again?" Rejecting the idea as too comic for Parker, Westlake needed a new leading man, one whose fatalism would temper his frustration: "Who was this guy—dogged but doomed? . . . For a long time I just couldn't think of the right name, and then one day, I was in a bar—the only time in my life—and one of the neon beer logos on the back said 'DAB—Dortmunder Actien Bier,' and, I said, 'That's what I want, an action hero with something wrong with him,' and John Dortmunder was



Lawrence photo: MGM. Other actor photos: the Everett Collection.

George C. Scott, Christopher Lambert, and Martin Lawrence: the actors who have played characters based on Westlake's Dortmunder.

born." Yet halfway through writing the first story, Westlake "ran out of steam," abandoning Dortmunder to a closet—which would have deprived the world of *the* German contribution to humor—and promptly forgetting him. (As Westlake asks, "Why remember failures?"—echoing, no doubt intentionally, Xenophon's pronouncement, "It is noble as well as just and pious and more pleasant to remember the good things rather than the bad ones.")

Fortunately, upon rediscovering Dortmunder, Westlake summoned his own Dortmunderian resolve, and "John Dortmunder's one and only story was ready to fly." Perhaps to vindicate the dictum that new things are noble because they are difficult, Westlake burdened himself with an entirely misleading epigraph from Nietzsche: "The criminal is the type of strong man in unfavorable surroundings, the strong man made sick." Far more appropriate would have been the epigraph to the Parker novel *Comeback*: "The outcome you have waited for is assured. Continue to persevere."—Chinese Fortune Cookie.

The Hot Rock follows Dortmunder's efforts to steal the Balabomo Emerald, sacred object to two small African countries, temporarily on display in New York. Dortmunder is commissioned by the U.N. ambassador of Talabwo to "rescue" the emerald from the Akinzi. Dortmunder devises a plan that circumvents museum security with ease.

It was a plan that should have worked. Through no fault of his, it didn't, and Dortmunder reacts with characteristic resignation. He blames neither his associates nor the gods. Presented with another chance—by breaking *into* jail—Dortmunder is persuaded to try again by his temperamental opposite and ambiguous friend, Andrew Octavian Kelp. (To get a sense of Kelp's character it is enough to consider his initials, upon which Dortmunder could very well choke; in *Bad News*, Westlake writes "John looked Andy over, as though considering him as a pet: Keep him, or have him put to sleep?") This pattern—unmerited failure, stoic resignation, and reluctant acquiescence to one last shot—is repeated at a police station and a mental hospital.

Before he can quite complete the second revolution, however, one of the book's antagonists—an unscrupulous attorney who voluntarily entered an insane asylum to keep the thieves at arm's length—laughs at Dortmunder from behind the safety of an electrified fence. That's a miscalculation. Dortmunder is inured to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He expects life to kick him. Yet he is also a man of a certain pride. "He can't laugh at me. I've had enough. . . . If he thinks, he can stay in that place, he's crazy." (The attorney, not having learned his lesson, shortly thereafter makes a memorable statement that *almost* provided the book's title: "'I've heard of the habitual criminal, of course,' Prosker said pleasantly, 'but this may be the first instance in the history of the world of a habitual crime.'" At the last minute Westlake decided to change *The Habitual Crime* to *The Hot Rock*.)

The virtues Dortmunder shows in all of his tales are worth considering. *Bad News* opens with a late-night burglary: "Speedshop was a great sprawling mass-production retailer stocked mostly with things that weren't worth a quarter and didn't cost more than four dollars."

Dortmunder's shopping after hours seems almost respectable. He is a Robin Hood for an age with an ethic of individual responsibility: He robs from the rich and shares with the deserving dishonest. Dortmunder's colleague Tiny Bulcher—"a man mountain who mostly looks like a fairy tale character that eats villages"—gives memorable voice to this way of life in *What's the Worst That Could Happen?*:

> Tiny was explaining to a panhandler why it had been rude to ask Tiny for money. "You didn't *earn* this money. For instance," he was saying, "the money I got in my jeans this minute, where do you suppose I got it? Huh? I'll tell you where I got it. I stole it from some people uptown. It was hard work, and there was some risk in it, and I earned it. Did you earn it? Did you risk anything? Did you work hard?"
>
> Tiny held the panhandler a little closer to him to give him some parting advice. "Get a job," he said, "or get a gun. But don't beg. It's rude."

So, too, Dortmunder is unfailingly loyal to his friends and colleagues as well as his faithful companion, the long suffering May. And in his idiosyncratic way, Dortmunder is a just man. When flush, he never begrudges friends in need: "If he had it, they could have it, and the kind of people they were, they'd take his two hundred

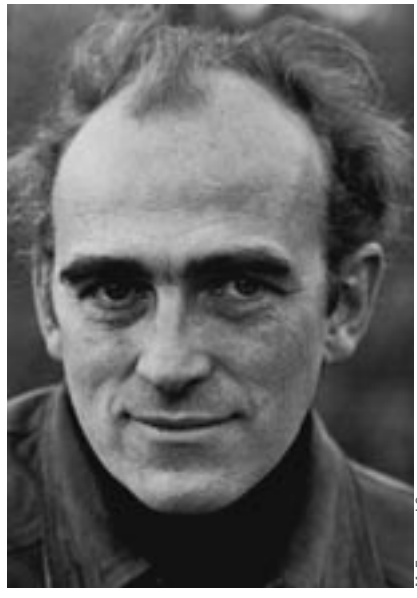
dollars and go directly to jail." Dortmunder occasionally even rises to Shakespearean eloquence: "If this thing was gonna get done, it was better that it got itself done soonest." Dortmunder is a man of peace. It is the rare occasion when he resorts to violence, never unprovoked or excessive. Dortmunder's most violent act occurs when, in *Don't Ask*, he escapes an unjust imprisonment by cold-cocking "an economist from Yale"—an action prompted by necessity, but not needing much excuse.

Dortmunder embodies the superior dignity of the thoughtful, and his associates recognize his natural authority. As Tiny puts it: "Wherever there's a lot of money, Dortmunder, there's always sooner or later some use for the guy who does the thinking, which is you, and the guy who does the heavy lifting, which is me." Yet Dortmunder does not abuse his power. He never demands more than an equal share of the loot, thus demonstrating why from a certain perspective—that of their own common good—a prudent gang of thieves is the best social order. (Westlake thereby intuits Kant's dictum: "The problem of establishing the good social order is soluble even for a nation of devils, provided they have sense.")

