

# The BOOKPRESS

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FREE

## You Say You Want a Revolution?

**The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics**

John A. Andrews  
Rutgers University Press  
280 pages, \$19.95

Nick Salvatore

America's rich and varied dissenting traditions have been profoundly marked by a millennial vision that anticipates the creation of a new, more perfect society as the very fulfillment of America's national destiny. In 1776, when Thomas Paine penned *Common Sense*, the singular pamphlet that gave voice to the revolutionary expectations of so many Americans in that turbulent year, he urged the people to overthrow the British monarchy in the name of a common fraternity and proclaimed, in a sentence now famous for its intense imagery: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."

Although Paine was his era's quintessential secular humanist, the millennial tones throughout *Common Sense* echoed another American cultural tradition as well. In his call for the creation of a new world, and in the Biblical language that permeated the pamphlet, Paine's message reflected, if not necessarily his, then the culture's deep religious ethos. As far back as the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, when John Winthrop delivered his sermon to those immigrants before they disembarked in Boston harbor, a yearning for spiritual regeneration intertwined itself with a particular faith in the colony as an instrument of God's will. In what is perhaps the oldest and most lasting metaphor defining American identity, Winthrop proclaimed that if his people honored their sacred covenant with their God, then "we shall be as a city upon the hill, the eyes of all the world upon us."

Paine's millennial views also foreshadowed those of generations yet to come although he, of course, could not have known that. The widespread religious revivals of the early decades of the nineteenth century led many to claim their personal salvation and simultaneously to dedicate themselves to achieving the nation's salvation as well. The conviction that the Kingdom of God could be realized on this earth, if only we might cleanse the nation of sin, fueled efforts at abolition and many other reform causes. So deeply did this religious impulse permeate American reform efforts, that, for many, the distinction between the religious and the secular became quite blurred. John Winthrop's fear that, if his people did not keep their spiritual covenant with God, "We shall surely perish out of the good land wither we pass over this vast sea to possess it," receded in the minds of those Americans increasingly bent on creating a decidedly secular New Jerusalem.

In the expectations of a Eugene Victor Debs, searching for the promised land in the socialist revolution he believed would fulfill the potential of 1776, one can see a secular millennialism that touched many. In an odd fashion, the technological millennialism of a Frederick W. Taylor, the promoter of scientific management, derived from a different yet recognizably common vision. Indeed, in the experiences of the Knights of Labor, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the initial organizers of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, this adaptation of the American millennial



Jack Sherman

prospect continued. The most famous anthem of both the American left and the American labor movement throughout the twentieth century captured this continuity poignantly. In the words of the last stanza of "Solidarity Forever," written in 1915 by Ralph Chaplin, an IWW organizer, generations of American dissenters have proclaimed with religious fervor and a decidedly secular conviction that "We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old/ For the union makes us strong."

The American labor movement has fallen on hard times since it reached its pinnacle of strength in the mid-1950s, and it never approached the messianic end Chaplin and so many others envisioned. Yet the millennial impulse so integral to the American experience did not therefore disappear. During the 1960s, for example,

expectations of a profound restructuring of American life again dominated the politics and the aspirations of a significant number of Americans. But unlike earlier moments in this tradition, this sense of engagement in pursuit of social justice was largely identified with that decade's youth. It was not that youth had been uninvolved in earlier movements, or that people over thirty were idle in the 1960s — think, for example, of Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, David Dellinger, Dorothy Cotton, or Staughton Lynd, to name but a few influential "adults" active during that decade. Rather, in the 1960s, what was notable was the number of young people who flocked to organizations founded by their peers that were critical of contemporary American life. That political impulse, inseparable from a wide-ranging cultural challenge to the official *mores* of a more staid America, defined the decade as one of youthful rebellion in both the mass media and in the inner eye of many activists themselves.

From the picture of those four black students occupying the Woolworth's counter in Greensboro, North Carolina in February 1960 to the pain-wracked image of a young woman pleading with the heavens over the body of a dead Kent State student in 1970, the decade seemed defined by its youthful dissenters. In 1960, the largely black Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged from Reverend King's adult ministerial alliance to affirm nonviolence, emphasize the importance of local community involvement in ending segregation, and to assert that the "redemptive community supersedes immoral social systems." Two years later, the largely white Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), itself an offshoot of an older social-democratic organization, released a founding statement written at Port Huron, Michigan. Insisting on the individual human potential they held contemporary society smothered, and proclaiming the need for a genuine par-

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# Thou Shalt Not Mislead

by Edward T. Chase

Like many other secularists I have often admired the Catholic church's Papal encyclicals for their powerful analyses of social problems. However, a recent Vatican report critical of advertising is surprisingly tepid, superficial, and remote from today's real world. The report is a 35-page pamphlet, from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Vatican's Communications Department, and has been distributed globally in six languages. It routinely addresses advertising's manipulation of children, its problematic impact on politics and the media, its penchant for violence and vulgarity, and the basic issue of its truthfulness. The report also fairly acknowledges advertising's constructive and essential role in the capitalist free-market system.

What happens to be in the forefront today is advertising's role in the matter of life and death respecting cigarette smoking, estimated to kill a million people a year worldwide, 400,000 in the U.S. alone. The cigarette industry itself has had to acknowledge that its billions-of-dollars advertising campaigns have been deliberately aimed at addicting new smokers. Advertising works. Professor Richard Palley of the University of British Columbia has tracked cigarette advertising for twenty years and reports that teenagers are three times as likely as adults to respond to cigarette advertisements, and that 79% of teenage smokers prefer the Joe Camel, Newport's fun couples and Marlboro brands. What's more, the rate of children smoking is rising. Britain has already outlawed the Marlboro Man and forbids images of healthy young smokers on grounds they mislead the young about the deadly effects of smoking. But America still features pervasive billboards featuring cigarette companies' sponsorship of sports events, associating smoking and physical prowess. At this writing, now at last fearful of the ultimately crushing cost of future lawsuits, Phillip Morris and R.J.R. Nabisco have initiated negotiations with the Federal Government that may lead to further bans on cigarette advertising. This constitutes a seismic change in tobacco industry policy.

As for the Vatican's finger-shaking at "truthfulness" in advertising, I am reminded of a personal happenstance that has had a lasting impact. My ever wise father, the painter Edward L. Chase, passing through our living room where I and my then ten-year-old son, Chevy Chase, were sitting watching a television commercial, pointed at the TV screen as he walked on and said laconically, "You lie." Chevy never forgot

Dad's offhand gesture and remark. He adored and trusted his granddad. Chevy likes to trace his satirical slant on pop culture in *Saturday Night Live* and his films to that childhood incident. He also relishes a comment of the late novelist Bill Fain, who once formulated what Fain deemed four key words of commercials that epitomized the phoniness of advertising: "Yes, friends, folks, and everywhere..." Each word is a phony, claimed Fain: "yes" a false suggestion of universal agreement; "friends" just utter strangers happening to hear the radio; "folks" a sleazy effort to invoke intimacy; "everywhere" a reckless lie suggesting universal approval of whatever was being pushed.

Is this issue old-hat trivia? Not if we consider the effect on public consciousness of the onslaught, the incessant barrage of biased communications that constitute the advertising that underwrites TV, indeed all media.

And the messages today aren't the crude claims of, say, 19th-century quack cure-all medicines. New techniques include fake "documentaries" and the strategic placement of brand-name products (for a fee) in TV shows and movies. It is hard to believe that all the way back in 1912, the federal Newspaper Publicity Act forbade advertising falsely presented as "news stories," and that the Federal Communications Commission originally severely limited the number of commercial minutes per hour of programming. The average American is astonished to learn that in Britain all outdoor advertising and TV ads for cigarettes have been banned since 1965. There is also the so-called cigarette code enforced by the government that prohibits ads that show smoking associated with "social, sexual, romantic or business success," or that is linked to success in sports. Few people would dispute that the defining character of contemporary American society is material consumption fueled by a market system that depends on advertising.

On this fundamental ground of material consumption the Vatican report comes alive. It deplores advertising's "unremitting pressure to buy articles of luxury that can arouse false wants that hurt both individuals and families by making them ignore what they really need." Of course this critique cannot fail to remind us of Cornell professor Thorsten Veblen's famous disquisition on "conspicuous consumption" in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In its bitingly sly and humorous way, Veblen's classic transcends most other economic tracts, which is why John Kenneth Galbraith named it as the book which had the most influence on his thinking.

But perhaps the humorists have always had the sharpest insight into the inanities

of advertisers. Typical is this sketch by S.J. Perlman, who wrote many of the Marx Brothers movies:

*The Brain Room of the agency Meeker, Sassavant, Singleton, Doubleday & Tripler, a conference chamber decorated in cerebral gray, Swedish modern furniture, and the inevitable Van Gogh reproductions. As the curtain rises, Duckworth, the copy chief, and four members of his staff—Parish, Munkaczi, DeGroot, and Miss Drehdel—are revealed plunged in thought.*

DUCKWORTH (radiant): Now let's get on to the Hush-a-Bye blanket account. Any hunches?

DEGROOT: We got a darb (producing two photographs). This is what the nap of a Hush-a-Bye looks like under the microscope.

FARISH: And here's the average blanket. See the difference?

DUCKWORTH: Why, yes. It has twice as many woolen fibers as the Hush-a-Bye.

DEGROOT (happily): Check. There's our campaign.

DUCKWORTH: Hmm. Isn't that sort of defeatist?

FARISH: A little, but it shows we don't make extravagant claims.

DEGROOT: We could always switch the photographs.

FARISH: Sure, nobody ever looks at

their blanket through a microscope.

DUCKWORTH (dubiously): We-e-ll, I don't know. I like your approach to the challenge, but I don't think you've extracted its—its thematic milk, shall I say. Now, I for one saw a different line of attack. . . . Now this is hazy, mind you, but it's all there. A beachhead in the Solomons—a plain, ordinary G.I. Joe in a slit trench, grinning at the consumer through the muck and grime on his face, and asking, "Are you backing me up with Hush-a-Bye blankets at home? Gee, Mom, don't sabotage my birthright with sleazy, inferior brands!"

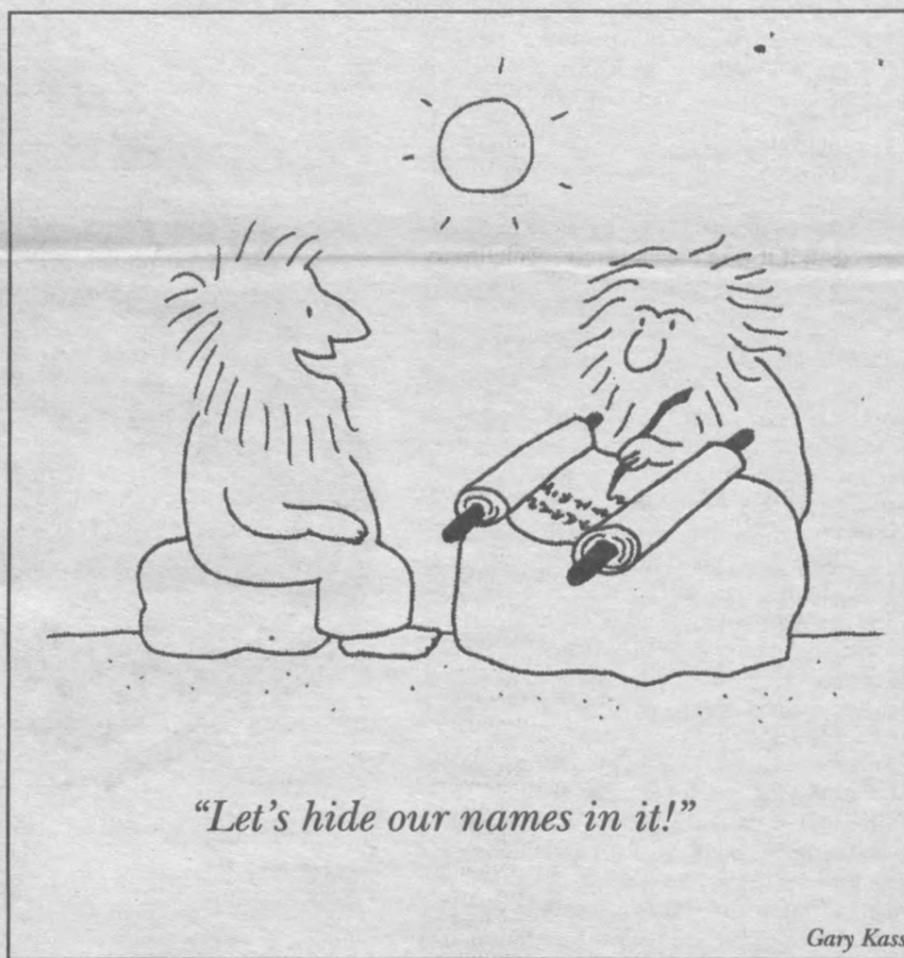
DEGROOT: Holy cow, that'll tear their hearts out!

