

# Three Poems by Victor Hernandez Cruz

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Rosa is not married her son is now in school  
she keeps it up her mother's house when she parties  
that big house on the corner where i got lost  
chasing her friends one time in the dark  
room to room my hands in the air  
hoping for better things to touch

she had a fake brother we never saw him  
but they say he was in jail

Julio wears 42 dollar knits with gators  
& shining slacks that were hand made  
because he works overtime & deals cocaine  
his girl loves him they want to get married in the fall  
they will wear rings & walk together on third avenue  
her stomach falling in front of her he will offer soda  
& run down:

do we need milk or something

Carlos with cons & new blue shades goes to college  
plays pool at the bar on the corner of 109th street

either i'm stupid or i don't know what you're talking about  
he said  
turning to look in the mirror

middle-class stupidity staring  
at him

Chino came back with an Army suit on i guess this was  
supposed to be hip  
when he walked with his old girl & took pictures  
by the park  
he kissed his mother hard & caught a train back

Carmen  
there was three Carmens this one from the projects  
we went to the East River when it rain & stared  
at the water but not for long  
Norma came & stay with Harold in the shadow of a tree

Carmen stares at my clothes & wonders  
why i don't wear knits like all the people  
she talks to me now when i visit though  
she thinks i'm a little crazy

Helen is a jewish neighbor so i told her what the names  
meant  
we lived on the same block i explained to her  
we went upstate together  
we came out together  
went dancing together  
gave our girls babies together  
went on junk together  
& didn't get off together

Helen did not understand

(O funny it used to be babycakes but not no more funny)

Mildred was big  
somehow she got small & skinny she visits me  
sat on me half a day once telling me lies  
& kissing me showing me the things her boyfriend  
buys her a good leather jacket & beatnik ear rings  
a new book by Dracula or somebody she smiles  
on the train going uptown i'm sweating bricks

Benny writes to me from jail  
he robbed a drug store & beat a policeman up on  
broadway then he stole a car & was caught  
kissing the tires in Florida

JADE TURNED INTO JIVE DUST  
WONDERED IF IT WAS VODOO

i told him it was panamanian red when he recovered  
he lowered his head & continued to ask what happened

Candy was the girl i was to marry  
but we ran into storms & i had to bust her lip  
one time  
& she didn't speak to me & winter came  
i saw her shadow going past me the last time

LiL. Man always comes around with his scars  
& his son that runs & walks

LiL. Man would understand even now when i see him

he wonders  
why i still carry a knife  
them days are over he tells me & i stare at him  
& he understands

maybe that last one was too close to me  
she got upset when i put my hand in her blouse  
she made coffee for me

&  
all these years how old i must be getting  
but no

i turn to the mirror & stare at my youth  
& wonder at my intelligence.

### 3.

the education

the second floor  
belongs to larry  
hanging from the  
light bulbs  
insulting  
respectable educators  
likewise the bathroom  
is his

(better not open the  
door & let all that  
smoke get out)

moving between doors  
& bells  
& small dark rooms  
where you could smoke  
or snort garbage cans  
full of coke

(only a paid fool  
would say this didn't  
happen - - - - -)

victor hernandez cruz

# Bagging It, by Carl Oglesby

## BEYOND BLACK LAUGHTER

THE BAG. By Sol Yurick. New York: Trident Press. 476 pp. \$6.95.

THE REVIEWING OF NOVELS is a petty and lackluster craft which implies, moreover, a host of social relations which Sol Yurick's new book implicitly denies.

In brief, social continuity: author and novel are made familiar entities by the reviewer's casual preoccupation with character, plot and language. The propositions of the novel, new or used, are either elevated to the status of truths or reduced to that of novelties. In either case, they are put out of action. Americans want sensibility and nerve. Substance is the window through which style exposes itself, ideas the toys of imagination, things which novelists acquire mainly in order to give function and motive to form. If an affective plausibility is achieved, enough is done. It is even a bit crude to want more. One wants meaning, of course, but almost any meaning will do: Roth today, Capote tomorrow, Updike sometime. One awaits the next performance. Enriched a bit if the book is good but not damaged if it is bad, the social history of man absorbs the addition and unflinchingly continues.

But what Yurick is trying to do in *The Bag* is deal with the immediate, pressing reality of America's psychosocial ruptures—the tearing of all cultural bags, the breaking of bounds and limits, the disgorging of the contents of identity categories: the mindfuck of the current situation.

