

Levy, Bernard-Henri  
BARBARISM WITH  
A HUMAN FACE  
Trans. by George Holoch  
Harper & Row \$12.95  
1/31 SBN: 06-012597-7

When this flamboyant polemic was published last year in France, Levy became an instant media star; a self-styled "nouvelle philosophe" and debunker of Marxist messianism. Torn from its context of Parisian literary fads and national elections—the United Left, including the Communists, were expected to win, but didn't—the fuss may puzzle Americans. Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, which had a marginal impact here, caused a sensation in France, and Levy credits the Russian's artistic evocation of the Soviet hell with awakening the precocious Maoist from his delusions and inspiring this book. This reaction is not unknown in France—Camus and Merleau-Ponty reacted similarly to previous revelations—but Levy is not strong on intellectual genealogy or philosophical rigor. Mixing up a stew of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Lacan, he wants to throw everything into question; he denies history, nature, progress, the state, and, hence, freedom from or in any of these. The idea is basically simple: all efforts at emancipatory politics are misguided because power and domination are existential givens, and such movements can only result in the imposition of repressive forms; the only valid politics is that of restricted, short-term efforts to relieve as much misery as possible. The idea is simple, but the *style* is the real story: "There is speech because there is social existence, and social existence is war. There are languages and language because there is want, and want is misery." Levy may not be profound, but he is having fun, at least. The term "nouvelle philosophe" is itself something of a joke, since the real target is the Enlightenment, which Levy attacks via Marx.