

temperament and the flaky insistence of her New Age politics; Red and Sophia Lesczynski both have, above all, each other, their children, and a close-knit Polish-American community in Pennsylvania, a place to come to amid the frequent displacements of Red's military career, but a hometown threatened by labor troubles and bewildering social change. From his depiction of authentic characters buffeted by real events, Webb achieves a moving commentary on the character of a whole nation.

We are left to suppose that Americans make up a nation worthy of love, intense loyalty, and genuine pride—in a word, patriotism—yet a

nation in whose character quite a bit has gone awry. And this has been Webb's consistent theme. In *A Sense of Honor*, for example, a midshipman AWOL for a compelling personal reason is involved in a fender-bender in Washington, D.C. while racing back to Annapolis during the wee hours of the morning to beat reveille. A lone sentence dropped in Webb's offhand description of that minor incident sums up what James Webb stands against and what his novelist's eye can see that too much of America, a country such as this, has let itself become: "The driver of the other car was walking around holding his neck, feigning whiplash." □

THE DEATH OF CHE GUEVARA

Jay Cantor/Alfred A. Knopf/\$17.95

FAMILY PORTRAIT WITH FIDEL

Carlos Franqui/Random House/\$17.95

Cynthia Grenier

Any man who writes a 578-page post-modernist novel with the eponymous hero one of the icons of our age certainly desires to be taken seriously. Jay Cantor, who was 17 when a Bolivian Army Sergeant killed Ernesto Che Guevara with a burst from an M-2 carbine, ambitiously pulls out every literary stop he can. There are flashbacks within flashbacks, reworking of entries from Guevara's own writings with "real" quotations cunningly threaded in, segments of shooting scripts and movie treatments, playlets featuring characters named Scum Mouth, Big Ass, Shit Head, Dog's Breath plus quick takes of a half century of recent political history. All this is compressed into those years in Guevara's life already extensively documented by Guevara himself, by biographer Daniel James, and Guevara's first wife Hildea Gadea.

And what a curious Guevara we have. The original was, one would have thought, ideal raw material for a novelist. Adventurer, doctor, apocalyptic visionary, would-be poet, a mystic who had no God (*dixit* Regis Debray), viscerally hostile to the United States, intensely political, personally engaging, witty, attractive—the intellectual who died as a man of

action. In short, the perfect paradigm for the decade of which he literally became the symbol.

Cantor, however, sees Guevara quite differently. His Guevara through all of these 578 pages is a whiny, father-dominated, asthmatic, mean-spirited, humorless wimp whose god is Mahatma Gandhi, of all people. Karl Marx, Vladimir I. Lenin, and Fidel Castro are, well, almost incidental. It's Daddy and Gandhi all the way, which gives rise to such passages of querulous Gandhi-ridden soul-searching as:

We might stop, Father, be nonviolent warriors. But they would then kill us all indifferently. They would never limit their greed until we destroyed them utterly, crushed their heads. I slammed my foot down on the pavement, smashing one under foot and not blood but milky-white juice ran from it, like sperm. My chest shook. A harsh wind took me over and made my body tremble. No, you said, *you must not tremble. Remember The Hindu Science of Breath Control!*¹

It is interesting to contrast this "pathetic little mother-----," as Cantor all too accurately characterizes his protagonist at one point, with the real Guevara as perceived in Carlos Fran-

¹This passage regrettably is entirely typical of the prose in which the whole novel is written—vibrating with high-strung emotion and utterly devoid of humor except for that which is clearly involuntary.

qui's two books, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* (1977) and above all in the recent *Family Portrait with Fidel*. Franqui, archivist of the Cuban Revolution, comrade-in-arms of Castro and Guevara in the revolution's heyday, went off in 1968 into permanent exile in Italy, having decided that Fidel had betrayed Cuba, the Revolution, and Franqui. His new book is a series of brief, vivid, informal, impressionistic views, a series of "takes" of Fidel in action during his first eight years in power, supplemented by glimpses of some of the other players, like Raul Castro, whom he loathes, and Guevara whom he esteems.²

One of Guevara's cameo appearances in Franqui's book gives more material, raises more questions, intrigues far more than all the many pages of Mr. Cantor's creative writing:

Anyway you look at it, Che made himself into a guerrilla leader through force of will, talent, and sheer audacity. He made sick men with broken weapons into the second guerrilla force in the Sierra. He carried out the first raids into the lowlands. . . . Within the free zone he set up factories, bakeries, hospitals, arms-repair shops, and Radio Rebelde—all with supplies sent by the urban underground. He raised the level of the war. . . .

