

# archipelago

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Union Square Vigil for Iraq Dead  
by Joan Schatzman

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Joel Agee, Elizabeth Alexander, Steven Barfield, Attilio Bertolucci,  
Charles J. Bussey, John Haines, Ruth Massey, Joan Schatzman,  
John Moncure Wetterau

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## CHAO KHUN

Joel Agee

The couch is the seat from which the Venerable Chao Khun Sobhana Dhammasuddhi observes me as I traverse the length of the room. Every morning for ten days. First comes my knock on the door. No, before that, as I await my turn, there is my predecessor's voice sounding up through the floor of my room. I can't hear the words, but the tone is one of complaint, a recital of trouble, maybe physical pain from sitting in the lotus posture, or obsessive thoughts of some kind. Or, who knows, something worse, like grief over a broken marriage, or a sickness, or a bereavement. It is human suffering, whatever its cause, and Chao Khun will welcome it into his human heart. But what can Chao Khun, what would the Buddha himself make of me and my monstrous affliction? And why am I here when I know I can't be saved? What other purpose can there be than to suffer deeper, more unimaginable degrees of humiliation and pain?

When this thought invades me, I cry out silently (it all takes place in silence):  
"Why?"

And the answer comes with fury:

### **BECAUSE IT WAS YOUR WILL!**

"When?" I ask then, dodging the Biblical hint and trying, sincerely, to remember.

### **FROM THE BEGINNING!**

Was that you, my Counterpoint? Was that your voice?

No answer.

Why do I trust you? Why do I trust even your capricious silence, when it comes?

C. Perhaps because you know it is not capricious but, like any other occurrence, inevitable. And because you have made your peace with silence. But carry on.

Now Chao Khun responds to the complainer, so calmly I can barely hear him. The complainer's voice rises again. Chao Khun responds with a brief comment. Silence. Then a burst of laughter from both of them. The interview is finished. The door opens and shuts. My fellow seeker – I know who it is: a skinny middle-aged Englishman who goes into spasms during meditation, probably from the release of Kundalini – walks up the creaking stairs, mindfully, as the house rules prescribe, and in slippers – noting, mentally, “lift” when a foot rises, “swing” as it swings to the next step, “down” when it settles, and then the same with the other foot, “lift . . . swing . . . down,” slowly, slowly up the creaking stairs and down the hallway, then gently taps on my door. I do not respond. The only words exchanged in this house are those exchanged with Chao Khun in the morning. The Englishman walks on, lift, swing, down, to his room. I step into my slippers, mindfully, slowly open and shut the door, walk down the hallway and down the creaking stairs. There is no way to hide in this house. The meditators gag for words at the breakfast table, words that would spin veils of pretense around us and build shells of refuge for the mind to hide from itself. But no words are allowed, and nothing is hidden. Everything I do betrays me. When I knock on the door, the relative force and spacing of the three little raps articulate the timidity of my hope and the weight of my fear with awful precision.

“Come in.”

Crossing the room. Consciousness clings to every motion, I am manacled, chained. I glance at him, hoping for a nod or a smile. Why doesn't he let me know that I'm OK? And why, for that matter, do I need his OK? Because I am treading the edge of an abyss, and that abyss is myself, and there is no support. But these aren't the rules of this game. The rules are that I must reach my appointed destination – a distant easy chair – on my own strength, while he sits on his couch, feet cozily tucked under his saffron robe, gazing at the floor, taking me in, I suppose, with his peripheral vision. Arrived at the chair at long last, I turn to sit and face him. His gaze is direct and not unkind, but there is a faint, slanting smile on his lips that gives him a sardonic expression.

“How are *you*?”

Always the same question, always delivered with the accent on the “you,” which gives it a faint touch of irony matching the quality of his smile. The impossible answer bubbles up in me, searches for words. It can’t be confessed.

“It’s hard.”

“Ts, ts, ts.” That and the way he shakes his head says: “Isn’t that too bad.”

This time I won't be seduced into laughing at myself with him, liberating though that would be for the moment. Already I feel steadier. My posture straightens imperceptibly. But it's not imperceptible. He mirrors my motion with a slight straightening of his spine, and again I feel caught.

“Is it fear?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“Visions?”

I hesitate. Visions are the least of my problems. Life itself has become a nightmare.

I look at Chao Khun again. “No,” I say, “no visions.”

“Sometimes it seems hard,” he says, “but only for the ego. The ego complains. The ego pleads weakness. But to do this work, we must be strong.”

Chao Khun's smile is indecipherable. I read in it compassion, mockery, amusement, kindness. A powerful emotion wells up in me. It is love. I love this grave, humorous monk. He is my teacher.

We gaze at each other in silence, smiling.

“Is the mind quiet now?” he asks.

I look in on the mind. It wavers like the surface of the sea when it is almost calm.

“Not really,” I say.

“Maybe quiet enough?”

We both laugh. There's always a laugh at the end of the interview. How does he do it?

I nod, tears of gratitude in my eyes. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Carry on.”

<<<<<<>>>>>>

On Chao Khun's recommendation, Joel practices the walking meditation in the garden,

under a blooming magnolia. The grass is of that youngest, freshest, infant green that will last just a few days before it matures into a proper English lawn. Robins, blackbirds, and thrushes chirp and warble in the fir trees surrounding the shrine room, a converted garage. There is one bird that calls, unmistakably:

*“Free-dom! Free-dom!”*

Of course the bird says no such thing, but the mind has elected to hear it that way, and once heard there is no way to hear it differently.

*“Free-dom!”*

There is something wrong with that bird, Joel thinks, trying to make a joke of it. But it’s not funny, because obviously something is wrong with the mind that imagines him and the birds and the garden and the world. And whose is that mind? No, don’t think. Lift, swing, down.

*“Free-dom!”*

Slowly, mindfully, at the prescribed snail’s pace, he approaches the stone Buddha at the end of the garden. He likes this figure. Once or twice he imagined its stone gaze blessing his efforts.

*“Free-dom!”*

Lift, swing, down. He walks around it. It has no back. It is hollow. The head, too, is hollow. It doesn’t mean anything, he tells himself. But it does. His heart sinks.

*“Free-dom!”*

Nothing is real. The garden is a stage set. For what sinister drama, what cruel farce? He already knows. His part is cut out for him. There’s no stopping, no hurrying it either.

*“Free-dom!”*

A cardinal lights on the shrine room.

*“Free-dom!”*

««««(O)»»»»

In the shrine room. Four men and three women are seated on firm round cushions in the cool semi-darkness, their eyes closed, their legs folded in the half or full lotus position, their attention tethered to the rise and fall of their breathing. One elderly woman sits on a chair. The man who knocked on Joel’s door earlier is sitting near the teacher, perfectly still.

Sooner or later he will start to tremble, but right now the serpent power lies coiled at the base of his spine. Joel sits behind him, wrapped in a brown blanket, fragments of dried leaves in his beard and long hair. Chao Khun sits facing his students, slightly elevated above them on a low dais, his eyes closed as theirs are, a faint curl of a smile in one corner of his full lips, his hands neatly placed palms-up in his lap, one on top of the other, thumbs touching. Everything about him expresses peace and contentment, even the folds of his robe, like the fluting of an Ionic pillar turned to cloth.

These visual details come by courtesy of my Counterpoint, without whose eyeless view the shrine room would have only an olfactory and auditory presence – the odor of incense and freshly cut pinewood, the chirping of birds, a scramble of squirrel claws across the roof. Joel is unconscious even of these. He is turning a key which he hopes will open the door leading out of the house of his fear. The key consists of attention and breathing. When these two become one, the lock turns by itself, and the door barring inside from outside is free to swing freely, in and out, from Now to Now. At moments he feels that the walls themselves have dissolved. A luminous emptiness spreads like a lake. But there is a shore. A ring of darkness surrounds him in the distance. How could it be otherwise? He is still there, reflecting. If there were no center there would be no horizon. Would that not be the meaning of “anatman” taught by the Buddha? No self, no point from which space and time are measured . . . No distance, therefore, between self and not-self . . . No “others,” in fact, but the world all one . . . No dread, therefore, and no guilt . . . Is that love, the true love Krishnamurti is always invoking when he berates his non-followers for misnaming lust and attachment “love”? Is that Chao Khun’s condition? Does he only exist for others, not for himself?

Now Chao Khun’s sleeve rustles faintly as he reaches for the little brass bell on its stand next to him. Joel’s eyelids stir, the ring of darkness collapses into a point in the pit of his stomach, the bell goes “Ting!”, a cloudy mass rises through his chest and throat into his face, his eyelids part, a black naked figure, no more than an inch tall, with jagged widespread little bat wings, detaches itself from his forehead, floats waveringly through the air, glides into the teacher’s forehead, and disappears.

I can’t go on.

C. You must go on.

I don't know how to describe what I felt.

C. Describe what you thought.

I knew at once that I had done something terrible. And it was all the more terrible because I had not intended it.

C. And now what you saw.

His face when he came out of the shrine room. I was waiting for him outside. There was something hidden about him, a kind of lurking. His neck looked shorter, as if he were pulling his head in. Maybe he was afraid. Also his skin was sallow. I approached him. "I need to talk to you," I said. I had to tell him, warn him.

"Tomorrow."

He meant our scheduled talk after breakfast, but he spat the word out like a curse.

"It's urgent, I need to speak to you *now*."

"Do you think you can save yourself by *talking*?"

He was right. I fell silent. The face before me was not human. It was a beast's face. But the beast was endowed with human intelligence, human cunning. It was Chao Khun's face, of course, and it was also the mask of impersonal evil. Never since have I seen such malignancy in a face. But there was also something very nearly comical about it. I think the threat was so great that fear itself came to a halt in me. I saw. Was this real? What if this greenish ghoul-faced monk with bloodshot eyes was purely a product of thought, an illusion? I leaned in more closely to peer into those eyes. Was anyone in there at all? The eyes rolled up and back into their sockets. Only the whites were visible.

What happened there, Counterpoint?

C. You sent him home. He hadn't been there for a while.

What home? Oh, that home.

C. The only one. Then he came to again.

Yes, his eyes rolled out again and his mouth opened and he screamed at me: “Be quiet! Tomorrow!” and wheeled around and stomped off with his slippers slapping against his heels.

That night something roused me from sleep. Not a sound, not a dream. I knew what it was. It was knowledge. (I know it was nothing of the sort, but that’s what I took it for then: iron, incontrovertible truth.) I sat up. The room was dimly lit by the moon. There were the walls, the corners, the window. Nothing had changed in the visible order of things, but there was another order, the order of time, of whispered intimations.

“You have been here before.”

Knowledge was memory. The terror of that!

“The past is now – and always.”

The mind quailed – the wordless, gestural equivalent of “not again!” – and that thought – the irony didn’t escape me – started the avalanche of repetition –

“Again.”

Because it had always begun like this – with the memory that it had always begun with a memory of remembering precisely this – and what was “this” ?

“Eternal recurrence.”

«««««»»»»»

I have grazed this subject a few times earlier in this book. I realize now that it can’t be described, at least not in its essence. It can’t be described because it can’t be imagined. To imagine is to place an image before oneself, but the eternal recurrence is not an image. It is a catastrophe of thought in which you, the putative thinker, become the object of a relentless investigation by a mind that has no use for your parochial identity because it is obsessed with totality. It seems to regard you as something like a function in a calculus of variations. Alas, the function feels, and the curve on which its variance is measured is an index of pain. Without feeling, you might be content to serve as a funnel through which an ocean of past events pours itself into the future. But that ocean is sentient, and you are made to know it. “Remember the cruelties!” Voltaire’s slogan could have been addressed to you. Not that you stand back to imagine the horrors of this world. You know that you cannot imagine them. Rather, you *are* their perpetual arising, they happen with and without your knowledge,

but in you and through you, and there is no end to the permutations. Moreover, the number of possible events, though inconceivably large, is circumscribed, but time has no end. Therefore everything happens again. Eternity and infinity are not concepts you hold in your mind. They are the arms of the cross to which you are nailed, the wheel on which you are broken, the perpetuum mobile through which you are ground . . . but *these* images, to describe the catastrophe, would have to be varied ad infinitum.

Or else . . . maybe I'm deceiving myself. Maybe the truest way to represent it is as a blank spot on the map. With a demon or devil next to it, as a warning to unwary travelers. Around it the colors and marks representing the known world, and among those the river I've been traveling on, a blue vein. It dips into the blankness and disappears. Later, out of that blankness (in the blankness there is no time, only eternity) the river emerges again. That's where memory leaps into being.

««««(O)»»»»

A thicket, impenetrable, or a jungle. Or is it a single tree? Bulging into fruition, shriveling into decay. The fruits are faces, bodies, lives. A world. Yet a tree. Out of this swarming indefinition, a hand, a finger on a red button.

*Time for a little hell on earth.*

**NO!**

The finger lifts.

*As you wish. The show will go on.*

# FOREVER!

Suddenly a weapon. Someone hands him a sword. Who? What a question! The word *is* the sword!

**WHO?**

Or is it an axe . . .

**WHO?**

Three heads chopped off with one blow, who are they?

Susan, Gina, Stefan.  
 A moment's horror, he sees: **they are thoughts.**  
 But they bleed!  
 Have I killed them?  
*Yes, and not for the last time.*  
 Are they real?  
*As real as dreams are while they last.*  
 Let me wake up!  
*Careful now – the world might end!*  
 Who are you, monster?  
*Who do you think? Who would devise such a scheme, if not you? So ingenious that not even you can  
 unravel it!*  
*So transparently fake, just a bubble of mind-stuff!*  
*So durable, so impregnably real!*  
*So cruel that you, the author of cruelty, cry out against yourself: Who are you, monster!*  
 Listening, I notice – almost too late! – that I nearly surrendered my only weapon:

## WHO?

The world-tree spreads itself, bristles. Sprouts organs, blue-veined bags of vulnerable flesh.  
*Murder the Creation . . .*  
 No world! No love! No time. No truth. No people. No creatures. No pain.  
*and you kill yourself . . .*  
 Is that true? Am I nothing but thought?  
*Why, what did you think, child? Thought thinks, therefore you are!*  
 And I see: All is thought, without exception. The body, a thought. The tree of life, a legion  
 of thoughts. Or one thought with a thousand heads, a million if needs be. Strike its heart:

## WHO?

Who indeed! Who dares lay an axe to this stem? Splitting it, and the split  
 runs through every branch, every leaf. A laugh fills immensity.  
*It was always like this, don't you see?*  
*Split-mind splitting endlessly, world without end!*

# WHO?

The word is no longer an axe or a sword, it prays.  
Promptly the tortured Christ appears, nailed to a cross, crowned with thorns,  
his side pierced, drops of blood adorning the wounds.

**“I know that my redeemer liveth”**

But he’s only a thought!

# WHO?

The Buddha appears to the far left of Jesus, resembling Chao Khun and also  
the hollow statue in the garden.

A mockery!

# WHO?

Now the adversary rouses himself in earnest, almost boastfully, with a swagger. As if to say: “What you’ve seen so far was just a flick of a finger.” His weapon is argument. He argues by revelation, which is to say, by force. In splendor and in horror, in grandeur and depravity, he knows no limits, and he shows me that. His essence, his truth, his joy, are summed up in a single word: Infinity. He knows no prohibition and only one commandment: Be! Mere possibility is an irritant and a perpetual goad to creation. Therefore, in his world, whatever is possible is, was, and will be condemned to exist. Only hope is impossible, though impossible to abandon. It is not possible because even the purest aspiration is immediately translated into the weirdly vegetal patterns of a purely quantitative infinity, much as the dignity and uniqueness of a face would be mocked by a system of mirrors in which it was not only endlessly replicated but also varied, an ever more

grotesque cartoon of itself, to the point of demonic inversion. And the corollary, each time, of these hideous demonstrations is that I am that; that there is no enemy and indeed no other being than myself, though I make myself plural a billion times over; that what I am is omnipotent thought dedicated, for reasons unknown to itself, to the elaboration of a self-torment that can only deepen and sharpen in the course of eternity.

But something has entered this desolate glory, a breach in the law of repetition.

# WHO?

Surely this word is the true name of God! I say this now, here at my desk in Brooklyn. Back then in my terror I thought it was still a crude axe or sword in my hand. But the word swept through the mind and its terrible creations, demanding truth and nothing but truth. The mind wants to hide, it builds labyrinths, posts the doors with promises and threats, beautiful promises, terrible threats. But to this word, this divine interrogative, nothing is hidden.

# WHO?

«««««(O)»»»»»

What happened next I don't remember. Or rather, a miracle happened, but between the curse and the miracle, there was a gap. What can I say? I don't know what happened.

C. That's because nothing happened. More precisely, what happened was nothing. You know it only by inference, as you know in the morning that you were unconscious for much of the night. But *this* nothing is not a blank spot on the map. It has no contours, no margin by the side of which you could post an indicative figure – an angel, say. No river runs through it. No traveler will ever explore it. Nothing whatever can be said about it. Not even that it answers the question "Who?"

But I can speak of the miracle. Out of that vacancy, bliss was born.

C. That was later. First there was knowledge. Not its parody, which is a product of fear. Fear is thought and thought is time, but this knowledge is not of thought. Don't try to remember it.

What was the knowing about?

C. About itself. If it were to speak – but to whom would it speak? It knows no self, no other – it would say: "I know that I know." It is consciousness without an object. If it were in time, it would be eternal; in space, omnipresent. But neither time nor space have yet been conceived. Out of this knowing, then, presence is born, and consciousness comes to itself as I AM. This I AM is not you, nor is It anyone other than you. It is pure being in pure self-enjoyment. Its nature is bliss, and that bliss has no limit. It is the quintessence of all joy, all beauty, all truth. Call It the Supreme Being, and it is That; but to itself it is only I AM. Out of this glory, then, forms arise, colors, distinctions: yet all is one. This you remember.

There were two bodies, naked. Beautiful, gold-olive bodies. Breathing, glowing. I don't think I glimpsed them for more than a second, but I knew it as an eternity. A man and a woman. On a bed, in a room. Entwined, yet completely at ease. I saw them. But also: I was them. There was no trace of Joel, except perhaps as a memory, otherwise I wouldn't have been so astonished. Bliss suffused the whole scene, and that bliss was myself. One self, male and female, eternally in love. Such beauty! Such happiness!

The next moment there was one body alone. It was me. I was seated, not lying, on the bed. Flowers were drifting down the walls of the room, slowly. The walls were diaphanous. Was I awake? Was this a dream? If it was a dream, it was not one from which I wanted to awake. Nor did I want to review what had happened. What I wanted more than anything was to sleep. That, it turned out, was a dreadful mistake.

I found myself in bed in the house where I had lived as child in Germany. It was night. My brother was asleep in the room next to mine, and my parents were asleep in their room. But then I saw my mother in the hallway adjusting the level of a picture on the wall. That was something she often did, even in other people's homes. Nobody ever minded. But this time I minded. I got out of bed and went to where she stood next to the picture, still fiddling with its angle. I took her firmly by the hand and led her down the hallway and out onto the lamplit balcony. I took her by her hips and easily, lightly, threw her over the railing. If this had happened in physical reality, she would have fallen onto a stone terrace one floor beneath. But there was no terrace. I threw her from our house into the blackness of eternal night. I woke, and it was I who was falling, forever, again, into the certainty of endless torment. I don't know how long this particular eternity lasted, or what intervened to allow me eventually to fall asleep.

«««««(O)»»»»»

I woke up feeling lacerated. Moreover, I seemed to have developed a new organ of perception overnight, one that enabled me to see malevolence in inanimate things. The corners of the room were cruelly angled. A gleam on the door knob was a stare. Even a sparkle of light on the magnolia leaves outside my window hurt me. So did the thought of Susan and Gina still asleep on the dark side of the planet, whirling into another day, another

increment in the fury of cycles; that and the fear that sooner or later they would have their brains pried open like mine, and that that would be *my* doing, that it was already my fault. I skipped breakfast, fearing the gazes of the other guests. I sat on the cushion in my room, attending to my breath as best I could. The skinny Englishman shambled and creaked his way to my door and knocked. There was no getting around it now, I had to meet with Chao Khun again (cycles!). Halfway down the stairs, I stopped. I wanted to stand there until my heart stopped pounding. Then I thought I could sense Chao Khun's thoughts speaking to me: "Do you really think you can hide?" He was waiting for me. I went to his room and knocked. It wasn't the usual tentative knock. "Come in." He averted his gaze as I passed him, but of course he was watching me. I crossed the room, a matter of seven steps. I took them with resoluteness, as if to say: "Crossing the room is my business," and: "If you want to make watching me *your* business, be my guest." I sat down in the easy chair and looked at him. His face was not unfriendly. Above all, he looked human. What a relief! Now he would ask "How are *you*?" That was *his* business. But he didn't ask that.

"You look well today," he said.

I smiled. We both smiled. Neither of us said anything. Our smiles faded. Fear stained the stillness, like a drop of ink spreading in a clear lake. It was the memory of our encounter in the garden. His gaze became penetrating and hidden.

"Did you sleep well?" He never asked questions like that.

"Not well," I said. "And you?"

He smiled: "I didn't trust you yesterday."

"I know. But you guys aren't supposed to blow up like that."

"I'm not perfect."

I loved him for saying that. I decided to tell him about my ordeal. Using the words "pain" and "fear" and "infinity" lightened the burden of secrecy. He wasn't the enemy. I also told him about my weapon, "Who?", and how it had saved me. He listened sympathetically.

"Was that Nirvana?" I asked.

"It is what it is," he said.

That formulation sharply recalled the root of the terror: that I, the most godforsaken of creatures, was the maker of worlds. This I would not tell him. What could it possibly mean to him? Buddhists don't believe in God. But that wasn't the real reason why I didn't tell him. I was ashamed. Such miserable abjection could not be confessed. Besides, he would think me insane, maybe have me committed to an asylum. Nor did I mention the

demon that had passed from my forehead into his.

“Later the fear came back,” I said.

“And? Did you ask again: Who?”

“No. I guess I lost hope.”

“Not thoroughly enough,” he said.

Those are the last words I remember him saying. He probably meant that I should steer clear of both hope and despair. But the meaning I heard was: “Abandon hope.” The more I think about that moment, the funnier it looks to me. It’s like a cartoon, a Zen joke: a monk in his cell, a man falling head first past his window. The monk says: “Take the Middle Way!”

««««»»»»

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<http://www.archipelago.org/vol7-1/agee2.htm> appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 7, No. 1.

His “The Storm” <http://www.archipelago.org/vol4-4/agee.htm> appeared in Vol. 4, No. 4.

All are from *IN THE HOUSE OF MY FEAR*.

