

at school; he liked mathematics; he lacked ambition in the civil service; he had a thick neck, and his legs were "not long enough"; he suffered from unrequited love; he was devoted to his mother; he was "far from impotent"; and so on, and so on. Perhaps such details might be shown to possess a significance beyond themselves; Lord Snow seems to love them aimlessly, for their own sake. They lead him to no insight into Stendhal's character, nor do they help us to understand his work. Indeed, Lord Snow's discussion of Stendhal's masterpieces makes no effort to relate them seriously to his life. We are told, for example, that Julien Sorel—the hero of *The Red and the Black*—is "the first voice of ultimate class hatred in a major work of literature," and that "Stendhal identified himself with Julien." However, nothing in the account of Stendhal's life prepares us to see him as an apostle of class hatred. On the contrary, Lord Snow asserts that the author of *The Charterhouse of Parma* "would have liked to be an Italian aristocrat." Possibly class hatred and the desire to be an Italian aristocrat can be made compatible, but one would like to be shown how. In fact, Lord Snow's view of the role of class in *The Red and the Black* is unconvincing—and left wholly unsubstantiated. Class hatred cannot explain Julien's ultimate motivation, and in any case he does not enjoy the uncritical sympathy of his creator. Given Lord Snow's interpretation, however, one must raise a question. Why has he chosen to praise the "realism" of a novel that he believes to be inspired by class hatred? What lesson are we to derive from this?

Similar examples of superficiality and incoherence occur plentifully in every chapter, but nowhere is the book's failure more evident than in the chapters on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. As figures of the very highest authority in world literature, they stand out even among the other great "realists," and the remarkable features of their lives—

Dostoevsky's youthful career as a revolutionary, his compulsive gambling, his emergence as a spokesman for conservatism; Tolstoy's transformation from dissolute young aristocrat into prophet of moral reform—make them especially suited to an analysis that blends biography with literary criticism. Furthermore, both require special interpretation because they challenge so radically the values that prevail in Europe and America today. Both rejected utterly

spiced with a great deal of gossip about the sex lives of the great men. The facts, although sparse, seem to be accurate; the gossip is mostly silly; but the platitudes can mislead. For example, in discussing the Grand Inquisitor section of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Lord Snow uncritically adopts the existentialist-leftist tradition that stresses Ivan Karamazov's hatred of God, and ignores the religious affirmation that derives from Dostoevsky's overall design. A distortion

"Among all these excellent pieces, none are finer than his rich examinations of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy."

—Wall Street Journal

the scientific, commercial, democratic and "progressive" culture of liberal Europe. To both, the liberalism that grew out of the Enlightenment seemed antagonistic to religion and a healthy political and social order; and while the details of their programs differ, both men sought to restore an essentially Christian polity. In this, they shocked nineteenth-century intellectuals much as another great Russian novelist—Solzhenitsyn—shocks our own. Lord Snow simply declines the task of trying to come to grips with the "realism" and the importance for our time of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. He contents himself with a few facts and platitudes,

of this kind, or the distortion of *The Red and the Black* mentioned earlier, coupled with the general triviality of approach throughout, makes one wonder about Lord Snow's preparation, or motives. Did he fail to study his material with sufficient care? Is he unaware of what other critics have done? Or is he engaged in an effort to make what he has to say conform to the taste of his audience? Is he more concerned with mimicking the thoughts that his readers already accept than with trying to lead them to conceptions that are different, older and more difficult? In any case, *The Realists* has nothing important to teach about either art or life. □

Private Part as Thing

Kingsley Amis: *Jake's Thing*; Viking Press; New York.

by Joseph Schwartz

Kingsley Amis's first and best novel, *Lucky Jim*, established expectations for his subsequent work that were not fulfilled. This new novel is being misread in some quarters, ironically enough, because it comes closer to realizing what

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Lucky Jim promised than any of the eleven novels since then. I will try to look at *Jake's Thing* without allowing the happy memory of Jim's antics to cast a troublesome shadow over my evaluation. It is enough to say by way of comparison that Jake is not Jim grown older, and that 25 years later Amis is much less lighthearted.

