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Dirty Old Man(ifesto)

Jeff Schwaner

Glare

A. R. Ammons

W. W. Norton

\$25.00, 294 pages

"The difference, already noted, noticeable."

One of the last times I saw Archie Ammons, before I left my native North for his native Sunny piece of curb, the season was fall, which seems to last nine months in Ithaca, New York, and a blustery breeze was teasing what little hair he kept close-cropped above his ears. He was seemingly oblivious to students passing him by, concentrating on that ten-year-old's tightrope trick, long arms just slightly raised as if asking a question, head and shoulders down and wearing his usual old green corduroy sports jacket. But one thing Archie has never been is oblivious. His poetics has always been one of attention, that balance concerned with reaching out for the large-scale yet retaining interest in its relation to the minutest of objects and phenomena, in both nature and human behavior. When he saw me heading his way, he betrayed no shame at his child-like play. He looked at me with that same grim smile he'd always used when I was his student, with a glint of the trouble-maker in his eye, and simply drawled out, in an accent quite exotic in New York State, 'Wehhhl, Jehhff Hel-looh.'

A. R. Ammons has played similar games of brinksmanship in his writing. Several times he's composed book-length poems on a single, continuous roll of adding machine tape, the first being the insightful and wandering *Tape for the Turn of the Year* the style and substance of all his earlier work, but with an added edge of desperation to the search. Worrying about the times when mere presence no longer persuades, he writes: "when I come back I'm going to be there every time." More recently the award-winning *Garbage* pokes fun at the impermanence of poetry while facing more sobering issues of waste and redemption.

Ammons concern seems to be not only the same old annihilation, but the way in which annihilation undoes the structures. This poet spent his life in collusion with those very things which naturally get along annihilation's way, anyway. Ammons, who turns seventy this year, seems to have chosen the adding tape route for this book to test the constraints of poetry itself: where in poetry does the poetry reside? simply in the style and not the substance? in other words, is the word just really the stage? To test it, Ammons throws the book at poetry in *Glare*, tossing in dirty jokes, bad puns, and rambling complaints.

It wasn't until moving down to Ammons' native region that I realized how anomalous he is to the South, and that maybe all of the above is wrong; maybe he simply likes what cold weather offers. So much of his writing is about snow, and the type of changes, brittle, informing changes, changes where reali-

ty is the dry crack of seasons sacrificing beauty for movement, stuff you just can't witness in the South. It's taken me three years to even begin to get used to this place to learn to like palmetto trees, which are barely trees in my opinion (you can't climb them and they shed no leaves), and the local lingerie of flowers that seem to bloom and humidity so thick with fragrance you can barely breathe, and the luxury of swimming in the ocean six months a year. But, the ocean's constant reminders notwithstanding, the illusion is that nothing much changes, that change has in fact been asked—politely—to leave due to a perceived lack of manners. People expect sun everyday; change is only given its due when its dining companion is peril, as in flash floods, scary thunderstorms that come out of nowhere like nuns, and hurricanes. The sameness of climate has me wishing for sudden frosts and freak snowfalls, the type that create small disasters like the bent up corner of your snow shovel, or the dead silent space in the middle of a winter night where the

only sound is of your own cells dying as your system clicks on and off. When I read in the middle of *Glare* that "cracking faults make room for oceans," I feel that type of big fault would simply not be tolerated in Charelston; although the pelican, ancient as the names of oceans, can stay. After all, he doesn't crack about noisily, and he's not changed a bit since the beginning of time.

Glare becomes a doubled-glance of a book, a poet looking back at poetry (and his own work in particular) with more than a little distrust as he seriously, consciously considers what lasts and whether meaning need be lasting; and a glare in the direction of the world in general, asking whether it's worth worrying about to begin with.

What gets saved when the earth recycles its own material? What type of material is consciousness? physical? spiritual? are they the same? Archie has always asked these questions: in this new book, though, it's almost as if poetic tinkering has stopped providing answers, or even more questions, and a dark recognition might be the only reply

Benn Nadelman

forthcoming. Maybe that grim sense of play which he applied to tightrope walking on curbs has found its true subject at last, perhaps with an added ingredient, plain old fear.

In this life if you scramble into a high place you have to fall out (of a high place) but from a low place you don't have far to fall: in either case you hit the ground, but in one case it takes longer and you hit harder: the difference, already noted, noticeable:

Hope's Okay.

When I last saw Archie in fact, in all the time I ever spent any time with him, between 1985 and 1994, he was already weathering the winter of his life. Sure, it seemed a little early, he hadn't even hit sixty yet, but Archie seemed to me someone who was going to make damned sure that old age didn't creep up on him; he was going to sneak up behind it and grab it by the skin hanging from its

continued on page 3

Alices in Wonderland

Bridget Meeds

Gut Symmetries
Jeanette Winterson
Knopf
\$22.00, 223 pages

As She Climbed Across the Table
Jonathan Lethem
Doubleday & Company
\$22.95, 212 pages

The physicist Leon Lederman explains the process of particle physics by asking us to imagine watching a soccer game without being able to see the ball. At first, all we would see is meaningless activity. But soon, we would observe patterns. Half the players wear a red jersey, the other half wear green. Each player covers a certain area of the field and has prescribed duties. There is symmetry—every red player has a green counterpart.

We would begin to name the positions, compare and contrast their duties, list their qualities and limitations on a chart. We would compile scores of observed rules. We would see what the players do. But we wouldn't know why.

Then a clever observer notices a rare event: every once in a while, immediately before the referee announces a score, and a second before the crowd erupts, she sees a momentary appearance of a bulge in the back of the goal net. What, she asks, if this game is dependent upon the existence of an invisible ball?

Score! All the rules and observed behaviors now make sense. Like a lost driver suddenly coming upon a known landmark, our entire mental map shifts and

settles into sense.

Novelists, those quintessential mental mapmakers, increasingly find physics to be a fertile field for their narrative imaginations. In 1997, we have already seen the publication of two "quantum novels": Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* and Jonathan Lethem's *As She Climbed Across the Table*. As we look at both and ponder their similarities, what invisible soccer ball will we find?

Gut Symmetries tells the story of a British physicist named Alice, who falls in love with Jove, a fellow physicist, on a long boat cruise. Upon their return, she also begins an affair with his wife Stella, a poet. *As She Climbed Across the Table*, oddly enough, also features a physicist named Alice, who abandons her lover Philip (a literary theorist) for a cosmological event named Lack.

So many Alices! Curiouser and curiouser. The third, not-so-invisible, angle of this textual triangle is Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland/Through The Looking Glass*, whose Alice is described by critic Camille Paglia as our "proxy in stubbornly making sense out of the flux of time." So too the other Alices.

Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* is by far the most heated of the three. *Gut* is a pun on the acronym for "Grand Unified Theories," Jove's field of study. But we also know that a writer who titled her last novel *Written On The Body* is not going to neglect flesh, and we have a fair amount of real bodies here as well.

Winterson's Alice careens from a complicated heterosexual affair into an even more complicated homosexual one, eventually achieving an uneasy, unstable trio state. Along the way, Winterson sometimes resorts to her worst purple prose:



John Tenniel

Cling. Pain upwards. Pain downwards. What corner of my insect world does pain not possess? The walls are smeared with it, sticky, slightly sweet. Pain as total as a lover....There we are, the infernal triangle, turning in the lubricious air. Breasts, cock, cunt, oversized inflated parachutes of skin. I know we are falling, all three, but the ground is still a long way off. Until we grab each other like sky divers.


Despite such occasional quagmires of swampy prose (usually attributed to the poet, more's the pity), Winterson's Alice emerges as a remarkably perceptive and resilient heroine. When her father's death prevents her from embarking upon an ominous boat trip with her omnivorous lovers, Alice is spared their adolescent pilgrimage of obsessiveness and survives to grow up.

Lethem's Alice is more precise and sparingly drawn than Winterson's. His Alice is edgy, living in California on the rim of the cultural frontier, pacing up and down the coast in repeated, escapist car trips to her parents in the Northwest. This Alice is fascinated, and ultimately obsessed with exploring an alternate "bubble" universe created in the lab by a colleague. But the novel's treatment of the physical world is anything but dry, even the lab where Alice works is visually sexualized. The novel begins:

I knew my way to Alice. I knew where to find her. I walked across campus that night writing a love plan in my head, a map across her body to follow later, when we were back in our apartment. It wouldn't be long. She was working late hours in the particle accelerator, studying minute bodies, push-

continued on page 8

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At The Bookery

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

Sunday, October 19, 4:00 p.m.

Michael Kammen,

Pulitzer Prize winning author and Newton C. Farr Professor of History at Cornell University, will read from his new book, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture*. This book brings together writings that span more than a decade and cover a broad spectrum of Kammen's interests, including the role of the historian, the relationship between culture and the state, the uses of tradition in American commercial culture, and much more.

Sunday, October 26, 4:00 p.m.



Donna Woolfolk Cross

will discuss the fascinating subject of her historically based novel *Pope Joan*. In the 9th century, disguised as a man, Pope Joan rose to rule Christianity as the first and only woman to sit on the throne of St. Peter. An extraordinary heroine, her very existence has been disputed for a thousand years. The author of *Mediaspeak* and *Daddy's Little Girl*, Donna Woolfolk Cross, lives in Syracuse.

Sunday, November 2, 4:00 p.m.



Rachel Josefowitz Siegel,

co-editor of *Celebrating the Lives of Jewish Women: Patterns in a Feminist Sampler*, will be joined by contributors, Jane Marie Law and Elisa Goldberg in a discussion of how being Jewish has shaped their identities, helping them to question, celebrate, and transmit Jewish and feminist values. Rachel Siegel is a retired feminist therapy practitioner in Ithaca.

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Man(ifesto)

continued from page 1

neck and shake the hell out of it so there'd be no secrets or surprises waiting for him. In those years he really only published one book, *Sumerian Vistas*, whose most salient work was on tombstones. I had the feeling, when books began appearing again—and they began to come almost annually—that Archie was maybe surprised to get up one day and find a break in the weather outside, and wonder if somehow spring had come around again. Is hope okay after all?

"Innocents in a Sense"

This lack of faith in change gives the South an almost puritanical aspect of its own, comparable with any New England preacher, that hides beneath the foliage of its steamy, gothic romance reputation. And a resistance to change is its resistance to open forms and formlessness. There's a puritan somewhere in Ammons' writing, too, but enlivened by the Northeast and its senses-startling speed of change, and the small hard nut of faith in spring one must hide away for half the year, the continual bloom and death of seasons. I see Ammons as rather a New England poet with the luxury of not being born in New England. Still, there's no doubting a certain sensuality gained from that Carolinian illusion of continual summer. In what sense do these elements combine?

Nearly every time I'd meet Archie when I studied under him, he'd always ask me as I left, "Jeff, you still in love?" It was, in the way of Archie's tendency to ask understated but sobering questions, half joking, half prying, but a question I never failed to take seriously; love heightens awareness of all that's sacred and vulgar about the mind and the body, it highlights the working relationship and betrayals between the two. It's one of the only real technical questions one poet can ask another. Further, it's a tougher question to answer than whether you believe in God. In both cases, there are countless levels of agnosticism, and they all produce mediocre poems and mediocre prayers and mediocre philosophy.

Glare keeps a steady eye on love and spirituality, moving smoothly from vulgarity to transcendence without suggesting it knows (or admits to) all the steps in between.

...what was

There ever to have won anyhow: an hour of sun:

A leaf gliding toward

a brook: a pussy hair behind your ear. can't you just imagine what

and then again,

how little something can be and be better than nothing: and there are notions sometimes as persuasive as the flesh (and less smelly): but it is degrading to think of sex as the flesh because in true love it is the spirit that connects, and the feelings are divine, tending toward the sacred and they generate children, sweet little innocents in a sense:

But maybe not in the same sense we're willing to parse that line. The last sense we read about is that of smell, and at times in *Glare* it appears the narrator has cause to believe that the whole cycle of birth, sex, and death stinks.

Killing Mr. Stevens; or, National Endowment

"Shall I not be as real as the things I see?"
—Emerson

In the beginning of Emerson's essay on

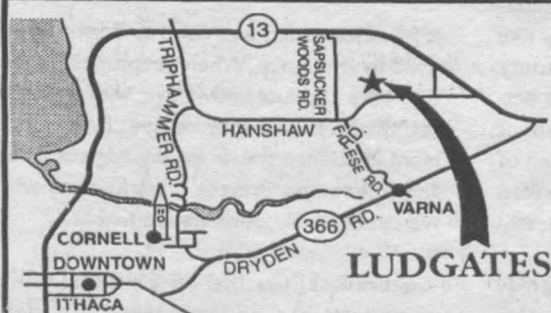
friendship, he writes, "We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken." One reasonable corollary to this is that the stuff we speak may be more mean than its mean value. I remember visiting Archie's office and seeing what I believe is a pretty famous copy of Wallace Stevens' poems—famous among his students not because it contained the verse of Stevens, but because it contained the emendations and corrections and criticisms and cross-hatchings of our teacher. If I could walk into any English department in the country and steal away with a single book, it would probably be that one. The lesson may be that the middle ground muddles, that the respect most ascribe to the middle ground can be found only in judgement or in judging and finding one wanting, and not in the neglect that finds judgement itself wanting. But I've always wondered what has cramped Archie about Stevens, who gets the once-over throughout *Glare*. One thing that's always bugged me about his verse was that it is so fluid that meaning passes right through it, without a hitch or gully, barely stopping to swirl or whorl, just slendering down the page like a snake down a shiny leaf. Is great poetry so great that it can effortlessly steer an idea beyond its meaning? Or are the ideas that get steered around simply all of Stevens' green scenery? Maybe the idea of excess fluidity cramping one up is both a bit too exotic and a bit too vulgar. But as I was thinking about this I ran across the following lines:

I was thinking of the word cramp and
I was thinking how this tape cramps
my style: it breaks down my extended
gestures: it doesn't give your
asshole time to reconfigure after a
dump

Maybe I'm not alone. Maybe working with the long sinuous tape is a way to deal stylistically with the problem I've just tried to describe, a proving ground for ideas—will they die on the vine, are they there for their color or their flavor, or what the mind's fermentation makes of them? I think Stevens has also always been Archie's way of gauging his work against immortality. All his life he's hedged his bets against the immortals, and the frightening thing at this point may be to think he's won, after all. It frightens me. He doesn't need that book of Stevens to tell him that. It's been something he's known all along, something we've all known, but been afraid to turn that transparent sphere in on itself, so in love with the image and language of it, and realize we're as real as the things we see, the transcendence each lifting leaf celebrates when its stem gives, the break with form and perception only a matter of certain cells dying, necessary bonds broken by necessity, all lessons learned and leaning toward death, certain death, like a tree leaning over the road, just beyond the glare in the windshield, what's only right:

what, though, is right:
wouldn't it be better to let the words
come out of and go into breakage in
the usual way we, too, come and go
wouldn't it be truer.

Jeff Schwaner is a writer and editor who graduated from Cornell University. He lives now in South Carolina.



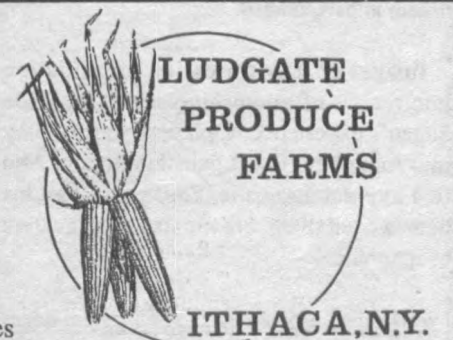
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Taking Science on Faith?

