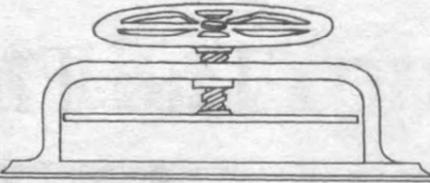


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COMPLIMENTARY

The Voice of the Serpent

Lori Burlingame

On January 22, Writers & Books, a literary center that operates in Rochester, NY, launched its "Contemporary American Voices" series with a reading by Leslie Marmon Silko from her 1991 novel *Almanac of the Dead* and her current work-in-progress *Sacred Water*. Silko, born in 1948 in Albuquerque of mixed Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and Caucasian ancestry, grew up on the Laguna Pueblo Reservation, and her work is an extension of the Laguna Pueblo oral narrative tradition. "Stories," she says "are central to the way one's identity is formed

in a communal culture like the Pueblo culture, because that's how it operates in everyday life... that's what's found in the oral tradition." In an interview with Silko in *The Amicus Journal*, Gina Maranto wrote, "The Pueblo people measure wealth not in material but in epistemological terms: to them, the truly poor person is one who knows no tales. Tales embody the vital force of the tribe and possess power to shape the future."

With the publication of her 1977 novel *Ceremony*, Silko was heralded by Frank McShane of *The New York Times Book Review* as "the most accomplished Indian writer of her generation," and with N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, and James Welch, she is among the best-known contemporary Native American writers. In *Ceremony*, Silko affirms the healing powers latent in the interconnectedness between the natural world and the story; Tayo, her mixed-blood protagonist, recovers from the alienation and loss of identity which result from his experiences in World War II by being brought back into a harmonious relationship with the earth and through a ceremonial reawakening to the creative power of the word.

The critical acclaim of *Ceremony* intensified the interest in

Silko's earlier short stories, "Yellow Woman," "Tony's Story," and "Lullaby," which are included in her 1981 collection *Storyteller*. Her other published works include *Laguna Woman: Poems* (1974) and *With the Delicacy and Strength of Lace* (with James Wright in 1985). Among the anthologies that feature Silko's poems and stories are *The Man to Send Rainclouds* (1974) and *The Remembered Earth* (1978).

Her honors and awards include a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (1974), a poetry award from *The Chicago Review* (1974), a Pushcart Prize for poetry (1977), and a grant from the MacArthur Foundation (1983).

I met with Silko, who graciously consented to be interviewed, even though she was at the tail end of a

results from commercialization of the artist, Silko pointed out that "a lot of the marketing ploys in recent years have started to push the person, the maker of the art, rather than the art itself." She feels that this is dangerous because "it confuses the artist with the work. They're really separate; at least they always have been. *Almanac* reflects the culture, what was happening around me. I was like a sponge. Individual artists very seldom are aware of all the places where their input comes from, so that the work of any artist or writer is actually greater than the individual; that's why readers, viewers, or listeners can find so much in there, so many things that transcend the individual's life. see *Serpent*, page 6



Photograph: Robyn Stoutenburg

Leslie Marmon Silko

hectic book tour for *Almanac of the Dead*, in her room at the Strathallan Hotel in Rochester. Expressing concern over the "personality cult" which

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Survival and Transcendence

Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg
Michael Schumacher
St. Martin's, 765 pp., \$35.00

Mark Shechner

Is it dueling bios of Allen Ginsberg we've got here? Even dueling authorized bios? You'd think so, with Barry Miles's *Ginsberg: A Biography* just three years old and now Michael Schumacher's biography, *Dharma Lion*, hitting the stores before the presses have stopped humming from its predecessor. And both appear to have Ginsberg's imprimatur. He encouraged both writers, who worked more or less simultaneously, and was generous to both with his time and his archives. But then Ginsberg has always lent aid and comfort to those who have devoted themselves to carrying his word. Maybe that's just Ginsberg's hunger for immortality, since in America immortality starts with publicity. Literary immortality works like any other hall of fame; no matter how

good you are, it helps to have a press agent out ahead of you beating the drums for all he's worth. Miles and Schumacher and Ginsberg's other *porte paroles* can be thought of as advance men for phase II of his career: posthumous fame. Ginsberg in fact is well positioned for phase II by virtue of what someone has called "the Ginsberg cottage industry"—a small army of assistants, secretaries, agents, clerks, bibliographers, transcribers, translators, lawyers, accountants, investigators, and editors who can be found at his farm in Cherry Valley, New York, working on various aspects of Ginsberg's poetry or journals or research or reputation. But then maybe the eagerness to publish his life reflects nothing more than Ginsberg's own gospel of nakedness, his lifelong insistence that he has nothing to hide because nothing is shameful and everything is, as he said in "Howl," holy.

A new biography was needed. Miles's book, which weighed in at 588 pages, took just five years to write—a wink in biographer time—

whereas Schumacher put in eight years to produce this great white shark. It is by orders of magnitude the more thorough, with 53 pages of footnotes to show for its scholarship. That's the good news. The bad news is that *Dharma Lion* is one of the clumsiest books you will ever read, and you have to wonder how someone with such a basic quarrel with the English language ever got attracted to poetry in the first place. How did St. Martin's copy editors sleep through his calling an illegal smoke an "elicit cigarette," or descendants "ancestors," or the prosecutor of the Moscow Trials "Puchinski" (it was Andrey Vyshinsky)? There is no end to these gaffes. To make matters worse, Schumacher writes at times as though the scales had fallen from his eyes about five minutes ago.

Not to worry: Ginsberg survives the gaffes and the grammar. His life is too abundant to be obscured by bad writing. After all, Ginsberg is one of the key literary figures of see *Survival*, page 10

The Third Sex?

Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety

Marjorie Garber
Harper Collins, 443 pp., paper
\$17.50

Susan Malka Choi

The 'third' is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis — a crisis which is symptomatized by both the overestimation and the underestimation of cross-dressing. But what is crucial here — and I can hardly underscore this strongly enough — is that the "third term" is not a term...The "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge.

About halfway through Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, I began to feel the way I imagine Garber herself may have felt while she was writing the book. I saw cross-dressers everywhere. Not only where they appeared as the crucial plot element

of television sitcoms, suspense thrillers, Gothic novels, or beloved Broadway musicals. Not merely in the "real life" appearances that seemed to have multiplied on the streets near my home, in the booths of my favorite bar, at parties, on planes, in the grocery store. This is not to say that transvestism as an intentional activity has gained in popularity. Nor does it seem that I had in some way become more perceptive to transvestite practices which had been until then invisible to me. Duplicious transvestites were not revealed behind the guises of "ordinary people," ordinary people were starting to look like "transvestites." This reaction was what Garber might call a crisis of categorization; its result being, in addition to a deep feeling of suspicion toward first impressions, my uncertainty as to whether it was the "ordinary person" or the "transvestite" that demanded the ironic imprisonment of quotation marks.

The argument Garber seeks to see *Third Sex*, page 2

Letters to the Editor The Third Sex?

Kahn Responds on the Economy

To the Editor:

Since I know that Professor Mahr would not intentionally mischaracterize any argument of mine in order to take exception to it, I can explain her misrepresentation of the central concern of my "Chronic Consumption" (your title) published in your October issue only in terms of her anxiety to emphasize the respects in which we do indeed disagree. [See Professor Ruth Mahr's response to Professor Kahn's article in "Letters," Feb. 1993.]

The subject of the article, she thinks, is whether we can "rely on the private sector to invest in the economic restructuring of the US....What can and should be the role of government policy in shaping this transition?" And my conclusion—if she "reads [my] article correctly"—is that "the task can be entrusted primarily to the private sector...." with the government confining its responsibility essentially to keeping "financial markets...flush with savings so that interest rates may be kept low enough to encourage investment."

To see whether this is a fair characterization of my views, it seems logical to look at the concluding section of my article, "the solutions." I group them under three headings.

● *The first*, to be sure, is that we must "reduce our huge collective dissavings via the federal budget" deficit. But the second, which I characterize as "at least as important," "is the need to reverse the long historical decline in productive government expenditures on infrastructure, technology, and education" (emphasis added).

And while the third emphasizes the importance of private investment, nowhere either directly or by implication does it give primacy to the simple governmental remedy Professor Mahr ascribes to me. I do indeed emphasize the importance of increased savings and have no doubt whatever about the importance of low long-term interest rates—more

about these later—but my specific proposal here is "we need to use *taxation* to encourage private investment...tax credits for real private investment, R&D, apprenticeship and worker training programs, and expanded employment tax credits" (emphasis added).

This was hardly a contention that all we need is more savings.

Nor was there the slightest implication in my article that either enhanced savings or the private market alone—or, as she puts it, "simply manipulating a few policy levers, among them the savings rate," would "cure the social ills that Professor Kahn lists in his article—increasing poverty, homelessness and stagnating living standards...."

On the contrary, one of the main reasons I call for a sharp curtailment in the government entitlements expenditures that go to people regardless of need—constituting something like 40 percent of the total federal budget—as well as cutting military expenditures, is "the huge shortfalls in the other *government* expenditures—which we surely have to make good...." (emphasis added). I later summarize these as "resuming our lamentably delayed progress in combating poverty, combating homelessness, taking care of the 35 million people without medical insurance and the far larger number that lack catastrophic medical coverage."

● I nowhere in my article asserted or said anything that could reasonably be interpreted as asserting that achieving higher saving rates (Professor Mahr does not disagree with my assertion that ours are by far the lowest among all major industrial countries) is or would be *sufficient* to solve our many problems. What I do assert emphatically is that they are *anecessary* condition, and I know of no reputable economist who would disagree. Or who would disagree with the proposition that high levels of achieved savings and *investment*—which, as Professor Mahr knows, are by definition the

same thing: the way society saves is by devoting a portion of its output to investment in plant, equipment, infrastructure, technology, and people—is central to the process of economic growth.

● But for this, Professor Mahr asserts, *domestic* savings are not necessary, because "financial markets are global"; ours can always be supplemented with foreign savings. She is silent, however, about my expression of concern at our dramatic conversion in the '80s from the world's leading creditor to the world's leading debtor country—the inevitable counterpart of the dramatic decline in our domestic savings rates (in the form preponderantly of the huge federal budget deficits)—and the fact that while doing so we increased the proportion of our spending on consumption rather than on making better provision for the future, through private and governmental investment.

● Part of the explanation of Professor Mahr's distorted summarization of my argument seems to be a simple misreading: she attributes to me a belief in a "world of smooth transitions," effected presumably under a market economy, because of my assertion that a conversion of perhaps 2 percent of our total national product from military to civilian uses (in contrast with 40 percent after World War II) would in itself threaten nothing more than a mild intensification of the problem of stagnation. She interprets that observation as reflecting a belief on my part that the "problem of stagnation" itself is likewise readily solvable and properly left to "the market." An unbiased reading of my piece will demonstrate that was the opposite of my meaning: as I said in my very first sentence,

to characterize the economic task we face today—or tomorrow—as converting from a cold war to a peacetime economy grossly exaggerates the dimensions of that particular problem, and correspondingly minimizes the dimensions of what really needs to be done (emphasis added).

There undoubtedly is a real difference of opinion between us on the extent to which we think it desirable or necessary to engage in direct governmental management of the economy. Professor Mahr thinks we need "a systematic way to manage trade" and "to use the extraordinary purchasing power of governments at all levels to create domestic markets for new, environmentally sound products and technologies." These assertions trip lightly off the pen. I suggest your readers give some attention to the way in which policies such as these have in fact worked out in practice—in Central and Eastern Europe, for example, or in Argentina, Guinea, or India. My personal reaction when someone advocates that we "systematically manage trade" is to put my hand over my wallet. That does not make me a *laissez-faire* ideologue.

Yours truly,
Alfred E. Kahn

continued from page 1

make throughout her tremendous documentation of the transvestite in Western culture is that the transvestite is not a "third term" or "third sex" but the mark of a crisis of categorization, a crisis that is occurring, however, "elsewhere." Thus the transvestite does not require reassignment to another gender category, for it is the transvestite that questions not only the binarism of gender but also the very notion of a unitary identity. The crisis of categorization is not occurring in the body of the transvestite; the transvestite's body simply marks this crisis. Strangely enough, the category crisis I experienced as a result of Garber's book was not the distant crisis to which she referred—the crisis of the Western understanding of gender, or race, or class.

Rather than encountering a crisis which I might come to better understand, through the figure of the transvestite, I was having a crisis of categorization regarding the transvestite it(?)self. Who, or what, qualified?

Garber's account includes, amid countless other and equally intriguing examples, the violators of sumptuary codes in Elizabethan England, the transsexual tennis star Richard Raskind/Renée Richards, the feminization of the male Jew, the masculinization of Josephine Baker, straight drag, gay drag, Liberace, Divine, Madonna, Elvis, and Barbie's boyfriend, Ken. She discusses not only transvestism that is performed and transvestism that is chosen as a lifestyle, but even transvestism that is "latent," unintended but nevertheless read, or received, as transvestism. (An obvious example is made of Michael Jackson, but Garber also cites Mr. T.) In support of her stated thesis—"that the transvestite makes the culture possible"—Garber enlists a body of evidence that is both massive and massively entertaining. This wealth of example, however, threatens to engulf the object of inquiry it is supposed to illustrate. Who, or what, qualifies as a transvestite? What does it mean, what stability of categorical convention is assumed, to say that a transvestite must "qualify" as such?

Taking the whole range of transvestism offered by Garber into account, neither intention nor reception nor the consistent employment of any particular vestimentary element—bound and flattened breasts for women, a stuffed brassiere for men—can be depended upon to denote the presence of transvestism. This particular category crisis eventually reintroduces the problem of the so-called "third term" in spite of

Garber's efforts to do away with this emancipatory ideal by renaming it a "mode of articulation."

The problem of terminology will become more apparent after taking a look at the way Garber's book is structured. In light of the subject matter, it seems appropriate to include a description of what the book was wearing, when I picked it up in its hardcover edition, towards the end of last year. Since that time the more affordable paperback version has been released, but the appearance of the cover remains unchanged.

The jacket color is purple, trimmed in salmon and mint. The lettering is black and white and sans-serif, the title in a style reminiscent of Miami Beach art deco. On the back cover a blurb of praise elicited from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., pronounces *Vested Interests* "a big book in every



Josephine Baker

sense." The front cover features a 1979 Paul Wunderlich painting of a diaphanous gown with breasts and also a penis and testicles of its own, an image which seems not so much an homage to, as an outright plagiarism of an almost identical painting by René Magritte. The Wunderlich painting is called *Hermaphrodite in a Hermaphrodite-shirt*. The front flap implies the contents of the book by means of a litany of questions—"Is transvestism a sign of homosexuality?" "Why is Peter Pan played by a woman?"—while the back flap pictures the author and her dog. A caption states that the author is pictured in leather, a fact not immediately apparent, and that her dog, Wagner, is in fur.

