

Lagunita"? Who seriously thinks of Our Lady of the Angels in connection with El Lay, or of Santa Cruz as having anything to do with the cross of Christ?

The result, for some of us anyway, is reflected in one of my favorite California stories. When some professor (maybe Hugh Kenner?) who had taught out here for many years left to take a job back east, someone asked him how it felt to be leaving after all that time. He said, "Like checking out of a motel."

California, what I've seen of it, is like that: very pleasant, a good place to spend some time, but not somewhere you could actually get attached to. I'll leave with fond memories, but I won't miss it, exactly—not like I miss the South.

Most Californians seem to feel the same way. Many, in fact, don't even recognize that there's any other way to feel. So many came to California in the first place because they liked what it had to offer; if somewhere else offers more, they'll move on (as many now seem to be doing to Oregon). Location is just another consumer decision, a utilitarian, cost-benefit calculation—a different proposition from liking a place because it's your home. When Californians ask you to admire their state, they're asking you to compliment their discernment and good taste, just as they'd like you to admire their choice of automobile or wine.

Some people like to argue that the South is the most American part of America—usually as a compliment, though sometimes (as in a trashy book called *The Southern Mystique*) not. But John Crowe Ransom claimed in *I'll Take My Stand* that, no, the South

is the most *European* part of the nation. I now think Ransom was right. The South is different from the rest of the country, but especially from California, in many of the same ways Europe is different from America as a whole.

Two of my friends out here are Englishmen. Both grew up loving American music (jazz for one, rock and roll for the other); both came here straight out of university, became citizens, and haven't looked back. Both despise England; both love America. Both told me, in almost exactly the same words, "If you like America, you should like California."

I can see that. It's easy for a Southerner to make fun of California as a sort of New Age Florida, just as it's easy for Europeans to make fun of bumptious, naive, self-absorbed America. But the place can be exhilarating. The liberation from the past, from attachment to a social and even physical "place," the freedom to pursue happiness any way you can afford, the sheer newness and flux and sense of unending *possibility*—that's what America used to offer, and California still does. And that can be powerfully alluring, particularly to someone unhappy with a more rigid or traditional place—a place, that is, like England, or the South.

Yeah, I can see it. But it doesn't appeal to me. Frankly, I feel about California the way some of my Baptist friends feel about Bob Jones University, that it's a caricature of their tradition, an exaggeration of some of its features to the point of ugliness. No doubt if California were a separate country, I'd find its culture as charmingly exotic as its landscape and cuisine. But I don't like the idea that one American congressman in eight comes from here: those guys make laws that I have to obey. I don't like being held responsible as an American for what Californians do (no more, I presume, than they like being held accountable for what Southerners do). Most of all, though, I don't like being made to feel like the kind of anti-American European I've always despised.

John Shelton Reed should have returned by now to his home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, after a year in the Bay Area.

Letter From Scotland

by Katherine Dalton

Beyond the Fringe



Our Scottish friends were trying to explain the phenomenon of the television police, and we were trying to understand. Television sets are taxed yearly in Britain and require an annual sticker. But since the sticker buying is done on the honor system, the citizens of Great Britain enjoy an occasional visit from the television police, who come into the house to make sure the stickers are current. This year the postman had come up the glen sounding a warning that the sticker checker was just behind him. Our friends were in the clear but there was a lady up the glen, said Margaret, who'd had to make a quick run to the post office for a sticker for her black-and-white, and who'd simply hid her three color sets.

With a few exceptions the Scots seem resigned to the television tax, but the same cannot be said of the poll tax, which, they will remind you, Scotland had a year before the rest of the union. In Edinburgh, whose beauty is not generally marred by graffiti, what graffiti we did see was opposing that tax. In general the level of Scottish resentment against England goes largely unreported here, but the Scots National Party has a fair amount of sentimental support in Scotland, even among those who do not really want to break with England. (One strongly nationalistic lady of my friends' acquaintance persists in calling the land below the Tweed "Englandshire.")

