

ind of modesty. Perhaps Lerner's literary heritage should be considered apart from the tale of his personal foibles. But one wonders whether the same profound

self-absorption that triumphed so relentlessly and remorselessly over spousal obligations is what rendered his oeuvre devoid of more than passing interest. ❧

a tough guy, and here he was, riding the El to buy an old lady a knish...

Gevalt. Woody Allen as Humphrey Bogart... But wait: It all leads up to the story of how the world-weary future owner of Rick's Cafe met the first love of his life—not Ilsa in Paris, but Lois Rabinowitz on the Lower East side...

"We missed it! We missed it!" she said with agitation.

"Missed what?" asked Rick.

"My stop," she said. "It was for my father..."

"What is?" said Rick, mystified, not for the first time, by the female mind.

"The gefilte fish," she said. "At Ruby's." She smiled. "It's the best."

For the record, I am not spritzing this up. Two pages later we come to the scene of Rick's first meeting with Lois's father Solly, the Beer Baron of the Bronx, who proceeds to pepper him with questions.

"You married?"

"No."

"Drink?"

"As much as the next guy."

"Ever use a gun?"

"No, but I'm willing to learn."

"You want to *shtup* my daughter?"

Forget Woody Allen. From this point on, it's pure Mel Brooks, as we move to the story of what happened to the surviving characters in *Casablanca* after their memorable fade-out on the airport tarmac that foggy night in Morocco. They all, wouldn't you know, wound up in the same unlikely place: Prague, with Ilsa as Mata Hari and Rick, Captain Renault and Victor Laszlo as hit men in the plot to assassinate the villainous Major Strasser's SS boss, Reinhard Heydrich.

A little real-life back-story here, for the benefit of those Generation-X readers whose familiarity with World War II is limited to Tom Hanks's saving of Private Ryan: Reinhard Heydrich was at that time the brutish *Reichsprotektor* of Czechoslovakia, known to his non-Aryan subjects as "The Hangman," and to Hitler himself as "the man with an iron heart." He was indeed assassinated, in May 1942, by Czech patriots working with British Intelligence, a fact duly

It's 'Play It Again, Sam,' Not 'Play It Again, Michael'

As Time Goes By:

A Novel of *Casablanca*

Michael Walsh

Warner Books / 420 pages / \$25

REVIEWED BY

Victor Gold

My father, a part-time casino gambler, once told the story of a blackjack player holding two tens and an ace who asked for another card. The moral, I believe, was that sometimes it's best to leave well enough alone.

Case in point, sequels to classics. Other than *Henry IV, Part Two* and *Second Corinthians*, I'm hard put to find one that's worked. But given encouragement, there are always those players who can't resist a chance to do the best one better.

According to Michael Walsh, he was doing lunch at a trendy restaurant in midtown Manhattan with a publisher one day when, out of the blue, she asked if he'd be interested in writing a sequel to *Casablanca*. Not a screenplay but a novel, on the order of the romantic potboiler a few years back that told Margaret Mitchell fans what happened to Scarlett O'Hara after Rhett said he didn't give a damn.

Odd, I thought, that a writer whose literary oeuvre included such heart-thumpers as *The First One-Hundred Years of Carnegie Hall* should get the call to embellish one of my generation's most cherished classics. *Why not me?*

Envy, yes. If anyone is to get the chance to fail at a *Casablanca* sequel, why not someone who lived through the era and

VICTOR GOLD is *The American Spectator's* national correspondent.

knows the characters and their story firsthand? To judge from his dust jacket photo, the blow-dried author of *As Time Goes By* acquired his interest in Rick and Ilsa by osmosis, at one of those with-it Harvard gatherings in the 60's, where the likes of Todd Gitlin and Al Gore bonded at the Brattle Theatre each year to celebrate Bogart Week.

No real feel for the material. Like Linda Ronstadt's rendering of Cole Porter, the words and music may be there, but absent the spirit...you know what I mean.

