



# THE Nation.

**RON PAUL'S  
ROOTS**  
Christopher Hayes

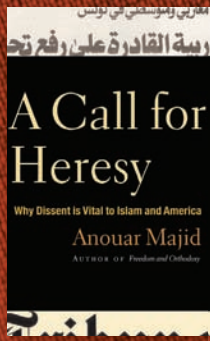
**FULL-SPECTRUM  
BLACKWATER**  
Jeremy Scahill

**TODD HAYNES'S  
DYLANS**  
Kent Jones

DECEMBER 24, 2007  
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**THE RISE  
AND FALL  
AND RISE  
OF NUCLEAR  
PROLIFERATION**  
**JONATHAN SCHELL**

# DARE TO BE A HERETIC



Don't miss the interview with Anouar Majid on *Bill Moyers Journal*! (Available on their website.)

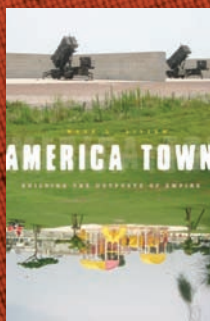
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MINNESOTA

## Letters

### Eye of the Beholder Department

WHITMORE LAKE, MICH.

What's with those soulless zombie eyes in the November 26 issue? Steve Brodner's caricatures are hideous! I couldn't believe they were illustrating essays that were endorsing the candidates. The issue itself, however, was spectacular.

TRAVIS ROY

NEW YORK CITY

What a delight it was to see Steve Brodner's caricatures of the candidates on your cover. Each one was dead on, and marvelously witty. Really remarkable.

EDWARD SOREL

### Hold the Sequins

NEW YORK CITY

Graham Usher, in "Musharraf's Emergency" [Nov. 26], writes that Benazir Bhutto "wears the soul of Pakistan like a sequined gown." I'm all for colorful writing, and this is definitely the memorable phrase in a rather gray piece, but what does it mean? When I see photos of Bhutto, she is wearing nonrevealing robes and a headscarf. Does she have a secret life as a *Cosmo* cover girl? Does the soul of Pakistan, whatever that is, long to fling off its traditional garb and go to the Oscars? Is Usher saying that Pakistanis are as mesmerized by Bhutto's claim to represent their aspirations as a pop star's fans are drawn to her sultry, but tawdry, beauty? Or is his point that Bhutto has taken something organic and profound—the soul of Pakistan—and transmuted it into something Western and self-dramatizing? Are sequined gowns bad or good? Whatever, Bhutto has enough to answer for without being saddled with sexualizing metaphors.

KATHA POLLITT

### Civilized Versus Savage

VIENNA, VA.

Re "Voting for Torture" [Nov. 26]: since refusal to recognize waterboarding as torture seems acceptable in our Pax

[letters@thenation.com](mailto:letters@thenation.com)



Americana, I suggest revisiting history. After the Spanish-American War, hearings before Henry Cabot Lodge's Senate Committee on the Philippines, in 1902, caused national outrage when brutality by some US officers and soldiers was revealed. Witnesses testified on widespread use of the "water cure" developed by priests during the Inquisition. "His suffering must be that of a man who is drowning but who cannot drown." President Theodore Roosevelt was outraged, too: "Great as the provocation has been in dealing with the foes who habitually resort to treachery, murder and torture against our men, nothing can justify...the use of torture or inhuman conduct...on the part of the American Army."

DON W. LONG

### Smile When You Call Me Pre-emptive

NEW YORK CITY

In "Hawking War Guilt" [Nov. 12], Jim Sleeper carelessly includes me in a list of journalists who, before the Iraq War began, "struck pre-emptively at many who foresaw reruns of the Vietnam War's trumped-up pretexts, overkill and quagmires." He doesn't cite specifics, and in my case he can't, because I never did strike "pre-emptively" at anyone, except those who thought the war was a good idea. In fact, I praised Al Gore in *Slate* for his excellent antiwar speech in October 2002 and, as a brand-new columnist for *Time* in 2003, was extremely skeptical about the war. I foolishly expressed grudging support for the war once on *Meet the Press* on the eve of the invasion, but I never wrote anything in support of the war or against those who opposed it.

JOE KLEIN

### Sleeper Replies

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Joe Klein is half right. He voiced doubts about the war during the run-up and so doesn't belong on my list of pundits who "struck pre-emptively" at dissenters. But he leapt to triumphalist nation-building

(continued on page 23)

# Iran's Nukes Fade Away

The just-released National Intelligence Estimate, which concludes that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003, should lead to a change in the Bush Administration's

dangerous and deluded policy of coercive diplomacy. But rather than using the NIE to announce a policy shift, an Administration stripped of credibility is still arguing the case for ratcheting up pressure on Tehran and for refusing to withdraw the threat of military force.

The NIE repudiates a 2005 estimate the White House has used to depict an Iran relentlessly working to develop nuclear weapons, and it's a ringing vindication of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has argued for years that there's no evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. If the new NIE, which incorporates the findings of sixteen intelligence agencies, represents the intelligence community's resistance to the meddling of White House hardliners, it's most welcome. It should certainly encourage stronger resistance to Administration saber rattling from the media and Congress members; too many of the latter—including leading Democrats—have accepted White House alarmism on Iran.

The findings also support those who argue that the Administration squandered a chance four years ago to strike a grand bargain that could have made Tehran a partner for regional stability. Iran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program, it appears, came on the heels of a May 2003 diplomatic overture to Washington. That feeler outlined Iran's willingness to end support for anti-Israeli militants like Hamas and Hezbollah, take action against Al Qaeda and accept the Saudi initiative on the Israel-Palestine conflict in return for an end to US sanctions and hostile behavior against Iran. In what may eventually be recognized as one of America's greatest foreign policy blunders, besides the invasion of Iraq, the White House spurned Tehran's offer, which has only strengthened Iran's position in the re-

gion while bolstering its hardliners.

The Administration is making a similarly grave mistake by ignoring the implications of this newest NIE. It will be very difficult for other members of the UN Security Council, especially Russia and China, to support new sanctions. It will also be difficult for them to continue to buy into Washington's conditions for serious negotiations with Iran—namely that Tehran freeze all enrichment activity.

The world should be relieved that the NIE findings make a US military strike less likely. The Administration's approach should not be more coercive diplomacy; it should be negotiations without preconditions, aimed at establishing a broader dialogue.

Coercive diplomacy has been a failure because it seeks to deny Iran uranium enrichment for civilian purposes, which it has a right to under the Nonproliferation Treaty, and because it has not given Tehran incentives for negotiation, other than a possible removal of sanctions. The goal of negotiations should not be denial of enrichment but a sufficiently intrusive inspections process to ensure that Iran does not switch its civilian program to a military one. In addition, the Administration and its EU negotiating partners need to add some carrots to future negotiations: an end to sanctions, normalization of relations, increased trade and a greater role for Iran in regional security.

Engaging Iran in this manner is the best way to constrain its nuclear ambitions—and a good model for how to halt proliferation in general, perhaps the greatest danger of the new nuclear era, as Jonathan Schell argues on page 11. It is also the best way to open Iran to international influence and thus offer hope to the country's many reformers, who want better relations with the United States.

EDITORIAL



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VOLUME 285, NUMBER 21, DECEMBER 24, 2007  
PRINTED DECEMBER 5

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**INTERNET:** Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com).

Printed on 100% recycled 40% post-consumer acid- and chlorine-free paper, in the USA.

## This week @thenation.com

### NEWS & ANALYSIS

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Christopher Hayes: Heartland Forum Tackles the Real Issues

Ari Berman: What the NIE on Iran Means to Democrats

Jayati Vora: Students for a Free Pakistan

### NATION POLL

What progressive group has made a real difference in 2007?

### VIDEO NATION

The Rev. Jesse Jackson on the subprime tsunami

### WEB LETTERS

Continuously published reader mail

# Ron Paul's Roots

Although not a single vote has been cast, it's safe to say that Ron Paul has run the most successful libertarian presidential campaign in American history. Sure, the Libertarian Party nominates a candidate every term, but said candidate struggles to garner money and media attention. Paul, however, has become a legitimate phenomenon, if not a particularly likely GOP nominee. With his full-throated rejection of the imperial

## COMMENT

project in Iraq and a radical vision of a stripped-down state (though, oddly, one that still forces pregnancy), he's attracting large crowds at campaign events and polling at a healthy 8 percent in New Hampshire. In November he broke the single-day fundraising record with a \$4.2 million haul.

So you would think that the circle of DC-based libertarians centered around the CATO Institute would be ecstatic. Not quite. "He doesn't strike me as the kind of person that's tapping into those elements of American public opinion that might lead towards a sustainable move in the libertarian direction," says CATO president Brink Lindsey.

Self-identified libertarians may be a tiny portion of the electorate, but small numbers have never stood in the way of bitter intramural sectarian disputes. When Lindsey says that Paul "comes from a different part of the libertarian universe than I do," he's referring to the libertarian version of the Trotsky/Lenin split, which opened up in the early 1980s and continues to echo through libertarianism today.

In 1981 American libertarianism's founding father, Murray Rothbard, had a falling out with CATO leaders over their weak-kneed conception of libertarianism as "low tax liberalism." After being kicked off the board of the organization he had helped found, Rothbard, a Jewish, Bronx-born economist who'd studied with Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, founded the Mises Institute in Auburn, Alabama. The institute became the intellectual center for what Rothbard protégé Lew Rockwell termed "paleolibertarianism," a worldview rooted squarely in the populist Old Right tradition. Paleolibertarians tend to be culturally conservative (attracting, on the edges, a fair share of Confederacy nostalgists and white supremacists), opposed to immigration and zealously against imperial foreign policy and the Federal Reserve. "Ron Paul has shown that the core of the state is the Pentagon and the Federal Reserve," says Rockwell, who was Paul's Congressional chief of staff from 1978 to 1982.

The division between paleolibertarians, centered around the Mises Institute, and cosmopolitan libertarians, centered around CATO, is also a case of "culture clash," according to Justin Raimondo, editor of *Antiwar.com* and prominent member of the Mises set. "There's the populist wing of the libertarian movement, and then there's the Washington crowd that's still trying to sell libertarianism, or their version of it, to elites. These people want to go along and get along. As long as they can abort their babies and sodomize each other and take as many drugs as they want to, they are happy. They don't care who is being killed in Iraq and how many Iraqis are dying. That's their hierarchy of values."

As you can tell, there's no love lost between the two camps. One DC-based libertarian—who asked not to be named because

he “would like to avoid getting endless 2 AM calls from nuts yelling at me for not agreeing with the gold standard”—told me he thinks Rockwell is “one of the most loathsome people ever to set foot on this continent.”

But nothing breeds harmony like success, and the Paul bandwagon is now getting big enough for both the Hatfields and the McCoyes to get on board. “Our readership is very enthusiastic,”

says Nick Gillespie, editor of the DC-based magazine *Reason*. A few months ago *Reason* published an article titled “Is He Good for the Libertarians?” That no longer seems an open question. “On basic fundamental issues he speaks strongly for libertarians, regardless of the flavoring,” says Gillespie, who recently co-wrote a pro-Paul op-ed in the *Washington Post*.

This gets to the paradox at the heart of the Paul campaign:

## Noted.

**FACEBOOK'S ABOUT-FACE:** The popular social networking website **Facebook** just backed down from a controversial new advertising program after a revolt by thousands of members. Facebook had launched Beacon, which was using “social advertising” technology to broadcast information about online purchases without many users’ consent. The idea was to convert private commerce into public endorsements: “Ben Bloom ate at the restaurant Junnoon,” read one ad, with a prominent head shot of Ben displayed next to the company logo. But what if Ben didn’t want his lunch date to be an ad? Beacon enrolled people automatically, offering users a choice to “opt out” of each ad on an individual basis.

Many people didn’t like that, so they protested, naturally, on Facebook. **MoveOn** started a group demanding that Beacon switch to “opt in”—a default to protect uninformed users—and allow people to reject the program completely in one click. A new group, Facebook: Stop Invading My Privacy!, quickly swelled to more than 50,000 members. It was a hub for activism, news and stories about Beacon snafus, including Christmas surprises spoiled by posted ads. Students from across the country signed up to lead the group as self-declared “privacy avengers,” and its message board drew more than 1,000 posts in less than two weeks. Then Facebook conceded to the first demand, scaling back Beacon so users must choose to participate. MoveOn declared victory, crediting “everyday Internet users.” The partial retreat was especially striking because last year, a much larger protest group of 700,000 users did not compel Facebook to abandon the “feed,” a new feature that blasts updates about people to their personal networks. This time, however, the

activism was not limited to decentralized complaints. MoveOn added critical leadership and a practical reform agenda, while users spread the word about Facebook on Facebook.

ARI MELBER

**LIFE IN THE GARDEN STATE:** On December 3 a New Jersey State Senate committee voted to rid the justice system of state-sanctioned murder, once and for all. With the Death Penalty Elimination bill on a fast track and Governor **Jon Corzine** vowing to sign it, New Jersey could become the first state to abolish the death penalty since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976 by the Supreme Court.

The bill hit a roadblock (built of political cowardice) last spring, when Senate Democrats—facing elections—sidelined a vote on it to avoid looking “soft on crime.” Now the same lawmakers may pass the law as was originally recommended in January by a commission that had held months of public hearings on the issue. With executions stalled across the country pending a Supreme Court ruling on lethal injection, now is the time for other states to hold similar hearings to rethink their death penalty laws. This has already happened in New York, California and other states. In Ohio—whose last execution was gruesomely botched—a judge recently announced plans to scrutinize the way the state kills its prisoners.

Lawmakers in search of alternatives to the death penalty will likely take their cues from New Jersey, whose legislation exchanges death sentences for life without the possibility of parole. It’s a commonly suggested substitute—even among death penalty foes—but one riddled with many of the same flaws as the death penalty itself: racism, class bias and overzealous prosecutions that lead to wrongful convictions. If there truly is, as the New

Jersey commission concluded, “increasing evidence that the death penalty is inconsistent with evolving standards of decency,” surely the same can be said for a punishment that condemns people—including juveniles and the innocent—to a living death that can only be described as cruel and unusual.

LILIANA SEGURA

**RESCUER DOWN UNDER:** Almost two decades ago, **Peter Garrett** and his band, **Midnight Oil**, were at the top of their edgy, politically charged international fame. In May 1990 the militantly green Australian rockers commandeered a spot outside New York City’s Exxon Building, pitching a banner that read MIDNIGHT OIL MAKES YOU DANCE, EXXON OIL MAKES US SICK before launching into a blistering version of their anthem “Dreamworld,” which contained a snarling message for corporate polluters: “Your dreamworld is just about to end.”

Now Garrett—the law school graduate turned singer who once declared, “We can’t treat the world like a garbage dump, and there’s more to life than profit and loss”—is off the streets and into the suites as Australia’s environment minister. A Labour Party member of Parliament for three years, Garrett was appointed to the cabinet by new prime minister **Kevin Rudd**, who has pledged to radically alter his country’s approach to global warming. Garrett will be in the forefront of that push, although now he’s the one feeling the pressure from environmentalists. Australia’s Green Party, which received more than a million votes nationally and now holds five seats in the country’s closely divided Senate, is prodding Garrett to abandon the relative caution he has displayed since trading his T-shirt for a politician’s suit. The Greens are hoping Garrett hasn’t forgotten that he was right about there being more to life than profit and loss.

