

seems to have backed away from the political realm of the liberal establishment. There are even three rather negative observations about feminism. But even if she has learned a few lessons,

"'The Feud' is a comic masterpiece."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"Thomas Berger may well be America's wittiest, most elegant novelist. . . . Seldom has so eloquent a voice been employed in the service of the comic burlesque; only *Candide* springs to mind."

—*Village Voice*

Ephron still fails the course. Ephron and the reader conclude *Heartburn* with no more understanding of the male-female relationship than they had when they began.

*The Feud* appears to be some sort of perverse stepchild to Roman or Shakespearean comedy, but intellectually it is more akin to *Family Feud* than to Plautus. Ordinarily, Thomas Berger can reveal how the mind and emotions play against each other with a certain amount of wit. His gift is in depicting the way in which trifling matters grow out of proportion and take on a life of their own. He can exaggerate human idiosyncracies to the point just before the characters become ridiculous and unfamiliar. The results can be fun and sometimes important. Sadly, however, Berger's heart does not seem to be in this novel. Whether the poor, rural, unskilled, and uneducated figures he has created here do not interest him as much as the urbane, philosophical people he has recently presented is unclear. Perhaps his style, initially so fresh, controlled, and surprising, does not wear well. Possibly his formula for success is shopworn. Even trump, after all, does not last indefinitely. Whatever the problem, this complicated and tiresome novel is nothing more than a smutty shoot-'em-up without Berger's usual concentration, irony, and mischievous tone.

The plot is unoriginal but not necessarily hopeless. The Beelers of Hornbeck and the Bullards of Millville begin feud-

ing over a misunderstanding that occurs in the Bullards' hardware store. Soon the store burns down, then the Beelers' car blows up, both patriarchs are hospitalized, one dies, and, to paraphrase the

politicians, pretty soon the whole thing adds up to real trouble. Naturally, but unbeknownst to the characters, the hardware store probably burned down because of the Bullard son's carelessness,

and the car bomb was planted as a prank by an unrelated third party. As it is, there is a fair amount of retribution and, since a Beeler son is infatuated with a Bullard daughter, sneaking around.

*The Feud* has the ambience of *The Dukes of Hazzard* without its brevity, and pretty soon a reader wonders what the point is. Even more monotonous is Berger's automatic insistence upon portraying rural characters as stupid and redneck. Certainly rural areas have ignoramuses; they also have librarians and ministers. The author's focus on the sleaziest stratum of life in the provinces causes him to miss connecting with his audience. Life is simply different from that which Berger captures on his pages, and sometimes it is better. □

## Twisting & Turning Totalitarianism

*1984 Revisited*; Edited by Irving Howe; Harper & Row; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

As the year in which George Orwell's masterpiece was set approached, a wave of critics, eulogists, and scavengers emerged. *1984* is a work hard to attack directly, though that has been done, and some who profess to be praising Orwell's work would really prefer to bury it. E. L. Doctorow, in a recent *Playboy* article, provides a specimen of the latter. So do some of the participants in Irving Howe's provocative anthology, *1984 Revisited*, a work, with the exceptions of few shortcomings, that tends to be intellectually respectable. Most of the contributions to this collection—notably those by Leszek Kolakowski, Robert Nisbet, Richard Lowenthal, Bernard Avishai, and Howe himself—are excellent. It is hard to say the same for the essays of Michael Walzer, Mark Crispin Miller, and some others, as they represent at-

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tempts to warp Orwell's insights for their own purposes, or even out of existence. Among other things, they seek to destroy the distinction between totalitarianism and authoritarianism in which Orwell himself believed. (The more extreme cases even try to erase the distinction between totalitarianism and democracy.) Indirectly, they seek to reduce Orwell's work to a cold-war polemic—which some snide leftist critics have always insisted it was.

