

it—Darwin, Freud, Marx, to name only three—we must wonder who needs universities at all. For, clearly, the great intellectual steps forward in the natural and social sciences were taken somewhere else, on the *Beagle*, or in the imagination of a despised Viennese Jew, or in the hall of the British Museum, open to a lowly foreign journalist.

What marks the university as different? It is that we assemble here to treat learning as shared, plural, open, diverse. What we institutionalize in universities is the possibility of shared discourse and public exchange of knowledge among different people who know different things and seek to find a language common to those different things.

What it means to study, in some one place, mathematics and botany, or sociology and religion, is that we judge it better to study these things in one place than in many places. And in the end that judgment addresses a deeper concern for explaining many things in a few ways. If chemistry did not speak to geology, or physics to mathematics, or economics to political science, then the premise of the university that learning many things helps us to understand them all in some cogent way proves flawed. But it is not flawed, for, as we know, economics without mathematics, and political science without history, and anthropology without psychology, are not possible. Learning flows across disciplinary lines, to the discomfort of the limited and the specialized, because humanity will not stay within bounds. In times past the analytical mind turned to measure the dimensions of God.

In universities we draw together many disciplines in quest for not infor-

mation but understanding. And by understanding we mean the capacity of many things to find explanation in some one way. What this means for those of us who study the particularities of a single human group—the Jews through time, or the Classics, or the anthropology of this tribe or the sociology of that class or locus—is simple. We all learn a great deal about some thing. But only when we can intelligibly address others, who know a great deal about some other thing, are we able to join in that mode of discourse that makes the university unique.

When we see what we know as suggestive, as data that serve as an example of a condition to be explored in diverse examples, and when we offer what we know as useful examples for the testing of hypotheses of common interest and concern, then we form universities. For how we treat knowledge indicates where we are. The entry of any subject requires displaying a passport: this is what I, knowing what I know, can teach you about you, knowing what you know—and therefore I can learn from you as well.

The framers of the Talmudic canon compare to the builders of universities in that they put together all knowledge, as they identified worthwhile knowledge, and explained everything they knew in some one way. They produced not an encyclopedia of knowledge but a single coherent statement of what they knew, set forth in a cogent and proportioned way. It was their theory of the whole, all together and all at once. When we can do that, we shall also have founded a tradition of learning that will endure, where it serves, as theirs has endured.

Jacob Neusner is a professor at Brown.

LETTERS



The Economics and Politics of Book Reviewing

by Jack Miles

Some months ago, Katherine Dalton of *Chronicles* wrote an article in which, it seemed to me, she seriously exaggerated the leftist homogeneity of the literary establishment and further overestimated the hegemony of *The New York Times*.

I begin with the question of the hegemony of the *Times*, but my acknowledgment must be larger than any challenge I can offer. *The New York Times Book Review* is, quite simply, both the biggest and the best of the weekly newspaper book sections. Quantitatively, the *Times* publishes more reviews per week than any other American newspaper. On at least a few Sundays in the year its quota of reviews would equal that of the runners-up—the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*—combined.

Qualitatively, too, the *Times* knows what it is talking about better than the competition does. In so saying, I allude to the fact that no book is reviewed in the NYTBR that has not been read in its entirety by some member of the book review staff, a policy I recently confirmed with editor Rebecca Sinkler. Nina King, editor of the *Washington Post Book World*, says that the most any book reviewed in her supplement gets in the way of reading before the

Plains

POETRY JOURNAL

Edited by Jane Greer. Traditional poetic conventions used in vigorous, compelling new works. Heartening manifesto for SASE. \$3.50/sample.
Plains Poetry Journal, P.O. Box 2337, Bismarck, ND 58502

decision to review is made is a half hour. Many books get less. At the third-ranking *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, I hasten to add, most books get much less.

Both the quantity and the quality maintained at the *Times* cost money. Several years ago, the well-connected head of an old New York publishing house told me that it was "common knowledge" that the *Times* lost one million dollars per year on its book review. The numbers to confirm these stories are not mine to cite; but I can report, on the basis of my experience at the *Los Angeles Times*, that such a loss is plausible if not, by now, decidedly conservative. In the spring of 1988 newsprint costs jumped 20 percent, while newspapers' advertising base shrank. Advertising is down at *The New York Times* (this is a matter of public record), and the result is that the loyalty of the paper to its large book review is a more salient and admirable fact about that newspaper than ever.