Oxford don Jaques (Jake) Richardson, nearly 60, has worked out a tolerable, mundane pattern of life with Brenda, his third wife. But this circumscribed enclave is threatened by his disturbing

lack of interest in sex, an interest previously central to his life. Comfort and pleasure are the twin rulers of his world. There surely must be, he concludes, something very seriously wrong with a man whose appetite is not markedly, constantly, and earnestly stimulated by the sexual banquet promised by his culture through television, radio, magazines, books, advertising, film, and almost everything else. Referred to a specialist, Dr. Proinsias Rosenberg, he docilely undergoes the treatment offered by professional sexologists for such a tragic condition. The ludicrous "profession" of sex therapy is Amis's immediate target but not his principle one. Rosenberg's diagnosis contains every silly cliché we have come, alas, to accept as absolute truth. "Our society's repressive attitude toward sex has engendered an unrelaxed attitude in you. You've been conditioned into acceptance of a number of rigid taboos . . . You're suffering from guilt and shame."

Jake is suspicious of the diagnosis, since his experience suggests that he lives in a society in which anything goes, a society, in fact, which insists that he take up the sex game with the enthusiastic intensity of everyone else. He concludes later, "Repressive? In 1977? I was doing fine when things were really repressive, if they ever were, it's only since they've become, oh, permissive that I've had trouble." For now, he dutifully goes along with the prescribed treatment; he is in the habit of doing exactly what the doctor orders.

Although one is not surprised by the illiteracy of specialists nowadays, Rosenberg is astonishingly remarkable in his indifference and antipathy to everything but his narrow profession. He prescribes a methodical, joyless program of nongenital and genital sensate focusing therapy in rigidly controlled stages. Jake is bored. Dr. Rowena Trefusis offers the technological approach to sex—high speed artificial stimulators and Richterlike measuring apparatus. "Nobody's thinking of you as an individual

or a person. You're just an object." Jake registers a disappointing .9 on a 33.9 scale. The girlie magazines and other fantasy masturbatory techniques also leave his libido unrehabilitated. Jake thinks the girls have faces like Jimmy Carter. Finally, he is sent to Ed, the American "facilitator," for group therapy. "I aim to release checks on emotion and improve insight." Ed's abuse therapy and humiliation techniques, while driving one patient to a suicide attempt, convince Jake that the game is not worth the candle. All the

fact that they hold it, their use of misunderstanding and misrepresentation as weapons of debate, their selective sensitivity to tones of voice, their unawareness of the difference in themselves between sincerity and insincerity, their interest in importance (together with noticeable inability to discriminate in that sphere), their fondness for general conversation and directionless discussion, their preemption of the major share of feeling, their exaggerated estimate of their own plausibility, their never listening and lots of other things like that,

"The title of the new Amis novel is a pun on the hero's anachronistic male chauvinism and his member, which is almost as moribund as Lord Chatterley's."

—Booklist

"... there are problems—among them a growing meanness toward the young, a taunting Tory narrowness..."

—Benjamin DeMott
Atlantic Monthly

"It must be said that *Jake's Thing* is a very funny book..."

—New York Review of Books

sexologists have to offer, he concludes, is arrogance, effrontery, and greed; intellectually they are beneath contempt.

Brenda, however, finds another man in the process and leaves Jake. Settling in "a perfectly bearable couple of rooms," Jake never wonders if or for long how much he misses her. Learning that his problem is physical after all (testosterone level), he declines the simple cure.

"Jake did a quick run-through of women in his mind, not of the ones he had known or dealt with in the past few months or years so much as all of them: their concern with the surface of things, with objects and appearances, with their surroundings and how they looked and sounded in them, with seeming to be better and to be right while getting everything wrong, their automatic assumption of the role of the injured party in any clash of wills, their certainty that a view is the more credible and useful for the

all according to him.

So it was quite easy. 'No thanks,' he said."

Jake's decision is not a victory, even a limited one. Although he is rightly critical of and indignant over the cultural malaise of which he is a part, his withdrawal into cold indifference, while necessary, is hardly triumphant. There is a submerged scenario in the novel pointing to things more significant than the desperately funny satire on sexology, which is, after all, merely a symptom of society's sexual madness. It is necessary to look at Jake from another perspective. The passage quoted above, for all its insight, contains the key words, "all according to him."

