

and the figure obscure, if pleasingly so. Consider these lines, from “Sword of Damocles”:

The lissome leg slides from the slit
ball gown,
A moustache looks silvered with
the blade’s sweat—
I come out of all this dreaming
trauma
With a small, wavering point of
knowledge . . .

Or these, the opening and final lines, from “Untitled Picture”:

Now you have nothing left to
dream—
That last camel with his eyes like
roses
Left the canvas into a world which
radically incloses
Things you cannot quite contain
within an artful scheme.
...
But when a camel wearing roses
like sunglasses
Comes home, the sheerest edges of
the dream extend.

All these figures and countless others convey what Eaton, in “Chuck Wagon,” calls “a steeped, concentrated sense of life,” the perception that “it seems almost mystic to be here, not somewhere else.” The temporal mode is the ephemeral—a wave breaking, light fading on the sea, sunset turned to ash; but Eaton sees their “joyousness of tint and tone,” unlike those who cannot feel “the calculations, calibrations, spent on passing things, / Thinking that eternity is only found in stone” (“Afternoon in a Yellow Room”).

These are not poems to be memorized; few lines will remain in a reader’s mind, partly because, other than rhyme, sound resources (rhythm, alliteration, assonance) are not utilized much. But through their striking images, often gorgeous (especially perceptions of the sea) and repeated just enough to complement one another, the poems leave a dominant impression like that which one gets in a well-lit gallery displaying paintings by a single artist in various tones—in this case, an impression of beauty and serenity, mixed with modern whimsy and a wise irony, pointing to themselves as self-conscious art, and yet beyond. Like the sun, “a vast impressionist,” the poet “mixes palettes” and “loves the still, ardent, and the physical” (as the title poem puts it).

Drawing out color and form from shadows, looking behind phenomena, Eaton acts as a magician, the revealer of being, “leading us through vistas opening, concealing depths” (“Dutch Interior”). Full of vitality, marked by beautiful coloration and fanciful figures along with occasional sourness from life’s dregs, *The Work of the Sun* is as bright as the title and, as “The Towline” says, “tows the cosmos back.”

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Poor Little Victim

by V. Groginsky

The U.S. and Mexico: The Bear and the Porcupine

by Amb. Jeffrey Davidow
Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Weiner
Publishers; 254 pp., \$24.95



An untimely cold finally gave me a chance to watch *The Godfather* (I and II)—30 years late, but just in time for fitting juxtapositions. I spent my down time sleeping, reading news about Mexico’s ongoing narco-cartel bloodbath, and reviewing former U.S. Amb. Jeffrey Davidow’s book, *The Bear and the Porcupine*. Most poignant were the similarities between the Sicilian Mafia’s culture of unmitigated and ruthless violence, corruption, and paternalism and Mexico’s.

The Bear and the Porcupine is a phrase coined by Davidow to describe the overbearing tendencies of the U.S. government and the porcupine-like paranoid defensiveness of the Mexicans toward their northern neighbors. Despite this 30-year Foreign Service apparatchik’s terminal diplomacy and conciliatory inclinations, much truth about the character of the Mexican nation comes through in his book.

This highly readable testimony is packed with back-to-back accounts of Mexican corruption, criminality, incompetence, inefficiency, and triumphant self-defeat.

Davidow gathers insights not only from his four-year tenure as U.S. ambassador to Mexico (1998-2002) but through his extensive travels throughout the republic with his wife, Joan. “I learned more,” he says,

about Mexico—the dimensions of poverty and disease in the countryside, the lack of rule of law, the power of drug lords . . . the corruption of local officials . . . by moving around the countryside, talking, and listening.

Davidow chronicles his interactions with U.S. law-enforcement agencies (DEA, FBI, INS, CIA, Treasury, Customs, *et al.*) and the frustration he experienced from their “ingrained prejudices” about institutionalized Mexican corruption—insinuating that it is not so, while, in almost every case, verifying that it is so.

Davidow makes no bones about his conciliatory position toward Mexico, his integrationist views and fondness for the culture, and his belief in “constructive engagement.” Yet his first-hand descriptions of the Mexican government and people highlight the impossibility of positive results and, while denying the futility of U.S. engagement with Mexico, document it at almost each turn of the page. The Mexican *diablo* is definitely in the Machiavellian details.

Davidow asserts that “Combating the drug trade was difficult in Mexico for many reasons. The country was plagued by corruption . . . [and] a massive web of politically-motivated complicity.” In fact, he continues, “Most of the governors had no confidence in their own law enforcement officials . . . Most were absolutely convinced that . . . the Federal Attorney General (PGR) or Mexican Customs Service . . . were even more corrupt.”

The “War on Drugs” was doomed to failure from the beginning, because “every major investigation in which the DEA cooperated with the PGR was blown by well-remunerated leaks to the drug dealers from inside the Mexican government.” For example,

Mexican customs officials would pay their superiors up to a million dollars to be appointed agent-in-charge at a busy border crossing . . . the job gave them the chance to make arrangements with the local narcotics, migrant and contraband smugglers . . . the PGR

was rotten with corruption.

