

Tenderness of Wolves, a murder mystery set in snowy 19th-century Canada. Penney, a former agoraphobe, hadn't spent a minute on Canadian soil. She researched the story entirely at the British Library. And she isn't the first Costa/Whitbread winner to substitute a library card for a passport. For example, Sid Smith won the 2001 Whitbread First Novel Award for *Something Like a House*, set in China during the Cultural Revolution. Smith had never been to the country.

But there are limits to the imagination, Lawson says. Historical fiction must, of necessity, rely upon the mind of an author—often stocked with armchair research. However, “realistic contemporary fiction benefits from

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having been there. A clever writer can fake it from printed sources—few readers could have guessed that Sid Smith was a stranger to China—but his writing style is impressionistic. A more documentary prose-stylist needs a few jab-marks in the arm.”

The disrepute into which Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* has fallen in some circles tracks a growing cultural prejudice against novels that depart from autobiographical or journalistic models.

Bellow had never been to Africa when he wrote the book, about a millionaire who finds spiritual inspiration among primitive African tribes. “Bellow's book, broadly accepted at the time of its publication in 1959, came to be regarded by some as contemptuous or even frankly racist,” Lawson writes.

The vivid, concrete fiction of “traveler-novelists” such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and their contemporary counterparts John Le Carré and Paul Theroux can't be duplicated with a sun-dappled imagination. But we shouldn't be surprised when writers astound us with worlds they build entirely in their fertile minds. Where their heads can take them, Lawson concludes, “is finally more important than where their feet did.”

OTHER NATIONS

Why China Won't Be No. 1

THE SOURCE: “The Sources and Sustainability of China's Economic Growth” by Gary H. Jefferson, Albert G. Z. Hu, and Jian Su, in *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, No. 2, 2006.

WILL CHINA OVERTAKE THE United States to become the world's largest economy? At \$2.2 trillion (in 2005), it is already the fourth largest, behind Germany, Japan, and the world leader, at \$12.5 trillion, the United States. If China can sustain its nine percent annual growth rate of the past two decades, versus the U.S.

rate of about three percent, it will catch up in 25 to 30 years.

Don't hold your breath, say economists Gary H. Jefferson, Albert G. Z. Hu, and Jian Su. China's surge is almost entirely the product of rapid gains in industries along the Chinese coast. That growth is likely to slow as their productivity catches up with that of the rest of the world. The remainder of China's economy is growing much more slowly.

China's growth is “being

driven by the ongoing reduction of two productivity gaps,” the authors say. One is the gap between industries in thriving coastal cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou and the international economy. The other is the gap between those booming industries and the rest of the Chinese economy, including non-coastal industries and the nation's large and lagging services and agricultural sectors. About 80 percent of China's workers are employed in this “other” economy.

Compared with South Korea and Taiwan at similar stages in their development, “China leans more heavily on its coastal industrial economy for overall catch-up,” Jefferson and colleagues say.

The region's factories are benefiting from an inflow of workers from the countryside, reallocation of capital to more efficient enterprises, and the demise of inefficient businesses. But labor productivity is still only about one-fourth of the U.S. industrial average, and diminishing returns are going to set in, just as they did in other developing nations in the past, predict Jefferson (of Brandeis University), Hu (the National University of Singapore), and Su (Beijing University). When that happens, the economists say, "China's GDP growth can be expected to slow sharply."

China's future growth will largely depend on developments in other sectors and regions. The authors find evidence that noncoastal industry is slowly catching up with the success stories of Shanghai and Guangzhou, although its labor productivity is still 30 to 40 percent behind. But the gap between industry and the huge services and agricultural sectors widened between 1995 and 2004. Getting those two sectors moving faster will require deep institutional reforms, from an overhaul of banking laws to the establishment of more firmly grounded property rights. Even if that happens, however, the benefits will be limited

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There are some caveats to all this. The authors compare the size of the U.S. and Chinese economies using today's exchange rates, assuming no change in the future. And by an alternative measure of gross domestic product called purchasing power parity, China will likely overtake the United States "as early as 2010."

EXCERPT

Just Visiting

Our apartment—a five-minute walk from the bridges over the Rhone River, at the point where it emerged from Lake Geneva—had been rented furnished. This was how I came to associate living in another country with sitting at tables where others had sat before, using glasses and plates that other people had drunk from and dined on, and sleeping in beds that had grown old after years of cradling other sleeping people. Another country was a country that belonged to other people. We had to accept the fact that the things we were using would never belong to us, and that this country, this other land, would never belong to us, either.

—ORHAN PAMUK, Turkish novelist and Nobel laureate, in *The New Yorker* (April 16, 2007)

OTHER NATIONS

After Fidel

THE SOURCES: "Rethinking the Cuban Embargo: An Inductive Analysis" by Douglas A. Borer and James D. Bowen, in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, April 2007, and "Castrated: The Bush Administration's Aversion to Dealing With Cuba Is Reducing Our Influence on the Island—Just When There's a Chance to Encourage Change," by Joshua Kurlantzick, in *Washington Monthly*, April 2007.

FIDEL CASTRO MISSED HIS 80th-birthday party in August, the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution in December, and the annual workers' parade on May 1. He hasn't been seen except on television since undergoing emergency intestinal surgery last August. Could his apparently grave illness mean the imminent end of the Fidel era, the

lifting of the U.S. embargo, and the normalization of relations with the United States? Don't count on it, judging by Cuba's recent actions, say Douglas A. Borer of the Naval Postgraduate School and James D. Bowen of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. And America's tactics are making such a happy ending even less likely, writes Joshua Kurlantzick, former foreign editor of *The New Republic*.

The Cuban government "does not want to see the embargo lifted," Borer and Bowen contend. The ban on trade gives Castro an excuse for the country's poverty, and an enemy to blame it on. Although the