The title of the book, precisely, is also the name of the book's agonist: the idea of fixed, continuing, serviceable social relations. The action of the book: the dismemberment of that idea in contemporary America. The writer cannot write, the painter cannot paint, the governed cannot be governed, the ruler cannot rule. Violently assaulted with the existential fact of their inadequacies and frauds, men's bags burst. Each bag's contents bleed into others; social structure decomposes. In the end, experience becomes pure cascade and all categories but one lose whatever power they may

have had to shape experience by transcending it. The one bag which is left at the end—more accurately, the one which emerges, not pieced together out of the ruins, but on the contrary precisely that torrent of ruination itself—is revolution.

But not revolution as we know it from conceptual meditations on the past. This new, rough and most American social realism becomes disfigured but is perhaps also made more chaste by its passage through Freud, Stalin and Sartre. Its most acute perception, a despairing one, is of the immense uncreating power of its modern enemy, the bewildered technostate. Historical optimism has therefore taken refuge in the orgasm:

"There you are in your split-level and the soft trees murmur and the crickets sound and the soft skylight of the late-late moon lights the asphalt and romantic shadows bathe the carport; sweet air and there is a little bushquiver and maybe a nightingale and what's the soft sweet hum coming up the road and what's that distant tinkle? And then the flames will lick your sleep and prickle up and you know the beast you used to kill every night while you slept has come. Many are called and *all* will be chosen. Welcome me with open thighs because I want to wake you up and set you free. . . . Just get out into the driveway and watch it go up."

I HAVE SEEN THREE reviews of *The Bag*. Richard Ellmann's in the Times Book Review (May 19) is small-minded in its distaste. Thomas Lask in the Times of June 4, and John Leonard in the May 24 Life, seem to me equally small-minded in their enthusiasm. The approving reviewers, and probably Ellmann too, agree that Yurick's picture is accurate. But there the understanding stops. Lask makes explicit a response which Leonard implies: that Yurick seems to be saying the situation is so bad there is nothing to do but laugh.

And there it is again, that last ditch, that final bag: *irony*. Irony becomes now, in the hands of the black humorists and their critics, the supremely *political* device by means of which the horror is to be lived with instead of destroyed, the device by means of which Lear's Fool remains present in the crumbling throne

room, remains loyal. Unable to detach himself from the breaking categories which had formerly seemed to make life orderly and sane, the modern man decides to *prefer* the life of alienation and erects an impressive philosophical subsystem through which his fundamental loyalty to the discredited but coercive primary system can be continued: there have always been victims; therefore, laugh. Unable to face the consequences of the need to destroy the seemingly indestructible, the new moral picaro (anti-hero, black hero) decides to revolt instead against the cosmos (Camus), against aspiration itself (Beckett, Burroughs), or, observing that for the lucky (white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class) there are certain loopholes in history, one opts for simple desertion (Heller), another technique for escaping a condition defined as intolerable and unchangeable. Black humor is gallows humor where gallows and society define each other and practical resistance is reduced to chagrined consent.

Yurick is above all trying not to laugh. You are not allowed to laugh at the society that destroys Minnie Devlin, black "unreachable" earth-and-welfare mother, or her unprincled consort, Sam Miller, the typical hypersensitized Jewish writer-intellectual. They laugh sometimes; Yurick, too. But the laughter does not become modish or reassuring or *black*. It does not try to represent itself as a political method. Yurick refuses the private solution to the social problem. That is, he refuses solitude.

This constitutes the fine anti-wisdom of the book. No grey-bearded, mellow meditation on the endless folly of it all. No twilight smiles or gentle, melancholy winks or comradely pokes in the ribs between you and the cosmos. Besides this particular concrete world—U.S.A., the '60s—an American has no other. Laugh in the street, you'll get your teeth kicked in. Still laugh, they'll tear out your face. Deal with this: no escapes.

Black humor is intellectualized blues. It's what happens to blues when the singer goes to college and remains a slave. Another set of changes and a few new modes, sure, but politically understood, black humor remains blues. Within its most basic psychosocial structures,

it continues both to express and to conceal that forced acceptance of the unacceptable which is the whole functional definition of blues. *Blues*: a method of dealing with the world by changing the subject from horror to response-to-horror; a subversiveness that refuses to complete its dreams in other than artifactual terms; at one and the same time a demand for revolution and a refusal to make it; a death sentence which will not be carried out. *Black humor*: another moral irony whose function is to destroy the political imperative of the situation. The argument for revolt is slipped at the last moment, and instead of shooting, someone laughs.

A howl of black laughter: angry and momentous—the tumblers of the universe are heard to drop. This, at least, is what the deeper critics will claim to have heard. “Since we have found here a method of transcending everything, even God, who needs to bother anymore with the merely historical?” The rulers in particular seem to be moved by this reasoning; theatres and stipends appear almost overnight.

