

Review: Arrested Development

Author(s): Elizabeth Bobrick

Review by: Elizabeth Bobrick

Source: *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 20, No. 7 (Apr., 2003), pp. 8-9

Published by: [Old City Publishing, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4024172>

Accessed: 31-01-2016 19:05 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Old City Publishing, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Women's Review of Books*

<http://www.jstor.org>

one country or another every year for the last fifty years.

Wars are never fought for altruistic reasons. They're usually fought for hegemony, for business. And then of course, there's the business of war. Protecting its control of the world's oil is fundamental to US foreign policy. The US government's recent military interventions in the Balkans and Central Asia have to do with oil. Hamid Karzai, the puppet president of Afghanistan installed by the United States, is said to be a former employee of Unocal, the American-based oil company. The US government's paranoid patrolling of the Middle East is because it has two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Oil keeps America's engines purring sweetly. Oil keeps the free market rolling. Whoever controls the world's oil controls the world's markets.

And how do you control the oil? Nobody puts it more elegantly than the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. In an article called "Craziness Pays," he says "the US has to make clear to Iraq and US allies that... America will use force, without negotiation, hesitation, or UN approval." His advice was well taken. In the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in the almost daily humiliation the US government heaps on the UN. In his book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman says, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas.... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valleys technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps."

Perhaps this was written in a moment of vulnerability, but it's certainly the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read.

There is a notion gaining credence that the free market breaks down national barriers, and that corporate globalization's ultimate destination is a hippie paradise where the heart is the only passport and we all live together happily inside a John Lennon song (*Imagine there's no country...*). This is a canard.

What the free market undermines is not national sovereignty, but *democracy*. As the disparity between the rich and poor grows, the hidden fist has its work cut out for it. Multinational corporations on the prowl for sweetheart deals that yield enormous profits cannot push through those deals and administer those projects in developing countries without the active connivance of state machinery—the police, the courts, sometimes even the army. Today corporate globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that it's only money, goods, patents and services that are globalized—not the free movement of people, not a respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination, or chemical and nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, or, god forbid, justice. It's as though even a *gesture* toward international accountability would wreck the whole enterprise.

Close to one year after the War Against Terror was officially flagged off in the ruins of Afghanistan, freedoms are

being curtailed in country after country in the name of protecting freedom, civil liberties are being suspended in the name of protecting democracy. All kinds of dissent is being defined as "terrorism." All kinds of laws are being passed to deal with it. Osama bin Laden seems to have vanished into thin air. Mullah Omar is said to have made his escape on a motorbike. (They could have sent Tin-Tin after him.) The Taliban may have disappeared but their spirit, and their system of summary justice, is surfacing in the unlikeliest of places. In India, in Pakistan, in Nigeria, in America, in all the Central Asian republics run by all manner of despots and of course in Afghanistan under the US-backed Northern Alliance.

Meanwhile down at the mall there's a mid-season sale. Everything's discounted—oceans, rivers, oil, gene pools, fig wasps, flowers, childhoods, aluminum factories, phone companies, wisdom, wilderness, civil rights, ecosystems, air—all 4.6 billion years of evolution. It's packed, sealed, tagged, valued and available off the rack (no returns). As for justice—I'm told it's on offer too. You can get the best that money can buy.

Donald Rumsfeld said that his mission in the War Against Terror was to persuade the world that Americans must be allowed to continue their way of life. When the maddened king stamps his foot, slaves tremble in their quarters. So, standing here today, it's hard for me to say this, but The American Way of Life is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

Fortunately power has a shelf life. When the time comes, maybe this mighty empire will, like others before it, overreach itself and implode from within. It looks as though structural cracks have already appeared. As the War Against Terror casts its net wider and wider, America's corporate heart is hemorrhaging. For all the endless empty chatter about democracy, today the world is run by three of the most secretive institutions in the world: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, all three of which, in turn, are dominated by the United States. Their decisions are made in secret. The people who head them are appointed behind closed doors. Nobody really knows anything about them, their politics, their beliefs, their intentions. Nobody elected them. Nobody said they could make decisions on our behalf. A world run by a handful of greedy bankers and CEOs who nobody elected can't possibly last.

Soviet-style communism failed, not because it was intrinsically evil, but because it was flawed. It allowed too few people to usurp too much power. Twenty-first century market capitalism, American-style, will fail for the same reasons. Both are edifices constructed by human intelligence, undone by human nature.

