

minutes, you know, an in-depth study," this is barely, if at all, tampering with the preposterousness of things as they are. Or take a doctor's urging Arlene "to give up tequila in the morning. He begged her to switch to a good, light, refreshing breakfast wine from the Napa Valley. He himself owned a share in a vineyard. He would sell her his own brand." Vintage satire, that. Equally crushing is a seemingly casual remark like, "Over the years what Arlene had not had lifted could never have fallen"—which might have been even better with the addition of two commas.

A man who can so easefully carry off such sardonic effects ought not to settle for less. Yet Vidal will stoop to the heavy and obvious. He writes: "Dr. Ashok looked so crazed that, for the first time, I thought him not only sane but possibly serious despite the essential frivolity of his alleged employer the CIA." Here both the facile paradox and the unduly propaedeutic tone of "the essential frivolity of his alleged employer" seem to me miscarriages of satirical justice. Yet Vidal can do worse. He will become pontifical and leave a good piece of satirical raw material uncooked: "This was a commonplace in that era: events were only real if experienced at second hand, preferably through the medium of the camera." Moreover, he will mix metaphors (and not deliberately—the speaker is his alter ego, Teddy): "the dark caravans of words that cross the pages of newspapers to invade and ravish the delicate house of memory like killer ants." It is unnerving to have camels shrink in mid-metaphor to ants, however deadly. Or take, "Miscegenation was in the air; it hovered like a mushroom cloud between us." This is not mixed, merely clumsy: Even in an ironic context, a mushroom cloud is too much to invoke apropos a black man's stare at a white bosom, and the image bombs out. And any schoolboy of Vidal's acquaintance could have written "the effect ... was ghostly, ghastly," which is only ghastly.

But then, for a fastidious, indeed finicky, writer, Vidal can become remarkably sloppy. Thus the Hindu phallus is the *lingam*, not the *linga*; the Latin for duplicity is *duplicitas*, not *duplicitatem*; Chomsky's first name is Noam, not Noah; "imposter" is a vulgar error for impostor; "Myna birds" is a redundancy for mynas; "forthcoming" is not acceptable in the sense of communicative or outspoken; no Frenchman would write "de Vigny" for Vigny; "could not help but" is tautological; and so on.

But—and it is, as it is so often with Vidal, "but" time once more—there are also wonderful things in *Kalki*. There is at times a lightness of touch that nevertheless reduces the satire's butt to mincemeat: "I was able to read the odd page by Joan Didion, the even page by Renata Adler," which with the greatest gentleness makes both writers out to be unreadable. Or take: "Since talking to taxicab drivers was the hallmark of the higher journalism, I asked the driver what he thought of Kalki." Again: "I affected an even deeper sincerity. I sounded to myself like a Malibu surfer discussing ways of getting together his/her inner space." Or, a TV commentator lapsing into TV grammar: "I think all of we Americans...." And what about this splendid *reductio ad absurdum*: "The Australian press was unusually aggressive. Apparently, they had once been able to drive Frank Sinatra out of Australia. This feat had made them overconfident." And, most devastating of all in its lethal concision: "Ms. Brownmiller's book on men, and rape," where putting the declared subject last and what Vidal takes to be the real one (sour grapes rather than bitter rape) first is a masterpiece of ingenious—or insidious—ridicule.

But—again but—this meticulous writer is capable of such lapses as having a singular child on page 245 turn into plural children on the next page. Such things are disturbing. But more disturbing still is the ultimate question this novel raises: Can one really pardon the feeling one gets in reading *Kalki* that Vidal would welcome the end of the world? This slips out time and again: "But then [if I were God] I would not have gone to the trouble of inventing the human race"; or "I did not be-

lieve that Kalki would switch off the human race... as desirable a happening as that might be." Not even Swift, in all his *saeva indignatio*, went that far.

And yet, and yet—one cannot help savoring a master satirist able to put down a whole subcontinent with a mere description of arrival at New Delhi airport: "The moon was still bright in the western sky. The dawn was pale pink. The air smelled of wood smoke, curry, shit." And who is able to dismiss the end of the entire world with, "You cannot mourn everyone. Only someone." ●

John Simon writes a column on language for *Esquire* and is film critic of *National Review*.