Fidel, ever the pragmatist, later used Che's innovations. Che had always declared himself to be a Communist, but his brand of communism never convinced Fidel, who recognized Che's independence of character and his sense of morality. Che and I had many arguments during that period. He would defend the Soviet Union and the Cuban Communist Party, while I attacked them. For him, they were synonymous with socialism. . . . Fidel would say that soon enough I would see Che arguing with and fighting against the Communists in the same way he disagreed with me. (And that was a fact, but Che's enlightenment is another story.) Fidel's problems with Che had nothing to do with communism; rather, they were related to Che's independence of spirit. He was ungovernable.

Cantor primarily appears concerned with all that is failure in Guevara's life. The asthmatic childhood, the traveling about Latin America (a lark according to Guevara's letters to friends and family, but treated by Cantor as veritable Stations of the Cross—a long ordeal of asthma attacks, dirt, stench, vomit, bile, and misery), the Granma expedition, and the early days of the Cuban adventure culminating in the

²Franqui's *Family Portrait with Fidel* is well worth reading for the one scene alone in which he describes Castro at the outset of the Cuban Missile Crisis punching a control button in the Soviet electronic station in Cuba to shoot down an American U-2 plane with a ground-to-air missile. "Robert Anderson, the American pilot, would be the only fatality in that war. The Russians were flabbergasted, but Fidel simply said, 'Well, now we'll see if there's a war or not.'"

near disaster at Algeria di Pio, and, of course, the final Bolivian campaign. All that is success, power, glory is rigorously scrubbed from the novel, which means effacing a lot of interesting not to say essential political history. What was it like being a Minister of Industry, then Minister of Finance at 32, when one knew nothing about industry, finance, or government? How did Guevara and his fellow-committed Communist friend Raul Castro jockey for power against the Cuban Communist party with whom they had virtually warred during the whole time in the Sierra Maestra (Franqui's *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* richly documents the struggle)? What of his economic policies, his concept of non-material incentives, his losing jousts with economist Charles Bettelheim, his theorizing about the creation of the New Man, his travels abroad, his meetings with Chou en Lai, Khrushchev, Ben Bella, his relations—all important—with Fidel?

By cutting directly from failure pre-Havana to the impending failure in Bolivia, Cantor deprives the reader of any perspective on the Bolivian venture or on the man himself. The Bolivian adventure itself takes up more than half the book, and is an extremely free reworking of the actual *Bolivian Diaries* described by their American editor Daniel James (certainly far from a pro-Guevarist) as "crisp, restrained, highly literate with a dry sense of humor." None of which qualities, alas, applies to Cantor's "diaries." Cantor lengthens the entries with many stage directions: Guerrillas are constantly screaming, crying, yelping when they're not whimpering or wailing.

Cantor's Indians are pseudo-mythic presences, owing more to Carlos Casteñada than to any direct observation of the Indians of the *altiplano*. As for any sense of what Cuba, Guatemala, Bolivia, or Argentina are like, the reader will look in vain. They are all presented as interchangeable alien lands with no indication that the author is aware of their highly different cultures, histories, and economies. A view which gives rise to such passages as:

The truth is in the villages. The villagers, once they have conquered their bodies, can live in voluntary simplicity. Latin American country people don't need manufactured goods. They don't need North American barbarism, North American industry. Latin America can regain the socialism of the Incas. Each Andean village was an organ whose veins were the Inca roads. The villages formed a single human body, incarnated and imaged in the Inca. The Latin American Revolution does not require violence, only noncooperation with the Imperialists, with their panderings to our lusts. With noncooperation the imperialists will evaporate like specters.

Cynthia Grenier, a movie producer, maintains an ongoing interest in matters Latin American.

“Nothing. An accident.” We paused for a moment. The pain was good for me, it distracted my mind from my anger. I cooled off, but my anger had left me exhausted. Monje was scratching himself through his beard, over and over. My words were annoying flies. Or maybe he

next time around Gandhi-loving asthmatics should be left out of the equation? Or is he merely indulging in an overly long literary exercise, blending today's fashionable political postures with yesterday's fashionable hero suitably "demystified"? I tend to the latter view. Guevara's life and times, not to mention that telluric totalitarian Fidel Castro, are stuff for more than one novel, post-modernist or other. □

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CORRESPONDENCE

(continued from page 7)

vigorous but serious critique of people to whom I pay due respect, only to be misrepresented as offering a debunking exposé. The editors have shown a failure to distinguish between literary disagreement and crude denunciation.

