



Photograph Credit: Peter Cunningham

Paul West has recently published three books, *O.K.*, a novel about Doc Holliday; *The Dry Danube*, a novella about Hitler as a failed art student in Vienna; and *The Secret Lives of Words*, a personal dictionary and etymology, and a Book of the Month Club Selection. "Hitler's Pianist and Other Portraits" is a continuation of West's earlier book, *Portable People*.

Paul West

Hitler's Pianist and Other Portraits

Colonel Doolittle's Amputee

After Colonel Doolittle had draped some prewar Japanese medals around the nose of a bomb, the Mitchells took off from the deck of the *Hornet* and headed for the mainland of Japan. They were taking off in a hurry because a Japanese ship and two fishing boats had already been sighted. The distance was some 650 miles instead of the allotted 500, which would allow the Mitchells to bomb and then find their way to Chinese airfields. Now, after bombing, they would have to take pot luck, landing wherever they could. Only one Mitchell faltered; a sailor had slipped, and thus entered his arm into the orbit of a propeller, which severed it, causing the pilot to forget to set his flaps. His plane sank, then recovered, and the squadron departed.

Oddly enough, as the Mitchells neared their targets, they watched Japanese planes giving them no heed, Japanese fishermen waving to them, and even Japanese civilians—unversed in aircraft recognition—signaling from the streets. They seemed almost welcome. The one person who, on seeing them, panicked, happened to be Admiral Tojo, on an aerial inspection tour. Knowing a Mitchell when he saw one, he knew at once what was afoot and sent out radio signals, too late. In the hasty, unpredictable world of contingency, what Tojo saw was the Mitchell whose propeller had severed that sailor's arm, but Tojo had not seen the dried blood on the blades and would not have reported if he had.

The Tears of Miss Ricks

Miss Ricks, known only by that name for as long as she lived, attached herself to us on Friday afternoons, her attaché case crammed with goods of the Earth. She would knock, at once step inside, hoisting her big box onto the soft chenille cloth. We sat around it like voyeurs from the Arabian Nights, each to a side of the table, looking for old favorites, I for the silver-plated mated hairbrushes, my sister for the doll that opened up to reveal yet another identical doll smaller, my mother (I think) eyeing ruby-encrusted candlestick holders. Imagine the weight of all this, the muscles of Miss Ricks who lugged it around year long, on and off buses, some trains, with no help from porters or redcaps. We removed our choices, ogled them, then put them back, possibly month after month breaking Miss Ricks's heart. *You never buy*, her face intoned, but we were not going to resist our view of the promised land, not so long as she kept coming, and I began to imagine that, one week, she would rest the suitcase on a specially prepared eiderdown of bees' fur, into which it sank never to be regained, relieving her of that insatiable lifelong burden, from which if she was lucky she sold a few crumb brushes a year, some sets of yellow dusters, a couple of manicure sets. I imagined the tears of Miss Ricks, blown to bits by an enemy bomb, her dry goods tossed miles high to where no purchaser held court for her, the mineral produce of her entire life no more than a case of samples.

Walter von Goggle-eyed

Ideal the black sough of deep woods for young boys firing arrows from bows, camping out under a canopy of dank chlorophyll, or even bringing home to mother a sheaf of bluebells, bleached stems conducting to azure tops. It was here I fell from a high branch, landing on my head among the fungi and rotten leaves, with no apparent harm (through some have wondered). It was between Indians and girls that a trio of us just wandering with fresh-cut staves broke through the edge of a clearing to see what we at first failed to understand: an astronaut descending with parachute high out of sight, the skein just visible. But he did not move, up or down. He stayed suspended, perhaps awaiting us for some obscure purpose. Yet he only swayed a little, some mother's son about

