

them, but they do pose a hazard to the spiritual health of others in the vicinity. I know I violate the Tenth Commandment every time I see one.

Moreover, buying a Volvo is detrimental to the U.S. balance-of-payments. This might not be so bad if the money were going to some deserving country that would otherwise be a candidate for foreign aid, but money spent on Volvos goes directly to one of the most obnoxious nations in the world, an overdeveloped country, with a busybody government that tells its citizens how to raise their children and its international betters how to run their foreign policies. If I didn't feel

sorry for the Norwegians, I'd say let the Russians have Sweden. But I'm getting off the subject. . . .

There is one other argument for taxing cigarettes. It is so specious that it's barely heard at all in North Carolina, but readers from other states may have encountered it. North Carolina's present tax is said to be so much lower than other states'—notably New York's—that various unsavory characters find it profitable to smuggle North Carolina cigarettes into New York. Raising Carolina's taxes, it's said, would cut off this trade. Well, sure, but so would lowering New York's. Why should Southern smokers pay for

the avarice of Northern politicians? Why should our legislators protect New Yorkers from the consequences of their greed? Let them pay to enforce their own silly laws. I would love to see customs stations on the George Washington Bridge. Maybe we could set some up down here, while we're at it. There are some New York products I'd like to keep out. cc

*John Shelton Reed, a one-time Southern liberal, teaches sociology at the University of North Carolina and is writing a book on Victorian Anglo-Catholicism.*

## CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS



**Where are the poets?** We asked conservatives that question in June. One answer was suggested by Jane Greer, the editor of *Plains Poetry Journal*, "a magazine for traditional poetry, that is, for poetry that uses the best from the past." Although *Plains* is not limited to conventional verse forms, it has no room for "free verse" that reads like "a tape-recorded conversation." The editor, Jane Greer, does not absolutely repudiate innovation; she does have the good sense to point out that Joyce's *Ulysses* owes much of its strength to the "blood, bone, and sinew of classical literature." Not all the poems published in *Plains* are of the highest order, but they are intelligible (sometimes too intelligible). The best of them can be moving, like Paul Lamar's "The End of My Parents' Marriage":

And hand in hand  
On the back steps, my  
pregnant sister and I  
Wistfully remember summers  
here—warm and long—  
A life this awful August  
will deny  
Her baby, whose presence  
now is slightly wrong.

Cool wind moves the little  
field of loosestrife.  
Their lavender tips are lurid  
in the darkening day.  
My dearest parents, these  
grounds will glow again  
with life  
Only after we have gone away.

The price for four issues of *Plains Poetry Journal* (P.O. Box 2337, Bismarck, ND 58502) is \$14.00, \$3.50 for a sample. cc

**The fighting over Vietnam** is not over. Loyal Americans are still winning the battles but losing the war. Fifteen years ago, American troops were victorious in every major engagement in the jungles of Southeast Asia, but all their efforts came to nothing, because the Presidents who committed us to war (Kennedy and Johnson) never formulated a strategy for victory and because many of those who opposed the war—especially the press—were either uninformed or dishonest about our enemies. A decade later, a small army of scholars and authors—"Vietnam revisionists"—are overcoming the anti-American clichés of

the late 60's and early 70's to produce a more accurate history of the conflict.

In the end, these interpretive exercises may founder on the same rock as the American war effort: an ideological and unrepentant press. It would be hard to imagine Mr. Rather saying his *mea maxima culpa* on the CBS Evening News. But the influence of the media is transitory and strikes only as deep as Tom, Dan, and Peter's understanding of world affairs. The real history of Vietnam, that is the myth that gets engrained into the popular consciousness, will be written by novelists and playwrights. It is a bad sign that *Coming to Terms*, a recent anthology of plays about the Vietnam experience, was edited by James Reston Jr. of the *New York Times*. As Reston explained last spring in *American Theatre*, "the playwright is more important than the historian" in turning the war into "a digested event," an event "folded into the sweep of our history and . . . calmly acknowledged as the downside of American potentiality." Emily Mann's *Still Life* and Steven Metcalfe's *Strange Snow* both show the Vietnam vet as a hardened, dehumanized psychotic. (The sister of a vet in *Strange Snow* speaks to him of

"generosity and love, feelings you've forgotten.") These plays, Reston explains, show "the social costs of fighting a war so adverse to the noble and radical principles on which this country was founded." Reston also likes Tom Colin's *Medal of Honor*, which ridicules Pentagon hypocrisy, and Terrence McNalley's *Botticelli*, which depicts American officers in Vietnam as uneducated louts—potential Lieutenant Calleys.

