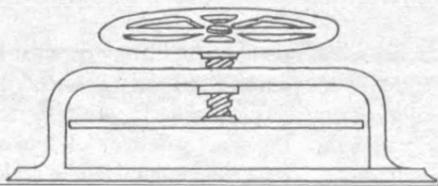


5
2
1035
A1
B735+

Cornell Univ. Library
Serials Dept.
1AKB6466
110 Olin Library
Ithaca, NY 14853-5301

the



The Newspaper
of The Literary Arts

BOOKPRESS

BULK RATE
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 572
Ithaca, NY 14850

Volume 2, Number 9

November, 1992

Ithaca, New York

COMPLIMENTARY

Edmund Wilson's *Upstate* Revisited

J. Michael Serino

Photographs by Janice Levy

In early October I found myself driving north of Utica on Route 12 on an odd sort of pilgrimage. The destination was Talcottville, a tiny village in Lewis County with a clear view of the foothills of the Adirondacks. Talcottville, as many people still remember, was the ancestral home—and summer residence from the early 1950s until his death in 1972—of Edmund Wilson. The village and Wilson's house—known as the Old Stone House—were immortalized in the last of Wilson's books published during his

lifetime: *Upstate: Records and Recollections of Northern New York* (1971). The recent reissue of that book by Syracuse University Press had provided an occasion to reread it after many years and was one of the events prompting the trip. The other was the death this summer of Frederick Exley.

The death of the 62-year-old author of *A Fan's Notes* (1968), *Pages from a Cold Island* (1975), and *Last Notes from Home* (1988), as Mary Cantwell observed in the *New York Times Book Review*, hardly came as a surprise. "He smoked too much, he drank too much, he ate too little. He didn't so much sleep as pass out, and the energy he expended in talk might have powered a generator," she wrote. It was his first novel that she found most appealing. "*A Fan's Notes*...is an attempt to justify what its author describes as 'that long malaise, my life.' Perhaps, having succeeded in doing just that in 274 funny, tortured pages, he should have stopped there."

For me, however, the book that held the greatest interest, and the one that had led me to Exley in the first place, was *Pages from a Cold Island*. There his narrator describes his reaction to the death of what was perhaps the last true American man of letters—that's right, Edmund

Wilson—and his own pilgrimage south from Alexandria Bay to bid adieu to the great man's shade. The novel began by being promising and ended by growing tiresome: the sly wink and smile implying that, yes, the narrator knew he was being self-indulgent and obnoxious but isn't that somehow charming in its way, proved not to be. The description of the narrator's trip to Talcottville and meetings with Wilson's friend Mary Pcolar and daughter Rosalind Baker Wilson proved interesting, however, although one couldn't read them without wondering why either of the women would spend any time talking to *him*. (At one point Exley visited Rosalind and asked her for one of Wilson's walking sticks—"something of him to carry with me." "It was like dealing with Uriah Heep," she would later write of the incident.) And his treatment of Rosalind in the book made it difficult to imagine why she would ever again want to talk to anyone else. Nevertheless, Exley's death served as a reminder of his, and Wilson's, rootedness in upstate New York. Both writers had created a rich sense of the area that had provided Wilson with so much serenity and had formed the background of his work during his last two decades. It was time to have a look for myself. So in



The Old Stone House

early October photographer Janice Levy and I headed for Lewis County.

Americans aren't much for literary pilgrimages. While the British plan vacation trips to Bronte country and the Germans comb the walls of castles in search of some spot where Goethe might have carved his initials in the stone, we tend to ignore

the physical trappings of our literature. For a country that has made the phrase "a sense of place" a buzzword in contemporary criticism, we are remarkably ignorant of the places our authors lived. Because of the cult built around the so-called American Renaissance, New

see *Revisiting*, page 10

INSIDE:

The Ramayana
illustrated by
Milly Acharya
page 8

Gloria Naylor's
Bailey's Cafe
page 3

Ithaca's Kitchen Theatre
page 7

The "Death" of Derrida

Richard Klein

Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher and former Andrew Dixon White Professor-at-large, came to Cornell last week and spoke in Ives Hall to an overflow crowd. It has been some time since Derrida was last in Ithaca, where, through the years, he has delivered many important papers to large audiences. While he has many friends here (and some enemies), it was mostly the curious who, on Tuesday, October 7, packed themselves into one of the largest halls on the campus in order to hear the first part of a four-hour lecture that continued the following day. Out of respect for Yom Kippur, Derrida delivered the second part of his lecture Wednesday evening from 8 to 10 and then stood for more than an hour of questions. People familiar with his past performances were not surprised by the latest marathon. Derrida has never felt constrained by the American convention which supposes that there is nothing worth

saying that cannot be compressed into fifty minutes. Many of those who attended only out of curiosity to inspect the founder of Deconstruction might have wished they had brought a toothbrush and a change of underwear.

But it was not only the length of his lecture that was daunting. In the period surrounding the most solemn of Holy Days, the topic, coincidentally, was Death. And the treatment of it in this lecture, part of a larger work in preparation, focused on the discussion of death at the center of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, one of the most monumentally, notoriously difficult pieces of philosophical writing in the so-called continental tradition. In his characteristically meticulous style, Derrida took all the time he needed to pursue the intricate argument Heidegger advances in his own highly technical style. Before the lecture, sitting at the front of that immense room, watching it fill up with many young people no doubt barely, if at all, familiar with

Heidegger, Derrida was overheard muttering to himself, "Oh! les pauvres, les pauvres." He knew perfectly well what they were in for, and felt sorry. It probably did not surprise him that some of the audience, after the first hour or so, began, steadily, to drift out of the hall; he might have been astonished that so many stayed to the end, and returned the next night. Some of those who left might have come hoping that Derrida would use the public forum to explain himself in terms more easily accessible than those he normally deploys in his writing. But, alas, there were few if any compromises with his usual, pedagogical style. He himself doubtless felt obliged to use the occasion to present his latest, most demanding work, to an audience he had often addressed in the past, one that included many of his most faithful readers.

The curious must have been attracted in such numbers by the notoriety, no less than the

see *Derrida*, page 2

Mal(e)practice Suits

Susan Malka Choi

WOMEN AND DOCTORS

John M. Smith, M.D.
Atlantic Monthly, \$20.95, 256 pp.

How do we label a profession 'sexist'? In the case of American gynecology, we could begin by pointing out that the number of women in professional practice comprises just under 20% of the field. Professional gynecology remains disproportionately male, then, but this cannot be all that we would mean by a sexist profession. If we could go on to argue, of the remaining 80%, that the majority are guilty of sexist practices, sexism that extends beyond conversational manner into the realm of diagnosis, that can be blamed for both unnecessary treatment and the failure to deliver needed treatment, then a definition of the sexist profession begins to suggest itself. Still, there is a difference between rampant sexism within a profession, and the less particular,

more unwieldy notion of a practice that is by its very nature sexist, built on a distorting and damaging bias that cannot simply be weeded out. Making sense of the distinction is crucial; it is the first step toward effecting change in a profession that Dr. John Smith indicts as not only grossly inadequate, but actually harmful, to the women it serves.

In an election year of insider/outsider politics and increased attention to the health care crisis, Smith's book, *Women and Doctors*, is well-timed. Smith is a medical profession insider gone outsider, and the first line of his introduction charges the American health care system with failure. Smith goes on to point out that not only is the situation of women particularly dire, but that the blame can be laid squarely at the doorstep of one specialization in particular, that of gynecology. Because the cost of comprehensive preventive health care is prohibitive in this country,

see *Suits*, page 4

Derrida

continued from page 1

celebrity, that Derrida has acquired in America. Since 1967, three generations of critics and scholars have been profoundly influenced by his collected work, which now comprises close to forty books, most of them translated in dozens of languages. Indeed, his influence has been so enduring and so widespread that many who came might not have expected to discover that he was not only alive but working as vigorously and productively as ever. It is not uncommon to hear him referred to these days as belonging to the recent past of a certain French intellectual hegemony by those, like Camille Paglia, who wish to clear the ground of what they consider to be his nefarious influence, in order to make way for their own apotheoses. In her recent book, *Sex, Art and American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1992), she dismisses him as merely an epiphenomenon, a creature thrown up by Parisian modishness, destined to vanish like other smoky ephemera. She is fed up, writes John Updike in the latest *New Yorker*, "with the vapid academic chic of the wicked French trio Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida," and like the other two, for her, he might as well be dead. She is

not alone in being exasperated by the stubborn persistence of his continuing influence when, after all, like anything that is merely fashionable, he should have long ago ceased to matter. If not dead, it is widely assumed (or wished) that he must be moribund, endlessly repeating the same thing with diminished energy. But Derrida steadily refuses to accommodate reports of his intellectual demise.

Professor Jonathan Culler, in his introduction to Derrida's lecture, paid homage to that quality which remains for him his most striking characteristic: "the boundless intellectual and analytical energy, the intensity of thought, which makes every text he produces a major intellectual engagement, a sustained process of reading, exposition, and invention, no matter what he is discussing." Culler went on to list the three books he published just last year, in order to display that remarkable diversity of pursuit that continues to characterize his work:

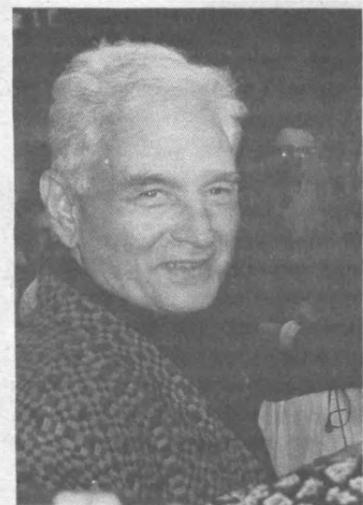
First, there is L'autre cap, soon to appear in English from Indiana University Press as The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe, a critical examination of the so-called "New Europe" and the discourse of Europe's identity and destiny.

Second, there is Circonfession ("Circumfession"), a text that accompanies Geoff Bennington's systematization of Derridean thought, Jacques Derrida, and outplays it, melding circumcision and confession, as a figure for reflection on the relation to and import of personal and cultural heritage and history.

Finally, there is Donner le temps, to appear from the University of Chicago Press as Given Time, an exploration, through a reading of Marcel Mauss, of the possibility and impossibility of the gift and, in a powerful reading of a Baudelaire prose poem, "La fausse monnaie," of the dependency of literature on this structure.

Derrida refuses to go away, despite all the pronouncements that have been being made over the last twenty-five years, like the one in the latest PMLA, announcing the death of Deconstruction. Derrida knows perfectly well the death-wish that sustains many of the bitter attacks directed against him in America by those on the right who are eager to discredit Deconstruction in order to purify the academy of what is perceived to be its baleful effects on our values, and by those on the left who have little use for "theory" at a time when so much needs to be done. That situation explains in part,

perhaps, the irony of what he acknowledged was the "impudent" title he gave to his lecture at Cornell: "Is my death possible?" It looked as if he were tempting fate or seeking to provoke some crazed realist into putting his rhetorical question to the literal test. Derrida apologized for the appearance of impudence and put the question to rest, as it were, when he revealed in the opening minutes of his talk, that the expression "my death" is a kind of quotation, a phrase whose logical structure may imply a pragmatic paradox, belonging to the nature of first person particulars, similar to the one implicit in a sentence like, "I am speaking French now." If spoken with reference to the present tense, the fact of saying "my death" contradicts its ostensible meaning. In a sense, it illustrates a larger aim of the whole lecture, which was to analyze and illustrate the impossibility of simultaneously speaking about death and referring to it—hence of understanding and conveying what it means. Uncovering the logical dilemmas that in a way make it impossible to speak about death does not, however, prevent Derrida himself from going on about it for four hours, but there is no reason to think it should. On the contrary, he wished to display how fruitfully the paradoxes (what he frequently calls



Jacques Derrida

aporia—in Greek, an impasse) surrounding what we can say about death set the terms and generate the production of every thanatography, all the individual and collective inscriptions of death that have often been considered to be synonymous with the origin of culture, with culture itself: funerary rites, attitudes towards death, ways of dying, and so forth. Far from wishing to escape the *aporia*, he stressed the point he often makes: whenever anyone tells you that they know their way out of an impasse, you can be virtually certain they haven't fully understood the depth of the dilemma they face.

see *Derrida*, page 14

Heading Us Off at the Impasse

Jeffrey Schwaner

Those Smith Corona employees in Cortland losing their shirts over the company's move to Mexico (due to a trade law loophole Congress failed to revise in October before adjourning) would probably have been better served on Capit(a)l Hill if they'd been represented not by Al D'Amato, but by Senator Jacques Derrida. Filibustering his way through a multitude of "ana(c)h(ronies)" in two marathon appearances at Cornell October 6th and 7th, he seemed more than capable of making a *differance* in American politics. Which brings me to my subject, or rather the object of this notice, which I will entertain in more detail *toward-the-end*, but which we can all agree is important; and that is, *To what does Derrida aspire?*

In *Limited Inc.* one may read on page 25 that John Searle argues (in an essay not included but "summarized" therein) against "Derrida's critique of the classical concept of writing 'as the communication of intended meaning.'" Searle challenges Derrida's argument that, as Searle (italics "mine") puts it, "since writing can and must be able to function in the radical absence of the sender, the receiver, and the context of production, it cannot be the communication of the sender's

meaning to the receiver" (p. 199). One can imagine how surprised I was to witness a Derrida — and "I" will say "a Derrida" because we will be dealing with articles of faith (but more on this later) — not speaking, but rather *reading* from a "text" (his own?) which in itself had been translated by a man who, Derrida admitted while bringing his name up after noticing a typo in the text, was himself "at this very moment in Buffalo."

So the text had traveled, presumably by post, before being translated into English, which Derrida then *read*. It seems self-evident that the difference between Derrida "not speaking" and his otherwise "speaking not" (from whatever source the oral gift emanates) appears more problematical than ever, at least in that Derrida as *reader* could no longer (person(ally)) assert the intent he perhaps once *pro-fessed*, though perhaps even that was relinquished earlier in the process of (w)ri(t)ing it. But what is it now? (What is wit now?) Derrida did not *speak on*, he *read from*. From what? From my vantage and from his reference/reverence to the man in Buffalo, I gather that it was a *manus(crip)*; while not ignoring the possibilities (and impossibilities) that an act of crippling/cribbing, stealing the words from their original script, if not the intent, may raise questions (u)nan(s)wer(able) — and we cannot unfortunately

unfold this analysis here — still it becomes obvious that Derrida's po(sit)ion as a *reader* was thus quite different from that of *orator*, that he was thus a kind of *proxy*, a representative for us, in that we could not all possibly have crowded around that single manuscript, much as the Smith Corona employees could not have all fit around the podium on the Senate floor those fifteen hours in October, problems of acoustics notwithstanding, and so were represented in proxy by Senator D'Amato.