—Peter Shaw
New York, New York

Hegemony on the High Frontier

Karl O'Lessker needn't be ashamed. The infinite maze of nuclear doctrine has claimed many before him who dared to enter it and never emerged—or else hobbled back with their logical faculties fractured ("High Frontiers of Strategic Defense," *TAS*, April 1984).

He analyzes and endorses the Administration's plans to replace Mutual Assured Destruction with a technically effective Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD). The Soviets won't like it, since the BMD would render us invulnerable to nuclear attack. So he then says, as he logically must, that this prospect will gravely tempt the Soviets to do "whatever they could to prevent it . . . includ[ing] a preemptive nuclear strike." In other words, the BMD project is itself a severe goad to mutual ruin.

Therefore, he vigorously approves an idea that seemed almost a casual afterthought when President Reagan first presented it: We must, O'Lessker argues, share our superior BMD technology with the Soviets so both sides would acquire the defensive systems simultaneously.

But this startling and logically correct proposal unravels into a hopeless tangle the instant you examine it closely. The BMD—especially its space-based components—would necessarily incorporate many of our most advanced high-tech achievements. Is O'Lessker suggesting that we hand the Russians the blueprints and manufacturing techniques that constitute our technical advantage over their manpower advantage and then trust them to use this bonanza solely for their own BMD program? Or at the opposite extreme, is he suggesting we simply deliver to them a completed BMD, batteries included, with instructions for turning it on; and then expect they will trust us enough to believe that if they ever need to push the "Go" button, the whole thing will actually work, rather than going "Kapoo!" in their faces like a trick cigar? Or is he suggesting some intermediate approach, say a merger of the U.S. and Soviet R & D establishments? How else could both sides get the finished product simultaneously? O'Lessker estimates that creation of a reliable BMD would consume 15 years and \$100 billion.

Anyone able to believe the two nuclear megapowers can trust each other enough to conduct in concert a huge Star Wars military hardware project, which will hatch functioning twin BMD systems at the same moment many years hence, cannot logically argue that any BMD system is necessary at all. If the two powers can plausibly embark on such a program, then they must already trust each other enough to move directly into phased, verifiable disarmament steps, a much cheaper and saner fruit of mutual trust than the immensely expensive and complex joint BMDs would be.

But if the two powers do not share enough trust to do this, then an American decision to proceed apace with our technically superior BMD development will severely rattle the Soviets, no matter how often we declare an intention to make them our full BMD partners, eventually. They won't believe it, and they will respond accordingly.

Some blind Tarzans plainly enjoy yanking the bear's tail. O'Lessker seems not to be one of these. Yet he urges immediately starting a BMD program that he acknowledges as likely to provoke a preemptive nuclear attack by the Soviets. And to forestall this, he proposes a BMD partnership with them, which assumes a magnitude of mutual trust that clearly doesn't exist.

This muddle suggests two contradictory conclusions:

1. Advocates of BMD and other High Frontier armaments don't really anticipate cooperation with the Soviets. But they hope that *proposing* cooperation on BMD will befuddle the domestic opposition enough for High Frontier to proceed toward the day when we can safely and credibly present the Soviets with an ultimatum: Capitulate or die. And what do the BMDers think will befuddle the Soviets enough to refrain from a preemptive attack insuring that this day never arrives? Maybe these advocates can cross their fingers and pray that our existing deterrent forces will hold the Soviets precariously at bay until the ultimatum is ready for delivery.

2. Advocates of BMD realize that current levels of suspicion and antagonism between the powers prevent cooperative BMD development, but they hope the mere proposal will signal a desire to revive détente. If détente returns, then various joint efforts could follow—including BMD, since it would shield both powers from third party missiles, particularly from Chinese ones, which are a special Soviet anxiety as O'Lessker notes. But a renewed détente, thorough and durable enough to sustain the mutual trust necessary for Soviet-American partnership on BMD and related projects, would actually constitute

a dual hegemony over the earth.

If this is what the BMD advocates really seek, they should say so, since greater clarity would help them discern and prepare for the consequences of what they seek. For instance: The Chinese, Europeans, and Third World would not like the prospect of U.S.-Soviet global hegemony and would try to sabotage it.

