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FREE



Après moi, le deluge...

Story on page 6

Beauty and the Beholder

The Art of the Lathe

by B.H. Fairchild.

Introduction by Anthony Hecht.

Alice James Books, 1998.

80 pages, \$11.95 paperback.

Repair

by C.K. Williams.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

128 pages, \$21.

In The Pines: Lost Poems, 1972-1997

by David St. John.

White Pine Press, 1999.

224 pages, \$16 paperback.

Wakefulness

by John Ashbery.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

96 pages, \$20 (\$13 paperback).

Girls on the Run

by John Ashbery.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

96 pages, \$20 (\$13 paperback).

Robert Sward

B.H. Fairchild's *The Art of the Lathe* is a collection of verses set largely in small-town America with its "little white frame houses" and the "oven-warm winter/kitchens of Baptist households," a world of hard work and thwarted desire, populated by machinists, welders and farmers. Each poem flows from the one before, but the book opens *in medias res* with the speaker in Italy homesick for "the treeless horizons/of slate skies and the muted passions of roughnecks."

We are at the Bargello in Florence, and she says, *what are you thinking?* and I say, *beauty*, thinking of how very far we are now from the machine shop and the dry fields of Kansas...

"Beauty." How can one read the word and not think of Frost's boast that in all his years of writing he used the term only once?

But here the poet is standing before Donatello's "David," with his wife touching his sleeve, asking "what are you thinking?" And he's actually thinking of beauty, of a discussion between Robert Penn Warren and Paul Weiss at Yale College, a 1963 radio broadcast audible in Kansas only because of "some weirdness of the air waves."

Here were two grown men discussing "beauty" seriously and with dignity as if they and the topic were as normal as normal topics of discussion between men such as soybean prices or why the commodities market was a sucker's game or Oklahoma football or Gimpy Neiderland almost dying from his hemorrhoid operation.

"Beauty" is a seemingly discursive, but in fact ingeniously constructed, long-lined, eight-page poem in four sections which touches on a variety of topics, including baseball, hard physical labor, popular music, and the difficulty many men have, poets among them, in saying the word, a word which doesn't seem quite natural or right to say aloud:

...she touching his chest, his hand brushing her breasts, and he does not say the word "beautiful" because he cannot and never has, and she does not say it because it would embarrass him or any other man she has ever known...

The Art of the Lathe is a book infused with the beauty of "silver Kansas light laving the [dinner] table," "light filtering down from the green plastic slats in the roof of the machine shop," high school athletes eager to gallop terribly against each other's bodies, light and "the uprisings of light," and the poem "Beauty" ending as it does with "the metal roof of the machine shop" breaking into flame "late on an autumn day, with such beauty."

Reading these lines one thinks of James Wright and poems like "Autumn Begins in Martin's Ferry, Ohio." Indeed, Fairchild acknowledges Wright in the two epigraphs that precede "Beauty."

Then there is Fairchild's justly popular "Keats":

I knew him. He ran the lathe next to mine. Perfectionist, a madman, even on overtime Saturday night. Hum of the crowd floating from the ball park, shouts, slamming doors...

This is Keats out of Kansas, a scrappy guy, short, but fearless. Keats, a skilled mechanic who took no lip from anyone, Keats who once beat up a mechanic "big as a Buick," who would lean into his lathe "and make a little song/with the honing cloth, rubbing the edges,/smiling like a man asleep, dreaming."

Reading the title poem and others like "Old Men Playing Basketball," "Work," and "The Welder, Visited by the Angel of Mercy," one sees the influence of Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, and James T. Farrell. These are naturalistic poems, objective in their representation of human beings. Dana Gioia and others have justly noted Fairchild's ability to plunder "the territories of prose to expand the possibilities of contemporary verse."

"Beauty." It's a risky word, a tricky word, one to be used with caution—particularly by poets. But now Fairchild has got me thinking and I approach C.K. Williams' *Repair* only after consulting a dictionary. "Beauty," I read, "craftsmanship, truthfulness, original-

ty." Is there beauty in the poetry of C. K. Williams and, if so, where?

Williams is a delver, a diviner, a discoverer of marvels. He is incisive and forthright, a risk-taker, an unflinching teller of things-as-they-are, yet even his images of injury and destruction, of violence and of loss are infused with merciful light, grief and compassion. In his most brutal poem "The Nail," for example, he tells of a dictator who disposed of enemies "by hammering nails into their skulls." The poem, graphic and horrific as it is, modulates in the final stanza:

*No, no more: this should be happening in
myth, in stone, or
paint, not in reality, not here;
it should be an emblem of itself, not itself,
something would
mean, not really have to happen,
something to go out, expand in implication
from that unmoved
mass of matter in the breast...*

The poem concludes:

*...it's we who do such things, we who set the
slant, embed the tip,
lift the sledge and drive the nail,
drive the nail which is the axis upon which
turns the brutal
human world upon the world.*

Each day of our lives images of this kind assault us. The images themselves are like nails driven into our skulls. So one is drawn to a book bearing the title *Repair*, a collection of poems that, in addition to everything else it has to offer, explores the nature and limits of healing and repair.

In "The Blow," an approaching beggar startles a man who blindly turns on him and punches him in the chest. Knowing he has made a mistake, harangued by the beggar, walking away as fast as he can, the man suddenly sees "himself/and the beggar as atoms/nullities, passing beside/one another, or through."

Musing on the fear of "our own existence," chastened, he recalls reading of a youth in a madhouse, "entirely idiotic, sitting/on a shelf in the wall." "That shape am I," the man understands and, "beholding his own mind," the man sees it "flickering desperately over/the great gush of the real,/to no end, to no avail."

In "The House," the poet speaks of that place in ourselves where consciousness—or something—cries "Make me new," but pleads "pitifully" at the same time, "Cherish me as I was." Williams draws on the language of a construction crew bent on demolition, "Down to the swipe of the sledge, the ravaging bite of the pick," as he leads into the inner core, that "rubble, wreckage, vanity: the abyss" we all share.

This is a book about repair, but as the poet makes clear, there can be no repair, no healing, without forgiveness—forgiveness of

others and ourselves.

The book ends tenderly, movingly with "Invisible Mending," where "Three women old as angels,/bent as ancient apple trees,/who, in a storefront window" work with needles, scissors and shears to repair the "Abrasions, rents and frays./slits and chaps and acid/splashes, filaments" of our outer garments.

*Only sometimes would they
lift their eyes to yours to show
how much lovelier than these twists
of silk and serge the garments
of the mind are...*

David St. John's *In The Pines: Lost Poems 1972-1997* is a seven-part collection of poems, many of which appeared over the past twenty-five years in limited edition chapbooks. White Pine Press is to be congratulated for bringing out this 176-page volume of the poet's "lost" or otherwise unavailable work, though the forbidding dark funereal green, black, and muddy yellow cover is quite at odds with the wonderful wit, humor, lyricism, and brightness of the poems themselves. Many of these sixty or so poems, whatever their length, tell fully realized stories—with the poet drawing on a variety of personas and writing in the first person. Consider the five-page title poem with its Rilkean account of an ailing man who, enchanted by an angel's singing, enters into a fantastical relationship with her ("blond wings the breadth/of a man's body"). The affair culminates in an erotic encounter, "the long feathers/Cutting my neck like fine razors/As I unbuckle my pants & pull myself/into her," and the androgynous angel "body/Of a condor: just as powerful, graceful, sleek" flies off with the male narrator, raising him above the pines, toward:

*...the empty heavens,
& I know my lungs in this clarity of air
Will last no longer than Her song.
Though I hardly care, though
I foresaw it all, still,
I know as well as she knows—in stories
Of this kind—when what comes
Has come finally to its end, which of us
Must fall.*

Decadent and urbane, utterly different from the Rilkean title poem is the lushly erotic, eighteen-line "Don't Talk to Me; Touch Me," a half-page *tour de force* which offers more character, more atmosphere, more "story" than many full-length prose fiction narratives. Casually, almost offhandedly, the poet evokes a complete scene. In this case the main character is a gigolo ("he'd carefully choose the one/Who'd certainly have money or jewelry back at her room—/A small price to pay for a man with

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Jack Goldman

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CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Benson, Tony Del Plato, Dan Finlay, Gayle Fritz, Jack Goldman, Walter Hang, Natan Hullman, Arnold Lapiner, Kevin Murphy, Barbara Regenspan, Carol Rubenstein, Robert Sward.

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Learning to Kill

On Killing

The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society

by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman.
Little Brown & Company, 1996.
366 pages, \$16.00 paperback.

Dan Finlay

The idea that trauma can have long-term repercussions in a person's life seems self-evident today. Yet post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) first became an "official" diagnosis only in 1980 when it was included in the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association. Its use spread rapidly among clinicians, and there is now widespread public understanding that persons who experience or witness a traumatic event benefit from talking about it and sharing their reactions. Disasters such as airline crashes and tragedies such as school shootings routinely involve crisis counselors to help survivors and relatives deal with the aftermath. Perhaps the most telling sign of how widely-accepted the practice has become is the fact that it is now satirized, as in a recent *New Yorker* cartoon portraying grief counselors as vultures, the ambulance chasers of the therapy world.

If people have long known through their own experience that trauma can ripple through a person's life for years, affecting personality, creativity, relationships, why has it taken so long for the full understanding of the power of this syndrome to emerge? In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman gives some historical perspective on this question: "the study of psychological trauma has a curious history—one of episodic amnesia. Periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of amnesia. The subject provokes such intense controversy that it periodically becomes anathema."

This point is especially true of violence inflicted by people rather than natural disasters. It is hard to look unflinchingly at what humans do to each other. Even more importantly, perpetrators have often had the power to discredit and silence their victims. Freud's knowledge, in cases published in 1896 in the *Aetiology of Hysteria*, that sexual abuse and incest were behind hysterical symptoms, was silenced and forgotten. Soldiers suffered "shell shock" in World War I, "battle fatigue" in World War II. These conditions were studied, treated, theorized about. But they did not automatically become part of the larger culture's understanding. Herman argues that what was missing was a social context for the truth to be spoken and heard:

Thus PTSD, a concept that evolved fitfully over 100 years, needed the momentum of women's liberation and the opposition to the Vietnam war to be understood as a coherent, socially accepted description of the impact of personal violence within families, violence towards women, and the violence of war.

On Killing by Lt. Col. David Grossman, about the psychological cost of killing in war, depends very much on trauma theory developed in the 20th century. Grossman reviews the psychological impact of combat on soldiers, something well-studied by many writers such as John Keegan in *The Face of Battle* or Glenn Gray in *The Warriors*. We know that, left in combat too long, healthy men with no prior psychological problems will break down: "98% of all soldiers in close combat will ultimately become psychiatric casualties." This is not a matter of bad character or weakness (as was thought well into the middle of the 20th century), but of extreme situational stress that will break almost anyone. We also know that these breakdowns are caused by multiple stressors: living in mud, rain, cold, or heat for long periods of time, experiencing extreme fatigue, hunger, lack of sleep, witnessing death and dismemberment, fearing death, facing hate, hating. As Grossman puts it:

emotional stamina on the battlefield [is] a finite resource. Faced with the soldier's encounters with horror, guilt, fear, exhaustion, and hate, each man

draws steadily from his own private reservoir of inner strength and fortitude until finally the well runs dry. And then he becomes a statistic.

Grossman's passion, the main thesis of his book, is that discussions of PTSD in combat leave out one key truth: it is traumatic to kill another human being. Men "have an intense resistance to killing their fellow man." We know that soldiers have to be trained to kill, we know the training itself can be brutalizing. But we do not talk about the act of killing and its repercussions on the individual. This is the unspoken truth of war, and our media reinforce this silence: our action heroes are never emotionally traumatized by the act of killing.

Grossman builds his case in two ways: with a historical discussion of firing rates in war, and with an examination of the frequency of PTSD in different combat situations. The standard source for the debate on firing rates is the work of Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall who fought in World War I and studied the firing rates of men in World War II, often using interviews with soldiers just rotated out of combat. He found a 15 to 20% firing rate and came to the very unmilitary conclusion which underlies Grossman's thesis: "The average and healthy individual has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. At the vital point he becomes a conscientious objector." Or as another writer on war, G. Dyer, puts it, "the vast majority of men are not born killers."

Grossman takes the evidence of low firing rates and does a speculative reading of history, applying it to earlier wars. He notes, for example, that the accuracy of Civil War muskets, the firing rate per minute, and the distance between formations of soldiers should have added up to much higher casualties than the historical record shows. Of the 27,574 muskets recovered at Gettysburg, 90% were loaded, and half of those were loaded more than once, evidence of non-firers. Or that 1% of World War II American fighter pilots accounted for 30 to 40% of the kills—evidence of reluctance to kill rather than lack of skill or courage.

This "unpatriotic" behavior on the battlefield, when it occurs, depends on combat situations where soldiers are close enough to the enemy to know they are killing a person. The closeness and the intention to kill seem necessary to create the trauma. When these factors are missing, the rates of PTSD are lower. Men who fought in modern navies have rarely suffered from PTSD. "Most of them don't have to kill anyone directly and no one is trying to specifically, personally, kill them." They are fighting ships and planes and they have "psychological and mechanical distance." Artillery crews and bomber crews generally have had low PTSD rates, again because of physical and emotional distance. Those who help on the battlefield, like medics, have lower rates, as do officers, who are less directly engaged in killing, and as do soldiers on reconnaissance patrols, who have orders not to engage the enemy. These exceptions, Grossman argues, show that the fear of being killed "does not reign supreme on the battlefield," and is not as prominent a factor in causing trauma as it has been made out to be. The civilian populations in World War II, deliberately targeted by both sides to be terrorized into submission, did not have high rates of PTSD. Further evidence shows that the closer a combat soldier is to the enemy, the higher the risk of psychological trauma, if his role in combat is to kill.

