

is either too dumb to be writing political biographies for adults, or—considering that he devoted years of investigation into proving what everybody from Austin to Boston has known about Johnson's victory for forty years—more the hot-eyed polemicist than the appraising historian.

Did I say too dumb to be writing political biographies? Look who's talk-

ing. For this review I get (1) a copy of the book; (2) a small stipend, in the low three figures; and (3) what latter-day psychologists are given to calling *conflicted signals* (a prelude to dyspepsia) in my *attitudinal disposition* toward Lyndon Johnson. And Robert Caro? The verdict was in, before I laid hands on his book. Two volumes down, two to go, and he's smirking all the way to the counting house. □

MEN AT WORK: THE CRAFT OF BASEBALL

George F. Will/Macmillan/353 pp. \$19.95

Robert D. Novak

Why would George Will, the stylish and profound commentator and columnist, write a book about baseball? The way his none too friendly colleagues in Washington have answered this question—that he wants to show he is a good old boy after all—reaffirms for all who doubted that the nation's capital is a nasty place.

Will's own answer is forthright: "My interest in writing this book has been to have fun exploring the spirit and practice of something fun, a sport." Part of the fun was touring America's baseball parks in the summer of 1989 while carrying on his regular workload without anybody knowing what he was up to.

The product is a delightful book that has won uniformly favorable, if sometimes grudging, reviews. Critics who came to bury Will stayed to express surprise. My favorite is novelist Mark Harris, a baseball fan, Nixon-basher, and unreconstructed liberal. "Since I had heard that he was a committed political conservative," Harris wrote in the *Washington Times*, "I approached his book with a prejudice against him, but I do very much like his book." Reviewers who are also journalists praise Will for his reportorial talents, but then turn mean and say he ought to put as much care and effort into his reporting of national affairs.

Although he never covered the police beat, Will in truth is both a stylist and a dogged gatherer of facts, whether about arms control or pitching control. I admit to a double bias. First, I like George Will, even if I cannot share his misguided views about the economy and government. Second, I have been

a baseball fan since 1938 when at age seven I was deluded into thinking that the Cubs' winning a September pennant came naturally.

An affinity for baseball would seem required for this book, its Number One position on the *New York Times* bestseller list suggesting that the grand old game is still the National Pastime. *Men at Work* might more properly be titled "Inside Baseball," delving into strategies and tactics that have not been discussed in print or electronic journalism. It taught me, a lifelong baseball fan, things I never dreamed of. The book's odd title is based on Will's contention about his protagonists that "their work is a game that men play, but they do not play at." In taking what he calls an "anti-romantic" look at baseball, he stresses the "small and boring and cumulatively stressful and draining things" that make a successful player.

It is, Will insists, not the drippy pastoral game often apotheosized. He quotes Houston pitcher Mike Scott as saying, "You've got to put a little fear

in there." Will concludes that the fear factor is "more important in baseball than in any other sport." That was reassuring to me, after wondering for years whether my courage was suspect when, as an untalented Junior American Legion player forty-three summers ago, I nearly died of fright while awaiting the southpaw delivery of an adolescent fast-baller.

While purposely engendering fear, the pitcher subjects his own body to exquisite tortures unimaginable in football or hockey. "Throwing a baseball is a highly unnatural act," Will writes. "As the arm accelerates past the ear, it gains terrific speed and then changes direction, turning down and decelerating sharply. Muscles stretch and tear and bleed. And that is when everything is going well."

Will's paragons of a sport that "you can not play with your teeth clenched [or] . . . with your mind idling in neutral" are a manager (Oakland's Tony La Russa), a pitcher (Los Angeles's Orel Hershisier), a hitter (San Diego's Tony Gwynn), and a fielder (Baltimore's Cal Ripken, Jr.). The after-publication fate of two of these heroes demonstrates the inconstancy of baseball fortune. The workaholic Gwynn began this season grossly overweight and Hershisier's repeated performance of "a highly unnatural" act has ruined his rotator cuff and maybe his career.

Will travels from his four heroes across today's baseball landscape and back through its history. He does not play the Tory. His concluding chapter begins with a quote from a former manager and player that "baseball today is not what it should be" because players—"getting paid big money"—"do not try to learn all the fine points of the game as in the days of old, but simply try to get by." This appeared in the *Spalding Base Ball Guide* of 1916.

Will suggests baseball is better than ever. Wee Willie Keeler won entry to the Hall of Fame by "hitting them where they ain't" only because the fielders of ninety years ago weren't where they should have been. "They did not know better," says Will, an astute critic of defensive positioning.

He does mourn for the strong-armed pitchers of yesteryear. But they were using a cuffed and dirty ball kept in the game to save pennies, throwing fewer than 100 pitches a game instead of the 130 to 140 required today thanks to picky hitters. When the immortal Grover Cleveland Alexander pitched thirty-eight complete games in 1916, Will notes, he not only threw forty fewer pitches a game than he would today, but many of them "were fat and slow, allowing weak hitters to dribble

the dead (and gray and battered) ball at fielders."