**Y**URICK IS NOT WRITING black humor. What, then?

It would be easy to call it contemporary history. After all, the book is about riots, counterinsurgency, New Left activists, black militants, liberal politicians, jargon-mongering careerists, radical intellectuals in the grip of the revolutionary need. But this would be misleading. He is writing instead about the living through of events which remain unclosed. Minnie remains permanently a torment, an affront and a victim. In her name—in behalf too of the other victims: those whom the convergent pressures of social insight, compassion, need and the brute logic of events compel to take positions which they cannot hold—Yurick stops his book, does not finish it, with the imperative which has not yet united with its concrete possibility: “Just get out into the driveway and watch it go up.”

The story is as simple and complex as the newspapers; it opens in the welfare office and closes in a riot. There is nothing at all perfect about Yurick's handling: 50 pages to set a stage the newspapers have already set very well, a bad ear for New Left bullshit and a promiscuous one for black jive; worse, a recurrent tendency to stage-manage

crises with pure language, the poet in him being summoned to do the work of the dramatist, the word made to function like the deed.

But that's all right; there are enough deeds, and the poetry very often works. And it is in any case poetry itself—the literary bag—which operates within the drama as a pressure among others, a supplicant to events. This is a crucial point.

The Life reviewer calls the central figure, Sam Miller, a “failed novelist.” Lask, of the Times, calls him a writer “with a block.” On the contrary. Miller has just finished a novel which his publisher is convinced is a best seller, and the “block” has absolutely nothing to do with the run-of-the-mill burnt-out writer's psyche with which a hundred novels have made us familiar. What Miller is going through, rather, and what requires him to withdraw his best seller, goes much deeper: how can a man write novels when the world is what the Missile Crisis and Minnie reveal it to be? Novel writing (like reviewing) implies a continuity of culture via its institutions. The novel surrounds itself with tacit assumptions by embedding itself in an actual world of publishers, distribution systems, agents, contracts, stores, buyers, critics, etc. It becomes a social commodity and hence an implicit affirmation of the society's institutional powers of veto and approval. It reifies the concrete world order in which novel writing is one job among others. When the novel comes forward to attack that very world, the artist is forced to recognize himself in a relation of duplicity: form affirming what content negates, gesture undercut by the ground on which it is made.

So Miller withdraws his manuscript, effectively immobilized by an insight which might as well be reduced to this: to be morally able to write novels, he must refuse to write novels.

And what about Yurick himself, whose own “best seller” (maybe it will be one: the first printing sold out in a month, full page ads in the Times, nibbles from Hollywood) was *not* withdrawn?

A familiar problem. Doomed apparently to eke out a parasitic existence on the body of a host whom he despises, the bourgeois artist cum-revolutionary-sans-revolution takes his own tail between his teeth and starts gobbling away. “What shall I tell them?” says Brecht in one of his poems, thinking of

the capitalist theatres, the capitalist audiences. Many, no doubt, have disappeared in the inner mazes of this question.

That the artist is put into precisely this relation with his culture, that his purity (or integrity or sanity) cannot survive outside the confines of an intentional silence which, however, will not become any the more audible or powerful for being intended, is the concreteness of his particular oppression and servitude—of his own stark human need for revolution. The bag of bags. The raw, daily experience of this need is what makes so much of the best of modern Western writing so viciously eccentric. It is what obligates Norman Mailer, for example, to play the ego-game of the Court Clown. But the acute, sustained encounter with this need is what makes Yurick's novel strong. Without self-pity or self-contempt, he has taken the measure of his own servitude. He has not denied it or tried to turn it into a virtue of sensibility. He has not pretended that understanding it is the same thing as a victory over it or that victory is expendable. Above all, he has refused to laugh.

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## CINEMA

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### As Others See Us

**I**F YOU THOUGHT Richard Lester's previous film, “How I Won the War,” was a lot of yocks—and apparently there are those who did, laughing *bitterly*, you understand, but laughing all the same—then Richard Lester's “Petulia” will roll you on the floor. But “Petulia” is not a funny movie. I mention this because some combination of Lester's reputation and the reviews (only Rex Reed, bless his waxy heart, had the gall to apply an adjective like “hilarious”) led me to expect a comedy. Uh-uh.

“Petulia” does resemble Lester's comedies, especially “The Knack.” There are a lot of frantic cuts through time and space, brief editorial snatches, kooky walk-ons, absurd props, *bits*. But the audience never seems to laugh as a body. Instead, there is this spatter of isolated



# THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION IS UNDER A CLOUD.

A cloud of smoke that pours out  
from all the back rooms of all the  
democratic wards in the country.