Westlake's plots invariably defy brief recapitulation. As Andy Kelp summarizes the plot of *Bad News*: "John and Tiny and me got involved with some people doing an Anastasia, and we need a right DNA sample, and it's gonna be on a comb in a place with hundreds of thousands of dollars of valuable stuff, so while we're there anyway, why don't we take it all?" An Anastasia is an attempt to establish a line of descent for fraudulently obtaining an inheritance. The Anastasia Dortmunder stumbled into was conceived by gifted confidence man Fitzroy Guilderpost. It sought to establish "Little Feather Redcorn" as the last of the Pottaknobbee and, as such, entitled to one-third of the profits of a casino on a reservation.

Yet Dortmunder feels unease about the propriety of collecting money not earned in a manner consistent with his sense of the fitness of things.


Random House


M. Evans and Company

Above: Donald Westlake in the early 1960s. Below: Westlake in 1974.

> "I mean, why am I in this place? I'm not a con artist. I'm not a grafter. I'm a thief. There's nothing here to steal. We're just riding Little Feather's coattails. . . . I think of myself as a person with a certain dignity and a certain professional ability and a certain standing, but what's happening here is I'm looking for crumbs from somebody else's table, so why am I here?"
>
> "That's a very good question," Tiny rumbled, and Kelp said, "To be perfectly honest, John—"
>
> "Don't strain yourself."
>
> "No, no, no, in this issue only," Kelp assured him.

Edward Banfield once wrote of an unusual academic candidate interviewed at the University of Chicago: an ex-convict. After a faculty lunch, that candidate asked who had been sitting across from him. Informed it was Leo Strauss, the ex-con replied, "He has the look of a man planning a break"—a description that delighted Strauss. Dortmunder would be a man after Strauss's heart, for it was Strauss who said, "A conservative, I take it, is a man who despises vulgarity; but the argument which is concerned exclusively with calculations of success, and is based on blindness to the nobility of the effort, is vulgar."

Bad News is the eleventh Dortmunder tale since Westlake created him in 1970 (ten novels and the short story "Too Many Crooks"). Dortmunder is *not* the underdog for whom everybody roots. Unlike that underdog—invariably less talented than his opponent—Dortmunder deserves to succeed. That he does not isn't a reflection on him, but his luck. Thus it isn't surprising that in the most recent tales, Dortmunder's fortunes have changed for the better. Though nothing has come without struggle, he has with *Bad News* raised his winning percentage to better than .500: four successes (more or less), three defeats, and four outcomes defying simple classification.

Since the publication of *The Hot Rock*, Westlake has written twenty novels without Dortmunder. His most conventionally ambitious is *Kahawa*, the story of two mercenaries' attempted theft of a train carrying $6,000,000 of Idi Amin's coffee. ("A most respectable crime," to use the words of one of my teachers.) Though the comedy of manners isn't Westlake's bailiwick, *A Likely Story* wonderfully captures the character—and characterlessness—of romantic love and its impediments in modern America, including the often unforgivable vice of failing to appreciate what one has until one no longer has it.

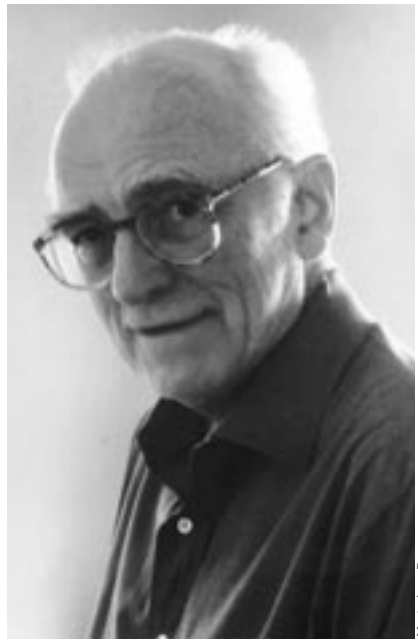
Of the twenty non-Dortmunder books, eleven are comic crime capers, and they all exhibit Westlake's wittiness. The most amusing are *Smoke*, *Help I am Being Held Prisoner*, and *Two Much*. *Smoke* is a light and airy crime

novel with a twist; it tells the story of a thief who accidentally ingests a combination of experimental formulae that render him invisible—a formlessness as personally unsettling as it is professionally useful. *Help I am Being Held Prisoner* tells the story of a practical joker who told one joke too many, resulting in a congressman's car accident—which leads to his incarceration in a prison where he stumbles across a coterie of inmates with a tunnel to the outside world. The setup for a perfect escape, no? Only one thing holds them back: They don't wish to escape. Why undergo the risks of escape when you can have a pleasant day in town and a nice, safe prison bed at night?

No less amusing, but less satisfactory, is *Two Much*, the story of Art Dodge, a moderately successful writer of humorous greeting cards with an overactive imagination and an overactive libido. Having met a beautiful girl, Elizabeth Kerner—whose considerable wealth tarnishes her beauty not a whit—Art naturally seeks her good graces via witty repartee and shared experiences. Upon learning that Elizabeth had a twin sister, Elisabeth, Art declares, to his future dismay: "I'm twins too." Thus is born Bart Dodge. After some extremely funny missteps, Art (and Bart) finds himself (or themselves) married to the Kerner twins. This is not a recipe for marital bliss. And when Volpinex (an unscrupulous attorney whose name sounds like a cross between a wolf and an acne medication) discovers Dodge's dodge, Art seems to have no out but to kill him. He hadn't, however, counted upon one of his wives witnessing the murder. So, in a panic, he kills her. And so on.

Somehow this ending leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. Comedy ignores certain rules at its own risk, and *Two Much* too quickly transforms itself from slightly bent light comedy to dark comedy, thereby losing a considerable degree of its charm. But this fascination with the darker side of human behavior—a product of the same detachment that allows Westlake to view serious things comically—appears in a number of his works that aren't unqualified successes. The most unsatisfying, *Pity Him Afterwards* and *The Ax*, are journeys into the minds of the criminally mad. *Pity Him Afterwards* is the tale of a nameless madman intent on destroying his medical tormentors, and *The Ax* is a chronicle of an everyman's descent into mass murder. Westlake deserves credit for making such stories compelling. Yet even he cannot tell a tale solely about human ugliness that doesn't partake of that which it depicts.

That's something Westlake understands in the hardboiled crime novels about Parker he writes as "Richard Stark." Parker is an amoral killer with a peculiar sense of justice. He first made his appearance in *The Hunter* (1962), and for thirteen years kept himself busy. After his sixteenth adventure, he went into a quarter-century retirement, only to come back in 1997's *Comeback*, since followed by *Backflash* and *Flashfire*. There is a typical form to the tales. Parker and some colleagues engage in a lucrative, illicit, and often violent enterprise, which leaves little to chance. Yet despite masterful planning and execution, something always goes wrong. That something is usually associates who cross Parker. (You'd think by now they would've learned better.) Unlike Dortmunder's, Parker's difficulties don't arise from fortune's malice. Circumstances don't conspire against him. Men do. And then Parker seeks his revenge.