I've described the book's jacket before describing the body of its argument, because that argument is devoted to the subsumption of the question of the human body's identity and authenticity under the more fundamental problem of its clothing. Garber argues that dress is not the inevitable extension of identity, but that it is constitutive of identity itself. The central issue for Garber, then, is the questionable facticity of the body, and the singular role of clothing as a mode of articulation that is not to the body as is a figure to its ground, but, rather, the reverse of this relation. Garber's analysis turns on the revelation, "epistemologically intolerable to many people," that the body is not the ground, but the figure, that gender is not represented, but exists only as an effect of representation: "This is the subversive secret of transvestism." In order to clarify this secret—which, in spite of its obvious importance to the argument, arrives extremely late in the text—Garber quotes Roland Barthes paraphrasing Hegel: "As pure sentence, the body cannot see *Third Sex*, page 16

the BOOKPRESS

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A Bite of the Apple



Gunilla Feigenbaum

New York, March 1993

Out-of-town visitors, from as far away as Europe or as close as Hoboken, always comment on the peculiar flavor of New York City. They wax poetic about the energy, unique to this city, ever present, day and night, the engine of mankind humming away. Living here, I agree of course, soaking up the comments and interpreting them as flattering, the way a loving parent listens for an occasional kind word about a child everyone knows is hell on wheels.

Everything here does seem to move faster. All business is conducted with singular expedience (and accompanying rudeness). It takes some getting used to. I have a friend who recently moved back East after taking a 20-year nap in California. Watching him adjust is like watching a sci-fi movie about a man who got stuck in outer space for half his life. It begs for both pity and contempt. There are probably things he knows how to do, which I don't, like how to have a meaningful conversation that starts with "What's your sign?" or which fork you use when you eat fish served with mango sauce (is it the dessert or the main course?), but living skills aren't fixed—they are location-determined and it seems that my friend Gregory lacks the most fundamental proficiency.

Take the seemingly simple activity of walking. At least Gregory lived in the San Francisco area, so he *does* walk, unlike L.A. acquaintances whose Nikes have never kissed a pavement. New Yorkers, of course, all walk, hence the location-specific

fashion of running shoes as an appropriate accessory to a Brooks Brothers suit or a mink coat. New Yorkers walk fast and to their right

of the sidewalk, like traffic. (Sometimes the side changes, because of some snafu like construction or a corpse, but when it does, everyone smoothly adjusts with no loss of speed.) New Yorkers don't walk fast because they are in a hurry—not all of them are, although all *claim* that they are. You don't admit to having time on your hands in this city anymore than you admit to liking ketchup in Paris. You walk fast because everyone else does and to do otherwise would be to obstruct traffic. I have long suspected that the pace is set by the first person who walks down 5th Avenue in the morning. You walk fast even if you don't know where you're going. If you want to hesitate, you go home and do it. You don't ever do it



sidewalk. Gregory ambles in the middle. You don't look up at the buildings. Only tourists look up. They look at the skyscrapers. New Yorkers look waist-high at the oncoming fellow pedestrians. You don't look people in the eyes. Only tourists look people in the eyes. When you cross the street you don't just check the direction the traffic is coming from. That's the least of your worries. You check the other direction, which is where the messengers on bikes will come from. The bikers in New York don't have to observe traffic rules. They can and do run red lights. They exceed the 30-miles-an-hour speed limit. They also bike on the sidewalks, weaving through the pedestrians, thus avoiding serious injury. In a confrontation between a pedestrian and a bike, the bike will win. Walking New Yorkers never stop at a red light. They don't cross against the red either—the trick is to always cross in the direction of the green. We pride ourselves by being able to plot a route that never forces one to come to a halt. Plotting routes is a very New York thing to do. When Gregory gets into a cab the conversation goes something like this:

Gregory: Where are you from?

Cabby: I come de Bangladesh.

Gregory: I've never been there. Is it nice?

Cabby: Is beautiful. Very poor.

Gregory: Ah yes, poor. Is that why you came here? To make money?

Cabby: Money, yes. But is no easy. I hardly make de money de feed de dog.

Gregory: Oh wow! You have a dog! So do I! I have a German shepherd named Oscar! What kind of dog do you have?

Cabby: I don't know de kind. My neighbor give de me de feed one week, then he never come back. Where you want de go, sir?

I get in, I say: "Church and White, turn right, then right again, go down the drive to 15th Street, exit and get

on again immedately because of construction right there, then go down to Houston, exit, go to Broadway, turn right, go straight down, cross Canal, White is two blocks below, turn right and go one block."

Cabby: Where you want de go, miss?

There are no baby carriages or children on midtown sidewalks. They don't move fast enough. I don't know how toddlers are transported from one part of the city to another. Are they always in cabs? Are they carried in Bloomingdale shopping bags?

If you want to see baby carriages, you have to go to other parts of Manhattan. My favorite walk when I'm in the mood for babies is from Chinatown to Greenwich Village. Take a cab to Mott Street and Canal Street and stroll around for a while. Buy some vegetables you've

never seen before (Don't ask what to do with them. No one is willing to tell you.) Continue up Bowery a few blocks and turn right for Orchard Street and the Jewish section, full of discount stores and street vendors. Bargain if you buy something. If you want knishes like your bubba made them you can find them here, and the service is something to be remembered. They treat you like you're uncle Izzie who deserted the family and will never be forgiven. Or turn left and experience what's left of Little Italy. Chinatown has grown to take over most of it but you can still find some terrific salami and get a decent cup of espresso and some pre-New-Age pastry.

Continue north on Broadway and west on Broome, then zig-zag Spring Street and Prince Street. There are lots of art galleries and fun stores with unusual objects and clothing. People wear interesting post-modern clothes and hair. Have a bite to eat in Manhattan Bistro on Spring Street. Now cross Houston Street into Greenwich Village.

You'll have seen lots of baby carriages.

Right below Chinatown is City Hall, where many New Yorkers have some of their most harrowing experiences. It's where you go to have your driver's license renewed, get a marriage license, or have an alien card issued or replaced. When I was given my card 27 years ago it was called a Green Card, but now it is no longer green and that association of "green" and "money" isn't appropriate (if it ever was). New immigration laws have it that all the old cards must be replaced, so we, who never thought we'd have to go through the horror of dealing with US Immigration and Naturalization again, find ourselves once more in the toils of the bureaucracy. I might have resisted, but I wouldn't want to ruin some person's greatest ambition, which I would, should I take it in my head to clean that person's house someday, and that person later was appointed to a Cabinet position and called to account before a Senate committee of untarnished white men whose houses are cleaned by elves.

Hence I found myself, in the blinding light of a too-early morning, standing in a long line to go through a metal detector, the first of many long lines. Once I had entered, I then stood on another line to receive a tag with the number 424. Looking for a place to sit and wait, I noticed that the number being served, as displayed on a lit board, was 161. There were some 500 people in the room and more were pouring in. All languages were spoken, except English. A sign proclaimed "No Smoking. No Eating or Drinking" in English, French, Greek, Spanish, and Portuguese. Ten window tellers were hard at work. Now and then one of them would say through a loudspeaker, "Anyone here speaking Russian and English?" "Anyone here speaking Creole and English?" "Anyone here speaking Indian and English?"

Indian???

It was a great place for people-watching. Minuscule Guatemalans sat next to Italian businessmen with Rolex watches. Turbaned Sikhs and Polish grandmothers. The thrill wore off after a few hours, giving way to stupefying boredom and the ensuing rage that is born from humiliation. The number of window-tellers shrank to three as they left for lunch and the lines crawled to a virtual halt. Children, hungry and thirsty, fussed and cried. People got mean and started fighting over seats. After three and a half hours my number was called, a city worker who had gotten her diploma in non-personal rudeness looked over my papers, signed them, and sent me to another line for fingerprinting. This one had some 300 people and you had to stand in it. No number, no sitting, one city official inking and printing. By now, no one was amused and the line was in a riotous mood, trading insults with guards and commiserating about the US.



I was done at 4 p.m. The whole day, and a total of maybe seven minutes spent with someone actually doing something.

I grieve the death of the Sears, Roebuck catalogue. When I got my Green Card, I was sponsored by Eileen Ford who signed me up as a fashion model because I sported the flat-chested, emaciated look that was considered the height of female charm in the mid sixties. I understand the catalogue is an American institution, an icon from pre-shopping mall days when it was the only way you could get a piano in Montana. I've never lived and lacked piano in any of the rectangular States, but I think fondly of Sears, Roebuck, which was a haven for models like me.

The hourly rate for a Ford model back then was \$60 an hour, which was a princely sum. The problem was, you didn't always work, and if you worked for magazines, they paid only \$15 or \$20 an hour because it was considered a boost to a model's career to appear on the editorial pages. And they'd get creative and do awful things to you, like put green paint on your lips and live hamsters in your hair. You were a canvas to their abstract expressionism. General advertisement bookings were also problematic because everyone

was paranoid and nasty, the stylists would stick you with pins, the clients would be there to look and try to get a date, and the atmosphere was one of rapacious cupidity.

Then there were catalogues, and Sears, Roebuck was king. If they booked you once, they'd book you again. As a Sears, Roebuck model, your rent was secure that year. Their demands were reasonable: you show up on time with your make-up on and your eyelashes in place, bringing your wardrobe of wigs (to change your appearance from one shot to another.) There were no make-up artists or hairstylists to torture you. It was assumed that a girl knew how to comb her own ponytail. Motherly women would steam-press your polyester pantsuit (elastic waistband, double-breasted styling with fashionable safari pockets, sixteen colors, sizes 6-18, wash and dry.) They'd dress you, pin the back, and stuff a ton of tissue paper in the front. Sears, Roebuck hated creases of any kind,

including natural body creases, so you were made to look completely smooth. You'd be warned not to sit down under any circumstances—"I hope you've already been to the bathroom, dearie"—and then ushered into the studio where the photographer waited with his Hasselblad. Other photographers used 35-millimeter cameras, and you had to shimmy in a yoga position while they used up two rolls of film on a single outfit. At Sears you struck one of the three accepted poses, the lights were adjusted, you were told to wet your lips and smile, then "drop the left hand, smile again, thank you" for a second shot, and then you were done. Change clothes and hair, do the next shot. If your booking ran past lunch they gave you a tuna salad sandwich and a Pepsi. They paid the full \$60 an hour, and it was nice to model something that could be worn to Wally's Wafflehouse in Boise, Idaho, for Sunday brunch instead of vinyl hot pants with Saran Wrap on top which surely no one could wear anytime, anyplace, in any charted universe, with the one possible exception of New York City.

"A Bite of the Apple" is a regular column by our not-so-far-flung correspondent and illustrator Gunilla Feigenbaum who lives in New York City.

Off Campus**At The Bookery**

The Bookery Winter/Spring lecture series continues Sundays at 4 p.m. in the new lecture space in Bookery II.

March 14

**Gail Holst-Warhaft**

will give a talk entitled "The Poisoned Omelette: Women's Laments and Greek Tragedies" concerning why Greek women's laments were banned in antiquity. Her just-published book is *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. Holst-Warhaft is a lecturer in classics and comparative literature at Cornell University.

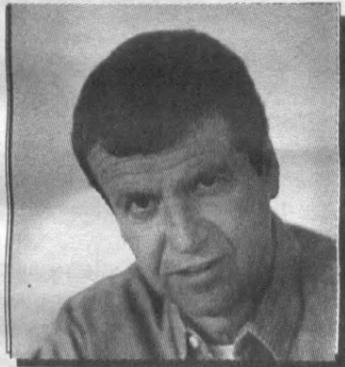
April 4

Sandra Bem

professor of psychology and women's studies at Cornell, will talk about our culture's assumptions concerning sex and gender and how they shape society, which is also the subject of Bem's new book, entitled *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*.



April 18

**Dan McCall**

professor of English at Cornell, will read from his soon-to-be-published novel *Messenger Bird*, which concerns two years in the life of a young surgeon assigned by the Public Health Service to a 25-bed hospital on a Native American reservation in the Southwest.

May 2

Deborah Tall

will read from and talk about her just-published book entitled *From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place*. Tall is a poet and non-fiction writer and a professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.

**The Bookery**

DeWitt Building, 215 North Cayuga St., Ithaca

For more information call (607) 273-5055

Canal Walking**King of the Once Wild Frontier**

Robert Schichler
Spillway Press, 120 pp., \$8.95

William Lonberger

Though it begins with a serial murder, *King of the Once Wild Frontier* is not a murder mystery. Though it deals with the Erie Canal, it is not a study of local history. Though it takes place in the early 1970s and includes television trivia from the '50s and '60s, it is not a book of nostalgia. It is difficult to put a genre handle onto Robert Schichler's work, for *King of the Once Wild Frontier: Reflections of a Canal Walker* is a phantasmagorical excursion along the towpath of the Erie Canal and the mind of the author. It is a concoction of truth and fantasy whose characters include Jiminy Crickey, Smokey the Bear, Bucky Beaver, a deformed elk, obstinate school boys, a toad-riding fly, lunatic entertainers in various guises, and the canal walker who would be king of this menagerie.

A teen-age girl in red shorts is staring down where I sit, a royal clown in a coonskin crown, on a stone throne at the water's edge.

"What are you writing?" she repeats.

"...just recording a few rants and ravings of an old king, that's all."

"Are you a king?" she asks in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Yes, that I am, your ladyship, that I am."

The duties of a canal walker are to walk along an assigned section of the canal during the summer and watch for leaks. This novel follows the walker "king" as he journeys along his designated realm of the waterway and chronicles his thoughts and experiences. Reality and reflection fuse in the story so that the worlds of television, actuality, and imagination blend together into the surreal kingdom of the out-cast canal walker and a sort of amusement park designed by Dali.

...reflections reflect unreality in their deception of human perception, existing in the eyes of a particular beholder...

Divided into three parts and experimental in nature, the narration in *King* shifts from second person in the opening section where the reader finds himself playing the role of canal walker, to third person in the middle, and concludes in first person. In each part, the king must walk along the canal's towpath which is a sort of tightrope separating the real world of his wild frontier on one side and the reflective world of the waterway on the other. It is along this Spencerport to Brockport towpath that most of the novel's action takes place.

