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COMPLIMENTARY

Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*

Child Sacrifice in America

Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* is an angry book, but his is the anger of outraged love. This is not a book about educational theory; it is rather a *cri de couer* from a writer who has spent the better part of his professional life grappling with the shortcomings and failures of the American educational system, only to see his dreams of reform turn into the nightmare which is the reality of our inner-city schools.

It is Kozol's special genius to have realized that the full horror of schools that are not only overcrowded, understaffed and underfunded, but are literally falling apart, could only be conveyed in the words of the children, teachers, and administrators who inhabit these condemned institutions.

In a way, the book is related to that very American genre - the road book - only in this case the road stops are the decaying schools of East St. Louis, New York City, San Antonio, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Camden, New Jersey. And the voices often astonish, not only with what they report - "We have children," says one grade school principal, "who just disappear from the face of the earth" - but also by virtue of their social understanding:

"My children," says a woman who lives in a black neighborhood of Boston, "know very well the system is unfair. They also know that they are living in a rich society. They see it on TV, and in the advertisements, and in the movies... So they know this other world exists, and, when you tell them that the government can't find the money to provide them with a decent place to go to school, they don't believe it and they know it's a choice that has been made - a choice about how much they matter to society. They see it as a message: 'This is to tell you that you don't much matter. You are ugly to us so we crowd you into ugly places. You are dirty so it will not hurt to pack you into dirty places.'"

But *Savage Inequalities* is not simply oral history; embedded in the chorus of wounded voices, like the *basso continuo* of some infernal Bach fugue, Kozol's insistent analysis lays bare the shameful retrograde history of our educational system and the hypocrisy of a government which pretends that dismally inadequate funding is not a real cause of our separate and unequal schools.

Yet, in the end, there is an almost perverse optimism about Kozol's book. He truly believes that if only enough people understand what is wrong, they will do something about it. After all, he seems to say, who cannot heed that "We are children only once; and, after those few years are gone, there is no second chance to make amends. In this respect, the consequences of unequal education have a terrible finality." -Ed.

Dave Lehman

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES
Children in America's Schools
Jonathan Kozol
Crown, \$20.00, 262 pp.

Dave Lehman, the principal of Ithaca's Alternative Community



weekends at one of the neighborhood playgrounds. Thus, it was no surprise that when desegregation came to the South and our two high schools were merged into the new T.C. Williams High School, that it soon became one of the perennial basketball powers in Virginia, and my

schools now, more than half the students are black, or newly arrived immigrants.

And then Kozol's analysis cut like a laser across time, distance, and geography when he describes Riverdale Elementary School in the northwest sector of the Bronx as two

selves: "It occurred to me that we had not been listening much to children in these recent years of 'summit conferences' on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions." (p. 5) Thus, at Clark Junior High in East St. Louis, a 14-year-old girl with short black curly



Photo: Jack Delano / Illustration: Benn Nadelman

School, was first inspired by Jonathan Kozol at a Chicago conference in 1973 on "Education for Change." In his book, "Alternative Schools: A Guide for Educators and Parents," Kozol refers to Lehman and his wife Judy as "two of the original leaders and most ethically motivated people in the movement." We asked Lehman for his reading of "Savage Inequalities" and were rewarded with both the following review and Lehman's telephone interview of Kozol.

To read Jonathan Kozol's new book *Savage Inequalities: Children in American Schools* is an emotional, heart-rending, personally challenging experience - at least it was for me. As Kozol describes our present "separate and unequal" system of education in this country, I am taken back to my childhood and my public school education in the schools of Alexandria, Virginia. I went through the seventh grade at George Mason Elementary School which was made up of other middle-class white students like myself, knowing only that there were other elementary schools, including "ones for Negroes" as was the language of the late 1940's and early 50's.

In 1953, I entered George Washington High School, from which I graduated in 1957. I can still remember looking out a third floor window literally across the railroad tracks at Parker Gray High School, the black high school, and wondering what it was like, but assuming in ignorance that it was surely "separate and equal." Being a member of the basketball team, one of the top high-school teams in the state, and knowing that Parker Gray also had an excellent team - but in the Negro league - I had been frustrated, angered, and confused by the fact that we were not allowed to play against each other - although we often played against and with each other on the

old high school became a fully integrated middle school.

Yet being in the "fully integrated" school district of Ithaca, I often wondered what my old high school was like now. Patrick Welsh at least partially answered that curiosity in his book *Tales Out of School: A Teacher's Candid Account from the Front Lines of the American High School Today* (Penguin 1987) which was his English teacher's view of T.C. Williams. It has continued to have the white middle-class population of my high school days, and, typical of most urban

"separate and unequal" schools within the same school: "The school therefore contains effectively two separate schools: one of about 130 children, most of whom are poor, Hispanic, black, assigned to one of the 12 special classes; the other of some 700 mainstream students, almost all of whom are white or Asian." (p. 93) This is what T.C. Williams seems to have become, and perhaps it is all too true here in Ithaca as well.

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol tries to let the administrators, teachers, parents, and students of our urban schools speak for them-

hair has this to say:

"Every year in February we are told to read the same old speech of Martin Luther King. We read it every year. 'I have a dream...' It does begin to seem - what is the word?' She hesitates and then she finds the word: 'perfunctory.' I ask her what she means.

"We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King," she says. "The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black.

see *Inequalities*, p. 6

Review

Digging Into Kansas

Mark Schechner

PRAIRYERTH
(a deep map)

by William Least Heat-Moon
Houghton-Mifflin, \$24.95, 624 pp.

The uncapitalized subtitle of *PrairyErth (a deep map)* is a description of its method. What the author, William Least Heat-Moon, has endeavored to provide here is a vertical map of a single county in Kansas, Chase County, by moving inexorably from its bland topographical features and Rand McNally-level data into the soil itself, to explore into and beneath the roots to see how thoroughly a man might understand a place, within the limits of his energy and imagination. That includes an historiographical inquiry that branches in one direction to, say, the tornado of 1968, and in another toward the Permian Era, when all was covered by ocean. To underscore what he is up to here, he quotes the late *New York Times* reviewer Anatole Broyard on the subject of "thick description":

In anthropology now, the term

"thick description" refers to a dense accumulation of ordinary information about a culture, as opposed to abstract or theoretical analysis. It means observing the details of life until they begin to coagulate or cohere into an interpretation... I'd like to see thick description make a comeback. Apart from the sheer sensuous pleasure, it gives you the comforting feeling that you're not altogether adrift, that at least you have an actual context to enter into and real things to grapple with. The protectors of the environment are a powerful group in the United States. Perhaps they should extend their concern to the country of the imagination.

One could hardly write a better one-paragraph summary of this book's method.

William Least Heat-Moon is the given Indian name of William Trogden, who, having English, Irish, and Osage Indian ancestry, has chosen his Osage name under which to write, which is surely emblematic

see *PrairyErth*, p. 8

INSIDE:

Interview of
Sander Gilman
page 3

Calling **Gary Snyder**
page 5

Ali Mazrui on Multi-
Cultural Education
page 7

David Curzon's
Midrashim
page 9

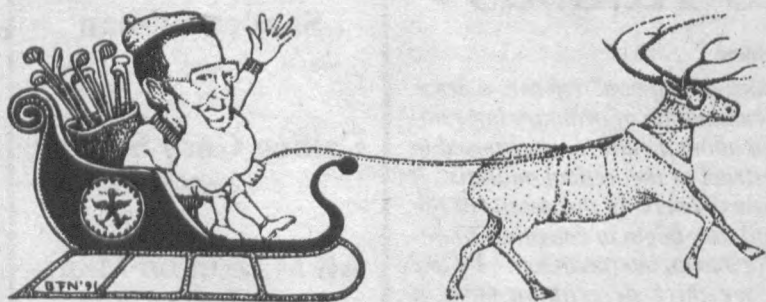
Susan Pickens and
Lisa Harris Confront
a Common Past
page 11

Diane Ackerman's
Passion for Detail
page 13

A Visit From St. Nichts

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
 Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
 The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
 In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
 The children were nestled all snug in their beds
 (except for the homeless and those underfed);
 The TV in the corner, and I in my cap,
 Had just settled down for a long winter's nap —
 When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
 I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
 When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
 but a sub-compact sleigh and eight tiny reindeer,
 With alert bodyguards — there must have been six —
 I knew in a moment it must be St. Nichts.
 More rapid than vetoes his coursers they came,
 And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
 "Now, Dasher! Now, Prancer! Now, Jogger and Vixen!
 On, Coolidge! On, Hoover! On, Reagan and Nixon!
 To the top of the polls! to the Victory Ball!
 Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
 As promises before an election fly,
 When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
 So up to the house-top the coursers they flew
 With the sleigh full of ploys, and St. Nichts, alas, too.
 Then Santa's helper came out of thin air;
 It was hard to believe he really was there.
 His eyes — how they twinkled; his dimples, how merry!
 He was lite as the feather I've seen in "Doonesbury!"
 His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
 And he seemed to just float on the wind-driven snow;
 As I drew in my head, and was flipping the channels,
 Down the airwaves they travelled, dressed in grey flannels.
 St. Nichts had the bundle of ploys on his back,
 And he looked like a pedlar just opening his pack.
 The stump of a pipe stuck out from beneath,
 And the smoke it encircled the town like a wreath;
 He gave a broad smile, when the room became smelly,
 Then laughed when I coughed, 'til my spine felt like jelly.
 A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
 Soon gave me to know I had something to dread;
 He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
 And snatched all the stockings; then turned to the jerk,
 And laying his finger aside of his lip,
 Managed somehow to give me the slip.
 They sprang to the sleigh, to the team gave a whistle,
 And away they all flew with the roar of a missile.
 But I heard them exclaim, ere they drove out of sight,
 "Happy Christmas to all, and it serves you all right!"

(Apologies to Clement Clarke Moore)



Calendar

New Alexandrian Plans Move and Expansion

The New Alexandrian Bookstore, specializing in books on "body, mind and spirit," has announced a mid-January move across the street from its present location to Clinton Hall, 110 N. Cayuga Street, Ithaca, above Ben & Jerry's. It will be opening as a "Bookstore/Cafe" in its new, larger space.

Upcoming Readings at Smedley's Bookshop

On Wednesday, Dec. 4, at 7:30 P.M., Harryette Mullen will read from *Trimings*, her collection of prose poems. On Saturday, Dec. 7, at 8:00 P.M., Isabel Miller, author of *Patience and Sarah*, *All Good Women*, and *Side by Side*, will read from her works. Smedley's Bookshop is located at 307 W. State Street in Ithaca. For more information, call 273-2325.

"the BOOKPRESS" will announce regional literary events free of charge in its calendar section. Information must be received by the 15th of the month previous to publication in order to ensure placement. Send event information to: BOOKPRESS CALENDAR, DeWitt Building, 215 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca, NY 14850.

Letters To The Editor

To the Editor:

In August, I wrote a reply to John Baines' review (*New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 11, 1991) of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and Cheikh Anta Diop's *Civilization or Barbarism*. I sent it to the *New York Times*, hoping that it would be published to allow an open debate rather than a one-sided view of the books. Predictably, the *Times* chose not to publish it. By pure coincidence, one of my students - in a class where I discussed Diop and Bernal - brought me a copy of your paper with Bernal's interview. Because the *Times* has avoided the debate, and given that your readers have now been informed of the issue, I am enclosing the letter for your publication. My main purpose in the letter is to defend Professor Diop who cannot defend himself because he is dead, but I also intend to contribute, via this reply, to a larger debate which has been carried on in the *Times* for quite a while now: the debate about "multiculturalism."

John Baines' review of *Black Athena* and *Civilization or Barbarism* is another example of confusion created in the name of academic expertise on the subject of "Egyptology." A systematic refutation of the review would be too lengthy for publication, so I shall make only four points.

First, it is quite obvious that Professor Baines has not read most of Diop's works. In fact, I suspect that he made only a cursory reading of *Civilization or Barbarism*. Had he read Diop's other books - including an English language con-

densation of his earlier (and major) works - he would not have made the baseless claim that Diop "can be read on faith alone." Baines is right in asserting that the book is "an assembly of studies that hardly coheres into a whole." But this is precisely why he should have consulted Diop's earlier, more important, works. Diop did not intend to repeat himself in *Civilization or Barbarism* and invited the readers to consult his earlier works for a better understanding of his major theses. The issue is too important to be left to a cursory reading; perhaps Mr. Baines cannot read French, which may have prevented him from having access to Diop's earlier works, where his main concern is not "faith" but evidence. If this is the case, then it is regrettable, since claims to expertise in Egyptology are shaky if one cannot master languages, especially French, Champollion's language, and African languages, on which some of Diop's main claims rest.

Second, Baines accuses Bernal and Diop of the sin of diffusionism. In his view, these authors imply that other cultures (including the West) were not inventive, since they borrowed from Africa. This is simply a distortion. Diffusionism is not synonymous with lack of inventiveness, especially not in this case. Had Baines read Diop, he would have discovered that Diop recognizes Greek, Roman, and European "genius." In any case, citing examples of "separate civilizations" (Upper Niger, Axum, Zimbabwe, China and Japan), as Baines does, is no proof that they did not borrow or benefit

from the Nubian/Egyptian civilization. Moreover, the theory of diffusionism need not be associated with racism and imperialism, as Baines claims, except in the minds of racists and imperialists. Neither Bernal nor Diop harbors such a mind. There is nothing racist about recognizing, for example, that much of today's non-Western world has acquired Western culture through diffusionism. This does not imply that the non-Western world is not inventive.

Third, Professor Baines claims that in attempting to show the diffusion of Black/African civilization, both Bernal and Diop have erred with respect to their methodology. In the name of academic "specialization," he derides them for not "absorb[ing] the methods of archeology or text criticism." According to him, Bernal and Diop are less scientific in their assessment of African civilizations because they "read their texts far more literally" than modern archeologists; they do not distinguish legends and rhetorical embellishments from facts. Embellishments in historical narratives are aimed at enhancing the status of one's own race, country, tribe, or lineage, and not that of others; Herodotus and other ancients who left testimony about African civilization would have been superhuman indeed had they done just the opposite. Archeology, however strongly supported by modern science, is a matter of interpretation, hence subject to the usual distortions and fabrications. Baines' critique is just as tendentious as that

see *Letter*, p. 14

Happy New Year
 From the
 BOOKPRESS

The staff at "the BOOKPRESS" wish you happy holidays. "the BOOKPRESS" will return in February of 1992.

THIS SPACE
 AVAILABLE

...for your comments, concerns, and questions. the BOOKPRESS is interested in what you have to say about the literary arts and our coverage of the literary arts. We are a forum for writers and readers, and that means you. You've done the reading, now do the writing! Send correspondence to:

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Erratum

Due to adjustments in our publishing system, the initial printing of the November issue of "the BOOKPRESS" (#3) contained several errors in content. The middle of Lamar Herrin's interview was missing, part of Robert Hill's essay, "On Reading in Bed," did not get printed, and the continuations for Biodun Jeyifo's article on "Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" were out of order. Fortunately, we were able to catch these errors and correct them, but unfortunately several hundred of the first printing managed to escape into the public's hands. We apologize to the authors and to our readers for the confusion this may have caused.

An Interview with Sander Gilman

Through A Glass Darkly

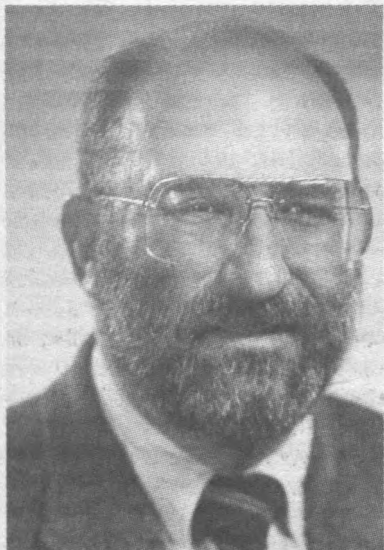
Barbara Mink

Recent Books by Sander Gilman:

HEINRICH HEINE AND THE OCCIDENT:
Multiple Identities,
Multiple Receptions
(with Peter Uwe Hohendahl)
University of Nebraska Press,
\$35.00, 256 pp.

INSCRIBING THE OTHER
University of Nebraska Press,
\$30.00, 372 pp.

THE JEW'S BODY
Routledge, \$15.95 paper, 303 pp.



