

## BOOKS

## SOCIALIST HISTORY

The tragedy of the KPD was that during the crucial years from 1929 to 1933 it was so intent on the "correct line," so busy denouncing and opposing the SPD that it neglected the formation of a united front against the Nazis. Stalin and other Soviet leaders were convinced that the USSR was threatened with attack not by the Germans, but by Britain and France. In both these countries social democrats were among the mainstays of the bourgeois ruling order. Moscow therefore ordered Communist parties throughout Europe to break off united front activity at the time it was most needed and to wage ceaseless ideological warfare against the "social fascists."

As Ms. Levine-Meyers shows, this allowed the party's far left to gain ascendancy with disastrous results. The trade union movement was weakened by the creation of separate, Communist unions. The party became dogmatic, undemocratic and obsequious to the "great man" in the Kremlin. In the name of "bolshevization," "double-crossing [and] lies became daily practice under the left...accompanied by perse-

cution of intellectuals." Hopelessly fractured, the left was unable to mount an effective resistance to the Nazis after Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933.

*Inside German Communism* takes us to the years of the early Purge Trials. Ms. Levine-Meyer portrays a number of individuals who became apologists for Stalin's totalitarianism, conscious of their own mendacity, but so devoted to the party and immersed in its life that they preferred to "sell out" rather than risk expulsion.

These memoirs tell us too little about what the KPD meant to the rank and file and do not adequately analyze the party's successes and failures in the historical and political context of the Weimar Republic. They do, however, give the reader a very good sense of what it meant to eat, sleep and live for the party, convinced that the revolution might be within grasp, even as the party was abandoning and betraying some of its best leaders and ideals.

—David M. Szonyi

David M. Szonyi is a doctoral candidate in modern European history and frequently reviews for *In These Times*.

tic element in human existence. This diminishes rather than illuminates the problem of humanity's imprisonment, which is his major concern. The quasi-allegorical escape in which Farragut "dies" in order to become free again stands in stark contrast to more naturalistic (and overtly political) accounts of prison life in America today.

Cheever's soul is not on ice—his pen lends it the wings of an angel.

Reality is a fashionable element in Joan Didion's new novel, *A Book of Common Prayer*. West coast radical chic, Latin American revolution, middle class ennui serve as the milieu of her story of a middle-aged California woman's disaffection from life. It is essentially the same story Didion told in *Play It As It Lies*—the fall from a position of wholeness and security into a place where fear and terror reigns.

The first-person narrator, a Yankee anthropologist who is the widow of a Latin American dictator, should have lent this novel depth and a more expansive view of the main character's suffering. Instead, it merely adds another layer of coldness to the entrenched Didion style. In her earlier fiction, it was already nearly as deformed as the pitiable creature born to the drugged, slightly demented and damaged Charlotte Douglass whose daughter Marin has run off a la Patty Hearst to play revolutionary.

Didion's soul is pure ice. She attempted to write a novel that would allow us to read between the lines of last year's newspapers, but gave us instead a book that falls between the stools of exploitation and explication.

Set for the most part in Iowa City, John Casey's first novel, *An American Romance*, sidesteps its way into the heart and minds of those who care about everyday things. A graduate student named Anya who wants to wrest herself free from the enervating daily round of Chicago intellectual life and a natural man named Mac who builds things, represent for Casey the paradigm of modern lovers. The case he constructs for them (as they build a repertory theater on the outskirts of Iowa University) is bold in its reach but overlong.

Fiction for Casey grows out of the facts of gritty, nitty living together in a quasi-commune complete with VD and a troupe of actors. Unfortunately, it's too much like life in Berryman's Dream Song #14, often boring, but we must not say so.

William Humphrey is author of several distinguished but not widely known novels of Texas life. His newest book-length work is the autobiographical *Farther Off From Heaven*, in which he reconstructs his boyhood in light of the traumatic death one summer night in 1937 of his auto mechanic father.

The elder Humphrey was a fiery bantam Texan, who left behind a boyhood as a share-cropper's son to become a hunter and tracker in the woods of east Texas and then an auto mechanic, Clarksburg's finest.

