

[*The Bullet's Song: Romantic Violence and Utopia*, William Pfaff, Simon and Schuster, 384 pages]

Isn't it Romantic?

By Leon Hadar

WHEN WE RECALL the very violent 20th century that spanned from the start of the Great War to the end of the Cold War—the short 20th century, as British historian Eric Hobsbawm dubbed it—the names that come to mind are those of the leading monsters who masterminded the mass murders of that era (Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung) and the buffoons (Hermann Göring, Nikita Khrushchev), serial killers (Heinrich Himmler), and rapists (Lavrenty Beria) who played supporting roles. We sit through this long horror movie, which opens with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 and ends with the scene of the collapsing Berlin Wall in 1989, and we feel a sense of revulsion and disbelief watching the sickening images of Kristallnacht, Babi Yar, Auschwitz, the Russian Gulag and the liquidation of the Kulaks, China's Great Leap Forward to Starvation and Cultural Revolution, Dresden and Hiroshima. Is it possible that a homeless and failed artist from Vienna, a paranoid gangster from Georgia, and a pedophile and drug addict from Beijing led to the ruin of millions and millions of lives?

Well, they certainly did. There is no doubt that if Hollywood gave a prize for the best movie with the theme of mass murder, the three dictators would win, trouncing such deserving nominees as *Il Duce*, Generalissimo Franco and Marshall Tito, Fidel and Pinochet. But if you watched the entire awards ceremony, you would know that before the trophy was given for the best picture, there would be all those prizes for best direction, best script, and best soundtrack conferred to all those who generate the

many elements that together constitute the soul of a film. By applying his organizational skills and leadership, the director makes the movie happen. But it is the screenwriters, the musicians, and the artists who dream the intricate plot, fantasize about the various scenes, visualize the color schemes, and hear the music playing in their heads. Through their minds and imagination, they inspire and create the movie.

In a way, *The Bullet's Song* is dedicated to the creative and sick minds that helped write the script and compose the soundtrack for the man-made death and destruction of the 20th century. From their imaginations sprang the delusions of utopia and the ideology of transcendent violence without which Nazism, fascism, and communism could not have succeeded in stirring up so many people to commit so much mass murder for such a long time. The achievement of the revolutionary artists, writers, and intellectual warriors was remarkable in its effectiveness in helping the big and little dictators mobilize popular support for war and revolution at home and abroad. These intellectual confidence men turned out to be the prime public-relations operatives of the last century. After all, they created the conditions for the favorable reception accorded the likes of Stalin, Mao, Mussolini, and other bloodthirsty madmen by the glitterati of the day in New York, London, and Paris and by the “useful idiots” in the great intellectual centers of the West.

One of our violent age's leading propaganda geniuses was Willi Münzenberg, a founder of the Comintern, who invented that masterful disinformation device known as the political front organization. He seduced a generation of innocents to support the Soviets, including fellow travelers in the West, but ended his life as a dissident who was strangled by Soviet agents in a French forest. It's not surprising that Münzenberg is one of the leading intellectual soldiers and revolutionaries that Pfaff implicates in the 20th century's physical and moral violence. He was a masterful intellectual con artist who served as the role model

for communist and fascist propagandists everywhere, as well as for their liberal counterparts in the West, starting with one of Willi's earliest collaborators, Arthur Koestler, who after years of serving the communist cause became author of the influential novel *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler ended up out-Münzenberging Münzenberg when he helped launch a successful anticommunist front group, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF).

Connecting the dots among a dozen or so emblematic lives like those of Münzenberg and Koestler, Pfaff describes the uprisings they led, the political styles they invented, the propaganda they created, and the intellectual and aesthetic influences they wielded in the 20th century. He also tries to discover their Rosebud, that is, the yearning after transcendence that motivated Münzenberg, Koestler, and the other central characters who “in their lives and public experience provided individual accompaniment to the political history of the century.” They include the British archeologist and spy T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”); the Italian poet and nationalist buccaneer Gabriele D'Annunzio; the world-renowned French novelist and “Byron” of the 1930s, Andre Malraux; and German novelist and nationalist Ernst Jünger. Other intellectuals, storm troopers, assassins, and terrorists such as Filippo Marinetti, a leading Italian Futurist intellectual; French writer Jean-Paul Sartre; and Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara appear in cameo roles in his story.