twenty, his face full of buoyant uncouthness in which shock and reassurance mingled. There he hung, presumably self-slaughtered, and, after a sullen pause in which we decided to do nothing to help him, we breathed deep and began to swing him this way or that. As we told it later, we *swang* him, hearing only the creak of rope and branch amid the huge frigid suction of the woods. Our stomachs felt empty and chill as we did so. But the longer we swung him the higher he went, parcel in blue serge (no doubt his best suit for the occasion, even a cheap silver tie). Then, by tacit agreement, we let him subside, in ever smaller motions until he hung again much as we'd found him, dead of love, hate, debt, cowardice, shame. Who knew? Someone had almost knocked his block off while he, central to this measly tableau, was just perhaps afraid of making nothing happen. Was he a local, or was he (as we deformed the correct pronunciation of nearby villages—Mosba, Fretch, Killer, Spunk, and Hayfway) —an outsider? Walter von Goggle-eyed I at once named him, remembering a name from somewhere. Even a rhyme formed, published later:

There was a young man from nearby
 Who found he wanted to die.
 Lacking all hope
 He purchased some rope
 And sputtered his last goodbye.

He surely got a better epitaph than that, after they had cut him down and smoothed him out. It turned out he was a conscientious objector, panicked by the draft. At least they didn't find him swinging or swung.

Reg Morgan

Morgan's magic shop—creaky beams, subdued lights, bottles of wine never sold, at the front nearest the street brand new air rifles and little capstan-shaped pellets—was a suitable place in which to rehearse a mystery. Mrs. Morgan, mother of the gorgeous Winona, had two sons, one of whom became a wireless operator in the RAF. On his shoulder he bore the insignia of his trade: a radiating crab of light, sending its beams into all quarters, just showing you what, with earphones and a Morse tapper, he could do when they bombed those German dams. Was he in

Hobday's plane that night? No, or he would have come back. It was all right, though, because Mrs. Morgan, already given to ethereal impulse, said he was coming through anyway on his own unmilitary wavelength, missing in action but found in the ether, all crackling good cheer and hearty greetings. Would my mother care to listen to him? My mother said no thank you, she knew what other worldly chatter was like. In fact, Mrs. Morgan began to hold a regular seance in which Reg ("Redge"), her son, urged them all on, not to forget him but to endure with him his transit through the other world as an insubstantial wireless operator. I never got over how appropriate it was for him to be still transmitting, as if he had found a superior method the air force might be glad to hear about. He was never seen again, but only heard from, in a big way.

Mr. Yates

Mr. Yates the Latin teacher who replaced Miss Knight had come fresh from the war; or, rather, not so fresh he had just come from war. He at once became the heartthrob for Misses Hannington (French) and Moffat (history), but eluded all women thanks to some withdrawn, tentative inwardness he specialized in. He got near his pupils instead. His way with Latin was gentle, almost breath-held, not as if he were dispensing ancient formulas, but as if this live, mercurial thing placed in his hands alone would save us all. There was a magic in Latin, almost a religion of it, and you could tell it had seen him through many a tight corner in its compact, sibylline fashion, never wasting a word, never (to us) seeming in the right word-order and therefore immune to the ravages of colloquial speech. How eloquent he was when telling us about Descartes (who was *he?*), who said *cogito, ergo sum*. It means, he said, "I think, therefore I am." This was magical all right. "Notice how in English we begin with our personal pronoun, presupposing what we intend to prove, whereas Latin, putting the pronoun at the end ("*o*"), suggests there is thought going on, *cogit*, and adds the *I* word third. It's as if Latin weren't quite sure of things, certain there was consciousness going on, but a straggler about the *I* bit, which of course relates to the rest of the idea: *therefore I exist*. What do you make of that?" We had discovered reticence among the dead languages. He died soon after, of some hidden tropical disease he'd been sent home with, Cartesian to the end.

