

# The BOOKPRESS

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## BLOOMSBURIED

**The Hours**  
by Michael Cunningham.  
226 pp. New York:  
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$23.00.

### Brian Hall

Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* was published last year to uniformly excellent, even ecstatic, reviews. It was named one of the best books of 1998 by *Publisher's Weekly* and went on to win both the Pen/Faulkner Award and the Pulitzer Prize. The commensurate question, then, for a retrospective glance is not whether the book is "good," in the sense of being competently put together and elegantly phrased, but whether it is *good*: exciting, surprising, revelatory, original. To this question, I would answer, No.

Cunningham's muse is Virginia Woolf and his novel's blueprint, one might even say its Bible, is her 1925 novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (whose working title, for a time, was "*The Hours*"). Cunningham makes this inspiration, this lineage, so apparent that he plainly wants us to read Woolf's novel and his in tandem, and although there is plenty of evidence that readers are enjoying *The Hours* without having read *Mrs. Dalloway*, you cannot discern what Cunningham is up to without having done so. Thus, he is correct to urge on us this dual reading, and certainly courageous, but he suffers the frequent fate of the brave. Reading the books together is a worthwhile exercise, almost amounting to a controlled experiment, because it sheds some light on a nice literary question: given the two novels' thematic, structural, and metaphoric similarities, what makes Woolf's so much better than Cunningham's?

*Mrs. Dalloway* recounts a single day in the life of an upper-middle-class Londoner and her radial net of acquaintances. Clarissa Dalloway, fifty-two years old, wife of Richard Dalloway, M.P., steps out of her house on a June morning in 1923 to buy flowers for a party she is giving that evening. As Clarissa makes her way to the flower shop and back, Woolf flits in and out of the minds of the people her protagonist passes. The effect is almost of consciousness as static electricity, the spark flashing between proximate bodies. One of these is Septimus Warren Smith (whom Mrs. Dalloway does not know), a shell-shocked veteran of World War I, whose paranoid and terrified fantasies, punctuated with delusions of grandeur, form a counterpoint through the day to Clarissa's alternating fits of depression and elation.

It seems that one summer many years ago, when she was eighteen, Clarissa chose the dull, safe Richard over the demanding, unconventional Peter Walsh (not to mention, as Clarissa herself barely contemplates, her even more unconventional infatuation with her friend Sally Seton) and has been haunted ever since by doubts. Is her party-giving trivial? Is her life trivial? Is her fine London house a cage? She soldiers through the day, dogged by moods that hover at the edges of

despair and suicide, lifted by brief epiphanies in which the mute material things around her seem suddenly beautiful, precious, sufficient. We are ushered into the minds of other characters: Clarissa's husband, her daughter Elizabeth, Septimus' agonized wife, a powerful doctor determined to put Septimus away for a "long rest." Peter Walsh unexpectedly arrives at Clarissa's door after years spent in India. She invites him to her party. The party is held, and Peter comes. Clarissa stands at the top of the stairs but does not throw herself down them. She gazes from a window but does not jump out. The novel ends.

This plot précis tells us nothing about what makes *Mrs. Dalloway* a great novel, but I include it as a skeletal reference for Cunningham's work. After a prologue describing Woolf's own suicide by drowning in 1941, *The Hours* devotes its twenty-two chapters to three alternating stories, each of which occur over a single day. In one of them, set near London in 1923, Virginia Woolf is writing the opening of *Mrs. Dalloway*. In another, set in Los Angeles in 1949, a young wife and mother prepares for her husband's birthday party that evening, all the while fantasizing about either killing herself or fleeing from her family so that she

can devote herself to reading books, in particular (on this particular day), *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the third story—New York City, "the end of the twentieth century"—a woman named Clarissa Vaughan, nicknamed "Mrs. Dalloway" by her old friend Richard, steps out on a fine June day to buy flowers for a party she is giving that night for the same Richard, a poet who has just won a major literary prize.

The New York City story is the principal one, opening and closing the novel and taking up a plurality of its pages. Cunningham has written much of it as a virtual pastiche of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf begins her novel, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." Cunningham begins his, "There are still the flowers to buy." As she steps into the morning air, Woolf's Dalloway thinks, "What a lark! What a plunge!"; Cunningham's Clarissa thinks, "What a thrill, what a shock." In Woolf, Clarissa enters a park, runs into Hugh Whitbread, a pompous ass who attends the royal household, reaches the flower shop, and is startled by a loud bang from a motor car in which two or three passersby catch a glimpse of a famous face they can't quite identify (the Queen? they wonder). In Cunningham, Clarissa enters a park, runs into Walter Hardy, a pompous ass who writes gay romance novels, reaches the flower shop, is startled by a loud noise and looks out to catch a glimpse of a famous face she can't quite identify (Meryl Streep? Vanessa Redgrave?). This dogging of Woolf's heel continues for many more pages.

To be sure, Cunningham has changed some things. His Clarissa did not choose, years ago, the safe, dull Richard. Instead, she chose the safe, dull Sally (now a producer for public television). Peter Walsh has become Louis, who was not Clarissa's lover during that distant summer, but Richard's. And Richard, who is afflicted with progressive dementia caused by AIDS, has become the new Septimus (a crazed survivor, you could say, of the AIDS holocaust, the destroyer of his too-young generation). These shifts to a modern social idiom are interesting as far as they go, but they don't go very far. The dull, safe spouse might have changed gender, but the role is largely the same, and if we accept Cunningham's premise (as I imagine most of his readers do) that gay marriages are not inherently different, morally or emotionally, from straight ones, then the sex of "Richard Dalloway" is a fairly trivial consideration.

What I principally infer from these New York City chapters is that Cunningham loves *Mrs. Dalloway*, and has always wished, as writers will do, that he had written the book himself. Indeed, in an interview after he won the Pulitzer Prize he said he had read Woolf's novel when he was fifteen, and likened it to "a first kiss," adding, "It stayed with me in a way no other book ever has. And it felt like something for me to write about very much the way you might write a novel based on the first time you fell in love." Fine; but Cunningham's decision not merely to "write about" *Mrs. Dalloway* but, to a significant extent, to rewrite it, strikes

*continued on page 10*



Jack Sherman

# The Fed and the Fountainhead

## Edward T. Chase

Most cults have relatively small constituencies and are spurned by the public. A curious exception is the cult of Ayn Rand, guru of the virtue of selfishness. Her credo synchronizes nicely with the market-worship that dominates our socio-economic policies. Not only is Rand reportedly the favorite author of freshmen at the University of California, Berkeley, but she is also praised by Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. Thanks to the unmodulated free-market ideology that Rand preached and Greenspan supports, the bulk of individual wealth in America is famously concentrated among the billionaires and multimillionaires in the top 1% of Americans, with munificent trickle-downs to the very rich first quintile. Below that is largely wage stagnation.

Why shouldn't Berkeley's bright, pragmatic young students admire what seems to work best? Unbridled individual greed pays off, they notice—at least so long as there is no social contract to ensure that the commonweal does not suffer from extreme inequality, "unfairness," or that if it does (and now it does) the public suffers without protest. Traditional American faith holds that each one of us, he or she, is sure to be one to make it. (If nothing else, there's always the lottery...)

Selfishness is the key virtue in Rand's philosophy of Objectivism—each man first and foremost for himself, the devil take the hindmost. This creed is the animating "philosophy" of Rand's best-seller tract novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. The year I became editor-in-chief of New American Library (Signet and Mentor Books), we published her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*. I lunched with Ayn and our publisher, and Ayn got into a discussion of her new book (though I was not involved in its line-editing). There was an electrifying moment when I casually quoted the Nobel Prize winner in medicine for 1932, Sir Charles Scott Sherrington, to the effect that everyone was "selfish," but that altruism often was the "good" man's egotism; his actions may be motivated by selfishness, but they eventuate in the best interests of another. Ayn seemed stunned at this and repeated Sherrington's phrase in consternation, "Altruism is the good man's egotism." This plainly pointed out the irrelevance of Ayn's own formula on selfishness since what counts is the intent and consequence of actions, not the fact that the original motivation was selfish.

We remained cordial. But as I discovered how superficial Ayn's learning was, it became hard for me to take her seriously. I recall a dinner party at her apartment with her (weak, meek, utterly overshadowed) husband, Frank O'Connor, and how pitiful her "library" was—*Reader's Digest* copies, a scattering of popular books, no works of importance in philosophy, political science or economics. She had virtually no under-

standing of market economics, but she instinctively deified it. She was all zeal and rhetoric. But, yes, she was vital, spirited, rather fun to be with. To an astonishing extent, what she wrote somehow "worked!" One might say she is to philosophy as Zane Grey is to modern literature.

But, ye Gods, to read today of how academe—scads of scholars yet, in diverse universities—have taken up Ayn the philosopher comes as a shocker. A movie, *Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life*, got an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Feature in 1998. And this year the U.S. Postal Service issued an Ayn Rand stamp in its literary arts series. Her champion, Professor Chris Matthew Sciabarra of New York

terizing Rand as a "prophetess of a cult," described her work as "a unique combination of tautology and extravagant absurdities" in which she "mouths slogans." The fact that the book consists of tendentious philosophical passages from her fiction did not inspire faith in its intellectual rigor. Joel Rosenbloom dismissed the book as "largely pretentious nonsense" in the *New Republic*. The earliest trade review, in *Kirkus*, declared "One can hardly see this taken seriously by those whose ultimate concern is philosophy." However, one reviewer wrote, "There is just enough truth about unprovable matters in its major assertions to make adherence by self-respecting persons possible for a while."

This was the cue, perhaps, for Professor

Nonetheless, Wertheimer notes grimly, "Many thoughtful people continue to say that their lives were elevated by Rand's beliefs."

Which takes us back, presumably, to America's economic guru #1, Alan Greenspan, alleged Rand idolater. Pause and reflect: Mr. Greenspan's strategy has been to hold inflation at bay and to keep the boom booming by his exquisitely nuanced fiddling with the prime interest rate. His only serious critics have been liberal analysts like former Labor Secretary Robert Reich who have deplored the Fed's refusal to countenance lower rates that could indirectly alleviate large-scale wage stagnation and pockets of intractable unemployment. What good luck, for Greenspan! Pro or con Rand's credo, not only has inflation been stymied but quite fortuitously a small reversal of wage stagnation has occurred even among some of the hardcore under-employed. Nevertheless, the alleviation is very modest, and the gap between haves and have-nots continues to increase. Economics writer Louis Uchitelle, in the August 1, 1999 *New York Times*, notes that for a decade middle-incomers (\$49,700 income our median) stagnated or lost ground, only rising significantly in 1998.

Greenspan didn't cite Ayn Rand but offered the Harvard Class of 1999 Daniel Bell's decades-old insight (without crediting Bell) about the onset of the "Post-Industrial" world wherein information—intellectual capital—was replacing industrial capital as the chief source of increased productivity. The information age of global computerized communication has not only reduced costs but allowed financial whizzes to make fortunes in currency manipulations. At the same time, in the U.S. "tough love" has replaced welfare; some 43.5 million are without any health insurance on any given day; and one out of five children lives in extreme poverty despite the present economic boom.

There is no denying that Ayn Rand would certainly bask in the present economic climate, where there is a world-wide de facto betrayal of traditional liberal policies, and nations on every continent strive to emulate juggernaut America's business successes. Any government efforts to ameliorate the maldistribution of wealth are rejected as collectivist or socialist. This trend is exhibited even by such social democrats as Prime Minister Tony Blair of England and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany. They collaborated in July on a paper mapping out the essence of a new "Third Way," writing that, "The promotion of social justice was sometimes confused with the imposition of equality of outcome. The result was a neglect of the importance of rewarding effort and responsibility...The weaknesses of markets have been overstated and their strengths underestimated." "But of course," Ayn Rand would doubtless say, and also surely Chairman Greenspan. Meanwhile the gap between haves and have-nots continues to widen.

Edward T. Chase is the former editor of *Times Books*.



University, reports that Rand's name and rep are "synonymous with individualism and free market capitalism" and that she "was a major inspiration to the founders of the Libertarian Party." There are several outfits promoting Rand, like the Institute for Objectivist Studies, the Atlas Society, the Ayn Rand Institute, and the Ayn Rand Society.

Yet, any respect for Rand as a serious intellectual should have been erased by the early evaluation of her most ambitious presentation of her "philosophy," *For the New Intellectual*, in 1961. Sidney Hook, charac-

Sciabarra to write his book *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (1995) claiming that Rand built a radical system of social theory that rivaled Marxism in its scope and power in consequence of her training in dialectical analysis with a Russian philosopher, N. O. Lossky, in 1921.

This year "Showtime" has presented a new TV movie Sunday at prime time in which Ayn Rand is the heroine. *New York Times* reviewer Ron Wertheimer allowed as how Rand comes across as "just plain nutty" and refers to her as "loopy Ayn Rand."

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# The Invention of Borges

## Selected Non-Fictions

By Jorge Luis Borges.