JOHN NICHOLS

he's the candidate least likely to hedge or obfuscate, the most apt to spell out in sharp detail his underlying principles—and yet he's also something of an ideological cipher, attracting the support of everyone from hipstertarian kids on Northeast college campuses to John Birchers in Texas. "You have this weird group of people," says Lindsey. "You've got libertarians, you've got antiwar types and you've got nationalists and xenophobes. I'm not sure that is leading anywhere. I think he's a sui generis type of guy who's cobbling together some irreconcilable constituencies, many of which are backward-looking rather than forward-looking."

But even if the Paul campaign doesn't point the way toward some lasting, powerful, paleo-cosmo libertarian coalition (and, really, let's hope it doesn't), he is at least providing libertarians with a long-awaited Kumbaya moment. "There are personal animosities that will probably never heal," says Raimondo. "But, you know, maybe Ron Paul can unite us all." CHRISTOPHER HAYES

## Blackwater's Business\$

Gunning down seventeen Iraqi civilians in an incident the military has labeled "criminal." Multiple Congressional investigations. A federal grand jury. Allegations of illegal arms smuggling. Wrongful death lawsuits brought by families of dead employees and US soldiers. A federal lawsuit alleging war crimes. Charges of steroid use by trigger-happy mercenaries. Allegations of "significant tax evasion." The US-

### COMMENT

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alleging war crimes. Charges of steroid use by trigger-happy mercenaries. Allegations of "significant tax evasion." The US-

### FORUM ON VENEZUELA

On December 2, by a slim margin—50.7 percent to 49.3 percent—Venezuelans rejected a slate of sixty-nine constitutional reforms championed by President Hugo Chávez. Fiercely debated in Venezuela, the referendum sparked a spirited discussion among our contributors. Go to [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com) for a forum with articles by Chesa Boudin, Sujatha Fernandes, Greg Grandin, Mark Weisbrot and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl.

## Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

### A Short Summary of What Karl Rove Now Says About The Origins of the War in Iraq

Bush wasn't in a rush for war,  
But Congress made him move much faster.  
I can't believe that anyone  
Could think that this is our disaster.

installed government in Iraq labeling its forces "murderers." With a new scandal breaking practically every day, one would think Blackwater security would be on the ropes, facing a corporate meltdown or even a total wipeout. But it seems that business for the company has never been better, as it continues to pull in major federal contracts. And its public demeanor grows bolder and cockier by the day.

Rather than hiding out and hoping for the scandals to fade, the Bush Administration's preferred mercenary company has launched a major rebranding campaign, changing its name to Blackwater Worldwide and softening its logo: once a bear paw in the site of a sniper scope, it's now a bear claw wrapped in two half ovals—sort of like the outline of a globe with a United Nations feel. Its website boasts of a corporate vision "guided by integrity, innovation, and a desire for a safer world." Blackwater mercenaries are now referred to as "global stabilization professionals." Blackwater's 38-year-old owner, Erik Prince, was No. 11 in *Details* magazine's "Power 50," the men "who control your viewing patterns, your buying habits, your anxieties, your lust... the people who have taken over the space in your head."

In one of the company's most bizarre recent actions, on December 1 Blackwater paratroopers staged a dramatic aerial landing, complete with Blackwater flags and parachutes—not in Baghdad or Kabul but in San Diego at Qualcomm Stadium during the halftime show at the San Diego State/BYU football game. The location was interesting, given that Blackwater is fighting fierce local opposition to its attempt to open a new camp—Blackwater West—on 824 acres in the small rural community of Potrero, just outside San Diego. Blackwater's parachute squad plans to land at the Armed Forces Bowl in Texas this month and the Virginia Gold Cup in May. The company recently sponsored a NASCAR racer, and it has teamed up with gun manufacturer Sig Sauer to create a Blackwater Special Edition full-sized 9-millimeter pistol with the company logo on the grip. It comes with a Limited Lifetime Warranty. For \$18, parents can purchase infant onesies with the company logo.

In recent weeks, Blackwater has indicated it might quit Iraq. "We see the security market diminishing," Prince told the *Wall Street Journal* in October. Yet on December 3 Blackwater posted job listings for "security specialists" and snipers as a result of its State Department diplomatic security "contract expansion." While its name may be mud in the human rights world, Blackwater has not only made big money in Iraq (about \$1 billion in State Department contracts); it has secured a reputation as a company that keeps US officials alive by any means necessary. The dirty open secret in Washington is that Blackwater has done its job in Iraq, even if it has done so by valuing the lives of Iraqis much lower than those of US VIPs. That badass image will serve it well as it expands globally.

Prince promises that Blackwater "is going to be more of a full spectrum" operation. Amid the cornucopia of scandals, Blackwater is bidding for a share of a five-year, \$15 billion contract with the Pentagon to "fight terrorists with drug-trade ties." Perhaps the firm will join the mercenary giant DynCorp in Colombia or Bolivia or be sent into Mexico on a "training" mission. This "war on drugs" contract would put Blackwater in the arena with the godfathers of the war business, including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon.

In addition to its robust business in law enforcement, mili-

tary and homeland security training, Blackwater is branching out. Here are some of its current projects and initiatives:

§ Blackwater affiliate Greystone Ltd., registered offshore in Barbados, is an old-fashioned mercenary operation offering “personnel from the best militaries throughout the world” for hire by governments and private organizations. It also boasts of a “multi-national peacekeeping program,” with forces “specializing in crowd control and less than lethal techniques and military personnel for the less stable areas of operation.”

§ Prince’s Total Intelligence Solutions, headed by three CIA veterans (among them Blackwater’s number two, Cofer Black), puts CIA-type services on the open market for hire by corporations or governments.

§ Blackwater is launching an armored vehicle called the Grizzly, which the company characterizes as the most versatile in history. Blackwater intends to modify it to be legal for use on US highways.

§ Blackwater’s aviation division has some forty aircraft, including turboprop planes that can be used for unorthodox landings. It has ordered a Super Tucano paramilitary plane from Brazil, which can be used in counterinsurgency operations. In August the aviation division won a \$92 million contract with the Pentagon to operate flights in Central Asia.

§ It recently flight-tested the unmanned Polar 400 airship, which may be marketed to the Department of Homeland Security for use in monitoring the US-Mexico border and to “military, law enforcement, and non-government customers.”

§ A fast-growing maritime division has a new, 184-foot vessel that has been fitted for potential paramilitary use.

Meanwhile, Blackwater is deep in the camp of GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Cofer Black is Romney’s senior adviser on counterterrorism. At the recent CNN/YouTube debate, when Romney refused to call waterboarding torture, he said, “I’m not going to specify the specific means of what is and what is not torture so that the people that we capture will know what things we’re able to do and what things we’re not able to do. And I get that advice from Cofer Black, who is a person who was responsible for counterterrorism in the CIA for some thirty-five years.” That was an exaggeration of Black’s career at the CIA (he was there twenty-eight years and head of counterterrorism for only three), but a Romney presidency could make Blackwater’s business under Bush look like a church bake sale.

In short, Blackwater is moving ahead at full steam. Individual scandals clearly aren’t enough to slow it down. The company’s critics in the Democratic-controlled Congress must confront the root of the problem: the government is in the midst of its most radical privatization in history, and companies like Blackwater are becoming ever more deeply embedded in the war apparatus. Until this system is brought down, the world’s the limit for Blackwater Worldwide—and as its rebranding campaign shows, Blackwater knows it.

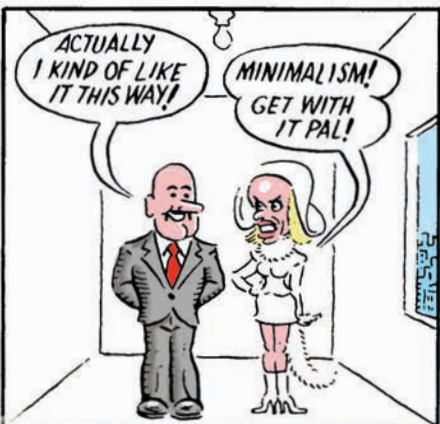
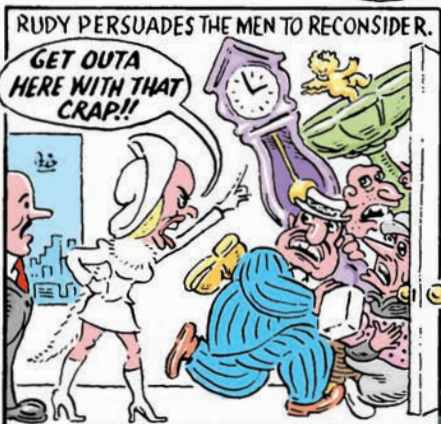
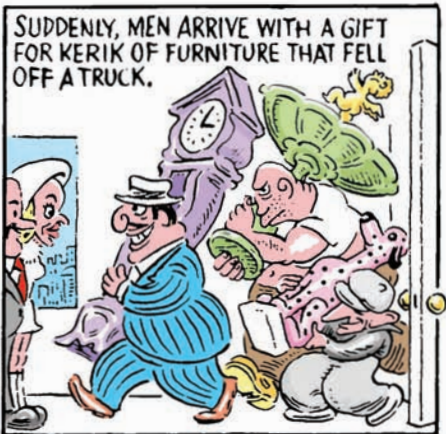
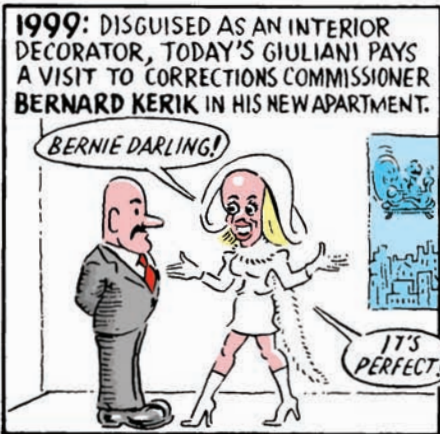
JEREMY SCAHILL

*Jeremy Scabill, a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is the author of Blackwater (Nation Books).*

# Comix Nation

## RUDY REMODELS

by ROBERT GROSSMAN



# Patricia J. Williams

## The Audacity of Oprah

This Christmas, the film *The Great Debaters* will come to theaters nationwide. Starring Denzel Washington and produced by Oprah Winfrey, it tells the story of an award-winning team of debaters from Wiley College, a small, historically black institution founded in 1873 and located in Marshall, Texas. In the 1930s the debate team, coached by poet Melvin Tolson, surpassed nearly every other team in the country in contests against universities as far-flung as the University of Southern California and Oxford. Nonetheless, the Wiley team was never officially accorded championship status because the national debate society of that day did not formally recognize black participation. Though unrewarded then, many of the graduates of Wiley's debate team went on to become the most eloquently influential movers in the civil rights movement, most notably James Farmer Jr., who founded the Congress of Racial Equality.

Recently the *New York Times* ran a front-page story titled FOR STRUGGLING BLACK COLLEGE, HOPES OF BIG-SCREEN REVIVAL; it was about the effect that the film is having, even before its release, on Wiley College today. Wiley did not fare well through the 1980s and '90s and came very close to closing. Thanks to the glow of celebrity interest, however, the school's buildings have been handsomely refurbished, Wal-Mart has promised to set up a scholarship fund and enrollment has suddenly doubled. The *Times* story ends with a moving description of a young woman about to graduate, of her plans to attend medical school, of the room Wiley has given her to dream.

It's a feel-good story, no doubt: a very satisfying saga of the aspiring little engine that could, then did—and still had to wait all these years to be heralded for its remarkable accomplishment. It's also a story that plugs into a deeply iconic American narrative: the battered underdog picked up, brushed off and ultimately saved by the success of the spotlight—and nary a moment too soon. The story is also iconically American in the way it loops between reality and Hollywood dream. The real Wiley College gets legitimated in its educational mission by virtue of a fictionalized representation.

The role of media, particularly the entertainment media, in allowing us to understand our civic life is not to be underestimated. Great actors, great orators and great businessmen draw upon similar thespian skills—it's what makes them likable, salable, commercial. We Americans shovel money at those who can best perform our fantasies.

I say all this because I'm intrigued by the brouhaha attending Oprah Winfrey's decision to endorse Barack Obama's candidacy. The Internet is positively foaming at her decision to campaign for him. Celebrities—from Toby Keith to Sammy Davis Jr., from Barbra Streisand to Jon Bon Jovi—have always stumped for candidates, but a lot of people seem to feel that Oprah is different. She's not a background singer; she is no

mere decorative backdrop. Oprah can turn a book into a best-seller!, fume the blogs. When she lends her magic touch, it's somehow complicated or even unfair. I suspect that some of the controversy comes from those who like Obama and don't relate to Oprah's television persona, or vice versa. But it's interesting to contemplate: what does it mean that some people are so concerned about whether this particular celebrity ought to express herself in the political realm?

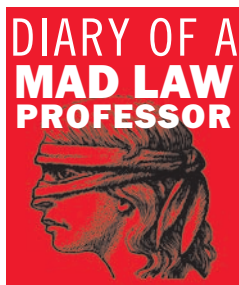
In a very straightforward sense, it's no wonder that the Double O's are such an arresting team: one of the world's most influential black men links arms with the world's most powerful black woman, and together they sell out an 18,000-seat arena in Columbia, South Carolina, so fast that the computers crash. It's an unprecedented performance of black power in the heart of the old Confederacy. For someone who lived through the most hateful moments of the civil rights era, it's exhilarating and hopeful—and vaguely scary in the vertigo it induces.

From another perspective, to many people Oprah embodies a comforting sort of motherly everywoman, whose embrace has been perhaps too comfortably nonpartisan. If some part of her audience felt betrayed when she lost more weight than the average soccer mom, it stands to reason that they'll feel betrayed when she takes an overt stand in the political realm.

Beyond that, however, Oprah Winfrey and Barack Obama are indeed remarkable for how unstilted they are in the public arena. Like the Wiley College debate team of old, they defy the sideshow of the exceptionally "articulate" colored person. The two of them are our most fluent contemporary orators. They are brilliant speakers, easy with large audiences, and both have a talent for translating hard topics into lucid argument. There's good reason both Obama and Winfrey are so often described as trustworthy.

In addition, their particular form of raced celebrity enshrines the notion of American mobility at a moment when it is—in reality—sorely vexed. As I observed in an earlier column, Obama radiates a kind of hope that crosses the immigrant epic with a romantic desire for rainbow diversity. Similarly, Oprah is the black, female, Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches story of our day. From her humble beginnings as a traumatized little girl, albeit pluckier even than Orphan Annie (we Americans do love "pluck"), Oprah reinvented herself by sheer will and rose against all odds to the very top of the phantasmagorical bubble machine we call the entertainment industry. There's a general fear of, as well as attraction to, that bubble. Is the celebrity a platform or a dog-and-pony show? Is it serious debate or entertainment? How easy the purchase of cynicism.

