Choice," lovingly applied to passing butts by freelance inspectors in pig noses. I couldn't help but think of a recent grim "feminist-vegetarian" monograph called *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Dropped here by the banks of the Mississippi, its poor author would probably have been carried off gibbering. (Later I picked up a copy of *National Barbecue News* in which a columnist urged that those who suffer from HIV—high intake of vegetables—should be treated with compassion.)

Some men wore overalls, Western clothes, or biker gear, but most wore shorts and T-shirts, often revealing all too plainly what beer and barbecue can do to the male physique. Overdressed and hot in the khakis and seersucker I'd worn on the plane, I reflected that those of us from Back East have to uphold standards, but welcomed the frequent spritzes from the water guns of good-natured party animals.

At the judges' tent we encountered a man with rows of rib bones worn on his chest like decorations. Given the atrocious puns I'd already been subjected to, I didn't have to ask (rib bones=ribbons, get it?). He was dispensing barbecue wisdom like "Both the pork and the cook should be well-basted." I'll bet you say that to all the girls, I thought. My judicial duties wouldn't begin until the next day, so we set off to take in the showmanship competition.

"Showmanship" was judged on the basis of musical routines with barbecue and Italian themes, and most strong efforts seemed to come from teams of corporation or government agency employees who brought a sort of office party atmosphere to the proceedings. "White boys can't dance," my sister muttered, while we were watching one of these efforts. I reminded her that black ones probably couldn't either after drinking as much beer as these guys had. Shoot, they were doing pretty well to stand.

A group from Southern Bell presented a typical offering. Set in "Mama Bella's Pizzeria," it began with a grape-stomping number, followed by "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" ("They asked me how I knew / I'd be barbecue"), a fine "Barbara Ann" take-off ("You got me smokin' and a-grillin' / Sauce will be a-spillin' / Barbecue, bar bar, bar barbecue"), three girls singing "Where the Boars Are," and a mildly risqué send-up of an old Platters number ("Only you / Can be my barbecue"). At the end the whole cast joined in a dance number inspired by the idea of barbecue pizza. Inevitably, several other skits celebrated this concoction, which I gather is actually served as a regular thing at one Memphis restaurant. I ate some at the judges' reception and it's not quite as vile as it sounds.

Alas, the showmanship we saw was rather tame—nothing to match M. C. Hamhock. For genuine unglued weirdness we had to wait until that evening, when the featured act on the big stage turned out to be none other than my old Raleigh buddy the Reverend Billy C. Wirtz, down from Nashville where he moved last year to pursue his dream. An audience of several thousand rowdy Southern pork-eaters sat rapt as Billy regaled us with songs about truck-driving lesbians from outer space and other products of his off-center mind. After the show I introduced Billy to my sister, and he took us back to his van where he gave us each a bottle of snake oil.

The end to a perfect day. And the serious business of the contest—judging the pork—hadn't even begun.

Next month: *Judgment Day*.

John Shelton Reed writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where some of his best friends are vegetarians. Others are pigs.

Letter From Paris

by Curtis Cate

Grasshoppers and Ants

Many American children who are brought up on Mother Goose stories, as well as other fairy tales, may not know that their author was a 17th-century Frenchman, Charles Perrault. They may also not realize that the fable of the melodious grasshopper (in actual fact a cicada) who whiles away the warm summer months in full-throated song, while the busy ant stocks up provisions for the bitter winter—so charmingly illustrated years ago by Walt Disney in one of his first "Silly Symphonies"—was the brainchild of another 17th-century Frenchman, Jean de La Fontaine.

This might seem a roundabout way of leading up to Edith Cresson—who was appointed French prime minister in May 1991 and then resigned after the Socialists' big defeat last March—but for the fact that it was she herself, an outspoken defender of French industrial interests, who used the famous simile to warn her overly nonchalant compatriots—implicitly likened to easygoing grasshoppers—about the looming threat posed, not only to France but to Western Europe as a whole, by the ant-like industriousness of the Japanese.