FARISH (with a sob): It brings a lump to your throat. It's a portion of common everyday experience.

DUCKWORTH: Remember, men, it isn't sacred. If you think you can improve the phrasing—

DEGROOT: I wouldn't change a word of it.

*Edward T. Chase is the former Editor-in-Chief of New York Times Books and senior editor at Scribner.*



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# Down with Free Verse!

## Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism

Mark Jarman and David Mason, eds.  
Story Line Press  
261 pages, \$12 paper

### John Bowers

This elegantly designed and reasonably priced volume presents the work of 25 representative poets of a movement that has come to be known as "The New Formalism." As the name suggests, these poets share the goal of reviving traditional meter and rhyme. The editors declare in their preface that not only is this "the most significant development in recent American poetry" but that "these poets represent nothing less than a revolution, a fundamental change, in the art of poetry as it is practiced in this country." These are large claims and, while I am in complete sympathy with the impulse that provokes them, having decided myself many years ago that free verse was a vein that had been mined out, I nevertheless feel an obligation to examine the poetry contained in this collection on its own merits, to see whether it can bear such a large burden.

To begin with, one might wonder whether the mere act of returning to the (admittedly almost lost) art of writing verse in traditional meter and rhyme could possibly, in itself, be as revolutionary as the editors claim. Can a genuine revolution in any art be accomplished simply by changing one's technique? Surely formal innovation—in this case, a return to the common techniques of an earlier time—must be accompanied by some larger change in sensibility, by some new content, if it is to produce truly revolutionary results. So the real question is not whether the verse in this volume is well-made and artfully constructed (by and large it is) but whether it is accompanied by a genuinely revolutionary change in sensibility, comparable in magnitude, say, to the change that took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Romanticism) or to that which occurred at the beginning of the century that's about to end (Modernism).

Much as I would like to believe that the work in this volume registers such a seismic shift in consciousness, I must nevertheless insist that it does not. With only a few exceptions, there are just two major attitudes, or sensibilities, represented in the work of these poets. The first is sardonic amusement; the second is gentle nostalgia. Amusing and effective examples of the former can be found in poems by R.S. Gwynn, Tom Disch, Frederick Feirstein, Andrew Hudgins, Charles Martin, Molly Peacock, Mary Jo Salter, Rachel Wetzton and Greg Williamson. Examples of the latter permeate the volume but are particularly noticeable in the work of Julia Alvarez, Dana Gioia, Rafael Campo, Emily Grosholz, Rachel Hadas, Paul Lake, Sidney Lea, Brad Leithauser, Phillis Levin and Wayne Prunty.

The title of the volume, *Rebel Angels*, gives a clear indication of the magnitude of its ambitions. The cover illustration reproduces William Blake's sinewy and powerfully emblematic painting, "The Good and Evil Angels struggling for possession of a Child", against a deep crimson background color. Yet I cannot find a single poem that begins to approach the simplicity and power of Blake or a single poet who would remotely qualify as a "rebel angel." Instead we find nostalgic set pieces such as Dana Gioia's "Summer Storm", with its memory of an encounter at a party twenty years ago and its anodyne conclusion with moralistic, Frostian overtones:

*Why does the evenings memory  
return with nights storm -*



Scott Werder

*A party twenty years ago  
It's disappointments warm?*

*There are so many might have been  
What if's That wont stay buried  
Other cities, other jobs  
Strangers we might have married*

*And memory insists on pining  
for places it never went,  
As if life would be happier  
just by being different*

Likewise, the much-acclaimed Brad Leithauser, whose debut volume, *Hundreds of Fireflies*, (ick!) the editors credit with first drawing "major attention to the new trend," is represented by the ever-so-cute "Post-Coitum Tristesse: A Sonnet":  
*Why/do/you/sigh/roar/fall/all/for/some/hu  
m/drum/come/-mm?/hm... and by a sappy  
piece called "The Haunted":*

*A crying white candle  
Lights the room where  
The moon's fairest woman  
Brushes her hair  
And we who are dying  
Just to be near her  
Who inextricably  
Adore and fear her*

*Hurl ourselves flatly  
On the walls and the floor  
Dancing a love-dance  
More and more  
Frenzied until-a kind  
Of kiss - she places  
Her mouth to the flame, and  
Blows out our faces.*

Clever versifying, to be sure—but revolutionary? Come on.

Far from being revolutionary, the dominant tone of this volume is one of comfortable chattiness, an effect that is secured in part through extensive use of enjambement—a particularly striking feature of most of the poets represented here. However, this device can become wearisome when overused: too many of these poems go on, line after line, never stopping to catch their breath, resulting in an odd sing-song effect. The pastmaster of this technique is Marilyn Hacker, whose brilliant verse monologues are tour de forces of verbal agility, reminiscent of Byron (with a dash of Browning thrown in). But, once again, there is nothing particularly revolutionary in art of this sort: on the contrary, the dominant note is one of nostalgia, mixed with a rueful acceptance of the world as it is—a sort of gay fin de siècle fatalism.

Toward the end of their preface, the editors' revolutionary ardor appears to cool considerably, leaving what looks more like a new neoclassicism:

The act of making measured speech assumes a valued civility, putting a premium not only on technique, but also on a larger cultural vision that restores harmony and balance to the arts...

The problem is that these guys want to have their cake and eat it too: they want the New Formalism to be radical and revolutionary, but at the same time they want it to restore classical harmony and balance to the arts and to culture generally. The revolution they seek through the "act of making measured speech" is one of "valued civility," suggesting to me that it is really a counterrevolution that they seek. They want to redress the imbalance brought about by a century of radical and experimental art by establishing a new era of balance, harmony and order.

I am all for experimenting with rhyme, meter, and verse forms both old and new. I agree that the reigning orthodoxy of "free verse" lost its vitality decades ago and is now nothing more than another outworn literary convention. But it must be understood that these technical matters are completely independent of the creation of radically new art, which depends upon a fundamental shift in consciousness and sensibility, not a mere change of technique. The poets represented in this volume are not, in my view, seeking to push poetry to the limit, to open up new artistic territory for exploration, or to articulate a genuinely new poetic vision. Rather, they are fighting a rear-guard action against a tradition of modernism that is already dead, attempting in the process to recreate a latter-day version of the comfortable (and comforting) verities of the late Victorian and Edwardian era before the First World War began the long, agonizing process of shattering humanity's moral and spiritual illusions.

If poetry—like all the arts—is to be of any relevance in the coming century, it will have to find ways of articulating a radically new vision of humanity's place in the universe. Some of the poetry in *Rebel Angels* represents a step in the right direction, but most of it fails to live up to the ambitions of the editors. Much of it is well-written and enjoyable to read, but how much of it will last out the decade? We do not yet know: "what rough beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born."

*John Bowers is a professor of English at Cornell University.*

Off Campus

## At The Bookery

This presentation is part of our ongoing series of readings and talks upstairs in the DeWitt Mall.

Sunday, September 14, 4:00 p.m.



### Paul West,

"possibly our finest living stylist in English," according to the *Chicago Tribune*, author of fifteen novels, recipient of numerous honors, will read from his newest novel *Terrestrials*. Using flight motifs as metaphors for everything from the end of the Cold War to the volatile friendships between men, *Terrestrials* is vintage Paul West.

Sunday, September 21, 4:00 pm



### Joan Brumberg,

author of *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, will discuss the idea that many of America's adolescent girls are growing up to believe that "good looks"—as opposed to "good works"—are the highest form of female perfection. In *The Body Project*, Prof. Brumberg explains how American girls came to define themselves more and more through their bodies, so that today the body has become the girl's primary project.

Sunday, September 28, 4:00 p.m.

### Kristina M. Torgeson,

translator and editor, will read from and discuss Wei Jingsheng's *The Courage to Stand Alone*. Wei Jingsheng, a former Red Guard, was imprisoned from 1979 to 1993 and was rearrested in 1994. He is now serving a 14-year sentence. From his solitary-confinement cell, he's written defiant letters to Communist leaders. The Bookery is grateful to Ithaca's Amnesty International for agreeing to appear and give information on AI's concern in China.

Sunday, October 5, 4:00 p.m.

### Richard Polenberg,

Goldwin Smith Professor of American History at Cornell University, will discuss one of America's most influential US Supreme Court Judges and the subject of his new book, *The World of Benjamin Cardozo*. From Cardozo's religious training in the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish community, to his renowned liberalism, Prof. Polenberg gives us a complex picture of this man whose judicial opinions continue to affect us.

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# Building a Book

## A Place of My Own: The Education of an Amateur Builder

Michael Pollan  
Random House, 1997  
\$23.00

by M. D. Morris,

Somewhere long ago I heard something like, "In his lifetime a man should write a book, build a house, and sire a son." With *A Place Of My Own*, Michael Pollan touches all three bases: His book, dedicated "For Isaac," his son, is the narrative of his many months of weekends spent confecting his personalized house. For both house and book, (principally his own driving effort), he had much help from an architect, a jack-of-most-trades, craftspeople, writers, editors, and his wife: and he acknowledges all that aid graciously. Both finished products, (the place for himself, and the book for the rest of the world), justify the means.

This is not a handy builder's manual because it tells us what ought to be done and why, not how to do it. A reader bitten by the building bug can do better with any of the myriad carpentry, or construction guides voluminously stocked in all bookshops. Also, *A Place Of My Own* is neither a psychological text on achievement motivation, nor a philosophical musing on the benefits of workplace solitude. It is a well crafted success story of a personal challenge from dream to realization, that leaves you with more than you had hoped to find.

For the armchair constructor, who really wants his castle to materialize vicariously; for the tentative soul who needs the reassurance to go do it; or for the reader comfortably ensconced in his own place, to share the triumph of another, Pollan repays any reader for his time.

Because Mr. Pollan has the experience of having been executive editor of *Harper's Magazine*, and writes for the *New York Times Magazine*, he uses his literary background to enrich what could have been a dreary self laudatory telling into a cultural surfeit and an enjoyable

brush with applied philosophy. He intersperses nuggets from all seven pages of his "Sources," an annotated list of sufficient additional good reading for a normal lifetime.

And *A Place Of My Own* comes at a good time, public interest in self-help house-raising has burgeoned so in the past decade, that several TV programs are now dedicated to the notion. The Learning Channel (TLC) alone features "Home Bodies," "Home Time," and "The Home Pro." The Yester Morrow School, founded by John Connel in Warren, VT, teaches adults a complete course in home building from plan to move-in, focusing on environmental compatibility. And so too does the Pollan work discuss in copious detail the real and cultural aspects of the relationship of the house with the ground, the house with the framing, and again with the roofing. But the author's underlying issue is the relationship between the house and its builder, and how they grew together.

In 1986 a student of mine designed and hand-built his own two-story, site compatible home on a concrete basement, using only part-time help. Steve Lawrence's course thesis was a running journal of his two year effort, fully illustrated at each step by color pictures. Unfortunately it evolved as a long photo essay with brief, undetailed captions. With Pollanlike effort, and some good editing then, it could have emerged a published book.