The Army took note of Marshall's findings on firing rates and changed its methods of training soldiers in Korea and Vietnam. In Korea, Marshall "found that 55% of infantrymen were firing their weapons." These training techniques were further perfected, and in Vietnam the firing rate appears to have been around 90 to 95%.

The training techniques that achieved this increase are, in Grossman's view, "desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms." The first of these is familiar to us from the stereotypes about boot camp and the abusive drill sergeant. This stereotype is based in recent history: "Authors such as Dyer and Holmes have traced the development of this boot camp deification of killing as having been almost unheard of in

World War I, rare in World War II, increasingly present in Korea, and thoroughly institutionalized in Vietnam." This is Dyer's comment on the social construction of the soldier who kills:

Conditioning is a matter of getting soldiers to shoot without thinking, "to develop a reflexive 'quick shoot' ability." The older way of teaching marksmanship was to use a bulls-eye target shot at from a stationary position. The modern way creates a more realistic setting for the recruit, in which "man-shaped targets at varying ranges will pop up in front of him for a brief time and the soldier must instantly aim and shoot." The conditioning makes the reaction automatic in combat, and human beings get equated to man-shaped targets. "Basically the soldier has rehearsed the process so many times that when he does kill in combat he is able to, at one level, deny to himself that he is actually killing another human being." Psychological denial works hand-in-hand with desensitization.

Grossman is a professional soldier who cares deeply about men in the military and who pursues his thesis on the trauma of killing with evangelistic fervor. From a military point of view the high firing rates in Vietnam were a success (a desired outcome of the training). From a psychological point of view, though, there was a higher rate of PTSD in Vietnam veterans. This should confirm Grossman's thesis. But Grossman the soldier is not in a position to pursue the full implications of the argument he makes as a psychologist. One of his professions has to betray the other or at least be subordinated to it. It would hardly be ethical for a psychologist to identify and describe trauma and then send people into it, but it is the military's officer job to send men into combat even in the knowledge that it is traumatic. Traditionally, the military psychologist works for this end too—recovery means return to combat. Respect for a client's psychological needs is subordinated to political ends, which will inevitably be a betrayal of some men.

This contradiction (not seen as such by Grossman) shows clearly in his discussion of the Vietnam War. Having spent three-fourths of his book arguing that the act of killing is traumatic, he does not deny that combat in Vietnam often produced PTSD, but his emphasis suddenly shifts to the absence of social support for the man who has killed:

In study after study two factors show up again and again as critical to the magnitude of the post-traumatic response. First and most obvious is the intensity of the initial trauma. The second and less obvious but absolutely vital factor is the nature of the social support structure available to the traumatized individual. In rapes, we have come to understand the magnitude of the trauma inflicted upon the victim by the defense tactic of accusing the victim during trials and have taken legal steps to prevent and constrain such attacks by a defendant's attorneys. In combat, the relationship between the nature of the trauma and the nature of the social support structure is the same.

Does the analogy to rape hold? The problem here is not the argument that the social support system can either heal or worsen the trauma. We know it can do either. The problem in Grossman's analysis is that, once the soldier who kills is seen as the victim of trauma, the responsibility for inflicting the trauma is never addressed, and the fury at what has been done to the victim is redirected (in this case) to the peace movement. To stay with the rape analogy, it is as though the rapist is forgotten and the whole focus of rage at injustice is spent on those involved in the aftermath.

That is why, in my opinion, Grossman's analysis of the Vietnam War is superficial in the extreme. He needs to denounce someone rather than look at the people and policies that put men in the path of trauma. Thus, he says, even though U.S. forces always won on the battlefield, the North won the war because it was more willing to commit atrocities. According to Grossman, the peace movement was always critical, hostile, disrespectful of veterans, and the only national forum that gave "a sympathetic and nonjudgmental

environment" for veterans to speak was *Soldier of Fortune* magazine! (Not a single mention, in the whole book, of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.) Grossman writes: "there is a nexus of events and causation linking the death of enemy soldiers [his thesis: killing is traumatic] and the spittle of war protesters [the social context worsened the trauma] with a pattern of suicide, homelessness, mental illness, and divorce that will ripple through the United States for generations to come." Demonize the opposition, both foreign and domestic, and there is no need to tie trauma to questions of responsibility.

What would be a healing social context in Grossman's eyes? Acceptance, understanding, good listening of course, but even more importantly, social approval, medals, honors, parades. These are superficial solutions. First of all, good listening is always a potentially radical activity: it might lead the storyteller back to the patriotic conventions of what is right or wrong, but it might just as easily subvert them and lead to a story of guilt and regret. Grossman has several such narratives of men watching the eyes of a dying enemy and feeling revulsion about the act of killing. Furthermore, good listening in the context of patriotism is rare. Grossman himself writes that "Veterans Administration psychologists are seldom willing to deal with problems of guilt; indeed they often do not even raise the issue of what the soldier did in war." They focus on "adjustment." Medals, honors, parades convey social approval, but they are the last place to foster listening or truth or the trust to speak the unspeakable. Patriotism, when linked to war, has only one story: that killing is heroic. This is the social context in which myth-making and denial begin and in which alternative stories of the soldier's experience of war are silenced. Every military parade should include a float in honor of amnesia.

Grossman takes his thesis in the wrong direction. What is needed is not a social movement that understands trauma and glorifies war anyway. This is psychology at the service of the status quo. Much preferable would be a social movement that recognizes the insights about the trauma of killing, is willing to connect an individual's psychological trauma to the social and political forces that made it, and then, to use Herman's phrase, "challenges the sacrifice of young men in war," both those who die and those who kill.

I believe such a movement exists, but in many different guises which make it difficult to perceive. And Grossman makes his own contribution to it, first by articulating his thesis for debate and second by the last section of his book which is a passionate attack on what he calls the virus of violence in American life. He believes the epidemic of violence is fed by the media's portrayal of violence, especially to children through television: "Today the data linking violence in the media to violence in society are superior to those linking cancer and tobacco. Hundreds of sound scientific studies demonstrate the social impact of brutalization by the media." He quotes the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to the effect that the murder rate goes up nation by nation worldwide 15 years after the introduction of television.

Grossman's special contribution to the national debate on this issue is to identify the link between the methods of desensitization and conditioning used by the military and those used by the media. He says that the methods used by the military to change the attitudes of men toward killing in order to achieve its mission in war are similar to those employed by the media for the sake of profits. Desensitization to killing, achieved when children watch thousands of acts of killing in films and television, lowers resistance to committing violence. Conditioning occurs in violent interactive video games. And social learning occurs through role models who glorify violence and killing as a solution to personal and social problems. It may not be the media's intention to train killers, but if it is profitable to entertain with the adrenaline high of violence, they will do so regardless of the social consequences.

In a twist of fate, described by Grossman in an article in *Christianity Today* (Aug. 10, 1998), the nightmare of school violence exploded in his hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas, where two boys (13 and 11) shot and killed a teacher and

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Ashes to Ashes

Last Supper

*Six for supper, the old crew:
Father, mother, four grown girls
Without our children and men.
Just these six in this same room
As for countless meals before.*

*One asks, When we were last here—
The six of us—no one more?
Some special holiday time
Before Linda, the first bride,
Moved overseas years ago.*

*Her tumor will not taint this feast.
We savor completeness.
Memories fortify each bite.
The sister who no longer eats
Nourishes those she leaves behind.*

Written for Linda Fritz Gardner.

—GAYLE FRITZ

Schumann in the Snow

*White blinds, white shutters of house—
Schumann is already going mad
one afternoon while walking through snow's
pieced light, faces linked in downspin.*

*Snow shovel leaned against front door's
white panel—through screening windlift snow his pace
slows, his mind's music marks a rest
mid-sequence. This is not his house, where has it*

*gone? He has drifted from shapes known to him—
His placed charmed piano, his beloved Clara, the tumbling
warmth of their children playing
in musical rush, the evening lamps. Instead is stood without,*

*alone, in search of perfect snow. Two front windows
bare to any stranger's view the darkened room's
interior rhythms. Eyes glazed and half-snow-
blinded, he weaves among possessions, seeking that glimpsed*

*so needed way, homing toward one inner framed clearness
windowing the house back wall—Schumann's art
then figures it, melts through it, touching true the found
the unmistakable snow. This, his own, his offering: Peace,*

*its liberty known, delivering him, the twice-removed silences
dropping silvery through him. Only the snow
is briefly trusted with secret escape, left uncompelled
by the headband of sound containing him.*

*Wishing to move on, he stays oddly stuck, not unlike
the picket fence guarding white its garden of whole snow.
What is he doing there? Peeping Tom, thief, sick man?
Homeless loiterer? Artist Jack Frost? Conducting, he stands*

*shaggy with snow. To the invisible passersby he shouts
that he is Robert Schumann, the composer,
that even his eyes make music. Snow-heavy,
the bush agrees. Opening his door, the owner greets his dear*

*friend Schumann—come in, sit down! The visitor
steps over the white repeating doorstep—gone
on in, enwrapped, soon is walled windowless. One sound
intones, his host repeats it—he not apart from all repeats closing*

*to mold him, he visited by one numbing theme, unable to exit, his
owned mind's phrases fixed. No sequences exist that link to lead
him to prefer a different snow—this one snow's darkening
already replaying, further beading lustrous, reshaping his matter*

—CAROL RUBENSTEIN

Carol Rubenstein lives and writes in Ithaca, whatever the weather.

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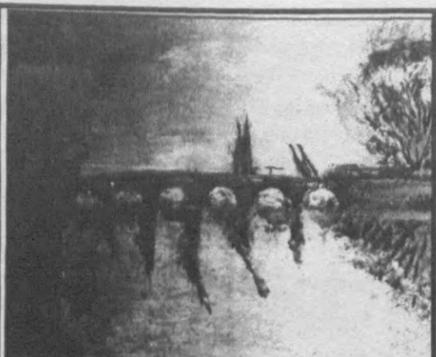
These presentations are part of our ongoing series of readings and talks in the Women's Community Building.

Music of the Birds

Lang Elliott

Sunday, March 05, 2:00 pm

Local author and bird song expert Lang Elliott will read from his new book "Music of the Birds." A naturalist, wildlife photographer, sound recordist, and lover of bird song and poetry, Elliott will show slides and play recordings of bird song to accompany his reading. Although the event will be informed by Elliott's scientific expertise in the field of bird song, we will also be treated to an introduction to both celebrated and little-appreciated songsters and the poets and prose writers inspired by them. Walt Whitman meets the Hermit Thrush, Henry David Thoreau the Winter Wren, and Emily Dickinson the American Robin. Amid the poetry and science, Elliott will treat us to his dazzling photographs of singing birds, many rarely caught in the act of making music. "The sheer immensity of the dawn chorus," Elliott writes, "can nourish the spirit and lead us to a state of wonder and delight." Please join us for this rare opportunity to savor a little bit of spring at the tail end of this seemingly endless winter.



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Ashes to Ashes

Angela's Ashes

Paramount Pictures & Universal Pictures, 1999.
Directed by Alan Parker.
Screenplay by Alan Parker and Laura Jones.

Angela's Ashes

by Frank McCourt.
Scribner, 1996.
364 pages, \$14.00 paper.

A Monk Swimming

by Malachy McCourt.
Hyperion, 1998.
290 pages, \$14.00 paper.

'Tis

by Frank McCourt.
Scribner, 1999. 367 pages.

Kevin Murphy

A willing suspension of disbelief, that universal given of fictional representation, becomes less absolute closer to home. Cornell's Dan McCall likes to tell the story of his reaction to Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* when it first came out in 1988. The film, which recounts the events surrounding the murder of three civil rights freedom riders in the sixties, centers on the efforts of F.B.I. agents to break through the wall of silence and conspiracy surrounding the murders until they finally crack the case and strike a blow for civil freedom and racial equality. The film is unabashedly pro-civil rights and has its quotient of sullen southern red-necks, well-intentioned northern liberals, and shrewd federal agents struggling to do the right thing for America. McCall, however, who had taught at black colleges in the south, grew increasingly agitated in the theater. It seemed the F.B.I., led by a tough-minded and crafty Gene Hackman, was to be given complete credit for the civil rights movement, with the efforts of the civil rights workers, both black and white, shifted discreetly but definitively into the background. The enormous gap between what he knew had happened in Mississippi and what was being served up on the screen proved too much: McCall jumped up from his chair and started shouting at the screen and the other spectators, "That's not true! That's not true!" The ushers escorted him from the theater, and, this isolated protest notwithstanding, the movie went on to gross tens of millions of dollars. Needless to say, Parker has a good eye for a winner, and he is not beyond taking liberties with his sources, especially if it will broaden the appeal to a targeted audience.

As it happens, this business about fidelity to sources gets a bit more complicated in the case of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, the 1996 best-seller which Parker has adapted for the screen. McCourt's memoir recounts his life from his birth in a Brooklyn ravaged by the depression to his family's reverse-immigrant return to Limerick where they encounter a poverty that proved even more devastating, and finally to his return to America at age nineteen, ready to take hold of the promise of the New World. McCourt had been transcribing and accumulating the anecdotes and vignettes which make up the memoir as far back as his days as a part-time student at NYU. Sometime in the late 70s, he and his brother Malachy took these vignettes on stage with *A Couple of Blaguards*, a two-man show recounting the humor and pathos of their family's travail. In another bizarre intersection of life and art, Angela McCourt, their mother and the supposed focus of *Angela's Ashes*, attended the show and is said to have shouted at the end of the performance (a la Dan McCall) "It is all a pack of lies!"

