

LIFE IN THE U.S.

WOMEN & SPORTS

By Anita Diamant

THIS WAS BOSTON'S SECOND Bonne Bell race. The cosmetic company sponsored fourteen 10,000-meter races for women around the country and in Canada this year, and for the second time the "national championship" was held in the home of the Big Daddy of distance running—the Boston Marathon.

This Bonne Bell could legitimately be called the Big Momma of women's running. At 4,350 women, it was the biggest women's sporting event ever. The previous record was last year's Bonne Bell in Boston which drew a mere 2,300.

The race seems to have matured into a serious, world class event. No longer cutely called a "mini-marathon," there were fewer tasteless jokes from the podium and less use of the word "girls." Announcements were generally limited to reports of the runners' progress. And the mechanics of the race were very well organized—it took only two and a half minutes for all the runners to cross the starting line.

Columbus Day in Boston was perfect for running—cool, dry and sunny. The route was flat and the start wide. It was an extremely fast field. The winners of all the other Bonne Bells were on hand, but it was a race for all of the 200 top seeded runners, said Jess Bell, company president and running nut.

Joan Benoit, a student at North Carolina State took top honors with a world record breaking time of 33.15. Two native North Carolinians, Ellison Godall and Mary Shea, won second and third place, respectively. Benoit, a native of Cape Elizabeth, Me., is a member of the Liberty Athletic Club, the impressive New England Track club that also produced the first and second place winners of last year's Bonne Bell.

The winners' circle in a race of this size seems terribly small. Every runner had a story with a happy ending this year. Everyone who started the race finished.

Joan Benoit received a wreath of laurels and a trophy. Polly Wilson just went home with a great big smile.

Wilson, a woman in her sixties, had sneaked out of her house to run. "I put on my clothes to go to work this morning and then changed them in a little turn out on the road so no one at home knows where I went."

Warming up to run by herself, Wilson was thinking of her daughter who ran in last year's race. "She's in Boulder. She got an application blank and said to send it in. She's the only one who knows I'm running in this race. It's a secret."

Although the Bonne Bell was her first race ever, Wilson isn't as new to running as most of the women stretching on the Boston Common around her. "I started jogging before the rest of the world started, but then I broke my leg. I've only been jogging a couple of months now."

"I think it's fun and exciting," she said cheerily, and then confided, "I'm scared. I didn't sleep last night and all that."

Many of the women I spoke to had a clear idea of how fast they hoped to run. Runners were seeded by their own estimate of their finishing time. Wilson wasn't thinking about speed, though. "I have a finishing goal. And I'd like to not come in the absolute last. But I probably will."

Polly Wilson was pessimistic about crossing the line 6.2 miles later and planned to inform her family of her adventure only if she succeeded. "If I do [finish], I'll tell them. If I don't, I won't. I'll just cry quietly in the corner."

Polly Wilson had a secret race, but most runners came with support. A team of squealing seven-year-olds drove up from the Cape. Women trailing friends, co-workers, lovers, parents, sisters, husbands and kids stretched and psyched up side by side. For many, a picnic accompanied

Women run to compete, for fun

The youngest runner, six years old, held her mother's hand.



Photos by Nora Tringale, Peggy McMahon and Sid Huang

the main event. Strangers chatted and everyone was smiling. It was a pleasant crowd of 10,000 people.

Barb Bergeron from upstate New York was in Boston for her third Bonne Bell of the summer. "One in Buffalo, one in Toronto, and here. I really enjoy the Bonne Bells." Bergeron came alone, though "there are a few other runners from Rochester. I met one other friend from my track club and we kind of prepared for this together."

Like many of the women I talked with, Bergeron has her sights set on even longer distances. "I'm hoping to work towards a marathon, but probably in Buffalo to start. So I'm taking a year to prepare for that." A jogger for ten years, Barb Bergeron started racing only this summer.

New experience.

Susan Dudley is newer to the whole notion of sports than Bergeron. She started running in May and was shooting for a race of 50 minutes. "I've never done an athletic thing in my life until I started running and felt all the good things from being physically fit. It's a whole new experience for me. Other people I guess have known those feelings since school, but I never did."

For neophytes and old hands alike, though, racing is a relatively new experience for most women. Like many runners at the Bonne Bell, Barbara Murdock had her husband to thank for an introduction to the pleasures of the day. Murdock's been running in her home-town race in Winchester for seven years, but even for her, "it's only recently, in the past year, that I've gone out and done other races. I did the Beverly women's race and one in West Roxbury and Falmouth."

