In the United States, when the war against terrorism was launched with a bombing of Afghanistan in October 2001, the need to liberate women from the Taliban regime lent moral justification to the attacks. Among some who had long sought to bring into view human rights abuses under the Taliban, such justification rang hollow. Riffat Hassan, a feminist Muslim theologian and contributor to Women for Afghan Women, one of a number of recently released books on the topic, observes that the “liberation” of Afghan women from Taliban rule occurred as a by-product of the U.S.-led military action in Afghanistan. Indeed, Hassan believes that were it not for the September 11 attacks, Afghan women “would have continued to live and die in horrific conditions under Taliban rule.”

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Out of the rubble

Competing perspectives on the lives of Afghan women

When the United States made its opening gambit in the war against terrorism by bombing Afghanistan in October 2001, the need to liberate Afghan women from the Taliban regime lent moral justification to the attacks. Among some who had long sought to bring into view human rights abuses under the Taliban, such justification rang hollow. Riffat Hassan, a feminist Muslim theologian and contributor to Women for Afghan Women, one of a number of recently released books on the topic, observes that the “liberation” of Afghan women from Taliban rule occurred as a by-product of the U.S.-led military action in Afghanistan.” Indeed, Hassan believes that were it not for the September 11 attacks, Afghan women “would have continued to live and die in horrific conditions under Taliban rule.”

The emergence of Afghan women as a human rights cause in the last year raises anew questions about the relationship between politics and the information market. continued on page three
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Under what circumstances do issues appear in global purviews; and why do some engage an American audience more than others? With respect to women in Afghanistan, the interest relates to how women’s rights historically have been leveraged in the West to justify intervention on behalf of “Eastern” women’s liberation. A quick glance at the covers of new books on Afghan women says a lot about how much both politics and publishing rely on this history to make their sales. Their titles—Behind the Burqa, My Forbidden Face, Veiled Courage, Veiled Threat—exploit long-standing myths in the Western imagination about the veil, Islam and women. Pitched into the American book market in the current climate, these titles, and the photos of undivided blobs of burqa-clad women that illustrate their covers, may inadvertently serve a political purpose.

The good news is that beyond the veil-obsessed titles and covers of some recent books, there is a wealth of analysis documenting the situation of Afghan women and placing it in cultural, historical and political context. Ranging from personal testimonies by ordinary Afghan women and professional human rights advocates to rigorous scholarship and more freely declarative journalism, these books attempt to account for the rise of the Taliban and their singularly brutal rule. Many of the authors of these books have taken the current interest in Afghanistan, but which may also inform policy in other contexts, especially since it appears likely that the United States is about to enter a new era of engagement in the Middle East.

The first point, which cannot be stated often enough, is that the grotesque situation in which Afghans found themselves under the Taliban has nothing to do with Islam. It has to do with politics. This bears repeating precisely because of the way in which the case for Afghan women is being made in book titles that reference Islamic cultural markers such as the veil. Moreover, there is no civilization or religion whose ideals tolerate the Taliban’s treatment of women and men. No relativist accommodation of tyranny—in the name of tolerance—need be made.

Books such as Canadian journalist Sally Armstrong’s Veiled Threat confuse the issue by reviewing theological arguments about gender and religion. Armstrong’s is a well-intentioned, but rhetorically overwritten and garbled, attempt to account for the Taliban regime’s interpretation of Islam by the post-Taliban regime. The claim that “the interpretation of Islam by the post-Taliban regime will likely determine the country’s future” is not only untrue, it feeds the premise that Islamic societies lie beyond the exigencies or possibilities of modern social and political frameworks.

The second point consistently made in new books about Afghan women is that gender is a crucial practical and theoretical consideration in rebuilding Afghanistan. This means not only that women must play substantial policy-making and other public roles, but also that the roles of men and masculinity must be factored in. In Women for Afghan Women, this discussion is examined at length. Several contributors to this excellent collection of essays, poems and photographs are members of the organization from which the book takes its name, a group of Afghan and non-Afghan women from the New York area who do fundraising and advocacy work. The collection provides both basic information for a newcomer to Afghan history and culture, and sophisticated critiques and analyses of the steps being taken toward a viable future. Sema Wali’s introduction erudates, in about a page of bullet-pointed remarks, some of the factual confusion that has arisen around who Afghans are—historically and ethnically distinct from Arabs or Iranians—the languages they speak, chiefly Dari and
to RAWA. The feminist political association weren’t content in deep traditionalism.” In the arms of an extended family, they didn’t accept loveless arranged marriage, or had sunk into depression when ones. They had been abused by husbands, indifferent to the deaths of their children, against the Soviets. Their attitudes, or had sunk into depression when ones. They had been abused by husbands, indifferent to the deaths of their children, against the Soviets. Their attitudes, followed shortly by an American-Pashto, and their relationship (none) to intentions in which ethnicity may not be the most criteria of ethnic composition” in a context into a nice conventional male-preponderant difference, of course, is that from “the morality project of modern diplomacy, the unintentional contrast. It is narrated by young Christian missionaries from Waco, Texas, whose dream of “serving the poor overseas and expressing the love of Jesus” led them to Afghanistan in the spring of 2001. While there, they were impressed and put on trial by the Taliban. They were mid-trial in the autumn of 2001 and, in November, air-lifted from the country by US Special Forces. The book is something being prophesied for, to be read for anyone interested in such an experience and in the genre of Christian inspiration, narrative; the young reader to perceive their imprisonment and the tri- als before them during interrogations as tests of their faith. But the narrative contains a secular political currency via the memories and musings of the women. The remarks on their courage are recorded on the book’s back cover. The front cover, a photograph of the Afghan women’s beaming faces, radiates with the implication that the very ability to show one’s name and face as a woman relates to a singularly American concept of freedom. In symmetrical contrast to Prisoners of Hope stands Between the Bards. It recounts the tale within is well-told. Both sisters, sixteen years apart, describe their lives from early childhood to the present, setting their personal experiences against the conflict between communists and mujahadeen that structured much of their existence. Salima, the elder of the two, relates her experience of the extraordinary level of Islam of the 1970s, a nationalist response to the rise of communism in Afghanistan that had severe ramifications in the arena of international relations. Communist Party member, fled the country in 1979, where her reliance on Quranic edicts to educate rural women led her into conflict with the Communist president, Hafizullah Amin. Hala left the country in 1997, following the discovery of her work as a schoolteacher and her violent persecution by the Taliban. All of the books mentioned here offer something of value to the reader interested in women’s赇. Two other books not discussed here are also of note. The scholar reader seeking an overview of the cultural and political rivalry between Afghanistan and the United States may turn to Hafizullah Emad’s Repression, Resistance and Women in Afghanistan. A number of his chapters, which place women’s roles in the context of a shifting state and capital structure, might be useful supplements to a college course. In a different vein, Maryam Qadizad Aseel, an Afghan American, has recorded her impressions in Torn Between Two Cultures. While written in a fairly banal and often sentimental style, it guides the reader through some of the misunderstandings Americans have about Afghanistan from a personal perspective. But the gem among these books is Latifa’s My Forbidden Face. This concise memoir is riveting, insightful and quite lovely; a testament to the human capacity to grow beauty in the roughest soil.
I

n a nation where fear has ruled for decades, Yvonne Vera has consistently spoken out against injustice and violence. Vera, the author of four novels and one collection of short stories, has built a writing career out of criticizing Zimbabwe’s shortcomings—no small feat in a country where outspoken journalists, writers and artists have been imprisoned and opposition party members have routinely disappeared. Even more remarkable is that Vera, who earned a doctorate in literature from York University in Ontario, still lives and publishes in the country of her birth. Born in Zimbabwe’s Matabeleland province, Vera’s commitment to her country has emboldened her to take on controversial subjects in her fiction, most of all the impact of violence on Zimbabwean women. Her central characters are women who suffer from the wars, poverty and patriarchal oppression that have plagued this southern African nation for years. She refuses to offer her reader conventional or tidy resolutions; rather, she weaves fragmented narratives that inexorably build to their tragic endings, wrapping incisive social criticism in impressionistic and elliptical language. One wonders whether her style has protected her from those who might not like what she has to say.

