

The BOOKPRESS

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE LITERARY ARTS

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Rediscovering Mary Butts

Beauty and the Beast

FROM ALTAR TO CHIMNEY-PIECE:
Selected Stories of Mary Butts
McPherson & Company,
295 pages, \$12

THE TAVERNER NOVELS:
♦Armed with Madness
♦The Death of
Felicity Taverner
McPherson & Company,
374 pages, \$15

Jascha Kessler

Literary history sometimes reads like archaeology, which, although another kind of historiography, presents some structural

analogies to it. There are, for example, eras and epochs preserved from the past in earth and rock formations that extend down back to beginnings; and those strata are often enough demarcated by disjunctions of the temporal continuity, which is seamless *per se*. Whether those "breaks" in the record are effected by mutations in climate, by volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, by upheavals of the crust and the shift of land masses as tectonic plates rise, subside, or plunge, or by catastrophes arriving from space, is part of the puzzle that scientists sift and decipher in order to write the history of the planet. By now, of course, one can assert it was a 19th-century error to associate the backward-glancing achievement by which history is written, and therefore history itself, with the notion of progress, and more dubiously with that of evolution-as-progress.

This is the error Henry Adams questioned in the biography of himself written in old age, the very title of which, *The Education of Henry Adams*, suggests that it needed a lifelong effort to educate his subject, himself, and to free



Mary Butts, by Jean Cocteau

his mind of illusion and prejudice—the better to comprehend the new century, which he foresaw would be radically different from his own, beginning with the harnessing of electricity.¹ What Adams opposed to the idea of progress was a skeptical, perhaps pessimistic, acceptance of an idea of evolution as change, and not necessarily advance, certainly if the doctrine was to propose what human society might come to amount to. One lesson he seems to have tried to teach was that of the value of historical consciousness, coupled with self-consciousness, as a means of arriving—through retrospection, to be sure—at an understanding of history as a succession of periods abruptly changed.

The difference between history and archaeology lies in this: that see *Mary Butts*, page 12

¹ In a brief image, it was for Adams the sign he called The Dynamo that would oppose, and inevitably replace the icon of The Virgin that had for two thousand years dominated the civilization of Europe.

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The Genealogy of Humanism

William Spanos

"Excuse me, Mr. X ... Uh, hi! I've read some of your speeches and I honestly believe that what you have to say is true. And I'm a good person in spite of what my ancestors did. And I just ... I wanted to ask you what can a white person like myself with this perspective do to help you and further your cause?" "Nothing."

from Spike Lee's film "Malcolm X"

I

After reading in recent issues of the *Bookpress* (May 1993 and Summer 1993) M. H. Abrams' "What is Humanist Criticism?" and then Jonathan Culler's "Human Limits: A Response to M. H. Abrams" and Ted Underwood's "The Strife Over Humanism," I feel the need to intervene in the debate. Not so much because of what Abrams, Culler, and Underwood say as of what they all, for quite different ideological reasons, leave unsaid concerning the question of humanism. What I find astonishing

about these essays, given the thoroughgoing critiques of both the discourse of humanism (that its rhetoric of disinterestedness conceals a repressive political agenda) and the discourse of deconstruction (that its claim of radicality turns out to be a politically innocuous inverted formalism) is precisely their evasion of the question of the political.

M. H. Abrams' essay is devoted almost entirely to a critique of contemporary "critical theory," which he represents as a "strenuous anti-humanism" that is intended to discredit or dismantle "the interrelated concepts of 'humanity,' 'human,' 'man,' 'the subject,' 'subjectivity,' 'the person,' and 'the self.'"

Despite Abrams' passing references to sociopolitically-oriented theorists such as Foucault, and the New Historicists (there is no mention of anti-humanist Neo-Marxists such as Althusser), it is, as his primary examples clearly suggest (Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson, J. Hillis Miller, Roland Barthes), fundamentally the by-now outmoded textualist discourse of deconstruction that he has in mind when he identifies

"contemporary theory" with "anti-humanism." Abrams carries out his defense of humanism or humanistic criticism against those he insists on calling "radical poststructuralists" at a site so rarefied that, like deconstruction itself, it draws attention away from its historically specific political implications.

It is no accident that Abrams concludes by recuperating the traditional, benignly high-minded and innocuous universalist definition of humanism which events of the 20th century—not least the US conduct of the Vietnam War—and the discourses that theorized these demystifying events, have gone far to delegitimize. "Quite simply," Abrams writes, "humanistic criticism deals with a work of literature as written by a human being, for human beings, and about human beings and matters of human concern." It is a conclusion that tautologically begs the questions concerning the "human" of humanistic criticism posed by posthumanist theory.

In the debate between Abrams and Culler, I would want to side with Culler insofar as he emphasizes see *Humanism*, page 16

Feet of Clay

THE GOLEM: WHAT EVERYONE
NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SCIENCE
Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch
Cambridge University Press
164 pages, \$19.95

Joel Ray

What, then, is science? Science is a golem.

A golem is a creature of Jewish mythology... a humanoid made by man from clay and water.... It will follow orders, do your work, and protect you from the ever threatening enemy. But it is clumsy and dangerous.

...it is truth that drives it on. But this does not mean it understands the truth—far from it.

I

What drives this book is its opposition to the myth that science proceeds outside of history and society, that—unlike the golem—it is self-created.

While most scientists may consider this position obvious, for much of the

public the myth is quite powerful. Harry Collins of the University of Bath and Trevor Pinch of Cornell University, both sociologists of science, aim at illuminating science for the public by recounting seven episodes that show how science ordinarily operates when theory and experimental data collide. They bring into focus some actual research—to most of us blurred or invisible—to show that facts and reason are scarcely so conclusory in science as we think.

The hopeful subtitle of this book means what it says: that the public needs to learn not more science, but more *about* science. One of the great fallacies of our age, say the authors, is the belief that the public must learn physics and biology and chemistry in order to participate in public discussion. They can hardly compete, after all, with the highly educated academics and professionals who control the debates. No one could reasonably expect the general public to decide on the basis of scientific knowledge whether the Human Genome Project ought to be undertaken, or the super- see *The Golem*, page 8

Letters to the Editor

Illusion...

To the Editor:

I was astounded to find Mark Shechner's out-of-date article, "U.S. Fiction Today: The Turn Toward Realism," in your September issue. I would have been astounded to find it in any of your issues; most of the pieces that appear in the Bookpress seem well informed and accurate. Trying to sweep a powerful glass over the fictional landscape, and so come up with a Zeitgeist of sorts, Shechner curtsies to such manglers of English as Susan Isaacs and Terry Macmillan. Princeling of platitudes that he is, he doesn't care about prose at all or about those who have made it do things it perhaps has not done before. Like many pundits, he has no taste and just wants authors dished up in trends and movements. I do not have time to correct all his errors or to engage in point-by-point rebuttal; but I do want to say that he omits from mention the historicist tendency discussed so ably at the Bookery by John Vernon (February 7, 1993) and the recourse to so-called Maximalism, discussed at length in all kinds of places. If, as I believe, stylists have at last taken over American fiction, the discussions that matter will be esthetic, not categorical, and such labels as "realistic" won't be needed.

Shechner identifies minimalism with realism, and I can see why—the Carvers, the Tylers, the McInerneys have no art that can be talked about; so, because they remain essentially anonymous entertainers, they must be assumed to be telling some kind of truth. The truth of course is that fiction is made of words and corresponds to nothing. The better the prose, the more powerful the illusion. Shechner seems to know none of this, which is perhaps why he says such things as "It strikes me as an age of silver, short on grandeur but brimming with fresh talent." Ignoramuses should not patronize. Try titanium, bronze, or mercury if metals we must have. The French think American fiction of today has a grandeur that once was French. And when has there not been "fresh talent" brimming? Talent will out, needing no truism to birth it.

Actually, the best retort to Shechner's muddle and low-brow bigotry would be a visit to the Bookery's almost palatial and certainly ecumenical Fiction room. Names to look for, if you intend to write about the American fiction of today, are these, all of them omitted from Shechner's screed: Walter Abish, Bradford Morrow, Alexander Theroux, Joseph McElroy, Guy Davenport, Thomas Berger, Harold Brodkey, Edmund White, Joanna Scott, Mary Caponegro, Elena Castedo, Michael Brodsky, Charlie Smith, Jonathan Carroll, Andrea Dworkin, Janice Eidus, Hortense Callisher, Evan S. Connell, James Purdy, David Bosworth, Gilbert Sorrentino, Richard Dillard, Felipe Alfau, Anita Desai, and John Vernon. There are many others, including the Ithaca novelists (whom in a feat of leprous abstention Shechner deigns not to heed).

Dogs may bark, but the caravan passes on, and behind us we hear the stale sound of solecistic yapping.

Paul West
Ithaca

...and Reality

Wow! It is hard to tell if Paul West is rebutting an argument or doing a war dance. Even in literary culture in which disagreement normally takes the forms of righteous indignation or personal vilification, Paul West's rhetoric is so hyperbolic, his invective so overwrought, and his performance so agitated and unfocused, that it might be mistaken for an exorcism. There is an argument buried in all that frenzy, but whether it goes very far beyond "Why do you think ill of me and my friends?" I can't say. I do not think ill of Paul West and

his friends, many of whom I have not read.

I am interested, however, in drawing a map of the literary terrain in America, which looks very different from the map as we might have seen it, say, fifteen years ago. Much like the world map, literature finds itself with new borders, new provinces, new nationalities and nationalisms. And for better or for worse—I hold it to be for the better—one of the striking new features is the large-scale emergences of social fiction, of regional and historical fictions, of fiction with a documentary bias composed by writers with distinctive histories and social positions in America, and of fiction devoted to the minute details of this time and of that place. So widespread is the phenomenon that it seems like a movement, and the vast majority of those books employ the idioms—Paul West would call them "illusions"—of realism. I'm no more a fan of these generic banners than Paul West is, but we're stuck with them, and when used modestly and skeptically, ascriptions like "realism," "regionalism," "nativism," "metafiction," "postmodernism," and "minimalism" (credit West with that one, not me), can point us toward some of the crude features of the land.

One is likely to suffer abuse for pointing out and applauding the revival of social fiction in America, or speaking of the popular as though it might also be the good, since there are vested interests in denying it. One risks being called many things, with "out-of-date" usually topping the list. But how out-of-date can you be when describing the events of the last decade? All one can do is come up with a reading list and send readers off to The Bookery to find out for themselves. In disputes such as the one between Paul West and myself, the reader, who comes away armed with two lists, is bound to be the winner.

It is impossible to respond to West's entire fulmination, nor is there any need to once we isolate the main threads. It boils down to the great mantra that we've been hammered with ad nauseum for years: "The truth is of course that fiction is made of words and corresponds to nothing." Oh? Sez who? Our time has seen these bumper stickers come and go in the arts: "Art is made of paint," "Music consists of sound." They sound plausible enough until their uses become evident. In this case, besides fostering a fiction that makes a fetish of its own fictionality, doctrines of West's sort manage to consign about 90% of America's working novelists to the scrap heap of linguistic inadequacy. And even as they rule out fiction writers, these mantras attract small but formidable colonies of the faithful in academies across the land, geared up to strongarm the rest of us into the church of "corresponds to nothing." Why novelists and critics should suddenly come on like mafiosi, making us offers we have to refuse, is anybody's guess, though some combination of insecurity and vested interest will normally explain it.

But what happens if we play variations of West's epigram? Suppose we were to counter

with "Fiction is made of stories?" or "Fiction is made of history?" or "Fiction is made of visions?" Experiences, dreams? How about "Fiction is abstracted from experience?" "Fiction gives pattern and meaning to existence?" I could make a case for a half-dozen options as plausible versions of the "fiction is made of" gambit, and so could Paul West. And so have scores of writers. Having been told, on the highest authority, that all they have are words and that their fiction corresponds to nothing, recalcitrant and unrepentant writers refuse to leave the world alone and cling to the naïve illusion that there is a world to be addressed and that they can, in their fumbling way, address it. They consistently defy the authority of the latest thought-saving ideas and tussle with their versions of reality as best they can.

West's diatribe is a game, of course, one of the oldest in the academy: take whatever is complicated, strip it down to 3 x 5 card size, and tape it to your office door: CORRESPONDS TO NOTHING. It is literary study's version of JUST SAY NO or A NEW WORLD ORDER or FAMILY VALUES: conquest by slogan. It gives the acolyte leverage in any polemical situation and prevents him/her from having to take seriously whatever is shaking its mane out there beyond the Pale. It divides the pure from the impure, the inspired from the merely documentary, the kosher from the trayf, and tells us what it is safe to consume at any meal.

West reminds me a bit of Clov in Samuel Beckett's play "Endgame," who peers outside the cheerless cell in which he and Hamm are confined and declares, "Nothing stirs. All is zero." That some novelists have taken such a proposition to heart and explored its ramifications is not always damaging to their art. Some wonderful writing has been done under that rubric: we have Beckett, we have Borges, we have some of Nabokov as cases in point. But that it should be the only legitimate ground from which literature may spring is a different proposition, both authoritarian and brutally reductive. It is one thing to remind us that a language-centered writing has produced some masterful tests but quite another to declaim with West and Clov that "nothing stirs" outside that practice and that "all is zero."

One hopes for Paul West's sake that neither his lawyer nor his accountant nor his agent are converts to his gospel, and woe to the therapist who ever declares it to a patient. (The therapist hearing from the patient might be forgiven for thinking he/she has uncovered a symptom.) Those who invoke such principles are usually referring to someone else's words, never their own, certainly not the ones they've just uttered. I presume that Paul West does not concede that the words in his letter "correspond to nothing," however tempted the rest of us might be to think so. If he can be gotten to admit that the words in his letter correspond to something, then maybe he could be moved

to think again about his stance toward literature. Or maybe there is no need. Some years back, in the course of an interview with *Contemporary Authors*, West declared, "The world is really a very exciting and enigmatic place, lush and rich, and we should try to pay homage to it and represent it." Hear! Hear! Now why won't he say it in his letter?

Mark Schechner
Buffalo

Abrams Perplexed

To the Editor:

I am puzzled by Jonathan Culler's "Response" (Summer, 1993) to the condensed version, in the previous issue of *Bookpress*, of my lecture "What Is a Humanistic Criticism?" I am puzzled because I find myself in agreement with a number of Culler's assertions about literature and criticism taken singly, but don't see their bearing on the two basic claims that these assertions are intended to demonstrate. The issues are not simple ones, and I hope can be worked out in private or public dialogue between Mr. Culler and myself. But in summary: I don't recognize what I defined as a humanistic criticism in the critical position that he opposes. And I recognize very little that is distinctive of deconstruction in the critical position that he proposes, and exemplifies by his analysis of Robert Frost's poem, "The Secret Sits."

1) I don't know what I said that led Mr. Culler to conclude that, in my view, a humanistic literary criticism is "concerned *only* with the story" (my italics) and regards as "inhuman" such aspects of literature as "meter and rhyme," "formal structures," and "the workings of language and its patterning." If this were my view, I would be rejecting a major concern of the very writers I identified as humanistic critics, from Aristotle to Northrop Frye; it would certainly disqualify a great part of what I have myself written, over a lifetime of engagement with literary issues.

As Ted Underwood noted in his admirably clear-sighted comments (also in the summer issue of *The Bookpress*), I proposed a "minimal" identification of the humanistic paradigm for language—that it "posits language as a communicative interaction between human beings" in an environing world; I then went on to identify a humanist criticism as one which, basing itself on this frame of reference, considers literature to be a linguistic product that is composed by and for human beings, and about human beings and matters of human concern. In their representations of this subject matter, literary authors deploy the full resources of language, material and formal, syntactic and rhetorical, conventional and counter-conventional, and the general nature of these resources, and their deployments in a particular work, are the proper and prominent

see *Letters*, page 18

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Memory's Journeyman

STORIES FROM MY LIFE
WITH THE OTHER ANIMALS

James McConkey
David R. Godine Publishers
160 pages, \$19.95

Jeff Schwaner

Ten years ago I bought the first paperback edition of Jim McConkey's *Court of Memory*. I was a Cornell freshman in the Agriculture College considering a transfer to the Arts and Sciences school and an English major, and I'd recently discovered the wonders of Cornellcard, the campus charge card, and much to my father's chagrin began accumulating what would become a personal library well-respected throughout the fine arts dormitory I lived in. I remember reading McConkey's introduction and the pleasantly meditative effect it had on me; but I never ventured past that page, packing the book and moving it with me from Ithaca to Boston, Boston to Portland, Maine, from Maine to Mecklenburg, a hamlet on a hill equidistant from Cayuga and Seneca lakes (and a mile or so from where the author lives), and then again back to Ithaca. At each stop I disposed of at least half my books, in attempts to lighten my load; in Boston, having run out of graduate school money I lived for two months off the cream of my remaining books. My Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Hume, my Milton and Mill and Virgil all took the long walk across Brighton Avenue to the used book seller there, allowing me barely enough to savor a donut and coffee while I read the classified ads.

With the release of *Stories from My Life with the Other Animals*, which concludes a trilogy begun with *Crossroads* (1968) and *Stranger at the Crossroads* (published together in 1983 as *Court of Memory*) I had a new chance to encounter the work of a teacher I'd always admired but always thought too mild, too nice to compare with the Nietzsches and Cummingses and Pynchons. I read *Stories* with no small wonder, then, and with equal awe discovered that my original copy of *Court of Memory*, its pages yellowed and spine dried and cracked wide open at the very page I'd abandoned it, had somehow weathered the numerous purges and raids that laid my library low. In the middle of the night in a dark Mecklenburg winter, and under the auspices of a shimmering aurora borealis, I let the book fall open where it had been waiting for me, and continued that first reading.

Stories also picks up where its author last left us, ten years ago, with McConkey's distinctly honest and unaffected manner and method very much intact. The essays use an event or state of mind in the writer's present moment as a sounding board into the past, probing connections as they're almost-casualy made, ever questioning the creation of meaning that follows. For many readers the book will also provide a thoughtful and surprising portrait of the generation of men and women who grew up into, and fought, and survived, the Second World War. It's astonishing to think that many of the elder statesmen of our colleges and universities were once fighting in the infantry, or aboard warships, or driving a stolen jeep through evacuated towns and blown-out countrysides in France and Germany, even if some of them, like McConkey, enraged their superiors by refusing to grunt as they stuck straw dummies

with the bayonets on their M-1's.

The two largest pieces in *Stories*, "A Family Record" and the title piece, both deal with characters and settings familiar to readers of earlier volumes. In "A Family Record" the author discovers, after his mother's death, a family album kept by her and annotated occasionally by his father. The blank pages and missing dates throughout the album's severely conventional format are as strongly evocative of his childhood as his mother's notes, and the essay explores how loyalty, betrayal, and the responsibilities of extended family are much more than "issues" for political debate. We feel them resonate through the Depression, the World War, the birth of three sons and their parents' guardianship of the author's aging mother, who lived to "munch on a piece of birthday cake" one hundred years after her birth.

"Stories from My Life with the Other Animals" includes the English-turned-Italian landlady in Florence who burns her tenants' garbage daily to avoid paying certain local taxes and who accepts no responsibility for a non-paying feline tenant named Monster who shares the McConkeys' cottage and refuses to eat anything but plates of spaghetti; it's a moving survey of our emotional investment in animals, domestic and wild, and recounts several late night trips to the Cornell animal clinic to save a newly-born goat and a black lab named Gandolf, whose ears remind the author of his first dog Bruin. That memory launches us into a spirited assault on the overuse of the term *anthropomorphism* in simplifying or debasing our complex relation, and relationships, to and with the "other animals." Like Augustine's *Confessions*, the book intends to be meditative and built on an avowedly imperfect sensibility; but the memory trilogy's epigraph, "All this I do inside me, in the huge court of my memory . . ." also serves as an apology and a necessary advance on the terms Augustine accepted. McConkey's book, he knows, will have no sins any more outrageous than Augustine's petty theft of pears. Yet this new confession is informed by an expectation that, unlike Augustine's, there is no ultimate court beyond that of memory; memory is the place of final judgment on all we do and think, and in fact is the only grounds on which judgment may occur. It is, McConkey writes, "the faculty that carries us as close to our origin in nature as we can get...binding as best it can all that our consciousness must isolate."

