

A Heartbeat Away: The Investigation and Resignation of Spiro T. Agnew.

By Richard Cohen and Jules Whitcover. The Viking Press; 363 pp; 8 pp of pictures.

In the rush and noise of the last two years of the Nixon Presidency, many things going on in America were overlooked. The failing state of the economy, the energy crisis, and a number of other issues all were ignored or slighted while the country went through the painful process of purging itself of the Watergate crew.

Surprisingly, some things that did not receive the attention they deserved because of Watergate were directly related to the Watergate scandal. The main item of this type would have to be the investigation and resignation of Spiro T. Agnew, former Vice President of the United States. Agnew's story had never been told fully. Because of the tight prosecutorial secrecy that wrapped the investiga-

tion, and because the events associated with the resignation were swamped ten days later by the 'Saturday Night Massacre' when Nixon fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and accepted the resignations of Elliot Richardson and William French Smith, the criminal investigation that brought Agnew down had been fully explored. But now there is a book to remedy that:

Written by Washington Post Jules Whitcover and Richard Cohen, *Heartbeat* is an exciting account of how four young prosecutors from the US Attorney's Office in Baltimore began and carried on an investigation of corruption in the State of Maryland — where corruption was almost as prevalent as the blue crabs for which the state is known. Beginning with "small fry" in the Baltimore County executive's office, they worked their way up until they were told by an engineer who had bribed state officials for contracts, that he personally had bribed the Vice President in Agnew's office in the Executive Office Building.

The behind the scenes machinations after this are the most interesting part of the Agnew story. Cohen and Whitcomb

have reported most of the dealing fully and clearly. The prosecutors, when they found themselves on the trail of a sitting Vice President, notified Attorney General Elliot Richardson — a move, one is lead to believe, that some of the prosecutors later regretted. Richardson then told the White House, and began dealing with Nixon lawyer Len Garment and White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig — the man responsible, ten months after Agnew's resignation, Nixon's.

The White House role in the Agnew case is intriguing; unfortunately, this is one point where the reporters are not at their best. Nixon, suffering from his own scandals and not wishing to bear the additional burden of Agnew's plight, clearly wanted to get rid of the Vice



President. But he was blocked by two things: the powerful Agnew conservative constituency that Nixon could not afford to alienate by publicly cutting the Vice President, and the looming spectre of his own removal from office. Although the impeachment bandwagon that eventually brought down Richard Nixon was not truly started until after the Saturday Night firings, the President could not afford to weaken his own base, even to rid his Administration of the Agnew scandal.

The plea bargaining behind the scenes — where Agnew, who was telling cheering Republican crowds, 'I will not quit,' was bargaining away his office to stay out of jail — are reported fully, which is, on the whole, a wonderful piece of reporting. Whitcover and Cohen appear to have discussed the case's aspects with all the principals — with the notable exceptions of Nixon and Agnew — and have explained the positions taken by the opposing teams of lawyers during the long months of August and September.

If anything is lacking from this book, it is the treatment of the issues behind the case — the political question, illustrated

Litterae is a literary page and is not a work of The Tech Arts Section.

in three cases in the past two years, of how Vice Presidents are chosen; the legal and moral questions of plea bargaining; and the questions of the role of the press in covering an investigation as sensitive as this. Although Cohen and Whitcover do not fully answer these and other questions, they do provide a basic outline for examining the affair that is both useful and entertaining.

Mike McNamee

things) for the English language editions of Perry Rhodan, and incidentally, does own the world's largest collection of horror films.

The result of all these real-world people cropping up in Herovit's world is to seriously weaken the thrust of the novel. Malzberg wants to write about the problems of a 37 year old hack with a writer's block, but he can't help throwing in a few digs at the science fiction world. He can only do this by having Herovit associate with SF fandom. Yet part of Herovit's problem is that after 92 novels he is himself still an unknown man — he doesn't even know himself. By writing about SF fandom, Malzberg seriously compromises his character.

Despite this flaw, though, the book on a whole is well executed. Herovit as a person comes alive; he is a person of enough depth that his shallowness can be tragic, and of enough realism that his story, for the would-be novelist, can be terrifying.