Though Michael Pollan's work is occasionally at odds with what I learned in Frame Building Construction 808 at Stuyvesant High School, I don't really believe that with only 14 line drawings he intended his book to be a construction "how to." Instead, he crafts vivid, thought provoking world pictures, all comfortably produced, like Thoreau, from inside that place of his own.

M. D. Morris is an author of three books and five hundred articles. He is an editor for McGraw Hill, and teaches writing to government and industry.

## What Do You Think...

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# You Say You Want a Revolution?

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participatory democracy to restructure American society, these student radicals wrote: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." The chasm that would grow between the two movements, as potent fantasies of black power revolutionaries and white guerrilla warriors careened crazily against each other and the police, was still in the future and, in 1964, it was yet possible to envision joint effort across racial and even class divides in constructing the desired new world.

That, at least, was the message of Mario Savio, the passionate intellectual student leader at the University of California, Berkeley, who fired this mix of ideas into their purest form: "America is becoming even more the Utopia of sterilized, automated contentment," Savio stated that year, after returning from a stint with SNCC in Mississippi. "The 'futures' and 'careers' for which American students now prepare are for the most part intellectual and moral wastelands. This chrome-plated consumer's paradise would have us grow up to be well-behaved children. But," Savio insisted, in an expression that caught the essence of these emerging student radicals, "an important minority of men and women coming to the front today have shown that they will die rather than be standardized, replaceable and irrelevant."

The path from SNCC's "redemptive community" or Savio's moral minority to the paranoid fantasies of violent revolution in the late 1960s is strewn with the fractured expectations of the Civil Rights movement and the growing outcry against the Vietnam War. But what was common for this generation of activists across the era's tumultuous divisions lay less in their specific actions than in the fundamental principles of their critique of American society. A testy dismissal of adult "hypocrisy" in not living up to American ideals quickly grew into a total attack on American liberalism and the political culture it spawned. Liberalism was structurally flawed, SNCC organizers in Mississippi came to argue, for there was no mechanism by which non-elites could counter the concentrated economic and political influence wielded by the white establishment. SDS activists, on campus and in the few urban organizing projects they started, came to similar conclusions. Even the labor movement, long considered by the American left as the crucial vehicle for any serious reform, to say nothing of revolution, was dismissed as hopelessly compromised, fatally attracted to a politically enervating materialism, and rendered impotent as an agent of change by its internal hierarchical and race-conscious structures. Above all, liberalism was corrupt, a

morally suspect system that under the guise of providing for a common good was in fact organized around achieving the self-interest of the powerful.

As these components of what would become a New Left critique developed, the movement turned, with perhaps less confidence, to projecting the outlines of the society that would replace failed liberalism. At the core was the concept of participatory democracy, that individuals would organize in their given communities largely without outside interference and define for themselves their aspirations and the principles by which they would achieve them. If, as James Tracy has suggested in his book, *Direct Action*, participatory democracy proved of limited benefit the less internally cohesive and compact a group of citizens were, that was a point not yet understood by these student activists. Indeed, grassroots organizing, the political tool essential to participatory democracy, became a catch-all slogan, perhaps especially among those who had not spent life-threatening days of raw tension trying to do just that. Out of this mix, it was hoped, the people themselves would define the parameters of the new society that would emerge.

Variations on this story have dominated public discussions of the period. While there have been disagreements, at times bitter, among authors concerning the aptness of past tactics, strategy, and guiding principles of various groups, all agree the real story of the era rests with the youthful dissenters and their struggle with the liberal political system. This is true for the best of the works such as James Miller's *Democracy is in the Streets*, or Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, as it is for the numerous documentary readers that define the decade solely from the perspective of the New Left activists. There is even now something of a cottage industry in the academic journals, dissertations, and books that assert a continuity of principle and practice by former activists despite the fate of the New Left after 1970. The title of Lauren Kessler's interesting volume captures this spirit perfectly: *After All These Years: Sixties Ideals in a Different World*.

But, one might wonder, what is that different world and how did it come about? Was the New Left a premature revolution, the fruits of which must await a future set of proper conditions to develop? Or was it more a victim of a giant government conspiracy that crushed a vibrant and growing oppositional tendency? Adherents of these and similar interpretations thus can explain the demise of the New Left while protecting its image as a tribune of a people in inevitable, if slow, political motion. But a perspective less protective of the

New Left might reveal more. Perhaps treatments of that era have never fully captured either the complex turnings of America's political and religious history or the complete portrait of dissident youth during and after that decade. The importance of John A. Andrew's recent book, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics*, is that he attempts to understand how the new, different world of the quarter-century since 1970 in fact emerged from, if not the ashes, then the fissures of the old.

Andrew, a professor of history at Franklin and Marshall College, takes as his starting point the rather simple proposition that SNCC and SDS were not alone among the important youth groups with roots in the 1960s. While those two groups garnered most of the newspaper coverage, underscoring once again the symbiotic relationship between youthful dissidents and the mass media locked in an increasingly sensational search for "good copy," there was yet a third group of major political significance with origins in that decade. Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a hierarchically structured group with a decidedly buttoned-down self-image, helped spawn the most far-reaching and fundamental transformation of American political life of any of the dissident youth groups. The image should not obscure the key fact: they considered themselves dissenters who possessed a serious critique of, and the outlines of an alternative to, contemporary American liberalism and its political culture.

On September 9, 1960, 97 college-age men and women gathered at Great Elms, the family estate of William F. Buckley, Jr., in Sharon, Connecticut. Buckley was already a conservative thinker of national

repute, having authored two books (*God and Man at Yale* and *Up From Liberalism*) during the previous decade and founded the leading conservative political weekly, *National Review*. While Buckley and other older conservatives such as William Rusher and M. Stanton Evans played important roles in organizing young conservatives, the group that met at Great Elms very much defined itself generationally: "In this time of moral and political crisis," the Sharon Statement, YAF's founding document began, "it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain eternal truths." If the prologue eerily foreshadowed the moral tones of the Port Huron Statement,

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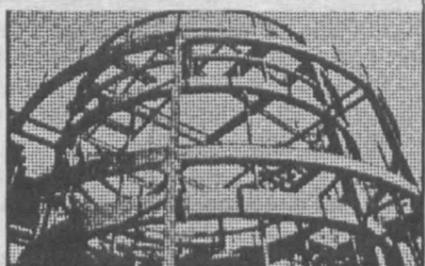
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# You Say You

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what followed was far briefer and diametrically different in philosophical and political orientation. "[A]s young conservatives," the founders identified "the individual's use of his God-given free will" as the "foremost among the transcendent values" to be honored and protected, for that guaranteed the individual's right to be "free from the restrictions of arbitrary force." YAF extolled a concept of government limited to preserving order and liberty; affirmed the essential unity of political and economic freedoms; and proclaimed the market economy as the most compatible "with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government" even as it remains "the most productive supplier of human needs." Not surprisingly, government interference in the operation of the economy, be it by the liberal state at home or by a communist government abroad, was condemned; and international Communism identified as the "greatest single threat" to American liberty.

This emphasis on individual freedom as the source of liberty served notice that YAF had a different philosophical premise than did the other major student groups. The fountainhead of liberty required protection precisely because it *could* be trampled by the forces of evil. For these conservative youth, to search for the secular millennium on earth was to avoid the central problem of human evil. Many of them traced their understanding of this human dilemma back to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and they reacted with a scorn touched with real dismay at their liberal/left opponents' attempts to construct the perfect society with such flawed material. If at times they might reduce a complex understanding of human nature to an anti-communist shibboleth, it was also true that their deeply grounded emphasis on man's sinful nature had unexpected political consequences. In the post-1945 decades, as this society embraced what is arguably its fourth major period of religious revival, that more somber theological and political tone provided these young conservatives with access to many Americans who, touched by the burgeoning Pentecostal and evangelical religious movements, had themselves restructured their moral lives through a profound conversion experience. In time they too came to search for an America that reflected their deepest beliefs.

Not surprisingly, the philosophical chasm that separated conservative youth from their liberal/left peers had its practical meaning as well. Where the emerging student radicals of the left protested the anti-Communist hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the governmental demand that university teachers sign loyalty oaths, conservative students formed the National Student Committee for the Loyalty Oath and praised FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, for his vigilance against communism. The most important practical difference, however, had less to do with particular political positions than with a fundamental difference over how each might transform American society. Where the liberal/left students came to embrace participatory democracy, community organizing, and massive demonstrations in their effort to restructure American politics, conservatives from the very beginning applauded the constitutional foundations of American political culture but sought to control its direction according to their own lights. In short, they appreciated the sources of political power and saw little need to devise new forms of political process.

For the students who would create YAF, the source of political power lay within the Republican party. From their point of view, the party had lost its moorings in the deluge of New Deal liberalism and in the

exigencies of a world war. The long-held demand for limited government and for a religiously-based moral order that provided a defense of tradition and a critique of contemporary secular and materialistic society — the core of a conservative critique for more than a century — seemed to them dismissed in the claim of the Eisenhower Republican party that it stood for a "modern Republicanism." To what was then a rump caucus within the party, President Eisenhower's view that the American people "are going to demand that the government do something to give them an opportunity to live out a satisfactory life" indicated to conservatives of all ages just how irrelevant were their principles to both parties as then constituted: liberty itself was threatened when the leader of the party of ideological conservatism so easily projected such an expanded role for government. To such a conservative, the threat of communism was even more sinister. For conservatives young and old, communism was indeed the anti-Christ — the very antithesis of their understanding of liberty and freedom — which could only be vanquished, not reformed. So pronounced was this battle imagery and so suspicious was any appeal for expanded government, that many thought the Eisenhower administration was, however unwittingly, little more than a Trojan horse that bore within it the virulent seeds of socialist disorder. From within such a world view there could be no millennium before Armageddon.

So the conservative students conducted grassroots organizing on campus and within the Republican party. No office, however insignificant it seemed when framed against national politics, was too

minor to contest; and the endless rounds of knocking on doors in assembly districts and campus dorms yielded results even before YAF formed. By 1959, conservative Republican students and their adult allies largely dominated the Young Republican apparatus within the party, and they mounted a vigorous campaign to have Barry Goldwater, the United States Senator from Arizona, nominated as Richard Nixon's vice-presidential candidate in 1960. While they failed in this, as they did in pressuring Nixon to embrace conservative principles, the effort did create a national, self-consciously conservative, student network. Thus the call for the Sharon conference stressed the importance of broadening the campus-based conservative youth movement and orientated those students toward action on and off the campus. "By action," the call to meeting insisted, "we mean *political action!*" John F. Kennedy, of course, beat Nixon in 1960 but as the Republican standardbearer was never the candidate of the conservative youth, they saw in his defeat an internal power vacuum that might allow them another opportunity to transform the Republican party itself. Although the conservative movement was anything but unified — indeed, its early organizational history reads surprisingly familiar to anyone who has plowed through discussions of left factional fights in this country — it's members did share a common goal nonetheless: to capture the 1964 Republican presidential nomination.

In the four years following Nixon's loss to Kennedy, two older men remained instrumental in the conservative movement's growth even as the students continued their organizing. If Goldwater's failed nomination as vice-president had galvanized the students, the January 1960 publication of *Conscience of a Conservative*

defined a political faith for that era. While liberals snickered that L. Brent Bozell, a conservative writer, had ghostwritten the book (they had yet to discover that John F. Kennedy's 1956 Pulitzer prize-winning *Profiles in Courage* was the effort of a poorly paid and later ignored writer), *Conscience of a Conservative* was a bestseller. In it Goldwater explained the moral and political principles of the conservative faith in a rather direct fashion. Centralized government undermined individual liberty, he wrote, and violated the "legitimate functions of government [that] are actually conducive to freedom": the maintenance of domestic order; protection from foreign foes; administration of justice; and "removing obstacles to the free exchange of goods." Written in an accessible style that reflected Goldwater's public speech, the book almost immediately fulfilled the author's goal. "Our objective," Goldwater wrote a conservative friend in January 1960, "is to take the onus from the word 'Conservative' and make it acceptable to people who shy away from it today.... If [we] can do this in a philosophical way, then we can attach the definitions and expositions to the concrete subjects of legislation." From the perspective of almost forty years later, Goldwater's effort yielded an immense harvest.