Nicholas Nicastro

By an interesting coincidence, two of 1997's summer movie blockbusters feature one virtually identical visual effect. In Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* and Robert Zemeckis's *Contact* the camera performs a grand, seamless pull-out from terra firma through the rest of the solar system and the swarm of nearby stars, out into the wider neighborhood of interstellar space, to a perch high above our galaxy. Both of these celebrations of scale end with the same joke, too: in *Men in Black*, we retreat far enough to see that our universe is just one of many small, shiny spheroids in some adolescent alien's bag of marbles; in *Contact*, we zoom out to find the galactic panorama is all in the eyes of the young heroine, Eleanor Arroway, whose innocence (we are to suppose) is deep enough to contain universes.

These similarities are unexpected, considering that Zemeckis' *Contact* is largely faithful (if that's the word) to the novel by Carl Sagan. *Men in Black*, on the other hand, is a spoof that is mostly sympathetic to everything Sagan hated about the modern culture of credulity—UFOs, alien abductions, conspiracy paranoia, tabloid journalism, et al. Where *Contact* is talky, earnest, and high-minded about the implications of extraterrestrial intelligence, *Men in Black* poses—and profits from—the notion that those interstellar immensities have little more significance than the border between El Paso and Juarez, Mexico.

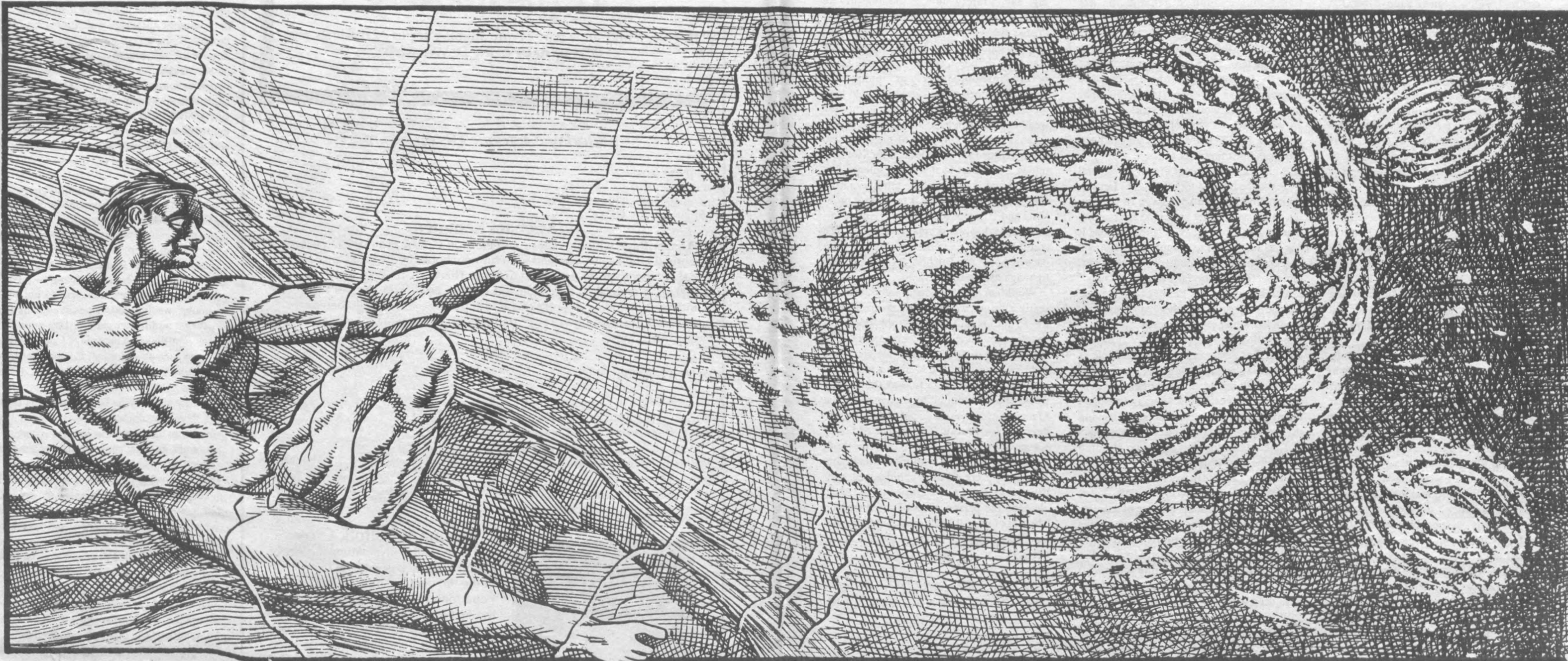
The two films represent two distinct, mutually exclusive popular dispositions toward the legacy of science. Sagan, until his all-too-early death this year, had long argued that science is the most precious of all the gifts of our rationality. A mode of inquiry of unrivaled effectiveness, it also (he held) instills a profound sense of humility as we, like young Eleanor in Zemeckis' cosmic zoom-out, realize that we contain universes. Petty hatreds naturally dwindle in the face of our enlarged perspective. (Star Trek, in all its various guises is the notable fictional expression of this sentiment.)

Against the doctrines of old-time religion and its trumped-up rewards of Heaven, Sagan offered "the cosmic connection"—the knowledge, available to everyone, that we all share a celestial pedigree ("We are all starstuff," he would say.) Indeed, though he was a notable popularizer of scientific fact and method, Sagan's most profound pitch for science was always deeply emotional, nowhere better exemplified than in his last testament, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*:

I was a child in a time of hope. I wanted to be a scientist from my earliest school days. The crystallizing moment came when I first caught on that the stars are mighty suns, when it first dawned on me how staggeringly far away they must be to appear as mere points of light in the sky. I'm not sure I even knew the meaning of the word "science" then, but I wanted to immerse myself in all that grandeur. I was gripped by the splendor of the Universe, transfixed by the prospect of understanding how things really work, of helping to uncover deep mysteries, of exploring new worlds...It has been my good fortune to have had that dream in part fulfilled.

Images of transformation, of initiation into realms of astonishing esoterica, made Sagan's experience of planetary astronomy into something like a gnostic religion. And like any good gnostic, Sagan also had his demons: vitalism, creationism, the avatars of ignorance—

I worry that, especially as the Millenium edges nearer, pseudoscience and superstition will seem year by year more tempting...Whenever



Adam Berenstain

our ethnic or national prejudices are aroused, in times of scarcity, during challenges to national self-esteem or nerve, when we agonize about our diminished cosmic place and purpose, or when fanaticism is bubbling up around us—then, habits of thought familiar from ages past reach for the controls. The candle flame gutters. Its little pool of light trembles. Darkness gathers. The demons begin to stir.

Without apologies, Sagan placed his faith in science. He never seemed much bothered by that other, more jaundiced view of its legacy. As reflected in movies like *Men in Black*, *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator* and the *Alien* films, there is a suspicion that the more science seems to change things on the surface, the more they really stay the same. Future knowledge and technological advancement will no more humanize us than did, for instance, the "discovery" of North America or the invention of the sternpost rudder. Moreover, the achievements of science should also be compared to the consequences of its thoughtless application, from the poverty engendered by rapid population growth, to nuclear weapons, to greenhouse climate change (a phenomenon, by the way, that Sagan first helped describe). If science will save the world, it will be from many of the problems science and technology helped to cause.

Against Sagan's lab-coat boosterism, critics like Richard Lewontin have questioned the presumed superiority of the scientific approach over other modes of inquiry. In his review of *The Demon-Haunted World* in *The New York Review of Books* (January 9), Lewontin rightly points out that the vaunted neutrality of scientific observation ("just the facts, ma'am") is a fiction; data never speak for themselves, but must be situated in some theoretical frame, explicit or not. Furthermore, he denies the claim of Sagan and others that science eschews "argu-

ments from authority," noting:

...given the immense extent, inherent complexity, and counterintuitive nature of scientific knowledge, it is impossible for anyone, including non-specialist scientists, to retrace the intellectual paths that lead to scientific conclusions about nature. In the end we must trust experts and they, in turn, exploit their authority as experts and their rhetorical skills to secure our attention and our belief in things that we do not really understand.

As a consequence of this, where Sagan saw (say) the debate between evolutionists and creationists as a Manichean battle between knowledge and ignorance, Lewontin sees it as a duel of competing social constructions, both with sets of "experts" whose power is historically and politically embedded. Perhaps more fundamentally, Lewontin denies Sagan (or anyone) has really proved the alleged superiority of science, writing:

...[Sagan's] exhortation [to use science] is to succeed, then the argument for the superiority of science and its method must be convincing, and not merely convincing, but must accord with its own demands. The case for the scientific method should itself be "scientific" and not merely rhetorical. Unfortunately, the argument may not look as good to the unconvinced as it does to the believer.

What is the curious bystander supposed to conclude from this argument? Have Lewontin and other critics from within the humanities really proven that scientific theories like evolution or post-Copernican astronomy being "historically imbedded," have no better purchase on the truth than creationism or astrology? Was Sagan really just a kind of (tele)evangelist, perhaps more sincere than some of his churchly counterparts, but a similar dispenser of received truths?

Sagan himself offered one short reply: "Science is not a perfect instrument of knowledge. It's just the best we have." (*World*, p. 27) Indeed, does science really

depend on arguments from authority to the degree Lewontin claims? Surely, he can't be suggesting that experts like, say, the DNA analysts at the O.J. Simpson trial were attributed with the same sort of infallibility the devout accord the Pope, or accord to any number of prophet/savior figures of the major and minor religions. There's authority, and there's Authority, and it's really not that difficult to tell them apart.

Nor do we ever expect the Pope to caution that his next Bull has a one-in-one-hundred-million chance of being wrong, or the Mormon fathers to suggest that the *Book of Mormon* is God's honest truth "to within one standard deviation." Where Lewontin apparently sees the uncertainty inherent in the scientific enterprise as a weakness that undoes its claims to superiority, dealing with such uncertainty is actually what science does uniquely well. In this sense, what is most valuable about science is not "the goods it delivers," but how it defines which goods are "deliverable"—which questions are truly answerable, which truths can be understood to be provisionally certain.

Is this approach important, and worth emulating elsewhere, as Sagan suggested? Consider, as the late Jacob Bronowski once did, what may have happened if some of history's more notorious authoritarians had adopted a truly scientific perspective. As it was, the Spanish Inquisitors, Stalin and Pol Pot never had much use for error bars. On visiting Auschwitz, Bronowski sounded very much like Sagan when he noted:

It [the Holocaust] was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave...Every judgement in science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible.

Bronowski touched on the moral utility of uncertainty when he quoted Oliver

continued on page 6

Cushing Strout

Contact
Carl Sagan
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I went to see *Contact* because I had once participated in a course at Cornell on science and religion in which the late Carl Sagan was also one of several teachers and certainly the most famous of us and the most knowledgeable about contemporary science. The seminar was sponsored and led by a historian of science, who was also a devout materialist and Darwinian but wanted to be fair to the opposition. The other teachers were either philosophers or (like myself) historians. It is hard at Cornell to find true believers in religion; the founding father Andrew Dickson White, not for nothing, wrote in two volumes the rationalistic *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. That role was played at the end of the course by an engineer who was also a fundamentalist Creationist. The students, responsive perhaps to the point of view of the course's leader, were in religion non-believers, except for a Jewish student, whose proposal to write his term paper on Einstein's religion I supported because Einstein had notably criticized the indeterminacy principle in quantum mechanics on the ground that "God does not play dice with the cosmos."

I remember one day seeing Carl Sagan go to the board to write on it a numerical estimate of the great improbability of an organ as complex as the eye being developed by the random process of evolution. Some scientists, he said, believed that this was evidence of an ordering intelligence in the universe, a reconciliation between science and religion. Making science religious in this way seemed to me to be the obverse mistake of the Creationists' attempt to make scrip-

ture scientific. I no longer believed in Kierkegaard's "neo-orthodox" and existentialist Protestant theology, as I did when I was a young man in the 1940s, but his influence persisted in my suspicion of compromising attempts to minimize the sharp irreconcilable differences between religion and science as modes of understanding reality.

In going to see *Contact* I was curious to discover if the movie reflected in any way Sagan's argument in the seminar. The movie has impressive special effects, but its conception of religion is impoverished, being melodramatized either in the person of violent reactionary fundamentalists, who sabotage the Machine built for space travel, or in the figure of the vaguely "New Age" and sexy theologian, Palmer Joss, who becomes the heroine's lover almost as soon as he meets her. The initial contact with an alien presence is portrayed intriguingly at first in the form of a swirling vine-like thing on a beach. But when it magically turns into the all-too-solid flesh of the heroine's long-dead father, it struck me as an idea derived from the Mormon religion, Freud, Hollywood sentimentality, or a combination of all three, not from any possible scientific outlook. I was in company with a physicist friend, and we were so stunned that we speculated that surely Hollywood had betrayed Sagan's book in this respect. So I made a point of reading the novel.

I was pleased to find that most of the heavy-handed melodramatic features of the movie are not in the book, which grew out of a treatment for a motion picture that Sagan and his wife, Ann Druyan, had written in 1980-81. Even the heroine's experience of space travel is mild enough not to require a seatbelt. No explanation is given for the sabotage of the Machine, and the theologian Palmer Joss is an intelligent, "twice-born" Christian, who is a friend, not a lover, of Ellie Arroway. The novel is interested in their frequent discussions about science and religion, not in their sex

appeal. The incredible "contact" with her father happens in the book also, but it is "explained" as a convincing simulation of her father by the clever alien intelligences.

Sagan was a critic of contemporary irrationalism in its various manifestations, from space aliens to psychics. He once invited the professional magician James Randi, who has debunked Uri Geller's claims to paranormal powers, to lecture at Cornell. Yet, to the uninitiated, contemporary space science often sounds like science fiction. (There is a recent serious proposal to send a crew to Mars with enough supplies to last three years to be followed by further missions arriving every two years, with the ultimate goal of colonizing the planet.) So if we grant that science fiction is licensed to exercise imaginative extrapolation from actual science and technology, the results are likely to seem more than passing strange to ordinary readers.

Much of what Sagan's scientific characters say about black holes and wormholes being consistent with the theory of General Relativity may well be valid. Even his heroine's imagining that extraterrestrials somehow found a way of keeping a wormhole open so that it has "smaller tidal stresses, two-way access, quick transit time as measured by an exterior observer, and no devastating interior radiation field" may be an acceptable stretch of contemporary science, if we allow for the utopian literary imagination. Nevertheless, the "contact" with extraterrestrials in the movie and the novel smacks too much for my taste of current examples of "weird science," which Sagan as scientist vigorously rejected, such as *The Anti-Gravity Handbook*, for example, which is advertised as having "mind-blowing" material on "anti-gravity, free energy, flying saucer propulsion, UFOs, secret suppressed technology, NASA cover-ups, secret testing facilities, levitation, anti-gravity airships, and more." (That more is already too much.) Sagan's fiction is otherwise, however, much better than the movie because of his lively wit,

his wide reading, his contagious sense of wonder, and his integrity as a profoundly secular person, whose feeling for science is tinged with a natural piety.