And as for size, so also for editorial quality. It costs money, in other words, to pay the NYTBR's staff of eight "pre-readers," the number recently cited in *Publishers Weekly*. (I note in passing and just a bit anxiously, that as recently as 1985 the then-editor of the NYTBR told me that he had ten pre-readers on staff.) At other newspapers, if any pre-reading is done at all (and how else does one separate meritorious first novels from earnest failures?), those who do it have other, distracting duties. The result is that those other newspapers cannot know the books that their book supplements are talking about as well as the *Times* does. The NYTBR's greater knowledge of the books it is reviewing clearly has paid off.

Finally, there is the matter of distribution. Though it is possible to subscribe to the *Washington Post Book World* (no separate subscriptions to *Chicago Tribune Books* or *Los Angeles Times Book Review* are available), the *Post* falls far short of the *Times'* 100,000 separately distributed copies. The separate circulation of the NYTBR equals or exceeds that of most independent journals of opinion, and its influence on the nation is accordingly great. But the distribution system that assures this influence is no accident: it is an investment by the

Times in its own status as a national newspaper.

Having said this much about and on behalf of the NYTBR, I must now insist that its influence can be overstated. One proof of the *Times'* limited influence is the fact that *Paco's Choice* by Chicagoan Larry Heinemann had won the 1987 National Book Award for fiction, though the *Times* had not reviewed it. Interestingly, the 1988 National Book Award for fiction has gone to another novel that the *Times* had not previously reviewed: *Paris Trout* by Pete Dexter.

And reverse examples also come to mind, by which I mean examples of books that, celebrated in the *Times*, have since faded. Loud has been the silence, in the 1988 postseason literary compositions, about Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. A front-page review in the NYTBR did wonders for that title—for a while. Briefly, Kennedy seemed to be everywhere. And *The New York Times Sunday* magazine kept his ball in play with a major "debate" article about his thesis. Gradually, however, the fact that the opening four-fifths of the book were a kind of college textbook began to weigh against it. It looks much duller now than it once did.

I would also maintain that New York counts for less than it once did because of the way in which nationwide bookstore chains—whose headquarters are outside New York and whose outlets are often outside the Northeast—have replaced the New York-dominated book clubs as launch vehicles for the most popular new books. The chains monitor local sales with great skill; and because of that skill, local best-sellers—books about the Bears or the Cubs in Chicago, for example—have a much better chance to become best-sellers than they did when the process was more New York-bound. True, the chains use the *Times'* best-seller list as a basis for their discounts, but they blithely ignore the *Times'* book editor when he (or more recently, she) puts on the cover something like the three-volume collected letters of Jack London (Stanford University Press).

The *Times* cannot make such a work sell at a truly commercial pace. Nor can its silence stop a chain-backed hot property from having a very good run. What the *Times* can do is, as

noted, affect the process by which the country makes up its collective mind about a book. But even here, though it is by far the loudest voice on the jury, it is demonstrably not the only one; and I see no reason to believe that its influence is growing.

I turn now to the politics of book reviewing.

Literary politics is of two sorts: literary politics properly so called; and political politics on the book page.

Literary politics is the sort of thing referred to under the heading "The Ethics of Book Reviewing" in the *Los Angeles Times'* "Practical Guidelines for Reviewers." Thus: "If you receive for review a book by a friend or an enemy, please notify the Book Review immediately. The presumption should be that you will not review the book in question. Exceptions will occasionally be made, but please do not make a silent and private exception for yourself. There are books enough and reviewers enough that old allies and old antagonists need not review one another's work."

The alliances and antagonisms intended are, obviously (at least I hope it is obvious), of the personal sort. If it were not so, then anyone who had written a book like the one under review could be considered a rival and therefore an antagonist; in the end all novelists could be barred from reviewing current fiction. And yet, even as such extremes are rejected, it may be acknowledged that the fit between reviewer and reviewed can sometimes be too exact. As a New York publicity director once cracked, "If you've got a book about helicopters, *The New York Times* will get a helicopter to review it."

The disqualification rule becomes most problematical where literary politics become political politics on the book page, for here more than elsewhere it is crucial that the voices of advocacy and antagonism, as well as those of detachment and neutrality, should be heard. Take the fight out of politics, and you take the politics out of politics.

Let me offer some examples.

On March 18, 1989, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* published a review of *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the '60s* by radicals-turned-conservative Peter Collier and David Horowitz. Our reviewer

was Chilton Williamson Jr., then book editor of *National Review* and now senior editor at *Chronicles*: conservative on conservative, in other words. On April 2, 1989, we published a reader's letter: "How could you assign Horowitz and Collier's book to a senior editor of the *National Review* for review? That is like asking Roy Cohn to review a defense of Joe McCarthy. There isn't a critical—in any sense of the word—sentence in the review. Williamson's review is a rehash of the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* and the lies of the Bush campaign. . . . I am disappointed in *The Times*."