The second major figure guiding the young conservatives was William F. Buckley. Too erudite and viciously witty for practical politics, Buckley acted as the intellectual catalyst whose books and articles, television shows, and independent political action (he ran for mayor of New York City in 1964, and in losing helped establish the Conservative party as a factor in state politics) gave the conservative cause intellectual respectability and recognition. Buckley was especially popular among young, college-educated conservatives. As Patrick Buchanan remembered,



Jack Sherman

# Want a Revolution?

talking of his days as a youthful Goldwater supporter:

It is difficult to exaggerate the debt conservatives of my generation owe *National Review* and Bill Buckley. Before I read *NR*, there was virtually nothing I read that supported or reinforced what I was coming to believe....For us, what *National Review* did was take the word conservatism, then a synonym for stuffy, orthodoxy, Republican stand-pat-ism and economic self-interest, and convert it into the snapping pennant of a fighting faith.

To have his ideas so influence even the grubbiness of electoral politics remains no small accomplishment for the Yale-educated, patrician son of an elite Connecticut family.

By 1964, the efforts of Goldwater, Buckley, and the hundreds of original YAF activists had produced tangible results. YAF claimed some 350 chapters nationwide, with a membership of approximately 30,000. (SDS, in 1963, claimed 750 members.) While no one could check those figures, both Irving Howe and Michael Harrington, socialists and incisive critics of conservatism, confirmed in separate 1962 articles that conservative students, while still a minority, were increasingly important on college campuses. Who, then, were these students? According to Andrew, who relied on a 1966 study of 120 YAF activists, the answers might have surprised students in SDS. YAF members came from families they themselves defined as strict and hierarchically structured, where parents were Republicans or Independents (of whom only 6.3% identified with the radical right), and which were predominately working class. Significantly, a third were from Catholic families, a figure considerably higher than SDS's 9.6% or even the Young Republicans' 19.2% of members from Catholic households. Without setting out to do it, YAF assembled among its early activists representatives of precisely the demographic and ideological groupings that would largely revolutionize American politics over the ensuing three decades. It was a lesson that, as they grew into their majority, the liberal/left students would deeply regret they did not heed themselves.

At first, however, just the opposite seemed the case. Thanks in no small part to the efforts of conservative youth, Goldwater won the 1964 Republican presidential nomination in an astounding rout of the Republican moderates. In control of much of the party machinery, a result of those long hours of grassroots organizing, conservatives cheered wildly as Goldwater proclaimed in his acceptance speech that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" and that "moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." The enthusiasm soon waned as Lyndon Johnson won all but six states, defeating Goldwater by some 16 million votes. But where political opponents saw in the defeat conservatism's final curtain call, conservatives themselves witnessed only the end of the first act. The basic problem Goldwater and his supporters had encountered, F. Clifton White, a conservative Republican, wrote in an election post-mortem, was that "in the latter half of the twentieth century practically everyone wanted, indeed expected, something from the government.... [Thus] Lyndon Johnson was a conservative defending the established order while Barry Goldwater, the true conservative, became a 'radical' bent on upsetting the applecart of peace and plenty." For conservatives, then, the question became how to learn to "birth a new world from the ashes of the old."

Unfortunately, but understandably, *The Other Side of the Sixties* essentially stops with the 1964 election. In his detailed

examination of the factional battles within YAF, and between YAF and other extremely conservative groups such as the John Birch Society and the Minutemen, John Andrew explains and analyzes with clarity and purpose. We learn much as well about YAF's critique of the New Deal legacy concerning labor law and social security, and we come to understand something of the consistency in political philosophy in some of the more honorable conservative politicians and thinkers. In a suggestive but limited final chapter, Andrew sketches the legacy of YAF's early years, noting that it was there, in the Goldwater struggle, that future leaders of American conservatism such as Buchanan, Richard Viguerie, and Howard Phillips cut their political teeth. But more is needed, for the impact of this conservative youthful activism has gone well beyond its personal meaning for a handful of participants.

In 1961, for example, when he wrote *Revolt on the Campus*, M. Stanton Evans may have been excused for his partisan enthusiasm when he proclaimed that "historians may well record the decade of the 1960s as the era in which conservatism, as a viable political force, finally came into its own." For most people at the time student activists were identified with a decidedly liberal/left politics. From the perspective of the 1990s, however, what demands explanation is precisely that Evans' prophecy has become such a commonplace, while the New Left has long lost political meaning.

To understand this transformation one must take seriously both the ideological and social meaning of the conservative movement. For all their internal dissension, conservatives as a group have been able to appeal to American voters because their ideas resonate deeply in this culture. There is a language of individualism, of protecting freedom from incursions by powerful elites accountable only to themselves, and it is at its core a language of patriotism. Irving Howe appreciated something of the power of this message when he wrote almost forty years ago that in the conservative students' "concern for the preservation of personal initiative in a bureaucratic society there is something an intelligent radical ought to accept." While some conservatives became at times paranoid in their fear of communist subversion, the history of opposition to the state in the former Soviet Union suggests the dimensions of the problem Howe alluded to. More to the point, the conservative defense of individual liberty reflected a major strain of American political culture. While the political consequences were indeed different if one invoked Thomas Jefferson, John C. Calhoun, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Horatio Alger as a nineteenth-century antecedent, each could nonetheless lead a twentieth-century activist into conservative thought. The transformation of those idealistic YAFers in the 1960s into the enormously successful and far more pragmatic conservative political operatives of the 1980s is precisely what needs analysis.

The social meaning of the movement bears attention as well. While much of the student left (with copious media encouragement) indulged itself with the expectation that, during its decade of the 1960s, it would "begin the world over again," others experienced a quite different era. Imagine, for example, a Chicago kid, age 12 in 1956,

attending the local Catholic parochial school, the grandchild of immigrants from Central or Eastern Europe, working-class or perhaps the son of a working-class father now a member of the white-collar, lower-middle class. For such a person, the political awakening of his decade may have begun in 1956, with fervent prayers at school and at home over the failed Hungarian Revolution and the fate of Catholic Hungary's beloved Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty. It may also have ended in 1968 when Russian tanks crushed Prague's Spring. From this perspective, the New Left's disruption of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in the summer of 1968 was anything but a liberating experience, especially if Vietnam had touched this imagined kid now grown to adulthood. Ethnicity, religion and class,

nurtured in the intertwined networks of an urban neighborhood developed over the critical developmental years in an individual's life, more often than not moved such "kids" away from the politics of the student left, even if aspects of the counter-culture proved attractive.

Vietnam also played a role, of course, in creating a conservative movement among young people. Some were attracted by the patriotism of the movement, by the fierce commitment to anti-communism. But others,

especially from working-class and poor families, also watched with growing anger as more New Left activists than now care to remember quietly signed the papers or took the tests to gain a student deferment from the military draft. Largely without those options, it was the black and white working-class kids who answered the government's call and suffered the consequences. In the moral language of the era, it was the hypocrisy of those liberal/left students that helped prepare many a white working-class youth for the conservative cause.

Finally, race played a central role in expanding the conservative movement. In part, many in the white, urban working class resented enormously liberal politicians manipulation of school redistricting, for example, which preserved the isolation of the more elite suburban districts while forcing urban schools into fierce racial and class conflicts. In Anthony Lukas' *Common Ground*, Jim Sleeper's *The Closest of Strangers*, and Jonathan Rieder's *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*, the movement of white working people away from a liberalism experienced as a forced, elite-driven, social experiment is evident; and conservatives quickly capitalized on the opportunity to bring into their fold these working-class, New Deal Democrats. Thus the phenomenon of the "Reagan Democrats" during and after the 1980s, and the simply stunning *New York Times* exit poll result that showed, for the 1984 presidential election, that nearly 40% of identified trade union voters chose to re-elect Ronald Reagan — this after the PATCO strike, Solidarity Day, and an intense anti-Reagan drive by the unions themselves.

But conservatives were not simply opportunists, corraling voters where they could in the manner of politicians throughout the democratic world. As early as 1964, Ralph de Toledano, a conservative writer and activist, argued that the message of Goldwater's defeat was in fact

the breakup of the New Deal coalition. Goldwater had taken five southern states, largely due to white anger over civil rights, and conservatives sought to capitalize on that fissure. By 1968, conservative analyst Kevin Phillips developed for the first Nixon campaign a formal "southern strategy," which consciously pitched its political message to attract those whites resentful at the "gains" African Americans made in ending American segregation. This was quickly adapted by the conservative movement in general. Unwilling, following Goldwater's defeat, to publicly stand for dismantling major portions of the New Deal government, conservatives instead merged the twin images of welfare cheats and black Americans into a potent racial appeal. In a consistent thirty-year effort, conservatives have successfully belittled Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation, particularly its welfare and civil rights provisions. That may be "fair" in politics, but intrinsic to that process was the demonization of black men and women as "welfare queens," hustlers, and shiftless, irresponsible people. Thus Goldwater's consistent (if wrongheaded) position in favor of full civil rights for black Americans without increased governmental action had degenerated within a decade into an ugly manipulation of the worst elements in human nature. That this was done on behalf of a cause so philosophically sensitive to the problem of good and evil in human experience makes even greater the burden of responsibility conservatives carry for the consequences of such destructive behavior.

In an ironic way, 1960s student radicals of both the left and the right actually achieved part of their goals. Liberalism, as a widely-shared political vision that addressed common goals for a great number of Americans, barely limped out of the decade. Yet it remains unclear what has taken its place. The New Deal coalition no longer exists, but the "Reagan Revolution" itself has devolved into a two-term Clinton presidency. American politics has shifted demonstrably to the right, with limited government, balanced budgets, and welfare reform prominent in the political rhetoric of politicians of both parties. Yet voters fail to turn out for either party in near-record numbers every four years. Contributing to the state of our civic life has been the revival of religion, perhaps the most widely-experienced American social movement in all of the twentieth century. For some, the power of their conversion obliterates consideration of political life, as the expectation of the coming glory dismisses all else before it. For others, such as those in the Christian Coalition, to be born-again is to become a soldier of the Lord in the political as well as the religious realm. While conservatives have indeed gained in the short term from these developments, that gain may actually obscure a more fundamental process. As happened during revivals in earlier centuries, the process of religious rebirth is again accompanied by a sharp, even antagonistic, critique of existing religious leaders and institutions.

That two of the basic structures of this society have been in such flux makes clearer the dimensions of the broad crisis of authority that has framed American life over the past three decades. The conservative "victory" is suspect, primarily because its adherents have been unable to consolidate it philosophically or politically. Far more important than the politics of this group or that tactic is the possibility that this crisis of authority in American society may be the key to comprehending the legacy of the 1960s.

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**More New Left activists than now care to remember quietly signed the papers or took the tests to gain a student deferment from the military draft. It was the black and white working-class kids who answered the government's call and suffered the consequences.**

# The Eternal Co-Pilot

Paul West

The *Eternal Co-Pilot* is the second excerpt from Paul West's forthcoming novel *Terrestrials*. (Scribner 1997). Bookpress published a previous excerpt in February 1996.

The man slouched at the gravy-brown desk is flying it. Its slave. It extends the whole length of one wall. Were it smaller, he could resist flying it, though his will is a slight thing nowadays. Even if he could resist its length, though, he could not resist the massed screens of the monitors piled one on top of the other all along the desk. Computer screen. Storm scope. Tremors of the graphite-gray memory. White digits on a background of varying colors. Or, on the radar scopes which bring home to him storms near and far, flares of yellow, green, and red, the last being the most fearsome weather of all. In these colorful displays, as he lolls and dreams, he thinks he sees Latin America burning, a scarlet wedge at the bottom right hand, matched by a green Africa in the opposite corner, but that is only rain. Africa is wet.

