

"You know what heaven would be?" Zeke said, looking over at Wayne from the diving board, where he was sitting. "Surf 'n' Turf," he said. "Heavy on the butter with the Turf, too. And a side of steamers with broth to dunk 'em in to clean out the sand."

"I think heaven for you would be the certainty of your convictions," Wayne said. "Not having to check with anyone to see whether they'd bear you out. Not caring if other people felt the way you did. Not caring jack shit, unless you felt like considering their opinion."

Buttered steak? "The certainty of your convictions"? The excrement of the Florida fish commonly referred to as the jack? Do Florida landscaping operatives really talk like this? Perhaps they do in the dream-setting where they also spend their time planting out rhododendrons.

Somehow, however, we can't summon up the energy to care very much. Like Zeke himself, the world in which he lives seems to matter hardly at all to our perspective on Will. Or perhaps to Will's own childish perspective on an adult world where everything is still as strange as Florida rhododendrons are to us. Much of the novel, that is, is kept at a distance from anything recognizable as actuality, even within the limited terms established by its half-hearted attempts at verisimilitude. If this is the author's way of making it new, so that rather than picturing Will we can picture as he does, it is more bewildering than exhilarating. The fact remains that it's not *true*, and one is left with the horrible suspicion that Miss Beattie would reply with sixties profundity: "Like, man, what is truth?" □

FROM BEIRUT TO JERUSALEM

Thomas L. Friedman/Farrar, Straus & Giroux/525 pp. \$22.95

Steven C. Munson

In 1983, Thomas L. Friedman won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting from Lebanon. In 1988, he won another Pulitzer, this time for his reporting from Israel. Over the past ten years, he has been the recipient of numerous other honors, including an Overseas Press Club Award, a George Polk Award, a Livingston Award for Young Journalists, a New York Newspaper Guild Page One Award, and a New Israel Fund Award for Outstanding Reporting from Israel.

In addition to being a celebrated journalist, Friedman has recently become a celebrated author. *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, a memoir of his experiences as a *New York Times* reporter in the Middle East, was published last summer to glowing reviews. It quickly became a bestseller and ended the year by garnering a National Book Award.

Like the reporting that won him his two Pulitzer Prizes, the book revolves around what Friedman heard, saw, and felt in the midst of two large events: the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the Israeli effort to quell the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza that began in 1987. His portrait of Lebanon is highly personal and atmospheric. It suffers from an accumulation of trivial, pointless, or irrelevant information, and more than a few of the stories he tells about life in Beirut sound forced, or out of place. To some extent, this disconnectedness—incoherence, really—probably reflects the reporter's difficulty in making sense of his circumstances; the situation in Lebanon is, after all, neither clear-cut nor easy to come to grips with. Primarily, however, Friedman's literary failure appears to be the result of certain inhibitions he feels when writing about Lebanon.

He himself admits that as a reporter in Beirut he fell far short of giving his readers a complete picture of what was going on. Like other journalists, he worked under conditions of constant fear and uncertainty, and had no illusions that the various Lebanese factions—Christian, Muslim, PLO, Syrian

—would tolerate much seriously critical reporting of their activities. He tells how he and his colleagues devised all manner of ingenious tricks in order to write stories that would not get them into trouble and would be more than just fluff. But it is clear, despite his best efforts to minimize the implications of what he is saying, that the factions in Lebanon that posed the greatest danger were also the ones that received the most deferential treatment.

Perhaps no group benefited more from this state of affairs than the PLO. As Friedman writes, "How many serious stories were written from Beirut about the well-known corruption in the PLO leadership, the misuse of funds, and the way in which the organization had become as much a corporation full of bureaucratic hacks as a guerrilla outfit? . . . The truth is, the Western press coddled the PLO and never judged it with anywhere near the scrutiny that it judged Israeli, Phalangist, or American behavior. . . . The overfocusing by reporters on the PLO and its perception of events also led them to ignore the Lebanese Shiites and their simmering wrath at the Palestinians for turning their villages in south Lebanon into battlefields."

