

background of the poem. Intelligent and useful though both essays are, most readers will still need Charles Kennedy's introduction to his translation (now in paperback from Oxford), since that essay presents the scholarly "problems" of *Beowulf*, summarized from Friedrich Klaeber's standard edition, in a clear and sometimes original fashion. It cannot be said that Osborne's translation is a definitive advance over Kennedy as a whole, though it certainly is in parts. The package is attractive, though, and the *Beowulf* amateur will derive much pleasure from it. cc

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Modern Mobs

by Richard A. Cooper

Elias Canetti: *Crowds & Power*; Continuum Books; New York; \$9.95.

On the stage of history, the crowd plays a dramatic and often critical role. Our own era has seen many powerful and ferocious crowds. Indeed the Nobel Laureate Elias Canetti, a Sephardic Jew from Bulgaria who lives in London but writes in German, contends that the crowd springs from the hunting packs of our primitive ancestors. As befits its violent origins, the crowd seeks to "discharge" its energy against a target, usually human. In the crowd's fascination with incendiary destruction, Canetti sees the survival of ancient passions. Driven by a "will" to subsume everyone under its banner, the crowd seeks to destroy those who stand apart. Canetti's belief that the quest for power within crowds is the desire to be the solitary survivor surveying the silent crowd of the dead explains why so many of our modern leaders have presided over hecatombs of corpses. It is in war that modern crowd behavior best illustrates Canetti's thesis of hunting-pack origins.

Crowds and Power, however, suffers from some of the worst faults of 19th-century writing: the substitution of analogy for proof; the careless use of explorers' accounts; and the question-begging concept of vestiges from the primeval past. How do we know that the crowd is a vestige of the hunting pack? Canetti does not say. His concept of vestiges requires acceptance of racial memory, an inherited unconscious memory of the species' past. Canetti creates a "metahistory," a history of what might have happened if only we

accept his conclusions.

Canetti examines unionism and union strikes—with its language of "Brotherhood" and "Solidarity"—as prime modern examples of crowd behavior, but curiously, he omits any discussion of Georges Sorel's compatible conception of the general strike as myth. Given the role of the crowd in 20th-century revolutions, it is even more curious that Canetti barely mentions National Socialism and Communism. Consider the Nazi Party's name: National Socialist German Workers' Party. Every single word refers to a crowd. "Party" is most congenial to Canetti's thesis: the political party was a "pack" organized for the pursuit of power. In ideology and practice, National Socialism was statist and collectivist. The "race," the "volk," and the "Aryans" are all crowd symbols.

If the crowd and its link to power is primeval in origin, as Canetti says, why does it persist? Canetti does not consider how modern politicians have deliberately reinforced the crowd mentality in the public schools and through propaganda and military conscription. Few people today can resist the influence of those who engineer mass conformity.

Canetti's *Crowds and Power* forces the question: How can we defuse the crowd's explosive potential? Our future requires an answer Canetti does not supply. cc

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The Politics of Gullibility

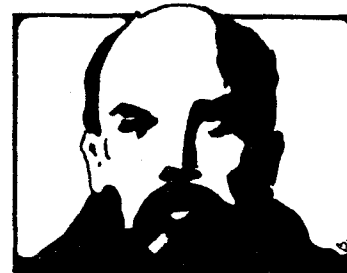
by Gary S. Vasilash

Gregory O'Brien: *Lenin Lives!*; Stein & Day; New York.

The degree to which Americans live in a media-contrived world is well illustrated in Gregory O'Brien's slim novel *Lenin Lives!* Mr. O'Brien shows the distortions in this world by imagining what would happen should the Soviets one day claim "they have performed a medical feat of sensational proportions: the resurrection of Russian revolutionary leader V. I. Lenin." O'Brien follows the story through newspaper reports, magazine articles, and transcripts of TV and radio broadcasts. At first, the oracles of information call the whole thing a tasteless hoax. Sixteen days later an *LA Times* editorial concludes: "In our news space, we have until now

dealt gingerly with Western sensitivities on this matter by placing the name Lenin in quotation marks. Beginning with today's edition we have stopped. Lenin lives." The proof? No medical exam, not even finger prints, but instead charisma and manners of bygone days. Surely O'Brien has given us a caricature. But how often does the insatiable American audience demand much more of its visible or invisible talking heads? cc

Gary Vasilash is a contributing editor to Chronicles.