There seems to be general agreement also that we could not have impressed each other and ourselves in reading aloud the manuscript to the extent that Jacques impressed us (himself included; Jacques made the point *toward-the-end* to speak of us in inclusive terms as sharing a secret faith, but I will defer on this until a little later.) He reads French quite well, as you can imagine; and his German is, if not exactly *German*, charming the way a Frenchman in America speaking German to an audience would tend to be. So c(harming)/ch(arming) was Jacques this night, as I think we can all agree, those of us who were (*p*)resent, and the rest of you may trust me concerning this, that it seems clear, does it not, that Jacques Derrida, realizing his subordinate position

see *Impasse*, page 14

The BOOKPRESS is available at the following upstate locations:

Ithaca: ABC Café, Blue Fox, Café Decadence, Cabbagetown Café, Cornell University (various locations), Country Couple, Courtside Fitness, CTB Trihammer, DeWitt Mall, Fall Creek Cinema, Hickey's Music, Irving's Deli, Ithaca Bakery, Ithaca College (various locations), Ithaca Music Hall, L'Auberge, Ludgate Farms, Mayers, New Alexandrian, Phoenix Bookshop, Rebob Records, Ruby's, Smedley's, Steiger's, Stella's Café, The Bakery, The Frame Shop, Tops, University Inn, Wegmans

Broome County: Art Theatre, Bookbridge, The Book Cellar, Burt's Bookstore, Gil's Book Loft, New Ritz, Roberson Center, SUNY Binghamton (various locations), Tom's Coffee & Gifts, Vestal Historical Society Museum, Whole Earth Store & Coffeehouse

Syracuse: Ala Mode, Books End, Book Warehouse, CD Heaven, Community Darkrooms, Eureka Crafts, Fay's, Good Bookstore, Marshall St. Mall, Mallard Tobacconist, My Sister's Words, On the Rise Bakery, Papa's Deli, Pastabilities, Seven Rays Bookstore, Syracuse University (various locations), Tales Twice Told, Village Green Bookstore, Waldenbooks, Wescott Bakery, Wescott Market

Owego: Hand of Man, Riverrow Bookshop, Tioga County Council on the Arts

Geneseo: SUNY Bookstore

Cayuga County: Aurora Inn, Wells College (various locations)

St. Lawrence County: Potsdam College (various locations), St. Lawrence University (various locations)

Rochester: Abacus Bookshop, Borders Bookshop, Bookshelf, Brown Bag Bookshop, Genesee Food Co-op, RIT Bookstore, Gutenberg's, Kinko's, Monroe C.C. Bookstore, Park Ave. Bookstore, Pyramid Arts Gallery, Silkwood Books, Sweet Shop, Village Green, Visual Studies Bookstore, Wild Seed Bookstore & Cafe, Writers & Books, Yankee Peddler.

see page 15 for Buffalo locations

the BOOKPRESS

Publisher: Jack Goldman

Editorial Staff: Jack Goldman, Joel Ray

Production & Design: Amy Kweskin

Design Consultant: Laurie Ray

Advertising: Joel Ray

Distribution: Olli Baker, Bill Gandino,

Scott Nash, Steve Seña, Ken Mink

Contributors: Milly Acharya, Stephanie Clair, Teresa Demo, Gunilla Feigenbaum, Peter Fortunato, Nick Gillespie, Robert Hill, Biodun Jeyifo, Hitch Lyman, Jeanne Mackin, Barbara Mink, Irving Mink, Kathy Morris, Mark Shechner, J. Michael Serino, Joanna Sheldon, Alan Singer, Suzanne Stewart

The entire contents of The BOOKPRESS are copyright ©1992 by The Bookery. All rights reserved. The BOOKPRESS will not be liable for typographical error, or errors in publication except the cost to advertisers for up to the cost of the space in which the actual error appeared in the first insertion. Questions or comments for The BOOKPRESS should be addressed to The BOOKPRESS, DeWitt Building, 215 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca, NY 14850; telephone: (607) 277-2254.

A Post-Lapsarian Eatery

Mark Shechner

BAILEY'S CAFE

By Gloria Naylor
Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich
\$19.95, 229 pp.

If you're going to write a novel or a story or anything else that requires a plot, why not let one of the classics be your guide? After all, the old stories are yours for the taking, and they are market-tested. Besides, there is nothing new under the literary sun. We are lately told that everything we read is "intertextual," i.e., that every book is cobbled together out of prior books and that words like "original" and "creative" are just honors we bestow upon the more cunning remembrances of texts past. James Joyce showed the way seventy years ago in taking Homer's *Odyssey* as a scaffold for his *Ulysses* and by cribbing promiscuously from almost everything he read. And T.S. Eliot, who cribbed lines from his poem *The Wasteland* from all over the map, once declared, "Immature artists borrow, mature artists steal."

In the post-modern age, moreover, which sanctions parody and pastiche as the best we can do, the sendup and the adaptation are elevated to state-of-the-art productions. In one recent instance, filmmaker Gus Van Zant took the plot of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* for *My Private Idaho* and got vivid, if zany, results. Gloria Naylor herself modeled two previous books on literary classics: *Linden Hills* (1985) on Dante's *Inferno* and *Mama Day* (1988) on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; and Shakespeare himself, we know, was one of the accomplished plot thieves of his day. Some reviewers rapped Naylor's knuckles for conducting literary exercises at the expense of social inquiry and for forcing her characters into roles that had been staked out in advance. That is the problem with plot theft — your characters may find themselves out of step in someone else's ballet. But then, post-modern aesthetics. We expect, we demand, the inharmonious, the incongruous, the downright ugly. Mix and match is all the rage.

Naylor's strategy this time has been to take a form that is both traditional and open to possibility: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which anything goes because the

storytellers are autonomous within the frame of the pilgrimage. Certainly, in contrast to, say, *The Tempest*, the round of stories is an open form. Only instead of voyagers to Canterbury, Naylor's pilgrims are the regulars at Bailey's Cafe, a family cafe run by a latter-day Chaucer whose name we never learn (he is only called Bailey) and his wife Nadine. The year is 1948: the war is still vivid in memory, Truman and Dewey are campaigning for President (no mention here of Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace), Israel has been founded, baseball

everyone has fallen low, sort of. Make no mistake; this street is a low place and Bailey's Cafe is a post-lapsarian eatery. But it, and Eve's boarding house, are also places of refuge, safety nets that prevent the fallen from going all the way to the bottom. Strange to think of a whorehouse as a safety net, but then we never do meet the Johns, only the madame, whose heart is, as they say, pure gold. "Bailey" says of the street: "It's nothing but a way station, and the choices have always been clear: you eventually go back out and resume your life — hopefully

first of two), known to the clients as Peaches, was a knockout from birth, and no man could keep his eyes off her. She in turn couldn't keep her hands off any man and is a dream mistress to a string of men, all of whom lose her as soon as they try to possess her. Finally, slicing up her face to mar her own beauty, she repairs to Eve's, where she can pursue her pleasure on her own terms: he pays and he leaves.

One of the stranger stories is that of Stanley Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carver, Black-Indian-Irish-Mexican heir to thousands

finds her way to Eve's, where the following scene takes place.

Sitting with Jesse through four nights of withdrawal, Eve takes her at last to the back door of the cafe and asks her what she sees. Jesse sees a vision of her own room as a child.

—*I dreamed of a bathroom like this when I was a little girl.*

—*I did too, Eve said.*

—*None of this can be real. Where am I?*

—*Hell.*

And that is where the trouble begins, because hell is and is not a figure of speech. Of course, drugs are hell, but that is not exactly what Eve (and what's in a name?) is talking about. Hell is a literal place just outside the back door of Bailey's Cafe, which at some point ceases to be a house of stories and begins to seem something like a house of God. By fits and starts, *Bailey's Cafe* turns into a religious allegory populated by an Eve, an Esther (Queen Esther, from the book of the same name?), a Gabriel, a Jezebel (Jesse Belle), and two Marys. (So far as I can see, the transsexual Miss Maple lacks Biblical reference, and there is a humor to his/her story that is missing from the others. It seems to come from a different part of Naylor's mind, one that is not supersaturated in prophecy.) The second Mary is Jewish, a fourteen-year-old Falasha from Ethiopia named Mariam, whose path to Eve's house is never really accounted for — she leaves her village on foot for parts unknown and winds up at Eve's. It is a miracle, as is the male child she gives birth to toward the end of the year. She swears that no man has ever touched her, and Eve herself declares the girl to be *virgo intacta*. That Gabe, the pawnbroker, also turns out to be a *mohel*, a ritual circumciser, clues us in right away that he is also Gabriel, the angel of annunciation.

What ever does one do with this stuff? As a social observer, Naylor is gifted and precise. She seems to know the street, and if she doesn't, then she creates a masterful illusion of street smarts. Naylor has a voice you want to trust, which prepares you for new degrees of insight into African-American life. All the more reason why the ham-handed allegory

see *Eatery*, page 15



Illustration: Fernando Llosa

has just been integrated, and the Cleveland Indians have Larry Doby and Satchel Paige in the lineup.

Bailey's Cafe is a crossroads, situated between Gabe's pawnshop and Eve's boarding house, a polite name for whorehouse. Any of Eve's roomers or Eve herself or Bible-quoting Sister Carrie might drop in to tell a story. They are all talking heads, and the book is a bullpen of stories held together by certain constants: everyone is Black, sort of (add a Falasha Jew from Ethiopia and a Black-Mexican-Irish-Yuma Indian from California); all the storytellers are women, sort of (allowances must be made for a transvestite named Stanley Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carver, known on the streets as Miss Maple); and

better off than when you found us — or you head to the back of the cafe and end it."

Among the regulars are Sadie, the accidental child of an alcoholic prostitute who grew up thinking her name was "the one the coat hanger missed." Initiated into prostitution at thirteen, she learns through trials of deprivation and humiliation where to find dignity. There is Eve, irrepressibly sexual at ten, who makes her fortune as a prostitute in New Orleans, but leaves because she was "overqualified to be the mayor of New Orleans...and much too overqualified to be the governor of Louisiana." Esther was seduced at twelve and kept in a basement, and even at Eve's will only see her clients in a darkened cellar. Mary (the

of acres of California farmland, and Stanford Ph.D., who grows up to be Miss Maple the transvestite and the scullery maid to Eve's. Miss Maple's story, full of humor and wild improbability, could stand on its own, and a scene in which his/her father, in a red taffeta dress with spaghetti straps and a circular skirt puffed out with crinoline, beats up the three Gatlin brothers is pure comic mayhem. Finally, there is Jess Belle, who rises from the docks on the strength of her beauty and marries above her station, into the black middle class, only to be driven away by her husband's Uncle Eli, who humiliates her family at a barbecue at which he makes it plain to all that she is not of their class. She becomes a heroin addict and

THE PHOENIX



BOOKS

1608 Dryden Road
Between Ithaca and
Dryden on Route 13
Open Mon.-Sat. 10-6
Sunday 12-6
607-347-4767

Dino's
Hair Styling



Unisex
Designing

- Cutting
- Perms
- Coloring

359 Elmira Road
(Next to
Manos Diner) 277-7765

Cornell's Department of Theatre Arts presents



The Royal
Family

by George S. Kaufmann & Edna Ferber

A story of three generations of the Cavendish family. Inspired by the exploits of great American acting families like the Barrymores, this uproarious play is written by two of America's legendary comic geniuses.

November 19 - December 5
Proscenium Theatre

TICKETS ONLY \$5 & \$7! CALL 254-ARTS

Columbus Day

Lately, I dream
Other people's dreams.

A sudden silhouette
Obscures the known horizon,
Engraved upon the boundary
Of vanished worlds.

(In that first light what weighed
Was not armor over flesh,
Nor even the dagger of disease,
But the worm in the blood.)

No matter how he dressed,
In civvies, jeans, or tribal beads,
The image in the glass
Was not himself.

Her hesitating shadow
Slipped down the stony path,
As she ascended
The thin air of revolt.

I wake to the bark
Of a neighbor's dog,
Savaging the earth
For a buried bone.

—Jack Goldman

Off Campus At The Bookery

The "Off Campus at the Bookery" lecture series continued last month with a reading by local writers whose work appears in the **Ithaca Women's Anthology**.

November 15



Dr. Peter W. Nathanielsz will read from his upcoming book *Life Before Birth and A Time To Be Born*. Nathanielsz is Director of the Laboratory for Pregnancy and Newborn research at Cornell University.

December 6



Alison Lurie will give a talk on "Good and Bad Children's Books." Her newest book is *Don't Tell the Grown-ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (1990). Her novels include *Foreign Affairs* and *The Truth about Lorin Jones*.

All events are held Sundays at 4 p.m.
in Bookery II's new lecture space.

The Bookery is located in
the DeWitt Building,
215 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca, NY 14850.
For more information call (607) 273-5055

Suits

continued from page 1

and because women have specific gynecological needs that present themselves regularly, a unique situation has emerged in that gynecologists now comprise the majority of primary health care providers for women. Smith claims that this state of affairs is rife with opportunities for patient exploitation, from careless misinformation to life-threatening mistreatment.

Smith establishes from the outset that he means for his book to be alarmist and controversial, that its dual aim is to provoke outrage, and to provide a concrete means for channelling this outrage into a grassroots, patient-led movement for reform. Smith is a practicing gynecologist, a former Air-Force physician, and — perhaps most importantly — a man. Add to this the book's dedication to his wife, whom he credits for having taught him "how to see through the eyes of a woman," and Smith has established himself as both authoritative and trustworthy: a man who is a gynecologist, who can see through the eyes of his patients, and who has clearly risked his own professional standing within what he refers to as "The Brotherhood" in order to bring this book to print.

Smith's book divides itself equally between exposé and empowerment. Exposé is the task of the first two sections, "The Health Care Problem for Women and America" and "Real Patients, Real Stories." The latter is the real page-turner, a hypnotizing horror-show of misdiagnosis, operative opportunism, and physician greed that is none the less shocking for how easy it is to believe. Smith tells us that the incidents are not only real stories, stories he himself has encountered in the line of practice, but that they are exemplary, unexceptional. A retiring gynecologist manages to "sell" twenty-two hysterectomies in the space of his last four weeks of practice, simply by going through a Rolodex of his patients who have not yet had, and still don't need, hysterectomies. A surgeon puts his patient under ether and then displays her breasts to his colleagues, before proceeding with the operation. One woman's benign fibroid growths are labeled terminal cancer, while another woman's near-fatal post-operative infection is imputed to hysteria by her gynecologist. After several return visits during which she details extreme pain, fatigue, and frequent "gushing" discharges of an unidentifiable liquid, the gynecologist banishes her from his office with the order that she is never to bother him again. An infertility patient is accidentally sterilized by her surgeon, who then blames her continued infertility on external factors, though well aware of his error. Such behavior does not limit itself to individual gynecologists in the privacy of their own practice: an incompetent surgeon is tolerated, even covered for, by his colleagues; doctors refuse to testify in malpractice investigations for fear of an increase in malpractice-insurance premiums; devices like the Copper-7 IUD are urged upon patients seeking alternative birth control long after a correlation between the device and devastating, sometimes fatal uterine infection has been repeatedly

documented in professional journals. What can account for such pervasive, overt abuse?

Smith puts an emphasis on the profit motive, although he is hesitant to claim that mercenary tendencies infect all gynecologists equally. We are cautioned to bear in mind that many gynecologists deserve the benefit of the doubt, that they are well-meaning victims of a profit-oriented profession with imperatives that override individual intention. It is important to note that by this point, the female presence in professional gynecology is virtually exempt from Smith's analysis. After making reference to their small number, Smith suggests that women in the profession may be the only purely redemptive force we can count on; after this he never mentions them again:

It is a rare male who is able to see women day in and day out, examine their bodies, hear the details of their sex lives, and not only never have a lascivious thought or abuse that access but always remain clinical and objective, yet caring and empathetic. It would be a rare woman who could abuse such a relationship. Much in gynecologic residency is dehumanizing, and much creates a sameness of perspective among graduates. Women, though, should be able to come through it without losing their empathy with women....

As enraging — and, some will argue, extreme — as the real-life stories in section two are, it is the argument indicated above that is the most truly inflammatory element of Smith's book. Smith goes on to explicitly state his solution to the crisis in women's health care: the banning of men from the gynecologic profession. He cites a number of justifications for this view, all of which deserve more lengthy consideration than he gives them. First, that women and only women are able to "empathize" with female patients, and that such empathy is crucial to the "already difficult" relationship between a doctor and patient. Second, that almost all women prefer going to a female gynecologist anyway, and isn't this reason enough? The third justification is as unsettling and problematic as the first. Female gynecologists "may still act" like their male counterparts with relation to the profit motive, but Smith contends that women remain the lesser of two possible evils: "I believe they are incapable of inflicting the level of harm to other women that is now inflicted by males" (emphasis mine).

Many women, whether self-declared feminists or not, might be reluctant to adopt Smith's platform on the bases he outlines. It has been made clear time and again that women have little to gain from subscribing to essentialist notions of their superior empathy, their immunity to greed, or their inborn inability to inflict harm. Smith often ends up caught between two equally difficult positions. He can declare that sisterhood is powerful, and be faced with the question as to what makes him a spokesperson for sisterhood; or he can laud the superior empathy of women, and expect the charge that his is an only thinly disguised paternalism. Earlier in this piece I indicated that there is another distinction, that between

sexism in a profession and a sexist profession, that Smith as reformer must articulate clearly. With regard to his own sex, Smith is unable to pin professional failure on well-meaning, but deluded, physicians, or on the intentional malice of villains. He himself was one of the former: "I am sure I have failed my patients many times in many ways...." If we are to accept his conversion as valid, on what grounds could we banish men from the profession?