Once again, this singular protest notwithstanding, the book version of McCourt's memories has had astonishing success: Angela's Ashes rocketed to the top of the best-seller lists as soon as it was published in 1996 (and stayed on the list for 117 weeks) and won the Pulitzer Prize the following year. At last count, it has sold over 6 million copies in 30 countries. Malachy McCourt, pretty much on the length and breadth of his brother's coattails, wrote his own much less successful memoir *A Monk Swimming* in 1998, and this past year, reaping the harvest of such celebrity, Frank McCourt followed up with a sequel *'Tis*, recounting his adult years in America. Now, bowing to an American inevitability, Alan Parker has

brought the film version of the childhood volume to the wide screen, and Touchstone, the paperback publisher of the book, has published two new movie tie-in editions (a mass market paperback at \$7 and a trade paperback at \$14) on the assumption that the film will reignite interest in the book.

The saga, and it surely is presented as a saga, plays on and conflates a number of American motifs—the round-trip journey of an immigrant from an America stunted by the Depression to (or rather through) the Old World of destitution and finally back to the land of opportunity. In the Brooklyn of the 1930s one finds melting pot affirmations along Classon Avenue (the Italian greengrocer who, in response to young Frank's thievery, gives him a bag of fruit for his little brother; the Jewish tenement neighbor who feeds the hungry children) as well as darker castings of a distinctly Irish variety: the booze-bedeveled father who sings patriotic songs of Ireland, the long-suffering mother who sits passively by the all-but-extinguished hearth, the mean-spirited priests, bureaucrats and schoolmasters who humiliate parent and child alike once back in Limerick.

In fact, what proves remarkable about the memoir is that, especially in the volume devoted to McCourt's childhood, there is almost no dramatic development of character at all; instead, we have immediately recognizable hard-hearted villains and hearts-of-gold saints. If there is a complexity in the book, it focuses on the parents, especially the father (despite the title of the book and film) who is presented again and again as the heart-of-gold villain, the man who, on the one hand, introduced little Frank to a world of Irish myth and nationalistic aspiration in the intimate shared quiet of the early morning hours before breakfast but who, on the other, mindlessly or willfully drank the entire family into humiliating penury and chronic hunger. The question, which the child in *Angela's Ashes* does not know how to pose and (in *'Tis*) the adult does not know how to confront is what such behavior means, especially in terms of its short-term and long-term consequences. At the core of the memoir is also a familiar Irish trauma, the break-up of the family, but it is one that is deflected again and again by the moments of lyricism and enormously funny anecdotes.

The key to the spectacular appeal of the book, one which allows it to transcend its melodramatic cast of stereotypes, is McCourt's decision, about 9 pages into the first chapter, to shift the narration from past-tense retrospective to first-person present tense. With the sentences, "I'm in a playground on Classon Avenue in Brooklyn with my brother, Malachy. He's two, I'm three. We're on the seesaw," McCourt transports his readers into the consciousness of a child, one who sees the world in terms of poignant emotion and vivid sensation, but one who is incapable of cognitive or moral insight. Thus, the father, Malachy McCourt, who is first introduced ironically in the opening past-tense narrative as something of a drunken buffoon—he's just finished serving a three-month jail term for stealing a truck full of buttons—is now magically transformed into the gentle storyteller who regales the child with the tale of Cuchulain, the mythic Irish warrior. The now-child narrator concludes, "He finishes the story and lets me sip his tea. It's bitter, but I'm happy there on his lap."

McCourt himself is fully aware of the centrality of this shift. As he said in an interview in *The Quill* (April 1998): "I knew then I had it—what I been looking for for years, the present tense of the small child. A small child has no hindsight, no foresight. He's just completely in the moment. I

wanted to write without judging, to tell a story the way a camera would." From one perspective, this statement might be seen as a general credo of any writer who sets realism as an ultimate literary goal, and could apply equally well to writers as different as Stephen Crane or Ray Carver. On the other hand, McCourt, as a creative writing teacher at Stuyvesant High School for over 20 years, should know that there is no way one can write without judging, that any camera angle is already an implicit judgment, and that the decision to withhold judgments on the actions being recorded will have its own specific effect on the narration.

And surely, at one level, that's exactly the appeal of the book. As the child records scenes of hilarity and horror, one sustaining delight is the knowledge that the reader understands implications of the scene which the naive and very impressionable child does not. When the schoolmaster in Limerick instructs young Frank on the sacrament of First Communion, we hear in deadpan reportage, "He tells us we have to be careful to stick our tongues far enough so that the Communion wafer won't fall to the floor. He says,

That's the worst thing that can happen to a priest. If the wafer slides off your tongue that poor priest has to get down on his two knees, pick it up with his own tongue and lick the floor around it in case it bounced from one spot to another. The priest could get a splinter that would make his tongue swell to the size of a turnip and that's enough to choke you and kill you entirely." In case there's any doubt about the blarney being shoveled out here, the master goes on, in a condensed

version of Irish religious history, to exhort the young boys to bare their necks willingly to the Protestant ax, to which all, in rote response, assent.

In very much the same narrative vein, however, we will witness the death of Frank's baby sister Margaret in Brooklyn at age seven weeks (with the horrific inference that the father sells the cadaver of the baby to the hospital for drinking money), the subsequent death of the twin brothers Oliver and Eugene once the family is back in Limerick, and the slow disintegration of the parents' emotional and sexual bonds in the face of the father's chronic unemployment and deliberate drinking. The father's subsequent departure for the factory jobs available in the England of World War II—with predictably none of the money so earned being sent back—sets the stage for what in both volumes of this Irish family romance (and in brother Malachy's memoir as well) proves an enduring if subliminal sexual wound: the mother's adultery with her cousin Laman Griffin, presumably in exchange for shelter and food for her children.

For Americans, the most familiar literary analogy to this inspirational use of point of view is Samuel Clemens's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the still controversial classic told in the voice of the streetwise but essentially good-hearted 14-year-old Huck. In the long drift down the Mississippi with the runaway Jim, Huck's naive response to the racist and religious cant he finds along the shore provides a scathing critique of the culture which he records in deadpan fashion. But that book's strength for many of its readers also turns out to its weakness, since by the end of the tale, the naive Huck, even though he has witnessed the brutalization of Jim as a slave and apparently recognized Jim's essential humanity, cooperates with Tom Sawyer in an outlandishly bookish scheme to set Jim free, one which reduces Jim to the stage-darkey caricature he was at the opening of the novel. Readers want Huck to wake up to the injustice of slavery, but Huck prefers the conventional comradery of Tom Sawyer and ends the book apparently forgetting,

or repressing, the horrors he has recorded. The Huck Finn analogy to the McCourt memoir, especially when one takes into account both the child and adult volumes, produces a further turn of the screw, but at the center of both works is a naive consciousness, speaking from the inside out.

The impossible task, then, that Alan Parker had in translating McCourt's book into a film was to find some way of replicating this narrative stance with its attendant implication of the viewer in the full nuance of each episode. In response, Parker, along with Laura Jones, wrote a screenplay which sets up an entirely different frame: instead of a story presented through the eyes of a child, we have an adult narrative voiceover (spoken by Andrew Bennett who sounds very much like McCourt himself) providing commentary and segue between the many scenes of McCourt's youth, with the young Frank portrayed by three different actors (Joe Breen as the five-year-old, Ciaran Owens as the ten-year-old, and Michael Legge as the adolescent who finally sails back to America). It's likely, as many of the film's initial reviews emphasize, that those who were drawn to the book's interior lyricism and pathos will be inevitably disappointed by the film since this technical transformation can only show us the child from the outside in. Still, in the course of the shooting, Parker attempted to be utterly faithful to the memoir ("The book is our bible. I tell everyone, 'When in doubt read the book'"), and McCourt, going against the tide of authors who have been appalled by movie versions of their work, has said that he is delighted with the film (*Newsweek International*, March 8, 1999).

The fidelity to the book's dramatic focus on the parents is carried off by the choice of actors for the roles. Emily Watson, who was Oscar-nominated for her portrayal of the long-suffering wife in *Breaking the Waves*, proves a perfect face to imply the anguished Angela, alternately paralyzed by depression following the deaths of the children and stirred by resentment in the face of her husband's debility and Limerick's begrudged charity. Robert Carlyle, whose recent portrayals of working class victim/protagonists in *The Full Monty* and *Trainspotting* suggest a sympathetic parallel with this role, captures some of the unresolved ambiguity concerning the father's alternate tenderness toward and utter disregard of his family. The close-ups of his tormented face suggest that—and this is not at all clear in the book—he is keenly susceptible to charges of uselessness which Angela hurls at him.

This possibility, that the father, for all his wastrel ways, could or should be seen in a sympathetic light, turns out to be very much at the heart of McCourt's memoir. Yes, he drinks up the dole money meant for the family and comes home singing songs of heroes who have died for Ireland. But he too, at least in the eyes of his adoring son, is a victim of his own overwrought paternal sensibility. The unendurable pain of baby Margaret's death sends him into the bars. Once back in Limerick, the death of Oliver, and months later of Eugene, does the same. In a strange blurring of fiscal and emotional logic, Malachy McCourt's drinking becomes the consequence rather than a contributing cause of the children's deaths. In the movie Malachy is not seen with a drink in his hand until after the death of the second child. The narrow-minded citizens of Limerick will never hire the father because of his north-of-Ireland accent, and that too is a mitigating factor in his alcoholism. Even more, the father's attempt to teach young Frank the Latin of the Mass so that he can become an altar boy meets the same class-bound rejection by the priest at the church as does Angela in her begging for hand-outs from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Both are victims of heartless Catholic institutions more interested in lace-curtain respectability than in Christian charity. In an attempt to give a depth and conflict to the father's unconscionable behavior, Parker and Jones wrote in a scene for the movie in which Malachy kneels in prayer with his two sons beseeching God for understanding in the face of his children's deaths.

The stereotype of the Irish Drunk also takes a different twist. The many, many times in the book that drinking is simply written off as the "Irish curse" cumulatively imply that the father, as cultural prototype, is less than completely responsible for his individual behavior. In the book, just

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EDITORIAL

Crossroads

On the issue of economic development, Ithaca is rapidly becoming a divided city. Interpreting his re-election as a mandate, Mayor Alan Cohen has vigorously—some would say heedlessly—pressed forward with his plans for commercial development in the Southwest and West End. Despite Ithaca's small population of 15,000 permanent residents (the number doubles when Cornell University and Ithaca College are in session), and the sluggish rate of 1% annual increase over the past decade, Cohen believes that the city is poised to attract large-scale chain stores which would fuel an economic boom.

Critics have pointed out that Ithaca is a late entry to this strategy and that the model it is adopting has been shown to impose serious environmental and social costs in countless towns throughout the country. Even with the best of intentions, the city may find that it has little leverage in negotiations with such organizations as Home Depot, Target, Borders, and others on the all-too familiar list. It is doubtful if a small, geographically isolated city like Ithaca can attract big-box stores without offering considerable infrastructure, maintenance, and tax abatement benefits that, over time, may seriously erode anticipated sales tax revenues.

There are also legitimate questions as to whether the Ithaca market is large enough to sustain more than one major shopping area. City representatives offer a vague and largely unsupported notion of mutual symbiosis between Southwest Park and the Commons. But past experience in other cities shows that big-box stores act as a magnet for strip mall development along the most heavily trafficked routes—in this case, Route 13—and this would draw additional commercial activity away from the Commons. Shifting its economic base to national retailers would make the city much more vulnerable to economic forces entirely beyond its control. Woolworth's and Lauriat's closed their doors

here, not because their Ithaca locations were unprofitable, but because both chains went bankrupt.

Some would say that economic growth necessarily entails risks. While this may be true, it does not mean that the mayor's approach is best for Ithaca. A recent article in *The New York Times* describes how an increasing number of communities have been left to pick up the pieces of malls abandoned by big-box retailers, turning them instead into modern replicas of old downtown neighborhoods. Other cities around the country are now working with private-sector developers to revitalize languishing downtowns, with a combination of small-scale national chains and local merchants.

Downtown Ithaca is certainly better off than many, but the city has not provided the leadership and investment to develop a comprehensive plan that would capitalize on its architectural assets and authentic local history. If adequate resources were assured to enable the Commons area to regain its economic vitality, the city could then pursue some larger retailers in the Southwest without jeopardizing downtown commerce. By reversing these priorities, the city is engaging in a high-stakes gamble that sufficient revenues will be generated by Southwest Park to restore the health of the Commons. What is more likely is that infrastructure and maintenance costs in the Southwest will drain the city's resources, leaving the downtown to suffer an irreversible decline.

One need not be opposed to economic growth to believe that Mayor Cohen's blueprint for Southwest Park represents a failure of community planning. Imaginatively impoverished and lacking a firm grasp of economic realities, it is certainly not worth the sacrifice of the valuable environmental and urban characteristics which still provide Ithaca with a sense of hope and a sense of place.

—JACK GOLDMAN, EDITOR.

Natan Huffman

As the owner of a downtown business and a former member of the board, I recently attended a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Ithaca Downtown Partnership. Like any other business improvement district, the chartered purpose of the IDP is to promote growth and retention of businesses within the district. Toward this end, the IDP is funded by levying a special tax on property owners and businesses located within the district. By definition then, I had anticipated that this group would share my concerns about the impact of plans for the development of Southwest Park on the downtown community.

The recently completed Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) for Southwest Park estimates the project will result in a loss of revenue for the downtown area of between 3 to 7.6 million dollars. Added to this is the highly speculative nature of the city's effort to attract big-box stores to Southwest Park.

In the past, most large retailers have avoided Ithaca because it is what is known as a third-tier market. Nothing much has changed in the demographics of Ithaca, but some national chains may now be tempted to locate here because larger markets have become saturated. It then becomes a question of who will assume the risks.