Though humorous on the surface, *King* is not just light reading. Replete with references to classical literature, philosophy, Christianity, local history, TV trivia, and mythology, *King* also never takes itself too seriously, reminding one of Vonnegut's caustic satire of and the absurdity of Tom Robbins.

I believe in stream of consciousness, in free verse, in free love. I believe in Walt Disney, the Great Grandfather Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in his son, Jiminy...

Though the king's world is in chaos and the fantastic episodes flash before the reader like a cartoon on fast forward, Schichler is in total control. He knows exactly what he wants to accomplish. Each paragraph presents vivid images:

But listen: crickets—thousands upon thousands of them, igniting sparks with the friction of their wings—lights, flashes, swirling ashes—the air is alive!

Like Blake, Schichler's influence is the "unlimited territories of the imagination." And through these territories, we accompany the king on his rounds as he highlights the absurdities of media, authority, religion, nature, and our own inflated concepts of ourselves.

Now I am a man of reflections and as I sit here at the center of my universe, many snares avail themselves to my outward gaze. I see many men caught up in webs of self-delusion...

King is an effective allegory of the conflicting dualities of the left side/right side brain. Coming to terms with these dualities within the reflective dimensions of the metaphorical environment provided by the canal is the major source of the novel's conflict, which climaxes with an artful debate between the coonskin-crowned canal walker and a tormenting court jester. As a result, the enlightened king comes to the understanding that, in order to survive, he must cease lamenting about the dualities of existence and plunge himself into its fullness.

I look down. At the same time, a frightened—yet inquisitive—face stares upward at mine...I jump... And there you are, in the midst of it all, leaping out of those depths as I plunge ever downward from these heights. I'll meet you half way... The mirror shatters...you and I are merging: our brains bubbling, our bloods boiling in union, mingling in utter confusion. We've become One!

A native of Rochester, Schichler received his B.A. and M.A. in Literature from SUNY at Geneseo and attended SUNY at Binghamton, earning his doctorate in Old English. A canal walker once himself, the author is presently a professor of Old English at Arkansas State University. A noted upstate photographer, Schichler's photographs of the canal illustrate this novel.

King of the Once Wild Frontier is published by Spillway Press, a Rochester-based writers' cooperative publishing house focusing on writers from the canal region.

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William Lonberger is a writer living in Kenmore, NY.

Plugged-in Poetry at State of the Art

Lisa Neville

Kurt Cline, a poet and performance artist from San Francisco, California, is currently curator of the reading series at State of the Art Gallery in downtown Ithaca. He is the author of three books of poetry, among them Brave Words for A Deadman (e.g.) and Strange Occurrences (SFSU Press). He teaches writing at SUNY Cortland and Ithaca College.

LN: Why did you start the State of the Art reading series?

KC: Well, I moved to Ithaca about two years ago from San Francisco, and I felt something lacking here, especially as regards poetry, the written word. Although there were a few occasional readings, there was no single series where people could see and hear—on a regular basis—poets and writers who were living and working in the local community.

LN: Is this only a poetry reading then?

KC: No, not at all. For instance, in January we featured Fred Wilcox who is a novelist and a nonfiction writer. Formerly we've had writers such as Jon Frankel who are prose writers as well as poets. We've also had musicians—Kathy Ziegler, a popular local musician, was also featured in January. We've had poets who are giving their first public reading ever, as well as professional, extremely accomplished poets, such as Ted Pearson. My idea was to have a kind of broad-spectrum reading where really anyone who lives and works in the Ithaca area would have an opportunity to read or perform, if not as a feature, then as part of the open reading.

LN: The open reading is important?

KC: Absolutely. There is an open reading following each featured performance and anyone who desires to can come up and read a poem, sing a song, basically anything they want.

LN: There's also visual art, mute but ever present in the space.

KC: Yes. State of the Art is a collectively run art gallery and they have been gracious enough to allow the reading series in their space. It's the kind of reading where people really go to listen to the work. That's very nice. I was nurtured at the cafe or bar poetry readings in the Bay Area and though there's a lot to be said for that, at times it's difficult to

get your work across because you're reading over the clack of pool balls in the background, the clink of glasses, people throwing beer bottles across the room, and so on. This is a very mellow place to read.

LN: Are you going to perform at this series?

KC: I will be performing in a multimedia presentation in April with a visual artist, originally from Syracuse, who now lives in Ithaca, Robin Mizener. We'll be presenting a combination of visual art, performance, and poetry.

LN: And go-go dancing?

KC: And go-go dancing.

LN: You come out of and have been influenced by a melange of different schools, the street poets, the surrealists, the Beats, who were a big influence in the Bay area, and of course the language poets, particularly at San Francisco State. I'm interested in how you synthesize all these different elements in your own work and how these different schools of poetry speak to each other.

KC: The poetry scene today is very diverse. Though there are movements of sorts I don't think there are any singular movements that have total sway over the art. I come from a background, as you mentioned, of Beat poets, street poetry, surrealism, and the language poets—these are all forms of poetry that challenge the status quo. There are many poets who do this. There are other poets, such as new formalists—a kind of neo-conservative form of poetry—and the more traditional forms of nature poetry that I don't see as really challenging anything. The mainstream attempts to be an arbiter of taste, but actually accomplishes a sort of tired rehashing of old forms which ends up imprisoning the imagination.

LN: So what do you ask of a poem? What should poetry accomplish for you?

KC: I would want to try to get away from the whole notion of functionalism to begin with. Functionalism in its strictest sense. The way our society disseminates art forces artists into considering themselves as creators of a product for material consumption. Our university art programs are often party to this tendency of making art safe in order to make it saleable. I think of my own writing as an exploration of certain ideas, whatever their ramifications are. After this initial stage of

writing, I try to craft the piece to make it readable, but that's different than writing for a particular audience. A poem should serve the function of expanding consciousness, opening a window to an alternative perception of the world. The reader's relationship to the world should be changed because the language the poet has used forces one to inhabit another reality. Poetry should consistently blow your mind.

LN: With the impending threat of

Breton's entire attitude toward women and toward reason itself is to be questioned. He claims the power of non-logic but he always uses logical structures at least in his theoretical writings. Nevertheless, I still think it was an important project and one that is echoed today by poets seeking to alter our relationship to reality by altering our relationship to language. It's true that in a fundamental way we are our perceptions and the interplay be-

got to do something about it.

LN: That's why I'm happy to have this open reading. I've been to many open readings and I know that you have to sit through a lot of work that doesn't interest you, that you don't necessarily admire or get much out of, but then you will find work that you need to hear.

KC: That's one of the reasons I favor having open readings. There is a sense of the unexpected, that anything might happen. I really began writing because of open readings. I started writing for the public at the International Cafe in Berkeley in the mid-'70s at an open reading series run by a man named Paladin, who was my first anti-mentor. Although he wrote beautiful and sometimes quite elegant verse, he was a biker and a strong individual who always had a weapon on his person, and the way he ran the poetry readings was consistent with his personality. For instance, in an open reading, the emcee's job is to introduce the readers in the order in which they appear on the sign-up list, but Paladin didn't do that. He pretty much picked names that he wanted to hear first, then he would let the other people read. Also, if he didn't like what you were reading, he'd just pull the plug on the mike in the middle of your poem, and if you didn't like it, you had him to deal with. This was extremely annoying to me at the time, but, still, it taught me a lot about egolessness. Now I don't feel that anybody can do anything to me in terms of my writing, any displeasure that anyone might put out can't really undermine me.

LN: So you had to give up your ego attachment to your work?

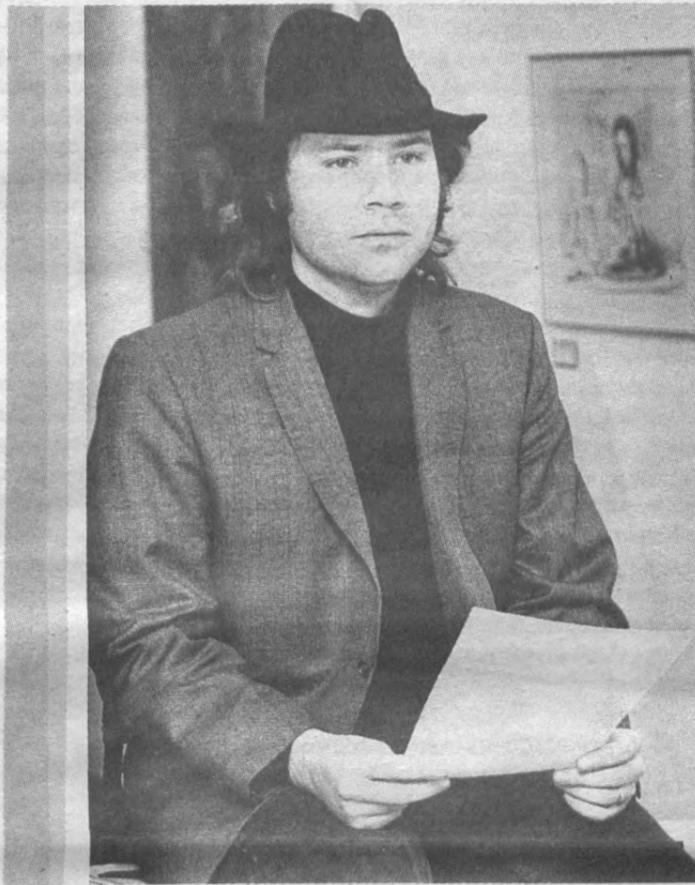
KC: Either that or start packing a pistol. Before I'd ever read anything, I was going to these readings and listening and I'd see Paladin on the street. So one time I asked him, what is a poet, what does a poet do, what's your gig? And he advised me right then and there to give up writing immediately. It's a terrible thing, he said, you'll never make any money, the most you might hope for is you might, *might*, occasionally get laid.

LN: It seems as though you ignored his advice.

KC: But you know, he was right.

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Lisa Neville is a writer living in Ithaca.



Photograph: Rebecca Berg

Kurt Cline

the new world order, the secret government, nuclear war, mass starvation, the rise of the national security state, all of these issues that need to be addressed, why is poetry important? Why does art matter?

KC: Art is more important than ever because in order for things to change there has to be a fundamental change in human consciousness.

LN: How can manipulating language change our consciousness?

KC: The surrealist project was and is to connect love, revolution, and art. It represents a revolution in consciousness. Now, of course, the surrealists have kind of fallen out of favor in recent days, and the sort of hard line that Breton held and

tween our mental activity and our perceptions determines our reality, and, in a fundamental way, who we are.

LN: What would you advise someone here in Ithaca who feels unconnected to other writers and wants to start something?

KC: You've got to do it yourself, make something happen in whatever way you can, with whatever powers and skills you have at your disposal. So many writers are waiting for that big chance, that big break, that publisher to make it happen for them. If you're writing poetry and you put your poems in your desk, you shouldn't complain that nobody respects you. You've

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Serpent

continued from page 1

That's the whole point of art."

Almanac of the Dead is broad and ambitious in its scope; over 700 pages long, it covers half a millennium and details the lives of more than 70 characters. About the writing of the novel, Silko says, "I locked myself up four to five hours a day, five days a week for six years. Altogether I worked for ten years making sure that the words are the way that I wanted them there on the page."

In form and tone, *Almanac of the Dead* was inspired by remnants of old Aztec and Mayan almanacs. In an interview with Eugene Marino of *The Times Union*, Silko says, "The old Mayan almanacs were constructed of narrative, and that's why I thought, aha, you could have a novel that was an almanac, because the old almanacs were many different narratives."

The central image that emerges at the end of the novel, a thirty-foot sandstone snake that appears near a uranium mine, is based on the 1980 appearance of such a snake at Laguna Pueblo. Silko says she now realizes that the snake unconsciously influenced her in the whole novel; she has even done a mural inspired by the snake on the outside of her Stone Avenue studio.

"Its immediate message is to look south in the direction of coming," Silko says of the snake. "But, of course, this is my interpretation of the stone snake as a novelist. I'm not a Pueblo holy person, so I have no idea of the whole message, and in a way it doesn't matter. I mean I know the rumor that went around, but the fact

that this rumor was public tells you right away that it's not the true interpretation. The rumor was that the snake had won. Of course, we saw right away the snake didn't win. Your world uranium prices fell, the mine closed, and the mountain that some people thought the snake was going to devour, the mountain's still there. But I would never want to say, oh, this is what the people at Laguna say

the stone snake means, no way. This is just what I did as a novelist."

When asked if the giant snake can be linked to the return of the Aztec plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl, Silko said that it would be wrong to assume that there is "only one Quetzalcoatl in any one place"; equally erroneous is the assumption that when the plumed serpent appears in the novel, it is always "operating along Aztec narrative lines." Silko says that "the giant snake belongs to all of the tribes in the Americas, and in Africa too" (in West Africa, the snake is known as Damballah). She also makes a distinction between Middle Eastern religions, like Judaism and Christianity, that fear the snake and those that revere it; she says that "snake-worshipping cultures are often matriarchal, they're very earth-oriented. The religions that oppose snakes tend to be negative toward women and toward the earth."

Almanac of the Dead chronicles the violent demise of materialistic, individualistic, and destructive Anglo-European culture and anticipates the reclamation of the Americas by Native peoples. With the exception of Sterling, however, the Native characters in the novel also participate in destructive rituals and violent means of obtaining power

and vengeance. I asked Silko if she felt that this undermined the novel's critique of such behavior and the efforts of the Native people to reclaim the land, or if it was, perhaps, a reaction of self-defense to the injustices suffered by the Native peoples.

"Well, I do think that that's what the characters would argue. I am the *Almanac* maker, and so I want that kind of tension to exist even among the Native American characters, because I am trying to be morally realistic. As I try to suggest with my references to Montezuma the Sorcerer, there is a strong possibility for violence and negative behavior on the part of Native American people, because they are human beings. Why

would they be different from Europeans to that extent? It always amazes me that, after all the violence Europeans have used against Native people, that anyone would be surprised if the tables were turned. That just might happen, but that's not Indian behavior; that's human behavior, and that's why all oppressors, whatever color they are, worry so much. Look at the mixed-blood character, Menardo, with his bulletproof vest; you know that's all about projecting the bad things you've done on your victims. But I don't want to pull punches and say, oh yes, you can be sure that all of the Native American people who want to retake the land are going to do it in the most pure and nonviolent magical way. I'm not going to promise that. What I try to do is show. I don't align myself with any one character.