The pains and intricacies of southwestern class and caste have never been so finely rendered as in Humphrey's prose elegy to his lost parent and to all the lost dus-

ty days of his childhood. This carefully composed, unassuming quest for the reality of one writer's past outshines Cheever's lustrious allegory, Didion's pretentious roman a clef and Casey's

garrulous carnival of the ordinary present.

—Alan Cheuse

Alan Cheuse teaches English at Bennington College and reviews fiction for *In These Times*.

## Best-seller built around tomorrow's headlines

## PARIS ONE

By James Brady  
Delacorte, N.Y., \$8.95

Superficially at least, the most distinctive feature of *Paris One* is its topicality.

The book's plot, which revolves around the attempt of a large Delaware chemical concern to take over one of the last great Parisian houses of fashion, occurs against the background of a French election: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing versus a left popular front. The book's hero, Anthony Winslow, obtains his job with a New York merchant bank after helping Felix Rohatyn "save" the city from bankruptcy. And when Winslow leaves for France, he flies out of Kennedy airport on the Concorde supersonic transport. Only a half dozen picketing housewives remain to see him go.

*Paris One* is a 300-page novel, and it was written in three months. Author James Brady, formerly editor of *Women's Wear Daily* and now editor of *New York* magazine, relies so heavily on current events that it is tempting to note instances where he was wrong about what would have taken place by the time of the book's publication. e.g., no Concorde has yet departed from Kennedy. But the point to be made is not how good a prophet Brady is, but how he uses current events to provide an instant social texture, which is thin but easily apprehended.

Brady has a sharp eye for people and writes well. *Paris One* is cleverly done, fast-paced, with a good deal of intrigue and sus-



Alex Goffroy

Author-editor James Brady

pense. All of which accounts for its continuing popularity.

He also delivers an extremely damning indictment of the practices of modern corporations—although he cops out in the end through the book's most stereotyped characters, the banker with integrity and the whore with the heart of gold.

The resultant anti-climax is dictated by the imperatives of aiming for the best-seller list. Nevertheless, *Paris One* is indicative of a shift in popular consciousness. It would seem that the same imperatives that make an author cop out, also permit him to ascribe violence, duplicity and murder to a multinational corporation as if these were only slightly exceptional business practices.

—Joel Blau

## Best-seller built around the history of a family

## THE THORN BIRDS

By Colleen McCullough  
Harper & Row, 1977

*The Thorn Birds* is a best-selling novel of the kind that deserves to be described as "romantic" and "sprawling." Some popular novels achieve their place on the most-wanted list by mixing sex and violence. *The Thorn Birds* is subtler.

The novel belongs to the genre of family sagas—in this case the Cleary family, who run one of the largest sheep ranches in Australia. We follow them through three generations from their impoverished beginnings in New Zealand circa 1915 to the late 1960s, by which time their grand-daughter is a great star of the London stage and their grandson is a Vatican priest.

The plot is rich and elaborately detailed. Many things can happen to a family in 50 years, and a family saga is not likely to leave anything out. As a consequence we have unrequited love and other suffering, and death by drowning, heart attack and prairie fire.

The purpose of narrating all these misfortunes seems to be the reaffirmation of the durability of the family. The Clearys are able to persevere through just about anything. The problem is that this casts some doubt on the integrity of the story.

The Clearys' ability to survive, of course, is not unrelated to their wealth. Colleen McCullough is strangely oblivious to this point. She seems to be using the family fortune to create a feeling of romantic excitement, while their misfortunes soothe our incipient envy and tell us that the rich are just like us after all because they also suffer.

These two themes—that families survive and that the rich are just like the rest of us—are tranquilizing medicine for what is currently unhinging the American mind. McCullough is on to something. She knows what's troubling us and wants to pat us all on the head.

Needless to say, we should not bend down.

—J.B.

## Fiction et al.



Jerry Bauer

Autobiographer William Humphrey.