Sander Gilman

Sander Gilman was born in Buffalo, New York but rarely admits it. He claims to be from New Orleans, where his parents moved when he was a child. Gilman's provocative works certainly seem more appropriate to the colorful polyglot world of New Orleans than Buffalo; he is the author of many books, including "The Face of Madness", "On Blackness without Blacks", "Seeing the Insane", "Disease and Representations", "Jewish Self-Hatred", and the newly published "The Jew's Body". Gilman is the Goldwin Smith Professor of Humane Studies in Cornell's Department of German Studies, and is also Professor of the History of Psychiatry at Cornell Medical College. He is married to Marina V.E. Gilman, currently the visiting Chair of the Voice Department at Syracuse University and the Director of Vocal Coaching at Cornell. They have two sons, Samuel and Daniel.

B.M. Tell us about the evolution of your interests. How did you start, and how did you get here?

S.G. I started as a historically oriented philologist, working with the 16th century, about as far away from real topics as possible. But at the very same time, 1968, I published one of the first essays on the representation of blacks in German culture, an essay which was published with great difficulty over the objections of a lot of people in the field.

For many years I worked on two tracks: one straight-forward philological editing of texts, the other taking a look at cultural critical questions. It was in part an attempt to reconcile my own political actions of the sixties, mainly the civil rights movement in the South, with the demands of a profession which stressed the a-political and transcendental. Literary studies at that time was New Criticism, and while I was learning that in the classroom, I was sitting-in at Woolworths and riding in the back of buses in New Orleans.

This became especially apparent to me during my first full-time teaching job, at Dillard Univer-

sity in Louisiana, where I was supposed to teach middle-class values to middle-class Afro-American students, while making sure no taint of revolution was heard on campus. That sort of schizophrenic life carried over well into my early professional life.

B.M. What's the difference between the kind of cultural criticism you do and the old German notion of Kulturgeschichte?

S.G. I'm interested in the fantasies of the culture, as opposed to the institutional representations of culture. For example, I'm not terribly interested in the history of drama, I'm more interested in using a play to represent some of the fantasy worlds that exist in culture. The other thing that differentiates what I do from cultural studies as practiced in the U.S., is that my model emphasizes the psychological dimension of an individual writer functioning in the society rather than that writer's economic or social position. I don't think those are necessarily contradictory; but I'm looking at another aspect of what the more economically or socially oriented cultural critic does.

B.M. The scope of your work is so wide-ranging, from Brecht to Wilde, from Nietzsche to nose jobs; is there a common thread that ties them together?

S.G. The common thread, at least for most of the things I've written over the last ten to fifteen years, is the way individuals belonging to certain groups create their own representations of those things that are sources of anxiety for them. Both the books on Berlin and London were attempts to frame some of the questions about how such images get generated. More recently I've been doing some very straight-forward books on images of disease and self-hatred.

B.M. You set some pretty strict literary parameters in your book on Jewish self-hatred, but there's a temptation to go beyond your psychoanalytic reading. Should we?

S.G. That book in particular was very carefully constructed because it does not argue that everybody automatically internalizes all the negative images of the group to which they belong. What it argues is that people internalize those images which are particularly relevant to them. The question is how you examine a very specific subset of individuals for whom a very specific set of images are relevant.

People who see themselves as writers and who are labeled as

Jews in the society in which they live respond to that society's images of the Jew's language, because that's the tool that they're going to use. The Aryan society often has a deprecatory image of the Jew's ability to command the language of their culture. Any Jew who becomes acculturated assumes that he has control of the language which he speaks; but the assumption of the dominant culture is that if you wake up that Jew in the middle of the night he'll start speaking Hebrew or Yiddish. In this country Gore Vidal attacked Norman Podhoretz two years ago not only for what he wrote, but how he did it, coming very close to saying that these Jews can't write because they're not real Americans.

When writers are forced to confront the myth imposed on them that they don't have control of the language in which they're trying to write, they can deal with it in several ways. Philip Roth, for example, makes that question a central topic of his books; Woody Allen dealt with this same myth in *Zelig*. Wittgenstein wrote in his journal about his own inability to be creative in response to the German myth that Jews can't be creative. And Berthold Auerbach - who wrote very German stories all his life - when confronted with this same myth by his friend Richard Wagner in his book *Jews and Music*, wrote that everything he had done until then was a sham, since he would always be viewed as an outsider by members of the dominant culture.

Even Yiddish, which would seem to be a way for the Jew to have his own language, was seen as marginalized bad German. So European Jewish writers exhorted Jews to stop speaking Yiddish, in order to assimilate more easily. But they had to write in Yiddish because that's what was being read. Out of that weirdness came the development of Yiddish as a literary language.

B.M. Are you saying that ordinary, not-self-conscious people do not internalize the values of the dominant culture?

S.G. No. I'm saying that they don't internalize those specific images which are associated with the act of speaking or writing to as great a degree as someone who's earning his living and defining himself in society as an author. You can look at autobiographies of "ordinary" Jews in the 19th century, the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, and see that for them language itself is not a highly charged medium of which they're self-aware. Clearly they're going to internalize other aspects of their representation,

but the difference is that writers define themselves in terms of their use of language, so for them the myth that they are unable to control the language through which they define themselves is an extraordinary moment.

B.M. In *Jewish Self-Hatred* you extrapolate from the question of the Jewish writer to the issue of all writers as Jews in society.

S.G. My argument is that the writer has a very specific role representing tensions within the society, tensions which are often inarticulated. This is true for any generator of texts, even sit-com writers. We are story-telling animals, and we like most to listen to stories about ourselves. So the story teller's role winds up reflecting who we think we are, rather than who we really are.

I think all writers have a self-conscious function, but the function of writers who are labeled as different is a very interesting one - African-American writers or Jewish writers, at times when these are relevant categories, gay writers today. Then there are whole categories that have disappeared - German-American writers for example, who were very important up throughout the 1920's. There are many reasons for this, including the conscious suppression of German culture after World Wars I and II, but also German-Americans are no longer labeled as different; they're seen as part of the dominant culture.

B.M. What role has the writing of Frantz Fanon played in your work?

S.G. I was greatly influenced by Fanon when I was a student. He was the first person I read who had approached the question of race from the standpoint of how people come to internalize ideas of their own difference, and certainly his work was absolutely central to my own understanding of psychoanalysis as a model for analyzing the sequelae of social imbalance.

But I very recently wrote an essay on Fanon which has upset a number of people, pointing out that Fanon does to the Jew what he sees French society doing to the black. He reduces the Jew to a type representing a single quality, and there is a certain level of privileging his own position. He reduces the Holocaust to a struggle among whites, and he situates the Jew as part of that dominant culture against which he's fighting. He deals with blacks as individuals, but with Jews as a monolithic class. It's an interesting problem in Fanon, because he provides us with a model for analyzing his own internalization of ideas of

gender and race.

B.M. Would you explain some of the psychoanalytic concepts you use?

S.G. The model that I use is a model of projection and its counterpart, intrajection, which has evolved greatly over the last 75 years. We look at how images are projected, why a dominant culture creates images of those who are different, then how and why that projection is taken into the psyche of specific individuals. You have to look at individuals because the texts we read are not generated by groups, but by individuals within those groups.

I've become very interested in the Kleinian notion of projection into the psyche as opposed to projection onto the psyche. The distinction would be that individuals serve not simply as a screen onto which images are projected, but rather that they take up into themselves - as parts of their own self-definition - aspects of those projections. We all wind up responding; there are no neutral spaces.

B.M. How did you come to write your book on representations of disease?

S.G. After seeing the Zefferelli production of *La Traviata* - one of my favorite operas - I left the opera house wondering why in God's name anybody would write an opera about a woman who's dying of tuberculosis? What a disgusting topic, not

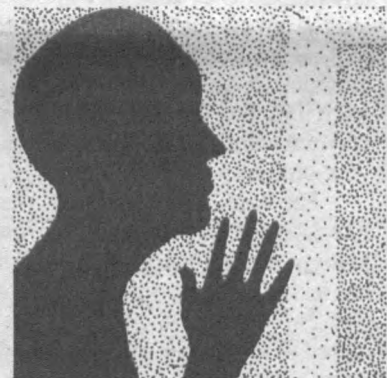


illustration: Benn Nadelman

only to put death on the stage, but death from a long and lingering disease. And the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to examine how ideas of disease are represented in different contexts.

The book looks at representation of disease from Chinese medicine of the 19th century to contemporary psychiatry, with an eye toward trying to understand the cultural space that different societies give to disease. Our society has not only religious and institutional responses but also very interesting cultural responses.

B.M. How does your work relate to Susan Sontag's writing, especially her book *Illness as Metaphor*?

S.G. I was greatly influenced by Sontag's work and still have great respect for it, despite the limitations I think are inherent in the thesis. After all, disease is not just metaphor, it's biological. Sontag was one of the first to deal with labeling and the ways such images affect our ability to control our fears. But the fears stem not just from words or labeling, but from the disease itself, and ultimately have to be dealt with.

B.M. How did you answer your original question about *La Traviata*?

S.G. I concluded that illness is represented in such a way as to

see Gilman, p. 15



illustration: Benn Nadelman

On Giving Books

Robert Hill

Rhetoric, Aristotle informs us, is the art of looking into the soul and knowing the causes that move it. In a word, discernment. It is also discernment that comes into play when one chooses a book as a gift. It is well and good to play it safe and buy up a crateload of *The Velveteen Rabbit* to pawn off on the anonymous progeny who noisily cohabit with one's acquaintances; or to purchase a job lot of *The Best Short Fiction of 1987* to meet holiday obligations to their parents. But this is hardly in



the spirit of a sacramental act. And giving a book is closer to a sacrament than those ranks of identical Dave Barry or Doonesbury paperbacks lurking on identical shelves in trade bookstores may permit us to believe.

Scoff at the word, sniff at its presumption; but giving a book is as close to a sacrament as any other candidate I can think of. I say this with a particular case in point, for I recall, one Christmas morning in early adolescence, hefting yet another package from beneath the tree, one with the infinite promise of good weight. My heart sank a bit when I unwrapped it to find just another book given me by an adult, no doubt well-meaning; but I could not at that moment appreciate the missionary spirit intruding on what should have been a feeding frenzy of the thirteen-year-old fancy.

The book, as it happened, was *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, and my fancy since I read it has never been the same nor has it ever entirely grown up. It had disclosed to me a realm that has never since been closed: the towering intellect of the scholarly Hafen Slawkenbergius, that could find its spark in such homely instances as the tale of the prioress, the novice, and their Ass; the raffish extravagance of Walter Shandy's theorizing, the man grown patiently irritable under the constant leer of unruly Fate; the gentle Uncle Toby on his Hobby-horse, whom one could not but wish to call Uncle; and how to

spot a tale of a cock and a bull, unless it be told by Woman.

That person who had the temerity to wrap up a book and give it to me in good cheer, without the sense to ask my forgiveness, indeed never thereafter stood in need of it. For she had given me a thing rare and irreplaceable, and she rose immeasurably in my grateful estimation. More than that, like the true rhetorician, she had revealed her very self - her taste, her close judgment of me, her whimsicality, and all those wrinkles of soul we call character.

For books, more than any other gift, reveal the whole character of the giver, as clearly as speech does in other lights. Another gift may show only a glimpse - extravagance, indifference, improvidence, or affection. A book can uncover the person. I would be amiss to wrap up Fodor's *Guide to Bhutan* for someone whose idea of world travel is a junket to the malls in Westchester; but with a little thought it is easy enough to get it right, and a photographic folio of Faberge's eggs might introduce such a person to the realm of consumables worthy of striving after.

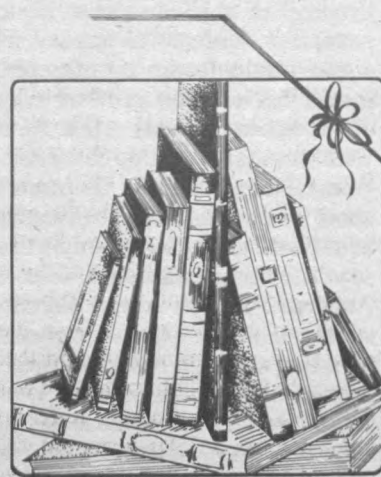
One of the beauties of a book is that its goodness is neither commensurate nor coextensive with its newness. In a second-hand bookshop, the marked absence of that glossy sheen of new covers holds more promise than not. "I hate to read new books," Hazlitt grouses, then proceeds to recount with relish the treasures he has unearthed and carried home from the bookseller's for a pittance - a volume of Milton, and one of Burke, "forked and playful as the lightning, crested like a serpent." The glory of the search lies in the luck of the draw, the chance timeliness of being there just then, of turning up a familiar and perhaps long lost companion. Trains of old associations may be set rattling along by no more than a glance at a recognizable spine. "Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again," bumbles Hazlitt in better spirits for once.

Ransacking shelves of used books to pass along as gifts, the search acquires an added dimension. Another discrimination is required, for among rumbling trains of associated ideas spring up faces of acquaintances who, in those instances of quick and ecstatic judgment, are likely to enjoy or profit from this or that chance find. It is mental chess, the markers divided equally among authors and titles on

the one hand, and the faces of our friends on the other.

There is, as in all matters, an equally plausible argument to be made upon the other side. Hazlitt may very well snort, "I do not think altogether the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living." But in that least mollifying of persons, the good Dr. Johnson, we may find a middle ground in his gentle admonition that "for many reasons, a man writes much better than he lives." Which I will construe to mean that, dead or alive, an author stands a pretty equal chance of being a bad patch, should we ever chance to meet one *ex libro*.

To take the argument a step further, however, and leaving aside the question of an author's character, we also find in Johnson a sound consideration for looking into brand, spanking, shiny, uncracked, new



books. "If we had inherited from antiquity enough to afford employment for the laborious, and amusement for the idle, I know not what room would have been left for modern genius and modern industry; almost every subject would have been preoccupied, and every style would have been fixed by a precedent from which few would have ventured to depart. Every writer would have had a rival, whose superiority was already acknowledged..." Which I will construe to mean that the more things change, the more things change, and that genius may shine from a snowy new page of phototype as likely as from a yellowed page of letterset.

Nor do we open books merely to sniff out genius at the turning of every page. Genius can cloy; books should never. It is too easy to think

of books only as things to be read, and read entire. But "modern industry," that more modest Johnsonian correlative of "modern genius," has produced as well books to be looked at, looked into, referred to; books that may entertain, educate, or be relied upon in any number of ways. We may receive instruction in Senegalese, learn to wire a house or a bomb, revive our Latin declensions or our memories of Latvian holidays, all without troubling any genius who may slumber between the pages of other books. In short, rather than troubling ourselves to match an author's patent genius with the characters of our friends, we may take the psychological route and simply cater our choices to their "interests." Not, that is, what may profit another, but merely what another might like, which is, after all, a fair consideration and one more easily satisfied in most instances.

Having introduced the merely preferential as a category of deliberation in our choice of gifts, we open up all sorts of further (if somewhat vague) psychological considerations. We have all learned in the last decade or so that some of us are right-brained, others left-brained creatures, and that this scrap of information included in each of our operating manuals has consequences for our particular preferences, abilities, and interests. (You see now what a rich mine the realm of psychology affords.) All of which brings me, in a right-brained kind of circuitousness, to the picture book. If the capacity for rational discourse, either with another person or with a book, is a rather high common denominator of humanity, a relish of the graphic is one of the lower ones. Or at least one of the commoner ones. And while picture books may not suit every purpose a book may answer, there is no denying they suit nearly every taste.

It is at least an arguable position that the best travel books are not primarily pictorial (is a picture always worth a thousand words?); plainly the best art books are. And there is something less damning in lapses of judgment when we give illustrated books; we get off easier, for example, if we give a glossy collection of Arnold Newman's abstract expressionist plates to a confirmed lover of Watteau's sheep portraits than if we should send off *A Man's Game: No-Risk No-Investment Real Estate* to our best Marxist/feminist friend. There is less moral shrapnel to be hazarded.