The smoke of a machine.

Smoke that fills the eyes of  
observers until they cannot see.

But this year they have to see.

Because this year, at the Demo-  
cratic convention, the country  
might begin to take a new direction.

The party hacks may like things  
the way they are, but 50 percent  
of the Democrats voting in the  
primaries voted for a change.

The Coalition for an Open  
convention plans to bring a half  
million people to the convention  
to show that they meant it.

The Mobilization is talking  
about another 100,000.

And a New Party is ready to  
be launched if the Democrats  
refuse to listen.

And so a lot will be happening  
at the convention.

But it is possible that it will  
all be lost in the smoke.

And that the people who come  
to it won't have much effect  
because of the confusion.

And that the people at home  
won't be able to do anything  
because they won't know what is  
going on.

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communication at the convention.

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provide.

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Minnesota (University of Minne-  
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MIT Tech, the Michigan Daily  
(University of Michigan), and the  
Yale Daily News, to name a few.

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to every delegation. And many more  
assigned to the campaign staffs and  
the various insurgent movements.

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followed the campaign from New  
Hampshire and know it as well as  
anyone can.

But most important, SUNDAY/  
FRIDAY will not be a part of the  
establishment press.

We will report not only what is  
happening inside the convention  
hall, but also what is happening  
outside.

If the New Party holds a  
convention right after the  
Democrats', SUNDAY/FRIDAY  
will continue to publish into the  
next week.

So the Democratic convention  
may be under a cloud.

But we think we can lift it.

[ ] All right. Send me the six  
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or money order for \$4.

[ ] Okay. Send me SUNDAY/  
FRIDAY. Bill me for \$6.

[ ] Attached is my classified ad  
and payment (check or money  
order). [35 characters equal one  
line equals \$1.] R-1

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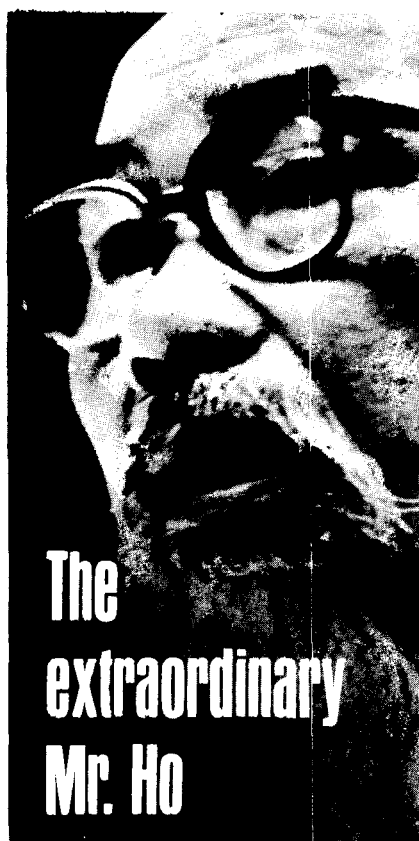
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**RANDOM HOUSE**

Photo: Charles Bonnay—Black Star

haws, as various individuals succumb to the insanity for a moment and then regain control. I hawed a few times myself. *Bitterly*, you understand.

After "How I Won the War," everyone discoursed knowingly about Brecht and the alienation effect, about how all that distancing was peculiarly appropriate to an emotionally exhausted subject like war. Soon, we figured, he'd return to entertainment. But instead of giving up the alienation effect in "Petulia," Lester has intensified it. The word that keeps coming to mind is the psychoanalytic term, "affectlessness," doubly apt because it is so affectless itself—just like "Petulia," which both exhibits and embodies an emotionless state. Lester's characters carom between catatonia and desperate involvement, lacking a natural flow of feeling in either case. Lester stays right between—his interest is as clinical as a lab technician's.

Visually, the film is exasperating, especially for those of us who detest flashbacks. From the very start Lester intercuts images of the past—innocuous or gruesome, instantaneous or anecdotal—with no visual or narrative warning. There are many cuts, but not a fade or dissolve in the entire movie. There isn't even much of the shifting focus that used to delight Lester so. Lester has never used many mechanicals, but in this film you really miss them—the staccato editing picks at your nerves. It is a perfect vehicle for the compulsive, self-conscious neuroticism that afflicts the characters, but it is still not any easier on the senses.

What's more, I'm sure Lester wanted it that way. In "Muriel," a film similar in theme and treatment, Alain Resnais achieves a serene mystery with virtually the same technique. Resnais' colors are more subdued and his camera movement is smoother; furthermore, his cuts rarely bridge as much time or space as do Lester's. But most of the difference is simply in the narrative tone. Resnais achieves mystery because his story is mysterious, not to say obscure; its people, whatever their strange hang-ups and economic problems, are aristocratic and inscrutable. In "Petulia," everything is known. The characters are rich Californians who hate themselves and each other. In other words, they are what people who go to movies like "Petulia" fear themselves to be.

