

points that remain between the United States and the Third World. American talk about the virtues of the free market sounds a little too glib combined with American reluctance to open trade doors when somebody at home might get hurt by competition from the underdeveloped countries. Indira Gandhi's annoyance at hearing all the successes of the Indian economy attributed to the private sector in a very mixed congeries of public and private initiatives is understandable. And there was more than cantankerousness in Julius Nyerere's remarks about the elaborate structure of subsidization that, in present-day real life, supports the sturdy, independent farmer of American tradition.

Still, in less than a year, the Reagan Administration has changed its image in the Third World. The President and those who speak for him have gone far toward dispelling the myth that the Reagan Administration means to turn its back on the developing countries. It doesn't look like indifference if, when food stamps are being cut back in the United States, the President is willing to keep foreign aid at present levels and even to increase it in certain areas.

He has made his point about the superior viability of free market approaches to development at a time when the conspicuous evidence is on his side. The prosperity of Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea speak for it. So do the moves, open and covert, of countries as disparate as

Peru and China to change directions away from socialist regulation and toward free market practices.

At the same time, the Administration has made it clear that concern for Third World problems is not the same thing as the Carter Administration's itch to be "on the right side of history," or any other euphemism for promoting Marxist revolution. Getting rid of a mindset that equates progress with guerrilla warfare has freed the American government of many embarrassments. It takes more now than a random charge of imperialism to inhibit defense of American strategic interests.

The President's winning manner takes away some of the shock effect of his refusal to make decisions on the basis of other people's either/ors.

The United States cordiality toward China will continue, but so will the time-honored American links with Taiwan. The United States will not let its hope of good relations with India stand in the way of strategically necessary ties with Pakistan. It will not even let the U.S. bond with Israel prevent strong ties with the Arab states. Non-alignment, the Administration makes clear, is a game any number can play.

Establishing firmness where there was wobble and simultaneously reducing the guff content of international debate is a considerable achievement. It won't solve the last dilemma over textile imports or Cubans in Angola. It won't make anything easy in Central America. But it will help. □



## HOT TO TROT, SO WHAT?

by John Muggeridge

Doctor Johnson said of Congreve's novel that he would rather praise it than read it. A similar preference is at work, one must charitably assume, among admirers of Susan Cheever's fiction. The *New York Times* calls her a born writer, the *Washington Star* an inventive and graceful one with a wry style of her own, while the *Chicago Tribune* thinks of her prose as graceful and spare, "the kind . . . that sounds effortless but is bone-breaking to write." A fair example of what these three newspapers have in mind is the following dialogue which forms the climax of Cheever's latest novel, *A Handsome Man*,\* and takes place in a ruined castle between the hero's mistress and his son.

"I want you," he said. . . . "I want you badly." He leant towards her, forcing her over onto her side on the grass.

"Travis!" Her voice sounded as surprised as she felt. [Hypocrite! Only four lines earlier his hand on her shoulder had "sent tingling little electric shocks across her chest and down her legs."] He was looming over her now, cradling her head in his hands and looking at her with love

and intensity. "Come on, don't do that!" She tried to pull away from him, but her resistance thawed in the hot force of his desire. . . . There was no ambivalence or doubt about Travis. He wanted her. . . .

"You want it, too," he said, "You want it, too." . . . He was right. She wanted it, too. . . .

"Listen, Trav," she said, trying to control the hot breath which blurred her voice [sic?], "You know this isn't a good idea."

"What do I care about ideas?" [Touché with a vengeance. One of the chief bones of contention between Travis and his family is the fact that he keeps dropping out of school.] He was unbuttoning the top of her shirt now. "I want you and you want me. Come on, come on," he moaned.

Bone-breaking to read would be closer to the mark. *A Handsome Man* is corner-store bookrack stuff spiced up with a spoonful or two of feminist *Weltschmerz*, neo-Gothic romance for the English Lit. set. It even features an upper-crust New York Mr. Rochester, complete with white Alfa-Romeo convertible and silver-handled shaving brushes, not to mention a healthily plebeian Jane Eyre raised under "the big Illinois sky with the distant glow from the lights of Chicago off behind the water towers." The plot unfolds in mystic Ireland. Here, among "images from James Joyce and Yeats and O'Casey

float[ing] past the car windows in the light rain," lust conquers all. Jane is loomed over by the irresistible Travis; her wronged Rochester sheds tears of remorse at his failure to "connect with people"; she forgives him, and they fall into each other's arms as the sun sets over the Western Isles and "one white horse walk[s] slowly across the silent landscape to the sea." But enough. Like Goethe on his deathbed your reviewer can no more. New-wave mawkishness closes over him; images from Barbara Cartland and Gloria Steinem float past his car windows in the heavy drivel.

