

Paul Buhle and Patrick McGilligan, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1997).

When Yogi Berra pontificated that "It ain't over until it's over!" he may have hit a deep vein of truth. Certainly, his sage words apply to the Cold War. Perestroika and the demolition of the Berlin Wall did not bring reconciliation between right and left — at least not in the USA, the source of Bruce Springsteen's famous bellow. Indeed, since 1989 we have been engulfed not only in renewed warfare on various battlefields but, more significantly I think, in the groves of academe. Intellectuals, right and left, hurl verbal missiles at each other with increasing frequency if not accuracy. Ellen Schrecker, for example, continues to mine McCarthyism for academic gold, if not glory. Witness, for example, the exchange of letters in the *New York Times* on Sunday, 2 August 1998. There is an increased fascination with the years following World War II, that Zeitgeist which I have tried to capture in conjunction with Joram Warmund. The book, *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports and the American Dream* takes a hard look at the cold war era and the legacy of heroes like Mr. Robinson.

This labour of love will be followed by a second burnt offering, namely, a study of Paul Robeson whose 100th birthday stirred old passions and even produces "hate mail" in the wake of a day in his honour, 28 February 1998, held on the campus of Long Island University. Thus, when another retrospective on "Scoundrel Time" beckoned, I jumped at the opportunity to share my unabashed enthusiasm for *Tender Comrades*, expertly edited by Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle and attractively published by St. Martin's Press in New York City.

The book's title is derived from an innocuous 1943 movie starring Ginger Rogers. A collection of interviews featuring blacklistees, this opus provides no magnum of new basic knowledge from this awful period in American history. David Cate, Victor Navasky, Eric Bentley, and Walter Goodman have related it before and more coherently, if not better. Nevertheless, I hasten to add that the brilliant mosaic of different points of view or verbal tiles, as it were, add up to a literary *tour de force*. It is impossible to discern a major leitmotif or dominant theme. Many of the conversants try to sort out their past, settle a few scores, and explain their life choices. I was disturbed by the frequency with which victims blamed other victims and how little rancour they bear their adversaries. For example, Jeff Corey, more famous as teacher than actor, actually liked John Wayne, Gary Cooper, and John Gavin, despite their right-wing affiliations. Perhaps one reason for the sentimental strain that mars the narrative is the softball questions served up to the respondents. Buhle and McGilligan seem so eager to please their discussants that one is painfully reminded of Barbara

Walters at her soppy worst. Hastily assembled, these essays invite further editing with the elimination of certain glaring errors. Susan Zuccoti is misidentified on page 41 as Zuccoletti. There is no attempt to assess the quality of what the writers crafted (the grapes of Roth?) in Hollywood. Major figures are juxtaposed to minor ones, presumably on the common ground of victimization.

Enough carping. I am not a cold fish. Nor am I indifferent to the many positives of this book. We learn for example that the late Frank Sinatra was not only a *mench* but an astute reader of Marx — Karl not Groucho. (292) The value of humour is highlighted in Marsha Hunt's account of an abortive attempt to stop the grand inquisitors at the pass in Washington D.C. In fact, the segment involving Hunt offers some of the best vignettes in the book. (305-324) Her description of the ill-fated trip to Washington in 1947 is a gem. She hails Danny Kaye as “the saviour, our court jester” who “danced up and down the aisle of the plane, making all kinds of fun and laughter. He really . . . saved the morale of the bunch. We loved him for that.” Ms. Hunt made 50 movies before the “dark ages” (her characterization) and only eight since. Sans souci, Marsha Hunt went on to a life of service and creativity. She is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and at age 81 remains beautiful, elegant and forever young.

Ironically, like many others interviewed in this fascinating book, Betsy Blair Reisz speaks of “progressive” [read good] people. Her list includes former husband Gene Kelly, John and Bobby Garfield, Richard and Ruth Conte, Orson Wells, Norman Panama, Bill and Edie Goetz, Jerry Wald, and even Dore Schary, later an ardent cold warrior. Minus malice, sweet Betsy from the left pike calls Schary “a great social democrat . . . and a great man.” (545) Reisz also confides that she cannot understand what he did or condone his political genuflections in front of the witch-hunters. She also heaps high praise on Frank Sinatra. He gave unstintingly to victims of the black-list. “If anybody was in trouble, he was very attentive and very generous.” (546)

For those of us old enough to remember, each subject evokes a connection. Millard Lampell discusses his football career. He mentions touch football in Riverside Park. In the early-1960s, I was privileged to play with Lampell and other literary lights. Though he was twenty years older than those who played, he excelled. Refusing to play ball with the inquisitors, however, he was forced to the sidelines like so many others. Did time dull the blade of outrage that this reviewer still feels, keenly? Primarily Jewish, these victims acted the true Christians. They turned the other cheek rather than turn in their tough comrades. Remarkable!

Thirty-six spirited (some indeed have crossed the River Jordan to join the spirits) respondents throw new light on a dark chapter in American history. The

vast majority bear no grudges and play no judges in trying to sift the sense from the nonsense that marked and marred their lives. Perhaps, *la guerre est finit* as Yves Montand learned in that bittersweet film and as Alan Ginsberg howled in *Kaddish*: “The war in Spain Aunt Rose, is over!” But the memory of Cold War conflict, like a haunting refrain, lingers. Most certainly we have an obligation to instruct new generations to avoid repetition of this sordid chapter once upon a time in America. And the editors, Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, deserve high praise for summoning the words of whom, in another context, Paul Cowan called “orphans of history.” They have much to tell us in this sparkling collection of oral histories — if only we will listen.

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