

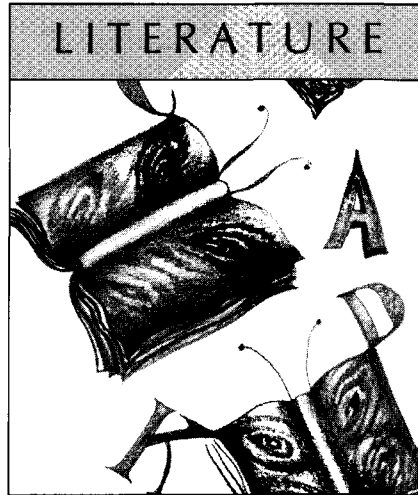
party with a willingness to tackle the welfare state head on—the New Democrats—appears to be dissolving. Holding 25 seats (and the balance of power) in Sweden’s parliament after the 1991 vote, this newly organized party mobilized populist anger over high taxes, uncontrolled immigration, and an unresponsive political elite. While the New Democrats were not invited to join the ruling coalition, the new government relied on their votes to survive. For a period in 1992, New Democracy claimed the loyalty of nearly 12 percent of Swedish voters, and it seemed on the verge of still greater success.

But then came trouble. Political deal-making over budget cuts began to backfire, while vicious assaults on party members as “racists” and “xenophobes” mounted in the media. Badly shaken, several of the weaker New Democrats in parliament denounced their party and defected to the coalition government (to applause in the press), while the party’s leaders—Count Ian Wachtmeister and amusement park-owner Bert Karlsson—worked with diminishing success to weave together a constituency ranging from “rednecks” and medical doctors to libertarians. Last summer, Wachtmeister suggested that Islamic mosques should not be a regular feature of the future Swedish skyline. Not long after, someone put a torch to just such a mosque, and the newspapers went ballistic. In August, a prominent early party member, Lutheran minister Kenneth Landelius, launched a verbal attack on New Democracy, labeling it “antidemocratic” and “foreigner-hating.” As he told *Svenska Dagbladet*, “New Democracy envisions a Swedishness that cannot be found, because most of our cultural vitality is imported.” Meanwhile, Karlsson’s business empire fell into bankruptcy, and a battered and exhausted Wachtmeister resigned as party leader last January, leaving the New Democrats in turmoil and with a meager four percent support in the opinion polls. Promising party initiatives, including family policy reforms based on tax-relief and diminished government, have withered away.

So one may count Swedish socialism among the political Undead, both in the form of a reenergized Social Democratic Party and in the more opportunistic guise of the Daddy Group. It stalks the streets of Stockholm once again, looking for what little blood remains among a fearful, dependent, and ever-so-

politically-correct citizenry, confident that other would-be Doctor Von Helssings dare not raise their heads.

Allan Carlson is the publisher of Chronicles and president of The Rockford Institute.



Anna Mrocz-Wolczki

The Weremother

by Kit Reed

A Short Story

Often in that period in her life, when she least expected it, she would feel the change creeping over her. It would start in the middle of an intense conversation with her younger son or with her daughter, behind whose newly finished face she saw her past and intimations of her future flickering silently, waiting to break cover. Black hairs would begin creeping down the backs of her hands and claws would spring from her fingertips. She could feel her lip lifting over her incisors as she snarled: “Can’t you remember *anything*?” or: “Stop picking your face.”

She had to concentrate on standing erect then, determined to defeat her own worst instincts just once more, but she knew it was only a matter of time before she fell into the feral crouch. In spite of her best efforts she would end up loping on all fours, slinking through alleys and stretching her long belly as she slid over fences; she would find herself

hammering on her older son’s window, or deviling him on the phone: Yes we are adults together, we are even friends, but do you look decent for the office? Even when he faced her without guile, as he would any ordinary person, she could feel the howl bubbling in her throat: Did you remember to use your face medicine?

