

who'd become a self-styled aesthete, surrounded by the soigné set of *tout Paris* who once adored him and now reviled him for his heresy. Lord had bought the mediocre painting as a gesture of kindness, but in opposition to the artistes he had already placed his feet firmly on the side of the political. He looked everywhere for Maar. Finally he caught her

eye and held out his hand, thinking she'd let ideological by-gones be by-gones. "My poor James," she said, grasping it. "You're determined to turn the whole world against you, aren't you?" Then, she let go and walked away, adding, "It's a pity." She's doubtless doubly mortified now; she still lives in the Vaucluse, in the house Picasso bought her. □

A DIFFERENT PERSON: A MEMOIR

James Merrill

Alfred A. Knopf/271 pages/\$25

reviewed by CHRISTOPHER CAHILL

James Merrill's eminence among contemporary poets, ratified as it is by an ever increasing burden of awards and distinctions, is still enigmatic, uncertain. Not that there is any question of his ability or his achievements—in addition to *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the long poem of our time most likely to last, he has written a body of extraordinary lyrics of passion and experience. Helen Vendler refers to him as one of our "necessary poets." Harold Bloom calls him "indisputably a verse artist comparable to Milton, Tennyson, and Pope. Surely he will be remembered as the Mozart of American poetry."

Merrill, then, is a national treasure, but of what nation? Like Henry James and Wallace Stevens, he is the sort of American writer who seems foreign to many merely by virtue of his social position and the undemocratic elegance of his art. In fact, as he says himself, he is "as American as lemon chiffon pie." In his poetry, Merrill has drawn on his personal dramas with growing candor and conversational élan, without any sacrifice of metrical virtuosity, making art "out of the life lived, out of the love spent." Now, in a memoir written at the age of

66, he has decided to consider those dramas at greater length.

He evades some of the pitfalls of autobiography (endless childhood, the boring accretion of accomplishments) by concentrating on a few years in late youth when, just out of college, he was living in Europe, undergoing psychoanalysis, trying to become a writer. "Who needs the full story of any life?" Merrill asks. "Biologists are learning how to reconstruct the complete organism from a cluster of cells; the part implies the whole."

This is a canny and innovative approach to the memoir as a form. Through the warm and concentrated attention it pays to a few years, *A Different Person* gives us not only a portrait of the artist as a young man, but, in glimpses, the whole of a remarkable life, from a privileged childhood in a broken home through a long love affair with language. In italicized sections at the end of each chapter, he looks back on his youth from the vantage of experience, considering it with the necessary charity and a certain amusement. "The proper volume for self-assertion," Merrill writes, "is hard to gauge at twenty-five; if a whisper goes ignored, try a howl of pain."

Merrill's circumstances were peculiar for two reasons: money and talent. Less unusual but more troubling was his

homosexuality, an elusive "cure" for which he pursued through much of the period described in this book. His father was a founding partner of Merrill-Lynch, and the disadvantages of privilege, difficult to complain of as they are, bothered him greatly at the time:

The best intentioned people, knowing whose son I was and powerless against their own snobbery, could set me withering under attentions I had done nothing to merit. So I looked forward to distancing myself from all that . . . in places where the family name cut no ice, the firm had no branch office, and I might, if need be, like the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, pass myself off as a poor student.

In place of such limiting providence, Merrill wanted to find for himself a life which would imitate art of the high, operatic variety—and which would allow him, in turn, to create art of his own. Already a poet of prodigious technical facility, Merrill, before leaving for Europe, realized that his poems "remained verbal artifacts, metered and rhymed to be sure, shaped and polished and begemmed, but set on the page with never a thought of their being uttered by a living voice."

This period in Europe was a dry spell for Merrill as a writer, but in the searching and feints at self-revelation that characterize it, there is a foreshadowing of both the matter and the material of much of his finest later work. Though there is some of each, this memoir does not rely on either gossip or shop talk, tracing gracefully instead the line of personality drawn between the social life and the private, professional life of the artist. Merrill's psychoanalytic sessions in postwar Rome with a certain Dr. Detre, an Austrian Jew waiting for his American visa, provides an ironic narrative framework. "The war's end," Merrill writes, "which found me eager for wicked, blackened old Europe, found him—the rest of whose family had disappeared at Auschwitz—among those millions dreaming of a passport to freedom."

Nothing dates like an eternal truth, and it is alarming to read about the faith Merrill placed in the arcane Freudian mythology of the time. In the end, though, there is something touching and even impressive about the discipline and depth of the antiquated form of therapy these

Christopher Cahill is the editor of the Recorder, a journal of the American Irish Historical Society.

two practice together, especially when contrasted, as it is by Merrill, with the flaky New Age hybrid of complaint and self-congratulation that is its successor.