Many attempts have been made by commentators to explain why President Mitterrand ever chose in the first place a woman deputy to replace his enemy, Michel Rocard—an enemy because he long ago founded a Socialist Party splinter-group, dared prematurely to stake out his own presidential ambitions, and managed to survive three years in office with his popularity in public-opinion polls virtually undiminished (a feat no French premier has achieved since Georges Pompidou). If this gamble was intended to curry favor with feminine voters, who now outnumber French menfolk, it clearly failed. Edith Cresson—who had held the ministerial posts of Agriculture (1981-1983), Foreign Trade (1983-1986), and European Affairs (1988-1990)—was no Margaret Thatcher, and within weeks of her appointment her rating in the polls had sunk to a level unequaled by any of her predecessors. It was, furthermore, an act of rashness to pick a woman who once belonged to the presidential *serail* (seraglio), for this offered Jean Amadou, the witty scriptwriter, and his puppet-operating colleagues, a golden opportunity for mercilessly lampooning her past relations with her "*chou-chou*" and "*chéri*" (François Mitterrand) in Stéphane Collaro's *Bebête Show*, where she acquired the name of Amabotte (freely translated—the Boot-Licker) and was presented to television viewers in the guise of a fawning, doll-like creature, ever ready to drool at the mouth in the presence of her god and master.

I must confess that, notwithstanding her *parler cru* (crude talk) and certain unnecessary lapses—such as suggesting that one Englishman in every four is a "pansy"—I felt a lurking sympathy for Edith Cresson. For regardless of the Socialist François Mitterrand might have chosen to succeed Michel Rocard, he or she would have faced the same daunting problems and the same social unrest.

There are a number of reasons for

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France's present economic plight, of which I will simply pick out three. The first has been the increasingly glaring discrepancy between what French manufacturing industry needs and what a hopelessly sclerotic, monstrously bureaucratized, and centrally controlled educational system is able to provide. To cite but one example: the Peugeot automobile company, run by Jacques Calvet—the very prototype of the capitalist magnate most French Socialists abhor, but who had been one of Edith Cresson's firmest supporters in demanding measures to dam the inrushing tide of Japanese manufactured goods—needed a full year to recruit the 1,500 engineers and qualified technicians needed to operate an ultramodern plant it recently opened at Poissy, northwest of Paris. At the present time some 14,000 engineers are graduated every year in France, when at least 25,000 are needed—among other things to manufacture and control the robots increasingly used in many fields of production. (A year and a half ago, in an eye-opening article published in *Figaro*, one of France's most persistent modernists, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, was already sounding the alarm, pointing out that Japan's manufacturing supremacy was due in no small part to the awesome fact that it had 175,000 robots in operation, compared to a mere 35,000 for all of Europe.)

Another root cause of France's present industrial woes has been a built-in system of job security that has remained virtually unchanged since the immediate postwar years. During that period, which began with General de Gaulle's 16-month premiership (September 1944-January 1946), when the French railways, the steel and coal industry, and five leading banks were nationalized, the main aim of social policy was to assure each French working man and woman guaranteed stability of employment. This proclaimed objective of "justice for the worker" was naturally championed by the communists, who for a dozen years controlled 25 percent of the vote, and for similar ideological reasons by the Socialists, who formed one of the three supporting pillars of the short-lived coalition governments that were formed and that kept collapsing right up until the end of the Fourth Republic.

In 1958, when Charles de Gaulle returned to power, first as premier, then as president of the republic, he chose a conservative, Antoine Pinay, to be his finance minister. But Pinay, one of the most underrated French politicians of modern times, did not share De Gaulle's anti-Anglo-Saxon and anti-NATO prejudices or the General's addiction to prestige politics, and after 18 months in office he resigned. His place was taken by a brilliant graduate of the École Polytechnique (roughly speaking, the equivalent of our M. I. T.), Válery Giscard d'Estaing, an ardent *dirigiste* who invented the pernicious Value Added Tax (a boon for finance ministries but a bookkeeping nightmare for shopkeepers and entrepreneurs) and who was an ambitious and often demagogic opportunist with one eye trained on the presidency.