After exploring the conflict between Zimbabwe and Britain during the late nineteenth century in Nebanda (1993), her first novel, Vera moved beyond the concerns of anticolonialism to examine the violence within African communities during the tumultuous twentieth century. Without a Name (1994), a brief but powerful novel that moves between past and present, tells a story centered around rape and infanticide; Under the Tongue (1996), a highly fragmented and poetic narrative, focuses on a young girl’s struggle to survive incest, her father’s murder and her mother’s incarceration. The equally imagistic Butterfly Burning (1998), which marked Vera’s US debut two years later, deals with more forbidden topics: abortion and suicide.

Vera aims even higher with The Stone Virgin, a piercing, lyrical novel that takes on another subject surrounded by fear and silence: the massacres of innocent civilians that took place in the 1980s, shortly after the country won its independence. Newly elected President Robert Mugabe, attempting to consolidate his power, sent soldiers to rid the country of black insurgents and dissidents. No one knows precisely how many people were killed, but the numbers run into the thousands. Matabeleland province, where Vera’s story takes place, was particularly hard hit. Years of terror silenced many people; now, with her new novel, Vera breaks that silence to give voice to some of the victims of the violence perpetrated under black rule.

Like Vera’s previous work, The Stone Virgin tells a story of wounding and trauma. But whereas her earlier work plumbs the traumatized psyches of individual characters, this one ambitiously reaches outward in time. She interweaves the lives of two sisters with the story of their community, Kezi, a rural town located 200 kilometers west of the city of Bulawayo. Unlike its more urban neighbor with its modern, grid-like streets, Kezi is a forgotten town at the end of a turreted road. Its inhabitants, who live in mud huts and congregate at the small, dusty general store, patiently wait for the arrival of a phone for the town’s empty telephone booth and cautiously watch the wars being fought in the nearby hills of Gutali. With this expansive sweep—across the geography of Matabeleland province, over a period of 36 years—the story of an entire nation unfolds.

The first third of the novel spans the colonial era and the decades-long fight for independence from white rule. It begins in Bulawayo in 1950, when Rhodesian society kept Africans and Europeans separate. Vera evocatively describes how black men and women were forced to conduct their lives within the interstices of the city: “Ekoneni is a rendezvous, a place to meet. You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because this city is divided; entry is forbidden to black men and women; you meet outside buildings, not at doorways, entries, foyers, not beneath arched windows, not under graceful colonnades, baldachroes, and cornices, but ekoneni. Here, you linger, ambivalent, permanent as time. You are in transit.”

As the story moves to the rural enclave of Kezi, we meet Thenjiwe, a beautiful young woman who has a brief but intense love affair with a man who steps off the bus from Bulawayo. They drift apart and the affair ends; the story hints that words have failed them. With masterful foreshadowing, Vera suggests the unforeseen calamity that lies ahead for Thenjiwe: “She has no idea now, or ever, that some of the harm she has to forget is in the future, not in the past, and that she would not have enough time in the future to forget any of the hurt.”

The remainder of the novel records the devastating violence that tore apart the young nation between 1981 and 1986. Vera’s characters are not spared: one sister is brutally murdered, the other is raped and mutilated by a black insurgent. Vera captures these excruciating events in images that are simultaneously explicit and metaphorical. She enters her body like a vacuum. She can do nothing to save herself... He forces her down. She yields. She is leaning backwards into his body. He holds her body like a bent stem. He draws her waist into the curve of his arm. She is molded into the shape of his waiting arm—a tendril on a hard rock.

He is at the pit of her being. Her anger rises furiously. Her saliva is a sour ferment of bile. She would like to speak, to spit. (p. 68)

The metaphor conveys the victim’s vulnerability with an unexpected lyricism, but it does not erase the violence. Rather, Vera’s use of metaphor suggests the inadequacy of language in the face of trauma. Again and again, the story returns to the same moments, as repetition suggests how a human consciousness would struggle to grasp the unthinkable. With each new stroke of the pen, the hay picture becomes a little clearer—or as clear as these unpeachable horrors can become.

Vera’s story reminds one of works by Toni Morrison, Edwidge Danticat and Michael Ondaatje, all of whom similarly grapple with physical and psychological trauma. Like them, she explores how violence affects both body and mind. How can healing take place when wounds cut deep into places that no one can see? What happens to language and to memory? “Only the skin heals,” she writes. But “[t]hese are the wounds of war, which no one can heal; bandages and stitches cannot restore a human being with a memory intact and true inside the bone.”

Given her earlier work, Vera’s preoccupation with trauma is hardly surprising. But what differentiates The Stone Virgin from her previous novels is her willingness to ask more searching questions about the violence that has plagued Zimbabwe. She ventures into entirely different territory—the mind of the killer—as the rest of the novel alternates between a woman’s struggle to heal and her attacker’s story. Readers who haven’t already felt disoriented by the story’s shifts in point of view (Vera frequently and unexpectedly switches between first and third person) will certainly feel the shock of experiencing the story through the eyes of the rapist Sibazo. Slowly we come to realize that he, too, is a victim of the war, a wounded man who takes refuge in a Gutali bomb crater filled with dead, dismembered bodies and ancient stone carvings of virgins which exude an enigmatic power.

As Vera plunges into Sibazo’s scarred psyche, she takes one of the greatest artistic and psychological risks of her writing career. Is it the gamble of a mature and compassionate writer and it succeeds: as the story deepens, we catch a glimpse of the full extent of the war’s ravages. Both dissidents and soldiers wreak havoc on the country, destroying Kezi with a systematic, planned brutality. As the violence stochets from person to person, no woman or man remains untouched.
Come September
by Arundhati Roy

Will things get better after they get worse?

Living as I do, as millions of us do, in a world that is no longer at peace, is a disconcerting experience. It is impossible not to feel that the governments of India and Pakistan keep promising their brainwashed citizenry, and in the global neighborhood, that the War against Terrorism (what President Bush rather biblically calls “the task that does not end”), I find myself thinking a great deal about the relationship between citizens and the state.

In India, those of us who have expressed views on nuclear bombs, Big Dams, corporate globalization and the rising threat of communal Hindu fascism—views that are at variance with the Indian government—are branded as “anti-national.” While this accusation does not fill me with indignation, it is not an accurate description of what I do or how I think. An anti-national is a person who is against her own nation and, by inference, is pro some other one. But it is not necessary to be anti-national to be deeply suspicious of all nationalisms, to be anti-nationalism. Nationalism of one kind or another was most of the cause of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrunk-wrap people’s minds and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead. When independent, thinking people (and here I do not include the corporate media) begin to rally under flags, writers, painters, musicians, filmmakers suspend their judgment and blindly yoke their art to the service of the nation, it is time for all of us to sit up and stink. In India we saw it happen after the nuclear tests in 1998 and during the Kargil War against Pakistan in 1999. In the US we saw it happen during the Gulf War and we see it now, during the War Against Terrorism. That blizzard of made-in-China American flags.

Recently, those who have criticized the actions of the US government (myself included) have been called “anti-American.” Anti-Americanism is in thrall to being conscripted into an ideology. The term “anti-American” is usually used by the American establishment to discredit—and not falsely, but shall we say inacurately—define its critics. Once someone is branded anti-American, the chances are that he or she will be judged before they’re heard and the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised national pride.

What does the term “anti-American” mean? Does it mean you’re anti-jew? Or that you’re opposed to free speech? That you’re antigay or against John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean you don’t admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean you are someone who practices civil disobedience, who goes to prison for what you believe in? Does it mean you have a long memory? Does it mean you bear grudges? Does it mean you are opposed to the American military? Does it mean you’re a pacifist? Does it mean you question the policies of the US government? Does it mean you are pro some other one. But it isn’t necessary to be pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name. Or does it mean you are pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name.

There are many Americans who would be mortified to be associated with their government’s policies. The most scholarly, scathing, incisive, hilarious critiques of the hypocrisy and the contradictions in US government policy come from American citizens. When the rest of the world wants to know what the US government is up to, we turn to Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Howard Zinn, Cindy Sheehan, Susan George, Michael Albert, Chalmers Johnson, William Blum and Anthony Amore to tell us what’s really going on.

Similarly, in India, not hundreds, but millions of us would be ashamed and offended if we were in any way implicated with the present Indian government’s fascist policies which, apart from the perpetration of state terrorism in the valley of Kashmir (in the name of fighting terrorism), has also turned a blind eye to the recent state-supervised pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat. It would be absurd to think that those who criticize the Indian government are “anti-Indian”—although the government itself never hesitates to take that line. It is dan- gerous to think that those who criticize the American government or anyone for that matter, the right to define what “India” or “America” are, or ought to be.