## Beyond Romance

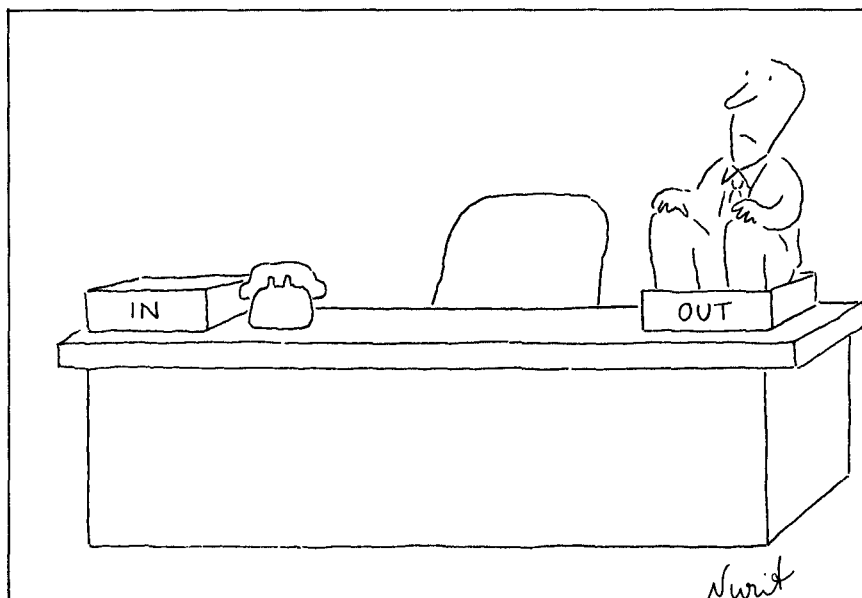
### An American Romance

by John Casey

Pocket Books, 455 pp., \$2.25

Reviewed by  
Joe David Bellamy

CONTRARY to the evidence that argues otherwise—from *Pamela* to *Wuthering Heights* to *The Catcher in the Rye*—we persist in our superstitions about first novels. A first novel is something committed, like a faux pas or a burglary. Like a first date, it will probably be a little clumsy and embarrassing. Out of simple good taste, a first novel is best ignored. Let the poor kid learn the ropes, and if he makes anything of himself in 10 or 20 years, there will always be his masterpiece to contend with and plenty of time for a retrospec-



# Reduce If Overweight

American Heart Association 

## HISTORICAL T-SHIRTS, ETC.

Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi, Chas. Ives, Wagner, Virginia Woolf, Dickinson, Thoreau, Hemingway, Nabokov, Tolstoy, George Sand, Tolkien, Nietzsche, Plato, Kafka, Dickens, Wittgenstein, W. Reich, Freud, Jung, Darwin, Frank L. Wright, Escollier, Rembrandt, Farhart, Tutankhamun, photo or engraving and name on:

T-SHIRTS: white \$6.50 ea., 4 522, red or blue: \$8 ea., 4 328 SWEATSHIRTS (gray): \$12 ea., 2 521 cotton sizes sm (34-36) med (38-40) lg (42-44) xlg (46-48) allow for shrinkage. TOTES (nat. canvas): \$9.50 ea., 2 \$18 COOK'S APRON (white): \$8 ea., 2 \$14 pieces ppd CANADIAN customers add \$1.00 per piece

HISTORICAL PRODUCTS, INC. BOX 220W CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02138



BEETHOVEN

**VEAL** TEEL VEAL IS GOURMET VEAL, MILK-FED, DELICIOUSLY TENDER. Grown naturally the old-fashioned way. Low in fat. No hormones, antibiotics or pesticides used. WE DELIVER.

- 20 lb. Sampler Available
- Call (804) 985-7746

TEEL MOUNTAIN FARM BOX 801 STANARDSVILLE, VIRGINIA 22973



## EUROPE BY CAR

45 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10020  
Phone: (212) 581-3040

9000 SUNSET BLVD., LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90069  
Phone: (213) 272-0424

SAVINGS ON CAR RENTAL • PURCHASE

## MOVING?

PLEASE NOTIFY US SIX WEEKS IN ADVANCE

Name (please print)

New Address Apt. No.

City

State Zip

ATTACH MAGAZINE LABEL HERE

Attach magazine label above for address change—or any inquiry about your subscription—and mail to SATURDAY REVIEW, P.O. Box 10010, Des Moines, Iowa 50340. Or call Toll Free (800)247-5470.

TO SUBSCRIBE CHECK BELOW AND FILL IN NAME AND ADDRESS ABOVE.

Send me 1 year of SATURDAY REVIEW for \$16.00. Outside U.S. add \$3.00

*Saturday Review*

For information about editorial or advertising content, please write to SATURDAY REVIEW, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019.