The time has come, the Walrus said. Perhaps things will get worse and then better. Perhaps there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.

This essay is excerpted with permission from a lecture given in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the Lensic Performing Arts Center, September 18, 2002, sponsored by the Lannan Foundation. The full essay appears in *War Talk* by Arundhati Roy, published this month by South End Press. © 2003 Arundhati Roy.

Arrested development

by Elizabeth Bobrick

Boys and Girls Forever: Children's Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter by Alison Lurie. New York: Penguin

Books, 2003, 208 pp., \$13.00 paper.



In her foreword to *Boys and Girls Forever*, Alison Lurie outlines her thesis and offers an implicit explanation for her title: "It often seems that the most gifted authors of books for children are not like other writers: instead, in some essential way, they are children themselves." She points to the schism between what adults think makes good children's literature and what children themselves prefer, namely, books in which the kids are heroes and which contain a subversive message about adult authority. She concludes by discussing the predominance of animal characters on the shelves of the children's section, describing in detail the *Animorphs* series and the way it epitomizes the commercialization of children's books—neither of which topics she ever mentions again.

This foreword points to the book's strengths and weaknesses. Lurie's insight into childhood as a culture of its own, one that is often in opposition to adult morals and manners, is clearly and convincingly manifested throughout. By contrast, her frequent digressions—Sharon Stone's interest in filming Louisa May Alcott's adult fiction, for example—are puzzling, especially since they come from so distinguished a novelist and scholar writing in her area of expertise.

The notion that writers of children's books are themselves essentially childlike, although touted on the back cover as central to the book, is explored only sporadically. It dominates the first chapter on Hans Christian Andersen, but is abandoned in the second chapter on the highly capable Louisa May Alcott, who seems not to have had much of a childhood and who supported herself and her family with her writing from a young age. The thesis is equally neglected in the third chapter, on the Oz books of L. Frank Baum (unless being an avowed male feminist well before the fashion is the same thing as being childlike). It is picked up again in the fourth and fifth chapters on Walter de la Mare and John Masefield, where it is convincingly illustrated. It is dropped again in the sixth essay on the Finnish author Tove Jansson's series about creatures called the Moomintrolls, and called into play in the chapter about Dr. Seuss. In her tribute to Salman Rushdie's thinly veiled resistance to censorship, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Lurie wisely refrains from suggesting that the author rediscovered his child-like naïvete after being the object of a years-long *fatwah*. Of J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, Lurie says, "Like many famous children's authors... [Rowling] remains in close touch with her own childhood."

This observation is particularly telling, and it goes to the heart of what is wrong with Lurie's thesis. She does not consider, here or elsewhere, that being in close touch with one's childhood is a trait shared by many authors of fiction (not to mention memoirists),

whatever the age of their intended audience. Nor does she seem to have entertained the idea that to draw on childhood experience as material for fiction does not necessarily make an author child-like.

Most of the chapters, we are told, appeared originally as essays in the *New York Review of Books*. Many contain informative and illuminating readings of children's literature in the context of individual authors' private lives and social histories, particularly the chapters on Alcott and Baum. But despite their prestigious provenance, the essays betray rather unsteady hermeneutics. For example, when writing about the idealized deaths of Dickens' Little Nell and Alcott's Beth (in *Little Women*), Lurie declares, "The hidden message to the reader is that to stay at home safe with your parents is to die." This reading is problematic on its own with regard to questions of authorial intention. Equally difficult to understand is why the feminist critical approach in which it is grounded disappears from Lurie's subsequent discussions of Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and in the chapter on J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, which provides a particularly obvious target for feminist readers: the female professors at Hogwarts School are either fussy or ditzy, and Harry's friend Hermione is a homely, teacher-pleasing prig, central-casting shorthand for a studious girl.

The final third of the book is comprised of more general essays that focus on a theme rather than an individual author, and here the book's now-you-see-it, now-you-don't thesis disappears completely. This section begins with "What Fairy Tales Tell Us." The reader will look for a reference to Bruno Bettelheim in vain: this turns out to be a discussion of the ideological function of the genre in English and American fairy tales from the Victorian age to the present. A particularly interesting feature of this essay is the contrast between English and American tales and the lessons they contain about how individuals take their places within social structures:

The standard European fairy tale, both traditional and modern, takes place in a fixed social world. In the usual plot, a poor boy or girl... becomes rich or marries into royalty. In a variation, a prince or princess... regains his or her rightful position.... Usually the social system is implicitly unquestioned, and remains unchanged; what changes is the protagonist, and what he or she hopes for is to succeed within the terms of this system. (pp. 132-133)

By contrast, Lurie claims, American folk and fairy tales do not set much

store by wealth and position. Their heroes and heroines are sceptics, critical of those who abuse power and of traditional social roles they themselves are expected to play.

