

Billings' move, therefore, from the West Coast and law to the East Coast and railroads was not a radical new departure. As Winks observes, "What Billings knew best was land law," and "railroad companies were, in fact, land companies." Addressing the standard question about the business giants of the Gilded Age—were they "Robber Barons" or "Industrial Statesmen"?—Winks' answer for the railroad builders is a little bit of both. Billings, however, despite a few small warts (real estate promotion is inherently risky to the promoter's moral health), unquestionably belongs in the second category; he is a "hero of capitalism."

The bandwagon labeled "Pioneers of American Conservation" has in recent years become increasingly crowded. Among the old, familiar riders—naturalists and foresters, novelists and essayists, politicians and publicists—are unfamiliar newcomers such as sportsmen and military men, artists and scientists. To this lengthening manifest Winks would add yet another name, the businessman—or at least a businessman—Frederick Billings. He showed an interest in conservation throughout his life and devoted his last years to it "almost wholly." Yet Billings was, as Winks makes clear, a conservationist "by the light of his day." Not only was he untroubled by such present-day questions of deep ecology as "Do rocks have rights?" but he died in 1890, before the controversy over definition that produced the conservation schism had fully developed. Hence, without much sense of inner conflict, he could be both preservationist "nature-lover" and utilitarian "wise-user." He worked for the preservation of the natural wonders of Yosemite, served on the Vermont Forestry Commission, and demonstrated reforestation, scientific management, and sustained yield on his Woodstock estate. Yet like his mentor Marsh, Billings was in the end an intelligent manipulator of nature. In Winks' words, "Love of landscape . . . was not enough. . . . Nature would need help." St. Benedict, not St. Francis, was the patron saint of conservation.

Winks' biography of Frederick Billings brings a much-needed reminder to conservatives: pioneer conservationists were not exclusively early-day, left-wing "radical environmentalists" pursuing the "hidden agenda" of destroying private enterprise. Conservation was not, and is not, inherently "anti-business," and Billings' life provided repeated instances of what Winks calls "the alliance of commerce

and conservation." Rereading Marsh toward the end of his life, Billings was convinced that "conservation was the highest form of efficiency." It is time for conservatives to regain the leadership role in the conservation movement that Billings pioneered more than a century ago.

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The Cultural Middleman

by Thomas Fleming

Daydreams and Nightmares:
Reflections of a Harlem Childhood

by Irving Louis Horowitz
Jackson: University Press of
Mississippi; 116 pp., \$18.95

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To start with, the process of Americanization began at birth. Within the space of one week at the Metropolitan Hospital, I started life as a Hebrew child, with the name Yitzhak-Isaac. This apparently was too cumbersome for record-keeping purposes, so I was entered on the birth certificate as Isadore. But my sister, or at least so she told me, thought that name was far too Europeanized for a Harlem baby, so I became Irving by the seventh day. Louis is an affectionation of my late teens—there had to be some way to distinguish myself from all the other Irvings who lived in the Bronx and Brooklyn."

So begins Irving Horowitz's remarkable memoir of growing up Jewish in Harlem. Readers be warned. This is no Neil Simon tale of adoring parents and precocious kids. The Horowitzes were not a happy family. The socialist father, who deserted the Czar's army but nourished dreams of a Soviet Yiddish state, displayed no affection toward his family. Without the skills to succeed in the garment trade, he set up a key and lock shop in Harlem on the sound theory that such a business would do well in a high-crime area. The author gives us the impression that when his parents were not quarreling with each other or beating the children, they were staying one step ahead of their black neighbors. During Christmas season the family worked the bulb scam: unsuspecting black cus-

tomers would bring in their bulbs for a test that usually revealed the lights to be defective. "When the same bulbs were retested after the customer left, they almost always were found to be perfect. . . . My father placed them into inventory and resold them as new."

But if the Horowitzes picked up a few dollars with such tricks, the whole of Harlem, black and white, was devoted to the hustle, and young Irving goes from sneaking money from his father's cash drawer to manipulating ticket sales at the Polo Grounds to running numbers and scalping tickets. What training for a political sociologist!

More than anything this is the story of a Jewish boy with a cleft palate making it the hard way on the streets of Harlem. After the great Harlem riot in which the family business is sacked, the Horowitzes move to pleasanter quarters in a Jewish section of Brooklyn. The young Horowitz—"a Jew with heavy traces of a black sharecropper's accent"—brought Harlem with him to Brooklyn. His new classmates regarded him, not without reason, as a bully, and he got into real trouble with his one attempt to imitate the sexual mores of Harlem by attacking a girl whom he had never met. When all hell broke loose, he "kept wondering why Harlem kids seemed to manage sexual intercourse without incurring the wrath of parents and other authorities." During his period of in-school suspension, he begins to see life from the principal's perspective, and it took the tough-minded teachers of PS 193 only one term to turn him into a kid who would grow up to be a major American social theorist and the proprietor of a major academic press.

Even more interesting than Irving Horowitz's personal story are his observations on the difficult relations between blacks and Jews. Like many Jewish kids, Horowitz was as fond of the blacks' music as he was terrified of their unrestrained behavior. If blacks envied Jews for their particles of economic success in the 1930's, some Jews had a sneaking admiration for black creativity. However, "the majority of Jews, for their part, saw this flirtation with black culture as nothing short of a desecration of Jewish life—an early warning signal that sexuality would displace marriage and undiluted individual expression would destroy family solidarity."