Not that Michael Walsh went into this project without fair notice: "Everybody knows *Casablanca*," he writes in an explanatory epilogue. "Everybody loves *Casablanca*. Therein lies both the challenge and the danger of writing a novel of *Casablanca*.... My solution has been to present the lives of the characters before and after the action of the movie, placing Rick Blaine, Ilsa Lund, Victor Laszlo, and the others in a larger historical context..."

The technique, that is, used by Francis Ford Coppola in his overrated sequel to *The Godfather*. Backward/forward moves the story, so that we learn for example, that before mistakenly coming to *Casablanca* "for the waters," Rick Blaine was a Jewish hoodlum. Real name, Yitzik Baline. On the lam, it seems, from the New York gang wars of the early 1930's:

He was riding the Second Avenue El down from his mother's apartment on East 116th Street, having walked over to visit her from his dump in Washington Heights.... He didn't mind visiting his mother from time to time, even if that meant having to listen to her kvell about his good looks and yiddische kopf and kvetch about his lack of a job.... This was (Rick's/Yitzik's) weekly mitzvah, going downtown to buy his mother a knish.... He liked to think of himself as

embellished by the author of *As Time Goes By* with, as he writes, "a few minor historical liberties, additions, and con-
flations," e.g., pages 353-54:

Ilsa looked ravishing. Her shoulder-length hair brushed her bare shoulders, and around her throat she wore a spectacular diamond pendant, which Heydrich had given her for the occasion.... He was standing very close to her, and she could feel his breath on her shoulder.... He ran his hands over the bare skin of her back.... "Please, Reinhard," she said, squirming gracefully away from him. "You want me to look my best, don't you?"

So much for what happens to a classic absent the spirit: We end up with *Springtime for Reinhard*. But Michael Walsh's unintended humor aside, given the spir-

it of these times, what sequel can we next expect? *Citizen Kane II*? (Kane, you'll remember, had a young son. Did he grow up to become Ted Turner?)

Not to make too much of a bad thing, but what does it say about the state of the culture when, at the end of the American century, we find that the best shows now on Broadway are poor revivals and, nothing being sacred, classics become parodies? Tell me, who's at fault? On second thought, don't tell me. I think I know. Round up the usual suspects. ❀

Correspondence

(Continued from page 12)

acknowledging the force of Columbia Union's complaint, ordered the district court (which had earlier approved this

discrimination) to document actual sectarian entanglement in the college's programs. The case may be in litigation for quite some time as courts try to sort out the proper standards in this area. Meanwhile, if Mr. Kelly thinks there are serious constitutional problems with state aid to education, he should take up the argument with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, co-founders of the University of Virginia, a state institution.

I Did It Amway

Mr. David W. Witter's smack at Amway co-founder Jay Van Andel (Correspondence, TAS, December 1998) is explicable only if motivated by pure ignorance or pure malevolence. Amway has been around since 1959 and oddly our zealous regulators have never noticed it is a pyramid. I would recommend that if Mr. Witter would like to broaden his understanding of what constitutes a pyramid, he look in his encyclopedia under the heading "FICA."

Mr. Witter dopily asserts that the to-bananas in Amway make all the money while the peons do the work. Even if true (most successful distributors make more money than their sponsors), that is hardly sinister. I know I have never worked anywhere where my superiors, no matter how shiftless, made less than I.

If Mr. Witter were given a desk phone, computer, and license at a brokerage firm, but only showed up occasionally to check his messages and use the executive washroom, would he accuse the company of swindling him if he didn't make any money? I guess so.

Amway bases its compensation on the construction of a network of independent distributors, each of whom starts at the same level. It is grueling at first, but at a certain level, you step back and watch the residuals come in. No one complains about J.D. Salinger's royalty checks although he hasn't touched a typewriter in years. Same concept.

Everyone has a novel in them. Few ever sit down and write it. So it is with some Amway distributors. But for a vast number, it has been a means to financial freedom.

—MEGAN BAILEY GERDE
Louisville, Kentucky

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Strong Opinion

I have been a subscriber for a few years and "conservative" for many years and I read TAS for all of the obvious reasons. I have no major problem with TAS that causes considerable indecision every year when subscription renewal time comes around.

