In Search of an American Muse

By Robert Bly

B eing a poet in the United States has meant for me years of confusion, blundering and self-doubt. The confusion lies in not knowing whether I am writing in the American language or the English or, more exactly, how much of the musical power of Chaucer, Marvell and Keats can be kept in free verse. Not knowing how to live, or even how to make a living, results in blunders. And the self-doubt comes from living in small towns. Yet I think it is a lucky thing to be a poet in the United States. I say that aloud to ward off pity. Some people keep away from poetry and compensate by feeling sorry for poets: "You poets must have a really hard time." William Stafford mentioned to me that if someone asks him, "Why do you write poetry?" he may reply, "Why did you stop?"

When anyone seriously pursues an art — painting, poetry, sculpture, composing — over 20 or 30 years, the sustained discipline carries the artist down to the countryside of grief; and that descent, resisted so long, proves invigorating, just as the goddess Demeter's daughter Persephone, when she went down toward grief in Hades, found herself in a psychic depth different from her mother's.

I come from Norwegian apple farmers on one side, fishermen on the other, who moved to Minnesota in the 19th century. My parents are second generation Norwegian immigrants. Neither of them went to college, though family members in Norway, I found when I went there, are fond of poetry. As a Navy recruit in World War II, I met for the first time a person who wrote poetry, a man named Marcus Eisenstein who I think teaches now at a college in Pennsylvania. During a class on radar, he wrote a poem as I watched. I had somehow never understood that poems were written by human beings, and I still remember that moment with delight. After a year at St. Olaf College in Minnesota I transferred to Harvard and found myself in the midst of an intense group of beginning writers that included John Hawkes, Donald Hall, Adrienne Rich, Frank O'Hara, Peter Davison, George Plimpton, Harold Brodkey, Kenneth Koch and John Ashbery. Military service had delayed some students from going to college and several classes entered together. Most of us had been in the war and each of us was obsessed in his own way. I learned to trust my obsessions. It is surely a great calamity for a human being to have no obsessions.

One day while studying a Yeats poem I decided to write poetry the rest of my life. I recognized that a single short poem has room for history, music, psychology, religious thought, mood, occult speculation, character and events of one's own life. I still feel surprised that such various substances can find shelter and nourishment in a poem. A poem in fact may be a sort of nourishing liquid, such as one uses to keep amoea alive. If prepared right, a poem can keep an image or a thought or insights on history or the psyche alive for years, as well as our desires and airy impulses.

So I was lucky to have such a group around me in college. Writers come in groups; I don't know why. Intensities feed each other. In another sense, I began where so many of us in the United States begin — with no tradition at all. Yeats's father wrote penetrating and profound letters to his son, guiding him.

Continued on page 29

Roman Polanski's Story/7
in art, and we know from Yeats’s memoirs that both sides of his family in Ireland were accustomed to books and pictures. In one branch of his family, eccentric and creative people went back centuries. When I compare Yeats’s childhood to my own experience, I would turn pale, turn — as Juan Ramon Jiménez, the Spanish poet, said of some window panes on Beacon Hill — viole, “the color of death.”

To be a poet in the United States is more difficult than to be a poet in Ireland. If poetry is a harnessed horse, we can say that in Ireland one finds harnesses still hanging in a barn. In the United States one has to kill a cow, skin it, dry the hide, cure it, cut the hide into strips, make buckles by hand, measure all the strips on a horse that won’t stand still and then buy a riveter from some old man, get a box of rivets, rivet the strips together, make reins, And then what about the bridle? What about the collar? And what do you hitch it to?

ALMOST all American poets I know suffer each day the anguish of having no family traditions in art, so they don’t know which sacrifices are proper to make for the sake of art and which aren’t. A Russian poet has specific instructions on that, and on usable form, from Pushkin: “Art, art, above all else, art!”

The American poet has much to do alone. He or she does not inherit a usable style; they have to decide the question of form, learn the art, and gain respect. At times a university offers to help. I don’t want to name villains, but I do think the graduate workshop has caused considerable damage to American poets during the last 20 years. The university makes a poet who is teaching an appendage, but also a special person, which is worse. The poet sees mainly students, constantly breaks his or her solitude and talks rather than writes. The university on its part muddles the whole problem of sacrifices and usefulness. The teacher has to balance the decades by saving him from the constant, deep and humiliating failure the old poets had to live with, Whitman and Frost among them. These two men made considerable sacrifices to write poetry, and they lived many years in isolation, exposed to their own raw side. Emily Dickinson did too.

If one wants to be and remain a poet in this country, one can’t depend on peers but has to find some way back to the nourishment of the ancestors. I still read Yeats every day, and after him Blake, and Chaucer, “Beowulf” and Horace. In North American poetry, I like to turn my poems to the interval between Whitman and Frost.

Moving to Europe doesn’t seem as essential as it once did. Joseph Conrad advised, “Immerse yourself in the destructive element,” but now the destructive element is here. The United States is the center, and if we listen carefully to what is happening in our own culture, we have what Gertrude Stein called the country of the imagination.

Being a poet requires enormous reading. One has to know many things, because so much has happened in psychology, biological thought and sub-atomic physics that the old poets did not know. I personally love the place where science and psychology meet. Blake began contemporary psychological speculation around 1800 and was particularly daring in identifying and naming interior persons, such as those he called Urizen and Orc. Freud continued such work and named the “I” (Ego), the “upper-I” (Superego) and the “It” (Id). Jung continued, describing well, although naming less well, “the anima,” “the animus” and “the shadow.” Naming interior beings is a task poets have accepted since ancient times. I feel very close in thought to the psychologist James Hillman, particularly to his distinction between image and symbol and his praise of Hades and the soul’s desire to descend there. I admire the mythologist Joseph Campbell tremendously, and I have learned from him the distinction between kinetic and stationary art — things T. S Eliot and Ezra Pound did not teach.

In America the audience for poetry has changed in the last 30 years, and that is partly because of the friendship between psychology and poetry. For what ever reason, the audience is noticeably larger. A book that came out in an edition of 1,000 copies in 1950 would report the same thing when it is reissued in larger print: there is a large and growing audience for poetry.

After I graduated from college, I spent several years alone in New York City, then a year at the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop, and then I moved to the country. I didn’t choose the rural area for romantic reasons, but because I got a free house to live in on a farm of my father’s. Yet, as I realized recently, some self-doubt is always part of living in a town that doesn’t want you or respect art. Yeats said that at times he would debate with himself and:

Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth In something that all others understand or share.

To augment royalties, I leave my house and family three months a year — January, March and May. I make most of my living now from teaching small groups of people (some groups are entirely men) who sign up in advance. I teach fairy tales, and at times Blake. The memorization of fairy stories helps later writing.

Any art form, when pursued over a long period, gradually reveals hidden dignities, secret thought and its connection with other art forms. It asks for more and more labor. I finally understand the idea that poetry is a form of dance. I may not be able to do it, but I understand it. As I’ve gotten older, I find I am able to be nourished more by sorrow and to distinguish it from depression.

What is sorrow for? It is a storehouse far in the north for wheat, barley, corn and tears. One steps to the door on a round stone. The storehouse feeds all the ends of sorrow. And I say to myself: will you have sorrow at last? Go on, be cheerful in autumn, be stoic, yes . . . be tranquil, calm, or in the valley of sorrows spread your wings.

A Russian fairy story, “The Frog Princess,” published in Aleksandr Afanas’ev’s “Russian Fairy Tales,” describes what it’s like to take up the life of an artist, especially when one doesn’t know what one is doing. A father tells his sons to shoot arrows away from the house as a way to choose their brides. The older brothers get a prince’s daughter and a general’s daughter. The youngest son’s arrow falls short and lights in a swamp, from which a frog hops, carrying the arrow in her mouth. So the youngest son has to marry a frog. When you begin to write poetry, the language doesn’t behave, the line won’t hold steady, the poem reveals more than you intended or something different. You feel clammy and unevolved and, moreover, your friends can tell by looking at you that you’re sleeping with a frog.

T’S embarrassing to bring this frog forward in public as your bride, even though you have no other. It turns out that the frog bride can slip out of her frog skin at night and do certain things your older brothers’ wives can do — for example, get a shirt made, get good bread baked, and so on. But she is still a frog. Finally the crisis comes. The bride offers to appear at the king’s ball for the first time as a human being, and she does, leaving her frogskin at home. Everyone is entranced with her. Without telling his wife, the man slips away at the end of the ball early, goes home and burns the frogskin. That was a big mistake because, as we can guess, the bride needs the frogskin. Now she has to leave, and much grief for both of them follows from the husband’s secret act.

Some rationalist inside us urges us to burn our frog skins. I don’t know all that “burning the frogskin” implies, but it suggests losing something that is wet, embarrassing, precious and private. Writing a commercial novel can resemble burning a frogskin. By nature, confessional poetry, because of its lack of reserve, dries and scorches the frogskin. Publishing a book of poems when one is too young is like burning a frogskin; something is damaged. A poetry reading, when it is done to entice love, can be a public burning of your frogskin; I have done that. I have a longing for love from strangers. But Boris Pasternak gave public readings for years and retained integrity, so public readings need not damage that which should be private.

If we get rid of the frog, we lose the way back to some ancient, instinctive source. We all burn our frogskins in different ways. I have burned mine more than once, from wanting to evolve while leaving the animal behind. Pursuing the discipline of poetry then includes studying the art, experiencing grief, and keeping the frog’s skin wet.
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RHODA LERMAN

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**TIME TO GO**

By Stephen Dixon


By John Domini

According to the biographical sketch in "Time to Go," Stephen Dixon has published stories in some 175 journals and magazines. And this is his sixth book (and fourth collection of stories) in less than 10 years.

Prolificity usually requires that one not waste time reaching after materials too far afield. True to form, Mr. Dixon's imagination sticks to the same home. His principal subject is the clash of the mundane and the aberrant, those unsettling run-ins with wackos or freaks who are all too familiar to anyone who's ever lived in a city. Here that city is nearly always New York, where Mr. Dixon has spent most of his life, and most of the time the protagonist is an unmarried male writer in early middle age. On top of that, more than half the stories are about the same writer, Will Taub, who teaches in a university very much like Johns Hopkins University, where Mr. Dixon teaches.

"Time to Go" does have touches of erotica. The title story features a running conversation between Taub and his dead father (the ghost proves one of the liveliest talkers in the book), while other stories disrupt chronology or, Barth-like, reflect on the story in process. But only one story genuinely breaks away from the metropolitan settings and writerly circumstances. And that one, the surreal "Come on a Coming," is grounded in such obvious symbols as a coin and is so patly predictable as to suggest Mr. Dixon is better off with his more down-to-earth urban encounters.

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History

Everything you wanted to know*

Don Duncan's Driftwood Diary

The fastest-growing parlour pastime in America may be the game of trivia. It hasn't reigned on the tube and any number can play. The trick is to dredge deep down into one's memories to extract a fact, the more obscure and "trivial" the better, with which to dazzle the other players.

Native Puget Sounders have an edge in local trivia. But any newcomer can—with dedication, an attentive ear and a keen eye—become proficient in antiquities by the time he or she can look at the rain and honestly say:

"I really don't mind it a bit."

This column will provide a modest primer for the would-be triviaist and a refreshers course for old hands.


That takes care of Jefferson and James, Cherry and Columbia, Marion and Madison, Spring and Seneca, University and Union, and Pike and Pine. Easy, huh?

Then, starting at Wall Street and going south, recite this easy line from George Meyers, Times sports editor:

On the Wall there hangs a Battery that rings a bell so Blanchard can call Lenora, Virginia, Stewart and Olive.

Well, what do you expect from a sports writer?

Seattle, like Rome, is supposed to have been built on seven hills. Some of them got lost in our regrades. But the original seven were Beacon, Capitol, Denny, First, Profanity (or Yesler), Queen Anne and Renton (the latter out on the Providence Hospital).

To be a real smoothie, you should rattle off the Lacey V. Murrow Bridge (Mercer Island Floating Bridge), the George Washington Memorial Bridge (Aurora Bridge) and the Hiram Chittenden Government Locks (Ballard Locks).

We once had two successive middleweight boxing champions of the world in the Puget Sound country, Freddie Steele of Tacoma lost his title, on a first-round knock, to Al Hostak of Georgetown, who promptly lost it to Solly Krieger the first time he defended it. The Steele-Hostak titanic took place July 29, 1938, and the third man in the ring was Jack Dempsey.

The first woman mayor of any major city in the United States was Bertha K. Landes, elected by Seattle's voters in 1926 and often referred to as "The Petticoat Mayor." Mrs. Landes was the wife of Henry Landes, a one-time acting president and long-time dean at the University of Washington.

Seattle had two internationally acclaimed swimmers in the 1930s, Jack Medica and Helen Madison. Helene won three gold medals in the 1932 Olympic Games. Both were coached by the same man, Ray Daughters.

Vic Meyers, who spent many years as the state's lieutenant governor and secretary of state, is part of our political folklore. Easily the most sensational escapade of the one-time band leader occurred when he dressed himself in a Mahatma Gandhi-type sheet and a top hat and led a goat around by a chain.

When and where did it happen? February 18, 1932, at a Shrine Club luncheon in the Olympic Hotel. It caused a near riot.

Meyers was campaigning for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor. He won in the F. D. R. landslide.

Two Mercers were famous in our town.

One was a judge and Mercer Island was named for him.

The other was an educator, the man who brought the Mercer Girls to Seattle May 16, 1864, and became president of the University of Washington. Who were they?

Give up? It was Judge Thomas Mercer. The educator was Ada Mercer.

A University of Washington shotputter won a silver medal in the 1932 Olympic Games. His name was Herman Brix. If you are a movie and TV fan perhaps you know him better by his stage name, Bruce Bennett.

No governor has ever served three consecutive terms in our state. But one did serve three terms.


And Hiram Gill, recalled as Seattle's mayor in 1911, was elected again in 1914 and in 1916.

One of the blackest days in Husky football was November 4, 1959. The Purple and Gold had lost only to Illinois and seemed destined to go to the Rose Bowl. If they got by California. Twice a giant California lineman foiled Husky drives almost on the goal line. Who was he? And who performed in the 1959 Husky "dream backfield"?

Les Richter was the California lineman. Don Heinrich, Hugh McElhenny, Jack Seth and Roland Kirkby comprised the memorable backfield.

No one who was ever there will forget the day a Boeing Co. test pilot slid in and powered the 1977 overage Gold Cup hydroplane over the course at Seward Park.

The date was August 7, 1955. The man in the airplane, Alvin (Tex) Benson.

The Rev. Mark Matthews, Seattle's most famous fighting agnostic, owned two honorary police badges — Police Dept. Badge No. 253 and King County Special Deputy's Badge No. 1.

The Police Department badge was presented to Mr. Matthews by Police Chief Charles Wappenshiek in 1909. Mr. Matthews used it just once.

To accept the Police Chief Wappenshiek and charge him with malfeasance in office.

There are more than 100 peaks in our state, 8,000 feet or higher. But there are only five over 10,000 feet. They are Mount Rainier (14,110), Mount Adams (12,286), Little Tahoma (11,415), Mount Baker (10,775) and Glacier Peak (10,541).

Next in line are Mount St. Helens (9,677), Mount Adams Peak (9,311) and Mount Stuart (9,415).

The Husky football team's current quarterback is Jim Owens (16 years). The winningest Husky football coach was Gilmore Dobie, 58 wins, two losses and two ties in nine seasons.

The Husky basketball coach with the most wins (27 seasons) and the winningest record (238 wins and 121 losses) was the late Clarence (Heck) Edmundson.

Other things you should know (or the game of trivia:"

Princess Angelica, daughter of Chief Seattle, is buried in the Lake View Cemetery plot of Henry Yesler, our most famous pioneer sawmill operator.

The highest ground in Seattle (519 feet above sea level) is at 35th Avenue Southwest and Southwest Myrtle Street.

Our most famous artist, Mark Tobey, lives in Basel, Switzerland.

Gov. Dan Evans is an Eagle Scout; Mayor Wes Uhlman is a minister's son; Henry Broderick, our most famous realtor, is a trombone player; Joshua Green, our most famous centenarian, got his start as a purser on a "mosquito boat"; William Allen, chairman of the board of The Boeing Co., is a lawyer.

The schooner Exact brought our first band of settlers to Alder Point November 13, 1851; the steamship Portland arrived here July 17, 1857, with the "ton of gold" that triggered the Alaska Gold Rush; the Kalakala was the world's first seaplane ferryboat.

Ego Vanni was playing right field for the Seattle Rainiers the night, August 12, 1938, Fred Hutchinson pitched his 19th victory on his 20th birthday.

I sat right behind Ego in a roped-off section of right field that night — one of the few times I was ever in the right place at the right time when local history was made.

Further trivia awaits another quiet Sunday.

*But were too lazy to ask
Orville Prescott, Times Book Critic for 24 Years, Dies at 89

By MEL GUSSOW

Orville Prescott, principal daily book critic for The New York Times for 24 years and a considerable force in the literary world, died on Sunday at his home in New Canaan, Conn. He was 89.

During his tenure at The Times from 1942 to 1966, Mr. Prescott wrote three or four reviews every week. Clearly and consistently, he spoke his own mind, challenging sacred cows and often crossing swords with artistic experimentalists while pursuing his own predilection for novels with strong narratives and characterization.

Reviewing Mr. Prescott’s autobiography, “The Five-Dollar Gold Piece,” in the New York Times Book Review, Granville Hicks said, “Often as I have differed with his judgments, I read his reviews attentively, for not only can I learn from them what the books are about; I can come pretty close to guessing what my own opinions are likely to be.”

If there was any doubt about Mr. Prescott’s judgments, he defined his positions in an essay written after his retirement and published in The Saturday Review. First of all, he said that “all critics practice a craft which consists of personal, subjective opinion tempered by experience and wide reading.” It was, he said, “not only inevitable but fitting and proper that they should disagree among themselves.”

Then he named the contemporary novelists he thought were “worth of thoughtful attention,” but who were “excessively overpraised” by his colleagues. On Mr. Prescott’s list were William Faulkner (“the most distinguished of these intermittently brilliant authors”), John O’Hara, Robert Penn Warren, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, John Updike, J. D. Salinger, William Styron, Henry Green, Graham Greene, Laurence Durrell, Günter Grass and Vladimir Nabokov.

In contrast, he said, there were novelists who were “more significant and truthful interpreters of life.” Their novels “represent the best fiction of the past 25 years.” On this list were John P. Marquand, James Gould Cozzens, Louis Auchincloss, Conrad Richter, John Hersey, Joyce Cary, C. P. Snow, Rumer Godden and Evelyn Waugh.

Looking back on his career, he said that his first review for The Times was of Nina Fedrova’s novel “The Children,” which he praised “with reservations.” That novel and others had been forgotten, he said, “including many that are quite good.” He added, “My scrapbooks seem like a graveyard of dead reputations.”

The future critic was born in Cleveland. His grandfather was the founder and president of the Sherwin Williams Paint Company, but it was his grandmother who was to have the greatest effect on his life. When Orville was 6, she offered him a gold piece if he learned to read. Mr. Prescott said in “The Five-Dollar Gold Piece” that the coin “marked the most important turning point of my life.” Beginning with the stories of Thornton W. Burgess, he became and remained a voracious reader.

After graduating from Williams College in 1930, he worked for the magazine Town Tidings in Cleveland, then joined Newsweek (Newsweek in its earliest incarnation) as a researcher. At the same time he wrote book reviews freelance for The New York Herald Tribune and for The Times. Subsequently he was literary editor of Cue magazine before joining The Times.

As a student of history, Mr. Prescott edited “The Crossroads of World History” series for Doubleday and two anthologies, “The Undying Past” and “History as Literature.” He wrote “In My Opinion,” a book of literary criticism, and edited anthologies of short stories and prose and poetry for children. Mr. Prescott was also a popular lecturer. After his retirement, he continued writing book reviews while also publishing two books about the Italian Renaissance, “Princes of the Renaissance” and “Lords of Italy: Portraits from the Middle Ages.”

He is survived by his wife, Lilias Ward-Smith Prescott; a daughter, Jennifer McLean Jr. of Chappaqua, N.Y.; a son, Peter S. Prescott, a former book critic for Newsweek, of New Canaan, five grandchildren and a great-grandson.
Scanner Pinpoints Site of Thought as Brain Sees or Speaks

When the mind needs a verb, a region behind the left eye lights up.

By SANDRA BLAKESLEE

Using souped up versions of conventional brain imaging machines, scientists can now peer into the workings of the human brain, making movies of changes that occur as the mind thinks, talks, listens, dreams and imagines.

At the handful of centers where the technique is being developed, researchers are bowing the machines at night and on weekends when patients do not need them and, like children in a toy store, are exploring one another's brains with unbridled glee. In recent months they have made movies of the brain's circuitry as it performs.

"This is the wonder technique we've all been waiting for," said Dr. Hans Breiter, a psychiatry and postdoctoral fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston where the technique was first demonstrated. "At last we can see inside the human brain."

Dr. Gregory McCarthy, an associate professor of neurosurgery at the hospital, said, "It is the most exciting thing to happen in the realm of cognitive neuroscience in my lifetime."

Dr. Walter Schneider, a psychologist who is using the technique to map human vision at the University of Pittsburgh, said, "We have, in a single afternoon, been able to replicate in humans what took 20 years to do in nonhuman primates."

Dr. Kamil Ugurbil, director of the Center for Magnetic Resonance Research at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine in Minneapolis, said: "This will do for neuroscience what the discovery of the genetic code did for molecular biology. It allows us to study how the human mind is organized.

"Most neuroscience research is conducted at the cellular level. But if you are interested in the human brain, you have to study patterns at the organizational level — what groups of neurons are activated and how they interact with each other during the performance of any complex task."

The tool making that possible is called functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fast M.R.I. Conventional M.R.I. machines employ strong magnets and radio waves to make sectional images of the brain's anatomy. Most functional M.R.I. machines are clinical machines that have been fitted with special hardware to speed the imaging process and advanced computer programs that can track the static images into movies. A few fast M.R.I. machines employ much higher magnetic fields and are used only for research.

The concept was pioneered by Sir Peter Mansfield of Nottingham, England, further developed by Dr. Seiji Ogawa at Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill, N.J., and first demonstrated in August 1991 by Dr. Kenneth Kwong of Massachusetts General Hospital.

Scientists were electrified by the concept, Dr. Schneider said. People rushed back to their laboratories to soup up the M.R.I. machines. Ten centers now lead the pack, but scientists at scores of universities and medical centers are modifying their machines, researchers said.

Fast M.R.I. exploits the fact that activated brain cells use more oxygen as fuel than cells at rest. When a network of cells is called upon to carry out a task, like recognizing a face or imagining a picture, those cells release a chemical that summons oxygenated blood from tiny arteries in the brain. As the blood gives up its oxygen, it moves past the brain cells to hook up with tiny veins that will carry it back to the lungs. The M.R.I. machine is able to detect the motion of this blood flow because deoxygenated blood carries a faint magnetic signal distinct from oxygenated blood.

The fast M.R.I. machine locates these faint signals and, through computer enhancement techniques, produces movies of the activated brain networks. Dr. Schneider said. "In half a day we take in a gigabyte of data," he added.

"This technique is not for the computational faint-hearted."

A research team at Yale University has one of the first published papers on these experiments, which appears in today's issue of The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. It is about spoken language in the brain and confirms results from other imaging techniques.

A baseline image is taken of a subject lying passively in the machine, said Dr. Robert G. Shulman, a professor of molecular biophysics and biochemistry at Yale. Then researchers say a noun and ask the subject to speak the first verb that pops into mind.

The region for generating spoken verbs is in the left frontal cortex, in back of the left eyeball, deep down, Dr. Shulman said. It is about the size of a pencil eraser.

At the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., researchers are exploring the silent generation of words. Subjects are told a letter of the alphabet and asked to think for 30 seconds of as many words that start with that letter as they can. Dr. Robert Turner, a visiting scholar from the University of London, "It is surprising how many different areas light up in different people," Dr. Turner said. Most are in known language areas, but many regions are used synchronously, he said.

One subject tried to fool his fellow experimenters, Dr. Turner said. Without telling anyone beforehand, he left distinct pauses between his silent words and challenged his colleagues to determine the exact temporal pattern he had followed. They did so, Dr. Turner said, impressing the skeptics among them.

At the University of Minnesota, Dr. Ugurbil's team asks subjects to silently imagine faces and move imaginary objects through space. Different areas of the brain light up, he said, depending on what is imagined.

Dr. Schneider's group is confirming decades of research carried out on monkeys to understand human vision. The visual cortex of primates, he said, is laid out in columns about one millimeter wide. Each strip of tissue is composed of thousands of neurons that specialize in separate visual functions, like seeing color, motion, diagonal lines and other features of the visual world.

Fast M.R.I., Dr. Schneider said, can distinguish cell groups one millimeter apart and is

**TOGGLE VISIBILITY**

**CONTINUED ON PAGE B6**

**Toward a Snapshot Of a Human Thought**

Computer-enhanced M.R.I. can now capture visible changes in the brain linked to specific mental processes. At left, a subject was asked to generate a verb after hearing a word. The word "cake," for example, might inspire the verb "eat" as a response. At right, a subject was asked simply to repeat a word, for example, the word "cake." The diagrams show more brain activity when the subject is asked to generate a new thought than when a thought is repeated.
Scanner Pinpoints Site of Thought

Continued From Page B5

A Picture Window into the Living Human Brain

Using computers to enhance the magnetic resonance imaging (M.R.I.) technique, researchers recently watched patches of neurons light up in response to different visual patterns, shown schematically at right.

CAPTURING OXYGEN’S FOOTPRINTS

Stimulated neurons are oxygen-hungry. They consume oxygen from blood by releasing nitric oxide.

Niritride oxide

Oxygen

Arterial (oxygen-carrying) capillary

Venous (oxygen-depleted) capillary

Neuron

The M.R.I. technique finds where the brain activity takes place by distinguishing between oxygen-rich and oxygen-depleted blood, detecting the tiny magnetic change that occurs when blood releases oxygen.

Areas that respond to moving dots

Areas that respond to colored stripes

 emission tomography, or PET scanning, researchers can. Unlike PET scanning, fast M.R.I. makes noninvasive images of individual brains and can illustrate functional cell groups over a narrow area, about the size of a pinhead.

Despite these advantages, most researchers say fast M.R.I. has problems of its own to overcome. A principal issue is that it does not measure nerve-cell activity directly, but rather the enhanced blood flow to a region of the brain where nerve cells are active.

We’ve seen some really neat things,” said Dr. Bruce Rosen, a radiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital. “But what do they mean? Is hemodynamics a good surrogate for brain function?” Nerves fire in millisecond seconds, Dr. Rosen said, yet the blood flow takes a second or more to occur.

Difficulty With Technique

“This is the brain-vein debate,” said Dr. Brian Wandell, a psychologist at Stanford University’s neurosciences program. “Everyone wonders, if a tiny vein lights up, is that because there is neural activity right there? Or might the activity be taking place somewhere else? Maybe a couple of places drain into the same vein.

Also, it is difficult for subjects — even highly motivated brain scientists — to hold dead still inside the tumor box, loudly clacking M.R.I. machines for up to two hours. Any tiny movement can blur the image and foil an experiment.

Nevertheless, scientists in the felding field of fast M.R.I. tend to have supreme confidence in their findings. Most of the work is unpublished or is just beginning to appear in the form of abstracts at future scientific meetings.

The future of brain imaging is spectacular, said Dr. William Orrison, a neuroradiologist at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, who is working closely with supercomputer experts at Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. There, fast M.R.I. and another technique, MEG, or magnetoencephalography, are being combined to produce high-resolution, high-speed movies of the human brain with the aim of helping stroke victims and spinal cord patients.

The great unanswered questions in psychology may now be explored in new ways, the researchers said. What is different about the brain of a poet? Or of a gifted mathematician? Do artists see differently? How do male and female brains compare? Do cultures affect the way brains are organized?

Scientists cannot wait to ask.
PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

The Shahn Who Could Break Free of Politics

By CHARLES HAGEN

The photographs that Ben Shahn made in the 1930's have suffered a kind of double neglect. Because Shahn is best known as a Social Realist painter, his photographs have sometimes been regarded by art historians as mere pendants to his other pictures; at the same time, he is often overlooked in surveys of Depression-era photography.

In part, this lack of attention may be the result of Shahn's own attitudes toward photography. He saw the medium as primarily a convenient way to make sketches and notes for later paintings; after the 1930's, he returned full time to painting, and never photographed extensively again.

In recent years, though, scholars have shone new light on Shahn's photographic work, and uncovered a large body of imaginative and well-made images. "Ben Shahn and the Task of Photography in 1930's America," at the Leubsdorf Gallery at Hunter College in Manhattan, offers a welcome chance to see an extensive selection of those pictures. (The exhibit will travel to Norfolk, Va., and Tampa, Fla.)

Shahn was already widely known for his politically oriented paintings when he took up the camera in the early 1930's. Armed with technical advice from Walker Evans, with whom he shared a studio, and using a right-angle finder that let him take pictures without attracting attention, Shahn began to photograph throughout New York City.

The seemingly casual compositions of Shahn's views of the city, made with a 35-millimeter camera, give them a remarkable vividity. At the same time, his eye for dynamic compositions is apparent even in these quickly made images.

In a photograph of boys playing handball, for example, the players and onlookers are spaced across the frame in a precise, staccato rhythm. In another picture, a young man in shirt sleeves and a cloth cap leans against a stamped-metal column, his graceful form framed against the dark doorway.

Photographs like these suggest the main strength of Shahn's vision, his ability to combine his interest in people with a sophisticated awareness of form. He had a remarkably astute eye for physical gestures and facial expressions; in a 1933 image, for example, he caught the delicate action of a street vendor resting his hands inside the top of his apron.

In 1935, Shahn moved to Washington to work as a graphic artist for the Resettlement Agency, the New Deal organization later known as the Farm Security Administration. Roy Stryker, who was charged with documenting the agency's programs in photographs, eventually hired Shahn as part of a group of artists including Evans, Dorothea Lange and others.

Over the next several years Shahn traveled to the South and Midwest to photograph the effects of the Depression and to record the Government's efforts to alleviate them. Many of his pictures are openly polemical, reducing the people in them to caricatures. Poor farmers standing in front of rundown shacks are made to look both needy and noble; a West Virginia policeman, a pistol on his hip, seems the embodiment of unthinking oppression.

In other pictures, though, Shahn's unexpected compositions break through the often formulaic sentiments. An otherwise familiar shot of two sad-faced and grimy children is given a surprising freshness by the cropping, with the frame cutting through the face of the child in back and emphasizing the intense expression of the one in the foreground.

Such disruptive compositions were unusual in documentary photography, and suggest instead the radically structured pictures that Henri Cartier-Bresson was making at the time. In a 1933 shot, Shahn captures the members of a poor farm family to the edges of the frame, creating a disjointed but emotionally taut image in which the play of forms echoes the human drama.

Even in pictures that seem intended to do little more than champion the strengths of American life, Shahn's eye for physical gestures and formally evocative scenes is apparent. A 1938 shot of three men on a bench in Ohio is a study of diversity within similarity, with each man wearing subtly but distinctively different clothes.

In her thoughtful if somewhat general catalogue essay, Susan Ed-
took over, when Dust Bowl conditions destroyed ranch pastures. Mitchell proved to be adept at staving off disaster. He shipped his cattle east to Kansas grass and so avoided a major loss.

Bell Ranch provides the reader with a valuable insiders' view of nineteenth and twentieth century New Mexico ranching. It shows how the transition from extensive to intensive ranch practices came about, and how a modern efficient operation worked. Fortunately, Remley emphasized the manager's, not the investor's, role in the book. The managers and their families were attractive people whose lifestyles and personalities add to our knowledge of what life was like for the rural upper-middle classes in the West earlier in this century. The book, with its photographs and analytical framework, is a fine addition to the literature of ranching.

MARK FRIEDBERGER
Texas Tech University


Teresa Jordan's personal and beautiful book deals with the values and trials of ranch life in Wyoming, from the perspective of a woman who knows the land intimately and loves it well. Jordan is a native. Four generations of ranchers, traced back through her father's family, are portrayed here—and the often harsh realities of their lives are contrasted with the mythology that surrounds them. But this focus on men—still more romanticized than women in this most romanticized American lifeway—is balanced by chapters that attend to female folk: "Mothers," "Marie," and "Writing my Grandmother's Life." Other chapters, including "Why Coyote Sent the White Girl Home," focus upon the story of Jordan herself.

J. L. Jordan, the great grandfather, created his own myth. In 1886—not especially early by Wyoming standards—he came west from Maryland. The family story went that, at fourteen, he had run away from home because his parents would not let him join his brothers who were fighting in the Confederate army. In fact, he did not leave home until he was twenty-five; and instead of breaking ties with his family, their continued communication and support helped him get his start.

Jordan makes it clear that despite the hardships of cattle ranching, it is in some ways a privileged and even elitist way of life—low caste folks scarcely stay at the Brown Palace when they go to Denver, or open charge accounts at its bar for newborn sons. Many would-be homesteaders and ranchers have given up, sold out, and gone away—to make room for the big and even medium-sized family outfits of today. The irony is that these families are now, in their turn, being displaced from the land, in too many cases because of exorbitant inheritance taxes.

At the turn of the century it would have astounded those predicting the "vanishing" of American Indian cultures to learn that many of these—however changed—would survive and multiply, while traditional livestock ranchers would rapidly approach extinction. The trend away from livestock ranching, Jordan tells us, is explained in many ways. Not least of these is the romantic appeal of ranching as a hobby rather than a livelihood to those who can afford to buy and run grazing properties for sentimental reasons today. The family-owned farm—and ranch now being crippled and destroyed—used to be a major source of national values and pride. But today, technology has reduced labor needs; one person can produce what twenty did just a few decades ago. Jordan says less than two percent of Americans now live on farms and ranches. "We were part of an exodus of over 14 million people who have left the land during my lifetime... . The Iron Mountain I knew as a child was a community
in which families had worked side by side for three or four generations. ... The couple of hundred square miles that comprise the neighborhood supported two or three hundred people in my grandfather's day ... sixty or seventy when I lived there ... fewer than thirty people, counting children, now live in all those miles and miles" (p. 15). In fact, in the fall of 1993, the U. S. Census Bureau declared that "Farmer," as an identifiable type, has disappeared, and will no longer hereafter be enumerated by the census takers. Farmers and ranchers are no longer distinguishable from the hobby or part-time farmers who depend on jobs in town. It is sad to drive through Kansas and Nebraska today, past hundreds of silvery abandoned farmhouses, many with camper-trailers in their yards at harvest time.

Such phenomena are not limited to America. Jill Kerr Conway's beautiful book on her youth in Australia, The Road from Coorain (New York, 1989), tells a story similar to Jordan's. But in other countries they may be less glamorized (and mourned) than they are here, due in part to the romanticization of the American frontier. Such television epics as "Lonesome Dove" return us repeatedly to the excitement and drama of that time. Perhaps like great sea fiction, they will go on forever. But it seems a curious coincidence that the Census Bureau has termed ranchers and farmers obsolete, even "vanished," exactly a century after the same was said of the American frontier by Frederick Jackson Turner.

Some of course say the frontier is still with us (see Dayton Duncan, Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier (New York, 1993) but Riding the White Horse Home tells us how that frontier in many ways has changed forever. The title speaks of the legendary, never-captured wild white mustang of the prairies, who for many generations fired the American imagination. If Jordan has at last ridden the horse home, never again to highlight our horizons, she has done so with heart-wrenching grace and style.

MARGOT LIBERTY
Sheridan, Wyoming


In Second Sight, historian Robert Hine describes his extended struggle against increasing blindness while teaching at the University of California-Riverside during the 1970s and early 80s. Stricken with uveitis and inoperable cataracts, he adjusted to his debility ingeniously and successfully, until the miracle of modern surgery restored his sight in 1986. During this traumatic period, Hine recorded his experiences in teaching classes and doing historical research, and read widely about how other blind professionals coped with life, careers, and family. Second Sight is a testimonial to the endurance of the human spirit, to the role of attitude in addressing misfortune. Hine is a fine writer and interlaces his odyssey with humor. The result is an honest book with a happy ending.

The nine chapters in the volume cover the author's life from age twenty to the present. The story begins with Hine's bout with rheumatoid arthritis as a youth in Leadville, Colorado, (his parents in California sent him there on the recommendation that a high altitude would reduce his affliction). When this failed to work, he accepted his handicap, battled his way through college, married, obtained a doctorate at Yale, and landed a job in 1954 at UC-Riverside.

Chapter 2, entitled "Metamorphosis," should be read by every historian. Here the author recounts his descent in the late 1960s into a gray world and relates how he managed to continue his classroom teaching by reliance on tapes, slides, music, and talking
Continued From Page A1

the subcontractor, say some families have reported that Life-Savers then offered to conduct further tests for $175 each and sought to charge an additional search fee of $300. The officials said Life-Savers actually had authority only to conduct preliminary tests and was not permitted to be in touch with donors or to conduct searches to match tissue types. In the preliminary testing, they said, only one in 100 apparent matches actually match.

The officials also say Life-Savers withheld the names of more than 22,000 people who had offered to provide their bone marrow. And when a court ordered the group to release the names, the officials said, Life-Savers provided incomplete, and so unusable, information on more than 11,000 of them, potentially depriving patients of donors who could save their lives.

In addition, the national program's officers say they have heard from families who have been unable to get an accounting of large sums of money that they say were donated to Life-Savers to help them find donors. They said that many families had told them that they had incurred debts of tens of thousands of dollars in their search for a donor and had been distressed that Life-Savers would not use donated money, designated for them, to help them pay their bills. The national program's officers said they were horrified to find that Life-Savers had sued a fund set up to help a dying patient over who had control over about $200,000 in donations to the patient.

Mr. Gore and four other Senators, Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts; Barbara A. Mikulski, Democrat of Maryland; Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, and Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minneso- ta, asked Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to investigate Life-Savers. Sullivan, who is also a personal friend of Mr. Gore, and his colleagues were expected to respond to a request for an audit of the program.

Paul, parted ways in June and have gone to the Federal District Court in Minneapolis over their differences. The main legal question now is whether Life-Savers can keep the names of donors it recruited when it was working with the national program.

On the sidelines, surgeons and others are expressing concern about possible repercussions of the dispute. "People are confused," said Dr. Steven Forman, a bone marrow transplant surgeon at the City of Hope Medical Center in Duarte, Calif. "They are told Life-Savers is dishonest. Then they are told that the National Marrow Donor Program is inefficient, they see people flinging mud at each other in a public forum and they say they don’t want to get involved."

Dr. Lenfant, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, said the dispute would deter potential donors from donating to their own. Only 20 percent of patients who search the registry find a compatible marrow donor, said Liz Quam, a spokeswoman for the program.

If unsuccessful, frantic families often turn to financially draining and usually fruitless drives to sign up new donors, hoping to find someone who will match. It costs the families $60 to $75 for initial blood tests of each volunteer. Yet even for patients who do find a match, the chance is usually less than 20 percent that the patient will survive the transplant, Dr. Forman said.

Starting last September, Life-Savers had been helping families with these recruitment drives. It was supplied with brochures, videotapes and the authority to collect money for the national program and had a $600,000 contract to sign up donors. Anyone who wanted to give money for donor recruitment was directed to send the money to Life-Savers, Ms. Quam said. Life-Savers, in turn, was to turn over the names of donors to the national program.

But the officials at the national program, transplant surgeons, and senators said they soon began bearing stories from patients that deeply disturbed them.

Douglas Shaw, executive of director of the national program, said the program broke with Life-Savers when Life-Savers sued the Friends of Allison, a foundation set up by the family of Allison Atlas, a leukemia patient in Bethesda, Md., over the use of funds. The suit against Friends of Allison "was the first issue," Mr. Shaw said. The second issue was that we were increasing-ly aware that we were not receiving the names of new donors." The group learned that 21,600 names had been withheld, Mr. Shaw said, contending that the Life-Savers was setting up a competing registry. After going to court in August to force Life-Savers to turn over the names, the national pro-

Some fear a network of lifesaving donors may fall apart.
Authors Muse on the Sense of Place

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about, and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it.

William Faulkner

By BARBARA GAMAREKIAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 2 — In the intimacy of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Elizabethan-style theater here on Monday night, 16 men and women who practice the most solitary of professions abandoned their literary cocoons to speak about a personal vision: their sense of place as writers in America.

It was a literary journey that took them from the streets of New York and the hills of Kentucky to Poland and the shores of Africa. But amid all of their musings, there was a reiterated theme, a search for home.

The evening was a benefit for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. Named for William Faulkner, who used his Nobel Prize money to support and encourage other writers, the yearly award was founded in 1980 by writers to honor their peers.

"Writers are always looking or head home," said Marita Golden, "and I have claimed one point or other, every place as my home. My people brought to this country in an act of grand theft with no return ticket. We have journeyed from Ghana and Nigeria to Tupelo, Miss., and Oakland, Calif., and have indelibly stamped, reshaped and claimed each place as ours. I am Africa's yearning stepchild."

Mailer and Kesyey Remember

Norman Mailer said he found it difficult "to come up with a sense of place, be it as large as one's birthplace or as small as a thought that takes place in a room." Ken Kesey spoke of his first impressions as a schoolboy when his family moved from Colorado to an Oregon valley in the summer of 1943. It was, he recalled, a place of "glowing berries sweeter than soda pop, a land of rising mists, cleared fields and forest after forest of timber, hemlocks and firs and pines, their points lifted like hope itself to the new day."

Eudora Welty spoke of place as "a gathering," the scene for a novel. "Place conspires with the artist," she said, "we are surrounded by our own story, we live and move in it. It is through place that we put out roots."

Another Mississippi writer, Ellen Douglas, said her neighborhood "got dislocated, or I got dislocated, the day I saw the first picture of Earth from space."

Poland and Texas

"Nothing before had shown us how small it is, how suspended in darkness, how fragile, lit up like a soap bubble by the sun. Such terrible knowledge opens chasms at the writer's feet. In the face of such knowledge, to write fiction? To keep on writing?"

Writers are always looking or head home.

The historian Shelby Foote arriving at a PEN/Faulkner Award reception in Washington.

Jerry Kosinski spoke of his roots in Poland and the oral tradition, and Larry L. King of a rural Texas that exists today in myth and legend. Bobbie Ann Mason traced her journey from Kentucky to Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania and back home to Kentucky. "It's a mistake to romanticize home," she said, "I think dislocation is a dazzling reality, full of possibilities."

Jay McInerney spoke of his boyhood moving from suburb to suburb, the son of a corporate gypsy, before finding his spiritual homeland and literary terrain, New York City; and Paule Marshall reminisced about a four-story Brooklyn brownstone at 501 Hancock Street. Its nerve center was the basement kitchen where the "fine talk" of her Caribbean mother and friends still reverberates in memory. "Over the years 501 Hancock has been elevated into the realm of imagination and I like to think these women are alive and well in my work," she said.

Mr. Foote looked out at the black-tie audience of Washington power brokers and literary figures and added, "He would have run barefoot over broken glass to avoid a gathering like this."

Trial Opens on Sale of 2 Live Crew AIDS

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., Oct. 1 (AP) — A jury on Monday began hearing the trial of a record store owner who is charged with selling an album of the 2 Live Crew to an undercover officer after a judge had ruled it obscene.

This is the first time the rap group's album "As Nasty As They Wanna Be" has faced scrutiny in a criminal court.

The defendant, Charles Freeman, was arrested June 8 in his E-C Records store by six Broward sheriff's deputies who were working undercover. The rest came two days at the request of State Attorney F. Lee Williams.
I Didn’t Give Myself Cancer

By Barbara Boggs Sigmund

PRINCETON, N.J. — What ever happened to the tragic sense of life? In late October, a medical exam revealed that my eye cancer — an ocular melanoma — had spread to various parts of my body. Very soon thereafter, the self-help books started arriving. I had caused my own cancer, they told me, so it was up to me to cure it.

"Bull," exclaimed my husband, when I informed him of having this interesting new fact to face so soon on the heels of the news itself. (When my husband exclaims like that, you must understand, the bull can still be seen on the not-too-distant horizon.) "What about babies? Did they cause their own cancer?"

Good question, and one that I had reason to contemplate directly. A few days later, I watched 3, 4 and 5 year old kids with cancer dance, sing and play insouciantly at a dinner for the Emmanuel Cancer Foundation, a New Jersey society set up to support children with cancer and their families.

Clearly, these children had not "caused" their own cancer through "stress" in their young lives or "lack of self-love" or a "need to be ill" or a "wish to die." No, they had been struck by a hydra-headed sickness that lists where it will.

And so it is with most of us with cancer. I did not cause my own disease. Overexposure to the sun is the only known suspect in melanoma, but the sun hasn’t glimpsed my head unhatted nor my skin unooled for decades. Only people who deliberately use or expose themselves to proved carcinogens can justly be accused of self-inflicted cancer.

Perhaps, then, I’ve just been too "good," although I must confess a sizable loyal opposition on that one. In a turnabout of the age-old agonized question asking why bad things happen only to good people, we are now told that — aha! — bad things happen only to good people (so repressed, you know). Cancer cells are internalized anger gone on a field trip all over our bodies. Give me a break.

But, say the gentle proponents of the self-cure books, what you are objecting to is merely "the dark side" of these theories. Don’t forget, I’m reminded, these books also tell you how to heal yourself.

Yes. And everywhere I turn I see evidence that the last frontier of rugged individualism in America is relentless self-belief. Even in the beauty parlor, I run across a book excerpt trumpeting, once again, that the only limit on the success and happiness we can achieve is the belief in limits themselves. No racism, sexism, sickness, poverty or just plain lack of talent need apply.

But, alas, there is more to fear than fear itself. Evil, illness, accident, injustice and bad luck strike the self-improved and unimproved alike.

Does this mean I don’t believe there is any merit to theories that positive and more loving attitudes can’t help us bear and possibly cure our sicknesses, even cancer? Or that changes in ourselves and the way we live can’t influence these things? Of course not. After all, almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus instructed the man he healed at the Bethesda pool that he should go his way and sin no more.

But seven years ago, I lost my eye to cancer. This time, the odds are better than ever that I will lose my life. And it simply doesn’t help to tell me that, rah-rah-sis-boom-bah, I can beat the odds if I only learn to love myself enough. Of course, I want to live. I’m at the top of my form, happy, useful, looking forward to new challenges. My boys are in their early 20′s now, and I want to see their lives unfold. And I long for that first merry dumping of a grandchild, whom I can all but taste and feel, should one of those boys ever get around to doing his duty.

But if I die, I don’t want to feel like a failure. My doctor tells me I’ve embarked on an unknown trail; he doesn’t know of anyone else with eye melanoma who has undergone this particular chemotherapy. It’s scary; I want the dignity of that reality.

I want to face the reality of randomness in life, as well. We humans would rather accept culpability than chaos, but randomness is the law of life. That’s not altogether bad. As my youngest son reminds me, my chances of getting better are better than my chances of ever having been alive at all.

It’s dicey, though, by definition, so I continue to need all of the prayers, good wishes, positive energy fields and love that I have been graced with these last weeks. I also need friends who tell me they kick at doors or utter foul words on my behalf.

It isn’t through lack of love in return that I report that picturing white blood cells as so many little men of war against the cancer cells, "imaging" techniques, or a no-nonsense all-American determination to redirect their lives may be fine and life-giving for others, but not for me. I’m sticking with the medal of Jesus and Mary around my neck and novenas to St. Jude. It’s strictly a utilitarian decision: The data base of success stories is larger by far.

And I can always fall back on that 8th century scamp, Eric the Viking, who bellows across the centuries: "You can fight the gods, and still have a good time."

Barbara Boggs Sigmund is Mayor of Princeton.
This admired author of short stories says that she wants to show political commitment to humanitarian causes "as part of ordinary people's lives"

Grace Paley has been a respected name in American letters for years. Her new book of short stories, Later the Same Day (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Fiction Forecasts, Feb. 8), confirms her as an utterly original American writer whose work combines personal, political and philosophical themes in a style quite unlike anyone else's.

Paley's characters, women and men who have committed themselves in trying to alleviate some of the world's myriad woes, usually appear in print as activists at demonstrations, marching with upraised fists. She has given them children, friends, lovers, aging parents, fearful worries, shopping lists—in short, a private life to go with their public activities. Paley's work is political without being didactic, personal without being isolated from the real world.

This striking individuality accounts for the profound impact of Paley's writing, despite what is to her admirers a distressingly small body of work. Her first book, The Little Disturbances of Man, appeared in 1959; readers had to wait 15 years for the next one, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute, and just over a decade for Later the Same Day. "I do a lot of other things as well," explains the author. "I began to teach in the mid-60s, and at the same time there was the Vietnam War, which really took up a lot of my time, especially since I had a boy growing towards draft age. And I'm just very distracting. My father used to say, 'You'll never be a writer, because you don't have any sitzfeisch,' which means sitting-down meat."

Her father's comment is hard to believe at the moment, as Paley sits tranquilly in a wooden rocking chair in the sunny living room of her Greenwich Village apartment. A small, plump woman in her early 60s, with short, white hair framing a round face, she resembles everyone's image of the ideal grandmother (so long as that image includes slacks, untucked shirts and sneakers). As she does every Friday, she is simmering soup on the stove in her large, comfortable kitchen; she regrets that it's not ready yet, as she thinks it would be good for her interviewer's cold. She has to content herself with offering orange juice, vitamin C and antihistamines. Many of Paley's stories express her deep love of children; meeting her, one realizes almost immediately that her nurturing instincts extend beyond her own family to include friends and even a brand-new acquaintance. It's this pleasure in caring for others that makes her activism seem so undogmatic and natural, a logical extension of the kind of work women have always done. It's more complex than that, of course—lifelong political commitments like Paley's don't arise out of anything so simple as a strong maternal instinct—but it helps to explain the matter-of-fact way in which the author and her characters approach political activity as the only possible response to the world's perilous state.

The direction of Paley's work is guided by similarly concrete considerations. One of the reasons she switched from poetry, her first love, to short stories was that she couldn't satisfactorily connect her verse with real life. "I'd been writing poetry until about 1956," she remembers, "and then I just sort of made up my mind that I had to write stories. I loved the whole tradition of poetry, but I couldn't figure out a way to use my own Bronx English tongue in poems. I can now, better, but those early poems were all very literary; they picked up after whatever poet I was reading. They used what I think of as only one ear: you have two ears, one is for the sound of literature and the other is for your neighborhood, for your mother and father's house."

Her parents had a strong influence on Paley, imbuing her with a sense of radical tradition. "I'm always interested in generational things," she says. "I'm interested in history, I'm interested in change, I'm interested in the future; so therefore I'm interested in the past. As the youngest child by a great deal, I grew up among many adults talking about their lives. My parents were Russian immigrants. They'd been exiled to Siberia by the Czar when they were about 20, but when he had a son, he pardoned everyone under the age of 21, so they got out and came here right away. They didn't stay radical; they began to live the life of the immigrant—extremely patriotic, very hardworking—but they talked a lot about that period of their lives; they really made me feel it and see it, so there is that tradition. All of them were like that; my father's brothers and sister all belonged to different leftist political parties. My grandmother used to describe how they fought every night at the supper table and how hard it was on her!"

As Paley grew older, there were family tensions. "My parents didn't like the direction I was going politically," she recalls. "Although my father, who mistrusted a lot of my politics, came to agree with me about the Vietnam War; he was bitterly opposed to it." Her difficulties with her mother were more personal. "One of the stories in the new book, 'Lavinia,' was told to me by an old black woman, but it's also in a way my story," she says. "My mother, who couldn't do what she wanted because she had to help my father all the time, had great hopes for me. She was just disgusted, because all I wanted to do at a certain point was marry and have kids. I looked like a bust to my family, just like the girl Lavinia, who I'm convinced will turn out very well."

"There's no question," she continues, "that children are distracting and that for some of the things women want to do, their sense is right: they shouldn't have children. And they..."
shouldn't feel left out, because the children of the world are their children too. I just feel lucky that I didn't grow up in a generation where it was stylish not to. I only had two—I wish I'd had more."