The women in Jake's life make a common accusation against him. Brenda "considered her husband to be at best indifferent to all women except as sex-

ual pabulum." She tells him bluntly that "You've got to find out whether you feel any affection for me or whether you're the sort of man who can only feel affection for women he wants to go to bed with . . ." Eve, a one-time convenient bed-partner, agrees with Brenda: Jake is a man who sees nothing more in women than creatures to go to bed with. The two women, he admits, are "absolutely right." It becomes clear that Jake's "thing" is not merely his penis; his "thing" is a fundamental dislike of women as whole beings—misogyny.

In the central confessional scene of the novel Jake discusses this problem with a fellow don. (The play on *Don Juan* runs throughout the book.) He discovers that he has been looking at women through spectacles of some kind, getting a distorted image. He had thought that women were tolerated because men didn't see them as they really were and "only-wanted-one-thing" from them. Not wanting that any longer, Jake concludes that he doesn't much like them in any way and despises them intellectually. "Imagine me thinking I liked them all those years when I didn't really care for them one bit." Although he no longer has on the distorting spectacles, his sight is not corrected. Having seen women in only one way, as sexual objects, he cannot now see them in any other. Ironically enough, it is his homosexual colleague who tries to put him right. Men, too, he explains, have their own ways of being evasive, dull, overbearing, and unsatisfactory. Although Jake can say to his colleague that women "are nice, aren't they," it remains a question, and, even if answered affirmatively, has no effect on his permanently warped psyche. "Do you know what I think I am, Damon? A male chauvinist pig." Going back to his Oxford rooms, he takes a plastic phallus sent him by women petitioning for admission to his college and destroys it with a paper-knife, a razor blade, and his bare hands. Attacking his own masculinity in an act of sexual self-destruction he concludes

that "life is a sight easier this way if you run things right." It is one of the most brilliantly managed episodes in the novel.

Society's deification of sex has been the effective cause of his distorted vision; he pays a higher price for this deplorable state of affairs than any of the women he has used as objects, having become an object himself. Jake's plight does not lessen the accuracy or essential rightness of his angry perspective in commenting on the religion (it is) of sex, finding it offensive and nonsensical. His virtues are good old-fashioned common sense, not suffering fools gladly, and positive anger at human stupidity. These are, of course, all well and good; yet they never stand up under the assault of experience unless they reflect a transcendental system of values. Jake has no such system. He is already a lost soul when we first meet him, the dramatic action of the novel portraying only the end result of his pathetically unmanaged and thoughtless life.

In the thirties Rosalind Murray wrote a profound book, *The Good Pagan's Failure*; I still recommend it to anyone who will listen. Her thesis applies to Jake, an indifferent, if not good, pagan. Murray tactfully questioned the moral authority of those who strove to live decent lives in a decent society without having any spiritual basis upon which their decent instincts rested. Forty years later Jake is a vivid sample of the consequences of the good pagan's failure. The society that evolved from their noble efforts is what we see and experience daily: sexual madness, moral indifference, meaningless anguish, obscene language, malicious vandalism, the corruption of political philosophy, and the decline of religion. The absence of a moral or religious sensibility in Jake is the key to his character and the explanation for his cold, selfish indifference.

"Jake's religious history was simple

and compact. His parents had been Anglicans and right up to the present day the church he didn't go to had remained Anglican. As far as he could remember he had never had any belief, as opposed to inert acquiescence, in the notion of immortality, and the whole game of soldiers had been settled for him forty-five years previously, when he had come across and instantly and fully taken in the Socratic pronouncement that if death was unconsciousness it was not to be feared. Next question. It, the next question, did bother him: how to see to it that the period between now and then should be as comfortable and enjoyable as could realistically be expected."

Even after he makes the discovery that he has missed the whole point of the dangerous, essential, and joyous difference between men and women, he is unable to do anything about it because, permanently crippled, he has nothing upon which to reconstruct his life. His misogyny is evidence for how much he has been cheated, and has cheated himself, by accepting sex as the compelling image of reality. No one wins. Loser takes all. "Oh, bugger and bugger" is the peevish lament of a diminished man.