That Friedman himself was quite prepared to coddle the PLO is clear from his account of a meeting he and his assistant Mohammed had with Mahmoud Labadi, Arafat's personal spokesman in Beirut, in July 1982:

"Mahmoud," I said, "let's get everything out in the open. I'm Jewish and you know I'm Jewish. When my editors asked me how they could send a Jew to Beirut, I told them it was no problem. I told them I had never encountered any difficulties with the PLO because of my religion. If the rules of the game have changed, then let me know and I'll go back to the Commodore and pack my bags."

"No, no," said Labadi, waving his hand. "That is not necessary. We have nothing against Jews. We just want you to do a little better in the future."

"Fine," I said. "I will try to be fair. I have been trying up to now."

After the meeting, Labadi took Mohammed aside and told him, "We know he's not bad. We just need more from him."

But the "overfocusing by reporters

on the PLO and its perception of events" cannot simply have been the result of their fear of retaliation. Otherwise, there would have been plenty of stories about the PLO's depredations in southern Lebanon once the cause of the journalists' fear had been removed. As it was, even after the Israeli invasion liberated southern Lebanon from PLO control, there was hardly more than a handful of stories about the ten years of PLO occupation, the crimes committed against the Lebanese, or the nature of the PLO state-within-a-state.

What there was, instead, was a torrent of misreporting of the Israeli invasion and the attribution to Israel of crimes that existed only in the minds of those who invented them and the journalists who publicized them. Day in and day out, week after week, the Israelis were depicted in the newspapers and on television as ruthless aggressors raining death and destruction on the helpless civilians of Beirut and, like modern-day Nazis, committing genocide against the Palestinians. It may be hard for many people to remember what it was like reading the papers or watching TV in the summer of 1982, but surely Friedman remembers. Yet he makes no reference to the journalistic rampage against Israel other than to note that "some of the news reporting out of Beirut that summer left something to be desired."

Nor does he take the opportunity afforded him by his book to set the record straight concerning the PLO. Out of five hundred pages there are no more than a few paragraphs in which he refers—as though the whole episode were so well known that the details were not worth bothering about—to what the PLO was up to during its years in southern Lebanon. Instead of examining the PLO conquest and how it destabilized the country, he devotes an entire chapter to the life and times of the man he calls the "symbol" of Palestinian "resistance," Yasir Arafat. In other words, Friedman is guilty in his book of precisely the same kind of "overfocusing on the PLO and its perception of events"—that is, precisely the same kind of self-censorship—that he and his colleagues were guilty of in their reporting from Beirut.

How is it possible, one cannot help wondering, that he has ended up committing the same journalistic sin twice? Can it be that, although he is now safely ensconced in Washington, D.C. as his newspaper's chief diplomatic correspondent, he is still afraid of what the PLO might do to him if he dares to tell the truth? Is he, indeed, so terrified that he feels compelled to continue writing the kind of public-relations fluff that can be found in his chapter

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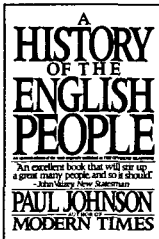
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Steven C. Munson, a frequent TAS contributor, has also written for *Commentary* and the *National Interest*.

on Arafat, "The Teflon Guerrilla"? The answer, clearly, is no. It is not fear that impels him to hold his pen now, any more than it was fear, primarily, that impelled him to hold his pen in 1982. What inhibits Friedman from telling the truth about the PLO today, just as it inhibited him when he was in Beirut, is his political sympathy for the organization and the cause he claims it represents.

This sympathy is evident throughout the book, from his characterization of Arafat as "the Ronald Reagan of Palestinian politics" and "a kind of Arab Pope" to his insistence that the PLO is a genuine "national liberation" movement to his rationalization that "terrorism, while morally repugnant, was functionally relevant for the PLO at its takeoff stage." Yet nowhere, perhaps, does he make his identification with the PLO and its goals more vivid than in his almost lyrical tribute to the Palestinian guerrillas trapped in Beirut—a band of brave and dedicated men who, we are meant to believe, would have thrown themselves in front of Israeli tanks, if only Arafat had given the word.