Edited by Eliot Weinberger.

Translated by Esther Allen,

Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger.

559 pp, New York:

Viking, \$40.00

## Andrew Weiner

Though *Selected Non-Fictions* may be profitably read as a complement to Borges's poetry and fictions, it deserves to be considered on its own merits. Broad, detailed, and surprisingly accessible, the selection is well-tailored to the needs of first-time readers and Borges initiates alike. Faces familiar from the *ficciones*—Kabbalists, crackpots, and *gauchos*—have made some curious new friends, among them Bette Davis, Citizen Kane, and King Kong.

The awkward title stems from Viking's decision, understandable yet inappropriate given the subject, to presume a material difference between fact and fiction. This distinction is famously more permeable in Latin American literature, thanks in large part to Borges; in the *Obras Completas* his work is simply ordered chronologically. As Eliot Weinberger notes in his "Introduction to the Selected Non-Fictions," the term "non-fiction"—a negative and rather empty definition—doesn't exist in Spanish criticism.

Though Weinberger's decision not to describe these writings as essays, on the grounds that the term is unjustly "limiting," is curious—other challenging works have claimed that title before—it is also warranted. Many of these works were published initially as "Inquisitions," and while there does exist one "Essay" in this collection, it is overshadowed by a greater number of "Histories," "Defenses," "Postulations," and "Refutations." As in Borges's *ficciones*, the steady flow of formal inventions and intellectual paradoxes slowly erode the categories one might use to describe them.

*Selected Non-Fictions* opens with a section of Borges's "Early Writings," pieces composed between 1922 and 1928. Their most marked characteristic is the preternatural ability and remarkable ambition of a young writer influenced by the thriving, politically engaged literary climate of that decade. The insistence of their tone, boldly stating "Intentions" and "Courses of Action," recalls a time when the artistic manifesto was a prolific form. The speaker, however, is unmistakably Borges: "I propose to prove that personality is a mirage maintained by conceit and custom, without metaphysical foundation or visceral reality...[and] to apply to literature the consequences that issue from these premises."

While the tone and content of these essays foreshadow much of the later Borges, their overloaded diction does not. Borges would eventually hone much of the ornamentation from his prose. Deriding his first three collections of essays as "Latin in Spanish," he would later move to have them suppressed. Luckily he was not entirely successful, else no record would exist of the "obstinate zealotry...[of] that conjectural Jorge Luis Borges on whose tongue sophistries are always at the ready." That 3rd-personalization of himself is not to be confused with the self-removed diction of the post-game interview *a la* Bo Jackson; it should instead be seen as the hallmark of a determinedly playful self-consciousness. Also of interest are the thinkers he cites and would return to again and again throughout his later work: Schopenhauer, Whitman, Quevedo, De Quincey, the Kabbalists.

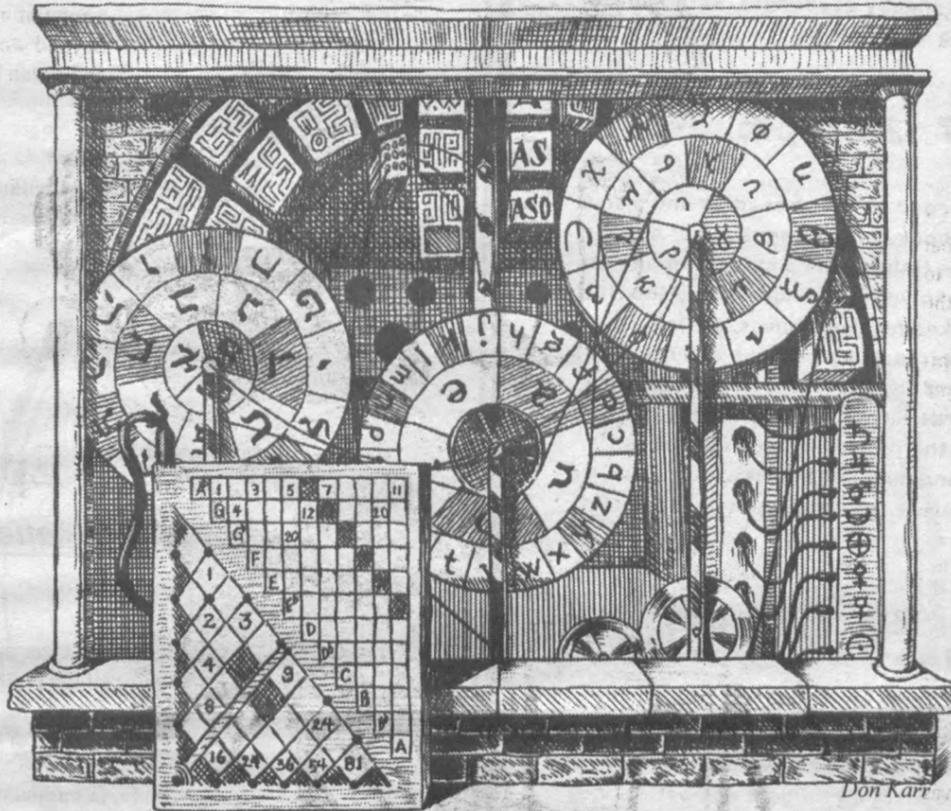
In a volume replete with all manner of revelations, perhaps the most startling is the fact that Borges spent three years reviewing books for *El Hogar*, a magazine that Weinberger describes as "the Argentine equivalent of Ladies' Home Journal." Books like *Absalom! Absalom!* and *Finnegans Wake*. Needless to say, this irony—and the freedom it afforded—did not escape its victim. In his brief reviews and biographies, we see Borges

in fine form. We learn of Theodore Dreiser, for example, that his "head is an arduous, monumental head, geological in character..." T.S. Eliot is introduced as "an unlikely compatriot of the St. Louis Blues." Borges wryly informs us: "I have frequented with true moderation the literature of Sweden."

Staple art? I don't think so. Reviewing Richard Hull's *Excellent Intentions*, a forgettably "pleasant" detective novel, Borges concludes that the mystery's solution is too obvious to be true. Its true function is to mask a secret plot that can only be discovered by subsequent readings. A similar move marks his approach to the Hollywood flotsam that occasionally washed across his desk. The Bette Davis vehicle *Now Voyager* inspires a meditation on how the limited narrative vocabulary of American film—a "disconcerting asceticism"—has induced a collective experience of déjà vu in the streets of

being the eldest, Marie for being the youngest, Annette because everyone mistakes her for Yvonne, and Cecile because she is completely identical to Emilie.

If *El Hogar* provided the perfect forum for the unexpected insight, it lacked any room for more topical commentary. One charge often levelled against Borges in the past is that he was unwilling to engage himself in political critique. As Weinberger clearly shows, in a section titled "Notes On Germany And The War," this was not the case. From 1937 on, Borges wrote in condemnation of anti-Semitism in Germany and Argentina, and of the "chaotic descent" of the culture of his beloved Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. These comments shed the gleeful irony of his earlier work; they are unambiguously moral in their tone.



Buenos Aires. Then, memorably: "Across the screens of the most remote movie houses, the film spreads its bold thesis: A disfigured Miss Davis is less beautiful." Such interpretations transpose the zealous hermeneutics of the Kabbalists onto that all-too-familiar artifact of culture—mediocrity—and outline a nuanced, creative, and humane irony.

Interspersed among these witticisms are a number of genuine insights, many phrased with a keen poeticism. A Faulkner piece opens by noting: "It is a general rule that novelists do not present a reality, but rather the memory of one." One of the "Nine Dantesque Essays" observes: "Like all abstract words, the word metaphor is itself a metaphor." A review of detective fiction defines genre literature as a kind of writing that "lives on the continuous and delicate infraction of its own rules." At its best, this style combines intuition and wit in a vertiginous layering of bracketed observations:

It may legitimately be observed (with the lightness and peculiar brutality of such observations) that the philosophers of England and France are directly interested in the universe itself, or in one or another of its features, while the Germans tend to consider it a simple motive, a mere material cause for their enormous dialectical edifices, which are always groundless but always grandiose.

Also present in these brief notes—none exceed five hundred words—is a sharp eye for the paradoxical events and characters to which the term "Borgesian" is now commonly given. Reviewing a biography of the Dionne Quintuplets, Borges unearths a masterpiece of tautological definition:

Yvonne is easily recognizable for

Yet one gets the sense that Borges's objection stemmed equally from the distortion of past ideas in Fascist and Marxist rhetoric. Political discourse, it seems, could only be an echo, "an imperfect reverberation of former discussions." This disjuncture appears to have influenced his self-professed distance from the meat-and-potatoes business of politics. "The true intellectual," he wrote, "refuses to take part in contemporary debates: reality is always anachronous." Whether this position was originally aesthetic or moral matters less than the fact that it became increasingly necessary when Fascism came to Argentina. If Borges's anti-Peronism were as vocal as Weinberger claims in his Introduction, why isn't it better represented in *Selected Non-Fictions*? Why does the book's index, with multiple entries for Parmenides and Poe, lack a single listing for Perón?

The topic that would both haunt and delight Borges throughout his life was infinity. To hear him tell it, the source of this obsession was a household object during his childhood: a biscuit tin whose illustration contained the image of the selfsame biscuit tin, and so on. This type of *regressus in infinitum* is the motive force behind such stories as "The Aleph"; it is also the point of departure for many of his essays. "The Perpetual Race of Achilles and the Tortoise," an exploration of Zeno's Paradox, was later described by Borges as "a prehistory of infinite regression."

"When Fiction Lives in Fiction" addresses the history of what one might call "nesting" literature, the classic example being Hamlet's play-within-a-play. This device, Borges argues, aims to imply the possibility of infinite repetition and therefore "to make reality appear unreal to us." Dream and wakefulness are only distinguishable as parts of the endless, vertiginous prospect afforded to us in fiction and biscuit tins.

Against these visions of boundlessness and uncontrollable proliferation, Borges holds up the possibility, more frightening still, of finitude. "Pascal's Sphere" leaves off with the speculation that "universal history is the history of the various intonations of a few metaphors." In "The Total Library" he considers the idea that linguistic expression has a conceivable limit—that the proverbial thousand monkeys with typewriters would, given enough time, eventually exhaust the permutations of a fixed alphabet. Tracing the history of this idea through Aristotle, Pascal, and Lewis Carroll, Borges concludes with a delirious inventory of this Library's contents:

Everything would be in its blind volumes. Everything: the detailed history of the future, Aeschylus' *The Egyptians*, the exact number of times that the waters of the Ganges have reflected the flight of a falcon, the secret and true name of Rome, the encyclopedia Novalis would have constructed, my dreams and half-dreams at dawn on August 14, 1934, the proof of Pierre Fermat's theorem, the unwritten chapters of Edwin Drood, those same chapters translated into the language spoken by the Garamantes, the paradoxes Berkeley invented concerning Time but didn't publish...the song the sirens sang, the complete catalog of the Library, the proof of the inaccuracy of that catalog.

This heterogenous list—a device Borges perfected—destabilizes the assumption that knowledge is either progressive or unified, and questions whether language represents truths about the world. For every legible line in the Library there are miles of gibberish. Overwhelmed by this disparity, intelligibility begins to look more and more like an accident. Imagination loses any spiritual aspect, and is instead re-envisioned as the act of recombination.

Since creativity and history also work within an exhaustible set of possibilities, a similar repetition is inevitable both in art and the everyday. The laughable predictability of the Hollywood film mirrors the more disturbing implications of cyclical time. Thinkers as diverse as Plato, Hume, and Nietzsche have addressed the Eternal Return—a topic, Borges joked, to which he tended "to return eternally." Reviewing the history of this concept in "Circular Time," he envisions time as a labyrinth without exit, an "impoverished eternity."

In the end, the strongest impression left by the *Selected Non-Fictions* is the image of Borges as architect of his own literary legacy. He once used the Spanish term *hacedor* ("maker") to describe the work of a writer as a process that unites craftsmanship, divine creation, and the literary art of poesis. Borges crafted a prose style which maintains its transparency even while glossing the most arcane subjects, and a tone which, while unsurpassably arch, resonates nevertheless with an unexpected empathy, offering glimpses into a deep and tragic sense of humor. Along the way he compiled a vocabulary of ideas definable only under the category which he himself invented, that of the Borgesian.

When Borges wrote that Kafka's work recreated its precursors, he might as well have been talking about himself. As the story "Borges and I" attests, he was fully conscious of the fact that the invented character of Borges had overtaken him even during his own lifetime: "I shall endure in Borges, not in myself (if, indeed, I am anybody at all.)" Having reinvented himself once, he would turn around and fictionalize his own fictionalization—exactly the type of labyrinth he strove to appreciate in life and create in literature.

Andrew Weiner is a freelance writer in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## Off Campus at **THE BOOKERY**

This presentation is part of our ongoing series of readings and talks in the Women's Community Building.