Beware, she is never far from us; she will stalk us to the death, wreaking her will and spoiling our best moments, threatening our future, devouring our past. Beware the weremother when the moon is high and you and the one you love are sinking to earth; look sharp or she will spring upon you; she will tear you apart to save you if she has to, bloodying tooth and claw in the inadvortency of love.

Lash me to the closet pole she cried, knowing what was coming, but she was thinking what might happen to the older son if he married the wrong girl, whom he is in love with. Who would iron his shirts? Would she know how to take care of him? It’s his decision now; he’s a grown man and we are adults together, but I am his mother, and older. I have a longer past than he does and can divine the future.

This is for your own good.

She and the man she married were at a party years before they even had children. Someone introduced the identity game. Tell who you are in three sentences. After you finished, the woman who started the game diagnosed you. She said you valued what you put first. Somebody began, “My name is Martha. I’m a mother.” She remembers looking at that alien woman, thinking: a mother? Is that all you want to be? What does that make of the man sitting next to you? She thinks: I know who I am. I know my marriage. I know my ambitions. I am those three things and by the way I am a mother. I would never list it first in this or any other game.

On the other hand, she can’t shake the identity.

Here is an old story she hates. It is called The Mother’s Heart. The cherished only son fell into debt and murdered his adoring mother for her money. He had been ordered to tear out her heart and take it to his debtors as proof. On the way he fell. Rolling out of the basket, the heart cried: “Are you hurt, my son?”

Damn fool.

Nobody wanted that. Not him, not

her.

As a child she had always hated little girls who told everybody they wanted to grow up to be mothers.

She goes to visit her own mother, who may get sick at any moment and need care for the rest of her life. She comes into the tiny apartment in a combined guilt and love that render her speechless. On these visits she slips helplessly into childhood, her mind seething with unspoken complexities while her lips shape the expected speeches.

What was it like for you?

"How are you feeling?"

Did you and he enjoy it and how did you keep that a secret?

"That's too bad. Your African violets look wonderful."

Why won't you ever give me a straight answer?

"Do you really want Kitty up there with the plants? I wish you'd get someone in to help you clean."

I wish I didn't have to worry. I went from child who depended to woman struggling for freedom to this without ever once passing through a safe zone in which neither of us really needed the other.

"That dress is beautiful, Mother, but you don't look warm enough."

I know you think I dress to embarrass you.

The aging woman whose gracious manner comes out of a forgotten time says, "As long as it looks nice, I can put up with being chilly."

Just before the mother looks away her daughter sees a flash of the captive girl. The old lady's flesh has burned away, leaving the skin quite close to her skull. Stepping off the curb, she is uncertain. Caged behind her mother's face is her own future.

As they go out the door the old mother tries to brush a strand of hair off her grown daughter's forehead; the old lady would like to replace her daughter's wardrobe with clothes more like her own.

Stop that. Please don't do that.

She thinks, Mother, I'm sorry your old age is lonely, but something else snags at the back of her mind. Why was my childhood lonely? She will lavish her own children with company: siblings, people to sleep over. She will answer all their questions in full. She will never insist on anything that isn't important.

All her friends have mothers. In one way or another all those mothers have driven their grown daughters crazy.

"She pretended to know me," says Diana, who had flown all the way to Yorkshire to be with her. "Then on the fourth day we were in the sitting room when she showed me a picture. I asked who it was and she said this was her daughter Diana, who was married and living in America. She had erased me."

Another says: "When I was little she praised everything I did, even if it wasn't any good. She praises everything so much that you know she means, Is that all?"

"She says, You can't do that, whatever it is, when what she means is that she couldn't do it. When I told her in spite of the family and the job I'd made the Law Review she said, 'You're doing too much,' when what she meant was: It's your funeral."

"The world has gone past her, and at some level she is jealous."

Every one of the women says, "She thinks my house is never clean enough."

"She thinks families always love each other and dinners are delicious and everything is always fine, and if it isn't, then it's my failure."

We are never going to be like that.

As their children grow older they try to remain open, friendly, honest, tolerant, but behind their eyes the question rises and will not be put down. Will we be like that after all?