Of course, among this group of noble guerrillas there were undoubtedly many who had participated in the running of the Palestinian state-within-a-state that the PLO had established in southern Lebanon. Despite the neglect this subject has received from journalists like Friedman, no one disputes the fact that the primary activities of this mini-state were pillage, blackmail, and terror—that it was, in short, largely an organized criminal enterprise. Had he told the full story of the PLO state-within-a-state, however, it would have been all but impossible for him to go on, as he does in the second half of the book, to present the case for a full-fledged Palestinian state in part of the territory now occupied by Israel.

The Israel section of *From Beirut to Jerusalem* is more focused, more straightforward, more down-to-earth than the portion devoted to Lebanon. At times, Friedman even manages to bring his subject to life, as with this memorable description of the country by the American-born writer and former government press spokesman Ze'ev Chafets:

For two thousand years, all these people have been crying and pleading and begging God to give them a country. I wanted to see it, but when I came here I found out that Israel resonated for me. I quickly realized I felt at home here, even though these people were not like people I had grown up with. When the Moroccans first came to Israel, there was this thing that Moroccans always used to walk in the road. And people would ask why. Didn't they have sidewalks in Morocco? No. The reason was that this

was *their* country. There's no plantation owner around. Now they can walk in the f--king street if they want to. I had a little bit of that feeling myself. Israel is how Jews behave when they are off the plantation—when there are no Gentiles around watching over them. All the things here that Americans complain about I liked. I liked the bad manners. I liked the directness, I liked the excitement, the adrenaline. I felt comfortable with these people. I never really articulated it, but on some unconscious level I got off the airplane and thought to myself, This is the place. I belong here.

Unfortunately, such moments are few and are ultimately overrun, or driven out, by Friedman's anti-Israel bias, which does almost as much to ruin the book as his politically inspired reticence about the PLO.

The contrast between his cordiality toward the PLO and his hostility toward Israel could not be more striking: when it comes to Israel, Friedman doesn't coddle, doesn't cower, and doesn't cover up. A case in point is the confrontation he had with Amir Drori, the commander of the Israeli forces in Lebanon, a week after the massacre of Muslim civilians by Lebanese Christians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut in September 1982. Far from adopting the placating tone that marked his exchange with PLO spokesman Labadi, he took the Israeli general to task in a fit of moral pique:

I banged the table with my fist and shouted at Drori, "How could you do this? How could you not see? How could you not know?"

And while he depicts Yasir Arafat as a flawed genius and a moral hero, Friedman takes a dim view, to put it mildly, of Israel's political leaders. In his eyes, for example, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was a man who "loved the idea of Jewish power, Jewish generals, Jewish tanks, Jewish pride. They were his pornography. . . . But what made Begin even more dangerous was that his fantasies about power were combined with a self-perception of being a victim. . . . Begin always reminded me of Bernhard Goetz . . . he was Bernhard Goetz with an F-15."

Even more of a monster than Begin, by Friedman's lights, was Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon "had his own fantasies about power. . . . Unlike [Syrian dictator] Hafez Assad, Sharon did not know when to stop. . . . Assad was a brutal realist with a very limited agenda—survival. . . . Sharon was a brutal realist with a strategic design. . . . That is precisely what made him so dangerous in Lebanon."

About the exact nature of the danger posed by Begin and Sharon to Lebanon Friedman is never very clear. Indeed he cannot be, for in truth, as even he must acknowledge, the Israeli invasion was

welcomed by the many Lebanese who were grateful to be liberated from the PLO. The invasion also paved the way for a renewal of American interest in Lebanon, a renewal that, by his account, was widely interpreted by the Lebanese to be the beginning of the end of the decade of internecine warfare that had begun after the arrival of the PLO. Furthermore, despite his omissions and distortions, he is unable to obscure the fact that it was only after Israel was forced to withdraw, and the U.S. lost heart and withdrew, that the "definitive dismemberment of both Beirut and Lebanon" came about.

A similar disparity between reality and Friedman's politicized view of it emerges from his examination of the situation in the West Bank and Gaza. He gives over several pages, for instance, to a discussion of allegations that Palestinians have been tortured, unreasonably detained, and denied due process by Israeli authorities. Although he acknowledges that "most of the Palestinians convicted by the Shin Bet [Israel's internal security service] were guilty of planning or carrying out violent acts against Israeli civilians, even if the evidence against them was incomplete, inadmissible or obtained through intimidation," he blithely disregards the significance of this fact, insisting that there is no real moral difference between the violence of the *intifada* and Israel's efforts to control it.