Mysterious Press

Donald Westlake in 2001, at age sixty-seven.

Parker cannot abide being cheated by his fellow "mechanics." He would be the poster criminal for the dictum "Don't get mad, get even" were it not that his maxim is better formulated as "Don't get mad, kill them." Parker is not a sociopath who takes pleasure in his disdain for the decent. (For a contrast, consider Baron Chase in Westlake's *Kahawa*, "a man so steeped in his villainy that the evidences of his evil now only amused him." Nor does Parker embody the pure negativity of Iago: "I am not what I am.") Parker derives no pleasure from killing. It needlessly complicates things. Instead he is motivated by pride and *justice*, if only the justice of the proverbial gang of thieves: Justice is necessary for everybody who is not willing to be alone.

Parker was not intended to be a series character. Westlake originally concluded *The Hunter* with Parker's death. Yet at an editor's suggestion, Westlake reconsidered. Since Parker was not a prime candidate for divine resurrection, Westlake rewrote the ending, and the series was off and running. The latest volume, *Flashfire*, is a typical Parker adventure—well crafted, swift moving, and highly entertaining. It begins with a spectacular armed robbery by Parker and three confederates that yields almost $100,000. Though not Parker's most lucrative payday, it's not bad for an afternoon's crime. Yet his confederates don't immediately share the "boodle." Instead, they invite Parker to use that haul as seed money for a more spectacular heist they have planned—one requiring their robbery's entire proceeds. Parker declines. So they leave him $2,000, his life, and promise of repayment. Parker considers this a breach of normal criminal ethics. Fueled by betrayal, Parker procures the means necessary to meet his erstwhile partners under rather different circumstances.

Still, it is the Dortmunder stories that one remembers and returns to. Westlake is more than simply a clever, unfailingly amusing, and inventive author. The Dortmunder stories form perhaps the only series of its sort in which the later books are every bit as fresh as the early ones. An author can maintain such a standard only if he never stops delighting in writing and thinking. Westlake is the anti-Hemingway, who—by not taking himself too seriously—teaches us not to take ourselves too seriously. This is a particularly timely lesson.

Americans are extraordinarily touchy folks, quick to take offense at slights. Such a way of looking at things is alien to Westlake. He finds something laughable about us all. Consider his description of the hit show *Desdemona!*, the feminist musical version of the world-famous love story, slightly altered for the modern American taste (everybody lives). Hit songs from the show include "Oh, Tell, Othello, Oh, Tell," and "Iago, My Best Friend," and the foot-stomping finale, "*Here's* the Handkerchief."

Can one find a better and wittier shorthand description of contemporary American aspirations? Wouldn't it be a wonderful world in which no one died young, everyone got along, and things always worked out? Nothing is sacred for Westlake. To laugh at everything that one is today forbidden to laugh at is the essence of his intention. (Or to use a phrase of Machiavelli's, Westlake seeks to look at all things *sanza alcuno rispetto*, "without any respect.")

Yet it is precisely *not* his intention to offend, but to show us ourselves in such a way as to make us less likely to take offense: For example, though Westlake is not hostile to religion, he finds humor in places—monasteries (*Brother's Keepers*) and convents (*Good Behavior*)—typically uncongenial to comic treatment. He succeeds by portraying what is both unnatural and potentially amusing about living with a vow of silence while simultaneously showing that the dignity of the truly decent rises above the merely ridiculous.

For Westlake the besetting vice today is moralism, that disposition that leads one to seek to silence those with whom one disagrees. In Westlake's novels one doesn't, for example, encounter gay characters manly in every respect other than sexual preference. Though not unsympathetic, they are identifiably gay, typically somewhat effete and affected. The blue-collar regulars at a bar are boastful, ignorant, and argumentative, with volubility in inverse relation to actual knowledge. Most important, Westlake's men and women—despite their remarkable range and variety—always remain men and women. One encounters tough broads and babes as well as sophisticated ladies—but they are identifiably broads, babes, and ladies. Westlake's writings are a refreshing antidote to all that makes us afraid to laugh.

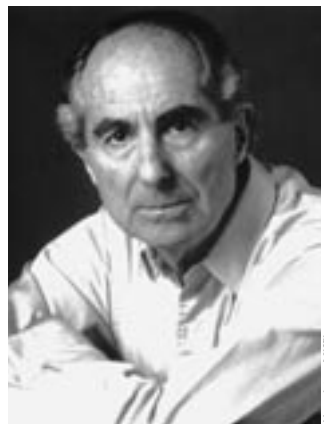
As Thomas Aquinas taught, some things lie outside the scope of human knowledge, but others do not. Fortunately, one of the things that lies within the reach of human knowledge is the fact that the writings of Donald E. Westlake constitute an American treasure. ♦

BCA

The Dying Novel

After three good novels, Philip Roth reverts to his old sex-obsessions. **BY J. BOTTUM**

This will never do. You can measure the failure of Philip Roth's latest novel, *The Dying Animal*, by the comments on the back cover. There's the blurb from the *Times Literary Supplement* that acclaims Roth's three *prior* novels for the "radical individualism" of which they were, in fact, the greatest denunciation recent fiction has produced. And there's the blurb from *Threepenny Review* that declares, "Beginning with *American Pastoral* in 1997, then moving on in 1998 with *I Married a Communist*, and continuing [in 2000] with *The Human Stain*, Philip Roth has engaged himself in a patriotic literary project that has no contemporary match in any field."



Houghton Mifflin

The Dying Animal
by Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin, 156 pp., $23

In other words, the blurbs on the jacket of his current book note that Roth had just finished with his previous books a trilogy of real passion about American history and the human condition. They weren't perfect novels, by any means. *American Pastoral* told the story of "Swede" Levov and the destruction the 1960s wrought on his upper-middle-class life and family, ending with the extraordinary lines: "All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life! And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" But along the way, the book suffered serious structural problems. *I Married a Communist* sagged badly in the middle. *The Human Stain* started out as a powerful fable of political correctness and race relations and wound down to something like a tired diatribe against

J. Bottum is Books & Arts editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

the Clinton impeachment. But they were all three real books, worth arguing about—and arguing for, as though the now sixty-eight-year-old Roth were the last author left in America who still remembers what the novel is supposed to do.

