

Books the Arts.



David Grossman walks past Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Supreme Court president Dorit Beinisch after winning an EMET Prize in Jerusalem, November 7, 2007.

JIM HOLLANDER/AP

Betrayal

by EYAL PRESS

In 1962, when David Grossman was an 8-year-old schoolboy in Jerusalem, his father handed him a Hebrew translation of Sholem Aleichem's *Adventures of Mottel, the Cantor's Son*, a collection of stories evoking the lost world of the Grossmans' Yiddish-speaking ancestors. "Do you like it?" his father asked. Grossman was too young to understand it, but he managed to make his way through the book and was soon engrossed in a six-volume set of Aleichem's stories, soaking up details about tailors, milkmen and matchmakers. He had come to grasp that his father's gesture was an invitation. "I realized that for the first time, he was inviting me *over there*, giving me the keys to the tunnel that would lead from my childhood to his," Grossman recalled in a recent essay.

Grossman's immersion in Aleichem's fictional universe was so deep that a year later he entered a trivia contest about it hosted by a popular radio quiz show. Soon after, he was hired as a child actor at Kol Israel, the state broadcasting station. "It's a whole reality ex-

pressed only through language," Grossman has said. "As soon as I started working at the station, I learned how much you can do with the human voice." While completing his army service years later, Grossman began jotting down poems, songs and confessions in military report logs. He was discovering another use for his voice. Some time later, after an argument with his girlfriend, Michal (who is now his wife), he sat down and wrote his first story, "Donkeys," about an American soldier who escapes to Austria during the Vietnam War. The experience was transformative. "Writing allows me to explore situations that are impossible for me to explore in my life," Grossman has said. "Emotionally, I am an extreme person, and writing makes it possible for me to go on."

Navigating extreme emotions has been a particularly vexing challenge for Grossman of late. Early one morning in August 2006, unexpected visitors roused him from his sleep: they were officers from the Israeli army, come to relay the news that his younger son, Uri, had been killed when a missile struck his tank in southern Lebanon. The incident occurred in the final days of the war against Hezbollah, which began that summer with barely a murmur of dissent in Israel and ended, thirty-three days later, with equally

Writing in the Dark

Essays on Literature and Politics.

By David Grossman.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 131 pp. \$18.

faint popular backing. Grossman, a novelist and longtime peace advocate, had initially supported the war on the grounds that Israel had the right to defend itself against an armed militant group that had attacked it without provocation. But several weeks into the conflict, he appeared at a press conference with the novelists A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz (both of whom had also supported the war) to call for a cease-fire and to protest the Israeli government's plan to launch a ground invasion. No cease-fire was brokered; the ground invasion commenced. Two days later came the knock on Grossman's door.

Grossman's latest collection of essays and speeches, *Writing in the Dark*, concerns the impact of grief and violence on the body politic and the private imagination. It is not about Uri, however, whom Grossman has refused to discuss publicly, but rather the precarious and necessary place of literature in a disaster zone. As Grossman observes in the opening essay, "The arbitrariness of an external force that violently invades the life of one person, one soul,

Eyal Press is a Nation contributing writer and the author of Absolute Convictions: My Father, a City, and the Conflict That Divided America (Picador).

preoccupies me in almost all my books.”

The burden of arbitrary death, and the looming threat of assault and injury, could easily lead an Israeli writer to tell his fellow citizens what many would most like to hear: that they have been saddled with this burden by their enemies. Yet Grossman doesn't offer such false consolation. For him, the act of writing is a process of jarring loose assumptions and stripping away emotional defenses through imaginative journeys into places it might otherwise be too painful or too frightening to go. Some years ago, reflecting on a story he was writing that featured a bitter, emotionally unstable protagonist, he described his desire to have the tale surprise him. “More than that, I want it to actually betray me,” he wrote.

To drag me by the hair, absolutely against my will, into the places that are most dangerous and most frightening for me. I want it to destabilize and dissolve all the comfortable defenses of my life. It must deconstruct me, my relations with my children, my wife, and my parents; with my country, with the society I live in, with my language.