## Nine Political Poems

John Haines

### *The American Dream*

It would have to be something dark,  
glazed as in a painting. A corridor  
leading back to a forgotten neighborhood  
where a ball is bounced from street  
to street, and we hear from a far corner  
the vendor's cry in a city light.

It would have to be dusk, long after  
sunlight has failed. A shrouded figure  
at the prow of a ship, staring  
and pointing—as if one might see  
into that new land still unventured,  
and beyond it, coal dust and gaslight,  
vapors of an impenetrable distance.

Too many heroes, perhaps: a MacArthur  
striding the Philippine shallows; a sports  
celebrity smeared with a period color.  
A voice in the air: a Roman orator  
declaiming to an absentee Forum  
the mood of their falling republic.

It would have to be night. No theater  
lights, a dated performance shut down.  
And in one's fretful mind a ghost  
in a rented toga pacing the stage,  
reciting to himself a history:

“Here were the elected Elders, chaired  
and bewigged. And placed before them  
the Charter: they read it aloud,  
pass it with reverence from hand to hand.

“Back there in the curtained shadows  
the people’s chorus waited, shifting  
and uncertain; but sometimes among them  
a gesture, a murmur of unrest.

“And somewhere here, mislaid, almost  
forgotten, the meaning of our play,  
its theme and blunted purpose . . .”

*City of Orphans*

How strange to think of those streets  
and vacant lots, the sandhills  
where we played and dug our trenches;  
the forts we built, the enemies  
we conjured to aim our stick-guns at,  
and then went home at evening,  
to victory, to safety and sleep.

And now the vast acres of rubble,  
the pitched and roofless houses,  
upended stonework and sunken bridges.  
The dog-packs roaming, digging,  
for the one still-unclaimed victim;  
the stray sniper aiming at dusk,  
and in the roadside fields,  
flowers that explode when picked.

The children wandering from one  
burned suburb to another,  
seeking that which no longer exists:  
a neighborhood, a playing field,  
a wading pool or a standing swing;  
for a kite to fly, a ball to throw,  
or just one pigeon to stone.

And through all this haunted vacancy,  
from cellars and pits of sand,  
come and go as on a fitful wind  
such whispers, taunts and pleadings:  
the scolding voices of dead parents,  
the lessons of teachers no longer  
standing, whose classrooms  
are blown to ash and smoky air.

And far-off, unheard beyond the drone  
of a single hovering aircraft –  
in Paris, Zurich, Prague, or London,  
the murmur of convening statesmen.

*Kent State, May 1970*

Premonitory, her outstretched arms  
as she kneels in the spring sunlight,  
the cry on her lips that will not  
raise the boy lying dead before her.

How often has that image returned,  
to fade and reappear, then fade again?  
In Rwanda, in Grozny, Oklahoma . . .  
Kabul, city of rubble and orphans.

And now the Capitol streets are closing,  
an aroused militia at the gates –  
the fences scaled by a stray gunman  
for an enemy poised ever within.

We are asleep in the blurred ink  
of our own newsprint, in the flicker  
of our nightline images; in the fraying  
voices of distracted candidates.

How long before that prone form rises,  
to stand, confused and blinking  
on the sunlit campus field; then fall  
again in the blood we cannot see . . .

And that long-held cry of hers awakens,  
to be heard at last over the stutter  
of gunfire – in the grassy echo of a town,  
a street, a house no longer there?

*Notes on the Capitalist Persuasion*

## I.

“Everything is connected to everything . . .”

So runs the executive saw,  
cutting both ways  
on the theme of all improvement:  
Your string is my string  
when I pull it my way.

In my detachment is your dependency.

In your small and backward nation  
some minor wealth still beckons –  
was it lumber, gas, or only sugar?  
Thus by its imperial logic,  
with carefully aimed negotiation,  
my increase is your poverty.

When the mortgage payments falter,  
then in fair market exchange  
your account is my account,  
your savings become my bonus,  
your home my house to sell.

In my approval is your dispossession.

## II.

Often in distress all social bonds  
are broken. Your wife may then  
be my wife, your children  
my dependents – if I want them.

So, too, our intellectual custom:  
Your ideas are my ideas  
when I choose to take them.  
Your book is my book,  
your title mine to steal,  
your poem mine to publish.

In my acclaim is your remaindering.

Suppose I sit in an oval office:  
the public polls are sliding,  
and to prove I am still in command  
I begin a distant war. Then,  
in obedience to reciprocal fate,  
by which everything is connected,  
my war is your war,  
my adventure your misfortune.

As when the dead come home,  
and we are still connected,  
my truce is your surrender,  
my triumph your despair.

*Politics and the Dead*

Who calls from the paper columns?  
Whose voice there in the paragraphs,  
in the handbills and leaflets?  
Why are you standing so still

in the shadows, unable to speak  
your name? Or was it you I saw,  
a drifter shrouded in the street,  
you lying cold in the doorway.

Your vote cannot be counted now.  
Party, affiliation – what are these  
to someone for whom the precincts  
are deleted, all entries cancelled?

Yet there you are, compromised,  
betrayed, hardly a whisper  
in the wind of the corridors,  
there where the laws are unmade.

Neither citizen nor ancestor.  
A rumor of something no longer  
required – unwanted stranger  
to your own renumbered house.

*Blood*

Tell me if you see it now,  
under your foot, by the roadside –  
a pool beneath the public phone,  
a stain on the voting-booth curtain.

Someone was here, and someone now  
is missing – distracted voices  
astray in the thrumming wires.

Tell me if that which reddens  
the wind and colors the evening  
makes you think of a book –  
if the news you read draws blood,  
if you feel the wound in your hand.

Turn the pages with that wounded  
hand: count the episodes, the raw  
displacements gummed together . . .  
It is history, now and tomorrow.

A cry that breaks from the crowd  
as the speaker slumps and falls;  
an image in the theater, a rope,  
a sudden flash from the shadows . . .

Something that swells the awnings  
like a summer downpour, but it  
is not summer, and it is not rain.

*The Unemployed,  
Disabled, and Insane*

*after August Sander*

He stands alone at the city corner,  
an old hat crushed in his hands.  
There is no hope in those eyes,  
fixed on a scarred and empty street.

On a facing page two blind children  
are holding hands. What they are saying  
to each other we are not told,  
but that they are disabled and insane.

It is 1929. We are waiting for what  
we cannot see and have no name for:  
a booted stride on a street of glass,  
the triumph of a murderous will.

Seventy tormented years have passed.  
The refugees are camped at the end  
of another road to cross the border  
into that same still-haunted age.

The children there are not yet blind;  
they are old enough to see  
where this solitary man is looking at,  
here at the center of an unturned page.

*It Could Happen Again**In memoriam: Hilda Morley*

We met in Provincetown two years ago  
this summer, companions in the art  
we shared, and in our separate lives.  
I remember that brief friendship,  
and the bond that grew between us.

We walked to the waterfront at evening,  
you limping on an injured foot.  
And then by the fireside at supper,  
in the quiet of that place we liked,  
and never once did you stop talking.

I listened: Your life with Stefan,  
in the Europe you knew and left behind.  
And how you planned to move to London,  
to a house you owned in Hampstead,  
and finish your life there alone.

And then you paused, on the one subject  
difficult to speak of, so much a part  
of what you are and were in our wounded,  
distracted world – of refugees and cattle  
trains, the forced dispersal of a people.

And you said, quietly but firmly,  
in the thoughtful voice of someone who  
has known too well what others merely  
read, the voice of a gentle seer:  
“It could happen again. It could happen here.”

*The Last Election*

Suppose there are no returns,  
and the candidates, one  
by one, drop off in the polls,  
as the voters turn away,  
each to his inner persuasion.

The front-runners, the dark horses,  
begin to look elsewhere,  
and even the President admits  
he has nothing new to say;  
it is best to be silent now.

No more conventions, no donors,  
no more hats in the ring;  
no ghost-written speeches,  
no promises we always knew  
were never meant to be kept.

And something like the truth,  
or what we knew by that name –  
that for which no corporate  
sponsor was ever offered –  
takes hold of the public mind.

Each subdued and thoughtful  
citizen closes his door, turns  
off the news. He opens a book,  
speaks quietly to his children,  
begins to live once more.

An excerpt from  
FOR THE CENTURY'S END  
POEMS 1990—1999

by John Haines

Seattle and London: University of Washington Press

<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/HAIFOC.html>.

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*Quattro poesie / Four Poems*

Attilio Bertolucci

*tr. from the Italian* by Nicholas Benson

*La consolazione della pittura*

*a G.*

Non soltanto guardare le piante  
lo spazio fra le piante una casa  
e un'altra più distante  
assorta in una luce dorata  
perché il giorno d'inverno che va via  
l'ha illuminata a metà –

ma guardarle in una tela che tu  
mi mostri e che rivela –  
dolore e gioia dei dodici anni già  
sul punto di finire,  
dei miei nei tuoi – quelle piante spogliate  
da un inverno in cui vorrei

che tu crescessi naturalmente vincendo  
il rigore del clima e della gente  
con la fiera dolcezza  
della tua indole a sua volta temprata  
non vinta dai geli, dagli sguardi  
di chi ti ama, ma chiama padrone –

non soltanto guardare in prospettiva  
i tigli nudi e la nostra casa  
e un passero che arriva e si posa  
sul ginepro pungente in una luce  
che l'ombra bacia e spezza, può lenire,  
ma un rosso sul grigio, la mia mente?

*The consolation of painting  
for G.*

Not just looking at trees,  
the space between trees, a house,  
and another further off  
absorbed by golden light  
because half-lit by the departing  
winter day –

but looking at them on a canvas  
you show me, and that reveals –  
pain and joy of twelve years  
already almost over –  
mine, in yours – those trees stripped  
by a winter in which I'd like

you to grow naturally, overcoming  
the rigors of climate and people  
with the fiery sweetness  
of your nature in turn tempered,  
not defeated by frost, by the looks  
of those who love you, but call you *master* –

not just to see in perspective  
the bare lindens, our house  
and a sparrow arriving to perch  
on pungent juniper in a light  
shadows graze and shatter, but  
a red on gray: that can soothe my mind?

*Un ballo in maschera*  
*a Giorgio Cusatelli che guardava dalla*  
*finestra distraendosi dallo "Stiffelio"*

Chi con cembali e timpani chi con risa e gridi  
con parrucche scivolanti in avanti sugli occhi allegri

così anima il lungofiume stipato di neve poi  
che l'ultima sera di carnevale ruotando s'accosta

alle dodici e arde sui quadranti rivolti  
al cittadino un invito ruffiano o un ammonimento?

Ma non sono clown questi che hanno graziosamente  
trasformato in teatro la pensilina delle foresi

dormienti ora e ancora altre ore prima  
dell'amaro mercoledì che è domani in rimesse

e parcheggi provinciali dislocati a monte  
a valle ben lontano da qui dove un torneo lento

di macchine sfilà procede e si perde  
per ricomparire luci versando a fiotti

sulle instancabili provocatrici e loro  
stivali maculati di bianco corpetti

in cui l'oro rilega pelo d'agnello  
madido di un inverno ormai al suo termine irreparabile...

I travestiti di Parma erano un tempo commessi  
scolari sarti garzoni di barberia

in doppio apprendistato sotto maestri esperti  
nelle due arti e anche non sempre in bel canto

col gusto di tradire il genio del luogo se è  
Cremonini a chiamare con tanta dolcezza

l'animale gentile e canoro strumento  
ambiguo di voluttà alla mente convulsa...

Vengono e vengono da città vicine  
alla petite capitale d'autrefois che suoi cittadini

empi e rozzi non vogliono ducale per inserirla  
nel dialogo nell'abbraccio mortale America Russia

sotto il segno intrecciato della pop art e della democrazia progressiva.  
Ma s'accostino prudenti che potrebbero sembrare

clienti timidi o voyeurs moralisti e venire  
irrisi o colpiti da palle di neve infallibili

e riconoscano in queste feste di Parma  
in questi costumi fantasiosi e impudenti

la linea serpentina locale ripresa  
con inaudito sprezzo del pericolo

da figli del popolo e dei borghi malsani  
fioriti di sorelle dalle dolci gambe cui

rubare atteggiamenti e fondi tinta  
per la necessità di essere inanzitutto colpevoli.

Ha ripreso a nevicare i forestieri se ne vanno  
felpati i rimasti non demordono

inventano mimiche accordate  
all'infinita discesa di farfalle dal cielo.

*A Masked-Ball*

*to Giorgio Cusatelli, who watched from the window  
distracting himself from 'Stiffelio'*

Some with cymbals and tympani some laughing and shouting  
with wigs tipped forward over happy eyes –

thus the snowpacked riverbank comes alive  
since it's the last night of carnival rolling on approaching

twelve and a warning or ruffian's invitation  
glows on sundials facing the town?

But they're not clowns, those who've graciously  
transformed as theater the shelter for fieldhands

now aslumber and for hours more still before  
the bitter Wednesday in the place of tomorrow,

with provincial parking lots moved to the mountain,  
to the valley, a good distance from here, where a slow tourney

of cars unfolds proceeds and is lost  
to resurface in lights pouring out in crests

over the tireless provocateurs their  
boots maculated white and vests

stitched with golden thread lambskin  
wet through from winter now at an irreparable end...

The transvestites of Parma were once salesmen  
scholars tailors barbers

in dual apprenticeship under expert masters  
of two arts, *bel canto* not always one of them,

with a taste for betraying the local genius  
if that's Cremonini who so sweetly calls

the gentle animal, the singing instrument  
of ambiguous desire, to the mind convulsed...

They keep coming from nearby cities  
to the *petite capitale d'autrefois* whose citizens,

crude and cruel, don't want the ducal franchise,  
to be involved in the dialogue, the fatal embrace, America Russia

under the crossed signs of pop art and progressive democracy.  
But they'd edge closer carefully so they appear

timid clients or prudish voyeurs and get  
derided or bombarded with infallible snowballs,

and recognize in these festivals of Parma  
in all the fantastic, outrageous gear

the winding local line resumed  
with heedless scorn for the danger

by sons of the working class, from dirty suburbs  
flowering with sweet-legged sisters

to steal attitude and makeup from  
out of need to be, above all, guilty.

It's snowing again, the strangers softly leave  
those who remain don't give in

they invent routines in imitation  
of the endless descent of butterflies from heaven.

*Lunedì*

La settimana si apre con azzurro e bianco  
mobilità e suono nuvole e stormi volanti  
parole portate via dal vento lasciate  
cadere nel viale ad ammucchiarsi con le foglie

e tanto amore inutilizzabile ai confini dell'inverno  
a meno di non bruciarlo fra cartoni e plateaux  
schiodati con allegria dove bruniva uva  
faville e fumo fanno precipitare la sera

e l'età unitamente così che di lagrime  
ti si mescola il vino che da sempre consola  
chi giunge a questi termini ferrei del giorno  
e della città terrena ormai palpitante

d'abbracci sulle rive di fango  
e sussurrante addii propizi a una notte  
che ognuno dovrà affrontare solo vizio e orazione  
smorendo inalimentati presso i letti raggiunti.

*Monday*

The week opens with blue and white  
motion and sound clouds and flocks in flight  
words swept away by the wind let them  
drop in lanes to gather with leaves

and so much love useless at the limits of winter  
unless burned with cardboard and crates  
pried apart with joy where grapes darkened  
sparks and smoke hasten evening

and age as one so you mingle tears  
with the wine that has always consoled  
whoever arrives at these iron gates of day  
and of the earthly city avid now

with embraces on muddy banks  
and whispered goodbyes promising a night  
everyone will have to face alone vice and prayer  
fading unfed by the long-sought bed.

*Per una clinica demolita*

Qui dove un poeta ha pianto e delirato un mese  
della sua vita - un aprile  
di nuvole,  
di bel cielo sereno  
insidiato di crepe –  
sbattono le persiane abbandonate.

Dove avete portato  
le vostre droghe e preghiere,  
Figlie della Sapienza, figlie  
della pazienza, tanto  
buone cuciniere e allegre  
dispensiere di minestre e di vino  
per la gran fame nel tardo mattino?

Qui un altro giorno, già  
demolite quelle stanze care,  
già più avanzato l'anno e la fabbrica  
nuova ormai alta, sonora  
d'un cantiere che tace  
solo se il mezzogiorno spacca in luce e ombra  
pane e frittata, al muratore ho chiesto inutilmente:

“Dove sono emigrate  
quelle vecchie e giovani suore  
che con aghi, con fiale  
sconfiggevano il male, precise  
come lancette sul quadrante a usarle  
senza errore, alternandole  
con preghiere cristiane?”

Che io sappia dove sono, che io sappia  
che non sono partite  
dalla città che genera in eccesso  
la voluttà e il dolore, che io  
le sappia, in quest'ora  
che precede la notte e l'inverno,  
ancora sagge e pazienti nel fuggire

per me, per tutti noi, sulla terra l'inferno.

### For a demolished clinic

Here, where a poet raved and cried away a month  
of his life – an April  
of clouds,  
of beautiful clear skies  
infiltrated by cracks –  
the abandoned shutters are banging about.

Where have you taken  
your drugs and prayers,  
Daughters of the *Sapienza*, daughters  
of patience, such  
good cooks and glad providers  
of soup and wine  
for the great hunger of late morning?

Another day here and already  
those dear rooms are destroyed,  
the year well advanced, the new factory  
by now towering, its echoing  
workyard quiet only  
when midday breaks omelette and bread  
into light and shadow, and in vain I ask the mason:

“Where have they gone to,  
those sisters young and old  
who conquered evil  
with needle and vial, precise  
as the minute hand in their unerring  
use, alternating that  
with Christian prayer?”

If only I knew where they were,  
knew they hadn't left  
the city generating an excess  
of lust and pain, if only  
I knew them, in this hour  
that precedes the night, and winter,  
patient still and wise in setting flight

for me, for us all, to hell on earth.

translations ©Nicholas Benson

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## Death Suite

Elizabeth Alexander

i.

“She remembered that in the mountains of Souli, sixty women had gone to one of the peaks, danced together, and thrown their children and themselves over the precipice rather than surrender to the slavery of the Turks.”

December 18, 1803

Zalongo mountain

traditional Souli folkdance

*danse macabre*

“ . . . & the agony of death awaiting set the rhythm.”

ii.

When I saw her 12 years ago, she danced like a girl  
on the legs of a girl  
with the clear sparkling eyes of a girl

My aunt Valla Dee, age 66; my niece's wedding

Last autumn they found cancer, she had surgery  
& six months later, not recovered from that operation  
went back for another —  
repair of a thoracic aortic aneurysm.

*To gain access to the aorta, you divide the sternum at midline  
(you make a vertical incision)*

*You induce prolonged hypothermic circulatory arrest  
(you lower the body temperature to 18° C,  
you cross—clamp the aorta,  
stop the heart)*

*You provide retrograde cerebral perfusion  
(via a tube inserted into the superior vena cava)  
to keep the brain from shutting down for lack of oxygen*

*You have 45 minutes to repair the aneurysm*

*The recovery: long & excruciating  
The alternative: the aneurysm bursts, the patient dies —  
or maybe not*

in the ICU:

Her sternum opened wide, chest cavity exposed

I could have peeked.

The breathing apparatus eclipsed her mouth & nose

but not her bruised complexion.

“Sweet Jesus, let her die”

(my prayer, not Aunt Valla Dee’s)

I lay my hand on hers & told her who I was

She tapped her fingers twice in recognition.

iii.

Punjab, 1946–1947

Not only the subcontinent but also the women who lived there were partitioned

Hindu, Muslim, Sikh

Their breasts sliced off,

their bodies branded,

“Pakistan, zindabad!” / “Hindustan, zindabad!”

Their assailants carved these tattoos.

“The female body became territory to be fought over & conquered. . . .”

In Thoa Khalsa, 90 women jumped into the village well & drowned themselves

(Sikh women, at the *Muslmaans*’ approach)

Had the women chosen not to sacrifice themselves, it is likely that their fathers

or their husbands

or their brothers

would have slain them.

(That same day, before the drownings, a man of Thoa Khalsa prayed,

“We have not allowed your sikhi to get stained

& in order to save it, we are going to sacrifice our daughters, make them martyrs,

please forgive us . . .”

Then he arose & killed his daughter along with 25 other women of his household.)

By water & by fire,

by gunshot, poison, strangulation,

women took their lives

or had them taken, by their own,

during partition.

“Viran, pehle mannu maar” / “Brother, kill me first.”

In Amritsar many women chose family honor over their own lives.

Others, horrified, prayed to escape the will of men.

“We would listen stealthily & overheard them saying that all of us should be locked up  
in a room & burnt alive . . . Our own families were saying this.”

Betrayal to betrayal

the war on women,

Hindu, Muslim, Sikh

during partition.

iv.

Bible story (Judges 11.29–11.40)

Jephthah made a vow:

If God would fight for him against the Ammonites,  
Jephthah would present to God a gift of untoward magnitude,  
not just any burnt offering — a lamb, say, or a goat,  
but a human sacrifice, from Jephthah's household.

*Jephthah's idea, not God's — the whole mad scheme*

Jephthah vowed, "Whoever first comes out of my house to meet me  
after I return victorious  
that one will die."

*a predetermined pool of candidates, a narrow field*

& God gave the Ammonites into Jephthah's hand, with a very great slaughter  
& Jephthah's only child came out to meet him.

*& God, foreshadowing Camus, did not let Jephthah off the hook.  
'If god is God,' wrote the philosopher, 'He is the devil.'*

& Jephthah tore his robe & passed the blame.  
"Alas!" he cried, "My daughter, you have become the cause of great trouble to me."

A vow was a vow was a vow in ancient Israel,  
Jephthah's daughter knew that, reassured him.  
"Father keep your vow, but let this thing be done for me . . ."  
She asked to spend two months

with her companions  
 in the mountains  
 bewailing her virginity.  
 “Go!” Jephthah said.

*How old were you, Jephthah’s daughter?*

*What was your name?*

*& did you die a virgin,  
 or did a shepherd boy appear,  
 or did one of your companions lie beside you  
 kiss your sweet thighs & lips & breasts*

*Did you know love?*

#### Notes

i. The initial lines are quoted from Louis De Bernières, *CORELLI’S MANDOLIN* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 88; the last line is from Souleiman–Aga, Turkish colonel and eyewitness, as recounted in “Zalogo,” [http://www.dimos-zalogou.gr/Monuments/Zalogo\(EN\)htm](http://www.dimos-zalogou.gr/Monuments/Zalogo(EN)htm).

iv. The sources for the quotations are as follows: Mattie Katherine Pennebaker, “‘The Will of Men’: Victimization of Women during India’s Partition. *Agora* no. 1, issue 1 (Summer 2000) <http://www.tamu.edu/chr/agora/summer00/pennebaker.pdf>; Gyanendra Pandey, *REMEMBERING PARTITION* (Cambridge University Press: 2001) as cited by A.J. Philip in “Betrayal to Betrayal,” <http://www.bihartimes.com/articles/ajp/betrayal1.html>; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bahsin, *BORDERS & BOUNDARIES: WOMEN IN INDIA’S PARTITION* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 47 and 49.