I know what liberals, socialists, hippies, communists, gurus, and feminists think. I do not buy TAS to read what some idiot, left-wing buffoon(s) got printed in the *New York Times* or *San Francisco Chronicle*.

I stopped reading "Current Wisdom" and your liberals' letters some time ago, but the thought of just one penny of my money supporting distribution of such stuff is infuriating. They have other outlets!

Believe it or not, after writing the above I had a snack and got around to finishing my copy of the August 1998 TAS. And what did I see on page 78—a letter (titled "Purist") complaining of TAS printing its hate mail!

I was astonished and angry to find that some rotten so-and-so among you had seemingly mocked the genial TAS fan by placing a letter right below his from a stupid, brain-dead Clinton groupie.

You crazy so-and-so's! Do you sleep better after kicking loyal readers in the rear? Do you really feel the need to be nice and fair and print junk from those that despise what we people that buy your rag stand for?

— J. CRIM
Winter Park, Florida

Fighting Back

Regarding the letter from Babson Dodson of Mingo Junction, Ohio (Correspondence, TAS, December 1998): Is this guy for real? For starters, TAS has existed long before the shadow of Bill Clinton sullied the American political landscape. To write "This publication would not exist without Bill Clinton" is either ignorant of the history (and longevity) of TAS or really wishful thinking (after all, Mr. Clinton won't provide good copy for your magazine after the rest of us forget him).

As for the coming revolution Mr. Dodson foresees if the Republicans continue in their constitutionally delineated duties concerning impeachment, who is going to bring the guns? The armed masses of left-wing militias? Mr. Dodson, I'm not even a Republican and your letter offended me. Why? Because...there is nothing

quite so offensive as another American with a word processor and no concept of U.S. government or the Constitution. Shame on you and back to grammar school (pay more attention this time in Social Studies)....

— JONATHAN G. CLOUSE
Southern Pines, North Carolina

The person (I couldn't guess the sex by the name) Babson Dodson, who had the formula for saving TAS in your December 1998 Correspondence pages, is probably wrong that supporters of Bill Clinton would take to the streets. I would suggest to Babson Dodson that they already work the streets.

— J. HARRY YEATES
San Antonio, Texas

In response to Professor Dr. Ash Gobar's letter in your December issue, I would be more than happy to pay your costs to cancel his subscription. Further, I would be glad to pay his expenses so that he might move to our "more progressive and humane neighbor."

Might I also add...Good riddance!

— JAMES H. SCORSE
Dana Point, California

Salon Suckers

While wandering around the Web today I came upon Salon's site. It came as a great surprise to find that the site is being sponsored by none other than Lexus and Lincoln automobiles, the favorite steeds of well-to-do Republicans. I'm curious how the demographics of Salon's viewership, combined with its extreme partisanship, makes it such an advertising mecca for Lexus and Lincoln, two very rich sources of potential revenue for Salon. Do you think Salon got these two new devotees because of its pro-Clinton coverage? If not, what could conceivably be the reason? When was the last time Lexus or Lincoln offered its advertising to TAS. Just wondering

— JOHN FRASER
Sausalito, California

Who Elected Us?

Guys, you better lighten up. You are giving the words Conservative, Republican, and Christian a bad name in America. I wish

you would be reasonable before we are all voted out of office. Because a group of radicals don't know when to compromise, we look like mean-spirited anti-social misfits. Please, reconsider your position and don't let your fragile egos and pompous attitudes destroy the Grand Old Party. You don't own it...we do.

— DAVID HAMMOND
Studio City, California

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almost 30 percent, a sufficient number to elect her under Venezuela's first-past-the-post system. But instead of running on her own independent ticket, she opted to accept the nomination of COPEI. Overnight Irene became "just another politician" beholden to the same people who had stolen Venezuelans' free lunch, and her standing in the polls took a nose-dive. So much so, in fact, that COPEI, presumably to rescue her candidacy, withdrew her nomination in the final weeks of the campaign. It proved too late.