The experience of her own children confirmed Paley's belief that each generation is shaped by the specific historical events of its time. "I often think of those kids in the Brinks case," she says, referring to the surviving fragments of the SDS, who were involved in the murder of a bank guard during an attempted robbery in the early 1980s, after they had spent years underground. "If they had been born four years later, five years earlier... It really was that particular moment: they were called. In one of the new stories ["Friends"], I talk about that whole beloved generation of our children who were really wreaked. I mean, I lived through the Second World War, and I only knew one person in my generation who died. My children, who are in their early 30s, I can't tell you the number of people they know who have died or gone mad. They're a wonderful generation, though: thoughtful, idealistic, self-giving and honorable. They really gave."

"The idea that mothers and fathers raise their kids is ridiculous," Paley thinks. "You do a little bit—if you're rich, you raise a rich kid, okay—but the outside world is always there, waiting to declare war, to sell drugs, to invade another country, to raise the rents so you can't afford to live someplace—to really color your life. One of the nice things that happens when you have kids," Paley goes on, "is that you really get involved in the neighborhood institutions. If you don't become a local community worker then, I don't know when you do. For instance, when my kids were very little, the city was trying to push a road through Washington Square Park to serve the real estate interests. We fought that and we won; in fact, having won, my friends and I had a kind of optimism for the next 20 years that we might win something else by luck." She laughs, as amused by her chronic optimism as she is convinced of its necessity. "It took a lot of worry, about the kids and buses going through the park at a terrific rate, to bring us together. You can call it politics or not; it becomes a common concern, and it can't be your personal life."

Paley believes such common concerns will shape future political activism. "One of the things that really runs through all the stories, because they're about groups of women, is the sense that what we need now is to bond; we need to say 'we' every now and then instead of 'I' every fifty minutes," she comments. "We've gone through this period of individualism and have sung that song, but it may not be the important song to sing in the times ahead. The Greenham women [antinuclear demonstrators who have set up a permanent camp outside the principal British missile base] are very powerful and interesting. When I went there the first time, I saw six women sitting on wet bales of hay wearing plastic raincoats and looking miserable. It was late November, and they said that on December 12 they were having this giant demonstration. I thought, 'Oh these poor women. Do they really believe this?' Well, three weeks later, on December 12, they had 30,000 women there. You really have to keep at it," she concludes. "It's vast; it's so huge you can hardly think about it. The power against us is so great and so foolish."

Yet Paley has never despised—she notes in the story "Ruthy and Edie"—that her characters are "ideologically, spiritually and on puritanical principle" against that particular emotion. "People accomplish things," she asserts. "You can't give up. And you can't retreat into personal, personal, personal life, because personal, personal, personal life is hard: to live in it without any common feelings for others around you is very disheartening, I would think. Some people just fool themselves, decide they have to make a lot of money and then go out and do it, but I can't feel like that." Her voice is low and passionate. "I think these are very rough times. I'm really sorry for people growing up right now, because they have some cockeyed idea that they can get by with their eyes closed; the cane they're tapping is money, and that won't take them in the right direction."

Despite the enormous amount of time and energy political issues absorb in Paley's life, they remain in the background of her fiction. "I feel I haven't written about certain things yet that I probably will at some point," she says. "I've written about the personal lives of these people; I haven't really seen them in political action, and I don't know if I need to especially, for what I'm trying to do. There has to be a way of writing about it that's right and interesting, but I haven't figured it out. I've mainly been interested in this personal political life. But I refer peripherally to things: in 'Living' in Enormous Changes, where [the protagonist] is bleeding to death, she remembers praying for peace on Eighth Street with her friend; in 'Zagrowsky Tells' in Later the Same Day, he's furious because they picketed his drugstore. That's the way a lot of politics gets in, as part of ordinary people's lives, and that's really the way I want to show it, it seems to me now. What I want is for these political people to really be seen.""The people who aren't seen much in Later the Same Day are men: Jack, the live-in lover of Faith (Paley's alter ego among her work's recurring characters), is a fairly well developed presence, but the book's focus is strongly female. "It wasn't that I didn't want to talk about men," Paley explains, "but there is so much female life that has so little to do with men and is so not-talked-about. Even though I think it's Susan [in "Friends"]... "You still have him-itis, the dread disease of females," and they all have a little bit of that in them; much of their lives really does not, especially as they get older. I haven't even begun to write about really older women; I've only gotten them into their late 40s and early 50s."

Is Paley bringing her characters along to her own current stage of life? "I'm very pressed right now for time to write; I just feel peeved about it," she says. "But I've always felt that all these things have strong pulls; the politics takes from the writing, the children take from the politics, and the writing took from the children, you know. Someone once said, 'How did you manage to do all this with the kids around?' and I made a joke; I said, 'Neglect!' But the truth is, all those things pull from each other, and it makes for a very interesting life. So I really have no complaints at all." WENDY SMITH

Smith is a freelancer who frequently contributes to PW.
Characters Dangerously Like Us

THE PROGRESS OF LOVE
By Alice Munro.

By Joyce Carol Oates

STORTELLING is shaped by two contrary, yet complementary, impulses — one toward bril-
liness, compactness, artful omission; the other to-
arded expansion, amplification, enrichment. The one, practiced most scrupulously, yields ever briefer and ever more abstract or parablelike fictions, the other, of course, yields the novel or the epic. Some storytellers experiment endlessly while others, having found their voices early on, and having developed (or appropriated) their native art forms, keep them, are content to work in more or less the same tradition throughout their careers. When the work is good no one is likely to lament the writer’s lack of inter-
est in experimentation. When the work is very good no one is likely even to notice it.

Like her similarly gifted contemporaries Peter Taylor, William Trevor, Edna O’Brien and some few others, the Canadian short-story writer Alice Munro writes stories that have the density — moral, emoti-
onal, sometimes historical — of other writers’ novels. As remote from the techniques and ambitions of what is currently known as “minimalism,” as fiction as it is possible to get and still inhabit the same genre, these writers give us fictitious worlds that are mimetic paradigms of utterly real worlds yet are fictions, composed with so much care and art that it might be mistaken for artless-
ness. They give voice to the voices of their regions, fil-
tering the natural rhythms of speech through a more redefined (but not obtrusively refined) writerly speech. They are faithful to the contours of local legend, tall tales, anecdotes, family reminiscences; their material is nearly always real, but the medium of their telling is such that con-
vention among competing others that swept all before it in the mid and late 19th century — and their characters behave, generally, like real people. That is, they sur-
prise us at every turn, without violating probability. They so resemble ourselves that reading about them, at
times, is emotionally risky. Esthetically experimental literature, while evoking our admiration, rarely moves us the way this sort of literature moves us.

From the start of her career in 1968 with the Cana-
dian publication of the short-story collection “Dance of
Joyce Carol Oates’s most recent book is the story
collection “Raven’s Wing.”

‘I Know Where the Rope is Attached’

Time is layered in Alice Munro’s latest stories, in
terwoven with reminiscence, and the stories consistently beckon to past selves and past experiences. “I’m very inter-
ested in how that affects people, I want to skip around in time.”

Ms. Munro has been less inclined to skip around in space. Though she has played the role of “suburban housewife” in Vancouver, managed a bookstore in Victoria with her former husband and taught writing at universities in Western Ontario, British Columbia and Queensland, Australia, she
has returned to live in the rural Ontario of her childhood — as she usually does in her writing. Her latest collection, “The Progress of Love,”
the Happy Shades” (published in the United States in 1973) through “Lives of Girls and Women,” “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You,” “The Beggar Maid,” “The Moons of Jupiter” and this new collection, “The Progress of Love,” Alice Munro has concentrated on short fiction that can explain little of fairly undistin-
guished men and women — but particularly women — who live in southwestern rural Ontario. When her char-
acters move elsewhere to live, to British Columbia, for instance, like the couple whose precarious marriage is explored in “Miles City, Montana,” it is still Ontario that is home. (But: “When we said ‘home’ and meant Ontar-
io, we had very different places in mind.”) Though Ms. Munro’s tonal palette has darkened considerably over the last 20 years, her fictional technique has not changed greatly, nor has the range of her characters. By degrees, of course, they have grown older. Their liv-
ing fulfills the prophetic conclusion of a beautiful early story, “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (from “Dance of the Happy Shades”): “I feel my father’s life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchant-
ment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine.

The most powerful of the 11 stories collected in
“The Progress of Love” take on bluntly and without sentiment the themes of mortality, self-deception, puzzle-
ment over the inexplicable ways of fate. In “Fits” it is observed that “people can take a fit like the earth takes a fit” after an uncontrollable murder-suicide has been discovered in a small rural town. (Indeed, “Fits” would have made an excellent title for this collection.) The story yields its secrets slowly, with admirable craft and suspense: the surprise for the reader is that the “fit” at its core is less the sensational act of violence than a woman’s mysteriously untroubled response to it.

“A Queer Streak” is a tragically comic (or comi-
cally tragic) tale of an ambitious young woman named
Violet, a “holy terror” in her youth, whose life is perma-
nently altered by the bizarre behavior of an emotionally unbalanced younger sister. It is a familiar temptation to which Violet succumbs: she decides, against the very grain of her personality, that the loss of her fiancé is a “golden opportunity” and not a disaster. Henceforth she will give up her own life, live for others: “That was the way Violet saw to leave her pain behind. A weight gone off her. If she would bow down and leave her old self be-
hind as well, and all her ideas of what her life should be, the weight, the pain, the humiliation would all go magi-
cally. And she could still be chosen. . . . If she prayed enough and tried enough, that would be possible.” But this moment of revelation is the high point of Violet’s life, as we see it.

Violet, who takes on, by degrees, the “queer streak” of her family, is one of Ms. Munro’s unromantic, inde-
pendent heroines — country bred, proud, resilient, courageous even in her old age. Her story might have been even more moving if it did not unaccountably ac-
celerate in its second half (where the point of view shifts to Violet’s cousin Dan about whom we know virtu-
ally nothing and who is merely used as an instrument to observe Violet). Also, Ms. Munro is curiously perfu-
tory in summarizing Violet’s love affair with a married
man — the most intense emotional experience of Vio-
let’s life, presumably. Like the adulescent love affair at the heart of “White Dump,” it is alluded to rather than dramatized: the reader knows very little about it, and consequently feels very little.

RECURRING in Alice Munro’s fiction is a cer-
tain female protagonist, clearly kin to Violet, but generally more capable of establishing a life for herself. She is intelligent, though not in-
tellectual; “superior,” though often self-doubting. She
has the capacity to extract from frequently sourd
experiences moral insights of a very nearly Jamesian subtlety and precision. She tells us what she thinks; tells
us, often, what we would think. Not conventionally beau-
tiful, she is nonetheless attractive to men: which leads her sometimes, as an adolescent, into dangerous situa-
tions — as in the new story “Jesse and Meribeth” in which the adolescent Jesse is scolded by a near-seduc-
er, an older man, for what he correctly perceives as her overwrought romantic imagination: “You shouldn’t go inside places like this with men just because they ask you. . . . You’re hot-blooded. You’ve got some lessons to learn.” In the more complex, multigenerational “White
Dump” a kindred girl is drawn into marriage with a man who “depended on her to make him a man,” and who will not, much less is not, adequate to her passionate nature. In
“Lichen,” one of the bleakest of the new stories, the heroine, middle-aged, cheerful, at last adjusted to a soli-
tary life, achieves a moral triumph over her fatuous ex-
husband simply by maturing beyond him. She is fully ac-
cepting of the terms of her freedom: “This white-
haired woman walking beside him . . . dragged so much weight with her — a weight not just of his sexual secrets
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Dangerously Like Us

Continued from page 7

but of his middle-of-the-night speculations about God, his psychosomatic chest pains, his digestive sensitivity, his escape plans, which once included her... All his ordinary and extraordinary life — even some things it was unlikely she knew about — seemed stored up in her. He could never feel any lightness, any secret and victorious expansion, with a woman who knew so much. She was bowled over with all she knew.” She has become, ironically, a kind of mother to him; but she looks so much older than he that he is shamed and frightened at the very sight of her.

In one of the collection’s finest stories, “The Progress of Love,” the daughter of a woman who sacrificed both herself and her children to presumably Christian ideals of integrity choices deliberately not to believe in those ideals, or to marry conventionally as her mother had done; she becomes, in fact, a real estate agent, selling off the old houses and farms that made up the world of her youth. Long divorced, alone but not really lonely, Euphemia — who calls herself Famed — seeks moments of “kindness and reconciliation” rather than serious love; she wonders “if those moments aren’t more valued, and deliberately gone after, in the setups some people like myself have now, than they were in those old marriages, where love and grudges could be growing up together, so confused and stubborn, it must have seemed they had forever.” But without the old marriages and all that they yielded of sorrow, repression, loss, romance — what remains? Fame’s love

affairs are affairs merely, matters of convenience. To celebrate birthdays “or other big events” she goes with friends from work to a place called the Hideaway where male strippers perform.

(While Ms. Munro’s Ontario countryside has come to bear a disconcerting resemblance to Andrew Wyeth’s stark, bleached-out, clinically detailed landscapes, her small towns have been tawdry transformed — dignified old country inns recycled as strip joints, convenience stores stocked with video games: “jittery electronic noise and flashing light and menacing, modern-day, oddly shaved and painted children.”)

More than “The Beggar Maid” and “The Moons of Jupiter,” the two story collections preceding this one, “The Progress of Love” does contain less fully realized stories. So thinly executed is “Eskimo” that it reads like an early draft of a typically rich, layered, provocateur Munro story: its male protagonist is offstage, its female protagonist senses, or imagines, a psychic kinship with a young Eskimo girl she tries to befriend on an airplane flight, but their encounter comes to nothing and the story dissolves in a self-consciously symbolic dream. “Miles City, Montana” recounts a child’s near-drowning but fails to integrate the episode with what precedes and follows it, and ends with a rather forced epiphany: “So we went on, with the two in the back seat trusting us, because of no choice, and we ourselves trusting to be forgiven, in time, for everything that had first to be seen and condemned by those children: whatever was flippant, arbitrary, careless, callous — all our natural, and particular, mistakes.” “Monsieur les Deux Cha-

peaux” and “Circle of Prayer” are each ratherSketchily imagined, though brimming with life; and “White Dump,” potentially one of the strongest stories in the collection, suffers from a self-conscious structure in which time is fashionably broken and point of view shifts with disconcerting casualness from character to character. We catch only a glimpse of Isabel and her lover and must take Isabel’s word for it, that she feels “rescued, lifted, beheld, and safe”; we are not even certain whether the author means her conviction to be serious, or self-deluded. And the image of the “white dump” — the biscuit factory sugar dump — is rather arbitrarily spliced onto the story, poetically vivid as it is.

EVEN the weaker stories, however, contain passages of genuinely inspired prose and yield the solid pleasures of a three-dimensional world that has been respectfully, if not always lovingly, recorded. And Ms. Munro’s minor characters, though fleetingly glimpsed, are frequently the vehicles for others’ gestures of compassion and pity. (As in “The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink,” where decades are compressed within the space of a few pages, and Edgar, whom we have seen as a bright, attractive boy of 17, emerges as an elderly stroke victim, seated in front of a television screen, indifferent to the visit of his cousin and to his cousin’s offer to take him for a walk. His wife says of him, simply: “No. He’s happy.”)

“The Progress of Love” is a volume of unfailing audacious honesty, uncomprising downright indirection, dissection of the ways in which we deceive ourselves in the name of love; the bleakness of its vision is enriched by the author’s exquisite eye and ear for detail. Life is heartbreak, but it is also uncharted moments of kindness and reconciliation.
Be Reasonable—Unless You're a Writer

By William Kennedy

SHELLEY believed that poets—and by that he meant all imaginative writers—are good people. He writes in his essay “A Defence of Poetry” that “cruelty, envy, base conduct, and the passions purely evil, have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of the poets.” Thank you, Mr. Shelley. However, he also thought that writers don’t necessarily know what they’re doing.

He attributes to them great power to change opinion or institutions beneficially. And this power, he writes, “is seated on the throne of their own soul.” And further, “electric life... burns within their words.” But he concludes with some chagrin, I suspect, that the writers themselves are the ones most sincerely astonished at the manifestation of their own power, and he sees this power derived less from their spirit than from the spirit of the age working through them.

This spirit of the age, this sensitivity to what is temporal, is what American writers are sometimes thought to be lacking. That is a confusion, and a serious one. Such criticism was very much in evidence last year during the International PEN Congress in New York, when a parade of foreign writers castigated their American counterparts for being too removed or aloof from, or indifferent to, the pressing needs of society. I found myself under siege in 1983 in Germany in a similar conversation with several writers. One German novelist concluded that there was no such thing as political writing among modern American novelists.

This, to say the least, is very silly; especially when you consider the work of Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison and Norman Mailer and Grace Paley and E. L. Doctorow and Richard Elman and Robert Stone and Saul Bellow and William Styron and Alice Walker and William Herrick and Tim O’Brien and Don DeLillo and so on and so on. Make your own list.

Not all these writers I’ve named would agree on what is proper to the temporal element of writing, the political temporality if you will. But I know that as writers of serious intent they understand the self-destructive element in the temporal—that being the appeal of propaganda, or partisan writing. Hemingway’s famous line on this subject is, “All you can be sure about in a political-minded writer is that if his work should last you will have to skip the politics when you read it.” Yet politics abounds in his own writing, the politics of war, for instance, in the retreat from Caporetto during the Italian campaign in “A Farewell to Arms” or the stories of the Spanish Civil War, in which political attitudes among the combatants are central to the meaning. These works have not gone dead in 50 or 60 years, and you do not have to skip them when you read Hemingway’s books; and so it is not the matter, and it is not the subject, that goes dead. Survival depends on the way the work is written, the way the writer does it.

How does the writer do it? How does he write about the temporal without falling fatally into the pit of propaganda? Consider Franz Kafka’s novel “The Trial.” Was there ever a more telling blow struck against totalitarianism? Here, without doubt, was a stunningly original attack on the state and on its courts—was it not? But then, again, wasn’t it really the analysis of the character? Or does it strike the naive shorter work “In the Penal Colony”—clearly an attack on the church, and on every dogmatic form of theology or ideology, wasn’t that what it was? Or was it, too, like “The Trial,” a case of the writer looking into the center of his own deceitful mind and finding something other than a one-for-one metaphor reflecting this morning’s political logic?

Propaganda is logical. It takes sides, foursquare. It argues, it finds enemies and targets, it promotes or opposes love and allegiance toward the object being propagated, whether it be the flag, the revolution, the mother church or the genocidal death machine. Love me or leave me, it argues. If you’re not with the revolution or the death machine, you are against it. Such directness is the function of reason, and synthesis, and unity. But writers are made of another fabric; and their fabric is the imagination.

“Reason is to the imagination,” says Shelley, “as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.” He defines poetry, or writing, as the expression of the imagination. Shelley imagines the connection to the wind—an ever-changing wind—blowing over a mythic aeolian lyre, and by this motion creating an ever-changing melody. This is unsurprisingly what the literary imagination does. It does not reach for, nor does it arrive at, simple conclusions. It is more concerned with centering on the action of things, the fluid condition of things, the wherewithal of things, the open-endedness of things, then it is with formulating prescriptions for proper revolutionary or reactionary behavior.

Albert Camus is one of the most political of writers, but consider his line, “I like men who take sides more than those who write about it.” He points out that if the merit of a piece of writing is imposed either by law, or by professional obligation, or by terror, then where is the merit? Camus writes in his diary, “It would appear that to write a poem about spring would nowadays be serving capitalism. I am not a poet, but I should have no second thoughts about being delighted by such a poem if it were beautiful. One either serves the whole of man or one does not serve him at all.”

The work by Camus that seems to be universally valued is “The Stranger.” It is a most political piece of work and, as with the work of Kafka, you search it in vain for conventional logic, or an appeal to reason. An appeal to unreason is closer to what it is: mirror images of certain dark unknowns of our deepest selves, a revelation of relationships that exist not on a basis of one-to-one, but of one-to-ten, or one-to-fourty. The reward in reading it is similar to that provided by betting long shots at the track.

My uncle Peter, who was a horseplayer, once pointed out to me a forlorn citizen of the world, a man in tatters who was picking a cigarette butt out of the gutter. “There’s a guy,” he said, “who used to play the favorites.” You can’t win much of anything playing the favorites. It’s too logical. Too much reason, too much method, goes into it. It is important to remember that at a certain point, Fox, the world’s best horse in 1899, going off at 1-1 to 2 in the Travers Stakes at Saratoga. But in the stretch here came Jim Dandy, a 100-1 to 1 shot, and Jim wins it going away. Wrote Damon Runyon: “You only dream the thing that happened here this afternoon.”

The tale goes to the core of the kind of writing I’ve come to value: first dreaming, and then executing, the improbable, and on good days, the impossible. This involves a serious reliance on intuition, and an enduring reverence for the irrational. It has very little to do with reason. Let me quote from the diary of Lionel Trilling, the literary critic and teacher, and a man of reason if there ever was one. Trilling saw a letter that Ernest Hemingway had written to Clifton Fadiman, the critic, and Trilling thought the letter crazy, arrogant, scared, trivial, absurd and written when Hemingway was obviously drunk.

And Trilling could write this: “Yet [I] felt from reading it how right such a man is compared to the ‘good minds’ of my university life — how he will never grope and search for a thing as to the world... how his life which he could expose without dignity and which is anarchic and ‘childish’ is a better life than anyone I know could live, and right for his job. And how far-far-far I am going from being a writer — how less and less I have the material and the mind and the will.”

This is said about Trilling and, to me, no news at all about Hemingway. Even Hemingway’s unfinished fragments now turn up on the best-seller list, 26 years after his death, and I’m glad to have them.

Trilling saw in Hemingway the same qualities Shelley valued in poets: the electricity of their words, the power of their imagination and the anarchy of their melodious minds. And then Trilling posed these questions to himself: how can Hemingway do it so well with such a disordered mind, and why can’t I and my orderly colleagues do the same? Well, as we used to say so frequently in my religion class, that’s a mystery.

And mystery is not only great sport, it’s also, as Luis Buñuel cleverly pointed out, the basic element in all works of art. But even if writers know all that, and even if they grudgingly admit that Shelley might have a point about their not always knowing what they’re doing; they also perceive that this isn’t a flaw in their makeup, but a happy gift of a particular kind, like being born double-jointed or with hair that falls out and reveals a noble brow; and these writers continue to write with enormous pleasure, and with reverence for the art. For with whatever marginal gift of reason that may have been doled out to them, they concluded long ago that not only was writing truly worth pursuing, it was the most important thing they could do with their lives.
Being Nice

Studying the regional stereotyping with which Americans try to understand each other, I am struck by the frequency with which Easterners talk about how "nice" Westerners are. This is often accompanied by nonsense worthy of Jean Jacques Rousseau about the sweetening effect of Mother Nature on the human character. Explanations for the niceness of Westerners include the regional abundance of sunshine, relatively unpolluted air, grandeur of the scenery and a landscape in some places so thinly populated that Westerners must drive 200 miles to get a passable pastrami sandwich.

May my lips be sealed with wallpaper paste if you ever hear them say Westerners are not nice, for they are. But why do Easterners go on about this subject? If the West is so superior in niceness, why do mass murderers — people with 20 and 100 victims to their credit — so often operate in California and Texas?

I am tempted to give the wise-guy explanation and say that Westerners are probably sick and tired of hearing Easterners tell them how nice they are. The real explanation, though, probably has more to do with Westerners than Easterners.

The fact is that Easterners do not think of themselves as nice, but have accepted the unflattering stereotype of the Easterner concocted in the South, West and Middle West, and feel rotten about themselves. In this stereotype, the Easterner is unhospitable, smug, cold-hearted, tight-fisted and joyless, a chilly piece of arrogance ready to foreclose on a widow's mortgage to pay his snobby children's Ivy League tuition. In two words, not nice.

Having accepted this stereotype of himself, the Easterner is searching for nice people he would like to resemble if only he were not cursed with his dreadful Easternness.

It is easy to find them in the West. The West is so remote that Easterners can know little about the state of the human temperament out there. And so, like 18th-century romantics who found nobility in savages because they lived so far away that nobody knew they practiced cannibalism, the Easterner admires the Westerner as a creature whose excellence mocks the unniceness of the East.

For the true Easterner, the West is still mostly a fiction created by movies, television and travel ads, just as the South used to be.

Remember when people used to go soft in the head about the South? Southern niceness was hokum created by bad novels and romantic movies when the South was still hard to get to, unless the Army drafted you. Then Easterners began going to Florida, and their view of the South changed.

The Easterner who had once thought the Southerner was nice now developed reservations. He began to think of the Southerner as a rascal scheming to waylay him in a speed trap and extort his vacation money with the threat of incarceration on a diet of sheriff-boiled okra in some tank-town jailhouse.

This new idea of the Southerner corresponded too closely for comfort to the Easterner's idea of the Easterner. He stopped thinking the Southerner was nice when he started thinking of the Southerner as just another Easterner.

Then came the civil-rights battle in the South and the Easterner enjoyed a moment of feeling there was at least one person whom he excelled in niceness — the Southerner. This brief elation faded as soon as the black civil-rights movement in the Northeast revealed that the Easterner was no nicer than the Southerner after all. Upon this discovery, so many Easterners moved South to settle that the Southerner has now become an Easterner.

In looking for somebody whose superior regional sweetness could make him feel ashamed of himself, the Easterner might have chosen the Middle West. For years, Easterners talked about how nice Middle Westerners were. But the Middle West never had a chance. Not with the West so far away.

The truth is, Easterners have always been afraid of a certain sly humor in the Middle Western character. A Middle Westerner, they suspect, wouldn't be above handling an Easterner a pitchfork after a blizzard — the Easterner thinks of the Middle West as six months of blizzard followed by six months of corn — and asking him to shovel the snow off the brood sow.

The Easterner hates being reminded that he is just as dumb about certain things as other people are about the Boston-New York-Washington shuttle. He can't believe that anybody who'd remind him of it is really nice. He doubts that Westerners would do that, the poor dol.
Yearnings for past, fears for future dominate literature

By KATHLEEN MERRYMAN
Of The Gazette Staff

Montana is the only state in the union where the macho men drive with a poem between their mudflaps, and, occasionally, in their hearts.

"Montana is the only state with a three-word poem on its license plates. 'Big Sky Country.' What a beautiful poem," author Norman Maclean told a packed house at last weekend's seventh annual Montana History Conference.

"Poetry is an important way, at times the only way, to make Montana's stories ring true," he continued.

As the author of "A River Runs Through It," he should know.

The collection of tales of his youth and early manhood near Missoula is filled with lovingly detailed recollections of fishing, working for the Forest Service, logging, his minister father and his brother, a master fly-fisherman of the Upper Blackfoot River.

"To say that 'A River Runs Through It' is just another book about fishing is like saying that 'Moby Dick' is just another book about whales," said Dr. Harry Fritz, chairman of the University of Montana's History Department as he introduced Maclean. "I am not a literary critic, but I know when a story's good. And these are good stories. Their appeal is universal. They even read them in Chicago."

One of the reasons they read them in Montana is that they are perceived as stories, not poems.

"Montana may inspire poetry, but most Montanans don't read it.

"Most of our poetry you will find in our prose," said Maclean, whose success lies in the fact that he has inserted the words and rhythms of poetry into magnificently crafted stories.

"Poetry is an important way, at times the only way, to make Montana's stories ring true. It must be admitted that our state was not settled by poets. They were too busy jumping out of the way of snakes and grizzlies," he said.

"Montana has made its poets. Often we think we are too tough to be poets," he said, adding that it's not unusual to hear a Montanan talk of the land in words he would call "sappy" in any other context.

"The poems in Montana stories should be just short of invisible to the passing eye," he said. "Their rhythm should be not showing, but invisibly felt...We must watch and listen for the rhythms about us."

He has watched and listened Montana for decades, and has felt an order in certain events shape them into stories.

Those stories, like others in Montana's store of fiction, are rich with acton and animals.

There are the bears he encountered as a lookout for the Forest Service.

"If you have never seen a bear going over a mountain, you have never seen a job reduced to the barest essentials," he wrote of a summer he spent with the marmots and grizzlies among the rocky crags of a mountain top.

"I became an expert at an early age at watching the rear ends of bears as they went over mountains," he said, adding that the effect of the bears leaving the earth "was like a bolt of lightning retrieving itself."

He watched his family.

He remembered his mother.

"Mother went to the bedroom, where, in a house full of rods and rifles, she faced most of her problems alone," he said of her, after the death of Paul, with whom she had had a special communion.

Much of Montana's literature is filled with a yearning for the past, he said, a feature that dates as far back as the publication Charles Russell's "Trails Plowed Under."

"Montana is nostalgia," Maclean said. "It is the memory of what you have had, and the fear that no one will have it again."
Parties mark 100 years of Western statehood

Even today, go to Singapore, Greece, Europe — hell, even Sri Lanka — and the locals know about the West because of Buffalo Bill.

—grandson Bill Cody

In us is some of the spirit of the mountain man, some of the expectation of the prospector, some of the cowboy's liking for boots, choke-bore pants, a big hat and a horse. Some of the endurance of the homesteader, a bit of this and a bit of that, and perhaps deep and dormant in those of us without trace of Indian blood, a guilty sorrow at the treatment of the red man. All of what we are owe to our forerunners.

—A.B. Guthrie Jr.

Tombstones at the Custer National Battlefield commemorate the defeat and death of Lt. Col. George Custer and his troops in battle against a force led by Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.

In his book a pioneer is a man who turned all the grass upside down, strung bob-wire over the dust that was left, poisoned the water and cut down the trees, killed the Indians who owned the land, and called it progress. If I had my way, the land here would be like God made it, and none of you SOBs would be here at all.

—Montana artist Charles M. Russell, to a group of Great Falls citizens who threw a celebration in honor of themselves in the 1920s.

By TAD BARTMUS
Associated Press Writer

The white men called it "next year" country.

Next year the rains will come, the prairie fires (or locust or hoppers or blizzards) won't. Next year the price of wheat will be up, taxes down.

Next year the bank's paid off, the truck'll be paid up, the cows'll pay for themselves.

That's the American West; Next Year Country.

Except this year.

This year North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming and Washington are celebrating their 100th birthdays, and they're having a rip-roarin' party starting the most of the way by the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean.

Wyoming and Idaho have caught the spirit, too, because next year marks their centennials. If you miss the huge barbecues, cattle drives, rodeos, bucking broncos, horse shows, fishing tournaments, parades, dances, and the 101 other festivities this year, Idaho and Wyoming promise encore in '90.

President Bush, who earlier took part in North Dakota's centennial celebration, his wife, Barbara, and S.D., and Helena on Monday to join festivities, then to Spokane on Tuesday.

Centennial celebrations are milestones measured long ago in much of the rest of the nation. Virginians, Floridians, even Missourians, may wonder: Why all the fuss?

Well, the West has always been America's young upstart, the shirter tail relative of the establishment East, the antebellum South, the Spanish Southwest, the conservative, agrarian Midwest.

But in the 1980s, the West has come of age and come into its own. It has a cachet sought by CEOs as well as collegians. Everywhere you look, from Hollywood's movies to
Centennial ceremonies continuing

By The Associated Press
Here's a list of major events related to the Western centennials:

**NORTH DAKOTA**
Entered the Union on Nov. 2, 1889. Centennial events:
- Oct. 1, in Minot, Citizen's Day, celebrating the day citizens voted on Constitution.
- Nov. 1, in Bismarck, festivities at the Capitol.

**SOUTH DAKOTA**
Entered the Union on Nov. 2, 1889. Centennial events:
- Nov. 2, in Watertown, reenactment of the inauguration of South Dakota's first governor, Arthur Mellette.
- Nov. 10, in Rapid City, parade billed as largest in state history, dedication of 8 million Cultural Heritage Center, Centennial Mall.

**MONTANA**
Entered the Union on Nov. 8, 1889. Centennial events:
- Nov. 8, in Helena, a forum of educators, government officials and business leaders will discuss Montana's relationship between now and 2008.

**WASHINGTON**
Entered the Union on Nov. 11, 1889. Centennial events:
- Nov. 11, celebrations and ceremonies in each county. Among them: burial of a time capsule in Mesa, 100th birthday party in Walla Walla, ferry voyage into the 20th Century in Anacortes, and Clamdiggers Society's Annual State Celebration in Lynden, 1989 Militia Ball in Tacoma.

Indian family works to improve lot

By TAD BARTIMUS

**NECEI, N.D.** — Long before Lewis and Clark, Marilyn Cross Hudson's ancestors had explored every bend of the upper Missouri and hunted buffalo on every broad plain.

They were prosperous enough to serve corn, pumpkins, wheat, beans, sunflowers, and even tobacco to French Canadian pathfinder Pierre La Verendrye when he "discovered" them in the 1740s in what is now northern Dakota.

Hudson, 53, is a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes composed of Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Indians, and is an administrator with the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Fort Berthold Reservation in New Town.

Her people were the native farmers who sheltered Lewis and Clark in 1804-05, and played host to every notable white man who traveled up the Missouri river in the two centuries prior to North Dakota's statehood.

In return, their visitors wisely disposed of the hospitable Indians with smallpox.

They lost their aboriginal existence to homesteaders and government agents who remanded them to a reservation.

Noting missionary attempts to convert the Indians to Christianity, artist George Catlin wrote of his native friends: "I love a people who keep the commandment with all their heart and soul, without ever having read them or heard them preached from the pulpit."

Theodore Roosevelt fled to North Dakota following the deaths of his mother and wife within hours of each other on Feb. 14, 1884.

"If it had not been for what I learned during the years spent in North Dakota," he later wrote, "I would never have been President of the United States."

Among Roosevelt's teachers was the Hidatsa Chief Old Dog, remembered by his people as a great hunter and wise medicine man.

"Old Dog died two years before I was born," he said his granddaughter, Phyllis Old Dog Cross, Marilyn's sister.

"My father kept his medicine bundle in the earth house and we kids were warned not to use it because it was too powerful a place," said Cross.

Now head of the eight-state mental health program for the Indian Health Service Hospital in Rapid City, S.D., Cross is one of 18 children of Old Dog's son, Martin, who changed his name to Cross when he served in the Army in World War II. Their mother was born in 1896 to Norwegian immigrants.

Of the nine living Cross children, nearly all are college graduates, many with master's degrees, and work with American Indians from Alaska to the Great Plains.

But when they return to the reservation for a reunion, there is no longer an earth house, or even their town of Elbowoods, to come home to.

Everything from their childhood, everything on the riverbank from the time of Lewis and Clark, was flooded by the backwaters of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Garrison Dam in the early 1960s. The Missouri River was dammed to prevent downstream flooding.

Raymond Cross, 40, the youngest of Martin's children, is trying to get Congress to right the wrongs done to the 2,000 members of his tribe.

"We are still owed a hospital, irrigation water, cheaper electricity, and the resources to rebuild a cohesive social and economic tribe," said Raymond Cross, a graduate of Harvard University with a Yale law degree who recently completed a year at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, studying economics.

"Indian people themselves must be the source for their own internal change, not the so-called do-gooders from outside," said Cross.

"I'm a cowboy who was honored by Ladies Home Journal in 1983 as the outstanding woman in South Dakota:"

"Now the hardest stereotype I run into is a backwoods, down-home, country bumpkin from among white liberals who want to keep Indians on the reservation as quaint and cute. They think that unless you're poor, depressed, down, alcoholic Indian you're not a real Indian."

"No one in my family fits that profile. All of us are trying to be of service to our people," she said.

"I lived with my Grandfather Old Dog and my grandmother Many Dances would be proud of us."

Hidatsa Chief Old Dog
a timidity to serious fiction now... an exhaustion of hope that writing can change anything."

According to Doctorow, too many novelists have succumbed to self-avoidance. Our fiction is no longer a risk-taking one, a condition that shows itself, he says, both in the work of young writers — "a lot of which is very well written but single-voiced" — and in the literary lives of established writers, "who have become careerist-minded. They're independent entrepreneurs, what Lionel Trilling called 'writer figures.'"

Doctorow's concern with the purpose of fiction is addressed in his novella, "Lives of the Poets." Its narrator, Jonathan, is a writer in his early 50s, Doctorow's age when he wrote it. He's separated from his wife and living in an apartment in Greenwich Village that has the same view of Houston Street visible from Doctorow's apartment there. A poet friend of his whom he's known since college has recently died of cancer under circumstances that parallel the demise of Doctorow's old classmate, James Wright. He worries that his body is crumbling. He's having a crisis of confidence about his work. In short, Jonathan's life seems frail to him, meaningless, a sense that leads him, in the end, to accede to an act of political engagement, housing in his apartment a family of illegal aliens from El Salvador. But even this is a halfhearted move, and the reader is left with Jonathan's desperation.

What is fiction and what is not?

"For me," Doctorow says, "the novel is meaningful only in terms of Jonathan's typicality. He's a representative creative person. It's told in a way that's confessional, but he's not me. It's not my marriage. The apartment was never a sanctuary for anyone. The novella is an allegory for what I take to be the state of America writing today. What the hell are we doing? We've lost touch."

He pauses, considering. "Maybe I'll give something away here. I hate to put it so baldly on the table, but here it is. There's a character in the novella who is represented as Jonathan's girlfriend, his mistress, who is traveling around the world. She was with him once, but now she keeps going further and further away, and there's some question about whether she'll return. When the book was published, that created a lot of curiosity in people. They wanted to know who she was."

"Well," he says, and the emphasis is final, "she's the muse."

For Doctorow, a book begins with surprise. "I've discovered that you cannot start a book with an intention, a calculation," he says. "You start writing before you know what you want to write or what it is you're doing."

The catalyst, the spur itself, "could be anything."

The germ of "Loon Lake," he explains, was a road sign in the Adirondacks reading "Loon Lake." "It can be a phrase, an image, a sense of rhythm, the most intangible thing. Something just moves you, evokes feelings you don't even understand." He talks of a book's "yielding," giving itself up to be written, and to illustrate tells how "Ragtime" was born.

The novel begins this way:

"In 1902 Father built a house at the crest of the Broadview Avenue hill in New Rochelle, New York." After having worked for several months on a novel based on the life of Dr. James Pike, the controversial Episcopal bishop who disappeared in the Israeli desert in 1969, Doctorow found himself stuck and brooding, staring at the blank wall of his study in his winter home. "It was in the back of my mind to be starting with Pike's childhood," he says, "which would have put it at the turn of the century. Suddenly I made the connection: 'Hey! This house!' And all these images came to me. I was off on my book and it had nothing to do with James Pike. This is what I mean by material yielding. 'Ragtime' is the book that yielded. You just punch around until something gives way. Then, if it keeps going, it's a book."

During the going, Doctorow is methodical and diligent, "getting up for work in the morning like anybody else," writing for about six hours until midafternoon, shooting for a production of between 500 and 1,000 words. He obeys rules: Hemingway's dictum about always stopping when you know what's coming next; until a draft is completed, never rewriting more than two pages earlier than his furthest progress; never rereading a working draft when he's tired. His drafts are typewritten, single-spaced, he says, "because then more of the landscape is visible at one time." And he has resisted purchasing a word processor, "because I like the physical aspect of writing. I like to tear up a piece of paper and throw it down and put a new piece of paper in the typewriter. When I've decided to change something, I like to retypewrite the whole page."

Asked about research, Doctorow freely admits that his is spotty. He studies paintings and photographs in order to familiarize himself with the tenor of the times he's writing.
about. But he is wary of being trapped by facts. "There's a conflict in you," he says, "on the one hand, to know as much as you can; on the other, not to know too much, to do your job properly, always to let the language do it for you. My idea of research is idiosyncratic and accidental, to find something to confirm your hunch, and not to look for it until you need it."

History as he has presented it has drawn critics for its frivolousness. Particularly after "Ragtime," he was accused of being a misinformer, willfully mendacious about sacred facts. Doctorow defends himself on two counts: "I think fiction intrudes on history, it always has. Nobody said anything about Napoleon being a character in 'War and Peace.' Stephen Crane was never in the Civil War. Daniel Defoe wasn't there for the plague in London. Besides which, the whole idea of objective historical reality is na""ive. Look at Nicaragua. What's happening now is that the President and this Administration are composing a Nicaragua that no one else has seen and no one else believes. But they have the power to do it. And eventually, with that kind of self-authentication, Nicaragua will become what they say it is, namely, a total Soviet satellite threatening to destroy the United States.

"And it's not just the politicians. Historians know they're not objective. Why should fiction writers be denied the composition of history? Finally, what is fiction about?"

Perhaps the novel that most clearly reveals the creative process as Doctorow goes through it is "The Book of Daniel," which Doctorow recalls now was his most problematic work. It focuses on a graduate student named Daniel Isaacson, the imagined son of less imagined parents, Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, whom Doctorow modeled on Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the couple executed for conspiracy to commit treason during the McCarthy era. Set against the radical backdrop of the late 1960's, the novel traces Daniel's effort to purge his rage and confusion over his parents' deaths by plunging into the muddled history of their notorious case.

"The genesis of 'The Book of Daniel,' " Doctorow says, "was living in New York in the mid-1960's during the growing antiwar protest, the springing into being of the student counterculture, rock music, SDS, the rise of massive dissent, people dropping out, hippiedom. It was profound. It was radicalism, really. And I started thinking about how unprogrammatic it was. A lot of it was stupid and self-destructive, as with the drug stuff. And it was anti-intellectual."

"Anyway, there were demonstrations and wide civil disobedience. And I began to think about the previous spasm of radicalism, which was in the 1930's, and which was far different. It was programmatic, highly intellectual, theoretically connected to Marx and spearheaded by a very lively and, for a while, successfully growing Communist Party. It all came to an end right after World War II. So I thought I recognized the subject, and it was the idea of radicalism in America, and the function of the radical, which is sacrificial. The radical proposes ideas that cause destruction and later become orthodoxies.

"And then there popped into my mind that the key moment in all this was the Rosenberg trial. There was the nadir of radicalism in America. There was the moment in our history when everything went wrong. That, to me, became the connecting link between the 1930's and the 1960's, and it became the focus of the book.

"What happened was — this is why it is so dangerous to start with an idea — I wrote 150 pages in a very straightforward, chronological simple past tense, omniscient narrator, and it bored me. I threw the 150 pages out.

"And I just started to type, very angry, full of despair, and with an intense feeling of self-mockery. I started typing — whatever it was, I didn't know — and it turned out to be the first pages of 'The Book of Daniel.' Somehow I had to go through some kind of transfiguration in order to find the voice for this book, and I couldn't do it until I hit some really
Robert Peters

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UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

 Didn't Hemingway credit his experience as a cub reporter for the Kansas City Star with teaching him the value of the simple declarative sentence? Weren't Djuna Barnes' celebrity profiles, published in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, the five-finger exercises from which she developed the unsettling, telescopic characters that people her remarkable novel, Nightwood? Katherine Anne Porter, Ambrose Bierce, and William Kennedy all did stints as daily reporters before penning their great fabulations, I remind myself.

I remember well when I first conceived the idea of following their path. Sitting in the barely tolerable cold of my college dormitory room, I transported myself through place and time to some variant of the life I imagined those writers having lived—usually, to a wine-stained table near the Moulin Rouge. I, too, would be a Mary McCarthy, or a Colette. I would contribute to journals, write fiction, sit until dawn with the most interesting people of my generation, and somehow through it all, manage to support myself.

That was fifteen years ago. I've learned, in the interim, that it is possible. But only just barely. Combining the life of letters with that of journalism requires a versatility and discipline that's hard for purists of either persuasion to imagine, much less to appreciate. I've learned if you want to succeed at a dual literary career, you must master a number of crucial survival skills that weren't mentioned in any of the literary memoirs I read when I was twenty.

You need, of course, to budget your time in accordance with your own priorities. This means that if your real ambition is to be the subject of a page-one book review, rather than book review editor, it's not helpful to take on that extra review assignment just to see your name in print, when you ought to be revising your latest short story. Even under the best of circumstances, you will find yourself pitting the open-ended quality of creative time against the proscriptive and arbitrary nature of your journalistic time. The muse doesn't conform to schedules, and it lacks the assertive nature of more directed activity like journalism.

You also need to respect your own limits in ways that others—editors, friends, even family—probably can't. For example, you won't be able to produce as much work as the full-time reporters you know, and you won't have the time to read as many literary journals or attend as many writers' conferences as your friends who don't have dead-
Where I Ought to Be: A Writer's Sense of Place
By Louise Erdrich

I

N a tribal view of the world, where one place has been inhabited for generations, the landscape becomes enlivened by a sense of group and family history. Unlike most contemporary writers, a traditional storyteller fixes listeners in an unchanging landscape combined of myth and reality. People and place are inseparable. The Tewa Pueblo, for example, begin their story underground, in complete darkness. When a mole comes to visit, they learn there is another world above and decide to go there. In this new place the light is so intense that they put their hands on their eyes to shield them. Grandmother Spider suggests that they adjust their vision to the light by gradually removing their hands.

Louise Erdrich, the author of "Love Medicine," is completing her second novel, "The Beet Queen."

and she points them to Sandia Mountain, the place where they will live. A great deal of wandering, bickering, lessons learned and even bloodshed occur, but once there, they stay for good.

This is the plot but not the story. For its full meaning, it should be heard in the Tewa language and understood within that culture's world view. Each place would then have personal and communal connotations. At the telling of it we would be lifetime friends. Our children would be sleeping or playing nearby. Old people would nod when parts were told the right way. It would be a new story and an old story, a personal story and a collective story, to each of us listening.

What then of those authors nonindigenous to this land? In renaming and historicizing our landscapes, towns and neighborhoods, writers from Hawthorne to Cather to Faulkner have attempted to weld themselves and their readers closer to the New World. As Alfred Kazin notes in "On Native Grounds," "the greatest single fact about our American writing" is "our writers' absorption in every last detail of this American world, together with their deep and subtle alienation from it."

Perhaps this alienation is the result of one difficult fact about Western culture — its mutability. Unlike the Tewa and other Native American groups who inhabited a place until it became deeply and particularly known in each detail, Western culture is based on progressive movement. Nothing, not even the land, can be counted on to stay the same. And for the writers I've mentioned, and others, it is therefore as if, in the very act of naming and describing what they love, they lose it.

Continued on page 23.
Where I Ought to Be: A Writer’s Sense of Place

Continued from page 1

Faulkner’s story “The Bear” is set in “that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punitively gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness.” That shrinking area is haunted by a spirit, the bear, which is “shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big, too big for the dogs that tried to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope.”

To Europeans the American continent was so vast that it seemed like hundreds of years ago it seemed that nothing and no one could ever truly affect it. Yet William Faulkner wrote nostalgically of a wilderness that had already vanished. What is invented, and lamented, is the loss of the intangible beauty and peacefulness of agrarian life. The bear, which is the brooding and immense spirit of the land, had all but disappeared from settled areas as the frontier moved westward, and today largely by virtue of human efforts on his behalf. The wilderness that once claimed us is now named and consumed by us. Carefully designated areas of it are kept increasingly less pristine to remind us of what was.

Just as Faulkner lamented the passing of the Southern forests into farmland, so Willa Cather’s novels about Nebraska homesteaders are elegies to vanishing virtues, which she links with an unmechanized and pastoral version of agriculture. That view has given way ever since developments in chemical fertilizers, hybrid seed, animal steroids and farm equipment become part of a more technological treatment of the land.

Douglas Unger, in his book “Leaves from the Land,” tells the rise and fall of a small town in South Dakota that bases its economy on large-scale turkey farming. When prices fall and the farmers can’t afford to ship their stock, they slaughter the turkeys themselves, pile them in a trench and burn them. Mr. Unger writes of the unlikely, apocalyptic scene, “The prairie filled with black smoke whirling up day after day, rolling, tumbling, dark scarves of smoke blown for an instant to the shapes of godheads, vague monuments, black smoke tornadoes that scarred the summer skies with waste and violence.”

Instead of viewing a stable world, as in pre-invasion Native American cultures, instead of establishing a historical background for the landscape, American writers seem bound into the process of chronicling change and forecasting destruction, of recording a world before that world’s very physical being shifts. As we know, neighborhoods are leveled in a day, the Army Corps of Engineers may change the course of a river. In the ultimate kitsch gesture of a culture’s desperation to engrave itself upon an alien landscape, a limestone mountain may be blasted into likeness of a mountain.

Our suburbs and suburban life may be more sustaining and representative monuments than Mount Rushmore. There is a mounting grandeur to the acres on acres of uniform cul-de-sacs and wide treeless streets, each green yard adorned with a swimming pool that sparkles like a blue opal. The large malls are awe-inspiring smog banks of artificial opulence. Although created as escapades, as places halfway between country and city life, but without the isolation of the one or the crime of the other, suburbs and the small-town way of life in which they imitate the small town offer a place to escape from one. One departs either back to the evil thrills, pace and pollution of the city, or to the country, where life is supposedly more deeply felt, where the people talk more, more genuine, where place is idiosyncratic and not uniform.

Writers such as John Cheever and Joy Williams admirably show that suburbs can be as strange as the next place in fiction. Any completely imagined description, from neighborhood to small town, creates a locus that the reader mentally inhabits. I don’t know whether Fitzgerald, the town in Marilynne Robinson’s novel, “Housekeeping,” exists in fact, but it does for me because of this passage, in which the narrator describes the town’s losses in the aftermath of a flood:

“Fingerbone was never an impressive town. It was chastened by an outstretched landscape and extravagant weather. The mountains were taller than the empty bellies. And then the library was flooded to a depth of three shelves, creating vast gaps in the Dewey decimal system. The losses in hooked and braided rugs and needlepoint footstools will never be reckoned.”

Of course not every writer feels compelled to make specific his or her setting. Samuel Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Donald Barthelme are among those whose fiction could take place anywhere, or nowhere. Besides, in our society mobility is characteristic of our experience. Most of us don’t grow up in a single community anymore, and even if we do usually leave it. How many of us live around the corner from parents, grandparents, even brothers and sisters? How many of us come to know a place intimately, to know it generationally, only to leave it? That this is part of a societal ebb and flow, a people washing in and out of suburbs and cities. We move with unparalleled ease, assisted by Mayflower Van Lines and rehearse homelessness by choice, relocating in surroundings that please us, and more often by necessity. Like hunter-gatherers, we must go where we will be fed, where the jobs are listed.

But for many readers and writers who place that all-important, there still remains the problem of identity and reference. An author needs his or her characters to have something in common with the reader. If not the land, which changes, it should at least be that the place is one that then currently provides a cultural identity? What is it that writers may call on now for communal references in the way that a Tewa could mention Sandia Mountain?

Whether we like it or not, we are bound together by that which may be cheapest and ugliest in our culture, but which may also have an austere and resonant beauty in its economy of meaning. We are united by mass culture to the brand names of objects, to symbols like the golden arches, to stories of folk heroes like Ted Turner and Colonel Sanders, to entrepreneurs of commerce like Conrad Hilton and Leona Helmsley. These symbols and heroes may annoy us, or comfort us, but when we encounter them in literature, at the very least, they give us context.

“Fiction can promote economic status, upbringing, aspirations, even regional background. It is one thing for a character to order an imported Heineken, another for that person to order a Schlitz. There is a difference in what we perceive in that character’s class and sensibility. It means a third thing for that person to order a Hamm’s beer, a brew said to be made of Minnesota’s sky-blue waters and which is not widely available outside the Middle West. Very few North Americans drive Volvos even though quite a few North Dakotans are of Swedish descent. The Twin Am is not the car of choice for professors of English in Eastern colleges.”

In Bobbie Ann Mason’s short stories, characters drink bourbon and Coke out of coffee cups, while the people in Richard Ford’s stories drink milk instead of pouring it from cartons, and transfer jam from jars to crystal dishes. Raymond Carver’s characters drink Teachers, nameless gins or cheap pink champagne. In a few of Eudora Welty’s stories, the whole point of the story is what thing, while some of William Kennedy’s characters would be happy to get it.

Though generalized, these examples show the importance of our culture in the fragmented, trivial or vulgar to cling to and even celebrate the stuff that inaduates us, consider America without football, television, or the home computer, a prospect that would only be possible in the event of some vast and terrible catastrophe.

We live with the threat of nuclear obliteration, and perhaps this is a subliminal reason that as writers we catalogue streets, describe landmarks, create even our most imaginary landscapes so thoroughly as to render inanimate matter how monotonous our suburbs, no matter how anxious our unzoned Miracle Miles and shopping centers, every inch would seem infinitely precious to us to disappear.