Only a screen, he says. Only screens. Stacked up on a desk. Amazing it holds the weight. Seven or eight of them. He seems unable to count beyond five or six. All he knows is that he sits here, sits out the days and the nights, tuning in the colors, the numbers, garnering news of the world. He loves that wood of the desk, the fake grain of the consoles, the warm dun-green steel of the cabinets. Once upon a time he never sat at desks, but now desks are his all, and what he heaps upon them. All that red weather. Sensed. Sounded. Touched with an electric wand that fans across the glass, dies, then sweeps in again from the other side, ceaseless and constant. Then he feeds the data, the givens, into his computer, sometimes called his transmuter. His hands tremble for joy. He force feeds it, but there is no overloading it. It does not in the end yield a prize paté from its liver. He could be staring into the end of the human world. He knows South America is not on fire. He knows Africa is not being drenched. He stares at the flares, the thimbles of molten light until they dance and lose their veils. He sees how screens shut out.

Then he sees his clearest, sees thunder cells the denuded crimson of *gaillardia pulchella*, that gaudy dandelion of the Outer Banks. He sighs. The hell of his life is reaching others at last. In his transmuter he stores up the storms. On the screens the incoming planes move like moths, but not on the same screens as the storms, although they both tear the same air apart. Where, once, his heels were winged.

The man slouched at the gravy-brown desk is flying it. Nothing movés. No keening of wires. No blurt of squashed air needing somewhere to go. A modicum of darkness in his face hints at pain. He flies his pain and it flies him. Into each of the rounded screens in front of him, a looking glass into which he heaves heart, mind, limbs and breath. Whatever else he has. He taps the keys of an aerial abacus. There, at his desk, in the shabby low room in a two-story cement blockhouse that might double as a bunker, void of dead as yet. But he has hopes and he flies them too.

Just walkably far away loom the huge granaries, the hangars, that enclose the planes he is no longer allowed to coax through space. If this burns him, he is cool. If he knows he is being observed, he does not flinch. The tanned small hands ripple away, making the silent sonata of enormous lift. To where no human ever was, so gross a journey. He will die at the desk, he knows, at something less than minimum sinking speed. All the big noisy tin birds jockeyed up behind him in their asylum. Rust. Creak. Inert as rain spouts. He only half eats. He lives not locally, but on Greenwich Mean Time, almost always five hours ahead. So he will die before his time. He will have been gone

five hours before they lift him from his chair and load him into the last surviving yellow biplane in the world and float him with it afire into the lake. For now, though, with each minute he goes ahead he falls a jiffy behind, or more than that. The twinkling of an eye. The drop of a hat. Two shakes certainly. Think of him as a dwindling Methuselah whose agate eyes have stared into the sun too long. The sun has stared him down. As in Africa, where he lost his soul. Booth his name, would he but answer to it, instead of 502524. Just sometimes he answers. A tease.

To and fro. He tries to think of that. It will not come. It must be to or fro instead. He tries that. Miraculous, it comes. Fro today, then. No, he is in between. Denied a direction, he circles through the ruined choirs of his mind, backing, backing away, until, grinning his half-millimeter grin, he almost develops a red shift, but as soon develops an air force blue as he strays into view again, forward as forward can be. But not so fast. Fast in his day, he is now a stationary man, well on the way to qualifying as a beacon. One of the fuzzier ones beloved of moths and gnats. Or like some child in school sitting up straight, a tiny paragon of attentiveness. Arms folded. Eyes on the blackboard. Ears tuned in. What could anyone say worth all of that? A shy swot he is. The hat on his head should be blue, of softest cotton with mesh gussets to hold the shape. Instead it is orange or red, from that region of the spectrum, cut as only he knows from a windsock of fluorescent dye-fast vinyl coated with nylon for long life, approved by the Port Authority. Three-and-one-half-inch bill. Twin fronds of oak leaves there. Scrambled egg from some last breakfast before taking off. No one has found the leftover windsock, but surely the wind that blew up or down it can blow across it as well, wherever it flutters or fills to mislead.

Behind him, ignored, hangs a plaque informing the world at large that aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea (he hates the sea) it is devilishly unforgiving of any carelessness. He laughs. Or incapacity. He snorts. Or neglect. He winces and almost begins to cry. Plague, he thinks. Not plaque. His mind roams away. His hands feel on his behalf. One screen is umber now, as if, outside, were only a stratosphere the hue of crushed violets. And he going faster than a nondawdling bullet. Happy days. They will not rise up from their graves. To hassle or to haunt.

In his mind's eye, while or because he holds his breath, old horrors come again. He is mining rock salt with bare hands that bleed. He is mining red salt. Cudged by black Danakils, those captors his raptors. Again he faints, choked on his babble. With slowcoach grace, hushed lepers prod his face. He mines red salt again, with exposed quick of finger. Things to come are already upon him, like next year's weather all at once and overwhelming.

To or fro. It hurts him now at the desk that he never cared enough. Did not in the desert give one jot about his friend. Out went the flame. Up and down went their capsules. And all he cared about was Barney Booth, who would have let the other one, his buddy, die. He did not even think the words: *I do not mind it if he dies today*. That would have been attention. He did not think of him at all, him unthinkable as if already dead, and an unre-membered one at that.

Next, one man marooned in the mountains as trapped as any sentry in his box. Utterly alone with wind and hawks. This is the buddy, permanent in his fix as a saint in a stained-glass window.

Next but one, a man captured by salt miners. Working. Working. Shoved. Badgered. Starved. Of all phases in his life the dominant. All his cries, yells, all helter-skelter racings of his heart start here.

Even now, looking away, they catch sight of themselves just then, peeping forward to the bliss of looking back on it all. The coming through the going through even before going

through with it. The difference, though, makes havoc of one who finds nothing to fill that vacuum of the heart where his buddy used to lounge or tap-dance in the full spate of his early middle manhood. In prime condition, really, ripe as a cauliflower, ready to cut and sell. A goner. His image peeled away. All the good-byes unsaid.

Harsh, Booth says. A done thing dies. Done, it lingers, like a fox cub in the doorway. Lingering, it fades at the tally-ho. Faded, as with all things whose vocation is to fade without a murmur, a gasp, a sigh, a little cheep-cheep, it is here today but gone tomorrow. That is the universal scheme, the butter on our bread. You count on that until your dying day, although you know, in the core of your going, it's not without demur. Oh no, you resist, you clear your throat, you blink to signal anybody. This is what happens to everyone else. Whereas I will it away with a sniff. Inhalation that does not happen. Reflex that does not flower.

He resumes. You go on clean. Betray again if you are good at it. Wipe the slate and start over with an incurable newborn smile. It's okay. You'll never do it again, you tell them. It isn't me at all. I was temporarily out of me. Out of things. Hit the wrong key, folks. Barney Booth, once you get to know him, isn't like that at all. He grows on people. He flowers in their gaze. Mister Reliable.

He wanted ever after to be good to that cast-off Sancho Panza of a friend, wholesome likeness to himself. Rupert, he says. What a name. Rupe is better. Or even rue. Two men the same. Muscle. Bone. Flesh. Juices. Beard to shave. From time to time, little white squirts from some self-engrossed bulb inside them. Two chips off the selfsame block. Only one of them damned.

Little word, damned, but he believes it. The two of them live on. Even an inferior living is living according to cosmic record books as big as mesas. Barney, for one, desks. To desk has now become his private verb. While Rupe, aloft as often as not, flies charter flights, a chauffeur glorified. Their future wears a hood. Their past bears acid stains, old underwear turned into dust rags. They smile at artificial flowers. They befriend what is left of each other. And only Barney knows. Ever ready for the so-called loss of life, as if life were gas escaping from a communal balloon, he had schooled himself. Not too close. Never too intimate. Know their names but not know them. Keep them a victim's arm's length away.

It never worked with Clegg, whom he surnames when being strict, whom he first-names, oddly, when trying to be even stricter, winning a cheery smile he puts aside like a paperweight full of tiny crystal flowers. Old asphodel. Clegg has no idea of what happened in the desert, or of what is happening now, but continues in miraculous blithe mutuality. Two men, back from the dead, with hairs growing still in their nostrils. Most of the old bodily rigmaroles. Not so deft as before, nor so honed as if muscle had alchemized overnight into the springiest of steels. But alive. Ticking. *Compos mentis*. Warm-handed, hearty. To go on friends until doom-crack.

But this deskbound one, the desker, he can hardly bear the heart-full grins of one who never wished him dead. Or uncared so far as to have him die unthought about. As if remorse shading into shame has failed to wipe out lovesick disappointment.

\*\*\*

Now, to prove himself still capable of motion, he 'hrusts himself two-handed back from the desk and heads for what he calls the Can. The Head to Clegg. Bathes his face at the basin, humming a desolate tune. Sees his face in the mirror, wishing he could see past that apparition to the Big Dipper, or, more prosaic, Utica in roughly that direction along the land. Ceiling and visibility unlimited, he murmurs. All down the sky from top to bottom. But, in the dead air of the men's room, he just washes his face all over again, splut-

tering. Madman, in the northern hemisphere, he wants to see the Southern Cross, and all he does, with hands undried, is walk outside to a dim spot behind the FBO, where dew and rain resist the sun, and, kneeling, plant the palms of his hand on the dredged-out, spongy grass, as if renewing contact with complete simplicity, and watched by that other, Clegg, who wordlessly notes in the man's movements something sly and random. He watches Booth straighten up, bunching his shoulders in toward his neck just like a wrestler before round one. Clegg slinks away before Booth turns, and so misses the shoulders coming down again. Booth walks as if waiting for the engine of his walking to kick on. It does not, and he feels as if he will never reach the dun green door of the FBO. His being is one red-hot thought. To be indifferent, not care if Clegg lived or died, is just the same as strangling him over and over again. He sees himself approaching, hands upraised, and saying, *It will not hurt, oh no, this is what I do to you nonstop*. Into the open with it, just like a murderer.

And Clegg, with his boylike smile, just says *Hands Off, I'm delicate. Your hands are green with grass*.

Booth will go to the can again, even if only to savor the shock of his appearance in the glass. Can this be me? This wasted face? These used-up eyes? The faint tan like a darkening from within? This is a man in a men's room. A glutton for punishment. His crime is mental only. The punishment is too. He nods, goes in, plies his screens again to bring in the pageant of bad weather.

Oh, Barney Booth. Conscience a cinder. Heart a golf-ball hole. You deep-sixed him like an empty bottle, with no message aboard for posterity to marvel at. Yo ho. Hosanna. The legendary bell tolling for humankind does not toll for him. Or the one tolling for him for it. He lives on. Squanders what is left of him, in robot motions toward what loosely is known as night, more exactly as the time between the end of evening civil twilight and the beginning of morning civil twilight, as published in the Air Almanac, converted to local time, which he does not heed.

Shoves forward nonetheless. Thattaway to the sun. With his body on local time, but his mind on Greenwich, what he needs most of all is the beautifully pertinent navigational aid known in the trade as Consolan, for transoceanic travel, although it guides only. It has never been known to console. Whence and whither is beyond him. He needs a system that steers him, knows where he has to go without his knowing what makes it tick. No tune. No commands. Just once, he knows, as he flails and dithers, he snapped like week-old toast. He could have yawned instead, and that would have been harder to do.

Somewhere I'll find you, he hums to the glide slope. To something this final, he thinks, there should be a thunderous prelude, a whole array of Vasi lights, red and white, to tell him he is making his final approach too high or too low. Red over white is right. All red is too low. All white too high. At thirteen hundred feet from the threshold he finds the far bar of lights. At six hundred feet from the threshold the near bar. From the near bar to the far. How he yearns for that. It sounds like an indefinitely postponed promise of refreshment, as if he were crawling through Dublin or Munich. But it is only, all told, twelve boxes of light, arranged in four sets of three on either side of the runway. What symmetry. What helpfulness, even at night or in snow. If the pilot making a night approach desires to have the brightness of the lights reduced, he need only ask the controller in the tower.

