

Sharon. The contrast is most vivid:

Her arms lowered and dangling, her short hair tousled, Alexandra resembled an exotic, stork-legged bird. She said, 'Who said let there be light? *He* did. Who saw that all of it was good? *He* did. Who said let us make him in our own image? *He* did. Who said let them have dominion over the whole shebang? *He* did. We've been living under him all of these god-damn centuries. When I swear, My God! what am I doing, Sharon Rose, tell me that?' In spite of what she heard, of what was said, Sharon was comforted. When she heard the voice of Alexandra she heard *his* voice, and knew she was in good hands. That

was her feeling, of course: the uppermost of the feelings she was able to bear.

We are not invited to choose between them, to like one rather than the other. On the one hand there is Alexandra, whose skepticism is at least evidence of the torment which is life; on the other, Sharon, whose implicit faith is a kind of sleep—the trait that allowed the Atkins women to bear their individual crosses. Neither, however, has answers: nor should she. For each plain-song is, in its own fashion, clear and beautiful; each has her own way of meeting her silent, difficult Lord. □

A Connoisseur's Recipe

Richard Nixon: *The Real War*; Warner Books; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

Many people may not be exactly overjoyed to see Richard Nixon reappear in public life. But such irritation should not obscure the truths the ex-president has attempted to publicize about the current state of the Cold War—that is, what he used to refer to as “détente.” The appearance of this book after the Iranian crisis and Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan is most timely. Though overlong, overloaded with epigrammatic quotations and written in a sometimes incantationlike style, it supplies a readily comprehensible survey of the contemporary situation.

Nixon fundamentally returns to the perception that the West is engaged in a permanent Cold War with the Soviet Union, its puppets and its allies, only he recognizes that we are now in a far weaker position than ever before. He outlines current problems with a reason-

able degree of clarity. He emphasizes the massive Soviet military build-up both in nuclear and conventional arms, Soviet moves in southern Africa and the Horn and their pincer moves in the Middle East proper, Yemen and Afghanistan. The Soviets’ “antiresources” strategy and the peril to the West’s “oil jugular” and the subtleties of Middle East politics have rarely been spelled out better.

Nixon skillfully tears down some of the devices many people have used to disguise what is going on from themselves and the public. While it is necessary to change things in South Africa, he observes that “We cannot let Africa become a stage on which Americans act out their psychic traumas” (as our ex-segregationist president and former Ambassador Young have been particularly apt to do). As Nixon bluntly points out, it is precisely Soviet conquest, whatever the guise in which it occurs, that will perpetuate “white domination” in Africa. He strongly urges a major military build-up, a revival of emphasis on relations with our allies and a recovery of the will to win. While he is entirely convincing on the need to alter course to avoid defeat, he is not quite clear on

what would constitute “victory” for the West or on how to achieve it, although he devotes an entire chapter to this topic. Let us hope that Nixon’s successors will read his discussion, based on hard-won experience, of how—and how *not*—to negotiate with the Soviets.

Though Nixon recognizes that “the nations most directly in the path of Soviet ambition are weak and unstable,” he does not explain just what the West should do to prevent the Soviets from exploiting internal crises in these countries. Nixon seems to believe that the Iranian revolution could have been prevented if only the United States had backed the Shah more firmly. I wish I could agree. This is not, of course, a new problem; dealing with communist threats to unstable, usually authoritarian regimes in the world’s backward regions has been the great unsolved puzzle of the Cold War—starting with China. Nixon rightly stresses the moral distinction between the “authoritarian” regimes with which we are sometimes allied and our “totalitarian” enemies. But he does not resolve some of the practical problems created by alliances with authoritarian regimes. (To be fair, no one else has been very successful at doing this either.) Nixon urges that “the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and other key states must be unequivocally reassured that should they be threatened by revolutionary forces, either internally or externally, the United States will stand strongly with them so that they will not suffer the same fate as the Shah.” When one considers the limited bases of support for these usually absolute monarchies, their large foreign populations—often Palestinian—and the danger of a complete desertion of such regimes even by elite groups (as happened in Iran), one wonders whether there would be much of a lever by which the West *could* intervene in a revolutionary crisis. In other words, it is possible that these regimes are simply not viable. But Nixon does not discuss this possibility or suggest how these countries could

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be placed on a truly stable basis. Since the West cannot let its vital oil supplies fall into the hands of the Soviets, or Khomeini, or Qaddafi-style fanatics, it is not impossible that outright military occupation—even a form of colonial rule—may someday be required. This prospect, however distasteful, should have been examined.