While the blurbs on the book's back cover by May Sarton, Eudora Welty, and Annie Dillard are all effusive in their praise, they could be tagged on the back of any good autobiographical work; what is distinctive in McConkey's prose is harder to describe. But one is quickly struck by the singularity of pacing. Although it reads quite easily, it also reads slowly, as if slowing you down without touching you like a friend walking beside you can alter your natural stride, creating more time within a finite trip for proper reflection. There's a feeling one gets reading the book that I would like to call "companionship," but for the fact, felt equally, that each piece leaves you with an open space in which your own thoughts and memories might wander, much as a walk outside in the late night or early morning will present to you in the sky a constructive emptiness, a place for solitude to expand until it's no longer solitary.

In *Good Measure*, Robert Morgan and

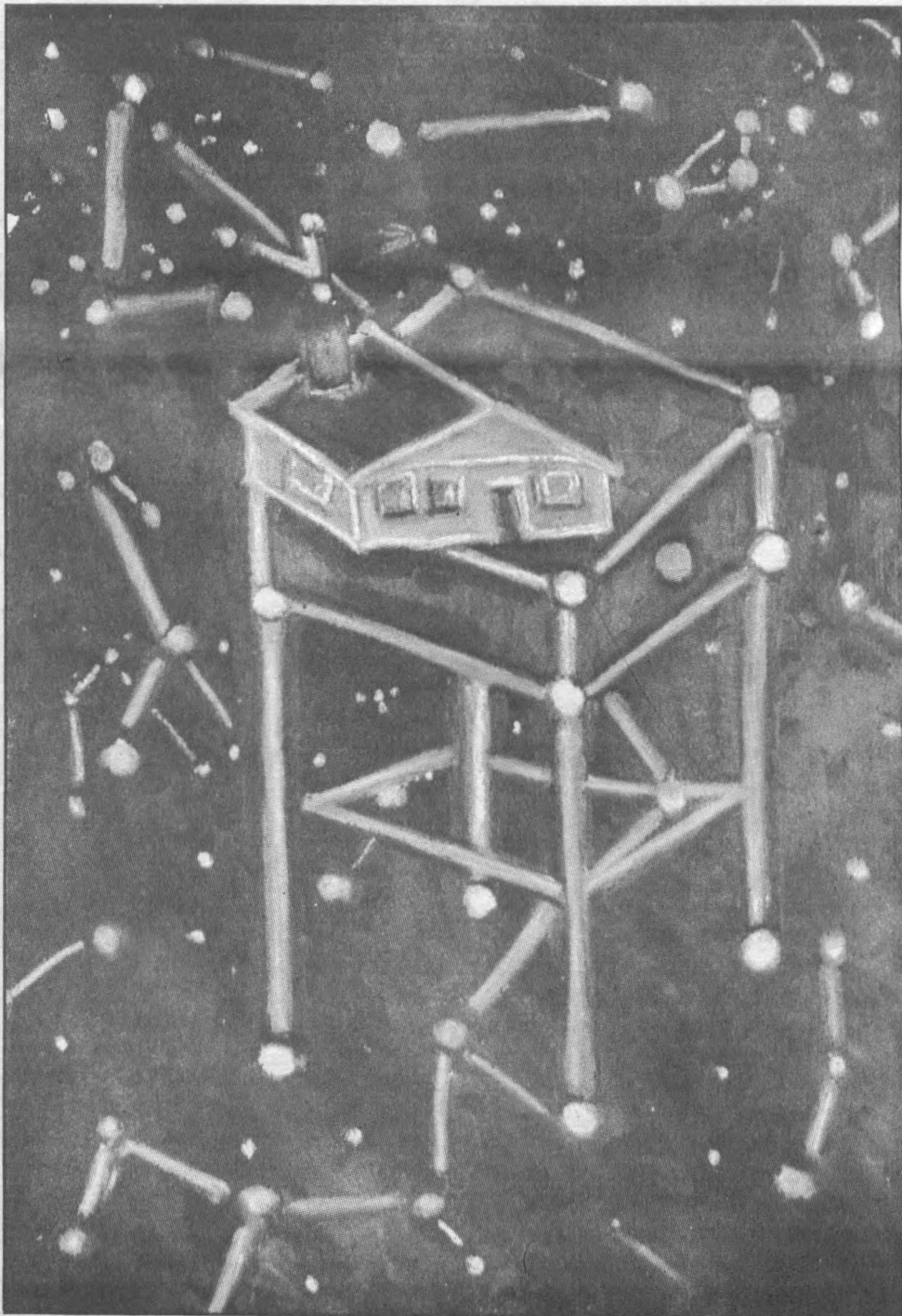
William Harmon discuss the difficulty of using language as an aesthetic medium when it is also the language of daily commerce. They bring the subject up in relation to regional writers who no longer live in the regions from which they draw their inspiration. McConkey, who writes in *Court of Memory* that at one point he "had no desire to belong anywhere," has managed to create a language appropriate to memory itself, one that is more than mimetic of memory's judgment, that to the reader seems to be the memory as it surfaces and resurfaces among the essays, taking on additional meaning and form.

Barns and buildings play important roles in his work, and with an examination of these structures I'd like to end this essay. A locked barn in Little Rock housed the old trolleys that Jim used to stand before in the dark, imagining himself the conductor hustling people off to important places. McConkey writes of his own house, 130 years old already when he and his wife purchased it, as "a dream of order and balance and proportion set down...to represent...a spiritual attitude that justified his striving." Throughout his life, since the first pen he built for his dog Houlihan, McConkey has been building: for his horses Smoky and Tammy and for his son's goats, barns to replace the land's original structures; for his wife and family and himself, everything from cabinets and hide-

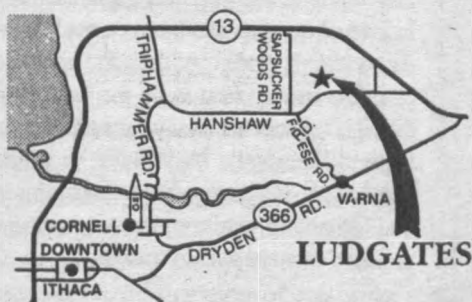
away tubs for a trailer that was their first home, to a swimming hole, an observation shack beside it, a treehouse, yet another barn to replace the one burned down; and for his mother, a self-described wretched little nightstand that, tottering on its uneven legs and in his memory, launched him into this masterful project.

McConkey warns us "one must be cautious about making pronouncements occasioned by cathedrals." So the reader may be warned; but in thinking about his work my mind constantly returns to the restored cathedral he visited at Reims, shelled in both the Franco-Prussian War and World War I. Unaware of the extent of the beating history had given the structure of its icons, McConkey writes that "in looking from statue, from stone to stone, in perceiving separately each of the many acts of restoration, I had the sense of a fragile violence. It took such violence to gain the sweet tranquility of Reims." He may as well be writing about the violence, spiritual and physical, in each of our lives, and the cathedral one writer built and restored to house the huge court that would try and re-try the last seven decades, humble but as inspired as Gaudi's, the autobiographical carpentry for this country's century and all its hard-hit, shell-shocked regions of memory.

Jeff Schwaner is a writer who lives in Ithaca.



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Off Campus

At The Bookery

The Bookery's Fall lecture series continues...

Sundays at 4 p.m. in the lecture space in Bookery II

October 3



Howard Gordon

assistant provost for academic affairs and social equity at SUNY Oswego, will give a talk entitled "Writing About Race and Romance." Gordon will also read from his new collection of short fiction, *The African in Me*, which depicts African-American life and its conflicts, from racism to romance, from the late 1950s through the beginning of the 1990s.

October 17

Timothy Murray

will discuss his newly released book *Like a Film: Ideological Fantasy on Screen, Camera, and Canvas*. The book investigates how "the cinematic" invades our culture and identity. Murray teaches film, performance, visual theory, and Renaissance studies at Cornell University.



October 24

Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny

will read from their recently published novel *THE RESTORATIONIST: Text One, a collaborative fiction by Jael B. Juba*. Their book has been described as "an intensely funny encounter between a property owner and a woman of letters who together turn an antebellum house into a post-realist experiment."

November 7

Elaine Leeder

associate professor and chair of the sociology and social work department at Ithaca College, will talk about and read excerpts from her new book entitled *The Gentle General: Rose Pesotta, Anarchist and Labor Organizer*. This is the first major biography of Rose Pesotta, the organizer and vice president of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) from 1933 to 1944.

No Safe Harbors

BUFFALO SOLDIERS

Robert O'Connor

Knopf, 324 pages, \$22

Nick Gillespie

Buffalo Soldiers, Robert O'Connor's debut novel, is both a promissory note on future accomplishment and a benchmark for comparison with those novels yet to come. Set in the waning years of the Cold War at a U.S. army base in West Germany, *Buffalo Soldiers* speaks directly to an America struggling to redefine its identity and reorient its moral compass. It is a harsh, bleak book, pounding as insistently as a hangover after a night on the town.

Buffalo Soldiers follows the exploits of Ray Elwood, battalion clerk for the "fighting 57th," a smack-snorting camp drug czar in relentless pursuit of "moments of perfect clarity."

You wait for the Glide to kick in, and with it the possibility of an MPC, which is the moment that you live for...when you go from wading in pain to the muddy bank of not caring. When you have an MPC, the world becomes sure; you move in the groove, and for as long as you are in it, the nature of the universe becomes abundantly clear.

MPCs aren't easy to come by, even in a world of readily available drugs. The military base, far from being a place of regimented certainty and button-down discipline, is the site of a free-for-all, between the "Motherfuckers" and the "Motherfucked." Racial tensions are beyond the snapping point, and the chain of command is broken at every link—the ranks made up of amoral rugged individualists who, in the face of an ever-diminished enemy, have no one to fight but themselves.

War, you have been told, isn't so hot, but at least then you have such common interests as staying alive. Here, all the friendlies are enemies, and all the enemies are friendly. The main thing is to keep control of the situation. You keep control of the situation by staying slightly out of control.

In a world characterized by such whirlpool logic, it's no easy matter to stay afloat. O'Connor daringly writes in the second person—usually the most turgid of narrative points of view—and manages to pull it off brilliantly. Elwood isn't so much addressing the reader as rubber-hosing himself, interrogating the why and wherefore of his every action.

So how, we might ask, did you get into this man's Army? The answer, of course, is ludicrously simple. You volunteered. Not just for Germany but for the whole Army experience. You came in with the True Believers, the Boy Scouts, the tenor section of "God Bless America." You were one of those. There is a reason for this. You have discovered that the Army is like a promiscuous woman. This is a comparison that is both apt and instructive. Like a promiscuous woman, she will fuck any man. But what she truly wants is to be loved, with purity and finality. She does not love draftees, because they give of themselves unwillingly. She loves only her volunteers; and to those who enlist, she will open up the world.

As Elwood negotiates his own personal treaties and moral armistices, the reader encounters a rich cast of characters: Base commander Lt. Colonel Berman, obsessed with career advancement and forever writing a military analysis of how the French could have won at Dien Bien Phu; Berman's wife, the "Mrs. Colonel," her husband's "behind-the-scenes strategist"; Stoney, the "motherfucker" who provides muscle for the drug enterprise and who, as a black non-com, hates whites except for Elwood; Eddio and Sasquatch, "your two favorite dumbbells in the Army"; Pfc. Knoll, a straight-laced bunkmate who "practically wears a sign around his neck: LOSER"; Sgt. Lee, a Vietnam vet and Elwood's brass-balled antagonist, bent on destroying the drug operation. Even

given the well-flogged military setting, O'Connor manages to create a uniformly compelling (and terrifying) crew.

Big trouble for Elwood begins when he starts to date Robyn Lee, the Sergeant's daughter. Missing part of an arm, indirectly due to her father's ineptitude, Robyn has a big grievance, and for her and Elwood, at least in the beginning, their romance is a way of abusing and enraging the sergeant. But the relationship becomes serious, and Elwood gropes for a way to explain his feelings: "The conversion process from morphine base to scag allows you to come out ahead, and so, you realize, does the conversion process of love." Ultimately, things get far beyond him and, as he loses control, he wanders across the "thin dividing line between Motherfucker and Motherfucked."

The dramatic action of the novel sweeps the reader along; O'Connor juggles numerous plots and sub-plots without dropping a single one. What really distinguishes *Buffalo Soldiers*, however, is its heavy dialogue with post-Vietnam-era America, a place notably devoid of MPCs. Issues of national and personal responsibility combine and recombine into a mutant form of a dispossessed American Dream. As Elwood recounts his road adventures while avoiding the draft in the early seventies, the reader encounters a country busted down to buck private:

You discovered that America was full of people who wanted to tell you the story of the misery of their lives. Their anger at parents and divorces and unfair prison sentences filled the miles...By the time you got to the [West Coast], there was no peace, or love, or harmony. You had missed that boat. Things were going haywire. There were bikers and hoodlums and scam artists all working their games. People were hunting each other and preparing for the end...The war was coming home, from across the ocean, a gathering storm...And the one thing you learned was there were no safe harbors.

This apocalyptic vision of the late sixties and early seventies, neither comforting nor smug, provides a looming, disturbing background for the novel. The Vietnam War proper similarly informs the whole of the novel, from Colonel Berman's obsession with creating a winning strategy for the French at Dien Bien Phu ("If the fucking French had been able to hold the line, we would've stayed out of Vietnam") to Sgt. Lee's justification of his participation ("The secret of Vietnam's simple. I loved it. Everyone else would too if we'd won."). Elwood, too, has a part in it, regardless of his status at the time. "You thought you had left the war behind," he muses at one point, "that it was going on someplace else, with other people fighting in your place. But in fact, you had left nothing." His fatal flaw is his willful complicity in a system in which heroes are "an anachronism." Elwood has retreated from a world of meaningful possibilities, becoming instead a psychologically armored robot who relies on hitting first. The problem with joining the "Motherfucker" bandwagon, Elwood understands all too well, is that it creates its own terminus, "Motherfucked-dom."

Over the course of the novel, Elwood becomes one of the "Buffalo Soldiers," a term originally referring to black soldiers fighting Indians in the post-Civil War West, but translated here as a metaphor for the "hapless chasing the hopeless — the oldest Army story." He struggles to regain his humanity, but his battlefield conversion fails ultimately to bring salvation in a world devoid of the miracle of unearned grace. *Buffalo Soldiers* is perhaps most poignant in its insistence that the moral life of an individual (or of a nation) is measured by everyday decisions made over time and not by some climactic heroic effort to do the right thing. In this, it is reminiscent of another great first novel, Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, in which the baseball-playing protagonist squanders his talent and ultimately, while trying to recapture his promise, only manages to strike out.

Nick Gillespie is a writer living in Buffalo.

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Bodies of Belief

SOME BODIES: THE EUCHARIST
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Jonathan Bishop
Mercer University Press
240 pages, \$35

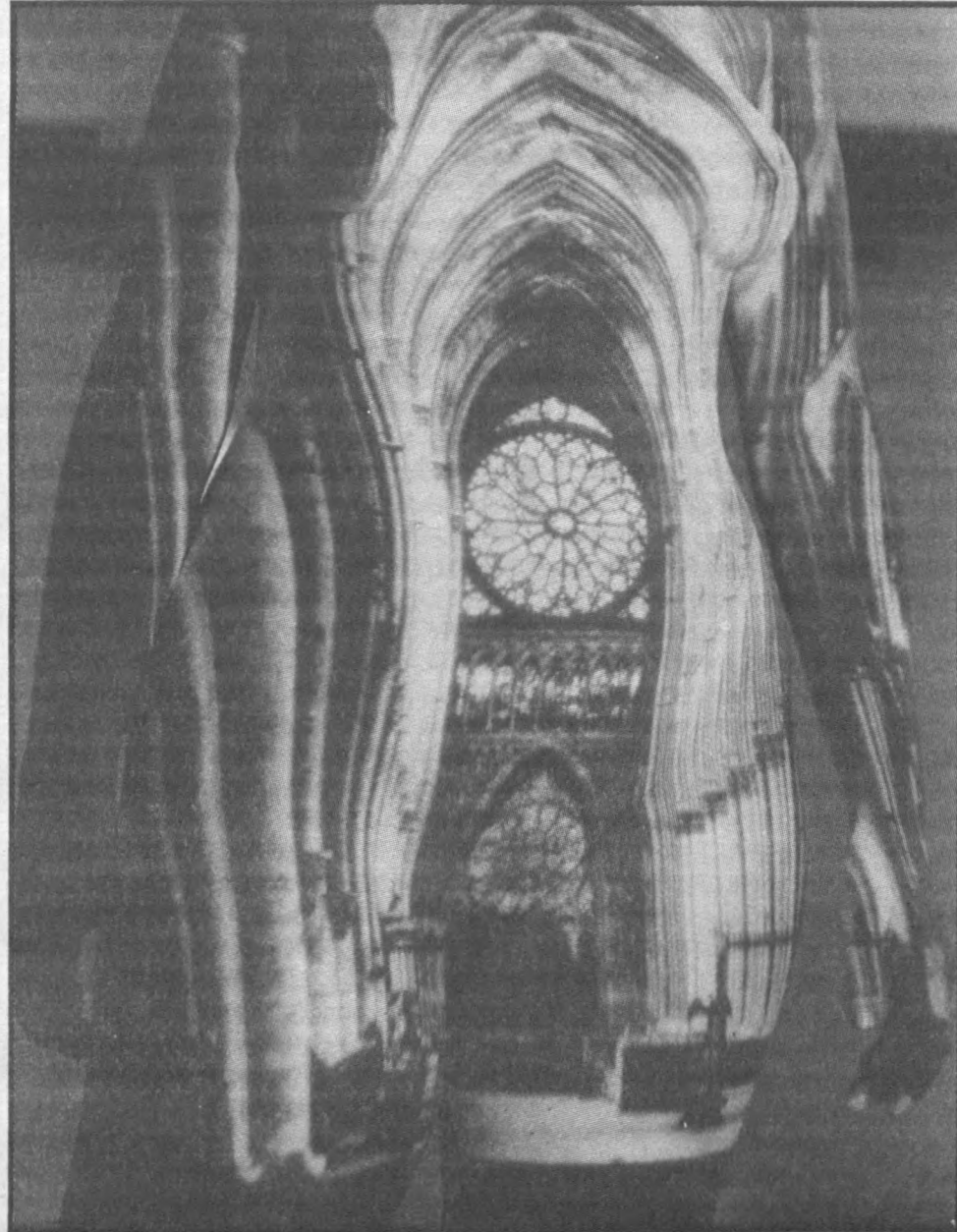
Steven Chapman

God help us all: a book on religion! When I was first approached about reviewing Jonathan Bishop's book, my initial reaction was: who cares about this sort of stuff anymore? The book at least did not fit easily into any of the established categories of academic publishing, and in its unabashed concern for religious issues seemed to fly in the face of current scholarly etiquette. This situation, and the need (whether real or imagined) to preface my own comments with a kind of preliminary apologetics, is itself a matter of some consequence.

Modern academic culture goes beyond mere indifference to religious issues and borders on a kind of fanatical intolerance, becoming a fundamentalism in its own right. When it is deemed unconstitutional even to mention the Gospel in our public schools, and when discussion of religious issues is quickly branded as "ideology" in our best universities, what is going on? Theophobia has become a new mania. Meanwhile, the militant apostles of political correctness have erected a new kind of orthodoxy. Its practitioners "confront" religion by engaging in a kind of search-and-destroy methodology, hiding behind a facade of intellectual legitimacy which they by no means possess. Indeed, the violent reaction that religion elicits from many quarters betrays a deep-seated paranoia and is perhaps unwittingly indicative of a broader "crisis of legitimation" affecting current academic discourse, especially within those subjects which used to be called the "humanities."

