

precise as water when water wishes to perform both in and out of light. Let it lie hidden in my eye, I thought, her tiny spirit, buoyant in the excessive salt of that dead sea . . ."

It is Suleri's contention that "there are no women in the Third World," and my assumption that this is one reason why she has written this book; I also assume that this is the reason why she is here in the States, teaching English at Yale, a world apart from Pakistan. But while "ugly, gray" New Haven, so far from where she grew up, is no refuge for Sara Suleri, part of her dilemma is that while she is free to go back, she has chosen to live in exile. What she has gained from so much loss—some of it unstoppable, to be sure, but the rest jettisoned—I am not sure I yet understand. This book, I suppose. But I can see why the ancients equated exile with death, and I think Jonah was never so much at peace as when he was powerless, choiceless, in the belly of the whale.

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## One Hell For Another

by Thomas McGonigle

*Seven Thousand Days in Siberia*

by Karlo Štajner

New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux;  
\$30.00

Karlo Štajner spent seven thousand days in Siberia and learned nothing. Of course the reader is moved by the awfulness of spending all that time in the Gulag, but still he is left only with the experience of a man who survived. Yet, for better or for worse, for many of the named victims, Štajner's book is the only memorial.

When Štajner singles out a General Brödis, the crime becomes vivid: "After breakfast, I saw General Brödis putting his possessions into a bundle. He took off his slippers (which I had always envied, since it was hard to walk around the cell wearing shoes all the time), placed them on top of the bundle, and then handed me everything, saying: 'You have been a friend to me. Please

keep this as a souvenir; I won't need it anymore.'"

Such honesty makes Štajner's book difficult to ignore on a purely human level. And the constant emphasis on sleeping, eating, and excreting under the most horrendous circumstances of months upon months of 30 and 40 below zero reinforces our understanding of what actually did happen. (Unfortunately, the closer you get to the actual truth of the Gulag, the more difficult it is to live with the happy-go-lucky Soviet-American relations.)

Karlo Štajner is an Austrian who worked many years for the Yugoslav Communist Party. A dedicated activist, he arrived in Moscow on September 14, 1932, to work for the Comintern. In due course he was arrested and framed for being a Gestapo agent. Sentenced to ten years in Siberia, he was "tried" again at the end of his first hitch and given an additional ten years for "anti-Soviet behavior."

Štajner served out both sentences and would probably have died in Siberia had not Tito asked Khrushchev for an accounting of 113 Yugoslav Communist Party members sent to Siberia by Stalin. Two days after Tito's query, Khrushchev replied, "Exactly one hundred are no longer of this world."

Štajner's book was published in Yugoslavia in Serbian, because it served to lay out the differences between Tito and Stalin, between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. In a way, it also served to hide the existence of concentration camps in Yugoslavia, where opponents of Tito, branded as agents of Stalin, were imprisoned. One such camp at the Naked Island (Goli Otok) was detailed in Venko Markovski's memoir, *Goli Otok, The Island of Death*, published in Bulgaria, where it served to emphasize the differences between the Bulgarians and the Yugoslavs and to obscure the camps in Bulgaria, and so on . . .)

The reader has no recourse but to go to Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* for the actual truth of the camps. They were not created by accident, despite anything that Štajner (who remains a Communist to this day) might think. The camps were set up by Lenin himself as early as December 1917—two months after the October coup. Perhaps Štajner needed the fiction of blaming Stalin for the camps as a way

to keep his faith in Communism. Sadly, the reader is left just with horror.

Politics, as Štajner's book makes it very clear, do matter and do have consequences, and it is good to read accounts like Štajner's, flawed though they may be, to remind us that when only politics remain and when everything becomes political, camps become necessary.