When Grossman learned of Uri's death, he was at work on a novel, his seventh, about a woman whose younger son is sent on a military operation and who has a premonition that the mission will end badly. To avoid being home to receive the news, the woman embarks on a walking tour, crossing Israel by foot while scrawling notes about her son in a journal. The book, *Isba Borabat Mibesora* (“A Woman Flees Tidings”), was published, in Hebrew, last spring. Grossman completed it only after he had been dragged by the hair into the nightmare his protagonist strains to avoid.

Grossman's first novel was *The Smile of the Lamb*, the story of an unlikely bond formed between a Palestinian civilian and an Israeli soldier he has captured and threatened to kill. Told in the voices of four interlocking characters, among them a cynical Israeli army commander too jaded to believe in justice, the action unfolds in a small town in the West Bank, a detail that might not qualify as noteworthy today. It was different in the ferment of 1982, the year Grossman completed the book and Israel's invasion of Lebanon sparked massive peace demonstrations in Tel Aviv. Among young Israelis, assumptions about the country's benign regional designs were unraveling. Though Grossman's debut work of fiction drew mixed reviews—the book's Palestinian character, a half-blind hunch-

back named Khilmi who lives in a cave, is mildly cartoonish—he marked himself as the voice of a new generation, one unafraid to wade across a political and imaginative divide. *The Smile of the Lamb* was the first Israeli novel set in the occupied territories, where becoming jaded about justice was hard to avoid.

In 1986 Grossman published *See Under: Love*, an ambitious reimagining of the Holocaust that unspools in the mind of a 9-year-old boy named Momik, who wants to learn more about “Over There,” the mysterious world from which his parents and the other adults with numbers tattooed on their arms had fled. The choice of subject might seem familiar: no issue pervades Israeli culture more thoroughly than the Holocaust, with Yad Vashem the first stop for foreign statesmen and brigades of Western tourists. But *See Under: Love* is set in a different time, when the Holocaust was a source of unspeakable shame in a young nation desperately trying to imbue its citizens with a sense of heroism and national pride. This is the moral universe Momik inhabits, and the same one in which Grossman, who was born in 1954 in Jerusalem, came of age. Grossman's father, a bus driver, fled his native Poland in 1936. His mother was born in Palestine. Though neither of them had numbers tattooed on their arms, Grossman grew up with a keen awareness of how easily this might have been their fate. Every day announcements of people searching for relatives floated across the radio dial: “*Rachel, daughter of Perla and Abraham Seligson from Przemysl, is looking for her little sister Leah'leh, who lived in Warsaw between the years...*” The “silence and fragmented whispers” haunted Grossman because, like Momik, he felt he could not understand a part of himself—where he came from, what he was doing in Israel—without grasping what had happened there. “I had to ask these questions of myself,” he says, “and I had to reply in my own words.”

A year after the publication of *See Under: Love*, Grossman returned to the West Bank, this time as a correspondent for the small newsweekly *Koteret Rasbit*, which had commissioned him to write an article about the occupation. Grossman, who is fluent in Arabic, spent seven weeks roaming around the West Bank. His dispatch filled an entire issue of the magazine and was soon published as a book, *Ha-Zeman Ha-Tzabov* (“The Yellow Time”). Israelis were shocked by its unflinching portrait of the hatred brewing in the territories and its suggestion that the plight of the Palestinians in some ways mirrored the travails of another exiled people, the Jews. As Grossman listened to an elderly Arab woman rhapsodize about the beautiful vineyard in

the village in Israel where she once lived, he was reminded of his grandmother, who had been expelled from Poland. Later, at a military court in Nablus, he watched a Palestinian youth get sentenced for an offense that wasn't on his charge sheet and was moved to quote Orwell's essay “Shooting an Elephant”: “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.” Grossman's narrative was suffused, sometimes to the point of excess, with anguished introspection, leading some to dismiss it as the work of a *yafeh nefesh* (“beautiful soul”), a bleeding heart. Yet the book became a best-seller in Israel, and by the time it was translated into English and issued under a slightly altered title, *The Yellow Wind*, the first intifada had broken out, lending the book a prophetic glow.