My Father and the Luftwaffe

Had my father been a feckless sergeant, he would not have survived his years of war, 1914 to 1918. Now it was the next war after that. Each night, as Nazi bombers raced their unsyncopated engines (whirr-whirr) above our house, he and I would go and stand outside, each with a brisket sandwich in hand, to peer upward as searchlights combed the skies for one of those silver seeds. I called them kellys, which I knew as rolls of silver paper enclosing a small ball bearing: you then sealed the tube, twice, rattled the kelly in a matchbox, and out it came with beautifully rounded ends. Sometimes, divergent shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells pattered down around us, lethal confetti: other times spent rounds, from some absently firing machine gunner in a turret landed not far away. Our ex machine-gunner himself had some fellow feeling for this airman. The brisket had a damp bouquet, the bread a dry lean. My mother had made sandwiches earlier and gone to bed, so there we were, we could have been drinking together (I too young) or extolling the fury of aerial bombardment in flourishes of hyper-virile bravado. None of that. We just, in an impersonal way, looked up and marveled, cursing and gasping. It was as if we knew nobody could get at us in the night, so long as we made targets of ourselves out there beside the privet hedge, the drain-pipe up which the spider climbed. We heard neighbor dogs howling and whimpering, even the distant *crump* of a bomb, but only on one night did the bomb-aimer actually salvo his load from high above the village, excavating an entire field but otherwise destroying nothing at all: too chicken, we said, to fly over us en route to the target of the big city.

“*Germans,*” my father commented, swapping his last crust for his pipe (showing a light was a forbidden offense). “They used to be made of sterner stuff than that. Shall we go in?” We had faced down the Luftwaffe, stared its bombs away (mostly), and consumed our brisket with slow-motion thoroughness, daring them to catch us napping, little knowing that, when they landed back at their stolen French airfields to swagger and boast over wienerschnitzel and warm beer, they had over floated a man and his boy ribbing their military swank. It could all have gone otherwise, but we flunked them long before they got home to Hunheim. I had been blooded, I suppose, a child having his nose rubbed in a fox’s blood after the hunt. Yet that image seemed somehow wrong, with us the target like the fox. This was the blind leading the blind, the half-blind veteran getting his own back by daring them to do it again a quarter-century later. *Debellare superbos*, my cub’s Latin had taught me: we were making the haughty less warlike through sheer scorn.

Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen

Here, creeping at last, half a century later, out of the rotten bowels of war, comes almost the last aristocrat, with a reckless, high-toned diary, man of the East Prussian nobility who settled in Bavaria, Poing the name of his place, where he emulated the domestic form of emigration once recommended by the poet Gottfried Benn. He loathed the Nazi mob, but mostly kept clear of it inside his pastoral idyll, dreaming of, not Hitler's, but the thousand-year Reich of the Holy Roman Empire. He may even have agreed with Spengler, the cultural pessimist, who had traced the rise of the *Massenmensch*, the "mass-man," back to Bismarck and beyond and blamed the formlessness of Germany for its woes. But Reck as we will have to call him, shrinking from Malleczewen, saw the gluttonous pessimist in the man, pathologically vain and forever toadying to Hitler's industrialist.

His journal, begun in 1936, ends in October 1944, with his arrest, isn't really about the Third Reich but, rather like Saint-Exupéry's *Citadelle*, recites events and memories, moments of illumination and sieges of indignation. "A man must hate this Germany," he wrote, "with all his heart if he really loves it." For this ironic stance, he paid at Dachau. A school-boy sings a crucifix out of a classroom, snarling "Lie there, you dirty Jew." He smells the cattle-cars leaving from rural Bavaria. He had missed his chance to assassinate back in 1932, able only in 1944, after Stauffenberg had flubbed his, to chide the generals: "Ah, now, really gentlemen, this is a little late." Of course. That is what you get for disagreeing even if you publish only half a century later. One has only to think about the McCarthy period, as if Senator Joe had managed to shoot, hang, or behead the real communists, only to sweep away a whole generation of those who merely disagreed, like the Sophie Scholls, guilty of leaflets, awaiting the opening click of the door into the guillotine room. His diary is called *Diary of A Man in Despair*.