J8AM

tive. Now in John Casey's prodigiously accomplished first novel, *An American Romance*, we have yet another example to debunk these fallacies.

*An American Romance* is a major work, a finely detailed novel of character and sensibility that marks the debut of a mature, confident, and full-bodied talent. It contains no warming-up exercises, no pointless flexing of muscles, no wasted motions, and no sophomoric cutenesses. It is as ambitious and as unpretentious as an egg.

The romance of the title is an extended mating ritual enacted between Anya, a self-centered ex-Radcliffe smarty zinging with raw energy and ambition, and Mac, an ex-Cornell hockey jock whose virtues are always getting him in trouble. She is "a good idea he'd never thought of." He is the only person she's ever met who would "rather be ruled by virtue than by passion."

Both are making voyages of self-discovery while discovering each other. Both are seeking personal solutions to the unique problems posed by coming of age in a particular place—roughly, all of North America, but especially the New York-Boston-Iowa axis—and both are seeking lives commensurate with their own problematic standards in a time—the present—when the old standards no longer seem to apply.

From their first meeting as graduate students on a rock-climbing outing, they seem mutually absorbed with the complex ways "their separate magnetisms sorted [ideas and objects] out into their separate styles." The true subject of the novel becomes the minute exploration of the consciousness and character of each of them and the ebb and flow of their relationship and their understanding of it as they slowly, inexorably merge.

They have to solve problems beyond each other, however, before their coming together can be made permanent or significant. At the outset, Anya finds that the "way she was leading her life, for all its academic and sexual variations, was not giving her... the full risks and satisfactions that she desired.... It was a question of finding some act that was as large as her energy." When Anya is invited to Iowa to serve as the director of a communal repertory theater and Mac decides to accompany her, she thinks she may have found it.

Her quest first takes the form of hectic ingenuity within the theater group, where she marshals her brains and sensibilities with admirable thoroughness: willing, coaxing, and bullying the players to carry out her visions; casing out promotional possibilities on the lo-

cal scene; hustling seasonal engagements for as far away as Chicago's North Shore. Her chutzpah reaps dividends, but her success seems small scale. She still keeps wondering, "What next?" She has the urge "to rise on a magic carpet of cosmopolitanism" and isn't sure how this can be accomplished.

At the same time, she is "terrified... to think that her ambition was uncontrollable. That her ambition was not, after all, part of her intelligence, her talent, or her craft—that it was deep-rooted, childish, possibly crazy—that it might even betray her." Increasingly for Anya it seems that her ambition may end up preventing her from finding personal happiness.

For Mac, coming to terms seems to involve giving himself over to useful labor and becoming a self-effacing pillar of civilization. His role in the commune is that of set builder and handyman, but he also begins to work part-time as a farmhand to help support Anya and the group, cook elaborate rustic meals, fish and hunt for food, and generally knock himself out. For him, the issue seems to boil down to the question of civilization versus barbarism. His experiences in the army and as a hockey gladiator have raised doubts in his soul about his own dangerously savage inclinations. He thinks his salvation lies in the submersion of self through exhausting physical labor and devotion to caretaking, building, and nurturing activities and in a solitary communing with nature, slowly listening to the music of his nerve endings. He turns out to have quite an aptitude for self-abnegation.

If this casting of the female as careerist, the male as domestic ballast, seems like a reversal of traditional roles, it most certainly is; and *An American Romance* is one of the first novels to treat the complexities of such changing social patterns without demeaning either party.

Casey is often surprisingly intelligent (we had almost forgotten how sheer intelligence in a novelist might feel, and, more than that, his *characters* are intelligent). Casey's most enviable accomplishment, however, is one that requires gift as well as guts, patience and intuitive force as well as technical mastery. He creates characters with depths; characters whose layers peel away like artichoke leaves, revealing even greater complexities within; who have the feel, the stamp, of individual temperament. His intricate dissections of character and emotion cause one to think in new ways about personality and about the flux and mystery of rela-

tionships. Somehow he has managed to find new combinations of language to describe bubbles of feelings, inarticulate longings, unconscious habits of rumination, and the subtle interaction of humors. He so successfully persuades us that we are every bit as complicated as we always knew we were that when Anya finally comes to the realization of "how their lives had merged, in an ordinary, lumpish way, from a sharp physical attraction—but no sharper than a lot of others, surely—to this weight of knowing him," we can fully understand how Mac and Anya have progressed beyond romance to something more enduring. ●

Joe David Bellamy, whose books include *The New Fiction and SuperFiction*, or *the American Story Transformed*, teaches at St. Lawrence University. He is editor of *fiction international*.