After going out on a limb with his blanket assertion of female superiority, Smith equivocates on this issue for the remainder of the book. Indeed, if he were to stick with his initial solution, there would be little need for the rest of the book: the road to reform would be obvious, though unlikely. Ultimately, it is to Smith's credit that he does not stand by his most radical assertion; his inability to maintain this position does justice to the complexity of the issues at hand. Gynecology is a unique case, for a number of reasons. It does not just cater exclusively to women; it is, as Smith has pointed out, usually the exclusive care-provider for a woman. The significance of its domain is overdetermined, the intimacy it demands is unacknowledged. It is not analogous to dentistry, or podiatry, and to conduct the doctor-patient relationship in the impersonal terms of these "parallel" medical practices is one of the most specious acts with which Smith charges his fellow gynecologists.

Thus, women have the right to assert that their grounds for dreading a gynecologist are valid, and that these grounds must be eliminated. There is no reason to assume that the way things are is the way they should be; take the now widespread use of speculum-warmers, a direct response to patient complaint. But beyond such tangibles remain a host of intangible factors that may well amount to trenchant, constitutive sexism. If we set gynecology apart from the other medical specialties, if we contend that not only is there more at stake for us there, but also a greater bias against us there, does this legitimize an exception to our current notion of gender equality? Does it call for a program of enforced gender inequality, in the favor of women? And if we say that it does, what are we implying about women? What qualities are we claiming for ourselves, and in what ways might we be entrapping ourselves?

In the second half of his book, Smith leaves these troubling issues behind, and devotes himself to patient empowerment and immediate pragmatic solutions. The first of these last two sections, "Empowering Women," provides a welcome, if cursory, look at the making of a professional gynecologist. Smith outlines the educational program and the processes of specialization and professional affiliation, placing emphasis on what is meant by "board certified" and the limitations that this title disguises. This is the most instructive section of Smith's "insider" account, for it offers women real criteria by which to judge potential health care providers, and it does much to demystify professional designations of status. Hearing that most gynecologists should be regarded with the fear and suspicion we reserve for car salesmen is alarming but unsurprising; it is more

see *Suits*, page 16

Neither Fish nor Fowl

Heather C. White

THE LONG NIGHT OF WHITE CHICKENS

Francisco Goldman
Atlantic Monthly Press;
\$21.95, 450 pp.

The Long Night of White Chickens, Francisco Goldman's first novel, is a long, complicated, and beautiful story about national identity and love. Set in contemporary Guatemala and the United States, it centers on three people and their intertwined allegiances to their country and to one another. The hub of the story is Flor de Mayo, Guatemalan by birth, educated in America, and a resident of Guatemala in her adulthood. The story begins when Flor is murdered. After graduating from Wellesley College, Flor had returned to Guatemala to run an orphanage for abandoned children. Part of her work at the orphanage was to place those children in adoptive European homes. After several years of this work, she is murdered under mysterious circumstances, and upon her death is denounced in the Guatemalan press as a participant in the illegal baby-trade. In this trade, Guatemalan children are sold to Europeans as, at best, illegal adoptees, and, at worst, living suppliers of internal organs to European hospitals.

Roger, or Rogerio, Graetz is the real son in Flor's adoptive American family. He is eight years younger than Flor, and an invalid when she comes to live in his Massachusetts

home. Roger's father is an American Jew, and his mother is Guatemalan. He spends the years before his illness in Guatemala, where his mother wants him to live like a "rich person," but is taken back to the United States when he contracts tuberculosis from one of the family maids. To relieve herself of some of the burden of Roger's confinement, his mother imports the orphaned Flor from Guatemala to work in the Graetz home as a maid. Roger's father, however, insists that Flor should attend school, and before long she is an unofficial member of the family. Flor thus becomes Roger's older sister, surrogate mother, and sole friend. The book is his account of traveling to Guatemala after Flor's death in an attempt to find out the truth of who killed her, and why her work at the orphanage was so viciously slandered.

The book's third principal character is Moya, a Guatemalan journalist, who is a childhood friend

of Roger's and one of Flor's last lovers. He persuades Roger to stay in Guatemala after Flor's funeral to join him in an unofficial investigation into the

individuals, nationalities, and class. The clash of these forces is most sharply evident in Flor, whose varied upbringing leaves her with no natural home. She is by birth a lower-class Guatemalan woman. Because of this, she will never be fully accepted as a social equal, much less a daughter, by Mrs. Graetz, her American employer. However, by training she is a product of the most elite American education, and by temperament she is self-reliant and ambitious. Soon after arriving in America she is ridiculed by her peers as the "spik" who starts kindergarten at age fourteen. Later, she is seen by her town and by her Wellesley peers as the exotic foreigner, aloof and glamorous. When she returns to Guatemala, she is met with suspicion and incomprehension;

stayed in Guatemala.

The question of what Flor would have been had she never left Guatemala is a persistent one for Roger. In his search for the truth of what happened to Flor at the time of her murder he finds himself searching for the truth about Flor: what she wanted, why she returned to Guatemala, what she was doing there. He is preoccupied by the image of an alternate Flor, a shadow-like personality that underlay her outward aspect, and which she never revealed to him. The emblem of this shadow is the missing counterpart to her adoptive family; if the Graetz's are, as she always refers to them, her "American family," who are her Guatemalan family? Are they the parents she never knew, murdered when she was small? The nuns with whom she works? The orphans she nurtures? This unknown half of Flor's double life partakes of the feeling behind Moya's favorite saying: "*Guate no existe*," Guatemala doesn't exist. He means that Guatemala is too small to possibly harbor its enormous problems, and that it does not exist as a real place in the minds of the rest of the world's people. But he also means that Guatemala does not exist for its own people in the way that other material things do; it exists at another level, that of ideas, or emotions, where it colors their experience of everything else. Guatemala is omnipresent where it is least traceable. In one of her finest moments, Flor defines the split in her national identities by saying.

See *Fish*, page 6

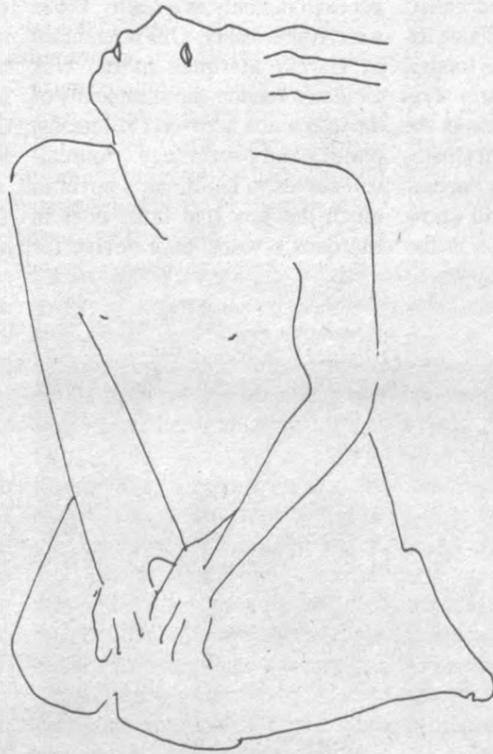


Illustration: Joanna Sheldon

causes of Flor's assassination.

The complicated web of emotional ties among these three people frames Goldman's portrait of contemporary Guatemala, and his meditations on the interactions of

no one can imagine what the gringafied *india* is doing there, if not flinging her superior education in the faces of men and women who never would have known her name had she



Harper Collins



The Life and Legend of Lead Belly

by

Charles Wolfe & Kip Lornell

\$22.50

The first biography of the legendary folk and blues musician who wrote "Goodnight, Irene" and "Midnight Special."

Masterpieces of African-American Literature

Edited by Frank N. Magill
\$40.00

Biosphere Politics

by Jeremy Rifkin
paper, \$13.00

The Sabbath Lion

Harper San Francisco
\$15.00

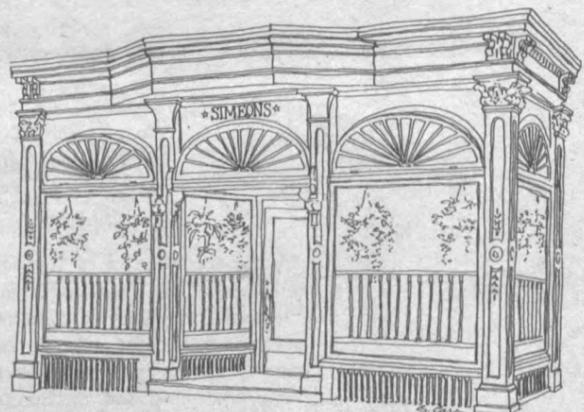
Retold by Howard Schwartz & Barbara Rush
Pictures in full color by Stephen Fieser

AVAILABLE AT BOOKERY II
DEWITT MALL - ITHACA 607-273-5055

Food For Thought ...and Conversation!

For *Unhurried* Dining or a
Leisurely Drink From Our
Vast Selection of
Fine Wines & International Beers
and Unparalleled Bar List, it's

SIMEON'S
ON THE COMMONS



ITHACA, N.Y.

Kitchen Open 7 Days 11 AM - 12:30 AM

224 E. State St.

272-2212

All Major
Credit Cards

Fish

continued from page 5

You cannot really love the United States with the same focused particularity and compassion you might feel towards a small country....You would not ever sum up your understanding of the United States over a cup of coffee or two and then find yourself weeping over it....Triste—this is much too flea sized a word to ever apply to the United States. Guatemala is bottomless grief in a demitasse.

Goldman, like his hero Roger, is half Guatemalan. The problem of how to evoke the sense of a national character so different from the American in what is at least half an American book is one that preoccupies Goldman throughout. It is a problem of both language and culture. Writing in English, Goldman must create characters that are intelligible and sympathetic to his American audience, while remaining true and recognizable for a Guatemalan audience. He must represent a place in its particularity, as it feels to its own citizens, in the language of another people who have no comparable feeling for their own country. Roger, more or less equally divided between Guatemalan and American sensibility, becomes an

emblem of possible approaches to this situation. He might be either the native son in search of his roots, or Holden Caulfield on a brief trip to hell. The issue is especially complicated when the country to be described *no existe* in the minds of most of the writer's readers. Moya, in describing to Roger the frustrations of being a Guatemalan journalist, laments his country's inevitable association in the minds of his foreign friends with natural disaster, tyranny, and killing. Those things are indeed everyday realities in Guatemala, and things which it is imperative that the outside world know about, but the question, as in the representation of any oppressed people, is how to portray a country in a manner that neither elides nor grants undue importance to its specific violence. Brutality is not constitutive of Guatemalan life, as it is not of American, though in both countries it is a constant pressure. To portray life in Guatemala fully, Goldman must find the balance amidst suffering, tedium, fun, and all the rest of the elements that make up any life. However, the net effect is to make the outrage of institutionalized terror in such lives all the more acutely felt by the reader; in this subtle way, the work of art effectively raises awareness.

It would be misleading, however, to speak of a political agenda in Goldman's work, for that would

the BOOKPRESS

risk narrowing the scope of its intricate meditation on the course of several lives. Goldman is as interested in showing how people live with violence as in saying that they should not have to. Making Guatemala exist for those who have never been there as well as for those who live there requires that its danger exist not only as a reality, but as a survivable reality. One is reminded of García Márquez in the way Goldman renders the complexity of the interaction between Guatemalan politics and psychology. Journalism serves in Goldman's novel in much the way that fable does in Márquez's work, as a device for picturing the ways a people record their history, and a means of saying indirectly what cannot be said plainly. Thus newspapers become coded documents, and even supermarket tabloids may convey important information. Moya, after years of such writing, is eventually forced to leave the country when one of his stories finally attracts the interest of the police.

The richness of Goldman's novel derives from his skill on both a large and a small scale. He handles with simplicity and grace a complicated narrative structure, with several different voices and temporal frameworks. In reading the book one often has the experience of being caught up in a tangent story, which returns almost imperceptibly

to the larger narrative. Goldman maintains this technical control of the plot's movement, while rendering with precision and delicacy emotional and local detail. With Márquez, Goldman shares a love of narrative abundance, a profusion of character and detail that accrues to a rich whole. *The Long Night of White Chickens* is illuminated by innumerable small moments of humor, beauty, and power. In describing his conversation with Moya in a Guatemalan cafe, for example, Roger notes:

Outside the demolition derby of the damned went on, a whole city of poor people's vehicles lurching around to the deliberate rhythm of car horns bleating near and far through the demonic whine of sirens.

It is a clever bit of metaphorical description, evocative and droll. However, as the story goes on, the theme of Guatemala's dangerous traffic grows more important, and more resonant. It is not only a constant danger to the city's pedestrians, and a leading cause of death among its street children, but also an instrument of authoritarian control. The authorities arbitrarily change traffic patterns without warning, keeping the citizens ever wary, uncertain, and powerless.

A further, and perhaps the love-

liest, example of Goldman's delight in the illustrative small tale within the larger narrative is a story about a cousin of Roger's, told near the novel's end. Previous to this story, her name has only been mentioned; she plays no role in Roger's narrative. Yet Goldman devotes several pages to the description of tea time with her family in Guatemala. As a little girl, it had been her job to get her father's tea, which he took at exactly the same time, and in exactly the same manner, every day. When she is grown, married and living in Canada, she imagines her father and brothers at tea each morning at the usual time. This regular reminiscence is not only a way for her to feel connected to her family and remember their happy times together, but is also her way to keep them safe in her mind. As long as she can see them in their usual places, she imagines, nothing can happen to them in her absence. Such stories within stories lend the novel a great measure of emotional force and depth. Goldman's feeling for people and keen insights into ideologies and institutions pervade his work, allowing the aesthetics of the novel to subsume its political themes, as the resonance between the two grows ever deeper.

+

Heather C. White is a writer who lives in Ithaca, NY.

For advertising information, contact:

- Buffalo.....Ken Mink (716) 833-1891
- Syracuse.....Bill Gandino (315) 443-3711

- Rochester.....Steve Sena (716) 442-4173
- Binghamton.....Scott Nash (607) 273-4679
- Ithaca.....Joel Ray (607) 277-2254

the Bookpress circulation is now at 12,000 copies

Just a Taste
Wine and Tapas Bar & Restaurant
Tel: 277-WINE

50 WINES by the glass
70 INT'L BEERS

INT'L CUISINE of TAPAS & ENTREES plus Homemade DESSERTS

116 North Aurora Street • Ithaca • Daily 11:30-10, Th, Fri, Sat 'til 12

Fresh

Thai hot chili, ginger, coriander, lemon grass, Thai sweet basil, garlic, galanga, kaffir lime

Experience the Taste of Thailand

LUNCH • DINNER • BRUNCH
Plus Vegetarian Menu

Reservations Suggested: 273-2031
Lunch 11:30-2, Sun Brunch 11:30-2
Dinner 5-9:30, Fri & Sat 'til 10
Closed Mondays

Try the exotic flavors of Thailand with the guidance of our knowledgeable staff. The Chutintaranond family of chefs invite you to savor the tastes of the authentic dishes of their country. Flavors that mingle from the freshest herbs and spiced mild, medium or as hot as you like it. And each recipe is a family favorite using only the freshest ingredients, delicately preparing every sauce and entree to your order.

Thai Cuisine
501 S. Meadow St. - Rt 13 Ithaca

6th Anniversary Celebration

...and what a celebration it is! Our inventory of fine rugs is the largest ever, with many beautiful one-of-a-kind treasures (some could even be called once-in-a-lifetime pieces). Every year we have significantly more rugs than the year before. Plus we offer an exquisite collection of small treasures from the villages and regions of Turkey. We proudly invite you to join us in celebrating our sixth anniversary today.

Oriental Treasures-
fine rugs

112 N. CAYUGA ST • ITHACA, NEW YORK 273-7184

Mon-Sat 10-6
Thurs. 10-9
Sunday 12-5

©88 Harvey Fendler

Kitchen Theatre's Well-Seasoned Fare

Katie Johnson

The Kitchen Theatre Company, offering alternative, contemporary theatre in the heart of downtown Ithaca, approaches its first anniversary this February. The company has grown in enormous spurts, taking everyone—even its founders—by surprise. Kitchen has a young, energetic, even rebel spirit, reminiscent of the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, where John Malkovich and Sam Shepard began their careers. Wanting to shake things up, the Kitchen seeks to bring challenging theatre to upstate New York. Their winter season, reviewed below, reflects a mission of "...performing works that challenge us to seek truth in ourselves and society...."

