

with Henry James, who thought that you never “get the full sense of the person at first glance.” Or maybe dwelling on the details of the face has “acquired a creepy voyeuristic overtone.” Then, too, we’ve always known that “clothes and body language may be a sign of artifice . . . now [that] the face and the rest of the body may be completely ‘engineered.’”

Baxter sympathizes with the modern skepticism toward appearances. But just as publications should continue to print photographs and painters paint portraits, nov-

elists should keep physiognomic description in their literary repertoire, he argues, especially description of those faces that “we don’t want to see . . . at all.” The face is what most brings the sense of humanity—if no other characteristic—to an audience’s attention. Baxter cites the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who “argues that the face is the unique physical presence that provokes the [audience’s] obligations” to the person with the face. It’s always ineluctably particular, never abstract or theoretical. Nobody’s just another pretty face.

#### OTHER NATIONS

## *Saudi Arabia’s War Within*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

**D**id the two suicide bombings in Riyadh last year, in which 52 people were killed, turn Saudi Arabia into a resolute U.S. partner in the war against terrorism? Washington claims so, and the ensuing crackdown on radical Islamic militants in the kingdom seems to support the claim.

But the basic situation hasn’t changed much, maintains Michael Scott Doran, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University, writing in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 2004). The powerful Saudi religious establishment continues to have the same enemies list as Al Qaeda (except that Al Qaeda’s list also includes the Saudi royal family). The religious leaders are locked in an intense struggle with Western-oriented elements of the elite. Crown Prince Abdullah, a de facto regent during the long illness of his octogenarian half-brother King Fahd, “tilts toward the liberal reformers and seeks a rapprochement with the United States.” His powerful half-brother, Prince Nayef, the interior minister and master of the secret police, sides with the clerics, says Doran.

So intense is the struggle, Doran believes, that it’s quite possible that “the jihad against the United States is actually a continuation of domestic politics by other means.” Saudi Arabia’s fundamentalist Wahhabi religious establishment “hates the Shiites more than any other group, including Americans or even Jews,” regarding them as dangerous

heretics. Radical Wahhabi leaders believe that the Shiite minorities in Saudi Arabia and other countries are conspiring with the United States and Jews to eradicate their “true” Islam. By inciting hatred against the United States and linking Shiites to a foreign demon, the Wahhabis are able to weaken reformers and other domestic foes who would ease up on the Shiites.

Economic crisis is exacerbating Saudi Arabia’s tensions, according to Doran. “The economy cannot keep pace with population growth, the welfare state is rapidly deteriorating, and regional and sectarian resentments are rising to the fore.” Political reform is needed, but “a profound cultural schizophrenia” prevents agreement on specifics.

In 1981, when oil was selling for nearly \$40 a barrel, the annual per capita income in the kingdom was more than \$28,000; oil is now back near \$40, but income is below \$7,000. The difference is due, in part at least, to a population explosion, says Robert Baer in *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2003). Saudi Arabia’s birthrate is about 2.5 times the U.S. rate. Half the population of about 19 million (not counting five million foreign workers) is under 18.

“Saudi Arabia operates the world’s most advanced welfare state, [an] anti-Marxist non-workers’ paradise,” writes Baer, a former U.S. Central Intelligence Agency operative. “Saudis get free health care and interest-free

home and business loans. College education is free within the kingdom, and heavily subsidized for those who study abroad. Electricity, domestic air travel, gasoline, and telephone service are available at far below cost. Many of the kingdom's best and brightest have little motivation to do any work at all."

Foreign workers hold 70 percent of the jobs in the kingdom, and 90 percent of the private-sector jobs. "For decades, the Saudi government has been attempting to replace foreigners with native workers," writes journalist Lawrence Wright in *The New Yorker* (Jan. 5, 2004), "but it has run into resistance from employers who don't want to hire their own people. 'Saudis aren't qualified,' Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the secretary-general for tourism, told me. 'Showing up for a job is not a priority for them. Even the culture of working as a team is not there.'"

**T**he Saudi government used to hire nearly all university graduates, until oil prices plunged in the mid-1980s. "Unemployment and idleness became central facts of life for young Saudi men," Wright observes. It's not surprising that all but four of the 19 hijackers in the 9/11 terrorist attacks were Saudis. Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden "gave young men with no control over their lives an identity, and a wanton chance to make history."

Saudi Arabia's atmosphere of extreme sexual repression may be another incubator of radicalism, Wright speculates. "The most unnerving feature of Saudi life" is "the self-

effacement of an entire sex, and, in consequence, of sexuality itself. The only places I was sure to see women were at the mall and the grocery store, and even there they seemed spookily out of place. Many of them wore black gloves, and their faces were covered entirely. It felt to me as if the women had died, and only their shades remained." According to Wright, it's not hard to see why young men such as the 9/11 hijackers might be "propelled in part by the notion of being rewarded in the afterlife with the company of virgins."

Last year, reports staff writer Faye Bowers in the *Christian Science Monitor* (Jan. 8–13, 2004), the government began stressing the virtues of tolerance and moderation to the clergy, reining in the zealous religious police, and purging textbooks of "objectionable references to Jews, Christians, and Hindus, and the inappropriate use of the word 'jihad.'" The government also arrested three clerics for issuing fatwas promoting terrorist activity; all three went on TV to recant their views.

Even so, it would be as hard for Riyadh to truly divorce radical Wahhabism as it was for the Soviet Union to renounce communism, contends Michael Doran. "Clearly, there are forces in the kingdom who would be willing to support the efforts of a Saudi Gorbachev, but it is not clear when or whether one will appear. Wahhabism is the foundation of an entire political system, and everyone with a stake in the status quo can be expected to rally around it when push comes to shove."

## *The Allende Affair*

"Kissinger and Chile: The Myth That Will Not Die" by Mark Falcoff, in *Commentary* (Nov. 2003), 165 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

The 1973 military coup d'état that deposed Chile's president Salvador Allende, ushering in a decade and a half of repression during which more than 3,000 Chileans were murdered or mysteriously "disappeared," is often blamed by the Left on Henry Kissinger and the United States. Journalist Christopher Hitchens has made the case for the prosecution in a BBC documentary and other forums. Falcoff, a Latin

America specialist at the American Enterprise Institute, rises to the defense.

In the presidential election of September 4, 1970, three years before the coup (and his death), Allende, a Marxist with "strong Soviet-bloc and Cuban connections," says Falcoff, received 36.3 percent of the vote—1.4 percentage points more than his nearest rival—and the Chilean Congress was expected to confirm him as the winner on October 24.