

ture, are central to the curriculum.

However much Arabs and Palestinians in particular view the United States as Israel's sugar daddy, it is still true that the American way of undergraduate education commands admiration. The historical record is a distinguished one, including the American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo, and the University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to name only three. In today's Palestinian lands this American tradition finds its most successful exemplar in Birzeit University, located not far from Jerusalem. The first graduating class left the school in 1976. By the academic year 1987-88, the college, with 190 faculty members in the humanities and physical sciences, offered the best education available to Palestinians living in the occupied territories. In the cultural studies program students are expected to read Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Vergil, Aquinas, Averroës, Avicenna, Hegel, Marx, and Freud. Contemporary Mideastern authors include nationalist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Egyptian reformer Muhammed Abduh. Politics intrudes on this idyll in the form of student factions demanding that the university adopt a more overtly nationalist character. Sullivan, who confesses to a traditionalist view of liberal education, cautions that Birzeit, as well as the other Palestinian colleges, "must remain on the alert to safeguard its integrity against . . . internal challenges."

But Sullivan admits that politics cannot be banished from campus. Palestinians can consider themselves fortunate that they have four private universities among which to choose. I can think of no other Arab country where freedom on this scale is available to students. With due respect to some notable exceptions, the state-run universities of the Arab countries provide mass education of the least-common-denominator variety. But the four universities in Palestine—Birzeit, Bethlehem, al-Najah in Nablus, and Gaza Islamic University—are viewed by Israeli administrators as laboratories for political agitation. In a study published earlier this year, Abraham Ashkenasi observed that campus elections show overwhelming student sympathy for the PLO and, at Bethlehem University, for far more radical groups. Benja-

min Netanyahu has gone so far as to conclude of the universities that the PLO has attempted to "turn them into centers of incitement, extremism and terror." The authorities can always find justification for banning books from libraries and classrooms or for sending students home for weeks at a time. Palestinian intellectuals in the territories and abroad dispute this assessment; they focus on the high quality of instruction and academic freedom, as well as the need to educate young Palestinians, who since 1967 have not been eligible to come and go as they please across international borders.

Sullivan says that it is natural that Palestinians look to university students as leaders in resisting Jewish encroachments on Arab land and in opposing abusive treatment of Arabs in Israeli jails. As the uprising passes its first anniversary, it is impossible to be optimistic about the chances of survival of the academic enterprise in Palestine. At the very least it will continue to lurch between the Scylla of nationalist agitation and the Charybdis of Israeli repression. Why shouldn't the Israelis take this occasion to close the schools, which they claim have little academic purpose? My prediction is that they will, and that Palestinian students will be obliged once more to go into exile for higher education.

*Michael W. Albin is a librarian by profession and a student of Arab and Islamic culture. He lives in Virginia.*

## Blood Relations

*by S.L. Varnado*

**Bitter Blood: A True Story  
of Southern Pride,  
Madness and Multiple Murder**

*by Jerry Bledsoe*  
New York: E.P. Dutton;  
468 pp., \$19.95



In 1840, when Edgar Allan Poe wrote the first modern detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," an unsuspecting public scarcely realized it was witnessing the birth of a new genre that would actually become the most ecumenical of all literary forms.

Since Poe's time, the detective story has flourished among readers of every

creed, class, and nationality. There are clerical detectives (Father Brown and Rabbi David Small); aristocratic detectives (Lord Peter Wimsey); sleazy detectives (Sam Spade); French, Spanish, and Indian detectives (Inspectors Maigret, Alvarez, and Ghote); septuagenarian detectives (Miss Marple); and even a blind detective (Max Carrados).

Indeed, the profession has become so overcrowded in recent years that Truman Capote hit upon the idea of widening the field by transforming the fictional crime story into the factual crime story. The result was his amazingly successful *In Cold Blood*, which spawned a host of imitators. Today, the "true crime story" is as popular as its fictional counterpart.

Jerry Bledsoe's *Bitter Blood* is one of the latest entries in this new form. Bledsoe, a reporter for the *Goldsboro News & Record* in North Carolina, bases his tale of murder and mayhem on a group of award-winning news stories that he wrote in 1985. The book recounts a series of multiple murders occurring in 1984-85 among three prominent and wealthy families in Kentucky and North Carolina. Ultimately, nine people lost their lives in this Grand Guignol. In an afterword to the book, Bledsoe informs the reader that he wrote the story in an attempt to understand why the tragedies happened. This is an ambitious goal, and it gives Bledsoe's work an integrity and seriousness it might otherwise have lacked.

Bledsoe's scenario is a complex one. On a quiet Sunday morning in July 1984, Dolores Lynch, a wealthy sixty-eight-year-old widow, and her daughter Janie were found in their suburban home outside Louisville, Kentucky, brutally gunned down by an unknown assailant. Since nothing in the house had been touched, police were baffled by a lack of motive for the crime. The following year, three members of the socially prominent Newsom family of North Carolina were found murdered in the living room of their large and elegant home in Winston-Salem. Again, no motive for the brutal slayings was apparent.