Pfaff is a child of the 20th century, who not unlike Malraux became, as he puts it, “an ‘engaged’ intellectual in the painful foreign policy controversies of the 1950's (and since).” In fact, at one time he was affiliated with some of the anticommunist groups modeled after Münzenberg's front organizations that were financed by the U.S. government and American foundations, including as an executive of the Free Europe Committee (the parent organization of Radio Free Europe) and as the deputy director of the European affiliate of the Hudson

Institute, a think tank that worked closely with the Pentagon and other U.S. government agencies during the Cold War. Indeed, it seems that at one stage in his life Pfaff was a Koestler wannabe and had the makings of a leading counterrevolutionary intellectual warrior who could still have been crusading for global democracy into the early 21st century.

As an eager child watching such sagas of Hollywood imperialism as *Gunga Din*, Pfaff dreamt of joining his hero Lawrence of Arabia in exporting Western ideas to the exotic Near East. Lawrence, the “Uncrowned King of Arabia,” was perhaps the prototypical romantic figure of the early 20th century and had significant influence on moral sensibility. Pfaff was ripped by the personality of the man and his intensely romantic character, as were the other intellectual warriors of that era, including Malraux, who tried to emulate Lawrence as a make-believe leader of the Chinese revolution.

Malraux was also an admirer of D’Annunzio and served as a Münzenberg agent in the Spanish Civil War. And D’Annunzio was worshipped by the Futurists and inspired Mussolini. Jünger, like Lawrence, entered World War I with the chivalric and romantic assumptions of the Edwardian period, becoming like D’Annunzio an avid nationalist and enemy of the post-World War I order and

servicing the warfare state in contemporary front organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Institute for Peace, the American Enterprise Institute, and the “new” Hudson Institute, whose success in cheating Americans into the quagmire in Mesopotamia would make even Münzenberg and Koestler proud. Pfaff resides in what seems to be self-imposed exile in Paris, where he continues to write provocative neocon-bashing columns for the *International Herald Tribune*. He is a recovering warrior intellectual whose aversion to the neocons reflects the sad recognition that he will never be able to recover his own Rosebud, that intense yearning for the security, hope, and innocence of childhood that encourages men and women to dream of utopia and to recreate themselves as heroic warriors. The history of the 20th century taught him something about “the ability of secular utopian thought to inspire a lethal dogmatic idealism served by increased cruelty.” Growing up, you learn that the answers to life cannot be invented and imposed on reality like a fine work of art. You become an adult and, like Pfaff, you can enjoy your peaceful retirement in Paris.

Reading Pfaff is like drinking good French wine. You have to be in the right mood and sip it unhurriedly so as to

of the violent utopian movement was the loss of the chivalric moral code that had limited what individuals or societies could do to one another.

The mechanized savagery of the First World War put an end to chivalry in the West, replacing it with a nihilism that people subsequently reacted to through individual transcendence and collective will, on one hand, and a longing for social utopias based on historical fiction on the other. The ends therefore justify the means; in fact, they provide a sense of legitimacy to the most degrading personal behavior. Why torment our consciousness with despair over the horrors of Abu Ghraib when we should keep our eyes on the big prize, a democratic and free Iraq that could serve as a model to the entire Middle East?

Indeed, it seems that the late century’s commitment to the redemptive power of violence has reappeared in the early 21st century as many Americans have embraced the utopian vision of exporting democracy and free markets into Iraq and the entire Middle East through the barrel of the gun. Today we have Fox News to provide a platform for the intellectual successors of Italy’s Futurists who, as Pfaff recalls in his book, demanded the “reconstruction of the universe” through the redeeming power of violence and war.

But while the bullet’s song is being delivered today with great effect by the intellectual warriors at AEI and the *Weekly Standard*, we should recall that their predecessors at least had the guts to fight and even die in the revolutions they promoted. They were interesting characters—some of them had written great literature and were great lovers. You may be repulsed by their behavior, but you will enjoy reading about it, which is something that no one would say about our own chickenhawks. They aren’t very romantic. ■

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THE BULLET’S SONG LAMENTS THE DEATH OF NATIONAL AND PERSONAL CHIVALRY.

an ideological ally of Hitler. But like Münzenberg, he turned against the monster he helped to create and eventually conspired to overthrow him. Malraux also ended as an enemy of the French Communists and fellow travelers he once admired, like Koestler and the first generation of neoconservative intellectuals affiliated with the CCF (Irving Kristol, Sidney Hook, Melvin Lasky). Malraux was transformed into an intellectual warrior in the service of the counterrevolutionary forces of the West.