There is also something impressive about a book of art or photographic plates that a book of words can never quite attain to. The former are always very large by comparison with the latter, and usually very glossy. But more than that, picture books bear immediate and unmistakable (because so graphic) evidence of our own good taste in giving it. And that is true even when the book itself is not particularly welcomed by the recipient, because there is an undeniable appeal for anyone in a big double-truck spread of colored (or black-and-white, for that matter) pages. No one would question another's taste when confronted with that spectacle. On the other hand, even though good taste may have come very much into play when we chose a piece of writing to hand along to someone, still there are subtleties in that sort of book that must be read more or less carefully to be appreciated. And there is the added fact that the book does not, by itself, present a visual spectacle as does a book of illustrations. Too much can intervene, too many niceties of poetry or prose can remain unread, and hence unrecognized, to be sure of impressing.

It all sounds more difficult than perhaps it is. Clearly books can have as wide an appeal as anything else. But doing it right really is more difficult than just going out and buying an ordinary gift like a Maserati or a refurbished DC-3. And the rewards of doing it right, in those rare instances when the right book presents itself for the friend who can appreciate it, are most satisfying. The chance of opening up a new realm of discourse or imagination to another is something worthy of the



illustrations: Milly Acharya

closest consideration. What are friends for? What are books for?

Robert Hill is a writer who resides in Ithaca, New York.

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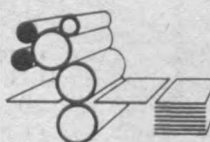
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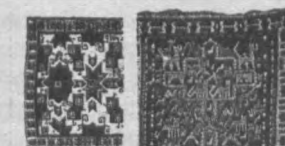
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Calling Gary Snyder

Peter Fortunato

Poetry by Gary Snyder:

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North Point Press, \$10.95 paper, 208 pp.

REGARDING WAVE

New Directions, \$5.95 paper, 84 pp.

TURTLE ISLAND

New Directions, \$5.95 paper, 114 pp.

I still get a kick out of the fact that Gary Snyder has a telephone these days, but I followed the old protocol of writing in order to set up a time for this interview. It used to be that Gary would have to drive out from his back country homestead in northern California twelve miles to the nearest public phone to meet his scheduled calls. He didn't do it every day, but you knew, of course, that if he said he'd be there, he'd be there. He's got a poem about it, "Under the Sign of Toki's" from 1976 - the year he "served as chair for the California Arts Council without a phone at home." Maybe this sounds quaint now, but I note that word originally means clever or crafty. Gary has never wanted to be too accessible, neither to his many fans nor to the Governor of California.

Now there's electricity and telephones and computers at Kitkitdizze, the home Gary designed and constructed with friends over

twenty years ago, a place I don't imagine he'll ever stop improving. The poems in *Turtle Island* (1975 - his Pulitzer Prize winner) are a good record of the vision he rooted in California, having come home from Japan ready to raise a family. You might remember that era, the late 60's challenge to do more than romanticize going back to the land: go back for keeps, some people did, and a lot of what they learned is "the real work" of environmentalism. Gary was born in the Pacific Northwest, a farmboy in the 30's and 40's who worked in the woods, and his writing has always been identified with such matters. For many years he's been an inspiring figure, always evolving his vision. A practical man who knows the value of laughter and storytelling, he is at heart very plain and generous.

Gary answered my letter about an interview with a phone call from his office near the house in a salt-box barn; I remember helping to build it in the summer of 1975, when the original idea was that it could hold horses. For me it holds some very dear memories of an extended period when my wife, Mary Gilliland, and I lived with Gary as his "poetry apprentices". What that meant in its broadest, most important sense was studying and practicing the "old ways", the wisdom-ways - the mother-wit which has endured because it has always informed human life. Mary and I were married at Kitkitdizze, and called on Gary to preside at our home-grown Buddhist wedding ceremony.

In recent years, while there's been a steady production of poetry,

Gary Snyder's emphasis seems to have been on prose writings that further develop his anthropology-based discourse on the value of wilderness and the making of human culture. This has meant an ongoing, detailed collection of "high quality information" from different cultures, as far back as the Pleistocene Epoch. (I recall a letter from Gary that began, "I think 50,000 years." It was



Gary Snyder

part of an introduction for Mary and me to his vision of San Juan Ridge, where we'd been invited to live.)

His recent book of essays, *The Practice of the Wild* (1990) is a beautifully written consideration of such ideas. It's not an easy book, despite its lucid prose, but that's because it represents such a distillation of perennial issues from the perspective of a no-nonsense present in which the possible demise of our species and many others must be acknowledged. To write poetry about such matters is a different sort of challenge - it's probably what launched Gary Snyder into his life-

long studies of Native American and Eastern cultures. There, poets have maintained an engagement with nature on nature's terms, going all the way back to the Paleolithic development of shamanism.

Over the telephone, Gary told me he is happily back at work finishing up a poetry project that spans about thirty years of his life - his wide-ranging, always evolving poem, last seen collected as seven sections in a 1970 edition - *Mountains and Rivers without End*. Since then, another eleven parts of the poem have appeared separately, or are due in print soon.

Six Sections from Mountains and Rivers without End, Plus one (now out of print) is written in open forms. The frequently elliptical pattern of imagery and associations propels the reader into a landscape of consciousness intriguing with allusions. The work is geographic in a literal and metaphorical sense - it is of many places regarded concretely, viewed through the primordial poetic act that sings this earth into human consciousness. The expansive themes recall for me the vision of Whitman, whose American-made soul wasn't going to rest within national borders: *Mountains and Rivers without End* is "plumed for such far flights" as India, China, or Japan.

The title of the poem is borrowed from a type of landscape scroll painting that flourished from the Sung to the Ming dynasties in China. Such a work is read horizontally, perhaps unrolled and rolled between the hands, animating a journey through a landscape for the viewer.

Throughout, as is typical of Snyder's work, there is keen attention to context and detail embodied in the swift movement of poetic images. This reflects a consciousness well aware of human proportion, tiny but distinctly present amid the landscape.

P.F. You say you are working on completing *Mountains & Rivers*, and that you're feeling the tentativeness of it. Do you have a projected date for this?

G.S. Oh, about two years, a couple of years. This is getting close to completion, but there are some things that are still to be seen in terms of overall organization.

P.F. The rhythm with which *Mountains & Rivers* has unfolded is unique, it's expansive over both time and space; can you describe what it's like to have been working in this fashion, and how do you know when you're working on this poem and not something else?

G.S. (Pause) That is a pure intuitive call. Nonetheless for several decades now, I, as most poets do, know when a chunk of poetry comes to me, know that it's *poetry*, possibly a poem. And in my case, when that chunk of poetry comes to me, I know right away if this is one of the *Mountains & Rivers* poems. It is a particular tone, voice, angle, flavor, and the fact that it belongs to a much larger framework. It's not closed. That's not to say that *Mountains and Rivers* is self-enclosed. It's a particular quality of the language and

see Snyder, p. 6

Control Burn

What the Indians
here
used to do, was,
to burn out the brush every year
in the woods, up the gorges,
keeping the oak and the pine stands
tall and clear
with grasses
and kitkitdizze under them,
never enough fuel there
that a fire could crown.

Now, manzanita,
(a fine bush in its right)
crowds up under the new trees
mixed up with logging slash
and a fire can wipe out all.

Fire is an old story.
I would like,
with a sense of helpful order,
with respect for laws
of nature,
to help my land
with a burn, a hot clean
burn.

(manzanita seeds will only open
after a fire passes over
or once passed through a bear)

And then
it would be more
like,
when it belonged to the Indians

Before.

From "Turtle Island" by Gary Snyder (New Directions, 1974)
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Off Campus at the Bookery

The "Off Campus at the Bookery" lecture series continued last month with Diane Ackerman reading from her most recent works, *The Moon By Whale Light* and *A Natural History of the Senses*. "Off Campus at the Bookery" continues to feature lectures and readings on a wide variety of topics, one flight up in the office complex Atrium of the DeWitt Mall, on Sundays at 4:00 PM.

January 12

Jim Hardesty

will give a slide lecture and demonstration on "The Discovery of X-Rays," their immediate impact on physics, and their introduction to the medical profession. Included among the vacuum tubes to be demonstrated will be assorted Geissler tubes, a Crookes Maltese Cross Tube, Crookes Paddle-Wheel Tube, Crookes Magnetic Deflection Tube, Roentgen X-Ray Tube, and assorted turn-of-the-century gas X-ray tubes. Each will show a portion of the puzzle which led to the discovery of the X-ray and the electron as well as some of the many problems of the early X-ray pioneers as they sought to apply the new discovery to medicine.

February 9, 1991

Joel Savishinsky

will give a lecture entitled "There's No Place Like (A) Home," based on his book, *The Ends Of Time: Life and Work in a Nursing Home* and will sign copies of the book. The book is a lively account of life in an average American nursing home based on six years of anthropological research in geriatric facilities in upstate New York. Professor Savishinsky's talk will examine the many meanings that late life holds for those who live in, work at, and visit the Elmwood Grove nursing home, and will look at the complex world in which residents, staff, and families wrestle daily with issues of morality and mortality, selfishness and altruism, silence and memory.

Gary Snyder Interview

continued from page 5

the imagery that comes. And the rhythms too.

P.F. What can you say about the overall formative principle?

G.S. In some sense it's working around the general structure of a type of Noh play, the category of Noh play to which *Yamamba*, *The Old Woman of the Mountains* belongs. It also might have some affinities with the Noh play, *Eguchi*. They are somewhat different plays, but there's something that I'm getting from them, and also from the general structure, the general direction of Noh plays - their traveling figures, and their ghost or spirit figures that come in and inform the way of the plot.

P.F. The poem is packed with crudition and allusions and quirky personal references. Does the uninitiated reader need footnotes, or are you asking your audience to pick up the trail, as part of the fun?

G.S. Some of it is that way. Some of the newer sections are not so much that way. So it isn't entirely allusive. Incidentally, the predecessor to *Mountains & Rivers* is *Myths & Texts*, which is also in that other direction, the mythopoeic and incantatory direction. And I conceived of *Mountains and Rivers* within six months of having finished *Myths & Texts*. [Published in 1960, *Myths & Texts* is also a book-length poem written in sections.]

P.F. Mary thought it surprising that *Mountains & Rivers* without End could end!

G.S. Well, I know people sometimes say that. That's simply because they're fooled by the title (*laughter*). As though the title says "no end", so the poem should have no end! There's more irony and more fun in actually having end. But then, you know, what is an end?

P.F. Your other recent poems seem less elliptical than say, "Bubbs Creek Haircut" or "The Blue Sky" from *Mountains & Rivers*. So what can you say about the techniques of versification that you're currently relying upon to finish *Mountains & Rivers*?

G.S. It's not exactly in the vein of *Axe Handles* or *Regarding Wave*. The poetry, I guess you'd have to say, is more mythic and more narrative, and, ah, more evocative. And in that sense elliptical.

P.F. How would you contrast that, say, to the poetry of *Axe Handles*? What would you typify that as?

G.S. Well, *Axe Handles* has a unifying theme, which is a kind of narrative of family life as the transmission of information and education in child-raising. *Mountains & Rivers* is much larger territory. And in that sense, much more detached. I'm really not speaking in a human voice a lot of the time. I'm speaking other beings' voices. Ecosystem voices are coming into it. Shape-shifter changes. Coyote and Raven voices. So it's not the same, really not the same. It's a different kind of poetry, so, (*chuckling*) not a whole lot carries over from my other poetry to it. I write two kinds of poems: I write the short lyric poem and I write

the mythopoeic, incantatory poem in other voices. Which a lot of people have done - the long mode, I mean.

P.F. Are you drawing on precedents in Pound or Olson or Williams?

G.S. Well, long ago I absorbed certain ways of seeing and appreciated what I learned from Pound in particular. It's taking some of the direction of the work that's been done with the 20th-century long poem, and putting some of my own twists on it, using some of the structures or using some of the craft that's been developed before, and in some cases not. But my direction I feel is pretty much entirely my own.

P.F. It struck me when I re-read the *Six Sections*, *Plus one*, and I thought back to *Myths & Texts*, which I've always loved, there's something that really is essentially yours in those poems, there's something about the energetic, boulder-hopping, perception upon perception, you know, that nobody can follow you in. We can say, well sure, this is modern ellipticism, this is imagism in a post-modern age, but it really is where you're going in your world. Do you want people to follow you? Or, in a sense, are you saying, the territory is bigger than you thought, others might be able to find their own interesting trails?

G.S. Both. Certainly when you get out into a broad terrain that people have learned to move in, then they sometimes take off. I would be very pleased if *Mountains & Rivers* opened up that kind of territory. I

see Snyder, p. 12



Savage Inequalities

continued from page 1

It's like a terrible joke on history." (pp. 34-35)

Another Clark student, Christopher, "a light-skinned boy with a faint mustache and a somewhat heated and perspiring look" tells Kozol:

"Don't tell students in this school about 'the dream.' Go and look into a toilet here if you want to know what life is like for students in this city."

Before I leave, I do as Christopher asked and enter a boy's bathroom. Four of the six toilets do not work. The toilet stalls, which are eaten away by red and brown corrosion, have no doors. The toilets have no seats. One has a rotted wooden stump. There are no paper towels and no soap. Near the door there is a loop of wire with an empty toilet-paper roll.

"This," says Sister Julia, "is the best school that we have in East St. Louis." (pp. 35-36)

I read this and I am angered: how can this be? What about *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 which led to the desegregation of the schools in the South? Isn't segregation illegal in our schools? How has this happened? Kozol provides the answer in describing two recent Supreme Court decisions in 1973 and 1975 which "ushered in the ending of an era of progressive change and set the tone for the subsequent two decades which have left us with the present-day reality of separate and unequal public schools": the *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* decision involved a class-action suit brought by Demetrio Rodriguez regarding the unequal funding of public schools in Texas; the *Milliken v. Bradley* decision concerned the unequal funding of the predominantly poor black inner-city schools of Detroit and the wealthy white suburbs.

Kozol attacks the Bush Administration's "America 2000" plans for our schools, particularly the President's "choice plan":

The White House, in advancing the agenda for a "choice" plan, rests its very faith on market mechanisms. What reason have the black and very poor to lend their credence to a market system that has proved so obdurate and so resistant to their pleas at every turn? Placing the burden on the individual to break down doors in finding better education for a child is attractive to conservatives because it reaffirms their faith in individual ambition and autonomy. But to ask an individual to break down doors that we

have chained and bolted in advance of his arrival is unfair." (p. 62)

As for President Bush's hypocritical claim that spending on public education isn't "the best answer," and "a society that worships money... is a society in peril," Kozol notes: "If money is a wise investment for the education of a future president at Andover [Bush attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. where \$11,000 per year is spent on each pupil, not including room and board], it is no less so for the child of poor people in Detroit." (p. 205)

Kozol is also skeptical that the solution to the problems of inner city schools lies simply in the appointment of black principals and superintendents.

Placing a black person in control of an essentially apartheid system - whether that system is a city or its welfare apparatus or its public schools - seems to serve at least three functions. It offers symbolism that protects the white society against the charges of racism. It offers enforcement, since a black official is expected to be even more severe in putting down unrest than white officials. It offers scapegoats: When the situation is unchanged, he or she may be condemned, depending on the situation, for too much (or for too little) flair or energy or passion. (pp. 195-196)

In the words of a black principal of a school in Camden, New Jersey interviewed by Kozol:

"The United States now has, in many black administrators of the public schools, precisely the defeated overseers it needs to justify this terrible immiseration. It is a tradition that goes back at least 300 years. A few of us are favored. They invite us to a White House ceremony and award us something - a 'certificate of excellence' - for our achievement. So we accept some things and we forget some other things and what we can't forget we learn how to shut out of mind and we adopt the rhetoric that is required of us and we speak of 'quality' or 'excellence' - not justice." (p. 152)

The book challenges; it makes me think of my fellow administrators in the Ithaca School District, particularly my black colleagues. What a terrible pressure to carry. Will they become our scapegoats; will they, too, be blamed for the failures in our District? And what of our relatively new black Superintendent? Will we find him lacking in vision or inept? For as Kozol puts it so clearly: "...no matter how the job may be described, it is essentially the job of mediating an injustice." (p. 198)

see Kozol, p. 10



An Interview with Ali Mazrui

Unveiling Islam

Ali Mazrui was born in Mombasa, Kenya in 1933. He obtained his B.A. from Manchester University in England, his M.A. from Columbia University, and his doctorate from Oxford University in England. He is now Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at SUNY Binghamton and also Andrew D. White Professor-At-Large at Cornell University. His books include "A World Federation of Cultures: An African Perspective" (1976), "Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa" (1978), and "Cultural Forces in World Politics" (1989).

