

Book Bag

#372

BOOK WORLD/JUNE 22, 1986

14



The following authors each wrote a book with a fruit in its title. Name the book.

- (1) Tom Wolfe, (2) Henry Miller,
- (3) Lawrence Durrell, (4) Anton Chekhov,
- (5) John Hawkes, (6) James Simon Kunen,
- (7) Yoko Ono, (8) John Steinbeck,
- (9) Lorraine Hansberry, (10) Anthony Burgess.

All entries (one per person) must be clearly written on postcards and mailed to: Book Bag, The Washington Post, Washington, D.C. 20071, and must include complete return address and competition number. The winning entry will be the first correct answer drawn at random. Employees of The Washington Post Company and their families are not eligible to enter. Entries must be received no later than July 3. The winner's name and city of residence will be announced in the July 13. *Book World*. A *Washington Post Book World* book bag will be sent to the winner.

Answer to Book Bag #368: The original titles of *The Sound and the Fury*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *War and Peace*, and *The Sun Also Rises* were, respectively: *Twilight*, *Stephen Hero*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Fiesta*.

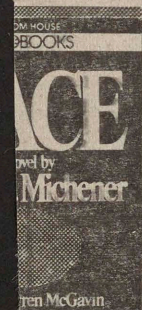
Winner: Gary A. Burch, Bethesda, Md.

gish majors in the USA). Transform-
to history, it seems untouched by his-
think thoughts gentlemen—real gen-
being facetious—do not think. Inno-
nd humiliation, it has never stood at
ling called “the bloody crossroads”

Both are important writers of fiction who when using
the middle style, (in their own inflections of course),
share a common voice. That voice has said some of the
most impressive and powerful things British literature
has had to say, and V.S. Pritchett is its great living
master.

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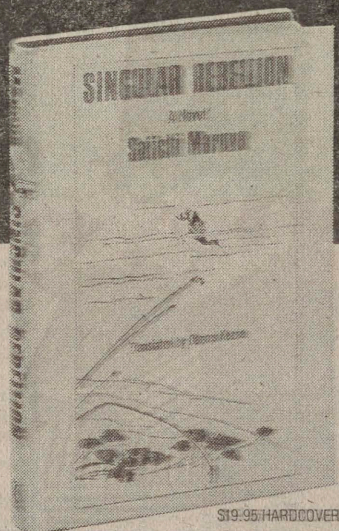
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BOOK WORLD/JUNE 22, 1986

Book Business

Alan Green

who has in fact no other role to play.

Now, here is the oddity in Memmi's novel: Whenever women appear as characters, and are actually on-stage, speaking and acting with the conviction lent them by an accomplished artist, they bear no discernible relation to the women of Emile's erotic imaginings. Even in the case of Emile's wife, who scarcely appears at all, we know we are in the presence of a real woman, with a mind, a history, human attachments, a human fate. Astonishing.

It shouldn't be, since this is after all a familiar experience. Woman in the abstract—matter for the pornographic imagination. Woman in her own person—a presence that renders irrelevant the exercise of the pornographic imagination. With the added complication that there are some men who cannot distinguish one from the other, but see in the living woman no more than the image of their desire. And of course it is just our familiarity with this experience that makes it virtually imperceptible under ordinary circumstances. Here an author has juxtaposed the living woman and the sexual wraith in the one novel, celebrated the barren image in the language of transport, but poured his genuinely fecundating energies into the human being—and seems unaware of the paradox.

Is this not most strange? My instinct is that the matter is of capital importance. To put it in literary terms, the scorpion's sting, the coupling of death and art, the coupling of love and death that is characteristic of our cultural tradition, has everything to do with the defeat of life implicit in the conception of sexuality displayed so clearly here. In human terms it is enough in itself to account for the profound intrinsic pessimism of the Western spirit, confirmed rather than relieved by Faustian visions of power and mastery.

The question is, are these patent evidences of impaired spiritual health things that may possibly be amended by our taking thought? Are they, at least in part, conventional rather than natural? To say "no" forecloses the issue, and, I think, condemns us to suffer that spiritual disease quite without hope of remission. To say "perhaps" is better strategy—particularly since it would scarcely have occurred to us to entertain these considerations had they not been placed on the historical agenda, as it were, by the new spirit that has arisen among us. I mean of course the spirit behind the movement for women's liberation, which is properly a movement for the liberation of the species, attended though it has been by folly, and greeted chiefly with derision—the usual harbingers of a decisive change in our conception of humanity.

If you're wondering how fares the First Amendment, consider:

1) In Queens, a borough of New York City, the board of a community school district, by a five-to-four vote, has removed from the shelves of its largely white, middle-class junior high school libraries Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, published in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf, in paperback by New American Library, and described by the American Library Association as "One of the Notable Books of 1967." Case for the book: It honestly and vividly portrays ghetto existence in its author's Spanish-Harlem, providing a glimpse of a life-style unknown to those who have never seen the inside of a slum. Case against the book: It contains four-letter language teenagers shouldn't know. Hah! And it also contains scenes of hetero and homo sex which no teen-ager has ever seen unless accompanied to the movies by an adult. In early May, the Queens board voted on a new resolution—to keep the book locked away in principals' offices, where parents could borrow it, read it and, if they chose, pass it on to the child. This half-measure failed later in May and succeeded in June, but the book still remains off the libraries' shelves. As this column goes to press, a federal judge is weighing a motion to set aside the ban. Even if he does, the opponents of the book will doubtless appeal, and the freedom to read will—as so often—continue to totter on the brink.