It can be argued that, even if France had been fortunate enough to have a Ludwig Erhard to free its economy from the shackles of state control, it would not have made that much difference, given the unimaginative stodginess of many French entrepreneurs and the lack of worker discipline in a country that has no less than four major labor confederations and where today only one worker in every ten actually belongs to a union. But what is undeniable is that under the successive presidencies of Georges Pompidou (1969-1974), Válery Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), and for the first five years of François Mitterrand's presidential term, the credo of job security remained an "untouchable," a sacred cow. This meant, in practice, that no entrepreneur wishing to expand his operations could hire a worker or an employee and then decide to fire him or her at short notice for laziness or incompetence without having to pay exorbitant amounts of compensation according to complicated stipulations prescribed by the state. For big concerns possessing large capital resources or partly financed by the state, the indemnities having to be paid out for the laying-off of workers have never posed a major problem, but they have had a disastrously inhibiting effect on the managers of medium and small companies in a country where two out of every three newly formed enterprises founder before the end of the third year.

It would of course be expecting too much of a Socialist government to grasp a nettle of this kind. But in 1986, when a conservative coalition led by Jacques Chirac toppled the Socialist government of Laurent Fabius, the moment seemed to have arrived at last for a wholesale dismantling of the complex fiscal restrictions and taxes that had long been crippling medium and small enterprises (most of which in France employ from 1 to 500 workers). Jean-Marie Benoist, who at the time was the self-appointed "philosopher" of the Chiracian "renaissance," advocated the launching of an all-out offensive, employing the Napoleonic language of "one hundred days" as the limited time available for making decisive breakthroughs on the legislative front before the powers of inertia regained the upper hand. Unfortunately, his "strongman" idol turned out to have feet of clay; for Jacques Chirac, like his successor, Michel Rocard, is a typical product of the École Nationale d'Administration, where future "public servants" (including many politicians) were until recently trained in an emphatically *dirigiste* atmosphere. Faced by the prospect of tens and perhaps of hundreds of thousands of workers taking to the streets behind their left-wing rabble-rousers to uphold the sacrosanct "right to work," Chirac's courage failed him, and the Napoleonic "offensive" bogged down in the usual morass of interminable negotiations.

It has been calculated that if French managers of medium and small enterprises (roughly one and a half million strong and comprising 63 percent of the labor force in the un-nationalized industrial, commercial, and service sectors) were freed of their present fiscal and other shackles, an unfettered freedom to hire and dismiss workers could produce as many as 500,000 new jobs—in a country where the level of unemployment is now approaching the three million mark. Such predictions are necessarily speculative. What is certain is that whereas from 1979 to 1988, major French industrial concerns, in a "streamlining" campaign aimed at making them more efficient and better able to withstand foreign competition, had to lay off 870,000 workers and employees, France's medium and small enterprises managed to create 450,000 new jobs.

Due credit must be given to Edith Cresson for having tried to reverse the tendency of previous governments to favor big industrial concerns. "Small is beautiful" was the caption chosen by the editors of the weekly *Le Point* for her photograph last September, when she came out with a program of 19 specific measures intended to help medium and small enterprises—but which, pre-

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dictably, fell short of what is needed.

A third, less technical, cause has to do with lifestyles and a general attitude toward work. Some years ago an economist friend of mine, Guy Lambert, who had a passion for drawing up comparative charts of working productivity, told me that by the mid-1980's in France the average employed man or woman only worked one day in every two (roughly 185 days in the year). His calculations took into account two-day weekends, a full month of paid vacations (for which most French workers and employees actually receive five weeks of pay), religious and other holidays of one kind or another, and work days lost through strikes, absenteeism, and an overindulgence in what is verily a national passion with this nation of disgruntled *rouspéteurs* (gripers)—street demonstrations.