Grossman hadn't seen the uprising coming. What he did notice was that serial abuses in the occupied territories corresponded with the serial abuse of language in Israel. Amos Oz once remarked that his excursion into writing political essays after the outbreak of the 1967 Six-Day War was triggered by a “linguistic reservation,” his objection to the use of the word “liberated territories.” (Only people, not mountains or valleys, can be liberated, Oz maintained.) Grossman underwent a similar awakening. At the time he received the assignment from *Koteret Rasbit*, he was working as the anchor of a popular morning news program at Kol Israel. Not infrequently, the job required him to read brief items about violent incidents that had taken place in the West Bank or Gaza Strip—“A local youth was killed during disturbances in the Territories.” Afterward, he would marvel at the “shrewdness” of the sentence:

“disturbances”—as if there were some order or normative state in the Territories that was briefly disturbed; “in the Territories”—we would never expressly say “the Occupied Territories”; “youth”—this youth might have been a three-year-old boy, and of course he never had a name.

Novelists may be uniquely equipped to detect these perversions of language, but this doesn't necessarily make them astute political observers. Yet as his next book affirmed, Grossman brings to his reporting a related skill: the art of listening. *Sleeping on a Wire* was built around conversations with Arab-Israeli artists, activists and citizens, a community rarely invited to remark on what kind of society “the Jewish state” should be. Unlike Oz, who composed his political writings at a safe distance from Arabs, Grossman anchored his observations in dialogue with them. The difference is not incidental: unlike

Extremely
Limited Availability

How Do You Spell Pearl Necklace? F-R-E-E.

Stauer comes to the rescue! \$295 necklace of genuine cultured pearls...FREE!

You read that right. If you'd like the Stauer genuine 18" cultured pearl necklace absolutely **FREE**, all you need to do is call us today or log on to the website www.stauer.com. There is no catch. If you're wondering exactly how we can afford to do this... read on.

Despite tough economic times, Stauer has had a very good year. It's time for us to give back. That's why we're offering this stunning, 18" strand of genuine cultured white pearls for **FREE** (you only pay the basic shipping and processing). This is a classically beautiful necklace of luminous, smooth cultured pearls that fastens with a .925 sterling silver clasp (\$295 suggested retail price). It is the necklace that never goes out of style. In a world where some cultured pearl necklaces can cost thousands, shop around and I doubt that you will see any jewelry offer this compelling!

Why would we do this? Our real goal is to build a long term client relationship with you. We are sure that most of you will become loyal Stauer clients in the years to come, but for now, in this lousy economy, we will give you these pearls to help with your future gift giving ideas.

We did find a magnificent cache of cultured pearls at the best price that I have ever seen. Our pearl dealer was stuck. A large luxury department store in financial trouble cancelled a large order at

the last minute so we grabbed all of them. He sold us an enormous cache of his roundest, whitest, most iridescent cultured 5 1/2-6mm pearls for only pennies on the dollar.

But let me get to the point: his loss is your gain. Many of you may be wondering about your next gift for someone special. In the past, Stauer has made gift giving easier with the absolute lowest prices on fine jewelry and luxury goods. This year, we've really come to the rescue.

For the next few days, I'm not offering this cultured pearl necklace at \$1,200. I'm not selling it for \$300. That's because I don't want to **SELL** you these pearls at all... I want to **GIVE** them to you. This cultured pearl necklace is yours **FREE**. You pay nothing except basic shipping and processing costs of \$25.²⁵, the normal shipping fee for a \$200-\$300 necklace.

It's okay to be skeptical. But the truth is that Stauer doesn't make money by selling one piece of jewelry to you on a single occasion. We stay in business by serving our long term clients. And as soon as you get a closer look at the exclusive selection, you're not going to want to buy your jewelry anywhere else.