Surveying the current academic terrain is much like flying over one of our larger cities: one sees only innumerable subdivisions with no visible center. Each subdivision is enclosed within its well-defined limits and operates according to its own by-laws. Aside from sewage links, there is very little communication between them. Just as the city has broken down and has been replaced by urban sprawl and urban decay, so the traditional liberal arts curriculum has collapsed, and has given way to endless fragmentation, tribalism, and a proliferation of new disciplines at the margins. In both cases, the core is allowed to rot while development is transferred to the periphery. The current debate between old-style humanists and neostructuralists—some of which has spilled over onto these pages—is merely symptomatic of a larger crisis affecting the very definition of culture in a "post-modern" age. The problem is not, as has sometimes been suggested, the resurgence of the counter-Enlightenment, but the failure of the Enlightenment itself, or rather the failure of Western rationalism, in its modern secularized form, to come to terms with the Western world's own cultural and religious heritage.

Part and parcel of this movement from the center to the periphery is that religion, which used to be the mistress of all learning, has fallen on such hard times. What is lacking above all in our current academic climate is a forum or a "marketplace" in which reasonably intelligent women and men can come together to exchange views on religious topics. There can be no question of restoring a system of "universal values" or anything of the like—such a system has never



photograph: Andrew Pogson

existed, as Nietzsche's disciples continue to remind us. But one could at least hope for some basis for discussion, a common set of "problematica" involving the serious questions all individuals ask and which religions seek in different ways to address, as well as questions concerning the relationship between religion and other academic pursuits. What is needed, in short, is a greater tolerance and a willingness to discuss ideas in an open and honest manner—and possibly with a bit more humility as well. When things in the academy sort themselves out, and reasonable people wake up to what is going on, perhaps it will again be possible to discuss religion on an even footing.

It is as a response to this situation, and very much against the grain of current academic practice, that Mr. Bishop has written *Some Bodies*. Embracing such diverse fields as theology, anthropology, psychology, and literary criticism, Mr. Bishop focuses on the body as the basis for a productive dialogue among these various disciplines. For him, the privileged body is Christ's body, or the Eucharist. Working under the assumption that theological discussion of the Eucharist can benefit from a wide range of theorizing about the body in other disciplines, but also that the current debate about the body may stand to gain from the addition of a theological perspective, Mr. Bishop stands at the crossroads of these various disciplines, freely borrowing from each as he sees fit. What results is a highly original reflection on both the Eucharist and bodiliness in general.

The first chapter opens with a discussion of the Eucharist, the Christian ritual whereby—depending on one's theological perspective—the elements of bread and wine either symbolically represent or actually become Christ's body and blood. The institution of the Eucharist is first recorded in Paul's first letter to the

Corinthians and may well be the earliest text of the New Testament—assuming that Paul received it from the tradition of the early Church and not, as either he or later redactors claimed, "from the Lord." If, pointing to some pieces of broken bread, Jesus really did say: "this is my body," the question remains: what did he mean? And what does it mean for Christians today who repeat these words in one fashion or another?

Mr. Bishop locates two competing traditions of interpretation. The first, which may be termed the "sacrificial" perspective, understands the Eucharist as primarily the reenactment of a sacrifice made for the atonement of sins. This view, present in both the Gospels and in Paul, receives its fullest articulation in the Letter to the Hebrews, where Christ is presented as both victim and high priest of a sacrifice to top all sacrifices. It became the standard interpretation among both the Church Fathers and modern theologians, and is still the Church's preferred way of understanding its liturgical role.

The competing interpretation—one that Mr. Bishop favors—is to understand the celebration of the Eucharist from a "sacramental" or an "eschatological" perspective. According to this view, the celebration of the Lord's supper is the perpetuation of the "body of Christ" within an eschatological community which identifies itself not only "in name" but "in body" with the founder. As Mr. Bishop historically reconstructs it: Jesus, knowing he was about to die, invented a mechanism which would ensure the survivability of the community he founded after his death. Through partaking of the Eucharistic meal, his bodily identity would be passed on through time to successive generations of followers. The ecclesiological implications of such an interpretation are indeed radical: the

Church becomes not a hierarchy invested in repeating an original sacrifice made long ago, but nothing more—and nothing less—than the aggregate of the bodies coming together in the celebration of the Eucharist. The real church would thus already be the eschatological Church, proleptically realized in the breaking of the bread.

The remaining chapters approach the Eucharist from a variety of different angles. The third chapter, for instance, explores the erotic implications of the Eucharist and, conversely, the eucharistic implication of the erotic. Mr. Bishop asks the daring question: can sex be a sacrament? One thing is certain: sexual union provides one of those "root metaphors" within the Hebrew Bible for describing the covenant of Israel with Yahweh, a tradition which is eschatologically reinterpreted in the New Testament. Rather than casting off the erotic elements as the expendable dross of the literal in favor of some higher "allegorical" meaning, Mr. Bishop cherishes them—while dropping hints along the way of a radically different Christian interpretation of sexuality than the normative (Pauline-Augustinian) one. If Christ is first of all an incarnate God, Word made flesh, then flesh itself, and even the transmission of flesh at the sexual level, must partake in His divinity. At its most extreme, such a view would allow every sexual act to serve as a sacrament for the coming of the Kingdom; this is what Mr. Bishop calls an "erotic apocalypse." "Eros," in this version, is not the enemy of "Agape," but one of its figures. Indeed, should not making love be an appropriate liturgy to celebrate the coming of the God whose name is Love?

The fourth chapter, on metaphor, serves as a useful contribution to current academic discussion on the function of metaphor within both religious and literary discourse. For Mr. Bishop, the key to metaphor is bodiliness, the sensorial concatenation of concrete images. At the same time, metaphors point beyond themselves, to a realm of truth which poetry can intimate but never fully express. Art, while not replacing religion, anticipates or recollects the work of the Spirit. Jesus too was an artist profligate in his use of metaphors; the parables are metaphors par excellence. The Gospels tell us that the proclamation of his message was possible only through metaphors, though for Jesus, of course, the metaphorical is the literal. Parables anticipate the completion of metaphor, giving assurance, for instance, that the coming of the Kingdom is more than just a figure. Would not the Eucharist, according to this interpretation, serve as a kind of "supreme fiction" embodying in a very concrete form all of our imaginative possibilities? The Eucharist would then be metaphor made literal, just as Christ himself is the Word made flesh.

Insights like this—and the book is full of them—make *Some Bodies* good reading. What is problematic, however, is the book's central thesis: namely, that the Eucharist should be understood primarily in an "eschatological" sense, and further, that this sense is identical to the "sacramental" sense (though this may only be a problem of semantics). A strictly "eschatological" reading of the Gospels, which would understand Jesus' proclamation in light of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, would seem at first instance opposed to a "sacramental" reading of the Eucharist. For if the end is indeed near at hand, why would Jesus bother about the future? Jesus' identification with the apocalyptic

see *Some Bodies*, page 7

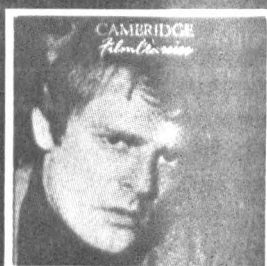
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The Translator's Ear

Gail Holst-Warhaft

Ten years ago, three of us interested in translating poetry attended a reading at Cornell University where poems about war written by contemporary Israeli and Palestinian poets were read in the original Hebrew and Arabic, and then in English translation by Chana Kronfeld, and Peter Molan, both teaching, then, in the Department of Near Eastern Studies. Nothing had to be said about the futility of war, the similarity of suffering, the reaction of sensitive souls to the horrors of the battlefield. The poems said it all and the audience of Jews and Arabs was visibly moved. Inspired by the evening, my friends and I decided to meet with Chana and Peter to discuss the problems of translation. We found we had more in common than the fact that we were translators. We were all attracted to poets who were dissenting voices in society, we were all interested in the relationship between poetry and music, and we enjoyed the sounds of languages we didn't understand. We decided to meet regularly to read and work on our translations, and to give our group a name. What should we call ourselves? Translators of International Poetry? I happened to be reading *Hope Against Hope*, Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir of the persecution of her husband, Osip, by Stalin's secret police, and we settled on OSIP, as a tribute to the great Russian poet and an acronym for the Organization for the Singing of International Poetry. We didn't exactly sing our translations, but the musical analogy is relevant.

What happens when a group of translators gets together to discuss their work? Without stretching the analogy too far, it reminds me of an orchestral rehearsal. I was disappointed, when I first began playing chamber music, by the conversations of my fellow musicians. Instead of talking about the music itself, the woodwind players talked about their reeds, the brass players about their lips, the string players about the next player's intonation. It was only occasionally, when the playing went well or when we began working on a new piece, that a sudden remark or simply a change in the feeling of ensemble between us would make me aware of the intense, even passionate relationship most players had to the music they played. When translators meet to "work" on their translations together, their concerns may seem to the outsider similarly mundane. Much of the work involves finding a felicitous English equivalent for phrases that sound awkward in literal translation, a word, an extra foot to fill a line. In both cases the practitioners are not attempting to create an original work of art. They are taking a poem or a piece of music with an already established reputation and re-presenting it in some way that is both faithful, in some sense, to the original and yet removed from it. In either case the person responsible for re-presenting the original work thinks of the task as an art, and the product as something to be judged on its own merits rather than as an explication or transmission of the original.

Walter Benjamin, in the introduction to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*, explored the relationship of a translation to its original, claiming that "translatability is an essential quality of certain works...a special significance inherent in the original manifests itself in translatability." He then made what seems a deliberately provocative contention that: "It is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation; in fact this translation is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original." Benjamin's argument about the relationship of translations to original poems is one we hope to explore further in later articles, but those of us who are engaged in the publicly unrewarded but curiously rewarding art of translating poetry understand that some poets are inherently more "translatable" than others. As a translator of modern Greek poetry, I realize that although Constantine Cavafy is probably the most difficult of modern Greek poets to translate, he is still

translatable. The constant shifts in tone made possible by Cavafy's use of formal and informal Greek are almost impossible to capture in English, and yet even a mediocre Cavafy translator can produce an English translation that is Cavafy-esque. This may be explained technically by Cavafy's avoidance of the "musical" elements of poetry, especially in his later poems, by his prose-like tone that made George Seferis wince. But it is hard to explain why W.H. Auden should say he would not have been a poet without Cavafy when not a single good translation of Cavafy was available to him. Was it something else in the content that made the Alexandrian poet attractive, even accessible? Is there some "special significance" in Cavafy's original that even a poor translation cannot help but convey?

As a translator, the question of "translatability" is rarely something one considers. What motivates the translator to choose one poem or a particular poet to translate is not the difficulty of the task, but more often a perceived special relationship between oneself as reader/ poet/ translator and the original. I may love Cavafy but Nikos Kavadias and Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke, the two Greek poets I have translated most, are mine. I have appropriated their work with the greedy pleasure of a singer who specializes in Monteverdi and defies anyone to sing his work better. The translator of poetry, who is unlikely to receive recognition, and who nevertheless spends endless hours working on a single poem, must be involved in a passionate relationship with the original. Whatever relationship the finished translation may bear to the original is less important to the translator than this personal involvement with the work in progress. For those of us who also write our own poetry, translation is a sort of apprenticeship to a poet whose art we admire, but that is not enough to explain the peculiar passion of translation. I can only return to the somewhat inadequate metaphor of musical performance. However many times you may listen to a Bach partita you only come to hear it better; if you perform it, you enter into a new and interdependent relationship with it.

The poems that are reproduced in this issue belong to the first group of OSIP translators and were translated in 1982-83. The membership of the group has changed several times and our languages now include Swedish and Serbo-Croatian. The next article in this series will be by another original OSIP member, David McCann.

Gail Holst-Warhaft is a lecturer in Classics at Cornell University.

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Poems from OSIP

A Basket of Lemons

A basket of lemons
Beneath the whetted rays of the sun—
And a boy calls out in a sad voice:
"Twenty for a penny!
For one penny twenty!"

A basket of lemons left the village at dawn.
They, even at that curs'd time, were
Green, wet with dew,
Swimming in waves of shadow.
They were, in their green slumber, the
bride of birds.

Ah!
Who frightened them?
What hungry hand picked them this morn-
ing,
Carried them in the half-light before sun-
rise

To the choked, crowded streets?
Feet not stopping, cars
Running on the burning of gas'line?
Poor boy.

No one stops to smell the lemons.
The sun dried the dew on the lemons.
The brown skinned boy runs, not keeping
up with the cars:
"Twenty for a penny!
For one penny twenty!"

A basket of lemons
Beneath the whetted rays of the sun—
My eyes fell on them,
And I remembered my village.

Translated from the Arabic of
Ahmad Abd al-Mu'ti al-Higazi
by Peter Molan

The Heat

In the heat of Greece
our chests, stuck together,
ooze water.
I drank your sweat
with your kisses
your sigh
in the shade of the shutter.
At the hour when
the angry noontide of the land rose up
you swelled too
with your crazy curls,
your divine eyelashes,
your multifaceted smile
amid the salty swelling of passion.
In such blistering heat
in such stillness
with only the shadow over us
the black certainty of fate,
the scrawls of our existence
seemed like the equations of insects.
August is inflamed
like an open wound
and the relentless cicadas
remind one again of the poet
at the end of the poem.
Breathlessness...
The fly, pedantic in everything it defiles,
sat on your penis
and eats your sap.
A megaphone passes by—
the guy with the watermelons.
Noontide falls
at my feet
like a cut-off head.

Translated from the Greek of Katerina
Anghelaki-Rooke by Gail Holst-Warhaft

Untitled

Big as pools and transparent
Were the days,
For we were children.

Often we'd sit on their banks
And laugh
Or we'd go down to swim
In the pure water.

At times we'd also cry
Into our mother's apron
For we were filled with life
Like the jugs of wine.

Translated from the Hebrew of
David Fogel by Chana Kronfeld



Osip Mandelstam, 1914

In the Old Capital

A boy of fifteen or sixteen carrying a bundle of peonies behind
on his bicycle passes the alleyway of the old, Yi Dynasty tiled-
roof houses, and he calls out in his rooster voice "Buy some
flowers." The pulsing of that sound fills air dyed the most
beautiful jade in the world. Behind him, a woman wanting
flowers opens the white paper window and calls out "Boy, you
boy! Come here!" But he doesn't hear her at all and goes on eagerly
shouting "Buy some flowers! Buy flowers!" Starting up the hill
where the dark tiled-roof houses end, riding briskly ahead of the
peonies he goes darting away, ringing his bell.

Translated from the Korean of Sô Chôngju by David McCann
(From *Selected Poems of Sô Chôngju*, Columbia University Press, 1989)

100° Fahrenheit

The air has a fever
children play
with the dust of ancestors
Women fade
at the sick glitter
fling their jewels
into the rubbish

The song of the lark
falls in a steaming bowl of air
returns as vapor

The light lies in wait
glowing shadows stand
threatening before the gates
in which people
hide themselves from the fire.

Translated from the German of
Rose Auslaender by Ingeborg Wald

Mostar

His glasses protected him
from the camera's eye
but his voice could not
withstand the siege
of microphones and it cracked

as he tried to tell them
what he had seen:
"Worse than we expected..."
and they didn't expect much
in a town held hostage
for three months.
He brought medicine
but the people in the street
were hungry and stared
out of shrunken faces
at this avatar of all
the world's nations
waiting for him
to put an end to it.

Two decades ago
on the back of a motorcycle
I rode into Mostar.
A river seethed
green as glass
under the Turkish bridge.
In the afternoon sun
boys with shaved heads
leaned against walls
of turquoise and lavender
still pock-marked by battles
I knew nothing about.

Gail Holst-Warhaft

Some Bodies

continued from page 5

"Son of Man" and the multiple pronouncements about the immanent coming of the end (cf. Mark 13) would seem to confirm his belief in a quite literal cataclysm to mark the end of history. When Jesus says in Matthew 24 that "this generation" will not pass away before these things are completed, why would he have had any compelling interest to perpetuate his own community within succeeding generations? Mr. Bishop circumvents the issue by claiming that "this generation" refers to the imminent eschatological generation comprising all of the followers of Jesus no matter how temporally distant from the founder. This seems to me to be a bit forced.

Would it not be more likely that the sacramental aspects of the Eucharist, and the growing attention to the ritual itself, arose as a response to the deferral of the expected eschatological events? It could be that only after the community which Jesus founded was forced to forge its own identity in the midst of fallen time that a Eucharistic theology was developed along sacramental lines—perhaps in loose imitation of the mystery religions. Moreover, if indeed Jesus saw his primary goal as founding a Eucharistic-based community which would continue his mission after his death—as Mr. Bishop argues—would he have waited until the final harried hours of his ministry to do so, especially knowing what twits the disciples could be, and how prone to forgetfulness?

The fact is we know precious little about Jesus's original intentions. What we do have, however, are "bodies" of evidence in the New Testament and other earlier Christian writings which provide us with a fairly good picture of the early churches' varied interpretations of the Eucharist. The letters of Paul are especially valuable in this context, as are the more enigmatic proclamations of John (although John is more concerned with the "Word" and with language in general than with the body). Although Mr. Bishop has valuable insights into both writers, he does not separate the various strands as carefully as one might hope.

Equally disturbing is the somewhat unsystematic way Mr. Bishop deals with other theologians. The simple strategy adopted in the first chapter of breaking down the tradition into "sacrificial" and "eschatological" schools of interpretation oversimplifies a very complex tradition. Although he mentions a wide range of authors and has evidently done a good deal of spade-work, he is too glib when talking about such figures as Hans Kung, Leonardo Boff, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

But these are quibbles. The virtue of this book is that it raises such questions and dares to engage in speculation. *Some Bodies* is a book written by a "somebody" who is not afraid to speak in his own voice—a welcome relief from the disembodied prose that characterizes so much recent academic work (perhaps inevitable after the "death of the subject"). It is not a book for everybody, but for "somebodies" like the author himself. Lastly it is written by a "somebody" who would be more than happy, I'm sure, to discuss these ideas with just about anybody.

Steven Chapman teaches in the English department at Cornell University.

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These essays were originally published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

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The Golem

continued from page 1

collider built, or genetically altered food sold commercially. But lacking physics or microbiology, the public can nevertheless learn how scientific investigation is affected by internal politics and how it reaches social consensus on the meaning of experimental data. Knowing how contingent research is, Collins and Pinch argue, the public would be better able to resist what the powerful—purveyors of the myths—think is important for them to know as science.

A key myth that Collins and Pinch address is that researchers are innocent acolytes of Nature who simply look and report what they see (drawing their conclusions in accord with an arcane method that ordinary people don't understand and can't judge). The case, rather, is that scientists are mostly craftspeople with a particular expertise, and that reaching conclusions about facts from experimentation requires not only sound questions and good experimental design, but such things as fortuity, reputation and affiliation, rhetorical and organizational skills, and competent technical support. The resolution of the debates this book reports on chemical memory transfer, solar neutrinos, gravity waves, and the sex life of the whiptail lizard all depended to some degree, for instance, on the matter of "mere" technical skill. The debate over spontaneous generation was settled by experiments later found to have been an unwitting stroke of luck, and by Pasteur's political support on the commission that heard the evidence. Collins and Pinch's conclusion here can stand for the book as a whole:

As in so many other scientific controversies, it was neither facts nor reason, but [Pasteur's opponent's] death and weight of numbers that defeated the minority view; facts and reasons, as always, were ambiguous.

In *The Golem*, Collins and Pinch set out to recover or preserve the histories of these episodes in science from the sanitizing of "perfect hindsight." Together with pithy introductory and concluding comments, the case histories (including an absorbing retelling of the 1989 cold fusion debate, which they tellingly call "normal" science) constitute a sort of sociological variant of the science-is-not-objective argument. Though the authors may not subscribe to the epistemological version of that argument, they do show that conflicts over scientific questions—is the established theory of solar evolution correct? do female whiptail lizards engage in pseudocopulatory behavior?—are often settled by factors that most nonscientists would think extraneous. Among them: personal beliefs; the impact of unwitting assumptions about nature; the drive for grant money; historical shifts in research interests; the power of hierarchy and influence; the demands of technology; professional competition; and the use of rhetoric and

subterfuge. All of this impinges heavily on the process of deciding "factuality," and makes the practice of science a social process like that which operates in any field.