What the blurbs on his latest novel are silent about is his latest novel itself, and you don't have to read very far in *The Dying Animal*, a disastrous throwback to Roth at his worst, to understand the charity of that silence.

It's like a bait-and-switch advertisement for radial tires: Roth hopes to lure the serious readers he regained with his American Trilogy into spending $23 for this 156-page retread—and those readers will want to register a complaint with the Better Business Bureau.

Perhaps it's damning enough simply to say that the hero of *The Dying Animal* is David Kepesh, who first appeared in *The Breast* (1972), Roth's peculiar tale of a college professor who wakes up one morning to find he's become, well, a giant breast. Kepesh reappeared in *The Professor of Desire* (1977), an account of his young days, pre-breast, in his parents' borscht-belt hotel. But one could claim—not successfully, you understand, but at least one could claim—that there was something comically Kafkaesque about *The Breast* and something of an interesting Jewish coming-of-age story in *The Professor of Desire*.

The Dying Animal has no such claim to comedy or interest. Now in his seventies, Kepesh has reverted to a man and—apparently forgetting his days as a breast—become a talking head, discoursing about books and culture on radio and television. Through the novel he relates the story of his affair, a decade earlier, with an enormous-breasted Cuban woman named Consuela, forty years his junior. Their intense affair is related with the erotic frankness and funkiness at which Roth has always aimed, and it ends when Kepesh, raging with jealousy at the possibility that a younger man will steal Consuela, preemptively breaks away from her—and spends the next ten years bemoaning it.

But all comes right for Kepesh when all goes wrong for Consuela, who calls after ten years' absence to say that she needs him to help her face the radical surgery she must have for—you saw it coming, didn't you?—breast cancer. So off he goes at the novel's conclusion to comfort his breastless mistress, with the promise that a man, even after a carefree life of sexual adventuring, can find happiness in a caring that evades, for a moment, sex. (I'm telling you exactly how *The Dying Animal* ends so you won't actually have to read it.)

Philip Roth was always a wordsmith, but somewhere after *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) he fell into a pit of sexual obsession that made him less interesting with each passing novel. The high points of the sex-driven books he wrote before his American Trilogy were the first, *Portnoy's Complaint*, in 1969 (with its famous depiction of raw liver as an aid to onanism), and the last, *Sabbath's Theater*, in 1995 (with its concluding scene of its hero masturbating in tears over his mistress's grave). But these were high points like the damp edges on either side of the slough of despond, and between them, what dreck. You could learn something from these novels—but nothing you couldn't get better from Dante's description of the second circle of Hell: *Intesi ch'a così fatto tormento / enno dannati i peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommettono al talento*: "I learned that to such torment are condemned the sinners in the flesh who betray their reason to their appetite."

This is the world to which Roth has reverted with *The Dying Animal*. You can find a hint here and there in the novel of some insight into Puritanism and the wreck that the sexual revolution produced, and a hint that love might, in old men, come at last to transcend sex. (The novel's title is borrowed from "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats's poem about being old: *Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is*.)

But then Roth gets lost in the sex and can't get out. He's like an on-the-wagon drunkard who decides it won't hurt to stop off for one drink with his old friends—and wakes up the next morning in the gutter. ♦

Campus Capers

David Lodge does what he does best.

BY MARGARET BOERNER

David Lodge's latest novel, *Thinks...*, explores the long-deplored and still-continuing divide between the "two cultures" of Britain, science and the humanities. Scientific investigation is represented by Ralph Messenger, womanizing professor and director of the prestigious "Holt Belling Center for Cognitive Science" at the very new University of Gloucester. Intuition is represented by Helen Reed, a novelist suffering from writer's block caused by the recent death of her husband.

To Ralph, an atheist, the mind is a "virtual machine"; to Helen, a lapsed Catholic, it is a repository for the soul (although a soul that seems at times to have left home). The scientist Ralph regards the fundamental problem of consciousness as the fact that "we never know for certain what another person is really *thinking*. Even if they choose to tell us, we can never know whether they're telling the truth, or the whole truth." To which his beloved Helen replies, "Just as well, perhaps. Social life would be difficult otherwise. . . . I suppose that's why people read novels. To find out what goes on in other people's heads."

Margaret Boerner teaches English at Villanova University.

And through the device of tape recorders and diaries (Ralph dictates, Helen writes in longhand, and each comes upon the other's record), David Lodge does indeed let his characters—and his readers—find out what goes on in another person's head. Ralph recollects his conquests; Helen recollects her marriage. He wants to have an affair with her (a violation of his unspoken pledge to his wife not to womanize on her home turf); she wants to contemplate her grief at her husband's death. But, unbeknownst to them—well, unbeknownst to them, their author is unfolding in *Thinks...* an entirely conventional, almost melodramatic plot. And why not? What David Lodge does best is satire, after all: high satire that exposes all our foibles.

Without writing autobiography, Lodge has always stuck close to the world he knows—the world of England's postwar Baby Boomers whose opportunities were far more expansive than those available to their parents. His novels reflect his own progress from lower-middle-class, adolescent South Londoner, to young soldier doing his national service, to young husband, father, and graduate student, and finally to English professor at the University of Birmingham.

Lodge started out writing under the influence of modernist fiction, particularly James Joyce, another rebellious, questioning Catholic. Lodge's first novel, *The Picturegoers* (1960), published when he was twenty-five, is a "sensitive" novel about a young man's anguish at his sexual longing and his alienation from his family. The picturegoer of the title is a young student of English literature who rediscovers his lapsed Roman Catholic faith through his longing for the daughter of the large Catholic family with whom he boards. As the daughter resists his physical advances, her faith dampens the fire of his ardor, just as she becomes interested and starts to find justification for having a sexual relationship with him. She comes to love—which causes her to lose her piety. He comes to believe—which causes him to lose his lust. She loves him and loses her faith; he loves her and regains his faith. Predictably, his obsession with the cinema and its depiction of "life"—he is a dedicated moviegoer—turns out to be "a substitute for religion." The old symbols reassert themselves over the new artifacts, so to speak, and the novel ends as its protagonist prepares to enter the priesthood.

The Picturegoers strongly recalls Joyce's *Dubliners* with its symbolic artifacts and ironic choices. But Lodge has never been convincing in his depiction of spiritual anguish and conversion, even though he uses them often. More than one of his novels sees its protagonist end by undertaking a pilgrimage,

Viking

Thinks . . .
A Novel
by David Lodge
Viking, 341 pp., $24.95

to the disbelief of the reader. But even in this first, highly derivative work, Lodge proved his talent at close observation of the fashionable cant we use to justify ourselves and rationalize our behavior. He didn't find the proper setting for his talent, however, until he turned to comedy—a comedy that often approaches farce.