Stauer is a high end jeweler that still understands value. As a matter of fact, our average client spends more with

us than at Tiffany's, but we still know something about affordability. Stauer was the largest buyer of carat weight emeralds in the world last year and this year we are on track to be the largest buyer of carat weight sapphires, so we know about volume buying discounts. We were only able to get so many pearls at this price. This offer is **very limited** to one per shipping address. Please don't wait.



Ask about our satin and velvet travel case.

JEWELRY SPECS:

- Genuine 5 1/2-6mm white cultured pearls
- 18" strand
- Sterling silver clasp

Cultured Pearl Necklace (18" strand)
Your Cost—FREE — pay shipping & processing only.

Call now to take advantage of this extremely limited offer.

1-800-806-1654

Promotional Code FWP230-08
Please mention this code when you call.

Stauer
14101 Southcross Drive W.,
Dept. FWP230-08
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337
www.stauer.com

many people in the Israeli peace camp, Grossman has never longed for a settlement that will separate Jews and Arabs. In *Sleeping on a Wire*, through the voices of people like Nazir Yunes, an Arab-Israeli doctor who described being turned away from a swimming pool after his children were overheard speaking Arabic, Grossman showed that the bitterness and frustration about Israel is not limited to Palestinians in the West Bank. He also tested the limits of his tolerance: for all his good will, Grossman found it challenging and unnerving to stand back and let his subjects do the talking. Hearing an Arab intellectual call for street protests in one scene, he felt himself recoil: "He speaks, and something unpleasant is slowly revealed

Grossman's writing is radical in its determination to see past the limits of politics.

to me.... How real and sincere is my desire for 'coexistence' with the Palestinians in Israel?" It was precisely this tension that lent the book its poignancy.

The high cost of concealing what is unpleasant has long preoccupied Grossman, and his willingness to pose questions that discomfit Israel's Jewish majority has led some people to label him a "post-" or "non-Zionist" Israeli (the critic Jacqueline Rose once described him as a "non-Zionist Zionist" in the *London Review of Books*). Such labels are misplaced. "The basic inspiration for Zionism was a noble idea," Grossman told *The Paris Review* in 2007. Despite his belief that a writer should hold nothing sacred, Grossman is a patriot who will go only so far in criticizing Israel, as was apparent during the recent war in Gaza. In an editorial in *Ha'aretz* published a few days after the conflict began, Grossman called for a ceasefire but did not question the decision to launch the attack.

Such views inevitably disappoint Israel's more unqualified critics, some of whom treat Grossman as one more apologist for the Jewish state's crimes. He would likely take their disappointment as a compliment. The radical element in Grossman's work lies not in his politics but in his determination to see past the limits of politics: to peel away the labels—"Arab," "Jew," "victim," "terrorist"—that color and distort how Israelis and Palestinians regard each other. In *The Yellow Wind*, there is an image of a corrupted body: the West Bank is "that kidney-shaped expanse of

land" Grossman feels has been transplanted into him "against my wishes." It is the diagnosis of a universalist who clearly believes the germ of cruelty can infect anyone, the moment one erases another person's humanity, the moment one begins to speak a "mass language—a language that will consolidate the multitude and spur it on to act in a certain way, formulating justifications for its acts and simplifying the moral and emotional contradictions it may encounter." In a region overpopulated with hard men and women who view the world through a narrow prism, Grossman is that rare thing: a humanist who considers any form of certainty, not least his own, to be a trap.

Writing in the Dark is less a work of literary criticism or political analysis than an extended rumination on the struggle and the thrill of shaping words into stories and reclaiming their meaning and beauty from

the "language defrauders and language rapists." The book is a response to a question Grossman first explored in *See Under: Love*, where he imagined what might have happened to him had he been stuck in a concentration camp: "What was the thing inside me that I could hold up against this attempt at erasure?" Grossman's answer reaches back to his novel *Be My Knife* (1998), the story of an epistolary love affair between two former classmates who never consummate their physical desires. "Listen," Yair, who makes his living selling rare books, informs Miriam:

I once read that Our Sages of Blessed Memory had the idea that we have one tiny bone in the body, above the end of the spine—they call it the "Luz." You can't kill it, it doesn't crumble after death and can't be destroyed by fire.