Moreover, "Mexico's newly appointed drug czar, Army General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, was arrested for being in league with the traffickers."

There are oversights and contradictions in Davidow's testimony, which, although raising many questions, do not detract from the merit of the whole. Whether his intention was to "remove some of [his] more outrageous statements and opinions," as the Foreword suggests, or to cover for brazen U.S. policy blunders, or simply to keep from burning his bridges for future bi-national endeavors, only he and his editors know.

Never does Davidow mention the historical roots of Mexico's staunchly defended inferiority complex, which is often used to justify inferior behavior: namely, the Arab component of Spanish colonial influence. Mexicans, men particularly, place pride and ego beyond all other considerations, thus sabotaging real honor and the fulfillment of their duties. Like the Arabs who, out of spite as much as politico-religious considerations, blow themselves up throughout the Middle East, Mexicans will gladly sabotage cooperative efforts at solving problems if they are not receiving sufficient recognition or a big enough piece of the pie. Their insurmountable egos create an almost insatiable desire for power and control, one that will see the ship sunk rather than commanded by another. Mexico, writes Davidow, "suffers from an arrested state of national psychological development that too frequently infuses the bi-lateral relationship with adolescent resentment and self-defeating posturing." If Davidow's testimony has one shortcoming, it is that he is too diplomatic.

Davidow does give due focus to the unreasonable demands and hypocrisy of Mexican attitudes toward the United States, including repeated mention of their criminality in America. The human-rights issue, which has become almost a *cause célèbre* for Vicente Fox's foreign policy, does not help either the average Mexican or American victims of Mexican crimes but only Mexican criminals and lawbreakers in El Norte.

More blood-and-guts facts regarding the negative impact of Mexican crimes in the United States would be instructive. Over 100,000 Mexican felons are currently incarcerated in American prisons, and over 360,000 have already been deported after serving time. Some have

returned illegally as members of the prison-formed Barrio Azteca gang (among others) to engage in drug running and other criminal activities. In Arizona alone, Mexicans have committed more than 60 murders, only to flee across the border, where immunity from punishment is virtually guaranteed. Mexican law prohibits extradition if the subject could face the death penalty or life imprisonment, so the villain walks free. A truly objective account of Mexican behavior in the United States would see an astronomical bill sent south of the border for all of the rapes, murders, robberies, carjackings, drug trafficking, and other damage done to innumerable American victims.

Mexicans cry havoc when a Mexican in the United States is facing the death penalty. (Some even accost unsuspecting gringos on Mexican streets to complain about alleged racism up north.) The Mexican constitution, however, provides absurd and biased protections against foreigners, including a prohibition on "*agrediendo a un Mexicano*" ("insulting a Mexican"), which is punishable by incarceration and deportation. Mexicans commonly hide behind this clause when cheating or abusing foreigners.

Another oversight on Davidow's part is his faith in Mexico's lame-duck president, Vicente Fox Quesada,

an honest man . . . a religious man . . . a man who [has] obviously thought carefully about Mexico's future. He [is] committed to . . . changing the country's political dynamic to give the people faith in their government. [He has] the ability to see himself at a distance . . . [He is] someone who [can] offer Mexico a concrete plan for the future.

In fact, Fox's government has abused power and state institutions no less than his predecessors in the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, and Davidow rightly notes that, just as not all that was done by

the PRI was bad, so not all that Fox has done is good. Fox has proved himself to be a demagogue, a paper jaguar unable to produce results, irrespective of opposition.

Just what has been achieved with a nonconfrontational Good Neighbor policy of "cooperation," Davidow's book never convincingly explains; and any benefit that could possibly be derived by the United States through further integration with such a dysfunctional, failed society remains unclear. Davidow openly admits the failings of current U.S. immigration policy: "[T]aken together, the millions of lies of [Mexican visa applicants] had changed the demographic face of America and made a mockery of US immigration policy."

And those who did not lie for a visa and risked the *mojado* border journey played Mexican roulette with their lives: "There [on the border] they suffered depredations at the hands of gangs who robbed, raped, and sometimes killed, often with the connivance of local [Mexican] police."

Davidow finishes his book with a futuristic prologue leaping forward to 2025, when an Open Borders agreement exists throughout North America, creating an arrangement similar to that of the European Union. But his utopian (or hellish, depending on one's point of view) theorizing does not address the impoverished, crime-infested, depressed *barrios* throughout the United States, where Mexicans have achieved numerical majority. More competitive wages would make jobs that attract illegal migrants viable for native-born Americans, thus improving the national economy and greatly reducing unemployment and immigrant crime. Nowhere in his epilogue does Davidow suggest sealing the borders and repatriating illegal migrants; yet these measures might be as good a way as any to prod Mexico toward an understanding of what it means to be, truly, a Good Neighbor.

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If You Can't Beat 'Em . . .