His satiric masterpiece came later in his classic *Small World*, but *The Picturegoers* already showed signs of his bent for witty observation. His second novel, *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962), took up the cant and folderol of the British peacetime army with a story of two young draftees, one a passive observer and the other prepared to endure hardship in order to keep his integrity in the face of official deceit and betrayal. The novel used Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* as its model, but it was not convincing in its depiction of the stubborn idealist. What Lodge had to realize is that he is more effective as farceur than as narrator of serious tragedy—a realization he made with his next novel, *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965).

It was with this book that Lodge came into his own. Using the structure of Joyce's *Ulysses*, *The British Museum Is Falling Down* follows its young graduate-student protagonist through a single day full of ordinary events with symbolic meaning—each chapter in the style of a modern writer such as Conrad, Joyce, Hemingway, and Woolf. He is called upon by the institutions in his life to be a good graduate student, a good Catholic, and a good husband. He worries continually about his wife (as Bloom worries about Molly), especially about her menstrual cycle. Is she pregnant or just "late"?

At the end, our hero exerts control over his life by joining the enemy. He becomes a book buyer for an American who plans to buy the British Museum for the express purpose of moving it to Colorado and making it an American institution.

When Lodge ended *The British Museum Is Falling Down* in this fashion, he signaled that he had finally given up his ambition to write the "serious" novel, and he entered the world of satire—liberating his talent and thoroughly improving his fiction.

As a professor of literature, Lodge is the author of some serious and very good academic criticism. (Most accessible to the lay reader are the short articles he wrote on fiction for the London *Independent* newspaper, which were collected in *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts*.) It was through his critical work that he came to the notion that his novels could—in "pastiche, parody and travesty"—explore the farcical possibilities of "the very kind of discourse" he uses seriously and without a blush in his "capacity as an academic critic." A major influence is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose "post-

Bettmann / CORBIS

modern" observations struck Lodge with the "same effect, as that of a light bulb being switched on in one's head." "For the prose artist," Bakhtin wrote, "the world is full of other people's words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear."

There followed over the next three decades a set of exceptional, pyrotechnic novels: *How Far Can You Go?* (1980), a novel about Catholic friends going through the changes in theology and popular thought in the 1960s after Vatican II; *Paradise News* (1991), about an ex-priest finding a difficult new life in Hawaii; *Therapy* (1995), about a television scriptwriter who is so full of anxiety and dread that he forces Lodge to put him through as many types of therapy (analytical, cognitive, sexual, water) as Lodge can bring himself to satirize. And then there are the satires written at the top of his form: the academic comedies *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984), *Nice Work* (1988), and this year's *Thinks...*, four loosely interconnected "campus" novels about the sexual and intellectual obsessions of the professoriate.

Lately, it has become fashionable, under the influence of Bakhtin, to call almost all novels "Menippean satire," because in the novel the centrality of the author to the interpretation of the work breaks down; the narrator discovers that he "means more than one thing," and truth becomes a possibility that arises from the conflict of ideas—the banging of ideas against each other makes the novel a kind of pinball machine of conceptual possibility.

This definition of the novel is too broad to be useful, but "Menippean satire" is an effective term with which to understand Lodge, for (invented by the Hellenistic Greek Menippus) it "presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent," as Northrop Frye put it half a century ago. It is fiction populated by "pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds."

The classical form of Menippean satire uses a narrator-searcher-traveler as addlebrained as the persons he encounters—which pretty much gives us the benign farce that Lodge makes of our pretensions, for he writes the type of satire that "deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes." Who can forget the proud mother of *Nice Work* who says of her page-three daughter's bare breasts on an "art" calendar, "Nice, aren't they?"

Or the American professor Morris Zapp (said to be modeled on Stanley Fish) and the paper he gives on Jane Austen at an academic conference, "Textuality as Strip Tease"? ("The dancer teases the audience as the text teases its readers, with the promise of an ultimate revelation that is infinitely postponed.")

Or Fulvia Morgana, the hard-core Communist and rich Paduan academic in *Small World*, who justifies her extravagant and swinging life as one that will make the revolution come sooner?

Or the two middle-aged couples who have exchanged academic positions in America and England and also exchanged spouses, staring at each other at the end of *Changing Places* and wondering how the author is going to resolve the plot they are in?

Or the graduate student in *Thinks...* who blackmails her womanizing professor into nominating her for an important academic conference and signs her disingenuous e-mails with the typo "Your fiend"?

Lodge's point of view was almost exclusively male until late in his writing career. He may have come to think he looked antiquated. In the event, he very successfully made a liberal female academic the antithesis of his conservative male businessman in *Nice Work*. The same kind of divide is made in *Thinks...*, where a male, rationalistic academic is set against a female, expressionistic novelist. Of course, one does not expect the sort of comedy which Lodge writes to examine character and inner life. It necessarily deals in types and stereotypes—the obsequious servant, the braggart, the sexpot, the battleaxe, the mother-in-law, the foreigner. Indeed, Lodge has made the art of character-typing so much his own that in his pages one recognizes one's colleagues, neighbors, lawyers, brokers, professors, baby-sitters, secretaries, and relatives.

Lodge's zest for nailing pedantry has somewhat abated. But he has not lost his ability to nail character types and to keep us turning pages to see what new lunacy will come next. It must be conceded that Lodge cannot write voices. Intrigued by Ralph's machine analysis of thinking, Helen sets her creative writing students to writing in the style of a modern author an answer to Thomas Nagel's famous paper about consciousness, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" The students write in the style of Samuel Beckett, *et al.*, and it is amusing. But it is not *very* amusing, because Lodge basically cannot write well in any style but his own.

One would think that this would matter greatly, but it doesn't. Lodge is a master organizer of plot and an unerring dissector of diseases of the intellect. He nails us all in our middle-class, middle-brow, earthly muddle. If you ever wonder what you were thinking at a certain stage in your life, go read David Lodge. He will tell you, as he does again in this delightful novel. ♦

Forward & Bechward

John Updike collects his Henry Bech stories.

BY DANIEL WATTENBERG

In his later landscapes, Paul Cézanne often elaborated the center of his pictures while leaving the corners unpainted, so the sky was only implicit in the blank patches of canvas. In his Henry Bech stories, recently collected in *The Complete Henry Bech*, John Updike turns Cézanne inside out: he elaborates the corners and leaves a lot of white space in the center.