In her essay “Place in Fiction,” Eudora Welty speculates that the loss of place might also mean the loss of our ability to respond humanly to anything. She writes, “It is only too easy to conceive that a bomb that could destroy all traces of places as we know them, in life and through books, could also destroy all feelings as we know them, so irrevocably and so happily are recognition, memory, experience,历史, love, the instincts of poetry and praise, worship and endeavor, bound up in place.”

“I don’t know whether this is true, but I hope that it is not, and that humanity springs from us and not only from our surroundings. I hope that even in the unimaginable absence of all familiar place, something of our better human qualities would survive.”

UT the danger that they wouldn’t, we wouldn’t, that nothing else would either, is real and present. Leonard Lutwack urges, in his book “The Role of Place in Literature,” that this very fear should inform the work of contemporary writers and act as a tool to further the preservation of the earth. “An increased sensitivity to place seems to be required,” he says, “a sensitivity inspired by aesthetic as well as ecological values, imaginative as well as functional needs... Literature must now be seen in terms of the contemporary concern for survival.”

In our worst nightmares, all of us have conceived what the world might be like afterwar and have feared that even our most extreme notions of a devastated place are not extreme enough. Consider, then, that to American Indians it is as if the unthinkable has already happened, and relatively recently. Many Native American cultures were annihilated more thoroughly, even a nuclear disaster might destroy ours, and others live on with the fallout of that destruction, effects as persistent as radiation - poverty, fetal alcohol syndrome, chronic despair.

Through diseases such as measles and smallpox, and through a systematic policy of cultural extermination, the population of Native North Americans shrank from an estimated 15 million in the mid-18th century to just over 200,000 by 1815. That is proportionately as if the population of the United States were to decrease from its present level to the population of Cleveland. Entire pre-Columbian cities were wiped out, whole linguistic and ethnic groups decimated. Since these Old World diseases penetrated to the very heart of the continent even faster than the earliest foreign observers, the full magnificence and variety of Native American cultures were never chronicled, perceived, or known by Europeans.

Contemporary Native American writers have therefore a task quite different from that of other writers I’ve mentioned. In the light of enormous loss, they must tell the stories of contemporary survivors while protecting and celebrating the cores of cultures left behind and part of the one we know.

And in this there remains always the land. The Ap...
Where I Ought to Be

Continued from preceding page

proximate three percent of the United States that is still held by Native American nations is cherished in each detail, still informed with old understandings, still known and used, in some cases, changelessly. All of this brings me, as last, to what a sense of place means from my own perspective. I grew up in a small North Dakota town, on land that once belonged to the Wahpeton-Sisseton Sioux but had long since been leased out and sold to non-Indian farmers. Our family of nine lived on the very edge of town in a house that belonged to the Government and was rented to employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school, where both my parents worked, and where my grandfather, a Turtle Mountain Chippewa named Pat Gourneau, had been educated. The campus consisted of an immense central playground, classrooms, two dormitories and numerous outbuildings. All of these places were made of a kind of crumbly dark red local brick. When cracked, smashed, or chipped back to clay this brick gave off a peculiar, dry, choking dust that I can almost still taste.

On its northern and western sides, the campus ran, with no interference from trees or fence lines, into fields of corn, wheat, soybeans, or flax. I could walk for miles and still find nothing but fields, more fields, and the same perfectly straight dirt township road. I often see this edge of town — the sky and its towering and shifting formations of clouds, that beautifully lighted emptiness — when I am writing. But I’ve never been able to describe it as well as Isak Dinesen, even though she was not writing of the American Great Plains but about the high country of Kenya.

“Looking back,” she says in her reminiscence, “Out of Africa,” “you are struck by your feeling of having lived for a time up in the air. The sky was rarely more than pale blue or violet, with a profusion of mighty, weightless, everchanging clouds towering up and sailing on it, but it has a blue vigour in it, and at a short distance it painted the ranges of hills and woods a fresh deep blue. In the middle of the day the air was alive over the land, like a flame burning; it scintillated, waved and shone like running water, mirrored and doubled all objects. . . . Up in this high air you breathed easily, drawing in a vital assurance and lightness of heart. In the highlands you woke up in the morning and thought: Here I am, where I ought to be.”

Here I am, where I ought to be.

A writer must have a place where he or she feels

"Through the study of a place, its crops, products, paranoia, dialects and failures, we come closer to our own reality."

Real Faces and Places

LOOKING AT CITIES
By Allan B. Jacobs.

By Sam Hall Kaplan

FOLLOWING the urban riots of two decades ago, city planners were very much involved in a variety of well-intentioned efforts to make cities better places to live, work, play and pursue the American dream. Planners could be found out on the streets, organizing, leading rent strikes, advocating community-oriented designs and immersing themselves in local concerns.

In recent years, however, reflecting changing national priorities and prejudices, the profession generally has drifted into dabbling in the rhetoric of sweeping theories and grand designs. While the nation’s cities and suburbs are being shaped and misshaped by developers, real-estate lawyers, market researchers and obliging architects and politicians, many planners seem content to practice their profession as academics or bureaucrats.

It is this current state of the profession that concerns Allan B. Jacobs; a professor in the department of city and regional planning at the University of California, Berkeley, a former city planning director of San Francisco and a consultant to various other cities. What he suggests is refreshing, and welcome.

Mr. Jacobs would like the planners and all others involved with the fate of cities to put aside statistics, leave their desks and computers, step out from behind their lecterns and go for a walk through actual streets.

"Planners," he believes, "tend to be more careful in deciding on policies and actions when they associate real people’s faces and images of real places with the decisions . . . . The more conscious we are of the relationships between what is observed and what actions are taken, the more likely we are to have better, more humane, more livable cities." It is a plea consistent with the planning theories of the late Kevin Lynch, whose classic "Image of the City" (1960) begins with the sentence "Looking at cities can give a special pleasure, however commonplace the sight might be." Mr. Jacobs echoes that attitude in an engaging, simple style.

With appropriate recognition also of Grady Clay’s "Close-Up: How to Read the American City" (1973), Mr. Jacobs offers an informal methodology for evaluating neighborhoods and change using a general category of clues, including such obvious ones as "For Sale" and restricted-parking signs and such less obvious ones as the age and condition of street trees. His goal is "conscious, systematic observation, as opposed to haphazard visual experiencing," leading to a better, certainly a more sympathetic, understanding of the area under study. The observations should be made on foot, at leisure, during an active time and with another person, so insights can be shared.

Though all this might seem obvious, Mr. Jacobs notes that in recent years urban planning professionals have rejected such observation as "too subjective as a basis for serious action compared to more quantifiable, statistically oriented methods." In support of his contention that looking can be objective as well as creative and fun, Mr. Jacobs details case studies of walks taken in San Francisco, San Jose, Calif., Cincinnati, Rome, and Bologna, Italy, where he tested his methodology. He also makes good use of observations made in other cities here and abroad. The total is an ingenuous call for more realistic and sensitive planning practices.

24 July 28, 1985

Left, a series of curved steps in Cincinnati lends itself to informal seating and leads to Ohio River; inset, typical old building in Bologna, Italy; above, several turns in Lombard Street, San Francisco.
Letters

The Bonus Army Incident

To the Editor:

In a review of Kenneth C. Davis’s “Don’t Know Much About History” (Sept. 30), James M. Cornelius writes of the 1932 Bonus Army incident in Washington: “More than 100 were killed, including two infants. That is surely something we need to remember.”

Actually, it should be quickly forgotten, because it is untrue. The violent dispersal of the unemployed Bonus Army veterans was certainly disgraceful, but although over 100 of the marchers were injured, there were just the two infant deaths.

WILLIAM MANCHESTER
Middletown, Conn.

How Much of Your Story Is True?

To the Editor:

Apropos of David Huddle’s delightful essay “How Much of My Story Is True? That’s a Terrific Question!” (Oct. 7), having been asked that question many times about my plays and novels, I have finally come up with an answer: “If I told you they were all made up, you’d feel cheated. If I told you they were all real, you’d be embarrassed.”

I think it’s nonproductive, if not downright dangerous, for a writer to try to trace the origins of a work. Once when I had gone to some lengths to explain to a therapist where one of my stories had originated, he smiled and said, “You think so?”

ROBERT ANDERSON
New York

intelligence and would have got hold of “By Way of Deception” whether it had become a best seller or not.

ZACHARY M. BERMAN
Brooklyn

Curious, Yet Familiar

To the Editor:

Could Thomas M. Disch, who reviewed Thomas Berger’s novel “Orrie’s Story” on Oct. 7, develop his concept of “sincere and almost temperate misogyny” that is “justifiable, esthetically”? It seems quite curious, yet somehow familiar.

MERRY TUCKER
New York

‘Desegregating the Altar’

To the Editor:

I appreciated Martin E. Marty’s review of my book, “Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960” (Sept. 23). Mr. Marty asserts, however, that “most of the superiors general . . . used their Epiphany Apostolic College and St. Joseph’s Seminary to close, not open, the door for priests of African ancestry.”

It is true that as a result of a number of factors, including episcopal opposition to black priests, the living martyrdom of black Josephites, the near destruction of the society itself and their own lack of faith in black leadership, three Josephite superiors general between 1908 and 1942 limited the admission of blacks to their college and seminary to only an occasional candidate. But as I point out in the last two chapters of my book, with the
Nabokov: The Sorcerer’s Apprenticeship

By Michael Dirda

WHILE Vladimir Nabokov was growing up in St. Petersburg—he was born in 1899—his family employed 50 servants. As a boy, Volo-
dya was chauffeured everyday to and from the prestigious Tенишеv School. At 17 a wiry raffish young dandy and already a published poet, he inherited a country estate and the equivalent of several million dol-
ars.

By the end of this first volume of two in Brian Boyd’s comprehensive, magisterial biography, Vladimir Nabokov is 41 years old, virtually penniless, on his way from Paris to New York where he will be offered a job as a bicycle de-
ivery boy. In the next 20 years this Russian exile will coolly transform himself into an American author, create the most brilliant English prose style of his time, com-
pose a handful of masterpieces of which Lolita and Pale
Fires are merely the best known, and eventually retire to a life of quiet luxury at the Montreux Palace Hotel in Switzerland. There he will be attended by numerous
maids, valets and waiters: Like T.S. Eliot, he might say, “In my beginning is my end.”

But all this glimmers in the dove-grey future. In Vladi-
mir Nabokov: The Russian Years, Brian Boyd leisurely chronicles the achievements of a European writer, one who wrote nine novels, a handful of plays, dozens of stories and scores of poems, all in Russian, between 1914 and 1937.

After the revolution, Nabokov’s father—an able and admirable liberal politician—took his family to Berlin where a flourishing Russian community existed, some 300,000 strong, big enough to support over 80 publish-
ers. While Volodya ambled off to Cambridge to complete his education, his father helped establish Rul, soon the leading emigre newspaper. Not surprisingly the Nabokov family became a center of exiled Russian culture, which in early 1920s Berlin meant that Pasternak, Mayakovsky, Gorky, Shklovsky or Tsvetaeva might drop by. In 1922, though, tragedy struck: Nabokov’s fa-
thier was introducing an old ally at a political meeting when an assassin rushed the podium. V.D. Nabokov wrestled the assailant to the floor, and was immediately shot three times by an accomplice. He died instantly. (Fifteen years later his murderer would be appointed the deputy to Hitler’s minister of emigre affairs. Little won-
der that in her Berlin years Vera Sionim, later Vera

“The cradle,” wrote Nabokov in the autobiographical Speak, Memory, “rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of
light between two eternities of darkness.” After the death of his father, though, the otherwise irreverent Nabokov reveals an increasing fascination with the poss-
ibility of an afterlife, complete with spirits. This sense of other states of being, says—Continued on page 11

Michael Dirda is a writer and editor for Book World.
Vladimir Nabokov

Continued from page 1

Boyd, accounts for both the "propinquity" of Nabokov's fiction and its tendency to modulate into a spectral otherworld, Nabokov's first masterpiece, The Defense (1930), tacitly describes the competition between two spirits for the soul of the chessmaster Lushin. At the sur-

"Vera novel: "Rusian" play-
ing any amorous involvement.
(Dmitri's footnote insists that she
was one of several Irinas who flirt-
ed with the handsome young novel-

But Boyd, with a measure of diffi-

cult to sit at the right hand of Richard
Elliott's James Joyce.

That said, any follower of the
Nabokovian publishing industry can
divert the pastime in itself—will
wonder how this new life stocks up
against Andrew Field's pioneering
biographical studies. Late in Naboka-

Boyd returns repeatedly to the
theme of self and temporal
transcendence, but never so obtrusively as to
get in the way of good stories and anecdotes. The Russian Revolution takes place literally down the block while Volodya hardly notices, so intent he is on writing poems for his latest beloved. At Cambridge young Nabokov buys a second-hand edi-
tion of Dahl's four-volume Russian
dictionary and resolves to read 10
pages a day, translating Alice in
Wonderland into Russian (her
 heroine becomes Anya), footnotes with
Pavlov, plays chess with Alekhine, works as a grocery picker in Pro-

"A terrific

Boyd

In the 1920s and '30s under the
penname Vladimir Sirin, Nabokov
quickness established himself as the
great White Russian hope among
younger emigre writers. A drunken
friend even demanded that the new
Nobel laureate Ivan Bunin give
Nabokov his ring in tribute to the
younger man's superior genius.

Stalin: The Glasnost 

Revelations

Written by Walter Laqueur, a brilliant European historian, and
based on material never before available, this is a startling portrait
of the man who left such an indelible mark on Soviet and
world history. $24.95 Macmillan

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The book of

Dr. St.

with the genre of

with

O'Brien

A terrific biography:
intelligent, indispensable.

there can be few if any other novels in
which the heroine is introduced by the
sound of a flushing toilet.

As a biographer, Boyd, a profes-
sor of English at the University of
Auckland, writes a plain reader-
friendly prose, at once clear, effi-
cient and meticulous. Occasionally,
he will bring Nabokovian interpreta-
tions of Nabokov's poems or

"The Russian Years naturally builds toward an account of The Gift (1937), for many the greatest 20th-

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Looking for a Home

THE PEREZ FAMILY
By Christine Bell
Norton. 256 pp. $19.95

By David Rieff

O

NE OF THE more common complaints made against American fiction these days is that our best and most serious writers appear more interested in animating the private lives of their characters than in coming to grips with the times in which they live. There are exceptions, of course, novelists like Russell Banks, Don DeLillo and Robert Stone, who understand how artistically impoverishing it is to exclude politics and history from their work. Still, an uncomfortable degree our literature remains in thrall to a species of miniaturism, that view of the world where the private life exists in splendid, autarchic separateness. It is the great strength of Christine Bell’s second novel, The Perez Family, that not only has she dared to take on a great subject, the vicissitudes of exile, but to set her book in Miami, one of the most complicated and interesting cities on earth.

As with so many of the best Miami stories, Bell describes her in a wonderful, bravura passage, “She had been screwed by basic patriarchy by being born a bastard child. She had been screwed by aristocracy by being born to a maid. She had been screwed by military dictatorship by having her common-law husband die fighting for Batista, and her next lover—on Castro’s side, she wasn’t taking any chances—died in the Bay of Pigs invasion. She had been screwed by communism because the U.S. had skimmed the fat off Cuba before the revolution. She had been screwed by communism the most skillfully because it had promised. And promised. And promised. And promised.”

Unlike Perez, whose notions of America are vague in the extreme and who hopes only to return to Cuba for a visit someday, Dottie knows exactly what she’s after. “John Wayne, Elvis Presley, rock and roll, blue jeans, nail polish,” she tells the Cuban authorities—and here she might as well be talking not just for much of Cuba but much of the communist world—“I want everything you say I cannot have.” Dottie takes her name from her father, who finally arrive in Miami, and, as they remain held in the Orange Bowl waiting to be paroled, Dottie decides that the only way they will get preferential treatment in jobs and housing is to pretend they are married. To foster the illusion, she enlists a crazy old man to pretend to be her husband, and he tells her to pretend he is her son. The Perez family is complete. Juan Raul is persuaded that his wife has gone off with another man, and, in any case, his passivity is, if anything, greater than it had been back in his prison cell.

In the meantime, there is Miami to contend with. Bell’s Miami is the Cuban city of exiles, but Cuban Miami not as the honest burghers of the Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce might see it but as Elmore Leonard might present it on a reasonably benign day. Dottie, of course, takes the grifters and thugs and con-men in stride. In the end, after a series of misadventures, some of which are essential to the plot and some of which seem calculated to let Bell have fun with Miami’s baroque seaminess, Perez finds his wife and Dottie her stand-in for the Duke. Neither union is a success; however, it is by no means an improbable denouement in that painful, improvised world called exile.

Some American writers have complained that the tragic history of other countries, while undoubtedly making things worse for writers as citizens, is a boon to literature. There, as Philip Roth once remarked ironically, it often seems as if one can say nothing but that everything matters, whereas here one can say everything but nothing seems to matter. It stands to reason that as the new wave of immigration fills America not only with people but with their tragic stories, writers conscious of history and politics will start to give the miniaturists a run for their money. The Perez Family is a step in that direction. It is witty, charged and full of life. Although, like most books the end is something of an anti-climax and the writing, though exuberant, is often excruciatingly sloppy, the book is by any measure a welcome antidote to the prevailing style and, particularly in the first half, considerably more as well.
My wife and I recently returned from a sentimental excursion to Ireland. All my life, friends have called me "Irishman," because of my name, McNulty, and since before this summer I had never been in Ireland and knew little or nothing about it, except those of Third Avenue and Boston, I felt like a fake. Now I spent a couple of months in Ireland, and I am still no Irish authority, a few small things did happen to me there that I am glad to have happened to me.

When we came to go was that we had a windfall of about four thousand dollars. The money was unexpected, but I had a joint impulse to waste it. Perhaps not to waste it, exactly, but to spend it on unnecessary things rather than put it aside in fearful anticipation of a disaster, four-thousand-dollar size. We'll dribble it away," I said venially, "with an automobile here and a new suit there, and a television set we don't want; and, first thing we know, we'll be gone and nothing to show for it. "We could go to Ireland," my wife said, and I was astonished. "I have an idea you've always wanted to go to Ireland," she went on, "but when I think of it, I don't ever remember your saying so in so many words." This was the surprise to me, because my wife not only a small part Irish, the other parts being New England Yankee and English and French.

I myself am what the Irish call a Narrowback. The term is neither praise nor disdainful. It is merely a sorrowful truth about us American men who were born here of parents who came from Ireland. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, our fathers came to this country with small education but broad minds and strong muscles, prepared to do such work in the United States as called for that equipment. Succeeding here to a greater or lesser degree, they gave us, their American-born sons, as much schooling as they could, and with some education turned to less laborious means of earning a living. So, figuratively or literally, through an accelerated process of evolution favored by the Irish, our backs grew narrower. It is my belief that every Narrowback is pleasantly haunted by the notion that someday he will go and see about Ireland for himself. When my wife said what she did, I replied, "That's the thing to do — go to Ireland. And let's have no more concern over what happens to our little box of money." "That's right," she said. "The hell with it." A strange thing for a wife to say, but a most pleasant thing to hear.

The trip decided upon, my first impulse was to noise the news modestly around our neighborhood, at Seventy-second Street and Second Avenue. Everybody knows Ireland is only twelve or thirteen hours away by plane, but a trip to Ireland seemed to me a sizable project. Besides, I didn't want to go by plane. I wanted it to be farther away than thirteen hours, and we'd go by ship and have a lot of talking about it beforehand. Our neighborhood, which comprises a certain few blocks where we know each other, by sight anyway, is small and nicely gossipy. I started the news around by going to Maxie Slavin, the tireless little hundred-and-fourteen-pound man who runs the newsstand at the corner of Second.

"I want you to stop sending the papers to the house, Maxie," I said.
"What's the matter?" he asked.
"Any trouble?"
"Oh, no, no," I said. "We're going away for a couple of months. We're going to Ireland."

Maxie smiled a big grin. He comes from Minsk. I noticed an odd thing in the next few weeks: when you tell people you're going to Ireland, they smile almost as if they were going themselves. I imagine that if you say you're going to Paris, people say something like "Oh boy, oh boy!," with the implication that you're going to polish off all the women and drink up all the wine. When you say England, maybe they say "Yeah?" When it's Ireland, they smile. I don't know why this is.

"Gee whizz! Ireland!" said Maxie. "Galway Bay! Blarney Castle! Going to Ireland, huh? You're a lucky guy! It's a great spot, they say. When you going?"
"I don't know yet. In a few weeks, maybe. Just beginning the arrangements," I said.

"Well, why am I going to stop the papers so soon?" he asked. "You could tell me just before you go away'll be time enough."
"That's right," I said. "I'll let you know."

It was probably a bad way to start the news around the neighborhood, but it was the only one I could think of.

The news got around. I went to the shop of Mark Tribus, the Jewish barber who always cuts my hair. "I hear you're going to Ireland," Mark said. "You going to Dublin?"
"Sure we'll be in Dublin," I said. "Right away I'll write a letter to my nephew," he said.

"In Dublin?" I asked dubiously.
"A man's going to Ireland, will I write a letter to a nephew in Chicago?" Mark said. "Certainly in Dublin! He got a big furniture business. A big man in Dublin, my nephew. Right away I'll write him."

"Do that, Mark," I said.

PART of the pleasant preparations was having a talk with a friend who was born and brought up in Ireland and in whose counsel I have great confidence. He is Timothy Athen Costello, who runs what he calls a "store," or saloon, at Forty-fourth Street and Third Avenue. (The "Athen," his confirmation name, was given him in honor of a nun in Ferbane, County Offaly, where he was reared.) We spread a large map of Ireland on the bar and together scrutinized it, I with the eyes of a greenhorn, he with knowledge harking back to the period years ago when he was the driver of cars rented to visitors in Dublin.

"I'll be raining most of the time," Tim said. "Do you have only a skinny raincoat, or have you something with a little weight and warmth to it?"

"Skimpy," I said.

"Then first thing is get a raincoat," he said. "I'll rain every day, and it'll be cold in the mornings and evenings, especially cold for Americans. A hefty raincoat, the first thing."

He took a pencil and made rings around four or five places on the coast. Then, with an appalling gesture of dismissal, he swept his hand down through the whole middle of Ireland. "This," he said, "you can skip. You'd find it very tiresome and dull. The coast is grand. It was as if on a map of the States he had eradicated in one motion all America between the Rockies and the Appalachians.

"Tell me this," Tim said, dropping his pencil point near Cork. "How do you feel about Blarney Castle?"

"I am determined to avoid Blarney
Shades of Scheherazade

The harmaid went back to humming "Mañana," with no more thought for Irish folklore, and after a Guinness I went on out and found Tadg Murphy's house. His first name is pronounced Tige, as if it were short for "Tiger," and it is the Gaelic version of Timothy. He is a soft-voiced, scholarly man, whose wife's brother lives in the Bronx. Murphy, who speaks the Gaelic language, has spent years going about in the rural parts of Ireland, seeking to preserve the vanishing lore and making written records of ways of life that are disappearing. He promised to find an Irish storyteller and take my wife and me to hear him.

A day or two later, the three of us met at noon and drove for an hour or so, to the foot of a mountain by the sea. Then we walked up past a farm, on the slope, through mist and rain, to a fine, substantial cottage. Two dogs came out to wag us in. Within—and it was warm after the chill rain of the mountain outside—was the scene so well known to millions who have never been in Ireland—the white-washed walls, the turf fire burning, the dogs and the children at their ease upon the floor, the furniture simple and scrubbed, many holy pictures, pictures cheaply made but sincerely revered, on the walls. An old man was seated by the fire, his back as straight as the haft of a T square, his cane in his hand, and his eyes as young as if he were twenty-five; they were not the blue Irish eyes, but gray-green. He was, we were told, eighty-one years old, and his name was O'Connor, the English form, coincidentally, of "O'Conaire," of the Galway statue.

Murphy explained to him that the Americans wanted to hear him tell a story, and he demurred, only slightly, on the ground that if we did not understand Irish, what would be the sense of his telling a story in that language to us, and it the only language he ever told stories in? Murphy offered to translate from the Irish to us, and the old man began.

"I will tell you a story of a young
man who let a great angler be born inside him against the sea and what happened by reason of that," he said, according to Murphy. "He was strong and bold, and there was a great deal of goodness in him, even though he had the mischief that has to go with sailing on the sea, which he did, and he was a fisherman."

This was the first time I had ever heard the Irish language spoken at any length. It did not seem to me a melodious language; it seemed guttural. Every once in a while—and there is no foundation for the resemblance in philology, of course—it sounded like Yiddish.

"Now, I will not tell you of their courtship," the old man said, "because that was a matter between the two of them and not for us at all, but in time the young fisherman married the most wholesome, handsome young woman of his village, which is not far from where we are all sitting, by this very fire, although the village is down by the edge of the sea itself. God sent them a lovely child, and the two of them were happy with the little one, and the father, home from his fishing, would carry the baby in his arms, with his wife walking behind them, on the two streets of the village, so everyone could see—back and forth, back and forth, on the two streets, of a Sunday or even in the twilight on other days."

The children were quiet as he told his story, and so were the rest of us. His daughter-in-law was attentive, and yet all the while she was baking bread. A large iron kettle sat on the burning turf. Upon its heavy lid, four or five oblong pieces of glowing turf had been placed, and so an oven had been made of the kettle. From time to time, but without interrupting the story, the daughter-in-law would go to the fire and deftly lift the lid, burning turf and all, with tongs, and reach in and move the large loaf baking inside, then replace the lid. She was smoking a Sweet Afton cigarette.

"The young fisherman went to sea in his boat, and his comrades with him," the old man said. "And his beautiful wife and his dear child were down by the water's edge to watch the boat go farther and farther away, and at last they could see it no more. Now, that was the time an evil sickness put its cold hand on that village. One after another of the people died, young and old alike. It was only four days after the young fisherman was away on the sea. All the same, in that short time what happened was so bad there was nobody in that village had the courage to meet him, when at last his boat came in, and tell him. His darling wife and the child were dead. He went home alone, nobody to meet him, and he found out in that minute he was always going to be alone—no more wife and child for him. The young fisherman was swallowed by sorrow and madness."

"Now, I will not tell you of the wake and how deep-stricken the young man was, because you know that and you can think it more truly than I can tell it in my poor way. What do you not know, and I'll tell you, is that when his dear ones were buried and him alone, this terrible anger against the sea came on. One day not long after, when he had the drink taken, he was seen by his friends on a lonely part of the strand, standing with his feet in the water, and he was shaking his fist at the sea and roaring curses upon it. They heard him say this to the sea—they heard him say, 'I hate you and hate you and hate you, and so I'll beat you always. I'll go back upon you and I'll beat you. You'll try to take my boat, and I'll beat you and bring my boat home to the land again. You'll try to make me and you'll try to drown me, but you'll never have me, because I'll beat you, and I'll walk the land alone until I die in my bed. I hate you and hate you and hate you. You kept me away while my dear ones were dying, and if I had been here, I would have saved them and not let them perish.' That is what the poor, unfortunate man was roaring at the sea, and who could blame him for that?"

As the storyteller went on, his words took on a discernible rhythm and cadence. His dramatic pauses were magnificent, and now and then he would strike his cane vigorously upon the hearth, and the children by the fire would look up and stare. I tingled with the anger imparted by the storyteller as he repeated the young fisherman's mad talk to the sea.

"Away he went, back to his fishing," the old man continued. "But that is not the end of my story. A big storm came in two days and the village was full of fear. And it was rightly so, because all of them were drowned, the young fisherman and all his comrades. In a bay far away, his body was washed up not long after, and it had not been touched by the monstrous fish that commonly devour the drowned people in the sea."

Two Irish words became familiar to me as I listened to the old man talk. One was "agus," which means "and." Many sentences, coming after it, began with "agus." I had noticed before, in translations of Irish, that the other word was "sendh," pronounced almost like "sha," and it meant "yes" or "so." It also began sentences.

"They brought the young body back to his village and they buried him in the cemetery there," the teller said. "Now I must tell you it was with this cemetery. A fine land stretched out into the water on the side of this finger of land was farthest away from the sea, the most peaceful place in all the village. And so it was there that centuries and centuries the dead of the village had been buried. Never the time there was an Irish lake waters been any other way than serene there where the cemetery lay. Not a handful of land had ever been stolen away by the sea coming though the cemetery spread down to within a few feet of the So, nine days after the young man was buried, in the grave, by the water, the most terrible in all memory arose. Three went on, and never had anybody the like of it. For the first time it happened, the monstrous fish sought the fingers of land the people stayed far back from and prayed for the end of the So, the storm ended at last and people went out. And they saw when they saw the great sea had brought about. It was the bigness of the damage that was frighten and struck silent—it was at this—it was that the waves of the storm, the clutches of the sea, had reached in and torn one grave. It was the grave of the fisherman who had shaken him the sea, and his coffin was gone never again was it seen."

Slowly the old man swept his eyes around at his listeners to the end of his story.

"We thanked him and got up. We said, 'You have some tea?' the daughter-in-law asked timidly after lifted the kettle of bread from the table. We said that it would be too trouble for her and anyway on was waiting for us back at the house. "You will leave my house, having a cup of tea and some and butter," said the old man. "We had it, and it was tea and fine bread and butter. We bade the daughter-in-law bye at the door and started.
Many sentences, coming after pauses, began with "agus." I had noticed that before, in translations of Irish stories. The other word was "readh," pronounced almost like "sha," and it means "yes" or "so." It also began many sentences.

"They brought the young man's body back to his village and they buried him in the cemetery there," the story-teller said. "Now I must tell you how it was with this cemetery. A finger of land stretched out into the water. Now, on the side of this finger of land that was farthest away from the sea was the most peaceful place in all that village. And so it was there that for centuries and centuries the dead of that village had been buried. Never in all the time there was an Ireland had the waters been any other way than most serene there where the cemetery was. Not a handful of land had ever been stolen away by the sea coming in, although the cemetery spread quietly down to within a few feet of the water.

So, nine days after the young fisherman was buried, in the grave nearest by the water, the most terrible storm in all memory arose. Three days it went on, and never had anybody seen the like of it. For the first time ever, it happened, the monstrous waves reached over the finger of land. All the people stayed far back from the sea and prayed for the end of the storm. So, the storm ended at last and the people went out. And they stood silent when they saw the great havoc the sea had brought about. It was not at the bigness of the damage that they were frightened and struck silent. It was at this—it was that the mountainy waves of the storm, the clutching hands of the sea, had reached in and torn away one grave. It was the grave of the fisherman who had shaken his fist at the sea, and his coffin was gone and never again was it seen."

Slowly the old man swept his keen eyes around at his listeners to signify the end of his story.

"You'll have some tea?" the daughter-in-law asked timidly after she had lifted the kettle of bread from the fire. We said that it would be too much trouble for her and anyway our dinner was waiting for us back at the hotel.

"You'll not leave my house without having a cup of tea and some bread and butter," said the old man sternly, in English. We had it, and it was fine tea and fine bread and butter.

We bade the daughter-in-law good-bye at the door and started to go.

McMullen's Homespun

Exclusive tweed in a casual cardigan suit—designed by Dorothy Cox

out into the rain, the two dogs wagging farewell as they had wagged a welcome. Suddenly, the old man, who had remained seated, appeared at the door. He took me by the arm and addressed me in his slow, halting, but precise English. "Do you see what I have done?" he asked softly. "Without passing a solid thing from my hand to yours, I have put words into your head, and they're the words of a story. Now you will carry the story back in your head to America, and perhaps you will tell the story, too, or perhaps you will write it down. And after a while I will die, but over in America will be a story of mine going around, without ever stopping from going, one to another, and so I won't be dead at all, in one way of thinking it. That's what I have done this day. God bless!"

When anybody asks one of us Narrowbacks why we are going to Ireland, we usually say we want to see the little village our parents came from. That was one thing in my mind when my wife and I were planning our trip. My father came from County Clare, from the region around a town whose name does not sound or look Irish to an American; it is Lisdow MMA. My mother came from around Ballyhaunis, which is a town in Mayo. (In Gaelic, the prefix "Bally-" means "town of.") Now, to come right down to it, I've never known much more about their birthplaces than these names. Other Narrowbacks I've talked to are in the same fix; we're pretty vague about background. Vague or not, there's quite a pull back to those places. Over the years, in the rare times when my eyes fell on a map of Ireland, two names stuck out from the hundreds—Lisdow MMA and Ballyhaunis.

But on the Britannic, going over, I began to shy away from Lisdow MMA. The guidebook described it as "renowned for its Spa," and said, "Attention centres on the recent analysis made by Dr. Monroe, F.I.C., of Bath (England), an acknowledged authority of spas, who found that all the waters of Lisdow MMA contain the very valuable therapeutic element iodine, in addition to their other constituents."

My people were of the soil, and I never connected them with spas and the resorty air that goes with them. This bit of prose about Lisdow MMA was far from the white-cottage, burning-peat reveries of years, so, as I say, I began to shy away from Lisdow MMA. We never did get to Lisdow MMA. Ballyhaunis was something else again. I really one day when early in the morning town my mother near Ballyhaunis was a market-drawn carts toward the town caravans on their covered w children happy wagons or trad one wagon, women. "It's no we believe that gypsy- wife observed. able that they we their own."

The square place, was busy and people. This for us, set aside of pigs to the man and pork-butcher thing for me about Ballyhaunis was away from the deserting my aunt felt at home, too. I belonged there. faces looked rich from Seventy-six- seldom, if ever, in the notion that them as I wandered pecked in at the down at the stone stones beside the I stopped by the late twenties when his cart. He didn't seemed friendly or come by, the pigs bring to ventured to ask around awhile.

"I'm wanting, he said. "Tell I should go to Mil.

For a while I was an American tongue, evident what they were said. "Do you have your own here—a litt getting along relatives in Mil you ask.

"I have a con asking me to co said. "Do you a to do, sir?"

"I was won't place of your own played. "I do," said
Complex Machines vs. The Writers’ Art

I AM writing this on a personal computer. It cost more than the majority of the world’s people earn in a year. Each time I tap a key, I am using more technology than was available to produce all of Shakespeare’s works, or Jefferson’s, or Thoreau’s.

Yet such writers spoke across centuries, with nothing but candlelight and pens. While today, with all the ROM and RAM at our disposal, writers are doing well to get out a phrase that is remembered until lunch.

What is happening? Does the message – and we who convey it – become less, as the technology of production becomes more? It is a good time to ask.

As the newspapers have been reminding us, it is now 10 years since International Business Machines put the first personal computers up for sale. In that short time, these devices have so permeated our lives that it is easy to lose track of the changes they have brought.

Mostly, the euphoric view of a high-tech future still holds sway.

Soon computers will work by voice, we read. They will be in every home. “The main event is yet to come,” gushed a techno-futurist from Silicon Valley to the New York Times.

But should we play host? It is time to stop gawking at computers, and start asking whether they are really making life better. The realm I know from experience, writing, gives me suspicions.

Recently I read over some articles I wrote back in the typewriter days (circa 1984). The mode of production was, by today’s standard, primitive. Yet the writing was no worse than what I turn out now with the help of Toshiba, Panasonic, and the WordPerfect and Microsoft corporations.

This seems true generally.

There has been no great advance in the quality of writing since computers came. Lincoln scratched out the Gettysburg Address on a scrap of paper. The current chief executive can’t come close to his level of eloquence, with all the government computers at his disposal.

If writing today isn’t any better, it is definitely more expensive.

The purchase price of a computer is just the entrance fee. After that come the software upgrades ($100 or so), an extended warranty ($240) – it never seems to end. For all this, the thing will probably be worn out or obsolete in three to five years.

An act of production – writing – has become one of consumption; computers do less to serve the writer than to enlist the writer in the service of the economy. For years, the central mission of the American economy has been creating a constant state of need.

Cars are built to wear out; the mass media propagates images of physical beauty and wealth to arouse unhappiness and a desire to consume. The computer is the full flower of this process – a perpetual need machine.

There is no denying that computers make revising more easy. (A few seconds ago this paragraph was somewhere else.) But convenience has a price. Back in the typewriter days, the retyping of whole drafts could coax out the larger rhythms of a piece. The clack of keys worked like the sound of raincars on a track, a kind of soothing percussion for the mind. Computers, by contrast, tempt one to fiddle endlessly with sentences. I used to think harder about what I wrote when fixing it wasn’t so easy.

But the real problem is the way computers always call attention to themselves. I never had to think about the old Royal manual. Change the ribbon. Get it cleaned every few years. That was all it demanded. This computer, by contrast, is a putative aid that requires constant attention. I have spent most of my time with manuals and the “config.sys” file.

All that is a diversion. Whether you write with a Mac or a No. 2 pencil, the task is pretty much the same. It is work not on an instrument but on one’s self.

“Oh, the joy!,” you can write will be the best you are.”Thoreau wrote that, and has since gone on to speak like that in a waiting room to meet in their waiting moments.

He wrote that with a pen. I doubt that a software upgrade would have helped him out at all. Had he been vexed by hard-line failures, he probably wouldn’t have been able to say it at all.
Women of Independent Minds

DAUGHTERS OF THE NEW WORLD
By Susan Richards Shreve
Doubleday. 496 pp. $20

By Valerie Sayers

USAN RICHARDS SHREVE'S fiction grapples with the most serious subjects—in the course of eight novels she has explored murder, injustice, racial tension—but her stories are told in a wry, sometimes even bubbly, style. It is this juxtaposition of light and breezy voice and weighty themes that is most fascinating about her work. The reader is hooked, but will the story ultimately be a slick one?

Shreve's novel, Daughters of the New World, is a story of five generations of admirable, determined American women who refuse to be defined by American conventions. I am afraid this description makes the women sound spunky—that awful word—and makes the book sound like grist for the television movie mill. I am glad to report, however, that Daughters of the New World is not a slick novel. A pleasurable read, probably one that will find itself a large audience, it is also a rich work of fiction.

Shreve's novel spans a hundred years, and one of her recurring themes is the changing face of death in our century. The book opens with the startling image of Anna Jermyn, Welsh immigrant, concealing her dead mother's body as their ship arrives in New York Harbor. After Anna, a servant, marries the son of a powerful Washington couple, they are cast out by his family and settle near the Chippewa reservation of Bad River, Wis. Anna faces the isolation of marriage to an unstable man, and in one of the novel's most powerful and moving scenes, she accepts the house of her dead mother's cape.

Anna's story, brief and lovely, is in large part epistolary: her letters to Melvina, a black woman, graces the gestures of the well-to-do. It is Sarah's daughter Eleanor who decides to go beyond sympathy and witness; after the brutal murder of a black woman, she finds a school for ghetto children. Her love for children affect the lives of others propels the narrative through the '60s and into its final confrontation with tragedy, American style.

All the women's stories are affecting, but many disappoint in these narrative wins. The book intends to be a series of snapshots, but sometimes the bland presentation of historical events is used to link the pictures. There's too much lightness in the face of tragedy, too ready an audience; I don't like it much that the fate of a daughter of Hendrik's—left behind in Europe as the Holocaust progresses—is never mentioned, and I find Amanda's and Eleanor's uncomplicated acceptance of their lovers' married status too,...

Living on the Edge

COLD TIMES
By Elizabeth Jordan Moore
Summit. 312 pp. $22

By Doris Grumbach

O NOT believe that the American proletarian novel died in the '30s, when Michael Gold, Joseph Freeman, John Dos Passos, Grace Lumpkin and John Steinbeck (with The Grapes of Wrath) described the plight of the unemployed, the slave-wage workers in mines and cotton mills, disenfranchised urban labor, the fight for unions and strikes, tenant farmers, Okies, hobos, camps, and the homeless riding the rails in boxcars.

The new proletarian novel is alive and well, and living, for the most part, in New England. It is populated by seasonal laborers, working-class whites, all of whom have lived in their small homes towns their whole lives, as have their daddies and granddaddies. They are poorly educated, they are closely related to each other, they lead lives of quiet and unquiet desperation, driven to acts of drunkenness, rape, violence, incest and cruelty by the poverty and hopelessness of their future, and the isolation of long, cold, unrelenting New England winters.

In rural Vermont, the genre is well represented by a writer of great skill and ferocity, Mary McCarthy Morris, whose much-praised first novel, four years ago, Vanished, was followed last year by A Dangerous Woman, another remarkable novel displaying her powerful understanding of the extreme behavior that grows out of deprivation and displacement from the mainstream of society.

Perhaps because of its chilling winters and long, dark days that seem to make way for fictional colorful acts of wild fierceness, the State of Maine has served as the locale of a number of good novels, none more so than mine is awarded to Carolyn Chute's The Beans of Egypt, Maine (1985) about the small towns around Portland where doggedly desperate people live out their lives in the humiliation and pain of poverty. There is also Elaine Ford's Monkey Day (1989), a fictional town in central coastal Maine, where hard-working Mainers on the edge of want and despair are caught between the con tact of violence and life and nature, and Elizabeth Pfeiffer's The Weight of Winter, 1991) writes with great wit and sympathy about the social inhabitants of a small town in far northern Maine.

Which brings me to the most recent work in the genre, a first novel by Elizabeth Jordan Moore which is expertly put together, competently written, and a fine "read," as we now hear such long, chronic novels described. Moore has written this novel in two rather similar working-class families, the Rudges and the Pembrokes, placed them near each other in and about the small towns near Portland, Maine, and recorded their lives over a period of thirty years, while a boy is born somewhat damaged, and another who grows up to have his life lost, or impaired, in Vietnam.

The families come together when the Rudge daughter is discovered to be the psycheically flawed Logan Pembroke, and separate when, in one of the only successful acts of rebellion and courage permitted these deprived victims of poverty, she leaves home for an independent life for herself and her daughter.

The novel begins at a very high pitch of tragic violence. Jarvis Rudge, a tenant farmer, sees his rented barn burn down in it, his crop of hundreds of chickens: "Slowly at first; then it shot through old hay quick as spring grass, caught ivy-like around timbers darkened by time and palms, knocked at the shingles like roots pushing through earth. The chickens scattered, the feathery torches. Black smoke rose in the glittering sky, now empty of stars, of moon. Many died before the flames or even the smoke could reach them, because, in the way of chickens, they scrabbled and scratched with their ancient feet upon each other's faces, and in tall piles in the tall narrow barn, they died."

Furious, Jarvis backs his rented truck into the shack the family lives in, gets drunk, lies out in the yard in a stupor, and then walks his family toward Portland after he has burned down the shack and seen the landlord drive the truck away. Now the family will move from job to job, place to place, resigned, angry, impatient to change their fate but, despite it, keeping alive an indestructible strain of love and concern for each other.

The chickens consumed by fire are a metaphor for the lives of these victims of social and economic inequality. Unskilled, unable to rise very far before injustice, lack of opportunity, they live a life of struggle and despair like no one who is born somewhat damaged, and another who grows up to have his life lost, or impaired, in Vietnam.

Coming Sunday, February 2
Witness to the Persecution

An excerpt from the memoirs of the late journalist Joseph W. Alsop offers fresh insights into one of the most shameful episodes in American history. Sen. Joseph McCarthy's reign of terror. In the Magazine.
Books of The Times

By Thomas Flanagan

UNTIL THIS HOUR. By Tom Wicker. 642 pages. Viking, $12.95.

S

deed in the New York Times, as it was known to the (or Second Bull Run), as it was called by the(userid:430) Northern forces), was fought from the 28th to the 30th of August 1862, the climactic battle of the Civil War. The Union army, under John Pope, had been defeated.

Lee had no choice but to act, although he knew the odds were against him. The course of the battle was determined by the combined forces of Lee's superior, giving to Longstreet the rest of nothing on the line along the


es Start

It's "World News Tonight" as the important results and developments as they happen. With a look at the latest in the daily news, Peter Jennings, host of "World News Tonight," on Tuesday's showroom, comedy contest, to "plug year at a second" if they did not.

But I have carefully spoken of "Until This Hour" as a "book," and Wicker himself, as he tells us in a postscript, thinks of it not as "factbook," as a "collection novel," as "first and last a novel." His dis- sidia for "fiction" is admirable, but it is nevertheless as historian rather than as novelist that he commands our respect here. The question of what fiction is and what it is not is one that recent criticism has made us aware of, but one thing re- mains fairly certain: Fiction lives by the energy of its language.

And Wicker's language were we to judge as the shrewd and much of fiction, is in trouble. He has a fondness for words and for feelings which are both so familiar, so much part of the ways in which Americans have learned to respond to the "Civil War," that his book is closed off from those centers of fresh imaginative energy by which fiction is concerned when the sun is not being "crimson," it is "dipping toward the horizon," "beating restlessly." Nighties are "reverberant" and bullets invariably "whine." Soldiers are "eager body-clutching at life while dealing in death," and when they die, their bodies slain into the earth, becoming part of it forever.

In " Until This Hour," there is a rather unique and "wild thing" into the arms of her lover.

Fargo Hart, the lover in question, is a General Longstreet and thinks: "There was little of the infallible Pete, that square body solid as a cai- se. As different from Jackson as beer from champagne—no, nothing liquid or fuzzy about either general. As different as a beer from a west- ern lager; put it that way." This is a moment, and not the only one, where Mr. Wicker takes us into the workshop where clichés are hammered into type, and we surprise him in the very act of discarding one cliché in favor of another. It might be thought that he is suggesting here the color- and texture of Hart's mind, and in- deed the novel's obligatory source displays him as a young man whose references are more vigorous than his imagination.

But Mr. Wicker's great figures, his Lee and Lincoln, Jackson and Pope, and Longstreet, are costumed figures drawn down from the attic of the American communal imagination— Lincoln lanky and Joshua, Lee gaunt, Pope pallid, and Longstreet out of the invented figures fare much better, nor the stories he has construed for them—unseen recruits and grit- tied, wary veterans, a dashing young Confederate general, a Quaker mill-plantation owner's wife who finds the strength to act without her husband's support.

The problems of "Until This Hour" as a novel, however, are inextricably bound up with its vivid, dense and exciting narrative of the Battle of Second Manassas. The writer of this kind of historical novel would be a general, deploying troops in their tens of thousands, at- tending to their artillery support and their screens of cavalry, sending out his skirmishers, fusing with his sup- ply trains, stiffening or calling tem- peraments, you cannot mold toward his characters, like a genera- tor's toward his troops, may be gener- ous and humane, but in the end he knows that he has to use them ruthless- ly, throwing them into the mouth of artillery or into murderous gaps in his line.

The language of "The Red Badge of Courage" seems almost new-minded, glistening and with its mission sharp to the touch. But then Stephen Crane was not writing a historical novel about the Civil War. The battle in which young Henry Fleming finds himself is said to have been based upon Chancellorsville, but Crane does not tell us this, and Fleming does not know its name, nor exactly where it is, nor why it is being fought. More importantly, Crane, novelist, contem- plate, was empowered to imagine and to lie. Mr. Wicker, one of the finest of American journalists, is claimed by truth. "Until This Hour" tells us all that the truth can tell us about Second Manassas.

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

ABOMIA BOLL BALE
CANE I ESK
BIL TRODE HEHE
BULL TRODE HOLS
EXILE TOE BORE
BULL TRODE GRIP
RESTLESS CAUSE
TURD TURD TURD
BILL TOWNесс DOL
TIP THE EAGLE
AND FISH

2/6/94
Hollywood Survival: 50 Years of Success And Oblivion

In his long career, Julius Epstein, at right, has won an Academy Award, in 1943 for “Casablanca,” with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, and is now receiving plaudits for “Reuben, Reuben,” starring Tom Conti, at top.

By ALJEAN HARMEZ

The wages of screenwriting in Hollywood are money and oblivion. Actors get notoriety and adoration. Directors get retrospectives and long obituaries. Producers get sexual favors and the ability to spend conspicuously on large yachts and beige tennis courts. Screenwriters rarely even get mentioned in the reviews.

Julius J. Epstein has written 50 movies in the last 50 years. He has been nominated for three Academy Awards and won once, for a film that went on to become one of the best-known Hollywood classics. Like many people who live in the sun-blasted Los Angeles canyons, he has also been burned out once— in the November fire of 1963. He was always known as a great dialogue man and when he watched his two-story house being destroyed on local television, he rose to the occasion. "Well, we always wanted a one-story house," he said.

In Hollywood, it didn’t ever pay a screenwriter to take himself too seriously. Today scripts are rejected, rewritten or rearranged at the whim of producers and directors, just as they were when the early studio moguls held absolute power. Ironically, it is still characteristic of Hollywood’s attitude toward screenwriters that, with rare exceptions, they remain anonymous even when they are successful. But Hollywood can’t do without them, and Mr. Epstein is a quintessential example of the breed.

For example, his Academy Award came in 1943 for “Casablanca,” written with his identical twin brother, Philip, and Howard Koch. And yet, only a film buff would know his name. Forty years later, he is basking in praise for his latest movie, “Reuben, Reuben.” He is prouder, much prouder, of “Reuben, Reuben.”

“There wasn’t one moment of reality in ‘Casablanca,’ he says. “We weren’t making art. We were making a living. Movies in those days were prevented from reality. Every leading man had to be a great sexual athlete. Every boy and girl had to ‘meet cute’ and the girl had to dislike the hero when they met. If a woman committed adultery, she had to die. God said, ‘Get that woman!’ Now the woman who commits adultery is your heroine.’

“Reuben, Reuben," which stars Tom Conti as a self-destructive Scottish poet with bad teeth cutting a sexual swath through the Connecticut countryside, is, says Mr. Epstein, his "finest piece of screenwriting, the most adult film I've written, and with no concession to any so-called box-office value."

Ironically, "Reuben, Reuben" is doing so nicely at the box office in
A Screenwriter's 50 Years of Success and Obligation

Continued from Page 1

gle theaters in New York and Los Angeles that its distributor, 20th Century-Fox, is trying a little television advertising in San Diego. If the ad

thetic behavior of the audience is enough, there is even a slight possibility that "Reuben, Reuben," which was directed by Robert Ellis Miller, is an adaptation, in this case of a 1964 Peter de Vries novel. "I found out early the grief of having your material tampered with," he says. "I decided I'd rather have the studio tamper with somebody else's material and save my original ideas for plays.

Mr. Epstein started in Hollywood as a ghost writer in 1934 and was, he says, the model for Julian Blumberg, the timid young nebbish whose

creenplays were stolen by the title character in Budd Schulberg's classic Hollywood novel, "What Makes Sammy Run?" By 1938, he had his first Academy Award nomination, for "Four Daughters." His screenplays include "The Man Who Came to Dinner" (1942), "Mr. Skeffington" (1944), "Romance on the High Seas" (1948), "The Tender Trap" (1955), "Light in the Piazza" (1962), and "Pete n'Tillie," from the Peter de Vries story "Witches' Milk," which brought him his third Oscar nomination in 1972. In 1978, he said his biggest box-office success was "House Calls," a hospital comedy starring Walter Matthau and Glenda Jackson. In general, he has written alone since his brother's tragic early death from cancer 32 years ago.

At the age of 74 and after 50 years in Los Angeles, Julius Epstein, is still a tourist here. "I have a feeling I'm living in a resort town," he says.

As if to add emphasis to his statement, his house is cut out of a cliff so sheer that the trees seem ready to hurt themselves over the edge, and his brick-lined swimming pool seems surrounded by air. He avoids having to discuss his accomplishments by fussing and hovering and bringing in coffee and dried papayas. He has made, he says, "only one contribution to the screenwriting craft. My brother and I freed the writer from having to work at the studio." He tells the stories of their decade as contract writers at Warner Bros. with the air of a raconteur who has told such stories often during the last 40 years. How Jack Warner met the Epsteins coming into the studio at 3 P.M. and told them to read their contract. They were to punch in at 9 each morning, just like a bank president. So they sent him an incomplete script and requested him to get a bank president to finish it. How Warner said one of his stories was terrible, Philiplooked at him in amazement and asked, "How can that be possible? The scene was written at 9 A.M." Then, in 1941, Philip Epstein had an appendectomy while the brothers were writing "Strawberry Blonde" for James Cagney. Working at Philip's bedside, they finished the script in half the usual time. From then on, Jack Warner said he could work wherever they wanted.

Each of the stories has a pinch of irony, a twist of self-deprecation.