Win Min Than

Squadron leader Forrester wakes to the sound of ice tinkling against a glass borne by perhaps the smoothest, sleekest face he has ever seen. Ungesturing at the glass, wholly mesmerized by the genteel sycophancy of the face in which a bit of shame mingles with pride, he tries to blurt, but his throat will not oblige. So he drinks, eyes still on the eager, submissive-looking neat face, with the whisper of someone educated at the best of girls' schools. Miss Win Min Than, as she introduces herself, will see to him, feed and rear him, get him to church and back to form. She knows all the jargon, the hearty British devil-may-care, and will lead him out of the funk in which he rots. His Mosquito has crashed in the desert; Blore, his Cambridge educated navigator has perished, trekking into the far desert in search of something unutterable. Or did he shoot himself? Forrester is not sure. Did he, Forrester, shoot himself as well, and can this be the skimpy afterlife that equips exquisite handmaidens with strange, inadequate-sounding names? Even if only comforting him with glasses of tinkling water, Win Min Than will touch him magically, he just knows it. Along comes Brenda de Banzie, hearty theist, who vows to see him honorably linked to God. Squadron Leader Forrester is Gregory Peck.

As stories go, it has epic reach, especially in its opening scenes. The flying is good, the just deserts in the desert better. In what seems no time, at least in the spiritual avalanche that in *The Purple Plain* passes for interiorized "recognition," as Aristotle put it, Squadron Leader Forrester goes in search of a ruby, or perhaps Win Min Than equips him with it. Yes she does. The love affair begins to boil, but only as warm catalysis over cold rocks. This is Burma after all, and the time that of the famed Burma Road. All liaisons are bound to be temporary, and Win Min Than, that honed, almost simpering epitome of Burmese beauty—slender, winsome, keenly spiritual—knows it. Yet she risks her all, as if life's profoundest experience has leaped upon her, never to come again. An air raid ensues. Things revert to so-called normal, and the tenderly adjusted octave of wartime infatuation slumps into diurnal uproar.

H.E. Bates, *aka* Flying Officer X, whose wartime stories I almost eagerly mopped up, does well in this regard, letting us intuit the lovers, unanimity as our own, as Forrester cottons on to what's exotic and she espouses his virile version of the mundane. She wafts away from our

minds only to haunt our imaginations, having given facial image to all the Asian Heroines that Greene and Malraux tried to bring to life. Win Min Than the svelte, sari-clad wisp animates the movie and (retrospectively) the book by summoning up into herself the fragility of Asian woman merged with her own perhaps unique ethereal regality. Merely to see her look, at and through and beyond him, is to grasp something all penetrating in at least Bates's concept: the East looking at the West and not quite liking it, yet, in that sympathetic aversion, finding a source of love.

So where has this bedside angel gone? Was she found, introduced, and wasted all in one go? I doubt it, but I have seen no other movies of hers, reinforcing my notion that she was indeed magical, and the mirage she conjured up in the Squadron Leader's hospital room was her only rosebud. That correctly accented whisper of British English is a rare thing in this age of mumble and slur. How come she spoke so well? Who, if not the equally phonetic Nimet, host of *The New York Times* radio station, WQXR, groomed her for the part and got her thinking she was more imperial in her concise grandeur than Mr. Peck's phoney Air Force? Brenda de Banzie understands best when, after the air raid, she explains that Asiatics don't brood inwardly, they let their emotions out. Perhaps Win Min Than felt that flood and slid away with it.