Their relationship is necessarily one-sided, with the patient describing to the doctor—and intermittently to the reader—his family problems, his romantic problems, dreams only the dreamer could love. But the solid, droll character of Dr. Detre is a perfect foil for the quicksilver of Merrill's own personality. The other central figures—parents, lovers, friends, extended family—are given weight and dramatic presence by their place in the inset narrative of this extended, therapeutic conversation. For it was not only Merrill himself who was eager to make himself into a different person. There was a strong pressure from his mother to repress his sexuality, and a weaker one from his father to enter the family business; there was the high society in which he was raised with its not wholly unappealing constraints. Among the many pieces of wisdom in this book, most impressive perhaps is Merrill's demonstration that such pressures are most often and most profitably not deflected but absorbed and rewritten, so that the son, ostensibly different in the extreme from his parents, can find the traits of each woven almost imperceptibly through the pattern of his life.

It is heartening and delightful to see the artistic process neither mystified nor belittled but demonstrated, made real without fanfare or display. Among the many gems of the book, there is a detailed description of the mosaics at Ravenna that is not only a masterpiece of descriptive writing but also a lesson in how, with proper ardor and attention, a work of art can reveal its view-er to himself:

The profusion of motifs, their vigor by now a reflex long past thought, gives out a sense of peace and plenty in the lee of history's howling gale. It isn't the creeds or the crusades they tell of, but the relative eternity of villas, interior decoration, artisans, the centuries of intelligence in fingers not twenty years old. . . . For this morning hour in San Vitale I feel like the aborigine who can describe all the people and animals who have traveled a road, just from whatever grows along its edge.

Even if Merrill has spoken of prose as "a mildly nightmarish medium," this bur-nished and inventive memoir shows him as one of its contemporary masters. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(continued from page 10)

get. Clearly the American public is in no mood to tolerate new U.S. casualties in the Middle East; a Somalia-like stampede to retreat from the Golan will inevitably ensue, leaving the Golan completely in Syrian hands. Thus will Israel be left without the Golan, and without American "protection." Is it sensible for the U.S. to pressure Israel into making risky territorial concessions on the Golan in exchange for "security guarantees" that are unlikely to be fulfilled if the fat hits the fire?

—Herbert Zweibon, *Chairman
Americans for a Safe Israel*
New York, New York

What Happened at the Top

As producer with my late brother of *Room at the Top*, I refer to the reference to our film in your interesting article in your magazine dated October (John Simon's review of Catherine David's *Simone Signoret*, *TAS*, October 1993).

The paragraph on page 74 is incor-rect. What happened was that my brother and I had wanted to cast Vivien Leigh in the film, but she was unavailable due to other commitments. We happened to be lunching with our friend, the distin-guished director Peter Glenville, and chatted about this problem and the diffi-culty of obtaining a British actress of similar importance. He suggested that we might instead engage one of the highly successful European actresses.

We considered several of the French and Italian actresses who were then so popular, and decided to send the script to Simone Signoret. We explained to her that the film was to be directed by Jack Clayton, who although he had never before directed a feature film, had been associated with us for some years as a production executive, and in fact the year before had directed a half-hour film for us called *The Bespoke Overcoat*, which had won an Oscar in its category as well as other major awards at film festivals.

Simone telephoned us to say that she liked the script very much and would be interested to do the film, but would first like to meet the director and us. The meeting went extremely well, and the result was the film which was highly successful and won international acclaim including two Oscars, one for Simone Signoret and one for the screenwriter,

Neil Paterson, as well as nominations for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actress.

So the quotation from the book, which I haven't seen, was correct and the review was erroneous in this respect.

—Sir John Woolf
London, UK

We've Met the Enemy

Just finished reading P. J. O'Rourke's "Collective Guilt"; otherwise known as the fifth annual New Enemies List (*TAS*, November 1993). Since the reading(s) were during lunch, I must confess to a dessert of double-strength Maalox. It would seem reformed Communists and all their red-shirttailed socialist cousins have yet another shot at creating a utopi-an society. . . .

—Tom Steele
Fountain Valley, California

I absolutely loved "Collective Guilt" by P.J. O'Rourke—a timely piece. I would suggest, however, the title is in error. It should have been titled "Collective Rage." *We the people* are enraged by the Clintonites and their extreme arrogance toward the citizens of this once-great nation. I for one appreciated the opportu-nity to share in the rage of "Collective Guilt" and all the while having a good laugh! Thanks again!