How the "Casablanca" producer Hal Wallis, who wanted to borrow Ingrid Bergman from David Selznick, sent them to tell Selznick the story of "Casablanca" and Selznick was eating a bowl of soup at his desk and never looked up as they described "crooks, refugees pouring in, a mysterious man who runs a nightclub." At last, Julius Epstein said, "Oh, hell, it's a lot of junk like 'Algiers.' And Selznick looked up and nodded and we knew we had Bergman."

Others remember things differently. The Epsteins wrote great scripts, says Hal Wallis. "They came up with wonderful dialogue, bright lines, little punchy lines: Round up the usual suspects." Julie was picturesque in real life, and he imparted that to the screen.

Ron Haver, curator of film at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, credits the Epsteins with creating the "poignant love story" in "Casablanca" and admiringly quotes a chunk of dialogue: "I came to Casablanca for the waters."

"What waters? We're in the middle of the desert."

"I was misinformed."

And Fay Kanin, screenwriter and past president of the Motion Picture Academy, says: "Julie's more than a writer of good dialogue. He's a good constructionist. His stories have good bones."

The Kinskis at Work


While Kendra Kirchner looks on, Don Oppen throttles Klaus Kinski in "Android," a science-fiction story set in the year 2036 on a remote station in space, where a lone researcher has been involved in the construction of the perfect female android. Aaron Lipstadt's film opens on Friday at the Waverly.

He is a small man, bald-headed, and he describes himself - inaccurately - as "E.T.'s grandfather."

There is nothing tentative, nothing ambiguous, about him. Tidy and trim, bristling and fit, he strides and grows. His weight was down to 160 pounds it was out of season in 1929, the year he was captain of the Penn State boxing team and intercollegiate bantamweight champion.

"If you had a Buster Brown haircut on the lower East Side, you had better learn to fight," he says. There is an old photograph of himself and his brother in velvet suits and he is momentarily bewildered because he is unsure which of the two faces belongs to him. His father was, he says, proudly the only lively stable owner in New York who refused to pay extortion money to the gangsters.

Until he was subjected to a pace-maker last July, Julius Epstein ran five miles a day. Now, he says irritably, he is "chic but reduced to walking."

He prefers exercising to writing. His favorite author is the 19th-century British playwright, Richard Shepard, "because he had to be literally chained to his desk. I write only when I absolutely have to. If I wanted to work every day I'd have gone into the dress business."

He writes at most for two hours, with any handy pencil, on long yellow pads. Yet, he adds, any writer works 24 hours a day. The ending to "Casablanca" was written dozens of times, none a satisfactory answer to the question of whether and how Ingrid Bergman should break up with Paul Henreid or Humphrey Bogart.

Then, "My brother and I were driving down Sunset Boulevard, and we looked at each other and said, 'Round up the usual suspects.' Somebody must have been murdered. Who was murdered? Major Strasser. Who killed him? Rich! That was the way we got our ending.

The ending to "Reuben, Reuben" came into his head in much the same way. In 1909, while in New York writing one of his numerous flop plays, "But Seriously..." remembered, he says, at all, for Richard Dreyfuss's Broadway debut, he saw "Sophoffdor," a play adapted from the title section of Mr. de Vries's novel. "I thought the playwright had made the wrong choice, that the story of the poet McGlade was the dramatic story in the book," he says. "But it was more than half a dozen years later that the idea of adding a dog to the story and the irony of the ending popped into my mind."

Having figuratively turned the novel into a shaggy dog story, Mr. Epstein telephoned Mr. de Vries and said, "I want to write a script. Let's have the same deal we had on 'Witches' Milk.' " The deal was an uncomplicated handshake and an equal share of any money.

The script was submitted to almost all the major studios. "I went through the usual procedure of being turned down by every studio, which I was encouraged by," Mr. Epstein says. "It meant I had written something of quality."

Eventually, Walter Shennon, the producer of "The Mouse That Roared," handed the script to Tom Conti after a ms. of "Whose Life Is It Anyway?" in which Mr. Conti was starring on Broadway. "I suppose you couldn't get Pacino," Mr. Conti sighed. The next morning, Mr. Conti called and said he wanted to do the film.
He is a small man, bald-headed, and he describes himself—inaccurately—as "E.T.'s grandfather."

There is nothing tentative, nothing ambiguous, about his manner. He is direct, crisp, and trim, bristling and fit, he strides and glows. His weight is the same 135 pounds it was at six when he was six, and in 1899, the year he was captain of the Penn State boxing team and intercollegiate basketball champion.

"If you had a Buster Brown haircut on the lower East Side, you had better learn to fight," he says. There is an old-world air of passing and his brother in velvet suits and he is momentarily bewildered because he is unsure which of the two faces belongs to him. His father, he says proudly, the only lively stable owner in New York who refused to pay exorbitant prices for the thoroughbreds.

Until he was subjected to a pace-maker last July, Julius Epstein ran five a mile. Now, he says irritably, he is "chic but reduced to walking."

He prefers exercising to writing. His favorite author is the 18th-century British playwright, Richard Brins-<br/>&am<br/>p;ton, "because he had to literally chained to his desk. I write only when a book has to be done to work every day I'd have gone into the dress business."

He writes at most for two hours, with a pencil over a yellow pad, and works 24 hours a day. The ending to "Casablanca" was written dozens of times, none a satisfactory answer in the question of whether and how Ingrid Bergman should wind up with Paul Henreid in "Humphrey Bogart's.

Then, "My brother and I were driving down Sunset Boulevard, and we looked at each other and said, "Round up the usual suspects.' Somebody must have been murdered. Who was murdered? Major Strasser. Who killed him? Rick! That was the way we got our ending."

The ending to "Reuben, Reuben" came, he admits, head in one way. In 1960, while in New York writing one of his numerous flop plays ("Pomp and Circumstance," one of them, at least, for Richard Dreyfuss's Broadway-debut), he saw "Spofford," a play "transferred from the small theater on Mr. De Vries's novel. "I thought the playwright had made the wrong choice of play." And the stones."

McGlad was the dramatic story in the book," he said. "But it was more than half a dozen years later that the idea of turning it into a dog to the story and the irony of the ending popped into my mind."

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In actuality, Mr. Conti was Mr. Shenson's first choice. But the studio shook their heads harder. Mr. Conti was a big enough name. Finally, Taft Entertainment agreed to put up $2.5 million.

"In the old days when I was a young kid and movies cost $300,000 and they CO- "Reuben, Reuben," I'd say there was no reason to spend $1.5 million to cost so much," Mr. Epstein says.

"There were all those extra takes because some actress's hair was out of place. I watched with a shadow on her face. In real life, people have shadows on their faces."

In an era when the average cost of a novel was $300,000 and "Reuben, Reuben," with no defectors of salary, cost $2.5 million. "Reuben, Reuben" is a success. What will tomorrow bring?

"Today each picture is so terribly important for your career and well-being," Julius Epstein says. In the old days, "there was a lack of tension, a club-like atmosphere. Your fate didn't depend on whether you were writing one picture. Another was in production. Another was in theaters. If one slipped through, you were in good shape."

His polished wood desk is neat and tidy, with none of the messes that writers leave behind. "Julie travels light," says Fay Kanin. "We hold our papers. Julie doesn't have one. "When it's over, it's over," he says.

Of the man, as opposed to the writer, she adds, "He doesn't tell you what's in his gut. He covers any emotion with a laugh."

"If figure I've written enough junk to have fertilized the Sahara Desert," he says. But a paragraph later he is sighing that it is too late for him to produce. We will become by becoming a director. Wearing earphones, he sat in the North Carolina countryside, listen-<br/>ing, throughout the filming of "Reuben, Reuben"—a slight, mild man until some actor tried to change the rhythm of his lines.

Hollywood was more fun in the old days, he says, "but there is no doubt the quality, the body of work, is much much better today. Without censor-ship. People speak like real people to-day."

The ability to write good dialogue, he adds, is genetic. "You're born with it like a good football player is born. There's no way you can teach the Big Chill have good dialogue." Then, passionately, "I love good dialogue."

"In this film, I had a scene that said 'This is not an industry that calls for philosophic comment."

But he can't resist, philosophically demurring, "I've been in this business 30 years with a quip. 'I lose every picture with a special effect in it, including E.T. Plant-eating pictures! I lose pictures where people eat plants."

FROM "CASABLANCA"

"I came to Casablanca for the waves.

"What waters? We're in the middle of the desert."

"I was misinformed."
A REPORTER AT LARGE

PRAGUE AUTUMN

The revolution began in the late afternoon on Friday, November 17th. It was bitter cold. Národní třída, a main thoroughfare in downtown Prague, was barely visible in the thick smog. A few blocks away, at Charles University, a Communist-organized mass meeting in memory of eight youths killed during a student uprising against the Nazis in 1939 was just ending. Some five hundred students were slowly making their way down Národní toward Wenceslas Square, waving national flags and calling for the release of political prisoners and for the right of free speech and assembly. Suddenly, without any apparent provocation—as an official inquiry commission later determined—a squad of riot policemen fell on the marching students with tear gas, wooden clubs, and attack dogs held on short leashes. According to eyewitnesses, more than a hundred students were wounded, fourteen seriously. The “massacre,” as the assault was immediately dubbed by students and human-rights activists—though in fact no one was killed—triggered a chain of events which is still in progress. In less than a month, it broke the Communist stranglehold over Czechoslovakia, and led to the establishment of a new Czechoslovak government—the first since 1948 with a majority of non-Communist ministers—which has already committed itself to holding free elections within seven months.

The way these events unfolded surprised everyone, including the revolutionaries themselves. Nobody expected the November 17th march to be the beginning of the end of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, which, next to that of Rumania, was the most brutal and narrow-minded in Eastern Europe. Three days after the “massacre” on Národní, the playwright Václav Havel, a veteran human-rights activist and one of the leaders of a newly formed opposition group called Civic Forum, told a friend of mine that he was afraid the police would come for him at any moment. Nobody would have dared to predict then that within a few weeks a panicky—but still Communist-dominated—rubber-stamp parliament would elect this courageous, fiercely independent-minded man to the highest office in the land.

The dramatic scenes were following one another with an astonishing rapidity. A few had the simplicity, the poetry, and the moral of a fairy tale, such as this scene in Wenceslas Square: a week after the “massacre,” in the brightly illuminated piazza where in 1968 Soviet tanks had crushed Alexander Dubček's democratic reforms, the same Dubček (still officially a “non-person”) was feted by the masses in the largest anti-government demonstration in Czechoslovakia's history. I was squeezed into the heaving crowd below the balcony where Dubček stood in the limelight, and for a moment it seemed as though half a million people suddenly took a deep breath. He was older, white-haired, and slightly bent, but, with the same awkward smile and quiet pathos of twenty-one years ago, he was telling the crowd how happy he was that his dream of “socialism with a human face” was still alive in the young generation.

Even as Dubček spoke, the men who had deposed him in 1969 were meeting in conclave at the Party school at Vokvice, a gloomy, ugly Stalinist building near the Prague airport, as though they were preparing to escape the country. Ashen-faced, grim, and worn with fatigue, they could later be seen on TV confessing “mistakes”; the entire Party leadership resigned that same evening. Meanwhile, the crowd in the square was shouting “Long live Dubček!” and “Dubček for President!” It didn’t matter that his dream of socialism with a human face no longer moved most of the people who were cheering him. The crowd wanted liberty and human rights, not socialism, with any kind of face. Dubček was applauded as a symbol of the past, not as a guide to the future. His “reform socialism” had stipulated a one-party state. “There are no reform socialists left in Czechoslovakia,” said a man standing next to me in the crowd. “There are only survivors.”

In the days that followed November 17th, hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovaks suddenly found new courage after decades of brutally enforced lethargy and submission. Young people came day and night to light thousands of candles and place little flags at the spot on Národní where the “massacre” had taken place; striking students, in an “occupation” of all Czechoslovak universities, held teach-ins on democracy; and crowds gath-
erected daily in Wenceslas and at the nearby Staroměstské náměstí, the Old Town Square, where Franz Kafka had lived during his last years, while he was writing "The Castle." On November 18th, thousands of students, defying the police, assembled in Staroměstská, and a student leader named Martin Mejstrčík, one of Havel's disciples, proposed a national strike, to last until those guilty of the "massacre" were punished. ("The massacre was our Sarajevo," Mejstrčík said later. "A last drop into a cup already full.") The next day, thousands of angry people started gathering in Wenceslas Square at all hours to debate and listen to opposition speakers. Day after day they came, waving flags and banners and defying the police with cries of "We're fed up!" and "Svoboda!" ("Freedom!") and "Down with Communist tyranny!"

In Czechoslovakia for much of this century, an exceptional zeal for political, social, and cultural excellence has gone hand in hand with failure and defeat. Between the wars, Czechoslovakia was a leading industrial power and a democracy, the only country in Central Europe that did not go Fascist. Twice in this century—in 1938 (Munich) and in 1945 (Yalta)—Czechoslovaks felt very strongly that they had been betrayed by the West, and they have remained traumatized. Three times in this century—in 1939, in 1948, and in 1968—they lost their freedom without being able or willing to do a thing about it. For this they were sometimes disparaged as cowards. "Czechs make good comrades; nothing else," sneered the dying Lord Marchmain in Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited." George Kennan, somewhat more generous, wrote that they were "a remarkable little people, whose virtues and whose failings are alike the products of adversity." For decades, most Czechs and Slovaks were transfixed by their fate; many had come to see it almost as ordained by God—or, at least, by history and geography. They might try, on occasion, to subvert that fate by wit and humor, like the good soldier Schweik, but never to escape it. After 1968, there were a few cases of intellectual defiance, by members of Charter 77, a small group formed to compel the government to respect the Helsinki human-rights convention it had just formally joined. Charter 77 was led by an old philosopher (Jan Patočka) and a young playwright, then little known (Havel), and lacked an effective organizational framework. It was subjected to constant police harassment. More recently, there were a few public demonstrations by Prague students, but the protests always remained isolated and were always brutally crushed by the regime. (Last summer, after a demonstration by students crying "Long live Havel!" was dispersed with dogs and tear gas, the joke going around the university was that rents were going down on Wenceslas Square, because gas was free now.)

After the "massacre" on Národní, for the first time since 1969 the protests spread outside the universities into the streets. Each day, more people in Prague cried "We're fed up!" and "Enough!" and "Free elections!" In a pub on the outskirts of the city, a friend of mine saw a sign saying "BEER DRINKERS WAKE UP FROM YOUR STALINIST DREAM." All the museums went on strike except those run by the Party or the secret police—such as the Lenin Museum, where in twenty-six halls of almost unremarkable bad taste Lenin is celebrated as the redeemer of mankind. (On the day I looked in, I was the only visitor.) The theatres were also on strike, but they remained open to the public, and in the evenings the actors and visiting intellectuals engaged the audience in discussions on the need for democratic reforms. The symphony orchestras were striking along with the theatres and museums. To the posters in downtown Prague advertising the Czech Symphony Orchestra's concert schedule for November, flyers were affixed in mid-month saying "STRIKE. CONCERTS TO BE RESUMED UPON THE RESTORATION OF FREEDOM." Though Civic Forum was supposed to be coordinating all these efforts, most of them were spontaneous. Havel ran Civic Forum with other veterans of Charter 77—most of whom had been in and out of prison during the last twelve years—among them Jiří Dienstbier, who from 1968 to 1969 had been a Czechoslovak foreign correspondent in the United States, and Václav Malý, a Catholic priest denied a parish by the Communist authorities. Their headquarters was the Laterna Magika Theatre, in downtown Prague. Here they gave daily press conferences, which were attended by journalists from all over the world—and, from the third or fourth day, by Czechoslovak reporters as well. Here manifestos were written, flyers were sent out, and thousands of people lined up at all hours to register as volunteers. (Civic Forum has since moved to sumptuous quarters in a building vacated for it by the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Society.)

Each day, more posters and leaflets appeared on walls and in shopwindows. The walls of the main subway stations were completely covered with them. Some were mimeographed, others handwritten. There were many cartoons. One, showing a man lying on the ground, had the caption "I know I'll always eat shit but I'd rather do it in a free country." A comic strip entitled "The Birth of Socialism" showed an officer at the helm of a small boat giving the cue to a sailor at the oars: "One-two, one-two." In the second frame, the sailor throws the officer overboard and takes his place. In the third, the sailor calls out the same: "One-two, one-two," but there is no one at the oars. The most common posters read

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That means "End Rule by One Party." Others read "MARX IS DEAD," "40 YEARS OF LIES," "PLURALISM NOT BRUTALITY," "PUT AN END TO THE DARKNESS," "PUNISH THEM." By the fourth day, the people had taken over the capital and half a dozen provincial towns.

On the fifth day, TV reporters rebelled, and forced government TV stations in Prague and Bratislava to cover the protest rallies live—most notably those in Wenceslas Square. The square is Prague's urban center—a huge space, some sixty yards wide and almost half a mile long. Each day brought more people into the square. The first few hundred would come early in the morning and gather around the equestrian statue of St. Wenceslas, Czechoslovakia's patron saint, where candles lit the night before were still burning. They would hand out leaflets and make speeches over improvised amplifiers.
During lunch hour, the number usually rose to three or four thousand. People would cluster around different speakers, at the corners of the square. Early one afternoon, I watched an old man in a worn-out black coat and carrying a tattered shopping bag huff and puff as he climbed a stand near the statue to address a militant young crowd. He was Jiří Hájek, who had been the Foreign Minister in Dubček’s short-lived government. In 1968, he had criticized the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and had been a “nonperson” ever since. The microphone was not functioning well. He waited patiently for a young woman to fix it. Then, in a shaking but nevertheless convincing voice, he spoke. I noticed several men and women in the crowd with tears in their eyes, and Hájek, too, was crying, as he told the protesters that he was now too old and too tired for politics. “But I am with you,” he said. “I support your every move.”

The protests were not confined to the main square. Almost every day during my stay in Prague, I saw columns of university students marching through the narrow, cobble streets of the Old Town, waving flags and calling for the dissolution of the secret police and the establishment of “a government of laws.” Everywhere they went, people applauded. Prague could never have been more beautiful than it was during those cold autumn days, when visual pleasure was coupled with the thrilling promise of freedom. It is still one of the most beautiful and best-preserved cities of Europe. The air, as it is almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, is polluted by the smoke of brown-coal furnaces. But when the sun comes out through the smog, and is reflected from the yellow, brown, and gray sky, and great sculptured bridges and magnificent baroque palaces and squares, the city gleams like a stage set in the shadowy light.

A four sharp every afternoon, the main protest meeting took place in Wenceslas Square. News of it spread by word of mouth and over Radio Free Europe, which is said to be the most popular station in Czechoslovakia. Every day, the choruses of “Svoboda! Svoboda!” echoed through the dusk. On the first Sunday after the “massacre,” at least fifty thousand came; the next day, more than two hundred thousand cheered speakers demanding free elections and an end to Communist tyranny. Entire families came, including those of many factory workers and peasants from the provinces, until, on Wednesday, there was no standing room left in the square. The crowd flowed over into the side streets, waving banners and flags and crying “We’ve had enough!” and “Punish them!” Some carried pictures of Czechoslovakia’s founder, the great democrat and humanist Tomáš Masaryk. There were large contingents of workers from factories, each under its own banner. On Thursday, three hundred and fifty thousand showed up, crying “Jakš to the shoe!” and “Let him work for a change!” (Miloslav Jakš, the Communist Party chief, was responsible for the purge of half a million Party members after 1968. He would resign a day later; within a week, he would be stripped of his Party membership and threatened with prosecution for “serious offenses and errors of judgment.”) On Friday, half a million people crowded into the square and its side streets. By Saturday, despite snow and driving winds, there were so many more people that the meeting place had to be shifted to Letná Plain, where the Communist May Day parades had been held in the past. The number of those attending was estimated at eight hundred thousand, which meant that every third person in Prague and its environs must have been there. Pressed in the vast crowd that afternoon, I reflected that I was seeing a historically new meaning given to what Communists in the past had fondly called the “broad masses.” “Down with tyranny!” the masses shouted, and “Give us free elections!” Here was a genuine mass revolt from below, for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was the only one in Eastern Europe other than Rumania without a real reform wing. This was people power, and the people knew it. Czechoslovakia’s Prime Minister, Ladislav Adamec, knew it, too. He had just shed his customary three-piece suit and donned a black turtleneck shirt and a leather jacket to plead on TV for “national understanding.” He, too, was in the grandstand, beside Havel (whom only a few weeks earlier, in Vienna, he had called a “zero”), asking—no, begging—for “dialogue.”

I HAD spent a fortnight in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968, and I remembered the euphoria and optimism of those days. This time, there were few overt displays of joy. The only real public merriment I saw was during a Church-organized parade on St. Nicholas Day, December 6th. Whenever Havel was asked how he felt, he replied with a Czech proverb: “Don’t praise the day before the evening.” A line scrawled on a wall in Wenceslas Square—“We have won! Czechs are free at last”—was in English, and was widely thought to have been left there by a foreign TV team. No one I knew had ever seen its equivalent in Czech anywhere in the city. It was also the only example of graffiti I observed. Thousands of flyers were meticulously taped to the walls, but there were no graffiti anywhere. The mass protests were marked by an eerie calm. Sometimes one had the feeling of attending a prayer meeting. Even when over half a million people crowded into confined spaces, I never saw anyone push. Day after day, people thronged into Wenceslas Square, but the young trees planted there recently were never damaged. Day and night, people stood around arguing in small groups in the square; I never heard anybody raise his voice. In the thick of crowds, lanes were always left open for ambulances to pass through. Given what many Czechs have had to endure for most of this century, it was hard to see how there could be so much calm, so much orderliness, so much good-natured politeness toward the oppressors.

When the revolution broke out, inadvertently, on November 17th, the angry crowds could easily have killed any number of police and militiamen. Instead, students were seen kneeling in the street, with lighted candles in their hands, singing “Join us! Join us!” as they faced the armed policemen. The protesters were constantly reminding themselves and others to avoid vio-
I BEGAN WRITING A TRAVEL NEWSLETTER in 1981 because there did not exist a no-holds-barred, honest, critical, well-written, cost-conscious advisory for the discriminating and practical traveler. This was after a business career as an international marketing executive for Tiffany and Sotheby's. ENTREE is dedicated to value. We seek out the new and undiscovered to report to our readers before the masses hear. We attack the mediocre and are relentless with ripoffs. We are dedicated to witty, correct journalism. We fiercely protect ENTREE's rather privileged information solely for subscribers and we limit the number of people receiving the publication to 6000. Currently we have 87 openings available. A year's subscription (12 issues) is $59. All subscribers get a bonus—access to our telephone hotline which may be called at anytime for advice on hotels and restaurants in specific cities to which you may be headed. ENTREE is predicated on the idea that the best travel tips are secrets passed from insider to insider. Therefore all things we write about are personally inspected. Lastly, we do not send samples but guarantee you will be 100% satisfied or your money will be promptly refunded in full. Won't you join those discerning readers who read Travel & Leisure called "the pick of the travel newsletters" and rely on ENTREE for our monthly insights on hotels, restaurants and travel around the world before anyone else gets the news? Thank you . . . William Tomicki, Editor

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lence, to be responsible, to maintain order. Maintain it they did. No acts of violence were reported in Prague after November 17th, and there were only a few sporadic skirmishes in the provinces. In Prague, one had the impression of being in the midst of one of the most civilised, gentle—or melancholic—peoples on earth. After each mass rally, the crowd intoned the national anthem, which, with its slow, wistful tune, sounds rather like a lullaby: Where is my home, where is my home? Streams are rushing through the meadows. Orchards decked in spring's array Scenes of paradise portrayed.

It was common to see hundreds of people in the freezing cold waiting patiently in a line two blocks long to receive copies of a leaflet or put their signatures to a human-rights manifesto. A nineteenth-century politeness prevailed through this revolution. (Havel, in one of his press conferences, called it "the velvet revolution").

When a spokesman for Civic Forum repeated for the nth time, "We wish to avoid a constitutional crisis," one of the reporters present asked, "But why? After all, you want the government to collapse." The spokesman calmly replied that the government mustn't collapse—it must be reformed. Just as in the last century, when Czech nationalists preferred to negotiate for their rights with the Austro-Hungarian imperial bureaucracy, so the Prague rebels of 1989 were seeking a "negotiated revolution." The furthest the opposition went, outside the mass rallies, was to declare a two-hour general strike. "If by this strike we succeed in violating the sick economy of this country, it would be the best investment we could make toward its cure," I heard one speaker grandiloquently tell the crowd. But the strike was gentle, too: it was scheduled for the lunch break. The uprising in Czechoslovakia coincided with the uprising in East Germany, where furious crowds were storming government offices and the headquarters of the secret police. Everything in Central and Eastern Europe was confused: Germans were acting like Poles, and Czechoslovaks like Germans—who, Lenin once said, would never storm a railway station without first buying a ticket.

And yet at the end of little more than three weeks the protesters in Prague had secured—or had been solemnly promised—the fulfillment of nearly all their demands. The parliament passed constitutional amendments abolishing Marxism as the official state ideology and eliminating the Communist Party's "leading role," thus opening the way, at least in theory, to a multi-party state. It promised similar changes in the law to assure freedom of association and assembly. It granted amnesty to political prisoners. And it officially declared the Soviet invasion of 1968 "wrong" and "unjustified." (That declaration was of immense importance to the rebels. As Mirek, a character in Milan Kundera's "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting," says, "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.") President Gustav Husák, who had conspired with the Soviets during the invasion of 1968, resigned, and the parliament elected the anti-Communist Václav Havel to take his place. (To some, Husák was the most cynical, brutal opportunist in all of Eastern Europe. To others, he might have stepped out of Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon," for this former Dubcek aide had himself been purged and tortured and, after a famous show trial in the fifties, spent six years in prison for being a self-confessed "bourgeois nationalist.") An interim coalition Cabinet was formed to prepare for free elections.

This last item was the most difficult to secure. The new Cabinet was the first since 1948 not dominated by Communists. By coincidence, it was sworn in on International Human Rights Day, December 10th. The country celebrated the event with a vast chorus of factory sirens, church bells, and car horns all over Czechoslovakia. It was a moment of enormous emotional release. I was on the telephone to an acquaintance in Brno when the chorus started in that city. My acquaintance, a young doctor, stopped short in the middle of a sentence. I heard him speaking intensely to someone in the room, and when he came back on the line his voice was thick with emotion. "For the first time in many years," he said, "I have the feeling . . . the feeling . . ."
He stopped short again. Then he said, "You remember Kundera’s line ‘Optimism is the opium of the people?’ I don’t want to celebrate prematurely."

Among those appointed to ministerial posts were leading anti-Communist dissidents. One, the Slovak lawyer Jan Čarnogurský, who was a practicing Catholic, had been in jail just three weeks earlier. The new Foreign Minister was Jiří Dienstbier. The day before his appointment, his telephone—belonging, as it did, to a leading dissident—was still disconnected. As one of the founders of Charter 77, he had spent three years in jail beginning in 1979. At various times, before and afterward, he had been able to make a living only as a stoker. "Jiří is very worried about his tenants," one of his friends, an actor in the National Theatre, told me while Dienstbier was serving as a press spokesman for Civic Forum. "He has been away from his job for weeks, and is worried there might be a problem with the central heating."

Among the new Communist ministers was an economist named Valtr Komárek. A few days before his appointment, he held a press conference, which I attended, and he said that Czechoslovakia had been run since 1969 by a bunch of "mafiosi." The government was nothing but a "social-Fascist mafia," he said, and went on, "This surviving monster"—it was still formally in power when he spoke—"must be dismantled. There mustn’t be any attempt to compromise with it."

His last book on the ills of the Czechoslovak economy, Komárek said, had been banned by the government. In it he had advocated a swift return to a mixed-market economy. Asked what he thought of Communism, Komárek answered, "My education and experience have convinced me that Communism is nonsense... a fallacious utopia." Then, almost as an afterthought, he observed that he well realized how little moral authority he had, as a veteran Communist Party member. Still, he said, there was a desperate need for a new start. "Let us begin again, in the spirit of Beneš and Masaryk," said Valtr Komárek.

The situation in Prague lent itself to reflections on the ephemerality of power. Power was everywhere and nowhere. One minute, it was there; the next, it was falling into dust. Here was a Tiananmen Square in the heart of Europe, yet, except for the November 17th assault on the students (and within days not one Communist leader was ready to assume political responsibility for that), the regime had not made a single attempt to put down by force what the official media were still describing as hooliganism. Fear was widespread among the revolutionaries that such restraint would not last. Most Communist Party leaders were intransigent hard-liners, and some of them were in favor of calling out the People’s Militia, the Party’s private army. A week after the "massacre" on Národní, Defense Minister Milán Václavík caused a panic by declaring that the Army stood "ready to defend the achievements of socialism." There were constant rumors of troop concentrations around Prague. But nothing happened. A few hours after Václavík sounded his warning, he suffered a collapse and was rushed to a hospital amid rumors that he had tried to commit suicide. Almost two weeks after the start of the demonstrations, Civic Forum published an impassioned appeal to all members of the armed forces not to let themselves be "misused." Remember, "you come from the people," said the appeal. "Honor their will and protect their interests."

In retrospect, the fears seem unfounded. The rebels had the regime on the run almost from the first day. As a headline in The Economist said, "they just had to say boo" for the walls to come tumbling down. One after another, the main scaffolding of power fell or tottered. The dreaded S.T.B., the Czechoslovak secret police, was said to be in complete disarray. There was no trace of it during the street protests, and in mid-December it was put under the strict control of Minister Čarnogurský. From the third day on, none of the ordinary police, except a few traffic cops, were to be seen, either. All units of the People’s Militia appeared to have been withdrawn. (The militia was officially disarmed in mid-December.) The Communist press reflected the changes: on Saturday it was still ranting against street riffraff and anti-social provocateurs; on Tuesday the same people were being referred to in the same newspapers as protesters against unjustified police violence. The first Communist fellow-travellers to defect were the apparatchiks of the satellite Socialist Party, which for years had been a lifeless relic and loyal servant of the regime: on the fifth day, they offered Civic Forum speakers a balcony on Wenceslas Square to address the masses below. Soon even the nervous Jewish community joined in the protests. Before long, elements of the city and state bureaucracy, too, became accomplices of the revolution. Initially, the speeches in Wenceslas Square were delivered through hand-held megaphones. Then someone hooked Civic Forum’s microphones into the permanent city loudspeaker system. The speeches were now audible within a radius of one mile from the city center. Suddenly, Civic Forum had at its disposal mimeograph machines, telephones, photocopiers, computers, and a fleet of brand-new cars. Only a month earlier, you could not get a photocopy made in Prague without showing your I.D.

One morning, when it seemed that the rebels had already achieved much
of what they set out to do, I went to see Jan Sirobrsky, a high-ranking official on the staff of the Communist Central Committee. I asked him what role the Soviet Union had played in the events that were shaking up Czechoslovakia. He looked embarrassed and slightly harassed, and said, as though he were reciting a familiar text, that things were not done that way anymore. Then he assured me that the Party was "irreversibly ridding itself of past deformations." It was definitely abandoning its "leading role based on power and ideological monopoly." He added, with a thin smile, "We are no longer in need of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The Stalinists distorted this concept. It is often misunderstood. Marx and Lenin intended it to be a transitional institution, not a permanent instrument of repression." The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia might even change its name, he said. It intended to draw henceforth on "the democratic tradition of Europe and the Czechoslovak nation."

The self-confidence of the crowds grew every day. With each achievement, the opposition raised new, more audacious demands, and the Party invariably complied. To calm the public outcry, the Party boss of Prague, Miroslav Stepan, who had been held responsible for the "massacre," was made to resign in disgrace less than twelve hours after his reelection to the new politburo. Forty-eight hours after Prime Minister Adamec resigned—because, as he put it, he could not work under constant pressure from the opposition—his successor, Marian Calka, granted all the opposition's demands, and then some. The fear line shifted almost visibly. The same people who one day were frightened of a possible bloodbath, as in Beijing, were saying a few days later, "They won't dare shoot at us here. After all, this is the heart of Europe." Up to a certain point, the people were afraid; then it was the regime that panicked. On the day the Party agreed to join a government in which it no longer constituted the majority, a shocked veteran apparatchik was overheard saying, "A coup is taking place! The Party is paralyzed!!"

The old leaders fell over backward with statements of remorse for their "oversights" and "grave mistakes," inventing almost overnight a new identity for themselves and for their party. It was now a liberal body in favor of pluralistic democracy, they said, able and ready to compete with others in free elections. One morning, I heard a man say on the Radio Prague English-language broadcast, piped into my hotel room, that political pluralism had always been one of the tenets of Communism, from the days of Karl Marx—that Leninism had always favored freedom of speech and free elections. The results of this backpedalling were, at best, mixed. For years, the leaders had barricaded themselves inside their mental bunkers. They were now incapable of reading the public mood. Thus, they deluded themselves into believing that they would gain popularity by "rehabilitating" the half-million Party members purged after 1968, and inviting them back into the Party. "A senseless ritual," mumbled an old journalist, a Dubcek man purged in 1970, who survived the next ten years by washing cars. "They would like me to legitimize them," he told me. "But legitimacy they can only get from society."

The Party's concessions—abolishing the cherished principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, agreeing to a new government, disarming the People's Militia—were invariably too little, too late. According to one estimate, thirty percent of all Party members resigned during the first two weeks of December. A public-opinion poll was said to have shown that only fifteen percent of the voters preferred the Communist Party. (In the last free elections before the 1948 Communist coup, the Communists had won thirty-eight percent of the vote.) The Party was like a church without believers but with an inquisition, and the will or the ability to deploy that inquisition seemed to have faltered.

I asked a political scientist in Brno, a very perceptive man who had spent years in jail, about the Party's collapse, and he suggested that at a certain point, probably even before the beginning of the unrest, the Communist leaders "had lost their nerve." Because they were veteran Communists, their psychological dependency on Moscow had been too great, he thought, and President Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika had thrown them off balance. "Imagine an ultra-conservative cardinal being told that the Pope had been converted to Judaism," he said. The result was a kind of paralysis. President Husak himself offered proof of this psychological dependency when at one point in his resignation speech on TV he remarked, "As Comrade Gorbachev has rightly said," and then launched into a pathetic display of self-criticism.

Others claimed that the worst blow to the old regime was that the workers were joining the protest in ever-increasing numbers, even though Czechoslovak workers are by and large better off than any others in Eastern Europe. Another blow was that most workers throughout Czechoslovakia observed the two-hour strike called by Civic Forum on November 27th. The success of the strike broke another taboo. Prime Minister Adamec had pleaded in vain for a "symbolic" strike of a few minutes only, and had been booed by the crowd at Letna. The opposition did not want a symbol; what it wanted was, in Havel's word, a "referendum," and it got one.

A few days after the strike, I drove to Kladno, an important steel and mining center west of Prague. The grimy streets, covered with soot, as if struck by some Biblical curse, combined with the reddish-brown smoke belching from the chimneys to produce an effect of early-Victorian industrial abuse. Here, too, the walls were covered with Civic Forum posters. Kladno is the birthplace of Antonin Zapatoczyk, who was Czechoslovakia's second Communist President and the author of a basic Czechoslovak-Communist textbook called "Red Glow Over Kladno." A famous street here in 1905 helped build the mythic underpinnings of Czechoslovakia's Communist ideology. In the free elections between the wars, the Communists won up to forty-five percent of Kladno's votes.

In Kladno, I visited Jiir Wohanka, a young actor at the local theatre. The theatre was on strike. We met in a small room behind the box office, under a framed quotation from Lenin: "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no workers' movement." Tacked around it were sheets of paper
listing Civic Forum’s main telephone numbers in Prague. Wohanka told me that a branch of Civic Forum had been established in the theatre three days after the “massacre.” The next morning, its members could not get back into the theatre; overnight, members of the People’s Militia had changed the locks. That evening, Civic Forum held a rally outside the building. Eight thousand people attended it, Wohanka said. On the following day, they were allowed back into their theatre. Regular protest meetings had been held there ever since.

Wohanka told me that at first the protesters had encountered a certain reluctance among workers to join the revolt of the “intellectuals.” “A number of law students came out from Prague,” he said. “We started visiting factories.” At one meeting called to discuss the issue, a pro-Civic Forum miner stood up. He won over the audience by reminding it that a few years earlier each miner had been issued a new pair of work boots once every six months, then once a year only, and that during the past two years there had been no new boots at all.

On the grounds of the huge Poldi Steelworks in Kladno, I met the deputy head of the local Communist trade union, Vojtěch Wolf. He said that “nearly all,” of twenty thousand four hundred workers at Poldi had observed the strike. He himself had addressed the strikers from a grandstand. Wolf, a big, burly man in his mid-forties, told me that he had been a Party member since 1966 but supported Civic Forum. As we spoke, loudspeakers throughout the plant informed workers that the Communist Party factory cell was being disbanded. For years, I was told, no one could become a foreman at Poldi, or go on vacation in one of the fine worker resorts in the mountains, or get his kids into college on a scholarship without a little piece of paper from the secretary of the cell. “The workers’ support shifted the balance in Civic Forum’s favor,” Wolf said.

Several people I spoke to explained what was happening by citing Václav Havel’s parable of the greengrocer, which was becoming a basic text of the revolution. I heard it recited one evening by an actor in a Prague theatre. In Havel’s parable, a greengrocer is told to put a sign in his shopwindow saying “Workers of the World, Unite.” Few customers give it any thought. The greengrocer doesn’t care much for it, but if he doesn’t display the slogan he may not be able to spend a vacation on the Black Sea or get his son into one of the universities. By displaying the sign, the greengrocer merely proves his readiness to conform. The system is held together by ideologically articulated lies. It collapses the moment enough greengrocers have the courage to take the slogans down. “A single seemingly powerless person who dares to cry out the truth, and to stand behind it with all his person and all his life,” Havel has written, “has surprisingly greater power, though formally disenfranchised, than do thousands of anonymous voters.”

In one or two weeks last fall, hundreds of thousands of Czech and Slovak greengrocers were discovering that power. They were moved, no doubt, by events elsewhere, too—by the upheavals in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany. The assault on Národní appeared all the more outrageous because it took place a week after the Berlin Wall was breached. But the main impetus seemed to come from high-school and university students and from the world of Czechoslovak culture—the world of education, literature, theatre, and music. Václav Havel said at one of his crowded press conferences, “For twenty-one years, we have lived outside time. The students gave history back to us. We owe them deep thanks for their desperate courage.”

Havel was—from all we know, much against his will—fast becoming the brain, if not the leader, of what was soon nicknamed the “playwright’s revolution.” He looked extremely uncomfortable in this role; and he agreed to be President of Czechoslovakia only for a limited period, until a free parliament was elected. One of his first acts after assuming office reflected the flair and direction of his thinking: a mass amnesty for thousands of prisoners in Czechoslovak jails whom the ex-con- vict President considered victims of the barbaric Communist penal system. Havel is a slight, fifty-three-year-old man with vivid eyes and a shock of wavy red hair. He dresses simply, like an undergraduate. On the day he was sworn in, December 29th, the students, who had kept up their strike until then, hung up flyers in Wenceslas Square saying “We Love a President in Jeans and Pullovers.” As the son of upper-middle-class liberal parents, he was forced after the Communist coup to attend night school and was denied a university education. In the early sixties, he found employment in the experimental Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade), where he worked as stagehand, electrician, secretary, assistant director, and, ultimately, house playwright. After 1968, he was forced for a while to make a living rolling barrels in a brewery. He is not really a political man but, rather, a writer propelled into politics by the unbearable difficulty of being in Czechoslovakia. He refused to leave Czechoslovakia when he was offered the chance by the authorities in 1979, choosing to remain in jail. Nothing could have been more moving for many Czechoslovaks than the scene in Prague Castle when Havel was sworn in, or more surreal than when Communist Prime Minister Čalfa said on that festive occasion that Havel deserved everybody’s respect for facing up heroically to injustice and repression. It was as though Kafka’s Joseph K. had been retitled and acquitted.

I saw and heard Havel almost daily at his press conferences at the Laterna Magika. Two or three times, I was able to exchange a few words with him afterward, in the confusion that surrounded him. I came away with the impression of a man of charm, wit, and self-irony. I once asked him if and when he was going to write another play. He said that he hoped to arrive at an amicable understanding with the future Minister of the Interior which would let him spend four days a week writing and three in jail, resting from the new freedom. Four years of imprisonment had given him ample time for solitary reflection; he seems to have used it to probe the deeper meanings of his experience. (He was most recently in jail from February to May of last year, for attending a demonstration in Wenceslas Square during which people laid flowers on the spot where a student named Jan Palách had immolated himself as a protest against the
Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.) Havel’s plays and essays were still formally banned in Czechoslovakia on the day he was sworn in as President, though they had circulated widely for years in samizdat. The plays are full of grotesque humor—they owe something to Beckett and something to Orwell. Most of them have never been produced in Czechoslovakia, though there have been more than two hundred and fifty productions abroad, including two in Warsaw last February, which were attended by Poland’s Communist Prime Minister, Mieczyslaw Rakowski. Havel’s three autobiographical one-acters—“Vernissage,” “Protest,” and “Audience”—explore the conventions of authoritarian regimes and the corruption of language and feeling through subservience and conformity. Heinrich Böll was one of many who have been struck by his shy courtliness, and by a “love of order which has nothing to do with the politics-of-order whose victim he is.” After reading Havel’s letters to his wife from prison, Böll wrote in Der Zeit, “Beware! Here speaks a rebel, one of that dangerous breed, the soft and polite.”

The lonely writer, who had posed so many awkward questions during the dark years, suddenly found himself cast as a man of action, required to provide quick answers. As a leader of Civic Forum, he is said to have displayed iron nerves, tact, a good nose for his adversaries’ weak spots, and a fine sense of timing. I used to watch him stagger up and down the stairs of the Laterna Magika, overwhelmed with fatigue, for he was rarely able to get more than three or four hours of sleep. He preserved a robust sense of humor throughout. On the day the government began to discuss concessions with Civic Forum, and Prague was full of reporters and self-important anchormen with huge retinues, all clamoring for interviews, he asked an overflow press conference to please stop requesting exclusives. “I have received hundreds of such requests,” he said. “If I grant only a small fraction, I will have no time at all for the revolution. After the revolution I promise I will hold a press conference if need be a day or two days long to satisfy all demands.” Asked if he was a socialist, Havel answered that he did not know what that word meant. “I only know what it doesn’t mean.” (His English translator at the press conferences, an American-educated woman named Rita Klímová, remarked afterward that she had heard a greengrocer in Prague say that socialism was the longest way from capitalism to capitalism. Klímová has since been proposed as the future Czechoslovak Ambassador to the United States.)

Havel often spoke of “Europe,” a Europe conceived not as territory but as culture. Nostalgia for Europe is a characteristic of all the East European countries that believed themselves raped by “Asia” after 1945. But in no other East European country was there such a distinct clash between culture and power as in Czechoslovakia last autumn. In Poland, the opposition was rooted in a powerful Church and a popular trade union. In East Germany, the Lutheran Church was agitating for change and human rights, and there was a reform wing within the Communist Party, though it was not as strong as Hungary’s. In Czechoslovakia, there was neither. The only meaningful opposition came from a handful of prominent writers, philosophers, and jazz musicians—jazz was a form of protest in Czechoslovakia and was considered heresy—and from the young students to whom only culture gave a sense of a better life in a better world. In Czechoslovakia, where the struggle between reformation and counter-reformation had prevented the emergence of a national church, the world of culture had often been a breeding ground for liberal revolt—from the time of Magister Jan Hus down to the days of Professor Tomáš Masaryk in this century. A great book could be written on how, in our time, the Havel’s, Seiferts, Kunderas, Kohout’s, Hrabals, and Vačulíks were able to survive the age of darkness in a Czechoslovakia where Kafka was banned for years because his nightmares recalled everyday life. When all other points of moral reference were falling, culture alone—the novelists, playwrights, actors, philosophers, poets, filmmakers, artists, musicians—retained a measure of moral credibility, dignity, and ability to inspire the young. To think that it all started right under Kafka’s windows on Staroměstské náměstí! The Prague Autumn of 1989 was a victory of culture over power. 

—Amos Elon
Author!

Some bookish quotes for National Authors Day, which falls on Tuesday.

• "I hate the notion of gregarious authors. The less we have to do with each other, the better." —Thomas Babington Macaulay.

• "There is so much nastiness in modern literature that I like to write stories which contain nothing worse than a little innocent murdering." —Edgar Wallace.

• "An author who is too widely read is tempted to write for the least intelligent of his readers." —André Maurois.

• "Nobody writes if they have had a happy childhood."
  —Joseph Heresheimer.

• "The author who speaks about his own books is almost as bad as the mother who talks about her own children."
  —Benjamin Disraeli.

• "I can never understand how two men can write a book together. To me that’s like three people getting together to have a baby."
  —Evelyn Waugh.

• "Many contemporary authors drink more than they write."
  —Maxim Gorki.

• "No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money."
  —Samuel Johnson.

• "A bad book is as much labor to write as a good one; it comes as sincerely from the author’s soul.
  —Aldous Huxley.

• "We do not write as we want to but as we can."
  —Somerset Maugham.

• "An author is a fool who, not content with having bored those who have lived with him, insists on boring future generations."
  —Montaignes.

• "It takes a lot of loafing to write a book."
  —Gertrude Stein.

• "The first writers are first and the rest, in the long run, nowhere but in anthologies."
  —Carl Van Doren.

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CHARLES BESLER COMPANY,219T S.18th ST, EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

Oct 30, 1960
THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
The qualities which distinguish Naipaul's work are toweringly apparent now that the inevitable nervous condescension and proprietary anxiety have long since fallen away. We have to adjust to the perceptions and demands of a writer whose careful journalism is as enriching in its scale as the other 11 books that alerted us to the arrival of a master. It is abundantly clear that we get four flightless fragments which have a universal rather than an exotic or local application. He sets the easy (estee, elb) labels that would again diminish him into "an unlikely colonial", as of the first four sections of The Overcrowded Barracoon is headed.

"A writer is in the end not his books, but his psyche Naipaul observes in one of his articles. "And that myth is in the keeping of others". His is here talking of Steinbeck but the tag could of course be quoted around. In years to come there are sure to be many forays into Naipaul territory, books feeding upon books rather than the keepers of Cannery Row in Monterey drum up trade out of the Steinbeck "atmosphere". Seraje and the Amistad, is the first to open shutters with a useful, painstaking Introduc tion which thematically groups the first of Naipaul's writings under such chapters as Fantasists, Housebuilders. Travellers and Casualties of Freedom. Intelligent and discriminating, but somehow too literal, nose close to the page, and lacking the tension of personal reaction which is the justification of this sort of essay. Theroux concludes that "it is everything to the uniqueness of his vision, but a demonstration of the odds against him, that no country can claim him".

"Claim" is a word with some unconsciously apt subsidies hanging about it: slavery and indentured servants, for instance, as V. S. Naipaul's latest title again reminds us. A barracoon is an enclosure into which human beings were temporarily herded. The precise cruelty of the dictionary entry is extended into a metaphor for wretched Mauritians whose malnutrition of body and mind, unemployment, political impotence and physical confinement. People of all colours adrift without adequate sail.

Once this must have been how he knew himself too. In the first (and earliest) article, written in 1958, the young Indian West Indian Briton, unemotionally and vividly explores the cultural collisions, the micromies and fantasies and emancipations, the helpless ventriloquism, which now in aftermath must make up our total sensibility of the derangement we together inhabit.

Dennis Potter

Two Monday Books

The writer and his myth.
A novel at the shrink's

A Yale professor of psychiatry has taken for his work on a novel by Madame de Lafayette's 'Le Critique' and has, in the process, been introduced to a contemporary mental hospital. The novel, 'Le Critique' is a story of love, but the shrink's role is more than that. He is a psychiatrist who must deal with the emotional problems of the characters involved. The novel is a study of the human condition, how love and relationships can be complicated and misunderstood. This novel is a reflection of our times and the complexities of human behavior. It is a fascinating read for anyone interested in psychology and literature. It is a book that will stay with you long after you have finished reading it.
Golden Fleece

THE THORN BIRDS
By Colleen McCullough.

By WEBSTER SCHOTT

O much money has changed hands as a result of "The Thorn Birds" one should review Colleen McCullough's financial statement along with her novel. There may be as much drama there as in the book. Avon paid Harper & Row $1.9 million for paperback rights. The Literary Guild is distributing the book as its selection for June, and Hollywood is smiling in the literary shadows, dipping its pen in green ink.

Webster Schott is a business executive living in Cleveland.

Anne Tyler, Writer 8:05 to 3:30

By MARGUERITE MICHAELS

WO plus nine is eleven, carry the one," Mrs. Anne Tyler Modarressi says as she bends over 3-year-old Mitra and her math paper. "I don't think you should write down the one you carry — it's too confusing." Used cereal bowls and signs of school lunches already packed are scattered around the kitchen. Dinner is in the oven, but morning tea is still brewing as Mitra and her older sister Tehz slam the front screen-door on their way to school. It's 8 A.M.

At 8:05 Anne Tyler is walking up the stairs to her study. "I've learned over the years that I can't even put the dishes in the dishwasher," says Tyler. "As I close the door on the kids I go up to my room—like one of Pavlov's dogs. Otherwise I'll get sidetracked."

Thirty-five-year-old novelist Anne Tyler, mother of two and author of seven, resents being referred to as a housewife who writes. "Is John Updike a father of four who writes?" From 9:30 in the morning to 8 she is Mrs. Modarressi: wife, mother, cook, housecleaner, laundress. From 8:05 to 3:30, when school's out, she is Anne Tyler: writer. Monday through Thursday. Friday is for "groceries and snow tires."

"I have perfect control of time," says Tyler, "and I can organize it." Five minutes for a peanut butter sandwich lunch. Thirty minutes for "the highlight of my day"—the mail. A junk catalogue freak—"you can't imagine what people are selling"—Tyler knows all the mailmen who work her east Baltimore neighborhood and their exact schedules.

Now working on her eighth novel, Tyler doesn't see herself building up to "the great book." "I think of my work as a whole. And really what it seems to me I'm doing is populating a town. Pretty soon it's going to be just full of lots of people I've made up. None of the people I write about are people I know. That would be too boring. And it would be very boring to write about me. Even if I led an exciting life, why live it again on paper? I want to live other lives. I've never quite believed that one chance is all I get. Writing is my way of making other chances. It's lucky I do it on paper. Probably I would be schizophrenic—and six times divorced—if I weren't writing. I would decide that I want to run off and join the circus and I would go. I hate to travel, but writing a novel is like taking a long trip. This way I can stay peacefully at home."

The housewife and the writer are connected by index cards. White and unlined, "Around the house," one card reads, "Cobb wears kneecocks, with her housedress." There are cards scattered in almost every room of the house. And ball-point pens. The pen in the bedroom has a light on it. The cards—with their random thoughts trapped—are eventually filed in one of two small metal boxes. The blue box is the novel box. Divided by chapter number, the box also has "extra," "general," "look up," "short story" and "revise" sections. The second box is the short story box. Its categories are "details" and "first sentence." The Cobb kneecod card has a three in the left-hand corner, which means it goes to event three in the 11th chapter of the new novel.

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Anne Tyler

Continued from Page 13

Other cards for chapter 11 are scattered across the black-and-white checkered daybed on which Anne sits—"on the small of my back"—to write. Her novels are written in longhand with a Parker ball-point pen on white paper attached to a clipboard. "I used to use Bics," says Tyler, "but after a few hours the ridges became painful."

Her study has two large windows, but her eyes fix on the wall opposite the daybed. It's covered with family photographs and an eclectic collection of pictures cut from newspapers and magazines: a sepia photograph of her great-grandfather playing a cello up in the hayloft door of a barn—the same photo of Caleb described in "Searching for Caleb"; bare, empty room in stark black and white; and a hand-drawn line of poet by Richard Wilbur about sleeping, which reminds Tyler of writing "...step off assuredly into the blank of your mind... something will come to you."

Everything on the wall is framed; extra frames are in the closet next to the stacks of white paper and the Parker refill. The pictures are moved and removed, and the only constants in the room are the daybed and the bookcases—filled with almanacs back to 1948, Time-Life history books decade by decade back to 1870 and several photography books "just to sink into," says Tyler. "To fill up on when I feel empty."