To call someone anti-American, indeed, to be anti-American (or for that matter anti-Indian, or anti-Timbuktu), is not just racist, it’s a failure of the imag- ination. An inability to see the world in terms other than those that the establishment has set out for you: If you’re not a patriot you’re a terrorist, if you don’t believe in the US, you hate us. If you’re not Good, you’re Evil. If you’re not with us, you’re with the terrorists.

In fear, like many others, I too made the mistake of scoffing at this post-September 11th rhetoric, dismissing it as foolish and arrogant. I’ve realized that it’s not foolish at all. It’s actually a cannny recruitment drive for a misconceived, dangerous war. Every day I’m taken aback at how many people believe that opposing the war in Afghanistan amounts to supporting terrorism, or vot- ing for the Taliban. Now that the initial aim of the war—capturing Osama bin Laden (dead or alive)—seems to have run into bad weather, the goals have become more diffuse. It’s not enough that whole point of the war was to topple the Taliban regime and liberate Afghan women from their burqas. We’re being asked to believe that the US armies are actually on a feminist mission. (If so, then what’s next stop Be America’s military ally Saudi Arabia?) Think of it this way: in its war against Afghanistan, it is waging an unbridled, shameless, filthy, and dehumanizing war against women, and we see it now, during the War Against Terrorism, that you’re opposed to free speech? That you’re antigay or against John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean you don’t admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean you are someone who practices civil disobedience, who goes to prison for what you believe in? Does it mean you have a long memory? Does it mean you bear grudges? Does it mean you are opposed to the American military? Does it mean you’re a pacifist? Does it mean you question the policies of the US government? Does it mean you are pro some other one. But it isn’t necessary to be pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name. Or does it mean you are pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name. None of us need anniversaries to remember what happened on that day. But it is no more than coincidence that I hap- pen to be here, on American soil, in the shadow of the nuclear holocaust. Our films were founded by bombing Santa Fe? None of us need anniversaries to remember what happened on that day. But it is no more than coincidence that I hap- pen to be here, on American soil, in the shadow of the nuclear holocaust. Our films were founded by bombing Santa Fe?

Since it is September 11th that we’re talking about, perhaps it’s in the fitness of things to talk about the two dates that mean so much to many people, to those who lost their loved ones in America, to those in other parts of the world to whom that day means more than anything. The war, the whole war, the political, economic, and tactical disordering is not offered as an accusation or a provocation. But just to share the grief of history. To this thing I add a little. To say to the citizens of America, in the gentlest, most human way: Welcome to the World.

Two and a half years ago, in Chile, on the 11th of September 1973, General Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in a bloody coup and put a dictator in power who we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own government. You know what happened in Chile then, and you know that the people of Pakistan and the land, the land, the land... and we see it now, during the War Against Terrorism, that you’re opposed to free speech? That you’re antigay or against John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean you don’t admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean you are someone who practices civil disobedience, who goes to prison for what you believe in? Does it mean you have a long memory? Does it mean you bear grudges? Does it mean you are opposed to the American military? Does it mean you’re a pacifist? Does it mean you question the policies of the US government? Does it mean you are pro some other one. But it isn’t necessary to be pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name. Or does it mean you are pro-American to stand by and do nothing while thousands of innocent people lose their lives in your name.
September 11th strikes a more recent world. Both are fault lines in the raging blood-drenched gifts to the modern Kashmir are imperial Britain's festering, sected ancient civilizations. Palestine and whose were not. How carelessly it vivi-

declaration, Lord Arthur James Balfour, tributes marbles.) Two years after the national homes like the school bully dis-
gates of the city of Gaza. The Balfour Declaration, which imperial Britain proclaimed a mandate in ignoring Arab outrage, the British gov-

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September 11th has a tragic reso-

Pakistan back from the brink of war. Is it so hard for it to take its own advice? Who is guilty of feckless moralizing? Of preening peace while it wages war? The United States, which George Bush calls “a peaceful nation,” has been at war with

Washington’s “new product” is not the plight of Kuwaiti people but the asser-
tion that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Forget “the feckless moralis-
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one country or another every year for the last fifty years. Wars are never fought for altruistic reasons. They’re usually fought for hegemony, for business. And then of course, there’s the business of war. Protecting its territory, its oil, its markets. The US government’s recent military interventions in the Balkans and Central Asia have to do with both of these reasons. The president of Afghanistan installed by the United States, is said to be a former emir who was brought into power by the US-based oil company. The US government’s paranoid parroting of the Middle East is because it has two-thirds of the world’s oil reserves. The US government is pouring sweeter oil. Oil keeps the free market rolling. Whoever controls the world’s oil controls the world’s markets.

And how do you control the oil? Nobody puts it more elegantly than the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman. In an article called “Countless Paros,” he says “the US has to make clear to Iraq and US allies that… America will use force, without negotiation, or for that matter, without any kind of well thought-out plans. In the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in the almost daily humiliation the US government heaps on the international community, the US is doing the right thing.” The Lion and the Olive Tree, Friedman says, “the hidden hand of the market will never work.” He also says that McDonald’s cannot flourish without a US Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. Perhaps this was written in a moment of victory, perhaps it’s right. But it’s certainly the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read.

There is a notion gaining currency that the free market breaks down national boundaries, and that corporate globalization’s ultimate destination is a hippie paradise where the heart is the only passport and we all live together happily inside a John Lennon song (Imagine: there’s no country…). This is a canard.

What the free market undermines is not just national borders, but the national boundaries that the rich and poor grow, the hidden fist has its work cut out for it. Multinational corporations on the one hand and world governments on the other are yielding enormous profits cannot push through those deals and administer those projects in developing countries without the active connivance of state machinery—the police, the courts, sometimes even the army. Today corporate globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutiny. Clearly, a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that it’s only money, goods, patents and services that are globalized—not the free market’s values, not the free market’s principles, not the free market’s respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination, or chemical and nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, or…”

Close to one year after the War Against Terror was officially flagged off in the ruins of Afghanistan, freedom is being curtailed in country after country in the name of protecting freedom, civil liberties are being suspended in the name of protecting democracy. All kinds of dissent is being defined as “terrorism.” All kinds of laws are being passed to deal with it. Osama bin Laden seems to have vanished into thin air. Mullah Omar is said to have made his escape on a motorbike. (They could have sent Tin-Tin after him.) The Taliban may have disappeared, but their spirit, and their system of summary justice, is surfacing in the unlikeliest of places. In, for example, in the ruins of Nigeria, in Armenia, in all the Central Asian republics run by all manner of despots and of course in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban may have disappeared, but their spirit, and their system of summary justice, is surfacing in the unlikeliest of places.

Meanwhile down at the mall there’s a mid-season sale. Everything’s discount—oceans, rivers, oil, gene pools, figs, vapors, flowers, childhoods, aluminum factories, phone companies, wisdom, wilderness, civil rights, ecosystems—air, sea, land, all of humanity. McGregor’s series about creatures called “Haroun and the Sea of Stories” has been, for example, in a book. It’s hard to say this, but the American Way of Life is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn’t acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

Fortunately power has a shelf life. When the time comes, maybe this mighty empire will, like others before it, overreach itself. One can’t help wondering what the future means for Africa. When the maddeened king stamps his foot, slaves tremble in their quarters. So, too, will the rest of the world tremble if he says this, but the American Way of Life is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn’t acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

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I n her foreword to Boys and Girls Forever, Alison Lurie outlines her scheme and offers an introduction to her title: “It often seems that the most gifted authors of books for children are not like other writers: instead, in some essential way, they are children themselves.” She points to the schism between what adults think makes good children’s literature and what children themselves prefer, namely, books in which the kids are heroes and which contain a subversive message about adult authority. Lurie proposes to discuss the predominance of adult characters on the shelves of the children’s section, describing in detail the many arguments she and others make to counteract the commercialization of children’s books—neither of which topics we will deal with here. This foreword points to the books’ strengths and weaknesses. Lurie’s insight into childhood as a culture in its own right, that is in opposition to adult morals and manners, is clearly and convincingly manifested through—by contrast, her frequent digressions—Sharon Stone’s interest in filmmaking and Louisa May Alcott’s adult fiction, for example—are puzzling, especially given the way she has so disenchanted a novelist and scholar working in her area of expertise.

