

peals to ascetic and scholarly ideals and the liberal culture's hedonism, Epstein notes a thematic continuity between them. They all attack the allegedly dehumanizing effect of men's ceaseless striving for worldly advancement and single out their own country for special blame. Because of a success fixation, Americans, it is claimed, have ignored higher cultural values and have lost sight of any nobler end beyond "making it." Epstein concedes the force of these arguments but also shows what moral problems have attended modern America's abandonment of ambition as an ideal. Our commercial and political leaders have grown embarrassed about money and power. They spend much of their time apologizing to others while supporting their own declared enemies. Families of established wealth underwrite the cost of revolutionary agitation and subsidize their countercultural detractors. Even those who remain explicitly ambitious are often morally less admirable than earlier generations of self-made men. What survived of the older religious (Victorian) work ethic in Carnegie and Rockefeller has by now been badly eroded. Those who strive after money do so only to enjoy it and not to fulfill a God-given calling, even one stripped of its older theological context.

Epstein describes a flawed ideal (ambition) being replaced by self-hate in a moral vacuum. No eulogies to capitalist productiveness or to material progress can dislodge the problem here posed. A moral difficulty bedevils us as a modern nation and goes back to what our founding fathers failed adequately to address: the social-ethical dimension of our national life. *The Federalist Papers*, produced by Madison and Hamilton in defense of a newly framed constitution, viewed religious institutions primarily as mutually restraining forces. The "extended republic" which they hoped to build depended upon having churches and social institutions function within a system of countervailing influences. Not virtue and justice, but freedom and

prosperity within a federal framework, were the paramount values to which our national founders appealed. That they gave short shrift in their constitutional arguments to public virtue and the moral requirements of citizenship may be hard to hold against them. Most Americans were then churched and still living in what, by modern standards, were tightly knit communities. Appeals to doctrinal orthodoxy also went against the nature of the American political experiment. The confessional strife that had proved so ruinous in Europe was still vivid in the Founders' minds.

Yet the pluralism we inherited has, by now, been strained to the breaking point. The principle of religious diver-

sity based on common biblical and classical values has given way to "alternate lifestyles," while ambition has been emptied, both in fact and in the popular imagination, of moral substance. Perhaps the time is then ripe—and certainly many Americans believe that it is—for a return to "first principles." If, as Aristotle taught, each activity, study, life and community is directed toward a specific inherent good, our ambitions as individuals and as a people can be rendered defensible only in the form of a shared vision of justice. Without this common perspective, we can surely expect a quantum leap in those unhappy family histories that Epstein so eloquently recounts. □

Chatting About Evil

Ingeborg Day: *Ghost Waltz*; Viking Press; New York.

by Christina Murphy

Early into *Ghost Waltz*, Ingeborg Day comments that between 1945 and 1975 alone nearly fifty thousand books were written about Adolf Hitler, and she wonders whether her own book will contribute much toward unraveling the complex tapestry of evil and conflicting values that was Nazi Germany. In a way, she is right to wonder, for *Ghost Waltz* is a probing of one central issue: how the parents Day remembers as loving and kind could have endorsed Hitler's vision, how her father, especially, could have served as a member of the Nazi secret police. *Ghost Waltz's* success thus depends upon two main premises—Day's ability to probe her father's psyche and her ability to relate her father's individual actions to the larger pattern of an understanding of human nature, or at least of human values.

Success eludes Day in her first en-

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deavor. She readily admits that her father has remained to her an enigma all her life, a man whose life was closed up and bound by duty and honor, whose rigid and inflexible character made it impossible for his children to feel close to him, a man whom she describes as possessed by "an inability to see any matter from another person's point of view, not a refusal, an inability." Rigidity she perceives as the essence of his character:

Either/or, yes/no, black/white . . . This slavery held my father captive all his life . . . For a lifetime my father lived as if driven by a machine with only an on/off switch governing emotion and brain, a switch, moreover, that worked only once for any human being or idea.

