

# Letters

## Starving the Ukraine

To the Editor:

I naturally don't want to carp at Craig R. Whitney's warm review of my book "The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine" (Oct. 26). But he does suggest that on a few points I accepted dubious evidence, and no historian could leave that unanswered.

Although he agrees that the only, or nearly the only, sources available in some areas are the firsthand accounts of survivors later reaching the West, he is unhappy with them: in part, it appears, because some of them were collected by émigré Ukrainian scholars in two volumes titled "The Black Deeds of the Kremlin." But unthinking rejection of books with such titles is only a cultural prejudice (which I admit I share), and should be resisted. For example, Yehoshua A. Gilboa's "Black Days of Soviet Jewry" is perhaps the most scholarly of works on the late Stalin period. "Black Deeds," in fact, consists (in addition to official documents) of many firsthand accounts, mostly given in the most matter-of-fact and unemotional way.

Of course, no historical source whatever is to be accepted uncritically: the historian must use his judgment. But these accounts are wholly consistent with those of others appearing elsewhere before and since (in the Harvard University Refugee Interview Project, for example) and are congruent with such material as has occasionally appeared in the Soviet Union itself and with reports of Western correspondents and others. Moreover, the number of such testimonies runs into many hundreds and they reinforce one another, unless one supposes a seamless conspiracy by Ukrainians, and also non-Ukrainians, to distort the facts, a far more extravagant scenario.

Mr. Whitney has special difficulty with my evidence of the blockading of the Russian-Ukrainian frontier to prevent the entry of food into the Ukraine, for which such sources could be the only sources. In the passage where I deal with it I quote 10 firsthand accounts, four from "Black Deeds" and six from elsewhere (and there are a number of others in the body of the book). I think that is enough. Mr. Whitney seems to reject the phenomenon largely because (and here we come to a major point) he is uncomfortable with the idea that the 1932-33 terror-famine had as its principal aim the crushing of the Ukrainians. He notes that the famine was also inflicted on some lesser, non-Ukrainian areas. But this does not affect the point: over 80 percent of the famine victims were Ukrainian; and the campaign was specifically linked with the simultaneous near annihilation of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. There were other terrors that hit the whole Soviet population equally: but in the terror-famine the Ukraine was laid waste and Russia wasn't.

ROBERT CONQUEST  
Stanford, Calif.

President's son and a dancer who got out just in time, and now Ms. Kirkland's autobiography (written with her husband, Greg Lawrence) — all make desperate pleas on behalf of the poor, pathetic, uneducated dancers.

These books are the output of passionate frustration. Yes, dancing is very, very hard; not everyone is able to sustain its demands, not only of body but of spirit. Classical ballet does not allow for mediocrity. Classical dancing, at its best, is about achieving a form of dignity, grace and beauty that is a very far cry from the "self-expression" that so relentlessly preoccupies Ms. Kirkland.

There is a crusade by these writers to save dancers, especially those "victimized" by George Balanchine, the major culprit. It is a strange notion to those of us who were asked to join the New York City Ballet and thought it the high point of our lives. We have not changed our minds, but apparently we have been brainwashed. It is interesting to contemplate what the story of Balanchine's



Gelsey Kirkland.

"domination" would be from one who voluntarily subjected her artistic life for over 25 years to Balanchine. Suzanne Farrell's "story" is not available on the printed page but in a much more lucid and eloquent form: in her dancing. Those who have been privileged to witness this statement of dedication, faith and spiritual fullness might see these narratives in another perspective.

Ms. Kirkland's analysis of herself cannot hide the lack of the essential requirement of her art: belief in it. Her book is not a revelatory account of the perils of a dancer's career. It is the self-indulgent exploration of a mind bent on self-destruction. That she chose a classical art form as the place to "experience herself" is not rare, only boring.

The deepest offense is her dedication to Joe Duell, "that the cry for help might yet be heard." Duell, a principal dancer with the New York City Ballet, committed suicide several months before the publication of this book. That Ms. Kirkland should presume to understand Joe's pain, to identify herself with his reasons and his ethics and to use them for her own purpose, sensationalism, is a devastating affront to him and those who loved him.

TONI BENTLEY  
New York

## Classical Dance in Print

To the Editor:

Gelsey Kirkland's "Dancing on My Grave" (review, Oct. 19) epitomizes and carries to an extreme the rash of books and articles that in the past few years have launched a violent backlash against one of the few flourishing tributes to human nobility in our century: classical ballet. "Off Balance" by Suzanne Gordon, "The Unmaking of a Dancer" by Joan Brady, articles by Ron Reagan, our

## Teen-Agers at Work

To the Editor:

In his review of "When Teenagers Work" (Oct. 26), Mickey Kaus neglected to discuss the central argument of our book. Excessive commitment to a part-time job during the high school years does little to foster healthy identity development or responsible autonomy among teen-agers and, instead, encourages "pseudomaturity" — the superficial appearance of being an adult without the

concomitant psychological resources. It is in this context that we discuss the potential benefits to adolescents of daydreaming, fantasy and introspection. In our view, part-time employment is yet another force pushing young people toward adulthood too quickly for their own good.

There is also one error of fact in Mr. Kaus's review that we wish to correct: We do not "explain away" research showing that work in the teen-age years has a positive effect on wages immediately after high school. Rather, we note that any financial advantage of early employment is likely to be quite short-lived, and that it is continued schooling, not early work experience, that has the most substantial long-term impact on wages.

LAURENCE STEINBERG  
Madison, Wis.  
ELLEN GREENBERGER  
Irvine, Calif.

Mickey Kaus replies:

I'm sorry Ms. Greenberger and Mr. Steinberg feel I didn't do justice to their thesis, but I object to their citing an "error of fact." The authors do try to explain away findings that early work experience leads to higher wages. First they suggest the presence of "unmeasured factors," then the possibility that the findings might not apply to college-bound youngsters. Only when these attempts fail do they make the point that continued schooling is likely to pay off even more than work.

## Dreiser-Mencken Letters

To the Editor:

In the article "Mencken: Don't Be So Bull-headed. Love and Kisses, Dreiser" (Nov. 9) it is not altogether clear that the letters presented are selected portions of complete letters, nor is it evident where the breaks in them occur. Readers should be advised that the book from which these excerpts were selected, "Dreiser-Mencken Letters," edited by Thomas P. Riggio, includes the complete text of all the known correspondence between the two. It should also be noted that the University of Pennsylvania Press's issue date for the book is Nov. 30, not in January as stated in the article.

JO MUGNOLO  
Philadelphia

## James Laughlin's Poems

To the Editor:

The review of James Laughlin's "Selected Poems" (Nov. 2) is really a disgrace to us all. To criticize a book one must understand it, whether one's criticism is negative or positive, but your reviewer clearly doesn't understand what Mr. Laughlin has done in his poems, doesn't see the layering voices of wit, irony and fantasy, or the breadth of literary sources, or the range of learning; doesn't understand the poems as literature, in short. It's a plain case of mismatching. Whether or not your reviewer could understand the poems as reports of experience is not so plain perhaps, but it seems doubtful.

It's unfortunate that such a thing should happen to any poet's selected edition, the work by which he will be remembered. When the poet is someone who has given as much to writing in this country as Mr. Laughlin has, it seems even more distressing, though I know this is an extraliterary consideration. But I'm sure it will be prominent in the thoughts of most of your readers.

HAYDEN CARRUTH  
Syracuse

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