### Saturday, November 6, 2:00 pm Beth Saulnier

Join us for an afternoon of local mystery. In *Reliable Sources* 25-year-old reporter Alex Bernier loses the man she loves (a police reporter whose body is found at the bottom of a gorge) and then nearly gets herself killed trying to prove his death wasn't a suicide. The book deals with heavyweight issues like love and loss, but it's also a satire: Alex casts a wry eye on such subjects as humorless activists, loutish frat boys, ambitious journalists, and sneaky academics. Beth Saulnier is a reporter, writer, and editor living in Ithaca, NY.

### Sunday, November 7, 2:00 pm Michael Skakun

Off Campus at The Bookery is privileged to host a reading and discussion of the stirring and provocative book *On Burning Ground: A Son's Memoir*. Joseph Skakun, the author's father, was a student in an elite rabbinical academy when his Polish town was conquered by the Nazis. For nearly three years, Skakun masked his Jewishness, devising a series of assumed identities, each increasingly perilous and complex, culminating in the ultimate in cunning and horror—entry in the Nazi SS. Retold by his son, this is an extraordinary account of one man's battle for life and of his courage in the face of incalculable odds. Michael Skakun was born in Israel and now lives in New York City. He will be joined at this event by his father, Joseph Skakun.

### Saturday, November 20, 7:30 pm An Evening of Passion: Music, Poetry and Tango

Join us for an evening of excitement as Gail Holst-Warhaft performs Greek songs in translation from the book, *Road to Rembetika*. Beverly Matherne will perform Acadian- and Alsatian-influenced poetic songs from her new book, *The Blues Cryin'*. In addition to music and poetry, the Ithaca Tangueros will be performing traditional Argentine tango. This promises to be an event sure to warm up a chilly fall night!

### Sunday, November 21, 2:00 pm Harvey and Bryna Fireside

Off Campus at The Bookery is pleased to host a reading and discussion of Harvey Fireside's new book, *New York Times v. Sullivan: Affirming Freedom of the Press*, and Bryna Fireside's new book, *Cruzan v. Missouri: The Right to Die Case*. The Firesides will examine these two pivotal court cases, each of which invites reflection and criticism regarding the way courts and the American public interpret the Constitution.

## The Woman Who Draws Birds

uses green ink  
sometimes  
a way of knowing  
flight is silent  
as a wish at water's edge

the birds rise up  
in one long wonder  
or hover  
where poem meets page

the woman works  
her memory of feather  
with fingers  
light as bone

her eyes travel  
where forests begin  
a song of nests  
beyond words' reach  
and ocean lets her go

KATHARYN HOWD MACHAN

*Katharyn Howd Machan is an associate professor of Writing at Ithaca College and the author of 18 published collections of poems.*

## Epicurean *after Horace*

O Wheeler Creek, clear as ice-cubes in a glass,  
you are worth all the pretty flowers and fruits  
that grow nearby for all the watery sounds  
you make here on the garden's verge

at day's end—in mid-summer—amid life's hurry.  
In the morning feral cats and at dusk the raccoon  
drink by your streaming edge, but we  
would never drink your waters

for the farms above have fertilized you beyond  
human delectation. Elegant horses in paddocks,  
cows in common pastures, do not appreciate  
you more than we, who only admire

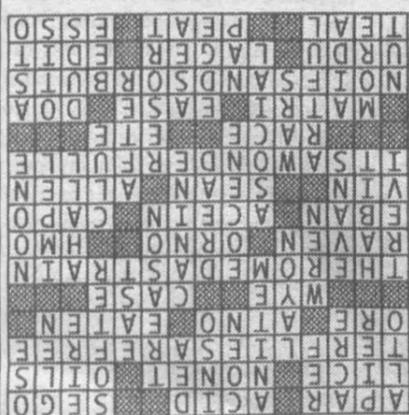
your good looks and voice—like Lynda, that blonde  
Parisian soap-star from Perth, whose perfections  
were as sweet as Sauternes at evening  
by your side, O Wheeler Creek.

PAUL KANE

*Paul Kane, a teacher at Vassar College, is a recent recipient of a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.*

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Answers to this  
month's crossword puzzle:



## PIANOS

- Rebuilt
- Reconstructed
- Bought
- Sold
- Moved
- Tuned
- Rented



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# Lost in the Caucasus

## Matthew Evangelista

In the Russian North Caucasus region history repeats itself again and again, and always as tragedy. Russia's leaders seem incapable of grasping the subtle complexities of politics in Dagestan and Chechnya, despite over two centuries of contact with the region. Moscow's latest military actions promise to make a bad situation even worse.

The most recent round of violent conflict in the North Caucasus broke out in August 1999 when Russian military forces responded to attacks from across the Chechen border into Dagestan. The invasion was led by the Chechen military leader Shamil Basaev and Habib Abdel Rahman Khatab, a Saudi Arabian citizen married to a Dagestani woman. This was not the only recent military action involving Chechens in Dagestan. In May 1997 a force of Dagestani fighters associated with the radical Islamic sect of "Wahhabites" took control of several villages, including the one where Khatab's wife was born. In December 1997 a group of Chechen guerrillas joined the Wahhabite force to attack a Russian armored brigade near Buynaksk. The residents of the villages "liberated" by the Wahhabites and Chechens declared their independence from Dagestan and established another "little Chechnya" within the Russian Federation. The August incursion looked like another step on the path to creating a united Chechen-Dagestani Muslim state, the explicit goal of Basaev and his allies.

How realistic is the dream of a united Islamic state in the North Caucasus? The mountain republics of Dagestan and Chechnya do resemble each other a great deal, both in their histories and in their present situations. The ancestors of Chechens and Dagestanis have lived in the same region for some six millennia. Both peoples were converted to Islam over the course of several hundred years, starting around the eighth century. Many Muslims in Dagestan and Chechnya adhere to the mystical Sufi movement, in contrast to the modernist Jadidism practiced elsewhere in the former Soviet Union and tolerated (and somewhat co-opted) by the communist government. The Sufi influence seems to explain why, according to survey data, religious belief and practice are far higher in Dagestan and Chechnya than in any of Russia's other Muslim republics, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The higher the level of religious practice, the more Islam can serve as a mobilizing force for resistance to Russian dominance, as it has done throughout the history of both Dagestan and Chechnya. Indeed, two of the legendary Islamic heroes of the Chechen resistance to Tsarist rule—Imam Shamil' and Kazi Mullah—were actually ethnic Avars from Dagestan.

In addition to religion, the peoples of the two mountain republics share many customs, such as a reputation for generous hospitality, a martial tradition and widespread expertise with weapons, and the practice of the blood feud. Both societies are loosely organized—around extended clans (*teips*) in Chechnya and groupings of villages (*djamaats*) in Dagestan. Among their present-day shared characteristics the most significant is probably their extreme poverty. Of the 89 "subjects" of the Russian Federation, these two republics rank 88th and 89th respectively in level of wealth, and their rates of unemployment are twice the national average. Unemployment among young men, especially in Chechnya, undoubtedly contributes to the appeal of armed bands and organized crime. But the poor economic prospects for the two republics would not bode well for their viability as a united, independent state.

The most recent similarity between Dagestan and Chechnya is no doubt the most striking: the massive air and ground attacks launched by the Russian army against both republics since last August, ostensibly to defeat armed separatist movements there. And in both cases Russia's actions have been counterproductive.

In applying the same blunt instrument of

military force to both Dagestan and Chechnya, Russian leaders seem oblivious to the important differences between the two republics. Dagestan is home to some 34 different ethnic groups, making it the most ethnically and linguistically diverse of all the regions of the Russian Federation—perhaps of the world. Chechnya was always more homogeneous, especially after 1996, when most of its Russian population fled in the wake of the Russian army's destruction of Grozny, the capital city, where most ethnic Russians lived. Dagestan is a less coherent society than Chechnya, in part because Dagestanis did not suffer the mass deportation that Stalin inflicted on the Chechens in 1944. That action, intended to destroy the Chechen nation, instead contributed to a stronger sense of Chechen identity and attachment to homeland, and fueled long-smoldering grievances against the Russians.

The political situations in Dagestan and Chechnya before the recent outbreak of war were also radically different. In Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, the president elected by a landslide in 1997, came under siege from his erstwhile allies, Shamil Basaev, Salman Raduev,

especially when they jeopardize Chechnya's hard-won independence and peace. Few are willing to support the holy war that he and his ally Khatab promote. Indeed, Basaev himself has called into question the religious motivations for their actions. When a reporter asked Basaev if his radical friend Khatab was a "Wahhabist," he said "No, he is a Khatabist." It was a revealing answer. Khatab and Basaev are less interested in religion or in fashioning an independent and viable Chechen state than they are in fighting for its own sake. It is all they know. Ordinary Chechens, by contrast, are tired of the violence. But just when the tide of public opinion was turning against him, Basaev was rescued by the Russians. As in 1994, when the unpopular leader Dzhokhar Dudaev was able to silence his critics and rally support in the face of a Russian invasion, so too the rival Chechen leaders have come together to meet the Russian challenge. As Basaev told the BBC, "in the current situation we are united and our unity is strengthened by Russia—and for that we are very grateful."

Although the political situation in Dagestan was completely different, Moscow's behavior has been similarly



Mosladi Udugov, and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev. His attempts at working out a *modus vivendi* with Russia led his opponents to question his commitment to an independent Chechnya. Russia did nothing to bolster Maskhadov's comparatively moderate position, even as the Chechen president attempted to discredit the supporters of the incursion into Dagestan. On 29 August Maskhadov issued a decree removing Udugov from Chechnya's National Security Council. Udugov, an ally of Basaev and a longtime supporter of a combined Chechen-Dagestani Islamic state, was accused of fomenting "a large-scale ideological sabotage operation against the Chechen state" and of having "pushed the traditional friendship between the Dagestani and Chechen peoples to the breaking point." Yet rather than give Maskhadov the benefit of the doubt, Moscow has seemingly abandoned him. Indeed, the recent Russian military action has been accompanied by declarations from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that Moscow no longer even recognizes Maskhadov as the legitimate leader of the country. Without Maskhadov—the key figure on the Chechen side in negotiating the end to the war in 1996—Moscow has no one to talk to if its renewed efforts to bomb Chechnya into submission fail.

Moscow missed a great opportunity to bolster Maskhadov at the expense of Basaev. In an interview with a BBC reporter, Basaev acknowledged that in Chechnya "some women curse me" because his military activities in Dagestan had provoked a renewal of Russian bombing. Indeed, few Chechens support Basaev's continued military provoca-

ions, especially when they jeopardize Chechnya's hard-won independence and peace. Few are willing to support the holy war that he and his ally Khatab promote. Indeed, Basaev himself has called into question the religious motivations for their actions. When a reporter asked Basaev if his radical friend Khatab was a "Wahhabist," he said "No, he is a Khatabist." It was a revealing answer. Khatab and Basaev are less interested in religion or in fashioning an independent and viable Chechen state than they are in fighting for its own sake. It is all they know. Ordinary Chechens, by contrast, are tired of the violence. But just when the tide of public opinion was turning against him, Basaev was rescued by the Russians. As in 1994, when the unpopular leader Dzhokhar Dudaev was able to silence his critics and rally support in the face of a Russian invasion, so too the rival Chechen leaders have come together to meet the Russian challenge. As Basaev told the BBC, "in the current situation we are united and our unity is strengthened by Russia—and for that we are very grateful."

Even before the August military action Moscow's behavior threatened to undermine Dagestan's stability. The republic's political balancing act depended on a system of rotation of elites representing different ethnic groups, along with a power-sharing arrangement between a dual executive (two co-chairs of the State Council) and an ethnically stratified legislature—the People's Assembly. In 1996, Magomedali Magomedov, an ethnic Dargin serving as the first chair of the State Council, refused to give up his seat when his term expired. The Russian government did not protest this clearly illegal move. President Yeltsin chose instead to look the other way in return for Magomedov's support of his reelection in the close presidential race of May and June 1996.

Moscow's military action in Dagestan is more obviously counterproductive than its undermining of the republic's constitutional order. The August invasion from Chechnya evidently met with little support from Dages-

tani villagers. They requested arms from the Russian government to defend themselves against the forces of Basaev and Khatab. Instead they got indiscriminate bombing of their villages, with heavy civilian casualties. Dagestanis wonder why Moscow is only paying attention to them now. The republic's average per capita income is a third that of the rest of the Federation. The gap between rich and poor is larger than anywhere else in the country. The federal government has done nothing to alleviate the dire economic conditions that contribute to the radicalization of some young Dagestanis. The military campaign risks driving them into the arms of the radical Wahhabite sect that advocates an anti-Russian holy war.