In "Louder than Words: Children's Book Illustrations," Lurie considers the differences between older and more recent visual depictions of traditional stories, concluding that the more recent versions are, with some exceptions, less realistic and hence less frightening than their predecessors. (Anyone who has seen the older Disney animated movies—*Sleeping Beauty*, for example—with a child, or as a child, may disagree.) She does not address the effects on illustration of changing technologies of pictorial reproduction, nor does she take into account the influence of modern art on modern artists, the children's book illustrators themselves.

The conclusions drawn in this chapter are sometimes difficult to understand. Although this reviewer is no fan of the Disney versions, which Lurie says "leave no space for the imagination," it seems gratuitous to lump author/illustrator Arnold Lobel with Uncle Walt. Lurie objects to Lobel's version of *Mother Goose*: "The comic exaggerations and loose, sketchy technique of his drawings, in which pencil lines and brush marks are visible, can destroy the illusion, reminding us that these pictures were made by a human hand and are not magical visions." Lurie, elsewhere a decided critic of the sentimental view of children, here shows herself to be perhaps unconsciously inclined toward it, or at least to doubt children's ability to understand that sometimes a wonderful picture is just a wonderful picture.

The final chapter, "Enchanted Forests and Secret Gardens: Nature in Children's Literature" is beautifully written, a true essay in which we see the author's mind at play. Lurie uses a voice more unfettered than anywhere else in this collection and warms to her topic in a way that excites enthusiasm in the reader.

For me, and I think for most children who have really known it, untamed nature seemed both powerful and sentient—a conscious force. The simplest rhymes assumed this: "Rain, rain, go away! Come again some other day," my sister and I chanted as the gray drops blurred the glass. The clear implication was that the rain could hear us, even if it chose not to do as we asked. This didn't seem strange: after all, nature often spoke by signs—the rainbow that marked the end of the storm, the groundhog that did or did not see its shadow on February second. (p. 172)

She goes on to incorporate into her discussion, briefly but seamlessly and with great sensitivity, how nature is portrayed in a host of children's classics: *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, *Goodnight Moon*, *At the Back of the North Wind*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Secret Garden* and *Charlotte's Web*. I wish that Lurie had chosen to expand this chapter into a book, for here we see what we have come to expect from this Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist: a vibrant, engaging style and a wide and deep knowledge of children's literature. ❧

Stranger than fiction

by Sharon Thompson

The Story of My Father: A Memoir by Sue Miller. New York:

Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, 174 pp., \$22.50 hardcover.



Amazon.com's over 700 books on Alzheimer's are medicine-wagon stuff for the most part, but about a quarter are first-person accounts by family members. Occasionally a gifted writer enters Alzheimer's narrative vortex—John Bayley, for example, and now the novelist Sue Miller, probably best known for *The Good Mother*, a disturbing novel that made a fan of me.

Miller has worked a very circumscribed terrain, a middle-class world of ministers and psychoanalysts, wives and mothers, whose families characteristically have "camps" in Maine or New Hampshire. She calls herself a "quintessential WASP—without the family money." It's an odd claim in these times, but it does accurately describe her turf, and I for one am interested. I respect the way she creates suspense out of the minute ethical decisions on which intimate domestic life turns. And I would forgive her a lot for her women, at once willful and sexual and "good."

In the past, Miller has steered clear of nonfiction out of a sense that facts can't convey "exactly how it was." That requires rearranging personal memories, in her view. "If I have a call," she says, "I suppose it is that." Even while producing a memoir, she clearly believes reordering memory is the higher narrative path. *The Story of My Father* is filled with rationales for having written it, as if she believes the form needs as many excuses as she can muster. And *The Distinguished Guest*—one of three novels she wrote while procrastinating over *The Story*—implicitly condemns the form as too shapely and self-interested to reflect fairly the multiple perspectives of family life.

Given these views, Miller would probably never have turned to memoir if Alzheimer's hadn't made its demand that unadulterated memory be honored. But in 1986 the police called her about a man who had gotten lost in the middle of the night and knocked on someone's door saying he had met "small strange people" in his journey. He had been driving a van, he said, but he had no idea where it was. It was her father, James Nichols.