Still, time "for thinking" and "for hearing my characters" is as important as the plain white cards and paper. She does much of her hearing from two to four in the morning—"an inherited family insomnia." When her children were little she slept through the night from fatigue, "and I wasn't half as productive as I am now. Five years went by between the second and third novels."

Her working rhythms were a long time coming. Born in Minneapolis, she moved around with her family—her father is a chemist—until they settled in a Quaker community in Raleigh, N.C. Never planning to be a writer, Anne Tyler would tell her stories just to get to sleep at night. Westerns, usually. At Duke University she majored in Russian but took the required English 101 with Reynolds Price. Before she graduated Phi Beta Kappa, Price introduced her to his literary agent. Then there was graduate school in Russian at Columbia in New York; library jobs at Duke and McGill University in Montreal; occasional short stories in the Saturday Evening Post, Harper's and The New Yorker; and marriage to an Iranian psychiatrist, Taghi Mohammad Modarressi. Not exactly in that order.

She finished her first novel, "If Morning Ever Comes," in 1964, but only after leaving the manuscript—almost on purpose—on a plane. She hates it and hates her second novel, "The Tin Can Tree." Her favorite is her fifth "Celestial Navigation," possibly because it has its central character, Jeremy, who never leaves his Baltimore block and lives life from a distance, is the closest Anne Tyler has come to writing about herself.

And she hates to research. "I wanted to do a fortune teller—Justine in 'Caleb.' Haven't you ever been tempted to have your fortune told? It would have killed it off instantly if I'd ever gone to one. Instead I bought a little dime-store Dell book—just to pick up the names of some of the card formations. It's a lot more fun to make things up."

But the first month of a new novel, according to Tyler, is not much fun at all. "It seems to me that very often the way I begin a novel is that I have these index cards—say a hundred. They are things that at one time or another I thought I would like to explore, maybe a conversation I've overheard..."
on a bus that I wondered where it was going or what it really meant. At every fifth stop or so a little click will go in my mind and I think 'boy that would be fun' and I start to expand on it and then I set the card aside. At the end I have maybe 10 cards, and they are such disparate things that the problem is how on earth am I going to get them all into one framework? I have to think a month before I can figure it out.

“Sometimes a book will start with a picture that pops into my mind and I ask myself questions about it and if I put all the answers together I've got a novel. A real picture would be the old newspaper clipping about the Texas girl who slashed ‘Elvis’ in her forehead [Evie Decker in “Slipping Down Life”]. With this novel, the one I'm working on now, a picture came very clearly into my mind from out of nowhere of a young man walking down a street of row houses in east Baltimore holding an empty baby stroller from the 1940's—one of those blue things with little white canework insets. There he went, and if you ask who he is and why on earth he's pushing an empty baby stroller—is he a man trying to take care of a small child? What are the complications?—then you can see a novel.

“My interest is character, The real joy of writing is how people can surprise one. My people wander around my study until the novel is done. It's one reason I'm very careful not to write about people I don't like. If I find somebody creeping in that I'm not really fond of, I usually take him out. I end a book at the point where I feel that I'm going to know forever what their lives are like. You know what Charlotte [in "Earthly Possessions"] is doing now. I build a house for them and then I move on to the next house.

“'I guess I work from a combination of curiosity and distance,' says Tyler. 'It seems to me often that I'm sort of looking from a window at something at a great distance and wondering what it is. But I'm not willing to actually go into it. I would not sit behind the windowsill and write about it. So all my curiosity has to be answered within myself instead of by crossing the street and asking what's going on.'

"I feel very strongly an urge to make a large space around myself at all times. I'm not really involved in a really tangled life and I have a lot of ways of saving myself—of simplifying life where it doesn't matter, so I have time for what does."
discover that her husband's aura of danger is not glamorous; it is dangerous, and it hurts. Yet, just as she half enjoys the edge-of-brutality games—at least at first—she needs that aura to be sexually attracted. That is the story of their marriage; it is the story of many women's marriages. Tip-toeing around her husband, desperate not to offend him, but confused by the arbitrariness of his fury (because it corresponds to nothing she recognizes in herself), she thinks, "Forget happiness, forget safety—think manipulation." And she understands that she must manipulate Sweets through her attractiveness and seeming docility just as he tries to control her through his rages.

"Sweetsie" allows Sally to ask questions in her own bewildered voice, questions that might otherwise sound n tendrally political, but whose answers, as well as the strength to act on them, cannot easily come from politics alone. Do men love themselves first—before their women or their children or their work? Do all men? And "maybe that's the right way... and women should emulate men in that." What does it mean that Sweets "loved to master what he loved... subduing, punishing," yet that she is the one who has killed, "like a man, like Sweets"? Does it matter that she didn't mean to hurt him? Should she be punished in spite of her intentions? And what becomes of the notion she grew up on that perfect love can change an imperfect lover? Must lovers come to each other whole, bleeding from no ancient wounds? In spite of all, because of all, she hates the world for doing what it did to Sweetsie, "Ruined a beautiful man." And when she refuses to destroy her husband’s reputation by describing his brutality in the courtroom, she wonders whose dignity is at stake, his or her own? Their life together, Sally insists to her lawyer, was more complicated than it could ever appear to a jury and a town of gossips and scolds.

When she is hailed as a feminist heroine by a group of local professional women (the price of whose boots alone could support her for a year), Sally, true to her lights, has contradictory feelings. If she is to be a heroine, it will only be by emerging from her "clean fury and muddled love" at her own hesitant pace, without the help of ideology. Mrs. Yglesias is sensitive to class attractions and antipathies, and, conscious of these complexities, makes the professional women seem neither absurd nor heroic in Sally’s eyes. Women are a class too, but the author does not make Sallyphy think that this gives her an edge over them.

II. BIOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

Dr. Komaki's extensive academic research into Biological Pacifism concludes that:

1. Even in the animal kingdom, the killing of mammals (animals possessing consciousness) is exceptional.

2. A meat-diet is unecomic from the point of view of nutrition and food production. For animals, are the consumers of all essential nutrients, and the green plants are the producers of all of them. For example, as the definition itself shows, the ESSENTIAL AMINO ACIDS—the essential components of ANIMAL PROTEIN—can never be produced by animals. 

3. The only role of cattle-breeding—in past days—was the biological concentration (not production) of the nutrients in a sort of a sort of plant.

4. Famous scientific biologists as Prof. Dr. Muuro, Fox, of England, Prof. Dr. Paul Chau, of France, regard the mechanism of all animals, except mammals, as a kind of a kind of mechanism like as an electronic computer, possessing no consciousness. Nobody, however, can conclude that fishes, birds or insects possess no consciousness. So—when mankind—must stop the slaughter of many—mammals—never stop killing all kinds of animals as soon as possible.

III. PHILOSOPHICAL CONCLUSIONS

In his collected works, Dr. Komaki concludes that:

1. One of the most important purposes of VEGETARIANISM is the all mankind's power for the eternal happiness of the all spiritual beings of the eternal and infinite Universe. (Not Only Earth).

2. The Universal Life is not only the Universal Law (Will) but also the Universal PERSONA possessing the Infinite Love, Wisdom and Power. And, therefore, the all spiritual beings must be immortal and must evolve to be completely happy. If not, the infinite Universe is the infinite wickedness.

3. We do not know the true mechanism. It is supposed, however, that a man is the wonderful complex of the living brain and the Psi Body or "Psi Information System", composed of Psi-1 and Psi-2 particles. The life span of the latter is supposed to be endless or very long, while that of the former is very short. (Prof. Dr. Hideo SEKI's English monographs on Psi Information System Hypothesis is obtainable from him, 5-11-3, Kamimura, Setagaya, Tokyo, JAPAN).

4. Christianity and Buddhism possess each vision of, and each know-how for, the eternal happiness of the all spiritual beings of the eternal and infinite Universe. In Christianity, this is via a Mediator warranteed by the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies. In Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, this is via a powerful chanting of "the phonetic and ideographical expression of Cosmic Peace" in front of a Mandala of TAISENJI. Buddha's complete prayer for the eternal happiness of the all spiritual beings of the eternal and infinite Universe.

Dr. KOMAKI will deliver an academic lecture for XIIIth International Congress of Nutrition, San Diego, Calif., August 16-21, 1981, and in main cities, U.S.A.

Dr. KOMAKI's Selected Works (Vol I., 276 pages, $12.00, Vol II, 286 pages, $15.00 Vol III, 121 pages, $7.50 plus postage) are available from American HISATOKI KOMAKI Foundation, 3 Bayne St., Norwalk, Conn. 06851.
Red Rulers and Black Humor

THE JOKE
By Milan Kundera.
Translated by Michael Henry Heim.

By IRVING HOWE

THE ever vigilant Party has already noted Ludvik Jahn’s individualist deviations: “You smile as though you were thinking to yourself.” A student in Prague during the 1960’s, Ludvik is a staunch Communist with but one chink in his ideological armor: He has a sense of humor. Irritated with his politically orthodox girlfriend — the kind called “goodthinkful” in Orwell’s Newspeak — Ludvik sends her a teasing postcard: “Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity!” Long live Trotsky!” A boyish prank? An innocent joke? Not on Ludvik’s life. He is soon brought up on charges at his Party cell and is exiled by a comrade, Pavel. Party and university expelled poor Ludvik, and he is shipped off, for ideological rectification, to work as a penal laborer in the mines. On his occasional leaves from the mines, Ludvik has a frustrated love affair with a frightened, almost speechless girl named Lucie. It comes, like everything else in his life, to nothing.

So begins “The Joke,” a dour and fate by the enormously talented Czech writer Milan Kundera, who now lives in Parisian exile. This novel, Mr. Kundera’s first, appeared a number of years ago in a botched English translation and has now been reissued, with the author’s approval.

Mr. Kundera started writing the book in 1962 and three years later submitted it to Czech publishers, aware that its spirit was diametrically opposed to the official ideology. It finally appeared in 1967, becoming a great success during the doomed, hopeful weeks of “the Prague spring.” When the Russian tanks crashed into Prague, “The Joke” vanished from bookstores and libraries.

Nor was its fate very much better in the United States. The first English translation tampered with the sequence of chapters and dropped entirely a crucial — and, I think, profoundly interesting — portion about Czech folklore. Mr. Kundera sent an angry protest to The Times Literary Supplement of London, but “I was powerless. Contact with the outside world was becoming more and more difficult in occupied Prague, and what with house searches and arrests, I had other things to worry about.” Now, later but not too late, Harper & Row has performed an act of restoration for which everyone concerned with modern literature must be grateful.

“The Joke” is a brilliant, flawed book. Its humor is of a kind more likely to evoke a grimace than a laugh. “Man,” writes Mr. Kundera in a new preface, “is caught in the trap of a joke (and) suffers a personal catastrophe which, seen from without, is ludicrous. His tragedy lies in the fact that the joke has deprived him of the right to tragedy. He is condemned to triviality!” — and never more so than in Ludvik’s attempt to gain revenge on Pavel, the friend who had denounced him.

We are now into the early 1960’s, and the mood in Prague has changed from zealotry to a weary cynicism. Ludvik, restored to a decent job but still embittered by his memories, plans an elaborate, cold-blooded seduction of Pavel’s wife, Helena, a lonely, sentimental and blowsy woman. The violation of the wife is supposed to cause pain to the husband. Ludvik arranges to meet Helena in a provincial town where she, a radio commentator, is to interview Jaroslav, an old friend of Ludvik’s, to his horror. Ludvik’s approach to his “Ride of the Kings,” the traditional folk ritual Mr. Kundera’s “A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography” is being published this month.

THE MAKING OF A WRITER
‘All I cared about was women and art’

By MILAN KUNDERA

From earliest childhood I heard my father play modern piano music: Stravinsky, Bartók, Schoenberg. But the public wanted Liszt’s “Hungarian Rhapsodies,” not Stravinsky. As a result, the halls where he gave his concerts were half empty. And, since I love my father desperately, I idolized modern art and disdained the public that preferred Liszt to Stravinsky.

When I was 15, I tried my hand at composing 12-tone music, and when I was 16, I read Marx. Communism enthralled me in much the way Stravinsky, Picasso and surrealism had. It promised a great, miraculous metamorphosis, a totally new and different world. But then the Communists actually took over my country, and a reign of terror set in. I was 19. I learned about fanaticism, dogmatism and political trials through bitter experience; I learned what it meant to be intimidated by power, to repudiate by power, feel guilty in the face of power and revolt against it. Expelled from the university, I lived the life of the working class. Later I played dance gigs with a group of musicians in the taverns of a mining region. The new world that opened up to me greatly whetted my curiosity about the people there; Why, I had to know, did they act the way they did in those incredible and cruel conditions? It was the curiosity born of that time which led me to become a novelist 10 or 15 years later.

The trumpeter in our band was a brilliant musician whom the Communists had ordered to leave the conservatory for political reasons. (Two years later, working as a bricklayer, he was killed in a fall from a scaffold.) As soon as the couples had drunk enough vodka to keep them otherwise occupied, he would chase me from the piano and play Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier,” which he knew complete and by heart, into the general din. Times like these made me grow to hate our century, hate politics and its crazy passions. I dreamed of the 18th century. I told myself that all I cared about in the world was women and art.

After my life calmed down a bit, I tried to return to my two basic interests. I had an easy time with women; I had a harder time with art. I painted, I dabbled in films and in the theater, I wrote poetry, but nothing seemed to satisfy me. I finally found myself when I set to writing my first novel, “The Joke.”

II

I was 33 at the time. On a visit to friends in the mining region where I had lived, I heard the story of a girl who was put in prison for stealing flowers from a cemetery for her boyfriend. I projected her back into the period when I had lived there. I imagined the life of a girl for whom sexuality and love were tragically separate, for whom sexuality was the antithesis of love. Her life then came together in my mind with the story of a man who seduces the wife of a personal enemy out of revenge, thereby turning the act of love into a splendid act of hate. Two stories of the dichotomy between love and sex. It is their counterpart that forms the novel’s framework.

Soon the theme of love and sex was joined by a number of others. The theme of the joke, for example. Ludvik, the novel’s hero, writes his girl a provocative card as a joke. The postcard is read by the police. Ludvik is expelled from the university and stigmatized for life.

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THE JOKE

Continued from Page 3

Helena's character is both his strongest and most problematic. For he knows that the falsities pervading public life must seep into that private life to which people retreat for shelter. Love means speech, and speech has become devalued. Only sex and violence can be undertaken without language. Mr. Kundera's characters turn to sex as a pure physical act they suppose beyond the reach of social controls and norms, but they are mistaken and soon their mistakes create the farce in which they have to face the pathos of their existence.

All of this is depicted with the virtuosity that no writer of our time quite matches. Yet there are troubling aspects too. Writers who portray degradation find it hard wholly to escape the stain of their subjects. Sometimes the trouble in Mr. Kundera's work is minor, an adolescent silliness accompanying sexual adventure. More important is a certain spirit of vindictiveness -- or so it appears to me -- in his treatment of a sexual relation. The scene in which Ludvik humiliates Helena is one of the most unnerving of its kind I have ever read, especially because there is no overt violence, only the absolute misuse of another person. I came away from this scene with the impression that some undetermined extent, Mr. Kundera the writer is complicit in the act of Ludvik the character, so zestful and even strangely joyous is the description of it.

In fairness I should add that most critics seem not to have been troubled by this aspect of Mr. Kundera's work. Only one, the British writer D. J. Enright, has felt obliged "to protest that Kundera humiliates [Helena] savagely, far beyond the call of necessity or decorum or even decency."

The only part of "The Joke" in which some sense of human worthiness prevails is in which Mr. Kundera writes with knowledge and affection about Czech folk culture. For he has a touch of comfort in the authenticity of a past in which folk could sing and speak without being manipulated by an omnivorous state. That he also realizes how little hope there is in the 20th century for the survival of such traditions only makes these pages all the more poignant.

Mr. Kundera's preface to this new edition of "The Joke" starts with an anecdote: "When, in 1980, during a television panel devoted to my work, someone called 'The Joke' a 'major indictment of Stalinism,' I was quick to interject, 'Spare me your Stalinism, please. 'The Joke' is a love story!'"

Well, yes and no. One sympathizes with Mr. Kundera's evident wish not to be typecast as a "di ssident" or "political" novelist, but the truth is that, even as his books tell love stories and offer meditations on folk culture, they are saturated with politics. Like his Ludvik, Mr. Kundera is trapped by the time in which he lives. And that, perhaps, is a part of the point that history has played on Milan Kundera, one showing farse to be the merest shade apart from tragedy.

MILAN KUNDERA

Continued from Page 3

Then Ludvik plays a joke on Helena, who never suspects that the reason he wants to make love to her is to take revenge on her husband, who was instrumental in his downfall. But fate plays another joke on Ludvik, who does not realize that the husband is no longer living with his wife and is thrilled at the excuse to shake her off. But the cruelest joke of all is played on every one of the characters by History. For all of them seek a political utopia that promises them paradise, and what they find instead of heaven is hell. The joke, which multitudes monotonously engulfing them all, is not "just a joke"; it is a category of human existence.

No, I will not go on enumerating themes in "The Joke"; I will stop with this final phrase. Without consciously trying to do so, I have arrived at a clear-cut concept of the novel. What I would call it is: the novel as
WHAT YOU’VE READ IS PRELUD E TO another, unfinished story. Now, Forgotten Man and Whistle-Blower are the same. I admittedly forgotten, am still alive, and my own up-and-down life story is inextricably part of it. The date is:

1929

And so, in the middle of my life, at last — and, for no reason remembered, became interested in the sense of smell. Books and common belief considered it, in Man, a practically useless, almost vestigial organ. I thought: Suppose it isn’t? — and kept on reading.

For relaxation, I wrote my first play. In innocence and ignorance, I sent it (unabridged and without even return postage) East to a famed Literary Agency. There — and miracles do happen! — a V.P. glanced at it; took it immediately to New York and sold it.

Mr. Asp, the first producer announced he wanted it.

Two weeks after I’d sent the play in, cold! Brandt & Brandt phoned that Jed Harris had taken the play and a Dramatists’ Guild Contract with Option Money on the play.

Mementos, rich, now, I found myself a home-y garage with a cost of running stewy of. Old ‘For Sale’ signs furnishings needed fuel. I was the first man to be moved from my new second home — that Public Library. And I was eating! — regularly! Life was good, very good, those Depression Days.

In the next ten years, I was the perfect model. I was the model for the summer, in Shubert Alley. I worked with my colleagues — battled, rather — over script changes. Afterwards, in free time, I was at the New York Public Library, continuing work on — you guessed it! — radio articles, the stock market broke in one scarily dry day. He gave up three plays he’d scheduled, including mine.

Another group optioned it, started work on it. Because of casting, rehearsals and so on, my Smell research suffered, but only temporarily, and it was a premonition of a goal almost within reach — something of major importance!

I handed it to Bernice at B & B’s Book Nook, then crossed the hall to the Drama Section and told Fremdman there, “I’m cured. To get that job,” 24 hours later, I was on the Super-Chief, Hollywood-bound with a year-long Universal Pictures contract in my pocket.

The good times ended a few years later.

Bernice returned my manuscript; reported that twelve major publishers had refused it. I was one more bad break added to others. I had done a foolish thing and would be paying for it permanently. For heavy money, I’d written a complete novel in 140 pages in forty-eight sleepless hours. A month later, I awoke, I found I was done with writing, forever. Brain and body had decided that the unnatural stress my writing had put them to wasn’t going to happen anymore. And they proved it! Every time I attempted creative work, my heart pounded, my

bombed scientific societies with his findings; was greeted with cold contempt ("Another outsider with a crazy idea!"").

1946

Years later, Bernice wrote that Tommy Dodd (Bless him!) had been thinking about my Ms. for years, and wanted it re-submitted. I got it out; discovered how carelessly put together it was. It needed smoothing, polishing. And, even in the shape it was in, I could do that.

For one solid year I worked on that script, word by word. This one thing, though, I added nothing: I took out nothing; I changed no thought, no statement. If the original hypothesis was true, I felt it should stand the test of time. I should add here that I’ve never changed it. As it was, fifty years ago, it is now.

1947

I sent the smoothed-over version in. Bernice told me that Tommy Dodd-Me had lost interest; however, she’d send it around again. It was unanimously rejected. Again, I put it back on the shelf.

Time passed, and more and more that script continued to bedevil me. I ought to do something — I felt I had to do something about it, and started saving nickels and dimes (that’s the way it was) toward a possible future publication.

1954

I had the money; I’d found a Vanity publisher — and then, my wife lost her job, my daughter had one more year at U.C.L.A. The manuscript went shelfward again. Once again, I started revving.

In 1959, I had enough, again. A publisher of art books took it on a spare-time, low-cost basis.

1960

Finally, it was a printed book.

We tried the usual things. Copies to reviewers — wasted. A few ads — in various magazines. An English trade journal, small but with worldwide circulation, printed a favorable review. We sent out a thousand copies of this to universities here and abroad. A little magazine in India reviewed it favorably. Orders came in.

We bought full page ads in U.S. and foreign magazines. More orders came in. A great many more orders came in. We’d reached the 500 mark. Then sales tapered off; stopped, I was old and tired. I gave up, completely.

Years passed. Then, surprisingly — not often, just every now and then, I began to get letters, always from undergraduates, expressing shock and bewilderment at finding, in a University Library, my 20-year-old book stating exactly what they were being taught in class as the newest developments in Smell studies.

One Harvard lad called me Long Distance, indignant in my behalf. He was going to tell his Professor this and that. I wondered who, Harvard man daring to bear his name? I wondered what happened to Yale men — it took ten years and a new Dean before they deigned to give me my Degree. I’ve never heard from the Harvard boy since.

People began sending me the odd order. More than a year ago, TIME Magazine printed as authoritative news, the tie-ins between Emotions and Smell.

I sent TIME a start of its article and a copy of my book, pointing out in it — as we had in paragraph — that TIME had presented as its latest scientific information. The magazine, having its own standard of news-worthiness, didn’t answer my letter or return the book.

Now, for an obligatory statement: others have worked and are working on the Sense of Smell, independently. It’s their privilege, of course. I hold no patents. So, after all, I am blowing no whistle; no whistle to blow.

Except this: so far as I can tell, no professor, Ph.D. or what have-you has ever admitted to any knowledge of my book. It’s been available, but apparently they’ve never seen it. Yet, those undergraduates have — and, like them, I wonder.

Let’s leave terra firma and return to solid ground. Back to those news-stories, Mark Okay on Emotions, I thought. Next to be discovered with fanfare and print, it would undoubtedly be DREAMS — The How? And Why? of them, or anyone mention the same right answers findable in Chapter XVI, pages 128-134 of ‘YOUR NOSE KNOWS’.

I decided to arrange for this ad. Even if it sells every remaining copy I possess, I won’t get back its cost. There’s no profit motive.

So why am I doing this? No doubt you’ve noticed through the years, a symbiosis between author and book. It gave me the most wonderful months of my life. Herewith, I’m trying to repay that debt.

And, one more thing — when I wrote it, I believed in this Hypothesis. After 50 years, I still believe in it and (Remember old Gregor and his wrinkled peas?) I think, maybe, that sooner rather than later, this page you’re reading will be looked back upon as my own small parish paper.

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35
vestigation into human existence.

III

A writer working on his first novel is not usually guided by a carefully conceived, personal aesthetic. His writing is much more spontaneous, more naive than it will be later. When I look back on "The Joke" today, however, I see, in embryo, everything I have tried to achieve in my novels since then.

1) The novel as an investigation into human existence. Which is to say, I have never considered the novel a form of confession. I despise indiscernibility both in life and literature. My life is my personal secret and no affair of anyone's. Similarly, I have never used the novel to describe social conditions or to expose them. That Stalinism is criminal is a well-known fact. It does not cry out to be said in the form of a novel. A novel makes sense only when it reveals an unknown side to human existence. True, the story-line is necessarily embedded in a specific social (political) context, but the only purpose the context serves is to enable us to see the human condition in a new light, from an unexplored vantage point.

2) The novel proclaims no truth, no morality. That is a job for others: leaders of political parties, presidents, terrorists, priests, revolutionaries and editorial writers. The novel came about at the beginning of modern times, when man was discovering how hard it is to get at the truth and how relative human affairs really are. "The Joke" is narrated by four characters. The author has tried to understand them all, but he never identifies either morally or emotionally with any one of them.

3) The novel represents a great intellectual synthesis. In addition to experience of life and the gift of imagination, it requires considerable knowledge. Whenever I write a novel, I do a great deal of research. "The Joke" contains a long essay on folk music. But far from revealing the "author's truth," it reveals the world of one of the characters. Without this almost scholarly essay the character would lack substance.

4) The novel is the only form of art capable of moving in time with complete ease. Yes, the novel is a "search for lost time," but a time as much collective as individual. Everything we do is governed much more than we realize from the depths of time: by traditions, myth, culture. Grabbing the link between the distant past and today is one of the possible goals of the novel. (Carlos Fuentes has realized it brilliantly in his "Terra Nostra."). I have incorporated the essay on folk art as well as a depiction of a folk ritual, The Ride of the Kings, into "The Joke" with just such a goal in mind.

5) The novel is composed like a piece of music, that is, on the principle of a theme and variations, the elaboration of a theme. The unity of a novel comes from several basic words, which gradually take on the force of philosophical categories. In "The Joke" they include the "joke," itself, the "lyrical age," "devastation," "revenge," "forgetting" and so on. Besides these "category words," a novel exploits several basic situations or images. In "The Joke" they include the idea of mystification or the image of the veiled face (Jaroslav fails to recognize his son, Ludvik fails to recognize Lucie, Helena fails to see through Ludvik's mask). A novel, like a piece of music, is made up of individual sections, each of which constitutes an autonomous whole with its own rhythm, tempo and articulation. In "The Joke" each section has its own syntax, and the final section is composed in three-part counterpoint.

6) "The Joke" has seven sections. At the time I wrote it I gave the number no further thought. With time I have come to see that I almost cannot write a novel otherwise. Even "Laughable Loves" has seven parts, and if the American publishers had not changed the stories' order (heaven only knows why they did it), it would present a clear prefiguration of "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting." In my latest book, which I am just now finishing, I have done everything I can to vary the composition. To no avail. I now realize that form, the architectural blueprint of a work, is something the writer bears within him as an obsession; it is an archetype, the irreducible pattern of his personality.

IV

Writers who have influenced me? Only after completing "The Joke" did I begin to formulate an esthetic of the novel and put together, a posteriori as it were, a literary pedigree. It runs as follows:

Plato: Characters defined by what they think of the world.

Rabelais: A boundless euphoria of fantasy that we all carry with us like a memory of paradise lost.

Laurence Sterne and Denis Diderot: Novelistic form as play.

Friedrich Nietzsche: The art of the aphorism. This is how the novelist must philosophize. Then contemplation provides the novel with beauty at its most intense.

Franz Kafka: The alchemy that combines the free imagination of dreams with a precise analysis of the modern world.

Hermann Broch: The novel combined with philosophy.

Martin Heidegger: Any word from everyday life as worthy of philosophical inquiry.

Georges Bataille: The philosophy of anarchy, the metaphysics of pornography.

Witold Gombrowicz: The rehabilitation of euphoria, of the joke, of play and frivolity in modern prose. "Great writers are always amusing." In France Gombrowicz's statement sounds disrespectful, even inflammatory.

V

An author writes a novel; the novel changes his life. When in 1965 I handed over the manuscript of "The Joke" to a Prague publishing house, no one believed it could appear in print. Its very spirit was unacceptable to the Communist regime. But Communism was imported into Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia) from without, from Russia. For that reason people there soon stopped taking it seriously and jumped at every opportunity to loosen, dismantle the political system. And for that reason in 1967 "The Joke" did appear.

I was 38 and unknown. I looked on in amazement as the book went through three large printings in quick succession, selling out in three days each time. A year later Russian tanks crossed the border. Czech intellectuals and Czech culture in general underwent atrocious persecution. Since I was blacklisted as one of the instigators of the counterrevolution, my books were banned and my name removed from the telephone book. And all because of "The Joke."

At about that time "The Joke" was published in Paris by
AN EPIC NOVEL
OF THE CIVIL WAR

In The Barefoot Brigade Douglas C. Jones writes about some of the most haunting men in the history of the American South...[It's] strength and heart lie in small events, individual antagonisms, boredom, waiting, slogging, hunger.

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Gallimard, and suddenly I had many French friends, friends who made it possible for me to move to France seven years later. Because of “The Joke.”

Six years after that I was granted French citizenship. Ever since, my native country has been Europe. I cling to it with the same desperate love I experienced clinging to my father when he played Stravinsky to empty halls. Poor Europe. Do you have any idea that the city of Copernicus, the city of Emanuel Kant, the city of Bach, the city of Goethe, the city of Franz Kafka, the city of Bartók—yes, all these cities no longer belong to Europe, that they belong to the Great Eastern Empire?

I have been thinking more and more about Chopin these days. The Russian occupation kept him from returning to his native Poland. He left in 1830, becoming a Frenchman without ceasing to be a Pole. On Sept. 19, 1863, 14 years after his death, Russian soldiers on the loose in Warsaw hurled his piano to the street from a fourth-floor window. Today the entire culture of Central Europe shares the fate of Chopin’s piano.

(This essay was translated by Michael Henry Heim.)

Thomas Keneally

Continued from Page 1

of 1,300 Jewish workers who escaped Poland’s cities of death because Schindler, against every probability, became a possessed man, ready to risk everything in a daring, almost flautet mission of rescue.

The versatile Australian novelist, Thomas Keneally, tells the true story of Schindler’s rescue effort in this remarkable book which has the immediacy and the almost unbearable detail of a thousand eyewitnesses who forgot nothing. The story is not only Schindler’s. It is the story of Cracow’s dying grays to and the forced labor camp outside of town, at Plaszow. It is the story of Amnon Goeth, Plaszow’s commandant and Schindler’s dark twin. Like Schindler, Goeth loved women and fine cognac; like Schindler, he was sleek, overweight. Schindler raked in the profits from his Emalia factory, Goeth raked them in from the plundered suitcases of Jews, the gold teeth, the extorted diamonds. If Schindler saved Jews, Goeth killed them: singly, and when he picked off workers with a rifle from his front porch, or in bunches, as when he ordered lines of inmates up a hill to be killed by his Ukrainian guards and buried in the woods. Goeth was distressed that his black market friend, Oskar Schindler, had been infected by the Jewish “virus,” as Goeth put it, but he helped Schindler almost whimsically in his embarrassing quandary: Since millions were dying, what did it matter that a thousand lived a year or so longer? Such was Cracow during the war: a hallucination, a madness, and it drove Oskar Schindler to his own saving madness.

According to Mr. Keneally, who absorbed archives of eyewitness material in a remarkable short time, it began in earnest one summer day in 1942, when Schindler and his latest mistress were riding on horseback in the hills surrounding Cracow. Below them stretched a suburb with a wall around it, the new ghetto. Shouts drifted up the grassy slope, an SS Action was in course. Schindler saw Jews being driven out of houses, lined up and sorted with the crazed orderliness that was the signature of the killing machine. On one street, a man resisted, and an SS soldier shot him in the head. Schindler noticed a little girl in a red coat turn around to watch. The SS soldier picked her out on the head and coaxed her back into the line. Schindler got off his horse and threw up. He understood now that the SS did not care who witnessed these acts, because the eyewitnesses, even the little girl in the red coat, would die too. Death would erase the Jews, and also the killing.

Schindler must have known that he possessed a genius of sorts. He bribed and cajoled like a master trickster, and when he had his greatest stroke, he would not merely save a life here and there, procure Aryan papers for a clandestine Jew, slip bread or money to an occasional inmate at Plaszow. He would save a thousand lives and, like a ferociously mocking god, he would do it for all to see.

Schindler obtained authorization to create a work camp in an empty lot next to his factory and house his Jewish workers there. He fed them out of his own pocket, stole medical supplies for them and managed to keep SS guards from entering the camp on any pretext. When an SS inspector showed up, he poured cognac down his throat before letting him onto the work floor, so that he would not notice the unseemly healthiness of Schindler’s workers. For three years Schindler manipulated officials who could, with a shrug, have consigned him to the death camps. He was arrested several times and released with the bemused blessing of highly placed officials. He slipped between seams of the killing machine, and he saved lives.

In 1944, the slaughter of Jews reached its final paroxysm. Auschwitz, only hours away, was a metropolis of death with, on a given day, half a million inhabitants. Schindler’s island of sanity shook, the cattle cars were never far: A flick of the pen, the transfer of names from one list to another in the infernal bookkeeping, and the machine would devour a thousand more lives without noticing. But Schindler applied his genius one more time. He traveled to Berlin, sent cases of liquor to well-placed generals at SS headquarters in Oranienburg. While Germany starved, he came up with hamper full of sausages and cigarettes. And he obtained permission to relocate his precious Emalia factory to the hills of Czechoslovakia along with his entire contingent of “skilled workers.”

Here Mr. Keneally’s narrative becomes heightened, almost operatic. A list of Schindlerjuden was drawn up by the Plaszow camp authorities: Those on it would live a little longer (and eventually be saved), those not on it would die now. Schindler’s “skilled workers” included rabbis, children, women, a girl dying of cancer, friends, anyone whose name he could remember. The list was a raft on a sea of millions. Among the convoys of Jews that ratted across Poland in cattle cars that fall of 1944, only the Schindlerjuden were not funnelled into the killing camps; only they, 1,300 on a tiny raft, reached the haven of those Czechoslovakian hills.

In his 1980 novel, “Confederates,” Mr. Keneally recreated...
Eugene Kennedy

Former priest, biographer of Chicago’s late Mayor Daley, now fiction writer, Kennedy says novelists are responsible for telling the truth about the world.

Chicago politics was again in the news the day PW talked with Eugene Kennedy. Richard M. Daley, chief prosecutor of Cook County and son of one of the last American big-city machine politicians, the late Mayor Richard J. Daley, had just announced that he would run against Mayor Jane Byrne in the February Democratic mayoral primary. Moreover, the final decision on who had won the Illinois gubernatorial race was postponed until a November 22 recount, as Cook County officials dreed out several cartons of mysteriously dampened and mislaid ballots that just might swing the close election in favor of Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson III.

For Kennedy, this was more of the kind of human, political drama that provided the setting for his second novel, “Queen Bee” (PW Forecasts, Oct. 1), published this month by Doubleday, which follows the rise of a woman to the post of mayor in the Byzantine atmosphere of Chicago politics. The twists and turns of the plot are so realistic that in “Queen Bee” Kennedy seems to have foretold Richard Daley’s announcement of the day before: near the end of the novel, Mayor Ann Marie O’Brien, who rose to the top initially with the help of and then behind the back of her predecessor, Mayor Thomas Cullen, a longtime machine politician, learns that Cullen’s daughter plans to run against her in the upcoming Democratic mayoral primary.

Kennedy laughs as PW notes the parallel of fact and fiction. But instead of gloating on what seems to be his pre-}

science, he praises the events in Chicago for their intrinsic interest and importance: “This primary race already has heightened elements of love, honor, family, tradition, corruption—all with the treasures of the city at stake,” he says. “And it is more than entertaining, entertaining as it is. It may be that the group that nomimates the next American president will take shape out of this election.”

These are just some of the issues that concern Kennedy, whose interests range from power, government, Chicago and Irish-Catholics to the role of writers in modern life and how culture can be made more humanizing. Kennedy is perhaps uniquely qualified to write about these themes. Born in an Irish-Catholic family in Syracuse, N.Y., he grew up in New York City and has lived in Chicago since the early 1960s. Kennedy was a Maryknoll priest for more than 20 years, during which time he was, as he puts it, “assigned” by the church to become a psychologist. He earned a Ph.D. and has been a professor of psychology at Loyola University since 1969. He is, of course, a keen observer of Cook County politics and frequently writes magazine articles on the topic. Altogether, he has written more than 30 books, mostly nonfiction on psychology and Catholicism, including such titles as “The Pain of Being Human,” “What a Modern Catholic Believes About Sex” and “The People Are the Church.” In recent years he has turned to politics and fiction to explore his concerns. In 1978 his biography of Mayor Daley, “Himself!” (Viking), appeared, and last year Doubleday published his first novel, “Father’s Day,” about the conflicts between a Chicago industrialist and his son who is a priest and president of the University of Notre Dame.

Kennedy identifies himself fundamentally as a writer, which for him carries a heavy weight: “I think novelists are responsible—like storytellers throughout history—for telling the truth about the world they live in.” He gives an example: “To learn the truth about the Industrial Revolution in England we turn to Dickens, and we cry and feel for what those people went through.”

Kennedy finds the novelist’s task increasingly difficult in the 20th century. “One of the problems for serious writers today is fighting against a manufactured world that’s full of surfaces,” he says. He blames television for much of the problem: “TV has created an impression of America through which people get life. It falsifies the world—there’s a discrepancy between reality and the media’s view of reality.” He gives a specific example: “On election night Dan Rather [the CBS News anchorman] kept saying, ‘This is what’s happening.’ As the returns came in, things didn’t happen the way he said, but he went right on saying, ‘This is what’s happening.’ He made it seem like CBS was the world.”

In the face of such distortion, fiction becomes what Kennedy calls “the last trustworthy instrument for rendering the truth of our times.” And on a personal level, writing fiction allows him to
explore topics he's merely "nibbled on" before. For example, power, one of the key elements in "Queen Bee," is what Kennedy calls "an issue in every household and family. In any situation, a human is ready to take it. And it is a theme rich in the American tapestry of life. We need to explore how power exists in human relationships, and it seems like the novel is a good way to deal with it."

For Kennedy, political power is crucial to life and culture. "Politics is managing people in their communities. The word for politician comes from the word for city, and the city depends on a large number of people with conflicting claims who must make compromises to allow the city to live and to exist. The politician is central to culture; he needs to mediate rivalries and conflicting claims, without which no culture exists. He needs to find human solutions to impossible problems."

"Whatever the other allures," he continues, "all politicians have the common desire to improve the world. I don't think they'd get into it if they didn't want to help people."

And despite his fast-paced, vivid account of the life of politicians in "Queen Bee," he says governing is not "a dramatic or romantic thing to do. It requires a willingness to master details about things that aren't intrinsically fascinating—like sewers, water systems, street lights. The great robbers are found in other walks of life: bankers, lawyers and MBAs are the enemies of the good life."

The question of power and politics leads Kennedy into his fascination for Irish Catholics, who, he says, have a "gift" for the mediation necessary in politics. "WASPs have always tried to make people good," he explains. "They produce politicians like [former New York City mayor] John Lindsay who winds up having a short political life. But the Irish have always understood that people are imperfectible. They accept compromise. They don't strike reforms that won't ever be effectuated."

Kennedy includes himself among writers like John Gregory Dunne and James Carroll who are "mining" Irish-Catholic culture much as "Saul Bellow has done with Jewish culture or Updike and Cheever have done with Protestant American culture."

He continues: "It's the end of the immigrant phase of Irish Catholicism. Most Irish Catholics are well assimilated into American life now. They're in the professions, in the academic world, and they no longer have to apologize and prove their Americanism. There's enough distance from the great immigrant era to allow the culture to observe itself."

At the same time, Kennedy sees a

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change in the Roman Catholic church: "These days the church has a friendly disposition and no longer sees the world as temporary housing. It has a new commitment to this time and place, to justice, to better race relations."

He notes that he wrote "a great deal" during his time in the church and laughs at a common misconception that priests and former priests who write may be at odds with the church: "I actually had a lot of encouragement from church authorities. I never had one word censored, and no one ever asked me not to write anything."

Kennedy returns to the subject of Chicago, which he calls "a gold mine." He explains: "It's a fascinating place, where I've seen what I'm attracted to presented on a manageable scale. It's a Catholic city and an ethnic city, and you still feel like everyone's ready to throw down their things and have a fistfight in the middle of Michigan Avenue."

Interestingly, one of the people who has helped him write about such a rough-and-tumble place is urbane Jacqueline Onassis, Kennedy's editor at Doubleday. When PW mentions her, Kennedy immediately says, "She's a lot of fun. She has a wonderful sense of humor and is an encouraging editor. She's insightful about motivations, character development, consistency and whether the experience does in fact ring true." And although there were other considerations, Kennedy says a large reason for his move from Viking to Doubleday was her similar move.

Kennedy also credits his wife, Sara, with having "great editorial influence, especially in taking things out. She's a psychiatrist," he says, "but she should have been a surgeon."

At the end of the interview, Kennedy returns to "Queen Bee" and admits that the inspiration for his novel came from imagining how tough it must have been for Mayor Byrne as a woman to succeed in the male world of Cook County politics. Still, he says, "you can't write a novel unless you surrender to the unconscious, which is a storehouse of plots. This may not lead you in a trendy direction, but I think I've written truly about what I know."

JOHN MUTTER

LETTERS

Hang On to ISBNs

In your Cross Currents section of Oct. 29 you quote Daniel Melcher as doubting the usefulness of the ISBN. One cannot deny his point: inclusion of ISBNs in Books in Print certainly requires more effort and increases the size and cost of the set. That effort, however, is well worthwhile. My staff make a point of establishing and using ISBNs in our book orders because we feel it helps our jobbers (especially those abroad) and publishers identify precisely the item wanted and does so more economically than other methods. ISBNs have also enabled us to easily identify publishers when omitted from the initial book purchase request. ISBNs would also seem to be a most logical identifier of book records held in computer storage. In summary, just at a time when librarians, jobbers and publishers are making more effort than ever before to use ISBNs, Melcher's remarks are a bit saddening. Please, let's not abandon the effort just yet.

DAVID T. BRAUTIGAM
Acquisitions Librarian
Westminster College
New Wilmington, Pa.

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I was saddened to read the report of Daniel Melcher's interview in which he expresses his doubts about the usefulness of ISBN. As one of the pioneer advocates of its use, he should be sobering the knowledge that ISBN has lived up to the expectations for it. The book industry is the envy of many other consumer products industries which realize that to be more efficient they sorely need this kind of aid. In fact the record industry is investigating bringing in an 'ISBN'-style system for itself. Let's hope that all of us who know what ISBN is doing for our industry will share these thoughts with Dan.

DEWITT C. BAKER
R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co.
New York, N.Y.

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As chairperson of the Book Systems Advisory Committee, which represents a cross-section of the book industry, I feel compelled to respond to Melcher's statement. The ISBN serves as a standard and simple method for those in the book industry to communicate with each other. At the urging of the United States ISBN Agency (sponsored by Bowker), booksellers, librarians and wholesalers around the country have been convinced of the accuracy ISBN provides in their ordering process. The ISBN has become even more useful to the entire industry in an era of increasing technical sophistication. Just compare the car and the computer. Melcher's comment: "Lovely gadget when it doesn't fail you." We can always go back to walking and green eyeshades.

STEPHEN BERNSTEIN
Avenel, N.J.

MEDIA

The Oregonian, Portland's daily newspaper, has combined its staff with the staff of the Oregon Journal, now defunct. Paul Pin tarich is now book editor. Book reviews will appear every day and a Sunday book section will be three to four pages in the "North-west" magazine. Send books and materials to: Book Editor, The Oregonian, 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, Ore. 97201.

Sportstyle, a new consumer magazine scheduled to debut in March 1983, will be a national four-color monthly devoted to the active/lifestyle. Send books covering fitness, health, medicine, sports, environmental issues, diet, fashion and other related topics to: Susan Roy, Sportstyle, 7 E. 12th St., New York, N.Y. 10003.

CALENDAR

Friday, December 3
American Society of Journalists and Authors theater party, "The World of Ruth Draper," Vienn's English Theater Production, adapted by Alan Levy, ASJA member; a one-woman show starring Ruth Brinkmann, 8 P.M. South Street Theater, 424 W. 42nd St., New York City. Tickets: $12, only through ASJA. Paid reservations required: Dorothy Stearn, ASJA, Suite 1907, 1501 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036; (212) 997-0947.

Wednesday, December 8

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PEN American Center symposium, "The Responsibilities of Translation," 8 P.M., the Gallery of PEN American Center, 47 Fifth Ave., New York City. Panelists: Maria Campbell, editorial representative; Thomas Colchie, agent and translator; Gregory Rabassa, translator; and others. Moderator: Peter Glassgold, editor and translator. Information: Christine Friedlander at (212) 255-1977.

Thursday, December 9

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A Louisiana Pageant of Calamity

BY REYNOLDS PRICE

ERNEST GAINES has won a sizable audience with his stories of the black and white Louisiana of his childhood. In a number of short stories and in novels like the early and tender "Catherine Carnier" and "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" (the latter the basis of an excellent television film), he has built handsomely on his firsthand knowledge of, and intensely ambivalent feelings for, that landscape. "A Gathering of Old Men" is again set in the bayou country of central Louisiana and employs characters closely related to those in his previous books. But in a crucial way, the new novel is distinctly different from the earlier work and is not so immediately attractive. If Mr. Gaines's old readers fail to adjust to its innovative method and conclusion, they may well be disappointed.

The time is roughly the present, although in so stable a society and so bare a fictional texture it takes a little calculation by the reader to establish a date. Beau Boute — the elder son of Fix Boute, a Cajun notorious for his violence — is murdered one morning in the black quarters of a large cane plantation. The young white girl, proprietor of the plantation unaccountably claims responsibility for the crime and summons nearly 20 elderly black men of the community to join her beside the corpse before the arrival of the racist sheriff. These men, too, will claim a role in the shooting in order to confuse the sheriff and the inevitable nightriders.

The old men gather slowly with their ancient hunting guns during a long and tense day. In the confrontation that follows (the first time the vigilantes have been challenged by blacks), suffocated years of communal guilt and hatred are revived and aired before violence breaks out. Two more men are killed (one of them Beau Boute's murderer) and many others wounded. The oddly comic trial of both vigilantes and blacks with which the novel concludes achieves a surprising but just resolution of the tragic events.

Mr. Gaines's narrative method has largely dictated his achievement. He has chosen to tell a complex and heavily populated tale through 15 first-person narrators, each of whom advances the plot in short, chronological monologues. Ten of them are black, most of them are male, none of them prove to be implicated in the heart of the action. They are nicely distinguished from one another in rhythm and idiom, in the nature of what they see and report, especially in their specific laments for past passivity in the face of suffering. Some of them, especially at the beginning, are a little long-winded and repetitively, in the manner of country preachers. But a patient reader will sense the power of their stories through their dead-level voices, which speak not from the heart of a present fear but from lifetimes of humiliation and social impotence. They are choosing now to take a stand, on ground where they've yielded for centuries — ground that is valuable chiefly through their incessant labor.

A good oral narrator is always ruthless with detail, with the decor and the visual atmosphere that have become such large components of the realistic American novel. Since the majority of Mr. Gaines's characters are oral narrators who, because of their rural Southern heritage, have adopted some elements of the entertainer's arsenal, they selectively exaggerate certain aspects of the larger story or omit others — in particular, the look of the landscape to which their lives have been devoted: the plantation house, the redneck tavern and the Cajun home that are the settings of the action. Mr. Gaines's method has forced him to sacrifice these potentially humanizing particulars, and the book that ensues is profoundly shaped by the choice.

What results is more nearly a pageant, a morality play, even a film script, than a novel. The imagining eye of a camera, to be sure, would provide us silently with dimensions that the reader normally expects from a writer. Would those palpable dimensions have impaired the meaning Mr. Gaines appears to have wished to convey? My own guess is that his meaning — some sense of conclusive battle (part victory, part rout) at the end of the meeting of long-entwined white and black lives; some leftover resonance of eventual wry justice in the lives of a few younger witnesses — would have been richer and almost certainly more accessible. Mr. Gaines has dangerously entrusted the work of visualization to the reader.

Still, in "A Gathering of Old Men" he has built, with large and single-minded skills, a dignified and calamitous and perhaps finally comic pageant to summarize the history of an enormous, long waste in our past — the mindless, mutual hatred of white and black, which, he implies, may slowly be healing. Though the idea that propels his action and characters is often disconcertingly apparent, Mr. Gaines's unflagging commitment is to a breadth, even grandeur, of grasp and comprehensiveness. At a time when American fiction is increasingly a matter of infinitely detailed reports from the locked interiors of minds any sane man would flee at first meeting, such ambition is as quietly startling as it is welcome. It may even prove true and durable.

Two Crumbling Minds

SINGAPORE: A NOVEL OF THE BRONX

BY JOE BERNARDINI


SPEARANZA

BY SVEN DELBLANC

Translated by Paul Britten Austin


BY DAVID EVANIER

IT'S a long way from "Marty," Paddy Chayevsky's realistic rendering of a sweet, uncomplicated Bronx loser, to Jeff Baldini, the 35-year-old subject of Joe Bernardini's first novel. A bachelor recluse living in a walk-up on Decatur Avenue, afraid to walk the Bronx streets, Jeff has invented a surreal Singapore that better suits him, and he is the king of it. "Tubercular poets wander through the missaic mist at dawn" in Singapore harbor; crows perch on the shoulders of merchant seamen wearing striped jerseys; during the torrential rain season, people stand on rooftops cooing in chorus with the pigeons; and Singapore's housing shortage is due to the rights of stray dogs to lay claim to empty lots.

Perverse, unsettling and funny in turn, this Singapore of a crumbling mind functions according to the contradictory and arbitrary wishes of its creator. Jeff creates scenes fueled by his desperate neurosis, compulsive energy and repressed sexual longing. He confines these fantasies to his only friend, fat Leon Epstein, who works in the post office and lives upstairs with his crippled mother and demented aunt. The unreal becomes as believable as the seedy Bronx reality that goes on around it:

"No people on earth are filled with more nostalgia and sentimento than the Singaporean. They cry over everything and they cry over nothing. Husbands off to work, children off to school, wives about to go shopping create such hysteria in the households they are leaving that they're tempted to stay home.

"I'll stay home!" announces a husband, dropping his attaché case on the sofa and unbuttoning his jacket and vest.

"But you must go to work!" his wife will tell him while clinging to his leg. 'Otherwise you'll lose your job, and then where will we be?"

"Thus, it's not unusual to come upon a husband, rushing to make the 7:20, dragging his wife and children across the lawn and even several yards beyond their white picket fence. And when he arrives at the office he's greeted with tears of joy like a conquering hero!"

Darker undercurrents of violence and bondage rise to the surface as Jeff elaborates his vision of Singapore.

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David Evanier is the author of a collection of stories, "The One-Star Jew."
Cover to Cover

That gorgeous great novelist

by Edward Hoagland

There is an old, pernicious sentiment in circulation, which I see posted up in government bureaus no less than in the kitchen. As if its time had come once more, it is said that the time is ripe for a genius, especially an artistic genius, which is one of the reasons why it is so salutary to have a lot of them around. While the achievement of a genius is simple, the achievement of a great genius is a challenge for all of us. The problem is not whether we can achieve the same thing, but whether we can achieve it consistently and with passion.

And the health of any branch of the arts depends on the existence of a group of heavyweights or two. A Picasso, a champion, who, no matter how far away he may be geographically or in technique or spirit, can set the stage for another two years of unashamed excellence. But the work behind them who are still getting better we can take to be John Updike and Philip Roth. Both are so good, so various, and have so much written about them, that we can’t help but be under-rated, reviewing by its writing a random, capricious judgment. Each seems rather touching as an impressive—Updike for writing about 20 years of marriage, and everybody else is writing about 10 years of marriage, and for trying very hard to be a broad-spectrum writer at an unlikely time. Roth, in his intensity of his commitment to individual institutions and the caring of his personal books, is a very good book. Updike, seeing his L I V E chapters, perhaps it is the New Yorker, and from feeling of rivalry didn’t manage to read him until about 10 years ago. When I did, I was stunned by how marvelous he was. Suddenly in an exact contemporary I saw dimensions bigger than mine, saw what I didn’t do well in my own books or had scarcely attempted to do. On a long-distance running, then I had in front of me a person who was extraordinary and could stretch my legs while perhaps gaining all the time.

Roth, for some reason, I never felt coniferous. For one thing, he wasn’t a classmate; for another he was a creature of impulse, like me, and I felt much in common with him. Also, he was an anomaly among first-rate novelists in being full of generosity, and I was a beneficiary of that. Like Updike, he was a revelation and had never intruded me in what he had attempted.