The notion that writers of children’s books are themselves essentially child-like, although touted on the back cover as central to the book, is explored only sporadically. It dominates the first chapter on Hans Christian Andersen, but is abandoned in the second chapter on the highly capable Louisa May Alcott, who seems not to have much in common with childhood and who supported herself and her family with writing from a young age. The thesis is equally neglected in the third chapter, on the Oz books of L. Frank Baum (unless being an avowed feminist and who nobody elected can’t and which contain a subversive message about adult authority. It is picked up again in the fourth and fifth chapters on Walter de la Mare and John Masefield, where it is convincingly illuminated. It is dropped again in the sixth essay on the Finnish author Tove Jansson’s series about creatures called the Moonmoothers, and called into play in the chapter about Dr. Seuss. In her tribut to Salmon Rushdie’s thinly veiled fatwah, Haroun and the Sea of Stories and in the chapter on J. K. Rowling, the Harry Potter series, which provides a particularly obvious target for feminist readers: the female professors at Hogwarts School are either funny or ditsy, and Harry’s friend Hermione is a homely, teacher-pressing prick, central casting shorthand for a studious girl.

The final third of the book is composed of more general essays that focus on a theme rather than an individual author, and here the book’s now-you- don’t-have-to-don’t-essay disappears. This section begins with “What Fairy Tales Tell Us.” The reader will look for a reference to Bruno Bettelheim, but there is not one. Instead, there is a discussion of the ideological function of the genre in English and American fairy tales from the Victorian age to the present. A particularly interesting feature of this essay is the contrast between American and English tales and the lessons they contain about how individuals take their places within social structures:

The standard European fairy tale, both traditional and modern, takes place in a fixed social world. In the usual plot, a poor boy or girl—becomes rich or marries into royalty. In a varia- tion, a prince or princess falls in love with his or her rightful position…. Usually the social system is implicitly unques- tioned, and remains unchanged; while the fairy tale can be a discussion of social conditions, and what he or she hopes for is to succeed within the terms of this system….

By contrast, Lurie claims, American folk and fairy tales do not set much
store by wealth and position. Their heroes and heroines are sceptics, critical of those who abuse power and of traditional social roles they themselves are expected to play.

In "Louder than Words: Children's Book Illustrations," Lurie considers the differences between older and more recent visual depictions of traditional stories, concluding that the more recent versions are, with some exceptions, less realistic and hence less frightening than their predecessors. Anyone who has seen the older Disney animated movies—Sleeping Beauty, for example—with a child, or as a child, may disagree. Lurie, on the other hand, is the author/illustrator Arnold Lobel with Uncle Walt. Lurie objects to Lobel's version of Mother Goose: "The comic exaggerations and loose, sketchy technique of his drawings, in which pencil lines and brush marks are visible, can destroy the illusion, reminding us that these pictures were made by a human hand and are not magical visions." Lurie, elsewhere a decided critic of the sentimental view of children, here shows herself to be perhaps unconsciously inclined toward it, or at least to doubt children's ability to understand that sometimes a wonderful picture is merely a wonderful picture.

The final chapter, "Enchanted Forest and Secret Gardens: Nature in Children's Literature," is beautifully written, a true essay in which we see the author's mind at play. Lurie uses a voice more unfettered than anywhere else in this collection and warms to her voice more unfettered than anywhere else in this collection and warms to her.

For me, and I think for most children who have really known, understood nature seemed both powerful and sentient—a conscious force. The simplest rhymes assumed this: "Rain, rain, go away; come again another day," my sister and I chanted as the gray drops blurred the glass. The clear implication was that the rain could hear us, even if it chose not to do as we asked. This didn't seem strange: after all, nature often spoke by signs—those rainbow that marked the end of the storm, the groundhog that did or did not see its shadow on February second. (p. 172)

She goes on to incorporate into her discussion, briefly but seamlessly and with great sensitivity, how nature is portrayed in a host of children's classics: Grimm's Fairy Tales, Goodnight Moon, Art, the Back of the North Wind, Huckleberry Finn, The Wind in the Willows, Winnie the Pooh, Little House on the Prairie, The Secret Garden and Charlotte's Web. I wish that Lurie had chosen to expand this chapter into a book, for here we see what we have come to expect from this Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist: a vibrant, engaging style and a wide and deep knowledge of children's literature.

amazon.com over 700 books on Alzheimer's are medicine-weapon stuff for the most part, but about a quarter are first-person accounts by family members about the day-to-day care they give. The writer enters Alzheimer's narrative voices—John Bayley, for example, and now the novelist Sue Miller, probably best known for The Good Mother, a disturbing novel that made a fan of me.

Miller has worked a very circumscripted terrain, a middle-class world of ministers and psychoanalysts, wives and mothers, whose families characteristically have "camps" in Maine or New Hampshire. She is herself a breast-Feeding WASP—without the family money. It's an odd claim in these times, but it does accurately describe her turf, and for one am interested. I respect the way she creates suspense out of the minute ethical decisions on which intimate domiciles depend. And I would forgive her a lot for her women, at once willful and sexual and "good."

In the past, Miller has steered clear of nonfiction out of a sense that facts can't convey "exactly how it was." That requires rearranging personal memories, in her view. "If I have a call," she says, "I suppose it is that." Even while producing a memoir, she clearly believes reordering memory is the higher narrative path. The Story of My Father ended with an apology for having written it, as if she believes the form needs as many excuses as she can muster. And The Distangished Guest—one of three novels she wrote while processing over The Story of My Father—implicitly condemns the form as too simply and self-interested to reflect fairly the multiple perspectives of family life.

Given these views, Miller would probably never have turned to memoir if Alzheimer's hadn't made its demand that unadulterated memory be honored. But in 1986 the police called her about a man who had gotten lost in the middle of the night and knocking on someone's door. He was wearing a suit and with none of the deep recognition that lights a face. And he was delusional, telling her "with delight... about little people who had spoken to him." At first she opposed his hallucinations with logic, as if he were a misguided and irritating child. "So I guess I was seeing things," he responded. Then, "Doggone, I never thought I'd lose my mind." Miller herself was not so cordial. Her father had been her refuge from the "high drama" of her mother, a woman Miller still dislikes so much that she can barely mention her without a sarcastic aside. And now this bulwark of sanity was rapidly losing his grasp on reality. There was the fear, too, that Miller might share his fate.

Throughout her father's decline, Miller found herself clutching at any signs that might be useful to other victims of AD, a tendency common, she observes, among those whose intimates are overtaken by the disease. At his continuing care, facility, she kept signing him up for lectures as though she shared his notion that he was enrolled in an odd sort of college. (One thing he couldn't figure out: "No one ever seems to graduate from here.")

She even bought him a ticket for the symphony at a point when he clearly couldn't be trusted not to wander off. For a long time after the facility's staff found her father intractable, Miller took pride in the fact that she could still manage to write about him. Then she turned on her as well. Ultimately, he died from a tumor Miller suggests she might have recognized earlier if she hadn't turned her instinct that he was in pain—or, as the staff should have, that AD victims often use aggression to express discomfort.

After her father's death, Miller suffered from dreams in which she failed to help him. She tried therapy; then, like so many of AD's secondary victims, began to write a memoir. "Of course," she says, "it was not so simple." She abandoned the memoir three times in the next decade, writing The Distangished Guest, While I Was Gone and The World Below in the process. As she explains in the afterword of The Story of My Father, these novels "interrupted" work on the memoir; they "came along" like unintended pregnancies. In fact, they represent extremely interesting attempts to deal with both the themes her father's illness brought to mind and with her unease about writing nonfiction. They are part of her project, in other words, not interruptions.

They must not have satisfied her conscience, however, because in the end she came back to the intransigent memoir. Her problem, she thought, was producing a confounding nonfiction voice. But memoir does not require a confounding voice. It isn't textbook stuff. And the fictions Miller wrote when she wasn't writing The Story of My Father made remarkable examples of successful nonfiction voices. Something else was wrong.