Time travel is as venerable a theme in science fiction as space travel, and features even in Mark Twain's burlesque historical novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Sagan's heroine recalls the memorable passage when the Yankee, unwittingly finding himself in Arthurian England with one of its native inhabitants, sees a city laid out before them:

'Bridgeport?' said I...

'Camelot,' said he.

Another book Ellie Arroway carries with her is *The Radio Amateur's Handbook*, and it is radio astronomy that will help to bring within the range of possibility her dream of travel into interstellar regions where extraterrestrials might dwell and whose enormous distance from us can be measured by the time it takes for their light, travelling at 186,000 miles per second, to reach Earth. When she and her fellow-scientists receive the radio waves emitted twenty-six years previously from planet Vega, they are startled to discover that they are waves transmitting a speech made by Adolf Hitler in 1936 at the Olympic Games in Germany. So her first surprising contact with extraterrestrials carries the heroine symbolically backwards in time and to a radically unprogressive society; in this respect it is like the journey of Twain's Yankee mechanic to sixth-century England.

But Twain is not otherwise Sagan's literary ancestor. Twain would have relished Sagan's satire of a big businessman's effort to contrive his own resurrection by means of cryogenics, but he was more pessimistic than Sagan about the social consequences of technology and its death-dealing capabilities. The Yankee is hoist with his own petard when he is overcome by the smell of the corpses of his enemies, an effect produced by his own aggressive use of galling guns and electrified fences. No such black comedy darkens Sagan's story.

Yet *Contact* does have another deeper and broader concern, having to do with the relationship between science and religion. The novel takes place around the New Year's Eve of the Millennium in 2000, evoking the long tradition of religious chiliasm about the Apocalypse, the Second Coming, and the millennial fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, themes that have had much play in popular religion in America throughout our history, including contemporary fears of a nuclear Armageddon.

Sagan's responsiveness to this material puts me in mind of a literary ancestor for his book that is more pertinent than Mark Twain's fantasy: Edward Bellamy's utopian romance, *Looking Backward*, published in 1888, just a year before Twain's novel appeared. After a hypnotic sleep, lasting 113 years, Bellamy's hero awakens in the brave new world of 2000, where social equality and fraternity have replaced the class-ridden, commercialized society of monopoly capitalism, rampant in the hero's own time in 1887 Boston. Sagan's heroine voyages into space on the cusp of that same millennial year and encounters a representative of an immensely superior form of intelligence, just as Julian West in Bellamy's book is amazed at the higher understanding of his guide, Dr. Leete, who lectures the time-traveller about the workings of the strange utopia in which he is bewildered to find himself.

"We belong to a future of which you could not form an idea," Dr. Leete's daughter tells West, "a generation of which you knew nothing until you saw us." But "we have made a study of your ways of living and thinking; nothing you say or do surprises us, while we say and do nothing which

continued on page 7

Taking Science on Faith?

continued from page 4

Cromwell, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." Lewontin's warns that "it is impossible for anyone...to retrace the intellectual paths" that have led to the current astonishing details and complexity of scientific knowledge. No doubt he is right, and in this regard science is a victim of its own success. But who ever said such a retracing had to be the job of "anyone?" Sagan understood that science must be supported by society. The community at large, including specialist and non-specialist scientists, bears a collective responsibility to understand what it is bankrolling. This was always the rub of Sagan's stance on public science education. The difference is, where Sagan worked hard at informing the public, Lewontin simply throws up his hands. This apparently wasn't always true. In 1964, Sagan and Lewontin together defended evolution before a skeptical Arkansas audience. The evening went badly, and Lewontin writes:

Sagan and I drew different conclusions from our [negative] experience. For me the confrontation between creationism and the science of evolution [is] an example of historical, regional, and class differences in culture that could only be understood in the context of American social history. For Carl it was a struggle between ignorance and knowledge...

It's hard to take Lewontin at his word here—that all he gleaned from the debate was the importance of grasping the intricacies of Arkansas politics. He did, after all, defend Darwin from creationism, and as far I know, continues to do so. Creationism is, after all, a doctrine rooted in revealed truths that are, ultimately, both unprovable and

irrefutable (because no degree of genetic or fossil evidence can ever prove that God didn't "fix it to look that way," or that He does or doesn't exist). Moreover, since creationism cannot explain where God came from, it attempts to solve one mystery by positing another. For that reason, regardless of the fascinating historico-cultural details behind its appeal, "creation science" is a non-explanation. This is true, incidentally, whether it is espoused by Anabaptists, Free-Soilers, or L. Ron Hubbard. In this case, the message is the message.

True, evolutionary theory is vulnerable to charges of teleology—especially in the way it is expressed in the popular media and in everyday speech—and of a certain logical redundancy. But the flaws are logically defensible (cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*) and considering the mass of evidence for and against it (massively "for") the theory can be tested. This inherent vulnerability, this obligation to be questioned, is the paradoxical strength of scientific explanation, and sets it apart from other sorts of knowledge. It is telling in this regard that Lewontin believes science can afford a demand for proof of its superiority, but he doesn't hold the alternatives to science to the same test. Perhaps it's because he can't imagine they would pass.

In fact, there are many other places where it is difficult to take Lewontin at his word. His questionable use of statistical fact is an obvious problem—meaning to cast doubt on the efficacy of modern medicine, for example, he notes that "at age seventy the expected further lifetime for a white male has gone up only two years since 1950." True, doctors have not yet proven themselves able to arrest the aging process. But this doesn't recognize

the more salient fact that more people are living long enough to get old: the life expectancy of a white male in America wasn't seventy years at all until around 1980, despite the Biblical sanction of "three score and ten." The life expectancy of white women, Lewontin might be heartened to learn, has risen 7.3 years since 1950. (The figure for black women is 9 years, to nearly 74; all figures courtesy of *American Demographics*, Inc.) Perhaps there's something to this medicine thing after all.

Both in his review and in reply to several letters to the *NYR* editors (March 6) Lewontin employs his own knowledge of molecular genetics to indict medicine for making extravagant, unrealizable claims because it has (so far) failed to completely eradicate cancer. Now it is undoubtedly true that certain scientists—especially ones in pursuit of research grants—are guilty of overselling new developments. A better explanation for medicine's piecemeal success, though, is that smallpox and polio are relatively easy to combat, but cancer is hard. The principle of diminishing returns applies beyond medicine as well; in Sagan's own field, past generations of investigators long ago mapped the moon and catalogued the stars, leaving the current generation to puzzle over quasars and the fate of the universe. The children inherit the hard stuff.

Indeed, Lewontin seems so ready to advertise his scientific credentials that it threatens to undercut his critique of science. If Sagan was an evangelist, Lewontin begins to sound like Umberto Eco's Brother William, promoting "right reason" in the scientific monastery by quoting (chemical) scripture—a skeptical voice, yes, but one from deep within the bosom of the Faith.

We need not employ history and politics to bludgeon "Saganism." Certainly, both in his public demeanor and in his style of writ-

ing, Sagan rarely showed the humility he claimed was the reward of enlightenment. Worse, the way he consigned all pre-scientific knowledge to the shadows of ignorance was high-handed and inaccurate. Long before Newton, Galileo, or Democritus, men and women were learning how to alleviate sickness, to build buildings, to read the weather. In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss likened this sort of prescientific investigator to a bricoleur, a jack-of-all-trades, a tinkerer. In this view, science formalized and institutionalized this commonsensical mode, and used it to explore problems and frame explanations against common sense, beyond normal experience. The result has been a rapid acceleration of the pace of discovery. But bricolage cast its own light against the darkness, too.

Would an extraterrestrial radio message really turn our world upside down, as portrayed in *Contact*? Consider some important developments that have occurred just within the last year or two: the possible discovery of fossil microbes from Mars in a meteorite, and the resounding defeat of the human world chess champion by a computer. The Mars discovery is still disputed, but the evidence is intriguing. The defeat of Garry Kasparov by Deep Blue was something some very important authorities (including Kasparov) were arguing could never, ever happen. Both of these stories have subtly changed the perspectives of some people. The rest of the public, by and large, vaguely recalled seeing it all before in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and changed the channel.

Nick Nicastro is a writer who lives in Ithaca. His first novel, *The Eighteenth Captain*, will be published next year.

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October 6
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Johnny Guitar
October 6
9:30 p.m. WSH
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Body & Soul
October 13
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Marked Woman
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directed by Lloyd Bacon with Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart

The Sound of Fury
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Pi in the Sky

continued from page 5

does not seem strange to you." The utopia of 2000 is not the end of progress for "the way stretches far before us, but the end is lost in light." A preacher tells West, "humanity has burst the chrysalis. The heavens are before it." Similarly, in *Contact* the extraterrestrial figure who simulates her father condescendingly tells the heroine: "You've got hardly any theory of social organization, astonishingly backward economic systems, no grasp of the machinery of historical prediction, and very little knowledge about yourselves."

Sagan's utopian speculation about extraterrestrials imagines that they are smart enough to be engaged in cooperative projects between galaxies that alter the universe by increasing "the local matter's density," a sort of "urban renewal" and "good, honest work." Sagan's heroine is astounded to learn that these advanced beings are just caretakers for what has been left behind by some "Galaxy-wide civilization," which had just "picked up and left without leaving a trace—except for the stations." ("In for a penny, in for a pound" writers of utopian romances must tell themselves.)

Like Bellamy's book, *Contact* is fundamentally rationalistic and optimistic, though its version of progress is couched in the scientific and technological terminology of astrophysics, rather than in the moralized sociology of Bellamy's collectivism. Bellamy had lost his baptist faith, but he took with him its millennial religious assumptions to envision a new world of prosperity, cooperation, and solidarity. Yet he had very little interest in technology, foretelling only the development of the radio.

Sagan's *Contact* has no comparable investment in economic panaceas or religious millennialism, but it has its own political gospel. When the space-travelling machine docks in the stars, the heroine sees a diversity of ports there, "with no hint of particularly privileged civilizations," a democratic "breathtaking diversity of beings and cultures." This vision of a populated galaxy, "spilling over with life and intelligence, made her want to cry for joy." She tells herself: "Well, it isn't Bridgeport." Nor is it Camelot either, for she has gone forward in time and technological development, just as Bellamy's hero did. She believes that space travel nurtures the needed contemplation of the earth and its populations as a whole, which is her version of Bellamy's dream of unity. The President (a woman) in Sagan's novel praises the Machine for bringing to Earth "the increasing mutual understanding within the human community, the sense that we were all fellow passengers on a perilous journey in space and in time, the goal of a global unity of purpose that was now known all over the planet as Machindo."

Ellie Arroway's vision (her "experimental theology," as she calls it) includes the idea that "we're not central to the purpose of the Cosmos," a theme which is absent from Bellamy's nineteenth-century humanitarian version of religious rationalism. She even imagines that there might be

as many categories of beings more advanced than humans as there are between us and the ants, or maybe even between us the viruses. But it had not depressed her. Rather than a daunting resignation, it had aroused in her a swelling sense of wonder. There was so much more to aspire to now.

She takes it for granted that these other beings will be more advanced, and this idea of their advancement tends to conflate technological superiority with a general idea of progress. It functions as a kind of surrogate secular religion. In this respect *Contact* makes contact backwards with Bellamy's novel and its preacher, who declares that "the way stretches far before us, but the end is lost in light." The human race would return to God by fulfilling its evolution at

which time "the divine secret hidden in the germ shall be perfectly unfolded."

Sagan's heroine eventually finds her own hidden secret about the universe. What is clever about *Contact*, however, is not its contemporary version of old-fashioned progressivism, but rather its ultimate irony about the heroine's polemical thrusts against religion and her dedication to science as the only way of establishing truth. She has always made much of asking religious believers why their God, who is so powerful, has not given the world a definitive message, whose authenticity cannot be questioned. Yet on her return from space her own unlikely story is vulnerable to the same argument, vigorously made by an opponent of the Machine Project: if the extraterrestrials had wanted to make it unambiguously clear that she had really gone somewhere, they could have brought her back a day or a week later. She had spent years trying to find them, her opponent says, "don't they appreciate what you've done?"

Arroway comes to see that her faith in her highly implausible and profoundly moving experience in outer space mirrors many of the features in the Christianity of her self-taught friend Joss. He is a former carnival roustabout, who was struck by a lightning bolt and interpreted his amazing recovery in Christian terms of a vision of God, "the idea of the Resurrection and the doctrine of Salvation." After being told by her extraterrestrial-simulated "father" about some hidden undeciphered message in pi, the heroine becomes obsessed with looking for it in the arrangements of numbers following its decimal point. Joss appropriately calls it "looking for Revelation in arithmetic," as if God were a mathematician. Her hope is that such a message would end sectarian divisions because "everyone could be a believer" in this scientifically established message. She appreciates the irony:

Here I am, the bearer of the profound religious experience I can't prove—really, Palmer, I can barely fathom it. And here you are, the hardened skeptic trying—more successfully than I ever did—to be kind to the credulous.

Carrying out the religious analogy, Sagan shows that his heroine, so fierce a critic of other people's mythology, has her own creation myth. When Ellie's mother dies, she leaves behind a letter explaining that the stepfather whom Ellie disdained was actually her mother's lover and Ellie's biological father, not the legal father whom she had always idealized. Transfigured by her quasi-religious experience, Ellie feels a new intellectual humility, realizes how much she had neglected her dying mother, and in a secular version of "conviction of sin" (to use the Puritans' term, not Sagan's) recognizes that she has "spent her career attempting to make contact with the most remote and alien of strangers, while in her own life she had made contact with hardly anyone at all." Like a remorseful Christian believer, she comes to feel that she had overlooked the "clearest message" of the universe: "For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love."

Bellamy's hero similarly feels remorse that in his earlier life he had been so "indifferent to the wretchedness of my brothers, as cynically incredulous of better things," and had done so little to "to help forward the enfranchisement of the race which was even then preparing." If Julian West had met Ellie Arroway in that year 2000, he would not have understood her sophisticated science, but having felt himself a bewildered stranger in an alien superior world, he would have had much sympathy with her plight and with the religious tinge of her self-reproach.

In the end, Ellie Arroway influences

Palmer Joss far more than he does her. She makes him the caretaker of her written account of her strange experience, and he is enthusiastically responsive to her vision of the vastness of interstellar space because of "the scope of your universe, the opportunities it affords the Creator." Ellie has had an unsuccessful intimate relationship with the President's scientific advisor, and there is a hint that in the future she and Joss might perhaps become more than friends. By suggesting their affinity for each other, Sagan ends his story with the same point about reconciling science and religion that he made when I watched him walk to the blackboard and put down a numerical estimate of the improbability of

Sagan's utopian speculation about extraterrestrials imagines they are smart enough to be engaged in cooperative projects between galaxies, a sort of "urban renewal" and "good honest work."

the emergence of the eye. What Eleanor Arroway finally found in the computer's analysis of pi, "hiding in the alternating patterns of digits, deep inside the transcendental number, was a perfect circle, its form traced out by unities in a field of noughts."

The circle is traditionally a symbol of unity, the absolute, and perfection. As an endless line, it can stand for time and infinity. Concentric circles are important in Zen Buddhism and Christianity in reference to levels of spiritual enlightenment. For Sagan's heroine, however, the circle simply proves that "the universe was made on purpose." It testifies to "an intelligence that antedates the universe." Therefore by the last page of the novel "she found what she had been looking for."