Beware for she is lurking, as the full moon approaches she will beg her captors to lock the cell tightly and chain her to the bars, but when the moon completes itself she will break through steel to get to you and when she does she will spring on your best moments and savage them, the bloody saliva spraying for your own good for she never does anything she does except out of love.

And she does love you.

Says her own mother, whom she has just asked what she's going to do when she gets out of the hospital:

"We'll see."

It is the same answer her mother gave when she was a child and asking, Are we going to the movies? Can I have some candy? Is my life going to come out all right? It infuriates her because it means nothing.

(She will always give her own children straight answers. She will tell them more than they want to know about things they may not have asked.)

She is trembling with rage. The aging woman looks at her with that same heedless smile, magnificently negligent. How

will she manage alone with a mending hip?

We'll see. That smile!

She cannot know whether this is folly or bravery. In her secret self she can feel the yoke descending.

I will never be like that.



Can she keep her hand from twitching when she sees her daughter's hair out of control? Can she be still when the oldest flies to Europe and his brother wants to leave school/move away/hitchhike to Florida and sleep on beaches? Will she be able to pretend these decisions are theirs to make or will she begin to replicate those maternal patterns of duplicity? Kissing the cheek to detect fever, giving the gift designed to improve the recipient, making remarks that pretend to be idle but stampede her young in the direction she has chosen. She never wants to do that.

She wants to be herself, is all.

Is that such a big thing to want?

Her problem is that she wishes to believe she has more than one function.

Lash me to the . . .

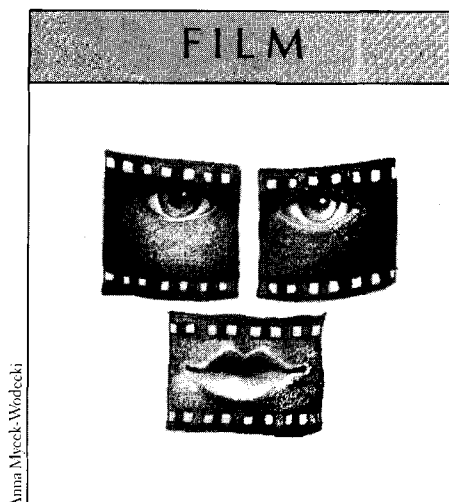
Are you sure you know what you're doing?

Are you all right?

I was just asking.

Beware the weremother, for even when you have hung the room with wolfsbane and sealed the door and bolted it with a crucifix, even as you light the candles she is abroad and there is no power to prevent her; cross yourself and stay alert for she will spring upon you and her bite has the power to transform even the strongest. Barricade yourself and never take anything for granted even when you think you're safe, for even in that last moment, when you think you have killed her with the silver bullet or stopped her once and for all with the stake at the crossroads her power lives; when everything else is finished there will be the guilt.

Kit Reed is the author, most recently, of a collection of short stories called Thief of Lives (University of Missouri Press).



Sinners into Saints

by David R. Slavitt

In the Name of the Father
 Produced and directed by Jim Sheridan
 Screenplay by Terry George and
 Jim Sheridan
 Based on the autobiography of
 Gerry Conlon
 Released by Universal Pictures

Franz Kafka was right about metamorphoses. The usual direction is from the human condition to something lower, the cockroach or whatever insect it was that Gregor Samsa became. Movies, though, are a popular art, depend on mass audiences, and, with more or less calculation, appeal to the mass taste. Movies prefer stories of transformation from bugdom upward, or, as in this picture, from fecklessness to something approaching sainthood.

There is a fine moment of vindication at the end of *In the Name of the Father*, when the judge dismisses the case of *The Crown v. Gerry Conlon* and bangs his gavel. The audience in the courtroom cheers as Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis) shrugs off his guards and announces that he is a free man and will walk out the front door. His lawyer, Mrs. Pierce (Emma Thompson), smiles in approval, and the crowd outside the courthouse roars in a celebration in which we are invited to join. . . . But of what? The correction of an injustice? The inevitable triumph of good over evil? The lesser

contention that, if only through Murphy's Law, evil doesn't always win out?