Perhaps this "on/off switch governing emotion and brain" is a form of blindness, for surely if one is oblivious or dispassionate to the shades of gray in human existence absolute actions become easier to perform and certainly easier to justify. Day perceives that her mother operated in the same manner, blinding herself to what she chose not

to see. A woman ostensibly placid and obedient, whose obeisance could be described as "the spineless calm that sometimes accompanies doing what is expected of one." A woman cognizant of her husband's involvement with the nazis yet choosing to maintain the treasured family illusion that father is a locksmith, though he works too many hours of the day and night for such a profession and comes home late in grease-stained clothing that no locksmith job could create. A woman who, bedridden for three years with a kidney disease, chooses to emphasize to her children her husband's kindness in caring for her through her illness rather than the nightly pilgrimages made by her husband to the maid's bedroom, journeys of which everyone in the household, including the mother, is poignantly aware. Perhaps, as Day suggests, such capacity for delusion, for self-imposed blindness, demonstrates how or why nazism bound the collective German psyche and resulted in the atrocities of World War II. People did not see themselves or their situations as they were. The nazi policeman presented himself to his family and his community as a locksmith; the devoted husband by day became the adulterer at night, who still saw himself the next day as the center of moral probity for his family. Dissociation, perhaps this was the villain in Day's eyes—that immeasurably strong capacity in human beings to remove themselves from responsibility for their actions.

This conclusion, that human beings lie to themselves and very often perform immoral actions under moral guises, seems the best insight into the mainspring of nazi Germany that Day can offer in *Ghost Waltz*, yet she seems to want more. There is some refusal on Day's part to let such a massive evil as nazism rest upon such simple explanations as human frailties. The horror that her parents were associated with, "history's worst," the nazis, seems to propel Day to find some extremely complex explanation for their behavior, when,

in fact, the true explanation is the simplest. People do what they do to survive, and when survival becomes one's primary motivation, ethics serves no purpose. In the battle for survival, ethics becomes the ultimate obstacle and thus is readily abandoned.

That Day brings us to this conclusion

"*Ghost Waltz* is a passionate, careful, difficult, effective, and extremely troubling memoir . . ."

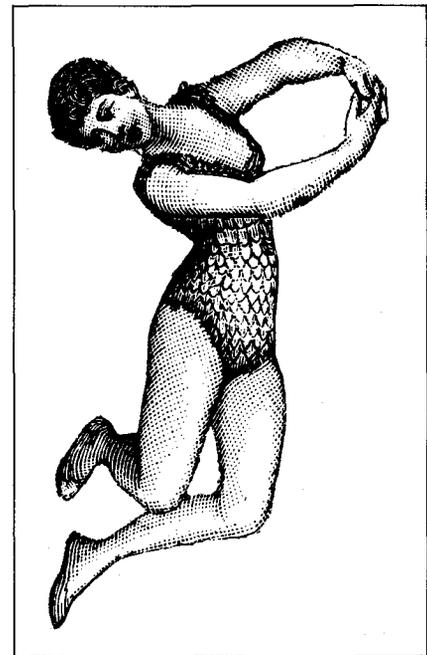
—Ms.

is not surprising, nor is it particularly illuminating. In fact, Day's philosophizing seems but a watered-down version of Hannah Arendt's view in *The Human Condition* or *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of the banality of human evil. It's not that Day consciously mimics or restates Arendt's views—although if Day's research for *Ghost Waltz* is as extensive as she claims, she must undoubtedly have been aware of Arendt's writings—it is just that some human motivations, supposedly complex, reduce themselves to nothing more than a desire for self-preservation. Examination of "history's worst" and of the legions of everyday, simple people who responded to Hitler's command to execute six million people with as much resistance or moral debate as would accompany the paying of a phone bill is certainly a worthy goal for any author interested in history's outcomes to pursue. But "pursue" is the essential element here, or rather, more precisely, "penetrate to." Melville's Ahab in *Moby Dick* understands the fundamental perception that if one is to come to terms with evil, to meet it, face it, understand it for what it is, one must "strike through the mask." Day's failure to do more than to record with puzzlement how her parents could have acted as they did is a failure to be aggressive with her subject, possibly arising out of a failure to understand it. If there is so little to say about one's parents, why make them the focus of *Ghost Waltz*, and if Day herself and her inner being intrude upon the memoir, why is she not the subject as

opposed to the supposedly detached observer and recorder? The answer may well reside in the fact that *Ghost Waltz* is more a catharsis for Day, the unjumbling and unraveling of a series of painful and puzzling memories in the hope that, given artistic form, they would also yield clarification and a certain un-

burdening of guilt and confusion.