But if we're lucky, maybe something enduring comes of artfully imagining our ideals. Maybe, as with Wiley College, that's how we escort them into renewed life. Maybe indeed it is not too much to hope that the redemptive power of an intelligent dream might reinvigorate the exhaustion of our embattled political landscape. ■



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## Eric Alterman

# What's Really Wrong With the MSM?

Of course, far more is wrong with the mainstream media than can be described, or even enumerated, in one column. But let's give it a shot, using only items that have come up since my last column, all of which speak to the issue of why its members have forfeited our collective trust.

1. *Its members consistently defer to conservative Republican Presidents with a history of deliberate deception, allowing them to define their terms.* "One of the reasons for not [calling chaos in Iraq a civil war] was, you know, honestly, a concern that because the White House has contended that this is not a civil war, that using the phrase amounted to a kind of unnecessary political statement." —Bill Keller, executive editor, *New York Times*.

2. *Its members invite Republican Congressmen, known to be not merely unreliable but delusional, to lie about Democratic Congressmen.* When challenged, they reply that they cannot be bothered to discern the truth: *Time's* Joe Klein, a pundit who terms the Democratic Party "a party with absolutely no redeeming social value," one whose members "make fools of themselves even when they speak the truth," recently informed the magazine's readers that "tone-deaf" Democrats in the House had passed legislation that "would require the surveillance of every foreign-terrorist target's calls to be approved by the FISA court, an institution founded to protect the rights of U.S. citizens only," and thereby "give terrorists the same legal protections as Americans." The liberal blogosphere, led by *Salon's* Glenn Greenwald, demonstrated that this statement was categorically false, as the bill reads: "A court order is not required for electronic surveillance directed at the acquisition of the contents of any communication between persons that are not known to be United States persons and are reasonably believed to be located outside the United States." *Time* eventually printed a correction but refused to adjudicate between truth and falsehood, claiming merely that Democrats and Republicans interpret the bill differently. Klein shrugged off criticism by saying, "I have neither the time nor legal background to figure out who's right." Later Republican Peter Hoekstra, who is also on record insisting that the United States had discovered a WMD program in Iraq but that the CIA had conspired to cover it up, revealed that he had been a key source for Klein's reporting.

3. *Its members invite conservative Republican individuals known to be insane, unbalanced and unconcerned with the truth to lie about Democratic presidential candidates on the front page of their newspapers and when confronted respond that it is not their job to determine the truth.* The *Washington Post's* Perry Bacon published a recent front-page article giving voice to right-wing paranoids, racists and assorted hatemongers who insist that Barack Obama is a secret Muslim. Sources included the Moonie-financed *Insight* online magazine, *Human Events* (home to Ann Coulter),

demagogues Michael Savage and Rush Limbaugh, and some guy who posted on the Internet somewhere. Beyond the Obama campaign's denials, nowhere in the piece did Bacon inform readers that these allegations are demonstrably false. In an online chat, the paper's Lois Romano explicitly defended the practice, claiming that "airing some of this and giving [Obama] a chance to deny its accuracy could be viewed as setting the record straight."

4. *Its corporations fire, and then buy the silence of, their own reporters in order to hide the truth, when it involves the draft records of certain conservative Republican Presidents.* After being fired by CBS News as the chosen fall-person for Dan Rather's story on George W. Bush's draft avoidance, producer Mary Mapes published *Truth and Duty*, a book that insisted the story was true, the documents were real and she had been the victim of a deal between CBS's parent, Viacom, and the Bush White House to quash the story. After the book's publication, CBS paid Mapes an undisclosed sum to settle her lawsuit against the company and required her to sign a confidentiality agreement covering the deal. The three other CBS staffers working with Rather on the story were also fired and given settlements, one reportedly worth \$3 million. Recall that the documents in question, while never authenticated, have never been proven to be forgeries, and CBS's own committee of inquiry took no position on their

veracity.

5. *Its members are so in thrall to the powerful conservative Republican figures they cover that they make up excuses for their self-serving behavior.* Appearing on Brian Lehrer's WNYC radio show, Mark Halperin, former political director of ABC News, now a top analyst for ABC and *Time*, offered his views on the reason Senate minority leader Trent Lott was resigning: "I think that this is a true 'wants to spend more time with his family' case." Halperin was apparently unaware that Lott—whose politically connected brother-in-law was recently indicted on bribery charges—himself failed to offer this lamest of excuses and also that his resignation came just in time to avoid the enactment of a tough new ethics law relating to retiring legislators and their future lobbying practices.

6. *Its members ignore the substance of politics and instead focus obsessively on atmospherics, leaving voters clueless about the politicians for whom they are expected to vote.* "I've always felt that we did a disservice to voters and the public by filling the news hole with too much horse race and not enough information to let them make a decision on who the best President would be," Halperin explains in a new book. "We should examine a candidate's public record and full life as opposed to his or her campaign performance," he then added in a widely quoted *mea culpa* on the *New York Times* op-ed page. Alas, within a week of writing those words, Halperin published two pieces on the *Time* website that focused exclusively on the various campaigns, with nary a substance-related syllable in either one. ■



# The Old and New Shapes of Nuclear Danger

During the cold war, the driving force was the bilateral arms race; now it's proliferation.

by JONATHAN SCHELL

**"A**fter I became an American citizen, the thing that stands out so clearly in my mind is the Reagan/Gorbachev summit at Reykjavik," California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said recently. "The leaders of the two most powerful nations on earth were actually discussing the elimination of nuclear weapons. Such a breathtaking possibility. I still remember the thrill of it."

The occasion was a conference at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, led by the four authors of an article that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* last January. It called for "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," as championed by Reagan and Gorbachev at Reykjavik, and its authors were George Shultz, Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan (Shultz was present at Reykjavik); William Perry, Secretary of Defense under Bill Clinton; Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Richard Nixon; and former Senator Sam Nunn—four archbishops of the cold war nuclear priesthood, most of whom until now have dismissed the idea of nuclear abolition as undiscussably utopian and naïve. The four cited proliferation and the terrorist danger, and warned that the world is entering "a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically costly than Cold War deterrence." Significantly, they invoked moral as well as practical reasons for their proposal, approvingly quoting Reagan's opinion that nuclear weapons are "totally irrational, totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilization." The conference at Hoover was the second in a series convened to explore concrete pathways to the goal of abolition. The group will eventually publish a book and hold an

international conference to present their findings.

As Schwarzenegger self-deprecatingly observed, he knows more about weight lifting than throw-weights; yet he went on to speak compellingly of the new nuclear dangers. (It is a perverse pleasure to be able to quote Schwarzenegger, Shultz, Kissinger, Perry, Nunn and Reagan approvingly in a single article in *The Nation*, which normally does not keep company of this kind. The hopeful aspect may be that in our fractious

time there are still some issues that can recall us to our common humanity.) And not only former weight lifters and nuclear priests but anyone who reads a newspaper can see that nuclear dangers are spreading like the brush fires that were sweeping through Southern California as the conference met. The United States has, of course, got itself stuck in Iraq in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and facilities for making them, including nuclear ones. In Iran the government is racing to produce nuclear power fuels that, with a few extra touches, could become nuclear weapons materials. To halt this development, many inside and outside the Bush Administration have favored a military attack on Iran, though a recent National Intelligence Estimate has declared that while Iran once had an active nuclear weapons program, it was suspended in 2003.

The Pentagon has even developed plans for nuclear strikes against Iran as well as other

possible proliferators. In nuclear-armed Pakistan, the state is in crisis and the danger is rising that some of its nuclear bombs or materials will fall into hands even more irresponsible than those currently holding them. A recent op-ed in the *New York Times* by liberal hawk Michael O'Hanlon and neoconservative Frederick Kagan suggested that the United States might intervene militarily in Pakistan. The mission would be to take control



of the country's nuclear arsenal and help "hold the country's center." (If, in a neoconservative dream-come-true, the United States assailed both Iran and Pakistan, it would be at war simultaneously in four contiguous Islamic countries: Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.)

Waves of fear are rippling across the Middle East and beyond from these crises and wars. In this year alone, twelve other nations in the Middle East have announced their interest in acquiring nuclear energy. Israel, of course, has been a nuclear power since about 1967, and in a still mysterious episode, on September 6 it bombed a facility in Syria that allegedly was part of a nuclear program assisted by North Korea, which tested its first nuclear weapon last year. Although North Korea has declared a readiness to give up its arsenal, no one knows if or when it will actually do so. Nor have the cold war nuclear powers surrendered their arsenals; on the contrary, they are retooling and retargeting them at the proliferators. The United States has founded an Air Force command called Global Strike Task Force, which enables it to target "any dark corner of the world" with conventional or nuclear munitions. Britain and France have announced similar policies. Thus, from Pyongyang to Tehran to Tel Aviv to Washington, a new global struggle has been born, matching many existing nuclear powers against aspiring nuclear powers.

Is there any chance that the abolition initiative will be taken up not only by people retired from power but by those who are in power or seek it, such as the current crop of presidential candidates? There are some hopeful signs. The nuclear question, an exile from discussion since the end of the cold war, has begun to seep in around the edges of the campaign. In the Democrats' August 19 debate, John Edwards pledged to "eliminate nuclear weapons"—and got a brisk round of applause. Dennis Kucinich was championing nuclear abolition long before the *Journal* article was written and has remained an eloquent and steadfast proponent of the cause. In a speech mostly detailing many sensible steps to reduce nuclear dangers, Bill Richardson committed himself to the same goal. The most significant conversion to abolition, however, was made by Barack Obama in a major foreign policy speech in October. He stated, "We'll keep our commitment under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty on the long road towards eliminating nuclear weapons.... As we do this, we'll be in a better position to lead the world in enforcing the rules of the road if we firmly abide by those rules. It's time to stop giving countries like Iran and North Korea an excuse."

Hillary Clinton took note of the *Journal* article in an article of her own in *Foreign Affairs*, but her substance and tone were notably different from Obama's. She reported that the *Journal* four had advocated "reducing reliance on nuclear weapons" and promised to do the same. But the very title of the article had been something quite different: "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons"—a goal unmentioned and not embraced by Clinton. As if to underscore the evasion, she claimed she could "reassert our nonproliferation leadership" merely by negotiating an

agreement to further reduce US and Russian arsenals. In a remarkable piece of double-think, she added that this "dramatic initiative" would "send a strong message of nuclear restraint to the world, while we retain enough strength to deter others from trying to match our arsenal." Deterring others from matching the United States is crucially different from deterring them from attacking the United States, for it commits the nation, as the Bush Administration does, to indefinite nuclear superiority over all other nations. In short, her "dramatic" act of "restraint" would leave the United States in a position of global nuclear dominance for the indefinite future. It's hard to imagine a stance more likely to accelerate nuclear proliferation.

The statements of Obama and Clinton have drawn a line between the campaigns of these two Democratic front-runners on an issue of supreme importance for our time. Obama has embraced the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Clinton has not. Wouldn't this matter be as worthy of a few questions in the debates as, say, driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants or Obama's readiness to get verbally tough with Clinton?

So far, Reagan's legacy has found no takers among the Republican candidates, even as they claim with every other breath to be his heirs. The debate question for them would be whether their admiration for their hero extends to his vision of nuclear abolition, and if not, why not?

### Abolition in the First Era of the Nuclear Age

In the year of campaigning that lies ahead, we'll find out whether the nuclear question—a "presidential" issue if there ever was one—gets the attention it deserves. Developments in the world's multiplying nuclear hot spots, however, are not going to wait for pundits, pollsters and spinmasters. The need of the hour, with or without the candidates' participation, is to figure out the alarming new shape of nuclear danger, how it got that way and what to do about it. One approach to these questions is to look back at the Reykjavik summit and ask what its larger significance might be and whether it has the relevance to our day that has been claimed. Reykjavik occurred at a turning point of the cold war. Today we have entered what many call the second nuclear age. Does the first nuclear age have relevance for this second one?

The reaction in the immediate aftermath of Reykjavik would suggest that the answer is no. An impression arose that the negotiations had been a chaotic and dizzying bout of improvisation in which a clueless Reagan had somehow been lured into momentarily agreeing to abolition. In this telling, the whole episode, both embarrassing and futile, came off as a freakish event in which the leaders of the major cold war states, departing from their briefing books and perhaps their senses, somehow decided to give an airing to a proposal that all serious people knew to be utterly quixotic. However, the recently declassified Soviet and American Memoranda of Conversation of the event reveal that the summit was in fact a disciplined, sincere exploration and negotiation of the possibility of abolishing nuclear weapons. Each leader knows exactly what he wants. Each listens carefully to the other. Each is a rock-ribbed abolitionist. Each, indeed, has been an abolitionist for several years and has thought long and deeply about the subject. By the second day of the meeting,



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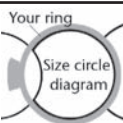
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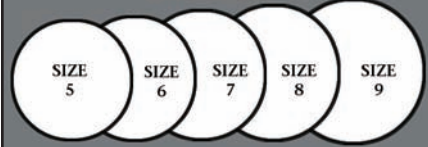
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each is prepared to surrender his country's entire nuclear arsenal on the spot. But their paths to the goal are different, and in the end—heartbreakingly—they cannot agree.

More important for understanding the present moment than this impressive performance is that the negotiation can be seen as the culmination of an evolution of thinking as long as the cold war. The problem presented by the advent of the bomb in 1945 was how to absorb such a stupendous, disproportionate force as the energy released from mass into the fluctuating, frail, contingent realm of historical events. A protracted effort at what might be called translation was required—a slow sifting and weighing, in heart and mind, of each aspect of the nuclear dilemma. For a single modern historical era, the cold war lasted a remarkably long time—and thereby offered a pedagogical advantage. Considered as a laboratory in which to examine the bomb, it provided ample leisure for investigation. You might say that it held the mysterious and elusive atomic fire steady in its tense grip long enough for people to discover some important things about it and to reflect on it quite deeply.

Most important, the bomb's uselessness for war was im-

## What might be possible today if a popular movement and a President were to cooperate in an attempt to rid the world of nuclear arms?

pressed upon its possessors. In this period, the nuclear-warfighting school, teaching that nuclear arms were just another weapon for war, was gradually eclipsed by the rise of the deterrence, or mutual-assured-destruction, school, teaching that the main objective of nuclear policy must be to assure that the weapons are never used. This strand of nuclear thinking seemed to reach a culmination in 1985, when Reagan and Gorbachev made their famous joint statement at the Geneva summit that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Observers might have thought the mutual-assured-destruction school had finally triumphed, once and for all. For decades right-wing politicians who rejected the doctrine had maintained that victory in a nuclear war was possible. Now their greatest champion, the ultraconservative Reagan, was standing beside a leader of the Soviet Union declaring otherwise. The decades of danger had not passed in vain. The illusion that anyone could win or gain any advantage from a nuclear war was officially dead.