2) In Groton, Connecticut, the February 1971 issue of *Evergreen* magazine, along with three underground periodicals, was removed from the public library while two John Birch-type journals remained. This action was approved by a six-to-three vote of the library board. No adversary hearing was conducted, hence no legal appeal was possible, and due process went begging. In other communities, recently, similar bannings have been effected through attacks on library budgets and by threats of building violations by watch-and-ward-minded building inspectors and fire chiefs.

3) And, in Pontiac, Michigan, a County Circuit Court judge found Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* "a degradation of the person of Christ" and banned it from a high school library after suit had been brought against Rochester High School by the father of a student. The school board is appealing the decision to the Michigan

Court of Appeals in a brief to be filed about the time this column appears. While the court studies the case, it might also consider a letter written to BOOK FORUM by Margaret P. Brown of Summerland Key, Florida, concerning SR's cover feature on Vonnegut May 1. She writes: "As a grandmother who has been a Vonnegut fan for five years, I ask that you please realize that the young are not the only ones who appreciate him!" How's that for a ready-made *amicus curiae*?

How much can its title affect the sale of a novel? False prophets (I was one of them) maintained that you couldn't sell anything called *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*; the seemingly irresistible title *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* has been generally disregarded for most of its 222 years in favor of *Fanny Hill*. All this as preface to the fact that in your bookshop and library is a new suspense novel, *Photographs Have Been Sent to Your Wife*. The book's editor, Lee Wright of Random House, knew the title was perfect and proved it. Well before publication date, she called Peggy Roth at Dell and, telling her nothing else about the book, sold the reprint rights instantly. Can the movie sale be far behind?

Lee has another rather good title coming along in about six months. *All Right, Everybody Off the Planet!* is the story of a being from outer space who gets sent to Earth equipped with human form and faultless English. (Berlitz is opening up *everywhere*.) The being is the forerunner of an invasion from his speck in the galaxy; his mission is to get an advance story of the invasion into *Time*. So he lands on the roof of the Time-Life Building and, extricating himself from the air-conditioning machinery, goes downstairs and gets an editorial job. How—or if—he makes out with his researcher, Lee didn't tell me. Yes, she did. Seems his human form wasn't *entirely* workable.

If the avant-garde won't die, will it ever surrender? This question was implied in three recent encounters. The first was with the head of a distinguished publishing house who was berating the "self-imprisoned insiders who edit literary publications highly regarded in Ivorytowerland and hold forth against any book that none of them has written." The second encounter was with a well-known literary

critic of the middle-aged school who mourned the passing of the narrative novel and the rise, in its place, of anti-plot fiction. He blamed the trend in part—at least its latest manifestations—on a well-established newspaper book review which, he says, is turning over its columns to callow young critics who worship obscurity and celebrate formlessness. The third was with *Faking It*, Gerald Green's new novel.

Faking It, a Pun City title, is a no-holds-barred satire on the new and not-so-new literary establishment in which some of the best-known novelists, critics, and P.E.N.-pals of our day are paraded around a writers' conference in Europe in see-through disguises. It's also a spy story spoof, four-lettered and impudent. Altogether, quite different from Gerald Green's last novel which, incidentally, did not bear his name. Working from the outline and notes of Drew Pearson, Green wrote most of *The Senator*.

Years ago, I ordered by phone from Simon & Schuster six copies of a book I'd written and, presently, received half a dozen of Abner Dean's latest volume. Now, this was before computers and other electronic gear had revolutionized (see *Reign of Terror*) publishers' warehouses. You can imagine the possibilities today. For instance, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has just published Mary McCarthy's *Birds of America*. In a little while, Harcourt's subsidiary, Johnson Reprint Corporation, will issue an original-painting-size elephantine folio edition of Audubon's masterpiece, *The Birds of America*. Miss McCarthy's book is 6" x 8½" and sells for \$6.95, while the Audubon will be released as a limited edition of six separately boxed parts, each 39½" x 26½", guaranteed to give any coffee table a hernia, and selling (all six together) for a pre-publication price of \$4,500. Later, there will be a four-volume edition, hand-bound in half leather, at a pre-publication price of \$5,500. No matter these differences of size, cost, and subject, once both the McCarthy and the Audubon are current, *Birds* and *The Birds* will be flying at random.

Incidentally, the Audubon will not be the only upcoming great bird book. In October, Harper & Row will publish Louis Agassiz Fuertes and the *Singular Beauty of Birds* at \$29.95. In this century's early years Fuertes was considered the greatest living painter of birds but after his death his work was neglected and some watercolors were actually damaged. Now sixty of his finest paintings and nearly a hundred of his drawings have been collected and, with text, assembled from letters written on his field trips.

DUBCEK

by William Shawcross

Simon & Schuster, 317 pp., \$7.95

Reviewed by Eugen Loebel

■ William Shawcross tells the story of an obscure official in the Slovak Communist Party who suddenly found himself at the age of forty-seven the most popular and beloved politician in Czechoslovakia. The unique impact of the Dubcek phenomenon on East-West relations and its threat to the Soviet Union's domination of Eastern Europe makes this study important to American readers.