In my room these two were running ahead of me. I wanted them to spur out in front, write the big books, re-affirming the indispensability of literature—the big fish whose swimming feats would astound us all. And with the heat in the world, they’ve been unable to so far. Maybe one reason why we’re now in the doldrums is that his hunches is that he has worn his hat as a writer and according to the reports, his books, taken together, are not as good as, say, Saul Bellow’s, but his achievement has been monumental and his boyish weight-lifting achievement. We’re so used to cheering on a gorgeous great novelist, and the point about Mailer is that, almost above the good writers, for instance, he recognized that the Moon Shots were a monumental occasion, an event that would change civilization, and set out, just as he had during World War II and the political upheavals to come, to get the scene down.

You don’t find warm-over Hemingway in Mailer, or second-rate Bellow in Bong. We cut-rate Nabokov, in Updike. Mailer is more intelligent than Hemingway and mixes a richer 20 years of experience. Bellow is a wider thinker than Nabokov, less flawed by the English. In his 50s, this natural watershed may be anticipated so fearlessly, that it arrives the transition is painless. The man simply steps looking forward, unpremeditatedly, because he thinks for a moment, so far what have I done?

That gorgeous great novelist

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Gorgeous

Continued from page 29

First-class, rough-washcloth journalism—but because we are ourselves in the books admiringly, we don’t know quite how to take that fact: literature before us, literature behind us, generally been some variety of make-believe. While it’s true that literature before us, even the classics, were usually written by journalists who write about subjects other than poverty and Vietnam sometimes do fiction journalism like the rough-washcloth journalists they’re human too, by no means 10 feet tall.

In Victorian biographies we read that “although Mr. Morewarrant’s formal education was sketchy, he had the run of his grandfather’s extensive library at home.” Perhaps that’s a way to think of the permanent body of literature—a rambling library with ladders to reach all the shelves. Ingar Bergman’s movies would belong there, but as far as I’m aware, one authentically great popular book has been published in the past 10 years. It’s a novel, “One Hundred Years of Solitude.” The book has the Colombian, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the eagerness with which so many have hailed it as well as, lately, Thomas Pynchon’s “Gravity’s Rainbow.”

Certainly an authentic attempt if not a success. First of all, how we’ve pinned for a great book or a great writer, secondly, that if another mixture of word literature had appeared we probably would have loved it.

Also, we are assuming now who our flagships are. In America, among people around 40 with much work behind them who are still getting better we can take to be John Updike and Philip Roth. Both are so good, so various, and have so much written about them, that we can’t help but be under-rated, reviewing by its writing a random, capricious judgment. Each seems rather touching as an impressive—Updike for writing about 20 years of marriage, and everybody else is writing about 10 years of marriage, and for trying very hard to be a broad-spectrum writer at an unlikely time. Roth, in his intensity of his commitment to individual institutions and the daring of his personal books, is a very good book. Updike, seeing his L I V E chapters, perhaps it is the New Yorker, and from feeling of rivalry didn’t manage to read him until about 10 years ago. When I did, I was stunned by how marvelous he was. Suddenly in an exact contemporary I saw dimensions bigger than mine, saw what I didn’t do well in my own books or had scarcely attempted to do. On a long-distance running, then I had in front of me a person who was extraordinary and could stretch my legs while perhaps gaining all the time.

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Continued on page 32

EDWARD HOAGLAND is a novelist and essayist. His latest book is “Walking the Dead Diamond River.”
Back in the World

MONA MOLARSKY

IN COUNTRY. By Bobbie Ann Mason. Harper & Row. 245 pp. $15.95.

For the past six years I have spent my Sundays watching a young girl grow up in North Plainfield, New Jersey. North Plainfield, with its main street, 7-Eleven, liquor store and boarded-up restaurants, is Bruce Springsteen country, living proof that the elegiac verses of “My Hometown” are not overstated.

A happy ending in North Plainfield is when you stay out of trouble, get a job, get married and buy a microwave oven. After six years of Sundays I’ve finally grasped that. Watching Kirsten grow up has meant that I’ll probably never watch ballet, listen to Mahler or read Wallace Stevens in quite the same way again. I have acquired a sort of double vision. Now when the curtain rises and the dancers glide on stage, they are sometimes displaced by images of New Jersey’s industrial skyline. And occasionally, in the middle of an adagio or a line of poetry, a young girl’s voice interrupts to ask what all this has to do with her world. Kirsten and I have had to learn each other’s language. For me there have been many initiations—my first shopping trip to K mart, my first Sunday dinner at Burger King, as well as my first six-hour mini-series recorded on a VCR and played back speeded up to Kirsten’s voice-over narration.

So when I picked up Bobbie Ann Mason’s novel, In Country, about a 17-year-old Bruce Springsteen fan who comes of age among the fast-food chains of western Kentucky, I read it with fascination. Critics have talked a lot about this novel’s rural background—Samantha Hughes, otherwise known as Sam, has a grandmother called Mamaw and a grandfather, Pap, who live on a farm. But the landscape Mason describes is mostly a place where tobacco fields are giving way to subdivisions, and economics has pushed all but a tenacious few off the land. Sam’s inner life isn’t filled with pastoral scenes but with images from television, brand names and rock songs.

It is 1984, “the summer of the Michael Jackson Victory tour and the Bruce Springsteen Born in the U.S.A.” tour,” and Sam has just graduated from high school. She spends the summer waiting around for a job at Burger Boy and trying to find out about the Vietnam War. The war interests Sam deeply. Her father was killed in Vietnam before she was born, and her uncle Emmett was psychologically messed up there. But in Sam’s mind, Vietnam is farther away than the moon. When she thinks about the war she pictures a few images on a TV screen, news clips she saw when she was small. When she tries to imagine her father’s death she thinks of the episode on M*A*S*H when Colonel Blake dies:

Years ago, when Colonel Blake was killed, Sam was so shocked she went around stunned for days. She was only a child then, and his death was more real to her than the death of her own father. Even on repeats, it was unsettling. Each time she saw that episode, it grew clearer that her father had been killed in a war. She had always taken his death for granted, but the reality of it took hold gradually.

Sam lives with her 36-year-old uncle Emmett in a down-at-the-heels house in Hopewell, where they subsist on tacos, Pepsi and Mountain Dew. Emmett hasn’t had a steady job since he got back from Vietnam, and he can’t seem to keep a steady girlfriend either. Mostly he hangs out with other vets at McDonald’s, watches television, plays Pac-Man and lavishes affection on a cat named Moon Pie. It is Sam’s concern about her uncle that starts her asking questions. She suspects that Emmett, who has frequent headaches and a bad case of acne, may be suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. But no one, including Emmett, will take her theory seriously.

She reads up on the war in library books and plies Emmett and his veteran friends with questions, but she can’t find out very much. Tom, a vet Sam has a crush on, tells her: “You might as well stop asking questions about the war. Nobody gives a shit. They’ve got it all twisted around in their heads what it was about so they can live with it.” Sam starts to understand just how difficult Vietnam must be for its veterans when she goes home with Tom and finds he’s impotent. It’s not a physical wound, he explains, but a mental block. The Great Wall of China, he bitterly calls it.

The Vietnam vets aren’t the only ones
in Hopewell suffering from mental blocks. When it comes to the past, everyone Sam knows seems to go blank. Her own mother, Irene, has remarried and moved away, preferring to forget her early life. And Mamaw and Pap, Sam discovers, have left their son’s war diary on a shelf unread. When she asks them about her father, they repeat that he was a good boy who didn’t smoke and never took a drink. The diary gives Sam her first real glimpse of her father, who, at her age, wrote there, “Dead gooks have a special stink.” Instead of heroism, Sam finds a dispiriting banality.

In this world of amnesia and paralysis, rock-and-roll is the one thing that offers Sam some kind of sustenance. Listening to her mother’s old records—the Beatles, the Doors, the Kinks—or turning the dial on her radio, she finds fuel to get her going. She hears John Lennon urging her to imagine and Springsteen singing a song that might be Emmett’s song if he could locate his own anger enough to sing it:  

Born down in a dead man’s town,  
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground.  
You end up like a dog that’s been beat too much  
Till you spend half your life just covering up.

Yes, Hopewell sent its boys to fight a television war—and no one there was, or is, equipped to deal with either past or present horrors. Hopewell has become a collection of fast-food outlets and dilapidated houses in which people sit dazed before their TV sets.

Mason first mapped out this country in Shiloh and Other Stories, in 1982. Shiloh’s characters are much like the residents of Hopewell, except there’s no feisty kid like Sam to churn up the dust, and so the effect is quite different. The title story of Shiloh introduces us to Norma Jean and her husband, Leroy, a truck driver on disability, who sits at home doing needlepoint and building miniature log cabins while Norma Jean throws her energies into self-improvement. She lifts Barbells, eats a cereal called Body Buddies, learns to play the electric organ and even goes to night school. In the end Norma Jean decides to leave, and Leroy realizes that “the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him.” There’s no denying the feeling of emptiness evoked by this story. But here Mason, like Raymond Carver and many contemporary American writers, seems content to detail a way of life and then trail off. Would a reader really be greedy in asking for something more, some broader perspective or deeper understanding?

In Country, on the other hand, is neither so reticent nor so modest. Mason takes a risk here; she pulls back from the tight close-up of the small stories to suggest a context. The Norma Jeans and Leroy’s, we find out, live on a planet where landscapes are defoliated and napalm is dropped. Are the two realities connected? In Country argues that they are. Naive people are the ones shipped to the front. McDonald’s golden arches, prime-time comics and name products that loom larger than life are roadside attractions along the way.

But popular culture, as Mason presents it, is not homogeneous. The same airwaves that bring Join-the-Army jingles and easy listening music to Hopewell also bring the reflective and defiant Springsteen. For Sam and her friends, Springsteen’s music means much because it comments on their lives in a medium they’re completely at home with.

Mason’s exploration of the ways in which popular culture can either encourage or challenge naiveté is an ambitious project and one not without its problems. While remaining true to the spirit of Sam’s character, Mason must paint a backdrop wide yet detailed enough to offer a complex vision. At times her unconvinced heroine seems out of place in the slightly self-conscious structure of the novel. A trip Sam makes “in country” to Cawood’s Pond to get in touch with the G.I experience seems a forced attempt on the author’s part to manufacture a classic epiphany in the American “wilderness.” And the closing scene of the book, which describes the visit Sam, Emmett and Mamaw make to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is somewhat sentimental, revealing less than it intends. Yet such lapses are minor next to Mason’s achievements.

Ironically, the people Mason seems to care most about are the ones least likely to read her book. One recent Sunday I brought Kirsten a copy of In Country. Would she recognize the characters, I wondered? That was weeks ago, and the book is still sitting where I left it—next to the TV, which is always on.

Whose literature is this anyhow? Is Mason really talking to the Sams of this world? If so, I wish her the best of luck and suggest a backup group dressed in matching T-shirts. As for that other audience, those who buy books, Mason illuminates American culture as it exists not for the educated but for the majority of Americans. It is a reality many of us ignore at our risk. To quote the Hart Crane of rock-and-roll: “Take a good look around. This is your hometown.”

LINGO.

JIM QUINN

Self-styled language conservatives, like political conservatives, sometimes adopt a pose of know-it-all judiciousness. Not for them the headlong rush after fad and fashion, the mob’s giddy urge for newness. Staunchly, sometimes sadly (for they know the cause is lost), they stand up for the civilities of the past and the language of our fathers. In their complaints about words like Ms or hopefully or prioritize, you can almost hear the voice of Carlyle opposing the Reform Act of 1832 or Matthew Arnold speaking out against the disestablishment of the Church of England. Erudite orthodoxy guards the gates of literacy. Of course it’s all a fraud, as anyone can discover by reading William Safire’s “On Language” column in The New York Times Magazine.

Safire is our leading sociolinguistic conservative, and with the help of a group of indefatigably alarmed correspondents he likes to call Lexicographic Irregulars, he publishes a weekly list of words we should worry about. The tone is urbane; the criticism is quiet, even jocular; the information, dead wrong. On the evidence of Safire’s columns, language conservatives are a small-minded bunch, so removed from erudition and so mentally lazy that they are strangers to the most primitive of research methods: looking words up in the dictionary.

All you need to demolish most Safire articles is a couple of good historical dictionaries: Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate, the Oxford English Dictionary and its supplements. I’ll take a single column, “Invasion of The Verbs,” from October 6, 1985, as a sample of Safire’s method.

“Invasion of The Verbs” warns us
against the new verbs that are "being coined every day." An adwriter from N.W. Ayer has heard a conductor say, "The last two cars of this train will not platform at Talmadge Hall," and is appalled at the presumption of the working class. To platform seems to him as bad as that other voguish verb, to parent. Phil Gailey of The New York Times reports that politicians talk of profounding the issues. Safire himself has come across liaise and post-mortem used as verbs. Worst of all, Harold C. Schonberg of The Times has overheard an editor say that fresh news "mooteed the story." And "I hoot," adds Harold, "at the moot."

First of all, as Safire himself admits in the column, making nouns of verbs and verbs of nouns or even of adjectives is a basic strategy of our language. So basic that the oldest and most intimate English words are the ones most likely to be both noun and verb: hand, mouth, eye, bed, house, father, mother and so on. The structure of modern English makes this functional shift easier for us. In most Indo-European languages you can tell what a word is by looking at it. In English you often have to have the word in context. "The cage" is a noun; in "I cage" the word is a verb; and in "the cage door" it works as an adjective. If speakers of English stop shifting words about in this way they won't be conserving the language, they'll be inventing a radically different one.

A little dictionary work could have saved us all this fuss. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to platform first appeared in print in 1793. Among the users cited are Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Abraham Lincoln. To parent has been around since 1663. To profound, listed as obsolete by the O.E.D., started in 1412 with Lydgate; Sir Thomas Browne is cited for three separate shades of meaning. Liaise is relatively new, though it is one year older than Safire. The O.E.D. calls it "services slang" and dates it from 1928. Among those who have used liaise as a verb without harm to the English language are Louis MacNeice (Holes in Sky) and Lawrence Durrell (Mountolive). Post-mortem is cited first as an adjective (1837), then as a noun (1844), then as a verb (1871); but new words are usually around for years before they finally appear in the conservative medium of print, so all three of those forms were probably used simultaneously. Moot as an adjective has only been around since 1577. The noun and the verb are much older; the O.E.D. gives the same year for the appearance of both, circa 1000. Moot, a verb before the Norman Conquest, a verb almost from the dawn of English as English, has continued in ordinary use down to this very day—among its users are William Langland (1362), John Henry Newman (1848), Andrew Lang (1902). Webster's adds Edmund Burke and many contemporary citations, including Commonweal. Moot, that humble and ordinary verb, may be—thanks to the wit of Harold C. Schonberg and the language expertise of William Safire—the oldest word in the English language ever attacked as new.

Membership in the Lexicographic Irregulars even extends to some language professionals. They write Safire the kind of relieved confessions of conservatism you sometimes hear from tipsy liberals late in the evening. Sometimes they are so relieved at unburdening themselves that they forget everything they know. "Invasion of The Verbs" quotes William A. Kretzschmar Jr., editor of the Journal of English Linguistics, at length. Kretzschmar rejects orientate: "It seems to me an ugly duplication of to orient," and more strongly, to dialogue: "I find it impossible to see how any subject person or group could unilaterally impose a dialogue on or with somebody else.... I shouldn't make such judgments, and should just believe in the doctrine of usage, but I can't help it—I won't abdicate my own right to decide what I am willing to say or write." Kretzschmar is so eager to attack new words that he has misunderstood or forgotten the nature of English verbs. Some verbs indicate that the subject imposes on the object. Others indicate joint efforts: conspire, collude, cooperate, interview and make love come to mind. There is nothing illogical about the verb dialogue. And even if there were, it's too late to complain about it; dialogue has been around since 1597. The O.E.D. cites Shakespeare as first user (A Lover's Complaint and again in Timon of Athens), then, among others, Richardson (Pamela), Coleridge and Carlyle.

All those writers, who are highly regarded in some circles, wrote without the benefit of advice from the Journal of English Linguistics, of course; but it's doubtful that they would have changed their minds anyway. And why should we? Kretzschmar has also misunderstood "the doctrine of usage." When words are used in new ways—as words are in every living language—you can either discover their new meaning or make do with a limited vocabulary. Approval is irrelevant. The respectable Victorian editors of the O.E.D. included the word windfucker (a kestrel, a term of opprobrium; Ben Jonson, "Did you euer heare such a windfucker as this?"); but that doesn't mean they used it in conversation. Kretzschmar prefers the verb orient (first cited in 1847), but I like orientate (1849); both are derived from the noun (1386) or maybe the adjective (1450). What difference can it make to anyone else which word we use? You are free to follow Kretzschmar's advice on usage if you like, though if you're looking for a model of expressive language, does it make sense to search the pages of scholarly journals and newspaper supplements, or are you more likely to find one in Timon of Athens?

But, as Safire says in "Invasion of The Verbs," "Esthetics counts. Prioritize strikes me as ugly," and that new verb nutshel, which has "the ring of jargon," should be replaced by "boil down." "The clerk nutshed the contrast between the former time and the present," wrote Mark Twain in Life on the Mississippi (1883); readers are invited to model their usage on the writer they prefer. They might also check how boil down works as a synonym in that sentence.

Of course, esthetics do not count at all when it comes to the sound of individual words. If orientate is uglier than orient, why isn't potenate uglier than potent? Find the suffix -ize so ugly you avoid it? What do you say for baptize, capsize, realize and economize? Isn't domicile more elegant than house, and whither more educated than where to? And don't we habitually avoid those educated and elegant variants just because they are elegant and educated? If you have any personal standards of word beauty, it should be easy for you to arrange the following list in esthetic order: bobolink, spaghetti, air conditioner, smegma, against, how, fremd, forn, laterally, gerontophilia, rape. Admit the task is impossible and you admit that good usage doesn't depend on word sound but on word meaning and context. Sometimes we like words that sound sonorous or sibilant, sometimes guttural and crunchy. What is wrong with that?
But even those questions are beside the point when considering Saffire's columns. The problem is simply inattention to the task at hand. "Invasion of The Verbs" attacks some thirty new verbs as inventions of the day. I list them, more or less in order, with the date of their first appearance in print, or with an X where the verb cannot be found listed as standard in contemporary dictionaries:

- implement (1806), dotted-line (X), fast-track (X), platform (1793), parent (1663), network (1887), surveil (1966), satellite (X), statement (X), videotape (1958), accessorize (1939), concertize (1883), funeralize (1654), mainstream (1974), leaflet (1968), credential (1888), source (1513), interface (1964), access (1966), moot (1000), sunset (X), demagogue (1656), cheap shot (X), excess (1888), orientate (1849), dialogue (1957), prioritize (1966), nutshell (1892), disambiguate (1963), disincentivize (X).

There's arguably some use in resisting words that can't be found in any dictionary, though I don't know how you'd resist a word like prioritize, even if you wanted to. Make sure to write "list things in order of their priorities" instead? No one will notice. Every time you see the word in print write aggrieved letters to some expert? All that does is call attention to prioritize, and help spread the new meaning.

Surely there's no sense in resisting words listed in major contemporary dictionaries. They are not there because the editors like them or approve of them or use them but because they have collect ed so many citations from so many sources that the word is in widespread use. Like it or not, ugly or not, the verbs platform and implement, like the noun spaghetti (a relative newcomer in 1888), are indisputably part of the language.

Clearly the Dislexicographers are not interested in language but in self-defense. Mostly male and almost entirely white, they find themselves surrounded by new ideas, new books, new music, new art, new language—and new young competitors. Words are the only things they can reject as new merely because they're new (and ugly, and threatening). Hardly anyone knows or cares enough to contradict them, so they attack what they think is the language of people they're frightened of (blacks, feminists, the poor and especially the young), and they attack the language of people they envy (successful politicians, better ad-
Art Nouveau

"YOU CAN FOOL ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL THE TIME"
By Art Buchwald.
Illustrated by Steve Mendelson.

By Felicia Lampert

My aunt Emma called me from Sioux City, Iowa, to ask how Art Buchwald’s new book, "You Can Fool All of the People All the Time," was doing in the nation’s capital, so I went to a Washington cocktail party to check it out.

"It beats me," a man high in the Smithsonian was saying as I joined a group, "how Buchwald’s 26th book can turn out to be as fresh as his first."

"How do you mean, ‘fresh’?" I asked.

"Both ways," he said. "Impudent and full of insights pristine as new-peeled eggs."

"That’s pretty poetic," said Bill, a columnist high in right-wing circles, "but is ‘fresh’ really le mot juste? I’ve only riffled through the book, but I noticed that these columns were still sticking to his old formula—a sentence about some news item followed by a ludicrous dialogue between a high muckamuck and Buchwald’s own platitudinous persona.

"Why should he change a recipe that works so superulously," I asked.

"Ah, the Coca-Cola syndrome," Bill said with a supercilious smile.

"You bet your Gucci boots," I said. "And, by the way, Buchwald has a gem about it in the book. He goes to see a master Coca-Cola taster who, by just holding his glass up to the light, was able to tell the year a Coke was bottled, the district it came from, and—the first name of the truck driver who delivered it to the supermarket."

"Amusing," Bill conceded, "but in political matters such absurdity is deplorably malapropos."

Felicia Lampert teaches expository writing at Harvard University and writes satiric verse. Her most recent book is "Political Plumblines."

ALL SET ABOUT WITH FEVER TREES
And Other Stories.
By Pam Durban.
211 pp. Boston: David R. Godine. $15.95.

By Robb Forman Dew

I n a recent interview William Styron is quoted as saying, "This, it seems to me, is an era of witnesses. We no longer trust the voice of the omniscient." But I think it is not so; I think that given any voice at all that has power and integrity, a reader will abandon his soul to it, and there is such a voice to be found in "All Set About With Fever Trees," this first book of collected stories by Pam Durban.

Though most of the seven stories are set in the South, it would be a mistake to label this regional fiction, because these tales are enriched by, but not dependent on, a sense of place. Besides, regional has become a derogatory designation for fiction these days, almost always meaning Southern, almost always meaning insignificant. This book should not be insignificant to any reader, because Pam Durban ranges up and down the social spectrum, and in and out of danger, the emotional territory to tell her stories. By the very nature of their particular persuasiveness they often demand an omniscient narrator. When an author with a vision as powerful as hers tries to convey the essence of lives lived in ways other than those of her readers, she must also tell the story in language that is not that of her characters, a language that makes a bridge of empathy between audience and material. She, then, is the witness, and within a paragraph we know she is trustworthy.

In "This Heat," the protagonist is a mill worker in Georgia who is trying to come to terms with her own grief at a long-expected tragedy. She is called to school for what she believes will be yet another bureaucratic confrontation about her child. "And that’s how she learned that Beau Clinton, her only son and the son of Charles Clinton, was dead."

"From then on it was just one miasma after another. She was amazed to find the day just as hot and close as it had been when she’d gone inside the school building. Everything should have been as new and strange as what had just happened. But the dusty trees stood silent against the tin sky, and below, in the distance, Atlanta’s mirrored buildings still captured the sun and burned. Then the word dead amazed her, the way it came out of her mouth as though she said it every day of her life... . she was surprised by her sister’s voice, how it boiled on and on shaped like questions.”

There is such a remarkable wealth here of intention and consequence. And, although in this story Pam Durban is at her most colloquial in her use of language, there is no sense of voyeurism or condescension. This author is entirely engaged with her characters.

The title story is a complex and fascinating delineation of family ties, familial love and the dangers that lie within a shared history. "The stories they told were the Highest. And when he asks Him if he can put the conversation on the record, He says, Be my guest. There is too much talk by politicians about what I want and don’t want and, as God, it really ticks Me off."

Bill’s reply was: "I suppose the book is teeming with effrontery of that sort. What nerve!" He bit sharply into his canapé.

"Oh, it’s not nerve," said Henry, the top man in one of Washington’s largest law firms, "it’s perfect self-possession. In this book, wherever you stick in your thumb you can pull out aplomb. Consider, for example, the column that begins, ‘Everyone saw James Watt ride off into the sunset. Unfortunately, we didn’t hear what he said to his horse. As they climbed up the windsing trail he said, ‘... I had great visions for this land. Paint. I wanted every American to have a strip mine he could call his own.’"

"It’s a funny thing," the Smithsonian man said. "Buchwald’s pretty rough on Watt and Meese and Casey and a few others, but he never shows any real malice."

"With malice toward none, and a Swift kick for everyone," I said.

"I like him best," a former Cabinet member suggested, "when he says things like, ‘Our foreign policy is not to have one,’ and explains that this leaves the Kremlin and the American people are about our objectives, and... climbing the Kremlin walls.”

"I’ve had enough of this Buchwald pondering," Bill objected.

I ignored him. "Buchwald’s hilarious," I said, "but it’s that sardonic streak of his that gets me. Every great satirist has one."

"What makes you think he’s a great satirist?" Bill asked acidly.

"Maybe the fact that I agree with all the positions he takes."

The others nodded emphatically.

"I’m apparently outnumbered," Bill admitted. "Very well, I’ll go home and read the damn book from cover to cover if it takes me all night."

"You’ll do nothing of the sort," I said. "Reading the pieces serioums kills the effect. You’ve got to take them like aspirin—no more than one or two every four hours. I guarantee you’ll feel no pain.”
Jeffrey Tambor, left, plays the hero in "Mr. Sunshine," and Peter Boyle is the star of "Joeesh." Both of the new series are on ABC.

Books: A Midwest Tale
By Martin F. Nolan


This is the dark side of Lake Wodegon. The victims and villains of "Final Harvest" are stronger, smarter or above average. Like other Americans, they were swept up in the tornado of social and economic change in American culture. When the twister landed in homicidal fury on a 10-acre spread in western Minnesota, the story provided Andrew Malcolm with a page 1 story in The New York Times and now this follow-up saga.

Mr. Malcom's reporting skills transform the dreams and hostilities of these people who seem so ordinary into an extraordinary story. On Sept. 29, 1983, Jim Jenkins, a failed farmer, along with his son Steve, managed to enrage the president of the Buffalo Ridge State Bank, Rady Blythe Jr., and the bank's vice president, Toby Thulin, a lonely and alcoholic road. Mr. Jenkins murdered them both, then fled to Texas, where he walked into an open field, carefully took his eyeglasses off, put a shotgun into his mouth and pulled the trigger. His son later stood trial in Minnesota on accessory charges.

"Final Harvest" is first a straightforward newspaper story of the uncomplicated kind that fails to excite somber symposiums at journalism schools. The author draws no morals or metaphors, no nostrums or cathedrals. The lyrical portraits of the Middle West and of farm life make it more than another detective epic. Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" tillaged literary salons several decades ago, but provided no context, offering lurid pulp masquerading as pseudo-documentary "nonfiction fiction." Mr. Malcom details the red bloodstains on the earth, but also presents context soberly and properly, justifying the subtitle of "An American Tragedy."

The romance and the drudgery of farming always had a soothing con
centrating "around the clock, around the years, through the generations." The Middle West cherished its myth of "the Heartland, the broad place in the middle with the big hands and the in
coisie smile, where old values like hard work, patriotism and neighborliness hung on long after they had been discarded as unflattering by most everywhere else.

Mr. Malcom treats Middle West values kindly but critically. Not since Rudyard Kipling visited Chicago stockyards a century ago has a re
tester reported America's bread
basket so evenly and elegantly, Farm life had become complicated by ex
ts, shifting diets and denominations, soaring oil prices and wrenching inflation. "In 1974, when soybeans were bringing the farmer nearer to $9 a bushel, a new tractor cost $14,300, twelve times its 1950 price. Today the price of soybeans is $11.32 a bushel while the price of the same tractor has nearly quadrupled to $55,000."

Bankers and farmers have been neighbors for a long time, long before William Jennings Bryan spun his "cross of gold" speech in 1896. Banker jokes are common in farming communities, and Mr. Malcom recounts one: "You know what the difference is be
tween a banker and a farmer on the road? There's skid marks for the bank."

Rudy Blythe, who moved to Minne
sota from the East, though he might be different. He made a ritual of going to the coffee shop for chat at 10 A.M. every day, he started the Lions Club in Ruthton, Minn., where he had just purchased the local bank with the same sort of risky legendarism his customers are steeling for shipping of their products of John Deere and corn pickers. Jim Jenkins could not comprehend these business practices nor could he comprehend the simplest tastes of his customers. That lack of compre
drehension had frequently led to psy
dynamic behavior and finally to an

Mr. Malcom makes no excuses for the murderer, or even for the victim of his crimes. He simply tells their story, as though he were a com
colm notes. "In the Midwest there is a special quality, so even and peaceful, vital and beautiful -- a little cloudy, for in
cess, or a refreshing breeze or a light rain shower -- can so suddenly turn ugly, violent and lethal."
evolution of systems of injustice and privilege. In order to penetrate the facade of images, radical history gave voice to those deliberately silenced or only allowed to appear as extras or standard stereotypes in the Hollywood panorama.

Several articles here focus on the importance of history as a form of resistance. Jeffrey C. Stewart and Fath Davis Ruffins's "A Faithful Witness" is an informative look at the evolution of popular forms of black history, largely sustained by the black community, from 1828 to the present. Lisa Duggan, in "History's Gay Ghetto," analyzes the recent flowering of oral history projects in the gay community. Linda Shopes, Jeremy Brecher and James Green write of their own experiences in such projects, in particular of their efforts to create forms which would allow working-class people to become their own historians. Sonya Michel's suggestive essay, "Feminism, Film and Public History," critically evaluates the risks film makers take in putting the past on the silver screen, showing how three feminist documentaries, "Union Maids," "With Babies and Banners," and "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter," sometimes sacrifice historical complexity for conventional cinematic techniques.

Beyond challenging official academic history and breathing new life into the historical profession, the most important productions of the new history have come from a sense of democratic engagement. Its practitioners have found a rich resource of ethnic diversity and modes of expression that help to shed light on the relationship between social forces and personal experience. By now, there is a small but significant body of books, pamphlets, slideshows, community oral history projects, people's museums and documentaries rooted in these discoveries. Unfortunately, the Reagan years have stalled efforts to continue this work. Although aspects of people's history occasionally grace the movie screens, by and large the image industry is still in control.

Parts one and three of Presenting the Past form a dialogue illuminating a central point: history has different meanings depending on who is producing it and for what goals. The second section, "Professionalizing the Past," about the new field of "public history," is more diffuse and, in a sense, diverts attention from the book's more compelling themes. Michael Wallace's "Visiting the Past" presents an incisive account of the Rockefeller restoration of colonial Williamsburg and of Henry Ford's Greenfield Village. Daniel Walkowitz poses important questions about corporate archival history. But the amorphous idea of "public history," which crops up throughout the book, is never clearly defined.

Public history began as a field in the late 1970s when unemployed historians looked for work outside the academy. They found it in a variety of contexts: corporations, historical societies, museums, local government, media and community projects. Out of this emerged a new field replete with its own journals and conferences. This book, in part, is a response to that development. One gets the feeling that the call for articles specifically asked authors to address the topic of public history. Yet the continual reference to it confuses more than it clarifies.

The word "public" is often abused; in a period of intense privatization, its meaning needs serious re-examination. Much of what is described as public history seems to serve private interests, particularly in corporations, corporate-sponsored museums and historical reconstructions. In the Fourth of July promotions around the Statue of Liberty, for example, what separated public history from public relations? What divides public history from mass-mediated versions of the past? Can corporate archival history and community oral history projects be reconciled in the same field? On these matters, Presenting the Past is not helpful.

In spite of this, Presenting the Past is a valuable resource for people interested in deciphering the anti-historical tendencies of American culture. At a time when historical amnesia is rampant and the popular imagination daily infused with myths, Presenting the Past reminds us that the struggle for historical memory is an essential task of cultural and political life.

More Than Zero

FRED PFIELD


W hat good are insights? They don't solve anything. They just make things worse." The words come from an interview with the man officially canonized as the current king of short fiction in this country; and the contempt they express toward even the desirability of wisdom has been the dominant attitude in "quality fiction" for some time now.

The result is a slew of work that uses what Fredric Jameson has called "the luxury of the existential" to grovel in rueful helplessness at the way things just somehow are. The form and size of the contemporary short story have been reasserted by this world view into a kind of recipe: just scatter some slightly sad, slightly twisted salt-and-pepper detail along the faint plot line of an attenuated familial and/or romantic entanglement, employ a suitably flattened narration to run it out to the desired length, and you've got your own, all-new prose "Dover Beach."

Here, though, are two new collections of short fiction that challenge the orthodoxy of insigntlessness. The author of The Sorcerer's Apprentice, Charles Johnson, is a black writer and an unabashed intellectual. The eight stories in his newest volume continue the project of his previous novels, Faith and the Good Thing (1974) and Oxherding Tale (1982), which simultaneously plumbed and sent up the philosophical traditions of both East and West as ways of getting at the relationship between being black and Being itself. Accordingly, many of Johnson's protagonists admit to having read some books. What's rarer still, every one of his protagonists, regardless of race, class, gender or even species, knows how to think, and does so, as it were, before our eyes.

Thinking is in fact the main activity in most of these tales. "China" stages a dialectical argument between a slumped-shouldered black postman who finds deliverance in the discipline of East-
ern meditation and martial arts, and his wife, Evelyn, who prefers solid ground, centered identity and the black Christian church. In "The Education of Mingo," a story set in antebellum Southern Illinois, Moses Green's slave Mingo begins chopping up his neighbors, thereby forcing Moses to accept a brutal logic: if slaves are, as Aristotle said, no more than living tools, if Mingo is no more than an extension of Moses, then the murderer is the slaveowner himself. Similarly, what sets "Exchange Value" going is the discovery by two black kids of a dead bag-lady's fortune; but what the story is about is their paralyzing insight into money as what Marx called "the commodity of commodities," a pure abstraction whose power to buy is lost the moment anything is bought.

Such stories are risky, insofar as they locate their characters' identities in the tug and pull of ideas and arguments and offer that play to us as our primary pleasure. All the stories in The Sorcerer's Apprentice are allegorical, a few ("Menagerie" and the splendid title story, a beautifully told set of reflections on the difficulties of an artist committed to serving the people) quite explicitly so. Yet the risk that we might lose interest, find the play of ideas pretentious or dull, is forestalled by the vigor of Johnson's style:

Now Moses Green was not a man for doing things halfway. Education, as he dimly understood it, was as serious as a heart attack. You had to have a model, a good Christian gentleman like Moses himself, to wash a Moor white in a single generation. As he taught Mingo farming and table etiquette, ciphering with knotted string, and how to cook ashokes, Moses constantly revised himself. He tried not to cuss, although any mention of Martin Van Buren or Free-Soilers made his stomach churn itself or sop cornbread in his coffee; or pick his nose at public markets. Moses, policing all his gestures, standing the boy behind his eyes, even took to drinking gin from a paper sack so Mingo couldn't see it. He felt, late at night, when he looked down at Mingo snoring loudly on his corn-shuck mattress, now like a father, now like an artist fingering something fine and noble from a rude chump of foreign clay.

How long it took me and Loftis to inventory, then haul Miss Bailey's queer old stuff to our crib, I can't say, but that cranky old ninnyhammer's hoard come to $879,543 in cash money, thir-

ty-two bank books (some deposits be only $5), and me, I wasn't sure I was dreaming or what, but I suddenly flashed on this feeling, once we had left her flat, that all the fears Loftis and me had about the future be gone, 'cause Miss Bailey's property was the past—the power of that fellah Henry Conners trapped like a bottle spirit—which we could live off, so it was future, too, pure potential: can do.

I can't say I find all the stories in The Sorcerer's Apprentice fully successful; there are tales whose plots are allowed to run aground, their dramatic possibilities traded away for philosophical wheelspinning. But even in these pieces the sheer exuberance of the prose kept me moving on. In The Sorcerer's Apprentice, which opens, appropriately enough, with an epigraph from The Confidence Man, Johnson demonstrates more clearly than ever his Melvillean ambition to use narrative to fuse concept and event, politics, philosophy and drama, and to make ideas dance.

No one, on the other hand, will ever accuse Russell Banks of gorgeous writing: his prose has the precise force of a steady, measured outrage. Which is not to say he is not skilled—only that the craft he was honing through the 1970s in Searching for Survivors and Hamilton Stark has now been placed at the service of a terrible probity.

In his last book, Continental Drift, Banks crosscut the story of Bob DuBois, a working-class white man trying to hustle up some luck in Florida, with the tale of Vanise Dorsinville, a Haitian woman trying to get to the United States with only the loa of voodoo for protection. The result was a powerful if not perfect book: at once a celebration of both Vanise's doomed heroism and Bob's pathetically inadequate goodness, and a howl against what the free market system makes out of the world. A similar project is evident in Banks's new collection, Success Stories, whose pieces both compose a loose Bildungsroman of another New England working-class boy, Earl Painter, and play off the exemplary story of his betrayal and self-betrayal against a group of parabolic tales of power, many of them set in the Third World. The risk taken in Continental Drift—that the more distanced Third World drama will not be able to stand up against the power of Banks's more immediate account of what it means to be an American working-class white man—becomes the manifest
weakness of *Success Stories*. The problem is not simply that the Third World and/or political fables (“The Fish,” “The Gully,” “Hostages”) are so much thinner than the tale of Earl Painter trying and failing to find the happiness his culture dreams for him, but that the effect of such disproportion is to render the Third World stories little more than allegorical pendants to the “real” story—the story of the white man’s life.

Still, that tale, as in *Continental Drift*, is far more than another wallow in the strange sad weirdness of it all. Indeed, from “Queen for a Day” to the closing story, “Firewood,” the Painter chronicle is more than worth the price of the book. Banks has put in enough time in working-class America to have an exact sense of what its dreams and betrayals feel like and how they work. What’s more, he has constructed a detached narrative style that reminds us of the frightening typicality of Earl Painter’s life, and of the lives of those he tries to love. That ability and power are most impressively evident within this collection in “Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story,” in which a man who calls himself Ron, but who could just as easily be a grown-up Earl Painter, recounts the story of a brief affair he had with an ugly woman, and finds he can only do so by continually stepping back and starting again:

I’m still the man in this story, and Sarah is still the woman, but I’m telling it this way because what I have to tell you now confuses me, embarrasses me and makes me sad, and consequently I’m likely to tell it falsely. I’m likely to cover the truth by making Sarah a better woman than she actually was, while making me appear worse than I actually was or am; or else I’ll do the opposite, make Sarah worse than she was and me better. The truth is, I was pretty, extremely so, and she was not, extremely so, and I knew it and she knew it. She walked out the door of Osgood’s determined to make love to a man much prettier than any she had seen up close before, and I walked out determined to make love to a woman much homelier than I had made love to before. We were, in a sense, equals.

No, that’s not exactly true . . .

Just as Charles Johnson’s fiction reconnects us to Melville, these relentlessly qualifying, additive sentences take us back to Dreiser in their urge to expose and name the everyday crime. Yet Banks writes with a more merciless exactitude than Dreiser ever had, and with far greater and more self-conscious skill. If American “quality fiction” were to abandon its minimalist chic, its obsession with purely private lives, in favor of some larger and more social quest, these are two writers we would have to thank for their part in the change.

LETTERS.

(Continued From Page 194)

Finally, Chomsky’s rendering of the case against Faurisson is incorrect. Initially several groups of anti-racists, survivors and resisters accused Faurisson of “ falsification of history.” But no court ever “endorsed” or “condemned” him for “falsification of history,” as Chomsky claims, because no such law exists. In fact, one of Faurisson’s leading supporters, and Chomsky’s French publisher, Pierre Guillaume, confirms that he was “never condemned for falsification of history, but for damage to others,” i.e., for racial defamation. The decision left all questions of his “conclusions” to the “judgment of the experts.” Ironically, the court’s refusal to consider such charges has been hailed as a vindication by those, like Guillaume, who deny that the Holocaust took place.

In short, Chomsky continues to defend a no-Holocaust kook and virulent anti-Semitism, Robert Faurisson, against a legal doctrine that does not exist, exonerating him of anti-Semitism in the face of overwhelming available evidence to the contrary. He has forgotten a fundamental point of civil libertarianism: no defense of civil liberties demands an abdication of judgment and reason. Voltaire never said, In order to defend you, I give up my responsibility to judge what you say; and to judge you, I shall ignore what you write. Anson Rabinbach

The editors regret the error in Anson Rabinbach’s letter of May 17.

CORRECTION

Two drawings by Isadore Seltzer in last week’s issue were misplaced. The one on page 169 should have been on page 175, and vice versa. Our apologies.

When drafting your will, please consider making a bequest to The Nation.

For information write or call: Office of the Publisher, The Nation, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011 (212) 242-8400.
Critic's Notebook

Form Over Function: Minimalism's Dead End

By Michiko Kakutani

"Break It Down," Lydia Davis's new collection of fiction, just out from Farrar, Straus & Giroux, gives us 34 stories in 177 pages. Half a dozen of these "stories" are no more than a page — or a paragraph — long. The one called "Safe Love" reads in its entirety:

"She was in love with her son's pedestrian. Alone out in the country — could anyone blame her."

"There was an element of grand passion in this love. It was also a safe thing. The man was on the other side of a barrier. Between him and her: the child on the examining table, the office itself, the staff, her husband, his stethoscope, his beard, her breasts, his glasses, her glasses, etc."

As part of a larger narrative collage this fragment might help shed light on certain characters or a situation. And alone, it might serve as a good idea for a story, even a good idea for a good story. As it stands, however, it's nothing but an unrealized sketch, a free-floating bit of prose. Why then, one wonders, did Ms. Davis — who elsewhere in "Break It Down" demonstrates a gift for narrative complexity, an ability to capture and orchestrate emotional nuances — choose to include such flimsy pieces in this volume?

The thing is, Ms. Davis is hardy alone in publishing the sort of fragments that writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald used to relegate to their notebooks. Michelangelo Antonioni's new book, for instance, consists entirely of what he calls "nuclei" — that is, scenarios for possible films. Some of the entries in "That Bowling Alley on the Tiber" sound like newspaper clippings, describing heavily ironic events (i.e., some people go on a crocodile hunt and are subsequently eaten by their would-be prey); others are nothing but perfunctory descriptions of vaguely ominous landscapes.

In a sense, such "stories" represent another dead end reached by the Minimalism so popular in the last decade. Sparedness of expression, a willful refusal to impute motive or interpret character, an inability or unwillingness to use the conventions of traditional narrative — all were initially strategies invoked by writers to portray the alienation experienced by a generation. And they were strategies that mirrored, in their very form, the post-60's sense of discontinuity and flux. In the hands of such writers as Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie, this approach could result in tightly controlled works of considerable emotional power; but at its worst, it dwindles into a grudging fiction in which the white space between the words and lines seeps into — and subsumes — the actual stories.

Recent collections of stories by Mark Strand and Frank Conroy display forms of this reticence — carried to a debilitating extreme. Here, generalities take the place of any sort of specifics that might ground the stories in a particular time and place; and brisk, impatient summaries of events supplant an examination of consequences and emotions. As a result, the stories turn in on themselves, instead of provoking the reader or drawing him into a palpable world. Similarly, in Marguerite Duras's best-selling novel "The Lover," austerity shrinks into mannerism, authorial restraint into mere self-consciousness and manipulation.

A taste for the minimal also seems to be creeping into the selection of book titles these days — so much so that the one-word title has become a dominant motif among new and forthcoming books. Some of them are genuinely evocative of a subject, metaphorical or concrete: "Home," a diverting study of domestic living by Witold Rybczynski; "Anagrams," Lorrie Moore's first novel about a woman's multiple selves, and "Whites," a new collection of stories by Norman Rush, dealing with the collision of races in Botswana.

Others, echoing the names Henry Green gave his novels ("Loving," "Living," "Party Going"), seem cleverly designed to evoke a condition or state of mind — "Waiting," Vincent Crapanzano's portrait of white South Africans, for instance, and "Lost," a new thriller by Gary Devon. "Privilege," by Leona Blair ("It was what she longed for and fought for through a lifetime filled with ambition, love, and betrayal"), recalls the titles of some of John Galsworthy's books ("Strife," "Loyalties," "Justice"), if not exactly their content. And "Shallows" (by Tim Winton), "Mermaids" (by Patty Dann), "Ulamarine" (by Raymond Carver) and "Beachmasters" (by Thea Astley) all succeed, surprisingly enough, in using marine imagery to comment, however obliquely, on their subjects.

In many cases, though, these new titles feel like words formed on a Scrabble board — words, picked as a last-ditch, makeshift solution — or words picked as curt, flat-footed labels. "Perfume" by Patrick Suskind sounds less like a suspense story than a high-tech generic brand of scent, while "Enchantment" by Daphne Merkin is misleading — it suggests not the story of a young woman's coming of age, but some kind of a young woman's movie featuring friendly puppets. Peter Warner's "Lifestyle" is so trendy and vague as to be meaningless, and "Designs" (by James Brady) and "Frieze" (by Cecile Pineda) suffer from a similar emptiness.

Of all these titles, the most succinct is probably Stephen King's "It," which even outdoes "She," H. Rider Haggard's romantic fantasy published in 1897. The most obviously derivative, "November" (by Janet Hobhouse), is scheduled to appear this November, much the way Judith Rossner's best seller "August" appeared in August of 1983.

Music: Britten 'War Requiem' at Tanglewood

Thanks to the recent movie we
Countercultivators

FRIDAY NIGHT AT SILVER STAR
By Patricia Henley.
127 pp. St. Paul:
Graywolf Press. Paper, $7.50.

By W. D. Wetherell

Writers at the beginning of their careers are in much the same position as those early homesteaders faced with the daunting prospect of seeking a patch of land and, through skill, sweat and determination, making it their own. Though the product is fiction and the labor imaginative, the results in the happiest instances are the same: a new fertile landscape that is indelibly one’s own to harvest.

The homesteading analogy is particularly apt when it comes to Patricia Henley’s first short-story collection, “Friday Night at Silver Star,” the winner of the Montana Arts Council First Book Award for 1985, because Ms. Henley writes so convincingly of contemporary back-to-the-landers—survivors of the 1960’s and early 70’s, castaways from mainstream America left stranded in the Reagan 80’s as the wistful custodians of a vanished dream.

Wistful and stubborn. They cling to their network of counterculture friends scattered across Montana and the Northwest, picking apples when they need cash, taking saunas in hot springs, keeping the faith through habit, even though they have long since forgotten exactly what that faith is. They have names like Little Egypt and Obadiah, Sunbow and Rein. They live in tepees and earthen dugouts, renovated school buses and homemade A-frames. What is left of their energy goes into rituals of food preparation: venison chili, tomato wine, falafel sandwiches, guacamole and chapatis. Alone, they are often on the lookout for partners of either sex to help them endure their solitude, at least for a while. “Out here, most folks find a mate for the winter, someone to share the chores, the wood chopping and water hauling, someone to warm the bed during the long nights.” They mate and unmate in casual and bewildering ways, but they retain a capacity for the graceful gesture that redeems their foolishness—the capacity to serenade their former lovers with “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” played on a trumpet from the crest of a distant ridge.

Another thing these characters share is the skill and sensitivity with which their creator describes them. In “The Birthing,” one of the collection’s strongest stories, a commune’s odd woman out waits for the baby she is not sure she wants:

“Greta made a cool hibiscus tea with raw honey and the two women sat suspended in the afternoon, in the shade of the main room, gossiping and sharing a secret now and then, a shard of the past. It might have been any lazy afternoon, two women drinking tea and talking, but for the pocket watch ticking away Angel’s innocence. The contractions grew closer and more intense so that when one came Angel’s speech was slow and distant and she would still be telling her story but it was as if another person spoke and she, Angel, had gone way inside, concentrating on the force certain as moon tide, the force that would wash the child into the world.”

As with any story collection, there are peaks and valleys. Ms. Henley sometimes falls victim to that familiar malaise of contemporary fiction: writers suffering from the same blahs as her characters. In the title story, a bizarre and funny situation at a combination potluck dinner and orgy is dissipated by an ending that, whether intentionally or not, seems too prissy. In “Moving In” the survivors of the counterculture are merely tiresome. We can see that Ms. Henley knows everything her characters know; we need to see she knows more.

But one advantage of treading a fairly narrow path is that even the less successful stories complement the better ones, fleshing things out. By the last story in the collection, “As Luck Would Have It,” Ms. Henley’s skill and determination have combined to form a memorable portrait of two stubbornly independent people, a cowboy and an earth mother, fighting their way toward a victory of love. In “Friday Night at Silver Star,” Patricia Henley has staked a claim on our imaginations in a readable and convincing style.
Arunbhai J. Patel, owner of Finlays P.L.C., a 282-outlet chain of British newspaper shops. If new bids are successful, Mr. Patel will be the largest owner of newspaper stores in Britain.

Indian Finds Riches in Britain

By STEVE LOHR

Special to The New York Times

LONDON, May 18 — For Arunbhai J. Patel, Britain has been a land of opportunity, yielding prosperity in return for his hard work, enterprise and grit. In just a few years, Mr. Patel has moved from the ranks of shopkeeper to one of the country's most successful entrepreneurs.

In the early 1970's, his family was thrown out of Uganda, where they owned four general stores, when Idi Amin's reign of terror began. The 30 members of this Indian family fled to Britain, crammed themselves into a small rental house in south London, refused offers of public housing and welfare, and started to rebuild their lives.

For Mr. Patel, who had emigrated to Britain a few years earlier as a student, it meant 20-hour days — studying accountancy and selling newspapers, candy and tobacco products in the family-run shop.

By last year, Mr. Patel had a small but thriving accounting firm in west London, and his family owned several newspaper and confectionery shops. Yet the stocky, 38-year-old accountant had bigger plans.

Last March, he acquired Finlays P.L.C., a 282-outlet chain of British newspaper shops, for $33 million. Still not content, Mr. Patel is bidding more than $400 million for the 1,000 newspaper agents, as newspaper stores known in Britain, and 312 other retail shops that Guinness, the big brewer...

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Indian Immigrant Finds Way to Riches in Britain

Continued From First Business Page

is auctioning off. If successful, the acqui-
sition would make Mr. Patel the largest news agent owner in the coun-

"We're moving up with big steps now," he said.

The sharp climb is a version of the classic immigrant's tale. Brit-
ain, like the United States, has long

proved rewarding for hard-driving

immigrants. But from the late Sir
Siegmund Warburg, the German

financier who founded a leading mer-
chant bank, S. G. Warburg, to the Aus-

tralian-born publisher, Rupert Mur-

doch.

In recent years, the immigrant ad-

vantage has been particularly striking

at Mr. Patel's bailiwick, the small-re-
tailing arm of the economy. It has

often been said that Britain is a na-

tion of shopkeepers — stated as an in-

sult, with pride by Disraeli — but it seems

hardly any of them are British any-

more.

Population Spurt

The Indian immigrants have done especially well as shopkeepers, and

that success has drawn other Indian

merchants to Britain. From 1975 to

1985, according to the most recent

Home Office statistics, the Indian

population in Britain nearly doubled,

to 763,000. Mr. Patel said he believes

that the bulk of Britain's Indian popu-

lation is engaged in small retailing.

As a group, they have put into prac-
tice the "spirit of enterprise" that

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher,

the shopkeeper's daughter from

Grantham, has preached as the solu-
tion to Britain's economic problems. Most prominent among the Indian

shopkeepers in Britain are the expa-

triate merchants from the state of

Gujarat. In fact, Indian families shar-
ing the Patel surname, most of them

tracing their origins to a half-

dozen villages in Gujarat, are so common in the

news agent business that in some

parts of London a "Patel's" is a gen-

eric term for a newspaper shop.

"It's in My Blood"

Members of the Gujarati trading

class, like Mr. Patel, are now liber-

ally spread across the globe, and have en-

slaves in the United States, Australia,

Fiji and South America. "Retailing is my heritage," Mr. Patel said. "It's in my blood."

He explains the long-held Gujarati

impulse to emigrate, especially to the

West, in terms of a streetwise anthro-
pology. "The Western society is so pros-
perous, so soft society," he said. "If you go into a soft society and you are hard, you will do well."

Mr. Patel is proud Indian. He

maintains family ties to his native vil-

lage of Dharajm, owns three houses in

Gujarat and has purposely re-

tained his Indian citizenship. But

the one place where Mr. Patel insists

he would never establish a business is in

India. "There are too many people

just like me here," he said. "If you rub two diamonds together, all you get is heat."

At Finlays, Mr. Patel, as chairman,
Boy Gets Girl, Changes World History

THE CHINA CARD
By John Ehrlichman.