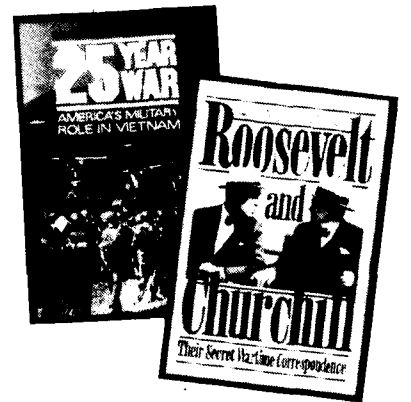
He seems even less willing to accept the truth about the Palestinians, which confronted him one day in the visa office of the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem. Wondering why all the people there were so desperately trying to leave their "homeland," he interviewed a number of Palestinians who rejected his claim that "this is a crucial moment in Palestinian history." They told him that the only thing they wanted was to get an education, or to resume their children's education, and to escape the fear and violence created by the *intifada*. Again, determined not to comprehend the meaning of what he has seen and heard, Friedman breezily dismisses it, concluding that, "Nevertheless, the *intifada* has done a great deal for the Palestinians."

It has done so much, in his view, that he urges the Palestinians to continue what they've started—even though, as he sees it, it could take years before the Israelis might finally be worn down enough to give them a state. The prospect of many more Palestinians getting themselves killed or injured—perhaps for nothing—does not seem to faze him, although his description of the stone-throwing and fire-bombing as "massive, relatively non-lethal civil disobedience" is clearly intended to

make his call for continued violence more palatable.

This sort of carelessness about other people's lives is displayed throughout the book, but it is about Israel's survival that Friedman seems to be the most cavalier. The idea that the country should have anything to fear any longer from the world, or even from its avowed enemies, is one that he simply refuses to take seriously. Such was not

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always the case. As he makes a point of confessing, "high school for me, I am now embarrassed to say, was one big celebration of Israel's victory in the Six-Day War." He also reminds us that in those days, among people like himself—that is to say, liberals—Israel enjoyed the blessings of a heroic image. To show just how popular the country was back then, he quotes an old *Washington Star* column by Mary McGrory:

Some of us never knew what a *simcha* was. We know now. It's what happens when the Arabs admit they've had it—again—and there are 30,000 Jews in Lafayette Park to celebrate. That's what a *simcha* is. We were all Jews in the park yesterday . . . we wept, we embraced each other. We sang the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikva." We observed a moment of silence for all who had fallen, heard the melancholy summons of the shofar.

Needless to say, it is difficult to imagine such a column being written to-

day. Attitudes toward Israel have undergone a radical shift from sympathy to hostility, and ideas that were once inconceivable to many people—that Israel has lost its soul, that Israel is the main obstacle to Middle East peace, that Israel is no better than its Arab neighbors—have been embraced with a vengeance. This is certainly the case with Friedman, who makes no claim to originality and, indeed, seems to prefer the company of the pack. But if his political ideas are thoroughly conventional, his acceptance of them does have a distinguishing aspect: he embraces the current anti-Israel perspective as a Jew. He makes much of this in the book, and his many admirers, in singing the book's praises, have made much of it as well. For them, as for Friedman, it serves as a special kind of moral license, entitling the bearer to add his own contribution to the campaign of defamation against Israel, and to do so without fear of rebuke. □

CORRESPONDENCE (continued from page 9)

number of Reform Communists in the new regime, of course.) It is not that massive repression is impossible. It is that anyone attempting a return to the bad old days must now ask himself if he wishes to risk Ceausescu's fate. How many Communists with sufficient fanatic edge to risk vicious internecine war exist in the East? Pray we do not find out, but also admit that the beginning is rather hopeful.

Second, our hand is not pat. We want a situation which yields healthy, democratic, stable societies, as rapidly as possible. Years of instability, economic stagnation, and somewhat authoritarian rule may sap these peoples of their drive to rejoin Europe, and give darker forces their chance to reassert themselves strongly. We have strong strategic, as well as humanitarian, interests in trying to influence the outcome, when social and economic prospects are uncertain due to the terrible ravages of Communism.