A Fighter & An Oiler

Russell Pulliam: *Publisher: Gene Pulliam, Last of the Newspaper Titans*; Jameson Books; Ottawa, IL.

Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier: *Dirksen of Illinois: Senatorial Statesman*; University of Illinois Press; Urbana, IL.

While national politics is largely an East Coast affair and the national media split their operations between New York and California, recent biographies remind us that the Midwest has provided some of this century's leading figures in both. Son of Methodist missionaries, Eugene C. Pulliam was born on May 3, 1889, in a sod hut in Ulysses, Kansas. After learning the fundamentals of newspaper journalism in Kansas City, he went on to become one of America's leading publishers, controlling four metropolitan dailies and a string of smaller papers. Son of a design painter, Everett McKinley Dirksen was born (with his twin brother Thomas) on January 4, 1896, in Pekin, Illinois. After polishing his rhetorical skills as an amateur thespian, while earning his living as a baker, Dirksen successfully ran for Congress in 1932 and eventually made his way up very near the top—the Republican leader of the Senate.

Both were hardworking and ambitious men. Both acquired reputations as

staunch Cold Warriors and conservative Republicans. More specifically, both were influential in starting Barry Goldwater's political career, both were supporters of LBJ's Vietnam War efforts, and both were critical of the New Left and the 60's counterculture. Yet a major difference in character between the two men may be more significant than any similarities. Early on, Pulliam realized that his "instinct for a good fight, his bluntness . . . [meant] he could never make it in public service." In contrast, in his first successful congressional campaign, Dirksen adopted "a pragmatic, nonpartisan approach, which involved a certain amount of expediency." Arguably, Dirksen's career rested upon pragmatism and expediency.

Pulliam was made of different stuff. He firmly believed that "the other man has a right to be heard" and was one of the first to run full op-ed pages in his papers, but he was fearlessly candid and outspoken in his own views. He could be a "table-pounding, argumentative, [and] cantankerous" exponent of his positions. Dirksen didn't pound tables; he made compromises. He described himself as a "moderationist" and took "The oil can is mightier than the sword" as his maxim. He preferred the saying "Nothing is eternal except change" over any set of "doctrinaire principles." Pulliam, who never minced words in criticizing the sensationalistic and liberal biases in his own profession, won "grudging admiration for his independence and convictions"; Ev won the different kind of respect accorded those who grease the wheels of political accommodation.

On occasion, Dirksen was compared to his boyhood idol, Abraham Lincoln, but the Schapsmeiers offer a truer comparison when they note the "unique closeness and comradeship" that made LBJ and Dirksen "two brother artisans in government." Observed Lady Bird, "There is something terrifically right about watching them talk to each other." Ev had found a new twin.

In Dirksen's defense it must be recognized that democracies depend on coalitions and mediation. But with "political pros" like Dirksen and Johnson, we begin to wonder exactly what principles—other than the careerist's pursuit of success—guide the coalition-building and mediation. Dirksen's biographers argue that the senator's support for Johnson's Civil Rights legislation was "an act of political courage," but apparently his chief argument for persuading Goldwater to join him was simply that "voting against it would be a political

mistake." Though they try to portray their subject as a statesman, the Schapsmeiers have to concede that the pragmatic Dirksen, with his "uncanny" talent for "grabbing the spotlight," could not claim the statesman's title as credibly as John C. Calhoun, a Senate opposition leader who preferred fidelity

to a lost cause over favorable public exposure. While Russell Pulliam concludes his biography lamenting that no one is now practicing his grandfather's independent style of journalism, Dirksen's pattern of leadership remains an attractive model for aspiring politicians. (BJC) cc

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