There had been previous signs his mind was deteriorating. Author of *The History of Christianity, 1650-1950* and Academic Dean of Princeton Theological Seminary, he'd always been writing something. But after her mother died from a sudden heart attack, he stopped writing and, for the first time in his career, students began to complain about his lectures. His sermons, too, suffered, and once when Miller arrived for a planned visit, he was surprised she was there.

Despite these lapses, she didn't think he was in really serious trouble. After all, he had always been somewhat abstract, and he was getting older. She assumed the police had overreacted. They had not. When she picked her father up, she recalls, "He saw me with a kind of relief, but with none of the deep recognition that lights a face." And he was delusional, telling her "with delight... about little people who had spoken to him." At first she opposed his hallucinations with logic,

as if he were a misguided and irritating child. "So I guess I was seeing things," he responded. Then, "Doggone, I never thought I'd lose my mind."

Miller herself was not so nonchalant. Her father had been her refuge from the "high drama" of her mother, a woman Miller still dislikes so much that she can barely mention her without a sarcastic aside. And now this bulwark of sanity was rapidly losing his grasp on reality. There was the fear, too, that Miller might share his fate.

Throughout her father's decline, Miller found herself clutching at any sign that he was superior to other victims of AD, a tendency common, she observes, among those whose intimates are overtaken by the disease. At his continuing care facility, she kept signing him up for lectures as though she shared his notion that he was enrolled in an odd sort of college. (One thing he couldn't figure out: "No one ever seems to graduate from here.") She even bought him a ticket for the symphony at a point when he clearly couldn't be trusted not to wander off.

For a long time after the facility's staff found her father intractable, Miller took pride in the fact that she could still man-

age him. Then he turned on her as well. Ultimately, he died from a tumor Miller suggests she might have recognized earlier if she had trusted her instinct that he was in pain—or known, as the staff should have, that AD victims often use aggression to express discomfort.

After her father's death, Miller suffered from dreams in which she failed to help him. She tried therapy; then, like so many of AD's secondary victims, began to write a memoir. "Of course," as she says, "it was not so simple." She abandoned the memoir three times in the next decade, writing *The Distinguished Guest*, *While I Was Gone* and *The World Below* in the process. As she explains in the afterword of *The Story of My Father*, these novels "interrupted" work on the memoir; they "came along" like unintended pregnancies. In fact, they represent extremely interesting attempts to deal both with the themes her father's illness brought to mind and with her unease about writing nonfiction. They are part of her project, in other words, not interruptions.

They must not have satisfied her conscience, however, because in the end she came back to the intransigent memoir. Her problem, she thought, was producing a confident nonfiction voice. But memoir does not require a confident voice. It isn't textbook stuff. And the fictions Miller wrote when she wasn't writing *The Story of My Father* include remarkable examples of successful nonfiction voices. Something else was wrong.

One challenge she faced was that her father had never "called up any of those little incidents from childhood" that her mother "specialized in." She doesn't think "he used his personal memories in coming

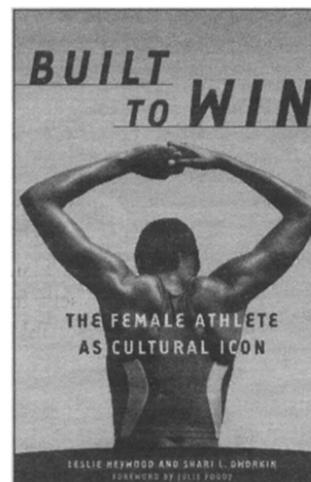
NOT THE SWIMSUIT ISSUE

Built to Win

The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon

LESLIE HEYWOOD AND SHARI L. DWORKIN

Foreword by Julie Foudy



The sculpted speed of Marion Jones. The grit and agility of Mia Hamm. The slam-dunk style of Lisa Leslie. *Built to Win* explores the confident, empowered female athletes found everywhere in American popular culture through interviews with girls and boys; readings of ad campaigns by Nike, Reebok, and others; discussions of movies like *Fight Club* and *Girlfight*; and explorations of their own sports experiences. Important, refreshing, and engrossing, *Built to Win* examines sport in all its complexity.

\$19.95 Paper ISBN 0-8166-3624-9

Mind-altering books from
University of Minnesota Press
www.upress.umn.edu
773-568-1550

MINNESOTA