## The Good Life According to Kristol

### Two Cheers for Capitalism

by Irving Kristol  
Basic Books, 260 pp., \$10

Reviewed by Webster Schott

READING IRVING KRISTOL in *The Wall Street Journal*, I've sometimes thought he should be moved bodily to the U.S. Bureau of Standards. Sitting there in a moderately comfortable armchair—everything about Kristol calls for moderation—he would receive social and economic ideas wafted over from the floors of Congress or the groves of academe and filter them for reasonableness. He might fulminate now and then, and some of his responses would drift into opacity. But overall, the intellectual processes directing change in our society would tilt away from impossible dreams and toward practical solutions.

Irving Kristol is a kind of Paul Goodman of the center. He is articulate, intelligent, politically astute, and socially oriented. He comes from the same semi-apostate New York Jewish literary intellectual establishment as Goodman, but via one of the better neighborhoods. With Stephen Spender he founded the *British Encounter*. Lately, Kristol has been Henry R. Luce Professor of Urban Values at New York University. Unlike the Utopian Good-

man, Kristol wants to lay fresh mortar into our eroded institutions rather than to tear them down and build new ones. "I regard the exaggerated hopes we attach to politics as the curse of our age, just as I regard moderation as one of our vanishing virtues," he said in the introduction to his *On the Democratic Idea in America* (1972).

Kristol likes labels about as much as he likes Karl Marx. He considers himself nonideological and strictly rational. He is nevertheless a registered Democrat. He served on a Nixon task force and was a principal of *Encounter* when it received laundered CIA money. For purposes of identification, Kristol would have to travel as a neoconservative with such figures as his friend Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, his coeditor at *The Public Interest*, a scholarly magazine devoted to political and economic debate, which Kristol founded with Daniel Bell, in 1965.

Aside from the density and weight of his usual subject matter, one of the problems in reading Irving Kristol derives from his position as a naysayer. The man who wants to put on the brakes instead of stepping on the gas usually has fewer ideas about where to go. With this book, we now get a clearer image of what Kristol and perhaps the neoconservatives are for and with how much passion. *Two Cheers for Capitalism*—Kristol's collection of essays on corporate capitalism, democratic values, social justice, and misdirected idealism—signals his preference with a title borrowed from E. M. Forster. As with Forster, Kristol's choice carries a modified conviction: "Socialism, communism, and fascism have all turned out to be either Utopian illusions or sordid frauds." Capitalism, on the other hand, "represents a sum of human choices about the good life and the good society." Unfortunately, says Kristol, "these choices... have had their associated costs, and after two hundred years the conviction seems to be spreading that the costs have got out of line." The job he sees ahead of us is "to take the liberal or radical impulse, which is always with us, and slowly to translate that impulse into enduring institutions which engender larger loyalties."

Kristol has some concrete ideas about how to do this, but he makes his proposals only after much regret over our present confusion. So before considering them, it's necessary to describe Kristol's analysis of the economic psyche in the United States.

First of all, he says we need help because we've forgotten or, worse, re-

**Kitchen Times,  
written by a fat  
little professional,  
is the most  
appreciated  
sophisticated and  
informative  
newsletter  
on food &  
cooking  
in the whole  
bloomin'  
world.  
Buy it.**



Saucy, educational and independent. Read and talked about around the world. Learn good cooking on your own time. Not a recipe collection, not a school, not haute cuisine. Eight conversational pages of precise, witty instruction on food and cooking, including honest comment on people and places. Published monthly. \$8.50 a year. 185 Marlboro St., Boston, MA 02116. Apt. C.

The English Wine Table \$19.

Our English wine table (c. 1784) is an authentic reproduction of a fine old English antique, hand-crafted of mahogany with detailed leather top. A traditional favorite in England for over 200 years. Priced directly from our factory at an astonishing \$19. \$38 for two. Please add \$3 each for shipping and handling. Dimensions: 20" high, 13" diameter. Naturally your satisfaction is guaranteed. To expedite your order, telephone us or send check or money order or charge MC/BA. Please incl. your exp. date. Send \$1 for our color catalogue.

The Bombay Company  
P.O. Box 52322 - Dept. R  
5256 Magazine Street  
New Orleans, La. 70152  
Telephone: 504/891-4405