The last line of the poem alludes to Philip’s title.

v. See Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA* (Oxford University Press, 1973 & 1977), p. 310.

## SIGNAL FIRE

John Moncure Wetterau

*On a deserted beach at dusk, a man rolled a note into a cylinder and stuffed it into one shoe. He patted the wallet, keys, and knife in his pockets, took off his clothes, and walked into the water. The current carried him to a wooded point where he came ashore, found his bag, dressed, and walked fifteen miles in the dark to the next town, crossing the main highway, keeping to back roads. In the morning, he caught a bus to D.C. and another bus to New York.*

*A tall kid put his field jacket on a table in front of the processing sergeant and signed a form. Four years, twenty-five days, and they take your field jacket. He walked off base past the main gate and stuck out his thumb.*

In a large room, heated by a woodstove, lit by an Aladdin lamp, central table partially cluttered with books, chisels, honing oil, bread, a piece of cheddar, guitar strings, and beer glasses, Gred Montgomery and I watched the rain gather and move up the mountain.

Soft grays and blacks, sheen of birch, October maples, hemlock green. Shadowed room corners, sharp lines of table and window. Two men sitting, half turned to the window – one rounded, red hair and beard; the other dark, angular, intense. In the air, a color that smells of woodsmoke.

A troubled society hemorrhages artists. Waves of painters, writers, and musicians came through Woodstock in the 60's. They drove VW bugs and microbuses, old pickups, and Daddy's lesser Mercedes. Some just stepped off the Trailways bus.

I was twenty-five, back in town, painting houses. At the end of each day, we milled around in the Depresso, Deanie's, and Buckman's. There were people who knew how to do

things and people willing to learn. Bob Dylan was there. The Band. You never knew who would show up – Norman Mailer, Van Morrison, Joan Baez. The locals scratched their heads and kept on with their lives, staying apart mostly. A few of us lived in both worlds.

Gred got off the bus. He bought a hammer and a Stanley tape and went to work. He was cheerful and made an effort to fit in. Women were attracted to his easy laugh, his willingness to share frustrations and enthusiasms. His red hair and beard grew longer. He began to be accepted as others came and went.

He lived high on the mountain, cabin-sitting, doing occasional odd jobs for the owner. One afternoon he invited me up to try his home brew. It was a gloomy day – lowering clouds, chilly. You couldn't smell winter yet, but it was coming.

The main room was filled with tools, books, and cases of beer. Sweatshirts hung on the backs of chairs. A guitar waited in a corner. A large window overlooked the valley, a northern fall view of woods, a few fields, a church steeple.

When you are young, you tend to define yourself by others. It is easier to say, I'm not like him, or, she's crazy, or, he's a good worker, than it is to announce yourself as Delft the Deft or Igor Intelligent. Each new and interesting person challenges your sense of yourself. Perhaps, in other cultures, people are quicker to know who they are. We were in the richest period of the richest country in history; we were taking our time.

Gred played his guitar and talked about a bluegrass group he was promoting. I told him that my writing hadn't gotten far, just poems and scraps. Trying to figure things out, I said.

The rain moved over us. Gred lit the lamp. I told him how I'd decided midway through my hitch in the Air Force that war was wrong and that it was my duty to get out. Damned lucky I didn't get a year in Fort Leavenworth. The judge gave me a choice, and I had a last moment epiphany. A voice in my head said, *"You asshole! People kill each other. They have always killed each other. What do you think you're doing?"* Thirty days.

"They add it to your hitch," I said. "I got five days off for good behavior."

"I was in the Marines," Gred said. "Went AWOL."

"No shit! They didn't shoot you?"

"They might." He was smiling. "If they find me." He opened two more bottles.

He had faked suicide on a beach. I thought he was telling the truth, but I may have looked doubtful. He produced a battered drivers license. It was from a southern state. Tennessee, I think. The name on it was Fred Shoegarth or something close to it. He underlined it with one finger. "I like Gred better."

We ate bread and cheese, leaned back in the chairs, talked, and listened to the rain. I felt self-contained, free around my feet and elbows. I don't remember the details, but Gred had been bounced around as a kid. He'd heard about Woodstock while he was with a woman in New York – Anna? She was coming that evening to see what was happening, to stay a few days, maybe more. When it was time for him to meet her bus, I drove down the mountain behind him, envious.

She didn't stay long. A few months later, Gred was living with Kitty, a singer with fiery dark red hair and a healthy bank account. They married and bought the old ice house on Glasco Turnpike. Gred incorporated the three-foot-thick stone walls into a new house, a project that involved successions of carpenters and mavericks. Kitty had a baby whose hair was red and curly.

The house was closed in when Gred was arrested. He had rented tools for a few days and hadn't bothered to tell the rental company that he was still using them and would bring them back when he damn well got around to it. He was fingerprinted. Gerry, the town's liberal lawyer, advised Gred to turn himself in before the prints were matched and the Marines came for him.

It was good advice. Gred got off with only six months in Portsmouth. Not that the Portsmouth brig is easy time. But still, we were at war in Vietnam. He was likeable. Probably, he did a great job apologizing. Maybe the judge took the wife and baby into account. Gred kept his mouth shut and survived, came back to town, and split up with Kitty.

The last time I saw him was a year or so later at a party. Large sails were drying on a lawn. He was involved with Lon's ex-wife, Mara, who'd inherited a small amount of money. Gred used some of the money to go to Maine and to buy an old wooden boat which he managed to sail down the coast and up the Hudson. He had a close call in Brooklyn Harbor, he told me, but a tugboat bailed him out. He and Mara were heading for Florida or the Bahamas. Mara was quiet, self-effacing, but that afternoon she was drinking gin. "So, you're with Mara now," I said.

"The way she's going, I'm not sure who she's with." He was his usual amiable-to-merry self, but there was an edge in his voice, a masked alertness in his eyes. Nearly forty years ago.

Gred had guts. He held to the jester's truth: you don't amount to much in the universe; you might as well enjoy life, take chances and challenges. Perhaps he's down in the Keys right now, heavier, a Hemingway beard, laughing, a glass of something near his elbow.

I clung to the writer's truth: words, if honest, matter; they lead to understanding, acceptance, joy even.

Why do we remember one thing and forget others? The process seems subconscious and continuous, winnowing and compacting, preserving, packaging for the future what might be useful. The memory of that evening on the mountain flickers like a signal fire on a distant headland. When I look across, I am shocked and encouraged. I got this far. I can go farther.

We thought we were experienced, that rainy night, but we were like springs yet to be released. If Gred were here, I imagine him asking, one eyebrow raised sardonically, "How's it been, all that writing?"

"Harder than whistling, easier than digging coal," I'd say.

John Moncure Wetterau's "Waiting for Happiness"

appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 8, No. 1

<http://www.archipelago.org/vol8-1/wetterau.htm>

## The Peace March in New York During the Republican National Convention

Joan Schatzman



Union Square Vigil for Iraq Dead

Shortly after one p.m. on Saturday, August 28, 2004, three carloads of University of Virginia students and private citizens departed Charlottesville, bound for New York City. We were going to protest the war in Iraq and March For Peace and Justice. That night, I called the folks from an Italian restaurant near Macdougall St., where I was staying. Mom said, “Don’t throw things at the cops and don’t get arrested, because they will torture you.” Dad said, “Strap a shiv to your leg so you can reach down to get it if you need to.” I assured

them it was going to be a peaceful march, and there was no way I'd put myself in harm's way.

*Sunday, August 29*

This is the day of the peace march. I had an over-priced breakfast of potato pancakes and coffee down the street from the apartment, at the International Café. I was charged \$9 for three cups of coffee. I thought the second two cups were merely refills, silly me.

Properly fortified, I walked from 4<sup>th</sup> and Houston to 14<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Ave, where the march was forming. The staging area was a large rectangle of several streets spanning 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Ave and 14<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>. Somehow I ended up right in front of the starting line. Michael Moore and, of course, Jesse Jackson were front and center.



Lead-off Banner UFPJ

I liked being ahead of the throng. I talked to two clean-cut guys recently graduated from college, who turned out to be guests of Republicans delegates. They said they were there to see what was going on. Did they realize they were adding to the body count? They

bought the whole Bush agenda hook, line, and sinker, parroting presidential sloganeering. One declared that his new insurance job was created by Bush's tax cuts.

The city was spending unprecedented amounts of money securing itself in preparation for the peace march and the Republican National Convention. The staging area and march route were lined with miles of metal barricades for crowd control, the police were helmeted, armed, and ubiquitous.



Barricading 7thAve

After a long wrangle in the courts, United For Peace and Justice (UFPJ), the march organizers, had been denied a Permit to rally in Central Park after the march. Barricades and an impressive line up of N.Y.P.D. forced the march to u-turn at 34<sup>th</sup> and head south down 6<sup>th</sup> Ave toward Union Square. I wanted to go to Central Park anyway after the march, so I crossed over the metal barricades and stood in front of Macy's.

For the next five hours I watched 500,000 marchers stream by.

Around three p.m., I saw smoke coming from 7th Ave and Madison Square Garden. A small group of activists had set fire to a papier-mâché dragon.



Dragon Smoke

Minutes later, cops came running up 34<sup>th</sup> St with their batons flailing. They moved in on a couple of guys and beat them to the ground. They themselves were immediately surrounded by the media and marchers with cameras rolling.



Red Drum

Within a minute, 250 cops in riot helmets, loaded with plastic handcuffs created an impenetrable ring around the tussle. Boos and chants erupted from the crowd to let them go. A second tussle sprung up a hundred yards away. The police cavalry was brought forward. Amazingly, the captures and arrests took place in twenty minutes. The march resumed as though nothing had happened. No more flare-ups were reported for the rest of the day.



Cop Cavalry

The dramatic and emotional high point of the march was 4000 people carrying 1000 flag-draped coffins.



Coffins

I met an older couple who lived on the Upper East Side. Morty, the husband, was plugged into his Walkman, listening to Air America, getting up-to-the-minute peace march news. Each time his wife asked him a question, he'd say, "What?" and pull out the ear piece. He was an architect who designs prisons. They took me under their wing after we stood and chatted for three hours. They escorted me to the subway and taught me how to buy a metro card. We took the F train uptown and parted ways at 63<sup>rd</sup> and Lexington. There was only a very tiny peace-march presence in Central Park. My guess was the march was so big and took so long, that there wasn't enough time to make it all the way back uptown. I bought a 24oz Corona and headed over to the park for three vander hot dogs and a nap on the grass.

*Monday, August 30*

I found a cheap breakfast shop next door to the Blue Note, where, for a buck and a half each, I got coffee and a bagel.

WINA, a Charlottesville AM radio station, had asked if I'd like to give live reports over the telephone describing the peach march and R.N.C.-related protest activities. You bet.

I went on the air at 9:10 a.m. Dick Mountjoy, the morning DJ, asked if I thought 500,000 peace marchers were going to make a difference. "Yes," I said, "but mostly to the already converted, because the current administration has a knack for dismissing large marches as just another focus group. For example, Bush dismissed 10 million peace marchers in Oct of 2002 in the run up to the war."

I was at the '68 Democratic convention in Chicago demonstrating for peace in Vietnam. Mountjoy asked me to compare and contrast the two conventions. I said the cops in 1968 Chicago were ignorant Neanderthals. The C.T.A. bus drivers were on strike. Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King had just been assassinated in the spring. The people were angry. In contrast, cops have become better trained. The N.Y.C. cops were disciplined and respectful. Marchers want to be peaceful and they want their voice heard.

After the interview, I crawled uptown on the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue bus to Times Square. It took forty-five minutes to go a couple of miles, because of the R.N.C. traffic. Times Square teemed with people walking in every direction. Electronic signs pulsed out their messages, traffic and construction noise deafened the ear. Hawkers stood at the corners selling everything, including cruise ship tickets on the Circle Line. I charged a three-hour circumnavigation cruise for \$26 on their satellite credit-card reader. (Isn't modern

technology wonderful?) It was only a four-block walk down to the pier, but a mighty long four blocks it was.

It was a perfect day to be on the water. The sun peeked out between huge weather clouds as they marched across the sky in an ever-changing skyscape. The temperature was just right, with only a light breeze. We shoved off, heading south, a little after noon. Going around the island is a good way to get oriented. I located the U.N., where I would be later on that evening, and the Cloisters, where I would go the next day.

At 3:30pm I grabbed a 42<sup>nd</sup> Street cross-town bus to the U.N. Forty-Second Street was divided into three zones, two lanes each for east and west traffic and two lanes up the middle for emergency and cop vehicles. We were let off in front of my favorite skyscraper, the Chrysler Building. I joined up with the Billionaires for Bush and walked to Dag Hammarskjöld Square, across First Avenue from the U.N. The area quickly filled up and spilled over with people converging from all directions to participate in a rally for the “People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign.” The Billionaires for Bush is a tongue-in-cheek collection of people festooned in Salvation Army tuxedos and prom dresses. They shouted out slogans like “More, More, More,” and, “”We Want Slave Labor and We Want It Now.” Other groups like The Pink Slip Ladies and Axis of Eve ladies shouted “Give Bush the Pink Slip” and “Bush Stay Out Of My Bush.”

The swelling crowds made the nervous cops herd everybody off the sidewalks and out of a small public park near Hammarskjöld Square. Even so, the crowd remained jovial. After the speeches and a mass pledge to remain peaceful, 10,000 people flowed up 47<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave in an unpermitted march. The cops chose to allow this spontaneous march. In a game of city-streets chess, the crowds and the cops tried to out-flank each other along the impromptu route.



Cops on Bikes (above)

Scooter Cops (below)

Scooter cops formed a moving fence line, keeping the marchers to one half of the street. Brigades of bicycle cops used their bikes to barricade the intersections, preventing the marchers from making any turns toward the Garden. The press was balled up at the front of the marchers, ready to pounce if any violence broke out. Undercover cops shadowed the marchers from the sidewalks. I said to one undercover cop wearing shorts and an overhanging t-shirt, doing a lousy job disguising his gun, "You look so obvious." He said, "I got nothing to hide." We fell into an easy conversation once I congratulated him and the N.Y.P.D. on the good job they were doing. He confirmed there were 500,000 at Sunday's Peace March, and only around 200 arrests.

I spied some Republican delegates emerging from a hotel on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. They were easy to spot with their R.N.C. delegate bling-bling. Shock registered on their faces when they saw and heard the protesters walking in front of their hotel. They cautioned each other to remove any signs or symbols that would give them away as Republicans. Were they ashamed? I overheard a male delegate tell a video documentarian about the marchers, "I don't believe in socialism." He never mentioned the "elephant in the living room": the war in Iraq.

The march turned north at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Broadway and got to within a few blocks of the Garden, where, after some arrests, the people dispersed.

### *Tuesday, August 31*

The outpouring of offers of assistance from New Yorkers in the lead-up to the Peace March was tremendous. Counterconvention.com, among many web sites, posted housing offered by people from the five boroughs and New Jersey. Mary Leah Weiss had listed her midtown apartment as a free place to stay for out-of-towners coming to march for peace. I was one of the many she wait-listed. She called back to say she was having a pasta dinner on Tuesday for all who had called but couldn't be accommodated. All I had to do was bring a bottle of wine.

After a sit-down dinner, we each related what motivated us to spend so much money and time coming to march and demonstrate during the R.N.C. The two Canadians came because they saw Bush as more than just the president of the United States. They saw him as president of the world, because any decision his administration makes affects the whole world. The others came because they don't like the direction Bush is taking the country. I came because my voice is no longer being heard. More than fifty percent of the voting

population effectively has no representation in our federal government. It is dangerous in a two-party democracy to have all three branches of government controlled by the same party. To get the attention of the administration because I wanted the war of choice in Iraq to end, I joined a huge group of like-minded people. Too bad, it is reported, that George Bush dismisses us as “focus groups” and doesn’t read the newspapers.



Empire

*Wednesday, September 1*

In the morning I gave my last report to WINA, then took the #2 bus over to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, where I met a friend. Hardly a soul was to be seen except for a hand full of cops standing around the restaurant. Garden visitors stayed away in droves when word got out the R.N.C. was hosting a luncheon there. At the last minute the luncheon was canceled. My friend and I had the whole Gardens to ourselves. After walking and enjoying the solitude in a large public place, we found a patch of grass at the cherry

esplanade where we could legally sit. We lay on the grass chatting till it was time to eat lunch at the Botanical Terrace Café.

Afterward, we walked over to the Brooklyn Museum and viewed three floors of paintings, decorative arts, and Egyptian treasures. Then I took a train across the Manhattan Bridge train to Union Square, just for a skyline view of the city.

The south stairs of Union Square were arrayed with a thousand pairs of tagged shoes.



Tagged Shoes

Each tag had the name of someone who has been killed in Iraq since George Bush launched his invasion on March 20, 2003. Spontaneously, people left their own shoes along side the existing ones. The whole display was a symbol of and a tribute to the 16,000 people and more, the organizers said, had so far been killed.

You have to love Americans' entrepreneurial spirit. All over Union Square, people were hawking, anti war t-shirts, buttons with slogans, bumper stickers, and CDs of George Bush's words electronically mixed.



Million Fingers

At six p.m. I took a train down to the Battery to see the Pink Slip Ladies and Axis of Eve rally.

The Pink Slip Ladies want to give George Bush the pink slip. The Axis of Eve wants to expose bush, and register young women to vote. Since these were women showing tits and bush, the male media swarmed the rally, giving lots of coverage to the uncoverage. By employing humor and female ingenuity, these women manipulated the press into giving them lots of photos and column inches in the newspapers.



Pink Slip

At seven p.m. I took the #6 train up to the N.O.W. rally in Central Park. The only access the police allowed us was at 90<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. We were herded between blue police sawhorses for nine blocks, until we emerged at the rally venue in the East Meadow.

If there is one thing I hate about New York City, it is no public toilets. And there weren't any in the park either. The N.O.W. people did provide two well-hidden PortaPotties for 20,000 rally attendees. For two hours, we listened to short impassioned speeches, alternating with spoken and musical performances. At nine p.m., sharp, the police unceremoniously cut the power. Peacefully, the crowd dispersed.

*Thursday, September 2*

After spending the morning nursing my feet (I was averaging about ten sidewalk miles a day), I walked to Union Square, the default place for protesters to congregate.

Later on I met a friend in midtown. We wanted to go walk by the Union League on 37<sup>th</sup> and Park and see where Dick Cheney and the Poppy Bushes were staying. There was no mistaking the fact that someone important was staying there, because three very conspicuous, gas guzzling, dark-tinted windowed, black SUVs were parked out front.

Next, we walked over to Macy's hoping for Republican-delegate sightings.

We walked past Madison Square Garden, but we were not allowed to linger.



Guarding The Garden

At the cocktail hour, we went to a beer joint called Ginger Man. When it came time to pay the bill, our three barmaids bought one of the rounds. They loved our anti-Bush pins. They wanted to show solidarity.

I returned to Union Square for the candlelight vigil.

Several thousand people assembled to once again deplore the war and honor the dead. Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping, dressed in a white suit, white collar, and black shirt, chanted the First Amendment through a bull horn as though it were a prayer.



Reverend Billy

The crowd repeated each phase till the First Amendment was committed to memory. Three different parents carried poster-sized pictures of their uniformed children.



You Killed My Son



My Son Died



Dead Son

I met two ordinary people who had just been released after being arrested in a police dragnet.

During a spontaneous march on Tuesday, the cops told the marchers to stay in pairs on half of the side walk. The marchers complied. For reasons yet to be revealed, the cops split the group and rounded up a few hundred people with orange plastic netting, including random passers-by. They were carted off to Pier 57, renamed Guantánamo on the Hudson, where they had to sleep on diesel oil-covered floors and were held for more than 24 hours

(this was illegal: they had to be processed and released within a day).<sup>1</sup> They were charged with unlawful assembling. Ouch.

Throughout the evening I had brief but intense conversations with whomever I happened to be standing near. More often than not the conversations ended with a heart-felt hug.

The common sentiment was: re-defeat Bush and end the war in Iraq.

At the end of the evening I watched George Bush's acceptance speech on TV. Once again he claimed the war in Iraq and the economy are going well. And Osama bin Ladin remains Osama bin Forgotten.

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<sup>1</sup> "NEW YORK (CNN) -- A judge in Manhattan held the city of New York in contempt Thursday, saying police did not abide by his order to release more than 500 people arrested in protests this week." Read more here <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/09/02/convention.protests/>.

The *New York Times*: "Tactics by Police Mute the Protesters, and Their Messages"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/02/politics/campaign/02protest.html?ex=1095138516&ei=1&en=1d209fda6e63f0e9>:

As the Republican National Convention approached its final evening tonight, nearly 1,800 protesters had been arrested on the streets, two-thirds of them on Tuesday night alone. But for all the anger of the demonstrations, they have barely interrupted the convention narrative, and have drawn relatively little national news coverage.

Using large orange nets *to divide and conquer*, and a near-zero tolerance policy for activities that even suggest the prospect of disorder, the New York Police Department has developed what amounts to a *pre-emptive strike policy*, cutting off demonstrations before they grow large enough, loud enough, or unruly enough to affect the convention. (emphasis added)

Media coverage of the march and demonstrations was usually biased and unreliable, according to "On the Media" [http://www.wnyc.org/onthemedial/transcripts/transcripts\\_090304\\_protests.html](http://www.wnyc.org/onthemedial/transcripts/transcripts_090304_protests.html):

BROOKE GLADSTONE: There was national coverage of the protests, but rarely was it more than a sidebar. Sunday's massive demonstration garnered some coverage, and when street action swept Manhattan a couple of days later, some cable anchors were talking. We heard man on the street interviews with activists, particularly of the "freaky" sort, and there was the footage, aired repeatedly on Fox News of a violent incident the day before. [SHOUTING, HUBBUB]. . .

The *Times* also reported low media coverage

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/02/politics/campaign/02protest.html?ex=1095138516&ei=1&en=1d209fda6e63f0e9>.

*Friday, September 3*

I took the subway to Penn Station to catch an Amtrak train to home. The Cardinal, to Chicago by way of Charlottesville, left the station on time at 9:25. In Philadelphia, I acquired a seat-mate who, I quickly determined, was a Republican. I have a long-standing strategy: never try to persuade someone about politics. Instead, I ask “why” questions, to draw out their reasoning. Sometimes, when they actually stop to think about what they believe, they end up persuading themselves.