Every bit as driveling and even more highly praised is Francine du Plessix Gray's new novel, *World Without End*.† Gray specializes in fine arts prose. Hardly a page goes by without an italicized reference to the *quattrocento*. Her book, in fact, reaches such a pitch of cultural exquisiteness that many critics refuse to believe that it was written at all, preferring to think of it as having been painted ("her canvas is vast, her brushstroke sure"), cultivated ("a mandarin garden of a book"),

exhibited ("an unapologetic display of literary opulence"), or even, as Harrison Salisbury implies with his comment that "the evolution of its human relationships is like a many-faceted stone," mined.

But perhaps the medium to which *World Without End* most properly belongs is public television. What Gray has produced is Masterpiece Soap Opera. Her romantic hero is Edmund Richter, a blond-goateed, bisexual art historian of Russian parentage with a cat called Vico, an irritating habit of exclaiming bilingually, and a conversational style so self-indulgently pompous as to make even Bernard Shaw's seem terse and low-keyed by comparison. At eighteen he has already sufficiently mastered graduate school back-slang to be able thus to berate a roomful of summer vacationers: "Your contentment with well-being, to use William James's astute insight, protects you like a carapace from the thirst for transcendence." The boys and girls lap it up. After thirty years of getting in and out of bed with students, family friends, and chance acquaintances (the poor man can't even drop in to a gay bar without becoming the immediate center of attraction), Richter marries his childhood sex partner and romantically retires to

\*Simon & Schuster, \$12.95.

John Muggeridge is a free-lance writer who has appeared in the *American Spectator*, *National Review*, and the *Human Life Review*.

†Simon & Schuster, \$13.95.

Nantucket Island among whose sand dunes she first took off her tennis shorts for him.

A third novelist in line for the Congreve treatment is surely Doris Grumbach. The fact that she is a frequent contributor to the *New York Times Book Review*, and author of a literary biography of Mary McCarthy as well as of *Chamber Music*, described by John Leonard as "one of those rare novels written for adults who listen," makes Grumbach's claim to instant admiration a compelling one. Certainly it seems to have compelled Herbert Gold who asserts that in her latest novel, *The Missing Person*,<sup>#</sup> a thinly drawn out docu-romance about Hollywood in the thirties and forties, "she manages a sober interlocking of anecdote reminiscent of both Sherwood Anderson and Nathanael West, though her melancholy lyricism is her own."

Wisely, perhaps, Gold is less specific about what is actually being interlocked. *The Missing Person* is one of those frequent novels written for adults who block their ears. Written in flat *Redbook* cover-story prose, it depicts scenes from the life and sex-ploitation of Franny Fuller (whose marriages—first to an amiable jock, and then to a Jewish New York playwright—make her an obvious pre-incarnation of Marilyn Monroe) interleaved with Marxist-feminist musings of the sort that Grumbach's school of journalists indulge in as reflexively as breathing. Even Franny, dumb, lost blonde that she is, identifies with the powder-puff proletariat. Her fellow aspirants to stardom she calls "sisters in passivity . . . who could never resolve anything for themselves because they had never been told it was possible"; in Franny's view being a man meant being able to think things up for yourself and make them happen; all women were, like her, "waiting for the Great Something they dreamed about all their lives to happen to them." No wonder, then, that the two wholly sympathetic male characters in *The Missing Person* are Eddie Puritan, Franny's homosexual agent, the only person capable of making her feel complete, and Ira Rorie, a girlishly named new-class Negro forced by segregated housing to inhabit his Cadillac, with whom she exchanges life stories and enjoys her only reciprocally satisfying sexual encounter.