Or, if the advocates really seek to get the BMD jump on the Soviets so we can eventually present the final ultimatum, they should say this clearly, because they must mobilize intrepid public support—beginning immediately. The intervening years will be extremely tense and scary, as the Soviets threaten nuclear attack before we can complete our BMD and as we brandish our megatonnage, trying to frighten them into quavering indecision. Without public support, the U.S. would blink first.

But in neither case should the BMD advocates beguile themselves (and the rest of us) with the dangerous delusion that if the U.S. unilaterally launches a BMD program, while swearing a desire to share it with the disbelieving Soviets, the result will be nuclear security for all under a joint BMD. The BMDers seek either the ultimate American dominion over the Russians or a dual hegemony with them. Stating this frankly and deriving consistent policy from it would at least help to avoid careening into nuclear war through misunderstanding and miscalculation—by antagonists and allies alike.

Otherwise, any survivors in the southern hemisphere, Asia, and European fringes will emerge from their fallout pits and bid good riddance to the arch blunderers from the continental craters that were the Soviet Union and the United States.

—David Underhill
Mobile, Alabama

Karl O'Lessker replies:

Mr. Underhill raises two major points against the proposal to build a BMD and share its technology with the Soviet Union. The first is properly a matter of serious concern: that the Soviets might profit from being granted access to the highest of our high technology. The second—that our doing so would be seen by the rest of the world as establishing a U.S.-Soviet dual hegemony over the earth—seems to me almost totally devoid of merit.

As to the first, I am well aware, as are President Reagan, former President Nixon, General Dan Graham, and others, that technology-sharing carries with it the risk that the Soviets would gain knowledge they could then use in other weapons systems. But to view this prospect as balefully as Mr. Underhill does strikes me as betraying

a certain naiveté about Soviet technological prowess. While we are certainly ahead of them in many respects, they are surely ahead of us in others—beam weaponry, for example. And, more important, technological advantage as between the two superpowers is as fleeting as young love and altogether too evanescent, in my judgment, to be a determinant of long-term global strategy.

The related question as to whether there could ever be a sufficient degree of trust between us to permit joint development of a BMD is crucial here. Mr. Underhill thinks not. But perhaps his "logic" (a word he badly overuses) is defective, because it ignores the implacable nature of the choice with which both sides will be confronted before long. As I tried to show in my article, there will be no option for either of us other than cooperation or annihilation once we begin to make demonstrable progress on a BMD. In so harsh a strategic environment as that, the difficulties in working out an acceptable mode of cooperation must seem a good deal less formidable.

Nor is Mr. Underhill's logic very compelling when he says that if there were enough mutual trust to collaborate on a BMD, it would be easier and better to move instead toward disarmament. Here again the key is dire necessity. With their present strategic nuclear superiority, the Soviets have little or no incentive to negotiate any sort of arms-control agreement that would reduce their advantage over us. But confronted with the choice of either cooperating on a BMD project or launching a probably suicidal preemptive nuclear strike, they are likely to rediscover the "logic" of cooperation.

Mr. Underhill's second point, that the rest of the world would regard so robust an expression of Soviet-American détente as constituting a *de facto* dual hegemony over the earth, may be correct but is also not very compelling. For one thing, it would be a peculiar kind of hegemony, consisting solely of an agreement not to wage an all-out nuclear war against each other, while doing nothing to reduce the possibility of many other sorts of conflicts, from guerrilla insurgencies in Central America to World War III in Europe.

Mr. Underhill sees unspecified but no doubt dark "consequences" flowing from the rest of the world's dislike for this putative dual hegemony. I wonder what they could be. A bad sulk, perhaps? I don't mean to be smart-alecky about this but I find it hard to conceive of any important sanctions the Europeans and Chinese could impose upon the superpowers for the crime of ridding the world of the threat of nuclear war. □

WARMING UP FOR RAMADAN

by Victor Anant

KARACHI, Pakistan—Apart from Islam and its regional sword-bearer, President General Zia ul-Haq, the news is always about a few areas of social skirmishes: seizure of heroin and other drugs, of VCRs and other prized consumer durables; rape, abduction, and other such exploits in rural areas; and that perennial crop of stories rebutting stories rebutting stories emanating from India about such friendly-neighbor activities as subversion, massing troops across the border, and arms purchases. It's business as before, and the alliance of forces that control Pakistan remains the mullah, the merchant, and the militia. It's only the area of underground activity that has both expanded and become modernized: for example, the fact that heroin has taken the place of the traditional export, hashish; and the grim possibility that the gathering warclouds might turn into nuclear mushrooms.