To many theatre lovers, the birth of the KTC was unexpected and welcome. Previous incarnations of the Kitchen, Central Casting and then First Street Playhouse, both gathered enthusiastic support from the community, but could not sustain themselves and were forced eventually to shut down. At a time when hundreds of theatres are closing around the country, when government funding for the arts has been cut by more than half in this year alone, and when several other theatres currently exist in Ithaca, why in the world would yet another theatre open its doors?

The answer is that there is a strong desire by both the company and audiences to have this sort of theatre performed. Though the grim reality is that professional theatres are having an increasingly difficult time surviving, the Kitchen has embraced this challenge head-on and enters its second year with a long-range plan, including a strategy for financial stability.

This kind of serious planning differs significantly from the thinking which formed the theatre. "It just happened to us," says Artistic

Director Matt Tauber. After former Ithaca College Theatre professor Arthur Lithgow presented a night of staged readings last winter with the Ithaca Theatre Guild and members of the soon-to-be KTC, Tauber wanted to offer a full production. In February, he raised enough ad revenue to produce Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*. The community's response was modest but encouraging, and before he had even considered another production, Tauber was repeatedly asked what was next on the agenda.

The idea of starting a theatre was not new to Tauber. He and KTC member Tim O'Brien had plans to begin a theatre in Chicago after graduating from Ithaca College. They saw the production of *Buried Child* as an opportunity to get reviews for a play they might take to Chicago. Following the positive response here, however, Tauber and O'Brien realized Ithaca was an ideal theatre community and decided to stay. Tauber calls the ensuing adventure a snowball ride. "Sometimes I feel that I'm in front of the ball being chased, and sometimes I'm behind chasing it. Lately, it's been nice just to ride on top of it and enjoy the ride."

Tauber has a very personal investment in the company. Dissatisfied with his education and frustrated by a lack of creative outlets, Tauber used his tuition money to found the KTC. "The experience I've gained this past year has been invaluable. It can in no way be matched by what I was learning in a classroom." While he might sometime return to school to finish his degree, right now Tauber is more than satisfied to stay where he is. "As Artistic Director, I am currently doing what I had hoped to be doing ten years from now. This opportunity has been incredible."

Tauber's choices for the winter season promise to enhance the Kitchen's success. After beginning with *The Gingham Dog*, by Lanford Wilson, they will produce *Lloyd's*

Prayer, by Kevin Kling (November); *Cloud Nine*, by Caryl Churchill (January); *Prelude to a Kiss*, by Craig Lucas (February); *Speed the Plow*, by David Mamet (March); and finally *More Than Meets the Eye* by Helen Walker (May).

While the Kitchen isn't breaking radical new ground, it is more heavily invested in contemporary drama than the Hangar, Cortland Rep, Cornell, and Ithaca College, where newer plays are balanced with a canonical blend of classics, comedies, and musicals. The Kitchen is

professors Norm Johnson, Jr., and Earl McCarroll, Cornell Resident Theatre Professional Frank Farrell, and former IC student Matt Tauber.

For Eileen Myers, who will open the season with Lanford Wilson's *Gingham Dog*, the Kitchen offers opportunities that the other institutions do not. Tauber's choice to begin the season with Myers' first full production reflects the Kitchen's spirited dedication to theatre that provides creative opportunities for young professionals.

Lanford Wilson's disturbing

Next, Norm Johnson, who teaches movement at Ithaca College, directs Kevin Kling's *Lloyd's Prayer*, a humorous fairy-tale about a young boy who is raised by raccoons. Johnson sees this play as his gift to the community. "This is really a family piece. It's sweet, bizarre, and touching. Ultimately the play is about caring for people." Johnson welcomes the opportunities the Kitchen Theatre offers. "When I first moved to Ithaca from Oregon," he says, "I kept hearing about what a great theatre town



Photo: ©1992 Mike Hopiak

the only local theatre to offer an entire season of contemporary plays, and it takes particular pride this season in presenting the American premiere of a new British play, *More Than Meets the Eye*.

The Kitchen also fills the need of local actors, directors, designers, and technicians to find professional venues. The slate of directors for this season reflects strong ties to Ithaca College and Cornell: IC senior Eileen Myers, IC Theatre

drama explores racial divisions through an interracial marriage. Myers became interested in the script in the wake of this summer's urban riots. While the play was written in 1969, she finds it especially relevant now, as racial problems continue to increase. Myers' objective echoes the Kitchen's ethos: "My hope is that this play will cause people to reflect upon themselves. Theatre needs to provoke. It needs to challenge people's complacency."

Ithaca was. In reality, there is very little beyond the schools' offerings. The Hangar is open for only three months." Johnson was a teacher of Tauber's at Ithaca College, and he urged the development of the KTC, but never thought the Kitchen would grow at such a rapid pace. "I went away on vacation for six weeks, and when I came back, the company had begun."

Frank Farrell, who will direct

see *Kitchen*, page 15

CARVER Sonic Holography Receiver

80 watt / channel
6 audio inputs
3 video inputs
remote control
3-dimensional sound
\$599.00

HR-742

For the Best Quality in Home and Car Stereo

McINTOSH • YAMAHA • SHERWOOD • KLIPSCH • NAD • NAKAMICHI
BOSTON ACOUSTICS • PIONEER • CARVER • PHOENIX • MONSTER
KICKER • MTX • ADI • ENERGY • QUART • ADCOM • AIWA • ORTOFON

Installations, sales and service

STELLAR
STEREO/AUTOSOUND

272-2644
702 Elmira Rd.
Ithaca, NY

"Don't forget, we are now at 702 Elmira Rd."

Forthcoming Western Societies Occasional Papers

Due out in January, 1992

Eric Weitz,
Popular Communism: Political Strategies and Social Histories

Michael Minkenburg,
The New Right in Comparative Perspective: The USA and Germany

Books may be ordered for \$9.95 + \$2 shipping from:

Western Societies Program
120 Uris Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-7601

HAIR ETC.
LANA M. GOKEY

Community Corners
Ithaca, NY 14850
607-257-7910

October Special: ✂ 15% Discount on all men and women's haircuts

10AM TO 7PM
Wednesday thru Saturday

Gil's Book Loft

Quality Used Books...
Records, Ephemera and Fine Art

82 Court Street, 2nd Floor
Binghamton, NY 13901,
(607) 771-6800
Gil Williams, Prop.

THE GOURMET FARM STORE
the most unique farm market in the county

OPEN 365 DAYS A YEAR
9 A.M. - 9 P.M.
1552 HANSHAW ROAD • 257-1765

Gourmet Gift Items
Fall Decorations
Fresh Local Fruits & Vegetables
Gourmet Specialty Foods
Coffee Beans
Local Baked Goods
Beans, Rice, Grains, Nuts
Dried Fruit & Specialty Flours

LUDGATE PRODUCE FARMS
ITHACA, N.Y.

The Rama

Robert Hill and Milly Acharya with Illustration by



Making Sense of Myths

Robert Hill

First we tell tales to children...they are, as a whole, false, though there are true things in them, too. We make use of tales with children before exercises.

Plato, *Republic*, 377a

What could anyone, writing this as I am in the post-Freudian, -Jungian, -Campbellian late 20th century, possibly assert on the topic of myth without raising either an ill-groomed hackle or a tweedy smile of bookish contempt? Not much, perhaps. A little, perhaps.

The mystification of myth has proven a great deal of fun and contributed much to reputations in certain circles for many decades now. There is an undeniable grandeur in the still-fashionable, ever-plausible identification of myth with a "collective subconscious," or with the culturally-prevailing dream states of damn near everybody; identities couched in big, heavy utterances with all the rivets showing, clanking away mightily with the comfortless, familiar clank of the synthetic *a priori*. This is not to argue that such identifications, as working hypotheses, don't uncover something about our collective human nuttiness. But it isn't clear that they tell us anything much about myths.

Frankly, I don't want to tell us anything much about myths either. I do have a theory about them, not a particularly subtle one, but let simplicity recommend itself just for a change. My theory is that myths serve a culture as a way of transmitting a sense of the ambiguity of morality. Which is to say further that an epic mythology, one that you can heft and roll around and repeat tirelessly, is the fairly intricate product of a rational humanity, one with a specific and reflective cultural function, and about as conscious and calculated a production as we can find. More like Shakespeare than like my (or your) recurring dream about my sister.

On the face of things, myth seems to have a lot to do with moral education. Devout Hindus, for example, have always regarded the Sita of the accompanying excerpt of

the *Ramayana* as the model of perfect Hindu womanhood — the faithful and subservient wife who preserves her fidelity, proves it graphically, and proves it to order. For the devout Hindu there is little question who the hero is. Perfect examples, clear enough to raise generations of obedient children and an orderly citizenry upon.

Such analysis is, by itself, neither interesting enough to engage even the typical anthropology undergraduate, nor the entire story. The point is that moral examples are the beginning of moral education; not only do examples work (for a while, anyway), they are a necessary starting point, perhaps the only one we have from which to extract broader principles of choice and action. What the anthropology undergraduate might realize — something by itself of considerable interest — is that it is culturally ambiguous just who the hero of the *Ramayana* is. It depends on whom, among the culturally initiated, you ask. Many inhabitants of Southern India have regarded not Ram, but the ten-headed demon Ravana as embodying heroic virtues. Neither a coward nor a pusillanimous, suspicious husband was Ravana, nor is he depicted as a creature devoid of virtue or pleasant quality.

What I think this ambivalent viewpoint illuminates is that in the nature of such oral and literary productions, questions are invited, in an ironical vein perhaps, about what is good, what is evil, and which characters embody those qualities. There is not a difference of *interpretation* in the differing import given the story of Ram, Sita, and Ravana by its regional tellers. Rather, different segments of the prevailing culture find their moral exemplars in quite different characters, in differing traits of behavior, and in varying sentiments. Such tales invite reflection; they were intended to leave room for serious questions. Anything but children's tales, they do incorporate, by way of example and character, enough of precept and salutary lie to serve as starting point for a moral education. And a perfectly instructive starting point, since children, while they may prove critical, are incapable of a critical irony.

So myths serve both as a vehicle of moral education and as the tale that supplies the very textual clues, oral or written that raise questions by implication about its depictions of its own moral order, without at the same time undermining or supplanting that order. And in this latter capacity myths contribute to the likelihood of ethical flexibility, as a cultural

safety valve. One naturally thinks here of Socrates piously quoting some accepted precept from the verses of Homer, or Hesiod, or Simonides; then puckishly discovering that he is uncertain exactly what the poet could have meant. If we take it in this sense, he muses, then that must follow; yet surely the poet could not have meant.... And so forth, until he has turned the little verse every way he can think of turning it, and left his conversational partner in a profound muddle.

Socrates never tries this conversational ploy with a young person. His interlocutor must be old enough, with a settled character, independent judgment, with sufficient prudence to enter the quandary along with him, sense the confusion, and be able to exit in pretty much the same direction and on the same moral footing as he entered it. The precept may be fine for one to follow in youth. But once moral education has taken



root and reason come to ripeness, only then can the puzzle-ment attending that recognition of ambiguity set such principles in a new light. Having scrutinized them carefully, we can accept the open-endedness and the tentativeness of our moral system without losing our balance.

Nor does any of this suppose that reflective souls will change simply because they have thought through their moral axioms, seen their provisional character, and recognized that they are grounded in childhood training and sentiment. Such recognition can, however, save any system of belief and practice from lapsing into hopeless universal ossification. So long as the myths that embody a morality are riddled with the ciphers of human character, they will invite continual reflection upon our collective moral opinions and preferences.

The genetic fallacy, that we can understand what myths are because we have accounted for their origins in dreams or common subconscious states, simply masks the fact that myths are also texts inviting critical appraisal; masks the fact that they have rational, cognitive import, although the sense lodged therein may be concealed or implicit; masks the fact that in its retellings a myth can be continuously encrusted with new layers of meaning. (For it is essentially, originally, an oral performance.) No matter how submerged in the turgid recesses of a collective psyche its origins may be, a myth is a potentially rational performance, a cognitive exercise with its own sense, its own means of interpretation, and with a clearly ethical and educational function.



Milly Acharya is an artist who lives in Ithaca, NY, and her husband Robert Hill is a writer at Ithaca College.



yanana

Milly Acharya

Excerpts from the Ramayana

retold for children by Milly Archarya

No sooner was Sita alone in the hermitage, than a feeble ascetic came, begging for food and alms. "Gracious lady, have mercy on a poor starving creature," he pleaded. "I have roamed the forest for days on end with neither food nor drink. Surely you can spare a little something for a harmless beggar?"

While Sita served him kindly, the stranger watched her every move. He remembered her in the splendor of Janak's court, adorned in soft silks and precious jewels, attended by maids-in-waiting and noble suitors. "She could have been my bride, but I failed to win her then. How bitter it was!" he recalled. Now her clothes were coarse, her hair matted, her feet bare; still he was charmed.

In a faint voice he asked, "Dear Lady, I can barely reach the cup you have so kindly offered. Pray, bring it closer so I may drink." Sita hesitated for a moment, remembering Laxman's parting caution. But her heart filled with pity at the old man's plight, and she thought, "What harm can this miserable stranger do? He scarcely has the strength to raise the cup to his lips. I must help him."

As she stepped out of the ring that Laxman had drawn, she asked, "Pray, sir, who may you be, and why do you wander alone in the forest?"

In an instant muscular arms grasped her firmly! She had stepped over the line and could not return to the circle of safety! Then Ravana, king of demons, revealed his awful shape. "I am here to take you to my faraway Lanka, O bounteous lady!"

Sita was terrified at the sudden change from a humble beggar into this mighty monster! She could not struggle. "O demon-king, your evil plan can never succeed," she cried. "When Ram finds what you have done, his wrath will bring untold misery upon you and all the demons of Lanka. Believe me, he will leave no stone unturned until he finds me and punishes you."

Ravana roared with laughter and boasted, "What can Ram do when even the gods are afraid of me? If Ram truly cared for you my lady, would you live in such hardship, following him barefoot through this wilderness, at the mercy of wild beasts and prowlers? Forget Ram, charming one; give yourself to me. Marry me, and you shall be my chief queen. All the pleasures of glorious Lanka shall be yours for the asking."

Sita's anger made her bolder. She refused scornfully. "Wretch!" she cried. "My heart is given to Ram. He is as mighty as the gods, and his anger is as dreadful. If you do anything to offend me, you will regret it."

Her warning fell on deaf ears. Ravana swelled to a demon of towering height, with ten heads and twenty arms. He was not so easily threatened. He picked up Sita and carried her into the magical Pushpak. At his command, it rose above the treetops and turned south to Lanka.

"It is time to convey the news of our triumph to Sita, and to release her," Ram announced. But he would not carry the news himself. Once more he sent Hanuman to Sita with his message. She was overjoyed that she could be reunited with her husband. But her first meeting with Ram, when Hanuman brought her before him, was quite different from what she had expected.

When she came to him, Ram did not rush to greet her, but stood where he was. Before the assembly he informed her, "I have defeated Ravana. So now you are free. Do as you please. You may stay in Lanka with Vibhisana, or join Sugriva if you

prefer. Follow Laxman if you like, or go to Bharat," he suggested. He seemed reluctant to take her back. But why?

Sita asked him to explain this strange and cold pronouncement. "We have been separated for almost a year," he answered her. "You have been touched by Ravana and have accepted his hospitality these many months. How can I be certain that you are still as pure and loyal to me as you once were?"

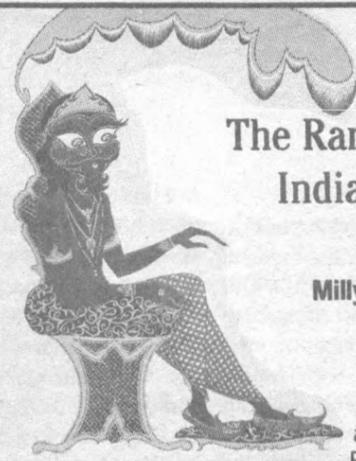
These words wounded Sita deeply. Ram was asking her before this enormous gathering of strangers to prove that her loyalty was complete and unquestionable. How could he doubt her? Janak's daughter felt shamed and insulted. The reunion was not at all what she had thought it might be!