Third, Franco and Salazar were despots and their societies were backward, but essentially they tried to protect traditional society against the dynamic side-effects of modernization. They did not act so destructively as Hitler, or Stalin and his successors. Not only do we have greater interest in the outcome, in Eastern Europe, but there is more healing needed.

What, then, do I propose? That we interest ourselves in helping with institution-building, in proportion to the liberalization of any given country. This does not mean merely aiding with elections. Rather, it means encouraging currency reform; helping to train legal

scholars in, for example, the principles of commercial law; helping train CPA's; aiding in the development of capital markets and credit instruments; acquainting them with the ways various legislatures expedite business, especially as pertains to oversight responsibilities; training pollsters; suggesting ways of defining the legal status of non-governmental public institutions—for example, non-profit corporations; training statisticians; and other such help through which they can expeditiously grapple with the problems of constructing modern liberal democratic societies. In addition, it seems reasonable that there be actual investment in Eastern Europe, not by our government, of course, but by businessmen. Beyond technology restrictions, I see little reason to hamper it. I am uncomfortable with the contemptuous allusion to capitalist rope-sellers. Some businessmen are idiotic and venal; so are some politicians. By and large, though, I think that Western participation in the development of Eastern bloc economies will be a "good infection," encouraging the process of economic liberalization. Finally, I agree with Mr. Ledeen that occasional humanitarian aid may be appropriate.

Perhaps Mr. Ledeen and I are not so far apart. It is hard to tell, for he was being a bit cagey. I hope that he will be afforded an opportunity to respond, so that we can see.

—Michael David Blume
Annapolis, Maryland

Michael Ledeen replies:

I'm grateful to Michael David Blume for his thoughtful comments. We agree on most things, such as the desirability of private investment in Eastern Europe, and the obvious need for support to democratic forces there (he calls it institution-building). We also agree that Eastern Europe—and, though he doesn't say so, I assume he agrees, the Soviet Union as well—is extremely explosive.

We disagree over where things stand at the moment, not over where things are headed and where our interests lie. He says that, after Rumania, no one should think that we're at "the beginning of the beginning." But Rumania is the purest example of the triumph of Communist Gorbachevites at the expense of real democracy. The fall of Ceausescu was a purge, pure and simple. The new regime is "reformist Communism," just as Gorbachev intended from the beginning. I do not think it will last, indeed I wrote long before most others that Gorbachev's lack of understanding of democratic revolution and his cowardly refusal to enact an effective economic program had led him to adopt a doomed strategy. He is now forced to cope with his own fail-

ures—political and economic—in his own society, and I believe that in the end the forces of democracy will prevail there as well. But there is a long way to go, and I cannot imagine it all happening without considerable violence. We tend to forget that there has already been a lot of bloodshed, but when the Chinese do it in front of CNN the world denounces it; when the Russians do it in Azerbaijan, with no TV cameras, we cluck understandingly, and the President expresses sympathy for the invaders.

I believe we hold a pat hand because we have what the Soviet Empire needs to survive, and we can deprive them of it unless they meet our democratic and strategic conditions. Mr. Blume says rightly that we need to withhold certain militarily useful technology from them. Let him say that to Secretary Mosbacher, who hasn't gotten the message. He is busily decontrolling all sorts of exotic technologies for sale to Eastern Europe (which promptly turns it over to the Soviets) and even to the Soviets directly. This is madness, for it encourages the Kremlin to believe that it can weasel its way out of the jam. I want to keep the controls on, until and unless the democrats come to power in those societies. There is still not a single security service in Eastern Europe under democratic control; not a single interior ministry; not a single defense ministry. I believe the democrats will eventually gain control, but they are not there yet.

And as for the Soviet Union, we are presented with the hilarious spectacle of the monopoly position of the Communist party being destroyed by . . . a unanimous (save Yeltsin) vote of the Communist party leaders. It is still only the beginning of the beginning.

It Won't Be Easy

My wife, native New Orleanian that she is, wishes to thank Victor Gold from the bottom of her heart for "We Never Called It 'The Big Easy'" (*TAS*, February 1990). Now if some other kind soul could do the same for me, native Manhattanite that I am, and pen a "We Never Called It 'The Big Apple,'" I'd be eternally in your debt.

