

though their dreams fail again and again, bounce happily back, convinced that the next time the planets will arrange themselves in the proper order. And all of them subscribe to one of Jonathan Swift's most treasured beliefs: that "when a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him."

Toole's sympathy and affection for these misfits shine through the disasters he heaps on them. "I am forced to function in a century which I loathe," wails Ignatius, but he is not allowed to sit and feel sorry for himself. Along with the others, he must turn the wheels of a terrifically complex but always logical plot. Toole displays the manic inventiveness of Mordecai Richler or Stanley Elkin together with the love for order and geometry beloved of his protagonist. "The universe, of course," Ignatius writes in his journal, "is based upon the principle of the circle within the circle. At the moment, I am in an inner circle."

The circles widen, gyrate, and blend dizzily, like the circles on those spiral-painted wind-up toys. After being fired from Levy Pants, where he foments an ill-fated rebellion of the proletariat, Ignatius turns

up as a hot-dog vendor, dressed in a pirate costume to attract the tourist trade. ("You look," says a fastidious French Quarter resident, "like Charles Laughton in drag as the Queen of the Gypsies.") His cart attracts a local smut peddler, who rents the bun compartment as a cache for pornographic photos, one of which turns out to be a picture of Ignatius's dream girl. This leads him to the Night of Joy night club, where Burma Jones advertises the extremely dubious floor show and Patrolman Mancuso is set to close in and. . . .

I give up. You will have to read this one for yourself, as a combined act of pleasure—and penance. The money from *Confederacy's* royalties, paperback rights, and movie option will go to the mother of John Kennedy Toole, who killed himself in 1969 at age 32. The book was published only as a result of her persistence in shoving at people the smeary carbon of what she insisted was a great novel. Finally, in 1976, she got it to Walker Percy, who agreed with her. Was it such discouragement over his own failed efforts to get his novel published that drove Toole to suicide? We shall never know, but something else is certain: how much we've lost now that he lies where savage indignation can no longer lacerate his breast. □

THE SECOND COMING

Walker Percy / Farrar Straus & Giroux / \$12.95

Joshua Gilder

It is surprising how many people, despite overwhelming evidence of the acute distress of the mentally ill, continue to believe in the "King of Hearts" vision of the blissfully insane. Not only is it fun to be crazy, the fairy tale goes, it's virtuous as well: The insane have opted out of a debased world to lead the moral life of saints, uncompromised by the meanness and pettiness of everyday living.

For Walker Percy this idea is something of an artistic conceit. Percy's tendency to romanticize mental illness was clear even in his first novel, *The Moviegoer*. The novel's heroine, Kate, cannot manage the most elementary of tasks and pressures of life, so she regresses to a state of infantilism. To save her from the anxiety of having to make choices, Binx, the narrator-hero, takes it upon himself to plan Kate's day step by step, sending her on errands, telling her what route to take on the bus, which seat to sit in, whom to speak to and what to say. Their decision to marry means that Binx will, in essence, be holding her hand through the rest of her life. Nevertheless, Kate's childishness is supposed to make her appealing: We are undoubtedly to see in her another, if slightly jaundiced, version of the helpless woman-child saved by the manly hero.

Percy develops the plot of his new novel, *The Second Coming*, along the same lines. Will Barrett, a retired lawyer and widower (who had married into great wealth), suffers not merely from the gently distressing anomie of his predecessor, Binx, but also from what turns out to be a rare synaptical dysfunction that causes him to fall down on the golf course and ruin his otherwise better-than-par game. Along with these "petit-

mal" attacks, Barrett develops a terrible slice. One day, while chasing a ball out of bounds, he meets Allie, an escapee from the local sanatorium. She is running away from her predatory parents, who are trying to steal her rightful inheritance, and from the sanatorium's well-meaning but incompetent Dr. Duk, who has almost destroyed her memory with repeated shock treatments.

Allie is an innocent, a *tabula rasa*, and through her eyes we are meant to see how silly and artificial our sane world is. While sitting on a park bench, for instance, she notices the "ironies" of contemporary life: the ridiculous changes in fashion, all new to her after her lengthy incarceration; the policeman who tells her to "Have a nice day" but doesn't seem to mean it; the jogger who sits next to her and talks nice but seems to have ulterior motives. Allie, you see, is too good for a world full of people who offer salutations in something less than complete sincerity and who make crude sexual overtures (heavens!). One gets the impression that, like Peter Pan, she didn't like the world, so she decided never to grow up.

