

expulsion of that non-Jewish population, in the name of Jewish "purity."

In Litvinoff's view, in fact, there is only one region in the entire world where the Jews have actually been able to attain peace and almost total fulfillment: in America. Litvinoff rightly emphasizes that Jewish upward mobility and the ease of Jewish merging into the mainstream of American life was facilitated most by two facts not of the Jews but of the United States: first, the Constitution, which explicitly forbade official state discrimination on the basis of religion, and second, the fact that in America the Jews found a society that was already made up of a great variety of different groups, a polyglot society where the issue of "national purity," if not absent, was greatly defused (at least as far as the white population was concerned). The result of all these factors has been that the Jewish experience in America has been the happiest Jewish experience of any society on earth.



And yet . . . there has recently emerged a new paradox. It is only in America in the post-Holocaust period that anti-Semitism has developed from a base of true populist mythology—found in the black community. In 1988 we witnessed Louis Farrakhan being invited by black college students throughout the country to come to their campuses to deliver his anti-Jewish diatribes (including the charge that evil Jewish businessmen were behind the drug problem in the black community). And in 1988 we also witnessed the incredible spectacle of an assistant to the black mayor of Chicago publicly accusing Jewish doctors of injecting AIDS into black babies: a return to the paranoid fantasies of the 14th century. Blacks, who have long served as scapegoats in American society, seem to have found a scapegoat of their own. I suspect that the sad story so well told by Barnett Litvinoff is not quite finished.

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Bad Georgie

by Brendan Galvin

Understanding George Garrett

by R.H.W. Dillard

Columbia: University of South Carolina Press; 230 pp., \$19.95 (cloth), \$9.95 (paper)

The facts of George Garrett's literary career are laid out in the bibliography here: his 24 books include novels, plays, and collections of poems and short stories. In addition he has served as editor of 17 other books—interviews with contemporary writers, literary criticism, books on film scripts. He has also written a biography of the novelist James Jones; a book-length critical study of the novelist Mary Lee Settle; screenplays; essays on William Faulkner, James Gould Cozzens, John Cheever, daily life in Elizabethan England, WASP humor, writers as teachers, and on and on. The amount and the range are breathtaking, and so is the quality. One is tempted to imagine Garrett—on his way to deliver one of his controversial lectures or an inspired reading from his work—seated in an airplane with a pen in each hand, writing on the two nearest folding trays.

Now comes R.H.W. Dillard, himself a novelist, poet, screenwriter, and critic of considerable accomplishment, to assess Garrett's oeuvre in *Understanding George Garrett*. This is the first of what will doubtless be many book-length studies of Garrett. That many lesser contemporaries have so far received far more attention than the author of *Death of the Fox* and *The Succession* is not surprising, given that Garrett has consistently ignored literary fashion and written what he wanted rather than what the pop audience craved. He chose early on to be, "If I could, like Mr. Faulkner, *The Cat Who Walks Alone* . . ."

Mr. Dillard is the right person to explain and evaluate Garrett's prodigious achievement. He is familiar with the multiple versions of Garrett's fictional works and how they mirror each other structurally, thematically, and imagistically. He is also grounded in the Old and New Testaments and in Christian symbolism, which is crucial to any reading of Garrett. And his familiarity with the work of contempo-

rary meta-fictionists renders him capable of untangling the intricate structures Garrett frequently employs to involve the reader, especially in such novels as *The Succession* and *Poison Pen*, where one is not permitted to be a passive listener, but must help create reality and meaning.

Mr. Dillard begins with an overview of Garrett's career to date, noting along the way that in "all of his work he has maintained a commitment to the creation and rendering of people and their problems as 'different' and individuated, as humanly and spiritually rather than sociologically or politically relevant." There next follows an analysis of Garrett's first novel, *The Finished Man*, whose backdrop is Southern politics, and which details the moral struggles of characters representing old values and new, always in the fallen world that Garrett insists we live in.

Chapter three discusses the second novel, *Which Ones Are the Enemy?*, and relates the plot and characters to earlier stories Garrett wrote about military service in postwar Europe. The setting is the Free Territory of Trieste in the early 1950's, and the protagonist John Riche, a professional soldier who by choice inhabits a spiritual wasteland in which he tries to remain uninvolved with other people. Through his relationship with Angela, a B-girl whose life has been ravaged by the war, Riche learns to break out of the cell of himself, only to lose Angela to suicide. In the end he has learned to empathize with others and to articulate his own experience as a step toward his redemption.

Do, Lord, Remember Me, Garrett's next novel, has had a curious publishing history, and according to Dillard deserves to be reprinted in its entirety, not in the way it was originally brought out. Under the pressures of publishing economics, fully three-fourths of the manuscript was cut, reducing the novel from a Chaucerian panorama of small-town Southern life to a neater tale about Big Red Smalley, a traveling evangelist, and his followers. One hopes that the publisher who reprints it (or, really, publishes it for the first time) will also collect Garrett's miscellaneous essays, which would make provocative reading.