Reston supports his version of Vietnam with a few references to "government studies," but he is not really interested in facts. Instead, he asserts that theater is at its best not when it "attempts to reproduce history . . . but rather when it presents a *concept* of history." In doing this the stage employs "tools . . . beyond those of the historian and the journalist" and so defines "the interior of things." Once that interior is properly shaped, Reston is sure that neither the scholarship of

"Vietnam revisionism" nor the polemics of Ronald Reagan will make any difference.

For a change, Reston is right about one thing: the power of the playwright to transcend history. Millions who have never read a page of Tudor historian Raphael Holinshed have accepted Shakespeare's recreation of Holinshed as the real thing. Richard III still has his supporters, but to really make their case, the Yorkists need their own Shakespeare. So long as conservative American interpreters of Vietnam concentrate all of their energies on historiography and let the America-haters create all the plays—and novels, poetry, movies, and paintings—they will lose this round of the ongoing *Kulturkampf*. In Giradoux's *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, the Trojan poet is killed just before the outbreak of war with the Greeks. Too bad, someone observes: now a Greek poet will have to write the story. The

Trojans had to wait a thousand years for a revisionist Roman to write a sympathetic account in the *Aeneid*. A thousand years is a long time to wait for the American Vergil. cc

**Religion is out, fashion is in.** So, at least, we might conclude from a poll conducted recently by Starch Advertisement Readership Service, which has been doing door-to-door opinion surveys since the 1930's. The results of a poll taken in 1953 indicated that the top five areas of interest for American women at that time were: (1) religion, (2) food, (3) homemaking, (4) child care, (5) home furnishings. In a similar poll done in 1983, religion did not even make the top 10. The new list reads: (1) fashion & clothes, (2) food, (3) health, (4) home furnishings, (5) "cultural activities." Homemaking dropped from third to eighth place, child care from fourth to sixth.

If the poll means anything, men seem to have been more constant in the past 30 years. Although business has gone from seventh to first place, sports and automobiles remain near the top. The biggest changes are the disappearance of religion (replaced, significantly, by science) and the substitution of travel for home building.

What a picture of life in America! Part Garry Trudeau, part *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Women worried about clothes and health (no wonder Jane Fonda was picked an all-American hero), men devoted to business, Monday Night Football, and the 8.8 percent APR on a new Cherokee. Neither appear to have much interest in home or family, to say nothing of church. Then what is all this talk we hear about religious revival and the rediscovery of parenting? Perhaps they are part of the "life-style" of a small but visible minority, what in religious terms used to be called the saving remnant. Lot couldn't even find 10 such people in Sodom. America must have thousands.

There is one consolation. The majority that has forgotten about religion is not sitting around brooding about the fire and brimstone to come. They probably won't even be alarmed by the results, because they probably won't read about them: books went down the tubes with religion. cc

## REVISIONS

### Art Unknown

Man is—whatever else we may know about him—an animal. To what extent biology can illuminate the problems of the human condition is a question as old as Aristotle and as timely as a newspaper story on genetic engineering. In *The Shaping of Man: Philosophical Aspects of Sociobiology* (Schocken Books; New York; \$14.95), Roger Trigg tackles some of the larger issues of the ongoing dispute over human nature. Skinner's behaviorism, Sartre's existentialism, and Gadamer's historicism all come to grief on the same rock: they all explain too much. If human social life is only a question of stimulus/response reflexes, or particles in the flow of history, then the same can be said of the theories of explanation offered by philosophers and scientists. If Skinner or Gadamer were right, words like *right* and *wrong*, *true* and *false* would have no meaning; science and philosophy would be intellectual entertainments subsidized by the taxes of

working people who had been duped into believing that the pursuit of truth was possible.