As with the previous Chechen war, this one is already having a corrupting influence on Russian politics and society. Terrorist bombs have exploded in Moscow and elsewhere, killing hundreds of innocent people. Although the Chechens have denied responsibility for the explosions, Russian authorities have retaliated against anyone with a "Caucasian face," expelling some 11,000 Chechens from Moscow alone. The campaign, dubbed "Operation Foreigner," is as Orwellian as the war itself. In the interest of keeping Chechnya an integral part of Russia, the government kicks out its own Russian citizens, with their Russian passports, calling them "foreigners" because they happen to be of Chechen descent.

The Russian government's method for convincing Chechnya to remain part of the Federation is somewhat counterintuitive. Russian planes bomb Chechen cities and villages, sending tens of thousands of refugees fleeing to the "border." As they reach the border (which is not an international border, as long as Moscow does not recognize an independent Chechnya) the refugees are turned back by the Russian army and are refused entry into what is, according to Moscow, another part of their own country—Russia. In the meantime, the army tries to create a cordon sanitaire to keep Chechens out of Russia.

Given the negative political repercussions and dubious security benefits of the current Russian military campaign, some Russian analysts suspect that Moscow had other motives for launching the war. Perhaps, according to one view, the government hoped that a quick victory would boost the political prospects of Prime Minister Putin, the colorless policeman whom President Boris Yeltsin has designated his preferred successor. Others anticipate that Yeltsin might use the crisis to declare martial law and cancel the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in which his candidates are expected to fare poorly. Finally, some analysts suspect that the actual target of Russia's military designs has been Chechnya all along—that Dagestan was just a pretext. They point out that the Russian government has fulfilled none of the more than fifty agreements it signed with Chechnya in the wake of the 1996 peace accord that was supposed to provide for reconstruction of the devastated country. Perhaps it never intended to do so. In May 1997 Presidents Yeltsin and Maskhadov signed a Treaty on Peace and the Principles of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The first principle on which the two sides agreed was "forever to repudiate the use and the threat to use military force to resolve whatever disputes may arise." The status of Chechnya was supposed to be decided peacefully through diplomacy by the year 2001. Evidently someone in Moscow wanted to give war another chance.

Matthew Evangelista teaches international relations at Cornell and is the author of *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 1999).

## Walter Hang

By virtue of our democratic heritage, most Americans hold an abiding faith in the principles of open and fair government. That is why Ithacans will be saddened by new revelations that state and federal environmental officials colluded with Cornell University to withhold critical information from the public regarding the Lake Source Cooling (LSC) project.

### Cornell's Illegal Lake Source Cooling Project

LSC will utilize up to 46 million gallons of cold Cayuga Lake water per day to help air condition Cornell's campus. LSC has generated intense controversy because it was granted a permit to discharge phosphorus into a severely stressed area of southern Cayuga Lake that already violates the water quality standard for that pollutant.

Pursuant to section 122.4 of the U. S. Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1313(d), no permit may be granted: "To a new source or a new discharger, if the discharge from its construction or operation will cause or contribute to the violation of water quality standards."

Given that strict legal requirement, the Cayuga Lake Defense Fund (CLDF), national environmental groups, and dozens of concerned Ithacans persuaded the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last spring to review the LSC permit granted by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This request was made at the same time that EPA was formulating a regulatory proposal to implement the moratorium provision on a nationwide basis.

### Skullduggery Behind Closed Doors

The EPA promised that its review would be impartial and fair. After months of delay, however, CLDF got wind of skullduggery behind closed doors and alleged in an *Ithaca Journal* article on August 8th that the EPA, Cornell University and the DEC had begun secret negotiations to decide the outcome of EPA's assessment.

All three institutions vehemently disavowed the existence of any negotiations. Mary Mears, the EPA's spokesperson, said, "We are not hiding anything from the public in our review process."

Through the Freedom of Information Act, however, CLDF discovered internal memos, hand-written notes, fax cover sheets and draft proposals that tell a shocking story about how government actually conducts the environmental business of the people.

These documents reveal that high-level federal officials in Washington, DC and New York City as well as state authorities in Albany and Syracuse conspired with Cornell officials to exclude the public from deciding the fate of LSC. Then they deliberately lied about holding any negotiations. Finally, Cornell and the DEC killed a landmark EPA proposal designed to safeguard Cayuga Lake.

These events unfolded while EPA, DEC and Cornell were earnestly pledging to "keep the public informed" and expressing a desire to "work with the public" to clean up Cayuga Lake. The striking contrast between their public pronouncements and their backroom wheeling and dealing underscores how environmental protections guaranteed by law are often not worth the paper they are written on.

### Secret LSC Negotiations

It will come as no surprise to some that government agencies grant special considerations to powerful institutions like Cornell. What is unusual is that CLDF caught the powers-that-be red-handed. The EPA, DEC and Cornell should have followed the edict of Martin Lomasney, a turn-of-the-century Boston West End ward boss who

nefariously noted: "Never write when you can speak, never speak when you can nod."

Fortunately, their missteps produced a paper trail of information that is now available for public review, challenging the credibility of declarations that the LSC discharge poses no threat to Cayuga Lake.

#### July 2nd

Philip Sweeney (EPA's Region II Chief of the Permits and Pretreatment Section) writes a memo reporting, "I spoke with Kathy (Kathleen C. Callahan, Director of

Office of Wastewater Management)."

CLDC had been lobbying EPA officials to support the moratorium on new discharge permits to impaired waters. This memo reveals that the highest levels of EPA authority were aware of those efforts and directly involved themselves in the LSC negotiations.

#### July 12th

On July 12th, Ron Borsellino (Assistant Director of the EPA Region II Division of Environmental Planning and Protection)

23-1999-08-53 EPA REGION 2 212 637 3891 P. 03/05

Agreements have been reached to move forward with the following evaluations and actions:

- Development of explicit criteria that would be used to determine if the project is causing adverse impacts. These criteria will assist in the implementation of the SPDES permit condition which requires re-evaluation of the outfall location if there is a statistically significant trend of increasing levels of total phosphorus or chlorophyll-a in the Lake.
- Completion of an outfall relocation study to evaluate alternative, extended outfall locations. For example, the parties will evaluate whether an outfall location below the photic zone (about ten meters deep) would effectively prevent any additional loading of phosphorus from causing algal growth. Completion of this study within the next one or two years (and prior to the occurrence of any unexpected impacts) will minimize any delay in implementing an outfall extension project if found to be necessary.
- Development and implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake. The main focus of this effort will be to identify nonpoint sources or similar diffuse sources of phosphorus, and to develop mitigation projects to control the source(s). This project could serve as a model to test the concept of "offsets" which is being discussed at the national level as a potential element of the permitting of new dischargers to stressed waters. Any such project would be expected to complement other projects and programs implemented in the Cayuga Lake watershed under the overall New York State Non-Point Source Management Plan.

It is expected that the above actions will be coordinated and conducted by NYSDEC and Cornell, with assistance from EPA. In addition, opportunities for informal public review and input will be provided.

the EPA Region II Division of Environmental Planning and Protection). She told Craft (Cornell's VP of campus facilities) our current position...She wants to see if we can get an EPA/Cornell/DEC agreement of some kind over the next week."

This memo is evidence that citizens were being deliberately cut out of the decision-making process as EPA, DEC and Cornell labored to strike a deal.

#### July 9th

Robert Wood (EPA national Chief of the State/Regional Branch in the Water Management Permits Division) notes in a memo to Kathy Callahan, "Chuck Sutfin (EPA's national Director of Water Management

wrote a memo to his boss, Kathleen C. Callahan. He noted, "This afternoon I spoke with NG Kaul (DEC Director of Water Quality) re: meeting with DEC/EPA/Cornell and Citizens. Kaul said that he did not want to meet with Walter at this time. *He thought that you and he agreed to meet with Cornell and the two agencies first, then meet with the citizens when we have something to tell them about future non-point source programs*" (emphasis added).

This memo reveals that all three parties deliberately decided to cut citizens out of their discussions until they had a *fait accompli* agreement to present.

From: PHILIP SWEENEY  
To: CALLAHAN-KATHY  
Date: 7/22/99 1:30pm  
Subject: Bad News on Cornell

I heard from DEC and Cornell today, and they don't like our "agreements". I have discussed this with Ron, and he wants to wait for input from you.

Pat McNally called, he spoke to Hal Craft this morning:

- Cornell has not agreed to any specifics. They have agreed generally to the "criteria" and "offsets" actions, but they want to discuss at the 8/17 meeting before committing to specific actions.
- They think our write-up about the outfall relocation study is off-base.

Steve Eldt called:

- He does not like the outfall relocation study write-up, especially the specific comment about the photic zone and phosphorus availability.
- He and Phil DeGaetano have a big problem with the specific reference to offsets, although he concurs with the remainder of the write-up on NPS mitigation - but he stresses that they will be looking for EPA money to get the projects done.
- He does not support the use of the word "explicit" in describing the criteria that will be developed to evaluate if the Plant is having an adverse impact. He thinks we need to set up a "process" for decision-making that allows for reason and judgment - and not develop a rigid numeric approach.

Options for us to consider now include:

- Wait until after the 8/17 meeting before we characterize the "agreements" and send out our review document.
- Delete the "agreements" from the document and explain that agreements are being sought on next steps. We could either identify the topics on which we are seeking agreement or just be silent.
- Maintain the substance of the three bullets but characterize them as EPA's recommendations for which we are seeking agreement.

CC: BORSSELLINO-RON, YEH-ALICE, ANDREWS-WALTER, THOMAS...

Permits Division) agreed that the outcome of your meetings with Hal Craft at Cornell and conversations with folks at DEC were positive...Chuck suggested that you contact Walter Hang right away to let him know of the planned next steps. I think this is particularly important since I learned that Mr. Hang has called and left a message with Mike Cook (EPA's national Director of the

#### July 21st

Philip Sweeney sent EPA's written proposal to be reviewed by Hal Craft and Phil DeGaetano (DEC's associate director of the Division of Water).

To EPA's credit, its proposal addressed three key concerns voiced by LSC critics. First, that the environmental assessment of LSC's water quality impact was funda-

# Beneath

mentally inadequate. Second, that LSC's discharge permit was illegally granted because it would "cause or contribute" to existing water quality violations in southern Cayuga Lake. Finally, that non-point source pollution hazards, notably urban and agricultural runoff, must be controlled in order to reverse the long-standing degradation of Cayuga Lake.

In short, the EPA proposal required:

- 1) Development of "explicit criteria" that would be used to determine whether LSC will cause adverse impacts on Cayuga Lake;
- 2) "Completion of an outfall relocation study to evaluate alternative, extended outfall locations." This study would determine whether an outfall location below the "photic zone (about ten meters deep) would effectively prevent any additional loading of phosphorus from causing algal growth"; and
- 3) "Development and implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake. The main focus of this effort will be to identify nonpoint sources or similar diffuse sources of phosphorus, and to develop mitigation projects to control the source(s)."

A copy of EPA's proposal is presented below.

Agreements have been reached to move forward with the following evaluations and actions:

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- Completion of an outfall relocation study to evaluate alternative, extended outfall locations. For example, the parties will evaluate whether an outfall location below the photic zone (about ten meters deep) would effectively prevent any additional loading of phosphorus from causing algal growth. Completion of this study within the next one or two years (and prior to the occurrence of any unexpected impacts) will minimize any delay in implementing an outfall extension project if found to be necessary.
- Development and implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake. The main focus of this effort will be to identify nonpoint sources or similar diffuse sources of phosphorus, and to develop mitigation projects to control the source(s). This project could serve as a model to test the concept of "offsets" which is being discussed at the national level as a potential element of the permitting of new dischargers to stressed waters. Any such project would be expected to complement other projects and programs implemented in the Cayuga Lake watershed under the overall New York State Non-Point Source Management Plan.

It is expected that the above actions will be coordinated and conducted by NYSDEC and Cornell, with assistance from EPA. In addition, opportunities

# Cayuga's Waters

for informal public review and input will be provided.

## July 22nd

This was the critical point of the negotiations. Sweeney wrote a memo to Callahan, entitled: "Bad News on Cornell." He reported that Cornell "agreed generally" to proposals #1 ("criteria") and #3 ("offsets") actions without agreeing to "specifics" while opposing proposal #2 (outfall relocation study). The DEC reportedly did not support any of the three proposals.

This was EPA's moment of truth. They either could have stood up for what they thought was right or caved in to DEC and Cornell. Unfortunately, EPA retreated.

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3. Maintain the substance of the

impacts. These criteria would serve as a decision framework to assist in the implementation of the SPDES permit condition which requires re-evaluation of the outfall location if there is a statistically significant trend of increasing levels of total phosphorus or chlorophyll-a in the Lake.

- Conduct a study to evaluate alternative, extended outfall locations. This would assure that should NYSDEC make a determi-

projects and programs implemented in the Cayuga Lake watershed under the overall New York State Non-Point Source Management Plan and other ongoing local efforts.

It is expected that the above actions will be coordinated and conducted by NYSDEC and Cornell, with assistance from EPA. An initial meeting has been scheduled, which will be followed by additional actions through the fall of 1999. NYSDEC, Cornell, and EPA are committed to providing opportunities for informal public review, input and dialogue with all interested stakeholders.

