

cultural life of the city. Their contributions, however, were neither specifically Jewish nor typically Modernist. Marshalling an impressive array of German-Jews of widely divergent religious commitments, socioeconomic backgrounds, and artistic styles, Gay concludes that "just as there was no Jewish way to cut furs, there was no Jewish way to paint portraits, play Beethoven, produce Ibsen, or fence in the Olympics." As for those Jews who participated in Berlin's cultural avant-garde, they were not there because they were Jews. On the contrary, Gay points out that German-Jews gravitated towards the mainstream of German culture as much as they were permitted to do so. It was (and is) an illusion—and a revealing one—to perceive something "Jewish" in their contributions to German and western culture.

Gay's rejection of the perception of the German-Jew as a "metaphor for modernity" is predicated on the assumption of an advanced state of Jewish assimilation, a condition in which German-Jews could make contributions to German culture as

Germans, not Jews. He sees the "intermittent civil war" among the Jews themselves as evidence of this. (Native German-Jews often held anti-Semitic stereotypes of East European Jews who had immigrated to Germany, and especially to Berlin. This prejudice, Gay observes, was just one more emblem of their Germanness.) And he concludes that, although German-Jews were tragically wrong about the viability of assimilation, "they had good reason to believe that they were right," especially before World War I.

It is at this point that Gay's interpretation of the German-Jewish experience must be challenged. Jewish assimilation was in truth a largely one-sided affair. As Gay himself notes, German-Jews tended to be only too anxious to prove to themselves that they were good Germans. (An example of this was the obsessive and self-flagellatory devotion of Hermann Levi, the conductor, to the Wagners.) Moreover, we now know that there were pockets of enduring German resistance to Jewish assimilation in virtually all sectors of society, particularly politics. And there was a historical

precedent for this resistance. Even the earliest proponents of civil equality for Jews, dating from the late eighteenth century, were ambivalent about the position that Jews, as a group, were to assume in gentile society. This ambivalence continued in the late nineteenth century with the anti-Semitic German historian, Treitschke, and his ideological heirs. Gay, however, does not address himself to the crucial problem of Jewish group survival, despite the fact that it was to become the bane of Jewish fortunes in Germany. In short, his account of the position of Jews in late 19th- and early 20th-century Germany is oversimplified, because his understanding of assimilation lacks a historical perspective.

Still, the questionableness of Gay's judgments does not detract from the validity of his central argument: that the view of the German-Jew as a "metaphor for modernity" is grossly inaccurate. By debunking this and many other myths surrounding German-Jews and Modernist culture, Gay has produced a valuable and informative book. □

#### BOOK REVIEW

##### *Against All Enemies*

Ervin S. Duggan & Ben Wattenberg / Doubleday / \$10.00

##### *Full Disclosure*

William Safire / Doubleday / \$10.95

##### *On the Brink*

Benjamin Stein & Herbert Stein / Simon & Schuster / \$8.95

Aram Bakshian, Jr.

To the native, Washington often seems a bloated, one-company town; those of us born here are constantly amazed by the glamor it seems to hold for the bedazzled or ravenously ambitious newcomer and, one step removed, for thousands of pop-fiction readers. Dullsville-on-the-Potomac has become a stock setting for potboiler novels and a shabby flag of convenience for scripts that pass in the night. Not that even the worst of Washington Novels does not contain a grain or two of truth. Much of the criticism such works receive for their wooden characters, trite dialogue, and cockeyed plots is unfair. Often they are realistic reflections of Washington and its inhabitants—as anyone who has ever managed to stay awake through an entire State of the Union address or a typical Capitol Hill reception can attest.

For, despite what you may have been told, politics generally makes for dull bedfellows—plodding, plotting drones who,

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when sincere, tend to shallow fanaticism and, when ambitious, tend to blind amorality. Above all, most politicians are shrouded by an overpowering banality. In such company, even power can be more of a sedative than an aphrodisiac, Henry Kissinger's assertions to the contrary. Only in the eyes of true power-junkies, of whom there are many, and the occasional bemused history buff, do the monotonous and frequently sordid everyday workings of political and social Washington take on a lurid glitter.

Hence the Washington Novelist's dilemma if he happens to be a writer of talent, taste, sensitivity, or depth: There are few genuine Washington characters or situations which lend themselves to deep, sensitive, or tasteful treatment. The result—with infrequent exceptions such as Henry Adams' *Democracy* and Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (despite its title, not a biography of Roman Polanski)—is usually a specialized, narrower version of the late Jacqueline Susann's revolting regimen of scandal, topicality, and hackneyed corn/porn, only worth noticing when an interesting political principle is injected between bedroom, barroom, and Oval Office.