One suspects it is his Luz that has prevented Grossman from sharing the fate of one of his most endearing creations: the protagonist of his 1991 novel *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, a 12-year-old boy named Aron Kleinfeld, who is given to daydreaming, comic impersonations and turning words over in his head for the sheer pleasure of their sound. The novel is set on the eve of the Six-Day War, in a nation whose inhabitants speak a new, emancipated language. Yet the more Aron listens to the adults around him—the crude vows to crush the Arabs, the mangled syntax of their sentences—the more alienated he feels. To escape the suffocating atmosphere, he retreats into a cocoon, smuggling damaged words through

the doors of the secret hospital he has created to perform surgery on them. All Aron wants is the freedom to invent stories and to dream, which is enough to make him a chronic misfit in a society where boys are supposed to be like his best friend, Gideon, a scout who aspires to be a fighter pilot. In the book's closing scene, having fallen in love with a classmate named Yaeli—who, naturally, falls for Gideon—Aron escapes from his misery by locking himself inside an abandoned refrigerator in a junkyard.

Like Aron, Grossman belongs to the generation of Israelis who celebrated their bar mitzvahs around the time of the Six-Day War. Like Aron, he was introverted and bookish, sensitive to the suppleness of language, aware of the pollutants that can contaminate it in a society where words are used as blunt instruments. Yet the parallels between novelist and protagonist may be too neat, since in recent years Grossman's faith in language has wavered. "I have to admit that many times I feel that words can no longer penetrate the screen of horror," he wrote in the preface to his essay collection *Death As a Way of Life* (2003), which charts the rise and fall of his hopes for peace in the tumultuous decade after the Oslo Accords. In one of the essays, composed after a string of suicide bombings prompted a further escalation of Israeli attacks, he concludes by informing the reader, "What I feel like doing now is not writing an article. I actually feel like taking a can of black spray paint and covering every wall in Jerusalem, Gaza and Ramallah with graffiti: LUNATICS, STOP KILLING AND START TALKING!"

During the second intifada, Grossman grew decidedly less forgiving of the Palestinians—of Arafat's double talk, of the nihilism behind suicide attacks—and less hopeful about the prospects for lasting peace. Though he never stopped criticizing the occupation or drawing attention to the suffering of civilians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, his language lost some of its verve. *Death As a Way of Life* lacks the vigor of *The Yellow Wind* and *Sleeping on a Wire*, in no small part because instead of scaling walls its author seems hemmed in by them. The book reads like a lament for a lost opportunity for ordinary people to experience in their daily life something Grossman views as one of literature's animating impulses: the power to dissolve the distance between oneself and "the Other." "The purpose of literature," Grossman writes in "The Desire to Be Gissella," the most searching essay in *Writing in the Dark*, is to redeem a character in a story "from alienation and impersonality, from the grip of stereotypes and prejudices...to comprehend all the facets of one human

character: its internal contradictions, its motives and inhibitions,” and then to realize that many of the same emotional currents course through yourself.

The toll of the conflict has also reverberated in Grossman’s fiction. In books such as *Someone to Run With* (2000), an entertaining if slightly saccharine novel that explores the world of street kids, drug dealers and stray dogs in Jerusalem, and *Her Body Knows* (2002), a pair of novellas about the perils of passion and jealousy, there was little trace of the surrounding atmosphere, a fact that did not go unnoticed by critics. In *The New York Review of Books*, Gabriele Annan expressed surprise that “there is scarcely an Arab to be seen” in *Someone to Run With*, this from a novelist who “is also a political journalist who has written about life in Arab villages.” The omission was no accident, and it prompts one to wonder whether Gross-

man’s desire to see past labels, coupled with exhaustion, is narrowing instead of deepening his scope. As Grossman told an audience in New York City in the spring of 2007, “in the works of fiction I have written in recent years, I have almost intentionally turned my back on the immediate, burning reality of my country, the reality of the latest news bulletin.” He wanted to write “about other things, things no less important, things for which it’s hard to find the time, the emotion, and the total attention, while the near-eternal war thunders on outside.”