In the end, however, melancholy lyricism triumphs over ideology. There is in *The Missing Person* more

<sup>#</sup>Putnam, \$11.95.

of *Photoplay* than of *Socialist Woman*. A damp-eyed whimsicality afflicts all but the sternest-souled writers on Hollywood, and Grumbach catches such a heavy dose of it that finally she is reduced to incoherence. Here is her answer to the question, "What really became of Franny?":

She lingers in the umbra between celluloid eternity and the accident of

mortality, caught and hung up like an escaping prisoner on the barbed wire of his enclosure. In her, the intimations of immortality are strong. She moves towards them, and then retreats, perched precariously on the swing of the unbearable present, and destined, like everyone else, for the final take on the shores of darkness.

One would have liked clearer directions.

Casting a jaundiced eye on Cheever, Gray, and Grumbach, however, may be doing them an injustice. More than banality of style and emptiness of thought prevents them from succeeding as novelists. They are contributing to a doomed genre. The new morality has ruled out serious romantic fiction. For sexual love to work as drama there must be rules to break, penalties to pay, and rewards

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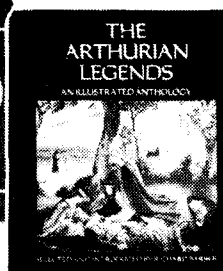
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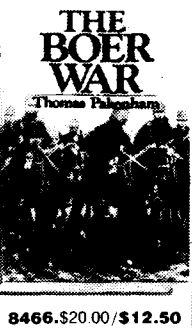
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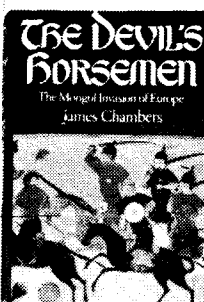
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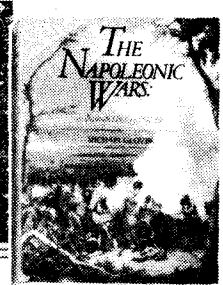
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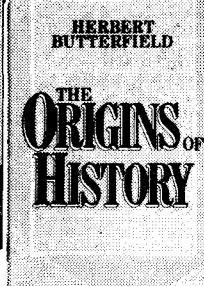
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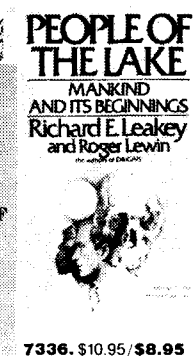
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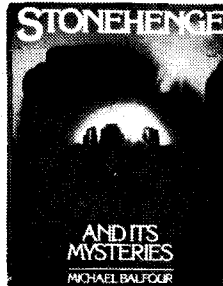
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to win. Life, in other words, must have a moral framework. In a world where adultery no longer adulterates and marriage is the tie that loosens, Anna Karenina's suicide becomes an act of pure insanity and Alex D'Urberville's murder the sort of senseless killing that Truman Capote might document. A century and three-quarters ago, Jane Austen could invest a chance meeting in an umbrella

shop with extraordinary erotic tension. Today, the only vibrations produced by the most brilliantly delineated explicit sex are pornographic.

Or sentimental. Our grandfathers are often accused of having covered up the fact that sex is fun; today's dirty little secret is that promiscuity is boring; undangerous liaisons are uninteresting. One way of diverting attention from this unpalatable truth

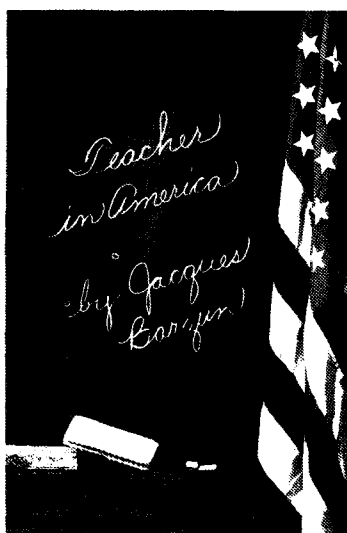
is to sentimentalize sexual freedom. And this is what the three authors under review go in for. Cheever, for example, brings in the pitter patter of tiny feet. Divorced, thirty, and childless, her heroine wants to get her man not just to enjoy his favors, but to make a father of him. Gray presses hard on the neoconservative pedal. Her Doctor Richter belongs to the Aesthetic Minority. A campaigner for

beauty in a world quickly going philistine, he writes against Pop Art, paints representationally, and above all believes in beautiful love-making. "I am awfully fond of the sheer symmetry bisexuality presents," he tells his mistress in Florence, "though I much prefer women." Even Franny gets more than physical satisfaction from her tumble with Ira in the Cadillac. Not only did she enjoy "the roll of his tongue in the pink, avid cave of his mouth," but to her what had happened "signified the successful execution of her woman's duty." Little Nell got the same sort of pleasure out of tidying up the Old Curiosity Shop.