We were in Perthshire to see our friends, but the main purpose of our trip had been to attend all we could at the Edinburgh Festival and its accompanying Fringe. By my count there were this past August sixteen Festival theater productions—the bigger, more ornate shows, where the companies have been invited—and something like 700 on the Fringe, where the quality ranges from good to awful, and where anyone who can rent a venue and snake his way through the British labor laws can mount a production. Given the sheer number of offerings and our limited

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time, we saw about one percent of what was playing—and that's just counting the theater, not the music, and dance, and the poetry readings.

Edinburgh is very proud of a festival that has put it on the international map, brings in tourist dollars, and allows it to outshine London for a month. Fittingly enough, then, the best play we saw was a Scottish production: the Traverse Theatre's production of *The Hour of the Lynx*. Edinburgh's Traverse has a good reputation for Fringe shows and this year mounted (among eleven others) this excellent play by Per Olav Enquist. *The Hour of the Lynx* is really a Swedish *Agnes of God*, for those of you who remember John Pielmeier's drama about a mother superior, a psychiatrist, and a novice charged with murdering her newborn baby, all in their various ways struggling for faith. Here in Enquist's play there is a young man (charged with a seemingly purposeless murder), a psychiatrist, and a female pastor.

The boy, never named, has been given a cat as part of an empathy experiment, the results of which have been disastrous—and the play takes for its themes the psychiatrist in need of counseling, the pastor in need of faith, and a young man who with his broken family and broken mind needs death more than anything else. The loss of the cat and his return, his "conversations" with the boy, and his promise that he died and was risen in order to bring the boy home—to the only heaven he can imagine, his grandfather's now destroyed house—unfold in a series of angry three-way conversations. The great power of Enquist's play comes from the poignancy of these searches for God, for the need that even enlightened modern Sweden has for some rhyme and reason, and for a very personal Savior. I can't tell how well Kim Dambaek's translation follows the original, but it played beautifully, and Simon Donald was especially good as the boy.

Oddly enough, that was about it for a solid drama among the productions we saw. Everything else, however good, was spectacle. The production values were very high in an American show, *Juan Darién*, produced by the Music-Theatre Group of New York. Originally staged at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1988, *Juan*

Darién won two Obies, no doubt for its sophisticated mix of music and masks and puppetry. Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga's story is about a jaguar cub turned into a child by the love of his foster mother, and turned back into a jaguar by the cruelty of his neighbors. The puppets ranged from Balinese shadow puppets to huge facial masks to full-scale, larger-than-life human-powered dolls, including an evil schoolteacher with a long warning finger and an open, flapping book atop his head instead of hair. The lyrics were sung in Spanish; the music was modern with a heavy overlay of Asian and Australian instruments; and the cast self-consciously multiracial. Despite the youth of the show's hero and the number of children in the audience, this is not a show for kids, and its needless coarseness was dismaying. But visually it was a success, and if the puppets were not completely original, reminiscent as they were of *Coppelia* and *Nutcracker* and Edvard Munch, they were wonderful all the same.

Also beautifully produced but again, not really a play in the old-fashioned sense was Daniel Reardon's *Spenser's Laye*, done by the Irish company Connaught. Here Edmund Spenser is an idealist in medieval garb, his patron Raleigh a bellowing Texan, his admirer Robert Devereux a Restoration fop, and his wife Elizabeth a Cork housewife who reappears (it's the same actress) as his patroness Elizabeth Gloriana. *Spenser's Laye* is a play about playing with language—an Elizabethan pastime if there ever was one—but the mix of periods is confusing and seemingly purposeless, except as part of the joke.

The drama turns on the paternity of Edmund Spenser's beloved son, the intrigues of Raleigh and Devereux and Cecil in a fight for the favors of the Queen, a poetical contest, and Spenser's pension. The set and costumes were beautiful in black and white, with a huge round mirror centerstage that served variously as bed and step and, when Gloriana stood upon it, the world at her feet. Equally wonderful were the period songs, among them "Musing," Raleigh's "Now What Is Love," and "Tobacco is Like Love."