One challenge she faced was that her father had never "called up any of those little incidents from childhood" that her mother "specialized in." She doesn't think she "used his personal memories in coming

to understand himself.” Much as Miller admires this reserve, she must have found it frustrating to be so little of her father's history to tap. She solves the difficulty, to a degree, by focusing on him as an adult—already her father, the man whose “calm” and “enormousness of self” she adored during her refuge. On this fact, in this apt solution. But her devotion to her father's reputation is her father's heart attack; losing her gave her her father, the man whose “calm” and “enormousness of self” she adored during her refuge. On this fact, in this apt solution. But her devotion to her father's reputation is

In the opening elegant passage of the book, for example, she recalls that her voice was raised when she talked about her uncle, radical Christians who believed Jesus “was speaking of a necessary act…when he called on his followers to turn away from the destruction of their own kind.” Her uncle had refused to register for the draft, spending the Second World War in a federal prison; the other had demanded alternative service. Her father, in contrast, took advantage of a minimal exemption, a choice Miller sees as ethically inferior. It’s not an idea she likes—her father at the bottom of the ethical pecking order—and her attention is so fixed on making him into her uncle’s ethical equal that she overlooks the people who might find an invitation of Jesus’ turn-the other cheek philosophy tone deaf in the context of the Second World War. (Should the Jews have turned the other cheek?)

Then there’s Miller’s treatment of her mother. In looking back at her parents’ marriage in 1934, Howard notes, “already her father, the man whose “calm” and “enormousness of self” she adored during her refuge. On this fact, in this apt solution. But her devotion to her father's reputation is

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In Bonnie Friedman’s memoir about seven years of therapy, she follows what Freud called the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis: communicate everything that comes to mind. Do not exclude any idea because it is too disagreeable, indecent, irrelevant, or nonsensical. *The Thief of Happiness* includes interchanges with her pseudonymous psychoanalyst Dr. Harriet Sing, a par-ticiple of childhood remembrances, assorted musings about love and life, and feverish fantasies. Friedman reports sundry details of meals, shopping trips, phone conversations and household chores. She puts readers in the position of the psychoanalyst who must locate what Freud called “precious memories buried in the ‘many tons of ore’ that free association produces. Those who prefer stories with discernible plots will throw up their hands. But there is method to Friedman’s madness: although she risks sounding self-indulgent, there is no more truthful way to tell a psychoanalysis.

As in most varieties of psychody-namic therapy, transference—the emotionally charged relationship between therapist and patient—was the pivot of the therapy. Dr. Sing was remote, aus-tere and sparing in her words. Apart from her wardrobe—blue skirts, starched white blouses and riding boots—Friedman knew little about her. This left ample room for her uncon-scious to run free, which is precisely the effect Sing intended. Friedman was instantly propelled into an intense infat-uation: “Little mattered now besides Harriet Sing, everyone else was merely metaphorical.” Sing encouraged this absorption: “If I say I felt lonely, she responds, ‘You felt lonely for me,’ and I know she’s right. A journalist…writes…” [11]

Friedman seems to find the gains she made in psychoanalysis equally mysteri-ous and unwill. She says, for example, “[T]o my surprise, I turned into a person who could think judiciously.” In her eyes, psychoanalysis is akin to witch-craft, and she sums up the experience as a “supremely useful…spiritual appren-ticeship.” But attributing so much power to psychoanalysis keeps her from credit-ing her own agency. Friedman’s narrative culminates in a dis-cussion of the complicated and often contradictory lives of foreign “nomads,” which for better or worse have become entangled with those of the Iranian men whom they married. These non-Iranian women often find themselves caught in webs of kinship relations and traditional expectations that they cannot quite com-prehend. Howard highlights the pain and joy of those Euro-Americans who live in Iran with their husbands. Some, like Jane (not the author), who opened a highly successful restaurant with her husband in Kashan (an ancient city at the edge of Iran’s great Salt Desert), preferred to stay in Iran because of the “kids.” Jane liked “the people here, they are very kind, very nice and very polite.” But others have suf-fered, particularly those who have married into religious families. Anna, a devout Roman Catholic who escaped from Hungary at the time of the 1956 uprising, described her anxiety to Howard in the aftermath of her hysterectomy: “While her husband nursed her throughout her illness and manfully looked after the chil-dren, her in-laws pressured her to get a divorce, the implication being that she was now ‘damaged goods.’”

Howard does not give the same atten-tion to the lives of non-European wives of Iranian men. She highlights a gather-ing of foreign women coming to Qom, where an articulate black American Muslim woman organized an annual meeting in memory of Malcolm X and challenged the masculinist monopoly on martyrdom. One would have liked to hear about how such women engaged issues of kinship and patriarchy in Iran. But overall, Howard’s readers come away better informed about the society and women of Iran, carrying with them stories about the lives of a wide range of individuals and the structural limitations of a culture. I enjoyed reading her book and highly recommend it.

Readers may well ask what actually did happen in Friedman’s therapy. Did she change because of her therapy or in spite of it? Her writer’s block—the problem for which she entered therapy—dissipated in two weeks. Why did she stay in therapy for seven additional years? Was analysis a trap that sidetracked her from productive and healthy living? Or did it ultimately enable her to write, live zestfully and rekindle a humdrum marriage? These questions have no easy answers. This is why scientifically-minded practitioners (and cost-conscious managed-care com-panies) are wary of psychoanalysis.

Some will read *The Thief of Happiness* as a story of self-discovery, spiritual growth and healing. Others will read it as a grim tale of humbuggery. At one point, Friedman herself pronounces Dr. Sing a humbug—the “Great Gatsby of Psychoanalysis,” the “Wizard of Oz.” Was Dr. Sing brilliant or inépt? Was she deluded by her own theories? Was she just fleecing her patient? Friedman poses these questions, but adroitly sidesteps their answers, leaving them for the read-er to ponder. Psychoanalysis, after all, implies that reality is never what it appears to be.

I must underscore that Friedman’s encounter with psychotherapy was not at all typical. Even among psychoana-lysts, the orthodox form that Dr. Sing espoused has been on the wane for sev-eral decades. To keep an individual, especially one who had no significant clinical psychopathology, in treatment for seven years is a dubious practice. And the aloof stance that Sing assumed has largely given way to a more active, conversational, egalitarian one. In Friedman’s telling, Sing’s pronounce-ments are often stagey and her interpre-tations cryptic. Indeed, her remarks sometimes sound like a parody of ther-apecious arrogance. One example: Friedman worried that if she deferred getting pregnant until treatment was

The view from the couch by Jeanne Marrzuck

Turkic-speaking people. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire included the territories of modern Turkey and surrounding regions. At that time, the empire was predominantly Muslim and had a diverse population that included people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Ottomans were known for their tolerance and cultural exchange, but they also imposed their own cultural and religious norms. The image of a woman carrying a baby symbolizes the cultural diversity and the influence of Islamic traditions in the region. The traditional clothing and the language spoken by the woman suggest a connection to the Levant, which includes parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. This region is known for its rich cultural heritage and its role in Islamic history. The representation of a woman with a baby also highlights the role of women in maintaining and transmitting cultural traditions. Women have played important roles in the history and culture of the region, both in domestic life and in the broader social and political contexts. The image of a woman with a baby is a common motif in Islamic art and is often associated with themes of love, fertility, and the beauty of life. It is a visual expression of the importance of family, motherhood, and the continuation of the cycle of life.
L

Ike many other North Americans and other “internationalistas” from Latin America, Japan and Western Europe, I spent a lot of time during the Reagan years either in Nicaragua or organizing solidarity against the Contra War. Following the July 1979 Sandinista Revolution that dislodged the Somoza dictatorship and its crucial National Guard from power, activists from the sixteen movements along with a new generation of citizens, including huge numbers of North American lesbian and gay activists, flocked to Nicaragua in response to the Sandinista call for revolutionaries to assist with a literacy program and help rebuild the war-torn and impoverished nation of 2.5 million people. I didn’t get to experience that first euphoric moment. Within a year the United States government, led by Jimmy Carter, began in project to banish the Sandinistas and to restore Somocon to Nicaragua, who was assassinated in his Paraguayan exile in June 1980. By the time I visited the new Nicaragua in May 1981, three months into the Reagan administration, his campaign promise to reintroduce American values to the region was in tatters. “Switching therapists is like switching mothers.” When Friedman broached the topic of termination (“When will you ever let me leave?”), said, “Your very restlessness is a sign that you have more work to do.”


Belli takes seriously the feminist slogan, “The personal is political,” and moves through her coming to consciousness, revolutionary ventures and feminist callings, making connections and self-criticism rarely found in revolutionary memoirs—Emma Goldman and Elaine Brown being notable exceptions, although neither claimed to be a great writer. She exhibits no bitterness, no vindictiveness or self-righteousness. Nor does she apologize for revolution or regret her historical role in it.