Now the torch has been passed from one Kristol to another, to a new generation of writers, scholars, and pundits

appreciate the aroma and flavor. In addition to the colorful portraits of his protagonists, there are bits and pieces of philosophy, theology, military history, dirty gossip, and poetry, not to mention the moving personal accounts. Even the long footnotes are worth reading. And the “liberal” Pfaff, like another one of my favorite writers, the “conservative” historian John Lukacs, cannot be pigeonholed with simplistic ideological labels. Indeed, *The Bullet’s Song*, which laments the death of a code of national and personal chivalry, could have been written by Lukacs himself. Pfaff argues that one of the key elements in the development

Fat Cats for Africa



The place is always described as exclusive, but that's one thing it is not. Davos is a Swiss ski resort for *hoi polloi*, an Atlantic City with snow, although

it's far prettier than Donald Trump's Jersey playground. Last time I was here was about ten years ago on the frozen lake for a car race that ended up in a humongous spin that lasted for more than a minute.

Davos only becomes exclusive during the annual gathering of fat cats—the World Economic Forum, as it prefers to call itself. GFC (Gathering of Fat Cats), however, is a far more appropriate name.

There is something ludicrous in watching world political and financial leaders jostling to rub elbows with brain-dead celebrities, but such are the joys of the modern world. Pretending to care for the poor is the order of the day, both for the suits as well as for the celebrated, and if one were a ten-year-old who happened to be particularly innocent, he might believe this year's Davos message: the end of poverty is near.

Davos Man returned home from the GFC last week full of dinner-party stories—how Bill Gates and Bill Clinton stood beside Tony Blair and Bono and Angelina Jolie and Sharon Stone and pledged to turn Africa into Palm Beach in the near future (by the year 2025, according to the economist Jeffrey Sachs; 3025 according to the economist Taki).

Mind you, everyone meant well. First and foremost among the assembled was the desire to publicize themselves and the companies they represented. The second priority was to network. Last but not least came the plan to end poverty, as noble a cause as there is, but for one problem. Nobody mentioned the c-word. Corruption—as in African leaders' corruption.

Bill Gates might have the cash and commercial credibility, Bill Clinton the soaring rhetoric, and Bono the blarney and celebrity, but if these cats manage to eliminate hunger from even one tiny African village, I will gift my beautiful sailing yacht to Monica Lewinsky. Call me cynical, but when economists, civil servants, politicians, and company suits start naming countries such as the United States, Japan, and Germany as the top sinners in the not-giving-aid-to-poor-countries category, it's time for the sick bag—especially when in the presence of mega-crooks like the president of Nigeria, top Saudi oil ministers, and—by satellite—Jacques Chirac, a man who is trying to pass a special law making him senator for life in order to avoid jail the minute his presidential term is over. (Chirac wants to introduce global taxes on air and sea travel and financial speculation to help Africa.)

Well-intentioned crusades against poverty in developing countries are good for publicity but little else. Accusing rich nations of not doing enough is just another way of ingratiating oneself with celebrities and the chattering classes. But the reason so many thousands of lives are lost daily in sub-Saharan Africa is not lack of aid but because too much money goes into fighting wars, leaving nothing for hospitals and schools.

Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are three glaring examples of this. Ethiopia has spent huge sums fighting Eritrea over a disputed border. Over 65 million Ethiopians can now hardly feed themselves, while the government spends bil-

ions on arms. Zimbabwe, once the breadbasket of Africa, is an impoverished nation because of Robert Mugabe's greed and disasterous anti-white policies. The psychopathic Liberian murderer Charles Taylor is living in Nigeria with the hundreds of millions he stole from the nation's coffers, and his protector, Olusegun Obasanjo, presents himself in Davos and lectures us on the need to help Africa. Ditto Thabo Mbeki, president of South Africa and the prime mover behind the theory that AIDS does not exist but is an American plot to weaken Africans.

Hand-wringing by corrupt African leaders is nothing new. Africa is suicidal, and its problems are man-made. They began when the British hastily granted African nations independence. Ensuing tribal warfare in Angola, Uganda, Liberia, Eritrea, and the Sudan robbed their citizens of health care and education. The rest was predictable. Africa's epidemics—malaria, cholera, typhoid, and AIDS—will not be beaten by grand gestures from the West. The problems lie in African attitudes. One dinner in Davos for a fat cat costs more than the annual income of most African families, and I do not condemn his appetite—but I do condemn his rhetoric. How dare the Saudi oil minister open his mouth in Davos, when fat Fahd spends \$200 million dollars in his three-week annual holiday in Marbella?

It may not be politically correct, but the only way to save Africa from itself is to recolonize it. The only solution is good governance, an impartial judiciary, secure borders, internal peace, modern medical practices, and an end to kleptocracy. But I won't hold my breath till it happens. Nor will I ever set foot in Davos again. Despite the altitude, too much hot air. ■