Furthermore, beyond these everyday influences is a fundamental tension at the heart of science—that of the "experimenter's regress." This is explained particularly well in the chapter on the attempt to detect gravity waves on earth, where what researchers expected to observe determined whether they thought the experiment was competent. The theory/experiment "method," especially where theory and experiment conflict, is a closed loop out of which the science community can break to arrive at a conclusion only by means of social factors—for example, which scientists agree the experiment was well or poorly done, i.e., what are their affiliations; or which (and how many, and what are their areas of expertise) are willing to admit that the theory which the experiment tested might be faulty. In the gravity wave debate, the loop was broken primarily because a major figure, physicist Richard Garwin, analyzed the experiments that claimed to have observed gravity waves and concluded they were incorrect. Garwin's prominence, his "confrontational style," and the persuasiveness of his analysis were the factors bringing less organized negative reports to a "critical mass" that ended the debate. One scientist reported:

...it's probably Garwin's publication that generally clinched the attitude. But in fact the experiment they did was trivial—it was a tiny thing.... But the thing was, the way they wrote it up....

Another said:

Garwin...talked louder than anyone and he did a very nice job of analysing his data.

The impulse to uncover the "messy" processes by which scientific results come to be accepted as truths of nature emerges from the authors' concern about society's "flip-flop thinking" about science: one day it is a white knight, and the next it is an evil wizard. Such fluctuations result from the myth of infallibility that the power of science has encouraged (taught in schools and peddled by the media—which tend to be abnormally credulous when it comes to science) and then from the inevitable crash that follows errors, misjudgments, failures, and fraud. (Fraud, incidentally, which was charged in the cold fusion case and has been a matter of concern recently in Congress, may be no more serious a problem in science than in any other activity—but our inflated expectations of scientists highlight it.)

The Golem is an important project. Scientists have largely declined their civic duty to explain to us what they do and why and how they do it, despite their dependence on billions in public funds.

Collins and Pinch's hope is that showing

science as it actually proceeds in the lab (and the journals and meetings) will help correct the destructive instability of "flip-flop" thinking, an instability that is

the inevitable consequence of a model of science and technology which is supposed to deliver complete certainty. The trouble is that both states of the flip-flop are to be feared. The overweening claims to authority of many scientists and technologists are offensive and unjustified but the likely reaction, born of failed promises, might precipitate a still worse anti-scientific movement. Scientists should promise less; they might then be better able to keep their promises.

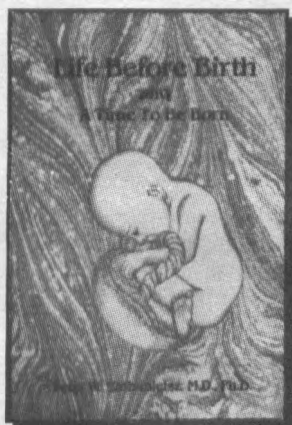
One concern here is that an "anti-scientific" movement, as illustrated by "experts" who take it upon themselves to debunk such things as homeopathy (they mention a certain magician and his stage act), can have a depressing effect on scientific inquiry as a whole by perpetuating the idea that certain kinds of inquiry are off-limits. Collins and Pinch may not hold Paul Feyerabend's anarchist views of scientific knowledge—though, says Trevor Pinch, he did open the space for work such as *The Golem*—but they demonstrate that neither big science nor small proceeds in the magisterial way either the powers in science or such self-styled police as the magician would have us believe.

"It's no coincidence," they say, "that those who feel most certain of their grip on scientific method have rarely worked on the frontiers of science themselves." In particular, few politically powerful scientists engage in frontier—i.e., controversial—science. The reason is suggested in the chapter on the whiptail lizard dispute:

Many scientists are wary of getting entangled in controversies and perceive them to be the repository of shoddy science. This can mean that denying you are a party to a controversy can itself be a tactic in such disputes.... In writing their articles in *Scientific American* both sides avoided any explicit reference to the controversy at all.

Most of what we learn in *The Golem* we certainly did not learn in school. At the end of the book the authors construct a nice summarizing situation which suggests how the problem might begin to be solved. In a class with ten youngsters all trying to measure the boiling point of water, each will get different results. The differences and how they occurred (incompetence, failure to account for atmospheric pressure, use of faulty equipment, contaminated water, and so forth) are part of the scientific process, not simply errors which hindsight has taught us to see as errors and thus insignificant to science's grand march forward. If teachers would fully recognize this in the ten-minute "negotiation" at the end, say

see *The Golem*, page 15



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AVA

Carole Maso
Dalkey Archive Press
274 pages, \$19.95

Faced with an infinite consciousness trapped within a finite lifetime, we would do well to store up a wealth of memories. Ava Klein, the heroine of Carole Maso's third novel, has done just that. Dying of a rare blood disease, she sings her last day in a series of fragmented memories from a life of love and music and passionate reading. Not a catalog, nor a list (despite the short journal-like entries that make up the novel), instead the narrative tells each moment like a rosary bead, meditatively savoring the chaos of life. Ava Klein's is a mind that refuses to stop even as it hovers on the brink of its own annihilation. In a rush to remember everything, she recomposes her memories into new constellations. She rehearses the terrible freedom of death, when she will be released from the tyranny of life's linear plot.

Maso gives her character that elliptical freedom. This novel is a welcome respite from traditional fiction that usurps the reader's breathing space. The poetry stands out as islands surrounded by white spaces. Maso invites the reader to recombine these words, to rewrite Ava's life as we please. "One thousand and one things change the meaning of any book on any given reading." In fragments she has shored against her ruins, Ava describes the shape of her life, not as a recognizable type but as a complicated and contradictory human being. Set aside expectations and take Maso on her own terms.

—Chris Furst

COLLECTED POEMS

James Schuyler
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 430 pages, \$35

Most of James Schuyler's poems are recognizable at a distance. They snake down the page in long, slender columns, no more than five or six syllables wide. Up close, they are recognizable for other reasons. His many skinny poems and his more infrequent fat, prosy poems share a distinctive conversational tone of voice, which emerges from their informal diction and their consistent engagement with an addressee. Sometimes the person addressed is in the poem, as "you," but usually the poems' style implies one. Often, the reader feels personally engaged in whatever subject Schuyler is pursuing, as though he wrote the poem imagining you sitting across from him, listening to him read it aloud. This effect stems partly from his delight in colloquialisms and personal anecdotes. Schuyler likes to tell stories about himself and his friends, and he is a marvelous storyteller. The effect also comes from the wide-ranging sympathy his poems demonstrate, for Schuyler seems interested in everything he learns, and everyone he meets. Somehow, he manages to shape this exuberance into meticulously modulated, many-faceted poems of beauty and depth.

—Heather White

ELECT MR. ROBINSON

FOR A BETTER WORLD
Donald Antrim
Viking, 185 pages, \$20

Ever since the ex-mayor was drawn and quartered (for lobbing Stinger missiles into a public garden—"many picnickers died that day"), things just haven't been the same in this unnamed progressive bedroom community on an unnamed tropical island. There's the feud between the Websters and the Bensons

(nobody's figured out yet which family buried the claymore mines in the village green); and dug into all the neighborhood lawns are trenches filled with bamboo spikes, broken glass, and water moccasins. Who better to lead the town into healing than Pete Robinson and his wife Meredith, both popular school teachers? Except that the town voted against funding school this year; except for the fact that Meredith, who's recently discovered she's really a coelacanth, is becoming something of a religious icon in town; except for the fact that Pete Robinson has the ex-mayor's body parts secreted in his freezer, awaiting a respectful burial; and except for the fact that Mr. Robinson's scholarship in the forms of medieval torture tells him that the events in the town are all quite normal and not an aberration of human mores at all.

The novel's message is as clean and microcosmic as the 1:32 scale styrofoam-and-soap torture chamber that Mr. Robinson builds in his basement: being able to speak calmly and with knowledge about history's savagery does not protect us in the least from its ravages. Also, perhaps, too much understanding permits barbarism. The novel is written in one long, briskly paced chapter. Had I the chance to pause between scenes, I might have considered an adjunct lesson: understanding a book's moral by page ten does not protect us from, nor does it justify, what Paul Harvey would call "the rest of the story."

—Jeff Schwaner

SHELLA

Andrew Vachss
Knopf, 226 pages, \$20

Andrew Vachss is a man obsessed. To date he has written six novels, all of which turn on one man's effort to end violence against children. The hero of *Shella*, Vachss' latest urban-avenger novel, continues the tradition. He has no name, no friends, and almost no personality. His own violent childhood has left him traumatized almost to the point of catatonia; he can walk, and talk, but just barely. What he can do well is kill. He survives by hiring himself out as an assassin, a job he performs with efficiency and without enthusiasm. His lack of charisma raises disturbing questions: Is he a hero? Is he on our side? What are the sides in his dangerous world, and does his world intersect with ours? Vachss raises the already high moral stakes by sending his protagonist on a mission to execute the leader of a white supremacist group. Like all of Vachss' novels, *Shella* is written in a terse, laconic style, and features a finely-tuned plot. Formerly the director of a maximum-security prison for youthful offenders, Vachss currently practices law in New York, representing only minors. Such experience lends the force of convincing detail to all of his work. *Shella* also resembles Vachss' previous work in its strange assortment of female characters, who are alternately tough-as-nails killers themselves and clingy dependents, frequently possessed by a desire to fellate the hero. But nothing about Vachss' work is simple, including its treatment of women. His books are troubling and addictive; once you enter his underworld it is difficult ever to get completely out.

—H.W.

WAKEFIELD HALL

Francesca Stanfill
Villard Books
401 pages, \$23

I have an uncomfortable suspicion that had Jane Eyre worked on Wall Street she would have done quite well for herself. She was, after all, a competent and practical young woman with a special knack for discovering and assessing the bottom line in any given situation. Perhaps it was a similar rumination that led Ms. Stanfill to write *Wakefield Hall*, a contemporary gothic romance.

The novel has many of the elements of a good gothic: a young and attractive heroine forced to earn her own keep, brooding and difficult men, an ancient mansion, secrets to unravel, even a mysterious maze. Unlike Jane Eyre, however, this story takes place in New York City (as well as England and Paris) in the greedy 1980s.

Stanfill's heroine, Elisabeth Rowan, is truly contemporary: her brooding lover is married and the father of two daughters. (Men just don't hide their wives in the attic anymore, so that motif had to go.) She's a journalist for the *Wall Street Journal*, not a governess, and while there is difficulty and confusion in her parentage, she is spared the pathos of an orphanage. This Jane Eyre wears Chanel suits, hops the Atlantic for weekends in Paris, and seems to have enjoyed extraordinarily successful assertiveness training.

The men—villainous and otherwise—have not been updated quite as well. They lack the dark power of Heathcliff, the sinister seductiveness of Mr. Rochester. Villainy too often in this new setting seems based on inadequate education or undeveloped aesthetics (Elisabeth falls out of love with a man when he fails to appreciate the rose window of Chartres cathedral) rather than true gothic maleficence.

The novel does have interesting twists and turns in its plotting, though, and a strong surprise ending that makes for a good, entertaining read.

—Jeanne Mackin

VIRTUAL LIGHT

William Gibson
Bantam, 325 pages, \$21.95

Thank goodness William Gibson has written a book about California. Now that *Virtual Light* exists, the match between Gibson's customary fascinations (with corporate crime and youth culture) and California (home of the Silicon Valley term "lifestyle") seems inevitable. Gibson is famous for being the high priest of cyberpunk, which is a literary outgrowth of science fiction in which the science is information technology rather than space exploration. This book is set nearer in the future than any of his previous works, and is more engaged in projecting the future of current social issues than in imagining future technologies. Chevette Washington, a bike messenger in downtown San Francisco, and Rydell, a private security agent in Los Angeles, are the heroes whose occupations reflect Gibson's meditations on urban space. Moving between buildings already linked in cyberspace, conveying information already available to anyone on the internet (which is everyone), Chevette is a last link to an age when information was tangible. Rydell, patrolling the neighborhoods of the wealthy and powerful, is an agent of a new age in which public space no longer exists. The imaginative richness characteristic of Gibson's work is fully present in *Virtual Light*, particularly in his depiction of the Bay Bridge as the future home to an entire subculture of its own. As usual, Gibson's work is exciting, challenging, and extremely entertaining.

—H.W.

BODY SHARERS

Elizabeth Rose
Rutgers University Press
156 pages, \$17.95

When her mother dies of a prolonged illness, adolescent Camille is shipped by her distant father to live with her uncle Scofield and his wife Marge at K-9 Kennels, their dog farm. The three of them form an unstable family unit, with Scofield desiring Cam, Marge desiring a dog trainer named Ritter, and Cam desiring an older student named Dana, but giving herself to almost everyone else she meets. From her earliest childhood years, Cam has, through a series of sexual and psychosexual encounters, experi-



enced human relationships as "body-sharing." More complex than a series of child abuses or victimizations, Cam's body-sharing raises questions about memory and perception that are more disturbing and provoking than the acts themselves.

To the extent that the narrative leaves Cam and focuses on her aunt and uncle, it loses its force and muddies our attention to Cam's story; outside of her the plot is weakly sustained, driven by a visceral kind of pacing that can neither keep up with Cam nor justify itself without her. Think a moment about why the characters are thrown together in any particular scene and you're thrown out of the book itself, sensing too easily where graceful phrasing or high-impact description is used as caulk instead of the actual building blocks of plot. Though a barghest (a dog's ghost) makes a strong showing, he unfortunately chooses the wrong character to haunt, and fades with Marge and Scofield. Ms. Rose writes as well as anyone of her generation now publishing—her sentences and her rhythms are accurate and faithful to her subject matter. Though she writes the novel from four points of view, she does not try to write in four voices, and it is from Camille, the only section written in the first person, that we may learn the most, and best be able to appreciate Ms. Rose's hidden but compelling voice.

—J.S.

TENEMENT OF CLAY

Paul West
McPherson & Company, 214 pages, \$12

It's surprising that Paul West's first novel had to wait 28 years to be published in the US, but it's gratifying to see this earlier work return to print. A dark and claustrophobic meditation on the failure of good intentions, the narrative charts a flophouse owner, Papa Nick, who dispenses "mechanical charity" to his collection of "minor monsters" while assaulting their ears with Brahms, the Bible, and Rimbaud. Nick suffers from moral confusion and bad faith, and devotes his wealth to his decaying flock. Attached to him, limpet-like, is his own imp of the perverse, Pee Wee Lazarus, a midget wrestler and "emotional chimpanzee" who has been Nick's ongoing project of informal education. Into the mix Nick pulls Lacland, a nearly catatonic human dummy whom he installs in the building's basement, hoping to mold this unformed clay into a human being. But in trying to act as Pygmalion he becomes an unwitting Dr. Frankenstein. His lessons have worked too well. Under Lazarus' ministrations, a grotesque parody of Nick's own, Lacland changes into wildman reciting snatches of Rimbaud, then into a TV personality, before seizing up like an overwound toy.

Nick's refuge is more a trap than a halfway house, both for him and the bums. He cuts off his last connection to a fuller life when he rejects the love of Venetia, an actress who has patiently waited for him to break out of his stasis. He lapses more and more into fantasy and hallucinations and, in a Belacqua-like state of moral lassitude, submits to his final dissolution.

West makes use of a protean metaphorical style that is Elizabethan in its energy. The brio of this prose carries us through a world akin to Melville's "Bartleby," a world where harm is the norm. In his first major imaginative sortie, West sets out the themes that will mature into such works as *The Women of Whitechapel* and *Love's Mansion*.

—C.F.

Illustrations by Mary Hood

Once More Upon a Time

THE OXFORD BOOK OF
MODERN FAIRY TALES,
edited by Alison Lurie
Oxford University Press
455 pages, \$25

Jeanne Mackin

I have been a reader of fairy tales all my life, finding in them when I was young the adventure real life lacked and, when I was older, the imaginative power that some other forms and writers of fiction lack.

Fairy tales are, at their best, round-trip tickets into the fantastic, sometimes dark corners of possibility, best traversed in the safety of the imagination, the land of what ifs, rather than the land of what is. Good fairy tales are not, as editor Alison Lurie quickly points out in her introduction to this new collection, silly or sentimental.

Consider for example, "Feathertop," by Nathaniel Hawthorne, an author who never shied from peering into our dark corners, not even when he was writing for children. In this "moralized legend," as Hawthorne terms it, he writes of a witch, Mother Rigby, her unseen familiar, Dickon, and the scarecrow that Mother Rigby brings to life. "That puppet yonder is too good a piece of work to stand all summer in a corn patch, frightening away the crows and blackbirds. He's capable of better things. Why, I've danced with a worse one...What if I should let him take his chance among the other men of straw and empty fellows who go bustling about the world?"

And so, with the help of Dickon and a magic pipe, the pumpkin-headed scarecrow comes to life, is promptly seen by the townsfolk as a visiting aristocrat, and proceeds to court the prettiest girl in town, Polly Gookin, daughter of Justice Gookin. Only Polly, pure of heart, simple of imagination, and too healthily vain to give herself to a scarecrow, sees through Mother Rigby's creation. All ends well, at least as well as fairy tales tend to end.

Silly? Hardly. Hawthorne used this tale to make some lethal jabs at his society and its great men. Sentimental? Not when our straw prince declaims, "I've seen myself Mother! I've seen myself for the wretched, ragged, empty thing I am! I'll exist no longer!"

Not all the morals in this collection of forty modern fairy tales are quite so somber, thankfully. Lurie seemed to have a wide range of mood, tone, and intent in mind when she chose the selections; one of the things I most enjoyed about this volume is its variety. There's plenty of humor interspersed among more serious fare;



Illustration: Susan Simon

while all good fairy tales have a point to make, if not several, some writers use levity as their vehicle rather than darker moods.

"Bluebeard's Daughter," by Sylvia Townsend Warner, certainly is intended to make the reader laugh, as well as warn the reader of the dangers of curiosity. In this tale, Bluebeard's daughter, Djamileh, enjoys a happy childhood despite her father's penchant for killing wives, "for none of the stepmothers lasted long enough to outwear their good intentions...." She grows into beautiful womanhood and when her guardian suggests she get married, she answers that she would prefer a public-school education. Of course she gets both, the education and a husband, Kayel.

"Happily ever after" is not what this collection of tales is about. Bluebeard's daughter and her husband argue, compete, insult, and wound—in between bouts of wedded bliss—and, in general, carry on like real folk. Kayel eventually proves to be far more persistent in his curiosity than Djamileh, a pleasant reversal of the original tale of Bluebeard, which would have you believe women are murdered simply because they like to know what is behind closed doors.

In fact, there is a feminist slant to many of these tales, making this book a welcome change from more traditional collections of passive princesses and stalwart heroes. It's not that Lurie went out of her way to choose tales that emphasize current virtues of womanhood; she simply and wisely chose tales that portray males and females as humans, capable of a wide range of actions, motives, and emotions, regardless of sex. In doing so, she has made this collection a true heir of the original purpose of fairy tales: to inform young people of both the perils and pleasures of life, and the causal relationship of their actions and

choices to those perils and pleasures.

That's not to say that this book is solely for children. While most of its stories could be read to even very young children, there are some stories that even grownups may find unsettling. "The Song of the Morrow," by Robert Louis Stevenson, is a poetic but disquieting short story of endlessly repeated actions and lives that says more about the dreariness of perseverance than the joys of anticipation. "The Wife's Story," by Ursula Le Guin, is a variation on the werewolf legend, told from the point of view of a wife who mournfully watches her beloved husband change from all that is beautiful and noble into a monster who must be hunted down and killed. But in this story, the wolf is the beloved, and his human form is the monster. It would be glib to say this is a story about acceptance of those different from us; darker forces are at work and the story lingers like a beautiful and deeply frightening dream.