I t is some ways, Belli’s story is a collection of four memoirs, reflecting the presence of thousands of professional and upper-class young women and men who abandoned their privileged lives to join what was, at its base, a mass peasant-worker movement. It resonates with the experiences of the critical mass of women who became Sandinistas—nearly half the combatants and clandestine activists by the time of the revolution. The Sandinista revolution was not the only national insurgency to coincide with the Women’s Liberation Movement. In southern Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, feminism and anti-colonialism through guerrilla warfare during the sec- ond half of the 1970s. The Iranian, Afghan and Guatemalan revolutions took place at the same time that the FSLN came to power in Nicaragua. But the FSLN was the first successful revolution consciously to recruit and incorporate self-proclaimed feminists into its ranks. Women like Gioconda Belli, Nora Astorga, Sofia Montenegro, Daisy de Leon and dozens of the United States women constitute a form of autobiography that offers a unique perspective on women’s lives around the world. Women like Belli brought a feminist consciousness to the revolution, she argues that a fatal flaw of the FSLN was its failure to concretely translate the women’s movement and feminism that led Belli to join the FSLN and become Sandinista. In 1979, when I visited the FSLN’s Front, I was able to see the connection between the movement and the Sandinista Revolution that dislodged the Somoza dictatorship and its crucial National Guard from power, activists from the sixteen movements along with a new generation of citizens, including huge numbers of North American lesbian and gay activists, flocked to Nicaragua in response to the Sandinista call for revolutionaries to assist with a literacy program and help rebuild the war-torn and impoverished nation of 2.5 million people. I didn’t get to experience that first euphoric moment. Within a year the United States government, led by Jimmy Carter, began in project to banish the Sandinistas and to restore Somocon to Nicaragua, who was assassinated in his Paraguayan exile in June 1980. By the time I visited the new Nicaragua in May 1981, three months into the Reagan administration, his campaign promise to reintroduce American values to the region was in tatters. “Switching therapists is like switching mothers.” When Friedman broached the topic of termination (“When will you ever let me leave?”), said, “Your very restlessness is a sign that you have more work to do.”

The Country Under My Skin is the ultimate insider’s view of a revolu-

I mentary process. In his rave review in the New York Review of Books last year, Charles Ponce endorsed his correspondent Karen Zediker, who covered Sandinista Nicaragua for the Times and knew Belli well when she was the FSLN’s chief correspondent. “It will appeal to anyone’s account... No woman will ever be able to write such an account, because no woman was ever admitted to the Sandinista elite.” I disagree with that view. Before the FSLN came to power and for three years after, Belli was the companion of Henry Ruiz Morgan, “The Man of the Demon Lover,” an obsessive, humiliating and self-destructive affair from which Belli finally liberated herself and the feminist ideals she had sacrificed. She writes:

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role in my life, but I was deter-
minded to stop being emotionally
dependent on them. I no longer
wanted a man to have life-or-death
power over me. (p. 290)

Belli’s retrospective understanding is
profound. Hers is truly an insider’s
account of a kind unlikely to be written
by a man, or even a woman who was not
a feminist.

Now married to a US citizen, a fel-
low-writer, Belli divides her time
between her beloved Nicaragua and her
home and family in Los Angeles, an
activist in both places: “I continue to be
another of the many citizens of this
world who are passionately convinced
that our planet will only survive if we
eliminate the gross inequalities that
divide its people,” she writes.

Every young woman involved in
political movements—mainstream or
oppositional—should read this book
as a self-help manual. For them, and,
for the rest of us, it is a true work of
literature, story-telling at its best, as
well as an inspiration. Belli’s closing
words are a call to stay in the revolu-
tion for the long haul: “My deaths, my
dead, were not in vain. This is a relay
race to the end of time. In the United
States, just as in Nicaragua, I am the
same Quixota who learned through
life’s battles that defeat can be as much
of an illusion as victory.”

---

Love after 9/11

1.

The worst photos were not beaming wedding birthday graduation taped
to lampposts subway billboards any walls at all
not even the ones you start to recognize yeah that’s
Angela Brendan Carmen Teresa last seen wearing
Mohammed yes, Mohammed

The worst clips were not the plane striking the tower
and then the second plane the first then the second.
Again. Again.

Not the hordes of people running through streets covered in ash
not the pet rescuers
not the weeping firefighters
not the vast twisted steel
not the mountains of contamination
not even the people insisting their loved one was not dead just
missing after 7 days 10 days 15 days

No, to me the worst were the ones they stopped showing after the first day so
maybe the papers agreed, photos of tiny
bodies hurling themselves from windows 90 100 floors up
so hot they jumped
caught by the worst photos in the vertical flow of traffic
just jumped midfall almost to ground zero not yet named

Are we that small?
A bad question but not the worst
No, to the worst question is were they
that frightened
that desperate
that hot

2.

Yesterday we made love for the first time since 9/11–
too tired, too raw, too in motion. I had to say
let’s do it: later, after we walk the dog,
after Key Food, after the delivery of 12 bottles of seltzer and a giant
laundry detergent, after 5 lbs of potatoes
arrive. Finally. You make one more call. I
check emails mostly about 9/11 and the impending
war and how to stop it when we are
that small, falling from a great height

Finally, by 6, 6:30 we had cleared away a small
space in which we might touch, sink into each other’s
bodies, and sleep a deep restful sleep
even for half an hour. And so we touched
the wordless comfort of skin. You
came first, loud and raucous, that deep place of
release. Then me: as I came I saw
bodies falling from a great height
each a tiny streak of light slashing the darkness and coming I
sobbed for all the bodies
and all the bodies who loved them, sobbed
in my own body
coming fully alive

—Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

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One child at a time

Another Place at the Table
by Kathy Harrison.


I am puzzled how to approach Kathy Harrison’s book. Should it be looked
at as an ordinary woman’s day-to-day journal of the routine of caring
for an endless succession of abused and neg-
l ected children (which it is)? Should it be
read as the passionately personal account
of the successes and failures with some of
t hose children, or as a tactual introduction
to the byzantine intricacies of the Child
Welfare system (which it is)? Or should I
simply accept it as a very good read
(which it quite definitely is)?

Harrison has been a foster parent, pro-
essionally, for thirteen years, and
Another Place at the Table is a report of a few high
and low points of her experience in the
field. It begins with her decision to take in
two young sisters to care for in her new
home. Though the Harrisons adopt Angie
and Neddy soon afterwards, their arrival
involves the family in the Massachusetts
foster care system and draws Kathy
Harrison’s attention to the desperate, des-
perately growing need for foster care.

She is blessed with an extraordinary
supportive husband; the family of three
almost-grown sons and the two adopted
little girls soon swells even further with
transient waifs and foundlings who come and
go, and whose young lives are graph-
ic demonstrations of physical and sexual
abuse, parental neglect, congenital disabili-
ty, mental handicap and psychological
trauma. The birth mothers who show up,
sporadically and unreluctingly, for visitations,
are often children themselves, helplessly
in the throes of poverty or addiction and
victims of a general cluelessness about
children’s needs. As Harrison gains expe-
rience, she takes on emergency place-
ments and harder and harder cases. She is
eager to adopt another little boarder with
whom she’s fallen in love. She won-
ders herself, periodically and poignantly
what’s the matter with her. But clearly her
insights into the needs of these forsaken
children make her as inevitably and intrin-
sically their nurturer as—at least—as Mozart
was a musician. Some things there is no
getting away from, and it is no surprise
that by the end of her account Harrison
has become something of a leader in fos-
ter care as well as a spokeswoman and
advocate for the cause.

So I am ashamed to confess that, for
me, the pleasures of reading Another Place
at the Table had more to do with the dra-
matic content of Harrison’s failures than
the triumph of her good works. If I
couldn’t put the book down, it was for
pretty much the same reason that I ate up
the first six copies of True Conspiracies I
ever laid eyes on—cover to cover on a
train from Urtica in 1951—flinging aside
the respectable volume I’d brought along
because I was eager to adopt another little boarder
among the respectable
world. But if I could have
the squall of
True Life makes for absorbing reading, it
doesn’t readily lend itself to cogent liter-

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it is a challenge to write about the con-
tradictions that immigrants face with
out sounding preachy (a pailful Hwang
successfully avoids by using the first
person) and overall the sardonic tone of
the narrative is not true to the genuine
feel of the character, because “his wealthy,
bourgeois parents had disapproved of his
father…forced him to marry a woman who
wasn’t of his own class.”