Grease it down, then. But he is as exempt from honor as devoid of grace. Again he falls earthward from that hulk of ruined titanium, away from all human forms of bliss. Free to. He interrupts that train of thought. Free between the near and the far bar, between the end of evening civil twilight and the begin-

# Co-Pilot

ning of morning civil twilight, to ply his Consolan. Free to go callous for the rest of his days. Free to talk himself back into his own good graces. Knowing it needs, he tells himself four or five nautical miles away from the threshold, the mind provides. Pride grows a scab. That is natural. That is the law. Look. Adjust. Line up. Not too heavy-handed now. Two fingers will guide it.

All so seemly. As in the color filter assembly. The upper two thirds are red, the other third clear. The lens effect thus achieved makes white light when viewed from high up. Red when too low, as aforesaid. But pink when seen from the horizontal center of the slit. Forty thousand candlepower to bring home how many horses? He tries to divide the one by the other. Vice versa. But nothing goes into anything. He no longer knows how much horsepower he has. Maybe no more than the harnessed heft of four shrews. Not so bad. Just that little will get him down safe. He would love to land on the land.

He has been interrogated to death. Like Clegg. All modes of interrogation save inquisitor in leather mask, breathing pure oxygen. Has answered on a basis so selective as to entitle him to instant membership in Infernal Fibbers Incorporated. Saving face. Saving soul. Two men in the desert, lost for more than a month, then, through some mathematical sleight of hand, questioned about it for five months more. Odd ratio. Smacking of the cabala.

All wrong. He has lost touch with knowledge, has too often explained himself to those who, amazed at his survival, refuse to make sense of it. Or of Clegg's, high up in the mountains with Booth below sea level. Never gave up, he always heard himself saying. Get through at all costs. A little coil of

tungsten will, he told them. To bend but not to break. But what fuelled his will to live had been the willingness to have Clegg die. And this can never figure among things tellable. Is only there as the thumbprint of a bleached abstraction's ghost. Missing believed killed.

For such leftovers he lives on. He foams inside. He churns. Tummy grumbles all the time as if some tiny animal has taken refuge there, spastic with fright. Officerly duty, Barney knows, says look after your people, whatever else. Like a Moses with epaulets. That is the law. In that, an F grade. Not for failure, but for friendlessness. Fraud. Fie.

Yet why ever after haunt himself? Belong to the order of perfect beings he might not, but he yearns at least to belong to that order's second or third class. If not as an eagle, then as gull. Crow. Cabbage white. Wasp no matter so long as winged.

The so-cold universe, from which he delicately takes hints without ever wishing to, goes on enveloping him. Able to accommodate his every thought, his chronic pain, even the in-suck of his imploded heart. There is no other penalty. Remorse is no carcinogen. Guilt has not struck him dumb or blind. He stammers or stutters a fraction, though. No longer quite sees how to shape his mouth to talk or kiss.

On he goes, desking, tapping keys, sometimes using his heel as a highspeed hammer on the dead polish of the floor. Jittery. Athrob. Ready, if he can only find out how, to put his mind in place of the universe. On he goes, from rage to weakened gentleness,

then to a more assertive gentleness, a louder prowess, with his fresh image like one newly shaved growing on him daily until he almost believes, shall we say credits, that he has come through unscathed. Mended at last. If ever hurt. He turns into a walking hopper of aviation lore. No end of it. He knows. He says.

He flies all the flights humanity has never flown. From Hell to nevernever, from Coventry to Nod. Just for the record. A Leonardo-Daedalus, he imagines all the undesigned and

See how it changes, Booth sighs. It turns from a gray into a whiteness. Funny, how they all of a sudden become real. You never expect them to.

As far as passengers go, Clegg laughs, I carry a paddle with me, and if anybody acts up I tap them with it. Works wonders.

Now, Booth tells him, I know why business has fallen off. You paddle them?

On the contrary, I'm the soul of politeness.

Well, Booth says irreverently, I've no soul at all.

manence. But also something underhand and unworthy. The word *operator* hurts. Operators big time or like him small are bad. Except for wireless operators, quaint term from an early war. And when the term means driver of some vehicle, yes, as applied in certain states, not of the heart, by jiminy, but of the Union, not, by Jehoshaphat, between man and woman, man and man, woman and woman, man and beast. Woman and beast, beast and angel, angel and the implacable tender deity. His mind overshoots constantly and he does not

correct. Fixed base also stands for the pilot who no longer flies. Grounded after a series of escapades, he takes pride in being cussed. Or accursed. The words have fused. Has twice taken off and landed with towbar fast to nose-wheel. Has once begun to taxi with one wing tied down. Repeatedly mistuned his radios when feeling bloody-minded. And, on too many occasions, taxied across runways in use, just to get a cup of bollocks on the airport's other side. Using airplane as rickshaw, airport as street. Has also deliberately landed on runways not in use, and in the deepest grass. Taxied from the nearby highway across a parking lot and buzzed his engine at a Snow-Cone, demanding mint pistachio, sugar cone, jumbo, above scything roar of propeller. Thus Barney Booth Esquire, hardly at home on his home planet, but a genius of air otherwise bound to buy the farm. A menace known. But as a menace in agony, which blurs and pips like Morse through his garbled heart, the least known of



Jack Sherman

unbuilt planes his maimed imagination can supply. So much so that, as he combines or twists his hands at subtle angles of attack and planes his palms above unthinkably distant hunks of it matters not which planet, he seems master of both archetype and prototype, feeding into his transmuter, as he calls it, the low-down on the air. In the nights testing himself on far-fetched data while swigging his own brew of bouillon cubes dissolved in coffee black as soot. His cup of bollocks, he says.

\*\*\*

Several times on slack days, when Clegg has no charter to fly, the two of them wander to the bench next to the parking lot and watch the traffic coming in. The distant buzz of an engine will do it, or a sudden flurry of talk from the tower. Squinting their eyes, they try to see the white or gray whateveritis sailing into view above the curvature of the earth, flying not level but along an arc that leads to them. Two whitenesses they see are wings. Like pilots on some poop, they stand and wave, hailing the newcomer marvel, Booth with sallow envy, Clegg with friendly skepticism.

I'm a stranger to all this, Booth says wanly. No way, Clegg tells him. Once a pilot, always one.

He's coming in too high. Chop and drop, Clegg answers. Look how steep he's coming down now. I do a bit of that myself.

Booth stares at him: With passengers?

No, when I'm on my own. Never with passengers.

What he has instead, he feels, but never says, is something like diffused dawnlight trapped in his head. The mental equivalent of a death rattle. He loves to watch the planes, but his heart does not go out to them as they arrive, all waft and freight, slowing and tilting back, touching down and heaving slightly forward as they slow. He wants a new life, even if he has to crouch on a wing to get it, and clutch with all his might not to be blown away.

Clegg plants a palm on his shoulder, telling him to stay. Clegg has to go. Booth watches him limp away, wishing he too were as whole a man as Clegg, as able to josh and touch. He walks right at a group of birds, scattering them, and walking abruptly at them where they settle next. Today he is willing to be nothing grander than a pesterer of birds. He is as much at home as an Inuit on the bank of the Ganges.

Earlier mental standbys from Table Mountain to the constellation Centaurus, from Trotsky to the ruddy-faced role model General Cyrus W. Shumaker, give way to uplift images of great aces from the history of flight. Billy Bishop. Cobber Cain. Paddy Finucaine. Dean Hess. Richard Hillary. Biggles and the Baron. Senior partner of this little airline, this little line in air, with that nemesis his friend hugged tight against his heart, he sometimes thinks that what they share is too routine to be endured.

Eff Bee Oh, he murmurs, for FBO. Fixed Base Operator in the trade. The very name evokes immovability, in the teeth of imper-

men.

Quiet the eagle that nibbles him yonder. Quiet the Rupert who watches him slink beyond the pale.

Quiet the khaki screen in which Booth sees his face.

As fixed as geology, he runs the office as its officer while Clegg and some juniors, such as the brash Lammergeyer, cocksman and health fanatic, fly the charters. Odd sound of the word *charter*, to Booth at least. If not of Magna Carta a surly echo, then of early navigators heaving up on the mouth of the Hudson. In their vessels heaving. Heaving to. As in Hove. Yes, that was epic, indelibly so. Crowns. Garlands. Cheers. Titles. Ordinary men dubbed knights. Or was that in the Indies after all? He wonders who he has been in other lives. With so many leftover cravings for glory, cloaks, his name writ in fire while they bury him in floaty petals. Only he knows, he does not tell, what over the years has arrived in crates and been sequestered in locked hangars, or in the whitewashed-windowed rooms above the Eff Bee Oh. Or what has been flown in after the control tower shuts down at five in the evening, the hour of the lifting of the arm. And vanished from human ken. Heads from beheadings? Foreskins from ancient wars? Dynamite disguised as walking sticks? Working models of his conscience made in bronze or teak, oiled with blood of Christian lambs? Oh no. He buys up model trains.

Daily he redesigns the plane of planes

*continued on page 11*

# To Be or Not to Bop

**Cranial Guitar: Selected Poems by Bob Kaufman,**  
Coffee House Press: Minneapolis, 1996  
166 pages, \$12.95

## T.J. Anderson III

It is unfortunate that many readers are unfamiliar with the work of Bob Kaufman (1925-1986). Acknowledged in France as the Black Rimbaud, Kaufman was a poet who actively engaged in the "derangement of the senses" and refused to embrace the literary or social status quo of conservative America. He was a writer who forged his reputation among the Zen-breathing aficionados of the underground, not the tranquilized drudges of mainstream art. Bob Kaufman is another example of how an African-American artist can be ignored in the United States, but acknowledged abroad. Fortunately, the publication of *Cranial Guitar* by Coffee House Press offers old readers the opportunity to reconnect with his work and new readers the chance to realize his genius. Included in *Cranial Guitar* is the full text of Kaufman's 1967 book *Golden Sardines*, selections from *Solitude Crowded with Loneliness* (1965), *Ancient Rain* (1981) and some uncollected work. The book is a monument to the best experimental qualities of American literature.

There are probably several reasons why Kaufman's work isn't as well received in the U.S. as it should be. We are a nation that constantly categorizes on all sorts of levels, particularly with regards to ethnicity and geography. Like the poet Stephen Jonas, Kaufman was a person who actively defied racial and geographical definition, becoming the embodiment of Whitman's "everyman."

*My face is covered with the maps of dead nations;  
My hair is littered with drying ragweed.*

*...  
Long Forgotten Indian tribes fight battles on my chest  
Unaware of the sunken ships rotting in my stomach  
("Would You Wear My Eyes?")*

Although both his father and mother were African-American, Kaufman would constantly invent biographical data that transcended strict racial classification. In several contributor's notes of various anthologies where his work appeared, he would write that his father was a "German Orthodox Jew" and his mother was a "voodoo Martiniquan Roman Catholic." He once remarked, "One thing for certain I am not white. Thank God for that. It makes everything else bearable." By refusing to specify his race and by having a recognizably Jewish last name, Kaufman became the quintessential American outsider.

Kaufman took perilous personal risks as an advocate for racial and social justice. As a result, he experienced all the violence and antagonism that the American judicial system had to offer. One of the highlights of this publication is David Henderson's informative introduction, providing crucial biographical information on Kaufman's social and political activities. His introduction further enriches our understanding of the poetry. However, the real difficulty lies in defining his poetry. Kaufman wasn't a self-promoter. He spent most of his life financially impoverished but spiritually enlightened.

*I refuse to have any more retired burglars  
picking the locks on my skull, crawling in  
through my open windows, i'll stay out forever,  
or at least until spring, when all the wintered  
minds turn green again,  
("I wish...")*

The majority of Kaufman's poetry was never written down in journals. Rather, his words were composed out loud or written down on assorted scraps of paper, and were later typed or recorded by his friends. Kaufman sought to return poetry back to its original roots as an oral art form, first and foremost, certainly anticipating the concerns of the Beat Generation.

Although orality was emphasized by Kauf-

man, it is interesting to note that he took a Buddhist vow of silence after the assassination of J.F.K. and didn't speak in public until 1973 after the Vietnam War ended. He ended his silence by reciting Becket's opening speech in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and one of his own poems.