## Four ways of dealing with American reality

## FALCONER

By John Cheever  
Knopf, \$7.95

## A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

By Joan Didion  
Simon & Schuster, \$8.95

## AN AMERICAN ROMANCE

By John Casey  
Atheneum, \$9.95

## FARTHER OFF FROM HEAVEN

By William Humphrey  
Knopf, \$8.95

John Cheever's new novel, a long-awaited affair, plunks the reader down inside Falconer pri-

son, into the cell and mind of a fratricidal WASP named Farragut, whose special condition comes to stand for the condition of us all.

Farragut is a drug addict (never a believable one) who murdered his brother and suffers imprisonment as a result. From the initial moments in which a fellow prisoner steals his expensive wrist-watch on through his love affair with a seedy young swindler, his petty insanities and laments and the facts of his incarceration make great sense. But Cheever turns the real surreal in order to dramatize the fantas-



## THE LAW

# Harassed woman sues the FBI

MILWAUKEE, WISC.—Over a period of many years, Mary Blair, a member of the Communist party, has been the target of a systematic program of harassment and persecution by the FBI. Now, with the help of evidence provided by the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act, she has brought suit in U.S. District Court here for \$1,634,000 in damages against six present and former officials of the FBI.

Blair's lawsuit charges that these six and other unnamed FBI officials, through covert, illegal and disruptive actions in 1960 and 1961, caused the Olsen Publishing Co. of Milwaukee to fire her, and through similar actions caused the Boy Scouts to remove her as a Cub Scout Den Mother.

Although the suit names only those actions occurring in the period of 1960-61, Blair has good reason to believe that the agency's activities against her began many years before that. "By the time I was fired by the Olsen Company in 1961, I had sort of gotten used to it," she said. "It happened before, but then I could only suspect the FBI's part in it—I had no proof. Now I have."

Blair's lawsuit, filed in her behalf by the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union Foundation, charges that the harassment against her in the 1960s was part of the FBI's COINTELPRO Program, which had as one of its objectives the destruction and disruption of the Communist party-USA.

The FBI's campaign to get Blair removed as a Cub Scout Den Mother actually was a warm-up for the main event of

getting her fired from her job. A couple of months before beginning an anonymous letter-writing campaign to the Olsen firm, the FBI's Milwaukee office sought permission from Washington to mail a Boy Scout official a *Milwaukee Journal* clipping "which ties Mary Blair and her husband, Fred Blair, with the CP."

The reply received from the FBI Director's Office read: "Authority granted to anonymously mail the *Milwaukee Journal* article.... The letter which will accompany the article should be prepared on commercially purchased stationery and should be very brief. It should merely express alarm over the possibility that the Cub Scouts under the supervision of Mary Blair will be indoctrinated with un-American ideas. The letter should be signed very generally as 'A worried mother' or 'Please do something about this.'"

Then in September 1960 the FBI officials prepared and mailed an anonymous letter to the Olsen Publishing Co. calling attention to Blair's membership in the Communist party and urging that she be

discharged from her clerical job on that account.

After that letter failed to cause her discharge on April 25, 1961, the Milwaukee office of the FBI sent the following memorandum to the FBI's Washington office: "The Milwaukee office requests authorization to carry out the following counterintelligence action designed to cause the discharge of Mary Blair, wife of Fred Blair, chairman of the Communist party in Wisconsin, from her present employment."

"Mary Blair's continued employment and income are vital factors to her activity in the CP and her function as State Treasurer of the CP of Wisconsin. Her employment gives her 'peace of mind' which allows her to freely devote necessary time to the CP. The loss of this income would disrupt the proper handling of her CP duties...."

Permission was granted from Washington to carry out this plan and in May of 1961 the FBI's Milwaukee office mailed a second anonymous letter to the Olsen

firm, threatening to damage that company by widely publicizing the continued employment of Blair. The way this letter was written implied that it came from an Olsen employee.

Still, the Olsen company failed to react, so the FBI Milwaukee office decided to try another tactic. On Oct. 13, 1961, they sent a memo to Washington requesting authorization to send an anonymous mailing of 15 pieces of Communist party literature they had collected to Olsen's employees and executives, "with the intent and with the expectation that the mailing would be attributed to Mary Blair."

