

Then nightly sings the staring
owl,
Tu-whit;
Tu-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel
the pot—

—she jams it into a theory about Elizabethan marriage, converting both Marion and Joan from farm-girls into housewives for whom (there is zero about this in the text) “love has to ripen into friendship and tolerance.” I note that standard Shakespearean practice is to identify scullions like Joan only by their first name. “Greasy Joan” is all of this character that there is in the play: She exists *only* in this line. But, for some reason, Greer needed a housewife and an argument that marriage requires mutual toleration.

When she attacks Old Capulet for being married to a woman too young for him, she says that “he has not danced since before his wife was born.” In fact, Capulet says to his cousin (Act I, Scene V) that he has not worn a “mask” for some 20 years—which is to say that he has not disguised himself in order to chase women. All he says about “dancing” is that he is now past the right age for it. But, again, it is important for Greer to insist that he is criminally older than the woman he married, and she even does some fancy arithmetic which the text disproves.

Here is Greer’s opinion of Iago:

Iago is still serviceable to us, as an objective correlative of the mindless inventiveness of racist aggression. Iago is still alive and kicking and filling migrants’ letterboxes with excrement.

There are some problems here—not least of which is Greer’s preceding remark that “it is futile” to pursue the issue of Iago’s motivation. As for the passage itself, that is simply critical bad faith. Greer would like to find a passage in Shakespeare that confirms her opinion on racism. So she invents a playwright who has foreseen Teddy Boys and Rockers. But that word “still”—is that what she thinks Iago has been doing in *Othello*?

So far as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* are concerned, both are hid-

den commentaries on things that Greer dislikes. They are models of a “sick society.” Prospero, for example, is a monster of capitalism who condemns Caliban “to brutish toil and keeps him at it by torturing him with cramps, side-stitches, and bone-aches, in much the same way that those who enslaved the Brazilian Indians forced them to work every day without pay by the use of the bludgeon.” I don’t get this: Can one *give* cramps and stitches? Is Shakespeare anti-Portuguese? What is the *point* of all this? Possibly, that Caliban is “really” a version of the “labouring poor” of London with whom Shakespeare sympathized. But if that were true, why didn’t he say so? Isn’t Greer remotely aware that the great divines of 1610 had no fear whatsoever of accusing monarchy and aristocracy of neglecting the poor? That no allegories were needed by *anyone* for a subject weekly exposed in sermons, homilies, and religious warnings? But it is necessary for her to believe in Shakespeare as a secret hater of Western culture—a modern who, like Mark Twain, was stuck among the medievals and who finally, in a code until now secret, has communicated with her.

This comes very close to crank literature. One has to say that the facts of this book give us no confidence in its ideas.

Ronald Berman is author of *A Reader’s Guide to Shakespeare’s Plays*.

Harmless Drudgery

Dictionary of American Conservatism by Louis Filler, New York: Philosophical Library; \$29.95.

No movement or discipline has fully arrived on the American scene until it has been the subject of a dictionary or encyclopedia. Conservatism has evidently made it, now that Louis Filler has dedicated one of his dictionaries to it. No one with a serious interest in American Conservatism can afford to do without this *Dictionary*. Movement junkies and *Washington Post* editorialists alike will now be able to browse from Abortion to YAF and back again

with considerable profit. It is a first of its kind and is sure to go through many editions.

When it does, the publishers will undoubtedly correct the many perplexing oddities that disfigure an otherwise useful reference tool. The sins of omission are as serious as the sins of inclusion. Where are, for example, M.E. Bradford, George Panichas, and John Howard, *Ethics and Public Policy* and *Reason* magazine? Of living conservatives, Filler is oblivious except for the most obvious celebrities. Instead, he peoples his books with the radicals and progressives to which he has dedicated earlier volumes: John Jay Chapman, Edward Bellamy, and Sinclair Lewis. Even more baffling is his description of Robert Nisbet as “a transitional figure from liberalism to conservatism” or of *Chronicles* as “edited by the late Leopold Tyrmand”—quite a trick even for our inspired founder! Still, for all its many faults, the *Dictionary of American Conservatism* is a good buy and a bright sign of hope for Philosophical Library.

Dakota Days

by Jane Greer

Those Days: An American Album by Richard Critchfield, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday; \$19.95.