In an essential way Barrett, too, has never grown up. Since a childhood trauma, which in the course of the novel he begins to relive and remember fully for the first time, Barrett's life has been, in a sense, parenthetical. His flight in early manhood up North and into the arms of a rich but plain wife, it turns out, was an attempt to escape the encumbrances of his past: the South, failure, a family suicide.

The two of them work fine together, Allie says, because he tends to fall down, and she—proud of herself for installing an antique, two-ton stove in her woodland home with pulleys and ropes—is a "hoister." Again, as in *The Moviegoer*, our hero takes upon himself the detailed organization of his girl's everyday existence. Like a little child, Allie must be told where to go and what to ask for when she gets there. Their relationship is so cloyingly infantile, in fact, that its consummation at a Holiday Inn suggests nothing so much as the mating of three-year-olds.

Joshua Gilder is Associate Editor of Saturday Review.

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And so, not surprisingly, when Allie speaks to Barrett in a personal dialect of her own invention just this side of baby-talk, he can understand her, although no one else does. Conversely, only she can truly appreciate his alternating disaffection and chemically imbalanced visionary states.

Critics like to refer to Walker Percy as a novelist of ideas, one who incorporates weighty philosophical notions in the substance of his work. But never, it seems, do they stop to consider the quality of these ideas. One wonders in this instance how meaningful any novel can be in which the basic philosophy is informed by a regressive desire for life before toilet training. And as to the general body of his work, it should be said that Percy is at his weakest as novelist/philosopher (and not in substance very far removed from the French existentialists he amusingly derides in his collection of essays, *The Message in the Bottle*) and is at his strongest when he separates these two functions.

There are some remarkably skillful characterizations in *The Second Coming* that demonstrate Percy's gifts as a novelist, one of the most impressive being of the Reverend Jack Curl, who hounds Barrett throughout the novel to donate a few millions of his deceased wife's fortune to a "Love and Faith" community on which she had her heart set before her death. Equally good is the passage in which Barrett finally remembers his childhood trauma, when his father tried to kill himself and his son. Percy's description of this horrific affair would almost in itself justify his reputation as one of our best novelists, although the scene's power is diluted and its meaning betrayed when we come to see that its primary purpose is to lead Allie and Will to their love duet in the Holiday Inn.

As a philosopher, too, Percy has moments of brilliance. His discussion of the "debased coinage" of metaphor in one of his essays on language, for example, is one of the most insightful critiques of contemporary poetry written. And yet, because critics must cower before so august an idea as Language Theory and quite rightly feel themselves out of their depth, no one seems to have noticed that Percy never makes good on the original promise of *The Message in the Bottle*, expressed in the subtitle as "How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with The Other." He does quite well with the first two; the third part of this relatively tall order,

however, is never fulfilled, and it remains the unanswered question in his fiction as well.

Since *The Moviegoer*, Percy has been jabbing over and over at this "mystery," sometimes expressed as the mystery of language, sometimes as the perversity of human beings. (Why, for instance, does Binx only come alive in a car accident and Will Barrett only feel truly himself when being shot at?) One begins to feel, setting his novels alongside the essays of *The Message in the Bottle*, that although Percy has much that is interesting to say about language, and much that is interesting to say about human experience, he will never tie the two together. His language theory, though presented in lucid, straightforward prose (no small accomplishment), remains prohibitively abstract; his depictions of particular human dilemmas, though ably described, remain impenetrable. Five novels and one book of essays after *The Moviegoer* he is no closer to unraveling his "mystery."

Percy, it becomes clear, has forsaken psychological insight for philosophical theories that, while fascinating in themselves, block the way toward a true understanding of human action and affairs. The kind of facile theorizing that leads him to romanticize insanity prevents him from undertaking the grimmer business of looking for the truth behind the cultural cliché. Critics do Percy no favor when they line up behind him, spaniel-like, slobbering their praise because they know he's a sure thing. Novelists of ideas are hardly above reproach, especially when they are lesser novelists for being so. □