I was delighted that Lester set the film in San Francisco, a move which under-

cut the usual geographical-stereotypical expectations of its audiences. This sneak play so befuddled the New York Times critic that she ended up praising the film's "evocation of the quality of life in Southern California." Angelenos always get the rap. Not only are they rich and at war with themselves, they are *vulgar*, and that is worse. Lester knows that vulgarity has many guises. The people in "Petulia" have culture, taste, all that stuff, yet it doesn't even begin to save them. In fact, it damns them twice.

"Petulia" is a satire that never comes off, done so artfully that you wonder, almost, whether it is a satire at all. There is a startling proliferation of goods on the screen, yet (except for an unfortunate early scene in an automated motel) Lester never pulls a Mike Nichols on us. He picks on no one and nothing; he is as fair to the inanimate objects in this film as he is to the people. We never feel that Lester is horrified, offended or amused by anything that passes in front of his camera. He may well be aware of the appropriate reaction; he may know, for example, that it is horrifying for Richard Chamberlain (excellent) to beat Julie Christie (present, which is always enough for me) nearly to death, or offensive for Joseph Cotton (superb) to conceal the beating, or amusing for a black hippie to tell George C. Scott (as usual) that he (the hippie) is on a "Polish trip." But he doesn't allow the reaction to register. The alienation effect is always in control. Lester is just setting everything down.

And how else are you going to make a film about The Alienation of Modern Man? There simply are no subjects that aren't over-exploited and emotionally castrated. War movies titillate our blood lust; alienation movies tease our self-pity. What's the difference? "Petulia" makes our eyes twitch and offers no salve of moralism. It's silly to ask anything more of it.

"THE FIFTH HORSEMAN IS FEAR" has been reviewed ecstatically by the liberal critics, who apparently enjoy watching the Nazis get flailed as much as the Czechs enjoy wielding the whip. Personally, when I need instruction in the dangers of fascism, I listen to Hubert Humphrey on the 11 o'clock news.

GEORGE AXELROD, reportedly an acerbic fellow, presents Hollywood's case for therapeutic adultery in "The Secret

Life of an American Wife." It's thoroughly stupid except when Walter Matthau and Anne Jackson are on the screen together. They redeem the unredeemable. You could do worse on a hot August night than take in the two of them—assuming your theater is air-conditioned.

"THE BRIDE WORE BLACK," François Truffaut's tribute to Hitchcock, is recommended to anyone who subscribes to *Cahiers du Cinéma*. I don't. Apparently I missed dozens of clever allusions, but I did notice that this film, unlike any of Hitchcock's, tells an uninteresting story.

—ROBERT CHRISTGAU

## BOOKS

### The Lower Depths

GOTHIC POLITICS IN THE DEEP SOUTH. By Robert Sherrill. New York: Grossman. 324 pp. \$6.75.

THERE IS A PECULIARLY sanguine variety of economic determinism that sees racist politics in the Deep South fading in the dawn of a new-South economic boom. But a close look at the same-old-South economic squeeze reveals the same old rednecks and peckerwoods, many of them now in the cities, being hustled by the same old pitchmen, subsidized and patronized by the same old rich men. And lots of folks, black and white together, are the losers.

This is the thesis of Robert Sherrill, Dixie's homegrown H. L. Mencken, in his new bestiary (there are toads, hawks, wolves and foxes) and anatomy (there are scrotums, hyperthyroids, cardiacs and cancers) of the personalities and patrons of Deep South politics.

Sherrill details the different local brands of cynical, race-using politicians: Louisiana's Leander Perez, the religious defender of the white faith, especially on the Perez plantation in the swamps; Georgia's Herman Talmadge, the weak inheritor of rural racism, edging toward a patriotic, suburban brand of his own; Arkansas' Orval Faubus, the prototype loser of federal battles to preserve his local tenure; Florida's George Smathers,

the Golden Hatcherman with racism as his career-opener and spoilsmanship as his profession; Mississippi's Jim Eastland, the mudcat McCarthyist, gaveling wildly in the U.S. Senate against the Red and the Black; South Carolina's Strom Thurmond, a political party unto himself, piously wrestling everything in sight; Alabama's (and America's) George Wallace, the bantamweight always probing for the political jugular; and lesser Favorite Sons-of-Bitches.