She turned slowly to Laxman. "Light a fire," she ordered. Then she faced Ram. "These flames will consume me if, in heart or thought, I felt one moment's disloyalty to you. Ravana carried me to Lanka and held me captive. He tried to win my favors, but I cared for none but you. If even for an instant I have been untrue, let the fire devour me. But if, as I claim, I remain untainted, the fire will not touch a single hair of my head."

There was a tense silence while the fire was lit. Logs were piled on flaming logs, and soon the blaze was roaring. Sita seemed fearless as she prepared herself for the test. Before her first step, she looked up to the heavens and begged the gods above to be her witnesses. All eyes were fastened on her as she slowly entered the crackling flames. Suddenly the air was rent with the piercing shrieks of the women in the crowd, for the shimmering orange heat had swallowed Sita. The piteous wailing ceased in amazement when Janak's daughter emerged from the scorching blaze unharmed, radiant and lovelier than ever.

Then all the warriors, all Ram's retinue, were certain that she had not been defiled by Ravana. Only now would Ram embrace Sita. He softened to her. "It was not I who suspected you of disloyalty. But as a ruler," he said loftily, "I am obliged before all else to satisfy my subjects. While I trust your word, they require proof of your purity. They are my subjects, you see. How could they respect their king if he accepted a disloyal wife? Your test by fire was the only way to dispel their suspicions."

"That may well be," answered Sita with solemn dignity. "But you will test me again at your own peril."



The Ramayana in Indian Culture

Milly Acharya

The Ramayana is the epic tale of the life and adventures of the hero Rama. Firstborn and the favorite of an aged king, Rama is heir to the throne of Ayodhya, a site near the modern-day city of Allahabad in north-central India. The wiles of his step-mother lead to Rama's 14-year exile from the kingdom, and accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Laxman, he leads the hermetic life of a forest ascetic.

In the forest fastnesses the three exiles encounter other hermits and sages who seek their assistance, and assorted demons with whom they must battle. These latter feats bring Rama to the attention of Ravana, the ten-headed king of demons, who retaliates by abducting Sita to his island kingdom of Lanka. The later parts of the story recount the rescue of Sita with the aid of an energetic army of monkeys, the destruction of Ravana, and the return of Rama to his rightful kingdom, where he rules for many years, although by no means happily ever after.

This, in brief, is the tale of the Ramayana—at once epic, fantasy, romance, and morality play. Rama, who was probably a historical prince of northern India, has been gradually transformed through centuries of telling from folk hero to divinity, an incarnation of the god Vishnu the Preserver.

The inevitable variations introduced by oral transmission have given rise to variants of the Rama epic. According to most scholars, the principal written text is that attributed to the sage Valmiki; the narrative flow, integrity of structure, and consistency of language all attest to the probability that the original writing is that of a single author. By contrast, the Mahabharata, which is nearly seven times the length of the combined Iliad and Odyssey, is clearly the work of multiple authors writing over several centuries.

There is a further legend behind the legend of Rama: Narada, a messenger between mortals and divines, is said to have narrated the poem to Valmiki, who found his task as divinely appointed author overwhelming. After being charged by Narada to record the epic, the sage went pensively to his ablutions in the Ganges, wondering how he should acquit himself of such a monumental labor. Bathing, he watched two herons disporting on the river bank in courtship when, to his horror, one fell impaled by an arrow. The other bird hovered in distress, unwilling to leave its mate, and moving Valmiki to curse the unseen fowler: "May you fail to find rest, O fowler, for an eternity, for you have killed from this pair of herons the love-struck male."

By chance, as happens in legends, his utterance was a metrical couplet or sloka, the vehicle of Sanskrit wisdom and epic poetry. When Valmiki returned from the river to his humble lodgings he discovered Brahma the Creator awaiting him with instructions that this very sloka was to be the meter in which the story of Rama must be recorded. Thus, out of anger, compassion, love, and poetry was the Ramayana born, all 25,000 slokas comprising seven books. The first and the seventh books are thought to be later additions of anonymous authorship, and it is here, unlike the middle books, that divinity is attributed to the hero.

The Rama story has numerous variants—in literary texts, folk dramas, song cycles, dance performances, and pageants. Valmiki's original in Sanskrit is still a central model for regional adaptations, themselves not mere translations, but recastings of the tale with varying regional emphasis, traditions, and flavor.

And the tale of Rama still figures in contemporary Indian politics. Ramjanmabhoomi, an ancient temple razed in the Middle Ages by Islamic conquerors, who erected a mosque from its stones, is currently the battleground of a strong Hindu fundamentalist movement in the north aiming to reestablish the traditional temple designating Rama's birthplace. Local governments rise and fall to this day according to how they stand on the question; lives are still lost in angry fundamentalist confrontations; even the central government of India has been shaken by its failure to deal determinedly with the religious situation surrounding the ancient capital of Ayodhya.



Revisiting Edmund

continued from page 1

England serves as an exception to this rule: tourists make their annual jaunts to Walden Pond or the Old Manse seeking to absorb something of the aura of these places and the magic of their literary associations. And there's Mark Twain's house in Hartford (or Elmira, or Buffalo—take your pick). And, of course, there

to establish a record of what great pals he and Wilson were, and Wilson's daughter's to put on record her own, not entirely positive, impressions of life with her father. (But wait: Costa comes to Wilson's rescue in his introduction to the new edition of Wilson's *Upstate*, where he describes Rosalind's book as mostly "a catalog of complaints about her father and most everyone else who crossed her path.") Yet neither they nor Exley have done the Old Stone House justice.

It was impossible not to find it. Talcottville consists of little more than a church, the Talcottville General Store, and a small number of houses, the Old Stone House most prominent among them. We could see it as we approached from the south, its pillars and porches already familiar from photographs and paintings reproduced in various books by and about Wilson, but, more vividly, from

Wilson's description in his 1933 essay "The Old Stone House." While the photographs I had seen make the house appear smaller or more compact than it actually is, Wilson's portrait creates an accurate image in the mind:

It was built at the end of the eighteenth century: the first event recorded in connection with it is a memorial service for General Washington. It took four or five years in the building. The stone had to be quarried and brought out of the river. The walls are a foot and a half thick, and the plaster was applied to the stone without any intervening lattice. The beams were secured by enormous nails, made by hand and some of them eighteen inches long. Solid and simple as a fortress, the place has also the charm of something which has been made to order. There is a front porch with white wooden columns which support a

white wooden balcony.... The front door is especially handsome: the door itself is dark green and equipped with a brass knocker, and the woodwork which frames it is white; it is crowned with a wide fanlight and flanked by two narrow panes of glass, in which a white filigree of ironwork makes a webbing of ice over winter ponds. On one of the broad sides of the building where the mortar has come off the stone, there is a dappling of dark gray under pale gray like the dappling of light in shallow water, and the feathers of the elms make dappplings of sun among their shadows of large lace on the grass.

The house had been built by the village's founder, Hezekiah Talcott, at the end of the 18th century. From its beginnings, it had served as the social center of Talcottville. (Wilson is said often to have pointed with pride at the china cabinet that had once served as the Talcottville post office.) It came to Wilson's family, on his mother's side, in 1832, when great-grandfather Thomas Baker—a Jacksonian Democrat and "something of what is now called an 'operator,'" according to Wilson—purchased it from Jesse Talcott, the last of the male Talcotts who remained in the region.

"It's huge," said Janice as we pulled up beside it. "It feels sort of eerie." We looked it over—there didn't appear to be anyone at home—and, while she began taking photographs, I walked down the street to the Talcottville General Store to find out what I could about the house's current condition.

Behind the counter of the General Store were Marcia and David Reese. David, a pleasant-looking man with glasses and a mustache, confessed that he didn't know much about the area, as he had been there for only six years. He told me what he did know: that the Old Stone House was now owned by Michael and Mary Hearn, who had lived "down around Baltimore or Washington" before buying the Wilson place in 1975. He said that upon Wilson's death the house had gone to Rosalind Baker Wilson, who apparently hadn't lived in it, had left it empty for a few years, and then sold it to the Hearn around 1976. She still lived in Talcottville, just three

houses down the street from the General Store, but she was rarely seen there. "She's like a hermit," David said. "She's a bit like her father was in his old age, I guess. She doesn't like to be bothered." I said that I would like to talk to her but had some reservations about intruding on her, given what I'd read in Exley and heard from other sources. They said it would probably be better to leave her alone.

"If you want to know more, you'll have to ask her," he said, indicating his wife, Marcia. "She grew up here."

Marcia Reese is an amiable woman who proved to be more comfortable talking to a stranger taking notes than might be expected. She remembered Edmund Wilson from her childhood, when she had played with Wilson's younger daughter, Helen, during the summers.

"He was crabby," she said, laughing. "That's mostly what I remember. You'd walk past the house and you'd be talking with somebody on the road, which was further away from the house than it is now, and he'd come out. 'Ge-Ge-Get the hell out of here'—you know, you'd be disturbing him."

I asked her for directions to Flat Rock—Wilson's favorite picnic spot on the Sugar River—assuming it would be a well-known local spot, but she didn't seem certain of its location. "I could probably find it, but I couldn't tell you how to get there," she said. "The last time I was there was with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and Helen, and that was a long time ago."

I asked the Reeses if they thought that Mrs. Hearn, the current owner, would be willing to talk about the house. "I think so," said David. "She's a nice lady and I think she enjoys talking about the place." I headed back up the street to the Old Stone House.

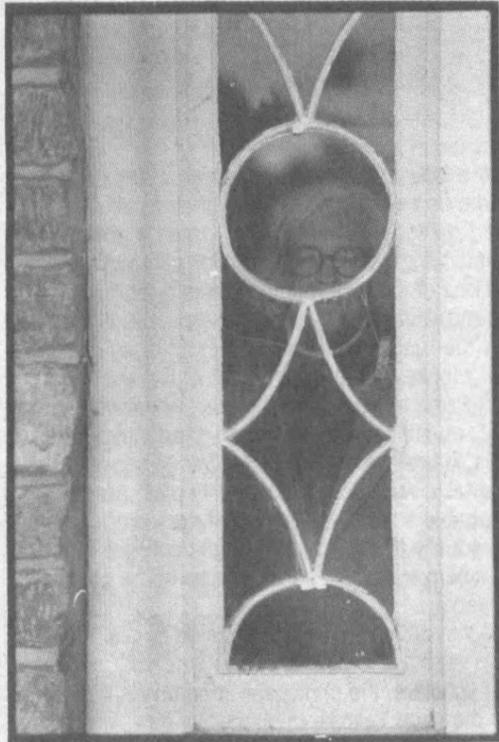
We went up on the porch and pulled the doorbell. After a moment, there was a rustling from within, the old door (now painted red) swung open, and a small, elderly woman looked out through the screen.

I like the feeling that I am occupying the largest and most distinguished house in the town.

—Edmund Wilson

Mary Hearn is a small, friendly woman, a Lowville native who, with her husband, Michael, had been living in Alexandria, Virginia, when the Old Stone House went up for sale in 1975. The Hearn had been eager to purchase it.

"I like the architecture of the house—that appealed to me



Mary Hearn, the house's current owner. "....a white filigree of ironwork makes a webbing of ice over winter ponds." (Edmund Wilson, "The Old Stone House.")

are always those people who point out at the Atlantic Ocean and describe it as "the setting of Moby Dick," but let's not get into that. These, as I said, are exceptions. But if a writer's environment can provide insight into his personality, then it makes sense to pay attention to that environment in our attempts to develop a full understanding of a writer's work. "[Upstate New York] is one of the points of triangulation without which it would be impossible accurately to locate myself in the world in which I grew up," wrote Wilson in *A Prelude* (1967). Let us take him at his word.

Two books have dealt extensively with Wilson's upstate life: former Utica newspaperman Richard Costa's *Edmund Wilson: Our Neighbor from Talcottville* (1980) and Rosalind Baker Wilson's own *Near the Magician: A Memoir of My Father, Edmund Wilson* (1989). Each has its own agenda—Costa's



"Wilson insisted on abiding by custom and stopping at one of his favorite restaurants, the Savoy in Rome." (Frederick Exley, *Pages from a Cold Island*)

considerably—and my son [Michael Patrick Hearn] is a writer, so he was interested in it," she says. "We're still working very hard on it, and every little bit shows up a lot." Even after 17 years, the enormous 14-room structure requires constant renovation. "The house still needs a lot of work, and we've spent a lot of time on the upkeep of it already," she said. "The porches are a big expense to keep up."

She blamed the condition of the house on the long periods of time it

Ithaca Piano Rebuilders



Rebuilt and Reconditioned Pianos
Pianos Tuned, Bought, Sold or Moved
Complete Rebuilding Services Available. No Job too Big or too Small.

272-6547

310 4th St. Ithaca
(Off Hancock St. 2 Blocks From Rt. 13)
9-5 Weekdays
10-2 Saturdays

Northside Wines & Spirits



ITHACA SHOPPING PLAZA (Across from K-Mart)
ELMIRA ROAD • ITHACA, NY 14850
(607) 273-7500 • FAX: (607) 273-0843 • (800) 281-1291

Honored as one of the TOP 10 ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE RETAILERS in the nation by *Market Watch* magazine. Our selection of OVER 6,000 WINES AND SPIRITS is the largest in the area. Call for shipping information.

Open 9-9 Monday through Saturday

ITHACA COLLEGE SECOND CENTURY SYMPOSIUM V

The Marjorie Mayrock Lecture Series and the School of Humanities and Sciences present

VLADIMIR POZNER

author of *Parting With Illusions*, cohost of the Pozner/Donahue Show
speaking on

"Prospects for Post-Communist Societies"

7:30 P.M.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

EMERSON SUITES, PHILLIPS HALL
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

ITHACA
Ithaca College Celebration of a Century 1892-1992

Wilson's Upstate

had remained empty—for a period before Wilson inherited the house in 1951, and for three years after Wilson's death.

Edmund Wilson in 1951: "Moldy-smelling inside—so much of the stuff now seemed cheap and rubbishy. But I have my ambitious ideas about it—shall preserve it, make it something my own. Though I always at first find it smaller and less distinguished than I expected, I soon get into the spirit of it and am conscious that it does make one feel its dignity and amplitude..." (*Upstate*).

There were many pieces of furniture in the house when the Hearn purchased it—pieces they are still in the process of restoring. "There were a lot of chairs—rocking chairs and like that. Most everything left in the house had to be restored. The kitchen was divided into two rooms, and when we bought the house we didn't see the room behind the kitchen. It was full of stuff. I spent a week going through it and was quite impressed."

Edmund Wilson in 1955: "I enjoy 'galvanizing' this old house into life, as I feel I have at last been doing, making it express at last my own personality and interests, filling it with my own imagination, yet feeling a continuity with everybody who has lived here, basing myself in some sense on them—the older I grow, the more I appreciate them" (*Upstate*).

We looked at the third-floor window in front of which Wilson worked. ("I am writing this on the third floor in the room that looks out on the old stone barn and commands a view of the general store. I first saw Helen cross the lawn at her morning slumpingest and yellowest; then, a little while after, Fern Munn got out of her car in order to go to the store" (*Upstate*). Did the Hearn still have Wilson's writing desk? Mrs. Hearn wasn't certain, but upon seeing a photograph of Wilson working at it, she realized that it was a piece she had long ago restored. She was pleased to learn it was Wilson's work desk.

And what of the famous windows? Wilson had such house guests as Saint-John Perse, Charley Walker, Phito Thoby-Marcelin, Sir Isaiah Berlin, John Wain, Edwin Muir, Stephen Spender, Louise Bogan, Dorothy Parker, and Vladimir

Nabokov engrave poems into his windows with a diamond-pointed pencil. Were they still intact?

"Some of it was damaged by vandals, and Miss [Rosalind] Wilson gave two away and she still has two. I think that's the way it is. I know that there are none here now. That's the first thing that everyone asks." Two Cornell University professors had in fact been there the previous week.