Will reverses the trend of applying sports analogies to politics that began with Teddy Roosevelt and culminated with Richard Nixon and his successors. An example: "A wit once said that it was not true that Gladstone lacked a sense of humor—Gladstone just was not in a mood to be amused. La Russa is no stranger to laughter, but he does not often laugh when he is within a fly ball's distance of a ballpark." Another example: "Not since Cromwell's troops, their puritan sensibilities offended by beauty, went around smashing decorative art in churches has there been an act of folly comparable to the abandonment and destruction of Forbes Field, the Pirates' home for generations."

For the most part, though, Will checks his erudition at the door. This is a book about baseball. Only at the end does he say he cannot "forebear drawing a lesson" from baseball by deploring "a tendency of Americans to demand too little of themselves at their lathes, their desks, their computer terminals." His conclusion: "If Americans made goods and services the way Ripken makes double plays, Gwynn makes hits, Hershisier makes pitches and La Russa makes decisions, you would hear no more about the nation's trajectory having passed its apogee."

But Will is looking at the best of the brightest, the elite of the tiny fraction that makes it to the Majors. If Will had sought out the best lathe operators, secretaries, and computer operators, I'm sure he would have found the same diligence. George Will is himself a "Man at Work," reflecting a work ethic that his pygmy detractors in journalism would do well to emulate.

Earlier, Will mounts the soapbox to decry the use of aluminum bats in college baseball, both for aesthetic reasons (the bat striking a baseball "makes a sound as distressing as that of fingernails scraping a blackboard") and for debasing the game at the level where many future Major Leaguers are trained. Will's suggestion that the Majors let loose some of their billions to subsidize wooden bats in college is laudatory.

My only quibble is that having turned his skills as political philosopher to the debate over the Designated Hitter, he says "I have gotten nowhere" in deciding who is correct. As much as I admire Dr. Will, he is not without fault—in maintaining that Americans are undertaxed, and in becoming an agnostic about the wretched DH. But as he writes, baseball is a "game of failure." Meanwhile, his batting average remains spectacularly high. □



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A MIRACLE, A UNIVERSE: SETTLING ACCOUNTS WITH TORTURERS

Lawrence Weschler/Pantheon Books/292 pp. \$22.95

Christopher Caldwell

New Yorker staff writer Lawrence Weschler has written several books on modern art and one on Solidarity. His art essays are not so much about art criticism as about some of the weirdos who inhabit the international art world, like the American painter who paints nothing but pound notes, and then spends them. *The Passion of Poland* is less about the Solidarity movement than about the atavism and romantic insanity that led a small workers' movement to triumph over the most heavily armed empire in the history of the world. Weschler is at home with people whom one might reasonably ask, "Why in God's name are you *doing* this?" As such, torturers—and those who stand up to them with nothing but their convictions—have found their chronicler. Here, Weschler limits himself to Brazil and Uruguay to show how torture was executed and expunged under two vastly different sets of circumstances.

Brazil's descent into the maelstrom began in April 1964, when a military coup overthrew the government of João Goulart. This was in the period when Brazil was raking in money hand-over-fist both through foreign loans and consequent industrialization, which left the country with some of the world's highest skyscrapers and some of the world's highest external debts. Goulart, with his zeal for wage reform and nationalization of industries, endangered Brazil's credit line, and had to go. Throughout the sixties and seventies, the Brazilian military would take any measure—including torture—to protect the country's prosperity. In the late seventies, the military governments of generals Ernesto Geisel and João Baptista Figueiredo, for the first time finding their credit linked to their human rights record, tried to liberalize the regime gradually, beginning with a *distensao* (relaxation) and culminating in an *abertura* (opening) under the Figueiredo government.

Weschler's account of the period centers on the *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Never Again) project, the brainchild of Sao Paulo's Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns and Brazilian missionary Jaime

Wright (whose brother was "disappeared" in 1973 for leading Christian student activists in political protests). With the help of the Rev. Philip Potter, a gigantic West Indian who risked his job as head of the World Council of Churches to provide \$350,000 in clandestine aid, Wright and Arns created a scam worthy of a Len Deighton thriller. Under the terms of an edict handed down during Figueiredo's *abertura*, an amnesty would be offered to both "political criminals" and human rights violators. But the military weren't taking any chances: lawyers were hired to defend the embroiled officers, and allowed overnight access to the government's torture files. This is where it gets interesting.

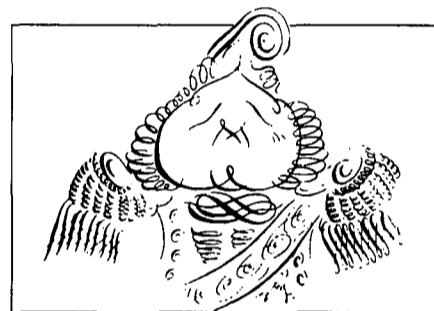
Wright and Arns established a bogus business-services company in a Brasilia office building and bought three copying machines. With the help of sympathetic lawyers, they set to work copying and cross-referencing every case of torture on government record. Because of the risk of leaks, many of the lower-level staff were not even told what they were working on, and most didn't figure it out until *Brasil: Nunca Mais* was whittled down from a million pages of documents and published in book form.