No matter that Faubus is currently up a creek without a patronage paddle; Smathers is edging himself out to less official pastures; Talmadge, Thurmond and even Eastland are, all things considered, more fart than ferocity in the ultimate scheme of national power; Perez is possibly not immortal; and Wallace has suddenly run out of trusted kin. These men have in fact paved the way for more reactionary, if sometimes more dignified, types. Sherrill convinces us when he concludes that the past decade of flickering, fainthearted federal intervention on behalf of civil rights will not soon alter the basic condition: "Long after the pitchmen have become decorous, and after even sheriffs come to look upon the country-lane murders of civil rights workers as unheroic, and after the loud disenfranchisement of black citizens ends, the negative power of this region will continue to shoot up like prickly hedgerows between the races. Laws may make life more enduring for the blacks, but only time will bring the pleasant blandness of equality, for Dixie's mischief is in the blood and must burn itself out."

For several years now Sherrill has been doing for the America of starvation what Mike Harrington did for the America that lives in invisible poverty. He has rediscovered and reemphasized the human tragedy beneath the political loose talk and statistics. His pieces in *The Nation* and the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* revealed stark hunger in such sensational locales as Senator Eastland's plantation and sparked the recent national publicity and legislative clucking. In the present volume, too, we can feel his outrage: "Choose any shanty; only the number of bodies inside will vary. Here is a mother and six children, residents of Washington County, against the river. Four of the children are asleep on the floor. They sleep most of the day as well as all night. Their lips and legs

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are covered with scabs and open sores. The youngest has a distended stomach and from it the umbilical knot sticks out like a valve from an innertube. Some days they eat nothing. Most days they have one meal, of cornmeal. . . ."

The underlying political tragedy is described only in passing. This is the systematic furrowing of a natural democratic Populism by bigotry, babbitttry, bellicosity and Biblicism into the national seedbed of fascism. These seeds have been shipped to Dallas and Los Angeles, for all the more sunshine and irrigation, and spread to the burned-over industrial turf of the North, to germinate and flower into racist politics for the "forgotten white working man." The South may be underdeveloped, but it has become America's political vanguard thanks to its war industry economy, the well funded, hysterical witch hunting aimed at unions and blacks and the commercialism gripping its soul.

**S**HERRILL DESCRIBES the careers of the men who swept away almost all remnants of democratic populism and New Deal progressivism in the Deep South. Thurmond had traveled

under the banner of the New Deal in the '30s and '40s before riding the revenge-seeking machine of Jimmy Byrnes to create an independent South Carolina Dixiecrat force that paved the way for Goldwaterism. Smathers had been nurtured politically by Senator Claude Pepper on a diet of Roosevelt-worship before using every Red- and black-baiting trick in the book to unseat his white-maned mentor in 1950. Faubus reportedly never saw a Negro in his early poor-boy mountain years in Arkansas. He rose to power on public-expenditure progressivism and moderation on civil rights, then allied himself with Klan politics in his Little Rock schoolhouse drama to gain a third term. Wallace began as a Populist ally of Big Jim Folsom (who attacked Big Business and appealed positively for Negro support) but, as Sherrill generously puts it, "like great but tragic Populist Tom Watson half a century ago, [Wallace] decided he could not really get to the top and stay there by dealing in economic problems and that he would have to bow to what Watson bitterly had called 'the inevitable nigger question.'"

Behind this searing system, according to Sherrill, is the frustrated fundamentalism among white folks—about the Bible, the Constitution, about eternal verities and control over their lives in a time of war, commercial speedup and changing national racial "policy" without an accompanying new political, administrative and economic order. Arch-conservative political use of this popular frustration was subsidized and encouraged by the central economic royalists of these states: the Big Mules of Alabama industrial finance; the Coca-Cola and insurance establishments of Atlanta; the private utility interests of Arkansas; the landed resource exporters of Louisiana; the banker-planters of Mississippi; the Dixie du Pont cousins of Florida; and the Barnwell barons of South Carolina, all seasoned liberally by a growing military pork barrel.

Their achievement as manipulators is to hold together a coalition of hapless rednecks and royalist "good people." This coalition, Sherrill shows, is welded by racism. "Peckerwoods ride by and shoot into Negro shanties at night; good people refuse to distribute federal surplus food to hungry Negroes in the winter, thus insuring their eager return to the fields at \$3 a day come spring. . . .

