

Review of *The Welsher*,
a novel by Peter Thomas

"Watkins told me all that a man knows or can bear. 'I have been figmented,' he said, 'eradicated, peeled tender and soft as a black-skinned banana; I am a tale in another country, a beast from the dark woods, a loup-garou; a figment in the cold wind.'"

In turn, Peter Thomas, himself fictionalized in an author's note, retells the story of the 'figmentation' of Anthony Watkins in *The Welsher*.

Like Marlow with Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the fictional author shoulders the burden of the dying Watkin's self-discoveries. Unlike Marlow, he doesn't balk at the difficulties of passing them along. Not only does he take on the first-person voice of Anthony Watkins in the pages that follow, he also assumes the consciousness of another character central to the action, that of Marjorie Gurnard, the wife of Anthony's cousin Len. "An historian must keep an open mind," argues the fictional Thomas, "(like a revolving door)."

As the novel proper opens, Len is revealed to have hanged himself. Thirty-four year old Anthony, then in Cardiff, reluctantly returns to his native Glastawe, South Wales for the funeral. Trapped by his parents into staying on with them and the very pregnant Marjorie after the burial, he discovers that his mother had been reading portions of his letters home to cousin Len, who had transformed them into ribald sexual fantasies in relating them to Marjorie.

But Marjorie is not a passive receptor (in any sense). On learning of the debowdlerization of his letters, Anthony succumbs to a hellish fever. Two oatmeal baths and a harrowing trip to the ty bach later, he believes himself out of the woods when Marjorie, in labour upstairs, screams, "I'll never let you touch me again! Swine! Bastard! Bugger! You did this, you did! Anthony!" "You're a shit," his father tells him; neither will anyone else credit Anthony's version of affairs. It begins to look as though it will be in his best interests to give up on it himself.

The Welsher, Thomas' first novel, is an entertaining and challenging comedy. Available at the Campus Bookstore and Westminster Books, hardbound, \$14.95. Pottersfield Press.

By RANDY CAMPBELL

To Mike - on junk food

in this horrible dream you
actually did what HE did
you fell in love, said you fell
in love with someone else.
i freaked out i beat her
up beat her to death until
her skeleton and skin flesh
lay neatly in two separate
piles on the floor. Then
we went out for pizza.

i. phaneuf

At Casablanca's

If you had asked me ten minutes ago, I would have told you that I was the most happily married man in the world. Now, as I gaze at the couple in the corner of Casablanca's, I'm having second thoughts. The fashionably dressed woman throws back her head and lets out a loud laugh. Her auburn tresses fall over her shoulders, her shoulders narrow as she regains her composure. She picks up her wine glass and plays with it. She throws him a sly-coy glance. He smiles casually and squeezes her left hand which rests on the table. Jesus Christ! Do I believe my eyes? My wife is *flirting* with another man. How? Why? I motion for the bartender. She frees her hand from his grasp and runs her fingers through her hair. The bartender appears before me and takes my order. He returns promptly and places my drink before me. I take a long pull at my scotch.

I'm shocked, numb. How could my wife cheat on me? Is this the first time or has she been unfaithful all along? She's never given me any reason to suspect her as guilty of an extra-marital affair. We have a good sex life, challenging careers, interesting hobbies, plenty of money, an eclectic circle of friends.

Steady, boy. Don't let your imagination run wild. Maybe he's just a friend or a business associate. She said she was going to a meeting tonight. Maybe they're just having a drink after the meeting. I don't believe it for a minute. Just look at the way he is looking at her. She's just as guilty. I wonder if she'll see me. I wonder what she would say if I was to walk over and join them. I should. I will. God, now I know how Hamlet felt. No, I'll just sit here and watch for a while. I'll interrogate her when she gets home. I can't do that, she'll become suspicious and defensive. Oh, what to do?

Nadine, Nadine, don't you realize you are killing me? Throw the drink in his face. Leave now and I'll forget what I've seen. Nadine, we've only been married three years. Have you forsaken me already? Have I neglected you or are you bored with me? Walk over and tell me. We haven't talked about "our relationship" for a while, I'll admit. Now's your chance

She's deaf to my pleas. She's a stunning woman. Not one of those magazine model types, she's unusual, interesting. I suppose that's what Mr. Interloper thinks too. She's witty, clever, shrewd... deceitful. I wonder if the guy is married too. Perhaps his wife is sitting at home wondering where he is. Maybe she's out having an extra-marital affair too. Perhaps his wife is here as well, feeling like a chump. I cast my eyes around the bar. All the women are in groups of two or three, engrossed in conversation.

Nadine is getting up. I wonder if she'll see me? Quickly I take refuge behind one of the pillars. She makes her way over to the pay phone, her graceful thighs sway gently as she moves. Who would she call this time? Probably me. I can hear the ring of the telephone in the hall of our apartment. Since I'm not home, she'll decide that it's safe to stay and have another drink. She returns to the table, her stilettos click, click on the tiled floor. She slides into her chair. He pulls her closer. She feigns an unconvincing protest before drawing near. He runs his fingers through her hair. I don't think I can take much more. A waiter appears at their table. Mr. X looks at Nadine. She shakes her head to indicate "No more for me". The waiter pulls the check from his cachet and hands it to the fellow.

Now's the time to go over and take charge of the situation. I'll go over and take her firmly by the arm and say "Come on, Nadine, let's go home." They rise and prepare to leave. He helps her with her coat (the one I bought her for our second wedding anniversary), she puts on her black leather gloves on and they edge past the crowded tables. I resume my position behind the pillar. I feel sick. I watch their backs disappear out the glass door into the night. I finish the remains of my scotch and stare vacantly at the empty glass. Now what?

Karen Skinner

Deadline for submissions:

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