"I do try to keep them mostly in a position where they can say, well, when someone is trying to kill you, you are allowed self-defense. And in some way that's scary. But someone is trying to kill us; hasn't anyone noticed? Terrible things have been done. The earth is being killed. But I don't agree with all of the things that my characters

do at all." According to Silko, "Anyone who would, at this point in the late 20th century, try to write a novel in which the reader is certain that the way is morally clear and that the characters are morally clear—that is a fairy tale, a repression and denial of how complex the human psyche is. What a complex situation we're in now with the earth."

One of Silko's notions in *Almanac of the Dead* is that "natural forces could push the United States further in the direction of a big economic collapse." After some of the fierce storms and natural disasters lately, Silko feels "that indeed the earth is starting to let human beings know that they have crossed over some lines. When *Almanac of the Dead* came out in November, 1991,

one of the reviewers poked fun at the notion that you can have riots, fires, earthquakes, all these things at once, but then Southern California had twin earthquakes, riots, and the big Oakland fire. The reviewers poked fun at the notion that somehow natural disasters could help bring down the US government, but when Hurricane Andrew hit Florida before they had even finished repairing the damage in South Carolina from Hurricane Hugo, the government began to see what natural forces could do to a country."

When asked how the natural landscape functions in her fiction, Silko replied: "It's pretty central in the Pueblo cosmology, and that's what most influenced me. From the

time I was an infant, I was raised by people who regarded the earth, weather, animals, and plants as all related. In western European culture, people try to objectify nature, make it separate from themselves; but I grew up with people who felt themselves totally integrated with nature, so we were part of the landscape. Of course the definition of 'landscape'—it comes into the English language fairly late—implies someone standing outside or away from. That word is sort of meaningless in the Pueblo culture. It goes without saying that we are natural beings; we're natural forces, as much as the coyotes, or the plants, or the trees. We don't separate ourselves; we're no better and we're no worse. If you have that kind of background, yes, place and the story are really one.

"For example, in the title story in *Storyteller*, when the woman who takes on the duties of storyteller runs out on the ice and makes the trading post guy fall through, that's an act of vengeance that works back through

time, an act in present time and past time, and it's also her working with the natural feature of that place. In the Pueblo oral tradition, that's how important landscape or place is. These oral narratives are what I was trained on, what I heard growing up, and unconsciously that's what I've done."

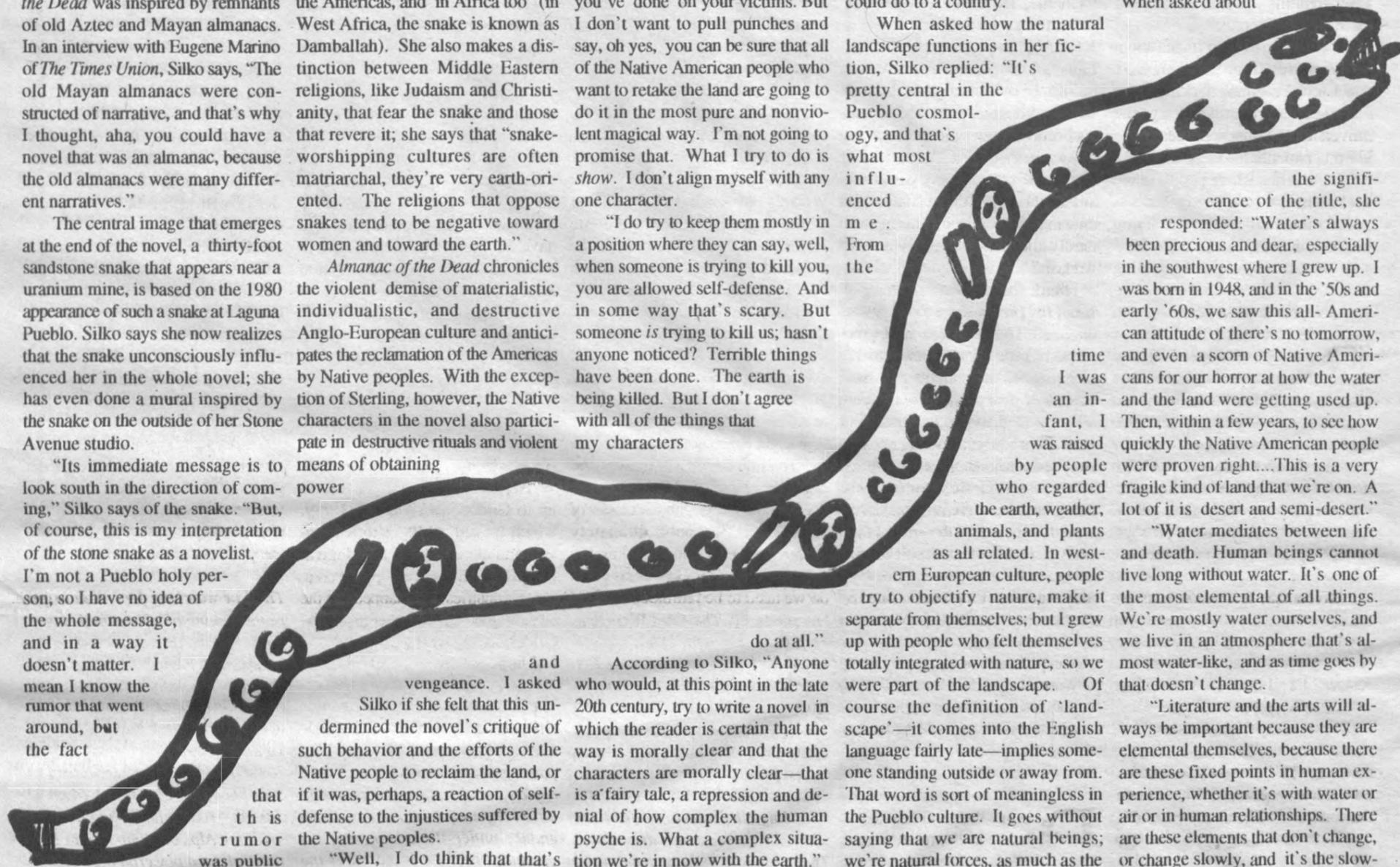
Silko is currently working on *Sacred Water*, which will feature a collection of personal narratives and photographs taken from her experiences in the Southwest and in Alaska. When asked about

the significance of the title, she responded: "Water's always been precious and dear, especially in the southwest where I grew up. I was born in 1948, and in the '50s and early '60s, we saw this all-American attitude of there's no tomorrow, and even a scorn of Native Americans for our horror at how the water and the land were getting used up. Then, within a few years, to see how quickly the Native American people were proven right...This is a very fragile kind of land that we're on. A lot of it is desert and semi-desert."

"Water mediates between life and death. Human beings cannot live long without water. It's one of the most elemental of all things. We're mostly water ourselves, and we live in an atmosphere that's almost water-like, and as time goes by that doesn't change.

"Literature and the arts will always be important because they are elemental themselves, because there are these fixed points in human experience, whether it's with water or air or in human relationships. There are these elements that don't change, or change slowly, and it's the slowness of the change that makes art possible."

Lori Burlingame is a graduate student at the University of Rochester. Illustration: Emily Goldman



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Nick Gillespie

Recently, prior to having the students in my composition class read a few essays about television shows, I asked offhandedly if anyone knew when TV was invented, or who had invented it. Nobody had any idea, and I realized that my own hazy recollection of a Philo Farnsworth postage stamp hardly represented substantial knowledge.

Given that television has become massively dominant so quickly, it's odd how little we really know about it (quick: who's C.F. Jenkins? John Logie Baird?). It might as well have dropped from the skies, a gift (or curse) from the gods. Familiar statistics indicate the dominance of TV: 98% of households own at least one set, 65% have more than one, and 60% subscribe to cable (typically receiving between 30 to 60 channels). Thirty-five million households watch their VCRs during prime time every week, and the typical viewer watches about 20 hours of TV per week. (Perhaps to make up for what they missed in a childhood without TV, people over the age of 55 average 26 hours a week.)

Despite Marshall McLuhan, whose ghost hovers over TV like a guardian angel, the tube has been the target of a number of especially

vituperative polemics. Books like *The Plug-In Drug*, *Media: the Second God*, *The Glass Teat* (and its sequel, *The Other Glass Teat*), and *Telegarbage* have all tried their best to kick in the small screen, and over the years the assumption has been set in concrete that watchers of the "idiot box" are idiots themselves.

As Neil Postman put it in his 1985 anti-TV jeremiad, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "The result of all this is that Americans are the best entertained and quite likely the least well-informed people in the Western World." Although Postman didn't blame all the problems in America on TV, he did come fairly close. "The language of radio newscasts has become, under the influence of television, increasingly decontextualized and discontinuous, so that the possibility of anyone's knowing about the world, as against merely knowing of it, is effectively blocked."

Mark Crispin Miller, author of *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* (1988), extended Postman's argument and slopped a good deal of blame on the victims. "Those who have grown up watching television are not, because of all that gaping, now automatically adept at visual interpretation. That spectatorial 'experience' is passive, mesmeric, indiscriminating, and therefore not conducive to the refinement of the critical faculties." But Miller doesn't let the producers off easy, either. "Everybody watches [TV], but no one really likes it... Its only champions are its own executives, the advertisers who exploit it, and a compromised network of academic boosters... TV has no spontaneous defenders, because there is almost nothing in it to defend."

Despite the good deal that's true in Postman's and Miller's critiques, their inexact overstatements have constructed a straw man, and a problem with straw men is that they tend to go up in smoke. In *Teleliteracy*, "Baby Boomer-turned-TV-critic" David Bianculli wants to light the match. "I'm more than willing to be a 'spontaneous defender' of television," writes Bianculli:

The best of TV is very good indeed, and...the idea of indiscriminately

ridiculing or avoiding the medium of television displays no more intelligence than denouncing all movies as fluff, or holding a "Don't Open a Book Day."

In "delivering the carefully considered opinion of a professional TV viewer," Bianculli pushes the concept of "teleliteracy" as "something to be embraced, not denounced.... From *Sesame Street* to *60 Minutes*, from the PBS documentary *The Civil War* to the TV coverage of the Gulf War, television is too important and pervasive to be dismissed as a crass medium."

Bianculli provides the reader with a historical overview of television, from the 1923 "broadcast" by C.F. Jenkins of his "waving fingers," to demonstrations at the 1939 World's Fair and the establishment of the major networks in the late 1940s, to the developments of the current day. He also does a fair job of chronicling the "mass contempt" TV has always inspired ("I can only imagine very stupid people looking at it," wrote H.L. Mencken in 1947) and contextualizing those critiques in relation to the ones faced by other mass media such as comic books, radio, and rock music.

Teleliteracy also stresses the critical response of TV viewers, and does a lot to dispel glib dismissals of them. Still, the book ultimately suffers from redundancy and a limitation of scope. How many times do we need to be reminded that TV has produced *The Civil War*, *Pennies From Heaven*, *Duel*, *Cheers*, *M*A*S*H*, *The Execution of Private Slovik*, and *Trilogy of Terror*? However, in discussing Robert Thompson's college courses on TV, Bianculli introduces a more interesting picture.

"English professors used to be what TV professors are now," Thompson says of those avant-garde teachers who first brought Fitzgerald and Hemingway into their literature courses. "Later, film went through the same problems. There have always been complaints about making room for the next tier of popular entertainment."

To George Gilder, the question of TV's relevance may be moot. If he is correct, we should begin to prepare for life after

television. "By all measures," he writes, "TV was a superb technology for its time. Indeed, its presence and properties defined the time. But now its time is over. The television age is giving way to the much richer, interactive technologies of the computer age."

For Gilder, a TV set is literally an "idiot box," since the "nature of both the vacuum tube and the radio-frequency spectrum" dictated that "television would be a top-down system...a few broadcast centers would originate programs for millions of passive receivers, or 'dumb terminals.'"

In place of such a "totalitarian medium," Gilder envisions a grand future for "the telecomputer." Where TV exalts mass culture, the telecomputer "enhance[s] individualism." "Instead of a master-slave architecture, the telecomputer will have an interactive architecture in which every receiver can function as a processor and transmitter of video images and other information." Gone will be the "severe bottlenecks" of information and creativity caused by TV.

Life After Television, originally published in 1990 as part of the Whittle Direct Books "Larger Agenda Series" and reissued by W.W. Norton this past year, is a follow-up to Gilder's *Microcosm* (1989), which looked at the historical development and the technological promise of the microchip and computer industries and mapped out the advantages of microcomputers. Gilder sees a world of possibility and hope, where

The force of the microelectronics will blow apart all the monopolies, hierarchies, pyramids, and powergrids of established industrial society. It will undermine all totalitarian regimes. Police states cannot endure under the advance of the computer because it increases the powers of the people far faster than the powers of surveillance. All hierarchies will tend to become "heterarchies"—systems in which each individual rules his own domain. In contrast to a hierarchy ruled from the top, a heterarchy is a society of equals under the law.

This power shift, according to Gilder, is already underway. In 1977, he notes, "large computers costing

more than \$20,000 commanded nearly 100 percent of the world's computer power; in 1987, they commanded less than 1 percent. By 1987, there were 80 million personal computers in the world—half of them in the US—and their collective computing power dwarfed the total of large computers."

A rosy scenario to be sure, but what will a post-TV society look like? Through the use of fiber-optics and ever more efficient microchips, the "balance of power between the distributors and creators of culture" will be radically changed, "forever break[ing] the broadcast bottleneck." Because consumers will get to call their own shots, they will get what they want (and only that), when they want it. Entertainment programs, news services and information networks will all be tailored by the consumer.

Gilder, of course, sees such a shift as not only beneficial to individualism but necessary to keep the entrepreneurial spirit alive, and such an unproblematic approach to both is hardly surprising coming from the man who, in 1980, authored the supply-side manifesto *Wealth and Poverty*.

The smell of something slightly rotten lingers in the air, though, especially when the discussion turns to the new forms of narrowcast entertainment programming. Consider the puniness of the payoff:

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To be fair, Gilder sees such benefits as secondary. Primarily, he sees the telecomputer as the means of reinvigorating those institutions ("family, religion, education, and the arts") "that preserve and transmit civilization to new generations."

Gilder seems to understand that technology is not some magic rocket see *Hyperspace*, page 11

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Rooms in College... Memories of

I recoup as best I can the England of December, 1948, when peace was new and everything still scarce. Everyone you met was a survivor, but by then we took the reprieve for granted, and I, at any rate, resumed an old pastime, watching the grand opening of the season of the common cold, whose very name seemed to imply a snobbish dismissal. A Luftwaffe of viruses blitzed us that winter, no less than the Heinkels and buzz-bombs of the war, and had to be likewise endured. Life went on. How could it not?