Six days later the FBI Director's Office in Washington replied, "Authority granted to mail the Communist party literature to the fellow employees of Mary Blair at the Olsen Publishing Company. The mailing should be made to the residences of these individuals. The usual precautions should be taken in carrying out these mailings so that they cannot be traced to the FBI or suspected of being an FBI operation."

And that did it. On Nov. 19, 1961, the Milwaukee FBI office was able to send this memo to Washington: "This is to advise that Mary Blair, Secretary-Treasurer of the Communist party of Wisconsin and an employee of Olsen Publishing Company, Milwaukee, has been discharged from her employment effective Nov. 6, 1961. The mailing of Communist party literature to 17 employees of the Olsen Publishing Co. had its desired effect..."

—*Liberation News Service*

## Mozambique

Continued from page 9.

odus of Europeans. The image of an unstable and unpopular regime is explicitly challenged by most of these journalists. According to Ottaway, "Opposition to [President Machel's] rule is grossly exaggerated in the Western and Southern African press" (*Washington Post*, Feb. 16, 1977). His assessment seconds the English journalist Nicholas Ashford, who wrote, "...the most striking thing about Maputo under FRELIMO is how calm the city appears. Reports about a reign of terror being enforced are just not true. There are virtually no police to be seen, no armed soldiers in the street and no roadblocks near the city" (*The Times*, Oct. 5, 1976). In a similar vein, Renee Lefort notes that debate rather than coercion characterizes Mozambique's revolutionary transformation (*Manchester Guardian*, Feb. 13, 1976).

But what of the reputed concentration camps and prisons holding many thousands of Europeans about which Western reporters have written so indignantly? The English journalist David Martin writes: "At least 3,000 persons have been sent to political reeducation camps. They include drug addicts, pushers, prostitutes and

pimps, petty thieves and fences.... Those who need it are given medical treatment. All are given the taste and habit of productive work including building their own camps and growing their own food. There is no discrimination about who is sent for reeducation. Some of the inmates are white and inevitably that has brought an outcry from the Portuguese and other whites who have remained here and are not used to being treated the same as blacks" (*Africa*, February 1977).

### Deep-rooted anxieties.

I recall the sense of surprise and disbelief when colleagues and I inadvertently walked into a makeshift prison, which was also an historical monument, in northern Mozambique last summer. None of the guards carried rifles, the prisoners were engaged in small group discussions and the only weapon in sight was a hatchet being used by a prisoner to chop wood. These prisoners, we subsequently heard, were former soldiers involved in an abortive coup. Perhaps we should not have been so surprised, since Mozambique is the first country in Africa to have abolished the

death penalty. Certainly we would be hard-pressed to find a similar scene in an American prison.

Rather than brutal repression, these journalists note that deep-rooted anxieties, reinforced by unfounded rumors of retribution, primarily precipitated the large-scale European migration. "African capitals, like capitals anywhere, are notorious for rumors," noted David Martin, "but in Maputo they have reached a new high. Since FRELIMO nationalized rented buildings in February there have been whispers that Machel is about to nationalize children, wives and bank accounts. Incredibly, some of these rumors have been printed and broadcast abroad, and panicked the white community here into exodus" (*Washington Post*, April 9, 1976).

Anxieties of this sort were expressed to me last summer not only by Portuguese but by mulattoes and Africans who had lived in relative privilege during the colonial period and had become disenchanted because the socialist goals of FRELIMO jeopardized their social position. Since

then Raymond Wilkerson has noted that it is residual fears and "perhaps disappointment that the government has stuck to its Marxist principles, that are driving out the large colony of Europeans" (*Washington Post*, April 20, 1977).

Thus, two rather different pictures of contemporary Mozambique emerge—one based primarily on secondary accounts, rumors and Rhodesian and South African propaganda, and the other based primarily on personal observations. Sadly, it is the former that has carried the day. As in the cases of Vietnam and Cuba, the American press—with such notable exceptions as the *Washington Post*, which has published conflicting accounts—has selectively reproduced images of Mozambique that bear little relationship to reality.

These biased and distorted representations support Mozambique's contention that a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign is being waged against it.

Allen Isaacman is presently in Mozambique as an associate at the University of Eduardo Mondlane.

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