At such times the Washington Novel ceases, strictly speaking, to be a novel and becomes a propaganda tract—clever or dull, good or bad, depending on one's own tastes and opinions. Judged by this standard, Ben and Herb Stein's *On the Brink* is a work of redeeming political merit and deserves serious consideration. *On the Brink* is no great shakes as literature; but it is a chilling and economically convincing warning of what could happen in the worst of all political worlds, with the OPEC cartel plunging the industrial West into chaos and liberal politicians deepening the crisis by mindlessly cranking out reams of worthless paper currency, thereby creating a wave of Weimar-style hyperinflation and its attendant political and social nastiness.

Professor Milton Friedman has said of *On the Brink* that it is "Good economics as well as good reading. Unbridled monetary expansion has had and can have the tragic effects that the Steins portray so dramatically. It *could* happen here. Perhaps this fictional episode will help us to avoid a real episode." One certainly hopes so, and can commend the Steins for producing, if not a literary triumph, a solid piece of "white" propaganda that may educate readers to a problem about which they would otherwise

remain misinformed. Herb Stein, President Nixon's chief economic advisor, has done a fine job sermonizing for a good cause, and his son Ben, a former White House speechwriter and now a Hollywood scenarist, has built the perfunctory fictive framework with professional competence. Friends of the younger Stein will note a few amusing little touches and several thinly disguised characters: such as a slightly dense, loony president who trusts no one but his dog; a sly, slippery Treasury Secretary from Texas named "Eugene Donnelly"; a deranged Midwest populist called "George McConger"; a poised, lace-curtain Irish millionaire on the White House staff named "Peter Hanrahan" (in many ways the spitting image of Peter Flanigan, a Nixon aide much admired by Stein); and an administration trade official dubbed "Tom Ebersole," a transparent caricature of a cornball politico of whom the heroine remarks, "if Ebersole ever said anything that was not a cliché," she would pass out on the spot. There is also one "Bob Hartley," a dirty old butcher who crops up halfway through the book boffing inflation-plagued housewives in return for discount lambchops. His name—though this, of course, is guesswork on my part—bears a marked resemblance to that of a certain fellow in publishing whose editorial hacking and chopping Stein once found particularly distasteful.

Another former White House speechwriter and highly accomplished political journalist has also tried his hand as a Washington Novelist. Perhaps William Safire best sums up his approach to the genre in the opening sentence of *Full Disclosure*: "Counterfeiting, that was for him. Meticulous work, satisfying results." *Full Disclosure* is meticulous in most of its Washington atmospherics and reportedly earned its author \$1.3 million in satisfying results. As for the counterfeiting, like most Washington Novels, *Full Disclosure* is ersatz literature at best, an evaluation I suspect Safire would agree with, though not the writer of his jacket blurb who acclaims *Full Disclosure* as a novel that "can be read on many levels: as an exciting political adventure, rich in details that only insiders know; as a study of the motivations and machinations of people in power, revealing how well-meaning and intelligent men can make horrendous mistakes; as a handbook for modern Machiavellis; and as an inspirational story of a man who had to lose his sight to gain his vision"—all of which is debatable at best.

What *Full Disclosure* is, and this is more than enough to justify it in political terms, is an interesting fictional treatment of a potential problem—presidential physical disability and the constitutional crisis it could bring on—that may start a few

readers (and politicians) thinking about an issue they would probably ignore were its discussion confined to learned journals. Under the circumstances one can even forgive Safire for giving the presidential seeing-eye dog the magnificently unpronounceable name of "Hangin'ere," something that shouldn't happen, even to a fictitious dog.

*Against All Enemies* is by two veteran Washington hands one of whom—you guessed it—served as a White House speechwriter in the Johnson years. It is perhaps the most crisply written of the three Washington Novels under review here, but also the skimpiest when it comes to political substance. There is no real issue or moral problem of the first water—just an updated fictional rehash of an administration under fire for becoming militarily involved in a small Third World nation, with the new twist that the incumbent President's Vice President decides to run against him. The central character, John Cardwell, is a young presidential speechwriter (surprise, surprise) who typifies the ambitious but not irredeemably rotten breed of talented young men who come to Washington with high hopes, a few pliable ideals, and a predatory glint in their eyes. To the accompaniment of the greater political struggle, Cardwell fights his own battle for integrity,



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bailing out before his Washington ego trip ends in moral disaster. He resigns and, in the closing line of the book, we are told that, "The next day he flew home—to Louisville." Literature would have been none the poorer if Cardwell never left Louisville in the first place; but one of his fictional colleagues at least gives us a succinct description of how the White House syndrome tends to corrupt so many bright young men, not to mention dim-witted old ones:

We're hooked. We've all had a taste of the White House. I don't mean the cars, the trips, all that. I mean the chance to play President.... We all play President, every day. When I brief the press—why I'm the President. When Andy

Martin tells a senator the President can't possibly see him until next month, or when he calls up some middle-level bureaucrat and chews his ass, he's the President! And you speechwriters...I think you've got it worst of all!...It's true with every guy I know, everyone who's ever gotten close to a President. Their egos get all screwed up, all tied up with his—and they call it loyalty, call it a sense of public duty, call it everything except what it really is.