This quasi-scientific theism, however, fails to provide the satisfactions religious believers find in their more complex and articulated faiths. When it was my turn to lecture in the seminar, as a historian of religion in America, I responded in part to Sagan's point about the eye by arguing that, for believers like the Puritans, God was not an abstraction but had personal qualities—judgment, anger, justness, forgiveness, compassion, and providential concern—which made him appropriate to be fearfully and lovingly respected and worshipped by human beings. Mere power or mere intelligence would never be able to elicit such a response; nor should they, for as abstractions they say nothing about whether they are diabolical, divine, or merely indifferent to all human concerns.

Sagan cites as one of many epigraphs in his book a passage from William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

The God whom science recognizes must be a God of universal laws exclusively, a God who does a wholesale not a retail business. He cannot accommodate his processes to the convenience of individuals.

That is Ellie Arroway's case against Joss. James was trained as a scientist and wrote psychology as one, but it is his point that this idea of God, while it is the only one acceptable to scientists, is thoroughly alien to religion, not because it is superior to religion but because in its abstraction from personality, it neglects "the private realities" with which religion keeps in touch. In doing so, religion

may be narrow enough; but at any rate it always remains infinitely less hollow and abstract, as far as it goes, than a science which prides itself on taking no account of anything private at all.

For James, the humanistic individualist, the "axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places, they are strung upon it

like so many beads."

Joss once asks Arroway a pertinent question: "What is there in the precepts of science that keeps a scientist from doing evil?" She makes no answer. Indeed, Joss's fundamentalism is easier to accommodate to her vision of the cosmos because in the novel he never articulates a view of human sinfulness. James was fundamentally agnostic and never claimed to have any "twice-born" religious experience, but out of his own troubled personal experience and responsiveness to his father's strong tinge of Calvinism, James characteristically insisted that evil facts are "a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be

the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth." The completest religions would therefore be those in which "the pessimistic elements are best developed." Nothing could be further from the point of view of either *Looking Backward* or

Contact, since both are vehicles for a secular religion of progress.

The cruel cutting off of Sagan's remarkable career by a rare and painful disease, which he bore with brave confidence and hope, reinforces for me James's point, no doubt underlined by his experience of depression, that "here on our very hearths and in our gardens the infernal cat plays with the panting mouse, or holds the hot bird fluttering in its jaws." Sagan was a member of "a small band of scientists from all over our small planet," as he describes them, "working together, sometimes in the face of daunting obstacles, to listen to a signal from the sky." He is being memorialized in Ithaca by a scale model of the solar system, ten tall obelisks to represent the sun and nine planets, placed at various appropriate places in the city. In a Note to his novel he says that his "fondest hope for this book is that it will be made obsolete by the pace of real scientific discovery." Probably he had in mind the development of space travel and its discoveries about the planets. No doubt no one can set limits to what these developments may turn out to be. Of only one thing can we be sure: we would be wise not to invest our non-technical hopes in this kind of progress.

Of course, science fiction can also be dystopian, as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* showed in 1932, with its remarkable prescience about the course of future human events. What is utopian is to imagine (as Huxley emphatically did not) that technology will necessarily lead to general human betterment, that our scientific techniques can eliminate conflict, disease, sorrow, failure, crime, guilt, and evil. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the introduction to his most famous story of the Puritan past, *The Scarlet Letter*, called it a "romance," but he began it by observing that

the founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison.

We know at once that we are in history, even if at one remove; and if it is a romance, it is not going to be a utopian one.

Cushing Strout is the author of Making American Tradition: Visions and Revisions from Ben Franklin to Alice Walker (1990).

Alices in Wonderland

continued from page 2

ing them together in collisions of unusual force and cataloging the results. I knew I'd find her there. I could see the swell of the cyclotron on the scrubby, sun-bleached hill as I walked the path to its tucked away entrance. I was minutes away.

Plenty of other mapping goes on in this novel. Two of the more amusing characters are Evan and Garth. They are blind housemates, one white, one black, dressed in identical black suits, sunglasses, and hats. Alice hires these binary Blues Brothers as a way of testing hypotheses about observer problems: the conundrum that a subjective observer (as we necessarily are) cannot make an objective observation (as we necessarily need). Garth possesses blindsight, the intellectual ability to see without the physical perception of sight. Alice hires him to "look" at particles. In the meantime, the two men offer a hysterically thorough verbal map of their world, constantly checking and rechecking watches and necessary formulae, like the number of steps from bus stop to home. They are certainly as funny as Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Romantic relationships, as Philip, the narrator of the novel, well knows, are full of blind spots and mental maps. As Alice retreats farther and farther from him into the enticing Lack, Philip becomes increasingly frantic and hyper-verbal, monologuing madly as she stares at him with no response. Unfortunately for her, Lack is equally unresponsive to Alice. While it (gendered by Lethem as a he) will devour any number of randomly selected objects (a cat, a pomegranate, an edition of Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*), it steadfastly refuses to take Alice, despite her repeated attempts to throw herself in. Lack, Philip finally intuits, has glommed onto the universe from which it came, and absorbed its likes and dislikes. The subjective/objective problem. Alice doesn't like her body, so Lack doesn't either.

Our third, and original Alice, also has an observer problem. Much has been made of Carroll/Dodgson's pedophilic tendencies, and it is true that he gives us a sweetly sexy narrator forever perched on the edge of girlhood. Winterson's Alice can not really enter and stay in Stella. Lethem's Alice cannot enter and stay in Lack. In much the same way, Carroll's Alice cannot enter through a door marked Queen Alice in Looking Glass Land. "Mind the volcano!" warns the White Queen. Alice travels on a journey towards womanhood, through a symbolic landscape fraught with the confusions and dangers of adult sexual society. Throughout the trip, she holds in check (but just barely) the volcano of her sexuality. And in the end, Carroll arrests the trip, sending Alice back to her girlhood on the



John Tenniel

other side of the glass.

Like their famous predecessor, the Alices in both these modern novels have disappearing cats. Carroll's Alice encountered the Cheshire Cat that disappeared tail first, grin last. Lethem's Alice tosses a lab experiment cat, B-84, into Lack, and when Philip finally tours the universe, he finds it populated by hundreds of exact replicas. Winterson's Alice, near the end of the novel, muses on Schrodinger's Cat:

The Schrodinger Cat experiment. The new physics belch at the polite seated dinner table of common sense. An imaginary cat is put in a box with a gun at its head. The gun is connected to a Geiger counter. The Geiger counter is triggered to a piece of uranium. Uranium molecules are unstable. If the uranium decays, the process will alert the Geiger counter, which in turn will cause the gun to

fire. So much for the precarious fate of the Virtual cat. To observe the cat's fate we will have to open the box. but what is the state of the cat before we open the box? According to the mathematics of its wave function, it is neither alive nor dead. The wave function describes the sum of all possible states of the cat. Until a measurement is made we can't actually know the state of the particle. The cat, like it or not, is a series of particles. It shares the potentiality of the entire universe. It is finite and infinite, dead and alive. It is a quantum cat...Mathematics and physics, as religion used to do, form a gateway into higher alternatives. a reality that can be apprehended but not perceived. A reality at odds with common sense. The earth is not flat.

All these elusive pussies! What are all these women and wombs doing in novels about physics?

Lethem has his Alice's department chair comment, "It's commonplace, Philip, that when one of our rank succumbs to mysticism it's because of passion," and he means physical passion. Out of this steamy mix of reason and passion, physics and sex, each author comes up with a similar conclusion: each dribbles an invisible soccer ball of feminist mysticism down the field of their text. And if you are surprised to come across Gaia cosmology in novels written ostensibly about hard science, you are not alone. Cosmology, the search for an explanation of the origins of the universe, is a field dominated by men. (The 1:1 ratio of female to male physicists in these novels is certainly fictional.) As Carroll demonstrates, male observers frequently give in to the tendency to conflate the mysteries of the outer natural world with the mysteries of the inner female world.

As do many novelists. What are we to make of this phenomenon, this rash of lady universe explorers bubbling up from the Western zeitgeist? Physics apparently is the current fashionable literary trope. I hope it isn't just because it is understood so vaguely by the novel-reading rabble that it offers a widely flexible and energetic image pool. But it could be. I do not speak the language of mathematics, and can't tell you if the physics in these novels is accurately rendered.

But I am fascinated by all this science popping up where I'd normally expect religion. And even more intrigued to find all these complicated human relationships (what could be more natural than love triangles?) explicated with the use of formulae. Perhaps it is only natural for novelists to cast cosmology in human terms, but it seems somehow unsatisfying, as though our language has not caught up with our discoveries.

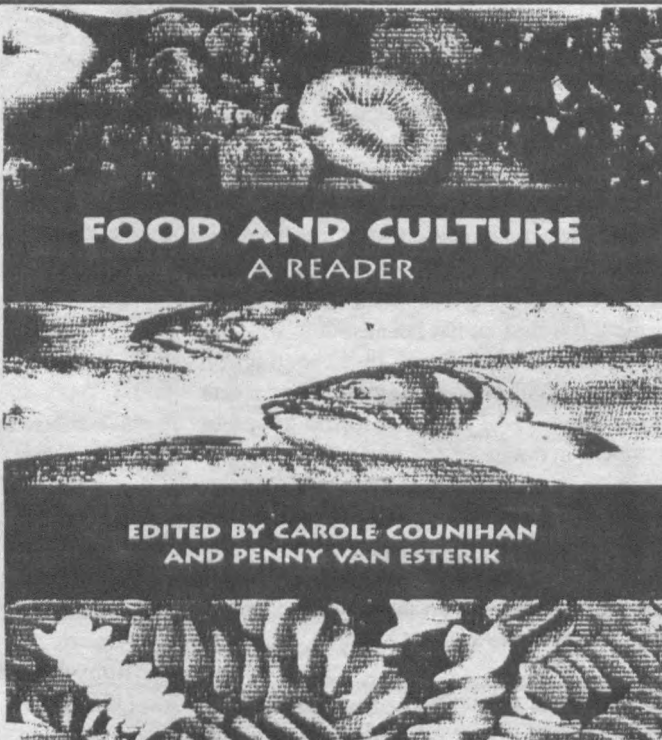
"Still she haunts me, phantomwise, / Alice moving under skies / Never seen by waking eyes," writes Carroll at the end of his tale. An Alice in motion stays in motion, states Newton. An Alice in a box needs us to create her fate, declares Schrodinger. An Alice is an Alice is an Alice, Gertrude Stein would suggest. If we had asked.

A long poem by Bridget Meeds, entitled *Light*, has just appeared in Faber & Faber's trio anthology *Wild Workshop*.



Counihan and Van Esterik's *Food and Culture* takes a global look at the social, symbolic, and political-economic roles of what—and how—we eat. The selections reveal how food habits and beliefs both present a microcosm of any culture and also contribute to our understanding of human behavior. Crossing many disciplinary boundaries, *Food and Culture* includes the perspectives of anthropology, history, psychology, philosophy, and sociology.

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The Bookpress Quarterly



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fiction

poetry

art

October 1997

Wish List

Stewart O'Nan

It's a half-day pass and Miss Crawford says it's not a choice. It's part of the pre-release thing. They want you to do things with your kid again to get them ready. Miss Crawford says it won't be hard for me because I haven't been gone that long. I'd like to say to her, how do you know, going home in that Acura every day—you can see it from the window in the upstairs can, all gold and brand new—but I just nod and say okay because I get to see Teresa and I'm not going to mess it up over her.

I already got a present—a Pocahontas suitcase I bought at Toys R Us at lunch the other day. I asked Mr. Parkinson and he said he guessed it was okay if he walked me over. Mr. Parkinson's all right. We walked all the way across the lot, talking about when I get out.

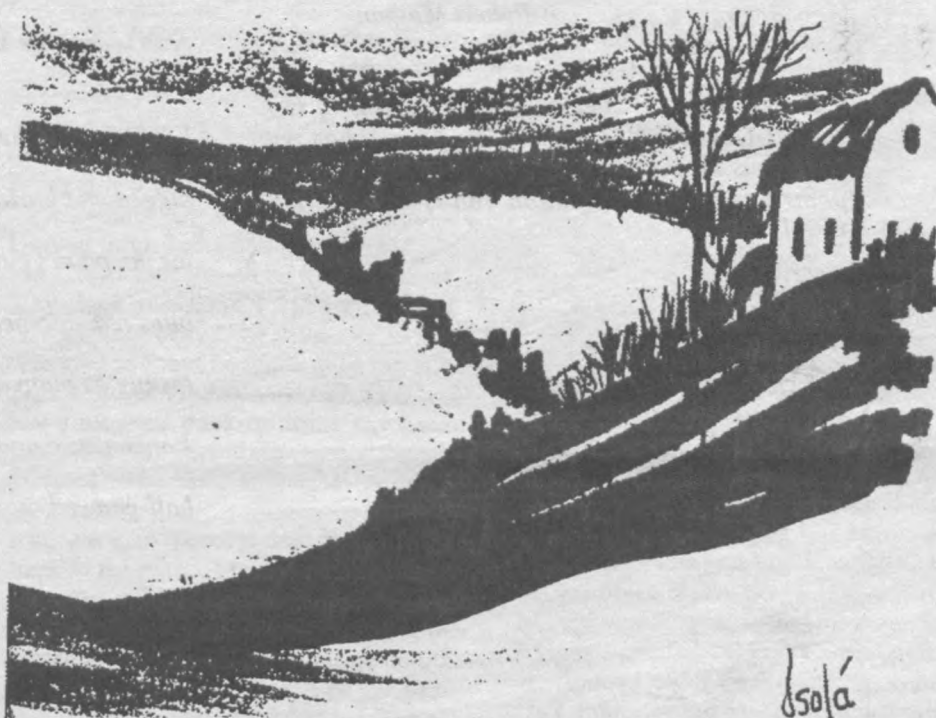
It was crowded because there were only a few days left. There was so much stuff, all the board games stacked up to the ceiling and all these moms with their kids, and there I was in my Wendy's uniform, even the dumb visor, and I felt like crap because here are all these moms with their shopping carts full of stuff, even some dads there with them, and all I've got is twenty bucks and I got pissed off at Jimmy again for getting me into all of this.

The kids, they were great, running up to stuff and yelling, "I want this! Mom, I want this!" There was even one little boy crying on the floor next to this Nerf missile launcher he wanted it so bad. His mom was like, no, just standing there waiting it out.

I wanted to get Teresa a Barbie, a nice one. I've been working hard but they don't even have to pay you minimum wage. I wanted to get one of the special ones—Pilgrim Barbie or Pioneer Barbie, Astronaut Barbie. I kept flipping the little price tags. Even the ones on sale were way too much. Mr. Parkinson said he'd pitch in but I couldn't let him. He walked with me up and down the rows like he was my dad. We walked past all the dolls in pink and the plastic horses and science kits, the fake food and Easy Bake ovens, and then in the Disney aisle I saw it.

I didn't even think it was weird for a kid—a suitcase. It was perfect because that's all I'd have when I get out, and if she had one, we could be like twins. We'd just get on a bus and go somewhere way the hell away from Jimmy, I don't know where, but I kind of saw the two of us standing there together with our suitcases, ready to go.