One of my favorite tales in this collection is John Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River or The Black Brothers." This is a gem of ecological storytelling, a masterpiece fable that manages to combine political theory, ecology, family relations, qualities of good citizenry, and lessons on what is important in life and what is not, with the required touches of magic that make fairy tales what they are. The villains are agricultural capitalists who destroy their valley through greed; the hero is a kind of male Cinderella who restores the valley of the Golden River through mercy and some common sense. As if that weren't enough to make it a page-turner, Victorian art critic Ruskin did not stint on his generous descriptive talents:

Level lines of dewy mist lay stretched along the valley, out of which rose the massy moun-

tains—their lower cliffs in pale grey shadow, hardly distinguishable from the floating vapour, but gradually ascending till they caught the sunlight, which ran in sharp touches of ruddy colour, along the angular crags....

The story is a feast for the mind's eye, as well as the ear and conscience.

Lurie, author of eight novels, several works of nonfiction and three collections of traditional folktales, was fully aware of the power of the fairy tale to do much more than entertain, though these tales are certainly entertaining. These modern fairy tales (written between 1839 and 1989), like their forebears, are arguments and allegories that challenge stereotypes and require us to reinvent the possibilities of the world, at least for the length of time it takes to read the stories. Silly and sentimental? Only if the destructive power of greed is deemed frivolous, the realization of mortality maudlin, or the variableness of love fictitious.

Or, as Lurie puts it, "any reader who knows the authentic traditional tales, or these brilliant modern variations on their themes, will realize that fairy tales are not merely childish entertainments set in an unreal and irrelevant universe. It is true that they can and do entertain children—and adults; but we will also do well to listen seriously to what they tell us about the real world we live in."

Lurie's collection of fairy tales deserves place of honor both on the shelf and in the reader's imagination. She has put together a selection of stories that resists facile assumptions and predictable outcomes and instead provides that two-way ticket into the fantastic.

Jeanne Mackin is a novelist who lives in Ithaca.

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LENIN'S TOMB: THE LAST DAYS OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE

David Remnick
Random House
576 pages, \$25

Harvey Fireside

Two years ago, soon after the abortive coup attempt by right-wingers in Moscow, I met a Russian exchange professor and his wife in Ithaca. How did they feel about the dramatic days in which civilians had ringed the headquarters of the Russian parliament, to put their bodies on the line for Boris Yeltsin's government?

The professor answered that the conspirators had failed because they used 1917 tactics in 1991. They had thought that seizing the "nerve centers" of power—the military targets, the government offices, the newspapers and the broadcasting stations—would assure success of the coup. Instead, citizens were able to find out what was really happening behind the official smoke-screen through alternative means: telephones linked to long-distance sources, shortwave and amateur radio, FAX, and "E-mail."

His wife's response was that, when she saw ordinary people putting flowers into the guns on tanks while persuading their crews not to fire, she felt a new rush of pride. Until then, she said, she had been embarrassed to admit her origins on trips abroad. She had noticed that citizens in American towns displayed their country's flag on holidays without having been ordered to do so. Now she, too, could look forward to seeing the old Russian flag as a symbol of resistance to Soviet rule.

David Remnick's book, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, bears witness to those heady days. It is worth recalling them, now that a chilly disillusionment appears to have seized Russia. Today's public seems too caught up in the perennial shortages of goods, the declining standard of living, and the rise of crime and profiteering to commemorate the events of August 1991.

Until his recent retrieval of Yegor Gaidar to resuscitate the economy, Yeltsin, the hero of that hour, appeared to be sinking into the same quagmire that engulfed Gorbachev. His popularity had plummeted. Hidebound bureaucrats were smothering reforms. Many Russians openly expressed a nostalgia for the restoration of the old Stalinist "order" that the junta had promised in 1991.

Like many other Western correspondents, Remnick, as the *Washington Post's* man in Moscow, was more taken with Gorbachev than with Yeltsin. He chronicles the incredible accomplishments of the 1985-1991 period, as former dissidents were freed from detention to assume the moral leadership of the regime. The new spirit of incipient democracy was embodied by the physicist Andrei Sakharov, released from house arrest in Gorky by Gorbachev's personal orders in 1986.

Even while he had the Soviet president on the line, Sakharov didn't waste time on words of thanks but interceded for the remaining political prisoners. Back in Moscow, though suffering from the heart ailments that killed him within three years, Sakharov became an untiring critic of reactionary forces in press

conferences and speeches as a member of the parliament. It was a measure of Gorbachev's greatness that he even permitted Sakharov to criticize him on national television.

Yet Gorbachev was finally unable to shuck off a lifetime of conditioning as a Communist party cadre. His finest hour, according to Remnick, was on November 2, 1987, when he picked up the theme of Stalin's crimes where Khrushchev had left it 25 years before. Gorbachev's critique was the most devastating that had ever been heard and, unlike Khrushchev's, it was addressed not to a secret session of the Central Committee but to the public at large.

Gorbachev's political coming of age dated from Khrushchev's shocking charges against Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress. Now, when he called the "mass repression and lawlessness" of the thirties "immense and unforgivable," it evoked his early memories of two grandfathers arrested in those days. But the "glasnost" period that Gorbachev inaugurated went beyond settling scores for personal wrongs or even asserting the claims of a new generation of leaders to succeed the old Stalinists and Brezhnevites.

Remnick shows how telling the full truth about Stalin led to the unraveling of the old dictator's empire. For example, once the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were published in 1989, there was no way to conceal that the Baltic states had been coerced into joining the Soviet Union. Then it was only a matter of time before Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia asserted the right to independence granted by the Soviet constitution. Similarly, when Russians openly discussed the merits of their 1968 "invasion" of Czechoslovakia, the crowds in Prague were galvanized to topple their Communist regime.

As a journalist, Remnick appreciates the power of the word. In focusing primarily on the "truth tellers," however, he may have overestimated the power of a relatively small circle of Moscow intellectuals. This "intelligentsia" welcomed Gorbachev's campaign of openness, or "glasnost," in the spring of 1986 after the first reassuring reports of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster were revealed as gross distortions. No longer would the men in the Kremlin allow themselves to remain ignorant of such awful news—and in ridding the media of censorship they incidentally unloosed a torrent of forbidden histories, novels, films and untrammelled discussions of the country's problems.

Remnick catches the intoxication of citizens slaking their thirst for muckraking reports at newsstands selling the latest exposé or glued to outspoken TV documentaries. No doubt, the media revolution of the late eighties changed public consciousness, from the apparent passivity of earlier times to a much more active relation to the leadership. But less prominently, more substantial changes were taking place. People were flocking to new neighborhood groups fighting the poisoning of the environment, organizing ethnic groups, such as the Tatars, to reclaim their homelands, and even forming embryonic political parties to break the Communist party's hegemony.

While Remnick focuses on colorful individuals, either bravely challenging the old establishment or learning to exploit the system's loopholes, the formation of new civic associations

receives scant attention. It could be argued, however, that the undramatic rooting of these groups in community after community has for the first time spawned something that might be termed a "civic culture" in Russia.

For over a year, Yeltsin tolerated a logjam created by the "apparatchiki" (old bureaucrats) who dominated the parliament. As this review goes to press, he is breaking the rules to dissolve the Russian legislature so that new elections can be held by December. Is this a coup? The majority of Muscovites are not massing in the streets to oppose Yeltsin, since they share his impatience with an obstructionist congress chosen under the Brezhnevite constitution. They—and the military—are not opposed to picking a truly representative body, which will draft a new democratic charter. Yeltsin appears sincere in his commitment to resubmit himself to the electorate as well.

Will Russian democracy come to life by authoritarian means? Such an optimistic scenario depends on a fundamental stabilization of the economy—a subject also glossed over by Remnick. In his oversimplified formulation, Soviet oil paid for the warfare state that crumbled in 1985. But the current system is neither socialism, capitalism, nor good red herring. Western correspondents tend to show little appreciation of the East European welfare state, with its free education and medicine, its subsidized housing, mass transport and recreation, and its makework avoidance of mass unemployment. Yet popular nostalgia in Poland for the old system led to the recent election victory of the Communists. And in Russia it hasn't only been the old reactionary foes of Yeltsin who tried to retain the welfare state during the advent of a market system, thereby averting the "shock therapy" of capitalism introduced by robber barons.

Outside experts have been notably wrong in predicting riots and civil strife as certain sequels to the kind of grinding poverty Remnick finds in Moscow and Siberia, among coal miners and pensioners. If the unrest has been remarkably self-contained, has that been due to some special Russian genius for suffering? An old farmer says that the old cooperative spirit is gone; he tells Remnick, "Now everyone lives for himself." Surely, such skepticism sells short the traditional Russian communal spirit. Unselfishness was reflected in the PBS footage of Hedrick Smith showing a revival of charities, and an incipient

"green" movement to protect the health of children and to save the environment.

Compared to other reporters' books on Russia—Smith's, Robert Kaiser's, David Shipler's and Kevin Klose's—Remnick's seems less Moscow-centered and more eloquent in its evocation of moods. Here is his description of the foul weather on his arrival in January 1988:

A drizzly cotton-wool sky, muddy snow humped along the curbs. The ancient cars slogged like hippos along the swampy streets, their movement barely perceptible through the fog.... A light snow or rain would fall and the sidewalks would be iced for days. Just to stay upright, you had to walk with a certain slide and push, your feet never quite leaving the ground.

The leading characters on the political stage are bigger than life: Gorbachev, the tragic hero who grew to rely on the powerbrokers that betrayed him; Yeltsin, a populist given to grand gestures but indulging his appetite for luxury cars when he had the chance; Sakharov, "a saint," who overcame physical pain to slog it out with corrupt politicians. Remnick tends to mix recorded events and anecdotes, confidential and public sources—all with minimal notes.

Though one could fault Remnick for not distinguishing between his own observations and interviews and those he came by secondhand, his book abounds with the testimony of hundreds of minor characters who bared their souls: from individuals of conscience who literally took to the woods rather than sell out to the gatekeepers of official careers, to the anti-Semites, crooks, and timeservers resisting "glasnost" to their last breath. Sometimes Remnick cringes when he recounts the lengths he had to go to for a story, as when Stalin's loyal grandson made him join in a toast to the old man that Remnick choked down muttering, "And may God forgive me."

Above all, Remnick succeeds in making the final days of the "Soviet empire" come alive in a well-paced narrative whose characters transcend stereotypes—conveying fears and hopes not altogether unlike our own.

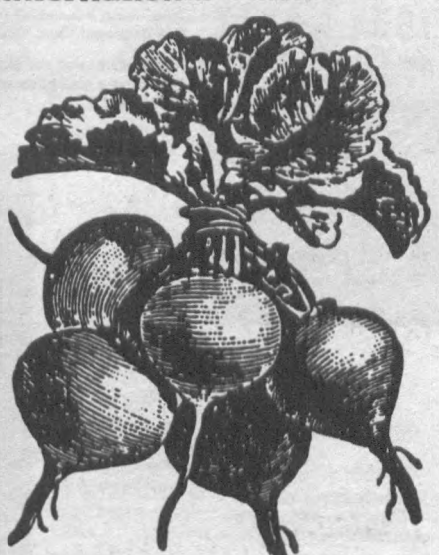
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Mary Butts

continued from page 1

the changes occur to a species which can learn because it records itself and remembers, so that what changes also remains, paradoxically, the same, and paleontology is what shows us that *Homo sapiens* mastered fire and walked on the moon. That is the essential property that the individual and the species exhibits: the hallmark of our proper existence is our creation of the historical perspective that shows us we remain what changes. Nothing new in that: Heraclitus makes just this observation in his apothegm about human nature: neither is the man who crosses the stream for the second time the same, nor is the stream itself the same.²

What I should like to have suggested, however, in my paralleling of archaeology as mute history to the work of the scholiast, is simply that the latter is engaged in reading not the periods in which their objects lived, but in studying and restoring documents—which are things never quite dead, never as utterly and remotely extinct as, say, the trilobite. An example of the liveliness of the lost and/or missing written work that illumines the remote past in a significant way is the finding and “placing” of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a project still very much in controversial development going on a half century. There, too, violent events seem to have been the cause of their loss and preservation for two millennia; moreover, the foundations of the Christian religion itself, both its origins and its present establishment, are concerned with the Qumran records.

Nothing so remote or immense is the subject of this discussion, however, which involves a relatively recent disappearance, Mary Butts' death in 1937, when she was 47. Perhaps the historical catastrophe of World War II took her work from view, just as the Depression had pretty much removed D.H. Lawrence, who had died in 1930 at 45, from the attention of the world of letters. When she died, Mary Butts was not an unknown or obscured minor writer; she was well and regularly reviewed all over England, and praised even over here by the poet Marianne Moore, who

observed in her review of *Armed With Madness*, “It is a triumph for the author that it is a mistake to recount anything she writes without recounting it in her own words....” And, “One need not read Mary Butts who has not a feeling for feeling. Her presentation of what one feels is...as accurate as of what one sees.”³

I cite an American critic because her judgment of the first of the two “Taverner” novels (now reprinted after more than 60 years) aptly conveys the subtle issues of the historical situation. On the one hand, there was Moore's lively response to an outstanding feature of Butts' fiction: the power of her accurate prose to portray landscape, mood, and the “life of things.” On the other, we have our present-day insight—made rather more inclusive and reflective by the passage of most of this century—into what is being conveyed by Butts' “feeling.” One can say now that “feeling” is too laconic a term for her passionate temperament and, even more important, too vague a word to suggest the complexity of the cultural issues she took up in that novel. Much of the quality of her insistent vision and dark prophecy is absent from (certainly not grasped, let alone appreciated in) the necessarily ephemeral reviews that greeted her when she was alive, accurate and cogent as most of those journalists then were (and, incidentally, on the whole strikingly better than what passes for most daily reviewing nowadays). Our advantage, in short, derives from hindsight: standing here as we do, not only well into a future she dreaded but also on the far side of the chasm of World War II and its irrevocable step into the Atomic Age, we can see all too well what moved Mary Butts.

What has to be remarked first, however, is that it's not just a matter of reviving interest in a writer as good as forgotten in her own country for the sake of enlarging the canon. The truth is, certain issues remain vexatious to our present cultural disorders. Lots of women prominent during the first half of the 20th century, writers and artists in particular, have been recruited over the past two decades to support ideologues and militants: feminists call upon them not merely because they are models and precedents, but because the number of recognized first-rate female creators is somewhat limited in comparison with males. By way of explanation, and even justification, there is the perennial question of autonomy for women, of the obstacles to their self-realization and fulfillment as mature persons in a culture that makes anyone's achieve-

3 *The Dial* (September, 1928). And I would add, “and as accurate of what it is she thinks.”

ment of maturity always iffy; moreover, the struggle of women for “empowerment” is a terrible and confused one: it casts its penumbra over the complexity of sexual identity, of the dialectic of female and male relations, and the evolution of their social rôles. Beyond all that, though, in the case of Mary Butts it is precisely our potential reciprocation of her passion today that should lead to her being unearthed and exhibited, as one would say of a buried hoard in archaeology. Toward that end, the credit is due to McPherson & Company, which is republishing Mary Butts in its new series of “Recovered Classics.” And this production of the two “Taverner” novels, bound in one volume, as well as a selection from three collections of her short stories, in handsomely mounted and inexpensive editions, is admirable since it enables us to regard her as a writer who speaks to us now.

When I was 19 and reading my way through Virginia Woolf—to the surprise of my favorite professor of English, who suggested Wells and Beerbohm but had almost nothing to say about Conrad or Joyce—my interest and admiration were elicited in 1948–49 partly because there were affinities between the turbulence of our postwar years and the suffering of unstable sensibilities found in a novel like *Mrs. Dalloway*, or the idea of coping with the ruined social and lost intellectual and artistic order of 1918–22, as in *To the Lighthouse*. Also, I was fascinated by the suppleness of her syntax, by her use of the semicolon, and her music, which was like a flow, ply upon ply, different from that of James Joyce. Whereas Joyce's books constituted for me a veritable university, Woolf, his disparager and (not so) secret imitator, suggested quite another order of being: in short, aesthetically, they were not complementaries but contraries. Still, they were together handy to help fill out the range of possibility required to get a sense of what had been the Modern, up to, say, 1930. Fitzgerald's prose seemed uninventive to me, so far as writing matters, his being a good, standard, polished style. Hemingway was obviously *sui generis*, the unusable, if helpful, genius: one saw even in 1948 that after *The Sun Also Rises*, his influence was to have resulted in mannered imitations, his first American heirs working in the genre novel, like Dashiell Hammett, as well as being valuable for screenwriters, while in the short story his “attitude” persists to this day.⁴

4 In 1948 there were only easily available *Sons and Lovers* and *Women in Love*—which latter was originally published in the United States, England during World War I being inhospitable to the Lawrences, and certainly to his extraordinary masterpiece—and also a bowdlerized paperback of the

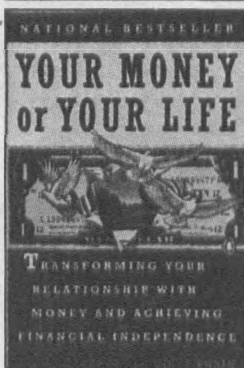
Apropos an introduction to Mary Butts, D.H. Lawrence, who was only five years older, comes immediately to mind. They are hardly from the same social stratum, nor did they have much if anything to do with one another personally, even if they were acquainted with some of the same London cast of characters. From his early discovery by Ford Madox Ford and acquaintance with the editor Edward Garnett, Lawrence was into and out of Bloomsbury until 1918, and some of its major players figure in, for example, *Women in Love* and *Aaron's Rod*. Both before and after the war, Lawrence had already begun to explore Germany and Italy, whereas Butts was to enter the fast society of London and Paris that Lawrence detested. Nevertheless, both writers have much in common temperamentally and in terms of their vision of the post-World War I world. While Lawrence after 1920 was to wander the world with Frieda, fulminating and agonizing over the collapse and disintegration of European civilization,⁵ Butts was fated to confront the wreckage as a woman: what she saw were the men who returned maimed, or walking wraiths; what she knew was the social frenzy and spiritual hysteria of the Twenties in London and Paris. Still, Lawrence and Butts came to similar conclusions about what had happened to the world, and they are congruent in imagining what might, indeed must, be done to remedy the present, if there was to be any hope for the future. They are of the same party, although they are not the same sort of prose writers. Roughly, one can say that Lawrence is fluent, full and clear in argument and thought, as well as poetic in his psychology and its projection of the subjective dynamic. Mary Butts' prose tends towards the laconic, the succinct, the terse; she is often syntactically eccentric, so that a page sometimes demands one's careful rereading, not only in order to parse her prose but to absorb her music, from which her meaning tends to emerge in disjunctive utterances: often she is most odd precisely when she is at her most sibylline. She has, in short, a way of speaking that exerts its peculiar authority over the page. Lacking that authority, she would not convince the reader long enough to weave her net; indeed, her extraordinary tales would certainly dissipate their power to hold the reader fast under the light of critical reflection.

3rd version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Very little, in short, for this great writer.

5 He puts his prophetic case early and powerfully in essays interpolated in the political satire of socialism he composed in about six short weeks in Australia, (1922).

2 On the morning of June 16, 1904, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus muses in *Ulysses* that the man who leaves his house in the morning is not the man who returns to it that night, a proposition amply elaborated chapter by chapter of the novel. That contemplative musing shows us that we are no longer in the confident 19th-century world of *Progress*; *Finnegans Wake* was to show us that Joyce had entered another universe altogether: that of the constancy of identity in the vast cycles of mutability, diurnal change and historical change interfused in a state of sleep that is not a sleep at all.