Murdock was there with her husband and two of her four children. The baby is 14 months old, but this was his second Bonne Bell. "I ran in the Bonne Bell last year when he was eight weeks old. My time wasn't very good."

"I didn't run while pregnant. I felt well during my pregnancy, but just couldn't get into a running habit."

At least one Bonne Bell finisher did feel well enough to run in her fourth or fifth month. Seventy-seven year old Ruth Rothbaum finished in an hour and a half. The youngest runner, a six-year-old, ran the race with her mother, sometimes holding hands "when it got a little rough." And Polly Wilson finished—far from one of the last.

The Bonne Bell races exemplify the women's sports boom in its many incarnations. The races offer women some of their few chances to compete in well-run, carefully timed, AAU-sanctioned all-women events. Distance running remains a step child. The upcoming Olympics still don't have any distance event for women over 3,000 meters scheduled.

A Bonne Bell race means that top competitors can meet in a field of peers and challenge one another to new records. It means that a woman will win the race—not just post the best time for a woman. It's an inspirational showcase for fine, amateur athletes.

But as well as being world class sporting events, complete with TV coverage and corporate sponsorship, the Bonne Bells resemble the "fun runs" that local track clubs now hold for all kinds of runners virtually every weekend all over the country. A Bonne Bell is a celebration of fitness, strength and independence from the passive, restrictive physical images of the past. And nobody is excluded.

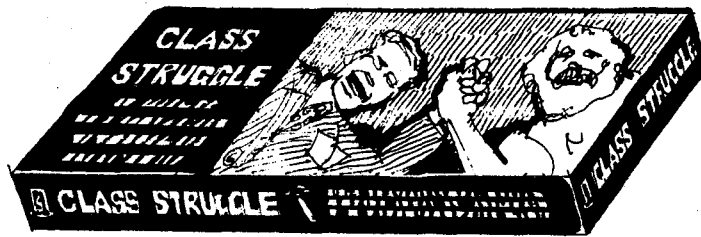
The message is loud and clear: Running isn't just for an elite class of super athletes. And competition isn't limited to the trophy winners. Women are still sprinting at the finish line even after 55 minutes. This is sport for everyone—and above all, it's fun.

Anita Diamant writes regularly on sports for IN THESE TIMES.

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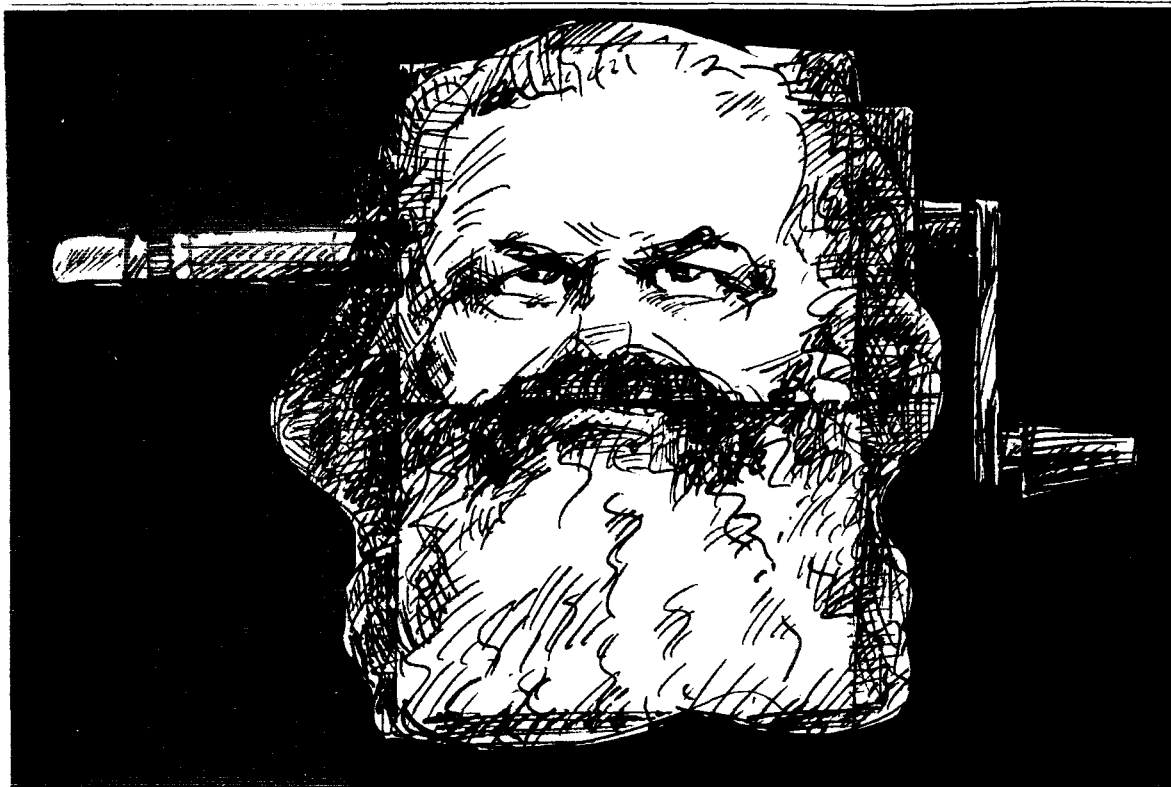
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Karl Marx meets the novel