Alongside the March 18 review of *Destructive Generation* we published a review of Paul Johnson's *Intellectuals*. Our reviewer was Russell Jacoby, author of the decidedly liberal *The Last Intellectuals*: liberal on conservative, this time. On April 2, 1989, we found ourselves publishing a letter that read: "I have just read with disgust your paper's review by Russell Jacoby of Paul Johnson's latest book. . . . Jacoby neither reviews the book's content, nor effectively refutes either Johnson's premise or his supporting data. Rather, your collegiate reviewer seems content to demonstrate an intellectual phenomena [sic] which probably encouraged the creation of 'Intellectuals' in the first place: Hysterical intolerance for any thought that is not ideologically collectivist in content, sympathy or tone."

To both letter writers our choice of reviewer seemed perverse because the outcome seemed predictable. Surely we knew in advance that Williamson was likely to approve of *Destructive Generation* and Jacoby to disapprove of *Intellectuals*. But I maintain that the fact that advocacy or antagonism may be foreseeable in a given case does not

mean that the means of the advocacy or antagonism will be foreseeable. And getting there can be all the fun. It could have been predicted that Christopher Hitchens, writing for *The Nation*, would dislike Johnson's *Intellectuals*. It could not have been predicted that he would express his dislike by means of a wealth of scurrilous and hilarious *ad hominem* stories about Johnson. (I add, in Hitchens' defense, that this is the sort of attack that Johnson does to all the subjects of his book.) And it surely could not have been predicted that Joe Sobran, writing in *National Review*, would also dislike Johnson's book.

The real problem is that a political book cannot be reviewed three times in one publication: once by an ally, once by an antagonist, and once by a neutral. In the particular context of book reviewing under newspaper auspices, I do take the responsibilities of basic reporting with extra seriousness. And yet even here the book review as a genre contains within it elements of editorial and "op ed" writing as well as elements of art criticism. If authors are so often enraged by their reviews, it may be in part because these newspaper functions, normally dispersed, are in book reviewing so compressed.

In the end, even if it is the principal duty of the newspaper to report rather than to opine, fairness can only be approached by tacking and counter-tacking, cruel or capricious as this must seem in individual cases. It simply must be arranged, in other words, that on some occasions a liberal will comment on a liberal, a conservative on a liberal, a noncombatant on all partisans, and so forth. If readers are not sometimes exposed to the kind of argument that only a polemic or an apology can deliver, they will miss the whole flavor of the thing. A measure of detachment

may be vital, but a surfeit of it is fatal. Variety, here, is not the spice, it is the very staff of life.

I have not yet addressed the implication in Ms. Dalton's piece that, in the mainstream press, most liberal books are reviewed by friendly liberals, while most conservative books are reviewed by unfriendly liberals. A full response to that charge would involve something like a book review head count, an impossibility in practice, and so I offer only a suggestive example or two.

A recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*—surely the parade example of a mainstream left/liberal publication—quoted at length Andrei Sakharov's grave reservations, then only just voiced, about the concentration of Soviet power in the hands of Mikhail Gorbachev. Another example: on March 30, 1989, *The New York Review of Books* offered a discussion of Sebastian Haffner's still-untranslated *Pact With the Devil: German-Russian Relations from the First to the Second World War*. Ideologically speaking, the Soviet Union lives and breathes by "The Great Fatherland War." But, who armed Germany after World War I? Who trained its officers? Haffner's book is potentially far more devastating to the Soviet self-image than even Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror*.

In these two cases *The New York Review of Books* offers either primary documentation or early intelligence on themes dear to the conservative heart. I know of no conservative publication with a comparable record either on its own conservative agenda or, much less, on the liberal agenda.

My own hope is that these two examples from the last two or three issues of a quintessentially liberal publication, joined to the politics of book reviewing at the *Los Angeles Times* as I have outlined it, may make Katherine Dalton and the readers of *Chronicles* think twice before speaking of the liberal literary establishment. Call us an establishment if you like. But, reversing the proverb, don't miss the individual trees in that liberal forest.

Jack Miles is book editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. The article by Katherine Dalton to which he refers is "Books and Book Reviewing, or Why All Press Is Good Press," in the January 1989 issue of *Chronicles*.

LIBERAL ARTS UNHOLY FOOLS

I cannot condemn a man for ignorance, but behold him with as much pity as I do Lazarus. It is no greater charity to cloath his body than apparel the nakedness of his soul. . . . To this (as calling myself a scholar,) I am obliged by the duty of my condition; I make not therefore my head a grave, but a treasure of knowledge; I intend no monopoly but a community in learning, I study not for my own sake only, but for theirs that study not for themselves.