Ultimately, EPA failed to gain approval for even its watered down proposal and did not voluntarily disclose the negotiations to the public. All evidence to the contrary, EPA denies that the public was cut out of its review process in any way.

## EPA's Final Report

By the time the EPA released its final LSC report, the only surviving vestige of its initial proposal was the development of "criteria" to determine if the LSC project is causing adverse impacts. This vague requirement presumably complied with the DEC's desire to "set up a 'process' for decision-making that allows for reason and judgment—and not develop a rigid numeric approach." The outfall relocation study and the "offsets" proposal were gone entirely.

Unbelievably, EPA determined that LSC's phosphorus discharge would not "cause or contribute" to Cayuga Lake's existing water quality violations because the phosphorus would be "diluted" before it could cause algal blooms. In reality, LSC will discharge phosphorus in a soluble reactive form that will be quickly uptaken by algae. It is scientifically insupportable that the phosphorus release will simply melt into the lake without causing or contributing to existing problems at the shallow end.

EPA also declared that Cayuga Lake would be the subject of a DEC study to determine if more stringent pollution controls are necessary. That study is currently slated to be completed by 2003. In the meantime, there are no plans to control the non-point pollution sources that have steadily degraded the lake's waters for decades.

Around the same time that EPA was finalizing its whitewash, Cayuga Lake was experiencing some of the worst algae and aquatic weed infestations in recent memory. Giant islands of floating plants the size of football fields clogged the southern portion of the lake directly over the spot where the LSC pipe will discharge.

*continued on page 9*

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- Conduct a study to evaluate alternative, extended outfall locations. This would assure that should NYSDEC make a determination that there is a trend toward increasing total phosphorus or chlorophyll-a, or an indication that the existing outfall would cause or contribute to Cayuga Lake impairment, the full array of data would be available to identify an acceptable relocation alternative. Completion of this study within the next one or two years (and prior to any finding of unexpected impacts) will minimize any delay in implementing an outfall extension project if found to be necessary.
- Identify the role Cornell could take in planning, development or implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake. The main focus of this effort will be to identify nonpoint sources or similar diffuse sources of phosphorus, and to develop mitigation projects to control the source(s). Any such project would be expected to complement other projects and programs implemented in the Cayuga Lake watershed under the overall New York State Non-Point Source Management Plan and other ongoing local efforts.

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CC: Borsellino-Ron, Yeh-Alice, Andrews-Walter, Thomas-...

## July 30th

EPA amended its proposal to try to gain agreement from Cornell and the DEC. "Explicit criteria" became "criteria." "Development and implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake was amended to, "Identify the role Cornell could take in planning, development or implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake."

Agreements have been reached to move forward with the following evaluations and actions:

- Development of criteria that would be used to determine if the project is causing adverse

nation that there is a trend toward increasing total phosphorus or chlorophyll-a, or an indication that the existing outfall would cause or contribute to Cayuga Lake impairment, the full array of data would be available to identify an acceptable relocation alternative. Completion of this study within the next one or two years (and prior to any finding of unexpected impacts) will minimize any delay in implementing an outfall extension project if found to be necessary.

- Identify the role Cornell could take in planning, development or implementation of project(s) to reduce diffuse loadings of phosphorus to the Lake. The main focus of this effort will be to identify nonpoint sources or similar diffuse sources of phosphorus, and to develop mitigation projects to control the source(s). Any such project would be expected to complement other

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# Bleak Science In Plain Light

## Welfare as We Knew It

*A Political History of the American Welfare State.*

By Charles Noble.

210 pp. New York:

Oxford University Press. \$45.00.

## Welfare in America

*How Social Science Fails the Poor.*

By William M. Epstein.

267 pp. Madison:

University of Wisconsin Press. \$45.00.

## William W. Goldsmith

The big question about Bill Clinton's capitulation to the Republicans on welfare reform, according to Charles Noble in *Welfare as We Knew It*, is "whether different political choices by liberals might have avoided this debacle." In a brief 150 pages Noble poses this question not once but four times, as he examines four historic opportunities for reform this century, and finds each time that liberals lost their nerve.

In the 1910s the Progressives failed to challenge the established order. In the 1930s, when Franklin D. Roosevelt enjoyed huge majorities in Congress, he nevertheless formed coalitions with conservatives rather than take the New Deal to the left. In the 1960s, even though Lyndon Johnson was predisposed to liberal reform and endowed with a huge majority in Congress, he chose to develop his Great Society in a broad coalition with conservatives. Bill Clinton's compromises in the 1990s, adopting the Republican's agenda on welfare (and their views on the budget), fit the century-long pattern well.

By way of contrast, during this century social democratic institutions were established in nearly every advanced capitalist democracy in Western Europe, Canada, Britain and Australia. Why, then, did progressive reforms fail in the world's leading capitalist democracy, the United States, leaving the country with a "welfare state...striking precisely because it is so limited in scope and ambition?" Noble identifies three decisive factors: weakly organized labor, highly decentralized politics, and deep racial divisions.

These factors interweave. Racial and ethnic divisions have weakened the labor movement and undermined political solidarity in each period of reform (or reaction). "The failure to directly challenge white racism left all social-reform movements vulnerable to divide-and-conquer strategies." The right used other ethnic divisions, too, to defeat or weaken working-class pressure for reform each time waves of immigrants arrived.

Adding to the difficulties that confront progressive reform, three political arrangements—single-member districts, winner-take-all elections, and strong states versus a weak federal government—result in a two-party system that resists pressure for change. Further, organized labor's historic concern with narrow gains specific to each industry or even workplace, rather than with public provision of general benefits and full employment, has strengthened conservatives.

But taking the argument a step further, Noble points out that not every social democracy grew because of pressure from an independently organized working class. Christian Democratic and Catholic parties developed welfare states in some European countries. Ethnic division (as in Belgium) is not by itself enough to stop reform. Decentralized institutions often allow experimentation and can facilitate reform. Why, then, were weak labor, decentralized politics, and ethnic strife so damaging to reform in the United States? They might not have been, Noble argues, but in each of the four periods when reform (or, in the most recent case, resistance to reaction) was possible, powerful leaders chose instead to adapt to the status quo. Noble concedes that deep reform would indeed have been a risky path, especially now given the political climate in Con-

gress and most state legislatures. He concludes that progressives must first achieve a more favorable political setting before any really effective social legislation can be expected.

In *Welfare in America*, William Epstein asserts that social scientists, policy makers, and politicians misunderstand both the need for and the consequences of assistance to the poor. In his self-styled "bleak and ambiguous study," Epstein claims that since assistance programs are so inadequate, good statistical research on their effects is nearly impossible because of the difficulty of taking measurements without interference from other influences. For example, how can researchers measure the work disincentive of cash welfare payments in a labor market that offers no good jobs? Notwithstanding this serious methodological obstacle, social scientists do evaluate programs, often promoting the false conclusion that the federal government or the states have attempted effective welfare measures only to find that they do not succeed (for two rare exceptions, with honest evaluations, he mentions work by James Tobin and Robert Haveman).

Epstein's main point is that U.S. welfare programs are grossly inadequate. He cites numerous studies and interpretations by others to demonstrate that redistributive policies hardly exist. Although he deals only with direct assistance to the poor, his conclusions are much broader. He finds that "perhaps more than half of all Americans [have] lives that are economically and social precarious," that "the history of social welfare in the United States is one of neglect and timidity," and that "all parties...seem to accept that the current welfare program has failed to adequately abate poverty." He refers to the failed attempts at reform of the Progressive Era, the 1930s, and the 1960s, and he too says Bill Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996—the infamous Welfare Reform—"capitulates to the Republican position."

The nation probably looks forward to more years of urban neglect, starved budgets, low pay for dead-end jobs, and declining neighborhoods. Noble's excellent study, reinforced by parts of Epstein's book, suggests that these urban problems, which are, after all, national problems, can only be seriously addressed in the context of wide-ranging political reforms, such as campaign financing, labor legislation to remove obstacles to unionization, funding for neglected schools, and measures to break the grip of wealthy special interests over the political process.

**William W. Goldsmith** teaches City and Regional Planning and directs the undergraduate program on urban studies at Cornell University. He is co-author of *Separate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities* (1992, Temple University Press).

## All of Us

by Raymond Carver.

386 pp. New York:

Alfred A. Knopf. \$27.50.

## Edward A. Dougherty

Raymond Carver's complete collection of poems is a powerful testament to a humane, engaged life. *All of Us* gathers up Carver's four editions of poetry, written mostly in the 1980s, and the posthumously published *No Heroics, Please*. Along with the full presentation of the poems, there is a wonderfully personal appreciation of the work and life by Carver's spouse, poet Tess Gallagher. Her introduction to the final collection, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, describing both writers finding a form for Carver's final batch of poems in the defining context of his cancer, is also included in an appendix. Finally, editor William L. Stull provides a detailed annotation of each work's publishing history.

Gallagher says in her introduction, "For Ray, I think poems, like rivers, were places of recognition and healing," and it is these qualities that make this book so rewarding. There is a sense of clinging, as if to a life-raft, in some of the work. In "Rogue River Jet-Boat Trip, Gold Beach, Oregon, July 4, 1977," the reason is clear. Carver writes:

*Now, I no longer know what's mine, what isn't. I no longer know anything except I am not drinking—though I'm still weak and sick from it.*

The struggle with sobriety animates the poems, energizing the best of them with a "recognition" of the terrible things people will do to one another. Carver is at his best when he deftly puts a scene together and lets the "characters" reveal their motives, as he does in "My Daughter and Apple Pie." The pie comes out of the oven, steaming, fragrant with spices and sugar, but the domestic scene is tense, out of joint, because "she's wearing these dark glasses / in the kitchen at ten o'clock / in the morning..." The restraint that saves the poem from sentimentality comes from that recognition which arrives clearly in the ending:

*I fork the pie in and tell myself to stay out of it. She says she loves him. No way could it be worse.*

There are many other poems that achieve this haunting quality, including "From the East, Light," "A Tall Order," "Mother," and "The Kitchen." These show Carver's skill and sensitivity as a story crafter. When they work best, such poems "force reason as far as it will go until it erodes into unreason," as Gallagher puts it in a note on another of these restrained, moving pieces, "Lemonade." She says "Story and prose elements

are so strong that the boundary between fiction and poetry gives way. Poetry? Fiction? Who cares. It's the haunting that matters."

What haunts me is the combination of the difficulties people enforce on each other, how they are remembered, and ultimately how they are redeemed. This book is positioned toward healing, not turning away. In a life shaped by poverty and alcohol—by violence, then—real healing cannot be purchased simply by ignoring those parts of life one doesn't like; they have long since settled in the fiber of one's thinking and feeling. Memories like "The Kitchen" do not go away, so there must be another way.

To get there, you have to cross some rough spots where the ground gives underneath. On the other side, though, there is acceptance. Carver embodies the integration necessary to open the self to hope, love, beauty. In "At Least," he writes of wanting to "get up early one morning" and witness the world coming to light. He details some of the particulars in his surroundings, then in the end he turns his wanting around a little:

*I hate to seem greedy—I have so much to be grateful for already.*

*But I want to get up early one more morning, at least.*

*And go to my place with some coffee and wait. Just wait, to see what's going to happen.*

The love poems are remarkable for their nearly-amazed tone. A man who thinks his recklessness should have killed him remains mystified that he is even alive, but to share a home and life with a woman he loves and admires is almost too much. This is best captured in "Gravy," but I prefer the one before it, "Cherish."

My complaints with the book stem from Carver's greatest strength, his subtle handling of voice. It makes possible the restraint I admire so much, among other things. However, it also creates rhythmically flat passages and allows received phrases to deaden both the imagery and the voice. Phrases like "thrilled / beyond measure" or "painted every color under the sun," or boats that actually ply the waters diminish the poem. They happen often enough to make me look forward to a *Selected Poems*, edited by Tess Gallagher, so that the finest examples of Carver's poetry can represent him.

There is an abiding faith and gratitude in and around the poems in *All of Us*, partly because of Carver's journey to sobriety, partly because of his discovery of love he believed in, and partly because death began to approach visibly and palpably. The poem "What the Doctor Said" carries the shock of learning one's limits, but many of the later poems emerge from this knowledge. Even when the imagery of the poems is forgettable (and in the complete collection of any writer, this happens) Carver's generosity of spirit prevails. Many books strive for this spirit, but it is a rare book in which it feels so lived.

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# Professor of Magic

## S. Cushing Strout

The most interesting television program on magic in recent months was not the performance of any stage magician, but a surprising documentary about a dead magician on the Canadian History channel: "Dai Vernon: The Spirit of Magic." (It was aired on April 25, 1999.) Vernon, known among magicians as "the Professor," was a Canadian who made his career in New York and later became a resident sage at the Magic Castle in Hollywood, until he died not long ago in his late 90s.