One novelist, however, who does not go in for sentimental evasions is Muriel Spark. She is a modern who somehow manages to avoid the artistic pitfalls of modernism. She is, for example, as subjectivist as any of her contemporaries. Her latest novel, *Loitering With Intent*,\*\* is unabashedly autobiographical; its fictional author, Fleur Talbot, goes "rejoicing on her way" through the twentieth century, meeting as she does so a typically twentieth-century bag of lovers, homosexuals, cunning old women, and secular and spiritual con artists together with their dupes. Yet there is a disengaged quality about her writing. She observes the world around her, but also herself observing it. The plot of *Loitering With Intent* is as multi-layered as that of *Don Quixote*. In what sounds like one side of a telephone conversation with her creator, Fleur Talbot recalls the events of 1949 when she was writing a novel called *Warrender Chase* in which she describes, sometimes ahead of time, the machinations of Sir Quentin Oliver for whose Autobiographic Association she was then acting as secretary. This putting mirrors up to mirrors is an ideal way of projecting Spark's clear unembittered satire. "What did I care?" says Fleur Talbot in defending herself against the charge that one of the characters in *Warrender Chase* was shocking. "I wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think me a nice person, but in order that my sets of words should convey ideas of truth and wonder, as indeed they did to myself as I was composing them. I see no reason to keep silent about the enjoyment of the sound of my own voice as I work. I am sparing no relevant facts." Then she adds most characteristically "... I treated the story of *Warrender Chase* with a light and heartless hand, as is

\*\*Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, \$12.95.

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my way when I give a perfectly serious account of things."

This weird mixture of detachment and commitment, of frivolity and seriousness may derive from the fact that Spark is an English Roman Catholic. She is, in other words, a universalist who finds herself tagged as a sectarian, a non-conformist

conformist. Her loyalties are complicated, even divided, but secure. Spiritually, she enjoys robust good health and writes about the psychic ills of her characters from the point of view of a visitor to the cuckoo's nest rather than a patient there.

But of course she cannot escape the twentieth century's moral disinte-

gration. The landscape that she passes rejoicing through is a devastated one. Her fellow English Catholic, Evelyn Waugh, chronicled the pillaging of it. Instead of bemoaning what has happened, however, or pretending that the bomb sites will facilitate urban renewal, she sits on a convenient pile of rubble and tells

bright, witty, fantastic stories about the people who pass by her in the ruins. She may sometimes lack the sort of bottomless despair that we have come to expect from serious writers of contemporary fiction. But one thing is certain—Doctor Johnson would have read her, and most likely have praised her. □



## A FEW LIBERALS SOBER UP

by Fred Barnes

Mayor Edward I. Koch of New York traveled to Brooklyn one day in 1980 for the dedication of a shopping center. As he wound up his speech, a black man in the audience shouted, "We want John Lindsay." Lindsay, of course, is a former mayor of New York, one usually blamed by Koch and nearly everyone else for the city's financial troubles. Koch stopped his speech. "Everybody who wants Lindsay back, raise your hand," he said. And a few hands went up. Koch paused, then bellowed, "DUMMIES!"

Koch, once a liberal purist, is proof that there really is a new liberalism. It has a fancy name, neoliberalism, and a growing set of distinguishable ideas, but don't start applauding yet. It's different from the old liberalism, but not *that* different. The joke in Washington is that the Democratic liberals in Congress vote for the same old programs, while the neoliberals sigh—and then vote for the same old programs.

