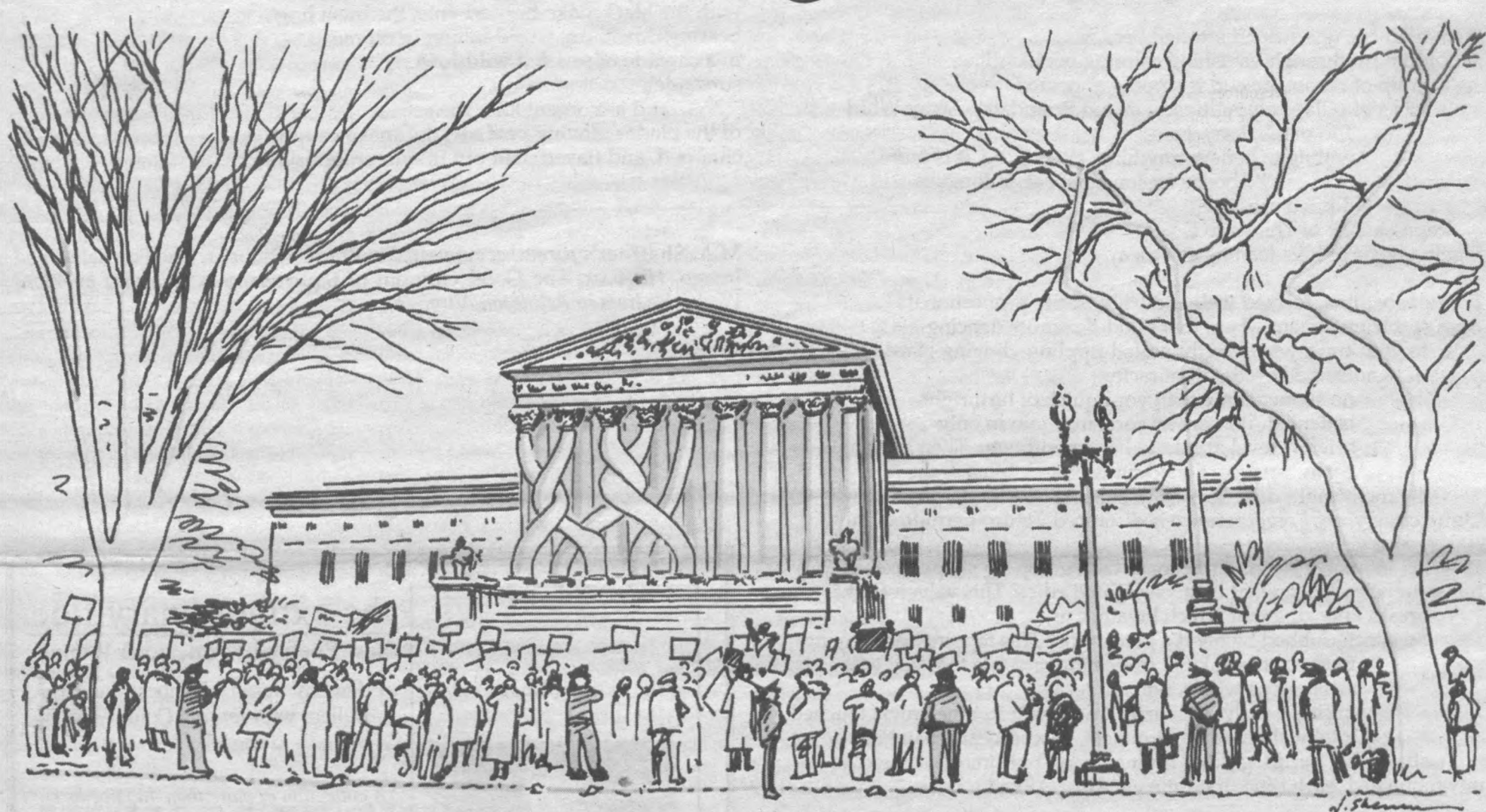


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Not Getting Over It



Jack Sherman

Hortense J. Spillers

Saturday, 20 January was a day from hell, and if you are among the fifty million or so American voters, as I am, who think of the past election season as a bad dream (from which we have not yet awakened), then the cold misery of this year's Inaugural will strike you as exacting poetic justice. The day for me was a "first" in a few respects, and let me count the ways: 1) I did not watch this Inaugural on television, as I have customarily done for the last few decades, because I was *in* it; 2) I spent about five hours of the day *outside*, in a rain poncho over a pea jacket over a smaller bomber-style jacket over a sweater, a pair of navy-issue trousers, a woolen cap, leather gloves, and thick socks in a pair of what a friend tells me are called duck boots, yelling my head off alongside several thousands of other Americans of all stripes: "Hail to the Thief!" "The People Have Spoken (All Five of Them)," "This Is What Democracy Looks Like, That Is What Hypocrisy Looks Like," and more.

In the nation's capital, about a spacious block from the intersection of 3rd and Maryland, the Supreme Court of the United States sits poised like a battleship on the horizon. That image of an impregnable fortress, guarded over that day by a considerable police presence, ready to crack heads, I suppose, impresses my imagination indelibly and accords quite well with how I've felt since 7 November, when the American electoral process came out of its clothes and ran naked

down the nation's streets; by the millions, we were appalled.

For whatever good it was going to do, we had come to the capital of the Free World by the busloads and the car-loads to register a profound grievance with the US Supreme Court. My travel companion and I arrived at the High Court only five minutes before the Chief Justice administered the presidential oath of office. We even heard the gun salute blasting the air around the Capitol. But intending to join the march sponsored by Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network and the demonstration in the behalf of voters' rights and Florida's disfranchised, we were momentarily confused when we encountered a motley array of protesters, scattered along the southern boundary of the Court. While there was plentiful activity on this front, none of it looked very organized to me. Where was that march for which I'd come? We turned a corner, aiming to walk around the building, when half-way down the street, a force of energy, as far away as three or four big city blocks, struck the atmosphere with a resonance so unmistakable that I realized the march was a leap and bound straight ahead!