Retreating from the shadow of war is a familiar habit among Israeli novelists. Writers who grew up in the aftermath of 1948 sought to slip the chains of collectivism forged during the decades of kibbutzim and youth movements, of Chaim Weizmann and David

Ben-Gurion. As the critic Hillel Halkin has noted, the literature of this generation abounds with figures such as Yonatan Lifshitz, the protagonist of Amos Oz’s *A Perfect Peace*, who longs “to be alone at last, entirely alone, to find for himself what it was all about.” Oz and his peers sought to refurbish what Yaron Ezrahi has termed “the impoverished language of the Israeli self” by overcoming the “difficulty of discovering or inventing one’s private voice in the midst of this chorus of pioneers, all singing the epic of the return of the Jews from exile and the resurrection of our ancient language in the Holy Land.” A half-century later, Grossman arrived at the end of a week filled with turmoil and, in his diary, noted what he’d forgotten to think about: his children, his family, his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. “So many cherished things and private moments are lost to

Poem

(circa 1185)

I love the jubilation of springtime
When leaves and flowers burgeon forth,
And I exult in the mirth of bird songs
Resounding through the woods;
And I relish seeing the meadows
Adorned with tents and pavilions;
And great is my happiness
When the fields are packed
With armored knights and horses.

And I thrill at the sight of scouts
Forcing men and women to flee with their belongings;
And gladness fills me when they are chased
By a dense throng of armed men;
And my heart soars
When I behold mighty castles under siege
As their ramparts crumble and collapse
With troops massed at the edge of the moat
And strong, solid barriers
Hemming in the target on all sides.

And I am likewise overjoyed
When a baron leads the assault,
Mounted on his horse, armed and unafraid,
Thus giving strength to his men
Through his courage and valor.
And once the battle has begun
Each of them should be prepared

To follow him readily,
For no man can be a man
Until he has delivered and received
Blow upon blow.

In the thick of combat we will see
Maces, swords, shields, and many-colored helmets
Split and shattered,
And hordes of vassals striking in all directions
As the horses of the dead and wounded
Wander aimlessly around the field.
And once the fighting starts
Let every well-born man think only of breaking
Heads and arms, for better to be dead
Than alive and defeated.

I tell you that eating, drinking, and sleeping
Give me less pleasure than hearing the shout
Of “Charge!” from both sides, and hearing
Cries of “Help! Help!” and seeing
The great and the ungreat fall together
On the grass and in the ditches, and seeing
Corpses with the tips of broken, streamered lances
Jutting from their sides.

Barons, better to pawn
Your castles, towns, and cities
Than to give up making war.

BERTRAN DE BORN

(Translated from the Provençal by Paul Auster)

fear and violence,” he sighed. “So much creative power, so much imagination and thought, are directed today at destruction and death (or at guarding against destruction and death).”

And yet the situation Grossman finds himself confronting in Israel today is arguably the opposite of what Oz’s generation faced. When Israelis come home from work these days, they don’t instantly engage in heated debates about what happened in the Knesset, much less in Nablus or Ramallah. Quite often, they turn on a reality show, or flip open a laptop and network on Facebook. Although the age of the kibbutz is long gone, the language of the Israeli self is again impoverished, this time laid waste by solipsism and detachment. Grossman’s *A Woman Flees Tidings* was a runaway bestseller in Israel, perhaps because of what readers knew its author had suffered, perhaps because it recounts a scenario so familiar in a nation where losing a child to war is an almost universal fear, or perhaps because, as historian Tom Segev suggested to me, the book taps into a widely shared desire to escape, to flee bad news. The problem in Israel today isn’t too little space for private concerns, one could argue, but apathy and cynicism about public ones.