Mrs. Hearn knows Rosalind Baker Wilson well, she says, and confirmed the generally held opinion that she does not like to be bothered by strangers. "It's best not to," she said. "She likes her privacy." The Hearn invited her to the house when they first bought it, but she declined, explaining that it brought up too many memories.

Just as she said this, a car came around the corner. "There goes Rosalind—don't look!" said Mrs. Hearn. We looked, of course, and saw a woman bearing an obvious resemblance to Edmund Wilson driving up the street. We fought off the temptation to run after her and returned to the conversation.

I asked if Mary Pcolar, Wilson's friend from the 1960s and the subject of one of Exley's chapters, was still around. "No," said Mrs. Hearn, "she died. Did you hear about it? She remarried and they were in Florida in their mobile home and something went wrong and they were gassed and died in their sleep." But some of the people mentioned in *Upstate* were still around, she said.

Chet Rice, for instance. Forty years ago, Wilson relied on Rice for a variety of maintenance matters—"a plumber of sorts," he calls him at one point. "Mr. Rice still does my plumbing and electric," says Mrs. Hearn. "He rewired the house for me, and he's something like 83 or 84. I just hope he did it right."

Then, right on cue, following the unspoken small-town stage directions that dictate that people appear as soon as they are mentioned, Chet Rice drove by in a small black pickup truck. "There he goes with his girlfriend," said Mrs. Hearn. The truck pulled up at the General Store—where else was there to go?—and Rice went inside. This time we decided to give chase.

The woman in the front seat of the pickup smiled at us as we waited for her beau to emerge from the

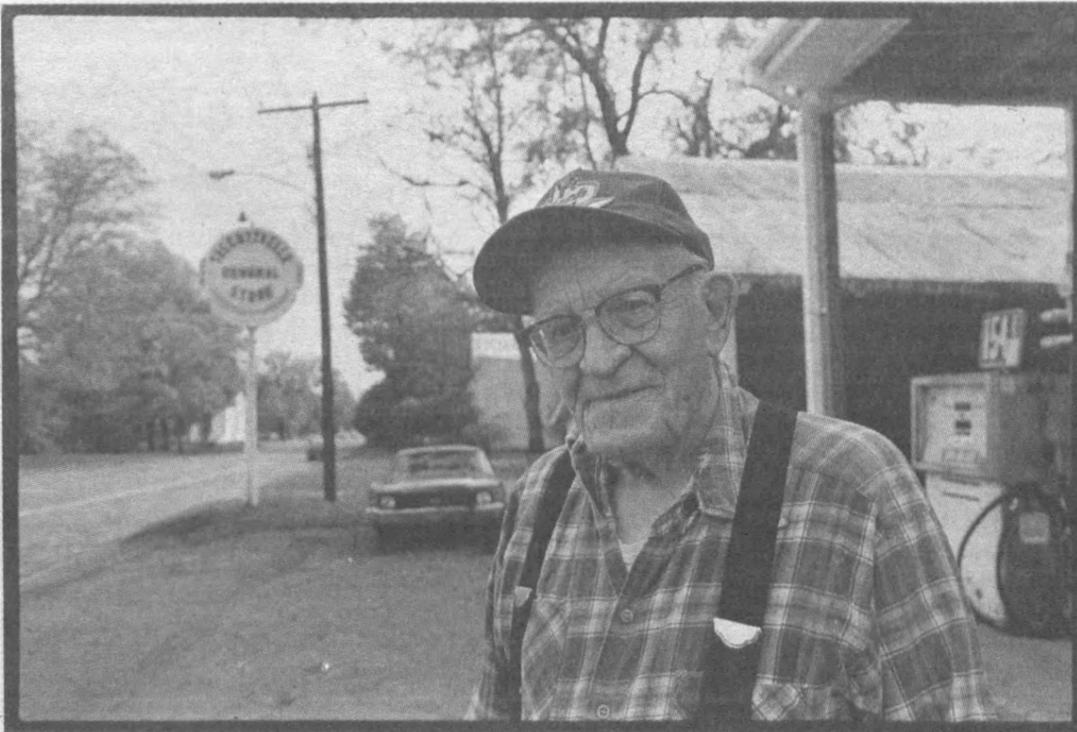
store. Chet Rice came out, moving in a slow, deliberate shuffle. (Later a Boonville businessman who knew him did a Chet Rice impersonation for us—a sort of slow-motion, man-walking-on-the-moon kind of thing. "It's not old age," the man said. "He's always been like that.") We asked Rice about Wilson.

"I knew him for a long time and done a lot of work for him over those years. He's been gone since '72. He was independent; he would always do everything himself if he could, but he wasn't very handy with tools or anything like that. He was all in books," he chuckled. "He didn't have

ago—or 20 years before that. There is the Old Stone House and the General Store, and Chet Rice lives across the street, and right past his house runs the Sugar River. The old haunts Wilson wrote about—mostly local restaurants and picnic spots—are still there and appear unchanged. But to Edmund Wilson in the last years of his life, the old world was passing away.

My young vision of New York State now hardly exists, though I do not think, as I did last year, that I shall sell my old place here. In spite of the encroachments of the high-

Wilson a sort of peace in his later years. It's in the pace of things, it's in the air, it's in the continuity of people and of families, it's in the feeling inspired by the age and dignity of the Old Stone House. This rootedness is almost entirely alien to contemporary American experience. Wilson articulated his own growing appreciation of it in his 1933 essay; by the time he compiled *Upstate* it constituted the atmosphere he breathed, and provided him with the strength to continue his work. To have even an awareness of it, and to be conscious of what is missing in its absence, helps to make sense of the



Edmund Wilson's handyman, Chet Rice, at the Talcottville General Store.

"I'd do jobs for him and never send him no bill, and come Christmas time he'd send me a check."

much money to spend on the house. When he drilled a well he didn't drill it deep enough—he just drilled it deep enough to get water." The Hearn recently had to have the existing 70-foot well dug an additional 130 feet.

"I'd do jobs for him and never send him no bill, and come Christmas time he'd send me a check."

Talcottville: a pied à terre in stability.

—Edmund Wilson

Despite the ongoing improvements to the house, there is a timelessness to it. To the outsider, Talcottville doesn't seem like it could have been much different 20 years

ways and the element of impoverished ambitionless inhabitants, I have still, I think, just enough money to keep the old place going, and I am still as comfortable here as I can hope to be anywhere. That the old life is passing away, that all around me are anarchy and what seems to me stupidity, does not move me much any more. I have learned to read the papers more calmly and not to hate the fools I read about. As long as my health holds out, I shall have to go on living, and I am glad to have had some share in some of the better aspects of the life of this planet and of northern New York.

In Talcottville you can feel the sense of rootedness that granted

tone, and of the anger, that run through much of Wilson's work.

We left Talcottville in the early evening, heading south toward Rome. As we drove past Rosalind Baker Wilson's house, dark and overgrown, we saw no reason to disturb her. Unlike Exley, we had no need to ask Wilson's daughter for something of him to carry with us. We had already found something.

+

J. Michael Serino is a writer and editor at Ithaca College, where his wife, Janice Levy, is an assistant professor of photography.

(All photos ©1992 Janice Levy)



Waldorf School of
the Finger Lakes
855 Five Mile Drive
Ithaca, NY 14850

Waldorf Schools

foster the growth of intellect and imagination,
the development of conscience, and a
sense of freedom and purpose.

Nov. 18, 7:30 pm 855 Five Mile Drive, Route 13A
Experience the Waldorf approach to the study of
diverse cultures through literature, geography, and history.
For information, please call: 273-4088

Open to all students regardless of race, color or creed.



QUALITY ACCOMMODATIONS
AT AFFORDABLE PRICES

Free Continental
Breakfast
and
Morning Newspaper

ITHACA \$45⁸⁸ single
356 Elmira Road
272-0100

Throughout Canada & the Northeast USA
CALL TOLL FREE

1 800-668-4200 CAA AAA

get BACK TO MUSIC

MIDI
specialists

KORG
Keyboards
+
Workstations

FREE KORG CLINIC

Friday, Nov. 13, 1992
• Call for Info •

HICKEY'S
MUSIC CENTER

104 Adams St., Ithaca (off Rt 13 at Day)
Park Free • 607-272-8262 • Major Credit Cards

Fantasy Inc.

Nick Gillespie

VINYL LEAVES

Walt Disney World and America
Stephen M. Fjellman
Westview Press, \$18.95, 492 pp.

It may be appropriate to start this review with a personal admission: I hate "Disney." I hate Disney cartoons, Disney movies, the Mickey Mouse Club. Even as a child — especially as a child — almost all Disney paraphernalia struck me as bland and saccharine as a fluffernutter sandwich (on white bread, with the crusts cut off, naturally). Where Disney peddled a banal universe of pat and happy endings, Bugs Bunny or the Little Rascals (for examples) lived in a world of contingency and flux, of risk and possibility. Because of this continuing dislike for Disney, I was initially predisposed to agree with Professor Fjellman's (he teaches at Florida International University) negative evaluation of Disneymania — or, for that matter, any negative evaluation of Disneymania. After reading through it, however, Fjellman has accomplished the unthinkable: he has me muttering, albeit through clenched teeth, those horrible words: "I want to go to Disney World."

Vinyl Leaves is a curiously split book, and the author takes great pains to explain his "fractionated" self:

I love [Walt Disney World]! I could live there. I love its infinitude, its theater, its dadaism. I love its food, its craft, its simulations. It gets me to think, to remember, and to make up new fantasies. I appreciate its civility and its safety...But I am also writing this because I think it is important to do so...[Walt Disney World] is the teaching shrine of the corporate world of commodities. This is a cruel and contentious world. The hegemony of the commodity form threatens evolution on this planet and all living things. I hope WDW becomes the most important museum representing the historical period when commodification ruled.

Vinyl Leaves is Fjellman's "application as a docent," his case against market economies in general and WDW in specific. What might replace commodities — "thing[s] that

by [their] properties satisf[y] human wants of some sort or another" — is left unspecified, although Fjellman hints that a world of limited resources and unlimited desires is merely a Big Lie: "Our attention has been drawn to commodities presented as solutions to invented personal difficulties." Similarly, exactly how the "commodity form threatens evolution on this planet and all living things" is left unspecified — even in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary. The comparative environmental situations in the "free" world and the former Soviet bloc seem to indicate that the institution of private property — including land in the form of tradeable commodities — may well act as a hedge against ecological excesses.

But how does Fjellman's self-announced love for the Magic Kingdom square with his resentment of Disney's petty fiefdom? "The contradictions are many. I live them every day. I argue against the deadening impact of television — and I watch it nearly every day, actively engaged. I rail against the commodity form and impulse buy all the time. I love literal and metaphorical plastic. It's terrible, I know, but I do." Fjellman, though self-congratulatingly aware of many conflicts in his life, is perhaps less conscious of the basic contradiction rumbling through his argument like a fault line: if, for instance, television has a "deadening impact," how can he watch it "actively engaged?" Hmm, perhaps because the impact of television is not all that deadening — or at least not necessarily so. And, by extension, perhaps the "commodity form" is not so monolithic in its "Huxleyan" hegemony. But Fjellman assumes that he is both smarter than everyone else and less seriously influenced by the baubles of the dreaded marketplace. He alone can walk through Disney World (accompanied by figurative animatrons of Marx, Gramsci, Weber, Adorno, and Horkheimer whispering truths in his ear) and enjoy it simultaneously as a ten-year-old boy and as a full-grown adult.

Where does this double consciousness ultimately lead? It's a difficult question for the "fractionated" social critic. On the one hand, criticism implies the possibility of change. "Critical thought, anger, heresy, and action toward change are

always possible," writes Fjellman. But on the other hand, the hegemony of "late capitalism" allows no such beasts in its commodity zoo: "These possibilities must be stopped or tamed by deflecting them in harmless directions." By constructing a system desperately needing an overhaul (evolution itself is under attack!) and by asserting that system is so overwhelming as to preclude change, Fjellman can be said to be guilty of selling what he might term a "fake" commodity. That is, a bogus experience of subversive thought. Not to worry, though, since Fjellman coyly distances himself from his project at the outset: "I'll state right now for the record that I don't have a clue as to who is re-

else to recommend the book? Well, yes and no, depending on how you "commoditize" satisfaction. Fjellman's account of the building of Walt Disney World is somewhat interesting. Drawing largely from newspaper and magazine articles, the professor recounts how, in 1964, what local newspapers called "the mystery industry" began buying up the 27,400 acres eventually comprising Walt Disney World. Fjellman documents the various deals with state and local governments to create "The Reedy Creek Improvement District," a trans-county administrative structure "whose charters, in fact, make it more of an actual kingdom than any other administrative district in the

that, prior to Disney's interest, the land was quintessential Florida swampland with little or no intrinsic value, but instead drew its value from Disney's "remaking the great swamp."

One thing *Vinyl Leaves* can rightly lay claim to is that it is an exhaustive compendium of the inventory of Walt Disney World. "At some point I will say something about every attraction at WDW," warns Fjellman. His "readings" of the park's attractions vary both in their intelligence and their ability to interest the reader. Ideological sunglasses securely in place, he often misses subtle colors and shadings and, typically, he ignores those things not pre-cut to fit his procrustean bed. His analysis of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride, for example, smartly seizes upon the apparently anti-Disney values embodied in the faux-boat trip through the Spanish Main:

...masked by the fun, the story told is not so pleasant. In addition to destruction and perhaps torture, one of the central messages — however cutely presented — is about rape. At the middle of the ride, next to an auction of young women, is a scene in which the motif of pirate chasing after luscious young woman is repeated twice. In an attempt to take the edge off this message, there is a further vignette in which a fat port woman chases an elderly, chubby pirate. It's a sexist joke and a joke about fat people.

Fjellman adds in a footnote, "it's probably also ageist." And the whole ride, one presumes, unfairly stereotypes pirates. But Fjellman leaves out the last section of the ride altogether, in which the pirates are reduced to skeletons and consigned to the anguishes of hell. This morality tale aspect of the ride is not necessarily incompatible with Fjellman's reading, but it certainly should be — or would be — discussed in a less ideologically driven analysis.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Vinyl Leaves* is barely evident on the surface. Lurking behind the sociological analysis is the story of a would-be philosopher-king who, by his own admission, loves WDW and who, deep down inside, wants to call all the shots on

see *Fantasy*, page 13



Illustration: Stephanie Clair

ponsible for the arguments in this book and its mistakes and slurs. It just wrote itself." Fjellman, then, is himself something of a Disney animatron, programmed by who knows who to say who knows what.

If the intellectual apparatus of *Vinyl Leaves* is as shaky as a carnival ferris wheel, is there anything

state of Florida." Not surprisingly, however, his reactionary response toward commerce pops up again and again. He mentions repeatedly how the price paid by the Disney people was "less than \$200 an acre," as if Disney somehow cheated the landowners with whom they dealt. He pushes this notion even while noting

Coffees of the World
Fresh-roasted daily

The Gourmet's Delight

**fine cheeses
spices & teas
chocolates
kitchenware**

Wholesale Coffee Prices Available

**Trihammer Mall
Ithaca, NY
(607) 257-2669
10-6 Mon-Sat, 10-3 Fri**

THE
Upstairs Gallery

**Arnold Singer
Paintings**

**Roberto Bertoia
Sculpture**

October 20 - November 21

Gallery hours
11-3 Tuesday - Saturday

Dewitt Office Complex
Ithaca, NY
(607) 272-8614

cornell cinema

NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHT:
*The Cost of Living:
The Films of Mike Leigh*

High Hopes

"Like a pointillist painter, Leigh builds his films with minuscule brush strokes—behavioral and environmental details often so tiny that they can't be perceived by the naked eye (or ear) until they start to accumulate and form patterns. Only when the painting is complete can we stand back and say what it is we've been looking at. This may help to explain why so many of his characters, who often seem awful, become endlessly fascinating and even endearing the longer we look at them. Leigh's method may also account for the fact that the English lives he depicts—so depressed and drab and hopeless—eventually signify something clear and powerful, not only where they're coming from but perhaps even where they're going."
--Jonathan Rosenbaum, The Chicago Reader

Dates throughout November and December

Plenty of nearby parking for our Willard Straight Theatre featuring Dolby Surround Sound. Pick up a calendar at the DeWitt Mall or in our theatres, or call 255-3522 for schedule information.