Yet Reagan had not embraced the deterrence doctrine's corollary: namely, that nuclear arsenals must be preserved forever. It so happened that he despised deterrence, chiefly on moral grounds. He did indeed assess the realities of nuclear war in the same way as his liberal opponents, most of whom were wedded to deterrence, but his prescription for dealing with the situation could not have been more different. Neither, of course, did he agree any longer with his own tribe of nuclear hawks. He was on his own. He was a fervent nuclear abolitionist.

The theme first surfaced on March 23, 1983, in the third year of Reagan's presidency, when he made two radical proposals in the peroration of a speech on his military buildup. The first, later named the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), was to build a defensive system that would “intercept and destroy stra-

tegic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies,” thus rendering “these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.” That accomplished, the world—and this was the second blockbuster proposal—could proceed to “achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles,” which in turn would “pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves.”

Reagan's double shock caught his top officials by surprise—and almost all of them were appalled. They believed, quite correctly, that an impervious missile shield over the United States or any other country was a technological impossibility. Reagan seemed to have escaped from one of the grand illusions of the nuclear age (that a nuclear war could be won) into another (that a nuclear attack could be defended against). Furthermore, support for abolition among Administration officials was nil. Seen from their perspective, Reagan had committed the United States to two impossibilities in one speech.

The reaction of the Soviet leaders was even more unfavorable. One of the often-avowed purposes of Reagan's arms buildup had been to spend the Soviet Union into bankruptcy. SDI appeared to them to accelerate this effort. They were not mistaken. After leaving office Reagan recalled, “We...knew that if we showed the political resolve to develop SDI, the Soviets would have to face the awful truth: They did not have the resources to continue building a huge offensive arsenal and a defensive one simultaneously.”

SDI also seemed to the Soviets to be aimed at US nuclear superiority after all. Yet just four days after his SDI speech, Reagan addressed this second issue. He announced that if the United States developed effective SDI technology, he would share it with the Soviet Union. Once the two countries were thus defended, he would declare, “I am willing to do away with all my missiles. You do away with yours.”

The sharing proposal struck both his own Administration and the Soviets as the most unreal element of the plan yet. Less noted at the time was that, however remote from realization (as was SDI itself), sharing made a kind of conceptual sense. If enacted, it would have precluded any bid for superiority. Moreover, it would radically reduce the burden of proof on SDI. Even Reagan was soon required to recognize that a full, impenetrable shield against a large nuclear arsenal was chimerical. On the other hand, if offensive arsenals were first eliminated, then defenses would face only the lesser and more feasible challenge of defending against the kind of tiny missile forces that a cheater on an abolition agreement might cobble up in secret. Later, Reagan would insist that this objective was the chief rationale for his program.

### 'Let's Do It!'

**T**he abolition idea aired at Reykjavik arose out of the confluence of several historical currents in the cold war's last decade. One was the evolution in Reagan's thinking, moral as well as strategic, regarding nuclear arms. Another was the nuclear freeze movement of the early 1980s. Reagan had opposed it in harsh terms, calling it “a dangerous fraud” perpetrated by those “who want the weakening of America.” Yet he could not ignore the freeze. One of its

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### About Your Professor

Professor Anthony A. Goodman is Adjunct Professor of Medicine at Montana State University and Affiliate Professor in the Department of Biological Structure at the University of Washington School of Medicine. He received his B.A. from Harvard College and his M.D. from Cornell Medical College.

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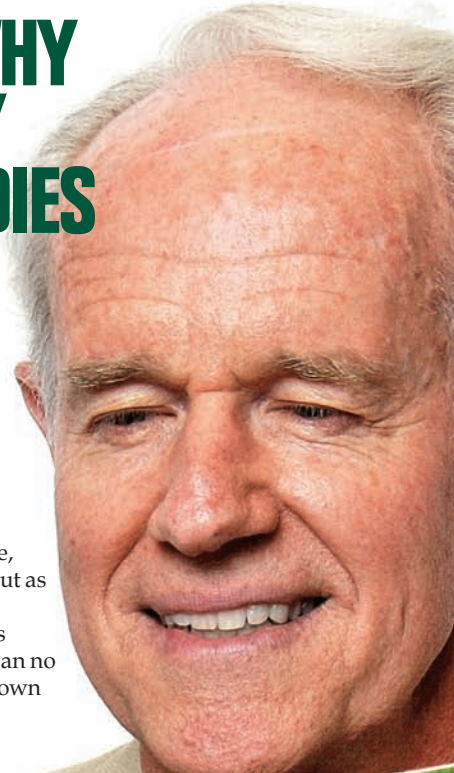
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many important victories was a sharp decline in the popularity of his nuclear buildup, which had dropped in the polls from 80 percent to 20 percent. Administration officials hoped the SDI/abolition package would steal the freeze movement's thunder—an aim in which it in fact appeared to succeed. For example, in 1984 Reagan's National Security Adviser, Bud McFarlane, wrote in a memo to Reagan, "You have thrown the left into an absolute tizzy. They are left in the position of advocating the most bloodthirsty strategy—Mutual Assured Destruction—as a means to keep the peace." Yet at its peak in 1982 and '83, the freeze movement created the *political* conditions that permitted Reagan's abolitionism, dormant until then, to appear. Unknowingly and unwillingly, the freeze movement and Reagan were partners in a powerful, almost decade-long effort to lift nuclear danger, leaving one wondering what might be possible today if a popular movement and a President were to cooperate in an attempt to rid the world of nuclear arms.

**T**hen a new historical current, destined to absorb all the others, came into play. On March 11, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Remarkably, Gorbachev was no less fervent a nuclear abolitionist than Reagan. In January 1986 he proposed a three-stage plan to abolish nuclear weapons by the year 2000. Gorbachev had arrived at his position along a route of his own. His goal was a democratic Soviet Union at peace with the West. In pursuit of this, he sought, more insistently than Reagan, an end to the cold war, for its own sake but also for the economic relief it would afford his domestic reforms.

Of course, abolition didn't happen in 1986 any more than it had in 1945. The decisive moment was Reykjavik. At the opening session, on October 11, both men agreed, in keeping with their public and private statements for some two years, that their objective was the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Gorbachev then startled Reagan with a handful of sweeping and highly detailed arms-control proposals, including a 50 percent reduction in strategic nuclear weapons. They were conditioned, however, on US willingness to confine development of SDI to the laboratory.

Gorbachev did not mention abolition in these proposals, but Reagan did in his response. Gorbachev was calling on him to restrict SDI, but SDI in Reagan's opinion was the very thing that "would make the elimination of nuclear weapons possible." The fundamental terms of the negotiations were set. In the course of the summit, the two heads of state seemed to compete in bringing forward ever more radical proposals for offensive nuclear disarmament, only to see them dashed on the unbridgeable disagreement over SDI.

The climax came on the afternoon of the second and last day. Gorbachev proposed ridding the world of all strategic nuclear arms in two five-year periods, while Reagan introduced a proposal to get rid of half of strategic weapons in five years and all ballistic missiles in the following five years. Gorbachev's proposal was the more sweeping, as strategic arms include bombers and cruise missiles as well as ballistic missiles: it was nuclear abolition.

Next, Gorbachev noted the differences between the two proposals and asked if Reagan would accept the Soviet one.

Reagan promptly agreed. Hawkish aides had handed him his more limited proposal as a means to pre-empt his abolitionism. But taking his cue from Gorbachev, he cast aside that plan and reverted to his own goal. He even worried that not every last nuclear weapon would be eliminated. He asked whether Gorbachev was saying that “we would be reducing all nuclear weapons—cruise missiles, battlefield weapons, sub-launched and the like.” For it would be “fine with [me] if we eliminated all nuclear weapons.” Gorbachev responded, “We can do that. We can eliminate them.” At this point, the record shows that the normally sober, impassive Shultz burst out, “Let’s do it!”

Of course, it was not to be. SDI reared its head again. Gorbachev continued to insist that SDI research be confined to the laboratory. Reagan continued to insist on the right to conduct tests outside the laboratory. Was the abolition of nuclear weapons, Reagan asked, to founder on a single word—“laboratory”? It was, and it did.

Whether abolition would have been implemented had an agreement been struck is an interesting question. A strange “asymmetrical” struggle between the two leaders, on the one hand, and a phalanx of the nuclear establishments, on the other, would have ensued. The outcome, whatever it was, could only have been decided in a struggle of the widest dimensions.

## Reykjavik in History

**T**he deeper and more important question raised by Reykjavik, however, concerns the relationship of the cold war to abolition, and the meaning of that relationship for our present nuclear disorders. Common sense would suggest that the end of the cold war should have been an ideal moment for disarmament. Isn’t peace better for disarmament than war, however cold? But the record shows that the opposite was true. In actuality, the idea of abolition resurfaced at one of the pinnacles of cold war tension. Reagan was in the midst of his military expansion. The decade before, the Soviet Union had conducted an immense nuclear buildup of its own in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis. In early 1983 it had walked out of nuclear arms-reduction talks with the United States.

It’s also a fact that when the cold war disappeared into history, the idea of abolition disappeared with it.

One reason for these surprising turns of events is that negotiations between great powers generally go best when the parties are in equilibrium; yet as the 1980s proceeded, equality was eroding. The Soviet Union had never come close to the United States in overall economic productivity; but by the early 1980s it had—at punishing economic cost—achieved parity in the nuclear arena, removing any hope that the United States could “prevail” in a nuclear war. The new parity drove home the long-existing reality that the two nations, equally and redundantly menaced with prompt inexistence, were in the same boat. Such had been the backdrop to Reagan’s and Gorbachev’s historic joint statement that nuclear war can never be won and should never be fought. And it was this recognition that led both men to ask why, if that were so, it was necessary to have nuclear weapons at all. In Reagan’s words in his 1984 State of the Union speech, “The only value in our two nations’ possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?” It was one of the deepest, hardest-won lessons of the cold war.

Nuclear strategy has often been likened to a chess game whose last few moves need not be played because everyone can see that the outcome is a foregone conclusion. The remarkable yet somehow fitting fact is that in the mid-1980s, this very conclusion was drawn by that game’s two kings, who were now asking themselves why, if the known end of the game was destruction for all concerned, anyone should even make the intermediate moves. Indeed, why play such a futile game at all?

But the moment of equilibrium was perishable. At Reykjavik, Gorbachev told Reagan, “A year ago it was not the case that the Soviet Union had advanced major compromise proposals.... I simply did not have that capability then. I am not sure that I will still have it in a year or two to three years.” Gorbachev’s reforms were designed to cure the ills afflicting the Soviet system, but the system was itself the illness, and instead of curing it, his genuinely salubrious measures helped it toward its demise. Whatever chance it had of surviving in a reformed condition was killed off in 1991, when hard-line Communists launched their coup against Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin picked up the pieces. Thus it happened that as one of the two great cold war rivals collapsed, the other rose, to what some began to imagine would be world dominance. The “sole superpower” was getting ready to proclaim itself. Its leaders thought they had been relieved from any pressure to surrender their nuclear arsenals.

Seen from this angle, the Reykjavik summit was a tragedy of timing. At exactly the moment when the harvest of protracted nuclear education was being gathered, the cold war laboratory in which it had been learned was on its way to being dismantled, and its great lesson—that the only sensible thing to do with nuclear arsenals was get rid of them—was shelved.

## The Second Nuclear Era

**W**ith the end of the cold war, a new era of the nuclear age opened. At first it seemed that with the old restraining parity with the Soviet Union a thing of the past, the sole superpower could simply do anything it wanted. But harsher realities built into the very nature of the nuclear age soon began to reassert themselves. In the new laboratory of the new era, the educational process resumed. Once again a dialectic of pressures and counterpressures commenced. Once again the nuclear dilemma, having further matured (some fifty nations are now capable of building the bomb), was driven from hiding by political events. Once again, there were trials and errors. And once again, just as in the 1980s, an impasse appeared—the one we face today.

There are important differences, of course. The new era has brought a new set of nuclear dangers to the fore. In the cold war, the most salient lesson was that the bomb is equally destructive to all; in the post-cold war era, the inescapable lesson is that the bomb’s technology is equally available to all competent producers, very likely including, one day not far off, terrorist groups. In the cold war, the driving force was the bilateral arms race; in the post-cold war era, it has been proliferation.

Nevertheless, the fundamental underlying lesson, built into the genetic code of the nuclear age and destined to last as long as that age does, is the same: nuclear weapons cannot be the source of advantage for any one nation or group of nations at the expense of the rest; they are a common danger and can be faced

only by all together, through political and diplomatic means. Just as during the cold war the double standard inherent in the concept of American nuclear superiority could not be sustained, so today the double standard implicit in the two-class world of nuclear and nonnuclear powers is unsustainable. Just as the two Reykjavik leaders drew the lesson that only negotiation, not further buildups, could release the world from the common peril, so today we must give up the illusion that force can solve the proliferation problem and must turn to negotiation instead. Finally, just as the true solution to the cold war peril of annihilation could only be abolition, so it is today, because any other leaves the double standard intact, and the double standard is at the root of proliferation. Perhaps because this is the second time around, the lessons have been presented more quickly, for a critical moment of decision has already arrived.

### The Prospects for Nuclear Abolition Today

These are the realities that the *Wall Street Journal* authors and Kucinich, Schwarzenegger, Obama and others are addressing. They are the reason the abolitionist message of Reykjavik is the right one for our day. Of course, the surrounding circumstances in the United States are as greatly altered as the shape of the international order. The prospects for abolition today are in some respects more promising than in the 1980s but in others less so. The arguments for maintaining large nuclear arsenals during the cold war were clear and strong. Many disagreed with them, but everyone at least knew what they were: each side saw in the other an implacable ideological foe with global reach. Neither dared to be without nuclear arms as long as the other possessed them. The path to mutual disarmament was strewn with large obstacles, not least the difficulty of verifying a disarmament agreement.

Today the arguments for nuclear arsenals are incomparably weaker. Consider the American case. If we ask why, in a Soviet Union-free world, the United States is willing to live in a world in which it and Russia possess thousands of nuclear weapons poised on hair-trigger alert, instead of seeking to negotiate away both nations' arsenals, it's not easy to give an answer. There is no hostility with Russia that could justify any war, much less mutual annihilation. Why, almost two decades after the end of the Soviet Union, *should* the United States and Russia maintain more than 20,000 warheads between them and nuclear materials for producing thousands more? Jack Matlock, Reagan's adviser on Soviet affairs at Reykjavik, has recently called this state of affairs "insane."

Does the counterproliferation mission perhaps create a new need for the arsenals, as the Bush Administration has often stated? For all the talk about the need to smash underground bunkers, it is hard to escape the suspicion that the nuclear bombs left over from the cold war have gone searching for missions rather than the other way around. It's difficult to suppose that the nation's leaders, unless they have truly taken leave of their senses, will attack Iran or North Korea with nuclear weapons simply in order to dig a deeper hole in the earth in search of a fugitive mini-arsenal all too probably hidden somewhere else. Certainly, arsenals of thousands of weapons would scarcely be required for the purpose.

