

Murdoch's baton. He became editor of *The Times* when Murdoch bought the newspaper in 1981. They fought. Pushed into a corner, Evans resigned and wrote a bitter book about the affair.

The story of the British press is studded with the names of eccentric, megalomaniac press barons who sought power through their newspapers. Their doings are not only the subject of gossip in Fleet Street but also the spice and stuff of history. It is this rich field that Stephen Koss, professor of history at Columbia University, explores exhaustively, wittily, and lucidly. This book is a sequel to his highly praised study of the nineteenth-century political press in Britain, and it is a masterly work of scholarship.

The book opens with the great Liberal general election victory in 1906, a time when the British press carried a considerably larger acreage of political coverage than it does now. The press barons—Northcliffe, Rothemere, Beaverbrook, and others—some quietly genial, some monstrous, strove through the pages arrogantly presuming their importance in the affairs of the country. But, as Professor Koss says, the power of the press was to a considerable extent a conceit of journalists who tried vaingloriously to live up to their legend. Public figures, seizing on the press out of hope, desperation, or simply habit, sedulously fostered the newspapermen's self-image: "As the maker of news, politicians fired the imaginations and captured the loyalties of journalists. As the purveyors of news to the general public, journalists were equally indispensable to politicians. At the point where their needs intersected, fascination gave way to obsession."

Some obsessions resulted in virulent newspaper campaigns to rouse the country. Particularly hysterical were the attacks on anything with a German name during the early months of the First World War. Prince Louis of Battenberg was hounded from his job as first sea lord because he was related to the kaiser. Rumors, passing for scoops, sold newspapers. The more fantastic the rumor, the greater the power to inflame, and the mob obligingly attacked German-owned bakeries in London and Liverpool and kicked dachshunds in the streets. Newspapers have never had difficulty arousing the baser prejudices. During the Falklands war the correspondent from Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* scrawled "Up Yours Galtieri" on a missile before it was fired.

Professor Koss's narrative opens at a time when Northcliffe had already revolutionized the popular press with his *Daily Mail*. He had bought the *Sunday Observer* in 1905 and acquired *The Times*, the crown jewel,

three years later. "Obviously," Professor Koss notes, "he was not a man whom the politicians could afford to ignore, much less offend." The book closes with the Australian adventurer Murdoch making *The Times* his jewel, while Concorde-ing around the world, kicking up dust in London, New York, Boston, and Chicago. The story, of course, goes on. **WV**

**THE PARABLE OF THE TRIBES:
THE PROBLEM OF POWER
IN SOCIAL EVOLUTION**

by **Andrew Bard Schmoekler**
(University of California Press; 400 pp.; \$19.95)

Brian Thomas

Consider ten tribes, peacefully cohabiting. If one become warlike, the remaining nine have limited choices. They can turn despotic themselves, flee the warriors, or be destroyed. No other alternatives exist, according to Andrew Bard Schmoekler. Aggression quickly eliminates any social

form that does not adhere to its laws. "It is vain," moreover, "to hope that all ten would choose the way of peace." He labels this dour mental construct the parable of the tribes.

In scrutinizing the infectiousness of power, Schmoekler delves into human nature, noting the recurring ways in which force has been acquired and exerted as he probes ten thousand years' worth of history and ethnology. How power is centralized, how it affects productivity, how it is connected with science and technological advances—these and other cheerful topics get bundled into Schmoekler's all-embracing survey.

This book is an exercise in the kind of meandering anthropology cum social criticism that Thorstein Veblen practiced with such droll bite. Like Veblen, Schmoekler relies on illustrations drawn from primitives, from what has happened on the margins of civilization. In doing so, he has produced a cavalcade of interesting cases, presented more palatably than they have been in anthropology textbooks. From my Olympian vantage point as an armchair anthropologist, I found nothing to cavil at in his characterization of ancient humans'

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habits, their hunting and gathering, the longevity of this mode of living, and its relative comfort. (Disgruntled city dwellers will be rueful to hear once again just how much less onerous primitive economic life was than its twentieth-century urban counterpart.) Otherwise, not much has changed, Schmookler rightly says, since the first hunter-gatherers abandoned their shy ways and started on the grisly path to empire building.

In addition, Schmookler's criticism of Karl Marx, though brief, effectively weaves together a number of strands from other critics. Without falling into a fatuous neo-conservatism, he parses the labor theory of value, as well as other mainstays of Marxism, and finds them wanting. His own parable, he claims, accounts for revolutions and empires better than does Marxist theory—which is not saying much, given Marxism's failings on this score. He also finds his parable applicable to the market system, which "cannot be relied upon to serve human welfare."