Shawcross has not attempted to deal exhaustively with the political crisis in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, nor is he concerned with the "seductive ideology" of the Prague Spring of 1968. But, in many important ways, his account indicates that Alexander Dubcek's rise and fall is typical of political development in Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, Shawcross does not tell us many things we would like to know about Dubcek, and often what he tells us is clearly incorrect. The material for this book was collected in 1969, when it was difficult, if not dangerous, to ask questions about Dubcek, who had been dropped as party chief in April. Moreover, because he was not in Czechoslovakia the previous year, Shawcross was unable to observe how Dubcek's activities influenced the political climate there and how he in turn was affected by it.

Shawcross admits that he was forced to rely primarily on Dubcek's speeches, but did Dubcek really write them? Apparently Shawcross does not realize that speeches of leading party officials are usually a collective effort and are often rewritten after they have been discussed by the Secretariat, the highest policy-making body in the party. Neither the party apparatus nor the Secretariat is monolithic. Both included officials with different views from Dubcek's, and some of their opinions appeared in his speeches. In order to rely on them as source material, Shawcross would first have to determine which of the principles voiced were actually his. An understanding of Dubcek's personality would help, but it is absurd to attribute contradictions in the speeches to psychological problems, as Shawcross does.

Dubcek joined the Communist Party (illegal at the time) at the age of eighteen—a logical step for the son of a long-time party member—and attended secondary school in the Soviet Union. We are told nothing about the effect of these years on Dubcek's political per-

sonality. During the war he was a partisan fighter and after the liberation of Czechoslovakia became a worker in a yeast factory. In 1945 partisans were treated as heroes and almost without exception given lucrative jobs. Why was Dubcek's status not improved?

After the Communist takeover in 1949, Dubcek entered the party system as an *apparatchik*, a petty bureaucrat. In 1953 he was elevated to Regional Secretary, a high-level post. Only men who actively supported Stalinism in Czechoslovakia remained in office during those years. In order to advance his career Dubcek approved the purge trials of the 1950s and helped to organize public opinion in favor of them. Although his support of Stalin could easily have been traced in the newspapers, Shawcross says very little about this.

Dubcek was rewarded in 1955 for his loyalty by being sent to the Higher Party School in Moscow. In the three years he spent there he was closely watched and tested for political reliability, and it was on that basis that he was elevated to Leading Secretary for Bratislava and, in 1960, to Industrial Secretary on the Secretariat of the Communist Party in Prague. Dubcek's promotion to head of all industry in the country, as well as his earlier advancements, was made by the pro-Stalinist Antonin Novotny, then First Secretary and President of Czechoslovakia. Under the impact of the Khrushchev liberalization, Novotny dismissed Karol Bacilek, First Secretary of the Slovak Party, and replaced him with Dubcek in 1963. Novotny was convinced that Dubcek was one of his ardent supporters and would be able to pacify the strong movement for self-determination sweeping the Slovak party. Dubcek's growing opposition to Novotny was a direct consequence of the latter's hostile attitude to the Slovaks. The nationalities problem, despite its vital importance in understanding Dubcek's actions, is only briefly mentioned by Shawcross.

Dubcek's political mentor was Vasil Bilak, a known Soviet agent. After Dubcek became First Secretary, he nominated Bilak as the head of the Slovak party. At present Bilak is a strong supporter of the Russian occupation and a vehement critic of Dubcek's policies.

When Gustav Husak and Laco Novomesky regained favor in 1963, Dubcek personally opposed their reinstatement on the party's executive committee because of "their past political errors" even though they had been formally cleared of the trumped-up charges that had been used against them during the purge trials. Dr. Hus-

The Publishing Scene

David Dempsey

Book advertising is a crazy business. When Doubleday published Ellin Berlin's *The Best of Families* (an old-fashioned, turn-of-the-century story) early this year full-page ads blazoned the headline: "When was the last time you read a novel that didn't seem like a marriage manual?" This is counter-culture. "I'm sure there are a lot of people waiting for just this sort of book," I remarked to the author at a publication party. "Yes, but the trouble is that most of them are dead," she replied. Added Lee Simmons, vice president of the Franklin Spier agency, who wrote the advertising copy, "That just about defines our marketing problem." Oh, yes, one more problem: people remembered the headline after they had forgotten the name of the book.

Most products can't talk back. Books—or, rather, their authors—can. Big-name writers often insist on seeing and approving the ad copy; some even want to write their own. Aaron Sussman, senior partner of Sussman & Sugar, Inc., estimates that he must "clear" his copy with about 25 per cent of his authors. (Theodore H. White is one; the late John O'Hara was another.)

But this may be academic. Many books are either not advertised at all, or else so sparsely that the ad becomes simply a token to please the author. (Bennett Cerf once said that with first novels publishers would do better to give the money budgeted for advertising directly to the writer.) A best-seller might merit a \$50,000 ad budget, but the average is much less, and a \$5 book that is expected to sell 15,000 copies may have to get by on \$5,000. Even the best-seller is up against a problem unique to publishing. There are only a few hundred places in the country, most of them concentrated in the major cities, where a book can be bought. (We exclude college bookstores, which have a captive market of their own.) Advertising will appear in no more than six or eight newspapers, and perhaps a few magazines. A study some years ago indicated that 25 per cent of all retail book sales were made in New York City. An agency executive estimates that half of every book advertising dollar goes to *The New York Times*.