—Robert J. Powers,
Shreveport, Louisiana

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CURRENT WISDOM

The Great Books Series

A stupendous exegesis of Miss Marabel Morgan's famed hamburger metaphor from Dr. Carol J. Adams, who in less enlightened times probably would not be invited to lecture at a major university:

In *Total Joy*, Marabel Morgan unites women and animals through the use of the metaphor of hamburger. Morgan fosters her own Shmoo syndrome in advising women to consider themselves like hamburger in serving their husbands' needs: "but like hamburger you may have to prepare yourself in a variety of different ways now and then." Her sentence structure—"like hamburger you may"—implies that hamburger prepares itself in a variety of ways, and so must you. But hamburger, long before arriving in the kitchen of the total woman, has been denied all agency and can do no preparing. "You," woman/wife, refers to and stands in for hamburger. Women stand in relationship to the "total woman" as they do to "hamburger," as something that is objectified, without agency, that must be prepared, reshaped, acculturated to be made consummable [sic] in a patriarchal world. Though the referent is absent, women cannot escape recognizing themselves in it. And just as animals do not desire to be eaten, Morgan's sentence structure subverts her attempt to convince women that they do.

[From *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, by Carol J. Adams, Continuum Publishing, 256 pp. \$22.95]

New York Times

From among America's career *indignados*, Dr. Anthony Lewis repeats himself, repeats himself, repeats himself . . . :

When has a President responded so feebly to the challenge of historic change? When has the idea of American leadership been so mocked?

The Communist Party is losing its monolithic grip on the Soviet Union. Soviet republics are threatening to break away. Across Central and Eastern Europe freedom is rising.

And how does George Bush respond? He goes on a tour to campaign for military spending. He asks Congress for new strategic nuclear weapons systems. He demands 25 percent more money for Star Wars.

[February 9, 1990]

From the Soviet Union to South Africa, societies are confronting their fundamental problems. Immobilism is giving way to change. There has never been a time in the world like this, we say to each other.

But one great country is not confronting its problems. It is avoiding them, refusing to risk the uncertainty of change. That country is the United States.

America's problems are no secret.

[February 20, 1990]

Nation

For those 1960s leftists still sozzled on the hooch that flows so copiously from this old sponge, authoress Katrina van den Heuvel tells how George let Gorby down once again:

The American invasion of Panama was the first—and in the West the least reported—setback for Gorbachev's domestic and foreign policies. The sending of 26,000 U.S. troops to capture the dictator of a tiny country shattered Gorbachev's assumption, already disputed among the Soviet national security elite, that Washington had accepted his "new thinking," which rules out the use of force to settle international differences. Conservative Soviet civilian and military officials, forced to watch in dismay as Communist parties collapsed across Eastern Europe, were quick to note the contrast. As one military officer said in disgust, "We look like a pitiful giant." A pro-Gorbachev diplomat said to me with visible despair, "Your President has given our opponents a wonderful New Year's present."

[February 12, 1990]

SF

(San Francisco, California)

An inscrutable communique from the city by the bay:

In the global recycling picture, the Soviets are definitely one up on the West. Cans, bottles and newspapers seem hopelessly passe when you consider the Russians are making jewelry, candlesticks and clocks from disassembled parts of SS-20 missiles. Just think of the new channels they've opened in the disarmament negotiations, not to mention being incredibly fashion forward.

And who more appropriate to lead us into the age of wearable weaponry than San Francisco's own arbiter of social decorum, Pat Montandon?

Montandon intends to introduce this line of missile-art along with other choice Soviet crafts in her Perestroika shop, scheduled to open in SOMA sometime in April.

"I'm even having the Soviets send me a whole dismantled missile to go on the ceiling of the store," Montandon says.

Other items on the inventory list include dolls made out of reindeer fur, wood platters carved with Russian fairy-tale themes, copper healing bracelets and Red Army uniforms.

At the same time, Montandon is working on exporting a line of cosmetics for Soviet women.

"We're going to make a video to show them how to apply cosmetics and send our people over to do makeup seminars. I don't think it's a far-out idea. It's like playing baseball after the earthquake. You feel better about yourself if you put a little blush on—it takes your mind off the fact that you can't get a loaf of bread."