I've got it right here with me. I had it



gift-wrapped at the store. I look at it once in a while while I get dressed, check myself in the mirror. My hair's still wet cause the towels suck here and you're not allowed a dryer. I've got my good jeans on and my best sweater, the butterfly pin my aunt gave me. Everything's healed, the eyebrow's coming in thick again. By the time I get out no one will be able to tell.

It's almost twelve and I sit on my bunk next to her present and think of what I'll say to her.

I missed you.

Merry Christmas, baby.

Finally I give up. When I get there, I think, I'll know what to say.

Outside, someone pulls into the parking lot.

"Hey Margie," someone calls down the hall, "your taxi's here."

It's the regular van. Wanda's got me on the clipboard. She flashes her badge as we go through the gates.

"I didn't know you had a kid," she says, like she knows me or something.

There's a bunch of us on the van. Most I

know except this tall kid with a patch over one eye and bright orange fingernails. She looks like she's just started working, she's still got that baby fat under her chin, and I think that it really hasn't been that long since I was like that, it just seems that way. But then I think, is that a lie?

We go through New Britain and up Route 9 to 84 and into the city, the same way it takes me to work. There's only a few snowflakes over the road, and no traffic. All our breath is fogging up the windows. I've got my present on my lap. Everyone has one, but mine's easily the biggest. Everyone looks at it but no one says anything. The kid with the patch rubs a hole so she can see out. I wonder what her story is, and then I think maybe they're right, maybe it's better not to know.

Wanda turns off at Prospect, right where I used to work, and I'm like, oh no, I'm going to be first. She turns onto Flatbush by the VW dealer's, and I'm right. We go along the barbed wire fence and rumble over the tracks.

"Marguerite," she says from up front, like I might have gone somewhere on her.

"What?" I finally say.

"First off is first back on. You be outside and ready at five."

We cruise through the old neighborhood, past the same two dudes hanging out by the corner bodega's pay phone, the same doors boarded up, the same Chevys rusting on flat tires. My aunt's is just up the block but Wanda stops and lets me out at the corner so she can make the turn.

"Five," Wanda says, like it means something if I'm not there.

I get out and the cold jumps down my neck. The light drops and Wanda cuts the van left. It gets small, and all of a sudden I'm alone, only me and a few flakes sliding off the parked cars. It's like for a second I can do anything I want to, and I think, there, that's a present right there.

The block's empty. My aunt's half of the house is done up with blinking lights and a green wreath on the door with little red pinecones on it. I bet they have a tree with a star and everything. She's probably already been to church with Teresa. It hasn't really started snowing but she's already salted the steps. The trike she got for Teresa sits in one corner. I stand there a second trying to figure out what I want to say.

I love you.

I won't be long, I promise.

"Okay," I say, and straighten everything before I ring the bell, then clear my throat.

There's footsteps and the door opens. It's Mr. Curtis the landlord in a green jacket and tie. The Patriots are on really loud so he can hear them. I can smell the ham from here.

"Marguerite," he says, "Merry Christmas," and bows like a butler for me to come in, and there she is, right behind him on the floor by the tree, playing with something in this red plaid dress I've never seen with white puffy sleeves. She has her back to me and she's got pigtails. Even sitting down she looks bigger.

"Merry Christmas," I tell Mr. Curtis, and walk right by him.

The first thing I say is her name. It takes her a second to look up from what she's doing, and I see she's putting all her little gifts into this bag—this bright vinyl suitcase with Pocahontas on it.

She looks up and for a second it's like she doesn't know who I am, but that's not it, she just doesn't know what she's supposed to do. We're even, because now I don't know what to do with my

continued on page 3

Inside:

Translations by David Lunde

"Prologue" by Edward Hower

"Out of State Plates" by Lawrence Cantera

Fear of Height

For high ladder work you climb to
confidence a rung at a time,
stopping first a foot or two up,
against electrocuting fear
concentrating on the task as
a rock climber will to secure
the next hold The accustomed work,
habits of labor, inspire, as
though scaffolding up in stages
of the familiar. Until later
you're thirty feet above the yard
and sure in the grip of balance,
tension of poise, in lofty reach
and accurate gestures that scare
those below. And you know one wrong
lean, one uncompensated turn,
one ungrammatical step, would be,
as precision roars through your arm,
both lethal and impossible.

—Robert Morgan

Bug Light

The color of the bug lamp is subtle,
not exactly purple nor pink,
neither lavender nor the blue of a police
call box. When I see the glow from back yards
and porches I think of St. Elmo's fire,
the corona effect thought by sailors
to show the holy body revealed in
a storm in the power of the sky pressed down
on mast and rigging with awful brightness.
But these bug lights glow quietly throughout
the countryside and night, erasing any
mosquito or curious moth, even bat,
that tries to taste the unnameable candescence.

—Robert Morgan

Robert Morgan is currently a professor of English at Cornell University. His poetry has won numerous awards. He has published eight books of poetry, two books of fiction and is working on a novel.



An Orchard's Last Weekend

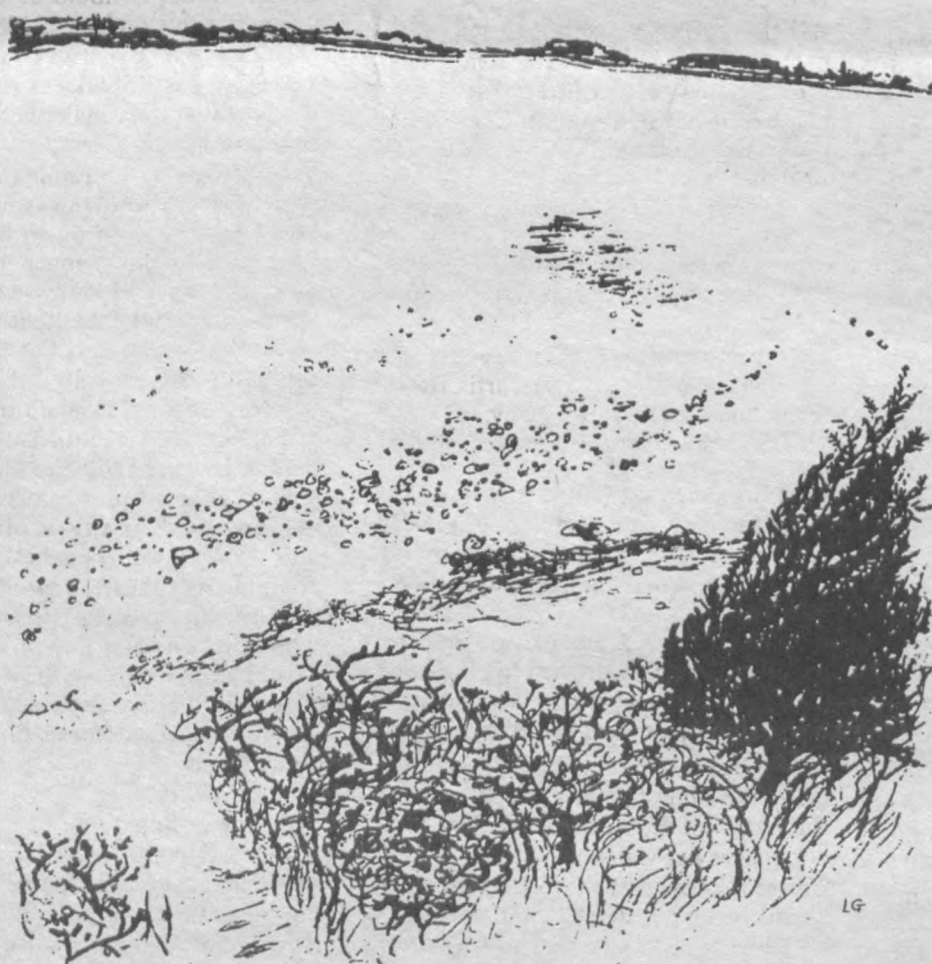
Leafed dusty planets
tugged and hurled—apples heading
for the palm's curved surface. A friend
bites red, another offers her speckled gold,
tasting as plain as Wise Men sampling
frankincense and myrrh. She lets the red sphere drop
half-gnawed, its worth a quiet thud.

The sky bears its moon
hours early, rising,
and I envy the trees'
letting go of their fruit.
This last weekend for one-upping gravity
the orchard collects its stars—threes,
fours, hundreds of them.
How many apples tossed into daylight never returned?
Runaways to the universe.

Earthbound siblings
filling our bushels
we walk back to weigh in,
ungloved hands ache where the handles cut into fingers.
I let go a minute and the weight shifts.
Earth's axis makes a slight
adjustment for my laziness.

—Kirsten Wasson

Kirsten Wasson's poetry has appeared in New York Quarterly, Manhattan Poetry Review, Kansas Quarterly, and elsewhere. She lives in Ithaca and teaches at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.



The Bookpress Quarterly Statement of Purpose

The Bookpress Quarterly is a journal of fiction, poetry, essays, and artwork, published as a supplement to The Bookpress. It shares with The Bookpress the goals of encouraging literary community and conversation in upstate New York and showcasing that region's best writers and artists.

Illustrations by: J. M. Barringer, Laura Glenn, Daphne Sola, Kumi Korf, Annie Campbell, Catharine O'Neill



Wish List

continued from cover

suitcase, so I turn and hand it to Mr. Curtis, then bend down and give her a hug.

"Baby," I say, "oh, I missed you," and pull back so I can look at her. She's got Jimmy's big eyes and his tiny mouth. "Did you miss me?"

"Yes," she says, not sure.

"Are you having a good time with your Aunt Caroline?"

"Yes."

I hold her close, and by now my aunt hears us and comes in. She's just had her hair done so it's really red and she has her emerald earrings on but still she looks old around the mouth and I feel bad for putting all of this on her.

She gives me a hug. I don't let go of Teresa

"You look good," I say.

"How are you?" she says, all worried like the one time she came to visit.

"Good," I say. "Clean."

"That's great," she says, "that's really good."

"Can I get you something to drink?" Mr. Curtis asks. "We've got some of that champagne without the kick."

"Just water's all right," I say

We sit down on the couch and my aunt asks Mr. Curtis to turn the Patriots down a little. I keep Teresa on my lap, but she's squirming, she wants to play with all of her new stuff, and I turn her loose.

"That's a good-sized box," my aunt says, pointing to it, and I tell her about the suitcase.

"Oh, that's terrible," she says. "I'm so sorry. If I had known."

"It's not your fault," I say.

"I'll take mine back," she says, and we argue over it a little, then I let her win.

"Whoa!" Mr. Curtis says, watching some guy on the Patriots catch a pass. I give my aunt a look and she just shrugs, meaning she knows he's not perfect.

A buzzer goes off back in the kitchen and she has to go do the potatoes. I want to help but she says no.

"So," Mr. Curtis says when she's gone, "when is it you're coming back again?"

"March," I say, "if everything goes right."

"That's great," he says. "Your aunt's very proud of you, you know."

"I know," I say.

"And Teresa's a real darling, a really sweet kid."

"Thanks," I say. Somebody fumbles and he forgets he's talking to me. He turns the sound up to find out what's going on, and I go over to play with Teresa on the carpet. She's got all kinds of stuff—a bunch of colored markers, pogs, some Hershey's kisses in a little red fishnet stocking. She's watching a wind-up frog hopping around, doing flips. My aunt used to teach school, she knows the fun stuff. I didn't have time to check out the suitcase in the store, so I look it over. It's pretty nice.

"Hey," I say, "you know, I got you the exact same thing." She doesn't get it, so I go get the box and open it for her. She just looks at it. "Funny, huh? I should have asked Aunt Caroline before I went shopping."

"Aunt Caroline didn't gimme it," she says.

"Santa, I mean. I didn't check with Santa."

"It's not from Santa," she says, like I'm being silly.

"Who is it from?" I ask.

"It's from Daddy," Jesus, I think. Great. Why didn't my aunt tell me this? "Did Daddy bring it over?" I say, and I must be getting angry because she just nods. I put my hands over my face and breathe like they teach you in workshop. "When did he bring it over?"

"Yesterday. He ate dinner with us." It's just nuts. I sit there and watch her start playing with the frog again. It's just crazy. Mr. Curtis is talking to the TV

set, telling them to go for it. I get up and go through the dining room. The table's all set—big platters, the cranberry sauce already softening in a dish.

My aunt is at the sink, draining the potatoes in a colander. The steam comes up through her hair.

I grab her arm. "What the hell is with Jimmy coming to dinner last night?" I say. "You know goddamn well he's not allowed within five hundred yards of me or her."

"Jimmy wasn't here," she says, looking at me like I'm crazy. "I wouldn't let Jimmy near her you know that."

"Then why is she telling me he was here last night?"

"She's telling you *what*?" she says, and I have to put my hands over my face again before I explain.

"Okay," she says, "yeah, she's been doing that lately, talking about him like he's around. Mike says it's normal."

"I don't think it's normal," I say, and I think, Mike? Since when is Mr. Curtis Mike?

"Jimmy's her father," my aunt says. "It doesn't matter what he is, a child likes to have a father."

"What about me," I say. "does she talk that way about me?"

"No," she says. "Sometimes. Yes. What do you want me to say—she misses you. She wants you to be with her."

"I am going to be with her," I say. "It's not even four months."

"A year is a long time for a child."

"I know that. Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I like being in there?"

Mr. Curtis looks in on us from the doorway. like someone's called for him.

"Everything okay?" he says.

"Fine," I say, but he waits until my aunt says it too and then doesn't go away.

My aunt goes back to doing the potatoes. slopping them into a pot. "Twenty minutes," she says, and we clear out of the kitchen.

I go back to Teresa, Mr. Curtis goes back to the game. I look at her, trying to see what's different, why she's like this. She hums and grinds the frog along the carpet and sparks shoot out of its mouth. Maybe she's fine, I think. I do the same thing every night, imagining reading her a story, tucking her in. It's not much different.

"You've got to catch that ball," Mr. Curtis says, and looks to me for support. The Pats are winning. Like I care.

In the back of the house a cork pops. "Okay," my aunt calls from the dining room.

The ham's a big one with the skin cut into little squares with a clove in the middle of each one. Mr. Curtis carves. I cut Teresa's into bite-size pieces. She doesn't trust the cranberry sauce. My aunt stops the production to say grace, and then for a few minutes it's just eating.

It's so good compared to the crap I'm used to that I laugh and then I have to explain why.

"I'll take that as a compliment," my aunt says, and she really is proud of it. The fake champagne tastes like diet ginger ale. Teresa's slow, playing with her silverware, and I have to spear a piece, feed her like a baby.

"Don't let her do that to you," my aunt says.

Mr. Curtis isn't going to get into it with us again. He's on thirds by the time Teresa's eaten enough.

And then there's mince pie and custard, and coffee after that, and presents. I keep checking the clock. I get a picture of me from Teresa with *MOM* on it, and I give her a kiss. My aunt gives me a pair of dark green bath towels. Mr. Curtis gets a sweater and, finally, a book on trains. Outside, the trees are dark. Back in the living room, the game has changed, the Raiders and someone. Teresa draws pictures on her new



tablet—the tree, me, her, Mr. Curtis. No Daddy.

All the coffee's getting to me, and I excuse myself. In the bathroom, I open the medicine cabinet just to see if she's cleaned it out. Nothing but razors and make-up, not even kid's aspirin. It's okay, I don't blame her.

It's the second quarter and dark out now. Across the street, blue and white lights are running around someone's porch.