In this business, the tail wags the dog. "Most commercial advertising is used to create sales," Lee Simmons points out. "In publishing, sales are used to create advertising." The theory behind this is that if salesmen have

not brought in enough advance orders, the books won't be in the stores when people ask for them, so why advertise? This dilemma has long baffled publishers, whose rule of thumb is to allocate 10 per cent of the retail price of a book for advertising and promotion. This works out to about \$1,500-\$2,000 for a lot of books, and, although money talks, at this figure it doesn't talk very loudly. A one-column ad in *The New York Times Book Review* costs \$1,322.50, a page in *Publishers' Weekly* (to reach the trade) runs \$700. This may be the extent of the campaign. Happily, reviews don't cost anything, and in this sense books are "advertised" free.

The Franklin Spier agency spends between \$5- and \$6-million a year on advertising—peanuts, by Madison Avenue standards—which is spread over about 2,500 ads. The gut of the problem is that each book is a new product, unlike toothpaste or detergents, where brand labels carry the day, and where you can say almost anything about a product ("Look, Ma, no cavities!") because there is really nothing much to say. Not so with a book, which has an independent life of its own, a content that can't be wholly ignored.

I say "wholly" because a good copywriter has to work through his share of bad books. The copy chief at one agency admits that his writers are better off not reading the whole of a book assigned to them—sometimes not even any of it. "Most of the time I urge them to read as far as the first quotable phrase," he says.

Sussman puts it this way: "We avoid those aspects of a book that would force us to lie, and emphasize the things that are true. And there are times when, for other reasons, an ad should not tell what the book is really about." He cites his campaign for *The Last of the Just*, a best-selling novel of the early 1960s, which dealt with the Nazi extermination camps. The agency decided that the book was too depressing. "Copy" was held to a minimum; full-page ads used a motif of birds in flight, visually attractive but vague.

Sussman & Sugar is one of the few agencies to use outside readers to evaluate the books they handle. Reports running from ten to twenty pages help determine the type of media to be used, the kind of ad, and the allocation of space. But they also give the agency an independent check on the publisher's own estimate of the book, and save the copy department the necessity of

reading it—or not reading it, as the case may be. Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles* is receiving its current advertising splash partly on the strength of a reader's enthusiasm.

Walter Hines Page, of the old Doubleday, Page & Co., is reputed to have said that 80 per cent of his advertising money was wasted, but that he didn't know in which review media. Publishers today are saving at least part of this "wasted" dollar—inadvertently—because so many big-city newspapers have been shot out from under them. "With the media outlets shrinking," says Herbert Lyons, vice president of Denhard & Stewart, "there are simply fewer opportunities to make a mistake. More and more of our advertising tries to reach the core audience—the library buyers, for instance—through trade journals and book-oriented magazines."

Lyons points out that, outside New York, book advertising is often coordinated with the author's TV appear-



ances. "Television does the main job," he says. "A small ad in the local paper simply lets the public know that the book is available."

Even a prominent ad in the *Times* may not be directed to the book-buyer so much as to the paperback houses. The strategy here is to raise the reprint bidding on a new book by creating the impression that it is going to sell well. Such ads are frequently run just before a publisher's luncheon date with a reprint editor. ("By the way, did you see our ad for ——— last week?")

One more crazy example: With non-fiction outselling fiction by a wide margin, a good deal of effort is sometimes made to convince the reader that a novel being advertised is somehow not really a novel at all. Agencies are using less artwork than formerly and more photographs; ad design emulates the "fact" approach, whereby the book, even though fiction, is recommended for its informational content on a certain subject. It's all part of the struggle to "put the book across," and since this is what the agencies are hired to do, no one can blame them for earning their commission.

Sussman will even intrude on the editorial preserve if he thinks he can make a book more salable. Almost twenty years ago he was writing copy for a novel about a small New England town, called *The Tree and the Blossom*. The title struck him as too vaguely poetical for the subject matter, which was raunchy and down to earth. "Let's call it *Peyton Place*," he told the publisher. The rest is history.

**PARENTHESES:
An Autobiographical Journey**

by Jay Neugeboren
Dutton, 222 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by Nicholas A. Samstag

■ Revolution recollected in tranquility. We meet the author on his thirtieth birthday, a frightening time for him (as for all of us, whatever side of it we're on), self-exiled to a village paradise in the south of France, ruminating on the events that took him there and that will—no surprise ending, this—bring him back to this crazy mixed-up country whose villainies, minor and major, so revolt him.

"I would like to consider myself radical, revolutionary." Good for you, Jay Neugeboren. Who wouldn't these days? Not only is revolution good for the soul, but it sells. Now, show us your credentials. Why you? What dialectic eventuates in these pages of manuscript, compelling me or anyone else to read what you have to say about the politics of exile?

The case would rest, it seems to me, on one period of the author's life. He was, by his own admission, a member of that forgettable college generation which came to its version of maturity during or not long after the Eisenhower years—"the Silent Generation," didn't they call us?—for whom the issues that so exercise an assertive minority of young people today simply didn't exist. So unradical was Jay Neugeboren, in fact, that he dropped out of graduate school and into an executive trainee position with General Motors. His revolution began at Chevrolet-Indianapolis, "a body-stamping plant employing about 3,000 blue-collar and 500 white-collar workers."