The careful reader will notice a suggestion Amis offers as integral to any explanation for Jake's—and our—plight. What society is and what it offers is packaged in an appalling language that corrupts the mind, cripples the emotions, and deforms the imagination. I believe that it was St. Augustine who held that the corruption of society follows upon the corruption of language. Jake is surprised that the otherwise obtuse Dr. Rosenberg agrees with him that what people read and see affects their actions. "If it didn't, my work would have to take a very different form." Language is never neutral, but always tendentious. For good or ill, language works. Virtue is the only defense against bad rhetoric. But where is this understanding of the sovereignty of the good (Iris Murdoch's phrase) to come from for someone like Jake?

"'Darling, you are a silly old Oxford don, it is only a word.'

'Only a word?'—sorry. No, this whole thing is all about language.'"

In this terrible quagmire of abused and bloodied language, there seems to be no way out. Jake has no "strong barriers of moral conviction [that] can be raised against mischief." Like Alice, he is trapped by the magisterial tyranny of our Humpty Dumpty world wearing its most contemptuous smile.

"'But *glory* doesn't mean *A nice knockdown argument*,' Alice objected.

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'"

Kingsley Amis has written a bright and clever satire on the sexual habits and hang-ups of our troubled society.

Deciding What's Bias

Herbert J. Gans: *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*; Pantheon Books; New York.

by James Hitchcock

Imagine getting an ample grant to study the news media and being given fairly open access to the news staffs of the major networks and magazines. A leading publisher then produces a thick presentation of your findings. The thought of the possibilities in such a windfall makes the mouth water.

It must be reported that exactly this good fortune fell to the sociologist

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That is no longer easy to do, since the subject has already been parodied by the grotesque behavior of people who are supposed to be real. Reaching a good deal deeper, he has touched on the underlying case of society's moral insolvency. He has done this using a cast of inherently uninteresting characters, while managing to persuade us to pretend otherwise for the fun (and terror) of watching them work out destinies we hope to avoid. Only one problem, not a small one, remains. Having given Jake the dominant point of view, Amis is stuck with the ambivalence toward women which results. A point of view more comprehensive than Jake's is not apparent often enough to the reader, causing him to confuse Amis and Jake. I would have preferred firmer auctorial control, especially for such a delicate instrument as satire.

A final irony too delicious to omit: *Jake's Thing* was selected for its membership by the Playboy Book Club. □

Herbert Gans. How did he celebrate his good fortune? He has served up so many fat, slow pitches that apologists for the media will have no trouble hitting them anywhere they want. What started out as a promise of a trenchant, fair-minded critique ends up mainly as mild praise. If Gans can be said to have a thesis, it is that the media are not

predicted with certitude that media apologists will point to his book the next time they are accused of such bias: "If we are getting criticized from both sides, we must be doing things right."

As a sociologist Gans should at least be praised for avoiding technical jargon. For a work of sociology this is mostly readable. In addition, sections of the book are mildly interesting, such as his discussion of the bureaucratic processes by which news stories are chosen and refined, which somehow makes us suspect that the book is not totally without redeeming social value. As to its central concern with the mental assumptions which govern news coverage, however, it is useful mainly for what it tells us about Herbert Gans. The light it sheds on the ideology of the news industry is minimal.

One of Gans' favorite theses is that reporters and editors are innocent of ideology, and like to think they don't have any. Gans identifies himself as a "left-liberal" and seems to think that by doing so he absolves himself of the same criticism. But ideological bias distorts his entire coverage, and it is not always clear how conscious it is. Astoundingly, for example, Gans mentions the Black Panthers at least four times and in one place uses them as an example of radical groups treated unfairly in the media. Yet, although he cites some of the work of Edward Jay Epstein, he nowhere even mentions Epstein's famous article in which he showed how the media kept repeating the charge that the Panthers

"Gans has succeeded, and the rest of us—journalists as well as our readers and viewers—are in his debt."

—Commonweal

"An excellent purchase for both public and academic libraries."

—Library Journal

liberal enough in their politics and are too respectful of conventional moral beliefs. Don't rub your eyes; you read that correctly. While you might think that liberal bias permeates the media, Gans can't seem to find it. It can be

were being systematically wiped out by the police even though the charge was, on examination, clearly false.

Similarly, there are at least five references to the Tet offensive during the Vietnam War, and in a footnote there