Dr. Mazrui is Vice-President of the Royal African Society in London and has been involved in a number of U.N. projects, ranging from human rights to nuclear proliferation. His television work includes the widely discussed 1986 series, "The Africans: A Triple Heritage," jointly produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation and PBS.

B.P. To academics you are known as an African political scientist, to the general public you are known as the host of the TV series *The Africans*, but you have also written a novel, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*.

A.M. Yes, I wrote it during the Nigerian Civil War, a time of great personal anguish for me. Christopher Okigbo was a real person, a gifted Nigerian poet, who fought on the side of Biafra in the war and was killed. The novel is concerned with two aspects of Okigbo's participation in the war: his subordination of his Nigerian citizenship to loyalty to his own tribe, the Igbo, and his willingness to risk the destruction of his poetic voice.

B.P. You grew up in Kenya, in the Swahili-speaking Muslim community in Mombasa. Could you tell us something about the role of poetry in Swahili culture?

A.M. Poetry in Swahili culture - unlike the novel, which is very much a new invention that came with the West - is highly developed and goes back hundreds of years. Much of it is oral poetry, sometimes spontaneous poetry. People will often just burst into verse in the middle of a debate or an argument.

B.P. Although the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize and the Nigerian novelist Ben Okori was recently awarded the British Booker Prize, African literature - even when written in English - does not have many readers in the United States. What are we missing?

A.M. Well, the tendency in the U.S. is for African literature to be read in African Studies courses at colleges and universities. So the literature is not entirely absent from the American scene, but it is not generally available for pleasure, for people just to pick up a book by one of my friends, Chinua Achebe or Nuruddin Farah, and decide whether to pass the afternoon in communion with this particular gifted African person. It is, of course, a different world. Yet, many of their characters express a duality of culture. They belong to a period when Africanity has moments of deep interaction with westernism, where the other becomes the self and the self becomes the other, in spite of one's own will. You only get this from post-colonial writers, and they don't have to be

African; they can be Indian, from the Caribbean, but you do get a special uniqueness from each one.

B.P. You recently served on the New York State Syllabus Review Committee on multi-cultural education. What was the mandate of the committee, and what were its recommendations?

A.M. We met for about a year in a series of meetings to examine whether what was taught in social studies and history classes in New York high schools did justice to the role of different cultures in the history of the United States and the world. After much debate, a good many of us arrived at a consensus in favor of greater multi-cultural content in the schools. There were one or two dissenters who wrote a short dissenting opinion.

The best-known dissenter was, of course, Arthur Schlesinger, who was ambivalent about the committee all along. Was he a member or was he a consultant? He is a very polished man, a very civilized man, but he was basically out of sympathy. I formulated a proposition, which the committee eventually adopted, that the United States was a good asylum for diverse peoples, but had not been a great refuge for diverse cultures. To some extent, Schlesinger accepted that notion, but he said that the two parts of it were interdependent: for the United States to become an asylum, it needed to be inhospitable to a diversity of cultures; it needed, in fact, to create one culture. He believed that the level of cultural diversity demanded would lead to the fragmentation of American society, and that the whole multi-cultural movement was a threat to national cohesion.

B.P. What is a multi-cultural syllabus supposed to accomplish?

A.M. With regard to minority students, the gain is that they learn more about civilizations which are part of their own ancestry and heritage, which includes participation in the creation of the United States.

As for Euro-American students, they also deserve better than to be taught a distorted version of history. The world is very diverse, and although the 20th century has witnessed a good deal of cultural homogenization - even substantial global Americanization - it is still vitally important that American children should grow up sensitive to the richness of other cultures.

B.P. You belong to two minorities, black and Muslim. Which is harder to be, African-American or Muslim?

A.M. Probably, Muslim. It is a smaller population in the United States, and far less influential than African-Americans. Until recently, many Muslims here felt insecure. They were very careful about expressing pro-Islamic views. Now, I think they are beginning to come out of the closet and Muslim organizations are being formed; there is a new mood of self-confidence.

On the other hand, African-Americans have a much larger underclass of disadvantaged, more devastated and with bigger problems than almost anything experienced by Muslims in this country. Curiously enough, some members of the black underclass find that Islam is one way of overcoming their condition, and Islam makes progress in some of the most surprising places.

Diana Frank and Sarah Elbert

There are lots of conversions in jail, black people in moments of their ultimate despair turning to Islam. Malcolm X is perhaps the most famous example. Actually, Islam has taken two forms in the African-American experience: one might be called nationalist Islam, which is a form of expressing racial culture as a route back to Africa - the reconstruction of the self in the form of a national identity. Then there is universal Islam which is not usually related to nationalism and is certainly not race-specific. What happened with Malcolm X, is that he started off as a nationalist Muslim and then converted to universalist Islam, after a tremendous inter-racial experience on a pilgrimage to Mecca. For that, he probably paid with his life and became a martyr. Fortunately, although both forms of Islam have continued, they are less hostile to one another than they were in the 1960's.

B.P. What aspects of Islam would you like to see included in the school curriculum?

A.M. I think it may be important to emphasize Islam as a civilization and a culture, rather than as a religion. In this society, there is a tendency to separate church and state, so there is a defensive attitude when Islam is mentioned, because it refers both to the religion and to the totality of the civilization - how people dress, walk, what architecture they have, the arts they enjoy, not just their manner of worship, but their whole way of looking at the universe. So it is important for people to understand that we are talking about one of the cultures of the United States. Many people don't realize that there are as many Muslims in the United States as there are Jews. When we talk about the world, there are already a billion Muslims and, in the course of the next century, one out of every four human beings will probably be a Muslim, which is why it is important for American children of all faiths to understand this culture.

B.P. Do you think the Islamic part of the African-American cultural heritage was lost to Christianization in American society?

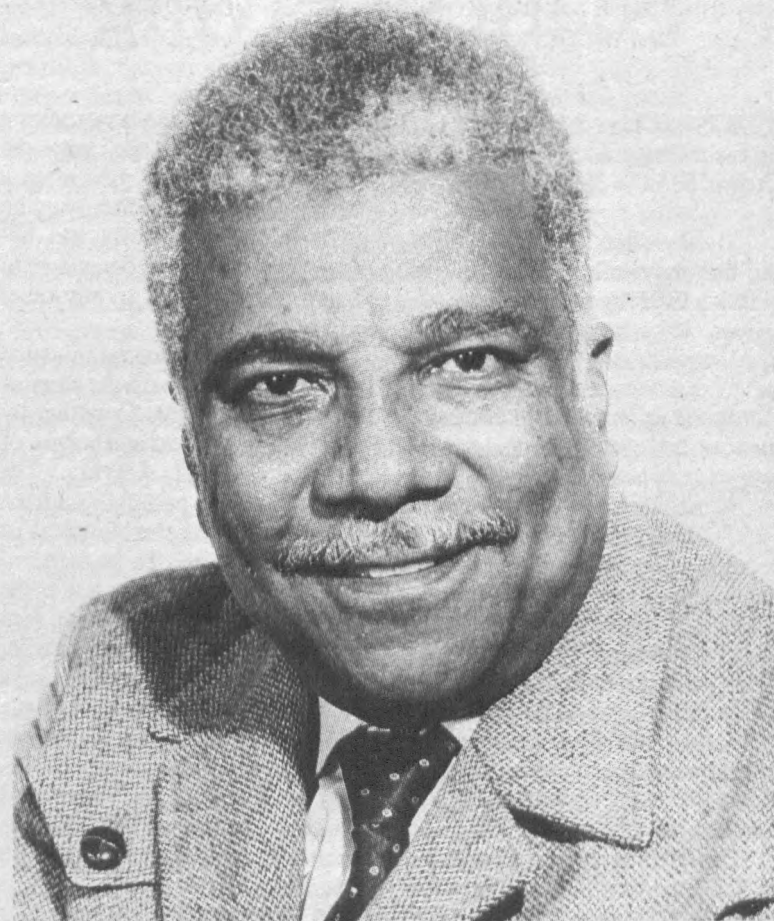
A.M. It's true, Islam arrived in North America in chains because it came with the West African slaves, many of whom were Muslims. Christianization destroyed not only their Islamic heritage, but also the indigenous African religions they brought over.

B.P. How would you introduce Islamic religion to American students?

A.M. First, they should understand how close it is to Judaism and Christianity. The initial point might be to examine how these three Abrahamic religions are interrelated. Even American college students are surprised when they learn that Islam regards Jesus as a major sacred figure, that it accepts the virgin birth of Jesus and deems him the Messiah - all this is totally new to them.

B.P. Do Americans tend to have a stereotype about women in Islam - the woman behind the veil?

A.M. Yes, partly because whenever television or the cinema does something on women in Islam they do it in South Arabia, which is the most conservative country in the Muslim world on gender issues. They could not reinforce those stereotypes if



Ali Mazrui

they were to film in Cairo or Indonesia. Muslim women in Africa have an active role in the economy; they are office workers, cultivators, and traders - much more so than anything encountered in the Gulf states. Yet the stereotype is perpetuated by using the example of women in the Gulf, even though they are but a small fraction of the women in the Muslim world.

B.P. When you did your television program on Africa, did you encounter much controversy around the notion of the importance of Islamic civilization to the history of Africa?

A.M. Yes, when the people from the BBC approached me to do the series, I told them I wanted to look at Africa through the concept of the triple heritage of indigenous culture, Islamic culture, and the Western impact on culture. They could understand the first and last, but, at first, they could not grasp the association of Islam with Africa. Yet there are more Muslims in Nigeria than in any other country, and the Muslim population of Nigeria, Egypt and Ethiopia is about a quarter of the total population of the African continent. And after I finally persuaded the BBC, and later PBS, that Islam was very much a part of African reality, I then had to convince them that North Africa was part of Africa, because they didn't consider countries like Egypt to be African.

B.P. In the West, probably the most famous contemporary book written by a Muslim is *The Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie. Could you explain why it is so offensive to many Muslims?

A.M. First, the title itself, *The Satanic Verses*, suggests that the Koran is not a revelation from God, but really a revelation from Satan. It is true there is a story that the prophet repudiated a few verses of the Koran which had not been divinely inspired. But Rushdie structured his novel to suggest that the whole of scripture was satanically inspired. Also, he creates a prostitute figure whose customers derive excitement from her name, which is the same as the prophet's favorite wife. There is

also the implication that the prophet had been drunk - as you know, of all religions, Islam is doctrinally the strictest about drink. So all of this was clearly intended to be provocative.

Now, if Rushdie had not been a Muslim himself, the level of outrage would have been far less and there would have been no death sentence from Ayatollah Khomeini. It was because Salman Rushdie had been born and brought up a Muslim that the issue of cultural treason arose. In the West, people accept the idea of capital punishment for treason against the state, but not treason against a community or religion. But for Muslims, treason to the *umma* - the Muslim community - is still considered a capital offense. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, of the more than forty members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, only one country - revolutionary Iran - passed the death sentence. I am personally not in favor of the death sentence on Rushdie, but I'm unusual among Muslims because I'm not in favor of the death sentence at all in the 20th century.

B.P. In the West, the Rushdie affair was seen as a violation of free speech. Do you agree?

A.M. To talk about the right of writers to write anything they like is a lot of liberal wishy-washy nonsense. Liberals say writers may write anything provided they don't abuse another individual, so you have laws of libel protecting individuals, but not whole communities. It is liberal superstition that only individuals require protection. In the case of *The Satanic Verses*, the publishers were warned before publication by their non-Muslim advisors in India that the book would cause riots.

As for the question of censorship, it certainly exists in the West. Margaret Thatcher chased the book *Spycatcher* all over the world in the effort to have it banned. In the United States, print censorship is generally done by the publishers, not the government. In the electronic media, it is done by the networks and advertisers.

see *Islam*, p. 14

Reviews

Fearless Flying

Teresa Demo

TAR BEACH

by Faith Ringgold
Crown, \$15.00, 30 pp.

Books often have two stories: the one they tell, and the one the author tells about how the book was written. Writers can usually recount their inspiration, whether the source be an experience from their own childhood or simply a fleeting moment of insight. Faith Ringgold's story *Tar Beach* began with a quilt.

Starting as a painter in the 1950's, Ringgold began working in soft sculpture during the 1970's, as the extensive end note in *Tar Beach* explains. This new interest was influenced in part by her mother's work as a fashion designer and dressmaker. She also became intrigued by the stories her mother told about her great-grandmother, Betsy Bingham, a slave in antebellum Florida who made quilts.

Storytelling, painting, and quilt-making merged into a single art-form for Ringgold. Her finished quilts, similar to early American

and father out of the construction workers' union. And she claims the ice cream factory to guarantee a treat each day for her family. She teaches her brother to fly, too, because "all you need is somewhere to go that you can't get to any other way."

The patches of social injustice and of fiction that make the story of *Tar Beach* are stitched together by Ringgold's poetic text and her use of the folk-tale motif of flying. The notion of literally taking flight from the impoverished surroundings of daily life is found in both Afro-American slave narratives and in the more contemporary writings of Toni Morrison. It is a metaphor for freedom, a slave's wish fulfillment of escaping by soaring away. In the confidence of her own imagination, Cassie knows flying means liberation, "to be free to go wherever I want for the rest of my life." It is this theme which gives *Tar Beach* its transcendent quality.

A photograph of Ringgold's original story-quilt is featured op-

W.A. MOZART:
DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE
by Peter Branscombe
Cambridge University Press, \$15.95
paper, 247 pp.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died slightly more than two months after the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* on September 30, 1791. This did not prevent Emanuel Schikaneder, his librettist and manager of the Theater auf der Weiden, from taking advantage of the situation with what would now be called media hype, advertising the 83rd performance of the increasingly popular opera as the 100th, and the 135th performance as the 200th. Schikaneder died, impoverished and insane, in Vienna in 1812; it sometimes seems that his dementia has been inherited by many successors who attempt either to produce or interpret the opera. Even those inured to what Germans call *Klassikermord*, murder of the classics, might frown at the early attempt to see the opera as a hidden allegory of the French Revolution ("The freeing of the French people from the hands of the old aristocratic despotism through the wisdom of a revolutionary legislation") or blush at a recent staging with characters in pilgrims' costumes, creating a sort of *Zauberpuritani*.

Nor have scholars hesitated to rush in where directors do not fear to tread. In the main, one can sympathize with attempts to find a complexity in the opera commensurate with its ability to move and enchant its audience. One intellectual historical approach treats *The Magic Flute* as a "kind of layer cake":

The stage play, on the top surface of the cake, contains the symbols of complementary layers that

are within the cake. These layers within have the same dramatic purpose as the top layer. They are all about the movement of the soul out of the darkness and into the light. However, each layer has its own metaphorical language. The actual story combines first with a layer of symbols drawn from traditional theories of knowledge. After this there are two other important layers. One of these uses symbols drawn from Greek philosophy and medicine, a tradition beginning with the ancient stoics, Hippocrates and Plato, and the other uses the symbols of the alchemists interwoven with the eclectic cosmology embraced by eighteenth-century freemasons.

I find it somewhat more difficult to understand the following vulgar Marxist reduction:

Upon closer analysis, are not the contradictions of the personae of the opera contradictions we find everywhere in bourgeois society? Isn't it sufficiently documented historically that, like Sarastro, many a wise Freemason secretly earned his filthy riches purveying slaves to America?

And the vulgar Freudian interpretation is altogether too predictable:

That Tamino and Pamina may "do it" with each other [in the trial scene] is deducible from Pamina's invitation, "Now come and play the Flute! Let it guide us on our frightful path." Unquestionably what is meant here by "playing" the flute is the erection of the penis, and by the "frightful path" the female sex organ.

Given the history of such interpretations, it might seem a relief at first to find an introduction to *Die Zauberflöte* that purports to eschew

interpretation in favor of merely getting the facts straight. The present volume, edited and largely written by Peter Branscombe, Professor of Austrian Studies at the University of Edinburgh, follows the usual format of the Cambridge Opera Handbook series, with a discussion of sources, a detailed synopsis, and chapters on the genesis, libretto, music (by Erik Smith), performance and reception of the opera, and a bibliography and discography. The status of *Die Zauberflöte*, as well as its difficulties, also justify additional chapters on the Masonic background, on producing the opera ("A Director's Approach" by Anthony Besch), and a concluding chapter devoted to "Problems."