"It's a quarter to five," my aunt reminds me.

She holds my gloves while I get my coat on. I say goodbye to Mr. Curtis first. I thank him—I don't know why.

"It won't be long," my aunt says, and her hair smells sweet like the ham.

"I know," I tell her.

"And you," I say, picking up Teresa, "I'll be back to see you very soon, so don't go forgetting your mom, okay? I miss you every day and I know you miss me too." I don't even know what I'm saying, but I'm holding on to her, I'm not leaving till I have to. "Merry Christmas," I tell her, "I love you," and she says it back to me the way kids do, not really meaning it. When I put her down, she heads for the tree, but my aunt stops her, makes her watch me leave.

Outside, I want to believe she meant the "I love you" part but it's not true. They all wave from the door, and stay there till I'm halfway down the block. It's way colder out now, I can feel it through my jeans.

The van's waiting at the corner, sending out clouds of exhaust.

Wanda is pissed, but there's nothing she can do. She slides the side door closed and the light goes out, then gets in again and it flashes for an instant.

We're packed in there in our coats. As we slide under the streetlights you can make out faces. Behind me someone's crying. At first I'm afraid it might be me. No one looks though, we all pretend everything's fine. I think of what I'm going to say in Miss Crawford's workshop, what I learned that was valuable from this experience.

I learned that my kid is messed up and

it's all my fault.

I learned that I should be with Teresa and not in this fucking shithole.

But I know I won't say that. I'll say something dumb like, I learned how important it is to make active choices for myself.

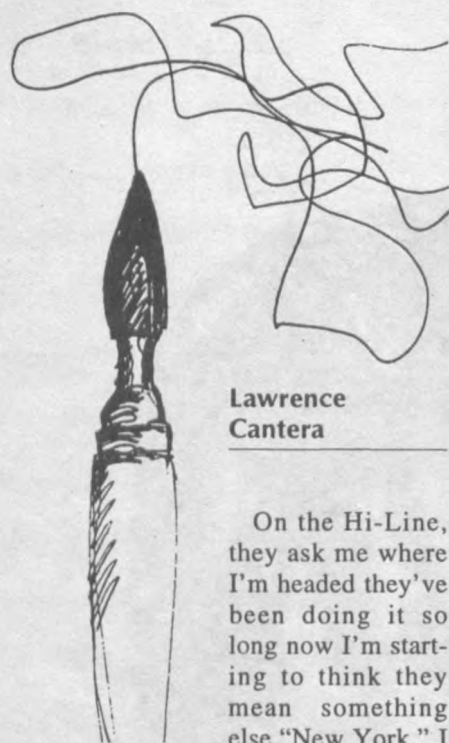
Wanda hits the on ramp and it's clear that whoever's crying is not going to stop. No one's going to look either. Both of those things make me mad.

So I do. I sneak a sideways look behind me, and right then the light hits her just perfect, and who is it but the kid with the patch. Oh Christ, I think. We're passing people, Wanda's trying to get us back on time, and the kid's just blubbering. I want to turn around and crack her a good one because it's just depressing the rest of us. Sure, she's a kid, but even a kid ought to know better. There's a time you've got to smarten up, and she's past it. That's what I'll tell Miss Crawford, I think. That's what I learned. Don't be stupid. Don't be a kid. Just cause you want something so bad doesn't mean you're gonna get it.

Stewart O'Nan has an MFA from Cornell. His novels are *Snow Angels*, *The Names of the Dead*, and, most recently, *The Speed Queen*. He lives in Avon, Connecticut.



Out of State Plates



Lawrence
Cantera

On the Hi-Line, they ask me where I'm headed they've been doing it so long now I'm starting to think they mean something else. "New York," I say this year. Other years it's been California, Washington, Minnesota, Iowa, Delaware.

"You're headed home," they say with a quick look toward the front bumper of my truck. "From where?"

They're almost right. I'm on my way back from my latest three-month job to where I live. My wife is there. And good friends. And so are the want ads and the job interviews my disinterest can so easily sabotage even before those hearty introductory handshakes.

"Missoula." I don't say San Francisco where the job was. That would only make the reaction worse.

The delay while frugal Hi-Liners calculate the differences in mileage, gas money, tire tread, and pissed away resale value because of the route I've chosen can stretch out almost long enough to notice. "You're all the way up here? You take a wrong turn?"

"I like it up here."

"Pretty far off-track for just liking it."

I wonder, is it me or are these turns of phrase a part of the local dialect I haven't quite mastered?

"The interstate will save you time. It would have anyway."

On this trip, "up here" is Galata and despite my belief that time is for spending not saving, I'm not without doubt. The Hi-Line is the railroad built across Montana in the 1880s by James J. Hill to bring boxcar loads of Honyockers to the misfortunes of dry land farming; it's pressed tight against the belly of Canada, a straight line not connecting two points, 800 miles north of I-80, 200 miles north of I-90, the straighter, faster lines I might have chosen. Perhaps the people in Galata and everyone I'll meet in this new world of Kremlins and Harlems and Glasgows and Zurichs, names chosen by one of Mr. Hill's employees by stopping a spinning globe with a fingertip, are right. Take the interstate. Any interstate. Get on with your life a day or two, sometimes three days, sooner. But then I ought to be on an airplane anyway.

Galata is a dark clump of trees north of the tracks. It's after 9:30pm. I resist the urge to drive through town looking at the houses, the main street. To imagine an evening there. Instead, I pull off Highway 2 into the gravel lot lighted by the universal neon signs of traveler's aid — Miller, Pabst, Rainier. I'm stopping at Sully's on the recommendation of a Missoula friend who said the owner, if he's still alive, was worth meeting, a kind of walking, talking personification of the Hi-Line in the days when it was trying to swear off steam locomotives and sod houses.

But he's not still alive. The bartender tells me the place has changed hands a few times since then. His arms are blackened by the sun and he's got them tightly crossed in front of him as if he's con-

stantly cold, suffering withdrawal from daylight. I'm the only customer and I've interrupted his TV program from Lethbridge. He opens a Rainier for me. A visible shiver passes through him at touching the metal can before he puts it on the bar. Then he asks it.

"Where you headed?"

I try a different tack. "East," I say.

"North Dakota?" He's straining to see my license plates through the reflected neon covering the windows. "Minnesota?"

From Marias Pass to Bainville there's a common concern for my destination. I can't buy a cup of coffee or a tank of gas, or apparently a beer, without being asked. I'm considering having T-shirts made-up — "Yes, New York. Please don't rub it in." Whatever happened to talking about the weather? In the Eighties, they'd ask me where I was headed and all I had to say was, "It looks pretty dry around here," and everything was fine. People can talk about a drought all day long. Even to a foreigner.

"New York," I finally admit to the bartender.

"Long ways to be driving. Where you coming from?"

Trying to stop things where they are I say, "Cut Bank." It isn't really a lie; I drove through there earlier in the evening.

"Hey," he says, squinting at me from behind the smoke curling off the tip of his cigarette. "That's where I'm from. Who were you seeing there?"

"Just passing through," I say, knowing better than to make up a name and fighting my own shiver, this one of uncertain origin. Perhaps I've stumbled into a suspicious man with wife trouble, so I say, "On my way up from Missoula," to guide us both back to familiar territory.

"You sure take the long way around things," he says, sounding personally disappointed in me and again making me wonder if something else is meant. "The interstate would have saved you lots of time."

He shakes his head and stubs out his cigarette in the ashtray next to my elbow before walking back down the bar to his TV.

The truth is, being "up here" helps me slow down. I can name fifty towns along I-90 and I-94 in Montana that I've never driven through let alone had a meal in or spent ten minutes sitting under a tree in, although I've had a couple of hundred chances. Superior, Belgrade, Columbus, Forsyth, I don't know a thing about them. Even Wibaux. How can I have resisted a name like that? But on the Hi-Line, there aren't five towns where I've spent less than an hour, which I think is saying something in places the size of Rudyard — "596 Nice People — One 01' Sore Head."

I stop and see things. Like the Poplar Pride, a compact wonder of a Missouri river boat, smaller than some water skiing boats on Flathead Lake. The Sleeping Buffalo rocks where passing Indians still leave offerings of tobacco.

The ever-present Mr. James J. Hill's statue in Havre with its plaque featuring quotes like, "We are glad now and at all times, it has been our policy to try and hold up the hand of the man who is cultivating the land." We're glad too, Mr.

Hill. We, on the other hand, sit out of reach of the sprinklers in the Lions Park in Chester to eat a sandwich.

What better to get on with?

I try to find places where I can see as much of the land as possible. The shadows of volcanic islands that are the Sweetgrass Hills. Trains at work in the distance. The warm breeze off the wheat fields brings a smell like toast to my tailgate picnic far from the hard road. Binoculars in my lap. Near a stray prairie pot-hole with pelicans floating over the water like sail barges and not seeming to envy in the least their cousins hanging out at seashore resorts.

I'm fortunate to have started driving the Hi-Line years before 1989 when the folks at the Montana Historical Society compiled all the text of roadside markers into a book that costs ten dollars. It might have kept me from stopping along the way to read every marker from Marias



Pass to the North Dakota border. Those stops usually turned into half an hour of thinking and stretching legs. Wandering out into the fields or along creek bottoms, alternately gazing off to the horizon and examining the ground at my feet, hoping that a percussion cap or a piece of buckskin or an arrowhead or fossil or amulet might be hidden in the grass.

This feeling of slowness in time that comes over me on the Hi-Line is oddly viral, fermenting every hour I'm here. It encourages me to deviate from my route, to dip down to the Bears Paw and the Little Rockies, hop on up to Opheim and Medicine Lake to see what's what. Extending the trip a day longer than even I've come to expect. It's a powerful virus. Lately I've caught myself thinking that despite the wind chill, I'd like to have a reason to travel the Hi-Line in January. Or no reason at all.

The Hi-Line has been what it's been since 1887 when most of it was built as the Great Northern Railway by crews laying three miles of finished track a day. It's communities are more resilient, of steadier character, than those along the old Milwaukee Road/Northern Pacific right-of-way, a portion of which runs from Missoula to Livingston. "Hollywood Gulch" I heard a man outside Clyde's Room in Malta call that stretch of track. He's got a point. I don't expect

to see Ted Turner or Jane Fonda or Andi MacDowell or Glenn Close or Bruce Willis in Malta, this Malta not the other one, anytime soon, or later for that matter. There's just not much to interest Gulchers on the Hi-Line. Unless you count Vick's Lanes & Beer Parlor in Nashua. Besides, ten bucks for that book from the historical society is a deal. "Read all about it" without leaving the Adirondack chair. No need to actually drive those longer miles of two lane, to get out of the car, to stand in a spot where anything happened and still is.

The Hi-Line has become my preferred route across the state. You visit a place enough, spend enough time, and things start to find you there. Two years in a row at Fort Peck, in the same campsite (#9), on the bare ridge of West End campground, I was awakened with my three-season tent flattened into my face by a thunderstorm. Every season except summer on the Hi-Line, I guess. Last year, I met a man carrying a ten-foot wooden cross on his shoulder from Seattle to Boston; the late May blizzard at his back, he said, was helping him along on his pilgrimage. And farther back, on a golden October morning I shot my first sharptail north of Culbertson and the next spring buried the dog that pointed it up nearby. Farther back than that I saw these prairies for the first time and unable to take my eyes from the horizon realized how big the world could be.

Driving the Hi-Line does its part to keep me in touch with this place, if a state as big as Montana can be called a place at all. It's important for me to go slow since I'll be away awhile longer. I can afford the few extra days. And because most people can't or won't, I'm not worried that a crowd will rush up here to turn Galata or Malta into another star in the galaxy of Hollywood Gulch. Although I'll admit to hav-

ing some nervous moments about the trend of things after I noticed you can get a cappuccino, latte, espresso almost anywhere between Cut Bank and Culbertson. The little French guy at Espresso Madness in Wolf Point, complete with beret and pencil-thin mustache, blue and red shirt with those horizontal stripes, seems to me a particularly subversive character.

So it's not all paradise. There's espresso and there's the weather and there's little French guys. And some people who make odd choices. The Sleeping Buffalo rock isn't out on the prairie where he belongs; he's penned up in a dank three-sided shack next to the highway trying to do his sleeping with eighteen-wheelers rumbling by. The Poplar Pride is beached in the weeds behind a chain-link fence. And down the road from James J. Hill's statue, there's a shopping mall built on top of the Wahkpa Chu'gn Bison Kill. Your first view of this historic site is through the wire-rimmed diamonds of another chain link fence hard by the dumpsters and loading docks. I guess there wasn't another acre of flat land anywhere around Havre to build a shopping mall. But in the end I think the Hi-Line can take it. It's survived a world heavyweight championship fight and plenty of gambling without becoming Las Vegas,

Out of State Plates

Mr. Hill's salesmanship without becoming California, the Defense Department without becoming Rocky Flats or Hanford.

I raise my beer can off Sully's bar and jiggle it a bit to indicate I'm empty so the bartender will have to leave his TV show and we can patch things up between us.

"Good weather for the harvest," I say. "Lots of trucks heading to the elevators anyway."

"We got hailed out in June."

The weather still works. The bartender launches into how things aren't so good at all. This year's crop is high in protein and low in weight. Last year it was high in weight, low in protein, so you can't win. Without a pause he points toward Galata out the screen door at the end of the back hallway. "This place used to be on the other side of the tracks," he says, "on the old road." He tells me that after the new highway was built, they jacked up the "whole shooting match" and rolled it over the crossing, set it down next to the new road all in one piece, ready for business. They left the supper dishes set on the tables in the cafe and the liquor bottles on the back bar. "And they didn't break a damn single one of them," he says with no little bit of pride.

I can't help wondering if the former owner, the walking, talking personification of the Hi-Line was standing behind the bar polishing shot glasses with a towel the whole time they were rolling his shooting match across James J. Hill's railroad tracks.

I step out the door of Sully's into the gravel parking lot. The view to the south is nothing but wheat. I catch myself thinking ahead to Bainville, the first town inside Montana along the Hi-Line if you're heading west. The last if you're heading east. I'll stop for a few minutes in front of the beautiful square-belfryed First English Lutheran Church at the end of Clinton Street. Beautiful that is if you can ignore the aluminum siding. And I think you ought to since you aren't the one who had to paint all those clapboards after the wind and the sun went to work on them every year. The trip always ends there, in a rare Montana town with more churches than bars. Then I head south, detouring into North Dakota to the bridge over the Missouri

before hurrying back to stay inside Montana's border a while longer to Sidney and Glendive and finally the interstate.