In the disappointing category falls Britain's National Youth Music Thea-

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tre (not to be confused with Britain's National Youth Theatre), which mounted an original production called *October's Children*. The story is based loosely on the life of Gogol but is essentially about the street children that wandered the countryside following the October Revolution in 1917. The father of our heroine, Natasha, is a nobleman, but after his death this little child of privilege finds herself left to her own devices on the streets of St. Petersburg, finally joining up with a gang of likewise lost or abandoned children. There were some good moments: one clear boy soprano, and a good Baba Yaga number done by three young girls as the witch's three heads, dramatic and funny and tuneful all at once. But most of the rest of the music was entirely modern, which is to say tune-free, and quite difficult, and young Natasha did not quite have the voice for it. The book was terrible. "Did your mother sing you that song?" asks the hero at one point. "Then she was a Russian!" Similarly the politics would have gone over bet-

ter three years ago when Jeremy James Taylor and Frank Whateley and David Nield started putting the show together. Gogol is not perhaps the man of the moment, caught as that country is now between *perestroika* and the crack-down in the Baltic states.

Leaving the Western world altogether was the Ninagawa Company's doublebill of a traditional Noh play, *Sekidera Komachi*, and Yukio Mishima's reworking and modernizing of the same story, *Sotoba Komachi*. In some ways Yukio Yoshimura, performing the traditional Noh, was the less disconcerting, though his performance of an old woman remembering the conquests of her youth contained no action, little drama, and almost no movement. We were watching the play of her thoughts across her painted face, a piece of theatrical haiku that was very strange for a Westerner. But the Mishima, with its mix of East and West, its magic and overblown emotions, and its typically Mishimesque finish (love = death), in its effort to blend two traditions failed to encom-

pass either. Again, the production values were very high; the wonderful falling hibiscus flowers made for an excellent effect, but the play was disturbing in a way that was only creepy and brought no emotional release, and so as a tragedy it failed.

Finally, what seemed to be the hit among the invited Festival shows, and something I did not see, was the French company Archaos' *Bouinax*, which was generally described as a postmodern, Mad Max circus. But there are some things I cannot manage, and these include productions that open with an intended-to-be-humorous dwarf in a wheelchair and finish with a staged beheading complete with the drinking of the "dead" man's blood. It seems inevitable that this should come to New York and you will just have to read the *Times* for a more complete description.

With the possible exception of the Enquist play, the best night we spent out was not at the theater at all but at Edinburgh's Acoustic Music Centre. Every year during the Festival the Centre sets aside one room for a sing-along. Anybody with enough courage and a song to sing can come up and perform, and almost anybody does; the night we were there the crowd ranged from some moderately successful Scottish folksingers (such as Robin Laing) to visiting American and English tourists, and the songs varied from the Beatles to "The Soldier Maid" — happily more of the latter. It occurred to me, sitting there, that this haphazard and very Scottish sing-along, which cost the bar nothing and the patrons only the price of a few pints, was more appealing and in a deeper sense a real "cultural experience" than Festival productions such as the Japanese Noh or the French circus, which probably each cost thousands of pounds to bring over. In other words, between the Centre and the Traverse, what was truly best about this International Festival was its most Scottish parts. And I hope that one of the benefits of English/Scottish tensions and Scotland's relative poverty is that both have encouraged a very deeply felt Scottish pride, so that the Scots know this.

Katherine Dalton is the managing editor of *Chronicles*.

LIBERAL ARTS

ITALIAN DISSENT ON THE GULF WAR

Most of the major political parties in Italy support their country's participation in the anti-Iraq alliance, but a strange anti-war coalition has emerged, of Communists, Greens, Communion Liberation Catholics, and the Lega Lombarda, whose leader, Senator Umberto Bossi, has been the most outspoken critic of the war. According to the *Corriere della Sera* (January 20), Bossi told his followers that the War in the Gulf and the suppression of Lithuanian independence are parallel developments:

"The war in the Gulf and the repression of the autonomist tendencies in Lithuania serve the same objective: to reimpose the division of the world into two blocks as in the time of Yalta. On the one hand, there is Bush flexing his muscles in the Gulf; on the other is Gorbachev repressing the struggle for agreement. We regret that America no longer has a Reagan but a man full of doubts and hesitations like Bush. . . . The dead Lithuanians are our heroes."