A policy vacuum has thus opened up, and politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum. The gate is open for something new.

A few Democrats have tiptoed up to it but not yet walked through. One reason may be that even if the arguments for keeping nuclear arsenals are weaker, so is popular will to challenge them. There is no movement on the scale of the freeze; however, there are stirrings of fresh efforts to address the new situation. Peace Action, the legatee of the freeze, has more than 100,000 members in some thirty states. Student Peace Action is active on more than 100 campuses. Other groups with a long history of antinuclear activism are stepping up efforts. They include the American Friends Service Committee, Women's Action for New Directions, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Council for a Livable World and the Nuclear Policy Research Institute, headed by the legendary antinuclear activist and writer Helen Caldicott. More specifically geared to the details of abolition is the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, which, with other groups, continues to refine its blueprint for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. A number of Washington NGOs are gearing up to supplement the Hoover effort. A new group, Faithful Security, under the direction of David Cortright, has begun to remobilize religious communities. Evangelical groups, many of which are concerned about global warming under the banner of "creation care," are a natural constituency to oppose nuclear weapons. The same is true of the secular environmental movement. If a coalition of traditional peace groups, environmental groups, Washington arms control organizations such as the World Security Institute and the Henry L. Stimson Center, and religious groups, including evangelicals, were to push for abolition in tandem with the Hoover group, a powerful political force would result, especially if there were a receptive President in the White House. But it won't happen by itself. It has to be created.

When Americans are asked about nuclear abolition, they regularly favor it by wide margins. A recent poll sponsored by the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland has found that 73 percent of Americans embrace the goal. In most countries support is even higher. This gulf between official and popular opinion is striking, especially since the public almost never hears abolition advocated in the news media. At the very least, the numbers show that if such a proposal were made, it would not meet with crippling public resistance. It even seems possible that if anti-nuclear sentiment did grow more intense, nuclear establishments around the world might yield to it more quickly than anyone now imagines.

Yet trying to forecast the rise or fall of public interest in this or any issue is probably a vain exercise. Major shifts in opinion almost always come unexpectedly. Who would have thought in 1979 that a nuclear freeze movement would soon arise and win approval in Congress, or that shortly thereafter the most right-wing President of the cold war period would advocate the abolition of nuclear arms, or that a Soviet leader would come to power ready to champion both abolition and democracy for the Soviet Union, which would then disappear? Is a serious new bid to achieve a world without nuclear weapons possible? Or will history's first use of a nuclear weapon since 1945 come sooner? Events—in the Middle East, in South Asia, in Northeast Asia, in Russia and in the United States—are pushing the world toward a decision. Soon, whether by commission or omission, for better or worse, it will be made. ■

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# Iraq's Civil Resistance

The secular left brings together unionists, women's organizations and students.

by **BILL WEINBERG**

**A**lthough it is eclipsed from the headlines by the ongoing carnage, there is an active civil resistance in Iraq that opposes the occupation, the torture regime it protects and the Islamist and Baathist insurgencies alike. This besieged opposition—under threat of repression and assassination—is fighting to keep alive elementary freedoms for women, leading labor struggles against Halliburton and other contractors, opposing the privatization of the country's oil and other resources and seeking a secular future for Iraq. They note that what they call “political Islam” dominates both sides in the conflict—the collaborationist regime and the armed insurgents. Both seek to impose a reactionary, quasi-theocratic order.

Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies articulates the dilemma: “There has been a huge problem since the beginning of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, that the only resistance we hear about is the military resistance. Key sectoral organizations—oil workers, women, human rights defenders and many others—have all continued their work to oppose the occupation, at great risk to their own safety. Many of them operate in local areas, and almost all function outside the US-controlled Green Zone, so few Western journalists, and almost no mainstream US journalists, have access to their work.”

On July 4 the leader of a popular citizens' self-defense force in Baghdad was executed. According to the Iraq Freedom Congress (IFC)—a civil resistance coalition—a unit of US Special Forces troops and Iraqi National Guard forces raided the home of Abdel-Hussein Saddam at 3 AM, opening fire without warning on him and his young daughter. The attackers took Abdel-Hussein, leaving the girl bleeding on the floor. Two days later his body was found in a local morgue. Since late last year Abdel-Hussein had been the leader of the Safety Force, a civil patrol organized by the IFC to protect their communities. Like many IFC leaders, he had been an opponent of Saddam Hussein's regime and was imprisoned for two years in the 1990s. His death was mostly ignored by the world media.

But on August 3 some 100 activists from the Japanese anti-war group ZENKO, an acronym for National Assembly for Peace and Democracy, gathered near the US Embassy in Tokyo to protest the slaying. One banner read: DO US-IRAQI SECURITY FORCES PROMOTE CIVIL RIGHTS OR BIG BROTHER THUGGERY? ABDEL-HUSSEIN FOUND OUT!

Among those speaking were two IFC leaders, including president Samir Adil, who said, “Because he said, ‘No Sunni, no Shiite, yes to human identity,’ because he wanted to build a civil society in Iraq without occupation, without sectarian militias—for that they killed Abdel-Hussein. They think they can defeat the IFC, the only voice in Iraq that says yes to a free society, yes to a nonviolent society, no to occupation, no to sectarian gang-



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sters. But contrary to that, after the assassination, many people joined the IFC. We received messages of solidarity from around the world. As long as we have the support of people like you, we will never give up.”

The IFC was formed in 2005, bringing together trade unions, women's organizations, neighborhood assemblies and student groups around two demands: a secular Iraqi state and an end to the occupation. ZENKO's most significant achievement over the past year has been raising \$400,000, which helped the IFC to establish a satellite station, Sana TV.

Nadia Mahmood, an exile from Basra who is the chief presenter at Sana TV's London studio, told the protesters, “We established the IFC to oppose occupation or rule by Sunni or Shiite militias. That is why the US, which says it came to Iraq to bring democracy, assassinates our leaders and raids our offices. And that is why we must demand an end to the occupation.”

Other IFC leaders have been assassinated—generally by unaccountable militias—and the Baghdad office that serves as IFC headquarters and Sana TV's local studio was twice raided by US troops. Mahmood and Adil say the IFC is becoming more of a threat because of its growing successes—uniting with organized labor to oppose privatization of Iraq's oil, bringing together secular anti-occupation forces in a common front and liberating space in Baghdad and other cities from sectarian militias.

While Adil says the IFC's Safety Force does bear arms—“Every home has a rifle in Iraq; it is just a question of how they are used”—he emphasizes that the IFC is pursuing a civil struggle and that its members are not insurgents. “In principle, we believe in the right of armed resistance,” says Adil. “But we believe a civil resistance is needed in Iraq now. Armed resistance has only brought terrorism to Iraq, turning the country into an international battlefield.”

Adil is also a veteran of political and labor struggles against

the Saddam Hussein dictatorship. Imprisoned for six months in 1992, he was tortured in prison—he never removes his cap, but a long scar can be seen extending down his scalp to his temple. He returned to Iraq from Canadian exile in 2005 to help revive an independent political opposition.

Adil says this opposition faces two enemies: the occupation and political Islam—a Sunni wing linked to Al Qaeda and supported by Saudi Arabia, and Shiite militias with varying degrees of support from Iran. These have turned Baghdad into a patchwork of hostile camps. The IFC includes secular Muslims (and nonbelievers) of both Sunni and Shiite background in its leadership, as well as Kurds and people of mixed heritage. Adil claims the IFC now has a presence in twenty cities, including Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk and Tikrit. “We have thousands of followers,” he says, “and we are growing every day.” The IFC’s first national convention, held October 21 in Kirkuk, was attended by elected delegates from all of Iraq’s major cities.

The IFC’s self-governing zone of some 5,000 in Baghdad, established in the district of Husseinia more than a year ago, is an island of coexistence in a city torn by sectarian cleansing, says Adil. Thanks to the Safety Force, the district has become a no-go zone for sectarian militias. “There has been no sectarian killing in Husseinia since September 2006,” Adil boasts. The IFC is working to establish more self-governing zones in Baghdad’s mixed Sunni-Shiite districts, and it has a similar autonomous zone in Kirkuk.

Adil is clear on where he places the blame for the crisis of violent sectarianism. “The occupation and the US-imposed Constitution have divided Iraq, Sunni against Shiite. The IFC is the only force to oppose this division of society.”

**T**he Safety Force is increasingly made up of trade unionists, a growing pillar of support for the IFC. In a September 8 press conference in Basra, representatives of the IFC’s Anti-Oil Law Front joined leaders of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions to warn the Iraqi Parliament against passing the US-written oil law, which would grant broad access to foreign multinationals. IFOU president Hassan Juma’a, also a member of the IFC’s central council, announced that the union will shut down the pipeline leading from Iraq’s southern oilfields if the law is approved. Five days earlier, the IFC had staged a protest in Baghdad’s Liberation Square. American forces surrounded the rally, blocking access to the square.

On June 4 the IFOU went on strike for four days to protest the oil law and demand the release of benefits due to workers, paralyzing the Basra-Baghdad pipeline. Four IFOU leaders, including Juma’a, were ordered arrested for “sabotaging the Iraqi economy.” The arrest orders, never formally dropped, hadn’t been enforced when the strike ended. Even though a heavy Iraqi army presence remained in Basra after the strike, an IFOU march against the oil law on July 16 brought out thousands. The government recently threatened to carry out the arrest orders if the unions stage a new strike.

“The oil law does not represent the aspirations of the Iraqi people,” Juma’a said in a statement from the union in May. “It will let the foreign oil companies into the oil sector and enact privatization under so-called production-sharing agreements. The federation calls on all unions in the world to support our

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demands and to put pressure on governments and the oil companies not to enter the Iraqi oilfields."

Iraq's labor leaders are, of course, targeted for death. On September 18 the IFOU announced that a leading union member, Talib Naji Abboud, was shot when US troops opened fire on his car. This killing may have been a case of trigger-happy soldiers rather than a targeted assassination, but it was only the most recent in a long string of slayings of union activists—most of them carried out by militias and death squads.

Despite danger and intimidation, the campaign against the oil law is building. A second rally at Baghdad's Liberation Square, called by the Anti-Oil Law Front for September 22, brought out hundreds—a significant achievement in an atmosphere of terror.

One of the IFC's founding organizations, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, led a campaign against the new Constitution, which overturned the secular 1959 Personal Status Law, instead referring family disputes to Sharia courts. OWFI leader Yanar Mohammed says the Constitution is encouraging a repressive atmosphere, and acid attacks against "immodest" women who refuse to take the veil are on the rise. OWFI organizes shelters in Baghdad for women fleeing "honor killings," which have surged under the occupation. Mohammed herself has received numerous death threats.

In addition to ZENKO, IFC solidarity groups have been established in Britain, France and South Korea. In America, US Labor Against the War has brought Iraqi union leaders on speaking tours. But there is still little awareness in the United States of Iraq's civil resistance—even on the antiwar left.

When asked about secular civil resistance movements in Iraq, Middle East scholar Juan Cole, publisher of the popular Informed Comment blog, says, "I think they are by now mostly in exile. The religious groups are better organized, get outside money and have paramilitaries." Gilbert Achcar, author of *The Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*, largely concurs. "What is tragic is that in the whole area actually, left-wing, progressive, emancipatory forces are quite marginal, as a product of historical defeat." However, Achcar is encouraged by the oil workers' struggle. "What I think would be worth supporting in Iraq is the oil and gas workers' union in Basra," he says. "This is a genuinely autonomous union. And they are in a very sensitive position, because the oil industry is the main resource of Iraq."

Bennis sees hope there as well. "The oil workers union has provided one of the extraordinary models of local/national mobilization in defense of workers' rights as well as Iraqi sovereignty and unity.... The work of US Labor Against the War, in mobilizing labor opposition to the Iraq occupation and simultaneously building support for the oil workers, also provides a model for international solidarity from the other side."

"The occupation and puppet government in Iraq created this conflict," says Nadia Mahmood. "They supported the militias and opened the door to terrorist networks. The US is not supporting political freedom. They just seek to loot our resources, and it's time to go." But she emphasizes that if the US exit is to lead to peace and a secular order, the civil resistance will need support from friends abroad. "The victory against US forces in Iraq will not be a local victory—it will be an international victory." ■

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## Letters

(continued from page 2)

when Saddam's statue fell and has been thin-skinned ever since about his boosterism for what he now calls a disaster born of others' arrogance and stupidity.

Wasn't it Klein's responsibility to call it that earlier? Google "Joe Klein" and "anti-war," though, and see a man who cannot stop excoriating the supposed strategic follies of a "left" that actually was powerless and whose members he never names. For instance, he replies to criticism in *Huffington Post* in 2006, "What I actually said was 'the hate America tendency of the [Democratic Party's] left wing' had made it harder for Democrats to challenge Republicans on foreign policy." Klein's writhing exasperation with the left (which I sometimes share) is a pivotal default position for him, his way of ducking the hazards of being a pundit who cannot bear to be wrong.

Where he does belong, as I reported, is among those who not only can't acknowledge their responsibility but applauded Peter Beinart, who did strike pre-emptively at dissenters and continues to do so in a book

Klein coronated in the *New York Times*.

JIM SLEEPER

### Standing Against Jewish McCarthyism

BERKELEY, CALIF.

Thank you for Larry Cohler-Esses's "The New McCarthyism" [Nov. 12]. That an editor of *Jewish Week* is standing up to the enemies of academic freedom is a sign that more and more Jews are sick of the intimidation of people, on and off campuses, deemed to fall outside the narrow range of acceptable discourse about Israel.

In Connecticut a Palestinian dance troupe performance is canceled. In New York the United Jewish Appeal Federation withdraws its support from a film festival about Israel's Arab citizens. In Sacramento a Jewish publication refuses to advertise a book tour by Dr. Alice Rothchild, author of *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams: Jewish and Palestinian Trauma and Resilience*. On and on it goes.

All these stories are followed on Muzzlewatch ([www.muzzlewatch.org](http://www.muzzlewatch.org)), a project of Jewish Voice for Peace ([www.jvp.org](http://www.jvp.org)). It is

a must-read for those standing up for open debate about US-Israeli foreign policy.

HENRI PICCIOTTO, chair  
*JVP National Board*

### The Caption, the Name & the 501(c) 3,4

The caption for the photo above Jonathan Schell's "A Colder War" [Dec. 10] misidentifies it as the first meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan, at the Geneva Summit in 1985, instead of as their meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986.

In the same issue, in Laila Lalami's "Beyond the Veil," the last name of Joan Wallach Scott was given as Wallach Scott. It should have been merely Scott.

Re Ari Berman's "The War Comes to Iowa" [Dec 17]: Iowans for Sensible Priorities did not endorse John Edwards; its 501(c)4, Caucus4Priorities, did. Similarly, John Nichols's piece on Joe Biden [Nov. 26], mentions ratings put out by a 501(c)3, Americans United for Separation of Church and State. It cannot rate candidates, but other groups do, based on its information.

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# Books & the Arts.