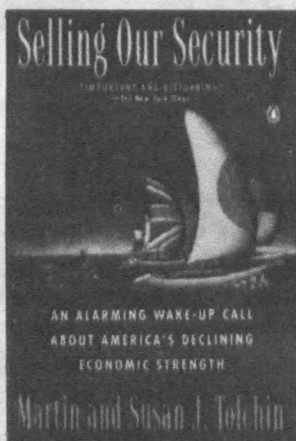
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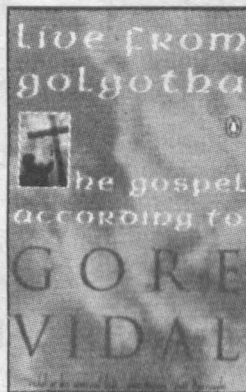
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It will be helpful to open to Butts at first in *From Altar to Chimney-Piece*, 16 stories selected from the thirty published in three gatherings (1923, 1932, 1938). This book offers a sampling of her themes and the range of her voice, which, incidentally, is so individual that one can believe one hears her speaking: it is a literally spellbinding voice that makes it seem a shame she was not recorded when she lived. Her characters are usually her contemporaries, starting about 1920: men who lived through the war and are spiritually paralyzed, or worse; younger men adrift after the war, heterosexual and homosexual, who can find little to do with themselves, with their lovers and wives or with anyone; young women who are at a loss vis à vis the males they have to deal with, their lovers, bisexual or gay, their husbands or would-be husbands who are simply unable either to attain manhood or preserve it. (Butts makes it abundantly plain that manhood to a woman means much more than mere sexual potency.) About homosexuality, Butts is open and direct: her homosexuals and lesbians are people from her own set in London and France; she doesn't write self-consciously about her family, friends, or ambiguous "lovers." Rather she is blunt, decent; she is to be perceived as a woman involved yet also detached and tolerant. Her homosexuals are not (stereo)typed by their object choice; indeed, she is sympathetic and generous in her rendering of men who have no women in their lives. In "The House Party" (which she dedicated to Jean Cocteau), Butts describes a conventicle of sophisticated artists and esthetes, the international gays of her haute monde—French, English, American—telling a wistful story of hope thwarted by a piece of rough trade; it is an unusually candid story, over which she casts the scumbled light of pagan paideutic pederasty and Calvinistic damnation. Throughout the range of her stories, she offers a gallery of sketches of English men and women, limited by her social acquaintance to the middle and upper classes; and her characters are eminently believable.

Butts' writing has a recurrent theme that shows her as having been committed to magic, with a capital "M." It's exceedingly hard for us today to understand the lapse into the remnants of erstwhile "druidical" ritualism. For us it will seem like a soft place in the hard, tough intellect she otherwise reveals even in those stories explicitly devoted to the supernatural. Sometimes it has to do with historical nostalgia: her various Paris stories hint at the hugger-mugger and wickedness underlying and pervading the ancient districts of the Left Bank she loved, an archaic Paris opposed materially and spiritually to the cosmopolitan world of the Right Bank with its modern lights, traffic, and commerce. Perhaps she wants to cause a little disconcerting frisson in conjuring up the processes by which a questing, typically naive, soul may be swallowed up, right in walking distance of the Eiffel Tower. It should be recalled that there was an upsurge of obsessive, dark longings accompanying the Romantic Age, as expressed for instance in De Quincey and Beddoes; those impulses degenerated toward the close of the 19th century into Spiritualism, into a fascination with evil and opium, reaching an intensity of sometimes cynical, sometimes desperate, grotesqueness during the decadence of the 1890s. There was also to come in the Edwardian period a foolish or idle pursuit of psychologically dangerous practices, Rosicrucianism, Blavatskyism, Gurdjieffism, and so on. From today's prospect, the Satanism of most of those French and English occultists will appear

somewhat futile, amounting to no more than the hapless flapping of Lucifer's once immense and now shrunken dark vans.⁶ What subsists today are "rites" such as our plastic-masked, machine-produced Halloween costumes, assisted by lurid comic-strip movies, a last, popular, and thoroughly commercialized figuration for the kids of what were once great powers, now dwindled to exiguous hints of mystery even in Butts' altogether serious handling, as in her story "With or Without Buttons."⁷

What can be found in her Jamesian story about evil, "From Altar to Chimney-Piece," is her latest treatment of such matters. There, she shows us what she came to understand in her maturity: that evil was commingled with sado-masochism, with the unrestrained egoism that uses some of the consequences of the Modernist revolution as a blind for psycho-sexual tyranny, which she depicts as justifying itself through the Surrealist manifesto yoked to Bolshevik radicalism.⁸ In this story, Butts cannily ties Cherry, the now-familiar 20th-century figure of the questing girl, to Gertrude Stein's salon and to a form of purely psychological degradation; it's a nasty story that seems in retrospect to have been the cathartic by which she purged herself of her former fascination with the labyrinth of the Magus.

There is nevertheless a meaning to Butts' interest in the magical, which took another turn, much for the better, when she abandoned the degenerate sophisticates she had frequented in London and Paris and decided instead to seek the Sacred. For her, its realm now is to be found in natural mystery, the wilder and more primitive the better, which she located in the primeval and chthonic simplicity of the "black West" from which "the last lights...went." This can be understood as what Gerard Manley Hopkins meant in saying, "And for all this, nature is never spent; There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."⁹ Her religious search is for what was to be secularized during the atheistic Existentialist heyday after 1945 as the "Authentic." Mary Butts depicts it in the world of her Cornwall,

6 Eliot recognized it in his last poems, remarking that when there was distress and turmoil among the nations, there was also an interest in fortune-telling. Recently the immense novel by Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, a wild, post-modern romp through the same Parisian purlieus Butts haunted, offered a compendious survey of hoary and dangerous Satanical idiocies; it satirizes our vestigial obsession with what passes for the demonic, and consigns to the trashbin our rational and irrational pretensions to psychic powers that penetrate the veil of our limited understanding of the universe.

7 Let's remember that before Yeats found his Blue Shirts, he was a devotee of mediumism and Rosicrucianism, and took quite seriously the same automatism that the Surrealists treated as secular absurdities and irrational sources of new inspiration. For that matter, that very bad man, the Black Sorcerer, Aleister Crowley, makes his appearance in Butts' short fiction, and Montague Summers' work flits through her shadows.

8 Her term: in Butts, Surrealist and Bolshevik were a part of the same inhuman vanguard. And they were allied—until Stalin disjoined them in 1930 at the International Congress in Moscow, when he banished the Surrealists from the Revolution.

9 "God's Grandeur." This sonnet might be taken as an apt credo for Butts' outlook, except that she is not a believer in the pos-

sibility that "the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." Rather, that yes, the world is "bent," but there is a mysterious power emanating from Gaea's breast, particularly as she herself, Butts, brooded over her Cornish landscape and listened to the wind and the waters.

where the "Taverner" novels take place, not far from where she was to die, much too young, of a burst appendix.

Armed with Madness and *The Death of Felicity Taverner* are extraordinary novels, what one likes to contemplate when thinking about permanent additions to the canon of the first-rate. Read them with this clue in mind: that their stories of dysfunctional family and friends are imagined against a grand/ quasi-allegorical backdrop, that of mental warfare, as Blake envisioned it.¹⁰ Butts attempts the "visionary," what others from her world would indeed have called madness. The title itself, *Armed with Madness*, is a defiant irony meant to answer the doubter and skeptic she wants as her reader, because she has much to say about what "values" can still be found in the contemporary desert. She has this in common with D.H. Lawrence, especially the latest Lawrence.¹¹ An important feature of Butts' machinery is Mythomania, one of the hallmarks of poetry and fiction of the first half of this century, referred to above as one of the aspects of Modern Primitivism. She attempts to evoke, or to resurrect, and even to believe in ancient, non-Christian archetypes, powers or essences that once were projected in the forms of the various gods of the pagan world, especially those she derived from the Greek pantheon. She longs to believe in their reality, above and beyond the reality of human psychology, and wishes to pin down evil and falsehood. In these novels, for all their strange poetry and vigorous, if sometimes brusque prose, Butts is nevertheless quite the worldly realist: her writer's voice is objective, detached, her viewpoint that of a dramatic artist. She is never coy, or fatuously the woman writer aiming for her books to sell as well as the trash of commercial *Schwärmerei*. Butts is, in short, as serious as the Lawrence who found a sacred clearing in the virgin part of Nottingham forest for his Connie Chatterley to lie down in with Mellors, as serious as the Lawrence whose last novella depicts a sacred copulation between a Jesus awakened in his own flesh with a virgin dedicated to Isis.

What must encourage the reader to enter her world in the "Taverner" novels is the magisterial authority Butts displays in the first chapter of *Armed with Madness*. The narrator, felt immediately as a woman strong in her views, opens up with a challenge to her characters, by saying to them in effect, All right, our civilization has been destroyed, millions of the best young men, our whole generation of lovers, husbands, leaders, scientists and artists, workers and all, have been killed off in the most murderous fashion in the Great War; millions of women are left

see *Mary Butts*, page 14

sibility that "the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." Rather, that yes, the world is "bent," but there is a mysterious power emanating from Gaea's breast, particularly as she herself, Butts, brooded over her Cornish landscape and listened to the wind and the waters.

10 Butts is after all a descendant of the poet's patron, Isaac Butts. And it seems that Mary Butts' mother, a woman to be reckoned with in many ways, few of them admirable, to say the least, did sell off most of the artist's now priceless works in the family's possession.

11 Lawrence's affinity to Blake was noticed by T.S. Eliot very early on, who attacked them both as false, heterodox prophets in the one collection he did not care to reissue, *After Strange Gods*.



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Mary Butts

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stranded in the emptiness; society shall never again even hope to be what it was during the past hundred years; the world has changed course abruptly and is moving in ways unknown before; all has been lost—here we are, we few left alive, and what are we going to do with ourselves? Let us therefore stop our handwringing and our self-pitying whining, our effete nastiness and rottenness, our miserable existence in this Wasteland, and look for Life. (Her "few" are some half-men, either undecided sexually, or shell-shocked, manic-depressive, or amoral pretty fellows; she herself is situated amidst them like an Earth goddess, as well as menaced by her more or less wicked relatives. There is as well an interesting foil: an American traveller who shows up, a thoroughly masculine and highly intelligent fellow, wholly, luckily, innocent of European exhaustion.) From the opening chapter of *Armed with Madness*, Butts' narrative vigor braces so that one gladly joins her in what is to develop in both novels as the struggle of her small, unarmed band of those who cling to a possibly redemptive Goodness against the active, determinedly Wicked.

It remains only to be suggested that the novels are quasi-Quest tales, quasi-detection fictions, although when I say "detection," I am thinking of the use to which Faulkner later put the genre in *Absalom! Absalom!* (written some years after Butts had published these novels). After opening her story upon a scene of devastation, cultural and personal, its characters' situation must be traced back to causes, which requires a tracing back to origins, a correction, post hoc, of the map of missteps and catastrophes; the source of some implanted evil, like the Fisher King's Wound, must be undone, before healing in some unknown future may occur. In the course of such a quest we will come to know ourselves, and understand how we became what we are. In Butts' novels, the enemies are the evil worldly mother and her associates and dependents. The villain in *The Death of Felicity Taverner* is Felicity's husband: a Jew, a Bolshevik, a nihilist, promoter of capitalism, cynic, blackmailer, and extortionist—all these perversions of the Good resident in one energetic and ambitious man! He's the embodiment of crass commercialism; he is our future: a developer with no regard for beauty, whether of persons or the natural world; and he proposes to turn Butts' wild, sacred landscape into tracts for vacation homes, tennis, riding, and golf: a forerunner of the impersonal consumerist conglomerates of our world today.

What did Butts arrive at, before she was suddenly cut off? The True and the Good having been buried in the rubble of Western civilization after the cataclysm of World War I, she seems to have found her ultimate hope in what remains, what perhaps may always remain, of the ultimate triad whose light shines over Plato's world: Beauty. Having suggested that, one is stunned by this circumstance which poses the theory of the following "Taverner" novel. Before it even opens, Felicity Taverner, a delicate, happy creature, a harmless, gentle loving beauty who was as close as one can imagine to being a daughter of Aphrodite incarnate, is found dead on a main road in the south of France. The ghost of her beauty is present from the first page; it hovers, as one reviewer remarked, like a perfume. Who killed Felicity, or rather, what killed her, and why? Moreover, how did she come to be found lying smashed on the Mediterranean coast? For the reader of Mary Butts, the unravelling of this mystery will provide her lost answer to questions we still ask today. She is a writer who will open up a fresh view from her own magic casement upon a world and a time utterly forlorn, as the pre-World War II period ineluctably is for us. Which is not to say we can manage to come to terms with the answer she had partly found before she died.

Jascha Kessler, Professor of English and Modern Literature at UCLA, has published 7 books of his poetry and fiction as well as 6 volumes of translations of poetry and fiction from Hungarian, Persian, and Bulgarian. In 1989, his translation of Sándor Rákoss' Catullan Games won a major prize from the National Translation Center. His latest volume of fiction, Siren Songs & Classical Illusions: 50 Stories, appeared in December 1992. He is an Arts Commissioner for the City of Santa Monica.



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The Golem

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Collins and Pinch, we might begin to correct the myth that science is inhumanly rational, and also encourage the frame of mind that leads to the exploration of frontiers—since students would see that science is an activity that involves error.

II

Except for the cold fusion debate, and the attempts to prove the theory of relativity, the episodes recorded in *The Golem* deal with little-known scientific debates. The choices are strategically sound because readers will come to these episodes without bias, which is crucial for the book's message to be clearly heard.

Despite this strength in its conception, the book does ignore some important information that is implicitly within its purview.

For one thing, in insisting so strongly on the flip-flop thinking of the public, as though the public were helpless before science, *The Golem* fails to acknowledge, first, the many mediators who have long assisted the public—scientists, writers, and lawyers among them—in understanding not only the science itself but the politics involved in applying it to technology, and in defending the applications; and, second, the many voluntary associations formed by citizens who have educated themselves about how science works and achieved some remarkable successes in resisting or correcting some of the more dangerous applications.

My second, related, criticism is more substantive. In their brief conclusion Collins and Pinch focus specifically on the public sphere, where ordinary citizens need to be able to make informed judgments about science—in the courtroom and in regulatory hearings, in accident inquiries, in schools, and in media reports. But in choosing their case histories they neglect disputes that have involved the immediate public interest (the cold fusion chapter is an exception, but it is very different from, say, hazard inquiries). Thus the authors have missed an opportunity to show explicitly how they see the public having an impact on the resolution of scientific debates.

This absence of publicly contested issues in the case histories obscures the question of power, especially the power of the principal clients of science—industry and the federal government, especially the military. Though some of the chapters, such as those on gravity waves and spontaneous generation, do show the influence of political clout in debates over experimental data, none acknowledges sufficiently the overwhelming influence of technological vested interests in scientific debates. And it seems to me that society's flip-flop thinking about science, which is real, stems from a diffidence that has less to do with ignorance about science than with lack of power.

During 15 years of watching the debate

over the health hazard of electromagnetic fields (EMFs), I've seen virtually all the social forces at work that Collins and Pinch identify in their case histories. This debate, one of the most protracted, agonizing, and expensive in the last three decades, broadly illustrates *The Golem's* major thesis, and reveals critical elements of scientific debate that *The Golem* doesn't directly address.

The EMF debate certainly demonstrates the vulnerability of frontier science—in this case, bioelectromagnetism—when it encounters entrenched technological and scientific opposition, particularly when the opposition waves the flag of "scientific method" and, for example, applies much stiffer standards of proof to positive data on EMF effects than to negative, or uses the "experimenter's regress," cynically at times, to maintain the idea that EMFs are not hazardous (to the professional detriment of some heavily criticized researchers, incidentally, who had the bad luck to be working in a "controversial" area). And it shows how normal scientific standards such as the need for replication can be used as political weapons, and used to impugn the competence of scientists whose work *could not* be replicated because no one would pay for it, or *was not* replicated because the government or industry researchers changed the experimental design so they would have an out if they turned up positive effects.

What is of central importance about this debate is that even the error-laden consensual process Collins and Pinch see as the normal way of science has been short-circuited by economic and military interests. Thus controversy has stretched on for decades, and the scientific questions have been confused (sometimes intentionally) with questions of technology and economics.

But once the issue became public after 1977, as the result of a three-year regulatory hearing on big powerlines in New York, general scientific disbelief in EMF effects began to shift perceptibly. For one thing, the hearing stimulated much new work over the next decade, with the result that many more effects were reported, often from unexpected sources, on both humans and animals. Eventually the research focus properly shifted from animal research to epidemiology, and reports of cancer correlations in various specific human populations around the world began to pile up. For another thing, citizens began to get involved in a serious way, as a matter of self-defense.

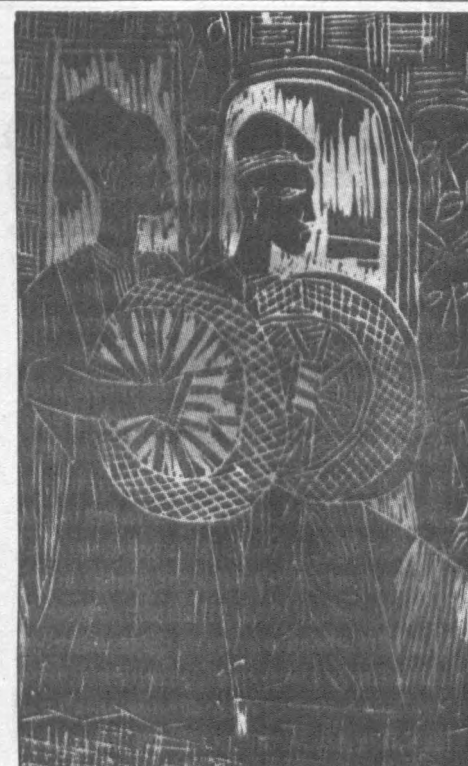
Consequently the arguments against EMF bioeffects have become increasingly vaporous. While this evolution is chiefly a matter of the evidence overwhelming both scientific dogma and the powerful, well-organized resistance of vested interests, it could not have happened without the public protest and pressure—assisted by a few outspoken scientists, lawyers, and journalists—that began around 1978. Now, in law courts and regulatory hearings, through citizen networks and legislative

hearings, the public's personal testimony about health effects is helping to determine the shape and direction of future research, and forcing changes in EMF-emitting technologies such as powerlines, computer terminals, electric blankets and hair dryers, police radar, and so on (though there is still no regulatory protection, and no industry will admit, on advice of counsel, that its mitigation measures are the result of health concerns).

My former coauthor Andy Marino, whose testimony in the 1975-78 New York hearing initiated the powerline debate, is now researching the neuroendocrine system's role in mediating EMF effects; but he also teaches law and medicine, is writing about science for lawyers, and takes every opportunity to educate the public about the social and political dimensions of science. He is the kind of self-aware and socially engaged scientist we need more of, and in talking with him recently about the current state of the EMF debate, nearly every point he made resonated strongly with Collins and Pinch's book.

What has happened in the EMF debate—especially as regards the influence of the public—may go beyond what Collins and Pinch ask for, but what they ask for is absolutely necessary. Aside from educating the public, media, judges, and schoolteachers, I hope *The Golem* will encourage scientists not only to recognize the impact of social forces on their science, but to relinquish notions of themselves as the anointed, as people with a special brief that exempts them from public scrutiny and criticism. (One of the great moments in the development of the EMF debate occurred in 1975, when a young, untried state agency lawyer forced the most powerful scientist in the EMF area to impeach his own testimony by admitting that he *did not know* whether power lines would cause ill effects.) If scientists began to speak of their work openly and with candor about its uncertainty and "messiness," then the public, the media, the law courts, and the schools would listen. And if Collins and Pinch are right, the destructive flip-flop thinking which results from promising too much would abate, and the attacks on so-called "fringe science" such as alternative therapies and bioelectromagnetism would diminish too. In a small way NIH is finally beginning to take seriously the exploration of alternative therapies, though much more should be done. One thing the public needs to learn about science is that it is driven by fashion, and that sometimes the public can force the right fashion. The course of the EMF debate and the new official attention to alternative therapies are strong data for the case made in this important book.

Joel Ray is managing editor of the Bookpress and coauthor of *The Electric Wilderness* (San Francisco Press, 1986), a book about the electromagnetic field debate.



