

Anthologies

by George Garrett

In this fat book I find
the signature, my own, my name
done in my same hand but different.
I could not make it that way now.

Summer of 1947 it would have to be.
The copyright is 1946—
A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry:
The Best Poems of the 20th Century.

A bit early then, wouldn't you say?
with this bloody century not yet half done
to be collecting and publishing the best.
Not at that time when everything was new

and wonderful, when so many of these poets,
words on pages, pictures in the back,
were new names to me and even now
look younger than any of us ever were.

Day Lewis, Eberhart, George Barker
and John Manifold are purely and simply
smiling and now are sure enough dead
or dying. Others look deadly serious.

And all but a precious few of them
are long gone to glory or oblivion.
Does anyone alive still miss Gene Derwood
with those wild eyes and that funny hat?

Does anybody else but myself and Mary Lee
Settle still march to Manifold's "Fife Tune"?
Is anyone around to rejoice at the rhymes
of Hildegard Flanner's "Noon On Alameda Street"?

The child who believed he was a man
and scribbled my name in the flyleaf here
went forth like Ransom's "Captain Carpenter"
to read his way through the book of wounds.

And this book sitting on its dark shelf
for years, a buried treasure of shining words,
a safe house assigned to all the dead poets
he loved and cherished at first sight.



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Jesting With Pilate

by Thomas Fleming

Americans pretend to be shocked whenever one of their national celebrities gets caught out in a lie. Is it really so surprising that Michael Jordan should attempt to conceal his gambling or that Bill Clinton should hide his *cochonnerie*? My European friends—some of them highly moral and religious men—never tire of ridiculing us for our Parson Weemsian naiveté. The scandal industry, so lucrative in these United States, is strictly a mom-and-pop business in France and Italy. *Spy* magazine attracted attention with “Bill Clinton’s First 100 Lies,” but who would dream of wasting paper on Mitterrand’s lies—or his mistresses, for that matter?

If Americans, as a people, take lies seriously, why do we have a national holiday for a plagiarist but not for the father of our country, who was almost as truthful as Parson Weems made him out to be? Why was there so little outcry when Donna Shalala, apparently egged on by Senator Simon, confiscated the data of two NIH researchers who had designed a plagiarism detector? Their crime, it seems, was to have unmasked a pop historian as a career plagiarist.

Our entertainment industry is as honest as a WWF wrestling match in which surgically reconfigured stars like Cher and Michael Jackson are lip-synched, dubbed and redubbed, spliced, patched, and remixed for films, discs, and videos that win prizes for enthralling the little gammas and deltas who give box-office records to Steven Spielberg. If there

is a national icon, it is Milli Vanilli.

The most basic lie of all is that ours is a free country, a representative democracy established by the Constitution of 1787. Even the ghost of that system was dissipated by our President-for-Life, Franklin Roosevelt, in whose four terms many of the worst official lies sent their spores into every nook and cranny of our national institutions.

FDR was the master of lies, from the doctored photo-record that made him appear a robust physical specimen, when in fact he was physically, not just morally, a cripple, to his manufactured reputation for brilliance and crudition. “He never told the truth when a lie would serve,” was Douglas MacArthur’s judgment, and that verdict could fit virtually every occupant of the White House since FDR’s timely demise. Bob Dole lost the Republican nomination by telling the truth, and he was widely criticized as a bad sport when he publicly resented the lies George Bush was telling about him. It is easy to predict the outcome of American elections: the better liar nearly always wins.

“And ye shall know the truth,” says Jesus in John’s Gospel, “and the truth shall make you free.” But in a culture so deeply dishonest, we cannot acknowledge the truth even in private company, even in our own hearts, lest we blurt out some truism about the sun rising in the East, or boys being boys (or not, as the case may too often be). If we cannot be honest with our-