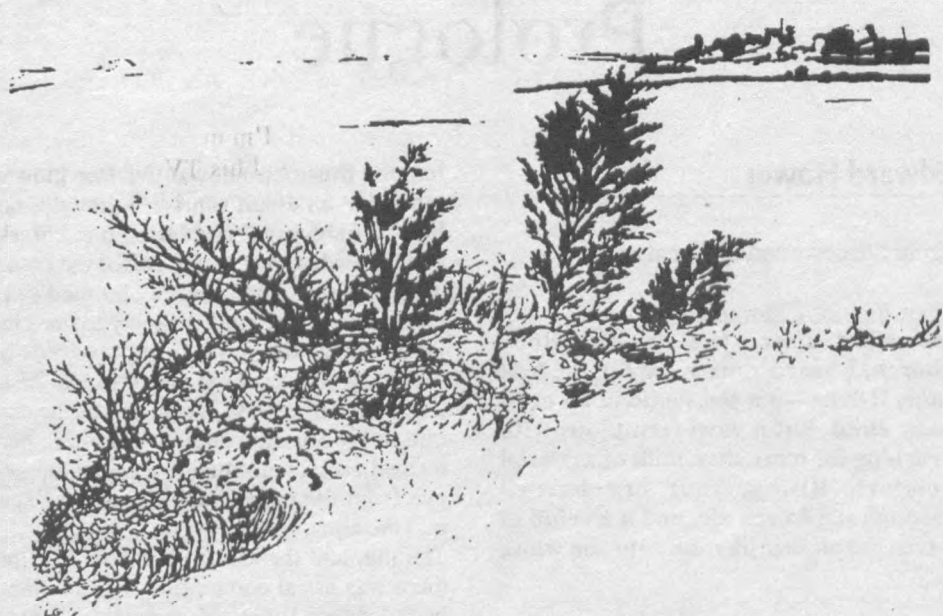
Once I hit the four-lane, I'll try to put the miles behind me as fast as they're willing. Try to fight the urge to turn around. To calculate the mileage and gas money and tire tread and resale value — and the time — it would cost me to spend a few more days where I'd rather be. I'll gas up at the bottom of exit ramps and eat while I'm driving. That night, AM radio will reach out from the Great Lakes and then the Atlantic Coast through the static of electrical storms to tell me where I'm headed.

The visible world is restricted to the reach of my headlights; the rest of it somewhere streaming past me. It's there at 80mph that the forgotten feeling overtakes me. The slow virus that made me immune to the memory of it is gone from my blood. The last trace disappearing near Medora.

The memory is this: Out-of-state plates. Folks on the Hi-Line glance at the front bumper of my truck and see someone from the east, from anywhere else. Not someone who came to Montana twenty-five years ago this month, did his seasons with the Forest Service thinning brush, marking timber, fighting fires, and has been trying to get back ever since. The strange thing is, this time they are right. I don't live here anymore. That's why Hi-Liners always ask their question. They are nothing if not polite and there isn't a lot you can ask someone who's just passing through. As much as I don't want it to be true, I am just passing through.

But Medora is a few days away yet. Right now the cool air of late summer, almost autumn, inevitably winter, is washing over me. There's a viral bloom in my blood. Where am I headed, I ask myself tonight. Back here, I answer. And if I can go slow enough, I'll stay.

Lawrence Cantera has lived in Ithaca, Montana, California, Delaware and Iowa. He currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he's president of a computer consulting firm, and is at work on a novel.



Loon Island Star

David Warren

These pieces are from The Loon Island Star, a homemade magazine based on the island my family has owned since the nineteen twenties when we were year-round residents of the lake Bonaparte area in Northern New York.

I began producing and sending the Star to my family as a newsletter assembled from my great grandmother's, grandmother's, and mothers North Country newspaper clippings and their entries in our camp log.

Josiah's Lamps

The Warrens can brag about having come to this continent in the person of the treasurer on the Mayflower, but if The Loon Island Star were a ship, it is our fore-uncle Josiah Warren born in 1798, who could be the figurehead. A musician, inventor, storekeeper, industrialist, writer, printer, publisher, multiple town-founder and political revolutionary, he is known in capsule histories as "the father of Philosophical anarchism." In his anarchistic way, he helped give birth to the industrial revolution in printing and at the same time organized private non-profit groups in humanitarian social reaction to it. He was a magazine of a man and I would(were he alive) invite him to join the Loon Island Star board of directors, if I weren't a sort of anarchist pretty much after his pattern, and if the Loon Island Star weren't itself a sovereign, one-man operation, without any governing board.

Like some of the rest of us, Josiah Warren was a short and stocky man with an ample forehead and blue eyes which could be described as either restless or shift. He lived in shifting circumstances, though he was a musician first and always. By the age of twenty-one he had already played a number of instruments in Boston bands, married, and moved to Cincinnati where he became an orchestra leader and music teacher.

In 1821 Josiah patented a lard-burning lamp(which was much cheaper to run than the tallow lamps currently in use), and soon afterward started a lamp factory. Josiah's factory succeeded, though success would never be a barrier to his quick changes for the sake of personal and philosophical development. After hearing a speech by the English philanthropist and industrialist Robert Owen, he moved with his family to the newly forming experimental community of New Harmony, Indiana where Owen had proposed to put into practice his theories of socialism and human improvement.

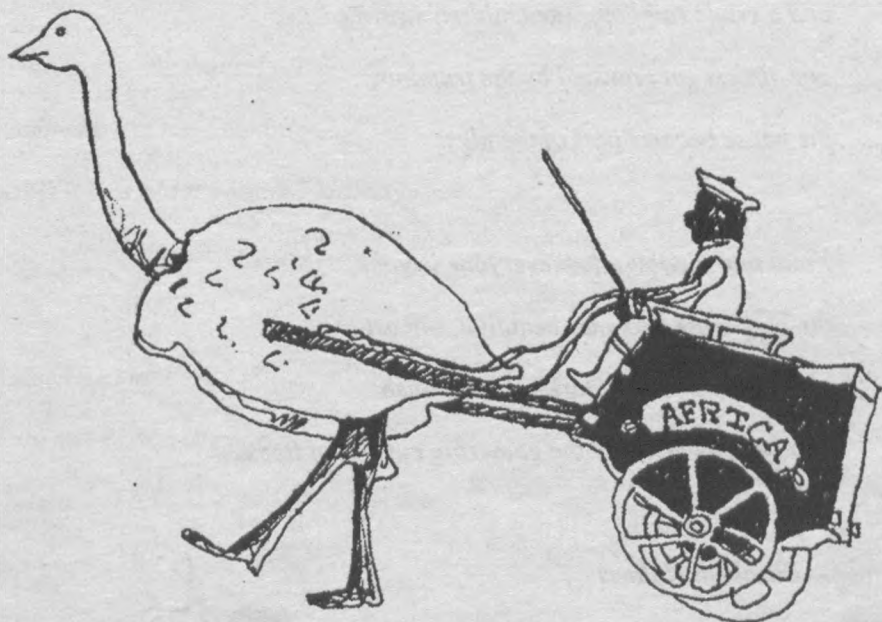
By Christmas of 1825 nearly a thousand people had gathered in New Harmony and cooperated long enough to draw up a constitution which provided

for absolute equality of property, labor, and opportunity. It also stated that the community should strive for complete freedom of speech and action. According to the thumbnail sketch in the anonymously authored Warren Family genealogy, Josiah Warren "was opposed to all forms of government" which presumably includes the one he was helping to devise at New Harmony, where he championed the most extreme individuality. Unsurprisingly, a state of the wrong sort of anarchy developed at New Harmony, and Josiah is credited in the family genealogy with responsibility for the failure of the experiment. However he and Owen himself apparently agreed that it was the communistic dampening of individual initiative which did the damage and Owen supported Josiah in later ventures which did quite well on the basis of this insight.

Josiah moved back to Cincinnati and started his first "equity store," where purchases were made with barter certificates granting the same credit for the same amount of labor. After two years Josiah's store broke even. He judged that to be success, since it was the goal, and it is not bad to my way of thinking, considering that most businesses fail in the first year and the rest cannot be expected to turn a profit before the third year.

His point made, Josiah moved on and in 1830 invented a high speed press, which he used briefly to spread information about prevention and cure during a Chicago cholera epidemic, but he never patented the invention, because the concept was so simple that someone else should have thought of it. The design was adopted and built by R. Hoe and Company in 1832, and by others soon after. Josiah next presented himself as The Peaceful Revolutionist, which is the name of the journal he started to publish in 1833. It was a supremely individual effort: Josiah made his own press, type(on the kitchen stove), and stereotype plates. He also did all the writing, composition, and press work. Though Josiah's magazine did not continue over a year, he published other journals later on, and numerous books, including one giving a new, mathematical system for musical notation.

Between 1837 and 1840 Josiah invented an improved press which fed a continuous roll of paper to a self-inking type-cylinder. Although the press was thought to be one of the most important developments in printing at that time, it was a large machine which required a number of men to operate, and the kind of extreme individualism Josiah championed would not be a job asset for any of those workers. After persistent sabotage by workmen, who may have been reading his tracts, and were worried about losing their jobs at the newspaper where the press had been installed, Josi-



continued on page 8

Prologue

Edward Hower

From *Shadows and Elephants*

Kiev, Russia: 7 March 1831

Hovering above the ancient stone church, I heard your voice for the first time, Helena—not the sound of an ordinary child, but a yowl tremulous with yearning for more than milk or material comfort. Rising, your cry burned through the frozen air, and a treefull of ravens exploded like ink into the white sky.

I knew then that I'd found the child assigned to me. Entering the church, I searched the pews for her, wondering what such an eloquent infant might look like. The odors of incense and piety made my nostrils twitch. Black-robed priests scuttled by. A consumptive organ exhaled chords. Banks of candles gave off a yellow glare but no warmth.

Near the baptismal font stood gentlemen wearing frock coats, shiny boots, monocles, mustaches. Ladies in furs and bulky dresses shivered in the gloom. Child relatives, confined by tight Sunday outfits, whined and tormented their nurses. Several of these children spotted me and, smiling, ceased their fidgeting. Only they, of course, can see beings like me; to adults I'm invisible.

In previous incarnations, I'd had several names; now I was Morya, a swarthy, black-bearded, breathtakingly handsome man of wise middle years. My superiors among the Ascended Masters had sent me here from an assignment in India, thus I was still wearing a white turban, caftan, and camel-hide slippers. I could see how important an event Helena's christening was by the number of *diakka*, or astral beings, who had turned out to celebrate it—or perhaps to oppose it, I couldn't tell.

None were of my high rank. A gaggle of apprentice angels admired their reflections in the stained glass windows. Trolls and needle-nosed fairies played among the shadows that groped up the walls. And near the font stood a being whom I assumed at first was a *domovoy*, a hairy old man who lived behind the kitchen stove in the family's mansion. Ordinarily such beings are content with souring the milk and spitting in the soup, but this one looked as if he had a more drastic action in mind. Behind his whiskers, his eyes were strangely young and reckless.

Suddenly the voices around me hushed and all faces turned toward the center aisle of the church. First came a white-haired priest carrying a miter, then several boys swinging censers from their hands and filling the air with sticky plumes of smoke. And then—here, the gazes of many guests turned quizzical—the child herself, Helena, rode down the aisle. She was not gliding compliantly in the arms of her stout nurse—no, not at all; she was kicking and thrashing her limbs in red-faced exasperation. Many, like myself, had been expecting a mere babe, but various family illnesses had forced postponements of the christening, and the Helena we beheld was a plump, curly-headed, round-faced little girl of nearly two. I could tell from her determined struggling that she was already far too independent to allow anyone to carry her—especially to a destination she had not chosen herself.

What an adorable creature she was—to me, at least. What bright round blue eyes she had! But the poor child had been stuffed into a tight, frilly dress that I could tell constrained her beyond endurance. The nurse passed her to the white-haired priest, a sinewy old bird whose grip must have seemed to Helena even tighter than her clothing. She began to yowl again.

To my occultly trained ears, her shrieks were glorious melodies. They sliced through the organ's groans like bold scimitar strokes; they scratched wild calligraphy

into the frosted windows. Her face glowed red—like a radiant sunrise, I thought, not like “a baby pig,” as I heard one elderly countess whisper. I nearly cuffed the crone. The priest, his bony hand clamped over Helena's mouth, moved slowly toward the altar, where the glow from hundreds of flickering tapers caused the air to vibrate as if in a state of ecstasy. Then, as was the custom in the Russian church, the cleric performed an ancient ritual to cast out the evil eye from the consecrated place—he spat into the air.

The moment the saliva shot from his lips, there was astral commotion. Fairies stampeded down the aisle. Angels fluttered against the windows like trapped moths. A pair of trolls who'd been copulating behind a stack of hymnals fled through the nearest doorway. But the *domovoy*, shielding his eyes, held his ground.

To Helena, the priestly effluvia that splashed against her cheek must have felt like a spray of acid, so loud was her response. Her screams clawed at the cleric's face and caused the racks of candle flames to ripple like a golden wheat field blasted by a storm. Gasping for breath, the child stared forlornly about in search of someone to rescue her.

Did Helena notice his approach? Many debated this afterwards, but I myself believe that she didn't see him, intent as she was upon absorbing her audience's adoration. In any case, her candle continued to sway in the air. The priest backed into it. The flame took a big bite from the hem of his robe.

From the pews, the faces of the children grew animated as the pretty yellow blaze blew sideways, sharing its flames with other dark-robed men. Thrilling screams echoed everywhere. Adults scattered. Billows of smoke flapped in the air like gigantic black wings.

One of the youngest of the priests, perhaps unaware that his lower parts were smoking, snatched up Helena. Then, his eyes filling with panic, he tottered beside the font as the turmoil swirled around him. Helena pummeled his chest with her little fists, but he seemed too confused to notice.

I must state here that responsible Masters do not normally intervene directly in mortals' karma. But I couldn't just stand by and let my tiny damsel be roasted in the arms of that priest.

“Drop her, you fool!” I whispered into the man's ear.

He did. Splash! She landed on her bottom in the baptismal font.

Someone threw a cloak over the priest as he fell in flames to the floor. Children were yanked toward the door. Men barked orders. Women wailed and wept. The scent of scorched clerics wafted through the air. Sitting in the font, her plump legs kicking, Helena gurgled prettily. Eventually, when all the fires had been extinguished, another priest fished her out of the little stone tub.

As she rose dripping from the water, Helena reached out both hands and gave a little cry. A chuckle, some said later. An ominous cackle, the priest insisted—which explained his decision to abandon her christening.

But I knew the true meaning of the sound she'd made. It was merely a cry of recognition. She had seen my face for the first time. “I'm the Master Morya,” I told her.

She burred happily. I translated her question: “Are you to care for me? Always?”

“Always,” I replied.

And I did—from that day on, I was her guardian. It was a labor of love. And it was a task that would test the limits of my fabulous powers.

Edward Hower is the author of six books, including the novel Queen of the Silver Dollar, which will be published this fall, and the recently completed novel Shadows and Elephants.

A Farewell Picnic for Ann, Peter, and Vann, August 1996

Vann, age six, has made up a play,

and under his joyous direction the children

dash across the lawn waving sticks,

plastic cups, a fire chief's hat.

Ashley's long hair's afloat, Liam

tumbles and crows, Nick runs the fastest.

The uncomprehending parents applaud,

seeing the children against a backdrop

of massed purple and white althea,

behind it the tall hemlocks beginning

to blur with evening, and back of that,

in the next yard, a box elder hovering.

How lush it all is, and not one child

crying, even the baby in his sling chair

cooing. We glance over the tops

of houses, where evening is turning rose,

a color we swear we've never seen there.

“These are the great days,” Harry says,

a minute before it couldn't be said:

we fold the blankets and put away food,

calling the children. Above us hangs

a splendid silver maple, a tree

notoriously weak-wooded, vulnerable

to wind; but here it is, still,

swallowing the last of the light. A while ago

four of the men went off and came back

struggling under Vann's playhouse,

ours now. They set it down in front

of the deep hemlocks: spray-painted red,

yellow and blue polkadots on white,

and a crude rainbow. The children swarmed;

one almost got crowned by the trapdoor;

the house became part of the play.