I was hopeful, optimistic. . . . I had no particular interest in General Motors, cars, engineering, or business administration, but I didn't see anything . . . wrong in them. Certainly I had no objections that were in any way political. As an executive, I might, I even told myself, be able to do some good someday. What kind of good I didn't know—but I assumed that anyone who possessed power in the largest corporation in America would also possess the power to affect the lives of many men.

It was a confusing time but also, for the reader of this narrative, a gripping story. Except for the too few descriptions of pastoral life in France, Chevrolet-Indianapolis is virtually the only part of the book that seems to deal with anything larger in scope than the author's ongoing omphaloskepsis—in

graduate school, as a toiler in the committees of the New York liberal establishment (this, the most tedious part of a tedious book, reads disconcertingly like a poor man's *Making It*, self-parody of self-parody), teaching the suburban rich and the ghetto poor, surviving a personal crisis or two. It is as if young Neugeboren, quit at last of GM and all it stands for, finds himself so benumbed by his experience that all else is but a sterile backdrop against which he must act out, ever so dreamily, these "parenthetical" chapters in his political passion play. The reader, foundering in this self-indulgent exposition of a rudimentary political awakening, is the one who suffers.

If there can be any point to so diffuse an exercise, it might reside in what the author calls "my working hypothesis."

In basic outline, it went as follows: men could not perform inhuman tasks eight hours a day for the better part of their waking lives and live meaningful human lives in the time which was left over. It was absurd to put one's faith in the men who possessed the power to work change . . . for even the best of them were concerned only with matters of expediency.

But he adds, more succinctly:

The point, I said (still having to find some justification—moral, political, and metaphysical—for every action I took in this world), . . . was not to be absolutely moral when . . . dealing with amoral bureaucracies. The point was not to let one's life be destroyed in symbolic skirmishes. . . .

This is not revolution. This is pique.

Nicholas A. Samstag is an editorial writer for the Providence Journal.



CITY LIFE

by Donald Barthelme

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 168 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by Josephine Hendin

"The aim of literature . . . is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart," said Donald Barthelme some years ago. Fiction then had the power to be outrageous, to create marvels or passion. Barthelme's characters used to hope that the sheer force of imagination could change the world, or, at the very least, that they could thwart reality by withdrawing into themselves, into a consciousness that Barthelme usually made witty and ironic. Even his Snow White, who is so tired of being just a "horsewife" for dwarfs, finally saves herself through a mixture of irony and poetry. Barthelme is still writing about literature, but he is not so funny any more.

Barthelme's black humor is now less humorous than black. His latest collection, *City Life*, is full of chaos and despair. The best stories are about the exhaustion of creative power, the disintegration of individual consciousness—the collapse of inner worlds that are now so fragmented that no one could withdraw into them with comfort—and the failure of fiction to create order or even, perhaps, diversion. All of these are very modish themes. And the worst stories in this collection have a quality of stylish, studied incoherence that suggests they have been ground into precisely the sort of disorder readers require of writers who take meaninglessness for their subject. Were it not for the genius of a few of its stories, *City Life* would be no more than yet another chronicle of how the past is gone, how impossible it is to catch hold of the present, and how the future does not exist. But Barthelme's talent is there, and in some of these stories it overwhelms you.

When Barthelme's heroes fight against the fear of disintegration, both of fiction and of personality, you get a real sense of the writer straining against language and struggling with himself. One of the strongest stories, "The Glass Mountain," is a parable about an artist caught between an exhausting concrete labor and his own draining inner horror. The story parodies a fairy tale, partly recounted, about a youth who must reach the top of a glass mountain to free a beautiful enchanted princess. But Barthelme's hero is a New Yorker painfully climbing a glass mountain on the corner of Thirteenth Street and Eighth Avenue with the aid of two plumber's friends.

How to Choose a Title?

SPEAKING of improbable names, we wondered about the significance of "The Air-Line to Seattle," the title of a recent collection of literary criticism by Kenneth S. Lynn. Was the title meaningful only to the author, we wondered, as was the title of Diana Trilling's collection, "Claremont Essays" (named after the street she lived on in her Columbia University neighborhood)? For although Mr. Lynn's book contains provocative essays on Walt Whitman, Ernest Hemingway, Maxwell Perkins and Malcolm Cowley, it contains nothing about Seattle.

Nothing, that is, except a mention in the prologue, in which the author, a professor of history at Johns Hopkins University, tells a tale about George Santayana. Annoyed by what he regarded as the insularity of his Harvard faculty colleagues and put off by William James's denunciation of the American annexation of the Philippines, Santayana satirized their attitudes in a poem. Contrasting the outside world of 1900 with Harvard Yard, he wrote:

*Yet the smoke of trade and battle
Cannot quite be banished hence,
And the air-line to Seattle
Whizzes just behind the fence.*

That "air-line" in 1900 was, of course, a train, a picture of which graces the book's jacket. ■

NYTBR
Sept 25, '83



7310 \$6.95

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James Morris, Heaven's Command, 183: Anglo-Indian book titles--