Among magicians he was famous for his brilliant versions of the familiar classics, the Linking Rings and the Cups and Balls, which are probably the only tricks most people can remember having seen. For magicians Vernon's versions are the gold standard, and amateurs can dedicate themselves to learning his routines because he left a large legacy of magical literature. Vernon seldom performed on stage; more often he performed during the Depression as an entertainer at the private parties of the socially prominent and affluent. In the late 1930s, however, he created an innovative act in harlequin costume for the Rainbow Room and performed it at Radio City Music Hall.

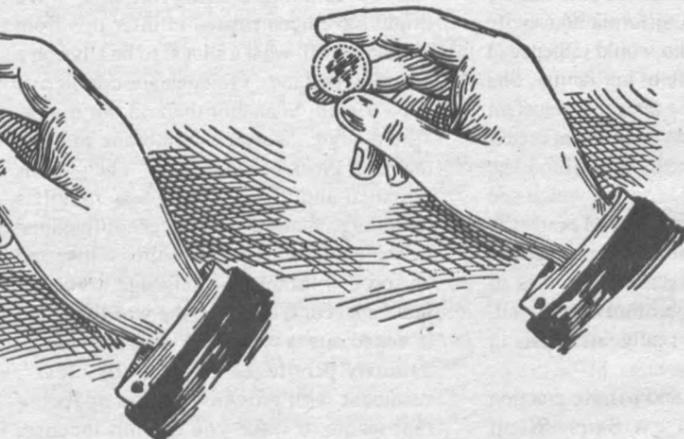
Vernon's importance also lies in his style of magic, which can be traced back to the great 19th-century French conjuror Robert-Houdin. (He is a major figure in Brian Moore's last novel, *The Magician's Wife*.) In his memoirs the Frenchman spoke of regenerating the art of conjuring by getting rid of "all the paraphernalia of the ordinary conjuror, which looks more like a toy shop than a serious performance" and too often is "designed to make up for the performer's want of skill." He aimed for a style of "elegant simplicity." In a similar vein Vernon admired the vaudeville conjurors Nate Leipzig, Max Malini, and Silent Mora because "none of them used the type of apparatus that could only have been constructed for trickery." Vernon taught many outstanding contemporary magicians (such as Ricky Jay) who made pilgrimages to the Magic Castle to learn Vernon's "natural" gestures and handling instead of the showy staginess of most performers.

Vernon's sense of magical history made him a bridge to past masters to whom he paid tribute in books of his own. In a country and a field which tends to be obsessed with the here-and-now, Vernon's influence has been an invaluable corrective.

But until the Canadian program (which narrated his biography with profound respect but drew no veil over his quirkiness as a teacher and his considerable liabilities as a husband and a father) few people outside a narrow circle knew anything about him. He was, as it were, not a name to conjure with—except among conjurors.

Nothing could be further from Vernon's "spirit of magic" than the contemporary style of theatrical magic that is centered in Las Vegas and exhibited monotonously on American television. These boring "spectaculars" with their prancing "bimbo" assistants and their redundant guest-celebrities of minor talent with nothing to say, shamelessly promise, with all the credibility of P.T. Barnum, that the performer will "vanish" a Stealth Bomber, the Statue

of Liberty, or even an island, as if the illusion of doing so could be credited to the performer rather than to the technical abilities of his camera crew. This kind of theatrical humbuggery also conventionally highlights some "death-defying escape," as in Lance Burton's last-second jump to avoid the plunging vehicle on the rollercoaster. Vernon appropriately insisted that the struggle to get out of a straightjacket, which Houdini routinely performed, might be an athletic form of showmanship; but it is not magic, which is the simulation of the impossible.



Magicians on stage necessarily tell lies, but like all art lying can be sabotaged by the extravagance of its ambition. Burton also vanished a donkey and later made a mouse appear under a cup, but these illusions were on a human scale and had a charm and credibility that (unlike the airplane vanish) went beyond the puzzle of how they were done. When a magician plucks cards, coins or balls from the air, we can imagine how in principle it could be done by natural means of manual skills. But that is beside the point when we are persuaded by the magician's skill and patter to suspend our disbelief and enjoy the amusing plot about the peripatetic objects. There was no manual skill about the donkey vanish, of course, but it was still on a

human scale, and the donkey engaged some of our sympathy by resisting cooperation. Ann Patchett was wise in her moving novel *The Magician's Assistant* to focus on a couple who performed in small venues; the tricks the heroine learned involved only a deck of cards, or the cups and balls.

Aristotle in his classic *The Art of Poetry* never considered theatrical magic, but he made the pertinent point about poetic effect that "a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility." Aristotle also observed that "whatever is beautiful" must be of "an appropriate size, for beauty is bound up with size and order." The "minutely small" and the "extremely large" are beyond the boundaries of Aristotle's rule, which should be applied to American show-business magic. There was a story in *The New York Times* recently about the crash of the multi-million-dollar plan to build a huge magical theme-restaurant on Broadway, filled with giant statues of the performer David Copperfield. I read of its demise with a sigh of relief.

An honorable exception to this mania for giantism is the company Le Grand David, which has been performing for decades on the north shore of Massachusetts. It is the achievement of Cesareo Pelaez, a professor of psychology at Salem College and a Cuban immigrant, who has recreated the style of magic he saw as a young man when the Bamberg family of magicians toured South America. The show uses lavish artistic costuming, mimes, clowns, and trumpet-players; and the stage illusions are all historical ones, built on a human scale. They share the stage with graceful and expert sleight-of-hand performed by the producer's apprentice. The company has a strong sense of ensemble and is closer in spirit to Canada's Cirque de Soleil than it is to any magical performance current in the United States. We owe to two naturalized Americans, the Canadian Vernon and the Cuban Pelaez, the example of first-class magicians who brilliantly escaped the glitz and banality of American television magic. To appreciate them is to see how badly we have been short-changed by Las Vegas.

S. Cushing Strout is professor emeritus of English at Cornell University and an amateur magician.

# Cayuga's Waters

continued from page 7

## National Consequences of EPA's Decision

The misfortune of EPA's lack of will is that the agency clearly recognized that its "offsets" proposal could provide benefits far beyond Cayuga's waters. EPA wrote, "This project could serve as a model to test the concept of 'offsets' which is being discussed at the national level as a potential element of the permitting of new discharges to stressed waters."

Across New York more than 600 waterbodies have been identified where pollution controls are insufficiently stringent to fulfill applicable water quality standards. The concept of "offsets" will be critical to improving those rivers, lakes and harbors as well as thousands of similarly stressed waters around the country.

According to a regulatory proposal issued around the time its LSC negotiations foundered, EPA would require one-and-a-half times more pollution to be curtailed than the amount permitted by new discharges to impaired bodies of water. Unfortunately, EPA's ill-fated LSC proposal will undoubtedly undercut that initiative. Why would permit applicants in other states adopt offsets once they learn that EPA failed to require them for Cayuga Lake?

## What Citizens Can Do

In the last year, enormous progress has been made to educate concerned citizens about the perils of LSC and the plight of Cayuga Lake. Even though construction of LSC is nearing completion, the fight to protect and preserve Cayuga Lake is just beginning.

Since EPA's innovative proposal has yet to receive a public hearing, citizen input should focus on bringing about its adoption. Individuals should join CLDF and other interested parties in respectfully requesting that EPA afford all interested parties ample opportunity to review and comment on its proposal before finalizing a decision in this matter.

LSC's unprecedented wastewater discharge must only be sanctioned after EPA's proposal assures adequate protection of Cayuga Lake and "offsets" to reverse its long-standing degradation. EPA's proposal also should be adopted on a nationwide basis because it offers a viable model for improving impaired waterbodies.

For information on how you can help, visit [www.cldf.org](http://www.cldf.org). Using the links on that website, you can also view the EPA documents described in this article and e-mail your opinions to the EPA officials involved with the LSC review.

Walter Hang is a resident of Ithaca and avid small boat sailor.

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# Bloomsburied

continued from page 1

me as a bit too much like Peter Walsh's domineering love for Clarissa—in the end she fled from him because he wanted to refashion her into his personal image of the beloved.

One pitfall of Cunningham's approach is a small but nagging distraction. Right at the start, Cunningham brings up his Clarissa's nickname: "The name Mrs. Dalloway had been Richard's idea—a conceit tossed off one drunken dormitory night as he assured her that Vaughan was not the proper name for her. She should, he'd said, be named after a great figure in literature, and while she'd argued for Isabel Archer or Anna Karenina, Richard had insisted that Mrs. Dalloway was the singular and obvious choice." Having thus inserted Woolf's book as a literal object into his frame, Cunningham creates a jarring tension between this object and *Mrs. Dalloway's* metafictional role as the blueprint for these characters' lives. If *Mrs. Dalloway* exists in Clarissa Vaughan's and Richard's world, and worse, if they are familiar with it, then the parallels between their lives and the book take on a brittle fantastic quality (in an otherwise realistic novel), and the characters' blindness to these parallels becomes absurd and finally, a little comic. The blueprint is the elephant in the corner that no one wants to talk about.

A more important objection is that Cunningham's piggybacking of Woolf constrains, even foredooms, his characters and so prevents them from taking on their proper weight. To give just one example: by the time Louis appears unexpectedly at Clarissa's door, after years away in San Francisco (as Peter Walsh appeared after years in India) we know what he is going to do. As he sits on the sofa with her and talks in a chipper way about his love life, he is going to burst into tears. "To his complete surprise," Cunningham writes. Louis does have his reasons for crying: at fifty-three he is still unattached, in an affair with a much younger man who doesn't love him, and whom he doesn't love. "There is so little love in the world," he thinks. But honestly, we don't care much what Louis thinks because we are too aware of the *main* reason for his tears: at this point in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh cried. (And he was surprised, too.) The effect Cunningham achieves is somewhat like coloring a black-and-white film classic, but in reverse. His characters seemed washed of their flesh tones, ghostly.

The most serious problem for Cunningham in these chapters is that he virtually demands that we compare his art with Woolf's—not just the shape of his sentences, but his whole approach to evoking a world and a mood, to suggesting large themes. One way to begin a comparison would be to look at the opening of *Mrs. Dalloway*:

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off

them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?"—was that it?—"I prefer men to cauliflowers"—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace—Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished—how strange it was!—a few sayings like this about cabbages.

I've chosen this passage because Cunningham quotes it in full in his first chapter on Laura Brown, the California housewife and mother in 1949 who would rather read than take part in the life of her family. She is lingering in bed in the morning, reluctant to join her husband and young son at breakfast downstairs. From the nightstand she has plucked up *Mrs. Dalloway*, which she has never looked at before, and reads the words above. Then Cunningham describes her reaction: "She inhales deeply. It is so beautiful; it is so much more than...well, than almost anything, really." (Ellipsis in the original.)

This is an oddly pat and passive reaction to a nervous, elliptical text. Surely Woolf does not intend for us (nor for that matter does she allow us) to *inhale* her words; we must chew them. She is deliberately keeping us off balance, making us a bit nervous ourselves. Where are we? At a window, a door, on the street? Who is Peter Walsh? What was the context of "I prefer men to cauliflowers"? Woolf has planted little mines that pop with a muffled menace in what otherwise seems a mood of elation: the "something awful" that bobs to the surface after the kiss and flap of the wave; the pocket-knife that strangely comes between Peter's eyes and his smile; the phrase "when millions of things had utterly vanished," which perhaps literally refers to all the things about Peter that Clarissa has forgotten, but which seems for a moment to allude to the millions of young dead, the civilization that was lost, in the great war. This is a prickly and provocative passage, yet Laura Brown inhales it like a floral scent.

Her reaction is significant because, though wrong for Woolf's prose, it is right for Cunningham's. He *does* want us to inhale *The Hours*, to exclaim, "Beautiful!" Here is his opening, somewhat shortened:

There are still the flowers to buy. Clarissa feigns exasperation (though she loves doing errands like this), leaves Sally cleaning the bathroom, and runs out, promising to be back in half an hour.

It is New York City. It is the end of the twentieth century.

The vestibule door opens onto a June morning so fine and scrubbed Clarissa pauses at the threshold as she would at the edge of a pool, watching the turquoise water lapping at the tiles, the liquid nets of sun wavering in the blue depths. As if standing at the edge of a pool she delays for a moment the plunge, the quick membrane of chill, the plain shock of immersion...

What a thrill, what a shock, to be alive on a morning in June, prosperous, almost scandalously privileged, with a simple errand to run. She, Clarissa Vaughan, an ordinary person (at this age, why bother trying to deny it?), has flowers to buy and a party to give. As Clarissa steps

down from the vestibule her shoe makes gritty contact with the red-brown, mica-studded stone of the first stair. She is fifty-two, just fifty-two, and in almost unnaturally good health. She feels every bit as good as she did that day in Wellfleet, at the age of eighteen, stepping out through the glass doors into a day very much like this one, fresh and almost painfully clear, rampant with growth.