One became ruefully aware, in the presence of so many runny noses, of the island's hinterland: that North Sea, a marine prairie on whose fringes it was never warm enough to swim or even paddle, not even in summer. Nineteen-forty-eight choked in a nasal maze. Raw-red septums showed up everywhere, and there was not a dry eye to be seen. Had it been this bad in 1945 and 1946? No one had noticed. And in the interim the winter had been mild, or the cold-season had taken a year off. But 1948 was glacial and a stern reminder that things were back to normal.

Against this backdrop, a ritual began that only observant malingers at railway stations, or on trains, could spot. You had to know the signs of this English equivalent to the running of the bulls, in which, as Hemingway and others had taught us, the young men of Pamplona, or wherever aficionados gather, dash through the streets only a few yards ahead of fated beasts). English youths in their middle teens, in green or brown sports jackets and unpressed gray flannels, boarded trains to Oxford and Cambridge, where, accommodated in the college of their choice and looked after by venerable servants as if already among the elect, they would sit scholarship examinations whose appalling demands belied the open-mindedness of the examiners. Knowledge counted for something. I was told before each of my own peregrinations by steam from the Victoria Station, Sheffield, to the juvenile *concours* of that year, but it was imperative to display—what were those enviable attributes unfurled before me like pavilion-awnings from the field of the cloth of gold?—flair, originality, style, panache, and class. These, or any one of them, singled one out from the common ruck, or so the rumor went. Not knowing very much (and, in the first of the two Cambridge examinations I took, obliged to perform in both English and French), I myself needed as much flair et cetera as could have wafted the Sun King Louis XIV and his court to Alpha Centauri, or some equally silly place, in the exact time of one levee.

Dazzle them, said my mentors at school on the eve of my departures, none of them I think intending to evoke Diaghilev's *Etonne-moi!*, addressed to Jean Cocteau, of neither of whom neither they (I suppose) nor I (certainly) had heard. Yet one bell rang. I knew Rousseau's *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker* almost

by heart, and saw that one of his notions—that of at least being *different*—I must not only take to heart but, during my candidate week, enact with choreographic zeal. It was like being obliged, within the confines of those much-climbed-over ancient college walls, to soar beyond the human race, yet without going too high. If one achieved excessive solar apogee, he would seem better suited to a rest clinic in the provinces than to a court near Cam or an Oxford quad, or, at worst, a teacher-training college where half-wits hard-earned massive sheepskins to mount on their walls. The main

Dostoevskian than Vegas-ian, not even sure that what I was planking down on the light or the dark blue was valid currency at all, but giddily conscious of tempting the fates without getting into debt. The whole test was a lottery, even the winner uncertain of being allocated to the college of his preference, since many colleges examined jointly and then competed among themselves, over the port and walnuts, for the cream.

A solid student than I would have worried about being unable to march his data past the reviewing stand, whereas I, exhorted to twist the questions to my needs, had a



thing was to fly.

I see that in reliving these initiations I have already filched images of taumachy from the half-objectified terrors of being sixteen, and interlarded them with images of pomp, insensate splendor, and maniacal record-breaking. Besides the fear there was the intoxication: one was both bull and matador, obliged to charge nobly and not be a bore to the examiners (who looked one over afterwards, in between intensive bouts of script-reading), yet also to execute risky passes with demented elegance. The cleverest boys, I presumed, would win by staging the unthinkable illusion of being their own executioner, holding bolt-still for the most reflexive thrust of all. But no: we were young bulls only, and the delusion of each's being his own matador came from precocity overtaxed. Dry-nerved rehearsals were just that. Our swords and capes were imaginary. Our teachers were the picadors and the college dons were the matadors (an Hispanic irony I missed at the time).

At a lower level of intoxication, well below the turmoil of seeming too brilliant to live, there was the near-felony of perhaps winning a scholarship for committing crimes which, in a more prosaic ordeal, would get one failed. With nothing to lose (at worst an august farewell) and everything to gain (a potential intellectual knighthood conferred), I felt like a gambler, more

field day throughout that initial baptism-of-fire week, side-stepping and weaving, importing irrelevance like ersatz gold leaf, discarding the examination papers themselves, boldly setting and answering (or begging!) questions of my own. My strategy, I now see, was to drive the examiners out of their minds into mine. Look!, my scribbled voluntaries cried, *I am here. This is what I do. Choose me, not them (or me among the few).* After thirty-five writing hours, two interviews, and a return train journey from Cambridge with my swollen suitcase in the tourniquet of my bathrobe's cord, I began the wait. An award would bring a telegram followed a week later by a one-line listing, precious as radium, of my name among others in the better-class newspapers. In the event I received a letter, in which the Master of the college explained that I could not even be admitted as a "commoner," which was Oxbridge (a hangover from days of bone-deep grace and favor) for entrance unfunded. I had not even been allowed in.

Too tired to think in terms of catastrophe, I leniently heard out my elders, who said it had all been practice; I had not been expected to "pull up any trees," except by some eleventh-hour egregious act of God. Next year I would go again, trying for both universities, but only in English: no more French, which upset me (I preferred its literature to

ours, and still do). Back to my books I went, a chastened performing animal, sacrificing Rousseau to Wordsworth, Rabelais to Swift, my innermost mind haunted by that heady sample of the promised land, Sidney Sussex College, where Oliver Cromwell had been. I yearned dimly for the flyblown quiet of its coal-dusty rooms (even a candidate had "rooms" and not just a room), the atmospheric seethe of the fire in the grate, the kettle that boiled thereon like an hydraulic ally, the rind-stiff marmalade on the dead toast in the dining hall, the tamed lawns in the courts, the continual bells, the river-sweet fog. It had all gone up in some kind of smoke, or down, like a severed head, into the enormous picnic basket into which one laid one's script when one's best had been done, or the proctor said stop.

One could, I discovered, form a crush on a place, on a college's official polychrome scarf, its plumbing, its amber evening lamps. That I had been born for (though not into) all this, I had no doubt, and that I had, like the gauche prince of legend, been shut out, I could not believe. A god had failed, and also a boy. Imagine my puerile agonizings as, in the spring and summer that followed, I ran into fellow-competitors who, as the jargon ran, were "going up" that fall, or, worse, the elect preparing for their second or third year "in residence." I longed to go up, with all that phrase's hint of aerial promotion, and to be in residence would be enclosure in a commodious trance. Furtively, at soccer or cricket matches, I perused the foreheads of the chosen few, eventually deciding that the typical winner's brow was low, concave, and signed with three undulant creases, whereas my own, impassive mirrors proved, was high, bulged slightly, and bore no lines at all. In a desperate effort to make the mind conform, I incised three magical lines above my eyes with the round end of a nail file, admiring the look of distracted maturity I thought they conferred, until the skin regained its natural tension and I became an also-ran again.

Slogging away at my books in my third-storey bedroom, at a table to whose over-varnished top my elbows stuck fast, I ran the gamut of affronted aspiration, certain I would glide in automatically next time provided, say, I wore an olive-green shirt, or looked paler than Banquo's ghost. A more pragmatic magic, however, set me poring over paperbound volumes of past examination papers (though I shrank from looking in the back at those in whose presence I had betrayed myself last year). Within those ferrocyanide blue covers lay the keys of a genteel kingdom, perhaps in the compulsory translation from Latin (*how* could Tacitus's "*temptat clausa*," bald brace in a museum tongue, mean all of "he tried to open all the closed doors"? Was this to be my own motto, malefically secreted among the stuff of my undoing?). Or was it in the three-hour general essay paper ("Discuss logic" or "The unexamined life is not worth hav-

ing.' Consider.")? Who was I to opine on logic, expert that I was in muddle, especially after grappling with Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, in which all chairs became unreal *fascii* of qualities? As for the unexamined life, I knew only, from recent bitter ordeals, that it might actually be an unmitigated joy (no more three-hour essays) and that, in a less shallow sense, although the un-examined life might not be worth having, the examined one might not be worth living.

In nightmares I kept meeting pimply geniuses with narrow, sunken, striated brows, who jubilantly remarked on the easiness of the translation from Chinese, the "piece of cake" that the literary history paper had been (mad minutiae pincered from a continuum rolling from Homer to Haldor Laxness), and the trivial stimulus of even the hardest essay topic ("Discuss any teleology implicit, or seemingly so, in the categorical imperative"). The only consolation, idle gossip of school cloakrooms, was that these examinations were stiffer than the universities' own final degree papers; graduates (Oh what Prometheans!) had repeatedly said so, and the dons (brain-pharaohs) concurred. Almost broken on the wheel when young, the winners breezed through the ensuing three years as if playing snap. Into the bargain, if bargain there would ever be, I came from a secondary school, which sounded downright second-class (although it only denoted post-primary), not a grammar school (where they syntactically and strategically meant business), and still less a public school, meaning private, which as often as not had closed scholarships available to its own boys only. Besides, we had girls on our premises, which surely proved the school's essential lack of high seriousness. I envisioned a hypothetical secondary scholarship, available only to our school, and then dreamed up the deaths—by traffic, pneumonia, and brainstorm—of my immediate rivals, at length accepting my award with the smile of a fireball coming home to roost.

Studying previous papers, those libretti of past inquisitions, I marvelled at the arcane trophies to be had. As well as Open scholarships, which explained themselves, there were the aforementioned Closed ones, restricted to Etonians, descendants of King Canute, or anyone born west of a line drawn from Berwick-on-Tweed to Land's End, but also indiscreet or painterly-sounding *exhibitions*, wholly enigmatic *sizarships* with faint connotations of glue or paste, and bisected things called *demyships* for which one perhaps received only a half-stipend. Lowest of all were commonerships, at which I now set my cap. Of such illustrious colleges as Cambridge's King's, which may have been only for male royalty, and Trinity, only for the devout or those who thought in threes, or Oxford's Magdalen (what if one whorishly mispronounced it during interview?), and Balliol, which was full of invincibly brilliant Scotsmen who

Paul West as a Young Scholar

thought all night in calculus, I had no hopes. In fact, I was addressing my endeavors to St. Catherine's and Selwyn Colleges, Cambridge, combined, and St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. Amazing as it now seems, not every college offered an examination in English Literature, almost as if, compared with the intricate preliminaries of Medicine, Literae Humaniores, or what Cambridge forbiddingly termed Moral Sciences, it weren't a serious subject at all. Anyone worth his salt knew it backward, *hein?*, and would not persist with anything so ephemeral; but for secondary schoolboys it might just do, like them having come so recently into being, an upstart lit. for an upstart lot.

So I forgot Oliver Cromwell's college and, to equip myself with a unique, local angle, began to study the poems of Edith Sitwell, in whose family's village I was born. Not daring to present myself for interview at the portals of haunted Renishaw Hall, I schooled myself in village gossip, amassing gaudy, antagonistic yarns of Edith's ring-encrusted hands, her habit of sleeping in a coffin in ornate robes, her basilisk's eye, her Plantagenet nose like a molten string bean, the iron mask she had been forced to wear as a child. Opening the local flower show on St. Peter's cricket ground, where I had often flung red leather balls at clay-brown stumps, she looked like some hopelessly etiolated macaw, not of this aviary at all but rented for a fee to be paid in mutant orchids. Fervently I worked out close analyses of her most sensuous poems, evolving bogus theories (if indeed the expression itself is not redundant) of verbal enamel and the annular baroque, identifying at a class-conscious distance with her exotic aloofness, and even going so far afield as to rehearse little monologues on Sacheverell Sitwell's poems, Osbert's slapdash use of the dash. A contribution to knowledge it was not, but it was viaticum and exam fodder in one. After a few months immersed in *Facade* and *Gold Coast Customs*, our man from Renishaw was ready for the Goliath brains of next December's inquisitors. This time, although the two examinations almost overlapped, there would be no sixteen papers in six days (which had meant three papers on four), but, in either place, a civilized new-style trivium of Authors, Periods, and General, to be followed by an interview, at which one stood a fair chance of being incompletely exhausted. Oxford came first.

St. Edmund Hall was a tiny place just off Oxford's thunderous High Street, where University College and others were subsiding an inch each year owing to the vibration from traffic and, some decades hence, would disappear from view into a Dark-Ages compost that no doubt included the bonemeal of Oxford's heraldic ox. The formulas of arrival did not vary markedly from those of what Oxford men referred to, with jocular hauteur,

as "the other place"; yet it was a serious jocular, and what Oxford respected in its less fruity sibling was a medieval childhood held in common. Arriving at the porter's lodge, one was put into the custody of a "scout," who, presumably knowing his way through the Mohicans and Comanches of the academy, conducted one to yet another set of temporary rooms, whose absent tenant had his embossed calling card set in a little brass frame let into the oak, as the outer door was called. To be private here, for whatever purpose, one locked it, and this was known as sporting the oak. Needless to say, I sported mine as soon as I could, and took out my last-minute notes.

Furtive, voluptuous comparisons, however, strayed through my concentration. After all, I would be off to Cambridge in a couple of days. Cambridge gowns were voluminous, those of Oxford mere rectangles with ribbons. At the former, one was catered for by a "bedder," an appellation whose overtones reinforced themselves in the fact that some bedders were female. Oxford had no female scouts, however, and I detected, I thought, generalizing wildly on too narrow a base, a magistral teak in the scout, that bedders lacked; a sour politeness which proved who really ran that ancient seat of learning.

My bedroom overlooked the college cemetery, an oblong trap of headstones and curbs all at conflicting angles, as if scrambled by a minor earthquake. I thought of Paul Nash's wartime painting, *Totes Meer*, in which fragments of airplanes canted up from the bowels of a lugubrious marsh as if trying to recombine themselves into a Frankenstein flying machine: a Junkerschmitt 17, say, or a Focke-Dornier 109, which as the last trump sounded would bomb us all over again, this time with tons of methane-heavy magma. St. Edmund's graveyard threatened a like resurgence, its composite outcome a giant Latin-booming head on a sketchy trunk, come to repel boarders from the uncouth north. I shivered for all three days; the tiny Hall stood over an icy meer, I guessed, and the little electric fire in my sitting room warmed only the peeling frame. Yet the magic of old Oxenford prevailed; one came here precisely to be cold, for cold made the mind adept. The only hot water of the day arrived in a tin jug with the scout at seven a.m. and poured from a kettle at teatime. "Gently with the gas, sir, and the power," he said, as if advising how to handle two beloved artefacts. "The austerity, you know." Certainly I would be careful, gentle, with them both. The tiny kitchen reeked of grease and mousedirt, but it was Cathay to me. Some of the headstones I perused were of the fourteenth century. I had taken a train right into history, a train that did not stop and had no terminus; no matter how many times you changed, it bore you on, then dropped you off while other passengers went gratefully ahead.