Fantasy

continued from page 12
his mental playground. For instance, there's this odd moment:

From the moment people enter the parking lots, they are channeled toward the transportation system and its staging areas. Those who — in a burst of manic, if guilty, freedom — walk across the grass may find that they have blundered into a shallow, mucky, well-camouflaged drainage ditch. Their reemergence into public space will be marked by a telltale calf-high mudline. They are usually cured of such disorderly behavior.

This is, no doubt, another striking example of how "freedom" is systematically denied in the Disney Gulag — and, by extension, Amerika at large. The reader is left to wonder whether Fjellman is one of those brave freedom-fighters with soiled trousers. Or is he really a totalitarian at heart?

Every Disney theater crowd has two kinds of sociopaths, each of which makes things unpleasant for those around them but neither of which can be stopped. Some people stop and sit in the middle seats, forcing others to stumble past them. Others ignore the attendant's request to refrain from flash photography, thus annoying and sometimes momentarily blinding others in the theater. In the face of such uncivil "me-firstism," one sometimes wishes for even more corporate control over human activity.

Indeed. The 3-D special effects of *Captain EO* must be seen at all times! Or, as Adorno and Horkheimer put it in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own punishment." Fjellman's contempt for fellow "guests" (as consumers at WDW are euphemistically called) is even more naked at times:

Typhoon Lagoon [is] itself, a 2 1/2-acre swimming pool surrounded by white sand, beach chairs, and thatch shelters. At the far end are the water chambers that form a wave machine capable of generating 4 1/2-foot waves — large enough, were there not lemming-like crowds, for body surfing.

The image of the mud-stained professor, perhaps attired in drip-dry tweeds and smoking a waterproof pipe (the pattern baldness and pot belly are givens), elbowing little Jimmy Lemming from Paducah, Kentucky out of the way is too vibrant to displace. What a goddamned day at Disney World! Trapped in mud while trying to beat the lines, blinded while trying to watch Michael Jackson dance in 3-D and now this — crammed into a huge, jouncing tub with the great unwashed! Begone, all of you! You can't even really appreciate it!

This personal narrative thread spun throughout Fjellman's account of WDW ultimately makes a fabric more substantial than unintentional comedy. He is uncomfortable not just with his "fractionated" self, but

with the great boob public's unwillingness to surrender to his superiority. "And I'm supposed to know better.... But if I'm supposed to know better, what about all the people who are not supposed to do so, those whose knowing better might upset the way things are? How we all are — my friends, fellow citizens, and I — sold a bill of goods that is not good for us?" He never once considers that notions of "good" might vary from person to person.

Instead, Fjellman, insisting on a single standard (his standard, naturally) of value, must decry any type of social or technological development that threatens a top-down value structure. "The telegraph made possible the annihilation of space because information from anywhere might be transferred immediately to anywhere else. However, such information must be impoverished, for its context could not be transmitted as well." One could see in the development of the telegraph, or the printing press, or the video camera, or the personal computer, an amazing opportunity at empowerment precisely *because* context might now be reconfigured in any number of ways. And though Fjellman himself is explicitly seeking to do just that — reconfigure the context of Walt Disney World and America — he ultimately wants to reserve the right only for those who are "supposed to know better." Fjellman is onto the con, that "exchange value" has replaced "use value," that "we are directed to *feel* bad if we don't have the commodities that solve the problems we're told we have." This uber-brainwashing takes place

everywhere in our society, without possibility of resistance — as if some products don't succeed where others fail, as if "use value" can be somehow calculated outside of a market mechanism whereby seller and buyer agree on terms.

One item that Fjellman *does* seem to be buying wholesale and uncritically is a traditional European disdain for so-called American "culture." The "vinyl leaves" of the book's title refer to the 800,000 green things clinging to the Swiss Family Island Treehouse, "a representation of the treehouse built by the Swiss Family Robinson in the 1960 Disney movie of the same name.... So we have a fake tree holding a fake treehouse, representing a fake story told in a different form, but alluding to, a classic piece of literature." To explain what's going on, he quotes Umberto Eco on the subject of "hyperreality...where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake." Of course, it's an American thing, a "plastic" country as opposed to what — the "natural" materials of the Old World? As if Defoe's novel — that "classic piece of literature" — isn't also a simulacrum of a shipwreck story. As if, for example, the chateaux dotting the Loire Valley in France aren't to a great degree invented artifacts, modeled after models from bygone (and heavily romanticized) eras. Obviously, this is no argument to prove that the "vinyl leaves" are somehow other than vinyl — but it is curious that Fjellman, for all his "deep attention to sources of information [and]...problems of

sampling," doesn't more rigorously interrogate his own distinctions between "real" and "fake." Although he creates a confusing and tedious taxonomy of representation ("real real, fake real, real fake, and fake fake"), he fails to define adequately terms like "elements of nature." When he asks "How do many of us come to believe Disney's authentic simulations represent realities?", he's fudging the point that most of us do *not* believe that Disney's authentic simulations represent realities.

But then, perhaps the trick has already been turned. As I indicated at the beginning, Fjellman's book, if nothing else, did pique my curiosity regarding Walt Disney World (and me, a Disney hater!). Suppose it is true that his book "just wrote itself," that the corporate paternalists who tell "people what to do and how to be" are using him as a dupe (unwitting or otherwise), that "we make history," as Karl Marx wrote, "but under constraints," and that "these possibilities must be stopped or tamed." There's no way out of the loop — each act of subversion is automatically contained in the repressive tolerance of the commodity system. And Fjellman, in trying to debunk "Distory," only gives it more publicity. Perhaps it's time to step off this particular wild ride.



Nick Gillespie is a writer who lives in Buffalo, NY.

Ithaca College Centennial and the Anthropology Department present



JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Native American Storyteller and Author

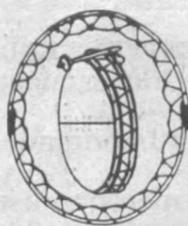
From First to Last Frost: An Evening of Music, Poetry, and Storytelling in the Native American Tradition

Tuesday, November 5
7:30 pm Park Auditorium

*Near the mountains
Footsteps on the ground
sound hollow.*

*This is to remind you
this Earth is a drum.*

*We must watch our steps closely
to play the right tune.*



PLUS: "Noble Savages": What the New World Taught the Old,"
by
Joel Savishinsky, Professor of Anthropology
November 3, 1992 - 4 pm
North Meeting Room-Egbert Union

for your **Dining Pleasure**

● Lunch from 11:30
● Dinner daily from 5:30
● Sunday Brunch 11:00 to 2:30

"A Little Piece of Europe"
on the Cayuga Inlet

272-4868
702 West Buffalo Street
Downtown Ithaca

FERNANDO
LLOSA
fine ART
[607] 533-8679

Top Hat
Antiques and Collectibles

- Large Selection of Classical LPs
- Paper Ephemera
- Unusual Santas

186 Clinton St.
Binghamton, NY (607) 771-8631

A Paper Worth Clipping

For only \$7.50, the next ten issues of *the BOOKPRESS* will be delivered to your home!

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

send to:
the BOOKPRESS
DeWitt Building, 215 N. Cayuga St.
Ithaca, NY 14850

VISA / MC, Discover, Check or money order payable to *the BOOKPRESS*

Derrida

continued from page 2

Derrida evoked in his lecture the vast literature that takes death as its subject—all the historical, anthropological, biological, medical, literary treatments, which must presuppose some understanding of the thing or the concept they consider. He alluded to what one might call the whole politics of death, the very contemporary turmoil surrounding efforts to determine the legitimacy or to fix definitions of death in law or medicine—questions concerning the prolongation of life, euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, suicide. For Derrida, it is a token of the vast ambition of a work like Heidegger's *Being and Time* that it seeks to investigate the conditions of the possibility of thinking the idea of death, the underlying

assumptions that make the study of what we call death seem possible.

Heidegger's work occupies a place of major importance in Derrida's conception of the history of philosophy. It is one to which he returns over and over again in his own writing. *Being and Time*, he said in the lecture, could be considered a world-historical event—one whose measure we are even today not yet able fully to gauge. It is, he said, more than a work of philosophy, or of metaphysics, of theology, or poetry, to all of which genres it has been frequently compared. He immensely respects its vaulting ambition to be absolutely foundational, to stake out the ground underlying all our most essential categories—beneath all, the category of Being itself, and he patiently follows its arguments in all their most obscurely convoluted formulations. At the same time, his whole lecture was

driven by the desire to question the hierarchies that Heidegger proposes and to hold up to suspicion the distinctions with which he claims to delimit once and for all the nature and boundaries of being-towards-death. In the place of Heidegger's formulations he tentatively advanced another set of categories, which have the advantage, he claims, of being more contingent, less ontological, more aporetic but less transcendental than those he finds in *Being and Time*.

However much Derrida might wish to think in a way beyond *Being and Time*, or in other ways, he would not for a moment allow himself to avoid it. He is forever recommending that students read that book, and forever demonstrating in his own work how useful, how necessary it is in order to be able to think in new ways about the validity of our most common assumptions, as well as

about the legitimacy of those that underlie the institution of disciplines in the university. Yet it is a somber irony that in coming to Cornell to speak, during more than four hours, about this "event" in Western philosophical thought, the appearance of *Sein und Zeit*, he was addressing a public which had mostly never read, and had hardly ever studied the work of Heidegger. How could they? As is true elsewhere in most American universities in 1992, not a single course on Heidegger is being offered anywhere on the Cornell campus this year. Indeed among the thousands of courses that have been offered at Cornell in the last decade, not more than one or two has been devoted to that seminal thinker. And yet if one were to believe Derrida, there is nothing one needs more urgently to study. Philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, like those at Cornell, consider Heidegger, and

Derrida, *a fortiori*, to be metaphysical at best, at worst obscurantist; Derrida, following Heidegger, would situate their discourse within narrowly delimited regions of positive knowledge. If one were to assume, for the sake of argument, that Derrida is right about the unavoidable importance of Heidegger's project, then one is left to contemplate the possibility that the university in America has seriously lost its way. And if that were true, then one might suppose that over six hundred people came to listen to the representative of a style of thinking that they obscurely recognize is at the center of all their concerns, even as that thinking has been utterly marginalized by the very institution whose foundations it serves to uncover.

Richard Klein is a professor of Romance Studies at Cornell.

Impasse

continued from page 2

of proxy as compared with that of orator, found it necessary to impress upon us the manuscript's need to be read correctly in order that his presence at the occasion not be supplanted altogether. For these nuances, the French and the German along with a few regularly spaced apologetics and (inter)ruptions into pure speech, seemed to insure that he not be incommoded. Still, the question lingers: what was interred in this process, a text or a speech act, and how was it that when it was raised Lazarus-like from Buffalo it was not even checked for a pulse?

But even more than this troubles me; I find I have questions concerning ti(me) and (be)ing, *Se(in)* and *Ze(it)*, as such. For instance, Jonathan Culler, in his introductory remarks, surprised me by announcing that *L'autre cap* was "soon to appear in English" as *The Other Heading*. How could that be? Mr. Culler, though a veritable Santa Claus with his adjectives ("boundless/intellectual/analytical/major/sustained") plays Scrooge with his verbs. *Appear*? As if to deny the entire state of production, the labor-intensive activity behind the translation of the work! Perhaps caught up with Heideggerian representations of death and arrival he misled us unconsciously. I've seen copies of *The Other Heading* and *Donner le temps*, also soon "to appear" "from" "the University of Chicago Press" "as" *Given Time* in a certain bookstore for months now; but perhaps true appearance is more closely tied to a book's arrival in its reader's hands, and to date, I must report, the two books appear not to have left the shelves.*

Derrida has always struck me as an ice cream man who eats the ice cream and gives you the wrappers to read; reading his work is like reading "A Modest Proposal" without referent to the famine, spiritual and agricultural, that Swift was addressing; after a while the style of indeterminacy, the pig-pile of oxymorons, all delivered with perfect pitch and rhythm but lacking in something else harder to "name", become a bit tiring. The repetition of Americanisms like "eh, keeck the bucket" (I stopped counting at six (cf. George Carlin)) wore thin. As a philosopher digging into the ontological, I'm afraid (see

Heidegger about fear as it relates to death) Derr(id)a is not boring enough; he is playfully dead serious, he is courted constantly by the constructs whose existence he denies, he is, in this sense, again, a politician. He is Plato to his own Socrates, but a master who disdains the hemlock.... For ultimately, isn't it true that Derr(id)a like a statesman, is happiest at an impasse? Eliding over the *aporia*? Although this would seem to be obvious, we can register the possibility that his comfort, his certainty in our inability to solve, might lead us to question whether there is an impasse at all, whether Der(ri)da and his *aporia* are not as a result more problematical than ever, or, to quote: "How to style this absence?"

But now, having found the Great One at home with his constituency, the next question, though regarding his writing, his rhetoric, his *differance*, has been rendered all but moot, that question being, *Would it be fair to hold Derrida to his word?*

I refer the question to the text itself: "I'll answer: 'Perhaps'." In accordance with a strange figure of discourse, I'm left to wonder if I was at the reading at all, if the entire thing is not of my own invention, if not intention. But first, I must address myself against the language of exclusion: is it possible that I am merely being resistant to theory? Resistance to theory, I take it, after de Man (the *de-man*?), is the academic way of saying "I see the EXIT sign above the door and I leave." But to my eyes, as one who did not leave, who did not turn the page metaphorically to more pressing matters, nobody seemed to be resisting as much as they were desisting, or perhaps even deciding, consciously, to no longer resist the overwhelming urge to depart.

Let us summarize: Jacques did not speak; the typist was, for a few moments anyway, in Buffalo; and I did not read the text. We seem to have reached an impasse in trying to cast doubt in any way that I have not written Derrida myself. (Perhaps in the inevitable movie about him starring Joe Pesci I will find out for sure; I would suggest John Cusack might "play" me, our height *differance* aside, should he be open to the role.) In perhaps the most damning evidence of my thesis, I give you this — if it is truly possible to give: I have been made aware that my observations are to be placed as a footnote to Prof. Richard Klein's article on the same lecture. However, I find it necessary to relate to you how Prof. Richard Klein appeared at the first lecture with neither pen nor paper to make

notes as regards his "article"; further, that Prof. Richard Klein, while talking to an associate of his sitting in a seat adjacent to mine, made manifest his needs; still further, that it was I who lent Prof. Richard Klein a pen and paper that night; the instruments of writing indeed came from me! (I should note here that Prof. Klein returned them immediately after the lecture, with genuine speed and gratitude.) In the words of Derrida as regards Searle, "I therefore feel obliged to claim my share of the copyright." Even "I", as author, cannot explain away such queer evidence.

In a last-ditch effort to disprove myself, I ventured to a dictionary to "look up" Derrida. Although I know he exists, that he in some sense shares his place with us in this world, which I can verify for instance by noting his peculiar behavior at Ruby's on October 7th while ordering two cappuccinos from a harried employee, I have yet to prove he in any way spoke here the previous evening. As I suspected, Derrida does in fact command an unusual space in the *American Heritage*, newest edition, of course. His is the absence, the unbridgeable space, between two words, *derrick* and *derriere*: *derrick* being "a machine for hoisting and moving heavy objects" ("obsolete *derrick*, hangman, gallows"), and *derriere* being "the buttocks; the rear," "from the Old French *deriere*, in back of...." In that infinitely finite space, that impasse of meaning, I know he rests; between the derrick and the derriere, between the ass and the gallows, I hear the sounds of filibustering. But he knows and I know the bill has been killed, its death was possible all along, though he may postpone conclusive adjournment a few hours longer.

*I should note that since the Derrida reading, one copy of *Given Time* was sold; it was purchased, interestingly enough, as a gift, for a man in Indonesia, by his wife who did not know who Derrida was, but who wanted something "popular" in theory.

Jeffrey Schwaner is a writer who lives in Mecklenburg, NY.

THE
FRAME
SHOP



Quality since 1956

For 36 years, we've taken the artisan's approach, giving time and care to each piece of art. We don't take short cuts. We do offer our customers the highest quality workmanship as well as a complete selection of mats & frames.