How could the generals have been so stupid as to leave all this evidence lying around? Brazilians can be proud of some of their military "achievements": they are still the world's fourth-largest arms exporter. They do, however, have a tendency toward excessive zeal: one prominent torturer, a navy lieutenant commander from a long line of officers, was christened with the rather un-Brazilian name of Hitler de Oliveira Mota. "Like the Nazis," one Brazilian tells Weschler, "they imagined that they were laying the groundwork for a civilization that would last a thousand years—that, far from having to justify themselves for occasional lapses, they would be celebrated by all posterity for the breadth of their achievement." All this took place during the foreign-lending orgy and concomitant economic boom known as the "Brazilian miracle."

In Uruguay, by contrast, the torture state was built on economic col-

lapse, which Weschler traces to "import substitution industrialization" (ISI), a policy that successive postwar Uruguayan governments followed assiduously. Basically, ISI is a temporary ("until our infrastructure is developed") protectionism backed up by Third World rhetoric. High tariffs created ridiculous profit windows for industrialists, who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Prices soared, purchasing power plummeted, and Uruguay found itself saddled with a program about as "temporary" as affirmative action. Unions radicalized. Students went crazy. The idea was so stupid that the army had to be called in to enforce it. And South America's most prosperous nation, the "Great Democratic Exception," found itself the newest of Third World countries.

Weschler admires the Tupamaro guerrillas; left-wing university students who about this time organized around charismatic law-school dropout Raul Sendic, and it's hard not to share his enthusiasm for these "antic insurrectionists," this "marriage of Chaplin



and Che." But in 1970, just as the military was reaching peak size and influence, they made a big mistake by kidnapping U.S. AID official Dan Mitrione, whom they accused of teaching torture methods to officers. When the government of Jorge Pacheco Areco refused to exchange several Tupa prisoners for the American, the Tupas shot Mitrione to death. They then began to engage in terrorism on a large scale, and the government answered in kind: Uruguay soon had the highest rate of civilian incarceration of any country where such things were documented.

While not as accomplished as the Brazilians at physical depredations, the Uruguayan regime added sophisticated psychological ones. The Uruguayan section of the book is twice as long as the one on Brazil, and descriptions of torture techniques are more elaborate. One wishes they weren't. A pianist has his fingers chain sawed. A four-year-old is forced to walk around a torture complex alone in search of his father; he finds him tied up in a hood. Another prisoner lives at the bottom of a well for weeks. Another survives on a diet of urine. And there is plenty of unmentionable sex. Some prisoners claim to have been tortured by men with Argentine accents during that country's

guerra sucia, or "dirty war," making it plausible that there was something resembling an international torture club operating in the southern cone over the past two decades.

If Weschler believes in such a club, there's scant doubt who he thinks its founding member was. He's a liberal of a recognizable stripe, with little good to say about American policy in Latin America and few North American heroes, save Jimmy Carter and the late Penny Lernoux. The "doctrine of national security" is a hobbyhorse that Weschler rides at a gallop; according to his reading, Washington inflicted its phobia of Communist infiltration on various Latin American governments in the decades following the Second World War, leading to internal repression and the tortures of the sixties, seventies, and eighties. Even if there was such a doctrine (and a policy is not a "doctrine"), to blame the U.S. implies a Latin American inability to form homegrown institutions and policies, and borders on condescension. One almost expects Weschler to add that the U.S. invented *cumbia*, cockfighting, and *caudillismo*.

For Weschler, the key issue in dismantling a torture state is the amnesty that the torturers are generally in a position to demand for themselves. Weschler does not argue that amnesties are necessarily bad, but he has a keen sense of how forgiveness can degenerate into forgetfulness, making future thug states more viable. The new ultra-left government of Luis Lacalle in Uruguay and the center-right Collor de Mello government in Brazil, both democratically elected, have failed to resuscitate their ravaged economies. In neither country has anyone been punished for torture, which is precisely Weschler's point: torture is not a policy but a symptom of societal sickness, and it can take societies as long to recover from these *guerras sucias* as it can the individual victims. Democracy is only a precondition; few people run marathons the day after quitting smoking.

Had he waited a bit longer, Weschler could have examined torture in Panama or Chile, but it's hard to find fault with his choice of countries. One of his charms as a writer is that he sticks to a subject like a terrier to a trouser leg, even after he's got a book and several articles out of it; he continues to write on Poland and on the perpetual freakshow that is the international art world. One hopes to read more from him on the subject of torture, particularly if he's able to treat the collapse of left-wing torture states like Rumania and—who knows when?—Cuba with the same acuity and outrage he brings to these two right-wing baddies. □

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