There is no doubt that Orwell based *1984* primarily on his insights into Stalin's Russia, not Nazi Germany. Orwell's point was not merely to satirize Soviet oppression, though he did do that, but to carry the then-current trends to the next logical step in three ways. First, and most obviously, by showing a world in which totalitarianism had completely triumphed—even in Britain and the English-speaking countries, their strong tradition of liberty notwithstanding. Second, Orwell sought to portray a ruling group—the "Inner Party"—which, unlike earlier totalitarian regimes, was completely conscious of, and happy with, its own depravity. For Orwell, the exercise of power, construed

in its most sadistic terms, was the true (but unadmitted) inner purpose of the Soviet and nazi regimes. The rulers of Oceania, however, no longer hide this from themselves. Third, Orwell sought to explore both the future of surveillance (through the "telescreen") and what was later to become known as brainwashing. It was commonly thought in the late 1930's and the 1940's that the victims in Stalin's show trials had somehow been "converted" into a belief in their own guilt. Orwell doubted that this conversion had occurred. He correctly thought that the victims had simply been tortured or blackmailed into confessing. But he went on to wonder whether science could make "true" forced conversion possible, and he developed this thought into the crowning horror of the world portrayed in *1984*.

If *1984* was not intended as a mere polemic against Stalinism, neither was it a mere literary reflection or product of the cold-war era, as an examination of Orwell's literary and nonfiction work shows. *1984* was the culmination of a series of earlier "negative utopias," or

"dystopias," which stretched back at least to the turn of the century and with which Orwell was familiar. (It was the culmination in more than one sense: no dystopia produced since *1984* is as horrifying, nor has any approached *1984* in penetration or philosophical interest, with the possible exception of Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*.) Orwell studied these earlier dystopias with great care and found Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, written before World War I, and Evgeny Zamyatin's *We*, written in 1923, the most impressive. The writings of Arthur Koestler and Franz Borkenau, both personal friends of Orwell, were important sources of his ideas; Borkenau's book *The Totalitarian Enemy*, published in 1940, expresses some of the notions later found in *1984*. Perhaps the most important of all Orwell's sources was James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*, published in 1941. This work predicted that capitalism and the nation-state system were coming to an end, but that they would not be replaced by socialism as it had been understood before 1914. Rather, society would pass under the control of a new ruling class, the "man-

agers," a collectivist hierarchy. The world would be ruled by three "super-states," which would probably be totalitarian, based in North America, Europe, and the Far East. The influence of all these sources, especially Burnham's, can be documented not only in *1984* but also in Orwell's essays and reviews.

Michael Walzer's essay, "On Failed Totalitarianism," is essentially an attempt to argue not only that totalitarianism is passé—which is suggested in several other essays in *1984 Revisited*—but also that there is no important distinction between totalitarianism and other non-democratic regimes—the latter generally grouped together under the rather vague rubric of "authoritarian"—even though Orwell and others perceived one. Since the 1960's a determined effort has been made by the left to discard the entire concept of totalitarianism. Walzer does not have the nerve to join this group, but indirectly his arguments have the same objective. This effect results partly from Walzer's misconstruing of the totalitarian-authoritarian distinction and partly from his using only one peculiar version of the concept of totalitarianism. Unfortunately, that is not the version that interested Orwell; in fact, it is a rather dubious notion that was formulated only after his death.

The word *totalitarianism* was coined by Mussolini in 1932. Totalitarian regimes exist where one party monopolizes all power in society. It does not merely enforce a political dictatorship, but replaces or controls all institutions and dictates—or at least seeks to—every activity of its citizens. Moreover, it usually attempts to destroy some social group, e.g., Jews in the case of nazism, the bourgeoisie in the case of communist regimes. Except perhaps for the last, most of these aspects of totalitarian regimes were fully apparent in the 1930's, when the term came into widespread use. By 1940, when Orwell began using it, many writers found it so familiar that they no longer felt it necessary even to define it for their readers. In this sense, totalitarianism obviously existed and

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### Subtle Wisdom

One Ms. Ehrenreich, the liberal left's newest first lady of sexual sagacity, praising a new feminist tract on sexology in *The Nation*, the flagship of American gauchism:

The short stories by Myra Goldberg and Carole Rosenthal explore women's attraction *even* to men who are manifestly creeps.

The emphasis on *even* is ours. We all know that crass misjudgments are quite common to existential vicissitudes. Moreover, without some ill-fated human propensities, their omnipresence, and their consequences, neither *Manon*



*Lescaut* nor *Washington Square* nor *An American Tragedy* nor most of Thomas Hardy's novels could have been written. Now, what about men who are attracted *even* to sluts and slatterns? □

continues to exist. It also differs considerably from other forms of government that, whatever their evils, did not usually control *every* aspect of society or destroy entire ethnic or social groups.

