Licensed to Chill

beaujolais Made in Europe. Enjoyed in America.

Campaign financed by the European Union, France and Italy.
Letters

With Friends Like These...

To the editor:

The Tribune’s initial omission of the FBI torture report to the core of Senator Durbin’s position got deserved Zorow-like rapier slashes in Reader headlines: “Tell ‘Em What To Do: But tell ‘em what they’re thinking it about!” [Hot Type, June 24].

Now, to cover the political as well as journalistic dimension of this story, I suggest an article headed: “Daley Twists Knife: Dems leave Durbin twisting in wind, prisoners twisting in pain, terrorists twisting in delight, Obama twisting in silences.”

Such failures of the “opposition party” actually to oppose only make it easier for the administration to get away with the blatant hypocrisy of: (1) openingly meditating torture, (2) releasing Brit Guantánamo prisoners (in a presidential minor favor to Tony the Lapdog) to go home and blab to the tabloids about tortures they experienced, (3) and then turn around to excoriate Democrats and the press for revealing torture practices.

Failing an opposing party, our only hope may lie in a Republican ticket of Senator John McCain and Lindsey Graham (R, SC), who have not backed off in criticizing U.S. tortures, instead as incite-ments to terrorism, betrayals of Americanism, and exposure of America as a culture to retaliatory torture by future captors. (McCain also needs needed Senate leadership on global warming.)

Moe Shanfield

W. Hollywood

Topic A: The Coverage

Michael Miner [Hot Type, June 24] quotes some details about the alleged abuses at Guantánamo and imagines that he’s proven that Dick Durbin’s criticism of the U.S. forces to Nazis, the gulag, and the gestapo and OGPU routinely investigated and disciplined camp guards who didn’t respect their prisoners’ basic human rights. Something which is un-lamentable, unworthy of the American system (though considering Guantánamo is in Cuba, it’s a lot closer to the norm there), and still be so far short of the utter inhumanity of the Nazi, Soviet, or Pol Pot regimes that it is obscene, not to mention dumb as a trunk or a Chomsky admirer.

If, since his article appeared, Miner has taken away for psychiatric impeachment, been denounced by his own relatives in front of his entire village, or been dead in a rickety padded for being literate, I take back everything I said. Otherwise, read some history before the next time you try to score cheap points off Bush, citizen.

Michael Gebert

Miner replies:

Among other details that escaped good citizen Gebert, I wasn’t writing about Bush.

In the Pest Camp

Heather Kenyon’s June 17 cover story, “Preservationist, or Pest for Short,” was compelling; I wanted to read more so I went to Marty Hackl’s Web site and found some glaring inconsistencies with his public persona.

The Reader article went on some length about Van Bergen and the fact that Hackl once owned a Van Bergen house. What the article neglect-ed to say, or what Hackl did not volunteer, was that he never gave a historic easement on his home. It is common practice for people concerned with preser-

vations to grant easements to a not-for-profit entity such as LPCI, or in Hackl’s case, to the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society. On Hackl’s site he writes about his historic home in anticipation of selling it and says, “Also a great buyer incentive is being offered: Sellers have left the outside area still assist to the transaction, for the buyer to donate a preservation easement to the Landsmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. Such an easement could be worth up to an estimated $120,000 in federal income tax deductions.”

A historic easement would guarantee that the building would stand forever and never be threatened by development.

Once an easement is granted, the mortgage is then encumbered, and the value of the prop-erty diminishes. The federal income tax deduction should offset the amount the property is diminished by. However, these homes are harder to sell and take a special buyer to see the value of historic preservation.

What I find troubling is that Hackl seems to have a sliding scale; on one hand he interprets historic guidelines as dogma and ruthlessly applies them to oth-ers, while on the other avoiding any financial encumbrance of his own asset.

Another inconsistency was when he said, “Now I’m the bad guy, picking on those poor old women” in the River Forest club. “I really like them and don’t want to hurt them.”

CHICAGO READER  |  JULY 1, 2005  |  SECTION ONE   3
Books

continued from page 21
eespionage. Correa, considered a founder of Cuban noir, began publishing in 1966, and his early short fiction was favored by Castro. The 2002 publication of Spy’s Fate in the U.S. was his first English translation; it’s just been rereleased in paperback. It’s a prescient look at spycraft not as the fetishized means to a Bondian lifestyle, but rather as the thin edge of the wedge in relations between hostile nations.