—Sir Thomas Browne,
Religio Medici



The Importance of Being by Ernest

by Gregory McNamee

The Betrayal of Hemingway

If Ernest Hemingway had any notion of what would happen to his first drafts, miscellanea, letters received and sent, and unfinished manuscripts after his death, it's likely he would have set fire to his study and all its contents before priming his shotgun and blowing his brains out on the second of July, 1961. For no sooner was he in his grave than did the supposed guardians of his legacy ransack Hemingway's literary remains, ostensibly in the lofty interests of American literary history, more transparently for the continuing royalties the remaining manuscripts would add to the trove earned by the sales of work published in Hemingway's lifetime.

From those looted papers soon came the grabbag reminiscence *A Moveable Feast*, a book assembled by Hemingway's widow, Mary. Using various drafts, she transposed passages and chapters and rewrote substantial portions of the text, claiming all the while that her husband had himself finished the book in 1960 before leaving Cuba. Although she edited the book well, Mary did not treat her husband's legacy with anything like restraint.

Six years later, in 1970, *Islands in the Stream* was issued, patched together out of drafts of a huge, unfinished

cycle of stories Hemingway once had planned to call *Harry Morgan*. Instead, he abandoned the project. Knowing that the work was not up to his standards—and that the published books of his last years were plainly inferior to his early masterpieces—he presciently destroyed most of his rough versions. (That unfinished cycle had produced, over the years, the tedious novel *To Have and Have Not* and the fine novella *The Old Man and the Sea*; Hemingway made such use of his discarded drafts as he thought appropriate, sometimes successfully.) There followed Hemingway's *Selected Letters*, drawing on private correspondence (which he had always regarded as privileged), along with a string of biographies and memoirs written despite Hemingway's having asked that no such book be issued for a hundred years after his death, and despite his having steadfastly refused to supply material or submit to interviews for proposed critical and life studies.

Fifteen years of silence passed before the assault on Hemingway's legacy was renewed. Then, in 1985, Scribner's released *The Dangerous Summer*, a piece of occasional journalism that Hemingway did not intend to publish as a book, although it came packaged as if Papa had wanted it that way. In 1959, *Life* magazine, the original publisher of *The Old Man and the Sea*, sent Hemingway to Spain to cover a round of bullfights by two rival matadors, the twenty-seven-year-old Antonio Ordoñez, whose father Cayetano had been immortalized in *The Sun Also Rises*, and Antonio's brother-in-law Luis Miguel Dominguín. Hemingway quickly sided with Ordoñez, and during his stay he acted more as a rum-soaked publicity agent than as a journalist. Ignoring the fact that Dominguín was technically the better bullfighter of the two, Hemingway described him as a coward and hailed Ordoñez as the crowning glory of Spanish tauromachy. Hemingway went home to file his story, while Ordoñez soon became famous throughout Spain for his despicable tactics—hiding behind his cape, killing from the side, running away from the tiny *medios toros* he chose to fight. He was eventually booed off the bullfighting circuit.

Life had asked Hemingway for ten

thousand words, or about 40 typescript pages. Its editors received a rambling manuscript of one hundred and twenty thousand words, approaching the size of Hemingway's classic account of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*. It was less a study of the Ordoñez-Dominguín rivalry than, as James Michener put it in his glancing introduction to the book, "a confused farewell from a great and legendary figure." Confused it is. The reader arrives at ringside almost accidentally, for the bullfights stand as anticlimaxes to Hemingway's real story: a foggy odyssey from barroom to barroom, where tired literary conversations and drunken anecdotes of the Spanish Civil War are the daily pastime; from sickbed to sickbed, where the matadors spend most of their hours recovering from carelessly earned wounds and where Hemingway spent most of his hours nursing hangovers and a rotting liver; from party to party, from town to town.

It was not one of Hemingway's shining moments. Indeed, *The Dangerous Summer* approaches Hemingway at his worst. Swimming in the old man's well-worn rhetorical tricks, the hard underpunctuated flourishes and tough-guyisms of 30 years' practice, the book reaches the point of unwitting self-parody:

We inspected the animals, the poultry and stables and the gun room and I went into the cage of a wolf which had been recently trapped on the place and stayed with him which pleased Antonio. The wolf looked healthy and the odds were all against his having hydrophobia so I figured all he can do is bite you, so why not go in and see if you can work with him. The wolf was very nice and recognized someone who liked wolves.

In the remaining two years of his life, Hemingway came to see that he had misjudged both Dominguín and Ordoñez, and he increasingly regarded the *Life* essay—which the magazine's editors had meanwhile chopped to their original specifications—as an embarrassment for all concerned. Hence, unlike some of his other occasional journalism, he did not shape the