The effect is not accidental. Updike is an artist of the corners, an objective artist who creates the impression that he is depicting what is there, not just what his characters happen to notice. In an interview in the *New York Times Book Review* with his own Henry Bech, Updike described the aim of his fiction: "It's bringing the corners forward. Or throwing light into them . . . , singing the hitherto unsung. . . . I distrust books involving spectacular people or spectacular events." One gets the impression that if Updike were a movie director, he would spurn the close-up: too subjective, prurient in its gaping at characters isolated in moments of high emotion. I once caught him on television fondly citing the most valuable piece of advice that his father ever gave him: Butter the edges of the toast—because some always ends up in the middle anyway.

Knopf

The Complete Henry Bech
by John Updike
Knopf, 512 pp., $23

A writer in Washington, D.C., Daniel Wattenberg is a regular contributor to The Weekly Standard.

If you're going to nibble the buttery edges of someone's prose, it might as well be John Updike's. On every page of every Bech story (there are twenty, spanning over thirty years), there is something to enjoy and admire—a sly literary gibe, a deft character sketch, a flashing social insight, expertly mimicked speech, or descriptive phrases that faithfully reproduce the material world and still manage to chime so melodiously on the page they might as well be arranged on staff paper.

But in the Bech stories not enough butter does finally trickle into the center, occupied by a protagonist we might think we know better than we do. Certainly, Updike supplies ample personal data about Henry Bech, the blocked New York Jewish novelist that he first introduced in a 1964 *New Yorker* short story that won the O. Henry prize. Bech comes to us with a detailed biography and (as an appendix to *Bech: A Book*, the first in the series of three Bech books, noncommittally called "quasi-novels") a complete bibliography.

Born in 1923, Bech was raised on Manhattan's Upper West Side by a domineering mother and an "atheistic socialist" father who worked in the diamond district. Bech saw action in the Battle of the Bulge and cut his eyeteeth on a service newspaper in postwar Berlin. He studied literature at NYU on the GI Bill (at least in one version; in another he is a stack rat who created himself as a novelist without the benefit of a college education) before beginning his literary ascent in Greenwich Village contributing literary journalism, poetry, and short fiction to the welter of postwar little magazines.

When first introduced, Bech has written three novels, the Beat-era road novel *Travel Light* ("a minor classic"), the highly aestheticized novella *Brother Pig* ("did his reputation no harm"), and his "frontal assault on the wonder of life" *The Chosen* ("universally judged a failure—one of those 'honorable' failures, however, that rather endear a writer to the race of critics, who would rather be assured of art's noble difficulty than cope with a potent creative verve").

By the time Updike begins writing about him in the mid-1960s, Bech is forty-ish, single, blocked, coasting on early fame, building his life outward without making dramatic upfield advances, and falling gratefully on any opportunity for escape. "In his fallow middle years [Bech] hesitated to decline any invitation, whether it was to travel to Communist Europe or to smoke marijuana," as Updike puts it in the story "Bech Enters Heaven." "His working day was brief, his living day was long, and there always lurked the hope that around the corner of some impromptu acquiescence he would encounter, in a flurry of apologies and excitedly mis-aimed kisses, his long-lost mistress, Inspiration."

Bech is a frequent flyer. *Bech: A Book* flies him behind the Khrushchev-era Iron Curtain to Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria for three stories. In the story "Rich in Russia," the author is flush with unexportable rubles from the royalties of his Russian sales and can't find much to spend them on besides cheap watches, blocky toys, and furs.

His Russian interpreter, Kate, is a translator of American science fiction. "'All over Soviet Union committees of people sit in discussion over *Travel Light*, its wonderful qualities,'" she tells him. "'The printing of one hundred thousand copies has gone *poof!* in the bookstores.' The comic strip colors of

Mary Cassatt, *Woman Reading in a Garden* (1880). CORBIS.

science fiction tinted her idiom unexpectedly." (Updike has a tendency, as here, to explain with superfluous literalness what he has already embodied with much charm.) The funny money and Kate's surprise splashes of cartoon language suggest all the hidden difficulties in cultural translation that frustrate the good intentions of "cultural exchange."

"Bech Swings" finds the author in swinging, mini-skirted London to promote a British anthology of his work and looking for a romantic Muse. She materializes in the shape of Merissa, a quick-witted heiress with whom his conversations "have a way of breaking into two-liners." The two go to a trendy club called Revolution "where posters of Ho and Mao and Engels and Lenin watched from the walls as young people dressed in sequins and bell-bottoms jogged up and down within a dense, throbbing, coruscating fudge of noise."

Bech's "particularizing" and very novelistic vision saves him from being taken in by the outwardly anarchical trappings of the counterculture: "Revolution was the cave of a new religion, but everyone had come, Bech saw, for reasons disappointingly reasonable and opportunistic. To make out. To be seen. To secure advancement. To be improved."

Bech's politics, like John Updike's, seem to be underpinned by a sternly traditional work ethic and patriotism that is as tenaciously held as it is seldom spoken aloud. It is typical perhaps of conservative luck that the one major American novelist of his generation who held himself aloof from the faddish shibboleths of the 1960s Left never chose to acknowledge an affinity with the neoconservatives whom he often sounds like.

The frequent flyer miles continue to pile up in the second book of the series, *Bech Is Back*. In the story "Bech Third-Worlds It," the writer hopscotches from hell-hole to basket-case across a third world simmering with post-Vietnam anti-Americanism. In "Australia and Canada," he visits Toronto and Sydney, all but interchangeable Anglo-Saxon "cities whose cores are not blighted but innocently bustling."

In "Three Illuminations in the Life of an American Author," a story that seems as if it were written as an excuse for its delicious closing line, Bech and longtime mistress Norma Latchett enjoy an expense-paid holiday in the Caribbean, courtesy of the Superoil Corporation, so that Bech can sign 28,500 copies of a fancy gift edition of his second novel. There, the blocked writer discovers what should have been obvious long before: He can no longer write his own name.

With his new bride Bea Latchett (the discarded Norma's sister), he travels to Israel ("The Holy Land") and Scotland ("MacBech"). His gentile wife glows with pious rapture in the Holy Land. The Jewish-American writer, in contrast, is repelled by the commercialism and banality juxtaposed with Jerusalem's holy sites. He is also made uneasy by his new wife's assumption that her marriage to Bech has conferred on her a proxy to, in a way, experience things on their joint behalves. In Scotland, the roles are reversed. Bech sees a paradoxically uplifting reflection of himself in Scotland's history of defeat, while the ethnically Scottish Bea imagines that Bech in going native is snatching her ethnicity from her for his own writerly ends.