From Southern politics to army life

to tent-show revivalism in three novels: it is not hard to see that Garrett was breaking new ground for himself with each book, moving from locale to locale, situation to situation. Along the way he was also finding new forms for his fiction, and Dillard is at his best when he explains what happened during the writing of Garrett's major works to date, the novels *Death of the Fox* and *The Succession*, the first an imaginatively reconstructed life of Sir Walter Raleigh, the second a book with no central character, but so rich with fleshed-out characters and authenticities of Elizabethan and Jacobean life that the reader never notices there is no main figure.

Dillard sees in the two books more than the run of historical novels. Together they offer, he says,

a fiction of artistic subtlety and intelligence rather than derring-do, of living fact rather than antiquarian gesture, of imaginative meditation on history rather than the recounting of invented events against a backdrop of history. Garrett builds up a historical context of great richness and factual accuracy—an Elizabethan and Jacobean world which is fully researched and vividly rendered—but he abandons conventional plot along with almost all of the other conventions of the genre in a successful effort to create new narrative forms, “open texts” which engage readers in the very act of historical imagination . . .

Poison Pen, which gets the next chapter in *Understanding George Garrett*, is a controversial novel composed of crank letters to celebrities (Lyndon Johnson, Christie Brinkley, Ted Kennedy, Brooke Shields, etc.), lists of hilarious literary judgments (e.g., “Dave Smith is the Robert Penn Dickey of American Poetry”), authorial denials, entrances and exits by one John Towne, a seedy academic who at times seems to have written *Poison Pen* itself—in short a hellzapoppin’ Olson and Johnny romp. Mr. Dillard deserves some new literary award for being able to untangle the structure of this one.

When misread, as by the reviewer

who saw it as a monstrosity creation of “Bad Georgie,” *Poison Pen*'s satirical intent can be misconstrued, for it truly is the many-layered kazoo concerto another reader judged it to be, aimed at our time, when celebrities tout their projected, media-fabricated personalities as the only truth. (Garrett quotes his wife as saying at one point, “Public life is an illusion. Only private life is real and matters.”) And that is the point to the celebrity-puncturing that occurs in *Poison Pen*.

Wherever he can, Mr. Dillard has thematically related Garrett's poems and short stories to the novels. What we now also need is a new, true version of *Do, Lord, Remember Me*, a collection of Garrett's feisty essays, and somewhere down the line someone must tell the story of Garrett's role as Father Confessor and Godfather to a younger generation of American writers, for no other contemporary teacher and writer has as many books dedicated in gratitude to him. R.H.W. Dillard has made a fine beginning with *Understanding George Garrett*, and the last word here should be his.

[Garrett] has maintained his serious dedication to writing of poetry and short fiction, even while his reputation was developing as an important novelist. He has taken chances as an essayist and critic by daring to point a revealing finger at the emperor's new clothes, no matter what powerful literary figure was wearing them at the time. He has written a body of seriously Christian art at a time when Christian belief is too often worn on literary sleeves rather than in writers' hearts. Recognizing both that people must learn “to lie a little and live together” in this world of lies and that the complex lie of art may be the surest way of speaking the truth in such a world, Garrett has truly gone his own way, and those who have benefited most are his readers, for he has shared with them an intensive and vital imaginative experience.

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A More Perfect Union

by William A. Donohue

In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government

by Charles Murray

New York: Simon and Schuster; 341 pp., \$19.95



In Pursuit is a philosophical exegesis on what is wrong with contemporary social policy analysis. In some ways it is a sequel to Murray's *Losing Ground*, having much in common with Part IV (Rethinking Social Policy) of that influential book. Though this is a more enterprising work, it is also a less successful one, leaving the reader with a sense that Murray's real goal is to provide a somewhat novel argument for a libertarian conception of the common good.

Murray concludes *In Pursuit* by stating that “much of what central government must do first of all is to leave people alone, and then make sure that they are left alone by others—that people are restrained from the use of force against each other.” What else should government do? That's about it. It is no wonder that three pages later Murray approvingly cites the libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick. But whereas Nozick was content to argue against big government on the principle of individual liberty, Murray seeks to up the ante by arguing that the pursuit of happiness is best fulfilled by having the government do next to nothing. Now it is one thing to show why government programs usually fail, quite another to maintain that the minimal state is man's best hope for attaining human happiness.

“The purpose of government,” Murray says, “is to facilitate the pursuit of happiness of its citizens.” Here he is at one with the Founding Fathers, making the case that government exists to enable men and women to use their resources in a way that liberates and promotes happiness. Borrowing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Murray makes the case that material resources, safety, self-respect, and enjoyment are central to the pursuit of happiness, and that limited government best facilitates that process in the long run.