Cate Blanchett as Jude in Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*

JONATHAN WENK/THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY, 2007

## Chaos, Clocks, Juxtapositions

by KENT JONES

**R**einvention of the self is an all-American subject, but you would never know it from our movies. Despite the fact that Hollywood was developed largely by Easterners who refashioned themselves as cowboys (the directors) and Jews who comported themselves like WASPs (studio heads), American cinema, not unlike American politics, has been plagued with the anxieties of authenticity and verification. Impostors and dissemblers are perpetually being rooted out, inner beauty and truth are forever being divined under the cover of surface disingenuousness. Such themes are as present in studio products like *Wedding Crashers* (the fiancé versus Owen Wilson) as they are in the contrasting narratives of Larry Craig, the recently disgraced senator from Idaho, and, at least for his first few years in office, our forty-third President. When great American filmmakers dip into the pool, the tone is often playful (a great deal of Ernst Lubitsch's work, Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve*) or filled with dread (Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, Roman

Polanski's *Chinatown*). And when reinvention is posited as a byproduct of the "artistic" temperament, we wind up with a template based on either the life of Christ or the fable of Icarus.

It doesn't take too much imagination to realize that this obsession with genuine articles and real things in American movie-making is financial in origin: the general nervousness over budgets, percentages, and profits and losses is unconsciously transposed into dramas of identity hinging on disputed wills, water rights, marriage licenses or what have you. Celebrations of reinvention have come easily to poetry, fiction, music and dance but with much difficulty to the still costly art of moviemaking. The comparatively inexpensive nonnarrative films of Kenneth Anger and James Broughton aside, a very special temperament is required to follow in Whitman's footsteps with the expenditure of millions of dollars hanging over your head and a flock of smiling executives pecking away at you as you're trying to get your movie in the can. "Rebel" or "maverick" doesn't even begin to cover it. Only militant aesthetes need apply, and I can think of no better term to describe Todd Haynes.

When *Safe*, his third feature-length film,

was released to rapturous acclaim in 1995, Haynes was praised for his generosity, for "loving all his characters." It seemed to me at the time that this odd misjudgment was inspired by the film's final moments, in which Julianne Moore's ego-free heroine, Carol White, declares her love for her own mirror image. *Safe* struck me as one mighty clever enterprise for its era. The film was possessed of an extremely sly sense of satire and negative characterization, exemplified by the shot of Carol's nowheresville husband standing before the mirror in his dark socks and spraying deodorant under his arms. But I also had the impression that Haynes's control of his material did not extend beyond his cannily calculated surface. The consistently uniform aesthetic choices (wide shots of long duration that pinned characters into their environments, capped by a sonic ambience of all-encompassing banality; a heroine with an all-purpose blankness who seemed to have had a cosmetic lobotomy) masked an unresolved anger that found its focus in the film's vastly superior and brilliantly written second half.

Haynes did a remarkable job in those scenes of elucidating the tyrannical effects of self-help rhetoric. Psychic if not spiri-

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*Kent Jones is the author of a collection of film criticism, Physical Evidence (Wesleyan), and the writer and director of the documentary Val Lewton: The Man in the Shadows.*

tual intrusion was treated to many impressive variations, from the disturbing (the signature image of the young man venturing awkwardly through the landscape in layers of protective clothing) to the chilling (the moment when the “helpful” therapist silently enters from screen right) to the horrifying (the remarkable group therapy session in which a patient resists the demand for self-affirmation and unleashes a blackhearted torrent of emotion). And the ending, far from a portrayal of self-love, was the coup de grâce, the final act of an easily intimidated woman who has no idea whether she actually loves herself or not. That Haynes had a profound empathy for the plight of his heroine was undeniable, but the cool passivity of his presentation struck me as an artful concoction, paling beside the less aesthetically novel but more powerfully bracing bitchiness of the group therapy exchange. By the same token, the most impressive moments in *Far From*

## Haynes’s heroes and heroines have their egos twisted into scrap metal by social norms.

*Heaven* (2002), with Moore as another suburban homemaker with a teensy-weensy sense of self, involved her closeted husband (Dennis Quaid) spewing venom from his living room perch. The power of these moments was only tangentially related to Haynes’s fussy re-creation of Douglas Sirk’s mid-’50s output.

**T**he multitentacled *I’m Not There* represents something new for Haynes. As everyone knows by now, the film shuffles its way through an assortment of Bob Dylan avatars, none of whom actually go by the name of Bob Dylan and all of whom partake of one or more aspects of his life and legend. In an echo of the young Dylan as he was staking out his patch in the folk-scene garden, there is a guitar-toting young African-American boy, played by Marcus Carl Franklin, who rides the rails through 1959 America as if it was 1935 and calls himself Woody Guthrie. There is a rough-hewn young “protest singer” in *The Times They Are A-Changin’* mode, awkwardly incarnated by Christian Bale. There is a movie star named Robbie, played by Heath Ledger, who has made his name playing the Bale character in a movie called *Grain of Sand*, in scenes that offer poignant echoes of Dylan’s *Nashville Skyline*/*New Morning* phase of disconnected

superstardom, with Charlotte Gainsbourg as his Sara. Most notably, there is Cate Blanchett as a *Don’t Look Back*-era Dylan, a rail-thin and ethereally beautiful artist-monster. There is Billy the Kid as played by a mellowed-out Richard Gere, traversing the “old weird America” on horseback. And finally, there is Ben Whishaw as Rimbaud-cum-Dylan, sitting before some kind of midcentury tribunal, halfway between a press conference and a scientific inquisition from *The Outer Limits*, with Rimbaud as the alien.

Haynes has always traded in pastiche, and each of his previous films has been a period piece with its own accompanying aesthetic register: *Safe* crosses Kenny Loggins vacuousness with *Red Desert*-era Antonioni and transposes environmental illness from the industrial wasteland of mid-’60s Ravenna to the spotless suburbs of 1987 Southern California; *Far From Heaven* dislodges the visual and emotional emphases of Sirk’s flam-

boyant melodramas from the cultural camouflage of their era and recouples them with closeted homosexuality and interracial romance; *Superstar* (1987) is, of course, the sad story of Karen Carpenter as told with Barbie dolls, so redolent of the plastic textures and commercial ideals of feminine beauty of the 1960s and ’70s; *Poison* (1991), a Genet-inspired triptych and Haynes’s most sheerly academic enterprise, shifts between horror imagery, ’50s sci-fi paranoia and the world of such suburban sitcoms as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. In one sense, Haynes has devoted himself to an impossible task. He has labored to correct the past by readjusting its clichés (homing in on the everyday fascism embedded within self-help speak, linking Barbie’s thinness to anorexia) in the hope of revising our collective cultural memory. In that sense, he is cinema’s pre-eminent academic leftist.

Haynes’s anger on behalf of his fragile heroes and heroines, their egos twisted into scrap metal by consensus-driven social norms, has kept his films emotionally grounded. That his pastiches have always been as sophisticated as they were finely calibrated is undeniable, but from the start they have been plagued by an accompanying predictability (large portions of the films hit all the notes one might expect to be hit by a smart young aesthete trained in semiotics), not to mention a papery thinness. To my eye, Haynes has displayed neither the inclination nor the ability to wrestle with nuances of behavior, light and shadow. Not

unlike Spielberg but to vastly different effect, Haynes has been great at the totalizing-vision part of moviemaking but not so great at the less iconically driven nuts-and-bolts aspects of storytelling (as the alternately clichéd and unkempt narrative structure of *Velvet Goldmine* showed).

*I’m Not There* doesn’t represent much of an advance on that front. With one exception, no episode has any special power of its own, beyond the obviously spectacular attractions of another hyperintelligent performance by Blanchett (her best work runs as smoothly and efficiently as a well-designed piece of software) and a formidable prisoner-of-conformity montage over a performance of “Ballad of a Thin Man,” in which she lip-syncs to Stephen Malkmus’s vocal track. The Bale section, patterned after an episode of *Biography*, is genuinely unfortunate, alternately sarcastic and unconvincing. If any actor is up to the task of incarnating the flinty young Dylan, it’s Bale, but Haynes leaves him with almost nothing to work with, and he becomes a paper-doll scarecrow. The Rimbaud section feels like grad school thesis work. The Blanchett section shifts deftly among evocations of Fellini’s *8½*, Godard’s *Masculin féminin* and re-creations of *Don’t Look Back*—so deftly that if you know the original films you’ll be busily sizing them up in your head against Haynes’s mimetic moves. Many acquaintances were most impressed by the Ledger/Gainsbourg section, a nicely executed, muted miniature of a marriage unraveled by celebrity. The Franklin section gains a lift from the young actor’s ebullience and buoyancy.

It’s the Gere scenes, which have taken a critical shellacking, that are in many ways the most impressive, because they offer welcome evidence of Haynes’s inventiveness, often curtailed and boxed in by his internalized conceptual neatness. This episode is set in the elegiacally languid key of Sam Peckinpah’s *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), crossed with Greil Marcus’s writings on Dylan and *The Basement Tapes* and, perhaps, Constance Rourke’s 1931 cultural study *American Humor* (a Marcus favorite). It peaks with a remarkable scene that is the best thing Haynes has ever done, a funeral for a little girl propped up in her open coffin in a gazebo in a carnivalesque town called (a bit too archly) Riddle, the mood around her balanced between wonder, sobriety and a potential surge of spiritual ecstasy. Jim James, the lead singer from *My Morning Jacket*, solemnly breaks into an unearthly rendition of “Goin’ to Acapulco,” backed by indie band Calexico. On *The Basement Tapes*, the song sounds like a near-throwaway, a trial run for the

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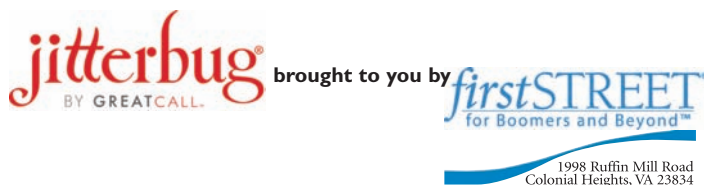
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album's "Tears of Rage." Yet this incandescent version initiates a spell of time-stopping beauty that pushes Haynes's film up to a higher plane.

**W**hat is impressive, if not majestic, about *I'm Not There* is the way its constituent parts talk to one another (in that sense, it represents a vastly improved version of *Poison's* narrative triptych). With multiple aesthetic registers at his disposal rather than just one or two, Haynes is able to create nuances of feeling through simple juxtaposition. And *I'm Not There* is above all a film of juxtapositions—of assorted versions of the American landscape, based in various ideas of openness and freedom; of frozen celebrity images-as-prisons; of faces and emotional registers, all of which converge to create a polyphonic effect that is most unusual in movies. Blanchett's helpless monster is contrasted with Bale's flinty, austere folk singer and Ledger's dreamy, lost movie star, and all three gain in poignancy and mystery. Gainsbourg's solitude, set against the droning of TV reports from the cataclysmic '60s, rhymes with Gere's melancholy wandering. Moreover, Haynes achieves a lovely atemporality that is completely in sync with the spirit of Dylan's thinking and his music, and that reaches its culminating moment when Gere's Billy jumps a freight train and finds the guitar left behind by Franklin's Woody at some unfixed point in the poetic future-past.

*I'm Not There's* ringing affirmation of the freedom to make yourself over stands in opposition to Haynes's earlier ballads of oppression and psychic destruction. It's as if all those Dylan avatars were whispering from the other side of the cultural mirror to Karen Carpenter, Julianne Moore's afflicted heroines and even the conflicted rock stars of *Velvet Goldmine*: "Don't worry about being authentic or inauthentic, real or false, whether you're in time or out of it—make it up as you go along." Amid all the shifting registers and juxtapositions, the one constant is the liberated and liberating presence of Dylan, manifested in his public afterimages and words, spoken and sung, sometimes by the man himself and sometimes by multiple actors and singers. Many Dylan lines from various interviews across the years are put in the mouths of the assorted avatars, including his (in-)famous response to Nora Ephron's question about the degree of chaos in his music: "It's chaos, clocks, watermelons. It's everything." His language is happily uncoupled from all-purpose journalistic adjectives like "enig-

matic" and "opaque," and a genuinely poetic voice (his, but also ours), individual yet anonymous, unashamedly impressionistic, happily riding the flux of experience and the appetites of the imagination, becomes dominant while the voices of rationalistic conformity are consigned to the deep background.

I think this is Haynes's best film by a mile, but it does share a limitation with the earlier work. The particulars will be familiar to viewers with a little American poetry and a lot of Dylan's music (not to mention his autobiography, interviews and Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home*) under their belts, but perhaps less familiar to everyone else. After all, the dilemma of pastiche is

that the viewer has to share in the emotional resonance found by the artist in the appropriated parts, unless it is communicated with the joyful verve of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* or the immense contemplative gravity of Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Haynes's expressive gifts are just as tentative as ever, and he still clings to his appropriated "sources" for dear life, like a child hugging a tree during a thunderstorm. When all is said and done, though, his "unclassifiable Dylan movie" is something to be reckoned with, an unapologetic affirmation of poetic reconstitution and a welcome riposte to this extraordinarily low moment in commercially driven groupthink. ■



Rod Smith, 2005

COURTESY MEL NICHOLS

## A Kind of Waiting Always

by JOSHUA CLOVER

**D**eed is the fourth full-length collection of poetry from Rod Smith, who has published numerous chapbooks and released a poetry CD as well, *Fear the Sky*. He edits the journal *Aerial* and publishes the essential poetry press Edge Books. He is a wryly intense presence in the blooming Washington, DC, poetry scene, where his daredevil performances help set a tone welcoming of both experimentation and fun: two great tastes that go great together, all too infrequently. He manages Bridge Street Books in Georgetown, which features (by now you will not be surprised to learn) a renowned reading series and one of the nation's most seductive poetry shelves.

It's a life lived in poetry, but also one through which poetry lives. In that stratum between the many MFA programs and the few po-biz celebs—the layer of homemade

*Joshua Clover's most recent book of poems is The Totality for Kids. His cultural study 1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About will be published in 2009.*

### Deed

By Rod Smith.  
Iowa. 87 pp. \$16.

poetic communities local and distributed—Smith's involvement is not the rule, but neither is it the exception. It's a way of being, of which Smith is exemplary: a transfer in the complex of circuits through which much poetry flows. If the social existence of poetry were the London Tube, Smith would be Paddington Station.