Despite his disappointment with the conduct of Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Grossman hasn’t succumbed to fatalism. In 2006, on the eleventh anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, only a few months after Uri’s death, he delivered a speech in which he called on Israel’s leaders to stop making excuses and talk to their enemies (the speech is reprinted in *Writing in the Dark*). Yet in a society that, for the moment, is circling inward, walling itself off from the larger world to avoid further disappointment and pain, even as the rage around it builds, it’s hard not to wonder whether this “troublemaker and magician,” as the critic John Leonard once described Grossman, feels choked off. Grossman’s best work shows how much can be wrung out of unsettling encounters with the unfamiliar, from entering “the vortex of [one’s] greatest fear and repulsion,” as he put it in *The Yellow Wind*, and emerging mended, enlarged, purified. It would be difficult to think of someone more entitled to withdraw into himself than Grossman. But it’s equally hard to imagine this bringing him much satisfaction, not least because he knows that those who retreat inward only flee further from the truth. “A society in crisis,” he once said, “teaches itself to congeal into one story only and sees reality through very narrow glasses. But there is never only one story.” ■

Bad Paper

by JOHN PALATTELLA

A little over a year ago, Doubleday published a study of the rise of neo-conservatism called *They Knew They Were Right*. The book has the trappings of a serious work of original research, such as extensive endnotes about primary sources, suggesting that its author, Jacob Heilbrunn, had toiled in archives and periodical reading rooms. In a review that appeared in this magazine (“Out of Place,” June 23, 2008), Corey Robin argued that in its materials and its method *They Knew They Were Right* is marred by blemishes large and small. Besides recycling lots of

well-known history, Heilbrunn reuses without attribution the language, argument and research of several writers. Robin’s suspicions were aroused when he noticed that Heilbrunn had pilfered material from an article Robin had published in the *London Review of Books*. After he recovered from the mugging, Robin opened Heilbrunn’s book to a random page, arbitrarily chose a fact-laden passage and set about vetting it. This passage, too, was tarnished by shoddy sourcing. Robin then undertook a more systematic investigation, and after finding several dozen instances of

Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*:

For example, on April 30, 1981, [Reagan] remarked, “Even at the negotiating table, never shall it be forgotten for a moment that wherever it is taking place in the world, the persecution of people for whatever reason...persecution of people for their religious belief...that is a matter to be on that negotiating table or the United States does not belong at that table.” But the *New York Times* reported on the same day that “after the speech, a White House spokesman said Mr. Reagan had not meant to alter his policy of playing down the rights issue in foreign relations.”

Derian, “Some of Our Best Friends Are Authoritarians,” *The Nation* (November 7, 1981):

On April 30, *The New York Times* quoted President Reagan as having said that “even at the negotiating table, never shall it be forgotten for a moment that wherever it is taking place in the world, the persecution of people for whatever reason...persecution of people for their religious belief...that is a matter to be on that negotiating table or the United States does not belong at that table.” In the same edition of *The Times*, a front-page story reported that “after the speech, a White House spokesman said Mr. Reagan had not meant to alter his policy of playing down the rights issue in foreign relations.”

Heilbrunn:

Reagan was initially rather disdainful of human rights, which he showed unmistakably by nominating Ernest Lefever, a member of the Committee on the Present Danger as well as the Washington-based Ethics and Public Policy Center (which Abrams himself would head in the 1990s), to be assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs. Lefever had declared that human rights were irrelevant to U.S. foreign policy and, furthermore, that any legislation making foreign aid conditional on a nation’s observance of human rights should be repealed. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which had a Republican majority, rejected his nomination.

Derian:

The President nominated Ernest Lefever to be Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. Lefever’s publicly stated views on the subject were (a) that all legislation making foreign aid conditional on a nation’s observance of human rights should be repealed and (b) that human rights had no place in U.S. foreign policy. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with a Republican majority, handed the President his first important defeat by voting 13 to 4 to reject the nomination.