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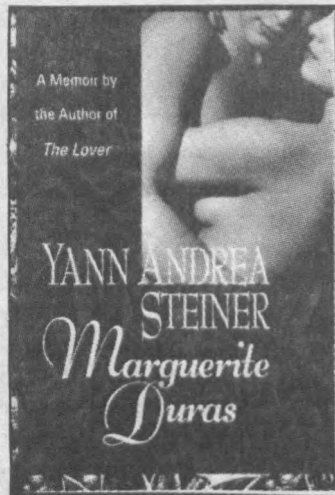


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Humanism

continued from page 1

Abrams' logocentric assumption that the meaning of a text is decidable. This critique of the humanist *logos* is a *sine qua non* of any adequate critique of the post Cold-War ("end of history") politics of liberal democracy. But Culler's response is, it seems to me, symptomatic of a certain crucial inadequacy of the discourse of deconstruction, in its failure to counter the apparent benignity of Abrams' representation of humanism by invoking the cultural, social, and political conditions of the contemporary historical occasion that we have inherited from the discourse and practice of humanism. What is at stake is not simply the question of the decidability of a text as such (although it is also that), but the struggle between a totalizing or imperial sociopolitics and a decentered, multicultural sociopolitics.

Culler is in some sense aware of this when he questions Abrams' definition of humanistic criticism as "taking the human as a given":

Michel Foucault suggests, in a formulation Mr. Abrams cites, that "man" has been an object of knowledge for several centuries but that this figure is the product of a particular configuration of knowledge and will disappear as that configuration changes. The claim is that our discourses of knowledge no longer take universal "man" as a primary object: biology, molecular biology, and biochemistry, for instance, look at processes and elements that are not peculiar to this species, and social, political, and cultural disciplines increasingly focus not on "man" but on men and women in different times and conditions, no longer presuming that knowledge seeks above all what people everywhere have in common. This shift in thinking has been prompted in part by the recognition that frequently in the past the humanistic focus on "man" has taken the attributes and concerns of a dominant group as universal, or at least as the norm.

This insight into the sociopolitics of humanistic criticism points to the very heart of what Abrams' discourse occludes. But in relegating this insight to the margins of his response, Culler symptomatically betrays the relative indifference of deconstruction (at least as it is practiced in North America by literary critics) to the sociopolitical differences that the logic of the discourse of humanism has repressed in the name of "Man." Rather, Culler chooses to counter Abrams' humanism by an exemplary extended exercise of deconstructive close reading (Frost's "The Secret Sits") which, despite its inversion of the New Critical project — the substitution of the principle of absence for the principle of presence — is extraordinarily reminiscent of the New Criticism.

Take, for example, Culler's response to Abrams' objection that deconstructive critics deny authorial agency:

No one produces exactly what he or she intends and critics need to be able to talk about what the work does, in order to compare this with what the author might have designed. To limit the meaning of a work to what a biographically defined author deliberately intended would be to set aside that exfoliating power — the ability to affect readers in the present and the future in ways an author had not anticipated — which literature exercises. Poets themselves, in their references to inspiration, to the Muse, to the crucial role of unconsciously assimilated rhythmical patterns in the gestation of a work, have been the first to note that something other than deliberate choice oversees the production of a text.

Insofar as this quite typical gesture of deconstructive criticism foregrounds the blindness of Abrams' "oversight" to the work of the "nonhuman" in (un)making literary texts, I have no quarrel with Culler (although his identification here and elsewhere in his essay of the work the "nonhuman" "oversees" with "inspiration" and "the Muses" sounds perilously like a reinscription of the humanist principle of presence). What I do find objectionable in Culler's response to Abrams's reaffirmation of

the authorial subject is his virtual indifference to the sociopolitical work that texts do. I mean his limiting of the "non-human" to textual contradiction, a limitation that, no less than Abrams' essentializing of "human being," universalizes literature, albeit in a reversed way. By focusing on the "nonhuman" logic of textuality in his reading of Frost's poem, Culler typically overlooks the historically specific ideological construction informing a text that, invisible to the "disinterested" humanist author, is doing its coercive work.

II

In situating his response to Abrams' humanist attack on "radical" theory at the rarified site of the latter's tautology — "quite simply," to be human is to be human — Culler's discourse, in the end, becomes complicitous with Abrams in occluding the historically specific genealogy of humanist disinterestedness. Underwood, on the other hand, does ostensibly invoke history and politics in his defense of Abrams' essay, but his history of humanism is so literal-minded that the politics he attributes to it and its critics constitute something like the airbrushing of history that Kundera attributes to the Czech Communist regime in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

Underwood is certainly right to point to the innocuousness of the "Derridean" critique of humanism represented by Culler and to insist that

today the fiercest attacks on the word 'humanism' come . . . from feminist, Marxist, and post-colonial critics who see that word as the embodiment of a complacent cultural style — the style of white men who imagine themselves at the center of the world and find it easy to generalize their experiences as 'universally human.'

But for Underwood, "a careful examination of the history of humanism" means an examination of the history of the word and this "shows that the hostility that leftist academics tend to direct toward the word is misplaced. It rests not on any philosophical incompatibility, but on historical confusion." "The problem," he goes on to say, "is that no one knows what the word means, because it has meant so many different things in the course of its history."

I cannot in this limited space undertake a critique of Underwood's "careful history" as such, though the glaring absence of any reference to the affiliation of Renaissance humanism with Roman (as opposed to Greek) antiquity should be noted. What I want to focus on instead is the preconceived conclusion Underwood draws from his disinterested history: not simply that "the word 'humanist' means entirely different things to different people," but, more specifically, that there is a "good" humanism and a "bad" humanism, a conclusion, according to Underwood, that informs Abrams' discourse.

To put this "conclusion" in the political terms that are at stake in Underwood's argument, there is a liberal (or pluralist) humanism and a conservative or reactionary humanism, the humanism of an M. H. Abrams and as opposed to that of such right-wing humanists as Irving Babbitt and, presumably, Allan Bloom, Hilton Kramer, Roger Kimball, Dinesh D'Souza, and the National Association of Scholars.

Underwood relies on this seeming truism — the incommensurability between a good, or politically "liberal" humanism, and a bad, or politically "reactionary" humanism — to undertake his critique of what he represents as my exemplary "Leftist" use of "humanism" in an essay entitled "The Apollonian Investment of Modern Humanist Education: The Examples of Matthew Arnold, Irving Babbitt, and I. A. Richards," published in the inaugural issue of *Cultural Critique* (Fall 1985). According to Underwood:

Most of the contemporary use of "humanism" as a pejorative smear-word occurs in passing, so that

it's hard to say exactly what the term is imagined to mean. Occasionally, though, you get a definition, for instance when William Spanos . . . claims that "humanism is a logocentrism that precipitates a binary logic—Being/time, Identity/difference, Order/chaos, etc.—in which the first term is not simply privileged over the second, but is endowed with the power and authority to colonize the second." If I may appropriate a bit of rhetoric, I'd like to ask, whose humanism? I hope the history I've traced makes it sufficiently clear that there is no single movement with a claim to that word; the philosophers with the best claim [sic] to it, [F. C. S.] Schiller and [William] James, are entirely ignored by Spanos—perhaps because they would valorize the second terms of his supposed oppositions—that is to say, time, difference and chaos. Instead he focuses on cultural conservatives like Arnold and Babbitt, who make easy targets but have less to do with the history of the idea than he thinks....In short, Spanos doesn't analyze the actual content of "humanism," or trace its history, at all. He is interested in the politics of style, and particularly, in attacking cultural conservatives. "Humanism" comes to hand as a convenient way of lumping people like Matthew Arnold and Lionel Trilling together with a lot of other older critics, ignoring the disputes that actually divided them, and disclosing "this humanistic network as a socio-political ideology, an Apollonian investment in hegemonic power."

What I want to focus on is Underwood's underlying assumption of the radical difference (which he also attributes to me) between the logical economies of liberal and conservative humanism. But to get there, it becomes necessary to expose the inaccuracies of his representation of my writing on the question of humanism. For it is precisely the violence Underwood's "careful," "disinterested" history does to my text that mirrors, in microcosmic form, the violence inhering in the benign logic of the discourse of humanism, and reflects the continuity—the identity—informing the difference between liberal and reactionary humanism.

To begin with, it is not true that I do not "analyze the actual content of humanism, or trace its history, at all." My history, however, is not the amnesiac history of the humanist custodians of the Occidental Cultural Memory, that, as Foucault, Bakhtin, Benjamin, and others have shown, has served to culturally legitimate the sociopolitical power of the dominant Occidental and liberal humanist culture. My history, rather, is of the counter-memory, which not only de-constructs anthropological representations of being, but remembers in the sense of retrieving—of giving a history back to—the differential texts, events, and human constituencies to which humanism has denied a history by methods that traverse the spectrum between overt repression and pluralist accommodation.

It is this retrieval of the "forgotten" history—the origins of the idea and the historical practice—of humanism (the history that Abrams leaves unsaid in his essay and that Underwood occludes by restricting his investigation to a tendentious history of the word that begins essentially in 1903) that leads me to the "conclusion" that liberal humanism and conservative humanism are the obverse sides of the same coin, the two faces of the same logical economy of power. It is impossible in this limited space to recapitulate this repressed genealogy, however briefly. Anyone interested can find it developed at varying lengths in the essay from which Underwood draws my "definition" of humanism—not simply in Part II published in *Cultural Critique*, but in *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), to which Underwood does not refer. Here, it will suffice simply to mention the most flagrant omission—given its importance in enabling the anti-humanist discourses of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, and other critics of post-Enlightenment modernity—in Underwood's "careful" history. I am referring

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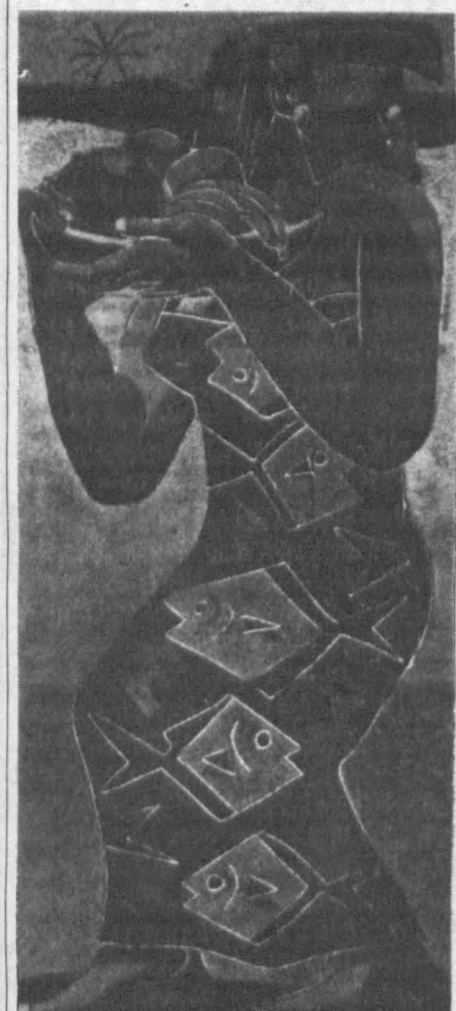


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to my invocation of Martin Heidegger's genealogy of modern humanism: his persuasive relocation of its origins from Greece (where modern humanists, especially since Arnold, have misleadingly located it) to Rome. I mean, more specifically, Heidegger's disclosure of a series of transformations of Greek being—an indissoluble, however historically uneven, relay of colonizations—that culminate in the humanist Enlightenment ("the age of Man"):

1) The reduction (or colonization) of the Greek understanding of truth (*a-letheia*: unconcealment)—an originary and open-ended temporal process of inquiry—to *veritas* (the correspondence of mind and thing, which is to say, truth as correctness)—a metaphysical mode of inquiry, in which, as the etymology suggests, time and the differences it disseminates are determined (structured or constructed) by a supervisory *anthropo-logos* (essential Man), a "center elsewhere," as Derrida puts it, that is "beyond the reach of free play [of criticism]."

2) The reduction (or colonization) of an errant Greek *paideia* that was essentially dialogic (not in the free-floating pluralist sense, but in the sense of Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzung*, i.e. of contestatory dialogue) to the production of loyal and dependable citizens ("Romans": patriots of the Metropolis):

Humanitas, explicitly so called, was first considered and striven for in the age of the Roman Republic. *Homo humanus* was opposed to *homo barbarus*. *Homo humanus* here means the Romans, who exalted and honored Roman *virtus* through the "embodiment" of the *paideia* [education/culture] taken over from the Greeks. These were the Greeks of the Hellenistic age, whose culture was acquired in the schools of philosophy. It was concerned with *eruditio et institutio in bonas artes* [scholarship and training in good conduct]. *Paideia* thus understood was translated as *humanitas*. The genuine *romanitas* of a *homo romanus* consisted in such *humanitas*. We encounter the first humanism in Rome: it therefore remains in essence a specifically Roman phenomenon. . . . [A] *studium humanitatis* [inaugurated as such in the Renaissance], which in a certain way reaches back to the ancients and thus also becomes a revival of Greek civilization, always adheres to historically understood humanism."

—"Letter on Humanism"

3) The reduction, consequent to the prior ontological and cultural imperialism, of the Greek idea of the *polis* to the Metropolis: the (humanist) city as measure, the city that, like the disciplinary *veritas* and *eruditio et institutio* of Roman humanism, perceives difference—in this case the peripheral (not-Roman) others—as a threat to the benign *Pax Romana* and thus as a darkly negative force to be "enlightened" or "civilized"; that is, to be conquered and pacified within the ever-expanding

circle of what Virgil, in the *Aeneid*, calls the *imperium sine fin*. As Heidegger says in his essay on Parmenides:

The essential domain that prevails for the deployment of the Roman *fas* [the opposite of *veritas*] is that of the *imperium* and of the imperial. *Imperium* means "Command." . . . The *imperium* is the command in the sense of the disposing order. To commanding, as the essential foundation of sovereignty, belongs "being above" [Obensein]. That is only possible through constant surmounting in relation to others, who are thus the inferiors. In the surmounting, in turn, resides the constant ability to oversee [Übersehen-können: supervise and dominate]. . . . The commanding overseeing is the dominating vision expressed in the often cited phrase of Caesar's: *veni, vedi, vici* - I came, I oversaw [übersah], I conquered. Victory is already nothing but the consequence of the Caesarian gaze that dominates [Übersehens] and the seeing which has the character of *actio*. . . . The imperial *actio* of the constant surmounting over others implies that the others . . . are fallen—in Roman *fallere* (participle: *fallum*). The "bringing-to fall" [Das Zu-Fall-bringen] belongs necessarily to the domain of the imperial.

In retrieving the historical transformations that culminate in the humanist Enlightenment ("the age of Man"), I do not want to suggest that my genealogy is restricted to defined institutional practices (knowledge production, education, government) as such. For I have also shown that these institutional transformations were accompanied, by way of the Romanization of the Greek language, by the eventual inscription and naturalization in the truth discourse of humanistic Europe of an integrally related and prolifically self-generating chain of metaphorical binaries intrinsic to the metaphysical principle of presence: most notably Center and periphery (Metropolis and provinces); Light (the panoptic eye) and darkness; Male and female (the phallic seed and the amorphous female earth); Maturity and adolescence (Developed and underdeveloped); Culture and anarchy (cultivation and wildness or wilderness: the Roman farmer, *agricola*, was a cultivator (*colonus*) of the *agros* (correlate of *agrios*: the "wild or savage" field, just as the Roman—and post-Renaissance European colonizer—was the cultivator of the *agrioi* at the periphery of the "*imperium sine fin*"); and so on.

All this is suggested by Heidegger's treatment of the truth claims of *homo humanus*—and, it should be added, is given historical force by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir*, where, as the title itself suggests, he demonstrates the enormous importance of what he calls "the Roman model" in the shaping of the humanist Enlightenment. (One of the most bizarre moments of Underwood's "careful history" occurs when he reduces Foucault's interrogation of humanism to the critique of post-World War II existentialism, thus occluding the latter's massively docu-

mented identification of humanism with the (Romanized) Enlightenment. In the essay in *Cultural Critique* cited by Underwood and since then, in *The End of Education* and in a forthcoming chapter of a book in progress entitled *Culture and Colonization*, I have also provided evidence to suggest that this indissoluble complex of metaphorical binaries pervades both the discourse of republican and imperial Rome (Cicero, Caesar, Virgil, Horace, Tacitus, Quintilian, Livy, Pliny the Younger, and so on) and of the Greeks colonized by Rome (Polybius, Plutarch, Strabo, Dio Cassius, Diodorus Siculus, and so on) as well as the discourse of modern humanism at large: not simply reactionaries such as Babbitt (or Bloom or Kimball or D'Souza or Kramer) as Underwood alleges, but also such liberal humanists as I. A. Richards, Lionel Trilling, E. D. Hirsch, Gerald Graff, and even M.H. Abrams.

Indeed, it is this seemingly benign language of "common sense" (to use one of Abrams' favorite words), all the while saturated by imperial metaphors, that belies Underwood's and Abrams' easy (because unexamined) assumption that a bad humanism and a good humanism are incommensurable. It is, to put it in Derrida's apt phrase, this "white mythology" that betrays most clearly the ideological continuity of liberal and conservative humanism. The difference between the two, however substantial, is not, finally, a matter of radical antagonism. It is, rather, as Foucault above all has shown, especially in *Surveiller et punir*, his epochal genealogy of power relations in post-Enlightenment modernity, a matter of the efficient and economical use of power.

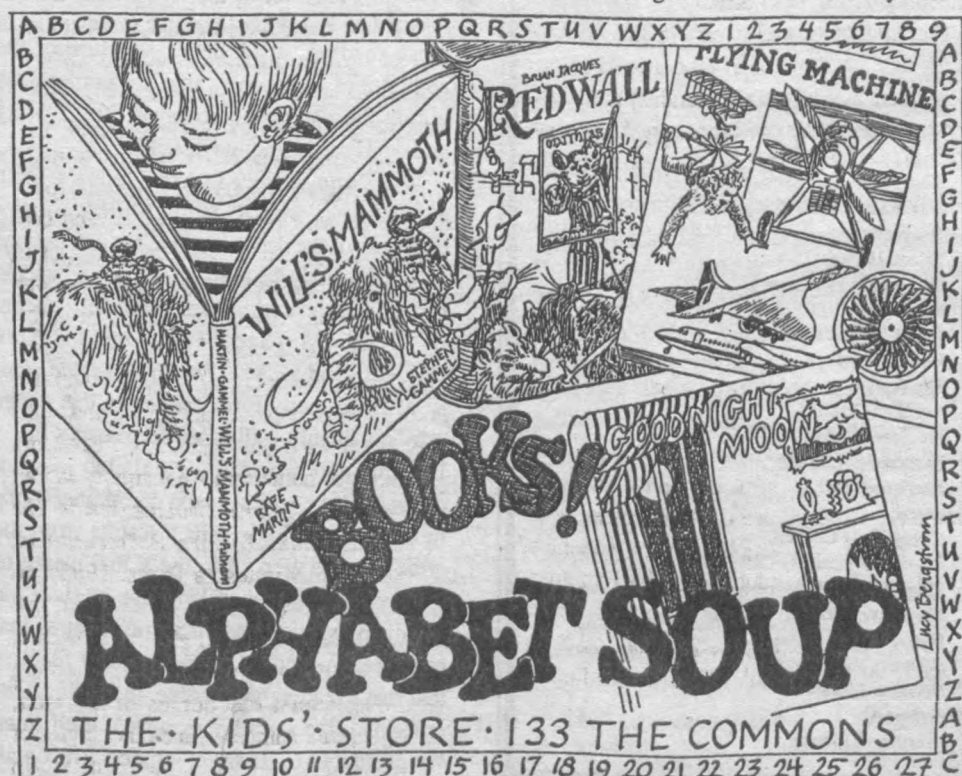
Whereas the overtly coercive discourse and practice of conservative humanists like Babbitt and Bloom render the anthropological "center elsewhere" visible and thus resistable, the (neo)imperial discourse and practice of liberal

humanists works by indirection. It inculcates a truth discourse (by way of education and cultural production) that makes its coercive center invisible and those it acts on the willing bearers of their subjection. Rather than using the anthropological center to exclude, repress, or indoctrinate the "other" (a use of power it calls "totalitarianism" to discriminate and validate its own "incommensurable" logic), liberal humanism actually encourages otherness in the name of disinterestedness, free inquiry, individualism (agency), and pluralism, but only to incorporate and accommodate this difference to the ontologically prior identical whole: to assign this "other" its "proper" place within its normalizing and pacifying circle. Which is to say, to colonize it.