It is . . . those who, merrily sucking a jawful of Red Man tobacco, are willing to work and sweat to dig a grave in the night to hide their murder, and that smaller group . . . called the 'uptown Ku Klux Klan'—men of substance who would not think of night riding, either to kill or to catch a killer; they are the Rotary Club of Indianola who did their civic duty by buying more riot guns for the local police when the SNCC youngsters came to town, not the farmers who later burned down the Freedom Labor Union's headquarters. Nine low-class white men were convicted of bombing Negro homes in McComb, an offense that could have brought death penalties, but it was a middle-class judge who put them on probation with the excuse that they had been 'unduly provoked' by civil rights workers who were 'of low morality and unhygienic.'"

Why would they want to change? So long as the economic climate for business remains "friendly" (subsidy for industrialists, policing for welfare rolls), the tax structure remains "broad-based" (regressive personal sales tax), industrial relations remain "harmonious" (no unions), and military and public works pork barrels are administered "responsibly" (the big 'uns get the contracts), why try to root out a little racism on the hustings and behind the back, pentecostal fascism on the airwaves and petty patronage in the statehouse? Sometimes Deep South business leaders advertise for moderation in the New York Times, to perfume over the latest bombing or assassination. But more typical is the performance of the president of Hammerhill Paper Company, who sat beside Governor George Wallace a few hours after 2600 people had been jailed for demonstrations in Selma and announced that he had decided to build a \$25 million plant at Selma, because "my company had investigated the character of the community and received nothing but fine reports."

In the areas where the rural Populist movement was crushed and diverted and the suppression of integrated organized labor left the struggling white Southern worker behind with the struggling black, gospel-hour politics have been the basic source of information and inspiration. The Message is frequently sponsored by new-rich Southerners or Southwesterners like H. L. Hunt, and by trickle-downs from the always-rich sugar daddies men-

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tioned above. It is often articulated half-wittingly by disciplined graduates of places like the "buckle on the Bible Belt," Bob Jones University of Greenville, South Carolina (to which Sherrill devotes a chapter). The Message usually equates states rights in the Constitution with baptism in the Bible and sanctifies suppression of the blacks and of the unions (Billy Graham once described the Garden of Eden as a place where there were "no union dues, no labor leaders, no snakes, no disease"). The rest is left to the imagination and the political follow-up men.

It is remarkable that Sherrill can describe this intellectual miasma in a tone that is, somehow, not despairing. His source of confidence lies, evidently, in his belief that America will not follow the South's racist lead. Thus he concludes his vignette on George Wallace: "If national politics has a place for a man with that rigidity, then Governor Wallace, with his proven ability to rally the masses, may have a fine future ahead. But for his type there is no middle ground, and if he has guessed wrong, then he can at best hope to wind up beside that old broken musketeer, Ross Barnett, in Dixie's wax museum."

To many readers, though, Sherrill's pessimistic story will carry more impact than his somewhat hopeful moral. This is a country where public figures are being forced into the categories of the rigid and the dead.

—ROBB BURLAGE

## The Prophet, Armed

VENCEREMOS! THE SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF CHE GUEVARA. By John Gerassi. New York: MacMillan. 442 pp. \$7.95.

LIKE PSYCHOANALYST of the Algerian revolution Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*) and American revolutionary Malcolm X, Che Guevara has made his peace with *yanqui* culture. CIA agent Felix Ramos and "the little Indians" of the U.S.-trained Bolivian Rangers got their man. Still, Che Lives—sprawled out in four colors across the paperback bookstand of your nearest Safeway, politically emasculated in Western Civilization 101 (four semes-

ter credits), and soon to be crucified by the Hollywood spectacle-mongers. Not even a communist revolution in Bolivia could save him from being a North American culture hero.

But Che Guevara, the flesh and blood revolutionary, was neither an anachronistic 19th century romantic nor a 20th century Galahad defending distressed Indians in the Sierra as he chased after the Holy Grail of revolution. Guevara was instead a serious and very modern communist: by means of the very computer and cost accounting techniques which have led capitalists and traditional communists to the grey inevitability of an "Advanced Industrial Society," Guevara struggled with the nuts and bolts of creating a playful, classless society.

It is this struggle, rather than the mushy humanism of the pop guerrilla, that former New York Times correspondent (and ex-San Francisco State College teacher) John Gerassi has brought out in *Venceremos!* Gerassi's choice of essays and speeches, many of them presented in English for the first time, does not exclude Guevara's artistic concern with individual will. Che's management of the Cuban economy, discussed in several of the more important essays, was simply a very human amendment to the laws of supply and demand. Without a much perfected will, the asthmatic Argentine would never have made it through two years of guerrilla warfare in Cuba, an experience he described in the book's longest essay. (A different, more wordy translation has been separately published as *Reminiscences of the Revolutionary War*.)

