

## Before

*by Harold McCurdy*

"A great while ago the world begon  
with hey, ho, the winde and the raine."  
— *Twelfth Night*

Before the pyramids rose, before the cities,  
Before the caves of painted horse and deer,  
Before the cairns and cromlechs, there was fear  
In little lives, and a thousand forgotten pities  
Thronging around some silent, leaf-strewn bier.

The history of mankind is a long history  
Of grief, and terror balanced against terror,  
Of hunting for the lost, of valiant error,  
Of consciousness awake to its own mystery,  
Stuck, but for love, in mind's self-serving mirror.

History? Well, prehistory! We must scrape  
Below the shaped things to begin to know  
The depth of human and prehuman woe,  
The scurrying through the leaves, the near-escape,  
The meteor falling, the earth-shattering blow.

Then, after a while, a long long after a while,  
The scribes scratch out some record of an event,  
Or man or woman worth a monument,  
Or celebrate themselves, till the crammed file  
Of history asks to be asked what history meant.

Times pass, and time is passing, while we still  
Wait for a clue. Strange happenings occur:  
Cordelia dead, and the King weeping for her,  
The throne usurped by Regan and Goneril.  
Fast, fast, the rumors fly, the spindles whir.

Poised on the warhead of a Titan missile  
Exploding in Arkansas, we cast a glance  
At Titans of the old time, and the advance  
From Then to Now; and whistle, if we can whistle,  
The Future up from the darkness we call Chance.



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

## America Through the Looking Glass

by Thomas Fleming

Not so long ago anticommunist conservatives used to rail against the mirror fallacy, the leftist assumption that the Soviet Union could be studied in Western terms. If only we could strengthen the hand of the doves and "responsible" elements, we could keep the country from falling into the hands of the hard-liners and hawks—the Soviet analogues of Barry Goldwater. After supporting a KGB thug (Andropov) as an urbane, Westernized scotch-drinker, it was inevitable that Gorbachev be seen as the savior not only of his country but of the entire world. All that was left was the Nobel Peace Prize—routinely awarded to butchers and hypocrites (with a joint award to Le Duc Tho and Henry Kissinger, they achieved a double word score). Now that he has the Norwegian medal of infamy, Gorbachev has carte blanche to proceed with his plans, whatever they are, for reconstructing his empire.

But if it is illegitimate to hold up the U.S.S.R. to the mirror of the U.S.A., the reverse is still a useful exercise, and by looking at recent events in Eastern Europe, we may be able to learn something about ourselves. To tell the truth, I

don't know very much about the Soviet Union. Like most Americans who sound off about global conflict, I don't know Russian, and a writer without an adequate grasp of the language is denied access not only to the newspapers, documents, and conversations that are the stuff of history, but also to the vocabulary of the spirit, the grammar and syntax of the national character.

Many of my conservative friends seem obsessed with all things Soviet in the same way that puritans can be obsessed with sin. There is a political prurience that leads us to gloat loathingly over the crimes of Stalin (or Hitler), as we thank God we Americans are not like other men. And if conservatives are prone to overestimate the crimes of Lenin and Stalin—Atilla the Hun or even Shaka Zulu might have killed as many, if only they had had the means—some of them are just as ready to overvalue the talents and accomplishments of the Russian people. We hear much of Russian "spirituality" and of the magnificence of Russian literature. Solzhenitsyn, before he was unmasked as a religious nationalist and therefore reactionary, was treated by some