As one who has served as an aide, writer, or consultant to two presidents, two vice presidents, several congressmen and senators, two party chairmen, and a Secretary of the Treasury, I have had all too many opportunities to watch this sinister psychological process in its various

degrees of fermentation. It is not a pretty sight, and the only sure way to avoid it is to come to the job mature—a matter of character, not years—and with a keen eye for the ridiculous in one's self and one's colleagues. Ervin Duggan and Ben Wattenberg both seem to have done so, and *Against All Enemies* just may help to vaccinate a few new arrivals against Potomac Fever in the years ahead. If it does, then it will have served a worthwhile purpose after all. But don't count on it. Like any really strong virus, Potomac Fever has a way of building up resistance to medication. Long after they've cured the common cold, it will probably still be with us. □

## BOOK REVIEW

*Facing up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion*

Peter L. Berger / Basic Books / \$11.50

David Levy

Peter L. Berger, a professor of sociology at Rutgers, is one of the most distinguished representatives of the phenomenological approach to social science. He is also, by his own description, a conservative and, as he puts it, "a rather heretical" Christian. The combination of sociology, conservatism, and Christianity is unusual enough in itself, but when the man in whom they combine is as intelligent and humane a social scientist as Peter Berger the result is fascinating. *Facing up to Modernity* is a collection of 18 essays whose subject matter ranges from a sociological understanding of the reasons for the popularity of psychoanalysis to the significance of the Calley and Manson trials. Professor Berger examines, among other things, paradoxes in intellectual conservatism, the socialist myth, the trend of American foreign policy, and (in several essays) the nature and limits of secularization.

At a time when sociology is often popularly regarded as a synonym for either radicalism or statistic-mania, a conservative humanist in the field will sometimes feel the need for an *apologia pro suae professione*. In a sense this is what Berger provides in his introduction. He admits that sociology is, as the radicals claim, subversive of established patterns of thought because it brings to consciousness the roots of much that is normally taken for granted in social life. But it is also conservative in its implications: "Society, in its essence, is the imposition of order upon the flux of human experience [and] order is the primary imperative of social life." Even the left

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understands that all social order is precarious. It generally fails to understand that, *just because of this precariousness*, societies will react with almost instinctive violence to any fundamental or long-lasting threat to their order. The idea of "permanent revolution" is an anthropologically absurd fantasy. Indeed, revolutionary movements can be successful only if they succeed fairly rapidly in establishing new structures of order within which people can settle down with some semblance of social and psychic safety.

By ordering experience, then, society attempts to make sense of its existence in space and time. Like Eric Voegelin, Berger maintains that any meaningful interpretation of reality must take account of the religious experience of transcendence. He is fully aware of the present disarray of organized religion—indeed, secularization, the denial of transcendence, is a major component of modernization—and he provides acute criticism of the ultramodernist "death-of-God" theology:

...a world view without transcendence must eventually collapse, because it denies ineradicable aspects of human experience.... Transcendence is the experience that human life touches on boundaries. On this side of the boundaries is the world of everyday events, practical activity, and reason, a world in which one is at home in a self evident way. On the other side of the boundaries is the world of the uncanny, of the "totally other," in which the assumptions of ordinary life no longer hold.

Religion is man's way of coming to terms with this realm of experience. Phenomenologically, it is an integral part of man's effort to make sense of his existence. Of course from the religious point of view it is much more—a revelation of transcendent truth which Berger as a Christian accepts

in the knowledge that as a sociologist of religion he can say nothing touching upon its validity. What he can say, and does with great force, is that no account of reality which dogmatically excludes the religious dimension can hope to be true to the full range of man's experience.

In his account of modernization and its discontents Professor Berger emphasizes not only secularization but also the primary importance of industrialization and bureaucratization. His picture of modern social life, dichotomized between powerful social institutions and an underinstitutionalized private sphere, draws on a long tradition of sociological work; and his emphasis on the importance of institutions which mediate between the individual and the state (family, church, etc.) echoes Robert Nisbet, the great anti-Rousseau of present sociology.

Berger regards the critique of modernity as a "task...of human and moral urgency," not because the work of modernization can be or ought to be undone, but because by understanding its nature we can mitigate its effects and build a humanly satisfying order in the midst of the modern rush of events. According to Berger, the myth of socialism has exerted such a strong appeal in our modern age precisely because it promises all the benefits of modernization with none of its alienating costs. And yet he helps us to understand that behind the call for socialization lies, ultimately, a totalitarian social reality.

Modernization is a complex process, and "facing up to modernity" is something we all have to do. Fortunately, Peter Berger is not the sort to offer simple and fraudulent answers. □