*All those ships that never sailed  
The ones with their seacocks open  
That were scuttled in their stalls...  
Today I bring them back  
Huge and intransitory  
And let them sail  
Forever.*

("All Those Ships That Never Sailed")

In *Cranial Guitar* Kaufman demonstrates an ease in employing African-American vernacular and standard English in a way that manages not to detract from content or rhythm. Like fellow Californian Charles Mingus who merged various ethnomusic traditions into cohesive jazz compositions, Kaufman merged various ethnopoetic traditions, weaving texts that talked and prophesied.

*Believe in the swinging sounds of jazz,  
Tearing the night into intricate shreds,  
Putting it back together again,  
In cool logical patterns,  
Not in the sick controllers,  
Who created only the Bomb.*

("Believe, Believe")

Kaufman had a good ear, employing jazz cadences, surreal imagery, and linear and non-linear forms. He journeys through urban landscapes and dreamscapes with equal ease bringing to bear a prophetic voice that serves as witness to our continual disenfranchisement and cautions against the industrialization of the human community.

*...who wants to be allowed not to be, suppose  
a man wants to  
swing on the kiddie swings, should people be  
allowed to stab him  
with queer looks & drag him off to bed & its  
no fun on top of a  
lady when her hair is full of shiny little  
machines & your ass  
reflected in that television screen, who wants  
to be a poet if you  
fuck on t.v. & all those cowboys watching.  
("A Terror is more Certain...")*

It is important that *Cranial Guitar* begins with *Golden Sardines* because it displays an artist who is unafraid to take risks. By including his poetic "failures" as well as his "successes" certainly marks a heroic moment in literature. What results is a miraculous unevenness of work that belies our Western desire to constantly create master works that often end up being closed and inflexible. Surely, Kaufman heard Artaud's call from France advocating "no more masterpieces." And, in doing so, he frees up the page and shows that good art can become simultaneously possible and impossible.

It is difficult to objectively define what constitutes a failure in Kaufman's work. He was primarily an oral poet. Thus, seeing the printed work detracts from the nuance of his voice. This omission is important because many people who had the privilege to hear Kaufman recite his poetry in the North Beach California cafes particularly recall his tonal quality and the power of his delivery. For example, how can we imagine the lines from his jazz-scat poem "Crootey Songo," "DER-RAT SLEGELATIONS, FLO GOOF BABER./ SCRASH SHO DUBIES, WAGO WAILO WAILO," if we don't hear the tonal inflections that was such a crucial element in his poetry? It's comparable to seeing the transcription of a Charlie Parker solo. Sure, the musical notations may move us in some fashion, but how much? Kaufman personally knew music innovators like Charles Mingus, Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. They too knew and respected his work. Not only are poems like "Round about midnight," "Jazz Chic," "African Dream" and several others exemplary examples of Kaufman's ability to create jazz-influenced poetry, but they also demonstrate his ability to effectively deal with issues of race. *Cranial Guitar: Selected Poetry of Bob Kaufman* is a message in a bot-

tle, an indispensable book that must be opened and sung.

*I have walked in this world  
With a cloak of death wrapped  
Around me. I walked alone, every  
Kiss was a wound, every smile  
A Threat.  
One day death removed his  
Cape from around me,  
I understood what I had lived  
Through I had no regrets,  
When the cloak was removed,  
I was in a pit of bones.  
A fish with frog's  
Eyes,  
Creation is perfect.  
(The Poet)*

T.J. Anderson III is a poet who lives in Binghamton, N.Y.

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## Paul Auster

# Hand to Mouth



Paul Auster's eight novels — including *The New York Trilogy* — are canonical reading for fans of American literature worldwide. In addition to several works of non-fiction and poetry, he wrote the screenplay for the acclaimed *Smoke* and wrote and codirected its companion film *Blue in the Face*.

*a chronicle of early failure*

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# The Eternal Co-Pilot

against the day it will be perfect. Predatory. Sleek. Faster than the rotating Sun. Heavy as neutron starstuff. And murder to fly.

Whenever he changes position, or relaxes, at his transmuter, murmuring about subroutines and arrays, or mouths utopian runes about the first job to do after entering a character (turn the next character on the screen, he whispers, into an inverse video version of itself), he lifts right hand, tautens palm to convex, cants up thumb, and cruises or sails the streamline of his hand against the icefield of the wall, each millimeter of motion, as his pulse taps in his wrist, the equivalent of a thousand miles. Sighting above his knuckles at some invisible horizon knobly with penguins, he lowers the tip of his middle finger only its nail's width and banks the hand slightly, half murmuring Ho Boy or Boyo, until the second and third fingers topple down, an undercarriage, and the airplane of his hand droops toward a landing nowhere on the stairs, coming nearer and nearer his face until, massive as a starship hotfoot from [Proxima Centauri,] one of his favorites, it blurs, closes the view, and drifts forward again.

Up flicks the finger gear. Then the middle finger drops only to rise at once, and the rest of the hand seals around it, an arrowhead if you permit that image forming while the thumb still cantilevers out, strained to the utmost.

He has no name for this bird in hand, but is always maneuvering it against acres of flabbergasting ivory light, planning angles of descent or bank, turn or tilt, and trying to accomplish ever faster that last downflick of the middle finger, after which the hand reforms like a horizontal parasol snapping shut.

Who'd not warm to that? To someone unused to watching him at work or rest, even rummaging through those hidden crates upstairs or in the locked hangars, he seems to be trying in vain to salute or to wave goodbye to someone direly far away. A tic, this, a mannerism, it wins him the reputation of playing blind man's buff all by himself, all the more so when he brings his thumb right up to his eye and traces the hand's gyration with his head touching it.

Grinding a small engine between his teeth, with a tiny crescendo coming down his nose, he zooms and wheels below the dewline of the windowsill, a chump of parallax, a slave of slow incessant motion. Then, land-ho, the world outside lumbers back into view like a moon's rump above the nacelles of his knuckles and the ordinary world goes giddy-up again.

Several times an hour he does this, and when they cry Barney, hey, Barney, hey there, Barney Booth! he invites them aboard what he calls the spaceship of pain, fresh in from [the Rhesus Condor Rift,] via the Coal-sack Solomons, his only cargo something so bad that no phonetic system can hold it. So he says. The harsh quotient of everything. Frosty rather than toasty. We are the after-birth of a cosmic abortion that almost took. Panspermied here by one more compassionate than us. His face dithers as always at that line. They watch entranced as the grown man plays imp, fool, clown, Judas among the nin-compoops.

Then he is quite explicitly saying something else, about a cursor, in which word they think there is an e. He excuses himself, telling them it is time to store. They go away, regaled but snubbed, even Clegg, that most mystified of men, in whom the milk of

human kindness has burned away to a crisp for reasons unknown. Just, Clegg broods, as if we were still out there in Africa. BB has never gotten over it.

Only sometimes Booth has. He knows they are already filing aboard settling into horizontal seats behind his goggled eyes. Those who don't know where they are, he chants, are more than eager to go far. Rifling through magazines and sucking mints, they are his passengers in the strict sense of not earning their keep on his team. Before the short-field takeoff, in a cross old wind, he shuts the turbines down. Mere will will ferry them all the way to the Category Three System where tulip bulbs of light in rows fifteen parsecs long grow weary of being bright. His eyes feel full, so prickly that he has to cough to free the tear ducts. He shuts down his transmuter for the day. Says I forget the address of the first byte. Knows what the one product of his transmuter is. Ends in um. Let them dub him daredevil, barnstormer, flying fool, a menace to all mankind. He'll one day show them such a time that each of them will need to write a dozen autobiographies, in mercury on slate, even to convey a glimmer of that sinusoidal ride. Look, folks, no hands. Things to come are upon him. Raw slipstream gnaws his face.

Why did memory boost itself so much? Why did something remembered loom ever bigger for having been brought back? Sweet in the gorgeous forenoon, were they two once upon a time together? Heart all balm, he answers: Were we ever! Him the pulp, I the rind. When last in evidence. In mind's eye an apple, in mind's apple a worm. I once was navy blue. He begins to quiver, a fraught aspen. Correct a hand if it outstretch o'er a poorly bird. Eye white. Face charred. Loins flayed. All the usual honors.

If time may be paged. No. If time may be read. And thus paged. This is more like it, Barney Booth. Book of life back and forth, as if to say I am not reading, nothing so ambitious. Just dipping, dipping. To and fro. Up to work and so to bed. Up at dusk and down at dawn. Now there's a program, felt in the heart as a power-on stall. Hip-hip. I'm waiting. Hip.

You won't. I wouldn't either. Not required except of dunderheads. Required

only in the down and out. Aren't there any out and down?

Booth's eyes hurt from gazing at the storm screens. When he looks away, the colors of the indoor world look wrong. When he looks back, the colors are harsh, they have no glow. Worse, he seems to see through things, and knowing there is a technical explanation for this doesn't help. He raises his hand against the overhead light. It casts no shadow on the desk. He can see the tube full of white light beyond his arm. He feels ready to climb the wall, questing, thirsting, for something forever beyond reach. Here comes Clegg with a weather report, but Booth sees the door behind his trunk, and the slight gap in Clegg's left eyebrow extends right through his skull, behind it only a smidgen of door.

The light's all wrong, Booth says. I'm seeing round and through things.

Eye fatigue, says the practical Clegg. You need some sleep.

Or a green eyeshade?

What did you say? Clegg asks again. What?

I was just remembering, Booth whispers, what I said when we were in the desert: You people there can help us much. I said that into the microphone.

They could. They did. From such flakes are miracles made. All for this. It was the same in Africa as here. Your eyes got so fouled up, you couldn't see straight.

Clegg has gone, urgent about his business, thinking that Booth sometimes couldn't get to first base in a first-base factory. Humming an Italian song he's heard on TV, he heads for the hangars, bemusing them all with his workaday cheerfulness as he does his ditty: At Benevento by the bridgehead. A war song, he thinks, from the time of Mussolini. But, just perhaps, from World War One, when there was fighting in the Alps. Then he comes back, smacking his forehead for forgetfulness, and calls his mother, pins down the weather, the cramp in her leg, how long it has been since he visited her, and then resumes his airward walk. No longer humming.

Booth rubs his eyes, applies spit, which dries into a crust. Salt. Like his first glimpse of the salt flats, where he landed. Then as now less part of his fate than watching it happen to another usurping his own face, about whom he does not care.

\*\*\*

One last time have that old minute. Even if only the shade of it like a fish-scale waning thunder light. Have. Half have. Have not. Runner recoiling from go, get set, get ready, unlimbering into the past as the crack of the gun travels back down the barrel into the blank.

He tries again to get this interior thing said so as to close the frequency down for ever after. To remember it exactly right must be to make it go away for keeps.

Now it comes. Hi, Bald Eagle. Hi, Clipper. Come on in, we'll take care of you. Sappy switchback, hear this prang. No, that was another time.

He tries again to get it back, and glaze it like an apricot. Than which, he huffs and puffs, under the sun by tolerant moonlight nothing less than a pearl contains the oyster. Was that a prayer? Lordloveus for such an inside out. Here a touch. There. Touched all right. All Africa my domain. Our help in rages past.

Now here it comes, thistledown amid the rumpus. He has to hold on tight.

I can see above us. Copy. The stars are shining. Out of ten for eleven. Cleared for base and final. Squawk ident. Say again. We are not quite sure, ah, who we are. Descend and maintain. Copy. Brah-voh Brah-voh is with you, Zulu Tower. Do you read? At this point we genuinely care. Please keep talking to me, I need it. Ah, affirmative. We're going in.

Comes a high-pitched whistle, just possibly one of exclamation.

Oh, that's wonderful. I'm in a kind of little pocket here. Just a bunch of spit and fluff. Thattaway. Gotta let down. Yes, sir. Hold on a second. It's. Remain this frequency, sir. Yeah. There's too much over. Negative on that. No further contact. Do you read? Bravo? It's. Negative on that. Buga-booth over. But not everything else. Only his voice ended.