Guy Consolmagno

Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament

Introductions by Edward Crankshaw and Jerrold Schecter. Translated and Edited by Strobe Talbott. 602 pages many photographs clothbound Little, Brown & Co. 1974

"I'm a free cossack. I have nothing to do. A pensioner's lot is simply to exist from one day to the next — and to wait for the end." Thus begins Strobe Talbott's presentation of the last of Khrushchev's taped memoirs: I call it a presentation, because the tapes were less organized. Three introductory remarks are concerned with the ordering of material and the authenticity of the tapes. The introducers make it clear that voice printing analysis has been used on every foot of tape. Talbott explains his ordering, "I have imposed a structure where there was none... I have tried to preserve what Khrushchev calls "the substance of my viewpoint" — to convey not only the letter of what he said but also the spirit in which he said it." People who wish to check this out are given thirty-six pages of the original Russian transcript and are told that the Oral History Collection of Columbia University has the tapes, original transcripts and the voice-printer's report.

I haven't read the first volume of the memoirs. I can't discuss continuity between the two. The present book is divided into two parts, Citizens and Comrades is first and slightly longer than Foreign Policy and Travels. The parts are divided into subject headings which have subdivisions. This fragmentation makes it very easy to skip around to the choice tidbits, like "Nixon and the Kitchen Debate."

Now we come to the inevitable samples:

Creative Intelligentsia: "I didn't particularly care for Solzhenitzyn's second book, *Matryona's Home*... I'd say it's... a matter of mood. Shostakovich, for whom I've always had the greatest respect... — I'd say our greatest composer... we couldn't understand why he spoke out in favor and support of jazz. I don't care much for jazz. In general I consider Yevtushenko a talented poet and a good amn."

"I'm dictating my memoirs for theoreticians, for experts on politics and economics, who will be able to draw the correct conclusions from what I've said... I'm convinced that if this record of my long life and considerable political experience comes into the hands of objective, courageous scholars, they will find more than a few grains of truth in what I have to say. Everything I've said in my memoirs, I say as a Communist who wants a more enlightened Communist society — not for myself, because my time has already come and gone, but for my friends and for my people in the future."

This is a mass distribution book. Sections of commentary which would be totally boring to the general reader have been deleted. It is very readable and gives a sense of presence. Perhaps Khrushchev is too charitable with himself in places, but this retrospective is undeniably fascinating.

Write? Interested in reading your work to an audience of interested people — other writers (and readers) from around the Tute? Come to the Open Reading, in 14E-304 Thursday, Nov. 7, from 3:00 to 6:00. Wine will be served — along with poems, short stories, and whatever you bring to read.

And sign up for the Expanded Reading Series, at the Writing Program Office, 14E-310b. When enough people have signed up, a reading will be held on the first available Wednesday, at 3:30, in 14E-3104. (Again wine will — hopefully — be served.)

For further information contact Ken Skier (x7894) or Tom Spisak (x3916) or stop by the Writing Program Office.

Litterae

Herovit's World

By Barry Malzberg

Pocket Books 95 cents 160 pp.

On first glance, *Herovit's World* is not science fiction as about science fiction. On second glance, it is not even that; it is just a very solid novel not about a field of literature, but about one man.

Jonathan Herovit is a pulp writer, author of 92 science fiction novels capturing Mack Miller, hero of the Galactic Survey Team, dedicated to destroying all aliens and rebuilding the universe in the image of Man. All of these books were written under the pseudonym of Kirk Poland; like everyone else in the field, Herovit is saving up his own name for the great novel he's going to write some day.

But some day isn't today; and today, he's 37, living in a four room apartment in an unpleasant part of Manhattan, with a wife who can't stand him and a six-month old daughter neither of them want. And he is a month overdue on his 3rd Mack Miller epic. He's already spent his advance on the novel, and borrowed against the rest.

One night, stuck on the 42nd page of the most atrocious stuff he's ever written, wallowing in Scotch and despair, his alter ego Kirk Poland appears. "You must admit you've pretty much reached the end of your devices," says Kirk. "I've been doing the work for 13 years, keeping you afloat; now you can give me a crack at the other stuff, too."

