
mother, and her husband, Wharton collapsed. Victimization, however, laid the groundwork for rebellion and rebirth. Gallantly, she fought back. She resumed writing. She had an affair with [a journalist named Morton Fullerton]. She shucked off her husband. And early and late she produced brave, wonderful books. In fine, *she triumphed*."

This "Wharton myth," Lynn argues, is a product of "the fantasies of [Lewis's] ideologically driven mind, wherein victimization equates with virtue and a wealthy, socially privileged mother . . . is bound to be a moral monster."

In his relatively skimpy treatment of Wharton's childhood development (she is 40 years old by page 105 of the 532-page text), Lewis manufactures psychodramas "out of swift manipulations of scanty facts, omissions of lengthier contradictory facts, pumped-up rhetoric, and bluff," Lynn asserts. For example, Lewis strongly implies that what Wharton described as a "choking agony of terror" she suffered in childhood "was rooted in the traumatic scoldings, humiliations, and other abuses visited upon her by a Gothic ogress of a mother." He ignores, Lynn points out, "Wharton's touching expression of gratitude to her mother and father for helping her through her agony," which is contained in an unpublished autobiographical fragment.

Lynn cites criticism of the Wharton biography made in the (London) *Times Literary Supplement* by two former research assistants, Marion Mainwaring and Mary Pitlick, whom Lewis warmly praised in the book as "something closer to collaborators" than assistants. "He lavishly praised my research," Mainwaring said, "but distorted or neglected much of the material I gave him. One result is that other writers have been propagating his errors." For example, Mainwaring found out a great deal about Wharton's affair with Fullerton, but was not able to find out much, not even her first name, about a woman named Mirecourt, who allegedly blackmailed Fullerton. In a letter to Lewis, Mainwaring speculated that Mirecourt might have been a journalist, "a kind of French Henrietta Stackpole," alluding to a reporter in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*. In Lewis's book, the Mirecourt woman appears as "Henrietta Mirecourt."

The other researcher, Pitlick, pointed out that a crucial "breakdown" Lewis claims Wharton had in the summer of 1894—supposedly precipitated by her marital unhappiness, her absorption of society's, and her mother's, "distrust" of anyone who took writing seriously, and her loss of self-confidence in her early stories—never took place. Lewis took at face value the excuse of illness that Wharton gave her publisher for failing to produce a promised volume of stories. He ignored the letters she wrote to others showing her to be "an ebullient woman going back and forth to Europe." The facts, Lynn writes, did not fit the "Lewis-confected Wharton myth."

A Grimm Dahl

"The Grimmiest Tales" by Christopher Hitchens, in *Vanity Fair* (Jan. 1994), 350 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Critics make two complaints about *The Witches*, *The BFG* (Big Friendly Giant), and Roald Dahl's other popular books for children. First, that the books, as one irate mother from Iowa charged, are too sophisticated and do not teach moral values. She cited passages in which a witch plotted to kill children, there was a reference to "dog droppings," and people's "bottoms" were skewered. Second, critics charge that Dahl (1916–90) was an anti-Semite and a racist, and that he treated his wife badly. Hitchens, a journalist, contends that the critics just don't grasp the powerful appeal of "a good yucky tale."

To the Iowa mother, Hitchens says: "The word is out about bottoms and dog doo-doo, and while you may want less of it, the kids are unanimous. They want more. They also wish for more and better revolting rhymes, sinister animals, and episodes where fat children get theirs."

One explanation of adults' dislike of Dahl's work is jealousy, Hitchens asserts. The writer's formula, as he himself said, consisted of "conspiring with children against adults." He was not merely a pied piper but "a genuine subversive," Hitchens writes. "In his world, kids are fit to rule. They understand cruelty and unfairness and, I'm very sorry to say, are capable of relishing it. They also have a rather raunchy idea of what's funny."

Hitchens quotes the late child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim: "There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own natures—the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that *they* are not always good; and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to be."

As for the politically correct critics who wring their hands over the author's repellent private attitudes and vices—now on display in Jeremy Treglown's *Roald Dahl: A Life* (1994)—Hitchens says they miss the point. There is little doubt that Dahl was a pretty awful human being. Only some cauldron of vileness bubbling away within him could have enabled him, in his books, to keep "children enthralled and agreeably disgusted and pleasurably afraid."

OTHER NATIONS

Germany's Painful Transition

A Survey of Recent Articles

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 suddenly made German unification a live issue, and West German chancellor Helmut Kohl embraced it as his own. With firm and crucial support from the United States, Kohl skillfully brought about the *Vereinigung* (unification) the next October. But in that election year of 1990, he "did not say that the path to unity would be expensive, arduous, and long," Heinrich August Winkler, a historian at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, notes in an exceptionally rich issue of *Daedalus* (Winter 1994) devoted to Germany. Instead, Kohl assured East Germans that the new *Länder* (states) would be transformed within a few years into "flourishing landscapes." That has not happened. With Germany now in the middle of a serious recession, it is apparent not only that real unity is going to require many years of sacrifice and patience but also that Germans are having to rethink what it means to be German.

Although the Berlin Wall is no more, it continues, in a sense, to exist, Columbia University historian Fritz Stern writes in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 1993): "On some deep psychological level the unified Germany is more divided than before; the physical wall has been internalized. Where once had been the untroubled hope that at some future date the division of the country, unnaturally maintained, would be healed, there are now painful inequalities of power, wealth,

experience, and assertiveness." Three-fourths of the nearly 80 million people of Germany live in the old *Länder* in the West, and an even larger proportion of the gross national product is created there.

The East German economy—supposedly the strongest in Eastern Europe—turned out to be in disastrous shape, historian Gordon A. Craig, author of *The Germans* (1982), observes in the *New York Review of Books* (Jan. 13, 1994). "Because of neglect and unrealistic planning, all major East German industries—steel, machine tools, chemicals, and synthetics, manufacture of cars and trucks, housing construction, and textiles—were far below Western standards and hence difficult to make competitive." Within three years after unification, three million jobs were lost in eastern Germany. Mass poverty was avoided only by vast infusions of aid from the West—160 billion deutsche marks, or \$27 billion, from the Fund of German Unity, up to this year. In March 1993, the *Bundestag* (parliament) approved a *Solidarpakt* (solidarity pact) providing for new taxes to underwrite more aid for the new *Länder*; about one trillion deutsche marks will be transferred over the next decade.

No matter how impressive such amounts may look, Ludger Kühnhardt, a political scientist at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, points out in *Daedalus*, "Germans are psychologically and culturally not brought together" by