—Philip Rusin
Napa, California

P.J. O'Rourke's roast of "The Worst Enemies Ever" was delightful. After reading it thrice, I sent in my renewal for 1,000 years and a gift for one son for 6 months, his attention span. . . .

—Lorne E. O'Brien
Palos Verdes Estates, California

I am a conservative Republican. Last year, in an attempt to locate a publication that publishes thoughtful conservative responses to current events, I purchased subscriptions from *The American Spectator*, the *Conservative Chronicle*, and *National Review*.

All of these periodicals have their strong points, but I decided that my reading time and my budget would only allow me to renew two of the subscriptions this year. I was in a quandary over which two to choose, until I received my November 1993 issue of *The American Spectator*. P.J. O'Rourke's article settled the matter. Though I wish you and your organization

(continued on page 70)

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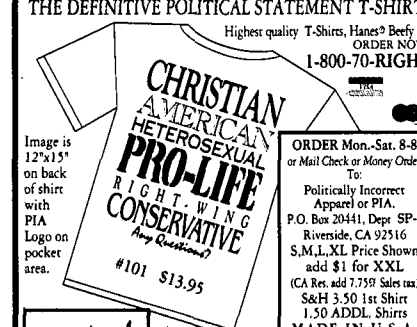



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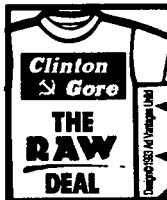
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CORRESPONDENCE

(continued from page 65)

well, I will not be renewing my subscription with *TAS*. I was greatly troubled by Mr. O'Rourke's self-indulgent vocabulary and by your decision to print such unpalatable material.

—Devrun L. Ellerman
Williamsburg, Kansas

Rubbed the Wrong Way

I am writing in response to your editorial "Father Higgins, RIP," which appeared in the November 1993 issue of *The American Spectator*.

I find it quite ironic that early in the editorial you display the audacity to refer to "boob journalists," colleagues you harshly criticize for taking a perspective that differs from your own. I am reminded of the expression with which you should be familiar, "It takes one to know one."

Several paragraphs later you exercise a very "liberal" and most shoddy and unprofessional style of reporting when you so recklessly, abusively, and inaccurately made reference to "a couple of liberal Catholic priests who offer therapeutic massages at the Indiana University Catholic student center. The priests claim to be trained masseuses [Please note: A masseuse is a feminine practitioner. Are you thinking the Roman Catholic Church has women priests? Try "masseur."] possessing wondrous powers over diligently fingered bodies and souls."

Could you please tell me what it was that possessed you to report in such a way? What was your intent (a critical component, by the way, in determining moral culpability)? Your reporting here is significantly misleading and terribly erroneous. Do you ever bother to check out the accuracy of things you report? Are you concerned about fact or only the fiction of your own personal opinion? Talk about "boob journalists"! It seems that your forte is vitriolic distortion. I resent having to waste my time with such arrogance, closed-mindedness, and somatophobia as you personify. But, such maligning and inferior reporting warrants a resounding response of disapproval. You really should be ashamed of such nasty tactics. I will continue to hope that you may one day discover the importance and value of honesty, justice, and charity.

I also want to comment on your frequent and "liberal" use of the term, "orthodoxy"; you use it in most unortho-

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dox and inclusive (God forbid!) ways, not unlike so many immature people today use the word “love” while not possessing a clear and appropriate definition of the term. Your vocabulary is not nearly so strong as you seem inclined to muse.

Finally, allow me to do you a kindness, to save you some money. Quit sending your complimentary copy of *The American Spectator* to St. Paul Catholic Center. We always discard it before it can pollute the minds of the truly decent people who attend here in great and growing numbers, a community with whom you could find so little in common. And, in case you’re curious, your editorial was brought to my attention by an understandably concerned friend.

—Father Kimball J. Wolf, Co-pastor
St. Paul’s Catholic Center
at Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

P.S. Be advised that, if something like this occurs again, we will pursue matters through our attorney.

The Choice Is Ours

Charlotte Allen’s anti-school choice essay is filled with errors (“Choice: A Burkean Dissent,” *TAS*, November 1993), of which I’ll address the most egregious.

Our school-choice lawsuits in Chicago and Los Angeles seek to apply simple consumer rules to the school marketplace. Taxpayers entrust billions of dollars to the public schools, and in exchange most state constitutions guarantee basic educational opportunities. The schools to which the low-income youngsters we represent are consigned are crime-infested educational cesspools. Our remedy would transfer control over the funds allocated for these youngsters’ education to the parents, allowing them to secure quality education for their children outside the public schools.