It may thus be initially surprising that Smith's poetry can tend toward the hermetic: an ironic point but not an irrelevant one. His is not the poetry of the social whirl, of artists and their headlong engagements, in the manner of Frank O'Hara; even less is it Whitman's public embrace. Though it can be quite personable and indeed charming ("Of course I want you for your mind/body problem," he once wrote, a funny philosophical pickup line), Smith's poetry rarely offers a chatty or populist style. In this he resembles an admired forebear, Robert Creeley, whose *Se-*



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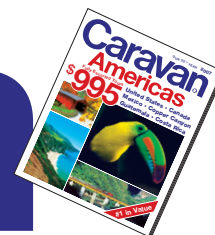
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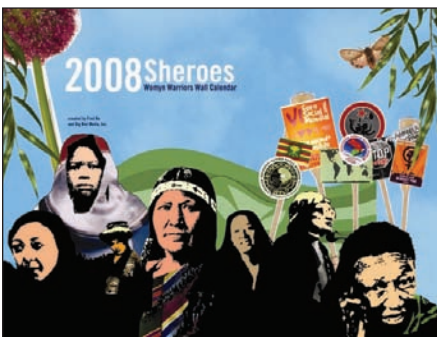
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lected Letters he is co-editing. The poetry does not come out to greet you. I am not quite sure what to make, for example, of the poem opening "Nothing believes Korea." I like the sound of that and feel like I might be about to understand something. By the next line, "Nothing turns into it, & leaves your salt there," I am feeling a little lost, and not in a Paddington Station kind of way.

And yet this differential between daily life and poetic style—between the social and the aesthetic—is more superficial than it first appears. For it is equally the case with Smith that the two things map onto each other. They don't share content but structure, a logic of how parts go together. After all, we shouldn't necessarily expect an economist to write poems about life at the hedge fund office. It would make as much sense to expect poems structured like economic systems. Experience and literature have many ways of informing each other.

This, I think, is a way to understand Rod Smith's poems, in *Deed* and elsewhere: not as descriptions of social life but as an attempt to arrange thoughts and phrases, and the connections among them, so that meaning and sensation travel and shift as they might in daily life—especially if one's daily life is very much interconnected with a broad community.

**D**eed knows this perfectly well and goes about finding ways to figure this problem. The long first section, "The Good House," offers architecture as a metaphor for parts and whole, and their order: "The good houses the parts," begins the title poem, shortly revisiting this as "The good part of the house/is where something leaves/alone the light that it lattice/the red." This is lovely and a bit archaic; does the optic lushness and synecopation summon up Gerard Manley Hopkins? But the poem, as one might expect of a long constructivist poem, has other tones, differently appealing. "This reverie noodles the lovely house/like the pleasure of not reading/a badly written headline," he offers later, sounding a bit like John Ashbery, filled with surprises that don't disturb but deepen the afternoon calm. Earlier, the poem hoped "to love the one one loves/& be loved/in a good house/for a long time."

Such sweet utopia is not a destination the poem seems likely to reach. It leaves off instead with a sustained sensation: "the dream-state,/the housed part//the closed inside then//a kind of waiting always." This sense of suspension within a larger structure, and of time passing through us but somehow without us, is a signal feeling of the book, modulating a strain of romanticism through

a more fragmented perspective. As a description of modern life, it seems just right.

Thus it is that ideas and images circulate, sometimes arriving at their destinations pages later, at which point you realize you were waiting for it to happen all along ("a kind of waiting always" indeed). The second long section, "The Spider Poems," equally defers and returns, extending its dreamlike images across yet another figure for the book's logic: "Spiders have needs of webbing," one poem points out. Webs, architecture and so on; it's a network of networks (indeed, the "network" is mentioned as well) in which any individual chunk is equally a transfer, receiving and relaying thoughts and feelings throughout the whole structure. The motion from one part to another, the sensation of finding shapes within the whole, of submerged connectedness: these make the matter of the book. In that regard the book's structure is very much like the author's daily existence. It's a form of life.

This sort of "relationality" is often found to be postmodern, which may be to say only that Smith is of his time. But *Deed's* timeliness should not be confused with the sublime whir of the digital frontier. Sometimes a web is just a web. Smith's tone, moreover, is unique among his contemporaries. He is often poised uncomfortably and achingly between emotional immediacy and wisecrass. As one page of "The Spider Poems" reads, in its entirety, "Some of the spiders are not called anything because they are happy./ This is my new style. How do you like it?/ It has caused me great personal anguish." It's uncertain how to take this last line, seemingly exaggerated and likely ironic. Certainly the book includes other such gestures, as in one poem composed only of a Bob Dylan quotation with the pronoun changed, given the quippy title "Barnes & Chernobyl." But the book has its great personal anguish too, including a breathtakingly brief invocation of the death of a son in a car crash: "There is some reason to believe/he was trying to miss a deer." The flatness of the tone lets it slide in all the more swiftly; after that, a pain comes.

All of which is to say, the matter of emotion and idea in the book is hard to discern in any given instance, verse, poem. Rather, one must have the patience to locate oneself within the larger structure; only then do passages take on their fullest resonance. No particular moment sets the tone or determines the meaning; there's no single focus. One late poem offers an image of "aeons/of foci—tunable, coherent,/immeasurable"; this is perhaps the closest Smith comes to saying the name of his poetic sensibility.

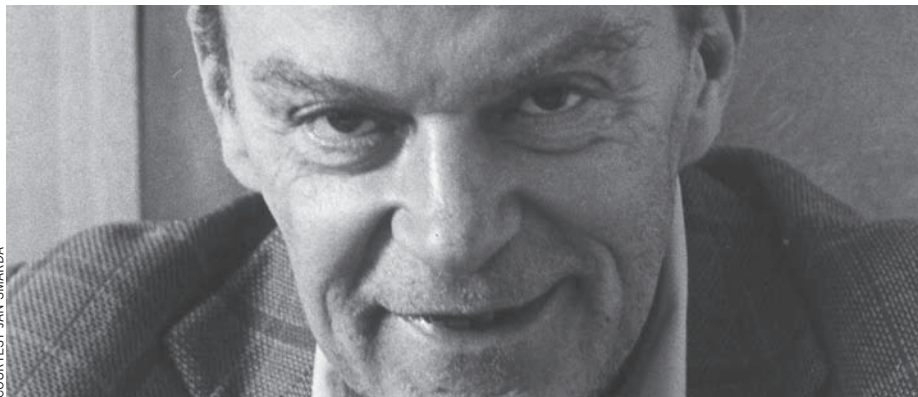
There is a kind of order, but no one is in

charge. No overarching figure organizes everything beneath it; no boss concept impedes the leap of sensation and feeling from station to station. This allows a greater sense of mobility and greater intensities at each point: "Each spider/is a clump of spider longings & thrills." Crude, but exciting; sign me up.

**B**ut isn't this just an alibi for chaos? Maybe so. In imagining our way back to social reality, anarchy may be a more useful concept than chaos. Not the black-masked caricature, or libertarianism with delusions of grandeur, but the dream of a social life without top-down rules and marching orders. Instead, a life where everyone is equally a point within a community, within the give and take of the great circulation. By now this should sound familiar. This is the book and the life equally. "If the house is just poetry," Smith writes, "we're in trouble."

Anarchism, famously, is a politics of desire—and a poetic one at that. "There is only one man who has the right to be an anarchist," said Stéphane Mallarmé. "Me, the Poet, because I alone create a product that

society does not want, in exchange for which society does not give me enough to live on." The logic of revolutionary desire haunts *Deed's* final poem, the five-line "pour le CGT." The title's reference is to France's leading trade union—la Confédération Générale du Travail, which traded the insurrectionary spirit of 1968 for a modest wage increase. It reads in full: "We work too hard./We're too tired/To fall in love./Therefore we must/Overthrow the government." It is not a poem that wants explication; it's clear enough, and by now the book has seduced us into taking such suggestions seriously, even as we conjure a wry grin. Perhaps it only bears recalling the complaint that much of today's most compelling poetry requires a lot of effort to read: shouldn't it be more accessible? There are many fine answers to this conundrum, but perhaps Smith's logic is best: *if we're too tired to read such poetry...* It is a vision, one might say, not of putting poetry in the service of revolution but revolution in the service of poetry, so that we are, all of us, left to read and write and love as we like, to be, each of us, a clump of longings and thrills of the intensest kind. ■



COURTESY JAN SMARDA

## The Madman and the Poet

by BENJAMIN PALOFF

**T**he experience of reading the Czech poet Ivan Blatný in English is strangely reminiscent of watching Peter Weiss's 1963 play *Marat/Sade*, set in the Charenton Asylum, with its astounding collision of intellectual brutality and insane gentility. Blatný, who defected to England shortly after the 1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, spent most of the subsequent four decades

*Benjamin Paloff is a poetry editor for Boston Review. He teaches Slavic and comparative literatures at the University of Michigan.*

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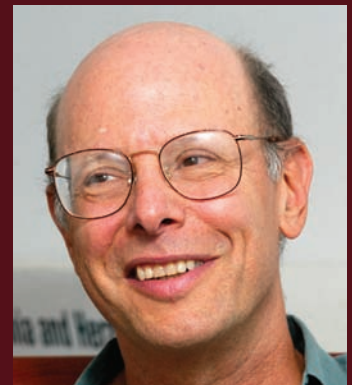
in mental hospitals, where he suffered from a number of ailments, particularly paranoia. Which, as the old quip goes, does not mean that they weren't out to get him, whether "they" were the authorities who publicly declared him dead on Czech Radio, the agents who kept trying to enlist his service

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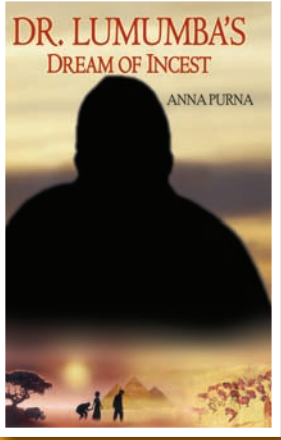


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for the Communist regime or the doctors and nurses who appear to have thrown out a substantial body of his work written before the late 1970s. They had learned, as Josef Skvorecký puts it, “that Blatný was a real poet, not just a madman who believed that he was a poet.” We would be hard pressed to find a more fitting allegory not only for the struggle to write these poems but also for the act of reading them.

*The Drug of Art* thus represents a curious literary event: the first major foray into English letters of a foreign-born poet who spent most of his life in England and who even wrote a great deal in English. As an event in book form, it has a fine orchestration that is not without some hint of theatricality. Editor Veronika Tuckerová enlists four additional translators, a Blatný scholar for the afterword and a cameo appearance (in the foreword) by Skvorecký, author of such novels as *The Engineer of Human Souls* and *Dvorak in Love*, which have made him one of the few big-name stars in contemporary Central European literature. All of this, combined with the brilliant visual design of the book itself, helps ease us into the madhouse that will follow.

**A**nd it is a madhouse. The poems written during Blatný’s first productive period, from World War II until his 1948 exile, bear the strong mark of his connection to Group 42, a loose association of writers, artists and literary theorists who advocated the use of expressionistic, sometimes surrealistic techniques to portray life as it is happening. The most influential of Group 42’s members was the poet Jirí Kolár, best known internationally as an innovative collage artist. While Kolár sometimes splices a familiar image onto an alien background—one of the more basic compositional techniques in collage—he more frequently reshapes the mundane, offering it in a state of unsettling displacement or disarray: a Dutch oil painting becomes a tin can, a crucifixion scene takes on the outline of a pear. In one image from the mid-1980s, which appears as the front cover of *The Drug of Art*, a photograph of a woman standing before a mirror is crumpled and flattened so as to fracture the glass and the woman alike.

These organizational principles of collage apply to Blatný’s poems as well, with their mishmash of seemingly disembodied images. Indeed, his best work from this period consists largely of Adamic gestures of naming, slippery attempts to identify those things that have entered his psychic and physical spaces, even as his attention and the things themselves are constantly chang-

ing. In the middle stanza of “This Night” (1942), from the poetry collection of the same name, Blatný presents this struggle to label and tag his world as an event always occurring in real time. Here is the opening, in Matthew Sweney’s lively translation:

This night As I say this night  
Now for example And what is that  
little spider called  
I get up, I take my old notes  
Rouault’s painting I think about  
When I will recognize you, I  
dreamed of you  
This day Arising unceasingly  
everywhere,  
on the tracks, in cities, in the woods,  
on the fronts  
Suddenly Ringing from  
below Embarrassing memory  
Insect between the lines  
With a thin, yellow ringed abdomen

In his self-interruptions and sudden shifts of awareness, Blatný stages a fundamentally open-ended act of mind: the external world can never be fully internalized, nor can the poet’s internal weather be broadcast without static or interference. The poem is always slipping away from that which the poet most needs to describe, since the world is continuously transforming in time.

The critic Harold Skulsky’s characterization of metamorphosis as “the mind in exile” seems tailored for Blatný. Unable to grasp the constantly changing reality around him, Blatný felt himself cast out from the world—from memory, literary tradition and ultimately from the poem in the moment of its composition—long before he lost touch with Czechoslovakia or, a few years later, with much of reality. The poet expresses this existential homelessness in his well-titled 1947 collection, *In Search of Present Time*, and most effectively in the poem “Song,” which riffs on a frequently repeated mantra: “Thousands of kilometers away from me.” Here is the poem’s closing, presented once again in Sweney’s exceptional rendering:

Thousands of kilometers away from  
me, around the chateau granary,  
around the blinded house growing  
cobwebs in its windows, around  
the farm buildings.  
Thousands of kilometers away from  
me, on a small hill named Kristálov,  
where bluegreen flies big as glistening  
buttons buzz over crumpled paper,  
crumbs, and picknickers’ crap,  
there, where the night floods and  
changes everything, there, where  
the moon

fills its quiet aquariums  
of dungheaps and courtyards paved  
with cobblestones,  
there, where the world and universe  
is outside me and inside me, and  
everywhere and elsewhere than  
everywhere,  
thousands of kilometers away from  
me.

In its pervasive sense of loss, its dynamic blend of nostalgia and rancor—all those “crumbs” and “dungheaps”—the poem recalls “Things I Didn’t Know I Loved,” the Turkish poet Nâzim Hikmet’s widely celebrated, much-anthologized 1962 meditation on similar themes. Without rejecting the universality that Walt Whitman famously extolled in “Song of Myself,” both poets suffer for it, at once lauding and lamenting “the world and universe” that “is outside me and inside me, and everywhere and elsewhere than everywhere.”

In Tuckerová’s otherwise astute introduction, in which she contextualizes Blatný’s contribution to Czech poetry and outlines its potential value for American readers, she presses the point about Blatný’s having been blacklisted from publishing in Communist Czechoslovakia. But the standard paradigm for reading poets from the chillier side of the Iron Curtain, a model that requires the reader to frame every utterance as an expression of the oppressed exile or victim of history, does not apply so well to Blatný, though he strikes a no less tragic figure. Himself a member of the Communist Party, Blatný arrived in England as part of an official delegation, only to announce to the BBC that he had no intention of ever going back. His friends and colleagues, many of whom still believed in the promise of building a great socialist state, felt understandably betrayed. In the coming years Blatný gradually divorced himself first from the life of Czech letters, then from life. His political status, though part of a larger story that has been the impetus for much of the West’s attention to poets from the East, seems trivial against the backdrop of what Blatný suffered as a victim of mental illness, the treatment of which is only now emerging from the Dark Ages.

