

Peres, or did Peres snub O'Connor; what is the meaning of Howard Beach; is Susan Sontag the last New York intellectual—Cole Porter might have put any of these people or issues in a song, but only on the condition that they not be taken seriously. If in the end nothing is taken seriously, then exclusion is mere snobbery and stupidity. But the urbane ideal did care about at least two things.

One was craftsmanship. The lyrics Short sings do not simply hang together; they are wound around inter-

nal rhymes and feminine endings like cat's cradles. One of the songs Short did the night I was there, an early Cole Porter called "Pilot Me," rhymed "aeroplane" and "narrow plane," "drive it, dear" and "private, dear," all in the first six lines. There was also a version in French. (Yes, Holden, it was pretty dirty too.) A teacher once told me that half the pleasure in attending a performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is waiting to find out how in the world Rostand will complete a couplet. The same goes for Lorenz Hart.

The other half of the pleasure, and all the thought, came from what the in-

tricate little verbal machines were saying. They were love songs, principally, just like rock and roll. But unlike rock, you have to be older than seventeen to appreciate them. Maybe you have to be older than forty (I'm not there yet, but I'm closer to the latter age than to the former). A better test than age, probably, is that you must be married, and not to your first love—or that you realize, from some equivalent experience, that life is not one huge choice, two roads diverging in a yellow wood, or even a few of them, but an endless series, and that not all your choices will be wise. The manner fits the subject.

By just sitting back on your heels and shouting, you can express many powerful emotions, but you can't express these. Artifice may not seem natural, but it's the only way to capture all of human nature.

These are the subjects and situations that the latter-day brand of metropolitan urbanity at the Café Carlyle is meant to explore. If that's too awesome to contemplate, order more drinks. But then you'll have to bring a fatter wallet, and you'll miss the fine points of a great act. And besides, there's all the rest of New York for escaping urbanity. □

SPECTATOR'S JOURNAL

THE SEYCHELLES TEST

by Micah Morrison

On November 29, 1985, a murder in London signaled a new phase in a quiet and largely obscure battle for control of the strategically important Seychelles island group in the Indian Ocean. The victim, Gerard Hoarau, was the leader of an organization of Seychellois exiles opposed to the Marxist government of President Albert René. The assassins—Hoarau was gunned down on his doorstep—are believed to be Libyan hit men working at the behest of René. Hoarau's death is a sign that the Soviet-backed René is growing increasingly nervous about discontent in the Seychelles. The rebels, however, are fighting alone, without Western aid.

The situation in the Seychelles poses an uncomfortable question for the Reagan Administration. An indigenous opposition movement has been fighting an illegally installed dictatorship for years; Communism is destroying the traditional Seychellois way of life; and there is evidence of Soviet plans to expand its naval and intelligence presence in the area. Here, it appears, is a justifiable case for application of the Reagan Doctrine of giving assistance to freedom fighters.

Instead, the Administration has been bolstering the regime with million-dollar deals and silence in the face of René's steady consolidation of power. Where, asked one Seychellois resistance leader, is Reagan now, when the opposition desperately needs the moral and material assistance the Presi-

dent pledged to the cause of freedom?

The Seychelles lie about 1,000 miles east of the African coast, astride the sea lanes plied by tankers leaving the Persian Gulf for Western Europe and North America. Six hundred miles west of the islands, well within electronic-monitoring range, is the important U.S. naval base on the island of Diego Garcia. Some analysts fear that the addition of a Seychelles anchorage to the Soviet Union's powerful northern Indian Ocean presence at Aden in South Yemen and the island of Socotra at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden would, in the event of superpower tensions, give the Kremlin the ability to control the area and choke oil-supply routes to the West.

But often lost beneath strategic considerations is the human-rights aspect of the Seychelles story. Less than a year after the islands were granted independence from Britain in 1976, René overthrew the elected government, declaring that he would make the little nation (population about 65,000) "free of capitalism and foreign countries." Opponents of René began to disappear; others were jailed or forced into exile. A new constitution was drawn up, making the country a one-party socialist state. Relations with the West cooled; ties with the Soviet Union and its allies dramatically increased. East Germany, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and Tanzania contributed men and material to back up the René regime. The Russians, recognizing the importance of a Seychelles base, sent the former KGB station chief in Turkey, Mikhail

Orlov, to head the Soviet embassy.