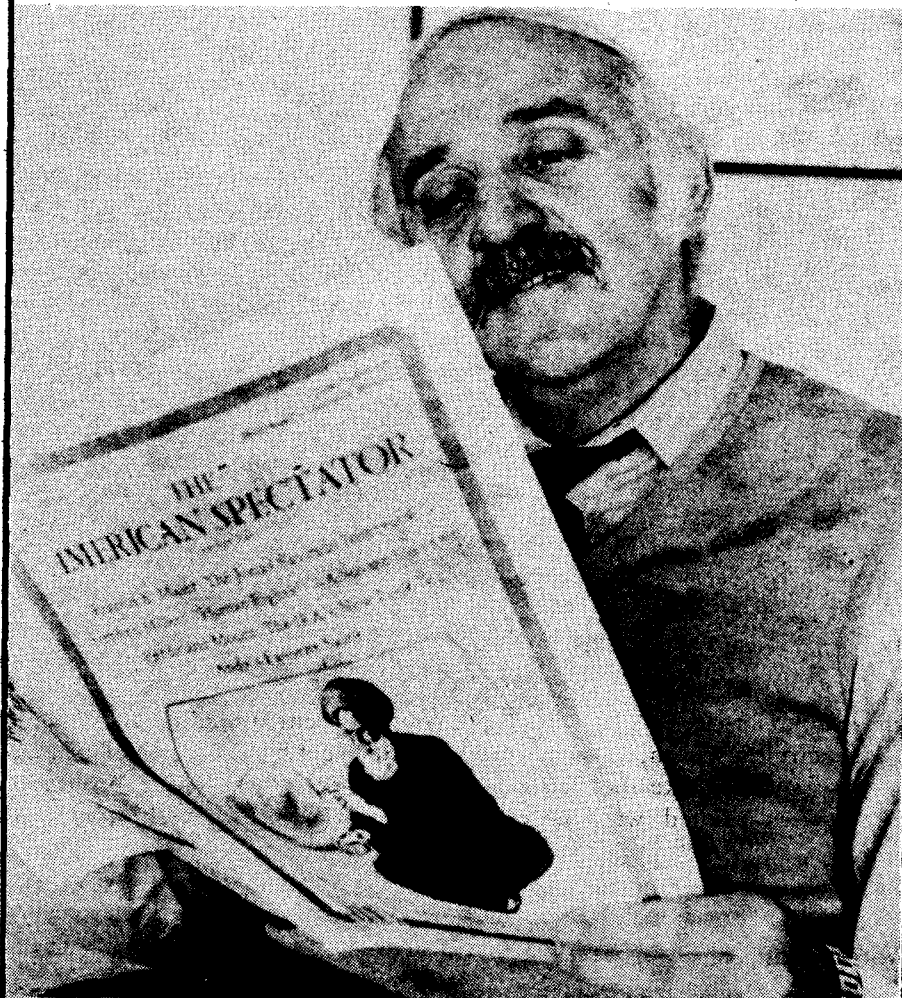
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C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

Righting Marx

I am grateful to Arnold Beichman for his generous remarks about my rational opposition to all forms of totalitarianism, including every variety of Leninism. I hope he will not consider it churlish of me if I briefly reply to his criticism.

1) He objects to my deriving the moral justification of Social Democracy from its commitment to the ideal of equal opportunity for all, on the ground that it is too "exclusionary" or narrow. "Surely," he writes, "Hook will not argue that the workers in the U.S. are social democrats." No, but I am prepared to argue that the independent, enlight-

ened trade union movement is Social-Democratic both in its domestic and foreign policy.

2) Beichman credits me with recognizing that "there is a totalitarian potential in any economy which is completely centralized and nationalized." Why then, he asks, is capitalism in its classical or traditional form an unacceptable alternative to me? The reason is very simple. A completely socialized economy and completely free enterprise economy do not exhaust the alternatives. I regard the mixed economy of the Welfare State as preferable to either.

3) Finally, he challenges my denial that what exists in the Soviet Union is Marxism with the flat assertion that "what does exist in the USSR is the socialism of Karl Marx."

To begin with, it should be obvious that one can hold that Marx's main historical and political predictions have been falsified by events and still deny that Marx's vision of socialism is incorporated in the institutional practices of the Soviet Union. To identify Marxism with any variety of Leninism, Stalinism, or Trotskyism is to overlook the centrality of democratic values and principles in his conception of socialism. Beichman will not be able to find—nor will anyone else—a single line in which he identifies workers democratic rule (or the dictatorship of the proletariat) with the dictatorship of a minority party over the proletariat and every other group as well. Had he lived in Russia, Marx would have been the first victim of Bolshevik terror.