At first, the two crimes seemed unrelated, but as police dug deeper they began to wonder if a link might exist between them. The investigation eventually focused on Susie Sharp

Lynch, a former beauty queen at Wake Forest University and the niece of North Carolina's first woman Supreme Court justice. Although Susie seemed an unlikely suspect in murders involving her own parents as well as members of the Lynch family, there were some puzzling circumstances. From childhood Susie had been an impetuous and high-strung girl, prone to sudden outbursts of rage. At the age of 24, while working on a graduate degree at Wake Forest, she had met and married Tom Lynch, son of the first victim. The marriage broke up a few years later, and at the time of the murders Susie was engaged in a bitter legal battle with Tom over the custody of their two young sons. Susie was also known to have become increasingly bitter toward her mother and father, Robert and Florence Newsom, because of their refusal to side with her in the custody fight. These were rather thin motives, but the police were interested.

As they pried deeper into the case, they learned that Susie had formed a strange and unhealthy relationship with Fritz Klenner, her first cousin. Like Susie, Klenner was related to both the Newsom and Sharp families. The son of a nationally famous physician, Klenner was described by acquaintances as a neurotic and unstable young man who nursed secret grudges and odd anxieties. A medical school dropout, a health freak, a gun collector, and a self-described "survivalist," he labored under a thwarted ambition of living up to the expectations of his prestigious father. Fritz and Susie were apparently drawn to one another by their mutual frustrations. When Susie moved in with him, bringing her sons along, the stage was set for a version of Euripides' *Medea* in modern dress.

As more and more clues fell into place, it became evident that Susie and Fritz had planned and executed the family murders out of a twisted desire for revenge on Susie's husband as well as the Newsom family. The police collected the necessary evidence and moved quickly to make an arrest—but not quickly enough. The final episode of this 20th-century *Götterdämmerung*, in which Susie and Fritz destroyed themselves after first executing Susie's sons, adds a grisly twist to a tale of pride, hatred, and pointless revenge.

Like many examples of the true crime story, *Bitter Blood* is told naively and without literary embellishment. The artistry, atmosphere, and nuances of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* are missing. Bledsoe's journalistic preoccupation with "just the facts, ma'am" leads him into needless complexities, and the reader often must wade through an unassimilated mass of names, dates, family connections, and biographical sketches, many of which have little relation to the central narrative. As a consequence, the book sometimes reads like a police report. Paradoxically, however, this gives it a sense of immediacy and verisimilitude that a more artistic finish might have lessened.

The thesis arising indirectly from *Bitter Blood* contradicts a number of theories dear to modern sociology and psychology. By implication Bledsoe seems to argue that evil is not necessarily the result of environmental factors: that it is more like an ingrained flaw in human nature. Susie Sharp Lynch and Fritz Klenner had the advantages of money, education, and social position. Both were from upper-class Southern families, and both were raised in an atmosphere of what used to be called "good breeding." Yet in spite of this, they seemed bent on wrecking their lives and the lives of others.

What went wrong? Bledsoe sifts through the paraphernalia of abnormal psychology—"classical mental disorders," "father hatred," "paranoia"—but appears to rest his case on pure metaphysics. He closes the book with a statement by Susie's brother Rob Newsom: "My sister despised the parable of the prodigal son. She thought it was unjust, unfair, and she didn't believe Jesus said it . . . in my sister's mind, you always had to be right because the consequences of being wrong were awesome . . . I don't know anything to call that but a sort of spiritual sickness." This is a great deal like the classical definition of pride, and while such terminology may not appeal to the modern psychologist, it would perhaps have appealed to Dostoyevsky, Sophocles, or St. Augustine. Stories such as this remind us that social and family relationships are often a thin veneer covering the mysterious area of human nature that Joseph Conrad called "heart of darkness," Herman

Melville termed "the mystery of iniquity," and Christians refer to as "original sin."

All of which returns us to the mystery of the mystery story. Why do we "enjoy" these horrendous tales of blood, jealousy, spite, and violence? Do they appeal to some unhealthy instinct in us? Do they encourage the mayhem they describe? Recently, a number of high-minded reformers have taken this view, and I must admit that in certain instances they may be right. But in the long run, humanity has given a different answer. Although Poe invented the modern version of the crime story, its antecedents extend back to the Bible, Greek tragedy, Renaissance drama, and the Gothic novel. The general public, as G.K. Chesterton pointed out, is going to have its murder stories, whether in the form of penny dreadfuls or in the work of Conrad, Dostoyevsky, and Faulkner. Perhaps the prophet Jeremiah summed up the ultimate appeal of such tales: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

S.L. Varnado is a professor of English at the University of South Alabama and author of *Haunted Presence* (University of Alabama Press).

## A Way Out by Peter J. Leithart

After Apartheid: The Solution  
for South Africa

by Frances Kendall and Leon Louw  
San Francisco: Institute for  
Contemporary Studies;  
253 pp., \$17.95

Discussions of the future of apartheid generally assume that South Africa must remain a homogenous "unitary state." This assumption not only presents a paralyzing dilemma (either democracy or apartheid), but also a prescription for continued social turmoil, if not outright civil war. A unitary state is a "winner take all" state—if there are indeed only two alternatives, then there is simply no hope for a just and stable settlement. Almost no one defends the injustices of apartheid; on the other hand, as if any additional