While catharsis may be an interesting and noble aim for Day, it does not create for the reader a cogent or convincing experience. The final chapters or vignettes of *Ghost Waltz* prove that by switching from the recounting of a neighborhood child's Bar Mitzvah to Day's sentiment-laden description of Christmas in Austria with her daughter. What these two chapters have to do with each other or with the central topic



of *Ghost Waltz* one can legitimately wonder. In fact, one could legitimately wonder what one is reading about at all, since Day's parents, nazism, the nature

of evil, etc., etc., have floated away, drifted away after the first third of the book to be replaced by stories of work at the office, Andy's Bar Mitzvah and mother-daughter reunions. All of this wandering away from topics or themes of any significance makes *Ghost Waltz* a flawed and limited work. Rather than a reflection on history, human values or human motivations, *Ghost Waltz* becomes instead only a chatty book, of interest, perhaps, to Day's friends, who may find descriptions of her life and musings of value. The reader who seeks from *Ghost Waltz* an understanding of the topics the book purports to investi-

gate will be severely disappointed by its lack of focus and design and severely frustrated by its aimless rambling from topic to topic. Had Day desired to write a diary of her thoughts over the years on her family and her life, *Ghost Waltz* would be an effective, though uninteresting, means to accomplish that end. As a book which lays claim to some measure of authenticity and some measure of concern with significant issues, *Ghost Waltz* is a failure. Day is not a philosopher, neither is she an historian; why she would endeavor to write a work requiring skills she does not possess one can only wonder. □

only by placing *The Federalist* back into the context in which its authors wrote. The modern world assumes the desirability of the democratic form of government. Until the completion of the American Revolution, however, democracy was a form of government that lived in a state of disrepute. Athens had indeed provided a model of democracy, as had many other Greek city-states. These ancient models had hardly provided a shining example to others who would institute democratic government, however. To read the popular impression of democracy reflected in *The Federalist* reminds one of a rather Hobbesian world. Democracies had provided little stability and no security to human rights. The history of democracy on the Hellenic peninsula was a story of petty strife and continuous struggle, with the regimes being as short in their lives as they were violent in their deaths. Following these experiments, few societies prided themselves on their democratic character for nearly two thousand years. The tradition of political philosophy that developed in the interim contended that democracy was a form of government suitable only for small cities isolated from neighbors and composed of homogeneous groupings of virtuous citizens. The larger nations of Europe were content to develop stable monarchies to maintain order among their peoples and themselves.

In striking contrast to this historical lesson, the American founders believed that they could reconcile the republican (i.e., democratic) form of government with the security of rights that had been central to the principles of the Revolution. Moreover, they rejected the historical lessons that argued for a small regime and a homogeneous people. In contrast to the bloody foundings that had characterized other great nations, the American founders sought to institute good government by "reflection and choice," a form of government that required the perpetual involvement of its people, that promoted the idea of government by "the deliberate sense of

Subverting History & Tradition

Garry Wills: *Explaining America: The Federalist*; Doubleday & Co.; New York.

Harry C. Boyte: *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement*; Temple University Press; Philadelphia.

Michael Walzer: *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat*; Basic Books; New York.

by Edward J. Lynch

American politics is commonly characterized as nontheoretical politics. Our national debates lack the contributions of a Plato, an Aristotle, a Hobbes or a Rousseau. Many of our scholars actually revel in the absence of this theoretical dimension, claiming that it enables us to avoid much of the turmoil associated with such fundamental thinking. The only book that appears to challenge this stand is *The Federalist*, and most Americans avoid the theoretical questions tackled there by ignoring the book. Garry Wills's interpretation

of the eighty-five essays comprising that volume is one of the handful of books published in this country devoted to this defense of the Philadelphia Constitution. Although the Wills essay has some merit, one can still say that we are awaiting the first accurate interpretation of *The Federalist*, one that takes the book on its own terms, using it to argue against those elements of the philosophical tradition that it rejects, building on the blocks that it provides and seeing the profundity of the actual work. To date, no one seems to have read the book whole.

The absence of an accurate understanding of *The Federalist* to inform our political discussion is one indication of the extent to which the American people have become divorced from their heritage. Each of the volumes discussed in this review contributes to this separation in its own way. Nonetheless, each of these volumes reflects powerful trends in current political thinking, and the distance between them and *The Federalist* demonstrates the degree to which "We the People" have lost vital parts of our tradition of liberty.

One can properly appreciate the revolutionary character of Publius's work

Dr. Lynch did his doctoral dissertation on *The Federalist*.