Contrary to his young New Left supporters and his older Old Left critics, Guevara is not preaching a Nietzschean struggle of will against history and technology. Throughout his essays and speeches he displays an acute consciousness of "the objective factors" of history. Guerrilla warfare in the countryside works only because most of the necessary conditions are already present, especially when South and Central America are seen as a single theater of operations. The oppressed peasants and urban poor share a single need: proof that armed struggle can be effective.

As a revolutionary, Guevara was first and foremost a realist. In his descriptions of warfare he pays the strictest attention to the details of seizing power, to the



(THE TEXAS GENTLEMAN)

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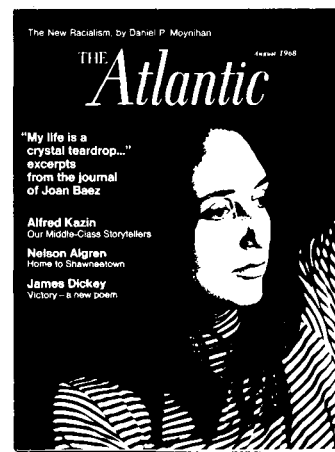
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all-important relationship between the original guerrilla nucleus of intellectuals and the peasants who give substance to social theory and muscle to the incipient popular army. His choice of the countryside as a starting place is equally pragmatic; he fully recognizes the need to carry the struggle to the rest of the country once the base has been secured. His own death in Bolivia only underscores his emphasis on the difficulties of the early months of struggle, including the need for a thorough knowledge of the terrain. In death, as in life, he stayed clear of both the utopian and the idealistic. For Che, the utopians were those who still looked to Latin America's "democrats" and the Alliance for Progress; the idealists were those who spoke of peaceful coexistence and nonviolence "without analyzing the practical results of this peace" (poverty, degradation, increasing exploitation of enormous sectors of humanity).

**S**EEKING TO CREATE Socialist Man in Cuba, Che integrated ideological concerns with an understanding of possibilities, economic growth with ethical principle, expertise with going to the people. In his introduction to this volume, Gerassi quotes a U.S. Export-Import Bank official who had dealings with the Cuban leader: "Guevara knows and understands foreign exchange, balance of payments, etc., and in fact he understands finance and economics, and he knows exactly where the hell he is going. . . . It was just like talking to another banker, except that the son of a bitch is an orthodox Marxist."

But even the bitchiness, the Marxist orthodoxy, hung very close to experience. A "socialist" economy based primarily on wage differences—"from each according to his capacity, to each according to his work"—would become an end in itself, Che warned. At the same time he saw that in Cuba, with its capitalist traditions and material scarcities, "interest in material gain is the great lever that moves the workers individually and collectively."

Faced with this conflict, other revolutionaries have opted either to increase production, whatever the damage done to socialist consciousness, or to bureaucratically impose a morality of sacrifice. Guevara's solution, carefully developed in *Venceremos!*, was to maintain some material incentives, while building the

new ethic into the very structure of the new Communist Party. How well this assault on "human nature" succeeded still remains a question. But by the end of his writings (and of his life), Che himself was convinced that, in Cuba, work was becoming "meaningful play."

Unfortunately, the communist Guevara of *Venceremos!* will have at least one additional difficulty in overcoming the Guevara of song and fable. As editor Gerassi admits, many of the essays make hard reading. Lectures on farm mechanization somehow don't convey the excitement and fear of peasants coming face to face with new machinery and new opportunities. Treatises such as "On Production Costs" or "On the Budgetary System of Financing" are poor vehicles for discussing revolution. And Guevara's often heavy language doesn't help. But the intellectual struggle to grasp these parts of *Venceremos!* is worth the effort, especially in a tired culture which has to depend on imports to turn on its young. And even the most turgid passages have an inescapable eloquence, for embodied in Che's writings is his belief that "the best way of telling is doing." —STEVE WEISSMAN

## CORRESPONDENCE

### [WHITEWASHING TWAIN]

SIRS: Maxwell Geismar's article on Twain's more radical writings ["Mark Twain on Racism, Imperialism et al.," *RAMPARTS*, May 1968] was an intelligent and reasonable survey of a side of his work that is often an embarrassment to the "nostalgia" critics, but it was, alas, also something of a whitewash. For all Twain's talk about the horrors of imperialism and his criticism of American adventurism in the Philippine campaign, when it came down to real commitments, Twain was often conspicuously absent. The most notorious example is the Gorky incident. When word got around that Maxim Gorky had come to New York with a woman who was not his wife, Twain did an uncreditable imitation of Chicken Little, asking such faultless arbiters of taste as William Dean Howells and Stanford White (!) what he should do, and ended by cutting Gorky cold.

While I agree with Mr. Geismar that Twain's radical works are surprisingly good, I must say that the most striking