Awed, and with chattering teeth, my mind intoning a round based on

the title, *Aula Sancti Edmundi*, I ran into Vice-Principal Kelly, a forbiddingly tall aquiline-faced theologian whose handshake descended diagonally from a black-clad altar six feet high. It was like shaking hands with St. Patrick himself, except that this saturnine young cleric spoke in impetuous diphthongs about having just played squash, of which game I had never heard, even though I played it later on and became almost proficient. I had never met such jovial fellows in my life, not even those who rented out donkeys at the seaside or massacred rabbits in the Sitwell woods, and could only conclude that these sublime luminaries—*Fellows* indeed—who ran colleges were forever either ill-suppressing convulsions of mirth at the awkward antics of examinees, or were tuned in to some acerbic transubstantial farce. One looked around for the master of the revels, in the dreadful iron-clanging, earthenware-cistermed lavatories, in the staircase tunnels that led from quad to quad, even in the examination room itself, where, let it be said at once, the scouts of St. Edmund continually stoked up and fussed over a fire that had no right to be indoors: a Dickensian conflagration that made me long for the moment when the hour chimed and someone said, "Gentlemen, you may begin." You literally warmed to your task as, outside in the cold, young men still in residence even during the vacation coughed and joked on their way across the quad in bulky red-and-yellow scarves.

With several other candidates, I entrained for Cambridge, an old hand on that battlefield, I reckoned, vain-

gloriously reassuring myself that, if all else failed, I was the only one of the group who had played cricket for his County's Boys. Surely Derbyshire sporting prowess would win the day should the lowdown on the Sitwells fail. I dashed a few lines home on letterhead I was not entitled to, in an envelope enhanced with St. Edmund's arms.

Weird as it felt, I was beginning to know my way round colleges. Such familiarity would never be allowed to go to waste. Again, porridge, beans, marmalade, and metallic-tasting tea began our day. Burned, flour-costive soup and vile beef curry, followed by jam tart, were the lunch. Pipsqueak ironists, we protested our conviction that England had *won* the war, not lost it, so why the front-line rations? One boy fished out a cherrywood pipe and lit it, biliously intense. We all darted out for postcards and little handbooks to the colleges. A London candidate actually purchased the college's tie, which our Oxford contingent thought a bit thick, though just as sure of ourselves as he. We invested shillings in gifts at one remove, those of the tourist rather than the rightful occupant: mugs ablaze with shields and unglossed Latin, calendars of punts on the river and daffodils on the banks.

It rained each day. There were, of course, no daffodils. We poled no punts. The college was eerily still, a bell-jar for wood smoke and the reek of boiling greens. I bought a big map of Cambridge and eyed the jet-black plan view thereon of Oliver Cromwell's college, but stayed away. I felt a gathering sense of being in the midst of what the Greeks called *kairos*, seasonal time as distinct from

mere chronicity. A thousand perceptions added up to fifteen sentences an hour, penned oblivious of clock or question. I wrote what I had come there to write, engraving the tablets before me with an horrendous mixture of gossip, purloined epigrams (just one of my own that began, "The annals of anguish belie themselves"), and quotations learned by heart and fist and squeezed through the cheesecloth of critics whose true vocation, I later saw, should have been astrology.

St. Edmund's had telephoned St. Catherine's, as if through some interdenominational holy line. I had to choose, they said; if Cambridge, it would have to be Selwyn College because it was Selwyn's turn (some such rigmarole). To ecclesiastical, redbrick Selwyn I walked, choked with mystery, but in the end chose St. Edmund, perhaps because of that ancient graveyard, or lofty Kelly in his dog collar, or those vast fires they built you to write by.

The impossible had happened. Then the possible erupted. There would be a mandatory two-year delay. While I did my military service, returning veterans would complete their interrupted studies, and then I could take up my scholarship. There was no way round it; the rule held at both places, and, it was suggested, a couple of years in uniform made a boy into a man as well as into a maturer student. But, having tasted ambrosia, I wanted a steady diet of it; I wanted to become not a man but a student, and an immature one at that. So I made what was then a sickening decision, almost as bad as going military: I settled for a redbrick university on another award I never even competed for, but which came like a free sample ion the mail after I passed a routine exam. Not quite my own executioner, but feeling every inch my own pawnbroker, I one day took the train to Birmingham, and three years later kept my appointment with Oxford, not in St. Edmund's *aula* after all, but in the college, Lincoln, that unleashed John Wesley on the pagan world. Anticlimax it surely was, yet one loaded with procrastinated joys. It began one of the happiest times of my life, perhaps because, once installed, I did next to no work at all, having done it, as it were, before arrival, during a succession of radiant summers whose uninsistent fleecy clouds partnered in my mind the blackened margins of innumerable books, and print that swam and jiggled until I knew not page from sky. I had flown blind through books, had learned the clouds by heart, confusing knowledge with magic, as always. Not facts but the fingerprints on them were my obsession; or, indeed, the etching of the whole palm: whorls, forks, asterisks, semiquavers, and scalpel-sharp crescent moons; or even, after overzealous chiromancers of the eighteenth century, the signatures or planets of our feet which, facing earth, receive the weakest light and dwell, according to one Fludd, in a

see *Rooms*, page 15



Survival

continued from page 1

our time and our greatest, if not always our best, poet. His *Collected Poems, 1947-1980* is less the record of unbroken creative achievement than a goulash of jeremiads, dreams, spells, anathemas, and prophecies, some of them galvanic, many of them soporific. A clutch of post-war American poets can lay claim to more consistent careers and sustained poetic work, but none can boast those moments of illumination that Ginsberg achieved in "Howl," "Kaddish," "Wichita Vortex Sutra," and several other spikes of consciousness. Randall Jarrell once said, "A good poet is someone who manages in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms to be struck by lightning five or six times. A dozen or two dozen times and he is great." By that standard, Ginsberg is great. Nonetheless, the example of the life and the myths attending it are likely to outlast the work. Ginsberg's writing is background to the man, evidence of his moral character, and that is why the biographers have been called in to tell the story. There is a moral tale to be told, and while not everyone finds it edifying, it does make a gripping story.

Ginsberg's life is like a Shakespeare play, veined with subplots. There is the legend of his mother, Naomi, whose fall into insanity was the main event of his youth, making hallucination his daily bread and setting into motion his own fascination with altered states of consciousness. Her death would be mourned in the greatest of his poems, "Kaddish." There is the chronicle of excess and its martyrs, the soldiers of new consciousness who stumbled and fell along the way: Jack Kerouac, who tasted success only as ashes and drank himself to death; Neal Cassady, who burned out on his own fires and died alone, sprawled along some tracks in Mexico, and a dozen others who fell from rooftops or windows, who cast themselves out of subway cars, who were shot by their husbands (Joan Burroughs) or stabbed by their lovers, "who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the walls." (See how easy it is to fall into the litany of "Howl"?) There is a history of the Beat movement; how it arose from the doldrums of the post-war years to become the top-billed cultural event in America. There is the story of the 1960s and the great battles that were fought over, it would seem, the soul of America. In those days, an entire youth culture would look at times like Allen Ginsberg's invention. There is the Hollywood/masscult/mediacult story and the transformation of the Beat image into pulp fiction (*Bang a Beatnik*, by Ira Staver; *Espresso Jungle*, by Howard Baker; *Beat Girl*, by Bonnie Golightly), Beatsploitation flicks (*The Beat Generation*, 1959; *The Beatniks*, 1960; *A Bucket of Blood*, 1960), and at least two TV series, *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-63), with Bob Denver as America's favorite Beatnik, Maynard G. Krebs, and *Route 66*, a

ripoff of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, with George Maharis playing a Kerouac look-alike. A major subplot is the story of America itself, struggling to make sense of itself and declaring war on the very writers who later became its own symbols. (This background information about the pop culture spinoffs and ripoffs comes not from Schumacher but from a recently-released CD collection from Rhino Records entitled *The Beat Generation*.)

literary than any of the other Beat writers, he rescued himself through books. What shall we make of the vision of William Blake that set his career into motion but this—that here was a man on his way down who was saved by poetry? He is a living defense of the literary vocation, and ironically honored in the academy, to whose basic

San Francisco, New York, India, Italy, France, Colorado, and Havana and Prague in 1968. Then back to the home bases: New York, San Francisco, and these days Boulder, Colorado and Cherry Valley. Ginsberg is the Wandering Jew as homosexual Buddhist minstrel, bringing the news about music, harmonic breathing, pacifism, and the cosmic mind to a world hungry to hear about such things. The "axial line" of such a life, taking a phrase

put it, "everyone plugged in at once announce [sic] the Coming Union of All consciousness...." Years later Timothy Leary would say that "we started planning the psychedelic revolution" after an evening at Ginsberg's house. After the disillusionment, Ginsberg, like many survivors of the 1960s, exchanged drugs for religion, the quest for a wider consciousness finding its final home in Tibetan Buddhism, whose "wild wisdom" had a particular appeal for him.

Therein lies the moral tale—Ginsberg's survival as others fell by the wayside, and survival, moreover, after testing life in some of its more hazardous registers. He counts as a living example of William Blake's proverb: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." And yet the Ginsberg we see these days, the smiling public man among school children, in a white shirt and tie, seems anything but a libertine, let alone a reformed libertine reciting litanies of regret for his misspent youth.

It is common enough for the libertine to become a teacher late in life, since libertines, after all, have lessons to teach. In Ginsberg's case, the odyssey of consciousness had turned him into something resembling a rabbi speaking with the voice of ancient prophets, whom he calls William Blake and Walt Whitman and Gautama Buddha, rather than Isaiah or Jeremiah. Long ago he renounced his Judaism—and sometimes in fairly ugly ways—in favor of a floating pan-denominational spirituality, later in favor of Buddhism. As a Jew he could never have spoken as he did to non-Jewish America, but as a Buddhist standing outside all the American categories, he could address us all. But behind the mantras and the sutras, the breathing and the OMMMMing, the chants and the finger cymbals, one can hear, unmistakably, the voices of ancient rabbis. Ginsberg is, willy-nilly, saturated in the manners and mannerisms of the Jewish prophetic tradition.

Despite himself, Allen Ginsberg has become the prophet from Paterson, recognizably the descendant of the Hasidic masters, the Baal Shem Tov or Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, rallying his volunteers on to holiness, be it the holiness of the naked body, the holiness of homosexuality, the holiness of the cosmic mind, the holiness of pacifism and self-control. It is difficult to imagine anything more improbable, which is why we read his biographies in such astonishment.



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Illustration: Milly Acharya

The big story, however, is one of survival and transcendence. Ginsberg's has been a mythic life. He is the legendary man who escaped the initial ground rules of his life and created himself as a visionary figure. Born into a Jewish family in Paterson, New Jersey, his father a poet and schoolteacher, his mother a communist at first and a schizophrenic later, Ginsberg was handed an unpromising life script. The most harrowing passages in this biography are the accounts of Naomi Ginsberg's breakdowns, especially the one in 1941, when a 14-year-old Allen had to guide his raving mother from bus to bus to reach a rest home in Lakewood, New Jersey. He was cut out to be a lost soul and a victim, and yet he altered the prognosis: by way of Blake and Buddhism he became that mythic American, the self-made man. More bookish, more

values—dispassionate toil, restraint, objectivity—he seems unalterably opposed.

What a long, strange trip it's been. Ginsberg has gone from being Louis and Naomi Ginsberg's baffled son to undergraduate at Columbia, which expelled him for writing obscenities on his dorm window ("who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull"), to Beat poet and cohort of Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, to advance man for magic mushrooms and the unity of all being, to international celebrity, to tone setter for the anti-War movement, to musician (who would perform with John Lennon, Bob Dylan, and The Clash), to *eminence grise* of the Other America. It has been a peripatetic life, from Paterson to Columbia to Mexico to Tangier,

from Saul Bellow, would be an odyssey of consciousness itself. "Widen the area of consciousness," he wrote in his journals, and in one way or another he lived up to that maxim all his life.

The point of departure for that, and so much more, was Naomi Ginsberg's madness, a consciousness, one thinks, dangerously widened. It progressed through Ginsberg's visionary interludes and efforts to recapture them ("who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity"). The normal catalysts for vision were either garden variety or exotic hallucinogens, the climax of this phase of Ginsberg's odyssey being his crusade in 1960 to initiate his friends into a cult of psilocybin, to get, as he

Hyperspace

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ship to the future, and that choices can and need to be made. "Technology," he writes, "is not a genie in a bottle or an overwhelming tide engulfing us from afar. It is not something that happens to us inexorably and chaotically like a Tolstoyan war. It is something we create or suppress, largely as we see fit."

At first glance, Neil Postman disagrees. In *Technopoly*, Postman extends his anti-TV critique, arguing that Western civilization generally, and the United States specifically, are surrendering "culture to technology." Although Postman makes a show of impartiality toward technology, it's clearly an empty gesture. "Every technology is both a burden and a blessing," he writes:

In the United States, where television has taken hold more deeply than anywhere else, many people find it a blessing, not least those who have achieved high-paying, gratifying careers in television...On the other hand and in the long run, television may bring a gradual end to the careers of schoolteachers, since school was an invention of the printing press... There is something perverse about schoolteachers' being enthusiastic about what is happening. Such enthusiasm calls to my mind an image of some turn-of-the-century blacksmith who... sings the praises of the automobile.

It is obvious that technological shifts have benefits and liabilities, but it seems peculiar to assert that individuals cannot adapt. What could the blacksmiths have done in the face of the automobile? he asks. "Weep, if nothing else," is his only answer.

Postman devises three kinds of cultures: tool-using cultures, technocracies, and technopolies. Tool-using cultures, which are disappearing rapidly, are characterized by tools designed to solve "specific and urgent problems of physical life" or to serve "the symbolic world of art, politics, myth, ritual and religion." More importantly, "tools did not attack...the dignity and integrity of the culture into which they were introduced." The next level (up or down, in Postman's cosmology) is

technocracy, in which "tools play a central role in the thought-world of the culture." Here, tools "attack the culture" and "bid to become the culture." Technopoly, by extension, "is totalitarian technocracy." Technopoly, elaborates Postman,

consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology. This requires the development of a new kind of social order, and of necessity leads to the rapid dissolution of much that is associated with traditional beliefs. Those who feel most comfortable in Technopoly are those who are convinced that technical progress is humanity's supreme achievement and the instrument by which our most profound dilemmas may be solved.