Hwang has drawn Ginger as a walking
contradiction. Although characterizing her-
self as an independent woman—“I wasn’t
one of those Korean women”—she
made my actions sometimes contradicted who I was inside, but I trusted that people who weren’t my mother could see or sense the
real me. The feminist, independently mind-
ful, “I’ve changed a lot.” Ginger doesn’t
seem particularly feminist or independent-
mingled. After putting through her gradu-
ate school, which Ginger dropped out of
in order to follow her best friend to
An M.A. magazine, her mother still pays her
rent in Manhattan and buys her furniture.
Ginger doesn’t protest her mother’s efforts
because she is “too emotionally bound to
her.” She forgives her desires to
make her mother happy, even while she
clenches her fists for the arrangement.
Ginger fiercely disdains Korean men and
customs and prefers to date white
men, but she also claims she is “always up
for a Korean meal, especially if it
involves eating the kind of ‘watered-down, bottom-of-
the-barrel food’” Gingercomments that
Korean restaurants serve to “Americans
or people like me.”

At work her priorities are clear and
she is more assertive, arguing for the respect-
ful portrayal of Asian models and the right
to take on more responsibilities.
She wants to get serious about her career,
not only because of her mother that she don’t
have time for an arranged marriage but to
do something she can be proud of.
Throughout the book, which is lightheart-
ed and amusing, Ginger confronts her
challenges with steady stamina, whether it is for advancement at the magazine, a blind date with a childhood friend or a boisterous Korean American—
“as embarrassing as I was, I had to hand
it to him. He was the most American Kyong I’ve ever met—or photo shown with a lecherous photographer. She is
funny and sincere, and it is a pleasure
for her to follow her natural progress
in one entertaining adventure to
another.

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tratulations that immigrants face with
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sel}
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For anyone in their thirties, reading Michelle Tea's coming-of-age memoir The Chelsea Whistle will be a lot like reconnecting with a childhood friend—reminiscing about episodes of Love Boat, Billy Idol videos on MTV and the various flavors of Maybelline Kissing Potion. Tea even resurrects period vocabulary like “goody,” which warmed my heart with nostalgia. For those of us who grew up in the working-class neighborhoods of America’s small cities during the late 1970s and the 1980s, Tea’s narrative also contains a strikingly familiar cast of characters—scary, unpredictable neighborhood boys, tough girls and parents who are often too busy barely earning a living and navigating their dysfunctional marriages to do what is best for their kids.

These days, Tea lives in San Francisco and travels with Sister Spit’s Ramblin’ Road Show, an ever-morphing group of writers, actors and performers co-founded by Tea and spoken word artist Sini Anderson (you can learn more at www.sisterspit.com). But she spent her first 21 years in Chelsea, a near suburb of Boston and at the time the poorest city in Massachusetts.

As a child, Tea is a thoughtful girl in a setting where thoughtfulness is general and specifically in girls is not rewarded, and her social consciousness makes her an outsider in her family and in their working-class neighborhood. From a young age, she protests her parents’ and grandparents’ muttered complaints about “the” Puerto Ricans, Cambodians, Italians and Blacks.

As a teenager, she expresses her estrangement from her family and Chelsea by embracing the romance of gothic rock, an eighties phenomenon that melded synthesizers and guitars with gloomy and often silly lyrics about love, death and mysticism. At fifteen, Tea sports a “gigantic goth hairdo” and regularly sneaks over the Banshees records.

The relationship between Tea and her mother, Louisa, is central to the narrative. Louisa warns her about the “Sickos” in the world, how dangerous people “don’t have horns on their heads,” advice that echoes in Tea’s consciousness throughout her life. Tea is convinced she is a Sicko, mainly because she is compelled to play games like “death” and “sex” with her younger sister, Madeline. Later, when she finds a book of erotica in her mother’s dresser that features bestiality, she suspects her mother might have gone further to please her brother’s tough girlfriend—reminiscing about episodes of Love Boat, Billy Idol videos on MTV and the various flavors of Maybelline Kissing Potion. Tea even resurrects period vocabulary like “goody,” which warmed my heart with nostalgia.
Friends on the street tells Tea over (she goes because he’s very cute and therefore possibly, among other reasons, she actually wants to wear her in the crotch with a tree branch). Tea’s tough friend Rita offers to teach her the Chelsea whistle, a signal the neighborhood boys to sit down. Tea tries the same tactic. She wants to learn it because “The boys it was meant to call were the boys I would need to be saved from.”

The thematic thread running through The Chelsea Whistle is Tea’s desire to escape. Tea explores with frank humor, passion and attention to the influences of family, community and pop culture. Tea’s mother and the Chelsea Whistle are a standalone and direct, and that she will have to “get used to” or “put up with” pain and betrayal from men, in much the same way a mother in the eighteenth century worried a soon to be married daughter what would happen on her wedding night. As teenager, Tea and a friend babysit for a woman named Jessica, who “cooked us pancakes and told us about having anal sex with her husband. She didn’t like it, said it actually hurt, that there was a lot, and that was part of being married.” At St. Rose’s all-girls Catholic high school, Miss Landers tells her class the reason she wore pants and not skirts was so that men wouldn’t rape her, teaching more likely to rape girls who wore tight clothes and dressed like tramps. This information was directed at Shirley Lombardi in particular. On no uniform days, [Shirley] wore the tightest black-and-red leopard-print jeans with a curling zipper that barely fitted. She lived in women, countries, her right and left legia split into plump little leopard-print pillows. (p. 164)

Despite these warnings, Tea tries to emulate the young women she sees on MTV, but admits “I didn’t have the resources so it just looked weird.” Like a child prostitute.

A significant portion of the memoir is concerned with her various boyfriends. She just looked weird. Like a child prostitute.”

Jane Smiley’s third book is a big novel. In 414 pages she introduces scores of characters (some rather larger than life) and so many themes that it requires only a chapter or two to hazard a first impression. Why did she approach this method so confidently, as in a chapter about dance class that becomes an exploration of masturbation, bestiality and power. Traveling into the unknown with a heart full of curiosity and a certain amount of fear, Tea’s fascination is followed by a portrait of the author’s love of fire, followed by more about the mall, before we reach the actual naturawash, discovered washing her hair in a mall bathroom.

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Janet Winterson describes a certain strain of female sensibility, marked by “the siring of feeling will be enough,” while more developed writing “knows that feeling must give way to form.” Ultimately, The Chelsea Whistle emphasizes feeling over form. In the middle of a memoir that begins and ends well, Tea seems to lose the ability to discern the characters she has added to the story’s momentum. In the first half of the book, the stories are arranged chronologically and each is unified by the theme of sexuality, but they lack strong plot development. Then more than halfway through, she begins a story so riveting I can’t help but think it must have been her intent for writing the memoir. This story-line, which involves a family mystery I won’t divulge, has a potent effect on the reader despite its late introduction, and it proves that Tea’s writing, at its best, contains all the necessary formal elements—sustained plot, suspense and a chilling emotional weight.

While readers’ interest might falter through the middle of The Chelsea Whistle, Winterson reminds us that “writing will likely propel them forward.” The book’s unconventional style mimics speech with its mixture of spasmodic energy, poetic phrasing and casual irreverence. I found the contrast between lyrical turns such as “School let out like a fever breaking” and the cheeky “Chelsea Landers thought Shirley Lombardi was begging for rape with her leopard-print carmets” refreshing and hilarious. Despite the book’s sometimes sour humor, which takes a grim turn in the second half of the book, Tea’s doesn’t believe in creating heartache. For her difficult adolescence, she reproaches her parents, Chelsea and the larger culture that allows cities like Chelsea to exist, cities where men and women are estranged from one another because their needs have become separate. The Chelsea Whistle provides no escape from or triumph over the sense of concentration growing up in Chelsea. What it does provide is a window on working-class girlhood, on what it is to be a woman, to be lost, and how many of us grew up in circumstances similar to Tea’s, seems sorely lacking among current memoirs.

