could also be somewhat intimidating. It is thoroughly absent in the positions of those claiming to be his martyrs.

If I must be labelled, I would call myself a critical admirer of Bettelheim. I admired his scholarship, the questions he raised in his popular essays, and his ability to examine and to dramatize impossible clinical and elusive historical problems – problems which are probably ethical issues. Neither his private nor his public persona was predicated on a need to be loved. As a famous man, and an outspoken one, often a dissenting voice, he was the target of a great deal of envy. At bottom he was a teacher who desired to have his thoughts and techniques studied, experienced personally, reflected upon, revised, and modified.

Newsweek's sensationalized attack on Bettelheim troubled me, not because I am one of his sycophants, but because I was appalled by its lack of balance and fairness. I questioned its research methods, its techniques of data gathering, and the utter unreliability and emotionality of the testimony against him – exemplified, once again, in these declamatory and malicious letters to *Society*. Since *Newsweek* only saw fit to publish a truncated account of my letter (co-signed by Dr. Rudolf Ekstein), and misrepresented by Pekow, the interested reader may want to consult *The Psychohistory Review*, April 1991, for the full text.

To attack, as these letters do shamelessly, is to play a game that is safe, yet self-betraying. Here the so-called victims displace the putative victimizer. Revenge slides into rage, rage into vendetta against a corpse. It indicates the degree to which the dead Dr. Bettelheim continues to torment, dominate, and distort their lives. I am baffled why they let fifteen years or more years pass before these vituperative insults were made public. These apparently successful individuals with articulate voices seemed unwilling to air their grievances while Bettelheim had the strength to answer.

Why *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Commentary* would open its pages to these denunciations remains another issue. Sensationalism sells; so does scandal, especially when it involves the apparent unmasking of a cel-

ebrated writer. To publish pieces that demolish the reputation of a distinguished, dead author and therapist is relatively easy pickings – the dead do not threaten law suits and are no longer able to make caustic rebuttals.

Perhaps on a deeper level, these vilifications aim to destroy the memory of an original psychoanalytic thinker who maintained a loyalty to the irreverent, critical, and interpretive possibilities of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic culture criticism. I read these published accounts as bad faith attempts to dismantle the clinical influence and undermine the good name of contemporary psychoanalysis.

Neoconservative organs like *Commentary* may have wished to devalue a penetrating and independent critic of their political and ideological stands. Bettelheim, after all, opposed *Commentary's* complacent and self-congratulatory tone. Rather than dealing with the substantive nature of his analysis of Jewish complicity in their own mass slaughter during the Holocaust, rather than debate his opposition to certain policies of the State of Israel, these publications preferred character assassination to authentic intellectual dialogue, scandalous accusations of abuse to honest working through of his ideas and social-psychological perspectives.

Name calling represents only another, somewhat primitive, form of banalization, of not taking a writer and his thoughts seriously. The dead Dr. Bettelheim, like all powerful dead fathers, continues to exercise an authority by his mythical – and for some, demonic – presence. The Bettelheim myth can be demythified and we can learn from his life and work, if we will only situate him historically and read his texts critically, that is to say, respectfully. These letters do nothing of the kind.

David James Fisher, Ph.D.
Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
UCLA School of Medicine
Associate Faculty
Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute

A Note From the Editor:

The editorial board of *SOCIETY* is, of course, quite aware of the controversies surrounding the therapeutic procedures of Bruno Bettelheim. One wishes that these had been aired more frankly and forcefully during his eighty-seven year life span rather than now, after his passing.

It is our view that publication of this interview provides a useful, arguably invaluable, postscript to the career of Dr. Bettelheim. It is not the task of any publication to offer a list of allegations (to which the deceased cannot answer) as a preface to an interview. In our thirty years of history we have published many interviews and autobiographical profiles. To change the rules for Bruno Bettelheim would surely be perceived as prejudicial in the extreme.

As a publication, we are not in a position to pass judgment on individual allegations of wrong-doing. But this inability is not a prohibition against publishing the words of a major figure in twentieth-century therapeutic theory and practice. Both the legal presumption of innocence and the intellectual character of Bettelheim's contribution strongly argued for publication – without editorializing or attitudinizing.

ILH

Correction:

In the article "From Rags to Robes" by E. Digby Baltzell and Howard G. Schneiderman (*Society* May/June 1991) several errors appeared that require correction. These are in no way the responsibility of the authors. The errors are as follows:

Page 45. Should read "twenty-four of the [remaining] twenty-nine presidents. . . were trained in law."

Page 49. 33 percent refers to nine of the twenty-seven justices who were of upper class origin.

Page 49. Should be Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, not Chief Justice.

Page 51. Harlan F. Stone was, among other things, Dean of Columbia Law School.

Page 54. Howard G. Schneiderman teaches at Lafayette College – not "Layette" College.