Glenn Miller

The only band-leader killed when an Allied bombardier salvoed his bombs onto a plane beneath him over the English Channel, Glenn Miller is bound to be hard to sift from myth. Did he buy Jaguars and Rolls-Royces with shoeboxes full of money? Did coolie hats full of cocaine sit on his credenza? Doubtful; the movie of his life has sanitized all such fol de rol. The problem, if any, remains with the so-called Glenn Miller sound, much touted in the movie as he shuffled trombones and saxes, accidentally finding the right combination when a trombonist split a lip. Then it came about! That velvet, swaying, almost plaintive swooning sound. With it came poise, as when, during a concert in the London blitz, a doodlebug flew over, pulse-jetting like someone with hiccups, fell silent, then exploded. The band played, waited, then resumed, the epitome of cool.

How was it then that, in our teens, when each of us collected a band,

some of us two (I Basie and Goodman), nobody collected Miller? I used to think it was because the Miller band owed so much to Glenn Gray's Casa Loma Orchestra, to the concept of suburban dance music at the Long Island Casino. The sound was too streamlined, too velvetea. I thought, even in unusual pieces such as *American Patrol* (the number they play in the movie as the V1 arrives, hovers, and falls). Nowadays I think it's not so much a mode as a lack. There are no rough edges, no honky tonk, no airshaft misery; the music swoops in and gets you like somebody handcreaming the insides of your bedroom slippers. You would like to resist. You try to. There are no blues, not even as much as in Tommy Dorsey's band or that of Harry James. Something bureaucratic and diplomatic comes through, a generic suavity, and overmodulated sinuousness. Say it's music at the end result of a process it does not allude to. Too cut and dried. Or molded and oiled. You might dance all night to it, to the fabled "sound," but you wouldn't give it a 78.

These thoughts sadden me. I have not grown up into a liking for the super-competent Miller, not compared with my old favorites Basie and Goodman. Herman and Barnet, not to mention the harmonic swell Ellington. No empty cans clattering in an alley, no cats mewing, no dissonance in the brass. His career has the right trajectory for a hero, but misses the bite I like. He is one of the heroes of Prometheus, and indeed of Clio (History), but not of Melpomene (Tragedy) or St. Cecilia. His version of *At the Woodchopper's Ball* seems to fly on auto-pilot all the way. He's a long way from Bessie braying *Gimme a pigfoot*.

White Mischief

I have always liked the music that goes with this roll of fluffy celluloid, especially when the major domo cum bandleader stands censoriously by while the trumpeter does his best. Jock is supposed to have shot Joss for tampering with Greta Scacchi, his much younger wife. How tedious. I much prefer the rumors of fascism in Happy Valley, with Joss Erroll, old chum of Oswald Mosley, the British fascist, bumped off by a sexy Girton girl, a crack shot gifted at mahjong. Erroll, it's said, had links with a cabal of peacemaking British officials intent on a deal with Hitler. He had a kraalful of political dirt, anathema to Churchill. In 1940, three Scottish potentates met in the Highlands to decide Erroll's fate and handed the matter over to special forces at 2300 hours, 12 September. Into and out of Joss's bed the hit-girl went, later changing her looks at a

Nairobi hairdresser's. She flagged down Joss's car and plugged him.

That this air-fairy stuff comes from papers devised by a former Kenya hand, the scribe of a conscience-ridden old Navy commander, bothers me little, just so long as I can watch Sarah Miles hoicking her skirts to scoop honey for dead Joss's chops, and Trevor Howard eyeing La Scacchi through his bathroom peephole after gifting her with a tiny pistol. Pistol. *Get it?* Two pieces missing from the movie: The one-legged Kenya hangman whom Jock cheated, and Jock's suicide at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, England. What a Scottish play.

Hitler's Pianist

Dancing with Djuna Barnes in 1914, Putzi suffered a burst blood vessel in his penis, but their torrid affair ended in 1936 because Djuna was not German whereas Putzi had a German father, an American mother.