Contrary to Allen’s baseless assertion, we do not seek in any way to disturb local control over public schools or to inject the judiciary into school governance. Indeed, if the “opt-out” remedy we seek had been pursued in the desegregation context instead of busing, our nation’s racial and educational landscapes likely would look quite better today.

Allen’s concerns about regulation of private schools in a voucher system are valid but misplaced. Voucher proposals such as the California initiative contain

explicit restrictions against regulation—indeed, far greater protection than private schools currently enjoy.

Before co-founding the Institute for Justice, I defended the constitutionality of the Milwaukee school choice program and represented private schools in a challenge to regulation imposed by the state. Again contrary to Allen’s assertion, the court *struck down* virtually all the regulations, reasoning correctly that the program was designed to preserve the private character of the participating schools.

School choice would effectuate the greatest transfer of power from government to individuals since the abolition of slavery. Unfortunately, discussion about the underlying principles often is sidetracked by factual distortions to which choice opponents always seem to resort.

—Clint Bolick
Vice President and Litigation Director
Institute for Justice
Washington, D.C.

Charlotte Allen replies:

Mr. Bolick accuses me of error, whereas he merely disagrees with me. On November 3, California’s voters had a chance to decide whether they thought the state’s public schools were indeed the “cesspools” of Mr. Bolick’s characterization. They declined to go along. Does Mr. Bolick now want the federal courts to cram vouchers down Californians’ throats? That’s called judicial tyranny in my book.

It is true enough—as I pointed out in my article—that Proposition 174 would have set up procedural hurdles (although not insuperable ones) to regulating private schools. Such hurdles do not exist under current California law. However, the impulse to regulate that would have inevitably accompanied a flow of state funds into the private educational sector does not exist either right now. So I would have to call Proposition 174’s failure a draw on the regulatory issue.

As for the Milwaukee school-choice system, the court did indeed strike down certain efforts by state education regulators to micromanage participating private schools but left the student-rights rules virtually intact (as I pointed out), including the one I quoted. The rest of Mr. Bolick’s letter is pure rhetoric.

Reagan and Abortion

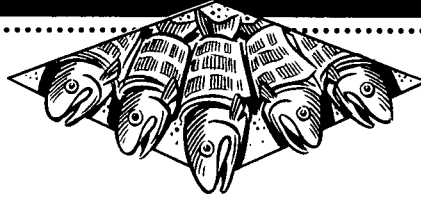
Letter writer John Romano is wrong in his interpretation of Ronald Reagan’s position

on abortion (Correspondence, *TAS*, November 1993). It is true that while governor of California Reagan signed a liberalized abortion law, but that was because some nefarious individuals took advantage of his well-known compassion. These people stated that women were *committing suicide* because of traumatic pregnancies, and that abortion was essential to prevent the loss of lives—both born and unborn. Naturally, Reagan was appalled and agreed that abortion should be made available to women who could prove that they were suicidal because of a crisis pregnancy. Later, he admitted that he had been “had” by these folks when, as he himself put it, every woman in California who wanted an abortion suddenly appeared with a note from her psychologist.

Mr. Romano is wrong again if he believes that abortion is a political and not a moral issue. For one thing, the murder of innocent human beings—especially when it is sanctioned, promoted, and even paid for by the state—is first and foremost a moral issue. But even if he were correct and the issue were purely one of politics, both Reagan and Bush would have been better off “pro-choice” or, at the very least, “personally opposed” à la Mario Cuomo. In fact, no less a personage than Nancy Reagan tried to woo her husband away from his forthright pro-life stand by arguing—in a politically correct and sensible manner—that pro-life voters “had nowhere else to go” and so the President could back off on the issue to his political benefit. However, Reagan would have none of it—not even from Nancy—and maintained his position in spite and not because of political expediency.

For his courage in opposing the abortion juggernaut, Reagan deserves sincere admiration. After all, politician Abraham Lincoln openly opposed slavery and no longer tried to compromise on the issue only after it became clear that a majority of Americans, their government, and their cultural institutions wanted slavery ended for good and all. On the other hand, Reagan stood tall for the unborn at a time when—supposedly—the majority of Americans, their government, and their cultural institutions *favored* abortion. In fact, Ronald Reagan was the first and strongest pro-life president in the abortion-on-demand era and we sorely miss him for that and, of course, other reasons.