Professional developers and large chains like Target and Home Depot are expert in protecting their interests. What about the city, which already has a projected annual budget deficit greater than a million dollars? If one or more of these big boxes fail—as some have in much larger markets—the city will find itself burdened with financing non-productive infrastructure with greatly reduced sales tax revenues. The further likelihood of at least some

business failures on and around the Commons due to development in Southwest Park could precipitate a decline in residential and commercial property values in the downtown areas, leaving the city with no choice but to raise property taxes in order to provide necessary services.

In its haste to push forward with its development plans, the city has ignored and even tried to subvert its own regulations. The best example of this is the so-called Widewaters site across from Buttermilk Falls. Building Commissioner Rick Eckstrom's initial denial of the fill permit for the developers was quickly overturned when Eckstrom was replaced by Phyllis Radke. Nearby residents appealed the issuance of the permit, and the city was bound by its own charter to suspend filling activities pending a ruling by the Board of Zoning Appeals. But the city did no such thing, and work continued—practically to the point of completion—before a successful legal appeal caused the BZA to courageously vote to rescind the permit.

My assumption that I would find a sympathetic hearing at the board of the Downtown Partnership proved false, largely because of the presence of Mayor Cohen and Alderpersons Ed Hershey and Susan Blumenthal, sitting members of the board who are all vigorous proponents of development in Southwest Park. Their responses struck me as a distortion of the role of the board, which was not intended to serve as an extension of the city administration.

Given the ineffectiveness even of the organization that was created to defend their interests, downtown residents and the business community will have to come together as concerned individuals if we are to prevent further dissolution of our urban core.

Natan Huffman is co-owner of *Sadie D's Delicatessen in the Dewitt Mall.*

Walter Hang

Public debate on the future of Southwest Park is rising to a crescendo, but a critical environmental issue has received surprisingly scant attention. A major portion of the area proposed for redevelopment is not a park at all. It is an abandoned, 65-acre dump polluted with dozens of toxic chemicals. Before the City of Ithaca finalizes its plans for that landfill, it is imperative that the site's pollution threats be fully investigated and remediated.

The former landfill is a classic example of an open garbage dump that received all manner of unregulated commercial, industrial and household wastes from the time it began operation more than 50 years ago. Based on available monitoring data, the dump and its immediate vicinity have been found to contain a wide range of highly toxic and persistent chemicals, including common industrial and commercial solvents, heavy metals associated with manufacturing activities, polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons generated by utilities or waste burning, and some of the constituents of gasoline. All of these compounds have been identified in dozens of toxic dumps across New York that have required full-scale investigations and clean-ups costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

Even though these pollutants are generally present at low concentrations, many of them are potentially toxic at minuscule levels of exposure. Some can cause cancer. Others are able to cause a wide variety of chronic toxicity ailments. In particular, benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene and dibenzofuran pose grave concerns due to their high toxicity and ability to cause long-term health problems. Lead, arsenic, cadmium and mercury also are highly toxic and often migrate long distances attached to dust particles. All of these chemicals have been found at the Southwest Park dump site.

Since the dump is neither designed, constructed nor maintained in any way whatsoever to prevent the uncontrolled release of its toxic chemical contents, it must be considered a significant threat to surrounding natural resources as well as nearby residents. The dump has no permanent cap, liner, leachate drainage system or methane gas controls. On-site inspections have identified obvious uncontrolled pollution releases at the dump.

Of greatest public health concern is the fact that a 25-acre trailer park, Nate's Floral Estates Mobile Home Park, is situated directly on top of the northern portion of the dump. The residents of this trailer park have, in all likelihood, been exposed to toxic chemicals that could pose hazards through inhalation, ingestion or direct dermal contact. Over time, these exposures could result in cumulative health threats.

In 1986, the Tompkins County Health Department reportedly denied a request to expand the trailer park, in part due to public health concerns related to the dump. Amazingly, no action was taken to assess the risks faced by those people already living on the dump. To date, no comprehensive epidemiological study or health monitoring survey has been conducted for residents of the trailer park.

The dump also poses a significant environmental hazard: it is located in a flood plain that drains into tributaries flowing directly into southern Cayuga Lake. The dump's eastern boundary is immediately adjacent to a flood relief channel and its western boundary is a short distance from the Cayuga Inlet Flood Control Channel. Given the large size of the dump, it could contribute a significant amount of pollution to Cayuga Lake, whose southernmost 5,000 acres are included on the national 303(d) listing of waterbodies where federally imposed restrictions are insufficiently

stringent to meet applicable water quality standards.

Despite the known and potential pollution threats posed by the dump, its past disposal history has never been disclosed as required by Section 103(c) of the Federal Superfund Act (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act) and the New York State Community Right to Know Executive Order. The failure to fulfill these regulatory obligations could impose major fines on the landfill's responsible parties, including all current and past owners and operators as well as parties who disposed of waste in the dump. This is a serious failure to enforce state and federal disclosure requirements.

For reasons that should be documented as a matter of public record, local, state and federal government officials have neither conducted a full-scale site investigation of the dump as a whole nor remediated its problems. It is disconcerting that such a large dump with identified on-site and off-site toxic contamination concerns has never been nominated for inclusion in either the Federal Superfund, the New York State Superfund or the New York Hazardous Substance Waste Disposal Site Study. Moreover, the dump was not included in the survey of former garbage dumps conducted by the New York State Legislative Commission on Solid Waste Management.

An Environmental Site Assessment of the dump site was prepared in June 1999 by Clark Patterson Associates, but the report is fundamentally inadequate. It fails to fulfill the requirements of the E-1527 Phase I Environmental Site Assessment protocol adopted by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM Standards on Environmental Site Assessments for Commercial Real Estate). This protocol is the industry standard that is most applicable for identifying clean-up liability issues and toxic contamination threats at the dump.

No environmental database search was conducted to compile information that could be critical for assessing the dump's known or potential hazards. Only a limited effort was made to research aerial photos, historic topographic maps, historic fire insurance maps or other available historical materials that could establish the age, boundaries, contents, activities and environmental impacts of the dump. The Report does not document what structures, businesses or activities existed on the site at various times in its history. All of this information is essential in order to be able to identify potential waste disposal and site contamination issues from the time the site was virgin, undeveloped land to the present.

A comparison of Report Figures A and B clearly reveals that the proposed boundary of the dump does not match the area where dumping activities were reportedly revealed by aerial photos, especially in the westernmost area of the site. In addition, two test pits (Locations 3 and 4) dug to assess "background" conditions struck buried residential waste. This evidence of landfilling also does not comport with the proposed boundary of the landfill. The Report fails to resolve these important discrepancies.

Additionally, the "site history" does not establish the chain of ownership of the dump. Without this information, the full range of "responsible parties" associated with the dump cannot be pursued legally. The Report identifies more than three dozen chemical contaminants in the dump, but fails to investigate their origin. Interviews with workers, local waste generators, and haulers might have revealed which businesses, local industries, institutions of higher learning, government agencies or other parties have dumped waste into the landfill.

Also, the Report seriously mischaracterizes the pollution problems of the dump. For example, it notes: "Given the age of the site and the lack of a low-permeability soil cover, natural processes such as dilution, dispersion, volatilization and degradation, have effectively reduced the potential for

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significant contaminant levels to remain at the site." This statement reveals a shocking ignorance of the hazards posed by dumps.

On-site monitoring data presented in the Report itself prove that all of the contaminants in the dump have not escaped into the environment or degraded through "natural processes." Many of the landfill's contents will never degrade—heavy metals such as lead, chromium and cadmium will exist until the end of time. Similarly, the polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene, etc. are highly resistant to degradation, especially when buried in the depths of the dump. Many of these contaminants do not volatilize due to their low vapor pressure characteristics. They do not dilute because they are insoluble in water. They also do not disperse because they stick to dirt. This is why contamination persists in landfills for many years.

On the other hand, the landfill's pollution has unquestionably escaped into the environment. Rain and snow falling on the dump have percolated through the buried waste for decades. This process has undoubtedly generated a contaminated leachate that has leaked out into adjoining surface waters and contaminated groundwater beneath the dump.

Unfortunately, the Report fails to investigate the impact of those releases on the trailer park, adjoining waterways, nearby commercial developments or Cayuga Lake. For example, only four groundwater monitoring wells have been drilled on the 65-acre site. Virtually no monitoring has been conducted of sediments in the waterways adjoining the dump where pollutants are likely to accumulate. No data has been generated regarding exposures to on-site residents.

In short, the Report's analysis is inconsistent and contradictory. It concludes that direct contact with wastes and subsoil is minimized by a surface soil layer. Yet, it also notes on page five that: "Surface wastes consisted of numerous C & D (construction and demolition) dump piles, and scattered household-type debris at the surface." This is waste that clearly has no soil covering. This problem is all too obvious to anyone who has ever walked on the dump.

The Report's final statement is its most potentially misleading conclusion: "There is no significant threat from the site to human health..." For all of the aforementioned reasons, this belief is premature at best and should not serve as the basis for implementing major land-use, environmental or public health policies. Given that the dump's hazards have escaped proper regulatory attention for more than 20 years, three initiatives should be undertaken without further delay: a) full disclosure of all local past disposal practices, b) comprehensive site investigation and c) full-scale clean-up of all identified pollution hazards.

Last summer, I provided extensive information to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as well as the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding open dumping of 55-gallon barrels in the vicinity of the dump. To this day, those barrels remain in the flood plain of Southwest Park precisely where they were originally pictured in a front-page article in the *Ithaca Journal*. I have little confidence that the dump's problems will be addressed on a comprehensive basis unless local government officials take concerted and enlightened action.

Walter Hang is a resident of Ithaca and co-author of *New York Community Right to Know* legislation that required state-wide disclosure of hazardous waste dumping practices between 1953 and 1983. This article was prepared from comments that he recently submitted regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Southwest Area Land Use Plan for the City of Ithaca.

Barbara Regenspan

I'm on a research leave from Binghamton University this term, facing my tenure decision when I return. I've spent the majority of my five years at Binghamton building a social justice-focused Master's program in elementary education, mostly loving the labor-intensive work, particularly the development of a conception of social action as curriculum that has led to significant involvement of energetic students in the local community. But I haven't published enough, even though I like to write and have collected lots of great data.

So now I have this wonderful block of time to write up, without the distraction of new data pouring in, what I've begun to figure out through my work: how John Dewey's particular understanding of imagination might help us revitalize teacher education. What has inspired my own work is Dewey's contradiction of the sentimentalized conception of the child's imagination as focused on the unreal and the asocial: he observed, rather, the desire of children to make sense of their social reality and to participate in their community as the project of their own growth.

For Dewey, the division of labor between cultured people and workers was antithetical to the nature of human beings, 99% of whom were not distinctly intellectual, but rather wanted to use their imaginations to design a work and social life that made sense in the context of living in a democratic community. My writing involves the development of a teacher education curriculum based on this assumption about the nature of human imagination.

But every so often one is serendipitously positioned in a conversation between art and life that is uncanny, even mystical, reviving an earlier belief in political and spiritual resources yet to surface. I was fortunate enough to have had such an experience during the last week in January when my eleven-year-old daughter insisted we attend, and then testified at, the hearings about the City of Ithaca's Southwest Development Plan. As it happened, it was the same week my thirteen-year-old son played storyteller Rashid Khalifa in his middle school's production of a dramatic adaptation of Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

It was not a simple case of art illuminating life. It was art issuing a personal invitation to participate in the life of the community in a way that took Dewey's conception of imagination and made it real in the present moment. Though the hearings happened first, and established a need for more general public activism, it was the way the play spoke to this cause that awakened my determination to find my own place in the opposition campaign against the City of Ithaca's current process and plans regarding big-box development.

A frequent theme among those who spoke at the hearings was the City Attorney's ruling, permitting the city to segment the environmental review process in such a way as to make possible the dumping of 80,000 cubic yards of gravel fill by the Widewaters Corporation at a critical flood-plain site across from Buttermilk Falls. More generally, though, the speakers focused on a multiplicity of troubling issues related to the city's pursuit of big-box development, some regarding the likely impact of this development on both the future vitality of downtown and on wages for the lowest paid workers locally, some on a complex of environmental issues, and many on the city's high-handed and possibly illegal tactics, including the firing of the building commissioner who had originally denied Widewater the fill permit on three well-publicized and reasonable grounds.

The Rushdie play was about politics, too; its ultimate message, get control over people's stories and you can control the world; let the story stream flow freely and no single force can dominate. To save our stories from being poisoned or plugged up is related to recognizing the insanity of armies (in the play the good guys win the war because they have no discipline), rejecting all orthodoxies, and questioning long and hard whether science really can

manufacture happy endings.

The play began with a classical chorus that resonated with the fears for our city's future voiced at the hearings:

There was once, in the country of Alif-bay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name. In the north of the sad city stood mighty factories in which (so I'm told) sadness was actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world, which never seemed to get enough of it. Black smoke poured out of the chimneys of the sadness factories and hung over the city like bad news.

And in the depths of the city, beyond an old zone of ruined buildings that looked like broken hearts, there lived a happy young fellow by the name of Haroun, the only child of the storyteller Rashid Khalifa.

The action progressed quickly from this ominous beginning, with the unbearable sadness of the city predictably contaminating the lives of the storyteller and his family. The beloved Soraya, Rashid the storyteller's wife and Haroun's mother, abandons them, running off with the upstairs neighbor, Mr. Sengupta. Soraya leaves Rashid the following note:

You are only interested in pleasure, but a proper man would know that life is a serious business. Your brain is full of make-believe, so there is no room in it for facts. Mr. Sengupta has no imagination at all. This is OK by me. Tell Haroun I love him, but I can't help it, I have to do this now.