It was their ordinariness that made them matter. . . . Individual life was by its very nature a tragedy; it came to an end; for all of us it was going to be a short way to that grave. But the ordinary life of a society was a comedy that just kept going on. What was at the heart of those days?

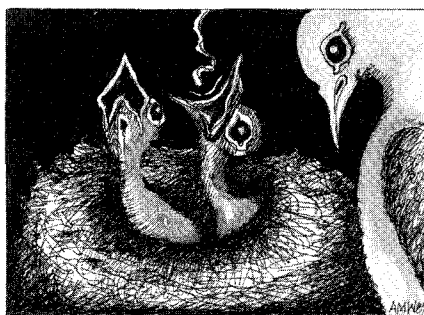
This is a book I wish I’d written, a love story of the largest and best kind. Like most people, I remember my childhood, that eternal summer, in a glow of happy forgetfulness, simply out of pleasure. Richard Critchfield “remembers,” as if he had been there, his parents’ lives and society before he was born, and shows why it’s *important* to remember and to go back even further

than our own birth: Because like it or not, we are *attached*. We are not historyless like Adam, breathed out of nothing; we're drawn from the narrow end of a real and compelling vortex—*history*—vivid with blood and bone, passion and fear, as it touches down to make us in the here and now. Part of everything that was and will be, we move up the funnel of history to make room for those whose history we will be. It was and is all real, all immediate in its time, and Richard Critchfield has the skill and insight to make it *seem* real and immediate.

In simple, exquisitely appropriate language, much of it taken from letters and newspaper accounts and interviews over many years, he introduces his mother, Anne, her family, the Williamses of Iowa, old Quaker stock, and his father's, the less respectable Critchfields of North Dakota. We witness his mother's less-than-perfect wedding day (her father said to her, hours before the ceremony, "I wish you were marrying Forrest [Claxton] instead"). Jim Critchfield, the author's father, brings his new wife to live in Hunter, North Dakota—she would write, "I was to hate wind for the rest of my life"—and they began their family in 1915; the author was the last of five children, born in 1931.

Anne held the home together; Jim stirred things up, made them interesting, committed bigger, heartier sins (that eventually killed him in his 40's), and was just as heartily sorry. A gentle, skilled doctor, and a doctor's son, he spent each day up to his elbows in the real life of the community. Even though this book begins and ends with Anne, it *feels* as if it's about Jim.

Interviewing old-timers who knew his parents, Richard Critchfield lays image upon image in language so inviting that it seems like fiction, and we come to know intimately not only his parents and family but also the entire society and era they inhabited. This is no vague nostalgic trek back to the nonexistent "good old days" or mere homage to a loved mother, but a gifted writer's careful examination of all available resources, to reconstruct the rhythm and immediacy of the past—its sounds and smells, human passions and disappointments. Critchfield has resuscitated those days, given them breath and pulse, and made their



relevance to us, now, evident.

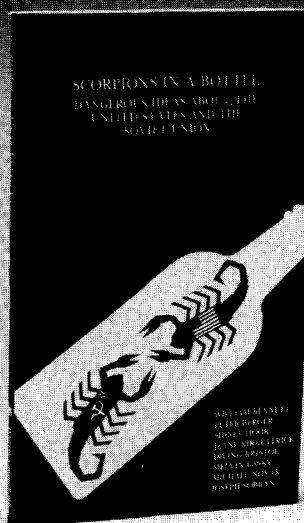
"What was at the heart of those days? Things like the taste of bread right out of the oven when you were good and hungry . . . The way the late, flat sun sent long slants of light across the prairie grass . . . Those times. They'll never come again. But somewhere . . . Somebody was always going to be swinging a golf club or a baseball bat or playing a piano or cracking a joke. Or taking a deep breath and drowsing off to sleep or dreaming or waking up. Or passing from youth to old age, and hardly

knowing where all the years went. Time, in the instant, in the irrecoverable passing moment, time continuous and remembered, going on and on . . . I wish I'd known them better."

Dying at the age of 95, nearly half her lifetime lived after the death of the husband she loved even through his long affair with a young girl ("I never wanted to marry her. She was just a girlfriend. You were my wife," he said as he lay dying of alcoholism), Anne Critchfield asked her youngest son, born only a few years before his father's death, to write about their life, about North Dakota and Iowa in those days. Critchfield thought, "What to say? And what if I did as she said? How could I write about Father? I asked her, 'How can I write about somebody I can't remember at all? I mean, say of all the people we know, who is like him?'"