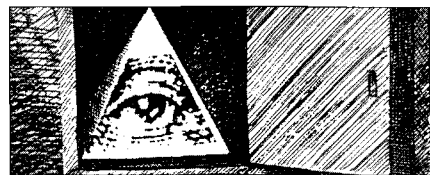
Conlon was one of the Guildford Four, accused by the Brits of having bombed a pub on the relatively flimsy ground that he was an Irish Catholic, had been in England at the time, and had gone back to Belfast with a fistful of money. Early on, they discovered that his alibi was plausible, that there had been a vagrant named Burke in the park in London where Conlon claimed to have been at the time of the bombing, but this was a war. Perhaps they believed that if they arrested and convicted anyone at all, the real bombers might take advantage of the opportunity and stop their acts of terrorism or at least lay low for a while.

Conlon wasn't a bomber and had nothing to do with the I.R.A., which wouldn't have had him even if he'd volunteered because he was an unreliable, lying, stealing, all but worthless layabout who was interested only in drugs, free love, and whatever easy money he could get hold of without too much effort. His transformation during the course of his 15 years of imprisonment (three and a half of them in solitary confinement) to a condition of some worth and weight, even of some wisdom, is the story Jim Sheridan is interested in telling, and he manages it well enough, I suppose. Daniel Day-Lewis is as good as he has ever been, and we mostly believe in the change his imprisonment brings about in him. But the real Conlon, whom I heard interviewed on the radio a few days before I went to the movie, is much more commanding than Lewis lets himself be. Conlon's laconic testimony to his suffering was eloquent and incontrovertible. And his punishments went far beyond what the movie's prison scenes dare to suggest.

The politics of the setting is all but irrelevant. The English in the film behave amazingly badly (but then, during the week I saw the film, Gerry Adams, the head of Sinn Féin, visited New York and the English demonstrated to the world how foolish they can be by broadcasting his CNN interview but having an actor read his lines so that his voice would not pollute their air waves). Yet the film is none too sympathetic to the I.R.A. either, and we are given to understand that their terrorist tactics are designed to show up the English as fascists, thugs, and bullies. Conlon is an innocent victim in a war, as the real I.R.A. bomber

explains to him when he's caught and put in the same prison, adding, in a nice reference to *The Informer*, "I'm sorry for your trouble."

That the transformation has something to do with Conlon's relationship with his father seems clear. The title tells us so, and the most implausible manipulation of Conlon's story is the assignment of both father and son to the same cell to provide opportunities for Gerry and his Da' to interact. How it works is a mystery, but something happens to the son. Other men might have been broken by the imposition of such punishment, which was, as Conlon argues, all the harder to bear because of his innocence. On the other side, there are only odd hints and inklings. Conlon remembers bits of his childhood—that he clung with his little hand to his Da's big hand, which smelled of tobacco. Happiness, he says, he still associates with that faint smell of tobacco.



It is the death of Gerry's father, Giuseppe, that turns him, somehow, into a man. The real fervor of the film is here, and the picture is worth seeing for Day-Lewis's Conlon and for Pete Postlethwaite's dignifiedly restrained father. The machinery of the film, though, is awkward. By a clumsily contrived accident, Mrs. Pierce, while preparing her appeal, is handed the wrong set of files. She asks for a file in the name of the father and discovers that there are others in the name of the son—including one marked in magisterial majuscules: "NOT TO BE SHOWN TO THE DEFENSE." I thought of a scene in some Woody Allen movie in which a couple of secret agents meet and exchange the code phrase: "I am a spy." Allen, of course, was trying to be funny. Still, the movie doesn't depend on such plot details. The point is that, as in *Henry V*, a father's death can be the occasion for a spiritual regeneration and redemption of the kind we see Conlon undergo, and this transformation is what the passion and intensity of Sheridan and Day-Lewis manage credibly to convey.

David R. Slavitt is a poet and novelist living in Philadelphia.