Marxism and Literature
by Raymond Williams
Oxford University Press, 1977,
paperback, \$2.95

Raymond Williams has been writing literary criticism from an English socialist point of view for more than 25 years, but this book marks a departure for him. Particularly when taken in conjunction with his Raymond Chandlerish novel, *The Volunteers*, which came out this year, it shows us Williams developing, changing, experimenting, almost playing variations on himself. And that's more remarkable than it may appear, for Williams has stood out among contemporary writers for his Mount Rushmore integrity: unchanging, unplayful, an embodiment of resistance.

Seen as an event in Williams' career, this book is important because he so long balked at Marxism. The book is, however, very interesting in and for itself. Williams wants, as his main idea, to study literature and culture as kinds of material production.

He divides the book into three parts: Basic Concepts, Cultural Theory, and Literary Theory. The first part discusses four of the crucial terms in the argument to come: culture, language, literature, and ideology. He shows us that the term culture itself embodies the tensions of the industrial revolution and the reaction against that. He shows how the term became specialized. As a noun of inner life, he says, it came to be limited to the arts and philosophy. As a noun of general process, it was limited to "whole ways of life." The first meaning played a crucial role in defining the arts and humanities, and the second in the social sciences, but they were out of touch with each other.

Next Williams turns to what Marxism contributed to the idea of culture, most importantly the stress on material history—"the most important intellectual advance in all modern social thought." But Marxist theory also left culture in the "superstructure" of society, in the world of effects, while causes occurred at the material "base."

Marxism and culture.

The second part consists of ten

short chapters on important Marxist terms in cultural theory. Williams objects to the base and superstructure concept as misleading. He reinterprets the idea of determining laws, to mean not rigid limits but pressures in certain directions. He makes "productive forces" cover political, social and cultural forces as well as industrial. And so on.

He also reviews, criticizes, and incorporates later Marxist cultural theories. Williams is most impressed by Gramsci's idea of hegemony—the interlocking of political, social and cultural forces which imposes an ideology on a whole society and determines the character reality has for it.

The third part presents ideas useful in discussing literature from a Marxist-Williamsish point of view. Thus he would like to put the tiresome and misleading question "Is this fact or fiction?" into a series which includes "What really happened? What might (could) have happened? What really happens? What might happen?" (All these questions should be asked about imaginative literature, and when the first one is placed in the series, it loses its power to paralyze discussion.) He would also like to change our idea of "author," with its antithesis to "audience" and "society." Instead he wants us to see ideas as originating from forces at work in many people at the same time.

Virtue and loyalty.

In *Culture and Society* (1958), Williams addressed Marxists from a distance, asking them to show what benefit they derived as cultural critics from their special doctrines. Williams himself was brought up in the British Labour Party and Trade Union movement (his father a Welsh railwayman) and his sense of loyalty to that past is very strong.

Virtue to him has always meant resistance, and Marxism was one of the things he resisted. In his novels, *Border Country* (1962) and *Second Generation* (1964) he dramatizes family situations close to those he himself knew, and the resolution in both cases is an act of solidarity by the young, university-educated intellectual with all that his father represents. In the former novel the father dies, and the son becomes the father.