In "Bech Wed," Bech finally comes to ground in suburban Ossining (John Cheever's home, where the West Side Jew feels like a "one-man ghetto") and nestles into a mock Tudor with Bea and her three children. Prodded into activity by Bea, his "suburban softy," Bech produces after almost two years of diligent work an uncharacteristically lurid novel, inevitably promoted by his astonished publishers as his "long-awaited novel." But after the book becomes a major bestseller, a wrathfully jealous Norma Latchett ("The very bones in her ankles seemed to gnash as she crossed and recrossed her legs") returns to needle Bech for "turning into one more scribbler" and exact sexual revenge on the smug sister who is "bragging all the time about how she got you your little *room*, and told you to write a few pages every *day*, and keep going no matter how *rot*ten it is."

In the last book of the series, *Bech at Bay*, the novelist is largely consumed, whether in nostalgia or bitterness, by the past that dwarfs his dwindling future. This final book is dominated by two long, almost novella-length stories. In the first, "Bech Presides," Bech is coaxed into assuming the presidency of "the Forty," an exclusive and outwardly august society of mostly frail and superannuated artists that has come to seem like a genteely elitist relic, even to most of its own

members. Just as Bech is getting used to his new briskly authoritative self, the decorously senescent members of the Forty, despairing of finding worthy artistic heirs among the rising generations, vote to dissolve themselves and pocket the proceeds of the sale of their mid-Manhattan townhouse and its valuable real estate.

"Bech Noir" is a pastiche of noir unsentimentality and superhero righteousness. Having discovered in his declining years "that the literary world was a battlefield—mined with hatred and rimmed with snipers," a caped Bech transforms himself into an exterminating angel on behalf of unfairly reviewed writers everywhere. The adverse comments on Bech's work cited in the story echo those made about Updike's own fiction over the years.

If Bech's life is amply documented, however, it seems under-dramatized. In part, this is an effect of the discontinuity of the Bech stories: If you try to read them as a unified novel, in the course of which the protagonist learns from experience and adapts in discernible ways, you will be frustrated. And in part, it is because Bech is portrayed to a large extent in isolation from a web of intimate friends and family that in fiction helps reflect facets of the protagonist's personality.

Take Bech's writer's block, for example. If Bech were a fully dramatized personality, his impasse—he goes sixteen years without publishing a novel—would be the central dramatic situation confronting him. Its effects on him and the way those effects change over time would be explored in dramatic incidents selected for that purpose.

Updike touches on the causes of Bech's block: perfectionism, narcissism, and negligence pretending to themselves that they are patient preparation or principled abstention. But with the unconvincing exception of an implausibly overeducated panic attack in the story "Bech Panics," Updike largely neglects the psychological effects of Bech's block. This is a curious omission. Bech's drift into a life of creative sterility cushioned by public and critical recognition has carried him to a polar remove from the modernist ideal of the artist-priest who perseveres in beading his string despite the absence of a public up to the demands of his difficult work. An "exquisitist," according to Updike, who "accept[s] the standard of Flaubert and Joyce," Bech is aware that his life has swerved off into the negation of the ideal by which he was called to literature. This knowledge should be an open wound near the center of his psyche. Instead, it is more often a set-up for jaunty one-liners: "Am I blocked? I thought I was a slow typist." (I never said they weren't good one-liners.)

Instead of selecting incidents that illustrate the effects of Bech's creative impotence, Updike seems to have assigned Bech writer's block as a pretext for staging the kinds of incidents—the cultural exchanges and promotion-

al appearances, the signings, book parties, and public readings—that permit him to poke gentle fun at his true subject: the trappings and peripherals associated with medium-sized literary celebrity in America. Updike has said that Bech "is about writing." But Martin Amis was probably closer to the mark when he said the Bech books are "about what writers get up to when they aren't writing."

Bech and his creator are often thought to be as unlike each other as two writers can be. This is in part because Bech appears to be assembled from parts of other writers, all Jewish: He has Bellow's intoxicated language, Roth's snarled feelings about his Jewishness, Salinger's silence, and Mailer's wooly hair and unconstrained polygyny.

But in the devout aestheticism of his art and the aggrieved traditionalism of his politics, not to mention his foreign travel, Bech is a surrogate for John Updike, a vessel into whom Updike can empty his travel sketchbooks and a screen through whom he can work off literary grudges at a plausibly deniable remove. The result reads at times less like fiction than like fictionalized journalism. While peers like Capote and Mailer were trying to smuggle their Great American Novels in under cover of journalism, Updike was smuggling highly polished travel journalism and glossy trade news in under cover of fiction.

That said, to the extent that the Bech stories are journalistic, they are less frontal than conventional journalism. Updike works his way in from the outside by layers of detail establishing a convincing sense of place, while often remaining coyly evasive about larger themes.

The Bech stories' epiphanies are muted, deliberately deflated, glimpsed on the go in peripheral vision. Pervading the stories is a sensibility of almost eerie detachment: They are about the eastern bloc but not the Cold War, about the book business but not writing, about sex but not love.

Of course journalism justifies itself by topicality and relevance to a broad audience. But collected in a book this size, over five-hundred pages, the themes of the Bech stories seem undersized. *The Complete Henry Bech* serves up plenty of John Updike's best prose, prose which leaves one wanting to lick the spoon. At the same time, you wonder: Is it too much icing and not enough cake? ♦

BCA

The Social Contract

Richard Russo shows how to write the novel today.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Richard Russo is a writer who dares to repeat himself. His fifth novel, *Empire Falls*, is about a small town in the Northeastern United States that has seen better days. The only notable difference between the town of Empire Falls and the town of Mohawk (the setting of his first two novels, *Mohawk* and *The Risk Pool*) is that Empire Falls is in Maine, while Mohawk is in New York. And both Empire Falls and Mohawk bear a distinct resemblance to North Bath, another fictional town in New York, in which Russo set his third novel, *Nobody's Fool*.

Knopf

Empire Falls
A Novel
by Richard Russo
Knopf, 483 pp., $25.95

Just as the settings are similar, so are the characters populating them. In a Russo novel, the men gather every morning and afternoon at the local lunch counter and drink and smoke their nights away at the same bar they've been patronizing for forty years. They tend toward irresponsibility, while the women in their lives tend to understandable dissatisfaction, and the children they produce seem fated to more of the same—no matter how much their parents might wish it otherwise. Living from hand to mouth, paid under the table in cash, they dream of new economic development that will offer new economic hope, but are invariably disappointed. Even Russo's sole foray into upper-middle-class portraiture, an academic comedy called *Straight Man*, is set in a third-rate state university in a dying Pennsylvania coal town where budget cuts are looming.

In brief, then, Russo sounds like a writer filled with proletarian gloom about the hellish lives of Americans who missed out on decades of national prosperity—a voice of the voiceless and therefore worthy and depressing as hell, whose novels sit accusingly on the shelves in bookstores trying to shame readers into buying them.