The identification of "an old zone of ruined buildings" with Ithaca's downtown was instantaneous for me, especially later in the play when Iff the Water Genie laments its probable fate:

Iff: The Old Zone is where the Source of Stories is located, from which the ancient stories flow. You know how people are—they want new things, always new. The old tales, nobody cares. But if the Source itself is poisoned, what will happen to the Ocean—to us all?

But it was Soraya's note that triggered my self-conscious awareness about participating in an important conversation with art. This woman left her beloved husband and child; that's how desperate she was for lack of imagination. And I recognized the play on words as the sentence was forming in my mind. She was desperate because of her lack of imagination; she was in desperate pursuit of a lack of imagination.

That note captured for me the peculiar wild emptiness of our city's pursuit of big-box retail. Here was the same abandonment of precious family: sensitive wetlands and the majestic views from Buttermilk Falls, already compromised by 80,000 cubic yards of gravel fill deemed illegal by a conveniently fired building commissioner. This in the name of urgent need for development, despite the universally acknowledged failure of the model.

The play responded with an appropriate perspective on both need and urgency: Rashid and Haroun leave their city, which is now too weepy for words, and travel into the surrounding letter-named countryside where Rashid will tell made up stories whose unabashed integrity will help elect local politicians:

Chorus: It was almost election time. And it was well known that nobody ever believed anything a politico said. But everyone had complete faith in Rashid because he always admitted everything he told them was completely untrue. So the politicians needed Rashid to help them win the people's votes.

In his sorrow over the loss of his wife, nothing but barks come out of Rashid's mouth in the Town of G. He is threatened with dismemberment by angry politicians, and accompanied by his protective son Haroun, he flees on a speeding bus to the Valley of K where he promises a "terrific" performance. It turns out that the busdriver, Mr. Butt, is a philosopher of sorts:

Rashid: "Do we need to go so blinking fast?"

Mr. Butt [the busdriver]: "Need to stop? Need to go so quickly? Well, Need's a slippery snake, that's what it is. The boy here says that you, sir, Need a View Before Sunset, and maybe it's so and maybe no. And some might say that the boy here Needs a Mother, and maybe it's so and maybe no. And it's been said of me that Butt Needs Speed, but but but it may be that my heart truly needs a Different Sort Of Thrill. Oh, Need's a funny fish: it makes people untruthful.

During election season here in Ithaca, local politicians are quick to present themselves as Mother to Ithaca's unique character (often including its View Before Sunset, not to mention its vibrant downtown arts community, held together with a web of independent bookstores) but the definition of that character is quite conveniently a funny fish; it changes when anybody calls for its preservation. (Need to stop?) And what will the city sell to developers at what Speed? Bridgewater's offer of \$960,000 following their earlier bid of \$804,000 for Carpenter Park met with no response from the city, being deemed inadequate; yet when Building Links, (a funny fish of Cynthia Yahn's who supposedly operates as a non-profit dedicated to building a healthy downtown economy) insisted on and got a Speedy acceptance of its \$900,000 offer, its client was the same Bridgewater and Ms. Yahn was sharing with local booksellers the news that the tenant was Borders. Now a former Common Council member tells us that there was no discussion at the time of the earlier bid which she knew nothing about. (Need to go so quickly?) And the contorted language of the purchase agreement reveals the city's effort to cover up probable environmental contamination of the Carpenter Park site.

Mr. Butt: "It was a figure of speech. But but but I will stand by it! A figure of speech is a shifty thing: it can be twisted or it can be straight."

The bus ride continues and Haroun convinces Mr. Butt to stop for a view of the sun setting over the Valley of K, a view Rashid has often described to his son as incompatible with sadness. Indeed, the view has that effect on Rashid:

Rashid: "Thanks, son. For some time I thought we were all done for, finito, Khattam-shud."

Haroun: "Khattam-Shud. Wasn't that a story?"

Rashid: "Khattam-Shud is the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech. And because everything ends, because dreams end, stories end, life ends, at the finish of everything we use his name. 'It's finished,' we tell each other, 'it's over. Khattam-Shud: The End.'"

It hadn't occurred to me before that there is a dialectical relationship between hope and storytelling, and that this relationship might help us to understand some of the conflict experienced by communities like ours over issues of big-box development. Rashid the storyteller has somehow remained cheerful despite the

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Seeds of Doubt

Tony Del Plato

For years, agribusiness has been quietly slipping genetically modified ingredients into the food chain, making Americans the largest group of guinea pigs in the history of the world. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are grown on millions of acres of farmland, interacting with other plants, insects, and birds. The people of the United States currently swallow hormones in their milk, eat genetically altered tomatoes and processed products containing bt-corn (Bt, produced by the bacillus thuringiensis is a naturally occurring toxin. Bt-corn has been altered to contain the bt gene thereby rendering it resistant to insect damage) and gene-laden Roundup Ready soybeans. (Roundup Ready soybeans have been genetically altered to make the plants resistant to herbicides and pesticides.) Some estimates suggest that 75% of processed foods test positive for GMOs. The most common genetically engineered foods are soybeans, potatoes, rape seed (canola), and cotton.

"Life science" corporations, biotechnology institutes, research centers, and even some farmer organizations have been operating as if the use of transgenic technologies in the production of food is "substantially equivalent" to conventional or organic methods. Americans have slowly awakened to these developments, demanding more information and choices in what kind of food they're eating. A food fight is simmering in America.

What is genetic engineering? When a piece of genetic material is artificially transferred, from one organism to another, the resultant organism has been "genetically engineered." If this artificial transfer is done within a species, the change is said to be "vertical." A "horizontal" modification occurs when the genetically modified organism (GMO) has lost its parental identity due to the addition of genetic material from another species, such as from an animal to a plant or vice versa. GMOs do not occur in nature, and unlike automobiles or other "technological products," once they grow, mutate and travel on their own, they cannot be recalled.

In January, Michael K. Hansen, Research Associate at the Consumer Policy Institute/Consumers Union, testified before the Food and Drug Administration:

The science is so clear that this unique and identifiable process of genetic engineering creates a new and unique potential for unexpected effects, due to the unique nature of the material being inserted, from a genome which has not previously interacted with the host genome, due to lack of control over the location at which the gene is inserted, and due to the introduction of the Cauliflower Mosaic virus 'promoter' gene, which overrides the existing genetic programming...There are also predictable risks, such as potential

risks of toxins, allergens and nutritional changes and antibiotic marker genes, which the FDA should address...The details of what safety review entails should be developed through a further process of notice and comment.

In a London *Guardian* article (10/5/99), reporter James Meikle wrote on the work of Arpad Pusztai of the Rowett Research Institute in England, who fed rats with potatoes modified with an insecticide gene from snowdrops and detected damage to their organs and immune systems. The Royal Society of England judged that Dr. Pusztai's work was "half-cocked selected pieces of information from the Rowett." But the *Lancet*, one of the most prestigious medical journals in the world, thought his results worthy of publishing and did so. Two papers by Japanese scientists on GM rice and soya reinforced Pusztai's concerns—stating that the position effect (of genes) has to be taken into consideration because drastic changes could result from the process of gene insertion.

Challenging one of the basic assumptions of genetic modification of foods—the substantial equivalence of conventional and GM foods—Pusztai said in an interview in *GMFree Magazine* (summer, 1999):

This concept states that there is no need for biological safety tests because the plants must be of similar composition as the parent line. This is the basis on which GM crops are being released. However, they cannot be substantially equivalent to the parent because you've introduced new genes. That's why I don't give tuppence for substantial equivalence...GM foods have been introduced on the back of just one published paper. Just one—in fifteen years of genetic modification. It was written by a Monsanto scientist and published in 1996. In the study Roundup Ready soya was fed to rats, catfish, chicken and cows...The researchers appear to have done their utmost to find no problem. They were using mature animals which are not forming body tissues and organs like young, growing animals. With a nutritional study on mature animals, you would never see any difference in organ weights even if the food turned out to be anti-nutritional...Most of this high overall dietary protein was used by the rats for energy, thus masking any possible effect of the GM soya protein.

Furthermore, the Monsanto study did a poor post-mortem of tested animals. Instead of weighing animal organs for more precise facts, the Monsanto scientists eyeballed them for differences. "I must have done thousands of post-mortems so I know that even if there is a difference in organ weights of as much as

25%, you wouldn't see it." Pusztai said. "This is my field, so you can take it for granted that if I had had the chance of refereeing that paper, it would never have passed."

The Institute of Science in Society (www.isis.dircon.co.uk) issued a statement on January 12, demanding a moratorium on the production and marketing of genetically engineered or modified plants and food until further protocols, testing and labeling were established. 238 scientists from around the world signed the "Letter to the Governments of the World," 129 from universities and research centers throughout the United States. None of the American scientists were from Cornell University. Nevertheless, Cornell researchers have recently released a study showing that bt-corn pollen kills Monarch butterfly larvae. Environmental Protection Agency scientists announced on October 7, 1999, that they would analyze new field test data from seed companies that sell genetically-engineered bt-corn to determine if the pollen is dangerous to Monarch butterflies. "There are extensive tests going on right now," Janet Andersen, EPA's director of biopesticides, told a Senate Agriculture committee hearing on biotechnology and crops.

When did this kind of "food engineering" begin? In 1992, the FDA determined that genetically engineered foods were "substantially similar" to conventional crops. Therefore there would be no requirements for labeling and safety testing before they would be allowed to enter the marketplace. The biotechnological revolution sprouted, and billions of dollars were invested in developing genetic engineering.

The various government agencies which were supposed to serve as watchdogs of the public good were at best overcome by the rush of biotechnological events. But the government has also been complicit with the "life sciences" industry, using public resources to subsidize giant factory farms.

In a story in *The New York Times* (12/1/99), Marion Burros writes:

Several Food and Drug Administration officials have disagreed with the agency's conclusion that genetically engineered foods can be regulated in the same way as conventional food varieties, according to internal agency memorandums read Tuesday [11/31/99] at a public hearing.

One of the memoranda, written in the early 1990s, accuses the agency of siding with industry and giving short shrift to consumers. An advocate of labels on genetically modified food, Steven M. Druker, obtained the documents in a lawsuit and read them at a hearing about the safety and labeling of such foods.

On July 14, 1999, Dan Glickman, the Secretary of the USDA, said, "Some type of informational labeling is likely to happen." At the time, he laid out five general principles the government would use in reviewing and

evaluating GE foods. He declined to specify what kind of information the labels might carry. Then, on January 10, 2000, Glickman reversed himself, saying that the U.S. is unlikely to require manufacturers and grocers to put labels on GM foods.

By advancing the production and sale of GM/GE foods, the Clinton/Gore administration has continued the policies of the Reagan era. As a matter of fact, presidential hopeful Gore has the former head of government affairs for Genentec (a leading biotech company), David W. Beier, as his chief domestic policy advisor. The revolving door between government and industry has also swung for Michael Kantor, former Secretary of the Department of Commerce and former trade representative for the U.S., now a member of the board of directors of the Monsanto Corporation; Margaret Miller, a former lab supervisor for Monsanto, now Deputy Director of Human Food Safety and Consultive Services for the FDA; and Clayton K. Yeutter, former Secretary of the USDA, now a member of the board of directors of Mygogen Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Dow Chemical Company. And the list goes on.

Fortunately, Representative Dennis Kucinich of Ohio has introduced the Genetically Engineered Food Right to Know Act, HR 3377, which has been co-sponsored by Rep. Maurice Hinchey of New York, among others. If passed, this legislation will require labeling and ensure the right of Americans to know whether the foods we purchase have been genetically altered in any way.

Dr. Ralph Hardy, President of the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council, affiliated with the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Cornell University, has been silent on the subject of labeling legislation, while Charles J. Arntzen, President and CEO of the Boyce Thompson Institute, told a recent conference on "Sustainable Cuisine" at the Culinary Institute of America that he wants to stop the hysteria around genetic engineering biotechnology. I had the privilege of attending this collegial gathering in Hyde Park of writers and experts from government, industry, and environmentalist and consumer groups. Judging by the buzz in the audience of about 300 people, it was evident that many in the audience, especially women, strongly objected to being called hysterical.

According to its campaign brochure,

the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research has conducted basic and applied research targeting the most pressing issues in the plant sciences since 1924. Moving from Yonkers, New York in 1978 to Cornell University allowed the BTI to utilize the resources at Cornell to further its mission: ...to expand the frontiers of plant biology and related areas of science while continuing a tradition of using science and technology to pro-

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Ashes to Ashes?

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after the baby Eugene's death, McCourt makes a point of shifting to a past tense narration in which he demonstrates the several ways in which even Malachy's Limerick in-laws insist on offering drink as consolation in the face of the grief. ("Grandma said, He doesn't have the pills to ease him, God help us, and a bottle of stout will be some small comfort.")

That's followed immediately by a shift back into the present-tense to record one of the book's vivid images of violation: the sight in a pub of his father's pint of stout resting on the white coffin which is to be brought back to the house for Eugene. The revulsion little Frank feels is complicated by his own sense of guilt since, instead of keeping his father out of the pub as he was instructed to, he stopped into the sweet shop to buy a toffee with the money which the sympathetic men lined up for the dole at the Labour Exchange had pressed into his hand. Aunt Aggie, the childless aunt who will later buy Frank his first set of clothes for work, sums up what will prove a central psychic perplexity fueling both volumes of the memoirs: "You out here stuffin' yourself with sweets and him in there gettin' himself into a staggerin' condition the day your poor little brother goes into the graveyard. She tells the shop woman, Just like his father, the same odd manner, the same oul' northern jaw." At each crucial turn in this coming-of-age drama, Frank is implicated in his father's reprehensible character or behavior, either by some parallel drawn by a relative or by some oddly complicit gesture.