By Orville Schell

In reading John Ehrlichman's new espionage novel, "The China Card," one is reminded of how out-of-date the updated maxim "Politics is the last refuge of a scoundrel" has become. Many in the White House class that graduated into political oblivion after Watergate along with their President, Richard Nixon, lost little time in recycling themselves directly into the writing profession. In the years since, they have produced a blizzard of books capitalizing on both their experiences in office and their well-known, albeit variously besmirched, names. And now, like an unexploded mine from this period, one of the most prolific, Mr. Nixon's former adviser on domestic affairs, John Ehrlichman, has produced yet another offering, this time a thriller about the opening of diplomatic relations with China, a central event of the Nixon Administration.

"The China Card" centers on Matt Thompson, a fictional young Chinese-speaking graduate of Harvard Law School who is hired by the firm of Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie & Alexander, goes to work for Mr. Nixon in Washington after he is elected President in 1968, becomes a partisan of the People's Republic of China within the White House and secretly travels to Peking to negotiate with the Communist leadership long before Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Thompson is kidnaped and shot at by rebels near Canton, and his heroic subsequent deeds end up paving the way for the President's historic 1972 visit.

Mr. Ehrlichman, already an expert on White House intrigue, has evidently done a good deal of research about this period of United States-China relations. He skilfully merges fact with fiction, marching the likes of Mr. Nixon, Mr. Kissinger, Alexander Haig and H. R. Haldeman onstage with not only Zhou Enlai, Lin Biao and Mao Zedong but an assortment of invented characters as well. Unfortunately, his plotting skills are not matched by his writing. His characters, even those celebrity figures we are naturally curious about, are treated as if they were merely ingredients that, if mixed together according to a recipe, would automatically produce a delectable cake.

Mr. Kissinger here is a publicity-hungry egomaniac. Zhou Enlai is a charming but ruthless and scheming Communist. The fictional Mr. Nixon is an insecure, paranoid President who calculates everything according to his advantage. Thompson is a boilerplate-handsome young lawyer whose unique feature is a faint glimmer of conscience. The love interest provided by a series of young women who fall for Thompson includes a glamorous Newport socialite with a nice body and a weak brain, as well as a bright, jokc-cracking Washington lawyer who wants Thompson to get out of Mr. Nixon's employ before he is terminally polluted. Last but hardly least, there is a pretty Chinese interpreter. Not only does Thompson implausibly fall in love with her while secretly in Peking during the height of the Cultural Revolution's period of most rabid hostility to foreigners but he ultimately marries her, Mao suit and all, in what must be one of the most contrived boy-meets-and-girls finales in recent publishing history.

None of the characters (real or otherwise) have any convincing ambiguity or the interesting inner tension that makes us identify with or want to know more about someone. Moreover, most of them are depicted as dark and self-serving. Once we get their stereotypes, we've got it all.

Far be it from me to argue that the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Nixon White House were not filled with stereotypically ambitious, insecure and self-serving men. But characters sketched in such an unflattering and one-dimensional manner rarely make for good reading. Even in a thriller, a reader must be able to feel an author's empathy for his creations, regardless of how compromised he chooses to make them. When an author's sentiments toward those he writes about are limited to contempt and scorn, it's difficult for the reader to become involved.

That this is a novel written by a former Presidential adviser who, in the words of the dust jacket, "has been there in a way no other novelist has — in the Oval Office, aboard Air Force One," etc. — is not enough to compensate for these shortcomings of craft. In fact, as I finished the book, I was so unmoved that I was forced to wonder — politics may not be the last refuge of scoundrels, but books like "The China Card" suggest that writing fiction may not be the last and best refuge of politicians.
WHOSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

When you, sir or madam, utter words today in Duluth or Orlando, or take up your pen anywhere from Boston to Seattle, please be aware that a new responsibility has been laid on you. It is now official that you are in charge of the richest language in the world, the Queen’s English of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.

Robert Burchfield says so, and he knows what he is talking about. He is the man who has decided what goes in the definitive Oxford English Dictionary. With his sweaty Sherpas and finicky specialists, he has labored for 30 years in the word mines. He has emerged with no fewer than 62,750 additions for the 12 volumes of the 1884-1928 dictionary, and he declares that the language’s center of gravity has clearly shifted from England to America.

This is brave of him. If he were not a nice New Zealander, he would be charged with treason and clapped in the Tower of London, Her Majesty’s slammer. His predecessor, the great Sir James Murray, who spent 35 years editing the first OED, fended off “Americanisms.” The English have always been stuffed shirts (U.S. colloq., 1875) about American words. Dr. Samuel Johnson set the tone when he interposed his person between any single American word and his dictionary of 1755. He rejected clever, fun, stingy, reliable. A lawyer in the High Court was rebuked from the bench for using “to bluff.” King Edward might have gotten away with marrying an American divorcée, but the Establishment could never forgive him for mouthing the Americanism “radio” in his fireside chat instead of “wireless” (a word that only the Miss Havishams use any more).

The doughty Burchfield has packed his dictionary with such made-in-the-U.S.A. items as teenager, superpower, yuppie, weight watcher, zap, zilch, sitcom, unisex. Is this corrupting a precious heritage? Not at all. English is safe while it is honest, vivid and concise. H. L. Mencken in his day was right to taunt the prudish with orneriness, yes man, gabfest, doghouse, handout, slush fund, kickback, kill-joy. Who would have sacrificed “rubberneck” for “a person obsessed by celebrities”?

Of course, some of the words about which Mencken was crazy as a bedbug (U.S. colloq., 1832) have faded as life changes. The pinup girl has been replaced by the centerfold, the bargain hunter by the discount tire kicker. The couch potato slumped in front of the tube is more of a feature of the ’80s than the lounge lizards and the barfly. The real menace to English consigned to American hands lies not in the vitality of the common people but in their seduction by euphemism, sales talk and what Orwell called political language designed to make lies sound truthful and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. Once upon a time, there were poor people, then they became needy, deprived, underprivileged and finally disadvantaged. A “disadvantaged” Jules Feiffer cartoon character summed it up by remarking that while he still doesn’t have a dime he sure has acquired a fine vocabulary.

I think of the bureaucrats who hide a ghettos in a relatively depressed socioeconomic area; television people who refer to precipitation situations; advertising that offers limited lifetime guarantees; airlines that say, “We will be in the air momentarily,” which is literally ominous, when they mean soon.

And chauvinism should be rejected. English has thrived on theft. Half our 600,000 words are foreigners. England itself is still inventive, and its exports should be gratefully received. There is that new word wally, meaning chump; and supergrass that so aptly describes the key police informant. It’s better than squealer, who is noisy, whereas someone who grasps does it furtively. I have liked to believe it comes from the Ink Spots’ song “Whispering Grass (Don’t Tell the Trees)”; but Burchfield says its root is grasshopper, which is Cockney rhyming slang for shoppers, meaning people who go to the cop shop and rat on their friends.

Perhaps the best English will be transatlantic, drawing on both roots as did Churchill, who had an American mother. “Give us the tools and we will finish the job,” he told Roosevelt in 1941. Imagine if he had called FDR and said: “The task would be capable of determination were the appropriate implements made available to those concerned.”

They would have lost the war.
A Dramatic Tribute to Eudora Welty

MEL GUSSOW

The New York Times, Sunday, August 4, 1985

When the actress, Brenda Currin, brings it to life on stage, Miss Currin is the adapter, along with her director, David Kaplan, of an anthology entitled "Sister and Miss Lexie," a dramatic rendition of, and tribute to, the art of Eudora Welty (at the Second Stage).

While one has certain reservations about other selections in the anthology (an excerpt from the novel "Losing Battles" is not really self-sustaining, and the show both opens and closes with a parade of names from Welty's "The Robber Bridegroom"), there is no question about Miss Currin's skillful and literate subject. She is Sister, Stella-Rondo, Mama (who "weighs 200 pounds and has real tiny feet"), Legg the spinster, Julia Mortizer, the schoolteacher so devoted to education that she "puts an end to good fishing," and all the other colorful characters she might choose to play, including Miss Welty.

Unlike Hai Holbrook recreating Mark Twain as a stage performer, Miss Currin does not really pretend to be Miss Welty. However, through a kind of acting alchemy, she conveys the essence and the artistic generosity of the author, providing, along with Miss Welty herself, an expressive interpreter of the stories. She handles the task of making the material fit the narrative, the story telling to use the word "reader," for this is not a stage reading, but fiction adapted into monodrama. She acts out the tales, playing all the roles and filling in the narrative. It is storytelling raised to dramatic art.

Monologues sometimes fall simply because they do not have an evocative story to tell, or because they are most alive when encountered between hard covers. The author, Mr. Pigott-Smith, inspired by his involvement in the television adaptation of "The Jewel in the Crown," commissioned a one-man play about India, from Francis Yeats-Brown's book, "Tales of a Bengal Lancer." Though Mr. Pigott-Smith is an intelligent actor, the material proved to be in its London version—undenemonic and esoteric, at least to Americans. The material seemed to have more to do with the English dress code than with the drama of Bengali lancers in India. It is unlikely that Englishmen would feel similarly unsettled at an evening of Eudora Welty. For her regions, her world writer.

There is a basic difference in the quality of writers chosen for dramatization. The several recent attempts at dramatizing the work of Dorothy Parker on stage have failed, at least partly, because of Mrs. Parker's own artistic limitations. Her cleverness made her a quotable character in her period, but it does not ensure that she can be a rewarding subject for an evening in the theater. On the other hand, Miss Welty, along with William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, is important enough as a writer to warrant such attention. Coincidentally, all three derive from a Southern heritage, which is itself abundant theatrical source material.

In the manner of her subject, Miss Currin's show achieves the generic through the clarification of the specific, beginning with the objects that act as scenery. The post office is represented by a small beehive of mail slots (the members of Sister's family are, after all, "the main people" in the town of China Grove), a handful of postcards (people who write their "uttermost secrets on penny postcards" deserve to have them read by the public), an electric fan, a Westinghouse radio, a fly swatter, a ukulele and Mason jars of green tomato pickle and other condiments. The orderly aggregation of meaningful objects serves not for the "peace" that Sister finds, alone, in the post office.

Inhabitability of the environment is a most congenial aspect, first seen in silhouette, carefully ironing an American flag. Fresh-faced and dressed in homemakers clothes, Miss Currin cuts a lovely but decidedly unglamorous figure, and her informal approach caresses the written word into conversational theater. She obeys the appearance of making up the stories as she tells them. Though she is not virtuosic at altering her voice, she is an actress with an apparently limitless ability to transcend material. In fact, one wishes that she had taken the time to tell more stories.

The program indicates that Miss Currin and Mr. Kaplan have added three Welty stories, including "Why I Live at the P.O." for television. One carryover from the show is the regret that the work of this major American author has not been adapted with greater frequency on stage, film or television. There have been isolated instances in the theater—the adaptation some years ago of the short novel "The Ponder Heart"; the musical, "The Robber Bridegroom"; and, last season, Larry Krton's dramatization of the short story, "The Hitch-Hikers." Each of the three remained faithful to the original and, in so doing, became flavorful individual works of theater.
Is ‘Drummer Girl’ Political?

By NINA DARNTON

When director George Roy Hill and scriptwriter Loring Mandel first met with the British novelist John Le Carré, to discuss the filming of his best-selling spy novel, "The Little Drummer Girl," they holed up together for three days in the novelist’s chalet in Switzerland. When they finally emerged, Mr. Hill said, in mock despair, "Great. Now we've got an eight-hour film."

Mr. Le Carré then took them to Beirut to visit Palestinian refugee camps so they could get "the buzz" of the Middle East. They returned to the United States with a script still two times too long and with, as Mr. Le Carré put it, an increased sense of "a solemn obligation to the material."

Beirut is only one of the locations in the novel, which moves around the globe in dizzying twists of international events and intrigue. But the multiple nationalities, the complexities of the plot, the large cast of characters, and the wide range locales in this weighty and controversial novel, were only the beginning of the filmmakers' difficulties.

The main problem in attempting to remain faithful to the book was dealing with what the filmmakers saw as its political balance — striving to be even-handed in the portrayal of Israelis and Palestinians engaged in a violent struggle for their respective causes and survival in the supercharged, highly sensitive arena of current history involving the ongoing agony of the Middle East.

"We weren't making a political film," said Mr. Hill. "We have no political ax to grind. We were making a suspense story that happened to have a political back-

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Blind Obsessions

Left, Jonathan Pryce plays a British journalist who allows his ambition to override ethics in "The Ploughman's Lunch," opening at the Public this Friday. Below, Anthony Perkins stars as a street-corner preacher obsessed with a mysterious woman played by Kathleen Turner in "Crimes of Passion," Friday at local theaters.


choice was made for dramatic reasons. It would have been boring, he maintains, to have on screen two characters as similar as Joseph and Kurt. But it's one example of how a change made for dramatic impact can subtly change the film's psychological effect.

Another is the scene in which Charlie is recruited by the Israelis. Called the "brainwashing" scene by Mr. Hill and Mr. Mandel, it runs close to 100 pages in the book. The film reduces it to about 10 minutes. Mr. Hill had to focus and shorten Charlie's moment of decision so he made two important departures from the book. Joseph, trying to persuade her, says that he hopes that some day there will be a Palestinian state living in peace next to Israel. The camera suddenly shifts to Kurt, who reacts by exchanging a glance of identical denial with another Israeli agent. The director says this touch was added to isolate Joseph from the others, in part to anticipate the ending in which he leaves the intelligence service disillusioned. But to the viewer the stolen glance has an extra meaning — it emphasizes the treachery of the Israelis who will say anything to bring Charlie into their net of retribution.

Another directorial decision that affects the politics of the film comes at the very beginning when an Israeli diplomatic family is blown up by a bomb left by a young Swedish terrorist. After the bombing we see the terrorist sitting in a getaway car hugging her accomplice. Her face is frozen in a moment of sadness. It undercuts the cold-blooded act of murder and sets the tone of serious purpose and dedication to a cause for the Palestinians and even their European allies — a group the book treated more as misfits and deviants, many of whom turned to terrorism for thrills. On the other hand, when Tayeh, the commander of the Palestinian training camp, tells Charlie that they are "not anti-Semitism," only "anti-Zionist," she answers "Tell me another one," a crack that tells the viewer not to take his assertion seriously.

The makers of the film seem concerned about the controversy that it might set off. As the film was being shot publicity was kept to a minimum. "What I hope is that the film is not viewed primarily as a political film, but as a human story and a work of film art," said Mr. Mandel.

Nevertheless, even in the production stages, the movie was seen as highly sensitive. Israeli officials allowed the company into the country but did not fully cooperate, according to Mr. Hill. Jordan refused permission altogether and Queen Noor of Jordan objected to the script as anti-Palestinian, he said.

The book, Kurtz, the master-spy, has many of the same doubts as Joseph, the agent Charlie loves. The two resolve their doubts in different ways. Joseph deserts them by working to stop the Palestinians even if in the process he has to act against his own country. Joseph, who had resigned from the secret service, said Mr. Kinski. The decision to bring back for this mission, finally with a cast of characters from the conflict altogether, to which the director adds that he has no knowledge of what is right from what is wrong.

In the movie Mr. Kinski, who has a soft voice and a wide range even when playing abstract characters, plays Kurtz as a hard-liner. He becomes a symbol of the politics of this country, the way so many have, a fanaticism, who absolutely brushes away all moral qualms. The effect is to make the Israelis seem like a loosely moving machine pitted against the more vulnerable Palestinians.

Mr. Le Carré original directed the casting of Mr. Kinski because "I thought he carried too much baggage with him." He said he thinks his character, Kurtz is probably "more Israeli" and not as harsh. Mr. Hill said the casting

Nina Darnton is a freelance writer who has lived abroad for nine years.

Diane. But we had to have an actress with a tremendous range and great authority. She carries practically every scene. We now have a character who still has a great deal to give and nowhere to give it. Her age gives her relationship to Joseph the poignancy of a lady who is alone. Mr. Le Carré confesses that he himself is oblivious to much of the age difference. "I was 53 last October," he said. "I've reached the age where anyone between 19 and 53 is tremendously attractive. I can't tell the difference. But my children tell me that the film is about grownups."

The change in Charlie's character is interesting because Mr. Le Carré has specified in his original contract that Charlie be played by an English actress. "We were unable to find a suitable English actress," Mr. Hill said. When I first spoke of the story we discussed the possibility of playing it with an English actress. Then I was led to believe that making her American — to isolate her even more from the European group. This difference in age, her more advanced age, makes the whole ending scene more moving, gives it more impact. By the end she can no longer act, she can't pretend. She has been destroyed."

Having passed Miss Keaton as Charlie, the filmmakers decided that all the other characters should not be American or known to the audience. "This is about the gross manipulation of a woman by men," said Mr. Le Carré, "a question of a unknown actress, to move through a sea of unknown faces."

While the changes in Charlie's personally added a dimension, the changes in Kurtz's removed an essential part of his character — a moral one.

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Voice of Dissent in Korea Is in Verse

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF
Special to The New York Times

SEOUL, South Korea, July 25 — Some angry South Korea dissenters battle the Government with bricks and gasoline bombs; others hurl verse.

"The role of a poet in Korea is not just to write about sentiment, but also to write about movements in history," says Ko Un, one of South Korea's best-known dissident poets. "Poetry is the song of history."

In this land imbued in poetry, where anthologies of verse sell the way spy novels do in the United States, it sometimes seems that the poems have been as effective as the bricks. The brick-throwers may lose their battles for control of the streets, but the poets have mostly won the battle for Korea's soul, for intellectual legitimacy, for middle-class sympathies.

"Poetry was a factor in the success of the democratic movement," said Paik Nak Chung, a prominent literary critic and professor at Seoul National University. "The poems were important in spreading protest, in inspiring dissent."

Poets Harassed, Works Banned

The Government apparently agrees, for it has harassed and imprisoned dissident poets, in addition to banning many poems and anthologies. Korea's most noted poet of protest, Kim Chi Ha, is a household name, largely because his poems have brought him repeated arrests and even a death sentence, which was later commuted.

Yet dissident poetry is flourishing as never before. Angry poems are read aloud at vast anti-Government demonstrations, expanding the audience for the verse. Collections are sold under the counter at bookshops. And in the last half-dozen years, countless tiny printing establishments have sprouted illegally around the nation to publish poetry without the required Government permission.

"My book 'A Voice Calling for the Dawn' was banned, but is sold so well that it went into five editions," said Mun Bong Ran, a 52-year-old poet in the southern city of Kwangju. "When the Government bans such books, that dramatically enhances their appeal."

Poes are useful weapons in Korea, because the struggle here is not just for power but for legitimacy as well. The Confucian heritage, which emphasizes respect for learning, means that intellectuals and artists are a prime source of legitimacy and are particularly influential throughout society.

Others Take Up Protest

All the arts, not just poetry, are being marshaled against the Government. Novelists, artists, photographers, dramatists are all taking up the ideas of protest, while trying to retain their authenticity as artists rather than propagandists.

Dissident artists organized an "Anti-Torture" exhibition a few months ago of paintings and woodcuts, which the Government promptly closed down. A new genre of politically oriented dramas and masked dances is catching on around the country. Both of the two main opposition leaders, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, practice the ancient Korean art of calligraphy to copy aphorisms and quotations laced with political meaning.

Yet it is in poetry that protest becomes most fervent and most effective, and it is poetry that has dazzled for the longest time in protest. A century ago, toward the end of the Yi dynasty in Korea, poets began to write against foreign influences, particularly the growth of the Japanese presence. More recently, poets challenged the Japanese occupation of Korea, from 1910 to 1945. The modern flowering of dissident poetry began after the student uprising in 1960 that ousted President Syngman Rhee, and gained momentum in the last few years with the growth of underground publishing houses.

Some Ask 'Pure' Poetry

Still, political poetry is not entirely accepted in literary circles. Debates rage between those who contend that poetry should be "pure" and aloof from the fray and those who say it must grapple with social problems. As recently as the 1970's, most critics objected to the political messages in poems by Kim Chi Ha and others, but these days the consensus seems to be that poetic beauty is not compromised — and may be enhanced — by making a political point.

"It is difficult to become a poet today without defining one's position with regard to the poetry of protest," said Kim Uchang, a critic and professor at Korea University.

The growing prestige of political poetry largely reflects its popularity. Kim Chi Ha's satirical poem "Five Bandits" initially drew some sneers from critics, but became one of the country's best-known ballads. It also helped that poets such as Mr. Kim and Ko Un were recognized as first-class craftsmen, even by critics who objected to the nature of their poetry. Other prominent poets began to join them.

"I have written poems about laborers, military fascism, the deaths of student demonstrators, and the rage we feel about the American role in Korea," said Mr. Ko, who is 53 years old and spent a dozen of his early years as a Buddhist monk. "In the 70's, there were very few poets who wrote such poetry. But in the late 80's, this kind of literature is spreading rapidly.

Most of the dissident poets insist that they would be remiss if they ignored the most important social issues and confined themselves to "bourgeois" topics as nature and romance.

"Expressing sentiment is important, but you must also express reality," said Shin Kyung Rim, an energetic 51-year-old who is among Korea's best-known poets. "The most important problems in Korea are democracy and reunification of North and South Korea. Without dealing with these problems, you cannot call yourself a poet."

Poems of Protest: A Sampler

The Winter Republic
By Yang Song U
(Translated by Ko Won)

Is it now winter?
The middle of night?
With what, my friend,
Shall we comfort ourselves
This winter time when our fields are frozen?

Is our great land still livable?
Is the land still as beautiful as silks?
That's a lie, that is a lie.
We are serfs, scarecrows
Lending our ears silently to lies
In a pretense of knowing nothing every day
And having to tolerate whips that cut our bones.

Crying out in our own dear language,
Why don't we make azaleas, azaleas, azaleas
Come alive and bloom out of this frozen land,
Blooming all over the paddies?
My friend,
Why don't we have our sad winter
Spoken of, and time and time again?
And mustn't we, shackled tight, struggle on
To the last, while waiting for the spring,
My friend?

Dialogue Between an American Dog
And a Korean Dog
By Mun Bong Ran

Korean dog: Hello, American dog. Your country is a bizarre society, a dogs' paradise, where dogs live luxuriously;
How ridiculous that a dog's life is pampered, while your neighbors like El Salvador have no human rights.
Our master's country has been trampled by Yankies, Japanese and Russians who divided the territory.
Hello, American dog. We are willing to sacrifice our lives for our master. We are happy. We can't understand civilized Americans putting the rights of dogs over those of people. Murderous humanism! Goodbye, happy American dog.

I Cannot Forget
By Chong Hul Song

Tomorrow
I will throw a scoop of dirt into my mouth
And plug it with a ball of cotton.

Day after day,
Night after night,
I bury a part of me
In order to annihilate the evidence of my living
In order to obtain my survival.

Daily Inspection of the Scene
Of the Crime
By Hwang Chi U
(Translated by Sol Sun Bong)

Yesterday
I came back with stakes driven into my ears.
Today
I installed a fence of barbed wire over my eyes
And bound it with bandage.
- slow down my answers
- no "wh"s
- humor
- cooler: hold more

Why does a novel have to be artificial?

you know more people in a small town than you do in a big place.

- Lewis Town: Thirty 200 mi away.
- there aren't as many walls of society.
- Alec began wearing a neck tie. 
- Mac - between y and between
- moister green i put two bridge
- heather green i put two bridge

- dreams are born, dreams are torn apart, dreams change.
- flow of life
- it poeves me.

- I believe you do have to goose readers in suicide every 45 sec. - huff, here comes.
- make a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.

- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.
- a Russian submarine! huff, here comes.

- Toussaint Rennie
- Ray Heaney

- "How's she going, Jock?" (WPA)
- "How do, Jock?" (W. B. Yeats)
- "Hey, Jock!" (Ray Heaney)

- history do to people.
Strangely, how you: I don't know o that, but if you were to run me-
comete: Um, myths, or show them in comedy form - cookies
prose "meant to be heard while it tells its story." Martin
That's what Sh'ogun was up to,
Voice: Like Brontë's,
John Clare (early 19th c): "Language that is evergreen:\n\[dialect: cadence of language is life\]
- an appetite for feast of language
- possibilities of language
- "better than a kick in a proper overseas."

Stegner, 1941: Jim Hill 'tuilt by ives of an awful lot of people into his empire - 5 in among them.
Mackean: "Anybody who didn't kick ass of A'da Co vs a dead duck."
My dad of big ranches
- It's not just theory or a win a win.
Yes: write good books

(Cont'd Devoltech - Brown's - beyond Las Cruces
NY: Trail: Mont-Spa-Wyo - Colo-NM = 6.5 mid

Almost as fast as he could move
Conrad: Let Jim, Vet, all H-D until 7: 6 Blackwell as C went writing. Just
in beginning is language. alpha, omega fell between

people who don't have

wisdom of heart. (colloquial) lunjo: a lot also do this

we are tribal - we dwell in a community of time

I rummage around back there

lunjo: "Still able to sit up & take nourishment."

- T'assunt: "Say on" (say more)

as jiek might say, "Hush? Whid you get that confused
idea 'it fell down out a tree onto you?"

Thanks one more time.
"The Writer, the Work" Features Les Murray

BY HELEN GRAVES

Joseph Brodsky wrote of the Australian poet Les Murray: "He is, quite simply, the one by whom the language lives." Murray's work is distinguished by its exceptional beauty, vigor, and intensity, and his visits to the United States are always occasions for rejoicing among his readers here. An enthusiastic audience gathered at The New School on February 25, when Murray joined Susan Sontag for a warm, animated conversation on poetry, politics, and the literary life. The evening was part of PEN's international series "The Writer, the Work," curated by Sontag; it was co-sponsored by The New School and Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Murray began the evening by reading several short poems from his collections The Rabbiter's Bounty (1991) and Subhuman Redneck Poems (1997). (The otherworldly wordplay of his poem "Bats' Ultrasound" was a highlight.) He then read two longer passages from his new novel in verse, Frey Neptune, which recounts the life of a German-Australian sailor who, in Sontag's words, "soaks up all of the central experience of our century" during his travels.

When Sontag asked Murray about the genesis of Frey Neptune, he pointed to the book's epigraph: a 1915 poem by the Armenian writer Siamanto, which describes a Turkish mob burning to death a group of women at the beginning of the Armenian genocide (Siamanto himself was killed later that year). That scene becomes the defining incident in the life of Murray's protagonist, who loses his sense of touch after he witnesses it.

Murray noted that he wrote the book "in the workingman's language of the first half of the twentieth century," because he "wanted to get away from literary language, from that received literary dialect or sociolect in which most literature is written.... It's very tyrannical, it'll prescribe all

Sontag: I suspect that you think that if you lived in Paris or London or Sydney or New York it would be harder to be a poet. Am I correct?

Murray: Probably. I like living at home. I had to negotiate with my family— "Would you like to move back to the bush?"— and my wife said, "We'll give it a year's trial, and see how it goes." After two months she said, "The year's trial is up. I love it—I'm seeing more of my fellow women here than I ever saw in Sydney." That was 1985 and we've happily stayed there since. You can get encapsulated living in cities among just a little group. That's not a polemical statement. The only polemics I ever used to make is that the center of the world is anywhere you feel the center to be. It's not true in the publishing world, but it's true in poetry, and I think in the deepest heart of people it's true. It's where you are and want to be; it's an elective affinity.

Sontag: What's the next project? Back to shorter poems?

Murray: I'm writing a book at the moment, just finishing it. It's called Conscious and Verbal, because when I came out of the coma there was a report in the paper saying, "Poet Les Murray is now conscious and verbal."

Sontag: [Is Catholicism] the spine, ultimately, of your independence?

Murray: No, no. Oddly enough, it's poetry that's the spine of my independence. You see, religions are poems, not poems are religions. My religion, in a way, is the poem of Catholicism, but I test that against other poems: How good a poem is it? I test all human formations by that: How good a poem is it?

Sontag: All right, then, poetry. Do you think of poetry as a search for truth?

Murray: Hmm. I think of poetry as a search for poems, for the poetic experience. It's the model of human creativity, by which all human creativity gets done. Most poetic acts turn out to be cars and marriages and lives and philosophies and universities and everything under the sun. A few of them turn into pieces of paper with short lines that don't go right across the page. And the great thing about that is that those don't require much more from you when they are made. They require only a lend of your body for a little while to give them breath and give them weight and blood. But they don't require blood sacrifice off you.... They're finished, they don't require further articulation. Like Napoleon's poem: It required millions of corpses.

Sontag: So a poem is not necessarily language-based.

Murray: No, what we do on paper, these little things that we do, are the model by which all human creation happens, and some of it is dangerous and terrifying, and some of it is harmless and good. And people make bodies for themselves. The body I made for myself is a body of work, a body of poems. The body you made for yourself is a body of your writing.
your attitudes and write your poem for you if you give it half a chance. I wanted to write in a completely different language and see what insights and expressions and realizations that would bring up."

Sontag asked Murray about his lifelong resistance to prescribed attitudes. "He has a rather incendiary reputation," she informed the audience, because of his reluctance to accede to "acceptable ways of thinking and talking."

"Received thinking is not much use to you," Murray replied. "If you're going to earn your keep in this business, you're not in the business of propaganda or reinforcing the received attitudes, you're in the business of making discoveries." He first experienced "coercive attitudes" in the 1960s, when he refused to sign a petition proffered by an antiwar activist who behaved as if he were "handing out a license to write poetry... and I didn't figure that he had the right. I realized that was a fatal turning point in my life—there was going to be trouble. I was going to have to write ever so much better now, because I wasn't going to get an easy ride."

His primary concern as he writes, Murray says, is to "make it fresh." At the end of Strawberries, the protagonist experiences a sensual and spiritual rebirth when he learns to forgive not the criminals who have caused all the suffering he has witnessed, but the victims whose misery has never ceased to haunt him. "Forgive the victim is a weird thing," Murray remarked, "but you'll have no peace till you do."

Sontag and Murray talked about the way his Catholic faith informs his approach to poetry, and the way poetry shapes his faith (see sidebar). Sontag asked, as well, for Murray's views on contemporary Australia: "We have the impression that the Australian identity is contentious and difficult."

"It's been contentious in the last thirty years," Murray responded. "The elites have been trying to move upmarket, become more sophisticated. It's improved the cooking out of sight," he commented cheerfully, "and we've gone from drinking beer to drinking wine, which is a clear gain." The downside, however, is pressure to "despise old Australia." Sontag noted that the title of Subhuman Redneck Poems is deliberately provocative, and Murray confessed, again gleefully, "It annoyed all the right people, it was just the job."

He concluded the program by reading more poems—this time from his 1994 collection Translations from the Natural World. Many audience members lingered for the book signing that followed, until they had to bid Les Murray a reluctant farewell.

In the Next Issue of the PEN Newsletter:

1999 Literary Awards Presented in New York
Benefit Dinner Raises $600,000 for PEN
Open Book Program Holds Panel & Reading: "Beyond Margins"
Good to back here at Scotts, as I’ve been uncountable times with my books—they were on the other side of the freeway when I first started at this. Reading from the new book, Mountain Time, today, I figured I’d do a couple of pieces to introduce you to a pair of the central characters, the McCaskill sisters. One of the other characters says these two women have the kinds of mouths that need holsters, but I find them interesting to write, and create lives, and predicaments, for. Here’s the first of these sisters, in the opening scene of Mountain Time:
four central figures of the book. Mitch is the environmental reporter for a Seattle newspaper called "Cascopia"—one of those urban weeklies for people concerned to know the difference between tofu and futon—and he writes a column called "Coastwatch," a kind of ecological watchdog column. Mitch at age fifty—when the book takes place in 1996—is jelly-sandwiched between the grown children he lost in an early divorce and an aging parent back in his Rocky Mountain hometown. He is, in other words, that not unknown specimen in our land, a Baby Boomer beginning to feel the pressure of the years.
Master of
The Word

BY CHARLES R. LARSON

On Tuesday, February 5, Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of Senegal and one of the pioneer exponents of the black African literary movement négritude, announced over Radio Senegal that Camara Laye, the Guinean writer, had died the day before. The 52-year-old novelist had been ill for many years—most of the time during his period of exile in Senegal, where he had resided for 13 years as the President’s guest. Although the Western press has made little of his demise, Laye was regarded by many critics of African literature (and his tens of thousands of African readers) as his continent’s pre-eminent novelist. If he had any rival for that distinction, it could only have been the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, whose books have been more widely available than those of his Francophone contemporary.

Most of Camara Laye’s career as a writer was a continuous struggle against hardship, poverty and government censorship—the harsh realities of many an African intellectual of his generation. Laye became a writer somewhat by accident. Born in Kouroussa, Guinea, in 1928, he distinguished himself as a student and in time received a government scholarship to a technical school in France—an eye-opening experience for many Africans of his time. At the end of that year overseas, when Laye decided that he wanted to continue his studies and pursue a race-laureate, his government abruptly cut off his funds.

Impoverished and on the verge of starvation, Laye took whatever work he could to support himself—first, unloading produce trucks at Lee Halles, later on the assembly line of the Simca motor factory. Out of loneliness, frustration and a growing fear that he would eventually forget his African heritage, he began to write down memories of his childhood in Guinea. This was sometime in the early 1950s and although Laye had never intended to publish his writing, an elderly Parisian woman who had befriended him persuaded him to show the material to a publisher. The work appeared in 1954 as “L’enfant noir” (“The African Child”) and is still the most beautiful account of traditional African life ever published—in large part because of the haunting portrait of Laye’s mother. If Laye’s readers in the United States have not been privileged to discover the greatness of this work, it is because the American edition (“The Dark Child,” Noonday Press) has been indiscriminately bowdlerized and abridged.

Laye’s first novel, “Le regard du roi” (“The Radiance of the King”) was published two years later, in 1956, by which time he had decided that he wanted to be a full-time writer. This novel—a lengthy narrative about a white man who undergoes a spiritual transformation and becomes an African—has repeatedly earned distinction as the great African novel. For readers outside the continent the work has a special appeal: its theme of cultural syncretism grows out of Laye’s strong belief in ethnic reciprocity. In a metaphor he used when I talked with him in 1973, Laye described the cultures of the world as all participating in

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Charles R. Larson, professor of literature at American University, is the author of “The Emergence of African Fiction.”
Laye

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one dance, each with its own special movement, contributing something significant to the total world rhythm. Any attempt to suppress one of them takes away an essential unit or beat from the cohesion of the whole. Laye's writing repeatedly illustrates this theme of cultural intermingling, thus offering a sense of optimism and hope in contrast to the pessimism so often found in the works of many of the continent's younger writers.

By the time Laye returned home to Guinea, he was already a famous writer in Europe though relatively unknown to his countrymen. He was given an innocuous position in the civil service, which permitted him to continue his writing but also led to his subsequent dispute with Sékou Touré, who had just become President of Guinea. When Laye completed his third book, Touré asked to read the manuscript before publication, apparently having gotten wind of the book's critical focus on politics. After reading the manuscript, the President told Laye that he had two options: to remain in Guinea and not publish the volume or to publish the book and go into exile. Laye chose the latter; "Dramous" was published in Paris in 1966, after being postposed for several seasons.

Read today, "Dramous" (the English version has been titled "A Dream of Africa") seems tame enough, despite its warning to Guinea's overzealous leaders: if you continue the policies of the colonists (the French colonizers), you will be as guilty as they were of exploiting the masses; heed your ways, and this country will become a promised land. Sadly, Sékou Touré ignored the advice and instead launched a reign of terror and isolationism that pushed Guinea back into the dark ages for the first 30 years of independence. Last year, when Touré reversed his policies and began to re-establish diplomatic relations with the other African countries and the Western nations from which Guinea had become estranged, Laye's friends hoped that he would be able to return to his native land— but the expected homecoming never materialized.

In exile, Laye was a troubled man. Sékou Touré had Laye's wife imprisoned, apparently in retribution for the books her husband had published. Laye agonized about his wife and his children back home in Guinea. He suffered repeated physical illnesses and mental instability, requiring intermittent periods of hospitalization. Like so many African writers, he discovered that his fame as a writer did not bring commensurate economic rewards (double and triple taxation considerably reduced the amount of his potential royalties). Were it not for President Senghor's generosity in creating a research position for him at the University in Dakar, Laye might well have withered away long ago.

Not surprisingly, his writing suffered. Though his research position was designed to give him the necessary time to write, Laye found it increasingly difficult to write truthfully about contemporary Africa. As he told me when I visited him, "No man is free to write what he wants in Africa today. No writer is free because African leaders are too sensitive—they won't listen to their poets, their artists, who in thinking are years ahead of the politicians." Laye was depressed about the decline of his literary productivity and about what he thought would happen if he published his work-in-progress, a novel called "The Exiles." He feared that its publication would thwart any future dialogue between Senghor and Touré. "The Exiles" has never appeared, and one wonders if it was ever completed.

Camara Laye was a gentle man, a generous soul who, despite the hell he lived through, infused his works with a rare vision of optimism and humanity. Though he described the role of the writer as that of a feeble man who takes the burden of his society upon his shoulders, those who met him encountered a man of great fortitude. In the last few years of his life, he completed a scholarly study of the griot—the traditional African storyteller and oral historian—with whom, it is clear, he felt a close affinity. That work, "Le Maître de la Parole," was published in 1978. Though it has yet to be translated into English, its title can serve as a fitting epitaph for Camara Laye himself: master of the word.

Gulag

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malingerers. The inmates are caught in unconvincing lies by the wily bloodhound Dr. Danill Lunts, scourge of the dissidents. They are spied upon by informers. Their tongues are loosened by "truth serums. Female physicians even seduce "estonia" out of their feigned
LAURI-VOLPI, Giacomo 1893(?)—1979

OBITUARY NOTICE: Born c. 1893 in Rome, Italy; died March 17, 1979, in Valencia, Spain. Opera singer and author. Lauri-Volpi was a leading tenor with the Metropolitan Opera from 1923 to 1934. He was popular with the audiences and had a large repertory, including Spontini's "La Vestale," Rossini's "William Tell," and the standard Verdi and Puccini operas. Lauri-Volpi had a long lasting career, singing in Italian opera houses until he was nearly seventy years old. One of his books was L'Equivoco, an autobiography. Obituaries and other sources: Harold Simpson, Singers to Remember, Oakwood Press, 1974; Musicians Since 1900, Wilson, 1978; New York Times, March 20, 1979.

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LAWRENCE, Marjorie 1907—1979

OBITUARY NOTICE: Born February 17, 1907, in Melbourne, Australia; died January 13, 1979, in Little Rock, Ark. Singer, singing teacher, and author of her autobiography. Lawrence was a leading Wagnerian soprano at the Metropolitan Opera in the 1930's. In 1941, while on tour in Mexico, she was stricken with polio, but later made a successful comeback. Her autobiography, Interrupted Melody, was made into a film of the same name in 1955. Lawrence taught singing at several colleges and universities. Obituaries and other sources: Current Biography, Wilson, 1940; Who's Who in Music and Musicians' International Directory, 6th edition, Hafner, 1972; Biography News, Volume I, Gale, 1974; Who's Who, 126th edition, St. Martin's, 1974; Musicians Since 1900, Wilson, 1978; Chicago Tribune, January 15, 1979; New York Times, January 15, 1979.

* * *

LAYE, Camara 1928—

PERSONAL: Family name, Kamara; personal name, Laye; born January 1, 1928, in Kouroussa, French Guinea (now Guinea), West Africa; son of Kamara Komady (a goldsmith) and Daman Sadan; children: four. Education: Attended Central School of Automobile Engineering, Ecole Ampere, Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers, and Technical College for Aeronautics and Automobile Construction, all near Paris, France.

CAREER: Worked in a market and at various other jobs in Paris, France, before becoming a motor mechanic for Simeca Corp. in a Paris suburb, c. 1953; served as attache at ministry of youth in Paris; returned to Guinea, 1956; worked as engineer for the French colonial regime in Guinea, 1956-58; government of Guinea, Conakry, diplomat in Ghana, and other African countries, beginning 1958; became director of Centre de Recherche et d'Etudes in Conakry; exiled self from Guinea, 1965; lived for a time in Ivory Coast; research fellow in Islamic Studies at Dakar University, Senegal, c. 1971; associated with the Institut Francois d'Afrique Noire in Dakar; became a university teacher in Senegal. Awards, honors: Prix Charles Veillon, 1954, for L'Enfant noir.


SIDELIGHTS: Camara Laye's books focus on his Guinea homeland while featuring the perspective of the outsider. Laye himself developed his view of Guinea from without by spending nearly six years as a student in Paris. After leaving his native tribal village, Laye first learned of urban life in his high school town, Conakry, the capitol of Guinea. After high school he accepted a scholarship to study engineering in the Paris suburb of Argenteuil, France. Predictably, the young Laye met difficulty in transferring from culture to culture. His birthplace, Kouroussa, rested within the anachronistic traditions of ancient African empires far different from the world's modern cities. A belief in magic sustained these people as exemplified by Laye's father, a goldsmith, who was assumed to have held supernatural abilities.

Laye did earn a professional certificate in Paris, but decided to continue his education by pursuing his own interests in study. Working part-time during the day and attending school at night, Laye began to write remembrances of his native land to help relieve the pain of his loneliness and poverty. The result of these first writing efforts appeared in his autobiography, L'Enfant noir ("A Dark Child"). In this book, Laye recreated his life in his tribal homeland and followed by recounting his exposure to urban life in Conakry and his first impressions as a student in Paris. One conflict Laye expressed was the difficulty in maintaining the life style of his traditional culture when aware of modern life outside that society. Thomas Lask outlined the culture's expectations for those like Laye, and its inevitable disappointment: "The clever boy with his learning will bring honor and fulfillment to his people. But in the process of harnessing that learning he must move further and further from the society that nurtured him. A final sundering troubles the consciousness of the boy and all those who love him. 'Hasn't he learned enough?' the mother asks, unwilling to contemplate the long voyage to France for her teen-age African son. The answer is bound to be no. Perhaps he never will.'

A common complaint surrounding L'Enfant noir centered on Laye's apparent unwillingness to attack the evils of colonialization. At the same time, however, Laye earned praise for contributing to the negritude movement by heightening awareness of traditional African life and values.

Lifted from his poverty by the financial success of L'Enfant noir, Laye soon published his next work, Le Regard du roi ("The Radiance of the King"). Here Laye reversed the pattern of his own experience, an African lost in an alien European culture, by forcing his hero, Clarence, to adapt to the strange African culture surrounding him. He, too, is poor, and has no means for a living until he finds work in the king's court. "But this is not as easy as one would have thought," declared Jeanette Macaulay, "because every task has its spiritual significance... . He has to adapt himself to a new society, a society which does not need him in any way, a society whose conceptions of life, of the value of life and the values in life are completely different from his own. In the end, Clarence's search for the king with whom he hopes to hold an audience becomes an obsession. It's the mirage which lures him on through dark forests with people he doesn't feel anything for, with people who do not understand him."

Le Regard du roi has met interpretations on two levels: religious and cultural. On the religious level, as Janheinz Jahn observed, "it is usually considered as an ingenious allegory
about man's search for god." Despite his worries about conforming to African society, Clarence "can only be redeemed after he has learned that his moral problems are not essential," wrote Jahn. "This is one of the strongest arguments against the Christian interpretation of the end of the book." David Cook, meanwhile, admitted Clarence's journey "might be compared to the quest for the holy grail—the great myth of early Christendom," and noted Clarence's questions: "What is an adequate god figure? What is the relationship between the human and the superhuman? What are we to understand by worthiness?" Ultimately, Cook believed, Laye is concerned to re-establish a true link between the idea of love and the idea of religion... The concept of love with which Camara Laye is concerned is the monopoly of no particular religion and no particular race."

This theme of assimilation was shared by those interpreting Le Regard du roi on a cultural level. Jahn thought "the end of the novel, often misunderstood, means that even the white man in Africa can be redeemed and accepted when he shows his will to learn and not only to teach." In this novel, "the white man may be the protagonist but Africa is the antagonist," wrote Charles R. Larson. "It is the hero's ability to comprehend the magnitude and the complexity of the African experience—to realize that his own culture has little significance at all—which leads us to a basic aspect of what Senghor has seen as the final evolutionary stage of cultural syncretism—reformed negritude,' a kind of world culture which embodies the best of all cultures... Clarence, who is archetypal of Western man in particular, is symbolic of everyman and his difficulties in adjusting not only to a different culture, but to life itself."

Laye left Paris and returned to his homeland two years before it gained its independence in 1958. Although he did diplomatic work for the new regime, by 1960 his desire to escape public service and his increasingly critical writings strained his relationship with President Sekou Toure. Larson reported that Toure "gave the option either of altering the manuscript of his third work and remaining in the country, or living in exile if his French publisher brought out the book as written." Laye chose to flee and, with his wife and children, managed to escape the country.

These bitter experiences in Guinea were reflected in Laye's only book published since 1954, Dramouss ("A Dream of Africa"). The book was much harsher in tone than L'Enfant noir and much more political: Macaulay called it "mainly a diatribe against the political errors of President Sekou Toure." Dramouss begins near the time when L'Enfant noir left off as the narrator, Fatoman, returns from a six-year exile in Paris. Flashbacks serve to reveal the incidents of the Paris years before Fatoman discovers Guinea laden with shallow slogans and an influx of materialism as it approaches independence. His father, for example, once a revered artist, now carves wooden objects for tourists instead. Bickering political parties convince Fatoman further of impending trouble for his country, and he warns a political meeting of the need for order in the establishment of the new government: "Someone must say that though colonialism... was an evil thing for our country, the regime you are now introducing will be a catastrophe whose evil consequences will be felt for decades. Someone must speak out and say that a regime built on spilt blood through the activities of incendiaries of huts and houses is nothing but a regime of anarchy and dictatorship, a regime based on violence." After going back to Paris and returning again to Guinea, Fatoman discovers, as reported by the Times Literary Supplement, "his fears of the regime are confirmed, his friends murdered and he is anxious for his own life. The book ends with a small parable in which, after Fatoman's father says some prayers, a hawk returns to the family compound a chicken it seized. Those who get God on their side... The Black Lion of Allah will eventually help eternal Africa take revenge on an unscrupulous present."

The ten year gap between the publication of Le Regard du roi and Dramouss aroused the anticipation of those impressed with Laye's first two works. Though his most recent book confused some with its use of allegory, its overwhelming impact was its severity. "A Dream of Africa," wrote Larson in Books Abroad, "contains some of the bitterest criticism an African intellectual has ever leveled against his own country. One wonders what kind of book Camara Laye will write next." Sketchy details of Laye's life since his exile increase that wonder. One report states that in 1970, the Guinean government seized Laye's wife while she was visiting her ill mother in Conakry and has kept her imprisoned as an enemy of the state.


* * *

LaZEBNIK, Edith 1897-


CAREER: Writer, 1978—.


SIDELIGHTS: Edith LaZebnik writes: "My book compares life in the United States to life in Russia. My motivation is to show young people how fortunate they are to live here and to appreciate what they have. I have traveled to Europe and Israel several times for research, and to confirm my own views and observations."

"I had hoped to be an entertainer when I came to this country. Now my grandchildren are doing what I had dreamed about."


* * *

LEACH, Bernard Howell 1887-1979

OBITUARY NOTICE: Born January 5, 1887, in Hong Kong;
Specific geographies--but galaxies of imaginative expression. For it is my utter belief that writers of calibre can ground their work in specific land and lingo and yet be writing of that larger country, that most familiar and most mysterious place of all--life.
Trying to take inventory of myself,
looking at the pantry shelf of my writing
AND SOON TO BE NINE
life and my eight books and I hope more to
BEYOND THAT
come, I find that—for all of my love of the
West, and my stories mostly about the
region and its people—I don’t go around
thinking of myself as a “Western” writer.
The greater territory is still those cave walls
between the ears.
To me, language—the substance on the page, that poetry under the prose—is the ultimate ‘region’, the true home, for a writer. Specific geographies, but galaxies of imaginative expression—
we've seen them both exist in William Faulkner's
postage stamp-size Yoknapatawpha County, in Ismail
Kadare's "Chronicle in Stone" of a nowhere little
Albanian city tossed back and forth with the dice of war,
in Roddy Doyle's hilarious heartbreaking rough beasts
of dialogue in his Barrytown trilogy of the Dublin
slums, in Nadine Gordimer's fearlessly particularized
stories from a land of "laws made of skin and hair",
South Africa under the apartheid regime. If I have any
creed that I wish you as readers, necessary accomplices in this flirtatious ceremony of reading and writing, will take with you from my pages, it’d be this belief of mine that writers of calibre--the ones I admire--can ground their work in specific land and lingo and yet be writing of that larger country: life.

// THANK YOU.
LIGHT, STEAM

Meriwether Lewis, 1774–1809

Because the mockingbird offered its own clear song, he was told, someone would die. Someone who caught the pared-down crystalline trill like a quick wind in the ear cup, the simplified song strung out at that moment, tree limb, to river, to the curved backs of his countrymen pushing their keelboat through the grip of a riffle.

/And yet no one. So they continued, westward. Folklore, he thought, or perhaps the bird was its own victim, earth-whittled, erased to a filament of sound.
/He filled his lungs, called everything in: wild artichoke,
lamb's-quarter, sand rush, wild cucumber. Squirrels swam the Missouri with the scratch-marks of leaves. By June the cliff Works began: soft sandstone, rain- and wave-cut, two hundred, three hundred perpendicular feet, edging the river path like buildings. Long galleries, he wrote, white parapets silent with statuary. A city, if he wished. A culture: by a fixed slant of the eye, his culture, swung round to meet him. As if for those miles, stretched back in the flat pirogue, he were the apex of a certain history—in his wake, wild artichokes, white buildings in a half-strip of sunlight.

~

Then the mountains were reached. Then the sea. Then, in the half-light repetition renders, the long
turning back began, bootprint to bootprint. And for him—having charted and claimed, having placed on the grasses and landscape the syllables of his time—the long returning: Cascades slipped back to their borders of clouds, the Bitterroots, Lolo Pass, the crest of the continent's peaked divide, returned, slipped back, while/in from the east, the thick applause that welcomed his journey swelled/and tapered like a slow exhale.
No sleep. Again, no sleep. I have held the expedition, he wrote, in equal estimation with my own existence. And inseparable from his own existence, each bootprint a memory, each memory a cell in a layering of cells: all the years of his life, water, wind, the arc-shapes of language and saddlehorns, childhood combs, history, flute notes, lamb’s-quarter, cool drams of persimmon brandy, gathering within him.

/And now slowly withdrawing. No sleep, delirium, the latticed borders of self, other, dissolving, pulling back. And what at the center then, stark and horrific? Tiny gnarl-root of light? Steam?

∽
He stepped from the swale of the Natchez Trace, down through a tangle of oaks and maples, to the peg- and sod-clogged dogtrot of an L-shaped inn. All evening, the October air grew thicker, birdsong like a border to his own voice as he spoke in the words of a president, a pauper, alone, pacing out and back through his small room, spoke in the words of a diplomat, child, each voice the echo of a common errand, that carrying outward of their shared voice.

Delirious, someone said. Then a silence. Two shots, and then after, a little scratching, as a gourd scraped down through a wooden bucket.
Water, he said. It was witnessed. Pale filament of sound. As if, irrevocably lost, wanting at last to leave the body, he wanted in turn to replenish it. Simple word, like a heartbeat, then the gourd-scratch like/the scraping of bird claws on a dry branch. Beak open, sharp tongue pulled back from a note's completion. To the left of its head a blackberry hangs, plump and dew-covered, each chamber a globe, each chamber a world where the song is traveling.

FOR IVAN DOIG
We move along now to Lexa’s “spousal equivalent,” Mitch Rozier. Mitch is the environmental reporter for a Seattle newspaper called “Cascopia”—one of those urban weeklies for people concerned to know the difference between tofu and futon—and he writes a column called “Coastwatch,” a kind of ecological watchdog column. Mitch is of the Baby Boom generation, and at age fifty is jelly-sandwiched between the grown children he lost in an early divorce and an aging parent back in his Rocky Mountain hometown. Here is Mitch, flying back up the Coast from covering an environmental conference in Berkeley called “Thinking Like A Mountain: The Place of Nature in a New Millennium.”
myself, "Oh, that's the **best** thing I've ever heard about Hemingway."