As the chapter on the genesis of the opera - divided into sections on "The Traditional Story" and "Evidence Provided by Contemporary Sources" - makes clear, a principal difficulty in approaching *Die Zauberflöte* is separating facts from accretions of legend. The result comprises one of the major successes of Branscombe's book. One hopes that his account will finally put to rest the old canard that the opera is flawed by a sudden and inconsistent plot reversal, necessitated by the appearance of a too similar rival production by Wenzel Müller, *Kaspar der Fagottist*, also known as *Der Fagottist, oder Die Zauberzither* (The Bassoonist, or The Magic Zither), in June 1791. Branscombe's touch is less sure in the chapter on sources and putative sources, whose number suggests how partial their influence can have been. Indeed, the generic nature of fairy tale motifs, romances of initiation, and even

see *Magic*, p. 14

PrairieErth's Deep Map

continued from page 1

quilts in their use of bold color and geometric patterns, included a text written on fabric strips around the border. In these story-quilts, she found a medium in which she could express her concern for black women in America and her own childhood memories of growing up in Harlem, where she still resides. The picture-book, *Tar Beach*, is based on the first of five quilts in her 1988 "Woman on a Bridge" series that is now in the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

The book's title refers to the tarpaper rooftop of young Cassie Louise Lightfoot's apartment building in Harlem. It is where she lies with her brother on a mattress one hot summer night while her parents and their neighbor friends, Mr. and Mrs. Honey, eat chicken and play cards. Here Cassie dreams that "sleeping on Tar Beach was magical." The magic comes as she finds herself flying high above Tar Beach, when "the stars fell down and lifted me up."

She soars over skyscrapers away from the restraints of her tenement life in Harlem as a black child in 1939. Not only does her imagined flying make her feel that she possesses the city below, it gives her the power momentarily to change the difficult circumstances of her family's life. She sees the George Washington Bridge her father worked so hard to build and flying over it, she makes it hers. The same thing happens when she flies over the Union Building, where racial prejudice has kept her grandfather

From "Tar Beach" by Faith Ringgold
posite the end note on the last page of *Tar Beach*. For the book itself, Ringgold created new paintings using acrylic on canvas. Each double-page spread combines one of these paintings with a quilt border that has been photographed from the original story-quilt, thereby maintaining a kind of continuity between the quilt and the book.

Ringgold's unique use of color and perspective create the folk-art quality of the book. The richly colored paintings show the New York cityscape in dark, dreamy blue-black tones. The characters, drawn large, flat-out and stiff-limbed, look like colored-in stick figures that Cassie herself, or any child, could have sketched.

Although Ringgold initially had some difficulty getting her story-quilt published, it has become an outstanding example of the innovative techniques that are finding their way into children's book art. *Tar Beach* was recently selected as one of the ten best illustrated books of 1991 by *The New York Times Book Review* in its biannual special section on children's books. Commenting on the book's acclaim in an interview for *Publishers Weekly*, Ringgold expressed the hope that "kids all over the world would love *Tar Beach*, even in places where they have no tar roofs. They still have dreams, don't they?"

Teresa Demo holds a Master's degree in Library Science from Syracuse University. She found herself spending all of her time in the classic children's collection at Cornell, so she is now back at Syracuse studying children's literature.

of the anti-assimilationist temper of our time. His previous book, *Blue Highways*, was the journal of a 13,000-mile trip around the circumference of America while in flight from a disintegrating marriage. It was a succession of pit stops and reveries in which the road map did service as a guide to "the dream cartography a mind wanders in." Least Heat-Moon brought to the curiosity of the tourist the dedication of the visionary and the skills of an English professor, which is what he has been at both Stephens College in Missouri and, from 1985 to 1987, the University of Missouri. His scholar's tolerance for the library and the archive along with a free-ranging imagination and a capacious soul are the tools he brings to bear this time on a single place, Chase County, giving us this sinuous meditation upon our most rectangular landscape. One of Least Heat-Moon's manifestos is "reduction is deception," and this is an anti-reduction book in which Chase County is liberated, at least in the imagination, from the grids and crossings, "the great reticulum" of the U.S. Geological Survey's rule of squares.

Why Chase County? In one sense, for no reason other than that it is near the center of America and is apparently as unremarkable - and therefore as secretive - as an American locale can be. But there is one other reason: Chase County contains the last major stand of the giant prairie grasses that once dominated the Great Plains, and Least Heat-Moon writes as an advocate for their protection through the founding of a Prairie Grass Na-

tional Park.

If that were all, however, *PrairieErth* would be about 75 pages long. Least Heat-Moon is in search of more than just grasses, and *PrairieErth* is nothing if not a roundup of impressions that recalls those rambling and eclectic 17th-century meditations: Thomas Brown's *Urn Burial* and Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. But though Least Heat-Moon knows the precedents, his ways of knowledge are home grown. Employing standard methods of inquiry - archival research, interviews, the keeping of a "commonplace book" of apt quotations (how Renaissance can you get?) - he composes a portrait of place with a uniquely Native-American vision.

What does that mean? For one thing, it is to be attuned to elements: earth, air, fire, and water as the greatest coordinates of being, each one of which has its own chapter (Strange to note that while rain and wind give rise to long meditations, there is nothing at all about sunlight.) Anything might be a sign that leads us back to the elements, sometimes in surprising combinations.

I'm walking down into an old marine world; in their journals, early white travelers wrote of the prairie, using a single metaphor as if it were the only one possible - "the ocean of grass" - and no wonder, since this land is like the sea and it is of the sea. The characteristic shape of the hills, the stacked trapezoids, takes its substance from the old ocean and its form from rain and ice... I'm a hiker through antique seas that have become stone cages of a marine zoo: crinoids, bryozoans, brachiopods,

gastropods, pelecypods, ostracods, trilobites, and vertebrates that left behind only their razory teeth

It means also to see history as alive and to pay homage to ghosts. In his interviews, his afternoons spent chewing the fat at the Emma Chase Café, his evenings at Darla's Fun Center, his rambles across the Flint Hills and bouts of reading in the county archive, Least Heat-Moon plunges into memory, hauling the past back in the manner of a local historian, albeit a historian with a shaman's heart. "To American Indians, who believe that the past is to a people as dreams are to a person, stories are the communal snagging of generations, the nets that keep people from free-falling towards pointlessness... and they are also the knots of matter that help people into dreamtime, where the listener, the traveler, can imagine he sees links between smithereens; from that hallucination, everything we value arises."

It is to be aware that Kansas was Indian territory, inhabited by the Kansa or Kaw Indians, who were cheated of their land and driven from it. There are only six full-bloods now left in Chase County. The Kansa/Kaw are little known in American history now because they were not a warrior nation and did not go down battling: they were simply bought off and evicted. Least Heat-Moon says bluntly: "Wherever Indians have had land distributed to them individually, sooner or later it ends up in white hands." Yet, like the ancient seas, they have left their trace: visibly in burial mounds, arrow heads, place names, invisibly in

see *PrairieErth*, p. 12

Commentary as Response

MIDRASHIM

(Jewish Writers Chapbook 5)

by David Curzon

Cross-Cultural Communications,
\$5.00 paper, 48 pp.

Judaism as we know it is not the same as biblical tradition. Rather, it is the product of rabbinic response to both divine revelation and to the historical experience of the Jewish people. The rabbis, inheritors of the Pharisaic approach to biblical interpretation, were the ones who shaped the legal, literary and speculative traditions that would sustain the Jewish people through two millennia of exile and dispersion.

Midrash (plural, midrashim) is the classic genre of rabbinic commentary. Midrashim come in many styles and sizes: sermonic and pithy, serious and lighthearted, direct and convoluted. Midrash is primarily interpretation of Scripture, but it often reveals more about the interpreter than the text interpreted. There are many midrashic discussions, for example, of why God chose to speak to Abraham. Here is one that, in a small sermon, attributes God's choice to Abraham's passion for justice, as evidenced by an incident that had not yet taken place. (For the rabbis, "there is no earlier or later in the Torah.")

Rabbi Azariah commenced in Rabbi Aha's name thus: *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness...* (Psalms 45:8). Rabbi Azariah in Rabbi Aha's name referred the verse to our father Abraham. When Abraham our father stood to plead for mercy for the Sodomites, what is written there?

That be far from You to do after this manner (Genesis 18:25). Rabbi Aha explained this: You have sworn not to bring a deluge upon the world. Would You evade your oath? Not a deluge of water will You bring but a deluge of fire?! Then You have not been true to Your oath. Rabbi Levi commented: *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly* (ib.)? If You desire the world to endure, there can be no absolute justice, while if You desire absolute justice the world cannot endure, yet You would hold the cord by both ends, desiring both the world and absolute justice. Unless You give a little, the world cannot endure. Said the Holy One to Abraham: *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has chosen to anoint you with oil of gladness above all your peers* (Ps. 45:8)...

Midrash often intentionally misreads the text, as if to conduct a kind of thought experiment to see what further questions might be raised, and what additional light shed, by reading the text against itself. But it comes out of an extremely close and careful reading of the biblical text, and it assumes that every word is there for a reason. When God announces to Abraham that he and Sarah will have a son in their old age,

Sarah laughed to herself, saying "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment - with my husband so old?" Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'" (Gen. 18:12-13)

To which Bar Kappara responds with a midrash:

Laurence Edwards

Great is peace, for even Scripture made a mis-statement in order to preserve peace between Abraham and Sarah. Thus, it is written, "Why did Sara laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'" It does not say, "With my husband so old," but "old as I am."

Whence derives the rabbinic authority to play so freely with God's word? The rabbis claim direct spiritual descent from Moses (whom they call "our rabbi," though Moses himself would not have recognized



from "Midrashim" by David Curzon

the word), through Joshua, the elders, and the prophets. They do not, however, claim the powers of prophecy for themselves. Rabbis are teachers to whom the Torah has now been entrusted, and who, through reasoned argument and spirited discussion, take responsibility for its interpretation and application.

Perhaps paradoxically, it is precisely the profound seriousness with which the rabbis regard the biblical text and their connection to it, that allows them to take a sometimes playful approach to its exposition. For scripture is God's word mediated through the limited instrument of

human language, an instrument that can barely begin to convey the reality that stands behind it. There are multiple levels of meaning within the text, and no interpretation is ever final. Contradictory interpretations can coexist side by side on a page of rabbinic literature and each of them will be considered authoritative and correct, but none absolutely.

Thus midrash is a style of ongoing engagement between the divine and the human, between scripture and tradition, between eternity and history. It is the deep and characteristically Jewish expression of covenantal relationship. It even includes the possibility of arguing with God, a tradition that began with Abraham. And since this response to the biblical text has become so characteristically Jewish, why should it be limited to rabbis?

Why indeed? David Curzon now adds his own voice to what has become a rich corpus of modern poetic midrash. In his engaging introductory essay, Curzon credits the Israeli poet Dan Pagis, a master of this genre, for the breakthrough that allowed him to begin carving these gleaming gems of insight. "Dan Pagis was the key; and through the door of my own resistance that it opened I came to the vast traditions I had been so wary of approaching."

The subject matter of his meditations ranges from the abstractly philosophical to the deeply personal. Some are humorous, some angry, some both. The settings range from ancient Israel, to Curzon's native Melbourne, to Manhattan. Some of the poems are less successful than others, but the best blaze

with intensity of insight. Most importantly for midrash, they provoke questions in the reader.

"The Garden" and "Proverbs 3:1," the two poems that evoke the poet's relationship with his father, whom Curzon recalls visiting in his "sparse rented / furnished rooms, our common silence / filled in with games of chess," were to me the most moving. They also most pointedly depart from classical midrashic style. The rabbis surely brought their own issues to the text, but they were more reserved about laying bare their personal lives. Contemporary poets are freer about such things, and I am touched by Curzon's desire and ability to read his own life through the lens of a biblical text (and vice versa).

Shadows of the Holocaust are everywhere in these poems, as are exile, wandering, and alienation. But so too is the deep joy of engaging the ancient sources, as if to echo George Steiner's phrase, "Our Homeland, the Text." Curzon does share something with his namesake, King David, whom he addresses in his opening "psalm." He takes a certain delight, enriched no doubt by his travels, in David's mysterious line, *How glorious is Your name in all the earth*. It is perhaps too soon to say, though, whether this small collection represents David Curzon's homecoming, or whether it is a brief respite before the journey continues.

Laurence Edwards is the University Jewish Chaplain and Director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at Cornell University.

[Psalm 137: 1-2]

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. 2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

[Translation: King James Version]

THE GARDENS

Melbourne's Botanic Gardens! where I came to walk along the bordered paths with him, and pose in short pants for the photos placed into this album I'm now leafing through, and eat my sandwiches beside the lake, and cast bread on the water for the swans. And later, when we met on Sundays, we went off to European movies, then to his small room where we played chess. He cut his dense black bread held close up to his chest. One afternoon we passed the synagogue and saw some litter scattered on its steps including some lobster shells. He said, "This is deliberate desecration. They must know lobster isn't kosher." "Daddy, it's not that, it's an Australian picnic. Not cleaned up." I thought it was absurd he didn't know. This must have been round nineteen fifty-five. A mere ten years had passed. And in four years he'd suicide, and I would read the documents he kept inside their envelopes in a wood box—certificates of immigration, change of name, degrees, but mainly photographs and letters from his parents and his friends. And then I found a letter he had sent to Poland. The final one. It said, "I wish I could protect you from the sadists" and was stamped "Unable to deliver." Somehow I was not aware. He never talked of it. And now I try to visualize what happened to his parents and those smiling friends of his, and try to understand how it would feel orphaned, divorced, recalling, to walk in the gardens of Babylon, and not weep.

from "Midrashim" by David Curzon
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Curzon on Writing Midrashim

In an interview last March on WBAV's "Sounds of Poetry," David Curzon spoke about how *Midrashim* came to be written:

I began searching for my roots with the full weight of my lack of belief still intact, and adopted a variety of strategies to try and find some way of connecting to the vast Jewish literary materials that were my inheritance. I worked out a number of strategies which fell flat. The first one, for example, was to go through the Talmud and Midrash looking for texts which could be immediately read as parables by a non-believer such as myself, or which were so strange that no one would ever imagine I believed in them. I was worried about my integrity, a very stupid thing to worry about at

my age since I was well past my adolescence. But I was, and still am, a modern secular person and didn't want to disown that. The idea of studying the Bible was something I was very ambivalent about. Nonetheless, I got a few poems from this first strategy, from stories at tremendous variance with modern secular understanding but which nonetheless give some sort of metaphor for psychological insight. I was trying to avoid the appearance of faith. I eventually became much more reconciled to what I was doing; less defensive.

Curzon was born in Melbourne, Australia, and has been living in Manhattan for the last 20 years, where he is Chief of the Central Evaluation Unit at the United Na-

tions. He has traveled around the world many times, followed Vinoba Bhava in India, seen Angkor Wat and Pompeii and the pyramids of the Sun and Moon, and, as he puts it, "had a wedding in Jerusalem and a divorce in New York."

In the WBAV interview, he says he now regrets "the minimal Jewish education" he received as a child. "I now look back on an education which at one point permitted me to solve the Schrödinger wave equation and various other things in physics, and gave me a doctorate in economics... and feel it would have been more useful to me had I learned how to play a musical instrument, learned a few languages, and got more grounding in the Talmud and the Midrash."

Critical Theory Redux

Tom Lampert

REAPPRAISALS

Shifting Alignments in Postwar Critical Theory

by Peter Uwe Hohendahl

Cornell University Press, \$10.95 paper, 247 pp.