[February 1990]

Newsweek

In the "My Turn" column of this famed weekly, an aesthete recalls the first of her visits to the friendly abortionist:

During the procedure I sang "Here Comes the Sun" to myself as I stared at the ceiling. Oh, there is the whir of the vacuum the booklet said I'd hear; here come the strong cramps I'm supposed to feel. Afterward the doctor gave me some peanut-butter cookies and I went out to the waiting room feeling more cleansed and relieved than sad.

[February 12, 1990]

Santa Barbara News-Press

And the pettiness continues:

For the Record

A quote was incorrectly attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King in an article on the Sunday Forum page. The quoted matter is actually from the Bible, Isaiah 40:4-5.

[January 17, 1990]

Washington Post TV Week

Mr. Corbin Bernsen, the Olivier of "L.A. Law," dumps the contents of his mind onto a page of the incomparable *Post's* television listings and levitates away:

He talks of legalizing drugs, revamping the United States Constitution, scrapping religion and electing dual presidents. But first, he wants to clean up the place. His method: theater, scripts, movies.

He'll start out by producing and starring in a trilogy set just before the year 2000, a date he views as "a fresh start." He plans a theatrical release, primarily because of TV's restrictions, he said.

"I want to study mankind at this time," he explained. "I'll be 45 in the year 2000 and I'd like to think that I'm socially conscious and I'd like to be part of a world that's more socially conscious. I'd like to look toward a future, and not a future that looks bleak." . . .

Bernsen rolls on to his next concern: religion. . . . He no longer believes in going to church on Sundays, he said. "I wake up in the morning and I smile and I don't have to wait until Sunday and go into a concrete building or wait with other people. I don't have to bless every meal. I believe in far greater than that: I believe in life, that force in life that's in all of us. Each and every one of us is a god, a part of God, no less or greater than a snail or bamboo in the forest . . .

This Corbin Bernsen sounds like a moralist, an environmentalist, maybe even a sort of evolutionist.

"This ain't no motel—this is home," he went on. "People treat this Earth like a motel room, because they think they're going to some other place. As far as I know, when I die I'm not going anywhere else, so don't mess up my heaven."

[January 21, 1990]

Anchorage Daily News

For those who think the *Village Voice* mentality cannot be transported across state lines, we publish Mr. Don Alexander's reaction to another of our government's failed attempts at World War III and Nuclear Holocaust:

The Republicans finally got the gift they wished for in November 1988, namely, a war. What's that you say? This is just a skirmish? . . . Personally, I feel as if I've been raped and robbed by His Royal Majesty King George's actions in Panama. I feel raped because the legacy of Southeast Asia, which has already violated our country, is still alive in the persons of Herr Bush and his sycophants, like Prince Ted of Alaska.

All Americans have been robbed, also. In the face of the crumbling of the walls of communist oppressions, on the heels of which all totalitarian states would surely fall, we had the chance to tell our children there would never be another war. This opportunity has been stolen from us by a jingoistic group whose greatest fear is peace.

[January 3, 1990]

International Herald-Tribune

On the howl page of this venerable paper of the world, the Conscience of St. Moritz speaks out:

President George Bush would do well to get out of the White House and walk among the destitute and homeless in America's big cities. Stealth bombers and "star wars" are not what they need.

—Walter P. Coolidge
St. Moritz, Switzerland
[February 15, 1990]

The Enterprise

(Brockton, Mass.)

A future editor of the *PEN Newsletter* levitates another bull above the heads of amazed readers in far-out Brockton:

In the growing list of victims exploited by the late Charles Stuart, there's one more victim no one has yet talked about: the animals killed for the fur coats that brought him in a cool \$100,000 a year.

Stuart obviously cared no more about the murdered minks that paid for a heated pool in his yard than he did about a murdered wife and son, who were to pay for his dreams to open a restaurant.

One can argue that he didn't personally bloody his fingers in the making of the furs that he sold. Perhaps one could argue that he did not pull the trigger on his wife—he just perhaps had someone else do the dirty work.

In either case, the outcome for Stuart was the same: all he really wanted was to be able to wrap himself up in what society considers glamorous.

—Karen Carbone
Rockport
[January 27, 1990]