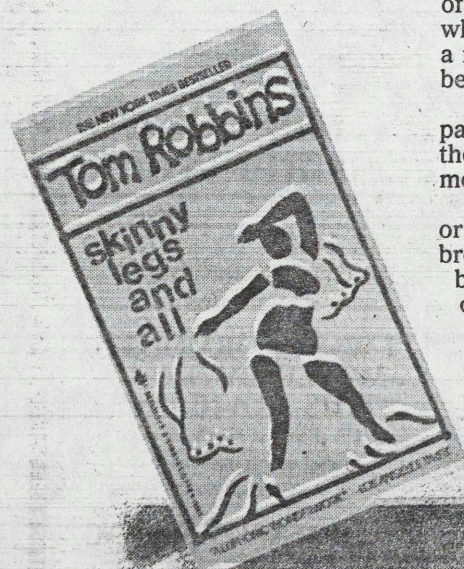
George Lawrence, Forty-Three Years in India.

footnote: "The most famous of the genre was Forty-One Years in India, by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, but as a professional in the field my own favourite is George Aberigh-Mackay's Twenty-One Days in India (1882)."

The words in a title often are the most important and difficult to write

'I don't know where these things come from. It comes from somewhere in my brain, that beehive of activity inside my cranium.'

— TOM ROBBINS
author



T

by Ferdinand M.
de Leon
Times staff reporter

hrough the six years Charles Johnson worked on "Middle Passage," the novel that ultimately would win him the National Book Award, he called it "Rutherford's Travels."

But by the time the book was done it was clear to Johnson that the working title — a nod to the Swiftian elements of the novel about the slave trade — would have to go. Three other titles were considered, but found wanting.

Crime writer Ann Rule said that for one of her recent works, a story about a woman who killed her children to prove her love for a man, she toyed with more than 300 titles, before coming up with "Small Sacrifices."

Despite the ability to fill hundreds of pages, the handful of words that appear on the cover of a book often prove to be the most elusive for many writers.

Should the title be long or short? Literal or literary? Will it catch the eye of the casual browser? Does it capture the essence of the book? Can it compete with the thousands of titles that fill the shelves?

It is a search where there are no guidelines, and writers rely entirely on intuition.

"I really do think good titles are vital to a book," said Seattle writer

Ivan Doig. "Readers don't have time to pick up every one of the 50,000 books published every year. I think it's the job of the writer to signal the reader with the title."

When a title finally is chosen, explaining its source can be just as difficult. Ask one of Seattle's many literary luminaries how he or she chooses a title and you get an elaborate shrug.

"I don't know where these things come from," said Seattle novelist Tom Robbins, whose works include "Skinny Legs and All" and "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues." "It comes from somewhere in my brain, that beehive of activity inside my cranium."

Rule credits the subliminal workings of the brain.

Because the central character of her book had a rose tattoo on her left shoulder, most of the titles she considered had either a rose or a tattoo — including the working title, "Blood and Roses."

But the answer came in the night.

"It had all been churning around subliminally in my mind when one night I awoke at 3 o'clock in the morning, sat bolt upright and said, that's it: 'Small Sacrifices,'" Rule said.

For Johnson, the right words could only come when the novel was written.

"Only once it was done could I see that the heart and core of the story was the slave trade," Johnson said. "'Rutherford's Travels' was just too literal and didn't arc beyond the book, but 'Middle Passage' was more provocative and suggestive."

Although the original title may not survive the process, for many writers, having a title — any title — is an essential first step.

"I choose the titles before I begin the books," Robbins said. "It's a point of departure. I choose an interesting title, ruminate on it and it leads to a first sentence, which then leads to a second. It's a journey. You never know where it will lead you."

Sometimes the journey leads to a long, strange trip that bears little trace of the point of origin.

"Skinny Legs and All," for example, came from a line from a song by a Tex-Mex blues singer, but the book itself is an apocalyptic tale promoting harmony in the Middle East, and has inanimate objects as central characters.

"I heard it on the radio one day and I thought it would make an interesting title for a book," Robbins said. "I thought about where that would take me and it took me a long way. But you find that everything is connected and finding those connections is one of the thrills of writing."

Rule also said she can't work without a title.

"It's something to put on the top of manuscript," Rule said. "It has to have some name or it'll be an orphan child. You have to have something when you say 'I'm going to work on...'"

But not all writers need a title to get going.

"I don't believe in that at all," Doig said. "I think the writer's job is to write what you can. It's deluding and dangerous to not move the rest of the book until you have a title. If you don't have a title, something will

Please see **TITLES** on L 2

Chamber festivals are listening more to what audien

How do you program a chamber music festival? Very, very cautiously.



conservative than Seattle Chamber Music Festival ones, because there was a strong contingent in the

And this year there is no participation in the Seattle festival by artistic director/pianist Alicia

before Labor Day, with programming split evenly between weekday and weekend concerts) and a

Titles: the hardest words

TITLES

continued from L 1

emerge or some bright editor will provide you with something."

Horror writer John Saul says he typically launches into a new book not knowing what it will be called, and often works with his editor in finding a title.

"I very rarely go into it knowing a title," Saul said. "Generally, it's panic city when it comes to finding a title."

After finishing one of his recent books without a title, Saul and his editor began tossing around ideas, but couldn't find one they liked.



Finally, with publication deadlines looming, they gave the story to the art director in order for him to start work on a cover.