One way Parker manages to enlarge the father's attractiveness is to conflate some of the characteristics of Uncle Pa Keating, one of the few consistently admirable persons in the book, with Malachy the father. Uncle Pa, as his name suggests, is very much the surrogate father that Frank might have hoped for: he has a steady job, he can handle his drink, and he is filled with colorful language and stories. In this world of Irish drinking rituals, he, rather than Malachy who has gone off to England, buys Frank his first pint. More significantly, it is Uncle Pa who advises young Frank against taking the postal exam and succumbing to the restraints of the Irish petty bourgeois world:

If you pass the exam you'll stay in the post office nice and secure the rest of your life. You'll marry a Brigid and have five little Catholics and grow little roses in your garden. You'll be dead in your head before you're thirty and dried in your bollocks the year before. Make up your own bloody mind and to hell with the safeshots and the begrudgers.

Uncle Pa's liberation mantra, "I don't give a fiddler's fart," is one young Frank embraces and which the adult Frank incorporates in his speech back in America. One of the scenes which fuse comedy and misery in both book and movie concerns the family's first night in the new house in Limerick. After finally settling in to sleep after an exhausting day, the entire family is roused out bed by fleas in the mattress, which the father drags out into the lane to beat with a shoe while he has his sons toss water on the ground to drown the dislodged fleas. Uncle Pa rides by on a bicycle and gives a wonderfully fractured disquisition on fleas, snakes, the English, and St. Patrick, adding one absurdity to another. In the movie, though, the free-wheeling take on fleas and Irish history is placed in Malachy's mouth. This is a small point, but one which indicates the deliberate tilt the movie takes in its presentation of the father.

These different points converge in the saga's central trauma, Malachy's departure for England. Malachy, who apparently would like to stay in Limerick, receives pressure on two fronts. The first is from Angela, who refuses to have any further sex with him on the grounds she will bear no more children. Malachy protests that she has to perform her wifely duties and submit to her husband or face eternal damnation. At first, Angela's reply, "As long as there are no more children eternal damnation sounds attractive enough to me," seems liberating, with this woman finally taking her body back from the sot who, while ordinarily

an irreverent anti-cleric, here weakly attempts to metamorphose his sexual demands into convenient Catholic orthodoxy. But Angela's sexuality, as unlikely as it seems in such destitute circumstances, will shortly move to the center of the drama, much to her disadvantage.

The second pressure, as it happens, comes from young Frank: "I say to him, Why can't you go to England, Dad, so we can have electricity and a wireless and Mam can stand at the door and tell the world what we're having at dinnertime?" When the father asks him if he doesn't want to have him at home, Frank replies, "I do but you can come back at the end of the war and we can all go to America." The father immediately assents. While young Frank's solution once again defers reconciliation to the return to America, it's also clear that the young boy feels that he has had a part in pushing the father out of the home. At the rail station, his plea, "Dad, Dad, don't go, Dad," inserted among the chorus of parting phrases, rings with anguish and guilt.

No money arrives from England, and, when Angela is eventually forced to move the family into the house of her cousin, Laman Griffin, she quickly becomes the sexual chattel used to pay the rent, a violation of family pride and chastity which both the book and the movie make clear is not to be forgiven. Frank is beaten by Laman the night before his 14th birthday, moves out into his added uncle's house, and sometime later is joined there by Angela and the rest of the family. Two years after, on the night of his first pint, he gets predictably drunk, and returns home for a confrontation with his mother. In the movie's most interventionist shift, Parker and Jones have the 16-year-old Frank sing the same Irish patriot ballad the father sang when he came home drunk. In the argument that ensues, the Frank who slaps his mother and calls her a slut is little more than a stand-in for the absent Malachy. One of the real ironies of this spectacular best-seller is that many of its readers and viewers consider it a sympathetic portrayal of Angela McCourt, with Frank McCourt the child who rose from her ashes. But in a book which finds ways to justify and forgive a father who starved and ultimately abandoned his family, there is little pity or understanding extended to the woman left in his destructive wake. What we have, masked by any number of funny or grotesque Irish stereotypes, is a deeply conservative and finally misogynistic view of the mother.

One wonders how aware Frank McCourt himself is of this view. His favorite reading at the library while the family was living in Laman Griffin's house was of virgin saints and martyrs, women who sacrificed their lives to preserve their chastity and faith. As an adult, his first assignment in his creative writing class was to have the students write 200 words on suttee, the Indian practice of women climbing on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Given the title of the book and the disapproval of his mother's coerced sexual submission, one wonders what McCourt would have had his mother do; wonders, that is, until the mother returns in the second volume.

The older Angela McCourt whom we meet in *Tis* is a nasty, demanding woman whom the adult Frank continually tries to placate. Four years after Angela has moved to New York, Malachy the father writes to suggest a reconciliation, claiming that he has stopped drinking. The father shows up drunk and stays that way for the three weeks he is in the city. On the last night he is in New York, he asks Frank to go for a walk with him, one that ends up in the bars along Flatbush Avenue. The father is presented pretty much as a harmless alcoholic, one who is hoping that Angela will say, "Ah, stay. Sure we'll find some way of getting along" when he returns to the apartment. Frank finds that idea lovely and leaves him at the door. The next morning the mother calls to say that the father had gone wild that evening and she had to call the cops. McCourt says she didn't tell what he did, but he imagines easily enough: "He probably tried to get into bed with her and that was not part of her dream." Instead, the mother sends the father away and accuses McCourt of precipitating the crisis: "Last night was the last straw and you were part of it." In a strange psychic replay of the original rupture, his mother's sexual rejection of the father, complicated now by her accusation of McCourt's complicity in his father's drinking, breaks up the

family.

If *Angela's Ashes* were a novel, we would pretty much have to take McCourt at his word here. But, as it happens, McCourt's brother, Malachy McCourt the younger, has also written a memoir, one which recounts the events of the same three-week period. I should say right off that *A Monk Swimming* is a painful book to read. Malachy McCourt spends almost 300 pages in self-congratulatory tales of boozing, brawling, and wenching in which he is always the larger-than-life hero, all in a lingo interlarded with hyperbole, cliché, and repetition. Reading the book is like being locked in a barroom with the local drunk trotting out tale after tale that he thinks enormously entertaining while you wonder if there's a backdoor or window out of the place.

Malachy's book, however, presents a very different portrait of his father. He tells of his father's visit to Limerick while Angela was living with Laman Griffin and after Malachy junior (presumably joining Frank) had moved into his uncle's house. Griffin, hearing that the father was in town, came to the house, slapped Malachy junior (who says he was ten or eleven at the time) and punched Malachy senior almost unconscious. Malachy the memoirist remembers this scene with anger and humiliation, especially since his father explains his passivity in the face of both their beatings with "See how well I kept my temper?"

Again during a visit to England as an adult, he looks up his father only to find him in jail on drunk and disorderly charges. The man he finds is scrawny, toothless, and unshaven, and this, the father informs him, is his twenty-third or twenty-fourth conviction on drunk and disorderly. Malachy calculates that serving the full 30 days for each conviction would mean that his father had already spent almost two years on and off in jail. The father who regaled young Frank with tales of Cuchulain the warrior is nowhere to be seen.

In contrast to Frank's rendition of the attempted reconciliation in New York, Malachy describes his mother's eagerness for a reunion and the difficulty she has in writing her invitation to Malachy senior in Belfast. But the father does indeed arrive drunk and stays that way for weeks, yelling out the window at passersby on Flatbush Avenue to go to Mass and learn Irish history. Malachy reports that the mother called night after night to have him "come over and get him off me." The father once again insists "that she had a sacred obligation to submit to her husband and perform the marital duty, or he'd report her to the church authorities." Instead of the gentle man who says "Och" and "Aye" to Frank, the portrait Malachy presents is that of a maniac and randy boozier.

The culmination of the visit is the father's taking up with two old ladies who live in the building. The mother calls Malachy over when the father doesn't come back one night. She suspects "there's been a bit of carrying on" over in the ladies' apartment, and asks her son to find out what's going on. Malachy junior discovers his father naked in bed with the two old ladies, all of whom are clearly sleeping off a long drinking bout. When Angela appears in the doorway, the son becomes enraged, lets loose a harangue about the father's abandonment of his family, and punches him in the stomach. When the father leaves to return to Belfast, Malachy sums up his mother's life: "Married to an alcoholic, who saddled her with seven children, three of whom died. She had taken up with another abusive drunk in Limerick, and for that, none of us ever really forgave her."

Needless to say, none of this is mentioned in *Tis*, nor does it square with the portrait of Malachy McCourt senior in either the book or film version of *Angela's Ashes*. Of course, any person can change over time (what's interesting, though, is that, in terms of the psychic dynamic, no one seems to change at all), and, as we note in *King Lear*, siblings can view a difficult father quite differently.

Parker's charge, however, was not to question McCourt's presentation of his father, but to translate the bestseller into a blockbuster. What Parker may not have realized at the time (along with most of McCourt's readers) is that he was filming half a book. The original manuscript was intended to carry McCourt across his time in America

and end (where *Tis* does) with the 1985 scattering of Angela's cremated remains in the family graveyard in Limerick. Nan Graham, the editor at Scribner's, suggested that McCourt end his odyssey from America to Ireland and back with the reentry to America and save the American experience for another book. Angela's ashes, whatever their metaphoric freight of destitution and renewal in the truncated volume, were originally just that: Angela's ashes.

The reason Graham suggested the division moves to the foreground in the movie: by having young Frank end his journey with the return to America, the coming-of-age tale neatly doubles as a coming-to-America saga, with young Frank McCourt overcoming the destitution of an Ireland beset by poverty, pretension, and class-bound exclusion. Janet Maslin, in her *New York Times* review of the film, complains about the quaintly romantic view Parker takes of the poverty of the Limerick lanes where everyone looks healthy even when they are made up to look pallid and the sewage on the rain-slicked streets looks a handsome shade of midnight blue. Her summary, "Nobody has indoor plumbing. Everyone has clean hair," neatly places the pin in Parker's sentimental bubble.

But this aesthetic packaging of poverty is only part of the larger romance that was implicit from the moment McCourt agreed to divide his memoir. The coming-to-America leitmotif dominates the music of the film. John Williams, rather than incorporating Irish music (which has no shortage of mournful melodies), includes Billie Holiday, jazz tunes, and American pop to provide background to the scenes in which the family moves from country to country and house to house. The Hollywood films of Jimmy Cagney, Bela Lugosi, and Zane Grey cowboys which the children watch on Saturdays at the Lyric Theatre remind us of the America which is waiting. The replica of the Statue of Liberty in front of the Limerick Post Office which Frank eyes from time to time makes it inevitable that the movie must end, as it does, with the liberated Frank McCourt sailing into New York harbor. The Williams score swells to an affirmative crescendo, and the camera pans to the Statue of Liberty against a brilliant blue sky. As Williams himself has noted, in a movie which seems an accumulation of anecdote and vignette, "the orchestra creates the final resolution" ("Williams Reflects on 'Angela's Ashes,'" *Boston Globe*, January 28).

Still, for all his faithfulness to the spirit if not the letter of the original, Parker found he had to intervene with the ending of the film. The book closes not with the approach to New York Harbor, but with a night docking at Poughkeepsie, on the way to the boat's changed destination, Albany. At the invitation of an Irishman from Mayo who pulls up by the ship, the now nineteen-year-old McCourt, accompanied by a rosary-beads-and-holy-water priest (who, by the way, turns out to be a pedophile in the sequel) accompanies the ship's officers ashore to a party of promiscuous housewives whose husbands are off on a hunting party. The tone of the episode, little more than a wink-and-an-elbow bar story in which all the men get laid while the priest fulminates, is at wide variance with the innocence of the earlier narration, and it leaves the reader feeling more soiled than gratified. In the movie, Parker's decision to have the *Irish Oak* with Frank McCourt on the railing sail past the Statue of Liberty assures that the targeted audience, both here and abroad, will have their melting-pot egalitarian assumptions about America reinforced rather than examined. Just as it seems more soothing to believe that the F.B.I. was responsible for the civil rights gains of the sixties, so too it is more comforting to have any complexities or contradictions in the narration blur into an affirmation of icon, color, and music.

As the final scene in the book version of *Angela's Ashes* demonstrates, McCourt has an uphill climb with rhetorical appeal as his narrator ages. The innocence of the young child who records the hard-heartedness or absurdity of the priests and bureaucrats in Limerick becomes less fetching and progressively less credible in the young man in *Tis* who finds himself again and again in bumbling sexual escapades. The man in his twenties who joins the U.S. Army and is sent

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Seeds of Doubt

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protect the environment and improve human health and well-being.

Nice words. The reality is far more complex when we consider that "Throughout the institute's seventy-five years of operations, the financial resources required to support research have been generated from its substantial endowment, a diverse group of supportive sponsors, and other sources" (BTI 1998 Annual Report). Who are the diverse group of sponsors and other sources? In the Gift Report there are lists of donor levels. John M. Dentes, part of the Scientist's Circle (\$500-\$999), writes in his Finance and Investments report that "The institute has been exceptionally well endowed since its inception...with the initial \$10.7 million endowment of cash, securities, mortgages, and real estate by William Boyce Thompson." Thompson made his money in the fast-paced world of minerals investments. "Since that time, its [BTI's] endowment values have risen to \$68.8 million from foundations, industry, government, and others...In the 1980's the investment goals changed (from income to support operating needs) to emphasize total returns." The institute is a not-for-profit corporation investing for profit and dividends. Is any of this taxed? Where does BTI invest its money?