But for all the ambiguities of the relationship, suggests Horowitz, it was a black-Jewish partnership that to a great

extent created modern American pop culture. "Even in the supreme black achievement of jazz . . . Jewish musicians—Goodman, Gershwin, Mezzrow, and Whiteman among others—not only played the music, but also served as critics and interpreters. In a racially controlled prewar America, it was the Jew who popularized black life, transforming a folk tradition into an art mode." Blacks, who "saw their uniqueness compromised" by this cultural appropriation, inevitably resented Jewish success, believing that "the gain and fame of their culture went to the accursed Jewish cultural middleman, while the purity of their performance remained undersupported and undermined." But it is doubtful that black cultural forms would ever have enjoyed their triumph without the help of the "cultural middlemen" who made it acceptable for white audiences.

In making these observations, Horowitz has displayed considerable courage. The ethnic roots of American culture are buried under tons of official mythology, the slag of the melting-pot ideology, and given the choice between truth and legend, most writers and publishers will always "print the legend." The childhood portrayed in *Daydreams and Nightmares* is a gritty little piece of reality, the irritant from which pearls are made.

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A Writer for All Seasons by George Core

Orwell: The Authorized Biography
by Michael Sheldon
New York: HarperCollins;
497 pp., \$25.00

E.B. White described Henry David Thoreau, that thorny individualist, as a regular hair shirt of a man; and no matter how much we may like the Thoreau of *Walden* and his other writing, few of us could bear having him as a neighbor. Such, too, is the case of Eric Blair, who would become George Orwell; but who, regardless of his name, was from boyhood a difficult and complicated human being, one probably far more likable on

paper than in person.

When we learn something like the whole story of Blair's passage through St. Cyprian's School in southwest England, we are much more inclined to see the side of the embattled headmaster and his aggressive wife than we are in reading Orwell's "Such, Such Were the Joys," an essay that may turn any of us against all boarding schools. Orwell, in looking back, viewed his as a microcosm of the totalitarian state. However imperfect most of them are, the worst seldom rival, say, the Third Reich or the Soviet Union for exquisite brutality levied against minorities and protesters and all others out of step with phalanx of jackboots marching down the main thoroughfare of the state.

George Orwell, as Samuel Hynes has observed, was not a great writer in the sense that he forged an overmastering book or permanently affected any literary mode, even the essay, of which he was the most brilliant practitioner in English in our century. But Orwell made a greater impact on general culture and the common man than any other English writer in our century except Winston Churchill and perhaps H.G. Wells. He did so by a gritty and unflinching pursuit of the truth as a writer and political thinker that makes even megalomaniacs and monomaniacs seem laggards by comparison.

This compulsiveness sometimes diverted Orwell from a reasonable course in his public and private life, shunting him more nearly toward madness than sainthood. He was not simply courageous but fearless in a way that often seems insane, as Michael Sheldon makes plain in several sequences. Orwell took absurd chances in the front lines during the Spanish Civil War and was shot in the throat in consequence; later, not long before his death, he endangered the lives of a boating party by being oblivious to the perils of the situation—being at sea in an open boat that had lost its motor and that was being drawn into a whirlpool. At such moments Orwell seems a caricature drawn from a boy's adventure yarn—a figure he would have immediately recognized in another person or within the covers of a book. He was also so set on seeing the aftermath of the war in Europe that he, although seriously ill himself, was abroad when his first wife underwent surgery (and did not survive it). And, although he was devoted to her in some ways, he was not faithful to her—odd behavior for the man often called the conscience of his generation. Orwell wrecked his health for rea-

sons that seem more nearly frivolous and whimsical than anything else.

So you may emerge from reading Mr. Sheldon's strong biography feeling dashed about the person who, against very considerable odds, made himself into a fair to middling novelist, a good broadcaster for the BBC, a superb satirist, and a great essayist. Not a man for all seasons but a writer for all seasons. A writer who could stand up for common humanity and for the common toad; a writer who could celebrate the joys of ordinary life; a writer who could attack political stupidity and savagery of all stripes, whether in England or elsewhere; a writer who did more than any other in our time to uphold human decency through the medium of the written and spoken word.

The author of *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of "Horizon,"* Sheldon came well equipped to write a new biography of Orwell. This book, however, was not authorized by Sonia Brownell, Orwell's second wife and late widow, who did her best to prevent a biography from being written and thus carry out her husband's quixotic wishes. Sheldon does add new material to the earlier accounts of Orwell's life by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams and, more recently, Bernard Crick. Stansky and Abrahams have written two volumes that take us only to 1938; Crick's life of Orwell is more detailed but more laborious than Sheldon's. I am glad to have this faster paced and more readable life but think that the flag under which it sails—Authorized Biography—is closer to being the Jolly Roger than anything else. Anyone seriously interested in Orwell will want to read Sheldon and will be well repaid, but the serious reader should remember that much of the writing about Orwell, from George Woodcock's *The Crystal Spirit* onward, remains permanently valuable.

During the last year of his life, when he was failing rapidly from tuberculosis, Orwell pondered the meaning of Gandhi's life and reflected on ordinary human existence versus sainthood. "Sainthood is . . . a thing that human beings must avoid," he observed. He reached this conclusion after presenting the heart of the matter about our frail nature: "The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is pre-