Now that might be selling them a trifle short. Neoliberals like Koch and Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts are not on the brink of embracing Ronald Reagan conservatism, but on some fundamental issues they have drifted far afield from undiluted liberalism. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his role as ideological policeman on the Left, has complained about both of them, Koch especially. Koch's apostasy is most flagrant on the crime issue: He's for the death penalty and against lenient

judges. Koch relishes an incident that occurred when he visited a senior citizens' center in the Bronx during his campaign for mayor in 1978. "What are you doing about crime?" he was asked. "Ladies and gentlemen, do you know that a judge was mugged this week?" Koch responded. "He called a press conference and said, 'This mugging will in no way affect my judgment in matters of this kind.'" And an elderly lady in the back of the room stood up and said, "Then mug him again."

Koch, who calls himself "a liberal with sanity," represents one wing of neoliberalism. It consists of traditional liberals of the "Kennedy Democrat" variety (that's John F. Kennedy), folks such as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and Rodney S. Quinn, the Maine secretary of state. They are hawkish on defense matters, favor a stiff anti-Communism in foreign affairs, support selective cutbacks in federal programs, are sometimes resistant to demands by labor leaders, and normally identify themselves with middle-class anxieties like crime. "People on the Left attack me," Koch told me last spring. "They say, 'You cater to the middle class.' I say, 'You bet I do.' I tell middle-class people, 'We ought to be kissing your feet for not leaving the city. You're the people who pay the taxes and create the jobs for others so that we can collect revenues that make it possible to provide services for the poor.'" When Jimmy Carter was President, Koch and Moynihan were often

critical of him and thus earned the epithet neoconservative. With Reagan in the White House, and the center of political gravity shifted, they were instantly neoliberal.

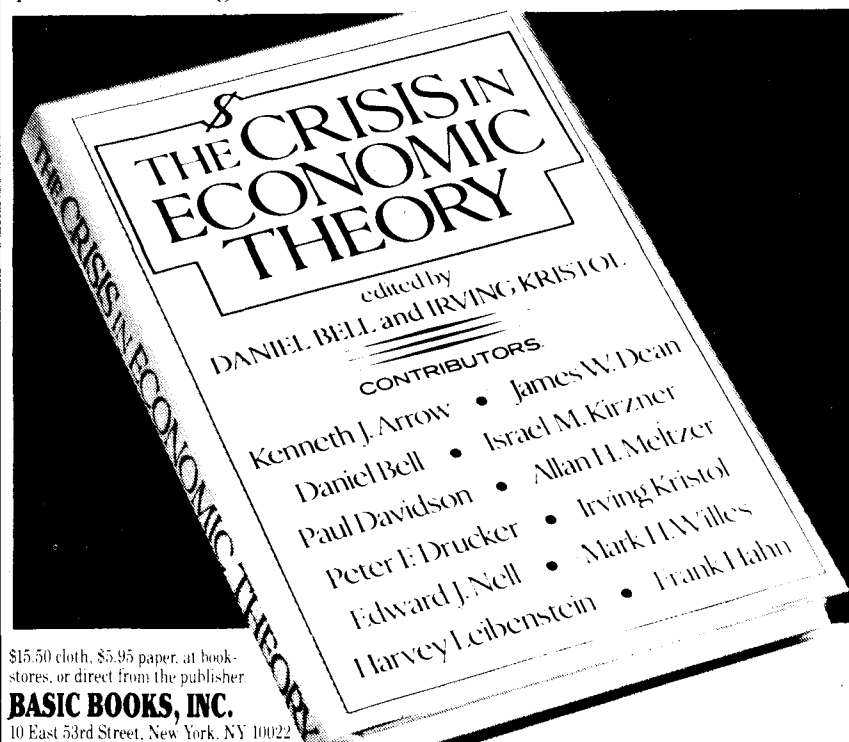
Tsongas represents the other wing of neoliberalism. His book, *The Road From Here: Liberalism and Realities in the 1980s*,\* is the first neoliberal manifesto. Tsongas calls himself a

\* Alfred A. Knopf, \$12.95.

"new liberal," or a "revisionist liberal," and bills his ideology as "compassionate realism." His viewpoint is often shared by Senators Gary Hart of Colorado and Bill Bradley of New Jersey, and by a group of a dozen or so Democrats in the House of Representatives led by Congressman Leon Panetta of California. They are dovish on defense and foreign matters, but they generally back substantial cuts in govern-

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