For the next three hours, Mike and I talked about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the budget deficit, minimum wage, and corporate welfare. I finally began to understand why Republicans like Bush. He used force!

However, there seems to be no questioning of the shifting reasons Bush has used to justify his war of choice. To date there are twenty-three different ones, and counting. There is no examination of the innocents who are killed or the survivors who are profoundly affected by collateral damage. Today the Republican Party line to justify the Iraq war, and the thousands of people killed to date, is: Saddam used biological weapons on his own people, the Kurds, in 1992. They dismiss the fact that Bush senior encouraged the Kurds to rise up, and then double-crossed them by refusing to come to their aid when Saddam retaliated with said biological weapons (furnished by the United States during the Iraq Iran war). I suggested if we went into Iraq to get a madman, then there is no end to the countries we need to invade or should have invaded first. Mike staggered me with: “One country at a time.”

Mike’s response to the \$400 trillion debt<sup>2</sup> (and that does not include the cost of the Iraq war) was: “So what?” He didn’t realize that foreigners hold half that debt. Far into the future, tax payers like us will be spending huge amounts of money to pay this debt service, instead of having our money going to domestic needs like education, health care, and social security.

We moved on, to welfare. Mike trotted out one typical, peanut-sized example of “government waste”: an academic got federal money to measure how much methane gas a cow produces in a year.<sup>3</sup> I said, don’t worry about that money. It is a tiny drop in the bucket.

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<sup>2</sup> I ‘misunderestimated’: the number <http://www.federalbudget.com/> as of this writing is \$7.3 trillion, and growing.

<sup>3</sup> For example, “Gas Powers a Microturbine... Cows Produce Electricity in California

Worry about corporate welfare. For example, the U.S. taxpayer spends billions every year on farm subsidies. Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), an enormous agribusiness, gets more than a billion a year in farm subsidies.<sup>4</sup> If the Republicans believe in the free market, let the free market operate. Get rid of the subsidies and sink or swim.

This led to the matter of the minimum wage. Mike believed raising the minimum wage would hurt the economy because prices would go up. “Actually it helps the economy,” I said, “because it puts money into the pockets of the people who will spend it immediately. Spending boosts the economy.”

The economy is like a hot-water heater. If you put heat in at the top, only the water at the top gets hot. That’s like, for example, tax cuts for the rich. But if you put heat in at the bottom, the heat rises and heats all the water along the way to the top. That’s like raising the minimum wage. “And realistically, who can live on \$5.25 an hour?” I asked. Outside Washington, he got around to asking me why I was in New York. He barely flinched when I said I was up there for the big peace march and other demonstrations and rallies. I barely flinched when he told me he was a nine-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He returned the courtesy of objective listening. It surprised him when I said I thought John Kerry and George Bush both loved their country as much as we do and wanted the best for the nation. I don’t like what Bush has done to America, or how he has broken treaties and alienated our allies. He is taking us in the wrong direction. “If you don’t like the way things are, you can vote.” Mike advised. “I did vote,” I said. “More than fifty percent of the voting population voted against Bush.”<sup>5</sup> He has ignored the majority of voters. We no longer

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<http://www.westbioenergy.org/dec2003/07.htm>.”

But not only in the U.S.: Canadian scientists also are measuring methane gas produced by cows as part of their agricultural and environmental research. See “Environment Canada is launching new efforts to measure the amount of methane gas produced by cattle as they digest their food

<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2004/04/11/417500-cp.html>.” See also, “The Health of Our Air: Toward sustainable agriculture in Canada ... [http://res2.agr.gc.ca/publications/ha/2d1c\\_e.htm](http://res2.agr.gc.ca/publications/ha/2d1c_e.htm).”

<sup>4</sup> According to the Cato Institute, for example, “Although much has been written lately on ADM and its harvest of taxpayer dollars, the full scope of its parasitic relationship with the U.S. taxpayer has rarely been closely examined. This study provides that detailed examination as well as an insight into the political dynamics that encourage corporate leaders to profit, not by pleasing consumers, but by pleasing politicians. The study also examines the three main arenas for ADM’s corporate rent seeking: the ethanol program, the sugar program, and subsidized grain exports.” <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-241.html>

A farm-subsidy database can be found here <http://www.ewg.org/farm/>.

<sup>5</sup> Al Gore won 50,999,897 popular votes. George Bush won 50,456,002 popular votes.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0876793.html>

have meaningful representation. People go to these marches and rallies to be heard.”

Mike listened to my words. They wouldn’t change his mind, but I got the sense he would think about them.

Our conversation moved on to more personal things. He told me his ambition to go to officer’s-training school. I made him laugh with child-rearing horror stories. We rolled past the Woolen Mills into Charlottesville. I pointed to my house: “It’s the big yellow one with black shutters.” We pulled into the station. “I liked your idea about getting rid the farm subsidies,” Mike said. “I don’t often get a chance to talk to Republicans,” I said, “and talking to you has been a real pleasure. Good luck in officer’s-training school. I feel safe knowing our country is being guarded by you.” We shook hands and said goodbye.

### *Sites*

United for Peace and Justice is here <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/>.

CounterConvention is here [www.Counterconvention.com](http://www.Counterconvention.com).

Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping are here <http://www.revilly.com/>.

A count of American, coalition forces, and Iraqi dead is kept here <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>.

The federal deficit count is here <http://www.federalbudget.com/>

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“It is worth keeping in mind—indeed, it is worth harping on—that our forty-third president holds office only because a judicial order stifled the vote count in a decisive state, thereby letting stand a preliminary total that was incomplete, distorted by irregularities, at odds with the will of the national electorate, and almost certainly wrong in its outcome. Reagan, on the other hand, was elected—and by an outright popular majority. And when he ran again, he received a larger absolute number of votes than any other candidate in American history. (The runner-up is Al Gore, a visiting professor of journalism at Columbia Journalism.)

Inducing forgetfulness about these uncomfortable truths, quite as much as soliciting support for tax relief for the comfortable, has been the goal of the opening weeks of Bush II.” (Hendrick Hertzberg, *The New Yorker*, Feb. 19&26, 2001)

## Dark Matter: The Controversy Surrounding Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*

Steven Barfield

Many theatregoers, theatre reviewers and literary critics (as well as the playwright himself) have been rather dumbfounded by the controversy that has come to surround his play, *Copenhagen*, in the United States. For example, Paul Lawrence Rose, an historian, and one of the play's most vehement and determined critics, concluded that *Copenhagen* is: 'subtle revisionism [...] destructive of the integrity of art, of science, and of history'.<sup>6</sup> In this essay, I will chart the growth of this controversy and offer some explanation as to why and how it occurred and will discuss the significance of this in terms of a broader, more political context. My perspective, is that of a literary critic working in the field of contemporary theatre studies, not that of an historian or scientist.

### 1

*Copenhagen* is an imaginary series of discussions between three historical characters. Two of them, are among the most famous theoretical physicists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Werner Heisenberg, a German and Niels Bohr, a Dane. The other character is Margrethe, Bohr's wife. The conversations in the play are revisitations, by their long dead ghosts, of a notorious meeting between Bohr and Heisenberg, which took place in Nazi-occupied Denmark in 1941. The motive behind Heisenberg's visit to Bohr and what was said, or, was not said, during their meeting remain disputed. The subsequent difference of opinion about both of

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Lawrence Rose, 'Copenhagen Plays Well, at History's Expense.' in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 46(35), Section 2, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2000, B4–B6, available to subscribers at <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

these matters has continued unabated for over 60 years. Heisenberg and Bohr were very old friends and long-standing collaborators on many ground-breaking discoveries in physics, but Heisenberg was in 1941 a leading scientist of Nazi Germany, ostensibly heading their atomic weapons research team, while the half-Jewish Bohr was a member of a subject nation. Historians and others have argued about both the meeting and why Heisenberg made the visit, but there is no doubt, that it caused a painful, decisive and permanent break in their close friendship. Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, is the first attempt to turn the actual meeting and the disputes about it, into a drama.

The controversy about *Copenhagen* began when it was first performed in New York (to generally positive reviews in the newspapers, and, later, winning awards), and that controversy continues to haunt the play even as the play becomes increasingly successful. It summons forth numbers of articles condemning and supporting the play, accompanied by increasing acrimony and polemic among critics and defenders. In addition, there have been several important symposia in the United States, connected to the play and the historical issues it raises.<sup>7</sup> In sharp contrast, the play when first produced in Britain was very much a surprise success, both commercially and critically. Frayn remarked later: 'I thought it unlikely that anyone would want to produce it. I can't remember ever thinking that anyone would come to see it, much less have strong views about it'.<sup>8</sup> It was originally staged in 1998 at the Cottesloe, a small studio theatre on three levels, which is part of the Royal National Theatre.<sup>9</sup> It won both the 1998 *Evening Standard* and 1998 Critics Circle Awards for 'Best New Play'

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Brian Schwartz (City University of New York), Prof. Harry Lustig (City College of New York) and Dr. Arthur Molella (Director, Lemelson Center for the History of Invention and Innovation) for inviting me to attend as a panellist at the Symposium, *The Copenhagen Interpretation: Science and History on the Stage*, held at The Smithsonian Institution on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002. I'd also like to thank Will Eastman for his hospitality. I learned a great deal from both the speakers and the expert quality of the discussion, which, indeed, prompted this article.

The program is here <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/sciart/copenhagen/program.htm>. A video of the Smithsonian event is available here <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/sciart/copenhagen/nyc/order.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Frayn, 'Friends and Mortal Enemies' in *The Guardian*, Saturday Review, Saturday March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2002, 1 and 3 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4379725,00.html>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

<sup>9</sup> For a useful history of this small studio theatre, see Mulryne, Ronnie, Margaret Shewring *et al.*, (eds.), *THE COTTESLOE AT THE NATIONAL: INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM* (Stratford-upon-Avon, UK : Mulryne & Shewring/ Royal National Theatre 1999).

and was a critical success, as reviews indicate.<sup>10</sup> Michael Billington in *The Guardian* remarked: 'Some claim to have been blinded by Frayn's science. I emerged deeply moved by his simultaneous awareness of life's value and its inexplicable mystery'.<sup>11</sup> After a short run, the play transferred to the West End's Duchess Theatre where it ran from 5 February 1999 to 7 April 2001. Subsequent transfers have remained remarkably consistent with the original staging of the play – Michael Blakemore directed both of the London productions, as well as the one in New York – which suggests that the very different reactions in the United States were not due to a directorial reinterpretation. While some British critics certainly realized there were issues in the play, they saw these as falling very much within the traditional context of plays of ideas that represented science and politics, such as Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* or Howard Brenton's *The Genius*. Duncan Wu, a literary critic, drew attention to this aspect of *Copenhagen*, in his introduction to interviews with Frayn and Michael Blakemore (the original director of the play):

[*Copenhagen*] seems perfectly to express the anxiety of the West at a moment when an increasing number of third world countries are acquiring the knowledge and means to construct the bomb. More importantly, it dramatizes the dilemma of taking responsibility for such acquisitions.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, most British reviewers and critics saw the play as being about contemporary issues of social responsibility in science, rather than about the representation and interpretation of historical events. If anything, the historical moment represented by the play was regarded as less important than the more specific theme of our political responsibility for nuclear weapons. (It is probably significant, here, that Britain is a country where the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has always been a powerful social force.) The

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<sup>10</sup> A selection of excerpts from reviews of the two London productions may be found at two sites: The Royal National Theatre 1998 production in the *Cottesloe*, at The Royal National Theatre Web Archive <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=1291&tmpl=whatsonrevis>, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January 2004; and The Royal National Theatre 1999–2001 production at the Duchess Theatre, Albemarle of London, London West End Theatre Guide <http://www.albemarle-london.com/copenhagend.html>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Billington, 'Copenhagen', *The Guardian*, Wednesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4380034,00.html>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Duncan Wu, 'Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (1998)', in Duncan Wu, MAKING PLAYS: INTERVIEWS WITH CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMATISTS AND DIRECTORS (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) p. 213.

literary critic Victoria Stewart argues that *Copenhagen* is a criticism of Heisenberg's belief 'that science could somehow seal itself away from politics'.<sup>13</sup> (This thesis is largely consistent with the way that plays about science, such as Brecht's *Galileo* and Brenton's *The Genius* depict the problematic relationship between scientists and society.) *Copenhagen* therefore was thought to have staged a dialogue between science and theatre whose primary relevance is to arguments about today's world, rather than to those about Bohr's and Heisenberg's original meeting. I should confess that this is very much how I too viewed the play, as a member of the original London audiences of both the productions.

## 2

It was Frayn himself, who first raised the question of the accuracy of the scientific and historical contexts, and their importance, in his 'Postscript' to the first Methuen edition of the play, a shortened version of which is in the original programme.<sup>14</sup> I suspect, that this Postscript was designed to make a difficult play understandable, without encumbering the dramatic action by excessive exposition: the scientific and historical material in the play is displaced into this short essay. Frayn's article cannot be construed as a response to what the British press or critics had said, because it predated reviews of the play and no one had shown any particular interest in this aspect of the drama. It is not a defence after the event,

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<sup>13</sup> Victoria Stewart, 'A Theatre of Uncertainties: Science and History in Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, XV:4 (NTQ 60), November 1999, 301–307. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press) p. 304.

<sup>14</sup> Frayn, 'Postscript', in *Copenhagen*. There are now at least three versions of this document, accompanying the editions of the play that have been produced. The original 1998 edition of the play had an initial version, Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript', in *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen 1998) pp. 97–116. This was then presented in a somewhat revised version, Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript' [revised] in *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen 2000) [This is the same version in the American edition, New York: Anchor Books 2000.]

The current version, however now includes not only a newly revised 'Postscript', but also a 'Post-Postscript'! Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript and Post-Postscript', in *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen 2003) pp. 95–149. It has grown from the original 19 to 54 pages.

Faced with the problem of which version to refer to in this article, I have settled on the only one currently available to readers, which is the 2003 version, unless the point which one of Frayn's critics makes, is substantially affected by changes that Frayn made subsequent to the version on which they were commenting.

but part of the original conception of the text of the play. I remember thinking at the time how long and involved Frayn's account was (it has subsequently been extended and revised in each new revised edition of the play, growing from 19 to 54 pages). It is not simply an author's traditional note on sources, but rather an essay that discusses the science and history informing the play and, as I shall argue, could be perceived as taking sides in an ongoing historical controversy. Frayn remarks at the beginning of the Postscript:

Where a work of fiction features historical characters and historical events it's reasonable to want to know how much if it is fiction and how much of it is history. So let me make it as clear as I can in regard to this play.

The central event is a real one. Heisenberg *did* go to Copenhagen in 1941, and there *was* a meeting with Bohr, in the teeth of all the difficulties encountered by my characters. He probably went to dinner at the Bohrs' house, and the two men probably went for a walk to escape from any possible microphones, though there is some dispute about even these simple matters. The question of what they actually said to each other has been even more disputed, and where there's ambiguity in the play about what happened, it's because there is in the recollection of the participants. Much more sustained speculation still has been devoted to the question of what Heisenberg was hoping to achieve by the meeting. All the alternative and co-existing explications offered in the play, except perhaps the final one, have been aired at various times, in one form or another.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth asking why Frayn, as a playwright, is so concerned to establish the validity of the historical context for his play. If, as he claims here, there are relatively few facts in this case, why not leave it at that? Why is it not enough, to list the range of historical sources that he has used to create his work? I can think of no other recent British play based on historical events, where an author has been so concerned to clarify what is fiction and what is history in their drama, even to the extent of discussing and summarising the various historical accounts which have informed his play. In fact, Frayn's remarks, suggest it is at least feasible to try to distinguish between those parts of *Copenhagen* that are some kind of *direct* historical reportage, as opposed to the elements that embody the fictional strategy of creating an imaginary work which uses real people. This is important, because it leads me to a central part of my argument: it is Frayn's long Postscript to *Copenhagen* that suggested to American historians, that the play should be measured in historical terms, not the actual play itself. In

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<sup>15</sup> Frayn, 'Postscript', in *Copenhagen* (2003), pp. 95-6.

discussing the problems of the historical record and the disputes between professional historians in this Postscript, Frayn has suggested the play is some kind of historical account.

The physicist and historian of science Gerald Holton remarks: '[T]here is of course the danger that the intermingling of playwright, actors, physics and history of science, might in some minds strengthen the all-too-common failing to confuse the play, a work of fiction, with a documentary.'<sup>16</sup> This may also explain Paul Lawrence Rose's rather acid remark that Frayn, 'affects to be an entertainer rather than a historian (although in his printed Postscript, he likes to play the historian)'.<sup>17</sup> While it certainly doesn't help Rose's argument to imply that literature is merely entertainment when compared to history, nonetheless he is responding to an authorial Postscript that encourages a reading of *Copenhagen* as some form of statement about historical events, even if that statement is that these historical events cannot be known objectively. In addition, Frayn does much more to invite such rejoinders from historians. Frayn suggests, for example, there is some fundamental contiguity between what he terms the 'storyteller' and 'historian'.

The great challenge facing the story teller and the historian alike is to get inside people's heads, to stand where they stood and see the world as they saw it, to make some informed estimate of their motives and intentions – and this is precisely where recorded and recordable history cannot reach.<sup>18</sup>

Now, while this parallel between historian and imaginative writer is meaningful in various ways, not least because both employ narrative, in another sense it is problematic. The 'storyteller' (or in Frayn's case the dramatist), is not primarily concerned with historical objectivity, or debates over primary and secondary sources, as modern historians *are*. Historians such as Paul Lawrence Rose would be unlikely to regard their work as requiring

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald Holton, 'Werner Heisenberg and Albert Einstein,' paper at Creating Copenhagen, A Symposium Exploring Scientific, Historical and Theatrical Perspectives Surrounding the Events of the Acclaimed Play, Graduate Center of the City University of New York on 27 March 2000  
<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ashp/nml/copenhagen/holton.doc>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Frayn, 'Postscript', in *Copenhagen* (2003) pp. 97.

imagination, to ‘get inside people’s heads’, because there is an area beyond the range of ‘recordable history’. I suspect that Rose would be unwilling to accept the implication of Frayn’s argument that the storyteller takes over the role of the historian when orthodox history is no longer possible. In addition, the question is crucial of whether there are indeed *facts* in the case of the real Heisenberg’s visit to Bohr. There is no agreement among historians of an absence of facts about this final private meeting between Bohr and Heisenberg, despite Frayn’s suggestion at the beginning of his Postscript (above). Instead, many historians, for instance Rose and Holton, would argue that there *are* clear facts upon which an objective analysis of Heisenberg’s behaviour and intentions can be made. Rose’s reaction in this respect is telling: he takes Frayn to be ignoring historical facts because he [Frayn] wishes to, not because, to Rose’s mind, there are none available. Rose asks: ‘What influences have led Frayn to shun the fairly straightforward historical and moral facts of the Heisenberg story in favor of his own peculiar interpretation?’<sup>19</sup>

Most problematic of all, is that Frayn’s Postscript appears to maintain an inconsistent stance. He criticises some historians’ depictions of Heisenberg, while endorsing others’, but simultaneously suggests this is not borne out in the play itself. For example, Frayn implies that an earlier article by Paul Lawrence Rose (in 1984) suffers from bias against Heisenberg (which may explain why *Copenhagen* drew such a furious response from Rose). Frayn suggests that Rose’s article assumes a lack of sympathy with Heisenberg that is manifest throughout, though Frayn does not either engage with its line of argument or use of evidence directly. He argues that Rose’s paper, ‘takes a remarkably high moral tone. [...] he talked about Heisenberg’s “guff”, his “self-serving, self-deluding claims” and his “elementary moral stupidity”’.<sup>20</sup> This is clearly a criticism of sorts, by Frayn, of Rose’s argument, which itself is representative of the dominant perspective among historians: that Heisenberg gave a deliberately erroneous view of his meeting with Bohr. Heisenberg, according to this argument, consciously did this after World War II, to suggest he was an unwilling participant in Hitler’s atomic weapons project.

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<sup>19</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004

<sup>20</sup> Frayn, ‘Postscript’, in *Copenhagen* (2003) pp. 97.

Frayn goes on in the subsequent revised version of the Postscript in 2002, to make similar objections to Rose's book, *Heisenberg and the Nazi Atomic Bomb Project*. Frayn wryly observes that this might have been 'handwritten in green ink', so strong is the 'contempt for Heisenberg'.<sup>21</sup> Although Frayn does not criticise Rose's arguments, this suggests that he considers Rose's work to be flawed by its attitude to Heisenberg. In contrast, the dissenting historical thesis is that of 'Thomas Powers' *HEISENBERG'S WAR*. Powers tries to rehabilitate exactly the analysis of Heisenberg's behaviour that historians such as Rose have dismissed as a post-war fabrication by Heisenberg himself. Powers goes further and suggests that Heisenberg may have deliberately sabotaged the German atomic bomb project, by withholding key information. (Thomas Powers is a journalist by profession, rather than an academic historian.) Frayn makes his own preference clear, referring to Powers' book as, 'remarkable ... generous in its understanding'.<sup>22</sup>

This makes Frayn's later remark appear disingenuous, when he states: 'The play is not an attempt to adjudicate between these differing views of Heisenberg's personality, or these differing accounts of his activities'.<sup>23</sup> Frayn's Postscript, therefore, endorses Power's argument as being better, in some sense, than that of many historians (one can only read 'generous in its understanding' as referring to Power's attitude to Heisenberg), which suggests that Power's book is the main source for *Copenhagen*. Yet, Frayn simultaneously asserts that the play itself, is *not* favouring Power's standpoint on Heisenberg over that of a historian such as Rose. It is not surprising, that for many historians this is at best confusing!

I think what Frayn is implying here (this is discussed in more detail below), is that in order to create the complex and ambiguous character of the fictional Heisenberg in *Copenhagen*, he needed an account such as that of Powers. A play based on Rose's account of Heisenberg, for example, while it may be closer to the historical facts of the matter, would have a central character who an audience could have no sympathy with whatsoever, and would make it impossible to develop *Copenhagen's* dramatic themes. Furthermore, the play itself does offer sharply contrasting views of such matters through the characters themselves,

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<sup>21</sup> Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript', *ibid.*, pp. 107–8.