From our window when everyone is gone,

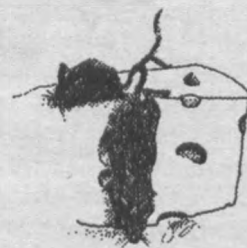
the playhouse becomes beautiful, almost

glowing in the near-dark—this childish

assertion, dwarfed by the gathering curtain of trees.

—Elizabeth Holmes

Liz Holmes grew up in Tennessee. She spent one year teaching in rural Kenya. She is the author of The Patience of the Cloud Photographer.



Translations

David Lunde

INVITATION TO LIU NINETEEN by Po Chu-yi (772-846 A.D.)

*I have some unfiltered wine, “green-ant”
new
and a little red clay warming-stove.
Evening is falling, and the sky looks like
snow
Can you drink a cup with me, or no?*

trans: David Lunde

SEEKING A HERMIT BUT NOT FIND-
ING HIM by Chia Tao (779-849? A.D.)

*Beneath the pines;
I asked his servant boy—
“The Master is gone,
out picking medicinal herbs.
He’s somewhere in these mountains,
deep in the clouds,
but I couldn’t say where.”
(ca. 800)*

ON HIS SAD DEPARTURE FROM
CH’ANG-AN BY THE GATE OF GOLDEN
LIGHT by Tu Fu (712-770 A.D.)

*This is the way I came back before,
to the Emperor’s territory;
barbarians were everywhere
in the western suburbs.*

*Until now I had not
regained my courage
the souls driven from my body*
must not have returned.*

*Returning to the capital,
I rode close to the Emperor—
surely it was not his Sacred Majesty
who ordered my dismissal!*

*Judged incompetent,
daily more old and decrepit,
I rein in my horse
and gaze at the doors of the palace.*

(758 A.D.)
*Reference to popular belief that a person had ten souls, seven animal and three spiritual, which could be driven from the body by a traumatic experience or severe illness. Rituals were performed to bring them back.

THE EIGHT FORMATIONS by Tu Fu (712-770 A.D.)

*Your achievements overshadowed
those of any in the Three Kingdoms;
most famous of all was your design
for the Eight Formations.*

*Against the river’s surge,
they stand solid, unmoving,
a monument to your lasting regret
at failing to swallow up Wu.*

N.B.: The person ddressed in this poem is Chu-ko Liang (181-234 A.D.), who was Chancellor of the kingdom of Shu during the reigns of its first two rulers. Tu Fu admires him as one of the greatest statesmen in Chinese history. The Eight Formations are groups of standing stones—some in the river—supposedly constructed by Chu-ko Liang to demonstrate his battle formations, but most likely they were raised by prehistoric peoples for much the same purposes as our stone circles in Europe. Wu was another ancient kingdom against which Shu waged an unsuccessful war.

THE CHANCELLOR OF SHU by Tu Fu (712—770 A.D)

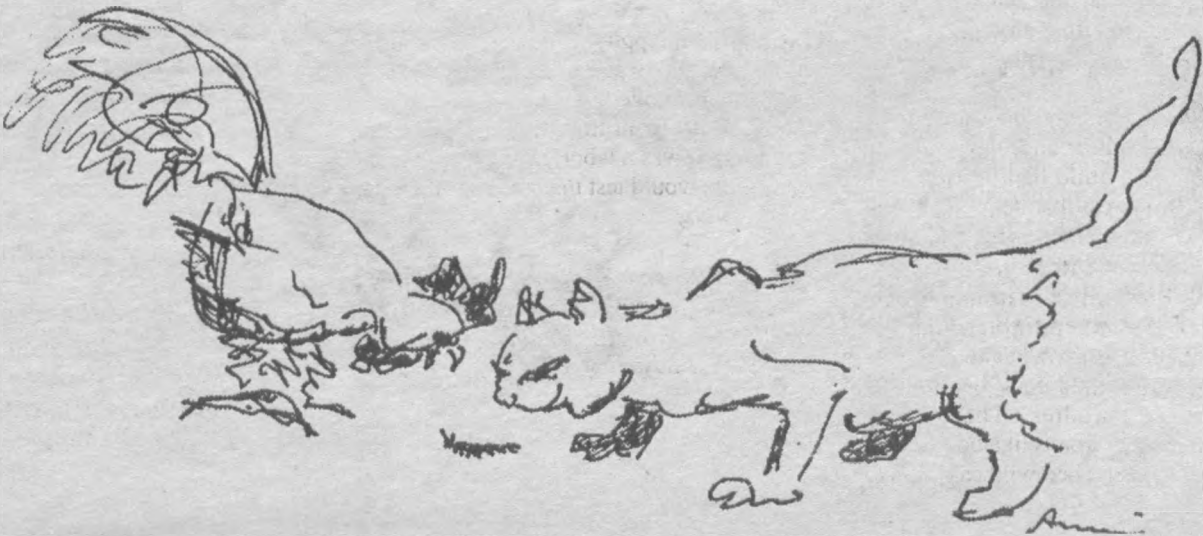
*For the Chancellor’s shrine,
where should one look?
On the outskirts of Ch ‘eng-tu
where cypresses grow thick.
On its steps emerald grass gleams,
keeping spring’s color to itself;
screened by leaves a yellow oriole sings,
its lovely sound unheard.*

*Three imploring visits
yielded a plan for world order;
Two reigns he founded and assisted
showing his faithful heart.
He led the army out against Wei
but died himself before victory;
at the thought of it, men of valor
will always shed tears of pity.*

[760]

N.B.: The Chancellor is Chu-ko Liang, who had earned a reputation for brilliance, but was living in retirement in his house on Sleeping Dragon hill at the time the “Three visits” were paid to him by Liu Pei. Liu was a soldier who considered himself the legitimate heir to the Empire of Han, and in his three visits he begged Chu-ko’s help in regaining it. Chu-ko rejected him twice, but finally agreed on the third visit, having been persuaded of his sincerity and determination by his willingness to humble himself.

David Lunde received am MFA from University of Iowa writer’s workshop in 1967 and is currently Professor of English /Director of Creative Writing at SUNY Fredonia. He has published two full length collections of poetry; Sludge Gulper 1 and Cal-



The Loon Island Star

continued from page 5

ah deconstructed and retrieved the press. Twenty-five years after Josiah took back the speed press, others re-invented it, or just stole the idea and took the credit.

Josiah turned once again to experiments with the more humane "equity stores" in the Midwest, which were succeeding and seeding the modern co-operative and grange movements. Then, in 1850, with encouragement and funds provided by Robert Owen, he moved back east and established the town of Modern Times, about forty miles from New York out on Long Island. Modern Times functioned well for more than ten years, though it might have become encumbered by the sort of eccentric characters it is said to have attracted. Perhaps to hide from fame, Modern Times later changed its name to Bretonwood or Brentwood, or something similar and equally forgettable.

Josiah himself outlasted Modern Times and at last he circled back to Massachusetts where, at home with friends from the old Modern Times days, he died several years later—a thoroughly rounded individual who long ago went where we are going and had been what we might become. The fact is that though he never actually set foot on Loon Island, he was probably the first Warren to travel completely around the island, Lake Bonaparte and the whole state of New York (albeit coming none too close) and although all relatives that far removed from our branch in the family tree are about as closely related to us as to Adam.

I myself have only recently begun to design primitive stone lamps. They use a paraffin oil which unfortunately costs ten times as much as lard. It may be time to bring back the lard lamp.

Mother Warren's Grasp

I remember Grandma Warren as she sat under her lamp-shade hat, her undershot jaw set like that of a lurking bass, her hands knuckles-up in her lap, a balled tissue in one of them.

She was so still and silent then that the flies in the room began to circle near; maybe they mistook her for a lamp, or for a dead body.

Suddenly her right hand shot out and snatched a fly right out of the air. She crushed the fly into the tissue in her other fist. Then she was still again.

A mighty fortress was Mother Warren. Her husband, Rev. Orson Lee Warren, had died of heart failure when Dad was twelve years old. The Sunday after O. Lee died, Mother Warren gave the sermon in their Baptist church. And, as I remember my father telling me she kept the pulpit through a month of Sundays, until a new pastor was found. Mama Dot, though, says that she is not sure whether Mother Warren preached several times.

Who knows what she said in that or those sermons? Did she snatch the devil out of the air and crush him right there? I imagine that she must have preached the Baptist priesthood of the believer, a doctrine—a program for individual sovereignty, useful in the straits where everyone is an island.

O. Lee's death left Mother Warren with Ernest, the youngest of three children, still at home. Without the parson's wages they were doubly poor, but she became a Baptist minister's assistant in Watertown and a librarian of the Carthage Free Library. Ernest was quick and skipped grades through high school. He was a favorite charitable cause for a few local

businessmen who had been members of the church or admirers of his father, as well as of his fierce mother. For many years the journalist, printer, paper salesman and author Charlie Brownell, who was always a sort of Uncle to Ernest, would take Mother Warren for automobile rides on Sunday afternoons, and some people thought that someday they would get married, but Mother Warren was too single-minded for that.

A Carthage lawyer, who was an alumnus of Hamilton College, encouraged Ernest to apply there and, when he was accepted, Mother Warren went to college right along with Ernest, whom I will call Dad from here on because, though he was only seventeen at the time, he had met my mother-to-be, who went off to Elmira College. While Dad waited on tables at the faculty club, Mother Warren cooked and kept house there in order to help pay for books, room, and board. If this heroic mothering was ever an embarrassment to Dad, I never heard about it.

When Dad went off to Cornell Law School on a special scholarship there for worthy and needy Hamiltonians, and Dorothy Failing, studying to be my mother and the next Mrs. Warren, came to Ithaca to get a graduate degree at Ithaca college, Grandmother Warren found a position as a housekeeper and companion for a rich boxmaker's widow over in McGraw, near where the Warrens had homesteaded and where she had been raised.

Until the orthodontist changed it many years ago, I had that same undershot jaw as Mother Warren, but I have never been able to catch flies like that. I suppose the talent lurks there deep in my being though, like the original fish from which we are all descended.

Loon Island, Beer Island, and the Silver Moon Tea Room

My Dad was not a traveling man. What traveling he did was mostly early in his life and always brought him back home.

When he was seventeen he went each Saturday the thirty or so miles from Carthage to Clayton in order to play trumpet with a band at the Silver Moon Tea Room. On Sundays in those same years he took the train up the line through Natural Bridge past Bonaparte to deliver the Sunday New York Times in the village of Cranberry Lake, which, was the end of the railroad line, was the source of the Times' paper pulp as well as being a summering place of wealthy New Yorkers. During his undergraduate college years Dad also traveled as a roustabout on the Chatauqua culture-circus train, and ultimately, carrying a suitcase which I now use for Loon Island Star documents, he took the train to Ithaca and the Cornell Law school. In law school he earned nothing but A's. Nobody had ever done that before and at

graduation the dean asked my father to stay and join the faculty. But he did not accept the offer. That summer Dad went to Bonaparte and worked hauling ice, chopping wood, and piloting the shuttle to bring visitors to the restaurant on Rock Island which would come to be called Beer Island for many years, and will be called that for many years from now, though it has been a while since the restaurant operated there. Dad and Mom were engaged to be married that summer and Grandfather Failing had just bought Loon Island and was getting ready to build there.

Dad spent the nights on Loon Island in his sleeping bag without a tent, and on his days off he helped cutting brush on the site and hauling up rock for the fire-place.

Dad and Mom were married in her parents' house and the wedding reception was next door at Grandma at Grandpa Drury's house. Dad worked for law firms in Utica and Carthage, starting out during the Depression, serving subpoenas. Eventually he became a partner in the Carthage firm and we moved into the Drury house in Natural Bridge.

During those years and afterward Cornell continued to offer Dad a position on the law faculty, but he stayed up north until it came time for us children to start entering college. Then he accepted the offer, along with what what would eventually amount to twenty years of free tuition for us children. We came back to Bonaparte for two months every summer.

Biting A Big One

Besides being known as "Uncle Ernie," by generations of the students he advised at the law school, Dad was at various times Dean of Students and Dean of Admissions. In the fifties, the whole university was presided over by Dean Malott, who, though he was officially president, was actually named Dean. Add to that the fact that Dad often advised us, as he must have urged his students, to do as we "deem prudent," so we Warren kids got the idea that there was a Cornell character called "Dean Prudent." That we never met this Dean Prudent meant little, since one could often see him tottering cautiously about the campus, and we wouldn't have expected him to go out of his usual way to come by our house.

The concept of Deem Prudence was Dad's all-purpose code of ethical, legal, and philosophical behavior, his doctrine of individual sovereignty, and his priesthood of the believer. But his apparent offering of Dean Prudence as a model was counter-balanced by the barrel-chested person of his friend Harrop Freeman. Har Freeman, also a professor at the law school, was an out-spoken political liberal, a fearless Quaker, a home-born world-traveler, a passionate pro-bono legal advocate of Indian land claims, a wild driver of sports cars, and a free-

wheeling counselor who no doubt often violated his own good council: a man who seems, from the reports of young women I have known, to have been as horny into his sixties as a year-old puppy, but an interesting and interested man, just as eager for the new experience as we Warrens were to get back home.

Har was less one for fishing than for skimming over or just dashing into the water when he visited us at Bonaparte but he did go fishing with us at least once, and it was probably due more to his aggressiveness than to mere luck that he managed on his first trip with Dad and me down to Mud Lake, to crank out a largemouth just about a half-inch longer than the biggest one I ever caught. I was about fifteen at the time.

We had given him a short plug-casting rod because there were the three of us in the boat and Dad wanted to lessen the chances of his grappling a hat or an ear.

Har plugged it right in there as if he were trying to skip the lure clear to Indian Lake. I cast far ahead of the boat and managed to haul in a sixteen-incher, which I landed without net by the approved thumb-in mouth hold. After a whiffle bass or two, but before we had been fishing another half-an-hour, Har hooked that bass and he didn't waste any time bringing it in, though it was well over five pounds.

He was determined to land his fish in the way I had demonstrated, and he had no problem getting his thumb in the big mouth, but the fish was not ready and he managed to get one of the treble hooks into Har's hand.

Naturally enough, Har tried to let go of the fish, but the Jitterbug didn't let go of Har, and the bass gave a couple of good shakes which set a couple more of the treble hooks into the meat of Har's Hand.

Har grabbed the bass with his other hand and finally got it into the boat and tried to pin it with his knee in order to get the hooks out, but they were both well hooked and the fish wouldn't stop flopping. When Dad offered to club the fish with the flash light, Har wouldn't let him.

Har struggled with the fish and the plug for a minute himself, a very grim minute. And then he just bent down and bit the poor fish in back of the head, right through the backbone. He took a piece right out of it. The bass shivered and quit. Har chewed and spit out the scales, but actually swallowed the flesh he had bitten off. I saw that and I am sure my mouth dropped open. I think he swallowed it on principle.

There were three hooks in Har, all the way in and out, so Dad cut the barbed points off and backed the hooks out.

Har didn't even want to go back then, but Dad insisted and Har finally deemed it prudent—said he guessed we had better finish eating the fish.

David Warren has an MFA from Cornell and has published two novels. For many years he has lived in Ithaca where he is a builder-contractor.