With Irene in definitive eclipse, the political establishment focused its hopes on Henrique Salas Römer, governor of the state of Carabobo, whose capital, Valencia, is a major economic powerhouse. Salas Römer is a kind of Irene writ large: He privatized Valencia's port works and other public services, and generated thousands of new jobs. He proved himself an able, energetic, and efficient administrator, and was so popular in his state that his son was handily elected to replace him when his term expired. Acción Democrática, the country's oldest and most important party, decided in the final days of the race that Salas was its only hope of blocking Chávez, and unceremoniously dumped its own nominee, Luis Alfaro Ucero. (When the 77-year-old Alfaro Ucero balked, he was stripped of his party membership—this after more than fifty years of patiently working and waiting for the nomination!) The spectacle of Venezuela's two major parties behaving like panic-stricken passengers on the *Titanic* opened the road for Chávez, and during the last month of the campaign it was only a question of by what margin he would win.

Hugo Chávez Frías is Venezuela's man of mystery. Nobody really knows who he is or what he thinks, since he has changed his rhetoric and demeanor at least twice during the last six years. In the aftermath of the coup, his message was a curious melange of left- and right-wing ideas he called "Bolivarianism." He criticized privatization of assets belonging to the state oil company, called for "collective democracy" (whatever that is), joined the leftish São Paulo Group (a collection of

unregenerate populist-statist Latin politicians which includes such charmless luminaries as Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, Mexico's Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and Jorge Castañeda, Jr.), and went off to Cuba to pay his respects to the island's aging Communist caudillo. There were rumors of connections with Quaddafi and the Colombian guerrilla groups, and of gangs (*Unidades de la Defensa del Voto*) armed with weapons taken from government arsenals during the 1992 uprising. At times Chávez's rhetoric has been bone-chilling: He has spoken of "boiling the politicians' heads in oil"; of "a million men in arms" ready to defend his ballot box victory; of dissolving the Congress and purging the Supreme Court and the Council of Magistracy, and so on. These were precisely the things most Venezuelans wanted to hear, and the more the country's traditional political class took fright, the better Chávez looked. That the State Department artlessly refused him a visa to visit the U.S. (on the grounds that he had attempted to overthrow a legally elected government) thrilled the left, most of whose parties—including the ramshackle Venezuelan Communist party—lined up behind him.

In the run-up to the election, however, when it appeared victory was in sight, Chávez suddenly moderated his rhetoric and extended his hand to some elements of the Venezuelan establishment, particularly the business community. (As one businessman said after Chávez's appearance before the chamber of commerce: "Well, on most things we agree, and even on those we disagree there is room for negotiation...") Wishful thinking became the order of the day in the swanky streets of Venezuela's Chacao, Country Club, and Altamira suburbs—that is, among those who weren't shipping their money, families, and furniture to Florida. There was even some talk of Chávez becoming Venezuela's version of Carlos Menem or Alberto Fujimori (the Argentine and Peruvian presidents, respectively, who campaigned on populist platforms and then proceeded to privatize everything in sight).

While it is true that President Menem has done what he can to provide Chávez with sound advice, the colonel is under no obligation to take it. Perhaps the most disturbing thing about Venezuela's new

president is that the centerpiece of his political program is not economic at all. Rather, he has called for the formation of a constituent assembly that will rewrite the Venezuelan constitution, for which purpose he plans to hold a plebiscite shortly after he takes office on February 2. His rearranging the constitutional furniture will alter the country's economic fortunes, hard to say, but Chávez is insistent. His critics point out that Venezuelan law makes no provision for plebiscites or for amending the constitution in this way. Chávez's response is that if the Congress refuses to authorize a new assembly, he will dissolve the body. Among other things, this would allow him to circumvent the current inconvenience that his own party, the Fifth Republic Movement, is only the second plurality in the House. Many imagine that what Chávez has in mind—her clearly borrowing from the example of Menem and Fujimori—is a constitutional change allowing consecutive presidential terms, a de facto Chávez dictatorship.