<sup>22</sup> Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript', *ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> Frayn, Michael, 'Postscript', *ibid.*, p. 112.

rather than by means of a framework of authorial meaning (as, say, a history book would use). Plays can do this, while essays can't. The character of Margrethe (as Frayn also tells us in the Post-Postscript of the revised play) is sceptical throughout *Copenhagen* of Heisenberg's claims, and her attitude is closest to that of historians such as Rose and Holton.<sup>24</sup> She undermines exactly the kind of arguments on behalf of Heisenberg that someone like Thomas Powers makes. The fictitious 'Heisenberg' that Frayn creates, lies closer to Power's account, because that book is much more favourable to the way that the real Heisenberg presented himself and his actions, in his own comments. *Copenhagen's* Heisenberg couldn't represent himself in the same way that Rose's interpretation of Heisenberg does, as people are seldom so hostile to themselves.

To sum up then, it is likely that *Copenhagen's* critics such as Paul Rose and Gerald Holton saw the play as direct intervention in an existing historical dispute (about Heisenberg's meeting with Bohr and what the former said subsequently about that meeting) *because* of Frayn's Postscript, and then read the play as framed by that same Postscript. For historians such as Rose, Holton and others, Powers' HEISENBERG'S WAR is not simply a wrong interpretation of history, but is misleading and dangerous, because it ends up defending Heisenberg by accepting Heisenberg's own revisionary, self-exculpatory account of his meeting with Bohr. By implication, therefore, acceptance of this argument would mean tolerating a presentation of Heisenberg's wartime activities in a much more favourable light than they deserve. Frayn's Postscript would thus appear to suggest that *Copenhagen* does have some kind of historical validity (albeit in a way that is hazy and not about objectivity) and prefers one particular position and source (that of Powers' book) to those views of the majority of historians.

In addition, Frayn argues there is a strong relationship between drama and history, which would imply that *Copenhagen* as drama is a kind of history (though exactly what kind is obscure). In turn, it is reasonable for historians such as Rose to regard Frayn's 'Postscript' (*and hence the play*) as criticising their own arguments, in terms they would consider misinformed, and reliant on a single and very contested source (Powers' HEISENBERG'S WAR). For Rose and Holton, even a refusal to adjudicate between differing views of Heisenberg would itself be taking a stance closer to Powers' view than their own. As Rose argues: 'For

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<sup>24</sup> Frayn, Michael, 'Post-Postscript', *ibid.*, pp. 137–8.

the central facts of the visit are really not in doubt, even if some people like Frayn refuse to face them'.<sup>25</sup>

Further evidence that Frayn sees *Copenhagen* as some form of history that needs to be accurate is provided by later revisions to the text and the production of a 'Post-Postscript', which considers questions of historical validity even further, while defending *Copenhagen* against the charges levelled by several historians. Frayn writes that:

With hindsight, I think I accept some of these criticisms. I should perhaps have had Heisenberg justify Germany's war aims on the Eastern front directly, instead of having Bohr refer to his arguments in one angry but passing aside. I should perhaps have found some way to make the parallel with all the other trips that were found offensive, and about whose purpose there was none of the mystery which had seemed to attach to the one in Copenhagen.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4

However, I do think we have to separate the actual play from the author's Postscript, because they are very different kinds of texts. Specific genres of written language require dissimilar methods of reading and create meaning in particular ways. Historical drama may rely on history, but audiences do not receive it in the same way as history. Are Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Macbeth* without value, because they bear little or no resemblance to historical fact? Do they therefore have nothing relevant to tell us about the relationships between society, individuals and politics? I think the answers here are both 'no': Frayn's *Copenhagen* requires examination in the same terms as other dramas based on historical events. Whatever the issues raised by Frayn's Postscript (and I do have some sympathy for the historians who have responded to Frayn over this matter), it really isn't the same genre of text as a play and should not be read as a framing device that would turn *Copenhagen* into some form of direct historical commentary. Frayn has unintentionally made this potential confusion worse because of the Postscript and his argument that distinguishing between dramatic fact and

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<sup>25</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Frayn, 'Post Postscript', in *Copenhagen* (2003), p. 133.

fiction is not only possible, but also a useful and appropriate thing to do. This invokes criticism by historians.

However, many theatregoers may never read the text of the play, let alone the author's written Postscript. For an audience, the performance of the text is what matters and where meaning is located. Whereas an authorial Postscript can have the same univocal intention that an objective historical account may possess, for drama to be successful it must allow multiple and conflicting interpretations to be drawn out by directors, actors and audiences that exceed any singular authorial intention. No single character has to possess an ultimately objective and omniscient view of the whole play. Richness and three-dimensionality in dramatic characterisation result in motivation that is as complex and unconscious as in actual human behaviour. Nor is *Copenhagen* a straightforwardly realist play, insofar as it does not try to directly recreate the real-world meeting that took place in 1941 Denmark, between three actual people: Bohr, his wife Margrethe and Heisenberg. Instead, the play stages an imaginary conversation between ghosts in some Dantean limbo, who are condemned continually to 'redraft' their report of their meeting, to see if they can finally understand and agree on what happened and what it meant. The three characters, Bohr, Margrethe, Heisenberg, have hindsight about the events they are trying to understand. Historians do not write about what ghosts might think or say, and this dramatic device distances us from the idea that the play is an attempted recreation of actual, historical events.

For Frayn's critics, the problem is that drama cannot be read in the same way as a text can be read, with a single, intended meaning. Jonathan Logan, a physicist and historian of science, in a review of *Copenhagen* in *American Scientist* reads one of Heisenberg's final speeches as if it were an essay.

BOHR: Heisenberg, I have to say – if people are to be measured strictly in terms of observable quantities ...

HEISENBERG: Then should need a strange new quantum ethics. There'd be a place in heaven for me. And another one for the SS man I met on my way home from Haigerloch. That was the end of my war.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Frayn, *Copenhagen*, p. 92.

Logan reads this speech as though the exhausted Heisenberg is being completely sincere at this point in the play. Logan believes it should be taken at face value, and that this in turn represents what the playwright wishes the audience to think. Logan argues: ‘So fast and so far does Frayn take us, this somehow is not meant to shock. Losing sight of the moral horizon can make you feel giddy – or sick.’<sup>28</sup>

Frayn’s rejoinder on this point is perfectly reasonable:

Even harder to credit was the reaction in some quarters to the “strange new quantum ethics” proposed by the fictitious Heisenberg. I suppose I should have erected a flashing ‘IRONY’ sign in front of it.<sup>29</sup>

Logan’s criticism is therefore problematic, because he does not recognise the critical strategies necessary for reading the words of a character in a play, but assumes the whole piece should be read, as if it possessed the coherency of a thesis. Nor is Logan much concerned with context: these characters are clearly not in Heaven, and it is hard to imagine even the most forgiving God making a special place in the after-life for the SS! The speech is Heisenberg’s attempt at a somewhat anxious and wan joke, combined with the even more desperate hope that he might just be remembered more favourably by history than his actions would permit. However, he is intelligent enough to know that this will never happen, as he remarks several times throughout the play. A few lines earlier than the speech Logan quotes, Heisenberg remarks to Bohr that: ‘You were a good man, from first to last, and no one could ever say otherwise. Whereas I ...’<sup>30</sup> Even if Logan had not seen the performance (he seems to have written a review of the *text* of the play), he rather mistakes the tone of this speech. Audiences are composed of many individuals, but it would seem surprising that so many reviewers had failed to see the ending of the play as the authorial sanctioned apology for Heisenberg that Logan perceives it to be.

Plays represent a multiplicity of different and competing voices and characters have

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Logan, ‘A Strange New Quantum Ethics’ *American Scientist*, July–August 2000  
<http://www.americanscientist.org/template/BookReviewTypeDetail/assetid/25927>, accessed 1st June 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Frayn, ‘Friends and Mortal Enemies’ *op. cit.*  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4379725,00.html>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002,

<sup>30</sup> Frayn, *Copenhagen*, p. 91.

their own individualised viewpoints of themselves and the dramatic action. It is misleading for the North American critics of the play to read individual characters as if they endorsed some supposed authorial view. These critics seem convinced, on reading the Postscript, that Frayn intends Heisenberg to be a kind of heroic protagonist; and so, they read the play as biased towards him. That much of what Heisenberg says is undercut by his historical behaviour as exemplified in the play simply doesn't occur to them. It is not easy to see the character of Heisenberg as heroic, when after all; he is a willing member of the Nazi party. He doesn't fly into exile, nor does he actively oppose the Nazi regime. He himself remarks in a speech: 'I've never claimed to be a hero'.<sup>31</sup> Heisenberg accepts on many occasions that his actions are flawed, whatever his intentions. Even when he does not, Margrethe is always there to continually undercut his position and his interpretations of his behaviour.

MARGARETHE: No! When he first came in 1924 he was a humble assistant lecturer from a humiliated nation, grateful to have a job. Now here you are, back in triumph – the leading scientist in a nation that's conquered most of Europe. You've come to show us how well you've done in life.<sup>32</sup>

## 5

However, beneath many of the criticisms of *Copenhagen* there is a buried assumption, with a more subtle argument: Anything that raises the possibility of Bohr's culpability (however minor and marginal) in the production of the atom bomb and its eventual use as weapon must be dismissed at all costs. Therefore, I would argue, the attacks on what is taken to be the (positive) misrepresentation of Heisenberg in the play are often *causally* linked to defences against the possibility of an accompanying (negative) misrepresentation of Bohr in *Copenhagen*. As Paul Lawrence Rose states:

It is simply monstrous to draw or imply a moral symmetry between Bohr and his disciple. Niels Bohr was a man of the most intense moral awareness, whose integrity has been universally recognized.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Frayn, *ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> Frayn, *ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> Rose, op. cit. <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

In addition, these criticisms regarding the way Bohr is presented in *Copenhagen* are associated with an anxiety that Frayn's play implies some type of criticism of Allied work on / use of the atom bomb. Logan makes this critical stance clear in his review:

By the play's elegiac conclusion, the audience has been led ... to accept a thoroughly manipulated version of Heisenberg ... [who] had 'never managed to contribute to the death of one single solitary person.' Bohr, by contrast, is charged with complicity in the human disaster of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>34</sup>

By wrenching this line out of its dramatic context, Logan elides the fact that this quotation comes from a speech given by a rueful Bohr, in response to Heisenberg, who has just stated: 'You were a good man, from first to last, and no one could ever say otherwise.'<sup>35</sup> However, Bohr in this scene, is both trying to comfort the distraught Heisenberg, who they both know will go down in history as a willing servant of an evil regime – as is inevitable – and also speaking as a man of conscience and responsibility should do when faced with the horror of nuclear weapons and the trauma they have inflicted on civilisation.

It is important to remember that the conversations in the play occur in an imaginary space beyond any specific historical moment, which allows them to have contemporary relevance. The characters are not interested only in the history of the atom bomb in World War II, but also the subsequent threat nuclear weapons pose to humanity.

Nevertheless, what is striking about Logan's argument is his description of the fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a 'human disaster'. This phrase is problematic, because it suggests that the *premeditated use of weapons of mass destruction* against a civilian population (whether justified or not) is much like the *unintended accident of the meltdown* of Chernobyl. These things are both certainly 'disasters', with regard to their consequences, but bombs are intended to have that effect. They are not just disasters *for* human being, they are disasters *meant* by human beings. For Logan to define the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in this way is to remove them from the realm of political, scientific and military decision-making, and thus offer a form of defence against criticisms of those who actually made such

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<sup>34</sup> Logan, *op. cit.* <http://www.americanscientist.org/template/BookReviewTypeDetail/assetid/25927>, accessed 1st June 2003.

<sup>35</sup> 30 Frayn, *Copenhagen*, p. 91.

decisions. Logan's argument therefore shies away from the necessity of thinking through science's ethical responsibility towards humankind.

That inability stands as the polar opposite to the discussion and speeches of Heisenberg, Bohr and Margrethe in *Copenhagen*. These three ghosts are obliged to revisit their past, because the creation of nuclear weapons has consequences that still matter to us today. If one of Margrethe's roles in the play is, as we have seen, to challenge Heisenberg's perspective, another is to remind the audience continually that physicists helped create the atomic bombs that killed people – and might still do so.

MARGARETHE: [W]hat it came down to in the end, all that shining springtime in the 1920s, that's what it produced – a more efficient machine for killing people.<sup>36</sup>

From a European point of view, one sees a kind of American 'exceptionalism' at work here in such criticisms as those by Rose, Logan and Holton. The Manhattan Project is remembered as a heroic narrative and eschatology centring on (and culminating) in American military and scientific success, with little accompanying public debate about nuclear weapons – or the actual bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This narrative is part of a surprisingly resolute faith in science and technology as the paradigmatic solution to the world's problems. Thus, lying behind the arguments of many of *Copenhagen's* critics, is an extreme reluctance to accept any comment that might appear to criticise scientists and the accepted history of the atom bomb project. This assumption includes repressing any linkage of that heroic narrative to the actual use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and, equally, keenly desires to avoid connecting the historical moment of *Copenhagen* to current concerns.

Paul Lawrence Rose fears that the play misrepresents Heisenberg to the detriment of Bohr. He argues, as we have seen above, that the play is a 'vicious denigration' of Bohr 'the good man', as a transference of Heisenberg's real guilt onto Bohr. The fictitious Heisenberg projects his very real guilt at having tried to develop an atom bomb for Hitler onto Bohr, by emphasising Bohr's involvement in the (successful) work at Los Alamos, as opposed to the failure of Heisenberg's own attempt to build an atom bomb. By this, Heisenberg makes his failure obscure his less-than-laudable original intentions. According to Rose, Bohr 'only

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<sup>36</sup> Frayn, *ibid.*, p. 79.

[joined the Atom Bomb project] after his serious ethical misgivings about such a weapon had been overcome by consideration of the immediate evil presented by Nazism.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps aware that most audiences (and the theatre reviewers) would miss this subtle play of transferred guilt, and, instead, feel that the character of Bohr is presented in the play as both moral and virtuous, Rose decides to raise the stakes. The Bohr of *Copenhagen*, he claims, (he offers no textual evidence from the play to support this assertion) is a 'self-absorbed prig, indifferent to the births and welfare of his own children.'<sup>38</sup> As he believes the play favours Heisenberg to the detriment of Bohr, then inevitably this means it *must* offer characterisations that would support such views.

But does Rose's interpretation of Bohr's character in *Copenhagen* make any sense in terms of the play? In *Copenhagen*, Bohr is continually haunted by the loss of his son Christian in a boating accident. Bohr (and Margrethe, his wife) suffer repetitive anguish because of this trauma, and it is deeply mysterious to this reader, as to how a member of the audience could fail to be moved by their evident suffering, and by the accompanying eerie sound of the gulls' forlorn calls in the performance.

BOHR: And once again I see those same few moments that I see every day.

HEISENBERG: Those short moments on the boat, when the tiller slams over in the heavy sea, and Christian is falling

BOHR: If I hadn't let him take the helm ...

HEISENBERG: Those long moments in the water.

BOHR: Those endless moments in the water.<sup>39</sup>

Are this really the words of a 'self absorbed prig, indifferent to the births and welfare of his own children', as Rose interprets the character of Bohr to be?

Rose also argues that the play suggests that the Allies and the Nazis are morally equivalent (again, he offers no textual evidence from the play to support this idea). As Rose argues:

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<sup>37</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Rose, *ibid.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Frayn, *Copenhagen*, pp 29–30.

Everyone, then, is seen to be guilty, and so everyone is blameless. There is no difference between the Gestapo and British intelligence. The British bombing of Dresden and Berlin is as bad as Hitler's Blitz on British and Polish civilians. Churchill and Roosevelt are amoral power-wielders, just like Hitler (another Heisenberg glibness), and so on.<sup>40</sup>

This is an attempt on Rose's part to widen the parameters of the debate, regarding his assertion of the presumed similarities between Bohr and Heisenberg implied in *Copenhagen*, into a much larger historical arena. In fact, the play doesn't really suggest such an equivalence: it is the Nazis, who are attempting to round up Danish Jewry and transport them to concentration camps, Hitler who is described (by Bohr) as a 'homicidal maniac'. The persecution of the Jews, which features so prominently in the play, was the action of a vicious, racist regime, which committed appalling acts of genocide without even a pretence of military justification. I think it very unlikely, that a British or European audience could ever be convinced of any general moral equivalence between the Nazis and the Allies. Perhaps an American audience could be, but somehow I doubt this.

What Rose must therefore be repressing in his argument, is that the only possible moral parallel between the Allies and the Nazis established in *Copenhagen* turns on the scientific development (as it turns out, unsuccessfully, in the case of the German project) of atomic weapons. This in turn leads to the responsibility for their production and use, by those who possess them. As Margrethe says bitterly, speaking as much of our present, as of the past: 'And this wonderful machine may yet kill every man, woman and child in the world.'<sup>41</sup> Margrethe, (whom neither Rose or Logan pay much attention to) represents the voice of those who are less concerned about the original justifications of the development and use of atomic weapons in World War II, than about the consequences. This voice does *not* suggest the Allies are morally equivalent to the Nazi regime, but neither does it let them off the moral hook of responsibility for developing atomic weapons nor their first use of them. One problem with the accounts by *Copenhagen's* critics, such as those of Rose and Logan, is that they, perhaps unconsciously, elide Margrethe's voice and, therefore, elide what it represents.

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<sup>40</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Frayn, *Copenhagen*, p. 79.

## 6

Perhaps most disturbing in Rose's argument is his suggestion that the play contains an implicit anti-Semitism, or at least an uncritical reflection of such (although he doesn't seem able to bring himself to say this directly). This is evinced, to his mind, by both the play's misrepresentation of the half-Jewish Bohr, as already discussed, but also by what Rose regards as a crucial moment in the play's structure of transferring culpability from Heisenberg (who was engaged in military research, however unsuccessfully, for what we would all agree was an evil regime) to others. For Rose, Heisenberg's guilt is therefore transferred to Bohr and in exactly the same way, Rose suggests, that guilt for atomic weapons is located at the door of Jewish scientists.

The Allies in general, and the Jews too; after all, as Frayn's play points out – in a moment that stuns a New York audience – the true inventors of the bomb, Otto Frisch and Rudolf Peierls, were Jews.<sup>42</sup>

Frayn's recent reply to this is worth quoting in full.

Other criticisms I found extremely difficult to make sense of — some even to credit. Professor Rose, who detected the subtle revisionism of the play, found a particularly sinister significance in one detail — the fictitious Heisenberg's remarking upon the neatness of the historical irony whereby the crucial calculation (of the critical mass), which persuaded the Allies of the possibility of building a nuclear weapon, was made by a German and an Austrian, driven into exile in Britain because they were Jewish. Professor Rose saw this as an attempt to blame “the Jews” for the bomb's invention.<sup>43</sup>

Rose has recently renewed some elements of his charge, while modifying others.

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<sup>42</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Frayn, 'Friends and Mortal Enemies', *op. cit.*  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4379725,00.html>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

Finally, there is the question of implicit anti-Semitism — not of Mr. Frayn, of course, but of Heisenberg and others. At page 83 of his US edition, Mr. Frayn has Heisenberg state that the crucial calculation for a bomb was done by Frisch and Peierls in England, instead of “for us” in Germany. Then:

MARGARETHE: Because they were Jews.

HEISENBERG: There’s something almost mathematically elegant about that.

Whatever his faults as a historian, Mr. Frayn is too experienced a playwright to be unaware of the impact this implication has on audiences, whether Jewish or not.<sup>44</sup>

I think there are several points to make here. First, this is quite an intriguing use of rhetoric by Rose, even if not very substantial as evidence. Why exactly are New York audiences stunned? We only have the words of Rose to testify to this. Exactly how does one decide an audience is stunned, or, for that matter, what stunned them? Is Rose suggesting American audiences are less well-informed than others, and thus had no idea that the Nazi persecution of the Jews had forced Jewish physicists, like so many other groups, to flee from Germany? The Nazis’ obsessive racial policies often worked to their own detriment, as for example in the Ukraine, and elsewhere, where the German army were welcomed as liberators but quickly turned their possible Slavic allies into enemies.

More worrying however, is the relentlessness of Rose’s attempt to turn history into a question of individuals, whether Jewish or not. It was clearly, the United States’ decisive advantage in military-industrial terms and political will that made the Manhattan Project work. Some scientists were Jewish, others were not: but they were a determining factor, insofar as they helped convince the Allies to make the huge commitment of resources to realise the atomic bomb and provided the theory. They are not the end, or the only important part of the story.

Let us return to the play for a moment. What happens in the scene quoted above is, in fact, Heisenberg’s sudden realization that Nazi anti-Semitism contributed to Germany’s downfall, and that he had been quite blind to this before. Margrethe is forcing him to recognise it. The sudden symmetry he discovers is his recognition of something he had been

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<sup>44</sup> Rose, Paul Lawrence and Thomas Powers (reply), ‘Copenhagen Cont’d,’ in *The New York Review of Books*, May 9, 2002, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15373>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002.

largely unaware of. This mathematical elegance is equivalent to poetic justice. Such statements are consistent with the characterisation of Heisenberg throughout *Copenhagen* as a flawed, sometimes thoughtless, often stubbornly naïve individual. However, this should not distract us from the point that both scientists as individuals and science as whole, bear moral responsibility for what they, and it, help others to achieve. Rose's argument, because of its particular focus, effectively obscures the more general issues of both scientific and social responsibility for atomic weapons and successive generations of weapons of mass destruction.

This is not to say however, that Rose does not have a valid historical point when he claims that the twin reasons pushing the Allied atomic bomb project were a desire to win the war against Germany and a fear that there was an equivalent Nazi attempt at development of such weapons.<sup>45</sup> But, it doesn't remove the more general questions the play poses, about scientific responsibility to society, and the consequences of such actions. If we focus, as Rose does, on the reason for the production of atomic weapons to the exclusion of their consequences, then we fail to see the outcome: tens of thousands of civilians deaths and countless casualties, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a lasting shadow cast over civilisation.

## 7

Though not in the way he intends, Paul Lawrence Rose may be right to attack *Copenhagen* for being 'destructive of the integrity of art, of science, and of history'. If, that is to say, by the 'integrity' of science he means that the play refuses to seal science off conveniently from society and its responsibility towards human beings, indeed, from the urgency of thinking of science as an ethical or political activity. Frayn's play succeeds as drama, in part, because it challenges such a view of science as a hermetically-closed endeavour. *Copenhagen* returns science from the ordered discourse of scientists and their historians to the anxieties and concerns of ordinary people.