What is Critical Theory? This is the central question which Peter Uwe Hohendahl attempts to answer in his book, *Reappraisals: Shifting Alignments in Postwar Critical Theory*. The answer, Hohendahl suggests, is historical; it depends upon when the question is asked. In West Germany, thirty years ago, for example, the answer would have been relatively unambiguous: Critical Theory could be identified with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt (the Frankfurt School), the

most influential members of which were Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. However, Hohendahl argues that the original answer to the question has aged. Adorno and Horkheimer's critical theory of society is no longer adequate for the changing political or aesthetic situation of advanced industrial societies. When one raises the question of Critical Theory in 1991, the answers are quite different. Not only are they historical, but they also depend upon the situation and location in which the question is posed. As Hohendahl outlines in his introduction, Critical Theory is understood in rather different terms in the United States than it is in Germany today. And in neither place is there one unequivocal answer. However,

Hohendahl argues, this ambiguity should not be seen as negative, but rather as a sign "that Critical Theory is alive, responding to new and different cultural and political situations." (p. 1)

Hohendahl's book is a collection of eight essays, six of which have appeared previously in West Germany and the United States in the past decade, supplemented with introductory and concluding chapters written especially for the book. As a whole, the book operates neither as a linear nor chronological narrative, but rather as a constellation, in which the themes appear and reappear throughout the essays. While all the essays revolve around the question of Critical Theory in

see *Critical*, p. 12

Jonathan Kozol

continued from page 6

Then, too, the teachers with whom Kozol spoke have their stories to tell:

In low-income Irvington [New Jersey], for instance, where 94 percent of students are non-white, 11 classes in one school don't even have the luxury of classrooms. They share an auditorium in which they occupy adjacent sections of the stage and backstage areas. "It's very difficult," says the music teacher, "to have to conduct rehearsals with the choir" while ten other classes try to study in the same space. "Obviously," she says, "there is a problem with sound..."

"I'm housed in a coat room," says a reading teacher at another school in Irvington. "I teach," says a music teacher, "in a storage room." Two other classes, their teachers say, are in converted coal bins. A guidance counselor says she holds her parent meetings in a closet. "My problem," says a compensatory-reading teacher, "is that I work in a pantry... It's very difficult to teach in these conditions." (p. 159)

Kozol asks how we can achieve both equity and excellence in education:

...[W]hen we look as well at the solutions that innumerable commissions have proposed, we realize that they do not quite mean "equity" and that they have seldom asked for "equity." What they mean, what they prescribe, is something that resembles equity but never reaches it: something close enough to equity to silence criticism by approximating justice, but far enough from equity to guarantee the benefits enjoyed by privilege. (p. 175)

I could not help thinking of our current committees investigating possible reforms in Ithaca schools. What of the subtle inequities still not fully addressed among our elementary schools, the current investigation of the tracking system in our secondary schools, the recent dismantling of our Affirmative Action Plan to bring more minority staff into all Ithaca schools? Will all this result in something only approaching equity? Something approaching excellence but not for everyone? *Savage Inequalities* is an urgent plea for us all to show the courage and the vision to demand a genuinely equitable redistribution of educational resources, and to demand the full integration of our schools - the elimination of the dual education system in this country.

In a recent telephone interview with Kozol, I tell him I have just

returned from a forum in Chicago where I had been talking with Debbie Meier, principal of Central Park East Secondary School, about school choice plans. Jonathan speaks of his deep admiration for her work, but then says, "All around New York City there are areas that aren't even touched by Central Park East's efforts; there are average class sizes, now, of 50-60 in some of the high schools. I love to point to candles in the darkness like Central Park East, but I feel the White House is exploiting these schools, saying 'See, this can be done without any additional funds being spent on our inner-city schools.' One of the things that makes the Central Park East District special is the number of exceptional teachers who have been attracted there. But, if the number of teachers is frozen in New York, there will be fewer talented teachers in the other schools, making them even more unequal. I don't think Bush really cares about choice, he is interested primarily in privatizing education; that's the hard right agenda that Bush and these pure market people are after."

I then tell Kozol that I will be making an address in New York City as part of a group of people speaking about "The Exhausted School: Reforms and Choices," and that I have some thoughts about "choice" that I'd like to try out on him. I begin by saying that I am referring strictly to public schools of choice and not the furthering of private and/or parochial schools with any kind of additional public funding. I go on to describe four conditions which I feel must be met for public schools of choice to address the gross inequities and injustices of our dual education system:

(1) There must be real choices among essentially equal schools that are funded by the same per-pupil expenditures.

(2) There must be real access to all schools of choice, which means not only free public transportation, but real communication with the students and their parents about such choices and the process of admission.

(3) Each school must guarantee a fully diverse student population from all minorities within a given school district, all the economic sectors, and from students with learning difficulties as well.

(4) There must be real democratic control of such a school of choice by the administration, staff, students and parents.

see Kozol, p. 12

The Politics of Literacy

Linda Finlay

Well-known philosopher-educator Paulo Freire will speak at Ithaca College on December 9 in the Roy H. Park School of Communications' Distinguished Speakers Series. Freire came to international attention in the late sixties when his extraordinarily successful literacy programs with peasants in Brazil were suppressed. Freire himself was first jailed by the Brazilian government and then eventually expelled from the country. While he was in exile in Chile and then in the United States, he wrote the work for which he is best known, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In 1980, Freire was allowed by the government to return to Brazil. Since his return he has been teaching at Catholic University in Sao Paulo and at the University of Campinas, as well as writing and working with labor unions. Literacy campaigns in many third world countries have relied on a pedagogical method which Freire devised to embody his philosophy of education. Freire's work has come to be known, respected, and used in the United States as scholars and educators have recognized that his conception of literacy has implications for education here as well as in the third world.

Literacy, in the broad sense in which Freire uses the term, includes - but is more than - the ability to match sounds with letters and meanings with words. To be literate is to understand the purposes embedded in the words that people choose to express and communicate their experiences and thoughts. For Freire, knowing in its most fundamental sense, is "giving meaning." In knowing, people interpret rather than reflect reality. Groups powerful enough to dominate public discourse have great influence because the language that expresses their world view becomes the lens through which the social world is seen and understood by others. The dominant discourse is widely assumed to represent things as they are, while actually it represents things as seen from a particular point of view oriented by particular interests. According to Freire, as people become literate, they become less

naive and more aware that all human constructions of meaning are rooted in history and culture.

The first step toward becoming literate is a kind of consciousness-raising which Freire calls *conscientizacao*. At the heart of this process is reflection on language use in order to understand the role of language in creating and sustaining social institutions and world views, including one's own. *Conscientizacao* makes explicit the purposes that are embedded in a particular discourse by considering how cultural, intellectual, and ethical traditions and historical situations bear on the formation of concepts and the choice of linguistic symbols that different discourses use to interpret experience. *Conscientizacao* reveals the link between language use, historical situation, and interests. To deny words their links to the practical world of human action leads to what Freire calls "demoralized thought," a term he used when visiting Cornell in 1983 to describe theory which is "sanitized of all relation to the social world." In answer to a question about the knowledge of oppressed people with whom he had worked, Freire noted:

"Our language is our structure of thinking. The poor develop specific ways of speaking. Their use of metaphor is very rich, though intellectuals say their language is poor and they cannot abstract. But the people would not know if they could not make abstractions, and *the people know*. They make abstractions differently, not like intellectuals are trained to do. Intellectuals say, 'A slum is an area where the poorest members of an economic system live.' The oppressed say, 'The slum is where we don't have...' The poor and oppressed describe their lives; intellectuals describe concepts and call that theory, but that is not theory. That is a 'demoralization' of theory. Our main task at the university is *not to de-moralize theory*. To treat concepts as isolated or separated from social reality is to sanitize them - demoralize them."

"We separate theory from practice, and we do this in such a way as to give theory priority. But really, you must first try to *do* in order to see what you know and need to know. Prioritizing theory implies

that if we don't start with theory, we will never get practice - which is not so. We separate manual and intellectual work. But they go together: you make critical reflections on what you are doing concretely. We separate teaching and learning, but they are two moments of the same process. We make ourselves into persons who transfer knowledge which we immobilize and bring to our seminars. This separation of research - the creation of new knowledge - from knowing and teaching is a disaster for the spirit and practice of the universities. The university is understood in consumer terms - a shopping center for knowledge, and theory is becoming synonymous with verbalism. These separations lead to de-moralized theory. I am not arguing for practical training but for a theory rooted in history, that necessarily includes practice. Each re-reading of a text is a new reading, because the context in which it was written and preserved and read has changed. In the new context, it speaks to new concerns as well as to the old ones, and also it must be seen from a historical perspective.

"In the serious study of what has been said, done, written, we demythologize knowledge by linking it to history and purposes. Theory is the serious penetration into the intimacy of the object or phenomenon in order to understand it. It requires curiosity, critical thought, feelings, objectives, clarity."

When queried about the relation of feelings to reasoning, Freire replied by distinguishing reason from rationalism. He explained that "we need reason, but not rationalism," and added that reason includes feelings. For him, knowing is giving meaning, and thus requires engagement. There is no engagement without feelings. From the point of view of the educational establishment, it is necessary to deny that feelings have anything to do with knowledge, that feelings may motivate the desire to give meaning, because if this were acknowledged the claims that knowledge is value neutral and that the curriculum is apolitical could not be maintained.

Linda Finlay is a Professor of Philosophy at Ithaca College.

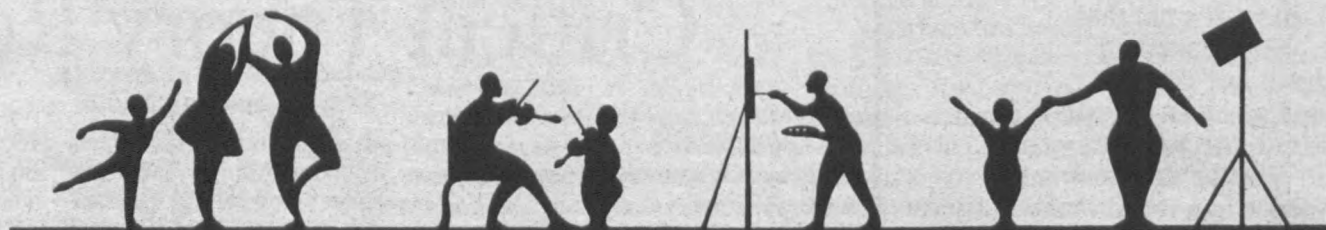
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"Conditions Which Guarantee Existence"

Artist and Writer Confront a Common Past

J. Michael Serino

Susan Pickens is a printmaker who works like a painter. Using a variety of printmaking techniques, often on handmade paper, she creates unique pieces by working back into prints, making changes, producing results that cannot be repeated. While there are often plates for the initial prints, the modifications cannot be duplicated.

The result is almost always engaging. Pickens' recent work, on exhibit at Ithaca College's Handwerker Gallery through December 20, displays the richness of her technical virtuosity in bringing her artistic vision into an innovative medium.

"The images themselves are abstract, but a lot of the forms in the work come from architectural forms," she says. "Some of those forms come from my background, from where I grew up, from memories, from looking at old photographs." Yet the result is abstract, minimal; the works evoke rather than depict.

"My work doesn't really speak to all-encompassing social issues or anything like that," she says. "It's more of a very individual voice that I think a lot of people can see things in and relate to. I think that it's very expressive."

At the heart of Pickens' current work, and a focal point of the current show, is a series of pieces produced in collaboration with poet and fiction writer Lisa Harris. Both women teach at Ithaca College - Pickens in the Art Department, Harris in the Writing Program. "My attraction to Lisa's work was that it was very gutsy; it would always hit me on that kind of level," Pickens says. "When I'd go to a reading I'd sit there and cry. It would really reach me."

When I initially called Pickens to arrange an interview she asked if Harris could be there as well. "We like to kind of bounce ideas off of each other," she said. This they certainly did, and the result was an insight into the collaborative creative process.

Artistic collaboration, as anyone who has tried it can testify, is a demanding, frustrating, emotionally draining undertaking. When it succeeds the result can be marvelous, a work that transcends the talents of either individual involved. When it fails, or when the agonies of the process claim victory over the participants, the outcome can be rancor, ended friendships, perhaps even violence. Pickens and Harris had worked together before on a work

called "Vision," but the creative process was less collaborative than serial; Harris provided Pickens with a completed poem, which Pickens made into a book. Both were pleased with the result, however, and began planning a more ambitious project.

The three collaborative pieces exhibited in the current show constitute a series entitled "Conditions which Guarantee Existence." In a brief artists' note, Pickens and Harris explain that the series "examines the lives of women from Southern Ohio and Central Pennsylvania through image and text." The regions were not selected arbitrarily: Pickens is a native of Woodsfield, Ohio, and Harris of Snowshoe, Pennsylvania.

"What initially instigated this project, in part, was the similarity in our backgrounds," said Harris. "We came from the same sort of matrilineal families and we came from rural areas. They're not near anything and they're both real poor regions. I think in America people fail to recognize a culture in their lives a lot of the time. And what started to become obvious to us was the existence of this culture we shared that had never really been articulated. It was certain foods and all this stuff that was very roots oriented. So we started thinking about how we could somehow bring this to life for people who had never experienced any of it, and how we could examine the historical trajectory of how that was changing. We envisioned it as a study in time."

"And in the characters of people, too," said Pickens. "In the three

trol. And then the last pair, which is contemporary, is kind of ongoing, and I think the work looks that way. There doesn't seem to be a closed-in finality about it."

The creation of these works took place over a period of several months. In March the two women, each with a child in tow, drove together to their native regions to talk to people, take photographs, and begin to isolate themes.

"We were afraid to take the trip because we were afraid we might end up never speaking to each other again, which would have made it all worthless," said Harris. "We didn't kill our children when we took them with us, which is a good sign. We decided that if we could survive two five-year-olds in the back seat without a plate-glass window between the front and the back that we could probably survive anything."

In May they began on the pieces in earnest, working intensively from May until mid-June. Crossing back and forth between media placed new demands on both writer and artist.

"The first thing that would happen when Lisa would bring me a poem is that I would look at it in terms of the content and my gut reaction to it," said Pickens. "I would always be blown away by the poetry. Then I would look at it and wonder how it would work as a visual piece. And then we would go back and forth, because there were things that worked in words that wouldn't work visually."

"There were all kinds of little things that happened that ended up



"Conditioned Arch" by Susan Pickens

pieces six women are grouped in three pairs. One pair we saw as kind of survivor types who have had some adversity but basically their lives were happy and rich and they survived. Another pair we saw as having had a lot of tragic things happen to them that were out of their con-

having a big effect on the words. For instance, there are two poems that are paired: one is right-justified and the other is left-justified, because visually it just works..."

"And I had a really hard time letting go of that," added Harris. "When I do experimental stuff that's OK, because I throw it all over the place or invert syntax, or stuff like that. But God knows, do I hold the left margin holy! So she said, 'I think we should right-justify this one to create a certain kind of space here.' And I said, 'Well, I don't know,' and went down to the studio." ("When I heard the tone of her voice, I thought, 'Oh boy, we've got problems,'" said Pickens.) "I'd seen people do things like that and I'd always thought it just looked stupid and contrived. I just didn't think I could do it. So Susan started to show me what she thought would happen. And the interior space that resulted formed a sort of spiritual cove. But it still took me about a week to agree to it."

"Susan was also very concerned about the visual impression a poem would make if you weren't reading it but just standing there looking at it. There was a kind of size awareness. I am, at my worst, verbose,



A work from "Conditions Which Guarantee Existence"

and there was one poem that was very hard for me to write and it was enormous, just disproportionate to everything else. I said, 'It has to be that way; it has to have all that information there,' and she would say, 'Maybe you could make it just a little smaller.' There were some hard choices; you try to trust the other person's instincts about the thing at which you're good."

For Pickens, having words in advance of the images she creates is often exhilarating. "It brings in a new dimension; it helps in germinating new ideas," she said. "I think that a few years ago I wouldn't have taken to it at all. I wouldn't have wanted to do it. But all of a sudden it seems like something about it is really right. You have to remember that this project comes from our backgrounds, so it is already a part of me."

Both women said that the process was cathartic, a means of coming to terms with their pasts. Part of the difficulty in doing so, they said,

was in confronting such a personal subject without lapsing into sentimentality.

"Our fears were real," said Harris. "There was a fear about nostalgia in the most negative sense. We had worries about preciousness in our work, about an overly literal reading - which is why we backed away from giving the viewer very much information. I come from a background that says the stuff either stands on its own or it doesn't."

"When I was driving up here today, I was thinking, 'I don't know about doing this interview,' because I've listened to some artists discuss their work and they've completely ruined it for me."

J. Michael Serino is a writer and editor living in Ithaca.



Just Below Fisher's Grove

Restless hands contain themselves
making millions of fine stitches.
Two bushels of peaches, six of tomatoes —
by dawn she's worked her magic
filling cupboards and need.

Beans erupt — a garden epiphany —
soon contained in saline and jar.
Her house shines from clean and kindness.