Harvard-educated, and destined to supervise the family art publishing houses in Berlin and New York, Putzi von Hanfstaengl was born in 1887, well-connected on both sides: Hanfstaengl had served as privy counselors to the Dukes of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and his mother's family, the New England Sedgwicks, had produced two Civil War generals, one of whom had helped carry Lincoln's coffin. Putzi grew up among a host of illustrious visitors, including Sarasate, Richard Strauss, Fridtjof Nansen and Mark Twain. Socially adroit and esthetically primed, he was just the man to escort the young Hitler to concerts and elegant soirées. Politically ambiguous, however, Putzi first befriended and financed Hitler, who was infatuated with Putzi's first wife Helene, but then fell out with Goebbels and, after escaping, spent most of World War II in nominal detention as an adviser on German affairs in Washington, D.C.

This lantern-jawed, six-foot-four turncoat was not only a pianist, however; he often functioned as Hitler's clown or fool, and just as often as mentor, taking him to see the female boxers in Luna Park or to visit the home of Richard Wagner. It was Putzi who explained American cheerleaders to Hitler, wrote marches for the SA band, set "Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil" to the tune of Harvard's "Fight, Fight, Fight," and concealed him from the police after the failure of the Munich putsch. Even after Hitler was jailed, Putzi continued to support him, doodling in power-politics on the fringe of the gathering Nazi movement, winning Hitler's

confidence more and more, removing adverbs from the first draft of *Mein Kampf*, yet seldom taken seriously except as a nuisance by the Nazi leaders, even after Hitler appointed him chief of his foreign-press department in 1933. Putzi is that interesting phenomenon, the two-faced intellectual, hopelessly dependent on his intellectual inferiors, able to gain power but unable to use it. He emerges as a passenger, an egregious and engaging courtier, resisting the dictates of his conscience, and brought to his senses only when put on Goebbels's blacklist in 1936. Increasingly, during his years with Hitler, Putzi tried to warn him against the viciousness and psychosis of the Nazi gang, little realizing it was precisely these qualities that Hitler needed and prized in his henchmen. Putzi idealized "Uncle Dolf," to his almost terminal cost, never quite able to efface the spell engendered in him when Hitler spoke in public, and the seedy official transformed himself into the mesmerizing savior. "It was like the difference," he said, "between a Stradivarius lying in its case, just a few bits of wood and length of catgut, and the same violin being played by a master." He and Hitler talked music all the time, indulging in detailed critiques of various performances of *Die Meistersinger*. He worked so hard in so appalling a cause, this kingmaker-esthete, urging Mussolini to visit Hitler (which he did), trying to set up Hitler with the attractive daughter of the American ambassador for a date (Putzi knew nothing of the Eva Braun liaison), and urging him to take more exercise, to cut out sweets. A minor snowball trailing Hitler's comet, he sings, versifies, brown-noses, teases, plays piano, edits, marches, ascends platforms, panders, trots to the jailhouse, fends off Goebbels and Goering, and in spite of all keeps track of the foreign press—especially of cartoons and caricatures that made fun of Hitler. He actually collected these up into a book, with his Führer's permission.

The last scene in Putzi's entr'acte is the most dramatic of all. Ordered to fly to Spain, supposedly to protect the interests of German correspondents there, he is to parachute over the Red lines between Barcelona and Madrid. Or so the pilot says. Putzi refuses the lethal order. The pilot fudges up a bit of engine failure and lands at Leipzig. Putzi gets out, pretends to call Berlin, and is flown back to his starting point, where he takes the night train to Munich, connecting to Zurich. In no time at all he is telling Carl Gustav Jung all about the Nazi menace. He spends the remainder of the war as a White House aide, publishes two books, and dies in 1975, the epitome of double-think whose best epitaph remains a deleted section of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, in which she depicted their

romance, from a first walk across Brooklyn Bridge to his jilting the heroine, who considers suicide but then throws herself at him again only to be sardonically told she is trying to become pregnant. Barnes saw Putzi for the last time in London in 1938, when he told her, as she then tells a friend, that Hitler's genitals are tiny: not even a mouse's ration.