Nevertheless, the pleasing parts of *The Parable of the Tribes* do not add up to a convincing whole. The most noticeable weakness of the book is the discrepancy between the optimistic goals of the author and the bleak determinism of his parable. In his personal commitment, he is doggedly hopeful. He is "currently working on a project with the Public Agenda Foundation to clarify the nuclear defense issue for public debate and judgment." And the present book does indeed apply to defense issues: No one is free to choose peace, he says, but anyone can impose upon all the necessity for power. As he puts it: "In the post-World War II world, the achievement of far greater global peace and relaxation has required not the improbable ten out of ten [tribes to choose peace], or a hundred out of a hundred, but a more reasonable two out of two. That is, if the United States and the Soviet Union were truly devoted to leading the world beyond the chronic struggle for power, inhumane forces described in this work might have been (still might be) significantly weakened."

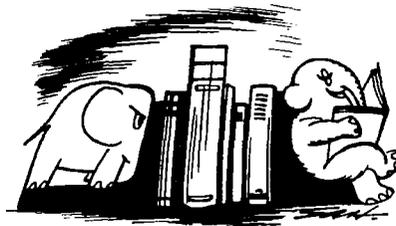
So Schmookler is not what Thomas Love Peacock called a deteriorationist, one who believes that life is steadily getting worse. Paradoxically, he sees his parable, and this book, as a means of liberation from the predetermined rigors of power. The parable can lead beyond guilt and misplaced enmity and drive a wedge between us and our systems. Schmookler has done his work too well, though. The parable as he presents it has no escape hatch.

Too often the parable is simply a truism:

If only the superpowers were not so bent on being superpowers, life would be different. Thus Schmookler calls to mind the apocryphal epidendrologist who first diagnosed dutch elm disease. A cure exists, he said, but it would cost ten thousand dollars per tree, and it would not work unless it is applied to every single dutch elm in existence. Don't hold your breath.

A more damaging flaw in *The Parable of the Tribes* is Schmookler's rhetoric. He was wise to call his insight a parable, for he undertakes no effort to test it, to come up with a refuting instance. He simply dredges the literature for corroborating instances. He pleads rather than argues.

A recent counterexample is not hard to find. Take Gandhi. A plausible argument can be made that noncooperation transcends force and makes the realm described by Schmookler's parable irrelevant. Naturally I don't want to digress into an assessment of the Mahatma and his limitations; nevertheless, the strategy of *satyagraha* undermines the parable's pretensions to explanatory power.



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The parable turns out to be a bulging suitcase of a concept, roomy enough to hold anything, yet too bulky to carry anywhere. As the old Yiddish adage goes: "For instance is not proof." **WV**

SALESMAN IN BEIJING
by Arthur Miller
(Viking Press; 254 pp.; \$16.95)

Anthony Scully

Arthur Miller's *Salesman in Beijing* is a first-person account of his seven-week sojourn in Beijing, where he directed a Chinese cast in his landmark play *Death of a Salesman*. Miller was, in effect, the first foreign director to mount a Western drama in China with Chinese actors.

Death of a Salesman won the then thirty-four-year-old Miller the Pulitzer prize in 1949; it has played somewhere every night since its opening. Like any powerful literary work, it is hard to sum up in a paragraph. With respect to its current successful Broadway reincarnation with Dustin Hoffman as Willy, the *New Yorker* describes the play as "a sentimental and yet oddly moving account of Willy Loman, a man who thinks success consists of being liked and who is dismayed to discover that this goal is, as a goal, unachievable." Miller himself describes his play as being "about the love of father for son and son for father." On stage, *Death of a Salesman* recounts the last days of Willy Loman, the archetypal salesman who has lived for the American dream of making it and, in the process, loses his soul. *Salesman in Beijing* raises the question of Arthur Miller as Willy Loman.

The cultural chauvinism Miller displays here is matched only by his strict adherence to a theatrical aesthetic that consecrates both the text of the play and the original New York production as an absolute code by which everything that happens in Beijing is measured and judged. Not only does Miller block out the play with precise reference to the first production directed by Elia Kazan; it is inconceivable to him that his Chinese experience might occasion new ideas about the playing, the set, or the music, or that it might suggest changes in the text itself. Miller has been known over the years for his crisp powers of observation, his brainy political "take," his classical sense of tragedy in the everyday. When face to face with a culture representing a quarter of the world's people, a massive population shaped in recent generations by a series of natural dis-