Though sensible enough in describing our present crisis, Nixon is not very good at explaining how it arose, and he is confusing—often disingenuous—when he explains the disastrous role of his own administration in creating this mess. He is frank enough to admit that agreements with the Soviets were oversold, to put it mildly. He now regrets the termination of the draft and his trade policies toward the Soviet Union. But he still dangerously fogs the issue by continuing to maintain that he achieved something called “détente.” The truth of the matter is that the agreements that allegedly created Nixon’s “détente,” *viewed in the most favorable light*, were far less important than the agreements of the first post-Stalin “thaw” of the 1950’s—and we know how feeble, short-lived and deceptive those agreements were. Though Nixon *now* emphasizes that détente involved only a limited understanding primarily aimed at avoiding nuclear war, and that he did not view it as a replacement for the containment policy or the end of the Cold War, he certainly failed to make this clear at the time. His current view of the strategic balance is a bit hard to reconcile with his Secretary of State’s famous complaint that strategic superiority was meaningless. The role of his administration in allowing the Soviets to overtake us becomes more than a little blurred. Nixon stresses that “SALT I itself did not freeze us into an inferior position.” It is certainly true that SALT I did not have this result all by itself. But a few pages later, Nixon himself barely and vaguely alludes to the superior “throw weight” given the Soviets by SALT, and he admits that

the Soviets “exploited loopholes in the SALT I agreement contrary to our understanding.” Some would not hesitate to call it a sleight-of-hand rationalization.

Nixon’s examination of the disasters in Southeast Asia is, to be blunt,

“... a compendium of horror stories about insatiable commissars poised to gobble up the world...”

—*New York Review of Books*

“... he has no shame . . . I am astonished at his insolence.”

—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
Saturday Review

deceitful. While the policies of his predecessors in Vietnam were nothing to brag about, his claim that the war in South Vietnam was being won in the early 60’s, before Diem was overthrown, is simply not true. It is even less true that President Johnson needlessly “Americanized” the war in 1965, as Nixon implies. There was no choice other than to abandon South Vietnam or to send in American ground-combat troops. This should not, however, disguise the justice of Nixon’s defense of the 1970 “invasion” of Cambodia against the rabid accusations of his critics. Indeed, the only criticism of that operation which makes any sense after ten years is that it was *not* an invasion; it was too limited. How many massacred people would still be alive today if the United States Army had entirely occupied Cambodia? But Nixon is again disingenuous in claiming that in 1973 “we had won the war militarily and politically in Vietnam” and “then we threw it away” by failing to supply South Vietnam, by stopping the bombing in Cambodia, and by denying the president the power to enforce the peace agreements. This is partisan, self-serving bluster. Although these things unquestionably helped to pave the way for the communists’ final victory in 1975, the North Vietnamese invasion was possible only because the war had by no means been won. At the time of the “peace

agreement,” the North Vietnamese retained intact “sanctuaries” in Laos and Cambodia which completely outflanked the South Vietnamese, and they maintained an army of at least 150,000 men inside the prewar borders of South Vietnam. Though the Vietcong in the south were defeated, and a stable, if not

popular, regime existed in Saigon, it can hardly be said that our war aim of a secure, independent South Vietnam was ever achieved.

More or less justifiable bitterness at Nixon’s abuses and mistakes, and his occasional attempts to polish his own record, should not be allowed to obscure the truths put forward in *The Real War*. The book must be rated as a not-unsuccessful attempt by Mr. Nixon to rehabilitate himself in the public eye by trying to render the nation a real service. Its ascension to the best-seller list may indicate that his effort was fruitful. Perhaps Mr. Nixon’s book may cure some people of the confusion that his policies helped to create. □

**COMMON SENSE
AND SUFFICIENT ENERGY**
by James J. O’Connor
Chairman, Commonwealth Edison
in the October 1980 issue
of *Persuasion At Work*

Two Married Pronouns

Herbert Gold: *He/She*; Arbor House; New York.