And his mother answered, "You are."

SCORPIONS IN A BOTTLE



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Letter From Switzerland

by Harold O.J. Brown

The German Swindle

To walk along a narrow ridge or cliff path, German-speakers will tell you, you have to be *schwindelfrei*. The French word *vertige* exists in English (vertigo), but we would be more likely to say "dizziness." The German word is for *vertige* or dizziness *der Schwindel*, but *Schwindel* also can mean what it does in English—swindle. "Mir *schwindelt's*": I am dizzy; but, "Ich *schwindele*": I swindle. Brigitte Sauzay, a young professional translator at international conferences, knows modern Germany as well as she knows German. Most people who have done simultaneous translation—which involves speaking the translation into a microphone as fast as the words in the original language—say that it is a tremendous strain. I did it for a number of years and remember that it produced headaches, and sometimes even *Schwindel*. "False friends"—such as *demande*, which means "ask", not "demand" in French, are bad enough, but when one runs into a succession of words such as *Schwindel*, which may truly mean swindle or treacherously mean vertigo, even the most skillful interpreter may be hard put to render a correct simultaneous translation. Dealing with contemporary Germany, it is hard to tell whether one is getting dizzy, being swindled, or both. In *Le vertige allemand* (Paris: Olivier Organ), Brigitte Sauzay tries to clarify matters a bit.

One of Mme. Sauzay's characteristic comments evokes an earlier remark by Nietzsche: "Germany is a country where a more ancient past and a more

imminent future than ours dwell together." The contrast between Germany as the creator of the most sublime culture and the perpetrator of the most sordid crimes has been noted in many variations: The land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms is also the land of Hitler, Himmler, and Goering.

Mme. Sauzay identifies the problem in a new way. After its catastrophic defeat in World War II, Germany—or rather West Germany, the *Bundesrepublik*—engaged in a frenzy of economic expansion wrapped in an orgy of self-reproach. Germans tend to wallow in their own guilt—sometimes voluntarily: Every new season, West Germany's government television networks bring week after week of dramatization of the country's criminal, Nazi past. Schoolchildren have to take as much as a full year of "Holocaust Studies." Officially this is to help Germany "come to terms with its past," but it has become a dead weight on Germany's present and a heavy mortgage on the future—not to mention a psychological disaster for countless schoolchildren. Many Germans seem to take a macabre satisfaction in denouncing Germany's past atrocities. The slogan "Nie wieder!" (Never again!) involves more than repentance, however. It seems to involve a certain claim to moral nobility for the present generation, authenticated by the intensity of the moral atrociousness of the second generation past.

Germany gave us the Protestant Reformation and in a sense dialectical theology. (The most eminent representative of dialectical theology, Karl Barth, was a German-speaking Swiss, but very much a part of the German intellectual world.) Both of these movements emphasize the depravity of man in contrast with the holiness of God, and each of them is subject to a

peculiar perversion by which man, having identified himself as depraved and God alone as holy, reevaluates himself as holier still by virtue of his insight in recognizing the "absolute qualitative difference" between God and man. Seeing how evil he is makes him superior to everyone else.

German intellectuals, students, much of the press, and the better-publicized parts of the Protestant Church are caught up in a frenzy of pacifism, environmentalism, and anti-authoritarianism. Reagan may be accepted as the moral equal of Stalin but certainly not of Gorbachev. West Germans live in the shadow of the Berlin Wall (which was a quarter-century old in August 1986) yet as a matter of course excoriate South Africa, Chile, and even the United States as the world's paramount examples of oppressive regimes. One curious paradox is that the very intellectuals who engage in vituperating all authority in the West make excuses for totalitarian absolutism in the East. Because this is so, it might be supposed that much of the German intellectual world is in thrall to Marxism if not to Moscow. This is true, in part, but it is not the entire explanation. German environmentalists—the "Greens"—reacted to the Chernobyl disaster by demanding, among other things, the abolition of West Germany's defense system. So that the Soviets might be able to move in and build similar reactors in West Germany? The logic is perplexing. Are Pershing rockets and Germany's own *Nachrüstung* (catch-up armament) the real threats to peace and freedom? The environmentalistic, pacifistic, antiauthoritarian, moralistically supercilious Greens are a smaller minority in Germany in the mid-80's, no more important than the Nazis were in the early 1930's, and yet in an