Pale bovine faces watch her at the clothesline,
the barn, the chicken coop, in the garden.
The low dull pain of rabid cattle
infiltrates the sheets, the children, the nights.

Fanged mountains line the landscape
protect and hinder florid kinship,
fine webs of veins and flesh
milk vines from breast to lips.

— Lisa Harris



Lisa Harris (left) and Susan Pickens

Photo: Joan Sage

Kozol Interview

continued from page 10

Kozol concurs and notes, "I live in the Gloucester school district which spends about \$5,000 per pupil, while neighboring Manchester spends about \$7,500 and so when the cross-district choice plan went into effect in Massachusetts, right away Gloucester lost some 70 kids to Manchester, but none went from Manchester to Gloucester. Bush's magic of the marketplace certainly did not work here. In order to have true inter-district choices, there must first be equity of funding of programs and schools in all of these districts, otherwise there will only be movement out of the poorer schools to the wealthier schools - done primarily by those who are mobile and can access such schools since no public transportation is available - leaving the poorer school even worse off, even more segregated, and with even

less funding with which to try to compete in Bush's marketplace."

I ask Kozol how the book is going - his publisher has called on another line while we are talking - and he replies, "It will be on the *New York Times* Best Seller list another week; there are 85,000 in print, more than any of my other books - even *Time* magazine treated it kindly." Finally, I ask what's next, and Kozol responds, "I'm doing some writing about choice, Bush's 'America 2000', and national testing. But maybe my next book will be a children's book."

Dave Lehman, an educator for 30 years, principal and teacher at Ithaca's public Alternative Community School, and President of the New York State Alternative Education Association, is a frequent writer for a wide range of educational publications.

PrairyErth

continued from page 8

a cast of mind pointedly different from our own. Least Heat-Moon quotes Peter Matthiessen from *The Snow Leopard*:

Such concepts as karma and circular time are taken for granted by almost all American Indian traditions; time as space and death as becoming are implicit in the earth-view of the Hopi, who avoid all linear constructions, knowing as well as any Buddhist that Everything is Right Here Now. As in the great religions of the East, the American Indian makes small distinction between religious activity and the acts of everyday: the religious ceremony is life itself.

Karma and circular time are implicit in *PrairyErth*. Lifting our eyes from its fabric of detail, its circumstantial lushness, we find the interdependent web of nature and culture: soil and rain, the bluestem grasses whose life is largely underground, the animals who make their home among the grasses, including a resurgent population of coyotes, the Indians, the settlers, the Orient rail line that railroad magnate Arthur Edwards Stillwell had planned to run from Kansas to Mexico, Jane Kroger's Homestead Ranch, run

exclusively by women, the Osage Orange fences that were at once "pig-tight, horse-high, and bull-strong," the slave wars that caused the state to be named "bloody Kansas." All are connected by the roots, in the past or deep in the earth, like the bluestem grasses.

In *PrairyErth*, Least Heat-Moon has laid out a different sort of grid, one that sacrifices right angles to ripples and waves, flat topographies to riverine shapes that branch and flow, branch and connect in a vast circuit of life. The book is applied ecology with distinctly spiritual underpinnings, approximating in book form an Osage way of knowledge. Does Kansas deserve to be anatomized this way and be given this ambivalent celebration, this tribute laced with jeremiads? Now we can answer the question with another: what portion of this earth does not? Is it strange that it should take this half-native, this vanishing American returning to native ground to spell out for the new inhabitants, the interlopers, what their Kansas is really worth, or is it just and inevitable, an expression of karma?

Mark Schechner is a writer who lives in Buffalo, NY.

Gary Snyder Interview

continued from page 6

think that what we're all trying to do is to break out of some of the old cultural assumptions about what being human means. In that sense *Mountains & Rivers* is not like the personal, the individual spiritual quest.

P.F. We may be near the end of a profane era. Modernism and post-modernism have ventured pretty far outside the temple *profanum* and now the word sacred is being revamped and people are beginning to sense that something's been missing. What care need we take in bringing back a positive valence for the term "sacred?"

G.S. Oh, I think it requires extraordinary care because the term sacred is used so commonly within a dichotomous mindset that would almost immediately distinguish the secular and the sacred and run out a whole dualistic game from there. I feel very strongly that the word sacred should be used very rarely as a distinctive category, and that what is more useful than declaring this or that sacred is to ask, in the early Buddhist sense almost, what is right living? What is right seeing? What is right occupation? What is the way to weave your way through the world, and ultimately to base the whole exercise on the question, how to do the least harm? How to live fully and honestly, but do the least harm, following the first Buddhist precept. And the spirit-world may be an ally to one who has made the

vow to try and live that way. For those who have not made that vow to do the least harm, to call on the spirit-world is to evoke possible dangers.

As I said in *The Practice of the Wild*, at some point the whole terminology of the sacred can be an obstruction, and make some things special and other things ordinary - make one spot a beautiful national park and another area a national sacrifice zone. Whereas in truth, if anything is going to be sacred, it's going to be everything. We have to live with the profane, the secular within that context.

P.F. What do you think about the way the Joseph Campbell phenomenon has made possible discussion about such topics as "the mind of metaphor?"

G.S. I think that part of it is great. If people read myths, read folktales and fairytales, I don't think they can go wrong. The more of the real stuff they read, the better. If they don't read too much commentary, that's okay too. The commentary is where they can get led astray. You know, who I really like is James Hillman. Oh, I think he's just marvelous.

P.F. Yes, he's a myth-maker.

G.S. He's a wonderful myth-maker!

P.F. How are you talking about the "spirit-world?"

G.S. I'm talking metaphorically about the powers and presences that cannot be ignored, like the ghosts of

ancient trees on the West Coast, or the lingering presence of the bison on the Great Plains, or the lingering presence of our own ancestors. You could say the karma of the past is with us. There are forces and memories and needs we would try to deny - or we could acknowledge. By acknowledging certain forces, certain events, certain presences something can be learned perhaps. Like something can be learned in North America by acknowledging that the Indians were people who were really here - to deny that puts another cast on the whole experience.

One of the reasons I'm careful in speaking about the sacred is because there are people who can be taken in by it, and there are so many people who would take you in by it. It's easy to set yourself up as a spiritual guide, or teacher in contemporary America. Better that we should be skeptical and careful and not depart too far from our own common sense and experience - trust our own experience, trust our own mind, trust our own mindfulness, avoid ideologies. The looseness, the playfulness of the metaphoric quality of mind that enables us to really use myth, use the language of spirit - instead of just casting it into some new and unpleasant concrete - is still evolving!

Peter Fortunato is the author of two poetry collections, "A Bell or a Hook" and "Letters to Tiohero." In 1990 he was awarded the Ruth Lake Memorial Prize of the Poetry Society of America. He teaches writing at Ithaca College.

Critical Theory

continued from page 9

the 90's, the particular focus of the chapters vary. The introduction and the final two chapters are more contextual and historical, tracing the directions of Critical Theory after Adorno's death in 1969. The middle chapters of the book are more textual, focusing on theoretical and political issues in the works of Georg Lukács, Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas.

In the more contextual chapters, Hohendahl outlines the changes which the general project of Critical Theory has undergone in the past two decades, including a depreciation in its reliance on Marxism and Marxist categories, and its encounters with and appropriations of other intellectual traditions, such as sys-

tems theory, poststructuralism and feminism. At the same time, Hohendahl traces the differences in the developments of Critical Theory in West Germany and the United States. In West Germany, a number of directions in "second generation" Critical Theory developed in the 1970's, of which Habermas was only one, albeit the most important one. Whatever the internal differences among these alternatives, they existed together in tenuous opposition to poststructuralist theory when it was introduced into Germany in the late 70's. In the United States, on the other hand, Habermas has been the only member of this "second generation" who has enjoyed a wide recognition. (American audiences are not familiar with other contem-

porary figures, including Albrecht Wellmer, Peter Bürger, or Alexander Kluge.) To complicate matters, the appropriation of the work of Adorno and Walter Benjamin has often come in conjunction with poststructuralism and deconstruction, rather than against it. Hohendahl argues that in the United States today, the Frankfurt School cannot be considered identical with Critical Theory. Rather, Critical Theory has become pluralized; it is now critical theory, that is, critical or oppositional theories, of which Habermas or the Frankfurt School are but one strand. In tracing these developments, Hohendahl is careful to point out how the different terrains have given

see *Reappraisals*, p. 14

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MIDRASHIM

David Curzon



Jewish Writers

Chapbook 5

MIDRASHIM

By David Curzon

"I needed some way of discovering my experiences, and moving beyond them, not directly based on my own life. After twenty years of avoidance, I gradually and reluctantly began studying the Bible and its commentaries by trying to write poems based on my reading."

—From the Preface

Midrashim is a book of poems based on Biblical texts, with the Biblical passages on which the poems comment on facing pages. The Australian-born author's poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Tikkun* (USA); *Tel Aviv Review* (Israel); *Westerly* and *Overland* (Australia); and have been translated into Italian, Portuguese, and Russian. "I read *Midrashim* with the greatest pleasure and found it fascinating. I consider the book a legitimate heir of the tradition because, like the old midrashim, it infuses a new strength into the ancient forms."

—Alex Rofé, Professor of Bible, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

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Vintage, \$11.00 paper, 331 pp.

On November 3, Diane Ackerman read from her recent works "The Moon by Whale Light" and "Jaguar of Sweet Laughter" as part of the "Off Campus at the Bookery" series. After the reading, Nick Vaczek interviewed her for this article.

Diane Ackerman got her Ph.D. in English at Cornell University, but she says she was always "poaching in the sciences," taking courses in "Physics for Poets" and anthropology, and sitting in on astronomy and chemistry lectures.

"I've always been fascinated by both the sciences and the humanities, and whenever I've wanted to write about a subject - an animal, a person, a gesture - I've wanted to look at it in the widest possible context."

Ackerman concedes her professors may have thought she was "just a tiny bit eccentric," but she feels Cornell was a good place to be a maverick in 1976. As an undergraduate she participated in the Science, Technology and Society interdisciplinary seminar and wrote her first book, *The Planets, A Cosmic Pastoral*, which she started on the birthday of Copernicus.

"I had been listening to Holst's *The Planets*, and thinking how sad it was that we were only able to have an intimate and profound relationship with nature if we glamorized it—

Mars, the war god, Venus as the goddess of love. So I decided to write a suite of scientifically accurate poems about the planets."

As a graduate student in the M.F.A. program, Ackerman published two more books of poetry, *Wife of Light* and *Twilight of the Tenderfoot*.

Recently, she has published in quick succession two books of essays, *A Natural History of the Senses* and *The Moon by Whale Light*, and a book of poetry, *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter*. She says the title for *The Moon by Whale Light* occurred to her while she was on a beach in Patagonia.

"I woke up in the middle of the night and looked over the ocean, which was covered in a thick layer of fog, and I couldn't tell where the ocean stopped and the sky began. There were whales in the bay and there was a full moon and in that sepulchral light, it looked as if the whales were more radiant than the moon, which was just their reflection. And that's where the title came from."

She says that writing three different books at once was possible because "they occupy different drawers in my mind. When I'm writing a poem spoken by the continent of Antarctica, for example, I'm fully available to that enterprise. But if, instead, I'm writing for *A Natural History of the Senses* about the quality of glare in the Antarctic which is so unusual that it functions almost as a pure color, I don't think about the poem at that moment, the landscape has my complete attention."

Though she says she has "always been attuned to the details of life," Ackerman firmly believes that observation is something that can be taught. "You can teach it in a basic drawing class," she says, "you can teach it in a creative writing class. I have practiced observation over the years and disciplined myself." Her

concern for detail extends even to the covers of the books she publishes:

"For *A Natural History of the Senses*, I asked the publishers to make the jacket purple, my favorite color, and they felt it wasn't a color men would feel as comfortable purchasing as women. So they chose

she not only observed the animals, but joined in tagging the new pups. Whether she is studying alligators, penguins, or bats, Ackerman believes that participating in the scientific work of a research team helps to hone her observational skills as a writer.

"The world fascinates me in

I will forget are how a person walked or spoke, what the animal's eyes looked like, the quality of the light on the sand - all of those sensory details through which we can invent a place, I have to jot down when I am there."

Working with scientists, Ackerman finds them generous with their knowledge and "really grateful to be able to share their life's work with an artist." While they teach her a great deal, scientists often learn from her work as well. "Many zoologists and biologists have not had a chance to work with some of the animals with which I have had the privilege of working. So when my essays appear in *The New Yorker*, I sometimes get letters from zoologists who are learning for the first time about some intriguing fact or behavior."

Though she writes both poetry and non-fiction, Ackerman says she has just one muse, "but it's very miscellaneous. Poetry requires the rigorous pungency of an epigram and I love that. But I also like the way nonfiction gives you a larger arena to work in and longer rhythms. I use both poetry and nonfiction to learn about the world."

As for writing about animals, Ackerman says her favorite is the human animal, and she will soon be writing more about us, just as she did in *A Natural History of the Senses*. But no matter what subject she chooses, Ackerman's approach is always one of passionate involvement. "I hope some of the energy and some of the tenderness I feel for the subject shines through. But I don't know, I'm too captivated by what I'm learning and writing to worry about that."

Nick Vaczek is a writer living in Ithaca.



Diane Ackerman

one more neutral in gender - deep forest green - and then made it a woman standing at a garden fence, completely enraptured by a single rose. You can't tell where the blush on her cheek ends and the blushing rose begins. And because the picture is embossed, you can stroke her hair, which I love. But they did make *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter* purple. They put a dark, more restrained purple on the outside and a very frilly lavender on the inside."

Last year, Ackerman went to the South Pacific to write about monk seals for National Geographic. As a member of the Monk Seal Project

detail. I can't remember a time when I didn't enjoy the spectacle of life at the level of color, sound, smell, and touch." When she goes into the field she wears a pair of pants with many pockets and takes two small spiral notebooks "with bright yellow covers." She only notes sensory details, and when the two notebooks are filled she knows she has enough for a twenty-thousand word article.

"I don't bother putting down the narrative, because I'm going to be able to remember that later, and I don't bother putting down what people say, because I can do that with a tape recorder. But the things

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Magic Flute

continued from p. 8

Egyptologizing narratives, not to mention the contemporary magic operas that comprise the immediate genre of *Die Zauberflöte*, makes it difficult to argue "influence," and Branscombe does not offer an escape from the quandary of differentiating between proximate and ultimate sources, sources and analogues.

The chapters on the libretto and the music bear the main responsibility for conveying a sense of *Die Zauberflöte* itself, and here the handbook disappoints rather severely. While the initial sections of the libretto chapter shore up the not inconsiderable credentials of Schikaneder, the discussion of "The figure of the bird-man" meanders through analogues of uncertain relevance to Papageno without ever proceeding to a discussion of the self-proclaimed "Naturmensch," as if philological hunter-gathering somehow precluded thinking about the text. And while Branscombe elsewhere refers to the libretto's "happy blend of fantasy, mysteriousness, high drama and cheerful comedy" (p. 146), he refuses to deal with it on any level other than fact-finding. A strange subchapter on "The qualities of the libretto" focuses on character motivation and prosody ("Many of the ensembles are rich in metrical and rhythmic changes, which frequently point up progression from one dramatic situation to the next" [p. 103]). Moreover, anyone writing a handbook on *Die Zauberflöte* has an obligation, it seems to me, to offer something in the way of interpretation besides a pedantic accounting of irregular rhymes and accents - something, say, on the history of ideas, fairy-tale quests and archetypes, traditional dramatic constellations (master/servant), the opera's diverse but carefully structured mixtures of styles and genres, perhaps even justifying the infamous "reversal" in the action in terms of the work itself.

The chapter on the music by Erik Smith is also disappointing. Proceeding from the assumption of the "classical balance and homogeneity which distinguishes Mozart's music perhaps above all others" (p. 112), an assumption increasingly called into question, the chapter ends with a provocative contrast between *Die Zauberflöte* and the ironic core of Mozart's Italian operas, emphasizing the principal's innocence in the drama's "central allegory of our journey through life and in the shadow of death" (p. 140f.). This might have become a point of departure for analyzing the transition from the fairy-tale quest of the beginning to the Act I finale and beyond, and discussing the great variety of styles within the opera as a drama. Instead, the treatment is broken up into a rather conventional and atomized presentation of musical aspects - numbers and finales, melody, tonality, orchestration, etc. Removed from the drama, musical highlights become a teleological necessity based on the divine revelation of tonality:

For Tamino's glorious outburst at the opening of the Bildnis aria his top note had to be a G - and that automatically made for an aria in E flat. Likewise, [Mozart] had to modulate into F for Pamina's cry "Tamino mein" for the sake of the soprano's radiant A. No other note would have done. (p. 131)

Singers do have definite ranges, and arias are written for specific singers, but this is nonsense. Smith suggests in his final section that if the achievement of *Die Zauberflöte* "is not to be found in the music alone, still less in the libretto, it must have been produced by the reaction between the two" (p. 140), but unfortunately never considered that this might, indeed should, comprise a major goal of his discussion.