"After reading it, the art director said, 'Of course, the title should be 'Second Child' and my editor said, 'Yes, of course, let me talk to John,' and I thought it was perfect," Saul said. "It's now one of my favorite titles. I thought it was a stroke of genius."

With genre books, successful titles tend to be recycled.

Most of Saul's recent novels, for example, have one-word titles. This summer's book was "Darkness," but before that were "Sleepwalk," "Creature" and "The Unloved."

"I had never had my titles changed before, but I didn't mind because it had to do with packaging," Anders said.

Marketability is a primary consideration even among more literary authors.

"Titles need to be short because people can't remember them otherwise," Johnson said. "Look at 'Roots.' The shorter it is, the better. But whatever you choose, it needs to announce itself on the bookshelf because there are so many titles out there."

Rule's rule of thumb is to have titles with four words or fewer — for a very practical reason.

"If you're on the road and you're doing interviews and you want to slip in the title of your book, you really can't do it too subtly if your title has more than four words," she said half-joking.

But long titles also have their advocates.

Doig, whose most recent novel is "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana," said the lengthy title reflects the spirit of his work.

"This is a pretty big book for me; it's a big jostling kind of novel, and I think the more plenteous title indicates that," Doig said. "I think it's worth the wordage to indicate what the book's about."

Doig's catchy title, with its use of alliteration and internal rhymes, features the name of a character, the story's setting, and hints at the road trips featured in the novel.

Some writers have a large enough following that the title of the work becomes secondary; it doesn't have to lure the reader.

Saul, for example, is among the handful of writers whose names



"The Day of the Jackal," "The Night of the Iguana," I'm tired of them. It's a nice device, but overdone.'

Tom Robbins



'I really dislike "Lust Killer" because it sounds like something you'd buy in a cigar store in a plain brown wrapper.'

Ann Rule



'The longest title I ever had was for my first novel, which was called "Faith and the Good Thing."'

Charles Johnson



'The title ("Friend of My Youth") is nice and balanced, and it tells me that here's a real craftsman at work.'

Ivan Doig

Titles authors like; titles they hate

Titles they like

Tom Robbins: "Woman Lit by Fireflies," Jim Harrison; "A Spy in the House of Love," Anais Nin; "Love in the Time of Cholera," Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

"I like these titles because of

H.G. Wells story and made it his own.")

Ivan Doig: "Friend of My Youth," a collection of short stories by Alice Munro ("the title is nice and balanced, and it tells me that here's a real craftsman at work"); Paul St. Pierre's mischie-

er, who used a variation. "The original title was 'Woodpecker Rising,' but some people pointed out to me that it's a double entendre," he said. "I'm happy it got stolen."

Both Rule and Saul wrote books titled "Lust Killer." Saul's version came out years before

subtitle the book "Landscapes of a Western Mind."

"It's funny," Doig said. "I've been praised for that evocative title, but I didn't think it up at all. It was the work of my New Jersey editor, sitting in her office in Manhattan."

With genre books, successful titles tend to be recycled.

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When Saul was with Dell, his former publisher, his titles followed another formula.

"The Dell titles had a rhythm," Saul said. "'Suffer the Children,' 'Punish the Sinners,' they all had the same rhythm. 'Comes the Blind Fury' I saw in Bartlett's (the reference book for quotations), and thought it was perfect. But when I switched to Bantam I thought enough was enough. The one word titles crept up on us unawares."

Rule's early books on serial killers, written under the pseudonym Andy Stack, also had formula titles. All took on their subject's police nicknames: "The I-5 Killer," "The Lust Killer," and "The Want Ad Killer."

Even Johnson, who said his editors generally keep a hands-off policy when it comes to titles, had one near-disaster.

After Johnson submitted "Oxherding Tale," an Indiana University Press editor showed the novel about slavery to a friend who suggested the title "Bondage," which appealed to the editor.

"He came back to me and for a week I said OK, but it really bothered me," Johnson said. "People would think they knew something about the book based on the title." Eventually, the editor was persuaded to keep the original title.

Donna Anders, who writes historical sagas and romance novels, said when Harlequin published two of her books earlier this year, the editors changed the titles.

Originally the two books were titled "Islands of the Kings" and "Goddess of Paradise." But the books were packaged together as part of the Islands of Paradise series, and they were titled "Mari" and "Ketti" after the heroines of the two books.

the story's setting, and hints at the road trips featured in the novel.

Some writers have a large enough following that the title of the work becomes secondary; it doesn't have to lure the reader.

Saul, for example, is among the handful of writers whose name alone sells a book. Fittingly, his name usually appears as prominently on the covers of his books as the titles. But Saul still believes in the power of good titles to deliver readers.

"It's true that after you get to a certain level, the books sell on the author's name," Saul said. "But that doesn't happen to many of us. I think a good title—and cover can definitely help sales."

Robbins, however, doubts that titles make much difference in selling books.

"From looking at the bestseller lists, I'd have to say sales aren't dependent on titles, because most of the titles are pretty pedestrian," Robbins said. "The readers are probably drawn to the book by the author or by something they heard about the book, because there certainly aren't many enticing titles on the bestseller list."

Doig adds that many books now regarded as classics had boring titles.

"In some cases, the passage of time and the intrinsic powers of the book justify what don't appear to be zingy titles," Doig said. "War and Peace? That could apply to many books. But the lasting strength of the book buries the title."