Nothing could be further from the truth, for Richard Russo is one of the funniest, wisest, and most exhilarating novelists writing in America today. He does not condescend to his characters or the places they call home, but rather makes both as vivid and interesting as any account of the glamorous denizens and precincts of Manhattan or Hollywood.

And his best novels, the new *Empire Falls* and the 1993 *Nobody's Fool*, have uncommon heft. You sink into them the way you sink into a juicy Victorian novel about provincial life. They are

A columnist for the New York Post*, John Podhoretz is a contributing editor to* The Weekly Standard.

packed with incident and plot, and by the time you are done, you feel as though you have gotten to know scores of people and that you could navigate your way around town in a rental car without getting lost.

Still, in each book, Russo is primarily telling the story of one exceptional man—a sixty-year-old day laborer in *Nobody's Fool*, a forty-two-year-old grill manager in *Empire Falls*—who has made too little of his life. Russo slowly unravels the causes for their failures of purpose in feats of brilliant storytelling that make these two novels as unexpectedly gripping as any thriller. And in the end, benevolent and loving creator that he is, Russo offers them a certain measure of redemption.

Miles Roby, the protagonist of *Empire Falls*, is the most charmingly dutiful man on earth. He shoulders responsibility—any responsibility, no matter how small—with cheerful resignation. His wife of twenty years has kicked him out in favor of her lover, the owner of the local health club. And yet, when the health-club owner persists in bringing his business to Miles's restaurant, Miles serves him with little complaint. Despite a crippling fear of heights and a too-busy life, he has agreed to paint for free the local Catholic Church where he is a loyal parishioner. And Miles continues to manage the Empire Grill in the employ of the town's premier citizen and owner, Mrs. Francine Whiting, despite her long-ago promise to give him title to the place.

Mrs. Whiting is the Miss Havisham of his life. For reasons inexplicable to him, she delights in his company even as she delights in tormenting him—reminding him what a disappointment he would be to his late mother because he dropped out of college to return to Empire Falls after her death and has never left. Everybody advises Miles to relocate to Cape Cod, where he goes on vacation for a week every summer, because it's the only place on earth he feels happy.

As a boy, Miles had spent a week on the Cape with his mother Grace during one of his housepainter father's frequent disappearing acts. (Max Roby isn't some noble Tolstoyan hardworking peasant: "By the time they'd discovered his shoddy work in Boothbay, he'd be painting someone else's windows shut in Bar Harbor.") Grace had come to vibrant life in the company of a man they encountered there named Charlie Mayne, who was kind to Miles and devoted to his mother.

That one week has haunted Miles's life ever since. The naggingly unfinished questions raised on Cape Cod about the nature of his mother's heart are in part the cause of his paralytic existence in Empire Falls. Midway through the novel, Miles learns that Charlie Mayne's real name was C.B. Whiting—the fourth-generation owner of the town mill where Grace was employed. What's more, Charlie was husband to Francine. This makes it all the more mysterious that, after Charlie's suicide a few years after the Cape Cod vacation, Grace would have gone to work as the private secretary to Mrs. Whiting—and even more mysterious that Mrs. Whiting would have taken such a complex interest in him.

Miles is not a discontented man: "There was much to be thankful for, even if the balance of things remained too precarious to inspire confidence, so on nights like this one his life seemed almost . . . almost enough." He has far too much of his self-sacrificing mother in him and not nearly enough of his reprobate father Max: "It probably was admirable that his father never battled his own nature, never expected more of himself than experience had taught him was wise, thereby avoiding disappointment and self-recrimination. It was a fine, sensible way to live, really, much more sensible than Miles's manner as he went about his business, disappointed by his failure to scramble up ladders, blaming himself for his wife's infidelity, perversely maneuvering himself into situations that guaranteed aggravation, if not outright distress."

Miles fears that his own beloved sixteen-year-old daughter Tick might be heeding his own passive example. Clever like her father, Tick loves to root out what the two of them call "Empire Moments": "lapses in logic on printed signs like the one on the brick wall that surrounded the old empty shirt factory: NO TRESPASSING WITHOUT PERMISSION . . . [and] outside the town's one shabby little rumored-to-be gay bar whose entrance was being renovated: ENTER IN REAR." But then Tick begins to show strains of her father's excessive sense of duty to others after she shares an art class with a deeply strange boy named John Voss. Told to paint something they dream about, Tick paints a snake and John an egg.

Why would the boy dream about eggs, Tick wonders. "I don't dream about eggs," he tells her. "I never dream." John's painting is derived instead from an offhand remark spoken by the mother who abandoned him: "If chickens had any idea what was in store for them, they'd stay where they were in their eggs."

Tick begins to take John under her wing, protecting him from her bully boyfriend and securing him a job at the Empire Grill. Of course, John does dream, just like everybody else in Empire Falls. Miles dreams of Cape Cod and the Empire Grill waitress with whom he has been fruitlessly in love since he was fifteen. Max Roby dreams of spending the winter in Key West where nobody minds if you don't bathe and do cadge drinks. Miles's ex-wife Janine dreams of living a life of privilege with her new beau, who is not what he seems. But John Voss's dream, it turns out, is a very dark one, and will prove to have profound and unsettling consequences for the town.

Empire Falls unfolds its thrilling design from the outset, the meaning of the first page fully clear only when one has finished the last. Miles may be too accepting of his fate, but Francine Whiting's hubristic determination to control Miles's life as well as the day-to-day doings of Empire Falls and even the direction of the powerful river that runs through it proves far more unwise. In unity of character, setting, and narrative, *Empire Falls* is without equal in recent American fiction. ♦

The IRS announced plans to mail 120 million notices reminding taxpayers that they will soon be receiving tax-refund checks under the tax cut enacted this spring. Critics complained about the partisan "cheerleading" tone of the mailings, which will cost the IRS more than $20 million. ***—News item***

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Dear Taxpayer:

This letter constitutes an official printed communication from the United States Government referencing The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 and certain appertainable reimbursements allocated for the above-referenced recipient in pursuance thereof.

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Let's begin at the beginning. Thursday, June 7, 2001, dawned like any other day in Washington, D.C. But then something extraordinary happened. Square-shouldered, disarmingly handsome, the gentle blue of his eyes showing playfully in the sunlight, **President George W. Bush** strode into the Rose Garden behind the White House. It was a building he knew well. Just a few months before, he had restored honor and dignity to it. And there, with a soft breeze lifting his salt-and-pepper hair, **the President of the United States** signed The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001.

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Yours truly,

Ed

Ed McMahon

Dick

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