That much said, purveyors of best-case scenarios were given plenty of material on election eve at Chávez's lengthy press conference in the Ateneo de Caracas, where the candidate's performance was no less than brilliant. Much of what Chávez said was true—that the country did not need 30 ministries, but could get along with ten or 11; that relations with the U.S. should be as close, productive, and friendly as possible; that the country needed to put an end to wasteful bureaucracies. He also promised to use the talents of any capable Venezuelan willing to work with him, an olive branch to the political parties he had so decisively defeated.

But even Chávez, for all his charisma, cannot avoid the fact that of late the Venezuelan presidency has been the graveyard of political reputations. *Somebody* is bound to be disappointed with the choices Chávez makes in the next few years. Outside the building where he spoke, over a million hungry, angry Venezuelans were gathered to proclaim him leader. Theirs was a mandate for vengeance, and a non-negotiable demand for resources. They will be looking for their checks in the mail. Chávez has mounted a tiger; it remains to be seen whether he will be able to ride it. ❧

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Rivera Live

Another unfortunate incident with Professor Alan Dershowitz, who simply will not take his medication:

This is truly the first battle in a great culture war. And if this president is impeached, it will be a great victory for the forces of evil—evil—genuine evil. People like Congressman Barr, Senator Trent Lott, Senator Jesse Helms, who support white supremacist organizations, will claim victory over decency and decent people. And I hope that moderates out there realize even if they don't like Bill Clinton, to vote for impeachment is to vote to give their party over to the mad dogs of radicalism. That's how strongly so many of us feel about this.

[DECEMBER 14, 1998]

New York Times

After months of haranguing the Boy President for practicing full frontal nudity in the Oral Office and speaking with forked tongue, Miss Maureen Dowd reverses field and puts the hellish Republican Party on the therapist's couch:

On Friday evening, we had the frightening scene of Republicans so crazed with hatred of the President that they were railroading through an impeachment even though the United States was at war with Iraq, even though the House chamber was mostly empty, even though Republicans were huddled in a glass house on the issue of sex and lies, even though Americans were sensibly refusing to be drawn into the madness, even though the White House was still pitching a tent and planning sleigh rides for a Winter Wonderland press party on Monday.

Why are the Republicans so hell-bent, when everyone in his right mind agrees that impeachment is an outlandishly over-the-top punishment for Mr. Clinton and a self-destructive course for the country?

Because they genuinely hate the President. They think he's a dishonest, immoral, issue-stealing, spoiled, selfish child of the '60s.

[DECEMBER 20, 1998]

George

More bad timing—political forecaster David Brock sounds the death knell for us Clinton skeptics just days before his hero is impeached:

It's over: The uneasy alliance between the political right and the Washington pundits to drive Bill Clinton from office has failed. Speaker Newt Gingrich is not the Speaker anymore. He's not even a history professor anymore. He's just history. Can Cokie Roberts be far behind? The only question now is how much more damage these two groups will inflict on themselves.

I never thought—not last January and not in August—that Monicagate was much of a scandal. Until election night, in November, that view was considered eccentric in Washington. Now, everyone knows that the crisis has passed; the poison is draining out of the system. At last, it's possible to just sit back, relax, and enjoy, as the spectacle runs its preordained course.

[JANUARY 1999]

Santa Barbara News-Press

As a public service to our readers, we hereby reprint the famous letter that induced vomiting across the entire Golden State sometime after November 3:

I want to express my deep appreciation everyone who voted on November 3. I was so pleased to have such widespread support in Santa Barbara County and across the state.

I look forward to going back to the State to work on the important issues that Californians care about—quality public education, a woman's right to choose, environmental protection, sensible gun control, campaign finance reform, and a Patient Protection Act.

Thank you again for the opportunity represent you in the U.S. Senate. I will try my very best every single day to make you proud of the decision you have made.

—BARBARA BOX
United States Senator

[DECEMBER 6, 1998]

Notification of Disapproval—Publications

The state of California's Department of Corrections overreacts to our September issue report on Rwanda entitled, perhaps recklessly, "A Formula for Genocide":

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The American Spectator—Sept. '98

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Terry Eastland

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[AUGUST 28, 1998]