Cunningham's Clarissa is meant to be as groping, as self-doubting about her choices, about her *seriousness*, as Woolf's Clarissa, but the prose doesn't grope, doesn't doubt. It locates us firmly. Its judgements are clear: Clarissa only "feigns" exasperation, actually "she loves doing errands like this." (We might have been trusted to infer this from "What a thrill, what a shock, to be alive on a morning in June.") Images are doubled or even tripled, to anchor them in our minds: "the plunge, the quick membrane of chill, the plain shock of immersion." The prose is polished and "lyrical" in a way Woolf's (with its parentheses, its sentences fractured by semi-colons, its sudden shifts of tone and perspective) is not. The language, while not quite clichéd, is familiar, the words coming in boxed sets: a "scrubbed" morning; "scandalously privileged"; "painfully clear"; "rampant with growth." This is not prose that wants to wake you up, but incense, ready for inhaling.

Woolf continues:

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durnall's van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

Woolf's jumps in perspective always come suddenly, and sometimes, as here, without any physical placement. Often, you've been "jumped" without quite realizing it, and have to back up a sentence or two to find where the leap occurred (this first instance is clearer than most; but Woolf does misdirect us, so that for a moment we think Purvis is in the van). The uncertainty you are made to feel by this technique mirrors the uncertainty of virtually everything said and felt by the characters in the novel. They frequently are sure they understand one another, and are almost always wrong. Every internal "narrative," no matter how powerful and convincing, is undermined by the next one. And this, in turn, is related to—is an organic part of—Clarissa Dalloway's ruminations throughout the day on the essential aloneness of the individual, on loneliness amid all the life of London. (And yet Woolf does not endorse the idea that this loneliness is "bad"; Clarissa often sees it as good, if also ineluctably sad; Woolf endorses almost nothing.)

Scrope Purvis thinks he knows Mrs. Dalloway, "as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster." But note that "one...one..." It sounds like the tolling of a bell, suggesting, contra Donne, that every man is an island. And it anticipates the next paragraph, when Big Ben will strike. (With the death of God in the trenches of the last war, Big Ben has become the mechanistic deity of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Father [Big] and Son [Ben] in one, knelling the hours that usher the characters ever closer to their non-afterlives.) And what Purvis sees when he looks at Mrs. Dalloway is—as so often in Woolf—wrong, and yet also (in a way Purvis himself does not realize) right. In the image of the bird, he seems to see freedom: lightness, vivacity, uprightness. The direc-

tion is upward, toward flight. Woolf leaves it entirely to us to discern—and for most of us, only on re-reading the book—a hint behind "light" of her own sense of her triviality, a shadow behind the bird of the gilded cage, a wink in the "stiffened" and the "very upright" and the "perch" toward taxidermy.

Woolf accomplishes all this in very few words. Cunningham takes much longer:

She straightens her shoulders as she stands at the corner of Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the light. There she is, thinks Willie Bass, who passes her some mornings just about here. The old beauty, the old hippie, hair still long and defiantly gray, out on her morning rounds in jeans and a man's cotton shirt, some sort of ethnic slippers (India? Central America?) on her feet. She still has a certain sexiness; a certain bohemian, good-witch sort of charm; and yet this morning she makes a tragic sight, standing so straight in her big shirt and exotic shoes, resisting the pull of gravity, a female mammoth already up to its knees in the tar, taking a rest between efforts, standing bulky and proud, almost nonchalant, pretending to contemplate the tender grasses waiting on the far bank when it is beginning to know for certain that it will remain here, trapped and alone, after dark, when the jackals come out. She waits patiently for the light. She must have been spectacular twenty-five years ago; men must have died happy in her arms. Willie Bass is proud of his ability to discern the history of a face; to understand that those who are now old were once young. The light changes and he walks on.

The doubling continues; we get the shoes and shirt twice. "Waiting for the light" has symbolic value, so we get that twice, too. There is no hint here, or later, that Willie Bass's perception of Clarissa Vaughan is wrong. He conveniently provides us with a detailed early description of the appearance of our protagonist, and he somehow sees to the heart of the matter with that image of the sinking mammoth. (Unlike Scrope Purvis, he is right to feel proud of his perceptive ability.) He also metaphorizes rather suspiciously like a writer, whereas Purvis' likening of Mrs. Dalloway to a bird manages its multivalent trick while never moving beyond an ordinary observer's cliché of woman-as-bird.

One could go on like this, scene by scene. (The mystery is why any writer would wish this on himself.) I'll mention only one other, a crux of a sort in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa's husband, Richard, has been out at lunch (a lunch that Clarissa was wounded not to have been invited to), and on the way home he decides on a whim to buy flowers for his wife and tell her that he loves her. ("Which one never does say, he thought. Partly one's lazy; partly one's shy.") He brings her red and white roses, but at the decisive moment he cannot bring himself to say the words. "But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa...He had not said 'I love you,'; but he held her hand. Happiness is this, is this, he thought." But in fact, Clarissa did not understand, and she is not happy. Richard happens to say something while they are holding hands that Clarissa interprets as a jibe at her passion for hosting parties. She doesn't respond; she doesn't even register the remark at first. (And in fact it's difficult, on looking back, to be sure what comment she's thinking of.) Richard leaves, and Clarissa's voice takes over: "But—but—why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy?...Her parties! That was it! Her parties. Both of them [Richard and, earlier, Peter] had criti-

continued on page 11

# Bloomsburied

continued from page 10

cized her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!" (Note the echo of Richard's "happiness is this, is this.") In a lesser novel, this would merely be an ironic and depressing scene, but Woolf folds it into a grander, subtler scheme in which Richard's unperceptive simple-heartedness is allowed eventually to seem positive, albeit with a full complement of Woolfian qualifiers—his lack of understanding in a way allows Clarissa more room, whereas what Peter had prepared for her was "a narrow bed."

Cunningham is not interested in such a distant, darkling illumination. He reproduces the scene in its outward particulars (Richard's part played by Sally), and then goes straight for the transubstantiation and the communion:

Sally flourishes the roses and, at the same moment, notices the vase full of roses Clarissa has put on the table. They both laugh.

"This is sort of an O. Henry moment, isn't it?" Sally says.

"You can't possibly have too many roses," Clarissa says.

Sally hands the flowers to her and for a moment they are both simply and entirely happy. They are present, right now, and they have managed, somehow, over the course of eighteen years, to continue loving each other. It is enough. At this moment, it is enough.

I demur: it is too much. Woolf's writing is porous, and it breathes through those pores. Since every reader is forced to make her own connections in *Mrs. Dalloway*, each reader makes different ones, and every reading, no matter how perceptive, is also reductive. The epiphanies that Clarissa only fleetingly, doubtfully glimpses become our epiphanies, too, because we, too, only fleetingly glimpse them. "I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time," Woolf wrote in her diary in 1920 as she was making the shift to the style of *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*: "no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist." Cunningham has come along like a heavy cold front and precipitated Woolf's mist. His writing, when it breathes at all, breathes entirely through the mouth.

Toward the end of his novel he gives us what amounts to a Cliff's Notes reduction of Woolf's "theme":

We live our lives, do whatever we do, and then we sleep—it's as simple and ordinary as that. A few jump out of windows or drown themselves or take pills; more die by accident; and most of us, the vast majority, are slowly devoured by some disease or, if we're very fortunate, by time itself. There's just this for consolation: an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectations, to burst open and give us everything we've ever imagined, though everyone but children (and perhaps even they) knows these hours will inevitably be followed by others, far darker and

more difficult. Still, we cherish the city, the morning; we hope, more than anything, for more.

Heaven only knows why we love it so.

Here is Woolf's "crepuscular" transcendence laid out in its Sunday clothes, parlor-lit and embalmed.

The other two narratives in *The Hours* are, on the whole, more successful, since they don't beg comparison with a better writer. In particular, the chapters on Woolf herself have some good moments, well observed. But Cunningham's reluctance to let even dull readers miss anything causes him to overdetermine the parallels between his three linked tales (in addition to simply having too many of them). The recurring images become fussy and forced; he pins them down until they can't move. To take just one example out of many: Cunningham writes a scene in which Richard's deterioration from AIDS is described. Among other things, Richard mentions one of his AIDS-induced hallucinations to Clarissa: "There was one that looked a bit like a black, electrified jellyfish." In the next chapter, we find Virginia Woolf putting down her pen for the day and beginning to worry about a possible relapse of her mental illness.

Now, I would like to believe that most readers—the sort of readers, anyway, that ambitious writers write for—could be trusted to see a parallel between poet Richard's and writer Woolf's respective mental illnesses. But Cunningham wants to make sure. The headaches that for Woolf herald a coming relapse, he writes, "inhabit rather than merely afflict her, the way viruses inhabit their hosts." And just in case there is a reader or two who slept through that one, he slaps us with another. The pain, he writes, seems to take on a shaped life of its own, "randomly spiked, fluid but whole, like a jellyfish."

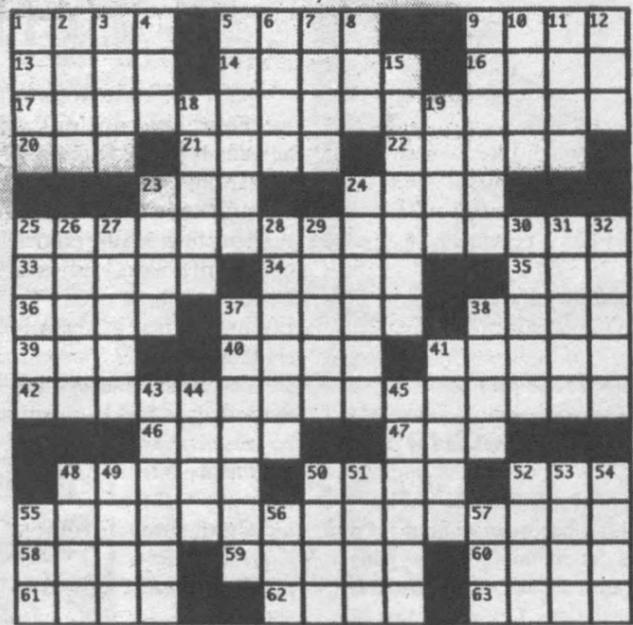
Cunningham's lack of faith in the brains of his audience brings me to the "surprise" that awaits readers at the end of the novel. That Cunningham means it to be a surprise is clear (and he has said as much in interviews), but it will only be a surprise if you inhale his book, rather than read it. (Warning: although the following sentence does not exactly reveal this surprise, it makes it marginally more obvious than Cunningham does.) If a reader steps back even for a moment from the text, I think he will notice: here are three tales whose linkages the author continually insists on; in one, set in the 1990s, there is a middle-aged poet named Richard (last name never given); in another, set in 1949, there is a woman named Laura Brown, whose sensitive three-year-old son is named Richie.

The reason I bother to bring this up is that it says something about the hollow, gimmicky nature of Cunningham's aims. To preserve his small surprise he pays a large artistic price. Discovering that (OK, now I'm going to reveal it) Laura Brown was Richard's mother, and that she eventually did abandon the family for a second life as a librarian in Toronto, would be revelatory to us—as more than a mere plot twist—only if we already had some notion of Richard's relationship to his family's past, and what it has meant to his personality and his art. But Cunningham can tell us nothing about that past, and certainly nothing about Richard's feelings toward his mother, because it would spoil his "surprise."

At the end of the book, Richard's mother and Clarissa meet: "Here she is, then, Claris-

## What's Missing?

Crossword by Adam Perl



### ACROSS

1. On \_\_\_ with
5. LSD
9. Western lily
13. Head problem
14. Mid-size ensemble
16. Museum offerings
17. 1972 Goldie Hawn film
20. 49ers goal
21. \_\_\_ extra cost
22. Consumed
23. 1998 peace accord river
24. It may be brief
25. 1971 sci-fi flick
33. Talking bird in a poem
34. Yes \_\_\_?
35. Controversial health grp.
36. Author Abba \_\_\_
37. \_\_\_ the hole
38. The Godfather, e.g.
39. Bordeaux, e.g.
40. Playwright O'Casey
41. Pleasantville's Joan
42. Capra classic
46. Human, for one
47. Hot time in Europe
58. Indian language
59. Bar order
60. Change the clues, e.g.
61. Catalog color
62. Bog content
63. Old-time gas sign

### DOWN

1. Part of SATB
2. \_\_\_ One
3. It's a plot
4. Call the game
5. News
6. Fargo creator
7. \_\_\_ many words
8. They make busts
9. Less harsh
10. The Emerald Isle
11. Valley
12. Sweet ending
15. A high crime
18. "\_\_\_ MacDuff"
19. National League division
23. Famous architect
24. Best friend, perhaps
25. Three coins in the fountain fountain
26. It's hard to break
27. Rogers' partner
28. Ancient epoch
29. Kind of locks
30. Rent \_\_\_
31. Force
32. Nary a soul
37. Not a party animal
38. Whodunnit film of 1985
41. Following
43. Kind of dodger
44. Star \_\_\_
45. Cancun, e.g.
48. Something else
49. Opera with elephants
50. Finish the lawn
51. Out to lunch
52. Threads
53. His career had its ups and downs
54. About
55. Aficianado
56. Pile
57. Contest

Answers on page 4

sa thinks; here is the woman from Richard's poetry. Here is the lost mother, the thwarted suicide; here is the woman who walked away." Through all those "here's you can hear Cunningham trying hard, but the problem he has created for himself will not go away. He has said virtually nothing about Richard's poetry until this moment, except that it is "wonderful" and "important." Thus this moment means far more to Clarissa than it can to us. And since *The Hours*, at its core, is an elegy for Richard, it is an irritating irony that in a book so ostentatiously concerned with the importance of art in life, Richard's own art—his consolation, perhaps his immortality—has been left invisible in the glare of Woolf's art. Even his last words are cribbed from Woolf.