Bad or conservative humanism, in short, is not radically different from good or liberal humanism. Its "imperial" project constitutes, rather, the end of the (anthropo)logic of liberal humanism in both the sense of fulfillment and demise: the disclosure of the contradiction informing its apparent benignity and thus its delegitimation. It might even be said, to appropriate Heidegger's meditation in the *Parmenides* on the relation between the Roman concept of the false and the imperial project, that the discursive practice of liberal humanism, its *pax*, as it were, is the *actio* proper of imperialism:


The "bringing-to-fall" can be accomplished in a "direct" assault [*Ansturm*] and an overthrowing [*Niederwerfen*]. But the other can also be brought to fall by being outflanked [*Um-gehen*]. . . . The bringing to fall is now the way of deceptive circumvention [*Hintergehen*]. Considered from the outside, going behind the back is a complicated, uncircumstantial and thus mediate "bringing-to-fall" as opposed to an immediate overthrowing. In this way, what is brought to fall does not thereby

see *Humanism*, page 20



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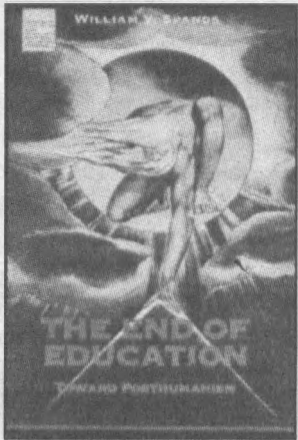
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Letters

continued from page 2

concern of literary criticism. To a humanistic critic, however, what Mr. Culler calls the "formal structures and...play of language," even in those literary works which most conspicuously foreground these elements, are not there in and for themselves, but for something other than themselves, and that is, to signify to the reader, in however complex and qualified a way, human beings' thoughts, actions, feelings, and perceptions of and in an environing world. Robert Frost, who wrote "The Secret Sits," also said about poems that "vowels, consonants, punctuation, syntax, words, sentences, meter are not enough. We need the help of context—meaning—subject matter." (*The Figure a Poem Makes.*)

Deconstructive theorists, in Ted Underwood's accurate summary of what I proposed, "invert the frame of reference and position their inquiry, not in the [uses of language] in the human world, but in language as such, or in a text that is taken as emblematic of the workings of language." From this theoretical position in what de Man calls "language considered by and in itself," the human agents and the references to human matters in a shared world, the central elements in the humanistic paradigm, are reduced to the status of "effects" of the internal processes of language.

In his "Response" Mr. Culler, in defending the deconstructive view, asserts that "what literature enables us to identify as the human emerges through non-human structures and processes." But surely the standard and reiterated deconstructive claim is that what we "identify as the human," whether as the agents or the references of literary texts, are the result of what de Man calls "mystified readings." In Derrida's phrase, they are "effects, and only effects"; effects, furthermore which appear only momentarily before the inexorable workings of language, by an internal dynamic, go on (in the familiar terms) to "subvert," "undermine," "undo," and "dismantle" them into an interminable play of signifiers without decidable significations. In my lecture, I applied the term "inhuman," never to analyses of the formal structures and functionings of language, but only to deconstructive "theory" when, exceeding what I said was its profitable function as a speculative discovery-procedure, the features and consequences of the theory are projected as the categories of a theory-world of life, language, and literature which is neither recognizable by non-deconstructors nor habitable by the deconstructor himself.

2) I find little that is distinctively deconstructive in the kind of critical analyses of literary texts that Mr. Culler defends, and then exemplifies at some length in his discussion of Robert Frost's "The Secret Sits." If that discussion had appeared in *The Explicator* in 1950 over the signature of Cleanth Brooks, it would have occasioned no surprise, but been deemed an exemplary instance of new-critical close reading, in its deft revelation of the ambiguities and ironies that are compressed within the narrow compass of Frost's witty and deliberately gnomic distich.

What one misses in Mr. Culler's lucid exposition is what J. Hillis Miller, a major exponent of the deconstructive art, has defined as its distinctive feature—that it is an "uncanny" critical procedure that produces "uncanny" readings. (See *The Georgia Review* 30 [1976] and Miller's *Theory Then and Now*) In Miller's many formulations of this distinguishing quality—all based on passages in Derrida, and repeatedly paralleled in other deconstructive critics—such uncanniness, "the moment when logic fails," results from the critic's penetration "into the actual nature of literary language, or of language as such," in the dizzying discovery that the features that make reading possible are the very features that make reading impossible. In reading a literary text, the uncanny manifests itself in an "undecidable oscillation" among irreconcil-

able alternatives; in the inevitability of interpretive double-binds, deadlocks, labyrinths, blind alleys, and aporias; and in recurrent *mises en abyme* of a regress of significations without end; resulting in the deconstructor's claims that all readings are misreadings, and in the recognition that, in deconstructing the language and logic of a text, the critic thereby deconstructs the language and logic which he has no option but to use to articulate his deconstructive results. And so on, in a dazzling diversity of designedly self-baffling formulations and discoveries.

It may be that Mr. Culler would dismiss such uncanny assertions—as, in his "Response," he dismisses the radical anti-humanistic pronouncements of the chief post-structural theorists as only "sloganeering moments." Derrida and Derrideans, however, insist that undecidability, aporias, and the endless regress of meanings are the consequences of a priori necessities inherent in what Miller calls "the actual nature...of language as such." Furthermore, to drain these uncanny claims from deconstruction would be to denature and domesticate it, leaving it not much more than the repetition of concepts widely current in humanistic philosophy and criticism, reformulated in a novel and often baroque vocabulary. And to do that would also be to deprive deconstruction of its pathos, its mystique of critical derring-do, of intrepid brinksmanship on the verge (in Miller's statement) of "the abyss" in a "vertigo of the underlying nothingness," and generally, of the extremist anti-traditionalism and iconoclasm which have been a major factor in the appeal of deconstruction to many students in the decades since the 1960s.

The aspect of Mr. Culler's analysis of the Frost poem from which I demur is signalized by his use of the terms "mechanical" or "mechanically" for the syntactic and rhetorical components of the poem: "rhetorical processes... mechanically produce this contrast," there is a "mechanical shifting of the noun *secret*," "the mechanical operations of rhetoric that...arrange words and phrases." The term "mechanical" plays a key role in Paul de Man's version of deconstruction, where it is used equivalently with "automatic," and represents the regularities and processes of language as self-determining and self-effective in producing meanings—or rather, the effect of having meanings. In the statement Mr. Culler elsewhere cited approvingly from Heidegger, "Language speaks; man does not speak." In the humanist view, however, it is not language but a purposive author who uses the formal structures of language as resources in composing a poem. Similarly, and despite repeated asseverations to the contrary, a poem or literary work does not deconstruct itself, but is deliberately deconstructed by a very purposeful deconstructive critic. To claim that an author is the inaugurator, designer, and producer of a poem, however, does not at all entail the view—which Mr. Culler, employing the argumentative logic of all or nothing-at-all, imputes to me—that, as Poe proposes in his deliberately provocative "Philosophy of Composition," all the properties, organization, and effects of a poem are first formulated by an author as conscious ends, then supplied, after due search, with the appropriate verbal means. And in a related matter: to claim that the poet Frost composed the sentence in his poem, "We dance round in a ring and suppose" is not, as Mr. Culler proposes, equivalent to saying that "Frost *affirms* that our activ-

ities are circular," which as he says "risks identifying as Frost's belief what is said in a line of a poem." Four centuries ago Sir Philip Sidney, a humanistic critic who believed that a poet is the "maker" of a poem, disposed of that misconception when he asserted—even if in too inclusive a generalization—that "the poet...nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth."

As I said, these and other issues Mr. Culler raises need to be worked out in a sustained dialogue. But it pleases me to end with an important matter in which we concur. He asserts that the term *human*, which I "link...with rationality and responsibility...is at the same time a name for limits, even infirmities," so that "we are prone to error, miscalculation, or forgetfulness." Indeed; and in my lecture, I stressed the limitations, the finitude, of our human condition. I agree, as I said, with the claim of Derrida and Derrideans that a metaphysical absolute—that is, a self-warranting warrantor of infallible certainty in our human dealings—is inaccessible to our limited humanity, whether we call this warrantor an ultimate foundation, or a presence, or a transcendental signified, or an onto-theological entity. But I disagree with the view that the lack of metaphysical certainty in our use of language precipitates us, as the sole alternative, into absolute uncertainty—into an interminable *suspens vibratoire* of undecidable and warring significations. The characteristic double stance of deconstruction comes down to something like this: "We *need* an absolute, even while realizing that any absolute is an illusion generated by our need; correspondently, we can't do without language, but it just won't do." In what John Austin called "the human predicament," however, though we lack metaphysical certainty, we make-do with practical certainty and adequate assurances. And our shared human experience shows that on many occasions we make-do so well that it makes no practical sense to undo our practical certainties by reference to a postulated necessity built into the constitution of language considered by and in itself.

M.H. Abrams
Ithaca

What Cézanne Saw

To the Editor:

Reading Kenneth Evett's article "The Life in Still Life" in the September issue of *the Bookpress* one cannot help but be impressed by his scholarship and erudition, his unswerving idealism and commitment to values he feels to be healthy and positive in the world of art—values he sees as being increasingly subverted by an audience clamoring for ever greater shock and schlock and by artists ever ready to provide it. His own particular love of still-life painting is movingly expressed as are the reasons he feels there should be a reawakening of interest in the genre.

It is when he discusses the still-lives of Cézanne and the Cubists that Evett gets into trouble and reveals his innate ultra-conservatism. The deviations from "real life" which Cézanne's contemporaries attributed to a skewed vision Evett defines as "inadvertent error and ineptitude" and suggests they were the result of Cézanne's observation of his motifs at such a radically close range his objectivity became flawed. It is a novel hypothesis but loses credibility for we find identical "mistakes" in the figures and landscapes. It is as impossible for Evett as it was for Cézanne's contemporaries to understand that the distortions were conscious, highly intelligent decisions upon which the very life of the composition depended. Curiously, after an extensive analysis of the "mistakes" Evett then goes on to praise Cézanne for his

"responsible control of all encounters and juxtapositions of the forms."

Evett continues his revisionist history by asking us to believe the configurations evolved by the Cubists were the result of Cézanne's errors. If true, that is maybe the first time in history error has been parlayed into success.

Evett commends the Cubists for their "invention of decorative forms of great elegance, organized with classic clarity and enriched with French color." At first reading this seems a very flattering appraisal. But is it really? The phrase "decorative forms" can be interpreted as a very low blow indeed. The forms in a painting are their very life blood; defining them as decorative is akin to slander. Many, if not most Cubist works, "Les Femmes d'Alger" for example, are anything but decorative. Also, two of the three major Cubists are Spanish and their color is decidedly not French. The phrase "organized with classic clarity" is right on the mark.

What Evett fails to realize is that the Cubists were as much if not more devoted to the realization of truth than he claims to be. Their deviations from an imitation of nature were the result—and this is imperfectly understood even today—of their desire to transcend illusion, to go beyond the mirror image. The multiple views found in Cubism and to an extent in Cézanne were not the result of frivolity or accident but rather an imperative need to get at (and into) the reality of any given subject, a reality greater than would be possible using Evett's preferred single viewpoint.

What then is Kenneth Evett up to? We learn toward the close of his thesis when he calls for the return of still-life painting as a means of restoring health to a decadent contemporary art. But why still life? Why not landscape or the figure, which after all have been the predominant concern of artists for five thousand years or so?

It is not only still life which Evett feels will breathe new life into a sick discipline, but a very specific way of interpreting it. Here Evett is vulnerable to a charge of serious inconsistency, for after appearing to accept the work of the School of Paris sympathetically he then emphatically calls for artists to interpret nature the way he sees it, with "unequivocal fidelity."

"Unequivocal fidelity," meaning exact replication, is rarely encountered in the best of art. Just about all the major painters of the past century and a half looked past the Renaissance with its fixation on illusionism (perspective, etc.) and found inspiration and sustenance in the non-illusionistic, inventive, and expressive art of non-Western cultures. Degas, with his dependency on photography, may be the one exception.

Also it is worth noting that the best of pre-modern painters always kept the scientific imperatives of the Renaissance—methods

intended to produce a more "real" image—in check. El Greco and the Mannerists evolved anatomically impossible figures, Poussin adopted the flattened-out formal motifs found in Roman sarcophagi, and Rembrandt appropriated the method of arranging the figures characteristic of the Persian miniatures he collected and often copied. Hundreds of examples might be cited.

In the US during the 1920s, starting with the Regionalists and their cantankerous spokesman Thomas Hart Benton, a profound xenophobia emerged primarily as a revolt against that which was considered the corrupting influence of the School of Paris. The irrational dream of a pure American painting emerged, a dream that reached its apogee in Abstract Expressionism. That idea still exists, even though in a less active form. While Kenneth Evett verbally expresses appreciation and acceptance of School of Paris painters, there is little evidence of European influences in his work. Evett's single viewpoint, his "unequivocal fidelity," precludes that possibility and defines him as a quintessential American painter.

Arnold Singer
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* As Derrida puts this claim of a priori necessity, in a passage I cited in my lecture: "The graphics of iterability inscribes alteration irreducibly in repetition,...a priori, always and already"; with the consequence that it "leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say)...to understand something other than...etc."

Humanism



Illustration: Jack Sherman

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become annihilated, but in a certain manner redressed within the boundaries staked out by the dominators. This "staking out" is called in Roman: *pango*, whence *pax*, peace. . . . In truth, the bringing-to-fall in the sense of deception and outflanking is not the mediate and derived imperial *actio* proper. It is not war [read the overt use of power], but in the *fallere* of deceptive outflanking [*hintergehen* *Umgehens*] and its appropriation to the service of dominion that the proper and "great" trait of the imperial reveals itself.

This deceptively indirect mode of the will to power over others is what Gramsci means by the "discourse of hegemony" and Foucault means by "the repressive hypothesis": the humanist ruse which claims, against authoritative regimes, that its truth is external to and the essential adversary of power rather than its accomplice. It is a formulation epitomized by Foucault's definition of humanism, which, though well known by this time, is overlooked by Abrams in his offensive defense of humanism and by Underwood in his "careful history" of the usage of the word "humanism":

By humanism I mean the totality of discourse through which Western man is told: "Even though you don't exercise power, you can still be a ruler.

Better yet, the more you deny yourself the exercise of power, the more you submit to those in power, then the more this increases your sovereignty." Humanism invented a whole series of subjected sovereignties: the soul (ruling the body, but subjected to God), consciousness (sovereign in a context of judgment, but subjected to the necessities of truth), the individual (a titular control of personal rights subjected to the laws of nature and society), basic freedom (sovereignty within, but accepting the demands of an outside world and "aligned with destiny"). In short, humanism is everything in Western civilization that restricts the desire for power: it prohibits the desire for power and excludes the possibility of power being seized. The theory of the subject (in the double sense of the word) is at the heart of humanism and this is why our culture has tenaciously rejected anything that could weaken its hold upon us.

The historical evidence suggesting the legitimacy of this charge against liberal humanism is ubiquitous in the history, both theoretical and institutional, of modern humanism. At the site of theory, it is discoverable, for example, in Matthew Arnold's appeal to (a Romanized version of) classical Greek culture to justify the suppression of the working class's right of assembly (*Culture and Anarchy*); in Lionel Trilling's reduction of American literary histo-

ry to the service of America's Cold War against Communism (*The Liberal Imagination*); in Walter Jackson Bates' call to the Harvard administration (and Harvard's alumni) to institute a hiring policy that would save the "*litterae humaniores*" from the deconstructive barbarians at the gates of the American university ("The Crisis in English Studies"); and, lest Underwood immunize him by invoking his "good humanism," in M. H. Abrams' lofty and quite illiberal—indeed, as the rhetoric suggests, imperial—definition of the "masterpiece":

The poet must win our imaginative consent to the aspect of human experience he presents and to do so he cannot evade his responsibility to the beliefs and presuppositions of our common experience, common sense, and common moral consciousness. . . . the artist's cost of failure in this essential respect is demonstrated by the writing of accomplished craftsmen in which the substance is too inadequately human to engage our continuing interest, or which requires our consent to positions so illiberal or eccentric or perverse that they incite counter-beliefs which inhibit the ungrudging "yes" that we grant to masterpieces.

—"Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief"

As for institutional practice, evidence for the charge that violence is latent in the discourse of liberal humanism can be found, for example, in the justification for introducing the General Honors (Great Books) and Contemporary Civilization courses into the curriculum of Columbia College in 1919: to make the college student a "citizen, who shall be safe for democracy" in the face of the "threat" of an emergent Bolshevism; in Harvard University's appropriation in 1945 of an updated version of Columbia's representation of the Western heritage in behalf of the political imperatives of the Cold War (General Education in a Free Society better known as "The Red Book"); and in the present—post-Vietnam—representation of the multicultural initiative as a "politically correct" McCarthyism of the Left by a coalition of politically conservative and liberal professors and by the mainstream media in the name of "free" and "disinterested" inquiry and the recuperation of humanist culture.

It is because Underwood ignores this historical evidence of the disabling contradiction—the will to power—informing the "benign" logic of humanism that his representation of my critique of humanism as deriving from an illegitimate focus "on cultural conservatives like Arnold and Babbitt, who make easy targets but have less to do with the history of the idea than he thinks, "constitutes a fundamental and ideologically motivated (not historically inferred) misrepresentation. As I have tried to suggest in retrieving, admittedly in all too summary form, the essential argument of the

posthumanist writing available to him (and to Abrams) at the time of the composition of his essay, the emphasis of my critique of humanism does not fall on the discourse of political reactionaries, but, on the contrary, on the discourse of liberal "pluralism." For what this history suggests is that the "enemy" of women, blacks, gays, ethnic minorities, third world peoples, the environment, and so on, is not so much those, like William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, Hilton Kramer, Dinesh D'Souza, and the National Association of Scholars, whose illiberal pronouncements and practices are easily contested. The real "enemy" of these marginalized constituencies is, as Malcolm X and other black activists of the 1960s knew from historical experience, the privileged discourse of liberal humanism, a far more insidious "enemy" precisely because its individual expression is assumed to be an act of free will and is often motivated by genuine fellow feeling. The history I have retrieved suggests, that is, that the real obstacle to authentic enfranchisement facing those contemporary constituencies of the human community to whom a history has been denied is the hegemonic discourse that has historically tolerated, indeed, increasingly encouraged the otherness of the other. This is so because the technologies of this toleration ensure that dissent remains free-floating, thereby successfully inscribing in the other the will to accommodate its differential otherness to the identity of the dominant culture: to the peace of liberal humanism. It is this peace, now understood as pacification, that resonates in Underwood's conclusion:

Insofar as this [the acquisition of "unpleasant connotations" by the word "humanist"] is just the fate of a word, it doesn't especially matter. But the failure of analysis here is also making it easy to dismiss unrelated ideas—for instance, pluralist democracy—as discredited by association. And the presence of "humanist" as a licensed all-purpose put-down threatens to make it intolerably embarrassing to talk about individual human beings at all in a literature class . . .

Akin to the arguments of such eminent liberal humanists as Frederick Crews (*The Critics Bear It Away*), whose mounting attacks on "theory" are predictably dissociated from "reactionary" humanists, Underwood's conclusion places in serious doubt his distinction between "good" and "bad" humanism.

William Spanos is professor of English and comparative literature at SUNY Binghamton and founding editor of *Boundary 2*. He is the author of several books of literary theory. His *Heidegger and Criticism: Retrieving the Cultural Politics of Destruction* is forthcoming.

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