Victor Anant has written for the London Spectator and other publications.



The censors have shown greater leniency recently to columnists who write deadly serious "funnies" and poetry, and cartoons and news reports that show Uncle Sam at his worst. Even in the flourishing underground trade of VCR cassettes, American porn has the edge over Indian films, and "Dallas" commands more private viewing than, say, smuggled denunciations of the military regime by political groups in exile in Britain. Indeed, Britain remains the epicenter of Pakistani politics-in-exile: Banned novelist Salman Rushdie's family lives here; Aziz Kurtha, who interviewed Miss Benazir Bhutto, daughter of former ruler Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on a British commercial TV program for the Asian minority in England, is a local boy made good. And one of the domestic drivers I talk to, Mefooz, from "Azad" (or Pakistan-held) Kashmir, tells me that from his hometown, Mirpur, everyone has set up some kind of shop or other in England. "They took even the local barber with them," he says. "And if you go to Mirpur today," he adds, "you will see big British cars, Chevrolet and Buick and Mercedes, standing outside two and three-story British bungalows."

The spectrum of what Foreign Minister of India, Krishna Menon, once described to me as "parallel government," the burgeoning area of underground activities, is the real-life domain of poor and rich alike. While a local industrialist has been able to persuade Agrico, one of the largest American agriculture corporations, to set up a fertilizer factory here which will provide three-fourths of Pakistani requirements, importers of fertilizers are spiking their guns. While Pakistan is dry, the bottles in which fridge-cooled water is brought to the dining table is always one with a Scotch whiskey cap; as for more dangerous forms of naive lawbreaking, the newspapers report towns like Shahiwal where "smacks," or what is locally known as White King, can be bought freely. I have been promised an eyewitness trip to the Valley of Swat, and the poppy-fields in the hills, and

introductions to the growing band of foreign "settlers": and, while the Burma-Laos-Thailand Golden Triangle for drugs takes a diplomatic break, London street-prices of heroin are further strengthening Anglo-Pakistani friendships.

There is nothing which can be done openly which isn't more safely done underground. One Pakistani importer of heavy machinery under aid-programs categorized as "agricultural," told me that *they* tell the Japanese manufacturers what the price will be. "We dictate our prices to them, after we have got the contract." A houseboy of mine who now works in "Woods and Caves," a local English-eatery, says he is being pressured by other waiters to join the forged-dollar gang. Every kind of Green Card marriage and visa to work abroad can be arranged more efficiently and quickly outside officialdom. "Parallel Government" works. For the last 37 years, it is the freebooters with their will to govern (not rule) whom I have seen keeping this unruly subcontinent going. And yet, not until the night of the party, with its promise of a 25-minute edited cassette of Aziz Kurtha's television interviews with opposition Pakistanis, did I realize how urbanely confident, optimistic, things are: Pakistan is a horde of self-administering fiefdoms, each with its inviolable code of honor, dynastic, competitive, but never breaking the cohesiveness of its constituencies.

It is becoming more irrelevant, as the country warms up for the fasting month of Ramadan, whether President Zia threatens elections before the Americans threaten to cut off (token, of course) aid. No one will be able to tell which candidate represents which party. While the politicians will boycott the elections and go underground, what could happen is that the President will succeed in legitimizing the underground chiefs. That's pragmatic. The only organized opposition is the People's Party, which

has just recognized Begum Bhutto and Miss Bhutto as the leaders of the party, even in absentia.

In the awesome intimacy of thousands of homes, friends, masters, and enemies are all watching VCR cassettes, pirated versions of Miss Bhutto's television performances, with the interviewer edited out for reasons of both economy and "hard-sell." Through the homely smell of raw onions and kebab, or biryani rice, she can be seen exuding a sulphurous charisma of youth, persecution, and endurance. As State-controlled TV defeats itself with "overkill," this is how the opposition will gain dramatic advantage, emerging Houdini-like around the country. When Miss Bhutto was asked by her British interviewer whether she had any last "message" for Pakistan, she rose with rhetoric, appropriately aware that she would be seen back in the VCR-decked homes. It will be a VCR election, when it comes, and Miss Bhutto is VCR-Queen. □