The extensive and frequently bizarre reception of *Die Zauberflöte* could easily be the subject of a book in its own right. Although

Branscombe's discussion of the first performance and early stage history is admirably detailed, revealing Schikaneder's company to have been rather talented and suggesting - contrary to yet another *Zauberflöte* myth - that the opera was successful from the start, the ensuing treatment of the posthumous history of Mozart's opera seems downright reactionary, unaffected by theories of reception that would let one consider the work's meaning diachronically, and it generally registers either further facts or disapproval. Needless to say, Ingmar Bergman's cinematic adaptation is treated as yet another betrayal; his "idiosyncratic mishandling of the original" "seriously distorts Mozart's intentions" - whatever those may have been - (p. 177), as if performers, producers and critics were supposed to be museum-keepers, preventing a pristine original from being sullied by posterity. One wonders what Branscombe thinks of Anthony Besch's interesting, if somewhat long, "director's approach," which mentions that he tries to fill in the background of an opera for the performers, adducing, for example, that the Third Lady is an amateur painter and may have done the portrait of Pamina, or that Papageno is a bastard son of the Queen of the Night and thus Pamina's half-brother (p. 196/201)!

This is a book primarily for those who want facts, useful and otherwise, about *Die Zauberflöte*. Anyone interested in interpretation, analysis of how text and music interact in even a single number, considerations of aesthetics and structure, indications that its varied reception itself poses major interpretive questions, or a detailed attempt to suggest why this magical opera continues to enchant its listeners, should look elsewhere.

Arthur Groos is a Professor of German Studies at Cornell University and is co-editor of the "Cambridge Opera Journal."

Reappraisals

continued from p. 12

rise to different theoretical issues and different political problems, and how these differences have often led to misunderstandings in the exchanges between American and West German theorists.

The more textual chapters of the book proceed in a roughly chronological order. They begin with an essay on Lukács' early, pre-Marxist writings through his turn to Marxism, pointing to the importance of romanticism in Lukács' critique of industrial society and capitalism. This critical and utopian moment can be detected in Adorno's understanding of the "good life" and his conception of authentic works of art, and even in Habermas' attempt to ground the normative dimension of his theory in language. Following this essay is a chapter on Adorno and Lukács, in which Hohendahl outlines Adorno's critique of Lukács as well as his debt to him. Hohendahl argues, following Peter Bürger, that, in spite of their differences, Adorno's and Lukács' aesthetic theories shared presuppositions about art which are no longer tenable, in particular, the notions of totality and aesthetic autonomy. Hohendahl develops this position in his next essay on Adorno's posthumous *Aesthetic Theory*, arguing that after the failed attempt of the avant-garde to destroy the separation of art from life, art works could no longer be correlated with a philosophy of history, and thus the concepts of aesthetic totality and aesthetic autonomy become problematic. Consequently, a plurality of aesthetic forms develops after the demise of the historical avant-garde. As art becomes a specialized domain within the division of labor in society, its position within society becomes peripheral. In the final two textual chapters, Hohendahl reconstructs Habermas' critique of Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas' critique of Derrida and Foucault, and then Habermas' own theory of communicative action.

Throughout, the book is pedagogical rather than polemical.

Hohendahl oscillates between theoretical textual explication and sociological-contextual analysis. He offers a sympathetic but critical reading of the Frankfurt School. This is particularly valuable in regard to contemporary debates between Habermasians and poststructuralists, in which both sides often appear so intent on winning the argument that they intentionally misunderstand the other side. Hohendahl carefully lays out Habermas' position, tracing the intellectual and political influences in the development of Habermas' theory of communicative action, and then pointing to where Habermas disagrees with his French and American counterparts, what he disagrees with and what he fears in these positions. Finally, Hohendahl offers his own critique of both Habermas and Foucault, and suggests possible alternatives. While Hohendahl wants to maintain the normative dimension of theory (against Foucault), he appears to favor a pragmatic rather than "quasi-transcendental" grounding of these norms (against Habermas), which would rely on a "rationally negotiated, pluralist compromise" instead of normative and rational consensus. In this sense, Hohendahl's conception of Critical Theory after Adorno parallels his conception of post-autonomy art. Following the student movements' attempt in the 60's to break down the barriers between the institution of theory (the university) and everyday life, Critical Theory, like post-avant-garde art, cannot be correlated with a philosophy of history. It must make smaller claims, existing within a plurality of positions. This is in accord with Hohendahl's general conclusion, "that during the 1980's Critical Theory has been most effective as a local theory in a dialogical situation with different approaches and methods, receiving its strength from concrete social conflicts and struggles." (p. 228)

Tom Lampert is a graduate student in political science at Cornell University.

Islam in America

continued from p. 7

In my own experience, the original American publisher of my book *Cultural Forces in World Politics* - Westview Press - objected to my comparison of Israel with South Africa. They also disliked my criticism of Salman Rushdie and my comparing the Chinese students at Tiananmen Square with the Palestinian intifada. The publishers never said their objections were political, but it was obvious from the chapters

they wanted to throw out. Finally, I told them to forget it, that I would publish the book elsewhere. Fortunately, I'm at the stage of my career where I have alternatives. If I were a younger political scientist or historian, I might not have been able to publish the book.

B.P. Are you hopeful or pessimistic about the possibility of educating Americans about Islamic culture and its concerns?

A.M. Oh, I have to be hopeful because my oldest son is American and his kids are going to be American, so there will be all these American Mazruis. Also, I've grown fond of this country. I've mellowed.

Diana Frank is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

Sarah Elbert teaches at SUNY Binghamton and is the author of "A Hunger For Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture."

Letter

continued from p. 2

proposed by scholars who have attacked Diop on ideological grounds for the last 30 years.

Finally, Baines contends that because some Jewish scholars have rejected another Jew's (Michael Astour's) work, it follows that Bernal's assertions about racist interpretations of Afro-Asiatic/Western civilizations are false. Merely because some Jewish scholars disagree with the views of another Jew is no ground for invalidating Bernal's

views on race in Egyptology. In the same vein, some of Diop's more virulent opponents have been Africans like himself. This does not invalidate Diop's demonstration that racial considerations have distorted the views of Egyptologists. In the specific case of Diop, he is obviously uncomfortable, almost apologetic, about raising racial issues. But he, like Bernal, cannot avoid the issue of race in tackling "theories" which have falsified history.

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The Teacher as Intellectual

Martin Laforse

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, THE STATE, AND CULTURAL STRUGGLE

Edited by Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren
SUNY Press, \$19.95 paper, 299 pp.

According to the editors, the aim of *Critical Pedagogy*, a collection of thirteen essays by different authors, is nothing less than a "new public philosophy of education" for the postmodern era. The essays themselves are rather uneven, ranging from a few rather turgid exercises in grand scale theory to more readable, if modest, efforts.

Among the latter is Michelle Fine's perceptive discussion of the deadly silences which inhabit too many classrooms, where "fear of talk" serves to exclude the students' own experience and emotions. She asks whether the price of being a good student may not involve the self-destroying muting of the individual's voice. Fine argues that students must regain their own voice so that their lives can become part of the educational system.

David Shumway urges the use of rock and roll lyrics in order "to

provide students with a critical understanding of a cultural form that plays a significant part in their lives." He enlists as compelling a critic as Walter Benjamin to argue that rock lyrics can serve as a form of social, moral, and intellectual analysis. Shumway's point is that rock music is where students live, so discussion of the lyrics can ignite their passionate interest, which may provide a path to the more traditional canon. Shumway's term for this is learning to read sign systems.

In her essay, Miriam David employs a feminist perspective to examine the world of "latchkey kids" living with single, working mothers. She takes on Mrs. Thatcher's mean-spirited reign in a way that might have delighted the great Labour educationist, Margaret McMillan. David indicts the stinginess of a government policy that shifts the priorities from equality of opportunity to parents' rights, which she sees as a cloak for insidious privatization.

Walter Feinberg severely criticizes the direction which the national debate on education has taken during the Reagan-Bush years. He

decries the inability of the schools to "provide students with the understanding they need in order to critically reflect upon the political and cultural values that are being thrust upon them."

Michael W. Apple's trenchant essay, "The Politics of Common Sense: Populism and the New Right," constitutes one of the best analyses of the decline of liberal ideology and the rise of the new conservative consensus this reviewer has seen. He, too, makes the case that dominant groups such as the military and business elites have a powerful influence on the shape of public schooling. It is those interests which are urging privatization and market concepts as the solution to the crisis in public education. Apple argues that conservatives have taken advantage of widespread discontent over falling educational standards and growing illiteracy to promote ideas like competitive schools, the voucher plan, and competency mandating as part of their effort to build a symbiotic relationship between market capitalism and education. Apple chastises those labor representatives who agree with this logic

of profitability and market ethics as the main principle of resource allocation.

Yet, both Apple and Martin Carnoy identify such groups as blacks, women, the poor and the working class as significant centers of opposition to the power of the dominant culture and its educational underpinning, the traditional curriculum. Apple, particularly, ends his argument on the hopeful note that new identities won in such struggles as the civil rights movement are not easily destroyed and that such experiences help to create points of resistance to a system whose primary purpose is to produce tractable workers and eager consumers.

School as a setting for cultural struggle is also the theme of Richard Smith and Anna Zantiotis in their essay on teacher education. They assert that public education has lost sight of its duty to "shape and reflect democratic social forms" and to help create a socially involved "critical citizenry." They lament such trends as bureaucratic control and surveillance of teacher performance. Co-editor Giroux reinforces this ar-

gument by calling for teacher education designed to train teachers to be true intellectuals whose critical participation in the cultural politics of education could serve as a powerful force in countering the hidden social agenda of the traditional curriculum.

Because the essays are uneven, it is difficult to decide if the editors of *Critical Pedagogy* have succeeded in articulating all the necessary elements of their program for the revitalization of public education. The problem is not so much with the theory, but with the "how to's," which remain omitted. Who could oppose the concept of the teacher as intellectual? Yet, how to attain that goal is another question, and the authors may be wrong in thinking that the intellectual teacher would be a radical. Still, the book's wholehearted advocacy of the disenfranchised is decidedly refreshing in these smug times.

Martin Laforse is a Professor in the Teacher Education Program at Ithaca College.



Sander Gilman Interview

continued from page 3

control it, to de-demonize it. A work of art - or science for that matter, both set limits - creates the illusion of control, and sometimes real control because if it works, it's real. So we're back to our story-telling nature. One of the reasons we tell stories is that, huddled around the fire with the saber-tooth tigers out in the dark, we could reassure ourselves that everything was fine. Or we could tell stories about all those terrible things that happened long ago and far away to other people, which no longer happen to us.

B.M. What about the just-published *Jew's Body*?

S.G. That's a project I started to look at how the idea of difference becomes embodied - and I mean that quite literally - in the body of individuals. I treated this in more general terms in my *History of Sexuality*, which appeared a few years ago. *Jew's Body* focuses on how Western cultures represented the body of the male Jew, and how the male Jew internalized ideas about his body to the point of becoming uncomfortable within his own body. I looked at myths about the Jewish foot, the Jewish nose, the Jewish voice, the Jewish psyche, myths about creativity or violence among Jews in order to plot both the ways people talk about Jews and the ways Jews respond. Actually, responses differ in relation to time, social setting, and gender, which is why the book looks at males, rather than both males and females. The myths about the female Jewish body would require another book.

B.M. Can you give me an illustration of a myth and a response?

S.G. When I was a teenager it seemed to me that every second kid I knew who was Jewish was getting a nose job; for some people it was commonly accepted to give a Jewish girl a nose job for her 16th birthday. I got very interested in where the idea and the practice of the nose job arose, and it didn't surprise me much that the modern tradition of aesthetic rhinoplasty arose in Berlin in the 1890's. Just as Freud is oper-

ating on the psyche in Vienna, the idea of Jewish visibility becomes focused on the nose. And indeed the first person to have cosmetic rhinoplasty is a man, not a woman, by a surgeon named Jacques Joseph.

I discovered that there is a real argument about who developed cosmetic rhinoplasty. On the one hand there is Jacques Joseph, who developed it in the 1890's for his Jewish patients to make them look more like Germans. But there's another claimant, from Rochester, New York about 20 years earlier, John Roe, who developed the operation for Irish men and women to make them look English. So the analogous

human personality. They want to believe in some sort of fixed identity based on gender, class, or whatever. Luckily, I've been spared any right-wing attacks - perhaps dealing with Jewish subjects makes one slightly less visible than if you're dealing with questions of feminism or African-Americanism. Having had to combat a strongly apolitical ideology in the 1950's and 60's which presented itself as neutral, but was in fact intensely conservative, I find it ironical to now be accused of being conservative and controlling.

B.M. Why do you think your work has been criticized?

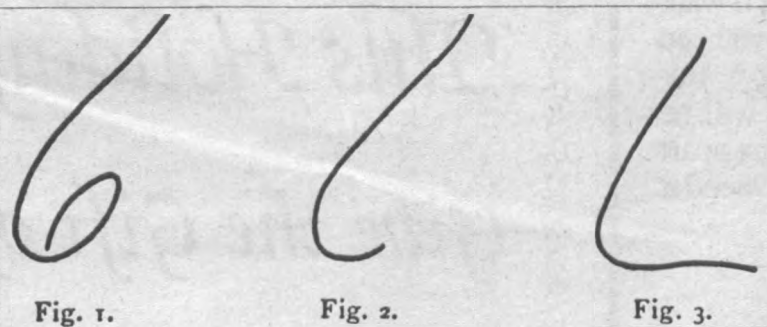


PLATE TWENTY-EIGHT

The creation of the "nostrility" of the Jew and its unmaking, at least in the form of a caricature. From Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics* (London: D. Nutt, 1891) (Source: Private Collection, Ithaca).

Reprinted from "The Jew's Body"

movement is indeed the movement toward invisibility, a denial of ethnic identity in hostile cultures.

B.M. Do you deal with circumcision in *Jew's Body*?

S.G. In a very specific case, Freud's case of Dora. I try to re-read it in light of the debates about infant male circumcision. It's an attempt to see not just what people say about circumcision, but rather how Jewish males respond to this caricature of their own bodies. What interests me is the response to the discourse about the nose, or about the penis or about the foot.

B.M. What challenges do you face from the responses to your own work?

S.G. Old style liberals seem put off by the idea that identity is an ongoing constructed aspect of the

S.G. There's been a general movement against cultural criticism. Partly it's because what I do is look at the social impact of psychological questions - the internalization of victimization and how victims respond. Also, some of the questions I've asked were simply tabu questions. The work I have been doing over the last few years, looking at the diseased body, the body of the Afro-American, the body of the Jew, were often the subject of jokes, perhaps because there is some truth to the old saying that we laugh about what makes us most anxious. But these issues are not simply the stuff of jokes; they are part of the inarticulated subtext of the culture.

Another thing is that my work is pessimistic. The liberal agenda of the 1950's and 60's, now transmuted into the 90's, argues for a rigid kind of agenda whose aim is to make the

world better. My scholarship doesn't aim at reforming individuals; it tries to find out how group fantasies function. In my view we're never going to get rid of group fantasies, but we can at least become aware of their presence, and of the oftentimes negative effects these images have upon individuals.

What I'm arguing for is a very definite form of political action - education - but not in a utopian sense. I think antagonism is built into all societies; the question is how to deal constructively with group

conflict, which may be a necessary part of all group and individual interaction.

But critical response to my work delights me, because it at least says the questions I ask are worth wrestling with. I certainly don't see my work as setting any kind of limits to discourse or exploration.

Barbara Mink teaches writing at Cornell's Johnson Graduate School of Management and is a member of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives.

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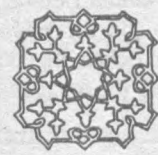
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