*Copenhagen* is also a critique of the integrity of a 'history', as it suggests a history that is no more than a desire to accurately record what happened in the past is a historicism that fails to engage with the vicissitudes of the present. We might instead prefer to see *Copenhagen*

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Richard Rhodes, *THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1998).

as opening up a dialogue between the dead and the living, and between the historical, the present and the future. As Walter Benjamin wrote in 'The Theses on History': 'For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'.<sup>46</sup>

Art often needs to be destructive of the supposed integrity of academic disciplines, in the pursuit of a wider remit: an obligation to question accepted ideas and assumptions. Nor is Heisenberg's final speech, which ends upon the line, 'the final core of uncertainty at the heart of things', in the last analysis 'banal', as Rose asserts.<sup>47</sup> Uncertainty is also about possibility: in this case, that which links the future to the past, for good and ill. It serves to remind us that what joins our preservation with others' annihilation is now contingency. We all now share that same fate created by the development of the atomic bomb, which is that our preservation is fraught with the possibility of our annihilation. This is why Heisenberg imagines history might have happened *differently*, if he had done his calculations correctly: London, or Paris, or Copenhagen, might have suffered the destruction of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The point is to make an audience feel and question this possibility, while remembering that life's intrinsic importance and essential strangeness, are part of what makes it worth preserving. Margrethe is significantly, both a woman and a non-scientist, her voice is therefore closer to that of ordinary people caught up in such events. She doesn't accept many of Heisenberg's attempted explanations of his behaviour, but nor does she buy into the myth of a pure science without any consequences for humanity. She sums up towards the end of the play, what the atomic bomb meant in more human terms.

MARGARETHE: And when all our eyes are closed, when even the ghosts have gone, what will be left of our beloved world? Our ruined and dishonoured and beloved world?<sup>48</sup>

This deliberately echoes a similar elegiac comment made by Heisenberg about Germany a few lines earlier: 'My ruined and dishonoured and beloved homeland'.

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<sup>46</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *ILLUMINATIONS* (ed. and trans) Harry Zorn. (London: Pimlico 1999), pp. 245–256.

<sup>47</sup> Rose, *op. cit.* <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i35/35b00401.htm>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Frayn, *Copenhagen*, p. 94.

Heisenberg puts into words how much Nazism has cost Germany, in terms of a ruin that is as much ethical as economic, it is dishonoured by what has been done in its name.

Margrethe, however, rephrases this to include the whole world, emphasising the ruinous price paid by everyone in ethical, political and human terms, for the development and use of the atomic bomb.

*see also:*

Katherine McNamara, "The Colossus," *Archipelago*, Vol. 6, No. 1

<http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-1/endnotes.htm>

(scroll down to "What Did Heisenberg Say? What Did Bohr hear? How Science Enters the Imagination")

*and*

John Casey, "On the Farm Hall Transcripts," Letters to the Editor,

*Archipelago* Vol. 6, No. 2 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-2/letters.htm>

*and*

Katherine McNamara, "A Year in Washington, A Visitation of Ghosts,"

*Archipelago*, Vol. 6, No. 3 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-3/endnotes.htm>

(scroll down to "Missiles over Alaska")

*and*

Epigraph, "Endnotes," *Archipelago*, Vol. 4, No. 1 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol4-1/endnotes.htm>

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## Darfur: The Way It Was (1995)

Ruth Massey



Farmer with millet – photo Ruth Massey

It was two o'clock in the morning when I walked down the steps of the plane, across the tarmac, and stood in the harsh neon light of the deserted arrivals hall of Khartoum's international airport. I looked around for a driver wearing the blue uniform of the United Nations. Instead, a man in a dark business suit walked towards me, introduced himself, and said he had been sent to drive me to my hotel. He was tall and thin. A short beard framed his angular face, and his eyes glinted like coins against the purple blackness of his skin. In the middle of his forehead I noticed the bump that comes from striking one's head on the floor of the mosque during prayers, a sure sign that he was a devout Muslim. His name was Idris. "I will be coming with you to Darfur," he said.

It was 1995, and no one in my part of the world had heard of Darfur. All I myself knew about it was what I had read in UN documents: that it was vast – larger than France – arid, and poor, and that there were problems between the Arab and black African populations. The only glimmer of hope in this depressing scenario was a successful rural development program that the UN was anxious to publicize. And since I spent most of my time in Africa photographing UN projects, my boss decided to send me to Darfur.

In New York two days earlier he had come into my office and sat down. “Just remember, Sudan is a fundamentalist police state,” he said. “And in Darfur there are special problems – ethnic tensions, and the beginnings of a rebel movement against the government in Khartoum.” There had been no mention of rebels in any of the documents I read. “So remember, no fools-rushing-in-where-angels-fear-to-tread kind of thing.” Like many Swedes, he was a Billie Holiday fan.

I followed Idris outside the terminal. A wall of hot air and the unique smell of Africa engulfed me, the familiar odor of rotting vegetation and spices, of drying fish and incense, of human sweat and hot soil. As we drove down the pitch black highway into Khartoum Idris told me that he worked for the Interior Ministry. This bit of news augured *mal* and confirmed my suspicions that he was to be my government “minder,” an agent of a repressive regime that ruled with the Koran in one hand and an assault rifle in the other.

“Tomorrow morning I will pick you up and we will go to my ministry to get your journalist’s pass,” said Idris after I had registered with a sleepy receptionist at the hotel.

“Do I need one? My UN laissez-passer should be enough.”

“You absolutely need a permit, otherwise you cannot travel outside Khartoum. Don’t worry, it’s just a formality.”

I was staying at the Acropole Hotel, a favorite with development aid and relief workers passing through Sudan. At breakfast the next morning there was Tariq who worked for UNICEF, a group of Danes who were installing water pumps in the Nubian Desert, Jennifer, a nutritionist with CARE, and Michel, Claire, and Stefan from Médecins sans Frontières, who worked in a refugee camp near Juba in the war-ravaged south.

In Khartoum there was no evidence of the forty year-old civil war raging in the southern region, a tribal holocaust that had killed 1.5 million people. It was Jennifer who told me about the huge numbers of refugees from the south who lived in camps just outside the city, entirely dependent on food distributed by various agencies. The resulting invasion of aid experts ranged from idealists to disaffected opportunists whose secret woe was that the AIDS epidemic made it too dangerous to get laid.

Promptly at 8:30 Idris, wearing a smart safari suit, walked into the lobby of the Acropole. We drove off into the swirling crowds of downtown Khartoum. Tall, slender men in white robes and gauze turbans strolled arm-in-arm past sidewalk vendors selling everything from cigarettes to snake skins. The women wore brightly colored gossamer gowns, the only exposed flesh their sandaled feet and bare ankles painted with henna in intricate lacy patterns. Like the men, they were dignified, proud, and very dark skinned.

The city lay at the confluence of the Blue Nile and the White Nile, neither of them blue or white, but brown and muddy. I asked Idris to stop the car and stood on the old iron bridge built by the British in the last century, watching the wide, fast-moving waterway full of silt and plastic bags flowing north towards Cairo.

The heat bore down on me. Minarets and whitewashed houses swam before my eyes, fine dust choked my throat. I got back into the car and we drove to Sharia el-Nil, a wide, tree lined avenue on the banks of the Nile where the British had built the colonial administration buildings that now housed various government ministries.

Idris parked in front of the Ministry of the Interior. On the dashboard lay my notebook and a file with documents summarizing the project in Darfur. It was innocuous stuff, no state secrets or coded instructions. So when Idris said, "You can leave your file and notebook in the car, no one will touch them," I didn't give it a second thought, and followed him into the building. After many flights of concrete stairs and at the end of a long corridor we came to a door marked "Alien Registration and Travel Permits." Inside, a harried looking young woman swathed from head to foot in many yards of flowered cloth sat behind an old Underwood typewriter. A nest of plaits curled under her headdress. On the wall behind her hung a photo of the President, Lt. Gen. Omar Hassan al-Bashir, wearing an army uniform. A rotating fan whirled in the background moving the stifling air around. After introducing me and explaining that I needed a journalist's permit, Idris excused himself and left. When he came back ten minutes later I was holding a freshly laminated pass with my photograph and an official-looking seal.

But the notebook and file were gone from the car. "Are you sure you didn't leave them upstairs," he said. Yes, I was sure. He made a great show of looking in the back and under the seats while I sat staring straight ahead in stony silence. I was certain he had taken them. And then I remembered the UN travel advisory on Sudan, with its warning that travelers could be detained by Sudan's security forces, especially in provinces outside Khartoum. My instincts of self-preservation told me to be nice to him, to make him like me so that I would not rot in some Sudanese jail, and instead could get home safely to New

York to see my daughter again. As these dark thoughts were going through my mind, Idris was explaining why he wouldn't be able to stay with me for my meeting at the UN office.

"My minister wants to see me before we leave tomorrow," he said with an air of self-importance. "And then I must go to the mosque for evening prayers. But you will be with your colleagues from the UN. They will take care of you. Almost as good as me." And he laughed, revealing a set of dazzling teeth, the only good feature in a face with a thin, cruel mouth and shifty eyes.

"I'll try to manage without you," I said. "In any case, I'm sure you'll be of great help in Darfur. That's where I'll really need you."

"Tomorrow morning I will pick you up at 6 o'clock. Our flight to El Fasher is at seven. *Insha'allah* we will be there by nine o'clock." His *God willing* didn't inspire great confidence in the next day's Sudan Airways flight.

At the UN compound, Peter Jackson was waiting for me in his office. An agronomist from Australia, he was the UN expert in charge of the Darfur program. Tall, in his mid-thirties, with sandy hair and a pleasant, intelligent face, he was relaxed and friendly in manner. On the wall behind him was a map of Darfur bristling with colored pins.

To my relief, he said he was coming to Darfur. "It's an incredibly arid and hostile environment," he said. "But the people are resilient and have traditional ways of coping with hardship. In the mid-eighties the whole region was devastated by a series of disastrous droughts and famines, the effects of which were long-lasting. Farmers weren't producing enough crops, and every year the desert encroached a little further onto the traditional pasturelands used by the nomadic herdsmen for their cattle. Long-standing disputes about the control of water and grazing rights between Arab herdsmen and black African farmers intensified. To make matters worse, because of the government's long neglect of Darfur, which is poorer than other provinces in Sudan, a separatist movement backed by rebels began to emerge.

"So when we came up with a proposal for a rural development program for Darfur, the government was quite happy to let us get on with it, as long as they didn't have to contribute, which they don't. The idea was to improve the quality of people's lives, to bring farmers and herdsmen to a level above mere subsistence. And if everyone's economic situation improved, perhaps disputes over who should control the natural resources would eventually end.

"We started the program two years ago with \$28 million, to be used for well-digging, irrigation pumps, and seeds to help farmers. Rangeland management and mobile veterinary

services were introduced to assist the herdsmen. Last year, sorghum, bean, and tomato harvests improved by fifty percent, and we vaccinated more than a hundred thousand head of cattle, so far fewer died. The result has been that incomes have doubled. When we fly over the region tomorrow you'll be able to see for yourself. The green of the fields is as sharp as if it had been carved with a knife. Unfortunately, I'm not so sure that the problems between the two groups have disappeared."

"Why can't they all get along?" I said. "It's not the same situation as in the south, which is mostly Christian. In Darfur they're all Moslems."

"That's true, and there's no difference between the Islam of the Arab nomads and the Africans. But the problems are a reflection of a racist ideology that goes back for centuries, which the government reinforces by saying, 'We are Arabs and these people are Africans and not true Moslems'. That being said, there are many Arab communities in Darfur who live quite peacefully and have good relations with neighboring African communities."

Then he asked me how I was getting along with Idris, and when I pulled a face he laughed. "His Sudanese colleagues don't like him either," he said. "They know he reports everything back to his boss. One thing is certain – he's going to stick as close as lips to teeth to us in Darfur."

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We arrived in El Fasher, the largest town in Northern Darfur, at 9 o'clock in the morning. Omar was waiting for us in at the airport in a Land Rover. He was the driver for Abdel Aziz Ali Ahmed, the Commissioner for Northern Darfur, who lived in Umm Kaddada, a small town 300 miles across the desert from El Fasher. We were to stay in his house while he was in Khartoum.

The road from the airport was filled with people and vehicles. Bush taxis mingled with bicycles, carts, goats and camels. We stopped at a roadside market to buy bottled water and dates for the seven hour journey to Umm Kaddada. Unlike markets in other parts of Africa, here it was the men who tended the stalls. They sat with their legs thrust out before them, their merchandise stacked in neat piles – peanuts in tiny plastic bags, millet cakes and fried plantains, melons and tomatoes. The air was blue from the smoke of little charcoal braziers where people cooked brochettes of meat under advertising billboards exhorting them to "Fly Sudan Airways" and "Drink Fanta."

photo Ruth Massey



In Darfur it can take a day by donkey to get from one village to another.

Photo Ruth Massey



A small shop in Umm Kaddada

A couple of miles down the road from the market, without slowing down, Omar spun the wheel and drove off the road and headed across the desert. There were no roads to Umm Kaddada. To reach it we would have to drive the whole day across a vast grey stony plain that seemed to reach to the ends of the earth, an anonymous landscape devoid of mark or sign, miles and miles of flat, rocky desert over which the wind blows ceaselessly and even the camels collapse and die. Before us lay three hundred miles of absolutely flat terrain without the slightest sign of life or the smallest undulation in the land, nothing to vary the implacable line of horizon on all sides.

I felt the intense pleasure of being in the infinite space of the Sahara again. I've had hepatitis and malaria, broken bones, been shot at, been caught up in a coup, and been robbed, but this was where I wanted to be, away from the routine, far from telephones, faxes and newspapers, out of touch and out of reach, at the very heart of the continent.

Hour after hour we bumped along at ten, twenty, thirty miles an hour. Omar worked the Land Rover against the sand. He drove hunched forward, silent, his head inches from the windshield, concentrating on the lay of the land, calculating the slant of the sun, looking for the familiar rock or bush that were his compass, knowing the precise moment to shift the gears, accelerating to fly over dunes, his eyes glued on the terrain before him, following the sun and the occasional fresh vehicle track.

Soon we were covered in sand as fine as the air. It seeped under the doors and through the windows, coating the inside of the vehicle and everything it contained. I cradled my camera bag in my arms like a baby, my body acting as a shock absorber to protect its contents. When I opened it, cameras and lenses were coated with soft, white dust like sifted flour. A pull on a bottle of water, and sand passed over my tongue. It crept into my nose and worked its way between my toes. It silted up my ears, crept into my mouth, and grated between my teeth.

I sat next to Omar in the front seat handing him dates cooked by the heat of the engine, passing hot bottles of water to Peter and Idris sitting behind me, while empty ones rolled at my feet.

We arrived in Umm Kaddada just as the sun was setting, and drove down the sandy main street. There were no trees and, at this hour, no people, just a few goats and skeletal dogs. The houses were low and shabby, the same color as the surrounding desert.

Abdel Azziz lived about two miles outside the little town in a comfortable one-story house with a small garden surrounded by a wire fence and a view of the unending desert. The two young men who cooked and cleaned for him were there to welcome us. They

moved gracefully in their white *djellabas*, greeting us with broad smiles, white teeth against skin like black velvet.

While Idris was saying his prayers inside, Peter and I sat in the garden on white plastic chairs on a small patch of grass, a miracle of green. We drank freshly squeezed orange juice, and watched the moon rise like a copper disk from behind a long slope of dunes. A wind came up and blew sand into my glass. We talked for a while and then we listened to the incredible, absolute silence. The sky was now pitch black and the stars shone with such power that I could see the Milky Way and all the constellations. I found myself constantly raising my eyes. Every few minutes a shooting star would leave its trail across the heavens.

For the next week we drove across the desert from one village to another. The distances between them were enormous. By donkey it would have taken a whole day. We watched farmers harvesting tall stalks of sorghum, beans, and watermelons, the only sound the put-putting of the diesel pumps that brought water from nearby wells to irrigate the fields. Wherever there were crops, water was not far below. It merely needed to be brought to the surface.

No matter where we went, I had the same impression of order and cleanliness. In bare courtyards women scattered grain among pure white hens, others wove prayer mats out of palm leaves inside houses made of sun-dried bricks, the rooms bare except for a bed made of wood and string, and perhaps a sideboard containing a few glasses and neat rows of shiny tin cooking pots.

At a brick factory in Abu Humeira, I watched a young woman bent double between the shafts of a heavy metal cart. As she pulled the load of bricks, the words of a missionary who had worked in Mali for many years came back to me: "In this country it is better to be a donkey than a woman." In Al Hoodi women wove carpets out of goat hair, and in Goz el Halag they made cheese out of goat milk. In Umm Jarada a steady stream of children came to draw water from a handpump. They wore amulets to protect themselves from evil spirits – pieces of root or horn, tiny bottles of holy water, or Koranic verses woven into leather or cloth. The amulets were wound around the children's arms, hung from their necks, or were slung around their bodies on long strings, like bandoliers.

Under a large acacia tree, we attended a village meeting, the men sitting on one side of a courtyard, a group of women on the other. They held babies on their laps, and constantly adjusted the filmy scarves around their heads to cover their hair.

The village had prepared a meal in our honor. It began with the traditional hand washing ceremony – a boy bearing soap, a towel, and a big pitcher of hot water walked

round the circle sitting on the floor. When everyone had washed and dried their hands, an earthenware dish of goat, millet, and beans was brought in and set in our midst. Using our fingers, we extracted the food from the mound in front of us. A silent woman wrapped to the eyebrows in layers of cotton served us countless little glasses of sweet mint tea poured from a pewter teapot, and then, sitting back on her haunches, solemnly watched us drink.

Wherever we went, Idris never left my side, writing down every conversation. Occasionally he would try to see my notes, which were written in shorthand and looked remarkably like his Arabic handwriting. Once he asked, "What is this language you write in?"

"The same one that I used in the notebook I lost in Khartoum," I said. As if to change the subject, he offered me a cigarette, telling me again, as he had for days, of the approach of Ramadan, when he would fast and not smoke until after sundown.

On the day before Ramadan, we spent the morning with some herdsmen who had brought their cattle to be vaccinated by a mobile veterinary team. The cows are their greatest treasure. Killing them is forbidden, and women cannot touch them. There must have been a hundred head of cattle milling around in a pen of thorny branches. A cloud of sand hung over them, kicked up by the thrashing of their hooves. The vet, his syringe poised ready to immunize each long-horned cow, waited like a matador, ready to plunge the needle into the struggling animal's neck, while four strong men grappled it to the ground, fighting to keep it still for the moment of truth.

About fifteen minutes after we had left the herdsmen, joyfully reunited with their animals, we almost drove over a gravestone lying flat in the sand. A large crucifix in stone was set in the cement slab. I got out of the car to take a closer look. Drifts of sand half-hid the inscription on the base, which was in the same grey stone as the crucifix. It read, "In Memory of Major Walter Middleton, OBE. 1844-1880".

"A footprint left in the sand by the British," Omar said when I asked him how an English officer's final resting place had come to be all on its own in the middle of the Darfurian desert. Then he went on to explain that in colonial days there had been a British garrison not far from Umm Kaddada. One day a letter arrived for Major Middleton from the woman he was engaged to in England, in which she informed him that she had married someone else. That same night he killed himself.

The grave was on the edge of an oasis. To see trees in this environment was almost as amazing as seeing a tombstone topped by a crucifix. We took a blanket from the car and spread it under the eucalyptus trees. A farmer had given us a watermelon earlier that morning after I had photographed him in his field, and now we cut it open and ate it. Omar

smoked tobacco leaves in the hookah he kept in the Land Rover for just such an occasion, and I lay back and looked up at the sky, a blue porcelain bowl filigreed by the branches of the trees. Thinking I had dozed off, Idris was telling Peter about his fiancée.

“We cannot get married until I have enough money to buy a house,” Idris said. “It is very difficult for me. Last night I had a dream about her. Very sexy dream. I was very much upset when I woke up.”

Peter said nothing.

Undeterred, Idris continued. “We are never alone, I can only see her with her family. And if I kiss her I could get arrested.”

“For kissing your fiancée?”

“Sudan is not like America or Australia. Here it is forbidden. It is very difficult,” he said again.

“I can imagine,” said Peter.

Then Idris lowered his voice so that I had to strain my ears to hear what he was saying. “She has been cut.”

“Cut? Where did she cut herself?”

“You know, cut. All Sudanese women are cut. It is done when they are babies.”

“Oh, I see what you mean. Performing a clitoridectomy is against the law where I come from.”

“I never hear this word. Thank you for teaching me.”

“Well, I’m sure it’ll come in useful.”

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In brilliant sunshine, Umm Kaddada looked even sadder than when I had first seen it at dusk on the evening of our arrival. There were very few people on the main street, on both sides of which were run-down houses and one or two small shops.

Peter wanted to show me what he euphemistically called “the small-scale industry activities of the program.” There was the white-bearded shoemaker who sat in the shade of a thatched awning making leather slippers, surrounded by animal skins hanging from wires slung between wooden poles.

The skins came from the tanner up the street who worked in an open compound of ochre sand, where an overpowering smell of chemicals used to soften the leather rose from open pits.

Further along was the pharmacy, with medications neatly arranged on shelves against the wall. Next door was a small shop that sold flour, grain, little metal teapots, and not much else, except for some sequined squares with embroidered texts from the Koran that hung above a battery-operated radio playing Arabic music.

In a family compound just outside the town, two women sat on the sand sewing narrow strips of black and white goat hair together to make an enormous rug. It was the second day of Ramadan, and out of respect for everyone around me I had decided to observe it. Nothing would pass my lips until sundown. "You must be crazy," Peter had said earlier. "You're not used to fasting. And in this heat you should at least drink water." He was right, as it turned out. While I was photographing the women sewing, the black and white lines of the rug became a blur and I almost passed out.

One of the women took me inside the house, and I lay down on some cushions made of goat skin and slept for a while. About an hour later I woke up and, smelling like a goat, wandered into the courtyard behind the house, where I found Idris, Omar and Peter sitting with the men. Several women were pounding millet, a sea of tin trays around them. Some were making biscuits for Ramadan from millet and wheat flour. Others were making unleavened bread and cooking a stew on a clay stove. They were preparing *iftar*, the meal that breaks the fast, which the head of the household invited us to share with them.

The sun was going down, and everything stopped for evening prayers. First the men, next the women, washed their hands and feet, then their faces. Prayer mats were placed on the sand facing east, the women's behind the men. At that moment their lives seemed as rich as they could be under any circumstances. This richness had something to do with their close physical involvement with the vast landscape beyond the compound, and with each other.

We were leaving early the next morning. In Africa, departure is often a pre-dawn activity. It is a good moment to set out on a long journey, just as the sky is growing white in the east and objects are black and sharp against it.

The complete Darfur  
photographic album of Ruth Massey is on  
*Archipelago* <http://www.archipelago.org/vol8-3/massey.htm>

Photo Ruth Massey



Mobile veterinary teams vaccinate more than a hundred thousand head of cattle per year.

Photo Ruth Massey



Zeinal Daif Elghany is eighteen and works from six in the morning until three in the afternoon at a brick factory, where she earns one dollar a day. Her village is an hour's walk from the factory.