There are, however, other books, like *What a Beautiful Sunday* by Jorge Semprun, a former member of the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party (author of the screenplays for films like *Z* and *La Guerre est finie*). As a young man, Semprun survived Buchenwald, survived writing a falsified record of his experiences in the camp, survived being expelled from the party, survived with the illusion that there were distinctions between the Nazi and the Communist camps—survived until an April 11, 1975, appearance of Solzhenitsyn on French television convinced him that he was one of the good left-wingers who condemn the camps while approving of everything that set them up in the first place.

*What A Beautiful Sunday*, a memoir of Semprun's encounter with Solzhenitsyn, unlike Štajner's *Seven Thousand Days in Siberia*, is the right book for gaining an understanding of how this century has come to be dominated by the image of the Camp, and why we are all likely to see many more of them, all set up in the best interests of the people.

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## Catching the Wry

by David Kaufman

*In Search of J.D. Salinger*

by Ian Hamilton

New York: Random House.

According to Leon Edel, the art of biography is a "noble" endeavor. But in our celebrity-crazed era, when prurient interests have supplanted respect for artistic accomplishment, the most popular biographies are those emphasizing lurid details. Joan Peyser's

## Very Old

by Tom Murray

To us it might seem that life  
For him growing older, grew harder:  
Endlessly attending an invalid wife,  
House-cleaning, replenishing the larder.

Tuesday and Friday are his outside days.  
Shopping bag in hand he stands  
At windows. You can see the reflected gaze  
Of blue eyes measuring blends,

Prices and quantities. The years  
Have etched the face, drawn too fine the skin  
For the mobility of hopes and fears;  
He keeps revelation within,

Knowing now that, having paid full toll,  
He has outlived his years; each fraction  
Of his chronology has become one whole,  
Each second an entity, no longer one section

Leading to another. All that's past  
Is turned to stone. Nothing now to narrate;  
The long experiment has reached its last,  
The test-tube's layered contents set and separate.

Memory no more can hurt. The wedded  
Bed is history. The mongol child  
That died is forever embedded  
In a glacier's depth. What's gone is filed,

Sealed and shut, no fingered door giving  
Emotion an inch of access. No breath  
Of air stirs the grassy, rutted past. By mere living  
He has absorbed the long liberation of death.

psychosexual exploration of Leonard Bernstein anticipated Arianna Stassinopoulous Huffington's even nastier and more controversial reproachment of Picasso. With a passionate impudence, the 80's are displaying an unhealthy interest in demythologizing yesterday's heroes. And within this hostile environment, where it pays to snoop for the ultimate putdown, Ian Hamilton's "search" for J.D. Salinger seems that much more inexcusable, since it sets out to expose the life of a writer who devoted considerable energy to securing his privacy. The only thing tasteful about Hamilton's *In Search of J.D. Salinger* is the subdued design of its dust jacket.

In all fairness to Hamilton, many of us share his fascination for Salinger. The rare photograph, for example, taken from behind as he walks up the hill from his mailbox or returns to his house proper from his studio cottage, has prompted a million words on the state of his health and the circumstances of his life. If Confucius had given as much thought to Salinger as Salinger has evidently given to Eastern mysticism, the oriental philosopher might have concluded that "he who wants to be the center of attention should remove himself from the picture altogether."

At one point, Hamilton goes so far as to suggest Salinger's reason for closeting himself in the first place may have been, ironically, a ploy for attention. At another, Hamilton assumes, naturally enough, that Salinger went into hiding because he had something to hide. But beyond suggesting that this "something" relates to Salinger's serving as a "spy" during the Second World War, and "that somewhere in his spying past there is a secret so secret that he now has no choice but to dwell perpetually in shadows, in daily fear, no doubt, of some terrible exposure," Hamilton doesn't even hazard a guess as to what that "secret" might be.

Hamilton has written a highly-regarded biography of Robert Lowell and has a scholarly background that would suggest he would rise above any ludicrous desire to "dish" his subject. Hamilton insists that his mission to capture Salinger's life was originally founded on good faith. When he embarked on the biography in 1982, armed with a \$100,000 advance from