Cunningham, first kissed by Woolf at fifteen, revering her like a goddess, has fed his characters to her.

Brian Hall is the author of *The Saskiad*. He lives in Ithaca.

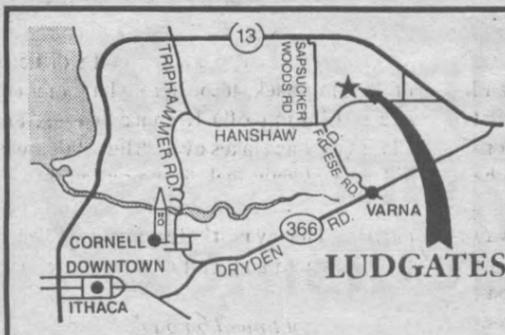
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# Serious Comics

## Watchmen

By Alan Moore.  
Illustrated by Dave Gibbons.  
New York:  
DC Comics, \$14.95.

## Sandman, volumes I-X

Neil Gaiman.  
New York:  
Vertigo Comics, \$19.95 per book.

## Jo Shannon Cochran

The concept of literary comic books—"graphic novels"—has been around for a while now, and dotted among the rayguns and Barbarellas are a number of projects with serious artistic ambitions. One of the first of these was Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. A few years later came Neil Gaiman's ten-volume *Sandman*, a gothic epic in comic book format.

Graphic novels are not taken seriously by the literary mainstream, for some very justifiable reasons: as Scott McCloud puts it in *Understanding Comics* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), they're "usually crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare—but they don't have to be!" His point is that comic books are not in themselves a genre; they're an artistic medium, just like novels or plays. Those art forms received, in their infancies, exactly the same dismissive critical attitude that comics get today. Novels and plays were trashy entertainment for the uneducated classes. And then great artists—Shakespeare, the Brontës—developed in those media, and the literati were converted by the *hoi polloi*.

Graphic novels have yet to bring forth their Shakespeare. But the medium itself is potentially a powerful one—as McCloud argues, "it offers range and versatility with all the potential imagery of film and painting plus the intimacy of the written word." And there are already graphic novels that deserve the name, stories told through word and image that are as sophisticated as many well-received mainstream novels.

*Watchmen* is one of these. It's an idiosyncratic vision, drawing shards from a number of different genres—superhero stories, serial adventure comics, hard-boiled detective fiction, Faulkner-esque psychological minutiae—to assemble an unsettling mosaic, a fragmented image of America's soul. If a culture defines itself through its myths, then Moore looks to the superhero trope to explain America. It's an ambitious project, and *Watchmen* isn't always an unqualified success. But the risks it takes are interesting ones, and they pay off more often than not.

The central strength of *Watchmen* is its fusion of comic book tradition—gadgets, code names, costumes—with psychological realism. What would happen, Moore asks, if a real person tried to live by the heroic code of comic books? The answer is the Watchmen: a collection of ordinary people who, due to various fetishes and obsessions, insist on dressing up to fight crime. Some are loose cannons seeking an outlet for violence; some do it as a publicity stunt; some are driven by a need to punish the world that harmed them; some are innocents who truly believe in Robin Hood and the Lone Ranger. The rest of the world sees them not as heroes but as freaks. As the plot unfolds, the lives of two generations of Watchmen are revealed: the original group, inspired by the dogged naivete of America in the fifties, broken apart

by internal dissension and external scandal; and the modern-day characters, shaped by the fear and wonder of the atomic age.

By turning an analyst's eye to the fetishes that have traditionally surrounded American comics, *Watchmen* ultimately becomes a commentary on the American psyche. The two generations of characters mirror the shifting hopes and fears of society. If they are lonely and pathetic, if they are deluded, even if they are sociopathic, it is only because they tried to actually live by the ideals that most Americans simply like to read about.

Dave Gibbons' artwork also reflects this juxtaposition of comic-book abstraction with real-world detail. The drawings are executed in a traditional style: clean lines, primary colors, speech bubbles. But the older heroes' potbellies are drawn faithfully, and within the speech bubbles a reader is confronted with problems of philosophical weight: "We do not do this thing because it is permitted. We do it because we are compelled," comments Rorschach, one of the modern Watchmen. He continues in his customary staccato: "Live our lives, lacking anything better to do. Devise reason later. Born from oblivion, bear children, hell-bound as ourselves; go into oblivion. There is nothing else."

Rorschach is the most attractive hero—the one with the most controlled demeanor and firmest faith in the morality of his actions. He is also the most deranged of the Watchmen (excepting The Comedian, who is murdered in the first few pages). On the other hand, the most outrageous hero—the only one with superpowers—is Dr. Manhat-

tan, the blue-skinned product of a nuclear experiment gone awry. But Dr. Manhattan is also the character who creates the *least* rift between our world and the Watchmen's world. He is simply a personification of nuclear power, tightly controlled by the U.S. Government, complete with carcinogenic complications. He wins the war in Vietnam, but the striking thing about that is how little it changes anything; the American conscience is still scarred by the atrocities committed there, and there is no impact on the daily lives of American citizens.

*Watchmen* begins in a climate of disillusioned embitterment. A generation of superheroes has failed to produce universal peace or justice. The passage of anti-vigilante laws has forced the heroes into retirement or made them into criminals. "Why are so few of us left active, healthy, and without personality disorders?" laments one. As the story progresses, it makes an attempt to recapture the power of superhero fantasy, even though the initial realistic tone becomes a bit muddled. The book opens with a murder and ends with its solution, but by the time the killer is exposed, the death seems almost incidental: what is truly at stake is, of course, the salvation of the world. It is typical of *Watchmen* that the book wholly accepts this outlandish plot but focuses mainly on the details: how does one "save" anything? By changing it, presumably for the better? Or by protecting it from harm, ensuring it remains as it is? Each of the Watchmen is eager to administer grace to a fallen world, but they cannot agree how it should be done.

Unlike *Watchmen*, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* is not about superheroes in any direct way. Gaiman is far less interested in justifying his genre; where Moore explores the meaning of modern American mythology, Gaiman invokes much older mythic systems, delving into Greek

epics and Sumerian theogonies for his referents. Fundamentally *Sandman* is about dreams and responsibilities, and the ways in which we are defined by our capacity to imagine that which is beyond ourselves.

Gaiman structures this by making Dream and Death and Delirium embodied figures, rulers of the realms they signify. Dream, the Sandman himself, is the center of the books: a black-haired, brooding king of the powers of unreality. He and his six siblings are the Endless, the forces of existence that predate gods. Human characters wander through their realms, changing and changed by what they find there.

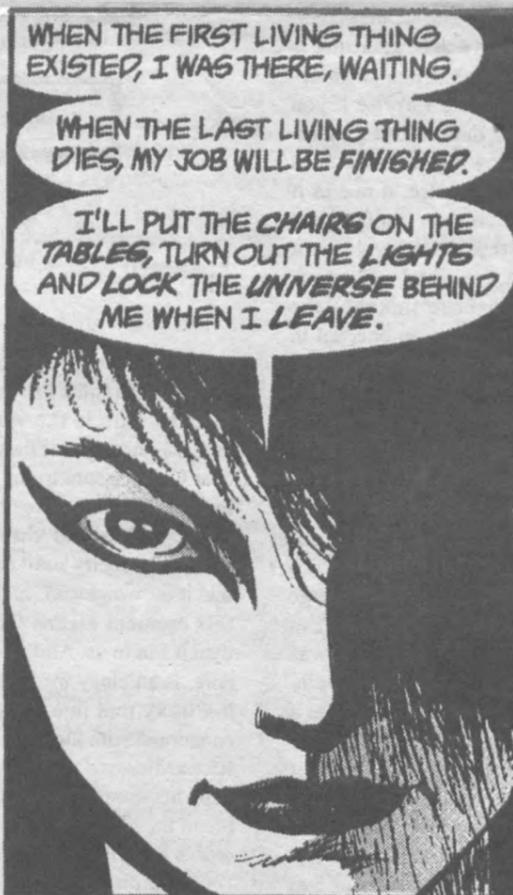
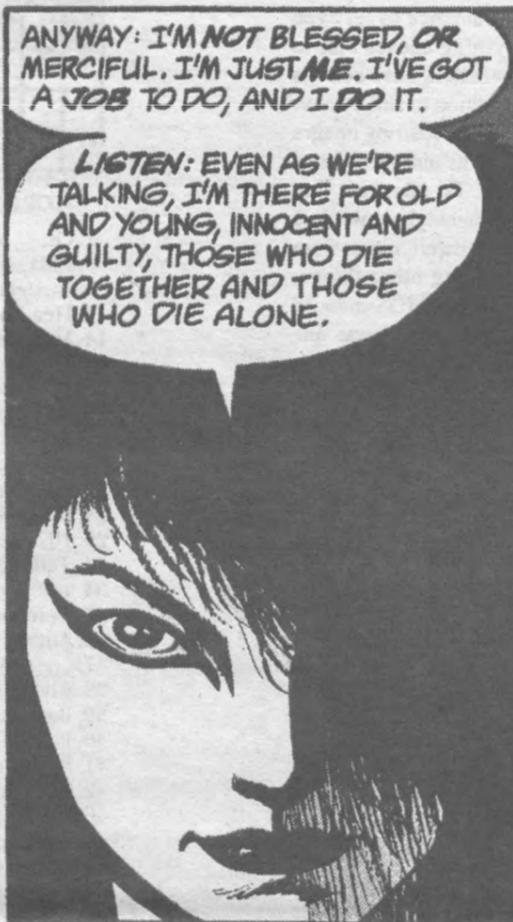
There are many individually complete narratives, but *Sandman* is also cohesive as a whole: the larger structure is that of an expanding and collapsing universe. The first books range in subject from Shakespeare to slavery to the dreams of cats. In the final volumes everything starts to recombine; repeating motifs become linked in a larger pattern; minor subplots and cameo characters turn out to advance the plot in major ways; what seemed throwaway lines are, in retrospect, imbued with thematic significance.

Gaiman's vision is often dark, encompassing a number of violent and graphic scenes, but he is ultimately humane. To live is to be at risk, he insists, but life must be lived nonetheless, and it should be lived bravely. For instance, one of the strongest stories in the *Sandman* epic involves a day, once every hundred years, when Death lives a human life. At the end, when her mortal avatar dies and is confronted by her endless self, Death asks herself, "Was it worth it?" And she answers, "I...I don't know. I think so. I hope so. I met such neat people."

As Gaiman himself acknowledges, the first *Sandman* book, *Preludes and Nocturnes*, is by far the weakest. "Rereading these stories today I must confess I find many of them awkward and ungainly," he writes in the epilogue. Much more successful is the second book, *The Doll's House*. It introduces Rose Walker, a teenaged girl with an unshakable sense of self who searches for the younger brother separated from her by her parents' divorce. Her dry sense of humor and ability to accept the basic senselessness of life guide her through a series of bizarre encounters that become entangled with the dreams and nightmares of childhood. *The Doll's House* is about families, inherited and chosen, and about their power to defeat or to sustain the individual spirit. It may be the best place to begin the series. (An eleventh-hour addition to the *Sandman* series, *The Dream Hunters*, is also scheduled for publication this month.)

Upon viewing Rodolphe Töpffer's picture stories—or comics, if you like—in the mid 1800s, Goethe wrote that, "If for the future, he would choose a less frivolous subject and restrict himself a little, he would produce things beyond all conception" (quoted in *Enter: The Comics—Rodolphe Töpffer's Essay on Physiognomy and the True Story of Monsieur Crepin*, edited and translated by E. Wiese [University of Nebraska Press, 1995]). Well, *Watchmen* and *Sandman* have chosen subjects that are not frivolous. Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman may well be the Brontës of their medium. The pleasure of searching for the funnybook Shakespeare is left to the open-minded reader.

Jo Shannon Cochran is a writer and editor living in Ithaca.



*Sandman, The Dream Country. © 1995 DC Comics*

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