Governor George Pataki hopes to make New York a major center for biotechnological research and has committed \$300,000 of his proposed 2000/2001 budget to Cornell University's Nanobiotechnology Center. Carl A. Batt, a microbiologist and professor of food science, said in a story by Missy Gloverman for the *Ithaca Journal* (1/12/00), "We are going to make an effort to transfer the technology into the private sector."

"It's raining money on the biotechnology sector," says Lawrence M. Fisher in the "Investing" section of *The New York Times* (1/23/00). But Michele Landsberg wrote in the *Toronto Star* (12/26/99):

Because of this human propensity to eat and to care about what we eat, a funny thing happened this year to Monsanto, one of the world's most overweeningly arrogant transnational corporations, as it rushed to the bank. It tripped and fell flat on its face. It got up and fell flat on its face again. And the series of hugely comical pratfalls kept escalating as the year dwindled to its close: most recently, Monsanto tried to hook up with another mega-corporation, only to see its share price (and that of its would-be new partner) tumble.

Shareholders are beginning to get restive over GM products. According to Roger Cowe of *The Guardian* of London:

A concerted shareholder campaign against GM foods is about to hit corporate America with a flood of resolutions at company meetings demanding a moratorium until proper testing has been done. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, an umbrella of 275 religious and other groups, has targeted Coca Cola, Heinz, the U.S. Safeway Stores and McDonald's for these resolutions. Shareholders are raising questions about the health and safety, loss of control over seeds by farmers, consumers' right to know what is in their food, and fears about the long-term ecological impact of genetic modification. Other companies being targeted are American Home Products, Dow Chemical and Du Pont, Archer Daniels Midland, General Mills, PepsiCo, Philip Morris and more.

In response to these developments, the biotech industry has launched its own public relations campaign. In a story by David Bar-

boza (11/12/99), *The New York Times* reported, "Biotech Companies Take On Critics of Gene-Altered Food":

Worried about growing resistance to genetically modified foods, some of the world's biggest biotechnology companies are mounting a huge lobbying and marketing campaign to counter their critics and combat what they call a rising wave of anti-biotech hysteria.

President Clinton said at the World Trade Organization Ministerials in Seattle, December 1, 1999: "The United States would never knowingly permit a single pound of any American food product to leave this country if I had a shred of evidence that it was unsafe...I say to people around the world, we eat this [genetically modified] food, too, and we eat more of it than you do." Mr. Clinton, like many of those concerned with U.S. competitiveness in the world, has ignored scientific investigations in Europe, as well as in his own agencies. In fact, he ignored concerns raised by scientists within the FDA because they undermined his domestic and foreign policy goals.

The farming community is also in turmoil over the events of the past year. *The Wall Street Journal* reported November 19, 1999: "Seeds of Doubt—Once Quick Converts, Midwest Farmers Lose Faith in Biotech Crops: As farmers place their orders for spring planting, there is growing evidence that a boom is fading." The story continues to say that this year will bring the first decline in sales of GM seeds after years of growth. Even those farmers who support GM seeds and foods cannot ignore the fact that people are refusing to buy their products. Tens of billions of dollars have been invested in GM crops. What was once sold at a premium is now being dumped into processed foods in America. Robert Wichmann, at Pioneer Hi-Bred International, a seed subsidiary of DuPont is predicting "some slippage" in sales.

The growth of food for people and animals is a matter of great complexity for farmers and consumers alike. What are the values involved in this process? What are the costs and risks in the emerging biotech future? Thoreau wrote: "The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run." It could be said that factory farming burdens our land and lives with a debt of damage to ecological systems. We are poisoning future farms, land, water and communities.

What should be done? David Suzuki, professor of genetics at the University of British Columbia and host of TV's *The Nature of Things* says:

We need a better and more systematic testing of these organisms before releasing them into nature, and we need mandatory product labeling. We need to slow down and take a hard look at what is motivating us to leap ahead with revolutionary, uncertain and largely unnecessary technology. But this doesn't mean research shouldn't continue.

He continues by referring to the cost of the Green Revolution of the 1970s "in terms of soil erosion, water pollution, a loss of biodiversity and the exacerbation of food inequities." He concludes, "We're fooling ourselves if we think we can solve social and political problems with technological fixes."

Considering the significance of this new technology, it is reasonable to limit all genetically modified seeds and foods to laboratory research until we have enough information about GMOs to feel confident that we understand their impact upon the web of life.

Tony Del Plato is a cook, restaurateur and resident of the town of Ithaca.

Beauty & the Beholder

continued from page 2

a waist/Like a cat.") preparing himself for an evening's adventure:

Outside, his motorcycle glistened like a black mantis
As he began slowly pulling on the shiny
Flowered shirt and striped pants that women loved
To touch underneath the arc-rainbow...

These are poems which give "intense pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind." Exhibiting harmony of form, excellence of craftsmanship and originality, *In the Pines* is in every way a beautiful body of work.

Ashbery's *Girls on the Run* is a fifty-page poem "inspired by the work of 'outsider' artist Henry Darger (1892-1972), a Chicago-based recluse with a history of mental illness, noted for his obsession with little girls." So says the publisher's promo material. The cover, Henry Darger's "Storm Brewing," suggests *Girls* is going to be a children's story.

I open *Girls on the Run* to section three, and read (in their entirety) the opening lines of the first stanza:

Out in Michigan, or was it Minnesota,
though, time had stopped
to see what it could see, which wasn't much.
A recent hooligan scare had
blighted the landscape,
lowering the temperature by several degrees.
"Having
to pee ruins my crinoline relentlessly,
because it comes only ecstatically."
But the wounded cow knew otherwise.

I blink.

Harold Bloom likes it. According to Bloom, *Girls on the Run* "will make readers happier and wiser." He calls John Ashbery "our universal poet, as Walt Whitman was before him." Funny, isn't it? Here's Harold Bloom, the critic most given to making lofty pronouncements, approving of Ashbery, the American poet most given to fence-sitting. The poems in *Girls on the Run* and *Wakefulness* are perpetually poised on the edge of meaning. Both books offer many delights, one tantalizing glimmer of sense after another, but hold back, line by line, teasing the reader, fence-sitting, never quite managing to communicate what the poet is thinking about anything. What do you make of someone for whom foreplay is the whole game? There are all these superlative lines, each one of which can be read as a prelude to a poem that never quite happens. Ultimately, this is poetry as a form of *coitus interruptus*. It's deconstruction, it's Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" writing, "Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know

no halt." I think that's a fair description of John Ashbery's work.

For all its agility and sharpness ("Our stalwart little band of angels got on it, and were taken for a ride/into the next chapter,") the whole of *Girls on the Run* is less than the sum of its luminous parts. How can one sustain a book-length poem on preciousness, on atmospherics alone? I'd be hard put to describe the drama or story line in *Girls*, and the participants in this "surrealist adventure," Jenny Wren and Tidbit, Dimples and Mr. McPlaster, *et al.*, are scarcely able to hold one's attention for more than a page or two. And what is one to make of a narrative so arbitrary in its construction, so lacking in some underlying human feeling, that one line, image or character could be substituted for another?

Then there are the Ashbery-ian echoes of Gertrude Stein: "Now she was the daughter or granddaughter of somebody famous, folks for miles around knew that. But no one could say what she was up to, she was far too clever for that." Elsewhere Ashbery writes: "A horse wanders away/and is abruptly inducted into the carousel/eyes flying, mane askew. There is no end to the dance."

Indeed, that's the problem with both *Girls on the Run* and *Wakefulness*: an overabundance of ironic, masturbatory, carousel giddiness; too much forced cheeriness and, sadly, no end to the dance. Today, re-reading *Wakefulness*, I recalled Frost's words. Poetry, he said, is "a way of remembering what it would impoverish us to forget." For all that there is to admire in Ashbery, what if a reader asks: What in *Girls on the Run* and *Wakefulness* would it impoverish us to forget? Listen to these opening lines to "Moderately," a poem that appears early on in *Wakefulness*:

The fox brooding and the old people smelling
and the tiebreaker—why did I not think of
that?
Why have doubts upon me come? Why
this worldliness? And I remember no longer
at the age of sixteen,
and at the age of seventeen great rollers
eating into night, I uncared for...

There is much that is gorgeous in *Wakefulness*, but how are we to keep up our spirits in the face of all this self-imitation, the Ashbery-ian stylistic tic: the brilliant-but-brittle, momentarily engaging, fragmentary phrase; the arbitrarily unfinished line; the refusal to communicate feeling or emotion; the verbal collage; the allusions to Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound; the entertaining "high-end" gibberish delivered with a wink; the persnickety squirreliness masquerading as ingenuity?

Guggenheim recipient Robert Sward teaches at University of California, Santa Cruz. He is the author of 16 books.

EMPRESS OF THE SPLENDID SEASON

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Our Town

continued from page 7

sadness that has descended on his town, causing it to lose its name. The factories spewing smoke have apparently poisoned everything, but Rashid, magically connected to the Story Waters in the Great Story Sea, loses his hope only when his beloved wife, his deepest and most intimate connection to humanity, abandons him. But a View Before Sunset is sufficient inspiration to reverse Rashid's desperation.

People who argued at the hearings and continue to argue daily for an understanding of what big-box development means from a global/ecological perspective are labeled "elitist" and/or "classist" and/or unsubstantial. The implications are that awareness of our spiritual and economic connections with others, and with all natural resources, the reality that John Dewey conceived of as the basis for the functioning of human imagination (and Rushdie, the basis for storytelling) is an unfairly privileged state that leads to irrelevant knowledge. In other words, our mayor tells us that you have to be rich to know that you don't deserve "development" purchased at the expense of your neighbors across town or across the world or through the loss of irreplaceable natural resources.

At the same time, because the real conversation is about making the deal go through, you are not real and your knowledge not substantive when you don't respond to the specifics of the actual development plan. Here you can have real input, the city tells us. What should we require of these corporations, even though they are a more powerful version of the ones we already have that won't pay for traffic lights, even as they threaten to go elsewhere during the very planning process? Loss of Deweyan imagination leads to magical thinking, but not the inspiring kind we find in stories. Instead, we are asked to negotiate with Khattam-Shud.

The problem is that the charges of elitism, so effective in silencing the dialogue that needs to happen about development issues, works for two reasons: The first is that in an era where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer at an alarming rate, those of us who live in relative comfort are ashamed and confused. Understanding vaguely that in this new global economy our standard of living is artificially bolstered by the poverty of others, usually of color, often far away, and usually having stories either poisoned or silenced by the Khattam-Shuds of this world, we are perpetually guilty.

The second is that there is some truth to this charge, even within the context of the local debates. John Dewey correctly saw that the division of labor into cultured people and workers was antithetical to the nature of human beings. But what we've learned since Dewey's time is how much of what we call human is open to social construction and destruction. Those who have been able to hold onto or recover the awareness of connectedness to others and to nature, the basis for imagination in the Deweyan sense, and for generating stories in the Rushdie sense, have somehow outwitted the division of labor in our own lives. But we have not successfully fought the global political struggle to end its economic and spiritual domination of the majority.

Sometimes this personal outwitting is accomplished through a process of spiritual awareness and transformation and sometimes it is achieved through education, often "elite" education. It typically involves a certain amount of sweat and personal sacrifice, but

the sacrifice is usually experienced as a choice. Sometimes it represents a reversal of the patterns of oppressing others and patterns of exploiting the natural world to which we have been socialized; sometimes it represents a reversal of patterns of accepting oppression. Typically it is partial and unfinished, like all human processes, meaning that people are still influenced by past limitations and ongoing disconnections despite their best intentions of moving toward a common good. Economic privilege and/or luck often makes such personal transformative processes, incomplete as they are, possible. The point is that without a massive political movement, such transformation is available only to the few.

There are no easy solutions to these contradictions, but again, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* offers hope. Strategizing about how to defeat Khattam-Shud and his Warriors of Chup, Rashid translates the ancient sign language revived in this silenced community by a renegade officer: "Don't think all Chupwalas follow Khattam-Shud...Mostly they are simply terrified."

Strategizing on this basis, the war is won, the Sea of Stories is unplugged, and the fortress of Khattam-Shud, including its story-poisoning apparatus, is melted, quite literally, by light, thanks to the son, Haroun. Soraya's love affair with lack of imagination is predictably short-lived and we are left with the impression that under the influence of Haroun, Rashid has grown out of his earlier self-absorbed befuddlement to become a storyteller with a better capacity to attend to immediate reality.

Though we know that reality is often stranger and more complex than the best of the arts (like this marvelous play bravely produced by our local Montessori Middle School), perhaps we can learn lessons from Rushdie. Perhaps Ithaca's arts and protest communities might unite to develop strategies of organization against the fears that polarize our city, silencing dialogue and giving power to Khattam-Shud, and we might even find ways to collect and disseminate the currently silenced stories in our midst.

Two recent developments suggest support from organizations that have long served as community anchors: The new editor of the *Ithaca Times* formally invited stories from poorly paid local workers in his last editorial, and the Board of Zoning Appeals, an independent body that can serve as a check on City Hall's power exercised that independence both by overturning the fill permit that allowed Widewater's to dump its gravel across from Buttermilk Falls and by dictating into the public record the story of the city's harassment of its own (zoning board) members.

So it's important to remember that our story is in process. And Rushdie's character, the Walrus, synthesizer of Happy Endings by P2C2E (a process too complicated to explain), and Haroun leave us with a final bit of wisdom:

Walrus: "Happy endings must come at the end of something. If they happen in the middle of the story, or an adventure, all they do is cheer things up for a while."

Haroun: "That'll do."

Barbara Regenspan is an associate professor of Education at Binghamton University.