They also believe that information is an unmitigated blessing, which through its continued and uncontrolled production and dissemination offers increased freedom, creativity, and peace of mind.

But what does it mean that "tools did not attack...the dignity and integrity of the culture into which they were introduced"? As an example, Postman offers the mechanical clock. Clearly, the clock was not intended to attack medieval society, but all the same it worked to transform the social organization of its world. Strangely, Postman appears to concede the shakiness of his three categories. After quoting Marx to the effect that "the hand-loom gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist," Postman adds,

Marx understood well that, apart from their economic implications, technologies create the ways in which people perceive reality, and that such ways are the key to understanding diverse forms of social and mental life.

If technologies create the ways in which people think, how does one get the distance from those technologies to distinguish between good and bad ones? Underlying that distinction, however, is Postman's du-

bious vision of society as a static, monolithic entity. It is only against such a backdrop that one could declare "that's enough, we don't need any more technologies." Cultures don't work that way—they are fluid and diverse and are constantly developing and recombining.

Ultimately, Postman bemoans precisely what is celebrated in post-modernism: the loss of meta-narratives.

There are those who believe—as did the great historian Arnold Toynbee—that without a comprehensive religious narrative at its center a culture must decline. Perhaps. There are, after all, other sources—mythology, politics, philosophy, and science, for



Fanzine from *Textual Poachers*

example—but it is certain that no culture can flourish without narratives of transcendent origin and power.

This tack, this overarching need for continuity, ultimately drives him into the arms of Allan Bloom, in whom Postman senses a kindred spirit. "Bloom's solution," writes Postman, "is that we go back to the basics of Western thought...he is a moralist who understands that Technopoly is a malevolent force requiring opposition."

Postman himself sees a way out of the "great symbol drain," the eventual emptying out of a "narrative of [its] organizing power and inspiring symbols," in the figure of "the loving resistance fighter," who

in spite of the confusion, errors, and stupidities you see around you... must

always keep close to your heart the narratives and symbols that once made the United States the hope of the world and that may yet have enough vitality to do so again.

Postman extends this argument into an "idea-centered and coherence-centered" school curriculum with an aim toward historicizing "the anti-historical, information-saturated, technology-loving character of Technopoly."

Seeking to steer a course between the "postindustrialist fantasy of technical sweetness and light" and the "disempowering habit of demonizing technology as a satanic mill of domination," the editors of *Technoculture*, Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, write:

To deny the capacity of ordinary women and men to think of themselves as somehow in charge of even their most highly mediated environments is to cede any opportunity of making popular appeals for a more democratic kind of technoculture...There may be little to be gained from simply adding to the paranoia and sense of victimization that is often produced by critics of the scary new panopticon, but there is arguably much more to be lost by asserting the

"leakiness" of panoptical systems proves that the sponsors of technological rationality are on the verge of being brought to their knees.

Technoculture's range is wide and the quality consistently top-drawer. The contents cover essays on video, rap, comic books, AIDS activism, "reproductive discourse," cyerpunk science fiction, and an interview with Donna Haraway (who also contributes a "Postscript to 'Cyborgs at Large'"). The editors' contributions are particularly aimed at appropriating technology as a means of empowerment.

Ross's "Hacking Away at the Counterculture" attempts to find a way out of the epistemological labyrinth into which the "critical left" has wandered.

One of the stories told by the critical

left about the new cultural technologies is that of monolithic, pan-optical social control, effortlessly achieved through a smooth, endlessly interlocking system of networks of surveillance. Although I believe that this story, when told inside and outside the classroom, for example, is an indispensable form of "consciousness raising," it is not always the best story to tell...The critical habit of finding unrelieved domination everywhere has certain consequences, one of which is to create a siege mentality, reinforcing the inertia, helplessness, and despair that such critiques set out to oppose in the first place.

Ross finds a model for activism in computer hackers who infiltrate large computer systems and sometimes infect networks with viruses. Using the "viral attack engineered in November of 1988 by Cornell University hacker Robert Morris on the national network system Internet" as a point of entry, Ross likens the mostly white, upper-middle-class computer buffs to past icons of alienation.

It may be that, like the J.D. rebel without a cause of the fifties, the disaffiliated student dropout of the sixties, and the negationist punk of the seventies, the hacker of the eighties has come to serve as a visible public example of moral maladjustment, a hegemonic test case for redefining the dominant ethics in an advanced technocratic society.

Ross also attempts to increase the ranks of computer guerrillas. It's not just nerdy high-school and college computer geeks who learn to control such systems—office workers typically invent "strategies for slowing down the temporality of the work regime" and, on occasion, engage in "sabotage, time theft and strategic monkeywrenching."

Such protopolitical hijinks can lead to programmatic change. "Every successful hack or computer crime in some way reinforces the popular perception that information systems are not in-fallible," writes Ross, who believes that such "technoskepticism" is a precondition for meaningful action. Such analysis results, however, in a conclusion that is fairly obvious to anyone acquainted with computers.

see Hyperspace, page 14

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Stories to Grow On: A Selection

Emily Rhoads Johnson

When I was growing up in the 1940s and '50s, there were no such things as young adult books in our school libraries—at least books that were labeled as such. We jumped directly from *Black Beauty* and *Sue Barton, Student Nurse* to *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. A few titles such as *Little Women* and *The Count of Monte Cristo* helped to bridge the gap; but on the whole, kids entering their teens had to settle for stories about adult characters involved in experiences far removed from their own in both time and emotional complexity.

Today, on the other hand, teenagers can find a multitude of books written especially for them by a host of fine writers who explore themes of growth and change, alienation, loneliness, love, and the search for values. Whether the genre is realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, or mystery, the main characters tend to express the same concerns and share the same intense, chaotic emotions as their readers.

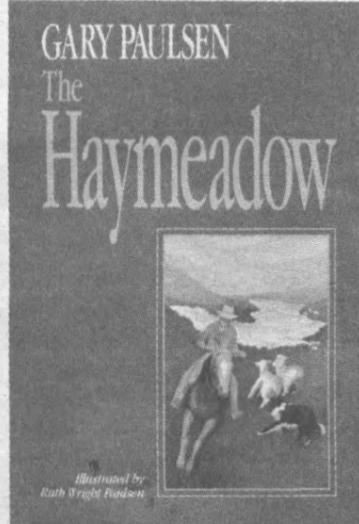
Categorizing young adult books by age group is difficult because they cover such a wide range of reading and maturity levels. Some are identified "for ages 10-14," others for "12 up," and still others for "12-adult." The definition of young adult literature, too, tends to

remain somewhat blurred. One textbook defines it as anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and twenty choose to read. Although it is generally accepted that young adult novels must have young adult protagonists, language and style can vary from fairly simple to as complex and sophisticated as that found in adult novels.

The phenomenon of young adult books is relatively new, the first ones appearing about a hundred years ago. The reason no books were written specifically for teenagers before the late 1800s is that teenagers as an identifiable group did not yet exist. Prior to the Civil War, children were recognized as—and in many ways actually became—adults as soon as they went to work, which for most children was between the ages of ten and fifteen. After the war, however, so many technological advances occurred that more years of schooling were required to train young people for new kinds of jobs. The result was the creation of a new societal category. Because teenagers hovered in a kind of limbo between childhood and adulthood, the search for identity became an ongoing issue for them, and is still a prominent theme in young adult books today.

Although a growing number of authors were writing books for teenagers before the 1960s (Maureen Daly, Betty Cavanna, Esther Forbes, John Tunis, Mary Stolz), critics

consider 1967 to be a landmark year for young adult literature, when writers and publishers turned in radically new directions. It was the year of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, about two gangs, the Greasers and the Socs, told through the eyes of a gang member named Ponyboy; and



Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender*, the story of a black boy hoping to use boxing as a way out of the ghetto. In 1968 came *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel, and in 1969 *Souder* by William Armstrong. Dozens of others followed, mostly books about teens from lower-class families grappling with the harsh realities of poverty, violence, drugs, alcoholism, abortion—topics that had barely been touched on before in books for children. The authors of these "problem novels" wrote the

way people really talked, which meant that sometimes they used profanity and ungrammatical constructions. And something else happened that was unusual in books for children: not all of these stories ended happily ever after. Not surprisingly, many adults (parents, mostly) were outraged by the new "tell-it-like-it-is" books and demanded that certain titles be banned from library shelves. Books for youngsters should extol moral virtues, they argued. They should make children feel safe and happy, not burden them with the truth.

Despite the censorship battle (or possibly because of it), and because they were exciting and offered readers a chance to read about characters with real conflicts similar to their own, these new novels continued to be popular throughout the 1970s and early '80s. Then things began to change again. The AIDS epidemic brought sex education out in the open, and television especially has assured that teenagers today are being exposed to the same information available to adults. Writers for young people must keep this constantly in mind. Young adult novels cannot be bland or watered-down or falsified in any way, or else readers will reject them as a betrayal of their intelligence and sophistication. Characters cannot be stereotypes, and the novels' central issues must really matter to the protagonists.

Avi, author of the award-winning novel, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* (Orchard Books, 1990), says in a recent issue of *The Horn Book* that "children's literature is a cry for help from adults to children." He has noticed a shift from protagonists who return home at the end of a book (*The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice in Wonderland*) to those who choose at the story's conclusion to leave home instead, which he sees as a metaphor for changing the world. He goes on to say that "fiction in children's literature is about unfairness, inconsistency, and lack of justice in the adult world. The constant struggle to adjust good with bad. Save us, we are saying to the children, save us from what you are becoming. Save us from what we are teaching you to become."

Gary Paulsen, another highly regarded author of children's books, delivered a similar message in his keynote address at a writers' conference in North Dakota that I attended several years ago. "Young people have almost no hope," he told the audience

I think it's our fault. Our parents blew it big time, and we blew it worse. Between the nuclear thing and pollution and various forms of technological ruin, we haven't given them the tools they need. We must find a different way of writing that blows the past away and elevates the young to a level above us because

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of Young Adult Fiction

adults can no longer make a difference.

Those were tough words, and it angered some of the listeners to be told that their endeavors were useless. But what Paulsen was telling us was that we need to show kids through our writing that preserving life is worth the effort; otherwise they aren't going to care any more about the preservation of our planet than we do. Paulsen's own books attest to his belief in the strength and frailty of the human spirit. They are books full of hope, which depict human beings at their most vulnerable and show them struggling to learn what they must learn in order to survive.

Two of Paulsen's most popular books are *Dogsong* (Bradbury, 1985) and *Hatchet* (Bradbury, 1987). His most recent release, *The Haymeadow* (Delacorte, 1992), is again about survival and change.

Yesterday, he thought--I was fourteen yesterday and nothing changed. He wasn't sure what he wanted to change, or how it should change, or even why it should change but he wanted something to change and nothing had and he felt cheated.

Fourteen-year-old John Barron lives on a ranch in Wyoming with his father, a stonily silent man still mourning his wife's death. John is forced to drive a flock of sheep to a

haymeadow in the mountains where he must stay for three months, with only two horses and four sheepdogs to assist him. The trials he faces—an attack by coyotes, a stampede, a flash flood, loss of food, serious injuries—all make for a fast-paced adventure in which John must draw



constantly upon his own courage and resourcefulness. When his father finally joins him with fresh supplies, the two of them manage to forge a new bond of love and respect.

We are living in frightening, volatile times when it is more important than ever to provide young readers with books that speak to their specific needs—books with strong, believable characters who, through their own uniqueness and inner resources, find solutions to the problems facing them. This by no

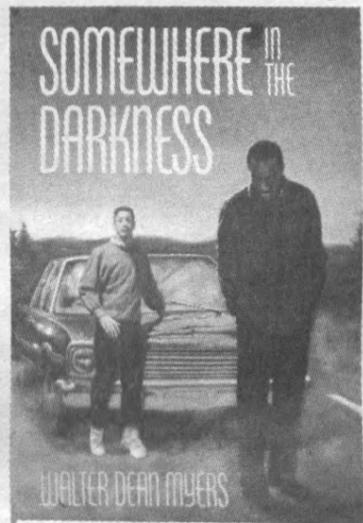
means excludes humor, or romance, or fantasy, or science fiction, all of which are terrifically popular with kids today. As children's book editor Jean Karl says in her book, *Childhood to Childhood*, "a good book of fiction is not about something. It is, instead, an experience. The reader is not told what happens. He sees it for himself."

It is this sense of *being there* that the most successful of today's writers are able to convey to young readers. Cynthia Voigt (whose latest novel *Orfe*, from Atheneum) accomplishes it in *Homecoming*, and its sequel, *Dacey's Song* (also from Atheneum), about 13-year-old Dacey Tillerman and her younger sister and two brothers who are abandoned by their emotionally ill mother in a shopping mall parking lot and must find their own way to their grandmother's house by walking the length of the Connecticut coastline. Their search for their roots as well as a home eventually takes them on to Maryland—"a journey of delights, dangers, sorrows and discoveries."

Walter Dean Myers' latest book, *Somewhere in the Darkness* (Scholastic, 1992), is about a 15-year-old black boy named Jimmy who meets up with the father he hasn't seen since he was a baby. The father has escaped from prison and is critically ill, and it isn't long before Jimmy's dreams about him are dashed. His disillusionment,

however, helps him to see his own life more clearly, and he resolves to live a life based on truth and integrity.

Jimmy thought about his having a child. It seemed so far off, like something that could never happen, but somehow would. He thought



about what he would do with the child if it were a boy. He wouldn't know much about getting money to buy food for him, or what things to tell him to do except to be good and not to get into trouble. But he would tell him all the secrets he knew, looking right into his eyes and telling him nothing but the truth so that every time they were together they would know things about each other. That way there would be a connection, he thought, something that would be there even when they

weren't together. He would know just how he was like his son, and how they were different, and where their souls touched and where they didn't.

The Horn Book calls *Somewhere in the Darkness* "one of Myers's most memorable pieces of writing...a page-turner elevated to a higher plane by its theme of the universal quest of a son for his father."

A list of other notable authors of young adult books would have to include Richard Peck, Robert Westall, Margaret Mahy, Norma Fox Mazer, William Mayne, M. E. Kerr, Sue Ellen Bridgers, and Virginia Hamilton, to name only a few.