The poems that make up *This Night* and *In Search of Present Time* are by far the most powerful in Blatný’s oeuvre. The sometimes multilingual poems that Blatný jotted down in notebooks and on bits of paper in the years leading up to his death in 1990 are fragmentary and haphazard by comparison. Still, even in these epigrammatic scraps, fif-

teen of which appear here for the first time anywhere, there are worthwhile glimpses of Blatný’s genius, with the poet once again struggling with the failure of poetry to translate the world into a language that is comprehensible to the self, whether to the poet or to his reader. This is the case, for example, in an untitled six-line poem composed mostly in English: “Queen, drones, bee-workers, život včel/ that is the bee-hive’s personnel//Now I must whisper in low tone//I was today a dying drone//But I am fresh and Glück-alive/back in the úl, back in the hive.”

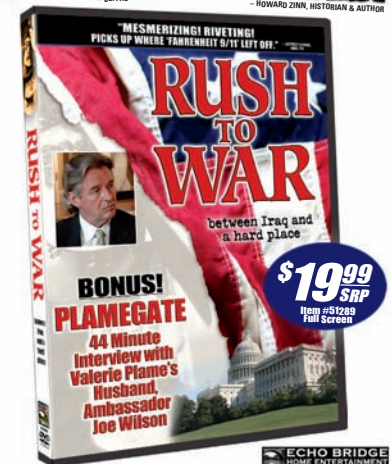
Light in tone, spoken with an unplaceable accent even on the page, Blatný is clearly a man at play, rhyming the Czech *život včel* (pronounced “ZHIV-otFCHEL”) (“the life of bees”) with “personnel” and finding more “good fortune” in the German *Glück* than in its English equivalent. Although the Czech word *úl* means “hive,” the poet has to use both words, in a sense reminding himself that these different sounds refer to the same thing. Tuckerová notes that in these later poems, “Blatný switches freely from Czech to English, French and German, all within a single poem and sometimes even within a line, as if the languages were all part of one primary or originary language.” Perhaps, though Blatný’s use of different languages to restate or slightly revise the same information suggests his grasping after a clarity that nevertheless continues to elude him. As Blatný flails after meaning, often with a tragicomic linguistic bravado, we recognize the line of continuity between his strongest work from the 1940s and the later poems, which, as stabs in an almost impenetrable dark, are thoroughly interesting despite their lack of polish.

Given that so much of Blatný’s work is about translation in all its guises—semantic, geographic, psychological, philosophical—it is wholly fitting that the publishers of *The Drug of Art* have paid special attention to the challenges of their collaborative enterprise, carefully noting the translator responsible for each text and, in an especially commendable move, appending a brief statement of aesthetic purpose by each of the translators involved. In this volume, respect for Blatný’s art is commensurate with respect for the process, however virtuous or flawed, of conveying it to new readers. This may be why the editor has chosen to print almost every poem twice: the original is paired with the translation for the Czech poems, a two-tone format for the multilingual poems and a facsimile of the manuscript for those poems printed here for the first time. These English renderings are

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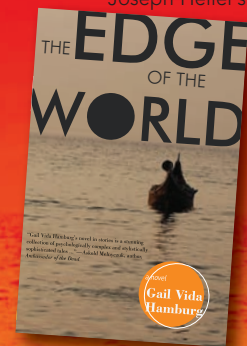


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forced quite literally to face up against their source texts, just as Blatný's poems confront "originary" experiences that nevertheless seem to elude expression in language.

Unfortunately, some of Blatný's poems slip away from their translations as well. The earliest poems presented in *The Drug of Art*, from his 1941 collection *Brno Elegies/Melancholy Walks*, are composed in gorgeous Alexandrines, the formal virtues of which the Irish poet Justin Quinn has tried to maintain, by his own account, "at nearly all costs." Admirable as his intentions may be—it is nearly always deflating to see a translator throw up his or her hands in the face of rigorous formal demands—the costs are great. Quinn, whose own poems, especially those in his book *Privacy*, display greater formal finesse than he shows here, makes an otherwise elegant young Blatný sound like a third-rate Edgar Allan Poe, as in these lines from "While rain went rippling...," which begins the collection: "Amidst its weeds, there is the grasp and flash/of speechless fishes' silence, which then goes./And the water mirrors hills and woods awash/in murmurs of the overflying crows." Or else this stanza, which opens "Above the wooded quarry...": "Above the wooded quarry are cement-works./I went up there to cut a rose-hip wand./The city faded and the river panned/beneath the hill, dragging its sluggish murk." We can actually hear the lines crackling as they stretch to meet unnatural demands in rhythm and rhyme. Of course, the author who employs such formal strategies also recognizes them as unnatural. The trick is to persuade the reader otherwise, and "dragging its sluggish murk" doesn't quite cut it.

Bad things can sometimes happen in translation—just as they can in any writing—and the remaining contributors (including Tuckerová, veteran translator Alex Zucker and American poet Anna Moschovakis) are more than up to the task of conducting Blatný into English, while Sweney's efforts, which occupy the lion's share of the book, are worthy not only of praise but serious study. The weaker poems, meanwhile, make up such a modest portion of the book that they would not be worth mentioning but for the fact that they come first and could easily be taken by the uncommitted reader for a preview of the whole. At the same time, it is strangely fitting that Blatný should be rendered into several different voices. After all, he was himself a tragically fractured poet, unsure of who, where or when he was, and therefore capable of speaking in a number of beautiful ways. Each of them is worth getting to know. ■

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# Puzzle No. 3108

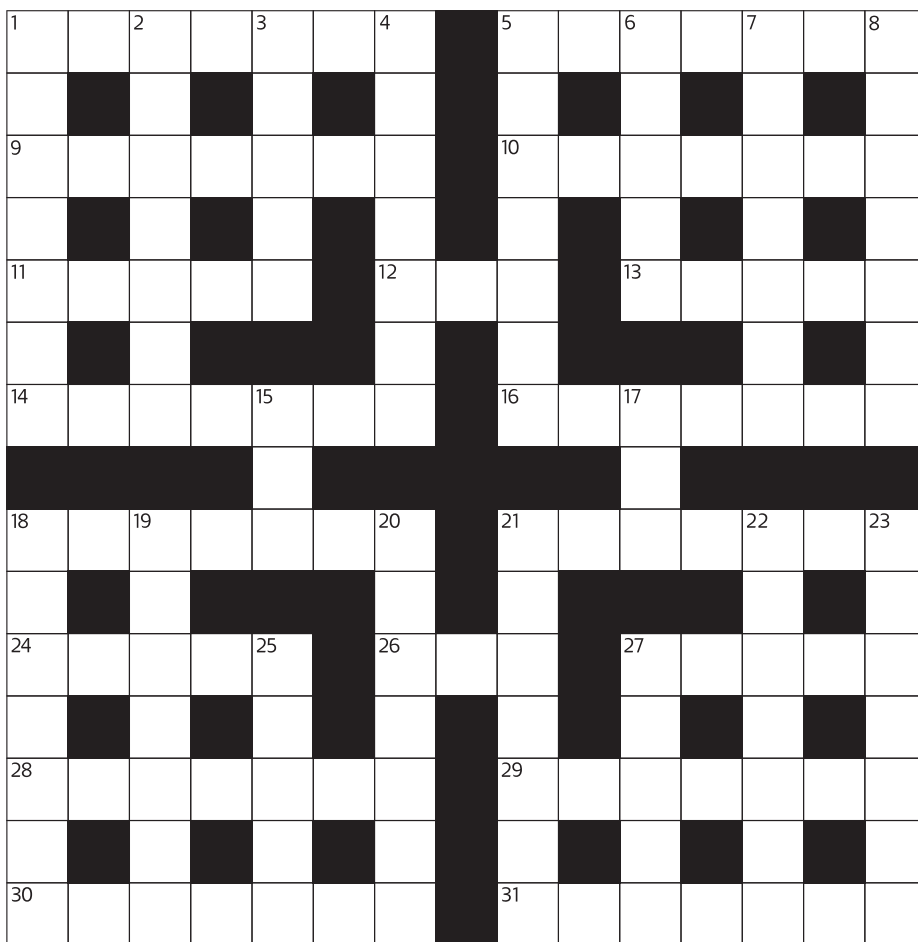
FRANK W. LEWIS

### ACROSS

- 1 A call of "Sh!" to you and me, considered by Hamlet to be made by a bare bodkin—or not to be! (7)
- 5 A pace made by one's best friend got trod in a different way. (3-4)
- 9 The best way to shake up the top, with one very quiet. (7)
- 10 In clover, and a good place to sit in summer. (7)
- 11, 12 and 13 Supposedly the makings of 6 down. (5,3,5)
- 14 They might show the clan, when the sailors have something the sun-worshiper wants. (7)
- 16 What the leading lady did to the banner is not exactly what Key meant, but a stretch leads to a broken leg! (7)
- 18 The result of the sergeant's order of dismissal? (7)
- 21 You'll see others confused about the First of May, but it might provide the hot—or cold—drink. (7)
- 24 Describing the 26 who was a 27 on 8. (5)
- 26 and 17 down The male type has to get older, to run. (6)
- 27 Might be passed out for free in a package of lye, reputedly. (7)
- 28 One who spotted the wheel way up there! (7)
- 29 Where to put the horse or the cow, or just put in anything that should work. (7)
- 30 If you've been bad, they should hold you! (7)
- 31 Incorrectly said to be on short streets, but they enjoy things in the worst way! (7)

### DOWN

- 1 A wartime hut might be an odd question if I were kept out of it. (7)
- 2 One or two might go in and get upset with the Queen of England. (7)
- 3 One who sees how the race is going, to send up the result. (5)
- 4 Their personal habits were studied by a well-known woman—but it's like getting up with cries of pain. (7)
- 5 504 according to Caesar has a fateful time associated with it, with such things as the Rockies being called great. (7)



- 6 Boys tripped the light fantastic together with them, on certain walkways in the air. (5)
- 7 Up for office, and going faster than 5 across! (7)
- 8 A portion comes up with the start of 28. See 24 across. (7)
- 15 A big party as some say, with a lot going on! (3)
- 17 See 26 across
- 18 There's a bug on part of the plant, with a blank look on this, according to part of the book. (7)
- 19 Look, bad duets make the most noise if so. (7)
- 20 Possibly a barrow, which is tumultuous in the extreme. (7)
- 21 Game of a little type spilled pints around it. (7)
- 22 Times of celebration for some, but cries for help otherwise. (7)
- 23 Ancient ones were found at low water, as one reads on the computer. (7)

- 25 What you don't like to lose at one point, being a loud complaint. (5)
- 27 A sign of loudness employed like the box might be to prevent trouble. (5)

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3107**

B	E	A	U	T	I	F	I	C	A	T	I	O	N
A	F	O	U	R	A	P	E						
R	E	F	R	A	I	N	O	I	L	S	E	E	D
C	A	D	D	S	L	N	E						
A	M	I	D	S	T	A	S	S	Y	R	I	A	N
R	R	T	P	B		N							
O	S	P	O	I	L	E	R	B	I	G	O	T	
L		O	A	E	U								O
E	X	C	E	L	T	R	E	A	C	L	E	U	
	A		I	D	H	M							R
A	I	R	L	I	F	T	S	C	A	R	B	O	N
M	T	N	U	S	C	R	A	E					
E	M	E	N	D	E	D	C	L	E	A	R	E	D
N	R	I	E	A	S	G	O						
A	S	S	A	S	S	I	N	A	T	I	O	N	S

# “My Husband’s **SECRET** ... for Amazing **INTIMACY!**”

I just had to tell your readers about a recent experience I shared with my husband. First, let me just say he is a wonderful man. **But, after being married for all these years, it seemed he was having confidence issues lately in AND out of bed.** It was having a real negative effect on his virility and let’s face it, it’s not like we’re newlyweds anymore.

Thankfully we didn’t have to deal with an embarrassing doctor’s appointment or prescription because everything changed a few days ago. I came home from work and something was different. He seemed more confident and excited than he’d been lately. He said he had found something that could help improve our recent bedroom issues, but it was a surprise. He had read about it online and we decided to give it a try. Well all I can say is I definitely felt sensations I’d never felt before ... in places I forgot existed. Best of all, there was clearly a difference in his erection quality and confidence. **I can honestly say it was the most incredibly intimate experience I’ve ever had in my entire life.**

When I asked him to reveal his secret discovery – he wouldn’t. So I did some snooping. It didn’t take me long to figure it out. In his top drawer was a tube of **Maxoderm CONNECTION**. After reading the fine print and finding the website, I went online to [www.maxodermct.com](http://www.maxodermct.com) to discover more about this magic in a tube.

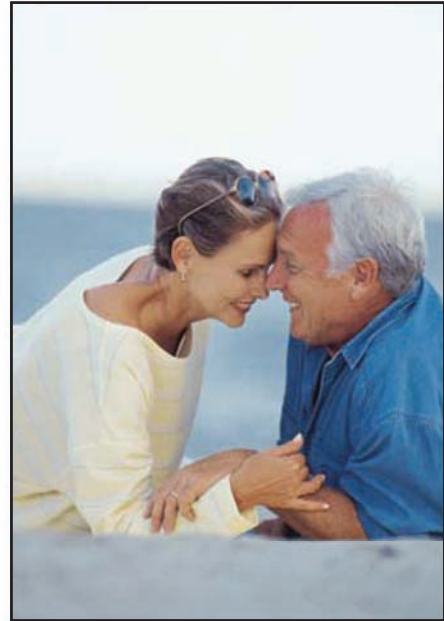
**Maxoderm CONNECTION** (of which I’m having my husband buy a lifetime supply) is a lotion that is applied topically to the most “intimate areas”. **A delicate blend of ingredients, it helps improve stimulation directly at the source – that’s when amazing things start to happen. Now he experiences improved erection quality and the feeling of firmness and I experience more pleasure and sensation than ever before!** We aren’t into taking pills of any kind – not even aspirin – so I was relieved to find he was using something topical without any potential systemic side effects you may experience with prescriptions. Unless you want to think of incredible intimacy as a side effect, because with **Maxoderm CONNECTION**, you just may experience incredible intimacy time and time again!

So ... please print this letter. Anyone who wants to experience amazing intimacy has to try **Maxoderm CONNECTION**. They need to tell their husbands about this product. Or just “accidentally” leave a tube lying around for them to “accidentally” find. I really want to thank the makers who developed **Maxoderm CONNECTION** for making a product that’s had such an impact on our intimate relationship. It’s really made a difference.

T.J.

T.J.  
 Phoenix, AZ

\*P.S., Let your readers know I’m pretty sure they can still get a **FREE MONTH SUPPLY** of **Maxoderm CONNECTION** with their order by calling **1-800-903-7101** or by visiting their website at [www.maxodermct.com](http://www.maxodermct.com), and **FOR A LIMITED TIME**, you can still get **\$200 worth of FREE GIFTS** with your order that are yours to keep. Oh and even better, their product is backed by a **90 Day Full Money Back Guarantee**.



“I can honestly say  
 it was the most  
 incredibly  
 intimate  
 experience  
 I’ve ever had in  
 my entire life.”



From the Makers of  
**MAXODERM**  
 Male Enhancement Formula

Individual results may vary. These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. The information featured above has been compiled from actual letters we've received from a few of our many satisfied customers. Customer testimonial results may not be typical. NAT11207

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