Much more can be said about the responsibility to historical truth by those who have been sobered, disillusioned, or shocked into a sense of reality by the transformation of their dream of a cooperative society into the Gulag Archipelago. Lenin was certainly the architect of Soviet totalitarianism, whose legacy passed to his legitimate heir, Stalin. But it still remains true that what exists in the USSR today is far from the society Lenin describes in his brochure *The Soviets at Work*, as unacceptable as that may also be. Nor does his crime against the Russian people in bayoneting out of existence the democratically elected Constituent Assembly, whose convocation he had demanded under Kerensky, show that he took German gold to overthrow the Kerensky Provisional Government.

Not only is it historically false to

identify Marxism with contemporary Communism, I believe it is strategically unwise. A very persuasive case can be made out to those who are so conditioned that they can only respond to the Marxian idiom that the basic ideas of the mature Marx, as well as the early Feuerbachian Marx, are utterly antithetical to the regimes of political and cultural terror that prevail in all countries under Communist rule.

Sidney Hook

South Wardsboro, Vermont

Give Me Some New-World Religion

In the August 1980 issue you carried a review of James Hitchcock's *Catholicism and Modernity* by Lord Longford. Since the review states that Hitchcock wrote mostly about the American Catholic Church, and that he, the reviewer, "must leave it to American Catholics to dispute with him the accuracy of his diagnosis," why did you pick Lord Longford to review the book in the first place? I learned something about Catholicism in Britain from the review, but very little about Hitchcock's book itself. Couldn't you have gotten Andrew Greeley or Daniel Patrick Moynihan? Either would have added to the seriousness of your paper.

Terrance Walbert

Baltimore, Maryland

That Old Standard—Gold

I usually enjoy Mr. Bethell's perspicacious thoughts on the state of the world, but his column "Sheer Gold" in the July *Spectator* raised my hackles. As a monetary theorist of the Chicago persuasion I am greatly offended as to the total misrepresentation of the Chicago position on monetary economics.

The claim that Milton Friedman has promulgated a theory of monetary supply over the last thirty years shows Mr. Bethell has never taken the time to study seriously the theory he dismisses in a few sentences. Friedman's real theory, clearly stated in 1956 in his article "The Quantity Theory of Money—a Restatement," concerns money demand, not money supply. In fact, almost all of Friedman's important work in monetary theory has been demand theory.

Furthermore, Mr. Bethell's assertion that monetarist doctrine says that the money supply determines

the level of GNP is a gross misrepresentation. The actual claim is that the nominal quantity of money affects the nominal level of GNP; that is, it only affects the value of output and therefore determines the price level. The level of real GNP, the actual output of goods and services, is determined by relative prices and rates of return.

I would also like to point out that Mr. Bethell's claim that, if we returned to the gold standard, we would no longer be subject to serious price level fluctuations, is not borne out by history. The great monetary contraction of the early thirties was caused primarily by the Federal Reserve System's adherence to the rules of the gold standard, inasmuch as the loss of gold reserves forced the Federal Reserve to reduce the money supply accordingly.

In conclusion, I suggest that if Mr. Bethell wishes to bang the drum for a return to the gold standard, he should be prepared to study both monetary theory and history.

Jerrold L. Goldblatt

Indiana University

Bloomington, Indiana

Back to Supply

Tom Bethell's article on gold in the July issue touches briefly and erroneously on the matter of who first discovered supply-side economics, and Mr. Bethell misrepresented me in that brief discussion as well.

Supply-side economics is the use of tax policy to alter the willingness to supply labor or capital to the production process. The supplies of these key inputs govern potential output. The pre-Keynesian classical economics of the 1920s and earlier was founded on this concept.

My statement to Mr. Bethell was that supply-side economics had not been discovered in the 1970s; it had been rediscovered. This rediscovery of the classical school by modern supply-side pioneers is the leading advance in economic theory and policy in the 1970s, in that it forces Keynesian theory back into the real world.

I also told Mr. Bethell that the Minority Members of the Joint Economic Committee were discussing supply-side economics in their dissenting views of JEC Reports several years before the Majority began to take the same approach. This convergence of views led to the supply-oriented consensus JEC An-

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