There are elements of conflict between the young man and his parents, but the stress falls clearly on closeness and on the transmission of a heritage so substantial it feels like an identity.

The image of virtue in both novels is an image of persistence, of obstinacy, of resistance. In both cases (and implicitly in Williams' theoretical books) virtue is defined by contrast with corruption. Of two men, one makes money, turns phrases, cuts a figure, changes; the other remains as he was; and the second is the figure of strength (strength and goodness are synonymous for Williams) to whom the other must come to sue for approval or forgiveness for each new venture.

Avoiding brilliance.

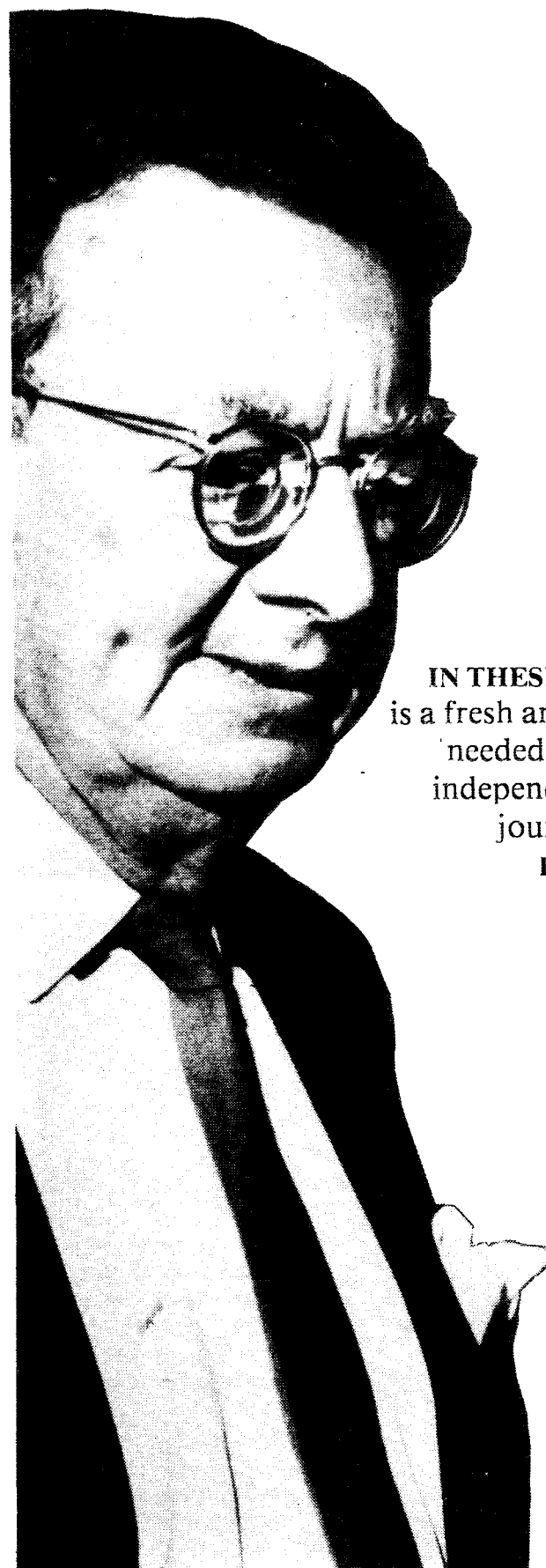
This inner dialectic makes itself felt in Williams' criticism in a certain dour inexpressiveness; an avoidance of the brilliant phrase, a distrust of eloquence and epigram; an impersonal substantiation of his ideas by redefinition (often in a highly abstract vocabulary) and by historical research which subverts established opinions—all this charged with anger underneath but superficially inexpressive.

This book is no more open, intellectually or emotionally. It is a very hard book to read. But the word revolution now seems to mean something less equivocal than it has in the past in Williams' mouth. The introduction begins "This book is written in a time of radical change" and its theme is that international Marxism has been renewed by the work of the last 20 years.

One might object that Williams has only found a way to interpret Marx to mean what he himself has been saying all along: that all evil derives from breaches in community, and all our efforts must be bent to healing such breaches. But the book arouses far more than objection. This and his new novel together prove—in their different ways—that Williams' mind is moving, experimenting, changing. When such a massive integrity begins to move one can expect great things. *Martin Green teaches English literature this year at Tufts University.*

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