Guy Lambert was not exaggerating. In 1987 a French businessman, Victor Scherrer, devoted an entire book to the subject, giving it the arresting title, *La France paresseuse* (Lazy France). It was panned by "serious" economists because the evidence produced was too selective. Yet recent statistical studies indicate that the average French factory worker or office employee now puts in about 1,550 hours of work in the year. If we subtract the four annual vacation weeks (reducing the yearly total to 48), this gives us a working week of just over 32 hours. The Japanese, on the other hand, put in 2,000, and even 2,200 hours (including overtime) in the year—which, again allowing for four vacation weeks, amounts to a working week varying from 42 to 46 hours.

In a radio interview given last November, Daniel Goeudevert, a dynamic French businessman who now heads the giant Volkswagen works in Germany, defended his company's recent decision to raise its workers' wages by 6 percent on the grounds that a farsighted management is the one that anticipates labor demands before they degenerate into a strike, which "is always a catastrophe." Over the past ten years, he added, the Volkswagen company had not lost a single working day through strikes.

It is, of course, unrealistic to expect a nation of highly individualistic *rouspéteurs* to behave like disciplined Teutons. But the cruel facts are there—offering food for sober reflection for every French working man and woman, as well as for the demagogues who rule them.

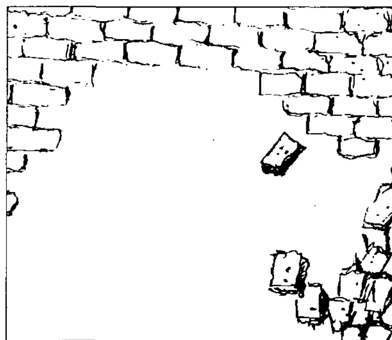
Personally, I can't help thinking that Western Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* can be explained in part by the fact that many German offices open for business at 8 a.m., as is the case in Switzerland. For it is by no means certain that the extra time "gained" by fixing the closing hour at 6 p.m.—the current practice in France—makes up for the lost hour in the morning, since many Parisian employees (I can't vouch for others) begin their evening dash for the subway or the bus at 5:30 or even earlier.

My suspicions are also confirmed by what has happened in Switzerland and in the neighboring Franche-Comté and Jura mountain regions of southeastern France. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the Swiss came perilously close to seeing their watch industry destroyed—like the camera industry in Germany—by the mass production of cheap Japanese timepieces. But the Swiss, being a hardy folk, and in this case more resolute than the drowsing beer-swillers of Hessen and Franconia, pulled up their socks, tightened their belts, fired more than 55,000 redundant employees, and managed to rescue a traditional industry, in which one thousand small enterprises nevertheless went under. Today Japan leads the world with an annual output of 325 million watches, followed by Hong Kong, with an annual output of 180 million. Switzerland, with only 81 million, seems to lag far behind. In *numbers* of quartz-operated timepieces, yes, but in terms of *money earnings* derived from top-quality production, Switzerland still leads the international field—with a turnover in 1990 of 7.3 billion Swiss francs, or 55 percent of the world total.

France—if we exclude the huge *terrae incognitae* of Russia and China—is in fourth place, with 23 million watches, well ahead of Germany, in fifth place with 3.7 million. The hardy inhabitants of the Franche-Comté and the Jura mountains—an often cold and foggy region where France's watch and clock makers have traditionally lived and labored—saw the handwriting on the wall and learned the hard way how to make high-quality watches with two hundred skilled artisans, where previously five hundred had been employed. But whether the *cigales* inhabiting the warmer regions of France will be prepared to limit their summer singing in time to meet the autumn chill of future years remains to be seen. It will require a psychological metamorphosis which neither the slick manipulations of that sleight-of-hand magician, François Mitterrand, nor the tough talk of his chosen handmaidens are likely to bring about.

Curtis Cate is a biographer and historian living in France.

LIBERAL ARTS



BLOCKING ROADBLOCKS

The roadblocks police use to stop all drivers in order to catch drunk drivers are unconstitutional in Michigan, reported the *Wall Street Journal* last April. An intermediate appellate court ruled that such roadblocks violate "the state's constitution and the traditional practice of law enforcement," and that "police can only search a car if the individual driver shows signs of being drunk."