Trigg is cautious—perhaps overcautious—in his appraisal of sociobiology. Sociobiologists, too, are guilty of reducing human life to materialist terms, but in their attempt to restore the concept of human nature, they have performed a great service. If they are less than brilliant on questions of metaphysics, it is largely a function of their almost boyish zeal for a new discipline and the engrained prejudices of the scientific fraternity. "Human nature, understood from the biological point of view, is not the whole story," is Trigg's sensible conclusion. We are aware of making moral decisions that are driven neither by instincts nor by cultural pressures. Still, he argues, it is the business of science to attempt materialist explanations for everything. If their efforts are doomed to fail—or what's a heaven for—"this does not mean that science is forced to give up its ambitions to help human behavior." cc



*These comments were suggested by a reader as a response to "Venusberg on the Hudson," Chronicles, December 1984.*

## A Brief Encounter With Bigotry

by W. Cleon Skousen

When I was 17 years of age I was invited by my church to serve at my own expense as a missionary. The assignment was to teach people, especially young people, how to be good Christians. My assignment was to go to England and, at first, everything went fine. The English countryside was beautiful and I felt quite at home with the people. However, one day I was mobbed while giving an open-air talk to the people of Ipswich. It is a terrifying and traumatic experience to suddenly have a crowd of people go temporarily insane, knock you down, kick you, tear your clothes, and beat on you until the police finally come to the rescue.

This crowd had been very friendly when I first began to talk. It was only when a minister of a local church interrupted and began accusing me of believing all kinds of things which were totally false that the people turned from a quiet crowd of curious listeners into a raging torrent of passionate and violent rage.

That was my first introduction to the raw, cutting edge of religious bigotry.

I suppose it is part of human nature to have a sense of exclusivity about one's most sacred and personal spiritual feelings. However, it has always seemed to me that a religious philosophy which is so insecure that it can thrive only on a diet of hostility toward all other religions is a terribly weak reed to use as a staff as we move along the pathway of life.

Thomas Jefferson's greatest aspiration was to see us become a nation where various denominations could live compatibly together and rejoice in

one another's success. He felt the war against evil was bigger than all of the churches combined. At the University of Virginia, he had planned to have all of the churches build seminaries around the campus so the students could have the advantage of a good religious education in the church of their choice. All the churches were to have free access to the university library and each professor was invited to feel free to have religious discussions on the campus with his students after classes were over.

Jefferson's dream never became a reality either at the University of Virginia or anywhere else. Americans, not unlike people in the rest of the world, have displayed such a strong flavor of bigotry toward one another that the first two centuries of the nation's history were deeply scarred from time to time with outbreaks of religious violence and mobocracy.

One of my favorite partners during the 16 years I served in the Federal Bureau of Investigation was a devout Catholic. It troubled me when I heard

snide remarks from some people about his being a Catholic. I knew that his devotion to his church made him a better father, a better worker, and a better FBI agent.

I very often listen to Jerry Falwell on television. He continually makes a plea for Americans of all faiths to unite in fighting the political, economic, and moral erosion which is taking place in our nation. Nevertheless, I recently heard a minister who claims to belong to the same faith as Jerry Falwell lash out at him in a spirit of bitter incrimination.

But Jerry Falwell knows how to love his enemy. I know him rather well and I have seen him make warm friends out of some of his enemies. He has taken young people by the thousands and lifted some of them from lives of dope and moral degradation to happy, productive lives.

For several years I heard a lot of terrible things about Reverend Sun Myung Moon. They were some of the same things I had heard people say in England about my own church. When

## LIBERAL ARTS

### Tag Team at the MLA

Interpreting literature has always been a struggle, but now that radical feminism has taken over the Modern Language Association, it looks more and more like highbrow mud wrestling. MLA President Carolyn G. Heilbrun devoted her entire 1984 presidential address to promoting the feminine mystique. Declaring it was time for women to "intrude on the narrative of male hegemony," Heilbrun offered a new interpretation of Jacob and the angel as an account of:

... each woman wrestling with the angel of the female past, with all female refusal to acknowledge the new state of women [sic].

The president is dissatisfied with the old woman scholar's ideal of "the hetero-



sexual woman who wants . . . to couple herself . . . with a man who also writes," and prefers the example of the first female MLA president, a woman writer who coupled herself with—what else?—another more celebrated woman writer (Willa Cather). Perhaps they should think about changing the name of the MLA. They can keep the initials, but the L could stand for something with more sex appeal than Language. cc