Following the "socialist" pattern, René proceeded to build what he called his "new society." Businesses were nationalized. Security expenditures were tripled. The independent press was shut down. A free National Health Service was trumpeted as a sign of René's progressive policies. (As in other Communist countries, however, medical care is channeled through party officials who use it to favor party members and keep non-party citizens in line; identical tactics are used in housing and employment agencies.) Seychellois children were sent to Cuban-style National Youth Service "education camps." Parental protests over these camps led to violent demonstrations in 1979. Tourism, once the economic mainstay of the lush tropical islands, rapidly declined.

The Reagan Administration has been following a curious path in its relations with the Seychellois ruler. Adhering to Lenin's dictum, the U.S. has been providing René with at least part of the rope with which to hang the resistance. The U.S. maintains a satellite tracking station in the Seychelles, and in order to keep it there Washington acceded to René's demand that the rent be more than doubled to around \$2.5 million a year; additional grants and aid amount to several million dollars a year. Perhaps more importantly, the White House has aided René with the gift of silence and indifference. According to sources in the resistance leadership, the State Department official responsible for the islands, former Ambassador to Sey-

chelles David Fischer, has repeatedly refused to meet with rebel envoys.

The "moral assistance" President Reagan pledged to freedom fighters costs very little and could be easily provided. There is a good case, too, for material assistance. Over the years the Seychellois resistance, which is sworn to a return to democratic rule, has launched repeated attempts to dislodge René. Since the assassination of Hoarau eighteen months ago, there have been signs that the resistance is moving to resolve internal quarrels, strengthen underground elements in the Seychelles, and step up the fight against René. Twice in 1986, in May and September, René abruptly acted to counter what appear to be attempts to force him from office.

Yet time is running out for the Seychelles. Moscow is increasing its stake in the islands. According to some reports, the East Germans have put up three radar units to monitor Diego Garcia, and the Russians have begun surveying the waters around the Seychelles, a procedure that could be the first step toward the establishment of a major new Soviet naval base.

Support for a return to democracy in the Seychelles is relatively cheap: a few words from the President and a small aid package from Congress would be an enormous boon to Seychellois fighting for freedom inside and outside the country. The irretrievable loss of a tiny island nation might not make a big splash today, but the strategic costs tomorrow could be great. The moral costs of remaining silent and inactive are incalculable. □

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BOOK REVIEWS

Literary greatness is one thing; icon status is another. Consider the major American novelists of the 1920s and thirties. The lives and personalities of Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald have long since become a cherished part of American literary folklore; those of William Faulkner and Willa Cather, for whatever reason, have not. Every year the books keep coming: either a new biography of Tom or Scott or Ernest, or a journal by one of them, or a collection of letters, or some sort of book (usually autobiographical) which an immoderately ambitious editor has carved out of the scrap heaps in the Wolfe, Fitzgerald, or Hemingway archives. Every year, consequently, for what seems the hundredth time, we find ourselves reliving one or another of those tempestuous, tragic lives. Indeed, it doesn't seem too much of an exaggeration to suggest that, for Americans of a literary bent, the lives of Tom, Scott, and Ernest are (for better or worse) our great national legends—our answer, if you will, to the Greek myths, the Icelandic sagas, and *Beowulf*—which, partly for inspirational and partly for cautionary purposes, we feel religiously compelled to rehearse periodically, the way Jews, each spring, recite among themselves the story of Passover.