Walzer, and some of the other authors in *1984 Revisited*, do not use totalitarianism in its original and obvious sense. Instead, they contrast both *1984* and current communist realities with a somewhat crabbed and scholastic theory of totalitarianism evolved by Hannah Arendt and others in the early 1950's. This theory, based on a narrow interpretation of Stalinism, deemed one-man despotism in its most extreme form and drastic purges of the ruling party as essential parts of totalitarianism, though such phenomena had existed only part of the time in the U.S.S.R. since 1917. Moreover, some of the theorists of this school tended to see totalitarian rule as a streamlined, efficient machine of power without major factional disputes. The last notion, of course, is not an accurate picture of any totalitarian regime at any time. As experience since 1953 has shown, neither the most extreme form of one-man despotism nor a permanent purge is a necessary part of totalitarianism.

In fact, none of these elements was essential to the original theory of totalitarianism, or to Orwell's projection of future possibilities. Orwell, as we know from his essays, did not regard totalitarian regimes as efficient. Moreover, in *1984*, aside from discussing the Inner Party's motives, Orwell showed remarkably little interest in discussing the nature of the ruling group. It is not clear whether "Big Brother" is a living dictator or (as seems more probable) an immortal synthetic front for a collective oligarchy. Whether the Inner Party is a harmonious whole or a collection of feuding factions is a subject in which Orwell had no interest; it was enough to show that disputes among the rulers will not help the ruled.

Perhaps the most inane misuse of *1984*, however, is a notion first aired by Erich Fromm, in an essay appended to a popular paperback reprint of the novel.

Fromm's notion is implicit in some of the sillier essays in *1984 Revisited*. Fromm and others suggest that a regime of the sort described by Orwell could result from the pressures of the arms race and the cold war. E. L. Doctorow has produced a prize specimen of this sort of idiocy; he declares that we are already arriving at a situation like that envisaged by Orwell.

But there is no warrant for this sort of supposition in *1984*. The regimes described therein are clearly the product of war and violent revolution, not of the pressures of political evolution. In recounting the origins of "oligarchical collectivism" we are specifically told that there was an atomic war in the 1950's in which hundreds of atomic bombs were dropped on major cities. The Party then took power in a violent revolution and civil war. Orwell thus based his work squarely on the history of actual totalitarian regimes that arose from war and extreme crisis. There is little evidence that Orwell thought that totalitarianism could simply "evolve," though he con-

stantly warned that totalitarian *ideas* were everywhere, ready to take root in suitable conditions. There is a good deal of evidence (see, particularly, his 1947 article "Toward European Unity") that he thought a world like the one described in *1984* was a potential outcome of the world situation. He regarded both a third World War and a final collapse of capitalism as likely but not inevitable. It was conceivable, he thought, that a war could be staved off for a long time, and that internal changes might take place in the U.S.S.R. And he thought it was possible that "even if the world falls apart into three unconquerable superstates, the liberal tradition will be strong enough within the Anglo-American section of the world to make life tolerable and even offer some hope of progress." Orwell did not foresee exactly what happened in the following decades, but he at least envisioned the main possibilities. That, and not just the prognostication he outlined in *1984*—one which we have neither realized nor securely rendered impossible—should make his claims as a prophet secure. □

## Erasing Mason-Dixon

John Shelton Reed: *Southerners: The Social Psychology of Sectionalism*; University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill.

T. Harry Williams: *The Selected Essays of T. Harry Williams*; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

by Edward J. Lynch

The South has an enduring status as a region somewhat separate from the main thrust of American life. The tension between agrarian and commercial impulses in American society, epitomized by the

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yeomen idealized in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* and the striving industrial class whose rise was promoted by Alexander Hamilton's *Reports* as Secretary of the Treasury, had its most bitter dimension in the conflict over the status of slavery. Although the American Founders sought to put slavery on the road to eventual extinction because they recognized it as an evil at odds with the first principle of the Declaration of Independence, substantial portions of the South resisted every scheme of emancipation, a resistance that intensified as opposition to slavery increased around the country. The most candid Southerners conceded that slavery could not endure among any people genuinely animated by the principles of the Declaration, so they recommended discard-