## A Postcard from Norway: How America Looks from Here

Charles J. Bussey

Born in Oxford, Mississippi, I have lived nearly sixty years in Kentucky where I teach American History at Western Kentucky University. Currently I am in Kristiansand, Norway, teaching a course called “The American South” as a Fulbright Scholar. This program was inaugurated in 1946 with legislation sponsored by Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright to create better understanding between the United States and foreign nations. In that sense, my wife Donna and I view ourselves as missionaries in a mission field in a 2004 world where the United States is viewed through many eyes as a rogue nation. It has been my purpose to demonstrate by word and deed that not all Americans, especially those of us from the American South, are arrogant and without international sensibility.

It is a fertile field, for I have discovered that among most Norwegians, including faculty and students at my university here, as well as ordinary citizens in the Kristiansand community, there is a strong anti-American feeling. By that I mean anti-American government – not anti toward American individuals. In fact, Donna and I have been extended many acts of kindness. We had been told by many people not to expect much of Norwegians beyond common courtesy and a friendly smile. Certainly, we were informed, you won’t be invited into homes and you won’t be taken into the confidence of those you meet. For the first week or two here in Kristiansand, that was true. Then we heard one of my colleagues, a poet named Annabelle Despard, speak to the international students at Agder University College. After going through a delightful introduction to Norsk culture and ways that Norwegians think and act, and in response to a question of how foreigners should act in Norway, Annabelle concluded by saying, “In the end, just do what your heart tells you.” Being very outgoing, I took that to heart – as did my less-outgoing wife.

We had heard a lot about the Setesdal Valley near Kristiansand toward the mountains where there is an isolated knitting museum near Telemark where a famous World War II raid against the Germans was conducted by Norwegian resistance fighters. I wanted

to go, so I talked to one of my students, a fifty-four-year-old grandmother named Inger, and asked if she might help us figure out how to get up the valley to Ose and the museum. She thought about it briefly and said, “I will take you there in my car. I will arrange everything.”

Two weeks later we set out. It was a lovely day in September, and Inger had brought a picnic lunch of homemade bread smeared with blue cheese and a thermos of coffee. Three hours later we were in Ose and introduced to Annemor, a well-known expert who often lectured in the U.S. about Norwegian sweaters and knitting techniques. Five minutes later we were off with Inger and Annemor along the Otra River to pick Norwegian *tyttebaer* for jam. Later, we toured Annemor’s shop and the museum. Following that we enjoyed a delicious fresh whole trout dinner with potatoes, vegetables, and wine in the old and tiny Ose Hotel which had maybe four rooms upstairs and a dining room that seated fifteen at the most. That night we sat in the basement of Annemor’s shop drinking wine and chattering away like old friends about politics in America, especially about President George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the direction America was taking under his leadership. Both Inger and Annemor were well informed. In addition, Annemor regaled us with stories about her most recent lecturing experiences in the Seattle area. Her hosts there for several weeks were leaders in the Green Party and in the American movement to simplify life styles. She thought it particularly amusing that one Seattle attorney’s idea of simplifying his life style meant going from twenty suits to ten. We all laughed as we sat in a very primitive building in Norway’s Setesdal Valley!

Inger and Annemor reminded me of American Southerners with their concern about the distinctiveness of place, of people, and of belonging. They talked of common acquaintances, where they lived, what they did, and naturally they concluded finally that they were distant kin. By 11 p.m., Donna and I were ready for bed, and Annemor said that she planned to row home across the fjord since she’d been drinking wine and didn’t want to drive. She showed us where we were to sleep – upstairs above her shop in a bedroom separated from Inger’s room by a common sitting area – and we settled in. The next morning, we discovered that Annemor and Inger had talked far into the night, but that Annemor had come back early and fixed us a huge breakfast with fresh baked bread from her basement oven which accommodates forty loaves at a time. She served us the usual assortment of meats, cheeses, and jams – but also fresh green beans from the garden, uncooked! It was the best of Southern hospitality, in “southern” Norway.

From Norway, looking back toward the United States, it is somewhat easier to put the current American government and its action in historical perspective. The American South, unlike the Norwegian South, was built on an arrogance and violence that revolved

around first slavery and then segregation, and it is clear that America today, led by George W. Bush, has “moved” south. America now seems to have undergone a “Southernization” process and become the worst of the South, to have drifted far to the right politically and socially. “Are we all Kentucky now?” I thought to myself the other night watching BBC World news. By that I mean, Kentucky currently has two right-wing Senators and a right-wing governor, and Kentuckians express far too often the intolerant, provincial and repressive ideas of the radical religious right. People in my home state of nearly sixty years now seem to have no shame that the United States is violating the Constitution as well as international law in its use of power. I wonder if Norwegians are different from Americans or whether Norway just lacks the overwhelming power which America possesses. While I think that there is a basic human nature common to all people, there does seem to be a gentleness, a sense of international responsibility, and a respect for the rights of others among Norwegians that is lacking among many Americans. Perhaps that is merely a reflection of historical circumstance, a question of power, a matter of social construction. Still, it does give one pause.

I have taken the opportunity of being a Fulbright Scholar in Norway to reread several times Senator Fulbright’s 1966 book, *The Arrogance of Power*. Based on lectures he delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1964, and published two years later in large measure as a response to America’s rush into madness in Vietnam, it is an amazing book to read almost four decades later. He wrote, for example, “America is now at that historical point at which a great nation is in danger of losing its perspective on what exactly is within the realm of its power and what is beyond it. Other great nations,” he said, “reaching this critical juncture, have aspired to too much and, by over extension of effort, have declined and then fallen. Gradually but unmistakably America is showing signs of that arrogance of power which has afflicted, weakened, and in some cases destroyed great nations in the past.”

Reading those words in Norway in 2004 jolted me. The U.S. today is clearly dominated by an arrogance of power, and “we are not living up to our capacity and promise as a civilized example for the world.” Fulbright reminds us that “the measure of our falling short is the measure of the patriot’s duty of dissent.” It is clear that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Presidents who engage in warring, in misleading the American people as they take us to war, in violating international agreements and the Constitution, know no party boundaries. Fulbright, himself a Democrat, was responding to a Democratic president (L.B.J.) and a Democratic Congress taking us to disaster in Vietnam while today it is a Republican president and a Republican Congress which has us on the verge of calamity. In

thinking about this, it crossed my mind that the only American president in my living memory who might have avoided, who might have taken a different tack, was Jimmy Carter – a Southerner, who only recently was in Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. While Carter made mistakes, he understood the difference between hope/memory and optimism/nostalgia. Most important, however, he understood that greatness has more to do with relationships and service than it has to do with power and prominence.

Carter, a Southern Baptist, took his religion seriously and demonstrated that his was a living faith in the best of the Southern religious tradition, and that too reminds me of southern Norway. Kristiansand, I was told shortly after my arrival here, is “the Bible Belt of Norway.” It’s true. In addition to the regular Norwegian State Church (Lutheran), there are innumerable Protestant offshoots, free churches, and Pentecostal groups. It’s like being at home! Carter, unlike President Bush, learned from his religion that there are human limits, and he tried to teach the nation that lesson, though he seems to have failed.

President Bush sees no limits. Never has an American president invoked the name of God more often nor I believe in such fundamentally flawed ways as George W. Bush. His references are usually connected to statements identifying the United States as God’s chosen country and with America carrying out God’s mission. While this construct is not unique to Bush – we heard it all in the mid-1840s when the term Manifest Destiny, the God-given right of white America to take the whole continent of North America from Atlantic to Pacific no matter who already controlled the land – it is amazing to hear it revived. Does history teach us nothing? The most blatant or excessive comment the President made came three days after 9/11 when he spoke at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and said, with no qualification, it is America’s “responsibility to history” to “rid the world of evil.” It astounds me that an American president – after slavery, the Cold War, Vietnam – would be that thoughtless. Such pride – saying that America could do what God has not done – flies in the face of Bush’s claim to be Christian.

Living in Norway, where BBC World is our source of world news, Donna and I realize that Americans may be the only people in the world who believe the rhetoric of America’s president. Norwegians certainly don’t. Especially not Christians. For example, one day a student came up to me after class and identified herself this way: “I am a devout Christian. How could anyone read the New Testament, the words of Jesus, and act like your president?” She was not attacking me personally – she likes me – but she was just so puzzled. Norwegians, like most Scandinavians, think that Americans are simple, that they see politics and world events without nuances, and they especially believe this about President

Bush and his advisors.

This brings me back to Senator Fulbright and how he might have advised our current president. “We are not,” Fulbright wrote, “God’s chosen savior of mankind but only one of mankind’s more successful and fortunate branches, endowed by our Creator with the same capacity for good and evil, no more or less, than the rest of humanity.” Since coming into office, and in the shadow of 9/11, President Bush has radically transformed himself and the direction of the United States. From talking about humility and international cooperation before 9/11, Bush has rapidly moved America toward becoming one of the most arrogant nations in history. I believe that is because we are so powerful, and “power tends to confuse itself,” as Fulbright pointed out in 1966, “with virtue, and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God’s favor.” Confederate soldiers thought that God was on their side in the American Civil War. I wish that President Bush would take a few moments to read Fulbright’s book and note the words, “Who are the self-appointed emissaries of God who have wrought so much violence in the world? They are men with doctrines, men of faith and idealism, men who confuse power with virtue. . . .”

The prayer that keeps playing in my head, “War Prayer,” comes from Mark Twain: “O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds. . . . Help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander . . . the wastes of their desolated land. . . . We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the source of love.” While many people would agree that taking out Saddam was beneficial, President George Bush believes that Saddam’s removal represents God’s will.

We are clearly today involved in a misadventure, and it is always difficult to extract oneself from that once it’s started. History is littered with stories of nations and leaders who found it impossible to stop policies once in place even when advised by people close to them that such a path was destructive. America’s own LBJ found this out in Vietnam. Senator Fulbright knew that when he wrote in 1966, “We may be thinking about how disagreeable it would be to accept a solution short of victory; we may be thinking about how our pride would be injured if we settled for less than we set out to achieve; we may be thinking about our reputation as a great power, fearing that a compromise settlement would shame us before the world. . . .” When my students here ask, “Why can’t America just recognize her mistakes?” I read them that passage.

The concept of American Exceptionalism mentioned earlier in this essay had its genesis in John Winthrop’s 1631 sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity,” delivered aboard the ship *Arabella* before the English Puritans disembarked in Salem, Massachusetts.

Winthrop talked about establishing a “city upon a hill,” a model of Christian community for the rest of the world to follow. Many American politicians have used this phrase, and some have embellished it. President Ronald Reagan, for example, inserted the word “shining” before city. What Reagan seems not to have known or remembered if he did know it is that the city on a hill was conditional, not divine. That city, according to Winthrop, was constantly under God’s judgment and would collapse if it proved false to its promise. Like Reagan before him, George Bush often uses America as an example to the world. On September 11, 2002, he said: “This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. . . . That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.” That quotation came, of course, from the New Testament, but the writer (John) was talking about God’s Word, about Christ, not America! Reagan maybe, but certainly Bush, confuses the American Civil Religion with Christianity and borders on blasphemy.

I don’t doubt that President Bush’s faith is sincerely held, but thinking Americans must be concerned as to how his faith impacts both foreign and domestic policies. While my focus in this brief essay has been on the Administration’s warring, let there be no mistake, military violence abroad is intimately connected to domestic policies and especially those related to poverty. A wise man once said, there is a “connection between war and poverty. . . . Poverty is militarism’s twin.” This administration is using the Iraq misadventure to cloak its war on social programs at home. Instead of L.B.J.’s “war on poverty,” we seem now to be engaged in a war on the poor.

Recently retired Kentucky physician and former state senator N. Z. Kafoglis wrote to me:

The Bush administration is the most dangerous administration in many decades. It launched a preemptive war on the flimsiest evidence that there was an imminent threat to our country. It has cut taxes while incurring the greatest deficit in our history. . . . It has alienated much of the world which used to respect us. . . . Administrative policies are even more hypocritical when it comes to the environment. . . . Funding for student loans has been cut, and we have lost [two and one half] million jobs in the past two years while the President keeps saying things are getting better. For anyone who might objectively assess the administration’s record, the conclusion would have to be that it has no credibility.

While the failure to deal with the health care crisis in America, where forty to fifty million Americans are without protection, is horrendous, the most callous example of this

“war on the poor” comes with the Bush administration’s effort to destroy Head Start. Often criticized after its inception in 1965, this program gradually came to have widespread bipartisan support by the 1990s. It was (is) a program designed to give a hand up to those children in America who grow up in poverty. Who, for God’s sake, would want to gut Head Start? The answer is clear – those who seem to despise the poor and hate government and government programs (unless they are military). Unlike attacks on other social and environmental programs, however, there is still a political necessity to cloak attacks on children as “reform.” Bush uses such phrases as “leave no child behind” and “school readiness” to disguise the efforts of his administration to dismantle Head Start, which owes much of its success to people like Julius Richmond, the founding director, and Leslie Dunbar, who supported Head Start from the Field Foundation. Both men fought early on to protect and maintain Head Start in the face of efforts from the political right in America to destroy it. The Bush plan, with its narrow focus on literacy, would completely compromise the original intent of Head Start to approach disadvantaged children with a comprehensive program emphasizing both physical and mental health, prenatal care, dental health, nutrition, decent housing, parent training, and access to other social services that impact a child’s current and future ability to succeed in school and life.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “Let us not be afraid to help each other – let us not forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us.” Those words have no meaning for Bush and his ideological handlers who want to destroy the social services remaining from the New Deal and the Great Society. F.D.R.’s words bring me right back to Senator Fulbright who said, “In the abstract we celebrate freedom of opinion as part of our patriotic liturgy; it is only when some Americans exercise it that other Americans are shocked.” Remember the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld litany, “If you’re not with us, you’re against us.” Rubbish! They’re radicals, they’re un-American, they’re anti-democrats! As Fulbright said, “To criticize one’s country is to do it a service and pay it a compliment.” For “in a democracy dissent is an act of faith. . . .” Continuing, he wrote, “criticism . . . is more than a right; it’s an act of patriotism, a higher form of patriotism, I believe, than the familiar rituals of national adulation.” We in America are in the process of becoming what we despise – a rogue nation. The White House published in September 2002 a “National Security Strategy” which is so reminiscent of NSC-68, a 1950 document from the National Security Council which provided the strategy and framework for the Cold War. That earlier document led inescapably to the terrible cost of militarism at the expense of social programs and to Vietnam. The White House candidly admits that the Bush strategy represents a major

shift in military strategy, maybe the biggest in fifty years, but who cares? America is the world's cop, the only superpower, and might makes right.

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, the primary architect of the new strategy, surely knows that it represents a radical reorientation of the political character of America. It indicates that the United States can act alone, anytime and anyplace, and can act in preemptive fashion against anyone the president determines to be terrorist. This would mean, Kentucky author Wendell Berry wrote, that "The law in the world, then, is to be upheld by a nation that has declared itself above the law."

Scandinavia, committed firmly to international cooperation, generally is skeptical of the policies developed by George W. Bush and his key advisors. The Danish Crown Prince in a recent interview with a French magazine used the word "simple" in an unflattering way to characterize American foreign policy. That reinforces the Norwegian idea which Donna and I often encounter that America's aim to "rule" the world presumes too much, is childish. Keep in mind that Norway, with fewer than five million inhabitants and independent only since 1905, clearly recognizes that she has little international clout. Norway has, however, found a niche as an international peace maker and has created the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

Donna and I spend considerable time with Helge and Trine-Lise, a retired M.D. (nephrologist) and secretary respectively. In their mid-sixties, both are taking my class "The American South," but the four of us gather often to eat and to talk about art and literature – as well as American politics and policy. Born in Norway in 1936, Helge spent his youth between ages eight and eighteen in Westchester County, New York, and New Jersey. His father, a Norwegian resistance fighter, fled to the United States when the occupying German forces discovered his work, and found employment in the United States with Norwegian shipping interests. After his father died, Helge returned to Norway and became a doctor. This couple, with enormous affection for America and her *ideals* of justice, freedom and equality, is disenchanted with America's current international policy.

The Norwegian way in short is clearly not the Bush way of "my country right or wrong," or "America, love it or leave it," and which is based on the premise that America is all "good" and those who oppose the U.S. are all "evil."

Senator Fulbright's book, which I have quoted several times, appeared in 1966. A year later, breaking with the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy, Martin Luther King preached a powerful sermon on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City. King brilliantly distinguished nationalism – "if you're not with us you're against us" – from

patriotism. “We are at the moment,” King said, “when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every man [and woman] of humane conviction must decide on the protest that best suits his [or her] conviction, but we must all protest.” As King put it that day, “We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow down before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate.”

King’s eloquent plea reminds me of today, when my nation again seems “trapped” in the senseless occupation of a nation which poses no threat of imminent danger to the United States. America is a strong and wealthy nation, and my dream is that someday – soon I hope – we will have leadership which will focus our resources and energy on making peace rather than war.

Clearly, warring as a result of arrogance is not confined to Republican President George W. Bush. As indicated earlier, it doesn’t take a long memory to recall Democrat Lyndon Johnson and his party’s ill-fated efforts in Vietnam. We lost more fifty thousand people there, to say nothing of the untold numbers of Vietnamese killed, and we wasted significant sums of money. Maybe no American president is immune to an arrogance of power. I don’t know.

What I do know – as Fulbright taught us – is that it is the responsibility of American citizens to rise up and say NO MORE. Berry said, “If we are serious about peace, then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully and bravely as our government now . . . [wages] war.” That brings me back to the class I am teaching in Norway – “The American South.” My Norwegian students in the class love the Southern Civil Rights Movement. So do I. That movement taught us that love is more powerful than hate, that nonviolence can beat violence, and that the powerless in America can bring those in power to their knees. President Bush, who constantly uses Christian imagery, should pay attention to the historical Southern Civil Rights Movement and the words of Jesus who taught: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. . . . Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” We need today in the United States nothing less than the resurrection of the Southern Civil Rights Movement in all its splendor.

For my part, I am proud to be a dissenting Fulbrighter, a Southerner, and an American.

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“A Postcard from Norway: How America Looks From Here,” appears in  
WHERE WE STAND: VOICES OF SOUTHERN DISSENT,  
NewSouth Books (PO Box 1588, Montgomery AL 36102. Phone 334-834-3556;  
fax 334-834-3557; information/sales [suzanne@newsouthbooks.com](mailto:suzanne@newsouthbooks.com)), July 2004.

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See also

“My Yellow Ribbon Town: A Meditation on My Country and My Home,”  
by Paul Gaston, *Archipelago* Vol. 8, No. 2 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol8-2/gaston.htm>.

Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger.

Hermann Göring

[http://www.mikehersh.com/Lest\\_We\\_Forget.shtml](http://www.mikehersh.com/Lest_We_Forget.shtml)

"We know that dictators are quick to choose aggression, while free nations strive to resolve differences in peace," Bush said.

Some people see irony there. Others don't.

Dan Froomkin, on Bush's U.N. speech, September 21, 2004

*Washington Post* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A41435-2004Sep22.html>

For four years, George W. Bush has used the power of words to overcome insurmountable facts.

*The Daily Show*

<http://taint.org.nyud.net:8090/xfer/Daily%20Show%20-%20GWB%20Film%209-1-04.mov>

Casualties in Iraq [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq\\_casualties.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm)

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## Some Notes on the Election and Afterward

Katherine McNamara

### *The Battle of Algiers*

I write this in the rising hope among friends across the country and overseas that, because Kerry acquitted himself well in the first debate, he now has a real chance, and the unwelcome possibility of four more years of Bush, Cheney, Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, DeLay<sup>49</sup>,

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<sup>49</sup> Tom DeLay (R-Tex), the House Majority Leader, was "admonished" by the House ethics committee recently

and the rest of their ilk may be scotched. The *Financial Times* (which once wrote, describing Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy, that the lunatics had taken over the asylum<sup>50</sup>) heaved sighs of

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for trying to bribe a fellow member, by offering to "endorse" that member's "son in a Congressional primary if he would support a measure then teetering on the edge of defeat." (DeLay marshaled "unnamed" corporate support and resources, offering to put them at the service of the Member's son, and to use them against the son if the Member did not vote as DeLay demanded.)

The bill was the Medicare prescription-drug bill for seniors, the cost of which the administration lied to Congress about, as has been shown since. According to the *Times*, "The middle-of-the-night Medicare vote was memorable. The Republican leadership held the vote open for almost three hours to force the measure through, over the objections of Democrats who claimed it was not expansive enough and conservative Republicans like Mr. Smith [whose son Delay promised to support, in exchange for Smith's vote] who argued it cost too much." (Carl Hulse, "House Ethics Panel Says DeLay Tried to Trade Favor for a Vote," *The New York Times*, Oct. 1, 2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/01/politics/01ethics.html>. See also, UPI, "Analysis: DeLay's ethics problems," <http://www.washtimes.com/upi-breaking/20041001-105202-2778r.htm>.)

The House ethics committee, having given Delay its lightest sanction, is also considering – though not yet acting upon – charges of money laundering filed by former Rep. Chris Bell of Texas. According to CNN:

The complaint is three-pronged. It accuses DeLay of wrongdoing in his dealings with Westar Energy Corp., which contributed money to Republicans, the complaint alleges, in the hopes of getting "a seat at the table" on pending legislation. It also accuses DeLay of illegally funneling corporate contributions to candidates for state offices in Texas. Finally, it alleges DeLay used his influence to get the Federal Aviation Administration to help track a plane carrying Texas Democratic legislators as they fled the state to derail a vote on redistricting. (Todd Barrett, "Ethics complaint filed against DeLay, Democrat who lost primary in redrawn district expects retaliation" <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/06/15/delay.ethics/>)

<sup>50</sup> Quoted and elaborated on by Paul Krugman, in the *Times*:

*"The lunatics are now in charge of the asylum."* So wrote the normally staid *Financial Times*, traditionally the voice of solid British business opinion, when surveying last week's tax bill. Indeed, the legislation is doubly absurd: the gimmicks used to make an \$800-billion-plus tax cut carry an official price tag of only \$320 billion are a joke, yet the cost without the gimmicks is so large that the nation can't possibly afford it while keeping its other promises.

But then maybe that's the point. The *Financial Times* suggests that "more extreme Republicans" actually want a fiscal train wreck: "Proposing to slash federal spending, particularly on social programs, is a tricky electoral proposition, but a fiscal crisis offers the tantalizing prospect of forcing such cuts through the back door."

Good for The *Financial Times*. It seems that stating the obvious has now, finally, become respectable.