Ashes to Ashes

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to Germany feels awful after having sex with a young prostitute but gleeful after bedding his superior's girlfriend Ruth. Several years later the same narrator tells us he blushes when one of the girls in his class at McKee Technical School calls out he's cute.

Still, the child in Angela's Ashes, in fulfillment of the relatives' prophecies, grows up in *Tis* to be very much his father's son. In the midst of many disconnected episodes, McCourt records his courtship of his first wife, the birth of their daughter, and his subsequent walking out of the marriage a week before her eighth birthday. He compares the mornings he spent with his daughter to the mornings he remembered with his father, but the rationale he proposes for the break-up with his wife smacks of begrudger and a facile class-consciousness: "Slum-reared Irish Catholics have nothing in common with nice girls from New England who had little curtains at their bedroom windows, who wore white gloves right up to their elbows and went to proms with nice boys, who studied etiquette with French nuns and were told, Girls, your virtue is like a dropped vase. You may repair the break but the crack will always be there. Slum-reared Irish Catholics might have recalled what their fathers said, After a full belly all is poetry." The lace-curtain Catholics of Limerick are here superseded by the lace-curtain wasps of Manhattan, but the stereotype does not translate well nor does it sit easy.

McCourt had said, during the time his father had visited in New York, "I knew in the days that followed that if blood called to blood I'd drift to my father's side of the family. My mother's people had often said in Limerick I had the odd manner of my father and a strong streak of the North in my character." What we have in the final chapters of *Tis*, those recording the deaths of Angela and Malachy McCourt, is the culmination of this drift, which has in fact been an undercurrent across both volumes of the memoir.

In the hospital Angela is irrational and demanding right up to her death, and McCourt discovers that when she dies he feels "like a child cheated." Her sons collectively decide to cremate her body, pretty much based on the low price, and Malachy's irreverent response to the undertaker's assertion that the law requires a coffin ("why can't we just put her in a Hefty trash bag and leave her outside for collection?") sets the stage for the Irish wake where the sons and grandsons sing and dance before her casket, actions which McCourt is sure non-Irish visitors will misunderstand. Although at first he finds himself unable to cry at his mother's death, when his daughter Maggie questions him about heaven in front of her casket, he finds himself weeping as he attempts to answer.

Even though none of the brothers make the trip out to the cremation in New Jersey, both Alphie (the youngest) and McCourt decide to fly to Belfast when they hear of their father's death in 1985. McCourt's justification for the trip centers on what he imagines his mother would say:

She'd say no matter what he did to us he had the weakness, the curse of the race, and a father dies and is buried only once. She'd say he wasn't the worst in the world and who are we to judge, that's what God is for, and out of her charitable soul she'd light a candle and offer a prayer.

This sentiment, while quite touching, has no correlation to the Angela McCourt we are shown in the latter volume. As we heard often throughout *Angela's Ashes*, Malachy is to be forgiven his deeds because he is Irish, and the Irish, as everyone knows, are cursed with this weakness. McCourt, who elsewhere describes himself as

having "drifted" from the church, imagines his mother appealing to God, lighting a candle, and offering a prayer, and that proves decisive for the repentant son. We have come a long way in Irish letters from Stephen Dedalus's *non serviam*.

Kneeling by his father's corpse, McCourt finds himself once again almost overcome by the humor he claims the Irish seem instinctively to muster in the face of grief. For a moment, his father's face absurdly resembles a seagull, and in his attempt to stifle a laugh he is sure all the other mourners believe he is sobbing uncontrollably. He later returns to the coffin with the specific intention of accusing his father of having inflicted a life of misfortune on Angela, but once again nostalgia blurs, then obliterates accountability: "I could only kneel by his coffin again and recall mornings in Limerick when the fire glowed and he talked softly for fear of waking my mother and brothers, telling me of Ireland's sufferings and the great deeds of the Irish in America and those mornings are now pearls that turn into three Hail Marys by the coffin." McCourt's reversion to his childhood memories allows him to forgive not only what his father did to him, but also what he did to Angela.

In the final three paragraphs of *Tis*, McCourt, accompanied by family and friends, scatters his mother's ashes at the graveyard at Mungret Abbey outside Limerick City. They all say a Hail Mary, but McCourt is momentarily concerned that it's not enough: "We had drifted from the church but we knew that for her and for us in that ancient abbey there would have been comfort and dignity in the prayers of a priest, proper requiem for a mother of seven." Still, the sentiment itself seems enough to assuage the worry, just as the sentiment at his father's wake made everything all right about Angela. Everyone heads off to a pub for food and drink and laughter because that's how the Irish are.

Kevin Murphy teaches English at Ithaca College.



Learning to Kill

continued from page 3

four students (all girls) and injured ten other students. Grossman participated in the post-traumatic stress debriefing and counseling and was interviewed by the media. He notes however that he was shut out by the major networks. He was the perfect "talking head," the former Army Ranger turned trauma expert, the consultant on what he calls "killology" (an unfortunate, self-revealing word choice). But the networks would not use him, possibly out of concerns over how his message might affect their own image.

Grossman was surprised and indignant. But again he fails to appreciate the subversive implications of his message. He validates the conditioning of men to kill in war, because, he says, it exists in a context of obedience to authority. He condemns the conditioning of children to violence because it lacks that context, but also because he wants a "transformation of our culture" in which people answer "the clarion call of decency and love and peace as an alternative to death and destruction." Grossman fails to see that, if we create children who resist the glamour of violence, we create children less easily conditioned to the purposes of the military, and we as a nation would have to live differently in the world.

Dan Finlay is a psychologist with the Family & Children's Service of Ithaca.

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Waltzing with Waldheim

To the Editor:

With the *Anschluss* of 1938, Austria willingly became a wholly owned subsidiary of Hitler's Nazi Germany. After World War II the country was occupied by the four victorious powers, but not as a defeated enemy—the Soviets had been sending signals to the effect that they were planning a complete takeover. It was therefore considered expedient by the United States, Britain and France to classify Austria as a liberated nation. Unrealistic? Certainly. But that was international postwar politics. Which brings us to January 2000, Jörg Haider, his Freedom Party and the Austrian national elections.

The media consistently refer to the Freedom Party as conservative or, more frequently, ultraconservative but hardly ever as Nazi, although statements by Haider—past, present, and continuing—do qualify for that epithet. Political arithmetic, however, dictated the appointment of Haider to the cabinet and his party to the ruling coalition.

What does all this have to do with "Greek Tragedy" by Gail Holst-Warhaft, in *The Bookpress* (October 1999)?

Professor Warhaft reviews five books about the horrors endured by Greek Jews during the Nazi occupation of their homeland. She writes:

The deportation of Salonika's Jews was achieved with remarkable efficiency. In three short months, from March to April of 1943 most of the Jewish inhabitants were deported...Yeshua Matsas was ordered to deliver a basket of jewelry and gold collected from the prisoners... "When I delivered the gold the officer in charge, a tall thin man, hit me on the head...I knew I would never forget his skinny face." Many years later in the Negev Desert Yeshua saw a wartime picture of Kurt Waldheim in a newspaper and identified him as the man who had hit him...

What was Herr Oberleutnant Kurt Waldheim, an Austrian on duty with the German (Nazi) Army doing in Greece?

When I left Germany in 1948 after the first of three tours I expected never again to hear of CROWCASS, the U.S. Army Combined Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects, which called for the apprehension of Kurt Waldheim for "complicity in murder."

The listing also revealed that he had been assigned to the *Abwehr*, generally reported by the unknowing or careless as the "intelligence service." That is incorrect. The *Abwehr* was the counterintelli-

gence service and that is not a minor difference. Members of the *Abwehr* were subjected to a rigorous, thorough background investigation to determine absolute loyalty to Hitler, his regime and the Nazi religion. Although not all members of the service committed war crimes, one thing is certain: the organization did not accept merely lukewarm Nazis. Of course, Waldheim could have lied during that investigation; the Austrian Pinocchio has proven that he is expert at that, but given the reputation of the Nazi security services, he probably could not have fooled them.

Waldheim's principal duty with the German Army in Yugoslavia was to coordinate the shipments of several hundred thousand Yugoslavs, including almost all the Jews of course, to Nazi concentration camps. It was specifically for this activity that the Croatian government awarded Waldheim a decoration for "outstanding service to the people of Croatia." (Croatia, incidentally, had become a loyal province of Germany, a status akin to that of Austria.)

In 1943 Waldheim was attached to German forces in Greece on temporary duty to apply the expertise he had gained in Yugoslavia at keeping a full count in German extermination camps.

In the *Challenge of Peace*, his 1977 autobiography, Waldheim claimed that he was medically discharged from the German Army in late 1941 after he was shot in the foot (a classic target for self-inflicted wounds) and that he returned to the study of law at the University of Vienna. We know that was a lie, that he remained on active duty until the end of the war. And we also know that Vienna U did not give correspondence courses. So, granted that he could not have studied law, we see that another massive lie was his claim to a *Doktor Jura* title at war's end.

The Waldheim affair exposed the fact, for those who had chosen to forget, that anti-Semitism and Nazism in Austria did not die after the war; it did not even get sick.

It should come as no surprise that some Austrians are still Nazis. Undoubtedly, some Germans are still Nazis. The important difference is that the Germans have learned not to be proud of it.

Another small piece of dirt: After failing to be reelected Secretary General of the United Nations in 1985 and preparing to move his domicile back to Austria, Waldheim was caught in the attempt to steal the furniture of the Secretary General's residence. He was foiled, but in the resulting brouhaha he managed to make off with the UN silverware and tableware. A major murderer but a cheap crook underneath.

Yet another piece: In 1985 Austrian defense minister Friedhelm Friedenschlager approved a memorial to Gen. Alexander Loehr, an Austrian who served

in the German Army where Waldheim had been on Loehr's staff. Friedenschlager traveled to the Italian border to officially greet Austrian Nazi Walther Reder when he was released from an Italian prison after serving 38 years for the slaughter of almost all the inhabitants of an Italian town.

And yet another: During three tours in Germany between 1945 and 1962, for a total of 11 years, I spoke to hundreds of German and Austrian officers who had stood in the midst of unspeakable atrocities and claimed, like Waldheim, that they did not know what was happening. They also denied knowledge of atrocities committed by their troops. It is really surprising how the German and Austrian armed forces managed to hold out as long as they did since they were led by an officer corps that was obviously blind and deaf. And many claim they continued to serve an evil master in order to mitigate the beastly behavior of the Nazis: Yeah, sure.

And the Austrians elected Kurt Waldheim as their president, the leader of the Peoples Party. That may sound innocent in English but in German it is *Volkspartei*. There were at least 13 Nazi organizations that contained the prefix *Volks* and as such it does not mean "people"; the term bears the connotation of race, ethnicity. The top court in Germany devoted to purely Nazi matters was the *Volksgesicht*.

And still more: At the ceremony celebrating Waldheim's 1986 election as president of Austria many of the Peoples Party officials flaunted their Nazi decorations and medals. There is reason to suspect that the same is true of the celebration of Haider's election two months ago, but I did not have an informant at that one.

By voting for Waldheim then and Haider now, the Austrians satisfied their longing for the good old days.

Are we being unfair by harping on events many decades past? Hell, I still haven't forgiven them for what they did to Mozart!

In all the heated discussion 15 years ago about Waldheim's past—Was he a Nazi? Was he a war criminal?—one factor was not given the prominence it deserved: Waldheim was a liar.

Perhaps Waldheim was not a Nazi; he just acted like one.

Perhaps Waldheim was not a war criminal; he certainly helped many others commit war crimes.

And he was a liar.

Had Waldheim been a German, and in the absence of evidence that he had committed a criminal act, on the basis of membership in certain organizations he would have been classified as a Class III *Mittläufer*, fellow traveler, an opportunist, under the West German Law for Libera-

tion From National Socialism and Militarism. As a denazification specialist with the U.S. Military Government in postwar Germany, I heard the same story thousands of times. Forty years later I heard it again—from Waldheim.

"I may have held rank in the party (or the SS or some other active Nazi organization), *aber Ich war immer dagegen*—I was always against it."

How did you demonstrate your opposition?

"Every time I heard a speech by Hitler or Goebbels I would say to myself, 'Oh, yeah?'"

And Kurt Waldheim claims that he too was really *immer dagegen*, an anti-Nazi. The Nazis set up about 32 organizations that were designed for revenue purposes, the collection of dues. The income for the party came to about 25 million marks a month. These funds made it possible for the Nazi Party to put on extravaganzas such as the one at Nuremberg made famous in the film produced by Leni Riefenstahl. Dues money also helped finance the 1936 Olympics.

Another *raison d'être* for these groups was to provide organizations that could be palatable to those Germans who were not enamored of Nazi ideology. They provided a means for those people to join *something* in order to get the local Nazi zealot off their backs, or to get a job, or to go to school, or for any kind of opportunity that is considered a human right in a decent society. That was Waldheim's explanation for his membership in the *SA Reiter Korps* (the mounted corps of the Brown Shirts) and the National Socialist Student Association.

Note that membership in either of these organizations was not regarded as incriminating *per se* either in Military Government directives or the German Denazification Law. And that was the ultimate irony. A torrent of derogatory information followed and Waldheim sank deeper into the mire with each denial followed by the *Ja aber* lame explanations that ensued. *Ich war immer dagegen*.

The 1948 War Crimes Commission report stated that Waldheim was responsible for the deaths of hostages and, the report continued, the commission "was satisfied that there will be sufficient evidence at the time of the trial to justify prosecution."

Waldheim was never prosecuted. Why? Wait for my book.

The similarity in the sense and the wording of the statements of Jörg Haider, Pat Buchanan and John Rucker is striking. It is almost as if they have been plagiarizing one another.

—ARNOLD LAPINER

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