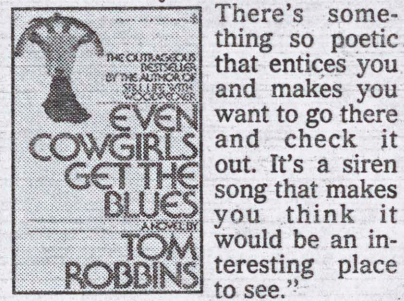
But when titles are well chosen, they are works of art in themselves, Robbins said.

"My hope is that the title will touch something in the readers' psyche and reverberate in the caverns of their subconscious," Robbins said. "A title is like one-fifth of a haiku; it's like writing a little poem."

Titles they like

Tom Robbins: "Woman Lit by Fireflies," Jim Harrison; "A Spy in the House of Love," Anais Nin; "Love in the Time of Cholera," Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

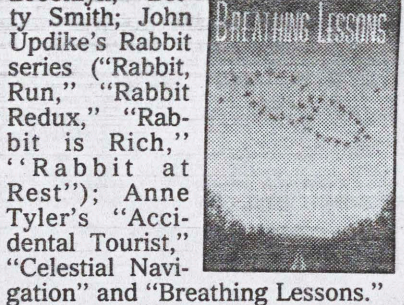
"I like these titles because of the poetic images they invoke," Robbins said. "It's like the name of a distant city in a world atlas."



There's something so poetic that entices you and makes you want to go there and check it out. It's a siren song that makes you think it would be an interesting place to see."

"Even Cowgirls Get the Blues," one of Robbins' favorite among his titles, has been used as the title of at least four songs since the book first appeared.

John Saul: "Appointment in Samarra," John O'Hara; "Silence of the Lambs," Thomas Harris; and the titles of Ann Rule and mystery writer J.A. Jance.



Ann Rule: "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," Betty Smith; John Updike's Rabbit series ("Rabbit, Run," "Rabbit Redux," "Rabbit is Rich," "Rabbit at Rest"); Anne Tyler's "Accidental Tourist," "Celestial Navigation" and "Breathing Lessons."

Charles Johnson: James Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time," and "Go Tell it on the Mountain," and Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man." ("He took a title from an

H.G. Wells story and made it his own.")

Ivan Doig: "Friend of My Youth," a collection of short stories by Alice Munro ("the title is nice and balanced, and it tells me that here's a real craftsman at work"); Paul St. Pierre's mischievous "Smith and Other Events"; and the lilting cadence of "The All of It," a novel by Jeannette Haien set in Ireland.

Titles they hate

Robbins: "'Jitterbug Perfume' is probably the least favorite of my titles. It may be because I didn't have that before it was written, but it's a label title instead of title with any poetic movement."

Robbins also dislikes one-word titles, name titles (he cited "Paris Trout" as an example) and "of" titles.

"The Day of the the Jackal," "The Night of the Iguana," I'm tired of them. It's a nice device, but overdone."

Saul: "'Punish the Sinners,' is a title I've always loathed. I thought it was a disgusting and grotesque title. I just don't like the sound of it. It sounds mean."

Rule: "I really dislike 'Lust Killer' because it sounds like something you'd buy in a cigar store in a plain brown wrapper."

Rule also dislikes technical sounding titles and titles that deliberately mislead readers and have nothing to do with the book.

"I think it's very affected of the writer," she said.

Adventures in titling

Robbins said one of his titles, which he had mentioned in interviews, was stolen by another writ-

er, who used a variation. "The original title was 'Woodpecker Rising,' but some people pointed out to me that it's a double entendre," he said. "I'm happy it got stolen."

Both Rule and Saul wrote books titled "Lust Killer." Saul's version came out years before Rule's. The two later became members of a writers group that meets regularly, and Saul pointed out the coincidence, and pulled out his copy of the book to prove it. The other members of group have pledged to use the title in one of their books, Rule said.

"The longest title I ever had was for my first novel, which was called 'Faith and the Good Thing,'" Johnson said. Faith was the name of the title character, and the title, which was patterned after "Jack and The Beanstalk," was meant to reflect the folk-tale style of the book. But some people took it as a religious novel.

"After that the titles got shorter," Johnson said.

Finding the title "This House of Sky" was absolutely the last thing done on Doig's book, a memoir about his family and childhood in Montana. Finally his editor suggested "House of Sky." Doig countered with "This House of Sky" — because he liked the added alliteration. The editor also decided to

subtitle the book "Landscapes of a Western Mind."

"It's funny," Doig said. "I've been praised for that evocative title, but I didn't think it up at all. It was the work of my New Jersey editor, sitting in her office in Manhattan."

Future titles

Johnson's next book, which will be about Martin Luther King Jr., will be called "Dreamer." The title refers to King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech and also other layers of meaning, Johnson explained.

"Everything She Ever Wanted" is the working title of Rule's next book, about another female murderer.

Robbins, who now avoids disclosing the names of future works, said he has a notebook full of potential titles.

"I've always liked 'The Queen's Wino,'" he said. "I'll probably never write about a queen's wino but I thought it was good title. If I saw that on the shelf I'd pull it out."

Doig also dislikes to disclose future titles, but he says that his next book will get away from the title rhythms of his most recent works, "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair."

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