It's no secret that right-wing ideologues want to abolish programs Americans take for granted. But not long ago, to suggest that the Bush administration's policies might actually be driven

relief: “Kerry looked the more presidential” and “Bush came over as flustered.” On the same page, another headline said, “Europeans urge Bush to adopt Kerry’s line on Iran.”<sup>51</sup>

It is not possible to be objective about the debates, or the election, I suggest, because too much is at stake. (Undecided voters may truly not have been paying attention; or, simply, they don’t want to answer direct questions and reveal their likely vote, for which we can only say, good for them.) The war in Iraq is, as Kerry put it, “a colossal misjudgment” in every way. The president’s continual (and seemingly mindless) assertion that “we are making progress” is unproven. On the very day of the debate, a terrible battle had taken place in Samarra, with a huge number of deaths resulting. The number of American dead since the invasion is more than a thousand; and the wounded? Estimates vary; but it is agreed that wounds have been uglier and more damaging, because body armor protects against all but the most serious assaults, particularly those to the head. The Pentagon distinguishes between casualties in battle and injuries incurred elsewhere. It even attempts to redefine suicide, to keep the numbers lower. The numbers of Iraqi dead and of the injured are not counted by the Americans. Estimates of those lost range from 20,000 to 60,000; but how can we know? We can presume the numbers are great. They are greater than the number of lives lost in the September attacks on this nation. As Senator Kerry reminded President Bush, Osama bin Laden, not Saddam Hussein, attacked this country.

May I go back in time? We read that before the invasion, the top brass and civilians at the Pentagon watched Gillo Pontecorvo’s film “The Battle of Algiers,” supposedly to learn about the rigors of urban warfare and counteracting insurgency. That the film is considered one of the great anti-colonial works of the twentieth century was an irony possibly not lost on a few, at least, of the military viewers. Yet, Americans have never been

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by those ideologues — that the administration was deliberately setting the country up for a fiscal crisis in which popular social programs could be sharply cut — was to be accused of spouting conspiracy theories.

Yet by pushing through another huge tax cut in the face of record deficits, the administration clearly demonstrates either that it is completely feckless, or that it actually wants a fiscal crisis. (Or maybe both.) (Paul Krugman, “Stating the Obvious,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2003; cached here [http://healthandenergy.com/bush\\_tax\\_cuts.htm](http://healthandenergy.com/bush_tax_cuts.htm))

<sup>51</sup> Joshua Chaffin, “View from the fireside: President came over as flustered”; Holly Yeager and Joanna Chung, “View from the newsrooms: Kerry looked the more presidential”; and Guy Dinsmore, “Europeans urge Bush to adopt Kerry’s line on Iran,” *Financial Times*, October 2/October 3 2004, p. 2. See “US Elections 2004” <http://news.ft.com/cms/7fc8f3dc-d258-11d8-b661-00000e2511c8.html>.

able to see themselves as an occupying – let alone, colonial – power; and, under the Bush doctrine, this government will not recognize that status now, even as “democracy” and “liberty” are the words the president uses to justify his war of choice.

“The Battle of Algiers” is thrilling cinema.<sup>52</sup> I saw it recently, for the first time, and agree that for us who have not known combat, that historical drama helps one to think –

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<sup>52</sup> Here are several links to articles about the film and what the Pentagon might have thought about it.

An essayist, Voline, writes in “The Battle of Algiers Revisited,” on September 16, 2004:

In September of 2003 the Bush administration telegraphed their intent to use torture on prisoners in Iraq when they screened Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1965 film *The Battle of Algiers* for officials in the Pentagon.

In September 2003 several newspapers reported that the Department of Defense was holding screenings in the Pentagon of Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1965 film *The Battle of Algiers* for military officers and civilian experts. Shot in black and white using actual newsreel film stock in a mock documentary--style, it dramatizes one part of the larger struggle by which Algerians won independence from French colonial rule in 1962. There are obvious similarities between the situation depicted in the movie and the one that faced the US government in Iraq. In both, an armed rebellion has broken out in an Arab country against occupation by a wealthy and powerful western nation-state.

In an article for *The New York Times*, Michael Kaufman wrote that the idea for the screenings “came from the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, which a Defense Department official described as a civilian-led group with ‘responsibility for thinking aggressively and creatively’ on issues of guerrilla war.” Those invited to the showings were “urged to consider and discuss the implicit issues at the core of the film -- the problematic but alluring efficacy of brutal and repressive means in fighting clandestine terrorists in places like Algeria and Iraq.” What lessons did Rumsfeld and his staff see in this movie? (continued)

<http://www.kuro5hin.org/?op=search&topic=freedom>)

Kevin Beary reviews the film <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig3/beary4.html>.

Derek Malcolm, in *The Guardian Unlimited*

[http://film.guardian.co.uk/Century\\_Of\\_Films/Story/0,4135,345300,00.html](http://film.guardian.co.uk/Century_Of_Films/Story/0,4135,345300,00.html), July 20, 2000, writes

Its stance is as fair as any such film could be, despite the fact that Pontecorvo was a member of the Italian communist party at the time and thus was implicitly on the side of the independence movement. There is, though, no caricature and no glamorisation of either side - just a feeling of palpable horror evoked by urgent images and Ennio Morricone’s dramatic but never melodramatic score. Pontecorvo sees the colonialists as victims of their own system, and the rebels as taking on some of the excesses used against them.

more clearly than the analogy with Vietnam – about the present war. Shot on newsreel stock, yet wholly staged, then edited with a dramatist's eye, Pontecorvo's film observes how the FLN (National Liberation Front, called "the organization") takes shape in the Muslim quarter, the Casbah, of Algiers, by using targeted assassinations of police and large-scale bombings of civilians. We see how the French despise their subjects, the Arabs, who retaliate with organized vengeance and tactical skill. (Ali la Pointe, the last leader, is illiterate, a former boxer, laborer, street criminal, the sort of "malcontent" dismissed early on by the occupation authorities in Baghdad as instigating "unorganized" insurgences there. He is the most intransigent of the guerrillas.)

We are shown, in contrast, that the resistance to French rule is brilliantly choreographed by its leaders, disciplined men whose purpose, broadcast to the crowds in the streets, is independence: an Algeria governed under Islamic law but with "normal" rights and liberties "for all." As their success grows – as the death toll mounts and the U.N. becomes concerned – we see the FLN take charge of their people's well-being, and impose piety and acceptable behavior on the crowds. In their broadcasts, the leaders grow more puritanical. In a startling scene, little boys turn into a gang of shrill enforcers, like crows, pecking at a sad street drunk. It is the mirror-image of a scene in which an old beggar in a

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Charles Paul Freund, "The Pentagon's Film Festival," *Slate* <http://slate.msn.com/id/2087628/>, August 27, 2003, writes a good historical analysis of the film and comparison – in all the ambiguities and uncertainties – to the situation in Iraq.

Will The Battle of Algiers teach us anything? A column in the Washington Post reported yesterday that the Pentagon's special operations chiefs have decided to screen The Battle of Algiers, Gillo Pontecorvo's 1965 classic film of urban terrorist insurgency, for Pentagon employees on Aug. 27. The decision to show Algiers, David Ignatius writes, is "one hopeful sign that the military is thinking creatively and unconventionally about Iraq." He even quotes from a Pentagon flier about the movie:

How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. ... Children shoot soldiers at point blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film. (continued <http://slate.msn.com/id/2087628/>)

An interview with Gillo Pontecorvo by Maria Esposito is on the World Socialist Web Site <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/jun2004/pont-j09.shtml>.

street of the European quarter is set upon by residents as a “dirty Arab,” who doesn’t belong in “their” streets.

The French paratroopers, crack forces, are welcomed with open arms by the European residents. Led by Colonel Mathieu, who, cool and rational, studies his adversaries not as enemies but opponents in a deadly-serious war game, they establish an efficiently brutal presence around the Muslim quarters. Mathieu instructs his force that the FLN are a small minority among the tens of thousands who are residents of the Casbah, invisible yet everywhere, smartly organized as cells in which each member only knows his superior and the two people he himself has recruited. Only the top four leaders know more; not until these men are killed or captured can the organization be stopped. Mathieu directs his men to use “any means necessary” to gain intelligence for breaking the cells. He is brilliantly, bloodily successful. The French *paras* segment the organization, then make its leaders ineffective. In the end, they smash the uprising.

This remarkable film is not a simple one, and its lessons, too – if lessons there be – are complex. Pontecorvo was Italian, a Marxist, presumably sympathetic to the anti-colonials, yet his dramatist’s eye follows all sides attentively. Mathieu is a professional soldier, as are his opposites – except for Ali la Pointe – in the FLN. Their combat, face to face, is an ironic chivalry. Mathieu, having captured one of the four leaders, says conversationally that he feels as if he knows him, having studied his dossier for months. He thus has shown both his respect and revealed his superior position, gained through breaking informers. The FLN leader returns his compliment. (The leader’s female companion is furious at the exchange and Mathieu’s superiority, and shouts furiously that Ali la Pointe remains in hiding, thus betraying him.) Again, at a press conference, Mathieu affirms his respect for a leader, al H’madi, who has been killed in captivity by the French, describing the man’s sense of morality and commitment to his cause as exemplary. (The official position is that in his cell the man had torn his shirt to strips, wove a rope, and hanged himself from the barred window. A reporter points out, dryly, that the man had been bound hand and foot to prevent his escape; therefore, how had he been so clever as to hang himself?)

The battle is a professional’s combat in which men lead. Women play key, although always subordinate or enabling, roles.<sup>53</sup> Publicly, they are veiled, thus, invisible to the

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<sup>53</sup> For example, this new interview by Liza Bear with Saadi Yacef, former FLN official and producer of “The Battle of Algiers”, on indieWire <http://www.indiewire.com>:

**iW:** People in the U.S. who are seeing the film for the first time may be surprised to find that there

French, and carry arms hidden under cloth or in their handbags. It is three women who, shockingly, place the bombs that will kill crowds of civilians, Arabs and Europeans, who are laughing, eating, dancing together. They have put on French clothes and makeup, concealed the bombs in their hand baskets, and charmed their way – one, with her small son – through the French security checkpoints. They mingle with the crowds they are about to harm, place the explosives, and leave.

The pivotal moment, the one perhaps most instructive, is Mathieu's press conference. The press, dismayed, carrying rumors of torture, finally ask him directly whether he has authorized its use on captured Arabs. His reply is equally direct:

The problem is: the NLF wants us to leave Algeria and we want to remain. Now, it seems to me that, despite varying shades of opinion, you all agree that we must remain. When the rebellion first began, there were not even shades of opinion. All the newspapers, even the left-wing ones, wanted the rebellion suppressed. And we were sent here for this very reason.

And we are neither madmen nor sadists, gentlemen. Those who call us fascists today, forget the contribution that many of us made to the Resistance. Those who call us Nazis, do not know that among us there are survivors of Dachau and Buchenwald. We are soldiers and our only duty is to win. Therefore, to be precise, I would now like to ask you a question: Should France remain in Algeria? If you answer "yes," then you must accept all the necessary consequences.<sup>54</sup>

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were children and women fighting amongst the FLN.

**Yacef:** In a word, evolution within the revolution. Normally women took the back seat. But when war broke out, we needed them. They fed us. They were lookouts on the terraces [of the Casbah]. The women were indispensable and totally implicated [in the action]. Among the women who gave me cover were law students who threw off the yashmak. They wanted to participate directly in the struggle -- plant bombs, hide weapons, do liaison work. They were exactly like the men. Sometimes better. A woman who plants a bomb is better than a man who does nothing or just hands out flyers. They played a key role [getting past checkpoints where a man would have been searched]. Of course, there were some traditional women. Even now, 80 percent of Algerian women don't cover their faces, except in the past few years these fundamentalists who pretend to be Muslims make demands on women. (continued [http://www.indiewire.com/people/people\\_040112algiers.html](http://www.indiewire.com/people/people_040112algiers.html))

<sup>54</sup> Billmon ran this excerpt on May 25, 2004:

**JOURNALIST:** Excuse me, colonel. I have the impression that perhaps due to excessive prudence my colleagues continue to ask the same allusive questions, to which you can only respond in an allusive manner. I think it would be better to call things by their right names; if one means torture,

The consequences are clear. Grim scenes of torture follow.<sup>55</sup> Some of them will not be unfamiliar to Americans, after Abu Ghraib. But the FLN's shootings and bombings, too,

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then one should call it torture.

MATHIEU: I understand. What is your question?

JOURNALIST: The questions have already been asked. I would only like some precise answers, that's all.

MATHIEU: Let's try to be precise then. The word "torture" does not appear in our orders. We have always spoken of interrogation as the only valid method in a police operation directed against unknown enemies. As for the NLF, they request that their members, in the event of capture, should maintain silence for twenty-four hours, and then, they may talk. Thus, the organization has already had the time necessary to render useless any information furnished. What type of interrogation should we choose? The one the courts use for a crime of homicide which drags on for months?

JOURNALIST: The law is often inconvenient, Colonel.

MATHIEU: And those who explode bombs in public places, do they perhaps respect the law? When you asked that question to Ben M'Hidi, remember what he said?

No, gentlemen, believe me, it is a vicious circle. And we could discuss the problem for hours without reaching any conclusions. Because the problem does not lie here. The problem is: the NLF wants us to leave Algeria and we want to remain. Now, it seems to me that, despite varying shades of opinion, you all agree that we must remain. When the rebellion first began, there were not even shades of opinion. All the newspapers, even the left-wing ones, wanted the rebellion suppressed. And we were sent here for this very reason.

And we are neither madmen nor sadists, gentlemen. Those who call us fascists today, forget the contribution that many of us made to the Resistance. Those who call us Nazis, do not know that among us there are survivors of Dachau and Buchenwald. We are soldiers and our only duty is to win. Therefore, to be precise, I would now like to ask you a question: Should France remain in Algeria? If you answer "yes," then you must accept all the necessary consequences. (continued  
<http://billmon.org/archives/001453.html>)

<sup>55</sup> In 2001, retired Gen. Paul Aussaresses went on trial in France for practicing torture on Algerians during the Algerian War.

"I would do it [the torture and killings] again today if it were against Osama bin Laden," he said. "These were not reprisals... It was a case of stopping actions which were being prepared for deeds that would cause the deaths of French citizens in Algeria."

In his book, *Special Services: Algeria 1955-57*, Gen Aussaresses said that the government of the day was fully aware of those practices, and that he had only followed orders to eradicate terrorism.

have been horrible. The resistance is a rhythm of terror and counter-terror, until the French *paras* crush the FLN's urban armed resistance.

The film does not end with that defeat. In an epilogue, it forwards two years, when the French, to their surprise, are met with rising demonstrations by the populace. There follows swiftly the independence of Algeria. The lesson is complicated. "Resistance" and "insurgency" can be organized into popular movements that will fight asymmetrically against enormous military force. But the subsequent government of Algeria was bloody, dictatorial, Islamist. And France, after a long, bloody war in which their armed forces employed the use of torture, still bears the scar and the shame of it.

"The Battle of Algiers," it is well to remember, is an art film. It is a kind of fiction based in a kind of truth. Its producer, Saadi Yacef, a former colonel in the FLN, told an interviewer that a good film is harder to make than a revolution: "You can kill someone, but to educate him, that's something else," he said. "And during the war we destroyed. There was an enemy and we killed him. Creating something is very difficult."

Baghdad and Falujah are not Algiers, but in them may in time be noticed a kind of analogy to "Algiers." From the twentieth century onwards, occupiers and colonial powers have been defeated, in part by insurgency, in part by their own weariness. We don't know, yet, another outcome. My questions are, therefore, insistent.

What costs are we willing to pay to keep our forces in Iraq?

How can we regain respect in the world?

The choice is clear, it seems to me: permanent wars of choice abroad in an increasingly unsafe world; higher taxes at home for the middle and lower classes, while the rich are spared having to contribute much to the common good; programmed reduction of social programs and services, as the number of those living in poverty continues to grow; an ever-increasing defense budget, though the (large) percentage going for mercenary contractors is obscured; rumors of a re-imposed draft; an Attorney General who does not respect the rule of law, and, even so, has not succeeded in convicting one of his 5,000 suspects of "terrorism"; secretive governing on a vaguely-defined war footing—

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(continued <http://www.globalpolicy.org/intljustice/general/2001/1127ga.htm>)

His subordinate was Col. Massu, on whom Mathieu was based. See also, "France Confronts Algeria Torture Claims," BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1108014.stm>, 9 January 2001.

Or: the possibility of clear-headed, responsible leadership to begin to undo the terrible mess that George Bush and the radical Republicans have made. We will spend the rest of our adult lives cleaning up after them. The world will yet hold us to account.

*National Security Comes from a Healthy Environment*

This is a very big idea and the media haven't gotten it. Kerry proposes uncoupling national security from assured access to oil (*viz.* Iraq oil fields), by policy and by proposed practice, i.e., exploration for and innovation in alternative sources of energy. This would be a major change in our nation's direction, not only environmentally but also in foreign policy, because it would mean that protecting and expanding oil fields – and our access to them – would no longer be a reason for war and aggression by the United States.

*Disciplined, Permanent Opposition*

What form will permanent opposition take? Even if Senator Kerry wins the presidency, he is likely to face a hostile Congress. We have seen that the Republicans intended to destroy the presidency of Clinton, and, effectively, did so; they would be no less brutal to Kerry – and thus, to the electorate. Tom Delay (see above), Majority Leader of the House, known as “The Hammer,” has vowed to reorganize Congress after the election, securing the reign of Republicans and insuring that the Democrats remain powerless. Attorney General Ashcroft, unlikely to go away, shows no particular respect for the Bill of Rights. We know the radical Republicans lie outright, by omission, by cover-up, and by euphemism. We know the operatives of their party are willing to do anything to control the government, at every level. We know they are dirty fighters.

What are we going to do? If we haven't already planned the action of permanent opposition, we had better start right now, beginning at our precinct meetings and house parties. This will take discipline and fortitude.

*Who Should Elect the President of the World?*

It seems the French, and probably most other nations, think they ought to be able to vote too, and probably rightly, since we're electing the president of the world. Even if Kerry does win – it's possible, as I write this – these radical Republicans have got themselves firmly implanted in the structure of the government, and I can't see how the oppositions can be resolved. In the far back of my mind, I fear more restriction, if not actual force. If Kerry doesn't win, we're in for more preventive war, and who knows what at home.

*Our Calm, Alert Presence in the Streets*

Joan Schatzman's citizen's-eye coverage of the demonstrations in New York during the Republican convention appears in these pages, and gives us a glimpse – again – of our better natures, as half a million of the Gore majority turned out to walk for peace and turn away from Bush/Cheney's warmongering. Most of us, by now, are veterans of some march or other. I think that we had better not stop marching. If all politics is local, I urge that on election day, we who were part of the Gore majority, who are opposed to the dangerous policies and incompetence of Bush and his party, assemble in the main street of our town or city, and that we stand in place, calm and alert, on that day and for as many days as necessary until the vote count has been validated. With luck and hard work, we will have much to celebrate. And then, we must hold our officials to account.

Mobilize. Vote. Trust, if you still can: but verify. Our civic duty calls for imaginative, attentive, permanent opposition.

—October 5, 2004

*Previous Endnotes*

- A World That Begins in Art, Archipelago, Vol. 8, No. 2 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol8-2/endnotes.htm>
- Incoming, Vol. 8, No. 1 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol8-1/endnotes.htm>
- The Only God Is the God of War, Vol. 7, No. 3 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol7-2/endnotes.htm>
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- Passion, Vol. 3, No. 1 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-1/endnotes.htm>
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- On Love, Vol. 2, No. 3 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol2-3/endnotes.htm>
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- Kundera’s Music Teacher, Vol. 1, No. 4 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-4/endnotes.htm>
- The Devil’s Dictionary; Economics for Poets, Vol. 1, No. 3 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-3/endnotes.htm>
- Hecuba in New York; Déformation Professionnelle, Vol. 1, No. 2 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-2/endnotes.htm>
- Art, Capitalist Relations, and Publishing on the Web, Vol. 1, No. 1 <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-1/endnotes.htm>

## Contributors

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**Elizabeth Alexander** grew up in Dallas and (after a long sojourn in New England) lives in Seattle. She is a freelance writer and editor, working mostly in educational publishing. Her creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in several publications named after animals (*Snow Monkey*, *Monkeybicycle*, and *The Raven Chronicles*) as well as *Gargoyle*, *Eating Our Hearts Out* (Lesléa Newman, ed.), *Pindelldyboz* (web), *The Circuit Rider*, and a few other places.

**Steven Barfield** <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/sshl/new/Englit/barfield.htm> is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Westminster, London. He is also director of London theatre studies modules at the University and deputy director of the U.K. Network for Modern Fiction Studies.

**Attilio Bertolucci** (Parma 1911 - Rome 2000) is regarded as one of Italy's greatest twentieth-century poets. The author of several volumes of poetry, he was also an influential editor and translator. Often grouped with Mario Luzi and Vittorio Sereni as a late 'hermetic' poet, Bertolucci wrote in a lyrical, diaristic manner that is impeccably honest and altogether inimitable. The poems in this issue are from *Viaggio d'inverno* / *WINTER JOURNEY* (Milan: Garzanti Libri S.p.A. [buono@garzantilibri.it](mailto:buono@garzantilibri.it), 1971), which is often cited as Bertolucci's most innovative work. Composed over a twenty-year period, the volume enacts on a syntactic

level the poet's anxiety as he searches for emotional constancy amidst the detritus and detail of a gradually estranged world. Among Bertolucci's many honors was the 1991 Librex-Guggenheim 'Eugenio Montale' prize, considered the highest award in Italian poetry.

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**Joan Schatzman** [joanschatzman@hotmail.com](mailto:joanschatzman@hotmail.com) was born on the Southside of Chicago, in 1951. Her education: MBA dropout 1989; art student, local community college 1999-present. She owned the Joan Schatzman Construction Company (1989 to 2002), and is a regular volunteer on building trips to Haiti, Guatemala (2), and Nicaragua (2003-present). Her politics: Commonwealth for the common good. She is the mother of a son, Jack, born in 1985.

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### ***News of Our Contributors***

**Katherine McNamara** [editor@archipelago.org](mailto:editor@archipelago.org), editor and publisher of *Archipelago*, has received the Columbus School for Girls Endowment for a residency at Virginia Center for the Creative Arts <http://www.vcca.com/>, where she will work on a book of memoirs of three notable persons, now dead, from Alaska and elsewhere. She is the author of NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH, A JOURNEY INTO THE INTERIOR OF ALASKA (San Francisco: Mercury House <http://www.mercuryhouse.org/mcnamara.html>, 2001). Katherine McNamara has also been asked to join the board of the U.K. Network for Modern Fiction Studies.