While Rockford, as I wrote last month, is becoming increasingly Democratic, Winnebago County, in which Rockford lies, remains fairly strongly Republican. Despite the massive growth of the City of Rockford over the last two-and-a-half decades (it now pushes all the way to the Boone County border on the east and occupies over 60 square miles, over a third again as much space as Milwaukee, which has approximately four times the population), Winnebago County remains largely rural and “underpopulated.” Farmers and small-town merchants (or the descendants thereof), most non-Rockfordian citizens of Winnebago County firmly occupy Red State America.

Thus, it is no surprise that 19 of the 28 members of the Winnebago County Board are Republicans. Their dominance is even greater than the numbers suggest. Winnebago County is divided into 14 board districts, and each district has two representatives. The Republicans control eight of the fourteen outright; the Democrats, three; and three are split between the parties.

Because Winnebago County is more Republican than Rockford proper, some politicians who have failed to win office in the city in recent years—such as W. Timothy Simms, the Republican candidate for mayor in April 1997—have sought greener pastures in county-board elections. (Elected in 2002, Simms is a board member for District 14 and the Republican majority leader.) On paper at least, the Republicans have complete control of the county, since they have a two-thirds supermajority and, thus, could (theoretically) pass (or block) any legislation they desire. The situation would seem quite conducive to the full flowering of the Republican vision of low taxes, fiscal accountability, and legislative and regulatory restraint.

And yet, for the past decade, the county has been anything but a Republican paradise. For eight years, from the fall of 1996 through mid-2004, many Republicans blamed the county's less-than-restrained taxing and spending on Kristine O'Rourke Cohn, the popularly elected full-time county-board chairman. (In Illinois, most county boards choose

their chairman from among the elected members, and the position is part-time. In 1992, the Winnebago County Board created the position of full-time county-board chairman, elected directly by the people.) Cohn, previously a Democrat, had switched parties, though not her political positions. (She remained, for instance, pro-choice, although that hardly mattered, since the only abortuary in Winnebago County is in Rockford, outside of the county's jurisdiction.)

During Cohn's eight years in office, taxes and spending increased dramatically, as did the size of the county bureaucracy. She embarked on an unprecedented road-building spree, which earned her many enemies when the county used special “Quick Take” legislation (a particularly virulent form of eminent domain) to seize half of the homestead of blind Army veteran Tom Ditzler. Where rolling hills, a stream, and trees once stood, today stretches a vast expanse of asphalt—the “Harrison-Springfield extension,” completing a loop of modern roads encircling Rockford. (In what seemed an especially nasty move, Cohn, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, christened this circuit the “Veterans Memorial Beltway.”)

With dissatisfaction with Cohn on the rise, her most vocal Republican critic (she had very few Democratic ones), Peter M. “Pete” MacKay, ran against her in the Republican primary in February 2000, vowing, if he won, to eliminate the very office for which he was competing. MacKay pointed out (quite rightly) that the Illinois counties with the highest taxes, largest bureaucracies, and greatest spending are those that have popularly elected, full-time county-board chairmen. It seems an obvious point, of course—give a politician a full-time job, and he will expand it as much as the limits of the law and the whims of the electorate will allow—but voters had a tough time wrapping their heads around the idea that someone would want to run for a position that he didn't believe should even exist.

With her sizable war chest; heavy backing from local developers, such as Sunil Puri, and public-works contractors, such as William Charles Ltd. (parent company of Rockford Blacktop, whose website,



rockfordblacktop.com, proudly—and without a hint of irony—displays the slogan “Paving the Planet for Over 55 Years”), both of whom benefited greatly from having a full-time county-board chairman; and endorsements from both prominent Republicans and prominent Democrats (including then-mayor Charles Box and then-state representative, and current mayor, Doug Scott), Cohn won the primary handily. Not surprisingly, she faced no Democratic opposition in the 2000 general election.

Cohn's second term, however, was marked by setbacks, as her desire to extend Perryville Road (on Rockford's far east side) all the way to the Wisconsin border was stymied by years of well-laid plans on the part of Roscoe Township, which just happened to own the right-of-way on a federally protected bicycle path that cut across all possible routes that Perryville could follow. And while Cohn, in concert with Winnebago County State's Attorney Paul Logli and Sheriff Richard Meyers, successfully lobbied for the passage of an open-ended one-cent increase in the county's sales tax, ostensibly to fund the building of a new county jail, the public outcry over the lavish design of the jail, the decision to place it in downtown Rockford, and the use of some of the funds to cover current shortfalls in the county's budget put Cohn on the defensive. By 2002, she had already started looking for a new job, and she accepted the dubious honor of being the Republican sacrificial lamb in the November 2002 race for Illinois secretary of state against popular incumbent Democrat Jesse White. (White's popularity had less to do with what he had done as secretary of state than with what he hadn't: Unlike his predecessor, George Ryan, White hadn't sold licenses to illegal aliens and truckers who had failed licensing and