The novel opens with a veteran’s homecoming. Carlos Manuel of the Cuban intelligence service has spent three years pursuing a mission in Africa, and upon returning in 1994 he finds his homeland badly hobbled by the Soviet Union’s dissolution. He wants to slow down and spend quality time with his grown kids. Instead, he’s startled to find them not just sullen but building a raft for the risky Florida crossing. Correa uses a rambling third-person omniscient voice that’s out of style in American literary fiction but works well here to make 1990s Cuba accessible. Manuel is both shrewd and a patriot, and he realizes the end of Soviet patronage has transformed both his nation and his life’s work into a house of cards.

Fearing for his children on their flimsy raft, he pulls some strings among his intelligence cronies and steals a motorboat to pursue them. Soon enough the weary, aging spy finds himself trying to protect and provide for his children in the U.S. from behind bars. The FBI and CIA sniff at his trail, even as he languishes in a detention center disguised as an ordinary refugee, but eventually he slips away from his captors—though not before igniting the fury of Sidney King, a vengeful CIA manager who lost a leg ten years earlier to a bomb that may or may not have been planted by Manuel. King is now so bitter that he schemes, Bolton-like, against his own subordinates.

Revenge propels the plot as it sprawls into kidnapping, faked deaths, and operational ties between the CIA and conservative Cuban exiles (a cold-war-fiction chestnut, as in James Ellroy’s American Tabloid). But Correa invests his characters with enough detail and color that the reader is absorbed by the conflict between Manuel’s cynical yet loyal cronies, the “true believers” among Castro’s military who want to make an example out of their ex-spook, and the CIA’s middle-aged cold warriors (with the exception of the payback-obsessed King) are just killing time until Cuba’s collapse. Correa further humanizes the stock narrative of escape and evasion by incorporating a domestic subplot: while Manuel is hiding out in Vermont waiting to cross into Canada and retrieve a Swiss passport, he rents a room from a single mother who’s being stalked by a local prosecutor and finds time to exact skillful retribution on her behalf, an efficient bit of spy sadism that harks back to the original Bond novels.

When Manuel returns once again to Cuba, his actions become a political litmus test for both his fellow spies and loyalists within Cuba’s deteriorating military infrastructure. The irony of Manuel’s career—that he has dedicated his life and skills to serving a tin-pot socialist regime now in terminal decline—remains, despite all the twists of Correa’s elaborate plot, the novel’s solemn central thread. Both My Life in CIA and Spy’s Fate are published by lefty independent presses, but despite their quirks they’re essentially thrillers, as compelling as anything by le Carré. Spy’s Fate is an absorbing and oddly relevant potboiler, while Mathews performs the valuable service of capturing the myopic obsession with the accoutrements of spypdom that’s led real-life spooks to their current state of ineffectuality. What distinguishes both is the dissolution of the cover, ritualized social contract forever epitomized by rows of unnamed stars on a wall in Langley, Virginia; that uncredited sacrifice will be honored by a nation’s ideals. In a time when America’s intelligence corps has been stained by outsourcing scandals, torture, and the practice of “extraordinary rendition,” we shouldn’t be surprised when the spies whose exploits entertain us turn unreliable and jaundiced too.
in his community, and people should take issue with him. I was surprised Hackl was so candid about waiting for an old man to die so he could personally profit from buying his home. Hackl is the worst kind of bottom-feeder in the real estate market. So you ask, preservationist or pest? Hackl is neither; he is an opportunistic hack.

Brenda Daley

Heather Kenny replies: Hackl says he decided not to donate an easement, which allows owners to place certain restrictions on property in perpetuity, for two reasons. First, the house is located in Oak Park’s Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District, which gives the structure some protections; it can’t, for example, be demolished. Second, he suggested an easement as an incentive for a buyer because even though he couldn’t get much of a tax benefit from it, a buyer with a higher income could.

Brenda Daley

Heather Kenny replies:

Hackl says he decided not to donate an easement, which allows owners to place certain restrictions on property in perpetuity, for two reasons. First, the house is located in Oak Park’s Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District, which gives the structure some protections; it can’t, for example, be demolished. Second, he suggested an easement as an incentive for a buyer because even though he couldn’t get much of a tax benefit from it, a buyer with a higher income could.