So familiar are the general outlines of Thomas Wolfe's life that it is surprising to be reminded that, prior to the publication of *Look Homeward*, by the distinguished Harvard historian David Herbert Donald, there were only two full-scale biographies of the North Carolina novelist—Elizabeth Nowell's in 1960 and Andrew Turnbull's in 1967. Though both of these books were commendable in many ways, both had considerable flaws. Nowell, a fine writer who had been Wolfe's agent, was too close to her subject; Turnbull, who was also the author of a celebrated Fitzgerald biography, often seemed less interested in comprehending Wolfe than in retailing juicy anecdotes. It is pleasant, then, to report that *Look Homeward* represents a notable improvement over both its predecessors. Lively yet thoughtful, scholarly yet lucid, Donald's book strikes an admirable balance between attention to the life and to the work, between an ironic and a deferential attitude toward its subject.

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LOOK HOMEWARD: A LIFE OF THOMAS WOLFE

David Herbert Donald/Little, Brown/\$24.95

Bruce Bawer

And what a subject: a highly regarded American writer whom John Dos Passos described as "a gigantic baby," whom Hemingway called "a glandular giant with the brains and the guts of three mice"—a man whose self-absorption rendered him so incapable of functioning like a normal adult that his publisher was forced to handle his money for him, so cowardly that he brought his mother north to help him dump his mistress, so irresponsible that when one of his bed partners informed him that she was pregnant, he told her, "Why don't you telephone Miss Nowell: she's my agent; she takes care of everything for me." His warmth, candor, and humility—to which many of Donald's sources testify—could turn in a flash to suspicion, hostility, and egotistic rage. As for his literary taste, he was indifferent at best to the work of Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Proust, but loved Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson. Donald keeps telling us that Wolfe had "the best for-

mal education of any American novelist of his day" (he attended both Chapel Hill and Harvard), but to my mind Wolfe is vivid proof that there is a difference between going to school and being educated. Curiously, after strongly denying (on page xvii) that Wolfe was "a literary naif," Donald (on page 399) uses precisely that phrase to describe him. And though Donald makes an elaborate case for the influence upon Wolfe of his favorite professors' systems of thought, it is clear that, though he certainly did parrot each of these professors for a time, none of them ever really taught him to *think*, taught him how to process ideas, helped him develop breadth or subtlety of mind. Indeed, throughout his life he was fervently anti-intellectual, suspicious of logical, consecutive, coherent thought, convinced that the purest and truest sort of literary artist didn't go in for such things.

When he did express an intellectual opinion, it was an embarrassment. In

the 1930s, unable to stay off the political battlefield, he spoke up in turn for both German fascism and American Communism, neither of which he understood in the slightest. Regarding Nazi Germany, for instance, he said in 1936 that Americans should bear in mind that "in Germany you are free to speak and write that you do not like Jews and that you think Jews are bad, corrupt, and unpleasant people. In America you are not free to say this." Later that same year, he described himself in a letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, as a "Revolutionary," "a brother to the workers," and proclaimed his apparently newfound belief "that this system that we have is evil, that it brings misery and injustice not only to the lives of the poor but to the wretched and sterile lives of the privileged classes who are supported by it." (Two interesting facts: Perkins cut a good deal of Marxist rhetoric out of *Of Time and the River*; Wolfe took the title of *You Can't Go Home Again* from a remark made at a dinner party by Lincoln Steffens's Communist widow, Ella Winter.)

But Wolfe was too full of himself to be sincerely devoted to any political idea. While reading proofs of his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, at Scribner's, he wrote to John Hall Wheelock that "there are moments when I feel that no one else has a quarter of my power and richness . . . that, one way or another, I am a fine young fellow and a great man." He bragged to his mistress Aline Bernstein that she would be remembered in death because she would be "entombed in his writing" (a favorite image; perhaps Wolfe was identifying with his father, a carver of gravestones). As he loved himself, so he loved his own prose: his famous inability to edit himself manifestly derived not only from his lack of discipline and of editorial training but from his mindless adoration of every sentence, good or awful, that came out of him. "Every time he began a revision," writes Donald, "his incredibly tenacious memory recalled every word that he had included in all the previous drafts, and he could not bear to dispense with any of them." His short list of twentieth-century novelists included two names: his own and Hemingway's. One of his countless lady friends observed (with a rather Wolfean wordiness) that "he didn't really care about and care for other human beings