—Valerie H. Protopapas
Huntington Station, New York



Wall Street Journal

Albert R. Hunt, preeminent mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, makes another bitchy point:

Nafta would be dead on arrival if George Bush were president; imagine sending Dan Quayle to take on Ross Perot Tuesday night.
[November 11, 1993]

Today

During an epochal interview on a recent Supreme Court decision on sexual harassment, the Bertrand Russell of modern progressive thought displays her wizardry at ratiocination and oratory to an awe-struck Katie Couric:

COURIC: Some viewers this morning, Professor Hill, may wonder if you're an appropriate spokesperson because this recent book, *The Real Anita Hill* by William [sic] Brock, they believe, shot some holes in your story. Do you have any reaction to that? You were very quiet when this book came out and did not come forward to refute any of the charges made.

PROF. HILL: Do I have any reaction to . . .

COURIC: To Mr. Brock's book and some of the claims he made.

PROF. HILL: Well, I can just say that those claims are untrue. I'm not going to try to refute, point by point, the book on this morning show because I think what is really important here is that we talk about this issue. And that's what I have been maintaining all along.

I think one of the things that is indicative, though, is that whenever we try to make gains on this issue it always seems that we're pulled back away from the issue by trying to focus on things that are not true and that have no merit. And what I would like for us to do this morning is to focus on Harris and how to move forward with this issue and those individuals who do have claims out there.

COURIC: All right. Professor Anita Hill, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

PROF. HILL: Thank you, Katie.
[November 10, 1993]

The Nation

The terror that was recently visited upon one of the most moronic of United States senators, as reported in the *Mad* magazine of the American left:

When Jesse Helms serenaded Carol Moseley-Braun with a few bars of "Dixie" in a Senate elevator this summer, his racial taunt was as clear and deliberate as a burning cross.

[November 22, 1993]

San Bernardino Sun

A scientific elucidation of the greatest threat to female virtue ever to face the Republic, to wit, nocturnal dreams of Our President:

Even when the Bill Dreams aren't romantic, many have an intimate flavor.

And few are presidential—Clinton usually drops into dreamland wearing his cap and jogging suit or a faded pair of jeans.

In one woman's dream, Clinton is her dentist ("but he isn't taking any new patients"); for another dreamer, the president is a stand-up comic who is bombing ("I wish I could give him funnier material").

Psychologists who specialize in dream analysis say the Bill dreams should come as no surprise.

"Clinton is very charismatic and he isn't afraid of a real woman," says Robert Van de Castle, a University of Virginia psychology professor and dream expert.

"He has struck a deep emotional chord. President Bush didn't stir up the same kind of passions. You wouldn't want to steal away with him to a hotel for a weekend."

Clinton's sex appeal was recently confirmed in a survey of 18- to 30-year-olds conducted by New York City psychologist Carin Rubenstein.

One of every four of the women polled was as likely to fantasize about Clinton as about TV heartthrob Luke Perry.

No president since John F. Kennedy . . .
[November 4, 1993]

The Great Books Series

Miss Linda Keen chronicles the difficulties a shy, highly intellectual, modern feminist has in approaching the ghost of John Lennon. What kept her off the Clinton cabinet?

Wandering in the imposing Swiss Alps that same morning, my heart and imagination allowed me to feel closer to the spirit of Carl Jung than ever before. Realizing how the mountain peaks were all connected to the same earth, I started thinking about the collective unconscious, that information which is common to all—the foundation of what the ancients called "the sympathy of all things." One curious element about the collective unconscious is that it can be tapped and communicated with. Was my dream tapping into John Lennon's reality? . . .

Back home in the Netherlands I continued to teach intuitive development at my school. During the next six months I kept setting aside any ideas about the possibility of communicating with the specter of Mr. Lennon and settled for the comfortable habit of communing with my familiar, old, intangible guardian, Basil. He had not only helped me write my first book, but had continued to assist me in many aspects of my professional and private life. I felt totally safe with him and didn't have to think about meddling around in the affairs of a world-famous deceased Beatle.

I did feel compelled, however, to nose around regularly in record stores and bookstores, trying to discover more about what John Lennon had actually been like. . .

No matter what my rational convictions may have been, John was a friend and presence, was growing steadily more genuine. I could swear he was taking a strong interest in my daily life activities. . .

In March of 1987, I reached a decision. Having grown steadily more curious, and somewhat less appreciative, I knew the time was ripe to meet directly with John Lennon's elusive essence.

[from John Lennon in Heaven, by Linda Keen. Pan Publishing, 291 pages, \$16.95]