Terrestrials is Paul West's fifteenth novel. His previous one, The Tent of Orange Mist, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Fiction Prize. In 1996 the Government of France made him a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters.



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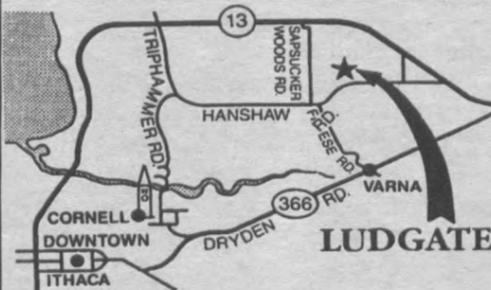
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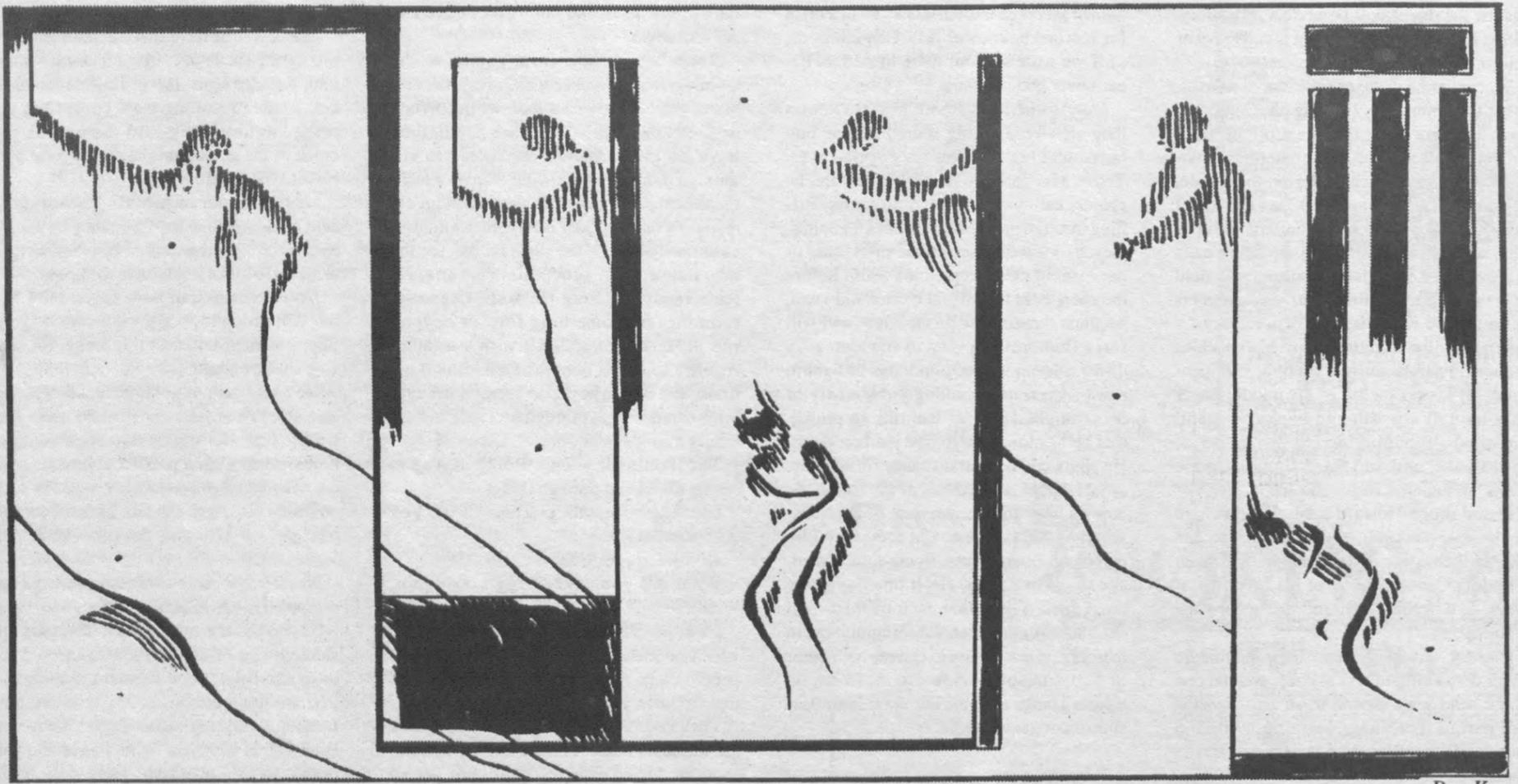
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# White on White



Don Karr

**The Farewell Symphony**  
by Edmund White  
Alfred A. Knopf, 1997  
414 pages, \$25.00

## Jane L. Bain

Admittedly, the first time I read Edmund White's novel, *A Boy's Own Story*, I tossed it to the bedroom floor in disgust. How could an act of seduction and betrayal be treated as an initiation into adulthood worthy of celebration? The boy had snitched to the prep-school authorities about his music teacher's drug use, and then proceeded to meet with the music teacher for sex. I felt guilty of inaccurately ascribing the protagonist's actions to those of the author, but I later learned that Ed White had admitted in an interview that he had indeed performed those acts and worried over how readers might respond.

*A Boy's Own Story* is the first book of White's semi-autobiographical trilogy. It is followed by *The Beautiful Room is Empty* and, most recently, *The Farewell Symphony*, which draws its title from Haydn's composition that ends with one lone musician playing after all the other musicians have left the stage.

White once stated that he is attracted to issues that are "difficult to resolve but urgent to consider." Although I haven't changed my mind about the cunning cruelty depicted in *A Boy's Own Story*, thanks to Edmund White I am at least better equipped, emotionally and psychologically, to confront it. His propensity for telling all, and doing so with lyrical, literary flair, won me over long ago.

*A Boy's Own Story*, published in 1982, is his story of sexual awakening and coming of age, and nearly any reader can identify with the awkwardness and alternating shame and arrogance that mark that period in our lives. In *The Beautiful Room is Empty*, White documents the protagonist's development from the time of young adulthood up to the Stonewall riots of 1969. The novel's title derives from a passage in a letter by Franz Kafka which is worth quoting because it so succinctly describes White's theme:

Sometimes I have the feeling that we're in one room with two opposite doors and each of us holds the handle of one door, one of us flicks an eyelash and the other is

already behind his door, and now the first one has but to utter a word and immediately the second one has closed his door behind him and can no longer be seen. He's sure to open the door again for it's a room which perhaps one cannot leave. If only the first one were not precisely like the second, if he were calm, if he would only pretend not to look at the other, if he would slowly set the room in order as though it were a room like any other; but instead he does exactly the same as the other at his door, sometimes even both are behind the doors and the beautiful room is empty.

*The Farewell Symphony*, the final book of the trilogy, is set mainly in 1970's New York with scattered scenes in France and Italy. It chronicles life in the gay community from the time of the Stonewall uprising to the age of AIDS. Rich in cultural history and vividly conjured episodes, the book spares no one — not family members, lovers, friends, colleagues, mentors, analysts, or neighbors — but in characteristic Edmund White fashion, neither does he spare himself. He claims he slept with different men several nights a week for years and had sex with his first thousand men by 1970. He also admits to raping a man in a drunken frenzy (knowing he is HIV-positive). I found those sections hard going. The homoeroticism...the continual cruising of parks, bars, parking lots, and bathhouses, or as John Rechy puts it, "...the silently symphonic, intricate, instinctively choreographed beauty of the promiscuous sexhunt," that White details are recognizable enough in their initial stages of longing and flirtation, but what I found difficult were his fully rendered descriptions of the actual physical engineering involved, replete with dimensions, reactions, sensations, and sighs. I keep chewing on David Bergman's suggestion that in many of White's books the aim of his characters is to "secure enough knowledge that they can afford to become innocent"...and that "innocence is in fact the privileged unknowing of the powerful."

White's detailed exposure of sexual practices flies in the face of "good taste" and is shockingly sincere in its depiction of gay life. In a striking scene he counterpoints his own tendency to expose everything in matters of sex with those who insist on maintaining the mystery of their "Athenian pleasures." (The protagonist is visiting with Ridgefield, a famous writer, now in his seventies):

For some reason the conversation turned to Jean Genet and Ridgefield said, "Oh, I knew him. That was a nasty piece of work."

"Rough trade?" Max asked daringly. "My dear, a bit of fluff, I would have said, in prison drag. No, seriously," and he passed his hand over his face to wipe away his faint, wicked smile, and his expression, as announced, emerged perfectly serious, "I met him several times and he was a crafty peasant - I know the type. After all, I'm a farm boy myself" Everyone mumbled well bred chuckles of protest against the far fetched humility of this grand old man of letters who was as proud of his contact with the soil as the Duc de Guermantes yet who sported in his lapel the purple and gold braided rosette of the American Academy."

"No, what I object to most," Ridgefield continued, "was not his way of lying systematically or lifting his hostesses' antique silver demitasse spoons..." Again his hand effaced a tiny smile, as though he were a judge who'd forgotten the dignity of his office and its objectivity. "No, those are mere bagatelles, worthy of gossip and nothing more. What I object to most is his way of wallowing in his perversion."

"Hear, hear!" "Even if he's presented his..." and here Ridgefield paused, searching for a euphemism, "his *uranism* in an attractive light, I would have objected. After all, a writer writes for everyone, for the man, woman and child in the street and, mad as it may seem: *They. Don't. Care* what Monsieur Genet daydreams about in his cell. And then (and here I'm being merely frivolous) I think it spoils everything if our..." (again the problem of euphemism, causing Ridgefield to wrinkle his nose) "...our *Athenian* pleasures are described to the barbarians. I think our world is amusing only so long as it remains a mystery to *them*. Everyone chuckled warmly and repeated his words in cozy asides.

"But *why*, my dear?" Max cried, smiling hugely, playing the straight man. "Isn't the duty of literature precisely the depiction of even the most exotic and depraved corners of human experience?" "Well, it's true that Dante *presents* Brunetto Latini," Ridgefield replied, letting his little smile alight once more on the swaying perch of his lips, "but only to identify his punishment in *Hell*, which would be exactly my way of dealing with, uh, the love that dare not speak its name "And that won't shut up these days," Max concluded gleefully. Everyone chortled.

*The Farewell Symphony* documents a passing culture, rendered with loving attention and helpless resignation: friends

become lovers; ex-lovers become friends; and art, music, travel, fashion, theater, drugs, sex, and writing intertwine and intersect. The range of characters and conversations is broad and wonderfully precise. White once had this to say about his need to write:

There is an equally strong urge to record one's own past - one's own life - before it vanishes. I suppose everyone both believes and chooses to ignore that each detail of our behavior is inscribed in the arbitrariness of history. Which culture, which moment we live in determines how we have sex, go mad, marry, die, and worship, even how we say Ai! Instead of Ouch! When we're pinched...For gay men this force of history has been made to come clean; it's been stripped of its natural look. The very rapidity of change has laid bare the clanking machinery of history. To have been oppressed in the 1950's, freed in the 1960's, exalted in the 1970's, and wiped out in the 1980's is a quick itinerary for a whole culture to follow. For we are witnessing not just the death of individuals but a menace to an entire culture. All the more reason to bear witness to the cultural moment

Though *The Farewell Symphony* is predominantly about life — liminal, passion-packed, richly-experienced — it is also about the losses and grief resulting from the impact of AIDS on an entire community. In 1981, when he became aware of the first AIDS-related illnesses (friends of friends), White, like most everyone else, had no idea how widespread the epidemic would become and how it would shatter so many lives. Though he only alludes to it in *Farewell Symphony*, it is evident that White's young French lover was a victim of AIDS. White is uncharacteristically silent about the man he loved and nursed until his death in 1994. It is especially difficult to see an author who has always enjoyed such a passionate love affair with language finally at a loss for words. Regarding that which he cherished most, we are left trying to understand what silence can say about sorrow.

Jane Bain is an editor for the Ecological Society of America publications Office.