POLITICS



Jeanne Berg

The Gulf Crisis in Europe

by Tomislav Sunic

Whatever may be the outcome of the crisis in the Gulf, one thing is already certain: European intellectuals will no longer be polarized along ideological lines, but divided along geopolitical fault lines. For the first time the European right is marching hand-in-hand with the European left, in common protest against the U.S. involvement in the Gulf. For the first time also the conservative press in Europe is printing anti-war articles whose pacifist tenor could easily outdo any leftist journal. By contrast, many former "sixty-eighters" who until recently tinkered with instant pacifism and global order under the banner of Marx, have discovered the glitter of the Stars and Stripes. That the emperor can swiftly change his garb is evident in France, where the former Marxist Régis Debray advocates the return of Europe to Europeans, while the former cheerleader of Maoism, Bernard Henry Lévy, praises the American war machine and its unflinching support of Israel.

The attitude of European conserva-

tives towards American involvement in the Gulf is complex on both geopolitical and philosophical counts. Before World War II, European conservatives of all stripes had a low opinion of America, a country they felt was exporting decadence, unwilling to give up its globalist preaching, and unable to reign in its marauding plutocratic and anational elites. After the war this hostile attitude markedly changed, partly because in the face of the real Communist threat coming from the East, the Hollywood culture of the West seemed the lesser evil.

Several years ago, when the spirit of Yalta came to an end in Eastern Europe, anticommunism lost its *raison d'être*. Its place had to be filled by the conservative *risorgimento* against liberal anomie and its major standard-bearer, the United States of America. Unlike their counterparts in America, European conservative militants, be they of traditional, nationalist, or revolutionary inclination, come from a pool of articulate and witty thinkers whose efforts are often put to the service of seemingly unpopular political platforms. Jean Marie Le Pen, the head of the French National Front, or Pino Rauti of the extreme right Movimento Sociale Italiano, their shrill nationalism notwithstanding, usually rely, behind the scenes, on the brains of those with prestigious academic and literary credentials.

The very independent-minded "New Right," probably one of the most outspoken groups of intellectuals operating today in Europe, has made no secret of its opposition to American Mideast policy. Its chief figure, Alain de Benoist, sees in the American presence in the Gulf the attempt of a dying global power to overextend its global ideology to peoples who might have a radically different idea of the world. In several of his recent pieces, Benoist compares American decision-makers to "world improvers," who, as true heirs of the biblical manifesto, endlessly search for the archetypes of evil: Indians, Germans, Communists, and

now, at the end of the century, the camel-riding, bomb-throwing, Israel-hating Arabs. In a sense, European conservative criticism of American foreign policy suggests that the American elites are incompetent to understand foreign traditional cultures; hence, when they fail to overawe their opponents either with money or the ideology of human rights, they must resort to airborne policing. Predictably, Benoist's current writing is more reminiscent of a paleo-leftist militant than of somebody with impeccable conservative credentials. Needless to say, few if any European conservatives believe in the U.S. pledge to uphold the rule of law in the Gulf. Most of them, along with an increasing number of leftists, concur that the purpose of U.S. military involvement is to drive a wedge between the Arab and the European world and further slow down the creation of grand Euro-Arab economic alliance. Behind the veneer of American legalism, Benoist sees a push for world supremacy by a hegemon whose major objectives have always been the same. In a piece in the December 6, 1990, issue of *Le Monde*, published a month before the air bombing started, he enumerated American objectives as follows:

—To remedy its economic problems and to avert a recession by escaping into the logic of war.

—To implant itself permanently in the Gulf in order to control oil wells.

—To destroy a regional power in the Middle East, to the benefit of those who have been demanding its annihilation for months.

—To take advantage of the transformation of the Soviet Union into a "Western power," in order to convert the Security Council of the United Nations—already dominated by the Westerners—into an embryonic global government and a new source of international law.

—To set up a world order that would: a) marginalize the countries of the South; b) subordinate the political