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LITERATURE

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Politics in American Letters

by Larry Woiwode

Remembering Dos Passos

The following was presented in acceptance of the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature, presented at Longwood College, Farmville, Virginia, September 20, 1991. The Dos Passos Prize is awarded to a writer in mid-career for a distinguished body of work; previous recipients include Graham Greene, Paule Marshall, Robert Stone, and Tom Wolfe.

* * *

When a writer accepts a literary prize, the writer should not, like Lear's daughters, be insufficiently grateful, nor so enamored of accolade that, like the tetrarch Herod, he's immediately consumed by worms. Nor should a writer on these occasions forget friends and colleagues who have labored without notice over the years, or who have received a good degree of notice but remained unlaureled, at least partly for reasons I hope to address. And so, since it would be redundant and unmannerly to present a case for my own work on this occasion, I would like to speak for those disenfranchised others as I offer some reflections on the writer after whom the Dos Passos Prize is named and on this dark time in American letters.

Whatever our feelings about the fictional techniques of Dos Passos, we have to view them as elements of a larger, individual vision rather than novelties. Mere novelty, Samuel Johnson says somewhere, thumping the table to wake Boswell up, is ignorance. Dos Passos' techniques by now have been absorbed into the mainstream of American writing and their effects can be seen in writers as diverse as Brooks, Capote, Doctorow, Isherwood, Oates, and both Tom Wolfes. What the "newsreel" or "headline" technique or "I am a camera" mode brought to modern writing was a sense of immediate engagement with the existing world.

There is the imperial trend in modernism, present in Joyce, Pound, Stein, Woolf, and others, that threatens to refine away the dirty world and its workings into artful constructs of language. The jolt of Dos Passos' work, arriving at the time that it did, served as a corrective to that, and had the effect of keeping modern fiction, as well as other genres of modern writing, more earthbound and mundane, and thus more honest. Honesty, along with the intellectual vigor necessary to sustain it, is indeed the hallmark of Dos Passos' writing and lived life.

He observed that in the United States, in the latter part of the 20th century, it is the art of politics, not the humanities or the arts, that governs everyday life. This seems on the surface a dark conclusion, and it is no secret that Dos Passos is at least as well-known for his sociopolitical views as for his literary techniques. In proper publishing circles, in fact, it is possible to hear his views dismissed in one word: conservative.

Dos Passos' brand of conservatism is identical to the conservatism of the writers of the U. S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. He did not want individual liberties to be infringed upon, and he began his career cherishing the views we now find enshrined at PEN—the acronym for that political congregation of poets, essayists, and novelists. Dos Passos did not become crystallized in his thought, however, or isolated within an "artistic" community. He began to write his way toward an alternate outlook that offered, as he saw it, the most humane and reasonable solutions to the social problems confronting Americans. He had not found such solutions in the socialism he once espoused, as the Eastern bloc of the world lately has not.

It takes not only intellectual vigor but courage to alter one's views, particularly when it means going against the grain, and this Dos Passos did, putting up with dismissal by critics and the academy—even the loss of old friends, such as Hemingway. He was scorned in the same way and for the same reasons that one of the most courageous and profound figures of the last half of the 20th century, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, was scorned in America during its liberal 70's—for his politically incorrect views.

It doesn't matter that the words of both have proven prophetic; their views did not and do not mesh with the views in ascendance within America's literary-publishing complex, the academy, or the extended media. If the humane arts (rather than the military or martial or other arts) have less and less governance over our attitudes, as they do, it is because those arts are more and more governed by internal politics.

This was what Dos Passos' warnings were about.

The quality or relevance of literary work nowadays can be less important than the views expressed in it or the people you know. And just as bad or worse (it's difficult to judge with the dark growing darker) is the academy's refusal to carry on discourse with ideologies or views alien to its entrenched Marxist-humanism (no oxymoron that), and the reluctance of the literary-publishing complex to take note of, much less put into print or support, the work of anyone whose views are not quite correct.

If anyone is unsure of what I'm saying, I'll say it more openly, because the

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