by Christina Murphy

He is the devoted, if somewhat infantile and dependent, husband who does not want to see his marriage end. She is the post-women's lib wife, insecure in the security she has known, seeking fulfillment in a nebulously defined freedom, sure of only one thing: marriage and motherhood have trapped her and drained her of her essence. He, rather than accept the most rudimentary principle of emotional fulfillment—which is: if you can't have what you want, learn to want something else—prefers, instead, to plead, beg, bargain and argue his wife into explaining to him what has happened to their marriage and why She no longer loves him. She, aware that in any relationship the one who loves the least can manipulate the most, uses his need to her advantage, coyly playing games with his ego, seducing him, rejecting him, comforting him, despising him, throwing barbs of spite and blame which he willingly accepts and seldom returns. In all, She is the consummate game player, a deft craftsman of control who knows her adversary well, especially his needs and weaknesses.

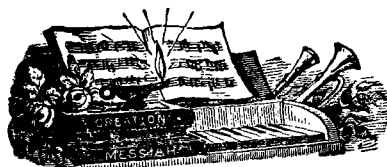
The main characters of this novel remain nameless throughout. By the same token, they remain largely unknown. An abstract He and an abstract She, fighting out the power game inherent in any relationship predicated upon the vulnerability of meeting emotional needs. It is the enigma of marriage itself that Gold goes after, an understanding of the psychological nexus which binds two lives together as one. Had Gold been successful in his pursuit, *He/She* would have been a most

insightful and revealing novel. As it is, it is a novel which skirts and circles central issues, contents itself with repetition and predictability, and never rises much above monodimensional characters seeking and espousing nonsolutions to their problems.

It is tempting to say that this novel fails because of the slimness of its subject matter—marriage in the modern age is, after all, perceived by many as a vacuous experience. But Bergman, Albee and many others have managed to make convincing portraits of contemporary life from the emotional wasteland of love/hate marital relationships. It is tempting, too, to blame the failure of *He/She* solely upon the weakness of its characterizations. The characters in this novel do not grow, change or develop. They are what they are from beginning to end, and what they are, unfortunately, is often not even sufficient to hold the reader's attention, let alone merit his concern. Throughout, He remains fawning and childlike, seeking to return, at any cost, to the security of wife/mother and the nurturing comfort of home. She, throughout, remains ambivalent and catty, the type of woman men delight in labeling as castrating. As He grows weaker, more dependent and needy, She grows stronger, more aloof and independent. He demands explanations; She dispenses smoke screens and empty platitudes. He wants her to stay and never leave him; She, however, is willing to throw him away, but not to let him go. These struggles and conflicts within the characters themselves eventually culminate in a series of endless and repetitive dialogues in which explanations are sought but never prof-

ferred, and in which each character seeks to be known but is never fully understood.

If the dialogues themselves (which are all variations on a theme and streaked with the monotony of people who talk a great deal but say nothing) weren't enough to kill this novel, the absurdity and banality of the cast of minor characters would be. Foremost in ridiculousness amongst the minor characters is the daughter He and She share in common, Cynthia. Cynthia makes very few direct appearances in the novel, but when she does, she is capable of reducing the novel's believability level to zero. Only Cynthia can ride with her father across town and at one intersection call him "Poopopants Daddy" and at another dispense philosophical insights into her father's dilemma, which contains the core of the novel's themes and the sum total of its conclusions. Cynthia is followed in order of absurd descent by Paul and Paula, two nonprofessional, self-appointed marriage counselors who, for thirty dollars an hour, speak in Gestaltese and manage to obscure even the most simple rudiments of common sense. He is disgusted with both Paul and Paula, but apparently learns no lesson, for soon He is enmeshed in the arms of Jehane, an aging Age of Aquarius groupie who speaks of transcendence, chakras, karma and the New Age coming, while artfully seducing him in saunas and hot tubs. While He retreats into the gibberish of misdirected Zen, She fares no better in seeking solace and suitors, managing to snare for herself Hal, the predictable beefcake lover with an animal's intelligence and an animal's appetite for sex. He, of course, is chastised for being jealous of Hal and is instructed that the times they are a'changing for the expression of women's sexual needs. When She learns that He has become involved with Jehane, She, of course,



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