Herovit resists; his resistance weakens; he gives in. Kirk Poland takes possession of his body. Filled with new life, Poland resolves to destroy Mack Miller, his agent, and his wife's sexual problems with the same alacrity that Mack Miller would the countless aliens the Survey Team has encountered. Somehow, it doesn't work out... his wife leaves him; his agent begins to catch on that poor Herovit/Poland has gone off the deep end; and even though the 42 pages of Mack Miller's latest incarnation have been ripped into halves and quarters and lights and burned, Mack himself doesn't go away. It seems he wants control of the body, too. And, as 92 novels can attest to, what a member of the Survey Team wants, it gets.

Now firmly in command of the situation, Mack Miller strides forth one last time to meet the countless, faceless aliens of Manhattan Island, until they finally overwhelm and destroy him; to which, he is run over by a truck.

The novel is not tremendously powerful or even startlingly original, but it is solid and competently written. Malzberg employs a breezy and easily read style which is similar to Vonnegut's without being a carbon copy of it. One effective device is that the story is written in the present tense throughout, adding a feeling of immediacy and forcing on the reader the lack of perspective which is Herovit's problem.

One major flaw in the book is the lack of consistency about Herovit's character. He keeps telling himself that nobody knows him, they only know his pseudonym; yet all of his flashbacks and all of his nightmares put him in the world of science fiction fandom, where he met his wife, the other faceless female bodies he takes to bed, and the fans who keep reminding him he's not producing like he used to. This may be a poorly executed piece of character development on Malzberg's part — maybe it's just that Herovit wants to believe that no one knows who he is, when the opposite is obviously true — but maybe it's symptomatic of a bigger problem with the book.

In *Herovit's World*, Malzberg certainly follows that time-honored writing professor's advice, "write what you know about." He writes about that strange subculture of four thousand or so diehard fans, whose life is centered about science fiction (as opposed to the millions who "just read the stuff.") It is a group whose fanatical devotion of the field is heightened by their own peculiar quirks. Full time SF Fandom is what happens to a typical Tech-type nerd who doesn't make it through engineering school. He's still left with the same personal problems with which MIT is all too familiar — the slovenliness in personal relationships and personal hygiene that is characteristic of a person who has rejected the outside world, or has had it reject him, because his ideas, be they founded on science or sheer fantasy, are too far removed from every day life.

The effect of having every word you write, every sentence you say, discussed endlessly and in the most extreme of terms by this small-town society of Science Fiction Fans, leads a number of authors, like Barry Malzberg and Harlan Ellison, into a strange love-hate relationship with their admirers. It's gratifying to know someone likes what you're doing; it's terrifying to think that people will take it so seriously.

This effect shows in *Herovit's World*. In many cases, the characters in the novel are but thinly disguised people from real life. "John Steele," the old-time pulp editor of *Tremendous Stories*, whose right-wing "think the unthinkable through to the end, damn the liberal establishment" views Herovit has pandered to for 92-novels (the Survey Team constantly extolls the virtues of slavery, for instance) is a dead ringer for the late John Campbell, editor of *Astounding Stories*, the man who in one year (1940) discovered Sturgeon, Van Vogt, and Heinlein and who single-handedly shaped the field of science fiction for thirty years, Morton Mackenzie, Herovit's agent, a man of wide-spread influence in the field who owns the world's largest collection of horror films, sounds like Forrest J. Ackerman, responsible (among other

He covered the investigation of former Vice President Spiro Agnew and wrote a book called *A Heartbeat Away: The Investigation and Resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew* with fellow reporter Jules Witcover. In 1976, he began writing a column for the paper's Metro section, which became nationally syndicated in 1981.[5] In 1998, Cohen was involved in a dispute with editorial aide Devon Spurgeon that was ultimately mediated by Washington Post management.[6] Cohen reportedly asked Spurgeon questions about "casual sex", told her to "stand up and turn around", and gave Spiro T. Agnew, Letter to the Editor, Baltimore Sun, May 30, 1976, D20; Jules Witcover, *White Knight: The Rise of Spiro Agnew* (New York: Random House, 1972), 44.Google Scholar. 4. Agnew defeated his opponent Michael Birmingham by a margin of 18,000 votes. Theo Lippman Jr., *Spiro Agnew's America: The Vice President and the Politics of Suburbia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 50.Google Scholar. 5. Jules Witcover and Richard Cohen, *A Heartbeat Away: The Investigation and Resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew* (New York: Viking Press, 1974).Google Scholar. Copyright information. © Laura Jane Gifford and Daniel K. Williams 2012.