Try as writers will, however, to turn the process into a **recipe**, there are always the **unwritten-down ingredients**--the pinch of this, the sift of that. One that particularly intrigues me in literary hash-slinging, let us call the **crocodile factor**.
August 20, 1976

Dear Ivan,

Another set of interesting busts from The Walden Pond group— all themes you mentioned at your reading at the County Bookshelf in Bozeman. When discussing regional (ie. "blue jeans") literature, I thought his idea would interest you even though his concern was the overhearing nature of European ideas on American literature.

Best -

Chris Boyd
426 W. Story
Bozeman

To please customers is a great step toward persuading them.
Henry David Thoreau - Journals
March 18, 1961: "A feeble writer and without genius must have what he thinks a great
theme, which we are already interested in through the accounts of others, but a genius
- a Shakespeare for instance - would make the history of his parish more interesting
than another’s history of the world.
Wherever men have lived there is a story to be told, and it depends chiefly on the
storyteller or historian whether that it interesting or not. You are simply a witness on
the stand to tell what you know about your neighbors and neighborhood.

(Paranthetical): "All this is perfectly distinct to an observant eye, and yet could easily
pass unnoticed by most."

October 16, 1859: "Talk about learning our letters and being literate. Whay, the roots
of letters are things. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types
which express our thoughts and feelings, and yet American scholars, having little or no
root in this soil, commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the
imported symbols along. All the true growth and experience, the living speech, they
would fain reject as "Americanism". It is an old error, which the church, the state, the
school ever commit, chosing darkness rather than light, holding fast to the old and to
tradition. A more intimate knowledge, a deeper experience, will surely originate a
word. When I really know that our river pursues a serpentine course to the Merrimack,
shall I continue to describe it by referring to some other river no older than itself which
is like it, and call it a meander? It is no more meandering than the meander is
Musketquidding. As well sing of the nightingale here as the Meander. What if there
were a tariff on words, or language, for the encouragement of home manufactures?
Have we not the genius to coin our own?"
People don't live in irony—they live in earnest. (i.e., check your material for being too arch—as in denigrating c&w music—take a reality check on yourself.)

Stories everywhere in the West: grizzlies at Choteau, the Hutterites.

Turner was a storyteller—"Stand at Cumberland Gap." This field of history has been standing at Cumberland Gap ever since. You've got to out-tell Turner. Show-and-tell.
O
late I have been swimming happily in the
many books of Robert Louis Stevenson, who
wrote hard, died young, and had the invalid's
foresight to write his own epitaph. These
famous lines, Here he lies where he longed to be / 
Home is the sailor, home from the sea / And the hunter home
from the hill, are chiseled in stone on a hill in Samoa, and they
are, it seems to me, a bit of his own fascinating voice, now
stone above bone.

By all accounts Louis, as his family called him, was a re-
markable talker very early on — one friend remembers first
hearing his "vibrating" voice emerging from a dark corner in
Edinburgh, and riveting ears for hours before the speaker re-
vealed himself — and many who knew him insisted that his
table talk was his prime genius. He was a close student of fine
talk in others, a wonderful inventor of talk in his novels, and a
man convinced to his dying day (which he ended talking to
his wife) that talk "is the scene and instrument of friendship,
the gauge of relations, the sport of life . . . there can be no fair-
er ambition than to excel in talk, to be affable, gay, ready,
clear, and welcome."

Pondering his lost voice, I consider the extraordinary role of
talk in literature, culture, politics, religion — in short, in
everything. How do we know of the past but by written talk?
What would we know of Socrates, Mohammed, Samuel
Johnson but by their remnant voices? What do we really
know of the itinerant Judean preacher Jesus Christ, after all,
than a bit of his puzzling talk?

All great literature and history (and religion is both litera-
ture and history) quotes heavily from its characters. What easi-
er and truer means is there to delineate personality and char-
acter than by what comes from the mouth? So plays are the
ordered conversation of characters capering across the stage,
and music what the extraordinary singer and reluctant talker
Van Morrison calls "the inarticulate speech of the heart," and
many novels are either long conversations or one mesmeriz-
ing voice: Joyce Cary’s The Horse’s Mouth, Samuel Beckett’s
Molloy, Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy.

Perhaps part of the reason we so love to talk is that we learn
it so early; it is our first means of communication and control,
and we have an affection ever after for that which has pro-
ressed us into the wider world. Think of the sea of conversation
in which children are bathed before they themselves can talk.
It is an incomprehensible muddle of sound, but once the code
is cracked it is the means by which the world opens like a
flower — "fluid, tentative, continually in further search," as
Stevenson said. Even talk with a bite, as it were, is often stimu-
lating and beneficial: There is the argument that clears the
air, the short sharp speech after much provocation that in an
instant empties a kettle of rage, the vulgar poetry of oaths, the
sharp words that are sometimes perfect blades for slicing
away fatuity.

The voice that begins as cries and whispers, moans and bur-
bles, grows to maturity as the utterance of our innermost
soul, and does not die easily; it works furiously to persist past
death, forcing itself into the future in books, wills, plays,
recordings, letters, memoirs, epitaphs. It is our faithful com-
panion, our most treasured possession, the last thing we
clutch as we go ungentle into the night, the last flare of our
selves and souls. Thus our fascination with last words, and
our powerful wish that a life might be distilled into a perfect
poem spoken as the curtain falls. Or spoken in stone over
bone, as over the cheerful and energetic Stevenson, now
silent after a life of rich and funny talk — which is, as he said,
our "chief business in this world . . . a thing to relish with all
our energy, while yet we have it, and to be grateful forever." □

— Brian Doyle
Sheepherders' and other monuments

(Lynn Adams poem, Painted Bride Qly)
--NYC (or at least Manhattan Island) as a spaceship; Central Park an artificial garden like the one in silent running...
One of the mysteries of life is why anybody ever asks a writer to talk out loud. It always strikes me like inviting somebody who sits around humming absent-mindedly to himself all the time to come on downtown and show us how you can yodel.

But you have asked for it—or at least Kathy Mosdal O'Brien has—and so here I am—and my tune for this evening is.....
speech material—about each of my first 8 books—in Amazon.com online postings from my desk file drawer
if that's what you can call sitting around in your own head all the time. In my case, I probably reveal something in Bucking the Sun when I have the Fort Peck taxi-dancer Proxy Shannon ask her new companion of the night about his suspicious political background: "if they pin something on you, will any get on me?"

(as a writer)

In my everyday work, I see it as my job to try to get poetry and literature on people.

On my characters, first. People who are poor in all else
are often rich in language. (My god, the history of the Irish!)
The everyday-ness of that pair of imaginative tongues I grew up around must have drilled that into me, because from my very start as a book writer with This House of Sky, I've always tried to attain a language which makes a shimmer behind the story—the appeal, the wonder, of the vernacular of people's lives coming through. Any kind of work has its own vocabulary, \textit{its "poetry beneath the prose"}, and people are dauntingly \underline{literary} at making up a language about what they do.
This is part of the job description of the writer,
I think--letting other voices speak the situation. Thus we get such accuracies as the line in Wallace Stegner's short story, "Carrion Spring"--the young ranchman who modernly might be described as suffering a lack of communication with the young wife he has brought to the bald prairies of Saskatchewan, but who when they meet up with the hard-used son of the local wolf hunter can say to the boy the perfect-pitch sentence, "How've you been doing on wolves?"/ (That "on" is one of the best prepositions ever.)
By the same token of small talk with a lot big behind it, from Mari Sandoz early in Old Jules we take in a lasting intimation when a ranch cook cracks to the young Swiss homesteader about his chosen land in the sandhills of Nebraska, "Great farmin' country. Never get your crops wet there."
And this finale novel has in it the designs sewn on a social flag last year—quite possibly the only modern novel, either.

There's also possibly a summarizing moment-of-the-things—In "Mariah Montana"—of my characters is a writer, somewhat reluctantly incumbent on his job, and when the book's entourage pulls into Miles City in Montana, he pops his head out during a service station stop and sees beyond the gas pumps the usual sign, AIR AND WATER. Before he can stop himself, he's out of the motorhome and over at that sign—and in the ancient passionate compulsion to expand the story, he adds beneath in precise lettering: EARTH AND FIRE.
Along these lines, we writers sometimes owe you keepers of the materials for some odd stanzas of library endeavor, as well as your usual rhyme and reason.

[Handwritten note: from Col's speech.]
I like the heroic story of the WPA Federal Writers Project for Montana. During the 1930's, as part of that New Deal project which also produced the famous state guidebooks, local people were put to work gathering local lore, often from their neighbors, sometimes even from themselves. In Montana that gathering was done in every county, the material accumulated, and files of it ended up at the state Historical Society in Helena. But a day in 1943, a history professor from Montana State College in Bozeman, Merrill Burlingame, decided to ride along with another faculty member on a trip to Butte, where the other faculty member needed to look at some sort of river-and-stream study that had ended up in the warehouse of the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, which was phasing out of existence. As Merrill Burlingame told the story when I asked him for it:
"We found the files we wanted near the loading door. Even closer were six or eight file cases marked Writers' Project. I investigated ever so lightly and began to drool. At that moment the woman who appeared to be in charge appeared. We questioned her about the destination of these files, and she informed us that they would go to the Butte City Dump in the morning. We backed her into whatever corner was available and told her she could not do that. She assured us in unprintable but perfectly clear English that she would.

She told us that in an early stage of closing the records she had sent a portion of these Writers' Project records to the Montana Historical Society, which was the approved depository. There, numerous writers of sorts, largely of the newspaper variety, had used generous portions of the materials without giving WPA the least credit.
"She didn't approve of that, and she would make sure that the Historical Society did not get one more folder of those records." The dump loomed. Burlingame goes on:

"We assured the good lady that nothing of that kind would happen at Montana State College, and that we would take special care that WPA did get credit. About 4:30 we got her permission to take them, but we were sure that speed was of the essence. We telephoned the college physical plant office and pressured them to provide a truck and driver in Butte as early as possible the following morning. And at that early hour, I came with the driver."
AS ANOTHER WRITER "OF SORTS"

I am eternally thankful that he did. Nearly forty years later, I was beginning to write a novel set in Montana in the 1930's, and in I came to the Special Collections at the Montana State University library in Bozeman and merrily ransacked those invaluable first-hand accounts of life during the Depression, that Merrill Burlingame heroically saved from the Butte dump. The people of my novel English Creek dance to a square dance call from out of those files, they remember great cattle roundups recounted therein, they enjoy at their Fourth of July picnic the succulent small spring frying chickens menueed there. And yes, in my acknowledgments, I sing out a credit to the Montana Writers Project of the WPA era, and to Merrill Burlingame.
I mentioned earlier that obscure voices are often the most valuable ones to me in a library. There's another sort of library voice that I don't even know what to call, except maybe ventriloquism. I have this example.

Now, like the rescued Montana Writers' Project records, we are in Bozeman--on a fine blue June day in 1977 when the five
The blue of the sky above Bozeman, on a June day in 1977 when the five mountain ranges around the Gallatin Valley all are in view. In the Montana State University library's Special Collections, I am going through a box of payroll records of the Crazy Mountain Dogie ranch, where my father worked for several years as a ranch hand and eventually foreman, and where my mother was the cook during lambing seasons. I find their names on the payroll records, and other names as well, one I recognize dimly—an old man who now is the swamper, the guy who sweeps the floor, at the grocery store in my hometown of White Sulphur Springs. The next day too is bright blue, and I am talking to the old Dogie man, Tony Hunolt, in his dark bachelor room in White Sulphur Springs. Yeah, Tony tells me in his Missourian voice, "Knowed your daddy since I landed into this country in '36, at shearing time at the Dogie. He staked me for my bedroll, I was so dead busted."
Didn't have to do it neither, but he done 'er."--and even though Tony Hunolt is dead by the time This House of Sky is published the next year, those words of his speak in its pages. Tony had told me too that I ought to go talk to so-and-so about some ranch topic--"He knows A to Why about that"--and that line speaks in the pages of English Creek. And Tony had said to me, about another man he and my father worked with on the Dogie, "He was an SOB on six wheels"--and that line is sure to speak in the pages of some future book of mine. There is simply no telling how long Tony Hunolt will go on, speaking in my pages, by way of library ventriloquism.
now that the book is really a book—I see some results in it I never intended. One is that, perfectly obliviously, English Creek shares warmth from a new hot topic: hard times down on the farm. Two big movies of it this fall--Places in the Heart, set in Texas during the Depression, with Sally Field and Ed Harris (Norma Rae and John Glenn in the cotton field, you can’t beat it)—and Country, with Jessica Lange and Sam Shepherd. It’s interesting for me as a writer, to look up from my typewriter and discover I’m in some kind of a parade. A more important unforeseen result of the work that went into this book, though, is a literary one. When I was finishing up with the very last of the writing of English Creek, I happened to read somewhere that the novelist John Gardner used
While I was writing *English Creek*, I read somewhere that John Gardner used
to tell his writing classes there are only two really good stories—somebody goes
on a long journey, and a mysterious stranger rides into town. Reading that perked
me up quite a bit. I've never taken a class in how to write fiction, so like the
bumblebee who doesn't know that it's aerodynamically impossible for him to fly,
here I was, blithely buzzing out fiction that has both of those stories in it.

The journey is an early-summer packhorse trip into the Rockies which my
narrator, Jick, makes—it constitutes about the first third of the book—and the
stranger is a man named Stanley Meixell, a former forest ranger now reduced to
tending sheep camp. Stanley turned out to be one of those characters an author
wishes he could patent the formula for. He kept appearing unexpectedly on the page,
and saying things I didn't know I knew how to write—and before I realized it, Carol and the friends who read pieces of the manuscript for me were wanting to know what was going to happen to Stanley, this is a real guy, a good old Stanley is. So English Creek became not only the book of the McCaskill family, but Stanley's book—the book of a Western loner who, when Jick asks him why he has come back to the Two Medicine country after all these years, replies: "Jick, by now I been every place else, and they're no better."
p. 242—I'm a full-time believer in writing habits, pedestrian as it all may sound. You may be able to do without them if you have genius but most of us only have talent and this is simply something that has to be assisted all the time by physical and mental habits or it dries up and blows away. I see it happen all the time. Of course you have to make your habits in this conform to what you can do. I write only about two hours every day because that's all the energy I have, but I don't let anything interfere with those two hours, at the same time and the same place. This doesn't mean I produce much out of the two hours. Sometimes I work for months and have to throw everything away, but I don't think any of that was time wasted. Something goes on that makes it easier when it does come well. And the fact is that if you don't sit there every day, it would come well, you won't be sitting there.
p. 356—I have just corrected the page proofs and I spent a lot of time getting seems and as-if constructions out of it. It was like getting ticks off a dog.

p. 358—At least this (The Violent Bear It Away) is an individual book. I can't think of anybody else’s that it might remind you of. Nobody would have been found dead writing it but me...

p. 481—I have no use for panels or any collection of writers. One writer is enough for people to digest at one time...
Well, onward to the new! The link is that Angus McCaskill was the founder of 3 later generations of McCaskills, who showed up in my other novels, English Creek and Ride with Me, Montana — and the latest member of that family crops up right away in this next book — to be.

This novel, so far, seems to be about a couple of people of today, trying to find their way as the earth whirls under them — as relationships keep having new names put on them, and as jobs go, and the Internet et cetera comes — and as they become something like the reluctant peanut butter & jelly sandwiched between the generations of their kids and their parents.

And so, the first couple of scenes, for the year before the millennium book:

One name you'll hear just mentioned — Midgett — two T's — perfectly honorable old Scottish name, but it sounds a little odd out loud...
Bathouse

New stuff tonight... (work-in-progress)
... takes place around now, sometime before the millennium...

So far, its settings are:
Lake Sammamish
San Francisco
the Espresso A Go Go Stand by Fremont
Prince William Sound in Alaska
the UI Dub football stadium
the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana
and as you'll hear tonight, last but surely not least
South and East of Ballard.

It seems to be about a couple of people trying to find their way as the earth turns under them—as jobs go, and the Internet comes—as they become something like the reluctant peanut butter and jelly sandwiched between the generations of their kids and their parents. (These are people we've got some Baby Boomer luggage.)

Tonight I want to read just a couple of scenes that bring the first of the main characters onto the stage, so to speak... (Midgett)
October 26, 1998

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 Tenth Avenue, NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Mr. Doig:

In April we will be publishing David McCumber’s extraordinary portrait of his year on a Montana ranch, which is entitled THE COWBOY WAY. As David says himself, “I have always been a Westerner, which means I have always thought about being a cowboy. Thinking and doing are different.”

Throughout our history, the cowboy has served as myth and touchstone. Has his way of life vanished entirely—to be replaced by 4-wheel drive vehicles and tract houses? These are a few of the questions McCumber raises: I hope his answers will surprise and intrigue you.

David and I very much hope you’ll be willing to look at the bound galley. If you can possibly find the time to read and comment on THE COWBOY WAY, it would make an enormous difference in helping the book find the audience it so richly deserves. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your reply. If I can hear from you before the end of November, we’ll be able to use your quote on our jacket.

Many thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Patricia Lande Grader
Executive Editor

PLG/sd
Crash

A long-ago automobile accident lies at the heart of Jonis Agee’s novel.

SOUTH OF RESURRECTION

By Dwight Garner

A
erica’s road maps are crowd-
ed with exotic and oddly reso-
nant place names — take Hot
Coffee, Miss., for example, or
Paradox, N.Y. But it wasn’t until Bill
Clinton began bragging that he hailed
from “a place called Hope,” Ark., that
we began to see a steady stream of sac-
charine film and book titles that took un-
fair advantage of Rand McNally’s boun-
ty. These days, it’s hard to enter a movie
with a title like “Leaving Normal” or
“Feeling Minnesota” without wonder-
ing if you’re in for an overly sensitive
stinker.

“South of Resurrection” — Resur-
rection, Mo. — is the title of Jonis Agee’s
new novel. It’s an achy-breaky narra-
tive, heavy on the pedal steel guitar,
about a woman who returns to her
hometown after 23 years and, among
other things, falls in love with a beery
old redneck named Dayrell. It’s not a
bad book. Agee’s sentences have an easy
swung to them, and she has an eye for
funky detail. She nails not only a man’s
“ice empty blue eyes” but his “light
brown Conway Twitty pompadour.” But
“South of Resurrection,” like its title, is
too sweet and strains for effect. There’s
something slightly off about it, like lis-
tening to Lucinda Williams try to pick
her way through a batch of Debby Boone
cover songs.

Dwight Garner is an editor for the on-
line magazine Salon.

Agee’s likable narrator is Moline
Bedwell, a woman who fled Resur-
rection at the age of 16 and swore she’d
never return. She wanted to put some seri-
ous Interstate between her and her
“trailer-trash relatives” who urinated
off their front steps when they drank
beer, and also between herself and her
guilty memories of a car crash that
killed a local girl and put Dayrell unjustly
in prison for seven years. Moline did
manage to construct an alternate life for
herself. She moved to Minnesota, mar-
rried a nice guy — maybe too nice a guy;
he reminded her of “a litter of baby bun-
nies” — and had a son. But when that
husband dies and the son abruptly leaves home, she returns to face Res-
urrection as her ultimate destiny.

Surely going home — and not reli-
gion, sex or death — is the signal theme
of American literature, and Agee has
some nuanced things to say about it. She
neatly captures Moline’s dread, both as
a young girl and now, of becoming “the
woman with the toddler in dirty diapers
and another on the way while she was
working 16-hour shifts at Wal-Mart,
Kroger’s, Dixie Donut until she couldn’t
keep her peeling vinyl handbag from
slipping off her rounded shoulders.” Yet
that dread is offset by Moline’s desire to
shed her newly acquired middle-class
reserve and feel life again — to let loose
a few exuberant yawps. She’s not back
in Resurrection for long before she sllyly,
and winningly, confesses, “Hell, I guess
I’d always been a slut, even when I was
pretending I wasn’t.”

Upon her return to Resurrection,
Moline confronts crises on a number of
fronts. Her elderly aunt and uncle’s fam-
ily farm is threatened by the malevolent
Heart Hog Corporation. Her rekindled
romance with Dayrell is haunted by her
failure to acknowledge that she knows
the truth about the night of the car

crash. What’s more, she is stalked by
Dayrell’s lustful and sinister brother,
McCull. She now remains under siege.

By its midpoint, “South of Resur-
rection” feels somewhat under siege as
well. The subplot about the Heart Hog
Corporation begins to seem flimsy and
forced, as do the biblical overtones
Agee injects into this story — we wit-
ness floods, fires, snake handling and a
great deal of Cain-and-Abel-style melo-
drama. Worse is a tendency toward cuteness (“This kind of failure made you
useless as a two-tailed cat in the rain”),
as well as a fondness for lines that
would sound just fine in a country
song but that don’t quite have the firm,
exacting quality of real prose. These in-
clude a lot of musings like the one about
“how love is a fast car down a dirt road,”
and sentences like: “They were wrong,
we’d all been wrong. You couldn’t outrun your history, you couldn’t just abandon your past. It was all
there someplace, waiting for the fu-
ture, waiting for you.”

SOUTH OF RESURREC-
TION” is an amiable book, a
laid-back tale about the com-
promises (and joys) of find-
ing love in middle age. It is surely never
a chore to hold in your lap. But it’s im-
possible to put this book down without
feeling as if something’s missing. It
lacks that quality that Alfred Kazin once
called “the marginal suggestiveness
which in a great writer always indicates
those unspoken reserves, that silent as-
essment of life, that can be heard below
and beyond the slow marshaling of ... thought.” By the book’s close, Moline
and Dayrell have indeed found a kind
of resurrection in Resurrection, and you’re
genuinely happy for them. But at this
point you’ll be looking for the Interstate
on-ramp, eager to get out of town.
Airplane, their first album rode the charts for almost a year, and their second—In-A-Gadda-De-Vida—was on the charts for 140 weeks, more than half of them in the Top Ten, making it the largest-selling record in Atlantic's history up to that time. Their success was comparatively short-lived, however. The follow-up album went to number three, but the group faded rapidly thereafter. Except for Blue Cheer's initial hit, neither they nor Iron Butterfly ever cracked the top twenty with a single (which shows that singles buyers weren't as dumb as FM fans thought), but they did give birth to a genre.

As the style spread east (critic Lillian Roxon once suggested it began on the West Coast because bands out there had to play that loud to be heard by East Coast critics/aesthetes), it began to fragment in ways that reflected Steppenwolf's nonaesthetic differences from the other West Coast heavy metal pioneers.

The late Lester Bangs once made an international taxonomy of heavy metal groups, dividing the British into Working Class and Aristocrats, Americans (all of whom he regarded as Industrial Working Class) into American Revolutionary and Boogie bands. (Both Blue Cheer and Iron Butterfly, e.g., were almost deliberately mindless—if you could boogie to a march, they were Boogie bands—but Steppenwolf was so deeply political that founder John Kay's electoral run for the Los Angeles City Council seemed almost preordained.) Though the Revolutionary wing, animated by the belief that rock was an anticapitalist as well as an anti-high culture weapon, was very much a creature of its times, its musicians (maybe because they were smarter to begin with) showed somewhat more staying power. Steppenwolf, despite a tendency to repeat itself, was on the charts until leader John Kay left in 1972, and MC5, out of the Detroit/Ann Arbor radical scene, buffered by in-and-out record company support and considerably more consistent police attention, was both a popular success, with a top thirty album, and a critical favorite. The initial album from MC5, a live and typically superheated effort, ran into trouble with Elektra Records over the spoken intro, "Kick out the Jams, motherfuckers." After some stores refused to stock the album, Elektra asked for an overdub, but the band's initial response was to cover a recurrent hit store's windows with Elektra stationery holding a "Fuck You" legend. After that, MC5 ran ads in underground papers complaining that their company was chickenshit, and their relationship with Elektra soon short-circuited.

Their troubles escalated during the subsequent between-label limbo when their manager, political theorist and activist John Sinclair, was jailed on a marijuana charge. Though they eventually hooked up with Atlantic, where critic Jon Landau produced their Back in the USA album, they'd lost momentum as well as a manager, and despite the album's passionate cult and critical success, cults and critics don't pay the bills. Atlantic axed them, and fairly soon afterward, this best of the American Revolutionary heavy metal bands broke up, its potential sadly unrealized. In their lack of immediate success, however, their albums made the important influence on a subsequent generation of bands, and as new punk bands began to develop on both sides of the Atlantic, their records were reissued in England in 1977, and the first was restored to Elektra's catalog a few years later.

Though he, too, had only marginal commercial success, the other Michigan influence—neither a boogie artist nor a revolutionary-was Iggy Stooge (or sometimes Iggy Pop) of Iggy and the Stooges (the late Ivor Le Roy) was a rock 'n' roll drummer turned rock superstar: that he lacked, at the time, a resemblance to a superstar's audience meant little to Iggy. He simply performed—diving into the crowd, cutting himself with shards of glassing up, rubbing himself with chunks of raw beef—as though the fans were present for his entertainment. By the time such performances were a these of many of them—Michigan frat boys and their dates—no one was at all; Iggy probably achieved the highest walk-out ratio ever reached by a rock performer of talent. And the talent was real: at their raw and powerizing best, the Stooges were much more than a meme show (after all, hitting the heads off thirty chickens, the thirty-first becomes a prescriptive statement), and through the unpredictable agency of David Bowie, Iggy eventually became an icon for the early British punk bands.

Like him, such bands brought a dangerous flash of unpredictable stage with them. The most impressive thing about the Stooges, however, their records could never capture, was that even Iggy's most leesences never seemed contrived. When he cut himself, he bled real, and if some inner demon was pushing him to die for his art—in you he would.

With Iggy, MC5, and Steppenwolf, rock had obviously come a flower power. This was angry music for angry times. Curious agent by which much of this anger would burst on the conscious American people was a scholarly, poetry-loving senator from Maine Eugene McCarthy. In 1966, McCarthy agreed to carry the antia war into the Democratic presidential race, challenging Lyndon Johnson for the New Hampshire primary found him hounded, longtime and Allard Lowenstein took to the "Dump Johnson" road visiting candidates throughout the Northeast, urging students to come to the New Hampshire primary, and give some time to the McCarthy campaign.

As it had been in 1964, when Lowenstein was recruiting for the "freedom summer," the response was enthusiastic, and thousands dents cut their hair and beards, donning "proper" clothing to come Hampshire as "Clean for Gene" volunteers. Virtually overnight, changed the tenor of the campaign, turning it into a high-spirited...
Montana seems to be like that, for a writer whose roots are there. A place of lessons, lore, where the uppermost memories had their origin. I live now within half a mile of Puget Sound and show no signs of shifting, yet my books plainly show the polar pulls of the Pacific and the Rocky Mountains. Winter Brothers and The Sea Runners with coastal settings, THOSE and THOSE WINTERING PLACE IN MONTANA. Indeed, I find myself more and more being tilted Montanaward. It looks very much as if my next two books, a long-awaited (by me) homestead novel and one of the West of the 1960s, are Montana.

And this in spite of the fact that there have been times when I tried--tried as hard as I knew how--to detach myself from Montana.

The quarrel began there when, as my folks said, I was "back east in Illinois," majoring in journalism at Northwestern University. The scuffle is between homeland and profession.
17021 Tenth Avenue N.W., Seattle, Washington 98177
(206) 542-6658

19 April 1964

Dear Mr. Knapp—

I'm very pleased about the honorary degree. My wife and I are making plans to fly to Bozeman the morning of June 8, and home to Seattle on a 5:20 p.m.

I'm looking forward to seeing you again soon.

Sincerely,

Ivan Doig
No more cuts in Cove-Mallard  
page 3

Braking for kittens  
— Letters  
page 16

High Country News

January 17, 2000  
Vol. 32 No. 1  
A Paper for People who Care about the West  
$1.50

STOP

A national forest tries to rein in recreation

By Allen Best

Colorado hasn’t been this contentious about its forests since 1907, when Gifford Pinchot himself had to stare down insurgents assembled in Denver.

It’s a different cast of characters now. Here on Colorado’s White River National Forest, it’s not cattlemen, lumbermen and miners who are bellyaching — it’s recreationists.

On a forest that stretches from the Continental Divide, just an hour’s drive westward from Denver’s expanding suburbs, into the heart of western Colorado, the Recreating West has rushed in hard on the heels of the Extractive West.

Sightseers and mountain bikers have shoehorned on the lumbermen and appropriated old logging roads. And every hunting season, all-terrain vehicle drivers blaze new trails onto the land. Hikers, cross-country skiers and snowmobilers every year make it more of a year-round playground, while downhill skiers account for 7.5 million visits a year.

All this recreation is beating up the White River, which covers almost 4 percent of Colorado.

Now, instead of accommodating every request that walks in the door, the Forest Service’s Proposed Revised Land and Resource Management Plan seeks to reassure loyalty to the land itself.

But with many users, the agency’s preferred alternative is not going down well.

In Edwards, Colo., 115 miles from Denver, at a meeting of some 30 builders last month, talk swirled nervously around the White River National Forest and its draft plan. Eagle County Commissioner Tom Stone pointed to a map that identified in red every road the plan would close.

Running across the 3,700 square miles of national forest, the red lines looked like a cardiovascular diagram in Gray’s Anatomy.

Backcountry skiers, the bulk of the state’s ski areas, dirt bikers — all face restrictions, he said. Why? "Politics," explained the county commissioner. "The decisions are being made back in Washington," Stone insisted, and "they don’t care because there’s just eight electoral votes from Colorado."

A real estate salesman told the builders that if the White River plan is adopted, it will make "remodeling contractors" out of them. Another real estate agent muttered that the plan will turn the forest into a drive-by forest — "a tree museum." A builder warned, "Did you know that the road to Thomasville will be closed?"

A regular donnybrook

The Thomasville road won’t be closed. But the rumors have taken on a life of their own.

No main roads will be closed; side roads will. The forest plan envisions decommissioning 22 miles of roads each year, but 1,500 miles of roads currently open to drivers of full-sized vehicles, such as Jeep Cherokees, will remain so. In addition, nearly 1,700 miles of trails will remain open to dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles.

This 16-pound plan is anything but radical. In closing roads, the Forest Service shows only slightly more ambition than it did in 1985, when the agency disregard its last zoning document.

Few people reacted then; this time there’s a loud outcry. In the 18 newspapers published in Vail, Aspen and other towns along the edges of the White River National Forest, almost daily stories raise new concerns; forest officials expect as many as 5,000 signed comments about the plan. Not just a Colorado issue, the 15-year plan emerging here is a national issue.

Even Congress has gotten into the act. After the Forest Service voluntarily added 90 days to the public comment period, Colorado Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell attached a rider to an appropriations bill, extending the comment period a full nine months, to May 9, 2000.

continued on page 6

RECREATION IN AN AGE OF LIMITS: Signs in the White River National Forest (Allen Best photo)
U.S. Found to Be a Leader In Its Diversity of Wildlife

But Imperiled Species Temper Good News

By WILLIAM K. STEVENS

The United States is home to at least twice as many native species of plants, animals and other wild things — more than 200,000 in all — than had previously been thought, according to what may be the most comprehensive survey of biological diversity ever undertaken in America. The nation was also found to harbor a more varied array of ecological systems than any other large country.

Conservation experts characterized the findings as an unexpected piece of good news. But as many as a third of the country's species are considered imperiled to some degree, according to the study, whose details are to be disclosed today in Washington by the Nature Conservancy, whose membership of more than a million makes it the nation's largest private conservation group.

In disclosing the results of the survey, the conservancy will also announce that it has undertaken a five-year, $1 billion effort to preserve large tracts of what remains of wild America. It is said to be the largest amount of money ever devoted to a conservation campaign by a private organization.

The inventory of species was conducted over the last 25 years by the conservancy’s Natural Heritage Network, made up of survey centers in all 50 states, most of them parts of state governments and universities. The network’s database on species and ecosystems is widely viewed as the most complete and detailed in the nation, and is the country’s leading source of biological information for conservation planners, government agencies and land managers.

But until now, the information gleaned from the network’s extensive field surveys and other sources like museum collections and scientific literature had never been pulled together to produce a portrait of the status of wild America.

The five-year analysis found that the 50 states contain about 10 percent of the known species on earth and that the United States ranks at or near the top among nations of the world in its variety of mammals (mostly small ones), freshwater fishes and needle-leaved evergreens like pine trees, salamanders, muskels, snails and crayfishes.

Among insects, by far the most diverse group of species, there are stunning surprises.

The United States, for instance, turns out to be extremely rich in bees, with nearly 4,000 species, most of them solitary rather than swarming creatures. And the United States harbors more species of caddis flies, mayflies and stoneflies, which are aquatic insects that support many freshwater ecosystems and are beloved by trout fishermen, than any other country.

At the same time, according to the survey, the United States has a wider array of ecological regions — big, distinctly different swatches of nature like deserts, various kinds of forests, grasslands and tundra — than any other of the six largest countries. By a calculation cited in the study, the United States has 21 of the world's 25 different types of ecological regions, 5 more than its nearest rival, the former Soviet Union.

So lush and variegated is the new portrait of biological variety in America that the conservancy will also announce today its commitment of $1 billion in new money to its long-established effort to protect the wild landscape by buying up large parcels of land or securing conservation easements on them.

"I think we've described biodiversity in a way that it's never been described before," John C. Sawhill, the conservancy's president, said of the study.

Its findings, Mr. Sawhill said, make the nation's conservation task more urgent.

"There's a more compelling reason now to invest $1 billion to try to protect biodiversity," he said.

Mr. Sawhill said $428 million had already been raised from private sources for the five-year campaign, which has three more years to run.

Most of the money is to be devoted to conservation projects in the United States, conservancy officials said, but some will be spent abroad.

The combination of the biological inventory and the financial commitment “is one of the most important conservation initiatives I can remember,” said Jamie Rappaport Clark, the director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the Endangered Species Act. “The two-punch effort of the knowledge and the resources is absolutely unparalleled.”

The effort comes at a time when many conservationists say their enterprise is on the financial rise, as private gift-giving has increased and governments have poured more money into acquiring and protecting large tracts. Congress has appropriated about $1 billion for that purpose over the last three fiscal years, and in 1999 an additional $1.8 billion was provided at the state and local level, according to figures supplied by the conservancy.

“We're now entering the era of big conservation, and this is not a moment too soon,” said Dr. Edward O. Wilson, the Harvard University biologist and biodiversity expert, a member of the conservancy’s board.

Most of the world’s species are found in the tropics, and this has led conservationists and scientists to focus much of their attention there. The surprisingly high diversity ranking of the United States, Dr. Wilson said, results partly from the fact that most scientists who study such matters live and work in the Northern Hemisphere. The ranking of the United States will fall when the tropics are better studied, he said.

Indeed, experts say, countless species are still to be discovered around the world. The new study says the United States itself may actually contain double the number of species documented so far. New ones are being discovered all the time; the study says 30 previously unknown species of flowering plants turn up in North America every year.

Despite the uncertainty, the study’s authors say, it is clear that the United States “ranks quite high in terms of its biotic diversity.”

Dr. Bruce A. Stein, a conservancy scientist who is one of the study’s editors, put it this way: “We have an amazing amount of stuff. The bad news is that a lot of it is not in very good shape. But there is time to protect it.”

The study found that 500 species were extinct or missing. Of the more than 200,000 species, 7 percent were found to be critically imperiled, 8 percent imperiled, 16 percent vulnerable and about two-thirds were secure or apparently secure.

Five special “hot spots” of imperilment emerged from the analysis; that is, places where high numbers of species found nowhere else are at risk; the San Francisco Bay area, Southern California, the Death Valley region, the southern Appalachians and the Florida Panhandle.

**ADDENDUM**

**A Biodiversity Trove, the United States**

An inventory of species in the United States shows a high worldwide ranking for many types of plants and animals.

**U.S. PLANT AND ANIMAL GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxonomic group</th>
<th>Number of U.S. species</th>
<th>Number of species worldwide</th>
<th>U.S. rank worldwide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammals</td>
<td>416 (66 are at risk)</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>768 (108 are at risk)</td>
<td>9,700</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshwater fishes</td>
<td>799 (300 are at risk)</td>
<td>8,400</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshwater mussels</td>
<td>292 (202 are at risk)</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crayfishes</td>
<td>322 (165 are at risk)</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnosperms (includes pine trees)</td>
<td>114 (27 are at risk)</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowering plants</td>
<td>15,320 (5,092 are at risk)</td>
<td>235,000</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Determined by the Natural Heritage Network, state programs dedicated to biological inventories.

Source: The Nature Conservancy and Association for Biodiversity Information

The New York Times
E-Mail Message Gore Sent Bush and Bush's Reply

By The Associated Press

Following are excerpts from the e-mail messages exchanged on Tuesday and yesterday by Vice President Al Gore and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas:

From Mr. Gore

Congratulations on securing your party's nomination. I think tonight's mutual victories give us a rare chance to change the way campaigns are run and restore voters' trust in our electoral process.

Therefore, I challenge you to accept my proposal that we both reject the use of soft money to run issue ads. I will take the first step by requesting the Democratic National Committee not to run any issue ads paid for by soft money unless and until the Republican Party uses money for advertising. This agreement would also cover loopholes which other organizations and individuals, like the Republican Leadership Council and the Wyly brothers, have used to raise and spend unlimited soft money to run issue ads without any disclosure of donors. John McCain described this scheme as "perverting the political process" and I call on you to publicly renounce such ads and insist they not be run on your behalf.

Thus, it's up to you and your party whether you want to start the ad war arms race; you have the power to join me in banning soft money. If you are willing to do the right thing, we can change politics forever.

I also challenge you to take a further step. Let's agree to forgo all campaign advertising and instead agree to a regular series of debates on the major issues facing the country. . . .

From Mr. Bush

Thank you for your e-mail and your congratulations. I congratulate you as well, and look forward to a campaign that raises the important issues of our time — reforming education, rebuilding our military and returning high standards to government.

Both you and I have made a number of campaign finance reform proposals. But before we debate these changes, it is important for Americans to know whether the current campaign finance laws have been obeyed and enforced. So I challenge you to clear the air on some serious charges. I hope you will encourage the White House and the Department of Justice to release all records and photographs relating to the investigation of fund-raising abuses by you and your administration.

In your e-mail, you spoke of restoring "trust in our electoral process." And that is the heart of the matter. New campaign finance laws are needed. What is even more important is the duty of public officials to obey the existing laws, and I'm afraid your own record does not inspire confidence.

In your note, you did not mention the matter of compulsory union dues being used to support political candidates — a violation of workers' rights. And I see that you did not mention this today, when you spoke to the A.F.L.-C.I.O. This would have been an ideal setting to display your sudden interest in campaign finance reform, and to demonstrate your own seriousness on the issue. Your silence was not encouraging, because any campaign finance reform must be broad and fair.

Thank you for your e-mail. This Internet of yours is a wonderful invention.
Study Jolts Views on Recovery From Extinctions

By CAROL KAESUK YOON

Over the past 500 million years, there have been dozens of episodes of extinction on the planet, the most famous being the titanic event that swept away the dinosaurs. Scientists have assumed that the time it takes for the living world to bounce back is proportional to the damage done: more time should be required to fill all of the earth's empty corners with newly evolved life after gargantuan extinctions and less time should be required after a more minor die-off.

But in an entirely unexpected finding that has gotten the attention of both paleontologists and conservationists, researchers reported today that it takes a long time to recover from these large-scale extinctions — around 10 million years — and more intriguing, the recovery time appears to be the same, whether the original destruction was one of the grander or one of the more minor events.

Many biologists say that by destroying tropical forests and other habitats, humans are driving species extinct at an accelerating rate that if unchecked will result in one of the major extinctions in history.

An ominous implication of the new research, some scientists say, is that humans may already or will soon have destroyed enough species that it will require a full 10 million years for the planet to recover — 20 times as long as humans have already existed and longer than many scientists predict humanity itself is likely to persist into the future.

Scientists say the new study will also prompt paleontologists to rethink how life evolves after major extinctions, events that have played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of life.

The study, by Dr. James W. Kirkner, an earth scientist at the University of California, and Dr. Anne Weil, a paleobiologist at Duke University, appears today in the journal Nature.

"I think it's a surprise to everyone," said Dr. Douglas Erwin, a paleobiologist at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. "We're just at the beginning of understanding biotic recoveries following extinctions."

Dr. Mike Foote, a paleobiologist at the University of Chicago, said the paper would change how people looked at the fossil record, adding, "It's going to be seminal."

Borrowing statistical techniques from other areas of geology and astrophysics, the researchers examined an enormous set of data gathered by the late Dr. Jack Sepkoski, a paleontologist at the University of Chicago. The data set documents when new kinds of marine animals first appear in the fossil record and when they disappear or go extinct.

Scientists expected that with every additional species that gets knocked out during an extinction, the longer the recovery should take.

What researchers found instead was that after extinctions, big and small, it took about 10 million years for the proliferation of new kinds of organisms to peak and then begin to tail off. The decrease in the proliferation of new creatures is seen as a sign that ecosystems have recovered and are so full of diverse life that there is little opportunity left for new organisms.

So unexpected was the outcome that Dr. Weil said that when Dr. Kirchner handed her the results, she said, "Did you do that right?" She added, "I made him do the analysis again while I was looking over his shoulder."

Scientists said the new study suggested that the evolutionary rebuilding after an extinction might work differently than had been envisioned.

Humans may be bringing on one of the earth's major animal die-offs.

That is, with the loss of a species comes the loss of opportunities for the existence of other organisms as well — like those that would make their living by preying upon or parasitizing that organism.

So when there are few types of organisms left after an extinction, there are few opportunities for new species to evolve. Each new kind of organism that does evolve creates more opportunities for other species, and each of those, in turn, creates more opportunities in a kind of positive feedback loop, the dynamics of which may be setting the recovery clock at 10 million years.

While some scientists predict that humanity will not live to see a recovery from the extinctions it has wrought, many questions remain. It is difficult to compare modern-day extinctions with those viewed through the lens of the fossil record.

As a result, scientists still do not agree on whether and when humanity will have destroyed enough species to require a 10 million year recovery, with some saying that point has already been reached, and others predicting it will be anywhere from 50 years to a thousand years or more in coming.

But if diversity is what provides the fuel for the recovery from any extinction, as the new work suggests, then in terms of a practical application, Dr. E. O. Wilson, an evolutionary biologist at Harvard University, said the message was clear. "The bottom line," Dr. Wilson said, "is that we had better take care to hold on to the biodiversity that still exists."
Anne Carson: “The Shape of an Idea”

On November 6, “The Writer, The Work”—PEN’s series of events which curator Susan Sontag describes as “encounters with world literature”—brought together Canadian poet and essayist Anne Carson with the Los Angeles-based literary critic Michael Silverblatt for a conversation at PEN Headquarters. Carson, coming from Montreal, was greeted by an avid and enthusiastic standing-room-only audience.

Carson began the evening with a brief reading from her work, which charmed the audience and provided a backdrop for the exchange that followed. Silverblatt lead with a question about how Carson arrived at the “form of a work.” Carson’s observation, that she “smells the shape of an idea,” was to thread through the conversation, resurfacing when the discussion turned to the importance of beauty in the line of a poem: Carson said it is the beauty that she smells. (With that thought in mind, Carson remarked that her new book, The Autobiography of Red, was written in verse partly because she thought “it looked ugly in prose.”)

This is a theme that clearly made an impression on the audience. During the question-and-answer session at the end of the evening, one member of the audience offered an appropriate bit of wisdom, culled from his understanding of Jewish teachings—that smell is the one human sense that is not “fallen.”

—Evan Harris
he came to New York City, a place where anything seemed possible, his taste for the fantastical was restored. Speaking to the issue of how his work has evolved, Gerstein said, “I write to find out what I’m going to write.”

Gregory Maguire reported a highly structured fantasy life as a preadolescent: out of the raw material of a vacant lot near his home, he created his own imaginary world and spent hours exploring it. Maguire, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on the topic, described the impulse toward fantasy as a desire to create “the greatest amount of light in the smallest amount of space.” As for his writing, Maguire cited a childhood dream/nightmare as a probable source for his novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West.*

Paul Zindel confessed that he had never regarded what he writes as fantasy, but believes that “fiction always has a fantastic dimension.” To illustrate the way in which this dimension was grounded in the experience of the author, Zindel recalled the source for his Pulitzer Prize–winning play, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds.* A former high-school teacher, Zindel was struck by the work of an eccentric but very talented student, who won the school’s science fair with her project, which just happens to have been called something like “The Effect of Gamma Rays on...” Real student, real project, but an element of the fantastic was already present.

Following each panelist’s presentation,
According to a new hypothesis by two scientists, Peter D. Ward and Donald C. Brownlee, the conditions necessary for the evolution and survival of complex life are so complicated and unlikely that Earth may be its only home in the universe.

2 LIFE ZONES
Life on Earth is made possible by multiple factors like location, composition and the stability of the planet and its neighbors:

HABITABLE ZONE
SOLAR SYSTEM
JUPITER
THE PLANET
THE NEIGHBORS
JUPITER-LIKE NEIGHBOR
Clears out killer comets and asteroids.

HABITABLE ZONE
SOLAR SYSTEM
JUPITER
THE PLANET
THE NEIGHBORS
JUPITER-LIKE NEIGHBOR
Clears out killer comets and asteroids.

DEAD ZONES
Most environments in the universe are too hot, too cold, or too close to stars, making them unsuitable for life.

GLOBULAR CLUSTERS
Contain bunches of massive stars too hot to sustain life and too close to one another for planetary orbits.

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

In the last few decades, a growing number of astronomers have promulgated the view that alien civilizations are likely to be scattered among the stars like grains of sand, isolated from one another by the emptiness of interstellar space. Just as humans might be alone, at least in the Milky Way, experts have estimated that there might be up to one million advanced societies.

This extraterrestrial credo has fueled not only countless books, movies and television shows—not to mention hosts of Klingons, Wookies and Romulans—but a long scientific hunt that uses huge dish antennas to scan the sky for faint radio signals from intelligent aliens.

Now, two prominent scientists say the conventional wisdom is wrong. The alien search, they add, is likely to fall flat.

Drawing on new findings in astronomy, geology and paleontology, the two argue that humans might be alone, at least in the stellar neighborhood, and perhaps in the entire cosmos. They say modern science is showing that Earth’s composition and stability are extraordinarily rare. Most everywhere else, the radiation levels are too high, the right chemicals too rare in abundance, the habitability of planets too intense for life. Any advanced common may survive in cosmic showers of panspermia, among other things, technology.

Their book, “B" (lag), out last month, gets criticism and praise, saying that the authors’ own simplistic model is “brilliant” and “We have finally...
In the Universe, After All

Even Earth's Milky Way galaxy or the similar Andromeda galaxy shown here, are not suited for life.

**CENTERS OF GALAXIES**
A zone rich with deadly X-rays and gamma rays and dense with colliding comets and killer rocks.

**EDGES OF GALAXIES**
Stars out here do not have enough metal content for formation of Earth-size planets with enough gravity to retain seas and atmosphere and have plate tectonics.

---

**THE ELEMENTS**
- **RIGHT COMPOSITION**
  - Oxygen (created by photosynthesis) and just enough carbon dioxide and other gases to preserve life without causing runaway greenhouse effect.

**OTHER FACTORS**
- **BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION**
  - Stable conditions during a long period allowed evolution of complex plants and animals.

---

Adapted planets too few in rain of killer rocks too terrible to have evolved into societies. Alien microbes many places as a kind of me, they say, but not excited enough to be awash in the "Earth" (Springer-Verlag, 1997), is producing whoops of disagreement, with some detractors saying out loud what so many have thought for so long — that complex life, at least, is rare,” said Dr. Peter D. Ward of the University of Washington, a paleontologist who specializes in mass extinctions and whose previous works include “The Call of Distant Mammals” (Springer-Verlag, 1997). “And to us, complex life may be a flatworm.”

The book’s other author is Dr. Donald C. Brownlee of the University of Washington, a noted astronomer, member of the National Academy of Sciences and chief scientist of NASA’s $1.86 million Stardust mission to capture interplanetary and interstellar dust.

"People say the Sun is a typical star," he said in an interview. "That’s not true." Dr. Brownlee added: "Almost all environments in the universe are terrible for life. It’s only the Garden of Eden places like Earth where it can exist."

Dr. Geoffrey W. Marcy of the University of California at Berkeley, a leading seeker of planets around other stars, 31 of which have been found so far, hailed "Rare Earth" as likely to spark a revolution in thinking about extraterrestrial life.

"It’s brilliant," Dr. Marcy said in an interview. "It delineates many things I’ve been thinking about but does a much more

Continued on Page 4
Support for a search for aliens, but scant hope of finding them.

fraction of stars with planets, the number of those planets on which life arises and so on, including the average lifetime of technological civilizations. By his logic, the Milky Way had about 10,000 civilizations capable of interstellar communication.

Later, Dr. Sagan revised the calculation and raised the estimate to a million alien worlds. Since the cosmos holds billions of millions of galaxies, by that analysis the total number of alien societies could be astronomical, one estimate putting the number as high as 10^70.
Megadrought Appears to Loom in Africa

By WILLIAM K. STEVENS

Lately, it has become increasingly clear to scientists that in the 10,000 years since the last ice age ended, the world’s climate has often served up droughts far surpassing anything seen in the last 150 years, resulting in some cases in the collapse of entire ancient civilizations.

Now a new study has found that over the last millennium in equatorial East Africa, decades-long droughts far longer and more severe than any in recorded weather history have alternated with periods when rainfall was heavier than today. The droughts dwarfed any experienced by humans in the 20th century, including the American Dust Bowl of the 1930’s and the African Sahel drought of the 1970’s.

In each of the earlier droughts, some of which lasted as long as 80 years, according to oral traditions recited in the study, famine ravaged the land, provoking social and political upheaval and forcing large-scale migrations of people.

Given this pattern of naturally occurring, long-term variability in precipitation, say the scientists who performed the study, there is a “very high probability” that a devastating dry period, possibly lasting decades, will visit tropical Africa again in the next 50 to 100 years. This time, it would affect a human population that has doubled in the last 25 years and is increasing its use of water even faster.

We have to anticipate that a major catastrophic drought will happen later, and we must prepare for it,” said Dr. Dirk Jacobi, the University of Michigan head of the study.

The drought that killed this cow in Kenya in 1983 pales in comparison with the great drought that is predicted.

The average surface temperature of the globe is rising, and the dominant view among scientists is that it will increase by 2 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100 if emissions of greenhouse gases are not reduced. While attention in the global warming debate has focused mostly on temperature, many experts say the warming’s effect on precipitation may be more striking.

Even in the absence of any impact by greenhouse gases, precipitation is often of greater concern than temperature. “Human societies suffer much more from declining or irregular water resources than from

LETTERS

Missing Language Link

To the Editor:

One thing missing from the methodology used by Dr. Joseph H. Greenberg to explore deep relationships between languages (“What We All Spoke When the World Was Young,” Feb. 1) is any way to evaluate similarities that they exhibit.

The comparative method used by historical linguists provides a principled basis for distinguishing between the similarities that are the result of separate development from a shared starting point, and the numerous similarities that are not inherited but result from borrowing or chance.

Dr. Greenberg’s method treats all similarities as equally valid evidence of historical relatedness, the only evaluative task is to apply a sorting technique to determine the subgrouping of the languages.

Working out the facts of linguistic prehistory is a complex task, and only rigorous methods are of use. Dr. Greenberg’s short-circuit methodology has been thoroughly evaluated by people who actually do this work. Many of them have found that his method does not work and recommend that his claims not be relied on.

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Assessing Risks

To the Editor:

The article “Hormone Replacement: Weighing Risks and Benefits” (Feb. 1) repeats the oft-quoted statistic—heart disease ultimately kills six times as many women as breast cancer—as a main argument in favor of hormone replacement therapy.

I am 59. In the last 10 years, dozens of friends and relatives of my age or younger have been diagnosed with breast cancer, had lumpectomies or mastectomies followed by debilitating radiation and chemotherapy that, at best, put their lives on hold a year or more. I know not a single woman under 80 who had a heart attack or stroke.

Why would women do anything to increase the risk of this disease, whose treatment so totally disrupts one’s life?

I’ll deal with night sweats, try to exercise and eat right, and take my chances on Alzheimer’s and heart disease later. I choose health now while I am still productive and enjoying life.

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