Putzi's White House years would not prove as enthralling as his Nazi ones (unless he stayed a Hitler sympathizer all through). So this would be an evocation of the pre-war years, when Spain rather than Germany was the focus; when the world was blasé and rosy-spectacled, no more willing to believe that something was rotten than Putzi himself, who at least merits a final walk-on as sybarite-optimist, egg-head collaborator, bifocal jester. A grim background forms behind him, made up of such other bifocals as Adam von Solz zu Trott, the Oxford-educated German diplomat whom Hitler hanged along with some two hundred others for his part in the 1944 Plot. This way Putzi could so easily have gone.

The Thin Red Line

Not so much a bloodline, this, skeletally lining a hand or a life, as a tableau of men's faces contorted in pseudo-bellucose anguish: shrieking aloud because they cannot bear, or understand, the uproar surrounding them. Terrence Malick has (maybe after Captain Starles who late on talks Greek at speed) subverted James Jones's epic novel into a mesmerizing series of upset voices that work almost like a chorus, though done in rueful monologs, some of which display severe questing broken-hearted wonderment. It is hard not to be disturbed by this movie in which greenhorns grit their teeth and open their minds. Some of the elegiac ruminations achieve a high level of misery and shame, war being presented as something Japanese as well as Americans should wash their hands of. The same anguished questions about light, death, nature, love, savagery, the absurd, would recur even if the subject was peace, but here the movie rasps and jars, upsetting anyone with the least tendency to enjoy the goings-on. In this sense it amounts to a wondrous anathema, likely to put you off not only war but enjoying war movies, or even enjoying other people's enjoyment of them. It rules them out, and our hearts go with the cashiered Starles (Silver Star, Purple Heart, off to the Judge Adjutant) and not Bellona's bridegroom, Nolte, who all his career has waited to charge up a hill covered with corpses and call it his own.

I had not intended to write about this film until watching it again after buying a cheap copy. Its hold amounts to a glutinous, brilliant spell, certainly as binding as Tolstoy's *The Cossacks* or *All Quiet on the Western Front*. I keep trying to pin down exactly what Malick has done with voices, and conclude it must be something stereophonic and serial, as if unknown elegiac poets were interrupting the action with miserable voice-over, addressing the dead or those who survive with battered brainpans, a condition akin to traumatic stress disorder. Early in my teaching career, when so many academic colleagues spurned the teaching of Vietnam vets, I took on one or two, for literature, introducing them to authors they didn't know (Jünger, Barbusse, Hillary, Bader, Hanna Reich, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, even Rupert Brooke) in hopes of providing a *planche de salut*, a sounding board of comparative safety. It more or less worked. I had had a three-year military career myself, instructing young air force officers, but in peacetime of course, and owed them something. *The Thin Red Line* is likely to stir such feelings in the viewer, whether James Jones is spinning in his grave or not.

William Higgins

The details fall away like blackheads from a skin. The image that abides, if even that, is of me looking downward, at the end of a rope, features oddly aquiline, a heavy-set lieutenant-colonel set upon by the crazies of a mouthful called The Organization of the Oppressed of the World. What on earth happened to plain English? Dragged from my car in Tyre, I was taken north toward the Litani River in a car with Iranian diplomatic plates, then almost abandoned when a UN helicopter flew over low in search of me. So I ended up in Jibchit, easy meat for an amateur hangman, destined to be "the opening gift" in a sadistic videotape.

Imagine the froth on their lips as they prepared to film. Nothing to stop them using the so-called Austrian method, though the cord was not as thin as the one Hitler liked to use. Strangulation, no quick drop. Of course. I was the movie star. I began with an American flag stitched to my tunic, graduate of Auburn and Pepperdine Colleges, master's degrees at both. So they hanged two masters. Widow, Robin, a major in the Marines, almost catching me up. Ha. When we head for distant planets, will we hang people along the way? Wasn't it in this neck of the woods they hanged Mossadeq from a tripod on a table? What a postage stamp for the future! Why not some profiles of the strangled on the first-class mail?