Antique Prints
Photos by Local Artists

272-1350
414 W. Buffalo St., Ithaca, NY

BURT'S BOOKS

Literally thousands of titles!

42-44 Washington Avenue, Endicott, NY 13760 (607)748-8233

ON THE AVENUE
ENDICOTT

For Your
CREATIVE KIDS
Toys and Gifts for Imaginative Children

- VALENTYNE TEDDY BEARS
heirloom quality
- Other handmade items
- New merchandise
arriving daily



Corners Community Center
(where parking is never a problem)

257-5834

SMALL TREASURES
from the CARIBBEAN



Paintings, Sculpture, Textiles
Nov. 24 - Jan. 16

SOLA' ART GALLERY

DeWitt Mall • Ithaca, NY • 272-6552
Mon - Sat 10:30 - 5:30, Sun 12 - 3

Kitchen

continued from page 7

Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, also has thoughts about the Kitchen's importance. Farrell was an integral part of the theatre scene in Chicago during the 1980s where he founded two theatre companies himself. He experienced the Steppenwolf Theatre firsthand, and likens the energy and play choices of the Kitchen to Steppenwolf. "What I saw happening in Chicago was dozens of small theatres cropping up everywhere. I

discovered that theatre can occur in a small, intimate space with fifty or a hundred people." Farrell points to a decentralization of theatre in America, a movement that breaks away from models like the European National Theatre and Broadway. More and more, theatre is becoming regional, and many new theatres are being founded by people in their twenties. "Chicago has a great theatre reputation precisely because of these youthful productions. The theatre there is exciting because, when you work with limited resources, you often have to be

very clever." Farrell stresses that the Kitchen is not a community theatre, but a professional company. "There can never be enough theatre," says Farrell. "If Ithaca had ten theatres side by side, that would be great."

The Hangar Theatre Board of Trustees president, Andrea Fleck Clardy, agrees. "The Kitchen Theatre adds a dynamic presence. All local arts organizations benefit when a new theatre enlivens community interest." Hangar Artistic Director Robert Moss is also supportive of the Kitchen. "Good theatre," he says,

"begets more good theatre."

The Kitchen's season will end in May with an American debut of Helen Walker's *More Than Meets the Eye*, which Tauber himself will direct. After Tauber saw this play in London last year, he was so impressed with it that he called the playwright to ask if she would consider taking the play to the US. Tauber succeeded in securing the American premiere and is currently trying to convince Walker to overcome her fear of flying to come here for the opening. Tauber plans to take the play to Off-Broadway after

the Ithaca premiere. "Developing new plays is definitely the future of the Kitchen Theatre," he says. "We will try to have at least one new play each season."

Plans for Off-Broadway after barely a year behind them? Let no one underestimate the energy and desire of the Kitchen Theatre Company as they strive to find a permanent place in the Ithaca community.



Katie Johnson is the Director of Marketing & Promotions at the Hangar Theatre.

Eatery

continued from page 3

the Biblical ectoplasm, the whorehouse-as-manger trope, the Jew-Black faceoff, the suggestion that Israel's founding is both a messianic event and a social misfortune (Naylor puts harsh words about Israeli racism into Gabe's mouth) — is so disappointing. How serious is Naylor?

It is hard to know. Naylor worked for seven years, from ages eighteen to twenty-five, as a missionary for the Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, North Carolina, and Florida, before becoming a writer and before returning to college at CUNY and Yale, where she got her Master's degree. The religion of

which *Sister Carrie* is the representative is part of Naylor's own deep background, though it has been supplanted by other values and by more complicated views of womanhood, which Eve and her boarding house now represent. Naylor has said of *Bailey's Cafe* that she wanted to "take the word 'whore' and redefine it, to bleed the poison from it." She does that convincingly enough, by putting these women in possession of their own stories, which affirm their dignity. I'd have even more confidence in them, however, if the Biblical prototypes were held at bay and there were not these Eves and Marys and Jezebels to conjure with. That side of *Bailey's Cafe* is too much like a Sunday service turned upside down, and the inverted sermon is still a sermon. At one

point, *Sister Carrie* and *Eve* go at it in a scripture-quoting contest, doing the dozens on each other in Biblical terms.

Sister Carrie: —How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things the work of an imperious whorish woman!

Eve: —Thou also, which has judged thy sister, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou has committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear they shame, in that thou has justified their sister.

"Bailey" confesses that he grows restless at such moments: "My nerves can't take all those tambou-

rines and drums." Amen.

And after *Mariam's* infant is born and brought into the Covenant of Abraham by Gabe, we know that we've left the street far behind and have entered the world of myth.

If Naylor believes she has written a prophetic book and that 1948 was, or could have been, the Millenium — presumably because of Israel — well, there is little one can do except to be skeptical, though the fact that an African-American writer should be making a gesture toward the Jews is cause for celebration in and for itself. But what if the allegory is purely an intertextual riff, like the Dante and Shakespeare routines of previous books: *what if it is just a nice story?* And what if, as is usually the case when the Christology runs thick and the

Millenium comes sniffing around the corner like the hound of heaven, the author is confessing that she doesn't know what to make of these folks on their own terms and that the meanings of their lives are obscure to her without guidance from THE BOOK?

Imagine the Jehovah's Witnesses coming to your door to announce that prostitutes are folks much like yourself and that the Second Coming might, *just might*, be at hand in the whorehouse down the street. You might say, "That's a great story," but would you still pay a quarter for *The Watchtower*?



Mark Shechner is a writer who lives in Buffalo, NY.

EUREKA CRAFTS
316-471-4801
210 WALTON ST., SYRACUSE, N.Y. 13202

STONEWARE BY RICHARD AERNI
NOT ALL ART NEEDS A FRAME

BOOKS END

Current, Used, Rare & Out-of-Print Books, Hardcover, Paperbacks & Comics

Open M-F 10-6; Sat. 10-5 and Sun. 12-5
2443 James St., Syracuse New York (315) 437-2312

We have the largest selection of Dover Books in the area!

The Bookpress is available in the following Buffalo locations:

- Anderson Art Gallery, Band Box Cleaners, Barbara Schuller Galleries, Bond Art Supply, Bradens, Brower's Books, Buffalo Graphics, Buffalo Picture Frame, Buffalo State University (various locations), Calumet Cafe, Care in the Square, Crabtree & Evelyn, Family Tree Restaurant, Epicuris Restaurant, Frame & Save, Gnome's Needle, Guildcraft Arts & Crafts, Health Food (Kenmore), Herdman's Art Supplies, Illos Piano Store, Mastman's Deli, Old Editions Book Store, Oracle Junction Books, Paper Cutter, Park Florist, Point of View, Pumpkins, Preservation Hall, Queen City Books, Stereo Advantage, SUNY Buffalo (various locations), Talking Leaves Book Store, Teddy's Music & Books, Vern Stein Gallery

CLASSIFIEDS

WRITING WORKSHOPS for women, led by Irene Zahava, at Smedley's Bookshop. For information and schedule: (607) 273-4675 or 273-2325

SMEDLEY'S BOOKSHOP Ithaca's feminist bookstore. Books and much more. 307 W. State Street, (607) 273-2325.

THE 12TH CLEVER GRETCHEN CONFERENCE On Folklore, Literature & Storytelling Saturday, Nov. 14, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. **Hall of Languages Syracuse University.**

ART-DRAWING & PAINTING LESSONS Private or semiprivate. My studio or your home. Credentials: Teaching Artist Southern Tier Institute for Arts in Education, CSMA, Kaleidoscope - Teaching all mediums, all ages and all levels. Benn Nadelman (607) 277-7544.

Classifieds \$5.50 for the first 10 words, \$20 each additional word. Display advertising in classifieds: \$12.00 per column inch. For more information contact the Bookpress (607) 277-2254, or send your classifieds to Dewitt Building, 215 N. Cayuga St. Ithaca, NY 14850.

Italian critic raves about Pastabilities...
According to Yolanda Wright in the *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, Thursday, November 28, 1991:

"Two chef's hats and one bottle of wine are spreading the good news about Armory Square's Pastabilities to Italian travelers looking for top dining spots in the United States. '(Pastabilities is) the only local restaurant listed in 'I Ristoranti de Veronelli USA' (Veronelli Editore, 1991), written by respected Italian critic Luigi Veronelli. Pastabilities, at 311 S. Franklin St., Syracuse, is noted for its 'excellent cooking' (two hats) and 'very good wine list' (one bottle) in the guide to Italian restaurants in this country."

Patrick Heagerty and Karyn Korteling, proprietors, welcome you.

Located in Syracuse's Armory Square 311 South Franklin Street, Syracuse. Reservations suggested - (315) 474-1153

TOYS OF DESPERATION
A HAYMARKET MURAL IN VERSE
by HAROLD A. ZLOTNIK

An epic poem on the 8-hour day struggle of 1886, the Haymarket meeting—the bomb—the tragic figures, the trial, and the consequences... in the great tradition of the saga. Indispensable for any Haymarket collection. ISBN: 0-932334-93-8. 344 pages—photos & illus.—(paper)—\$14.50 ea. postpaid.

ORDER FROM: Heart of the Lakes Publishing
PO Box 299, Interlaken, NY 14847

CHICAGO'S GREAT LABOR UPRISING

Suits

continued from page 4

empowering to learn that board certification in gynecology is a permanent achievement, unlike similar conferrals of status in the other specializations. After achieving board certification, a gynecologist is not obliged to keep up with newer, safer, and often cheaper technologies and treatment methods. Neither is he, or she, ever prevailed upon to demonstrate a continued competence in surgery, if such competence was reached in the first place. Smith is most instructive when simply reiterating a central message of the Women's Health movement: Know your body. Don't be swindled. Speaking as a doctor, Smith points out that a woman armed with knowledge is not only on equal footing with her doctor, but could well be a few steps ahead. Relatively recent technology such as the laser not only demands a gynecologist's time, for additional training, but also a considerable financial investment. If the profit will not clearly outweigh the investment, an instrument like the laser will be ignored in favor of the more expensive and radical surgical procedure its use could have enabled the patient to avoid: hysterectomy. It is up to women to stay informed and to reject any gynecologist who withholds information or modes of treatment.

Smith's fourth section, "Information and Advice," describes both common and uncommon gynecological problems and the current methods of treatment available for them, and Smith hopes that women will use this as a reference, and that

they will be enabled to confront their doctors prepared with specific questions. (One glaring deficiency of the book is that this section is not indexed.) Beyond reading books such as his, Smith advocates strategies that range from habitually seeking second, even third, opinions, to befriending nurses for their access to O.R. gossip: Who's an incompetent surgeon? Who checks out the breasts of his etherized patients before commencing surgery?

The amount of research and footwork this vigilance entails might lead women to wonder what exactly they're paying a gynecologist for, anyway. Smith's point is just that: you pay your gynecologist for as little as possible. The solution Smith returns to again and again is this brand of watchdog consumerism, and here he seems to be speaking to the stereotypical American housewife:

Be a smart and wary consumer, and keep the entire health-care system in the same perspective that you probably already have placed car dealers, insurance salesmen, and the makers of food products.

Smith's emphasis on the power of the dollar in altering physician behavior presupposes a certain kind of patient, the woman who has the money to shop for a car, the leisure

the BOOKPRESS

to infiltrate ranks of hospital nurses. The generalization is understandable in light of Smith's career experience, from which he is writing. Still, he would do well to address the growing number of women who do not have a private gynecologist as a primary health care provider, who seek health care instead in government-run and other not-for-profit

get what they want. Presumably, the free market and justice will prevail. But equating change with skilled consumerism only serves to show up the impasse we have reached in the American health care system. The number of people, men and women, whose dollars no longer have any effect on health care delivery in this country is tremendous

and growing, and yet between 1987 and 1990 we experienced three consecutive years of a double-digit increase in costs, with no decrease yet. I've made a leap, from the particular problems of gynecology to the national problem of health care, but we have seen that Smith couches his discussion in these broad terms from the beginning, and he returns to them at the end. Women can and must effect alterations in physician behavior, and these alterations will at the very least add up to more than we had before. Speculum-warmers, for example. Non-surgical treatment options. And equally important, doctor-patient protocol changes like the chance to dress between a doctor's examination and discussion. No woman likes answering personal questions dressed in a backless sack with a sheet of wax paper over her knees, and no woman has to. These changes are not insignificant, and all change takes time. But ultimately, Smith writes:

[Women] will continue to receive

inadequate medical care at the hands of the health care system unless there is significant restructuring of the way health care is financed and delivered in this country... Because women get the worst of what is now a bad system, they can benefit the most from its reformation.

The greatest change we can make, then, will only amount to a stop-gap measure in the end — but there will be no change, unless we do this. Smith is not afraid to put forth his own proposal for a nationalized health care system, and this is the content of his epilogue.

Women and Doctors ends in leaving more questions asked than answered. These are not only the unsolved problems that Smith explicitly articulates. Far more difficult are the issues that he raises unintentionally, by the presentation of the book as a confessional/critical account, and by the author's self-characterization as a "feminized" man, one who has learned "to see through the eyes of a woman." Again, what is the nature of sexism in professional gynecology, and what is to be done? The sense of knowing even less about gynecology after reading this book than before, is the great advantage of having read it. In his epilogue, Smith hopes that now, "Individually, each woman should approach her physician with reasonable skepticism and cynicism, and never again accept a doctor's authority without question." This is a laudable aim for his book, and Smith does achieve it.

Susan Malka Choi is a graduate student at Cornell University.



Illustration: Joanna Sheldon

clinics. These women are in no position to make the impact a well-heeled housewife can make on her doctor, when refusing to buy an unnecessary and expensive hysterectomy. Smith urges patients to hold their doctors accountable, to pursue malpractice suits, and to take their money elsewhere if they don't



Our Customers Always Have A Merry Christmas!

Wonderful Tree Ornaments & Tree Tops • Snow Village & Dickens Village Houses • Byers' Choice Carolers • Snowbabies • Nutcrackers • Candles Whimsical Christmas Stockings • Music Boxes Christmas Cards - Calenders • Giftwrap & Ribbons

Distressingly Delicious Chocolates • Gourmet Foods & Fruit Baskets Fresh & Artificial Wreaths & Garland • Paperwhites & Amaryllis Poinsettias • Holly & Mistletoe • Exquisite Floral Arrangements Bonsai & Tropical Greenery.

Fine Dinnerware, Serving Pieces & Crystal by: Lenox, Wedgwood, Adams, Johnson Bros., Royal Worcester, Spode, Mikasa, Noritake, Royal Doulton, Crown Derby, Minton, Beatrix Potter for Children, Portmeirion's Botanic Garden & Birds of Britain, Fitz & Floyd, Oneida & Yamazaki Flatware, Marquis by Waterford.

Baskets for Plants, Picnics, Anything Candlesticks • Caswell-Massey & other fine Soaps • Linen Placemats & Tablecloths Collectibles - Hummels - Lowell Davis Picture Frames • Framed Prints • Mugs Pawley's Island Hammocks • Itty Bitty Book Lights • Fantastic Plush Animals • Wicker & Rattan Cocktail & Dining Tables, Chairs, Etageres, Rockers, Headboards, Lamps, Magazine Racks & Mirrors • Straw Rugs Wall Hangings • Bronze Garden Faucets by White Swan • Seed Kits • Vases For Your Flower Loving Friends...



The Plantation

130 Ithaca Commons 273-7231

Mon.-Wed. & Sat. 10-5:30, Th. & Fri. 'til 9, Sun. 11-4

Come & Join Us

for your

- Thanksgiving Dinner •
- Christmas Party •
- Sunday Brunch •

The Aurora Inn

A 19th-century Inn located in the most beautiful village on Cayuga Lake

Restaurant and Pub Open Daily (except Monday) featuring our delicious lunch buffet

14 Elegant Guest Rooms

Live Entertainment Every Friday Night

Route 90, Aurora, NY

(315) 364-8888

CUPB

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PROGRAM BOARD

PROUDLY PRESENTS

The Capital Steps

musical political satire from Washington, DC

Saturday, November 7

9 PM

Bailey Hall - Cornell

\$14 at the door
\$12 presale

Tickets on sale at
Willard Straight Hall

For information call (607) 255-2346