In high school English classes kids are still reading *The Scarlet Letter*, *Macbeth*, *Ethan Frome*, and other classics that, when taught creatively, will open new worlds and give them a solid grounding for future encounters with good literature. Experiencing these books is important; but with so many other things vying for their attention—homework, jobs, sports, television—teenagers have little time left for "outside" reading. This is indeed a tragedy when there are so many extraordinary books available to them that could change their lives.

✦

Emily Rhoads Johnson teaches writing and literature at Empire State College in Ithaca. She has published two novels for children.

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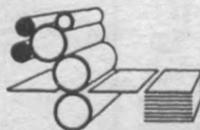
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The growth of public data networks, bulletin board systems, alternative information and media links, and the increasing cheapness of desk-top publishing, satellite equipment, and international databases are as much the result of local political "intentions" as the fortified net of globally linked, restricted-access information systems is the intentional fantasy of those who seek to profit from centralized control. The picture that emerges from this mapping of intentions is not an inevitably technofascist one, but rather the uneven result of cultural struggles over values and meanings.

Penley's piece, "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology," looks at the phenomenon of *Star Trek* "K/S" or "slash" fandom and dopes out how "women can manipulate the products of mass-produced culture to stage a popular debate around issues of technology, fantasy and everyday life." "Slash" fandom, overwhelmingly if not exclusively female, revolves around the creation of homosexual pornography involving Captain Kirk and Spock. (The "slash" refers to the slash between K and S and serves as a code to those purchasing fanzines through the mail.) This does not seem to be exactly the stuff of social revolution, but Penley convincingly demonstrates the creative ingenuity of the

Kirk/Spock (K/S) fans, who do more than "make do" [with what they have]; they make. Not only have they remade the *Star Trek* fictional universe to their own desiring ends, they have achieved it by enthusiastically mimicking the technologies of mass-market cultural production, and by constantly debating their own relation, as women, to those technologies through both the way they make decisions about how to use the technological resources available to them and the way they rewrite bodies and technologies in their utopian romances.

If nothing else, the slash fans relegate the stereotype of the passive TV watcher to the dustbin of criticism. Penley uses various concepts of Michel de Certeau to ground her observations. The "Brownian motion," of the article's title is de Certeau's term "to describe the tactical maneuvers of the relatively powerless when attempting to resist, negotiate, or transform the system and products of the relatively powerful." Undergirding Penley's analysis is "de Certeau's claim that consumption is itself a form of production."

What do the slash fans get out of imagining that Kirk and Spock are lovers or that "Spock...has extra erogenous zones (especially the tips of his pointed ears) and a double-ridged penis?" According to Penley, the fictional construct of *Star Trek* allows fans in general "to articulate a

lived relation to the world." Many fans think that their experience with extrapolatory fiction has given them a privileged sense of "thinking global" and that they are more likely to be concerned with environmental issues....[*Trek* fandom] represents one of the most important popular sites for debating issues of the human and everyday relation to science and technology.

Slash fandom takes this program one step further, extending "these issues and debates about science and technology to the realm of minds and bodies." When the mostly heterosexual female slash fans write their pornography and distribute it through contemporary technological means, "they creatively reimagine their world through making a tactics of technology itself."

Similar fan strategies are discussed in Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. Stereotypically depicted as contemptible losers, fans are instead seen as challenging producers' attempts to impose and regulate meanings and values.

Jenkins, an assistant professor of Literature at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a self-confessed fan, reacts against media theories that focus mostly on the production end of things and that refuse to ascribe critical interaction

and intelligence to those on the receiving end. Where Mark Crispin Miller defines television watching as "passive, mesmeric and indiscriminating," Jenkins sees fans "as active producers and manipulators of meanings." Like Penley, he focuses on Michel de Certeau's notion of "textual poaching" to explore how fans "construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images."

Of course, it is precisely the desire to construct a "cultural and social identity" out of shlock (*Dr. Who*, *Twin Peaks*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, etc.) that leads to the images of fans as acne-scarred losers with nothing better to do than to memorize the "Star Dates" of every *Star Trek* episode or dress up like Darth Vader. Taking issue with this view, Jenkins writes:

Far from sycophantic, fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings.

In emphasizing the activity of fans, Jenkins meaningfully revises de Certeau's concept of "textual poaching" ("an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or

pleasurable to the reader"). While de Certeau believes that readers may become "writers" by marking their texts, by "scribbling in the margins," that possibility is denied to television viewers since, according to Jenkins, de Certeau maintains that "the concentration of economic power and cultural production seems so immense that there are much more limited opportunities for viewers to directly intervene in the production process." For Jenkins,

the fans' meta-text, whether perpetuated through gossip or embodied within written criticism, already constitutes a form of rewriting. This process of playful engagement and active interpretation shifts the program's priorities. Fan critics pull characters and narrative issues from the margins; they focus on details that are excessive or peripheral to the primary plots but gain significance within the fans' own conceptions....

Much of *Textual Poachers* is devoted to close readings of various fan works (which include videos and music as well as more traditionally literary forms) and the book is illustrated with fan-generated artwork. The range of interests in these things (typically published in small circulation "fanzines") is bewildering. Fans, it seems, are willing to boldly go where no television producer has gone before and stretch any number of narrative and sexual conventions. *see Hyperspace, page 15*

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Rooms in College

continued from page 9

microcosmic night. An additional source of delight was that I remained still unclaimed by the military; what on earth, I wondered, would I have been useful for in Korea?

How stably one goes home again, unerringly plants a love-tap at first base. The cyrie room in which I studied looks out still at a golf course where, during winter floods, a friend of my mother's drowned while saving a sheep. My school books are there, like empty oxygen cylinders, dusted off by my mother the same day each week, in case I ever need them again, need to start over. No, that room is a bit of a shrine for a mostly absent son. The gilt on the spine of the *Short History of English Literature* has wanned beyond bleach into invisibility; the cover of my pocket selection of French verse from Ronsard to Valery has given its friendly cobalt blue back to the pouring afternoon sun; Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* falls apart if moved, into tiles of pages dangling from glue-faceted threads that set the teeth on edge; the damp-

warped *Boy's Own Astronomy Handbook* still tells the truth, sidereally reliable although written before the Hiroshima bomb. I can still, thank goodness, lean my elbows on the sticky-topped table and

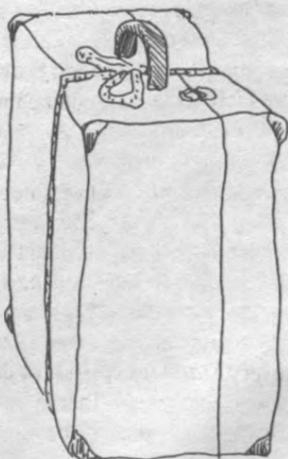


Illustration: Johanna Sheldon

peer again at the black-and-white photograph of the globular cluster M 13 in Hercules, scintillating eight

inches and twenty-two thousand light years from my retinas. M13's electric bull's-eye of spattered light, a boy's rune, awes again, forever crinkling like silver paper in a match's flame. Yet it has a hum-drum counterpart on our own planet: not the photograph in my old album, but one of those miraculous patterns traced by programmed worms. Fuzzy as the state of mind in which I competed for my sweet tomorrow, this pattern's winning caption says, after a number: cloud path generated by a gentle worm.



Paul West's thirteenth novel, *The Women of Whitechapel* and *Jack the Ripper*, has won the 1992 Grand Prix Halpérine-Kaminsky for the best foreign book published in French (*Les Editions Rivages*). His next novel, *Love's Mansion*, published by Random House has been chosen for the Best 25 Books of 1992 by *The Village Voice Literary Supplement* and is among the *Notable Books of the Year* chosen by the *New York Times Book Review*. West lives in Ithaca.

Hyperspace

continued from page 14

Jenkins discusses, among other things, reworkings of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* ("Napoleon and Illya within a world harboring...cat people"); *Doctor Who* ("The TARDIS has materialized every place from the Planet of the Apes to Fawly Towers, even on the set of *Wheel of Fortune*"); *Beauty and the Beast* ("Vincent's late-night visits to Catherine"); and, of course, the *Star Trek* series ("Jane Land's Demeter...puts Uhura and Chapel in command of an all-female landing party on a voyage to a lesbian separatist space colony"). The power of Jenkins' (and Penley's) analysis comes from a willingness to engage fan creations on their own terms and from an emphasis on possibilities for action. Instead of seeing individuals merely as automatons programmed by outside forces, Jenkins stresses activity over passivity and empowerment over "marginalization." Still, he is no Pollyanna; he concedes that a fan's relationship to the "text remains a tentative one," often existing "on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer's own efforts to regulate its meanings." But he also recognizes that fans, through a critical give-and-take with "original" texts, are capable of generating their own systems of value and meaning. Empowered through imagination and a variety of tech-

nologies, fans "assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons." These "canons" may not be accepted by large segments of society, but they don't have to be—their value is not dependent on "dominant cultural hierarchies" but instead on people who take pleasure from constructing them. In elucidating and underscoring the development of these systems of value and meaning, Jenkins not only redefines the stereotyped "fan," but also increases our understanding of how more culturally-sanctioned interpretive activities (such as academic literary criticism) work and generate a community.

The differences between the authors discussed here are, of course, large and meaningful, but so are the similarities. When a diehard apologist for capitalism like George Gilder and a member of the critical left like Andrew Ross begin to converge, when a critic like Neil Postman begins to talk of "resistance fighters," when "fans" like Constance Penley and Henry Jenkins explore the audience's control over mass-produced texts, some new consensus is being approached in discussions of electronic media, countering tendencies of cultural despair on both the right and the left.

Nick Gillespie is a writer living in Buffalo, New York.

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The Third Sex?

continued from page 2

signify; clothing guarantees the passage from sentience to meaning."

Garber divides the argument into two halves, which the reader is instructed to regard as not "completely separate or separable, but rather as complementary mirror images of each other." The first half, "Transvestite Logics," details "the way transvestism creates culture," while the second half, "Transvestite Effects," explores the inverse, the way that culture creates transvestites. The perplexing idea of complementary mirror images — identical but also crucially different, each providing the other with what it lacks — is not, unsurprisingly, borne out by the text. The division of the book into its two halves is not grounded on any discernible distinction. The difference between the transvestite creating culture and culture creating transvestism is never made clear.

Throughout both halves of the book, Garber treats the transvestite as a recurring figure in the collective "dreamwork" of Western culture (read: the US and Great Britain). First identifying an "over-determined" transvestite figure, be it an individual (Rudolph Valentino) or a type (the cross-dressed nun), Garber then proceeds laterally, following a chain of association composed as often of coincidence and offhand comment as by a structural similarity between one case of transvestism and another. For example, Garber finds a continuum of transvestism linking Rudolph Valentino to Liberace, Liberace to Elvis, and Elvis back to Valentino; the argument is supported not only by the similar sartorial tendencies of the three entertainers but also by the fact that both Liberace and Elvis had twin brothers who died in infancy, and by a comparison between Elvis' funeral and that of Valentino. Garber's historical anecdotes are nothing if not fascinating, and she must have had an army of fact-checkers at her disposal for the writing of this book. The trouble is that every detail is presented as equally capable of carrying the burden of proof. Garber catalogues so many instances of transvestism, and at such a hectic pace, that her evidence is leveled and her argument remains circular. The transvestite is cited as evidence of a 'category crisis'; henceforward a category crisis is simply assumed

upon identification of the transvestite. Garber does not theorize the mechanism by which a culture, threatened by a collapse of its categories, comes to choose its apotropaic transvestite figure — be

Gates's assessment, that *Vested Interests* "is a big book in every sense," is that the book is so big that it loses track of its most critical issues. Unanswered questions traverse *Vested Interests* like subterranean

transsexualism are rebuked for being "divisive rather than helpful," but Garber unproblematically takes transvestism as her explicit subject matter and then conflates the transvestite with the transsexual on

jacket and its content, it's an interesting coincidence that these issues should be so clearly evoked on the jacket while generally evaded in the text. The promising queries on the front flap — "Is transvestism a sign of homosexuality?" "What are the politics of drag?" — are lost in the book amid discussions of why Peter Pan is played by a woman, when the gendered meanings of pink and blue got reversed, how the Order of the Garter came by its motto. Additionally, the use of an image of hermaphroditism on the cover of a book ostensibly concerned with cross-dressing begs the question of terminology once again. The stability of the taxonomic system which distinguishes between the "third terms" of transsexualism, transvestism, and herma-phroditism is based upon the gender binarism which Garber suggests is deconstructed by the very existence of the transvestite. If the transvestite is defined as one with "an abnormal desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex," is gender essentialism consolidated, rather than exploded, by this implicit equation of gender identity with anatomical sex? If the adjective "transsexual" denotes not only an "overwhelming desire to belong to the opposite sex," but also "of or pertaining to both sexes" [OED, emphasis added], what room does this leave for the differentiation of the hermaphrodite? Either gender identity is recognizable, essential, in spite of the contradictory testimony of the body, or the body is resorted to as the arbiter of its own truth. In failing to address the assumptions underlying cross-gender terminology, and in implicitly equating cross-dressing with anatomical transsexualism or hermaphroditism, Garber ends in perpetuating the notion of an emancipatory "third sex." What are the vested interests inherent in this taxonomy of the body's gender and sexuality? Garber's argument for the transvestite as the harbinger of Western category crisis is underpinned and undermined by a terminological chaos which emerges, or rather fails to emerge, as the most interesting problem of her book.

✦

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Photograph: Chris Makos

Andy Warhol from *Vested Interests*

it Elvis, Captain Hook, or the Big Bad Wolf. *Vested Interests* is undoubtedly, to quote more of its jacket copy, "encyclopedic" and a "survey," but it does not make a case for Garber's initial thesis, "that the transvestite makes culture possible, that there can be no culture without the transvestite because the transvestite marks the entrance into the symbolic."

The downside of Henry Louis

faultlines, not readily apparent but productive of extreme discomfort all the same. The appearance of homosexuality in conjunction with transvestism in literature and in film is described at length, but the implications of this link for gay self-identity and for the cultural construction of homosexuality are hardly explored. The taxonomizing practices of professional medicine with regard to transvestism and

several occasions. While it is doubtless true that clinical taxonomies not only fail to be "helpful" but are often harmful, Garber would do well to examine the politics of these terminological distinctions, rather than dismissing the issue while retaining the terms.

Recalling the argument inverting the relation between figure and ground, clothing and the body, and, by analogy, between the book's



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