The guy who got out of the Caddy was very smooth looking—created tan slacks, expensive-looking white shirt, Italian-cut jacket, tasseled loafers. He pocketed his keys and threw his sunglasses on the seat of his car, then glanced around for his door. When he saw me looking at him through the plate glass, he broke into a smile with no one. He made deals without understanding a word of territory sometimes. (p. 8)

Joe embarks on the complex process of supervising renovations and publicizing Salt Key’s development. Marcus’ grand ideas astonish him.

. . . if you lay some pipe, you can link it up with your little shopping center and your other development a couple of miles out on the road, a more modest development of, say, three-bedroom houses on quarter-acre lots. Two hundred houses there, four hundred here—here, the little shopping center— I think Jim Croshie is going to go for it in a big way. Not only does he realize that with this deregulation of the S and L that Congress just passed, he can get a branch of his savings-and-loan out here before anyone else thinks about it. And they’re going to let S and L develop properties now. It looks to me like they’re going to let them do just about anything they want— (p. 177)

Smiley’s setting is evocative if enigmatic—depicted, the novel is placed in a generic region, not a precise geographical location. This mountainous area of a Rust Belt state, one and a half hours from New York, features such colorful place-names as Nut Hollow, Maple Glen, Hardy Well Road, Roaring Falls. Joe is clearly at home here: “It was “mid-spring, clear morning, not quite to the daffodil stage. The sky was a cold blue-gray, but the grass had greened up out there. And it looked like you could see each blade shining with chlorophyll.” A fastidious, attentive man, he is often given to reveries on seasonal change: “In the middle of March the trees were bare, wet, and black and the roadway was lined with puddles and dirty patches of snow; but there was nothing unseasonal about it.”

If the physical locale is idyllic, the social scene among these upwardly mobile realtors and bankers is insidious with professional rivalries, sexual acrobatics and dubious business practices. Joe tries to maintain his integrity and optimism as he glides on the hillsides, and it seemed like you could see each blade shining with chlorophyll.” A fastidious, attentive man, he is often given to reveries on seasonal change: “In the middle of March the trees were bare, wet, and black and the roadway was lined with puddles and dirty patches of snow; but there was nothing unseasonal about it.”

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For the most part, Smiley has succeeded in an authentic rendering of her middle-aged male protagonist. One of Joe's unusual habits is his tendency to describe everyone's wardrobe in detail. Of course there's no reason a man couldn't notice clothes; focus, he compares Susan Webster's sexy bikini to "everyone else's Cole of California bathing suits," you wonder how a man who has spent most of his life with a female partner could identify specific brands of women's clothing. Then there is the vocabulary: words like "gamboling" come from the author's voice, not that of her character. Smiley's wit is evident in Joe's light irony and in the novel's larger satire about collective hypocrisies and vanities, about temptation in the Salt Key harbor. Her playfulness extends to the allegorical names of Marcus Burns and Felicity Baldwin. Marcus' sister, who plays a directional if not authorial role in the business, is called "Jane." Joe Stratford's initials are EEmmmmaa G Goldmman... Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American

Apostle of anarchy by Karen Rosenberg

Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American

N o more Emma, no more Rosa; the editor of a once-alternative journal announced to me in the early 1980s. The times they were a-changin', and Goldman and Luxemburg were, out, over, history. Fortunately history has its historians: in 1991, the Emma Goldman Papers Project at the University of California at Berkeley, headed by Candace Falk, put out a massive microfilm edition of writing by and about Goldman called The Emma Goldman Papers, destined mostly for libraries. And now the first in its series of annotated books containing a selection from those microfilms of Goldman's material discovered, later has been published. Making little-known documents available to the general public for the first time, Volume One of Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years offers an alternative to "no more Goldman": no more cult of Goldman which ignores uncomfortable aspects of her biography. As Falk notes in her introduction, this anthology "us[es] the darker owls of her youthful political militancy." Readers who only know Goldman from her memoir Living My Life are likely to be surprised, even shocked, by this volume. Treating the period from 1890 to 1901, it presents Goldman's emergence as an agitator for anarchism and its causes, including free speech, free love and the eight-hour-day. These were the years when she made a name for herself by delivering lectures and speeches in the US and Western Europe, writing for far-flung anarchist publications and giving interviews to the mainstream American press.

In 1892 Goldman's former lover, anarchist Alexander Berkman attempted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the general manager of the Carnegie Steel Company who used lockouts, Pinkerton detectives and other repres...
Voltairene de Cleyer in 1891, among the few women of stature in the anarchist movement. From *Emma Goldman.*

at organized power, and to defend themselves against invasion; and I have always and will stand on the side of the one who has been courageous enough to give his own life in taking or attempting to take the life of a tyrant, whether political or industrial. 

(p. 434)

Hold on there. Who gets to decide whether someone is so terrible as to merit death? Can any individual or group serve as a self-appointed judge, jury and executioner? As political and moral philosophy, this is dangerously facile stuff. At other times Goldman gets around the thorny issue of moral responsibility by turning to the imagery of determinism. Her language shifts suddenly the agents of history are no longer human beings but metaphors like stars, weather, the weather. In 1901, a month after Leon Czolgosz tried to kill President McKinley, she wrote in *Free Inquiry,* “Resistance against force is a fact all through nature. Man being part of nature, he, too, is swayed by the same force to defend himself against invasion. Force will continue to be a natural factor just so long as economic slavery, social superiority, inequality, exploitation, and war continue to destroy all that is good and noble in man.”

As the documents show, Goldman had performed this slide from advocacy of violence to the mere prediction of its demise. That’s another thing you won’t find in *Unauthorized Pleasures.* As political and moral philosophy, this is dangerously over-optimistic. Goldman was more effective as a publisher and reviewer than as a writer and thinker.

Goldman was examined, the transcript of which is a treasure for historians of radical journalism. For instance, there is a valuable passage about the arrest of one of the most successful anarchist couriers in Europe. With the arrest of one of the most successful anarchist couriers in Europe, Goldman and Berkman into his nervous system. He, too, is swayed by the same force to defend himself against invasion. Force will continue to be a natural factor just so long as economic slavery, social superiority, inequality, exploitation, and war continue to destroy all that is good and noble in man.”

(p. 434)

**Earnestly erotic**

by Nina Auerlhab


S
educed scholars assure us periodical-
ly that Victorians’ sex lives were
too often delicious. Ellen Bayuk 
Rosenman is one of them. *Unauthorized Pleasures* is more appealing than most of these books. In general, they rehash, not the self-presentation of Victorians them-
selves, the best-known of whom were

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Unauthorized Pleasures is a hard book not to like. It is always fun to read about any Victorians, who were, in earnest in their transgressions as in their work, and Rosennan often describes her research well, bringing to life a trope of silly moralism which she will read but not will to know about. However, thickens of jargon crop up which I wish she had weeded out. A freely discussion of William Longworth has been fashioned itself in language and subject of this: “Once she is unveiled, Margaret is redrawn as profoundly, transparently other, her imagination, as filtered through a class of male and female visages, to have done better than this. The effect of such biar-patches is not so much to make the book heavy as to make it sound com- municated, a corporeal discourse, to make to her material of its suggestiveness. As she has trouble finding a language, Rosennan also has trouble finding a tone. I'm not sure what, finally, she wants to say; the five chapters, fun as each is, don't coa- lase into a unified argument. Since she don't build to a statement, their organiza- tion seems arbitrary; if the order of the chapters were scrambled, the book would be the same.

I suspect Unauthorized Pleasures may suf- fer less from a failure of thought than from an excess of nomenclature. Sex is hard to write about as it feels: it becomes a magnet for anything the reader might diag- nose as the author's own inadequacies. Except for her repeated perky insistence that she likes sex, Rosennan leaves out a lot. We all like sex, I think, but it is also fraught with danger. In the nineteenth cen- tury, there was a public atmosphere that today, carrying fears of pregnancy, disease, ostracism, clamshells and simple, consum- ing desire, suggest Rosennan has tried to avoid seeing what she as the punitri- tanic tone of her female elders, but she considers few of the real hazards that accompanied sexual release in the nine- teenth century. Any Victorian who relishes her or his sexuality becomes a hero of Unauthorized Pleasures.


Each month we list the recently published books received during the preceding month or so which we think readers of the Woman's Russia will want to know about. This is, however, a very partial selection of the books by and about women published each month. Our listing is informational, not evaluative; the only annotation added is a brief indication of the subject-matter, where the title is not self-explanatory. All are non-fiction titles published in 2003, unless otherwise noted.

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