The National Action Network and Washington, D.C.'s Center for the Study of Constitutional Law, under the leadership of Ron Daniels, were among an omnibus of organizations taking part in the counter-Inaugural. Larry Holmes and Brian Becker, co-directors of the D.C. branch of the International Action Center, had previously appeared on C-Span broadcasts in order to solicit support for the counter

demonstrations and to explain how the organization's lawyers would attempt to obtain parade permits; apparently, the D.C. Police Department and the US Park Service granted the permits only when directed to do so by the courts one week before the Inaugural.

The four-block square around Stanton Park teemed to overflowing with people walking, in wheelchairs, bearing children, old, young, middle-aged, and right across the spectrum of American communities. The moving tribute to one of the parents of the slain civil rights trio—Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney—who'd all be just about my age now, had they lived; the recalled deeds of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party; and Rev. Al's rousing, orotund call and response, which ended with the mass swearing of an oath to work to protect the most fundamental of all the democratic values, the right to vote, (that right for which so many have struggled and died) with our voices, wave on wave, rolling and pitching and resounding through the ambient air—this spectacle of outraged citizens actually warmed me and made me glad. That we were here at all was altogether stunning, and that we were here about the franchise—for God's sake!—with the threat of arrest not all that remote in the capital of the Free World and at the Inauguration of the man who would be president of all the people, that man out of Texas, this "uniter, not a divider," this man who said that he trusted the "people," not the "government," simply opens the next big chapter of

my life. I suspect that I am not alone.

The instructions from the podium were clear and repeated over and over again: Stay on the sidewalk; don't provoke the police, be orderly. *Please*. We didn't come here to be arrested, and with that caveat we poured out of Stanton Park in droves, headed back to the Supreme Court. But with numbers like that, who could stay on the sidewalk? Who the hell *wanted* to stay on the sidewalk? So we covered the streets, six, eight deep, with cops aligned along the route, some of them plainclothed, taking snapshots. But we arrived at our destination without incident. For the next couple of hours, it was as if we had encircled Jericho's walls, as we formed a chanting human chain on a four-block radius around the Supreme Court, from whose corridors one of the most shameless decisions in US jurisprudence had lately come down. Even though the justices were nowhere to be seen—we know for sure where at least one of them was at the time—I should like to hope that they learned we were there.

Predictably, the loud, raucous, vulgar and misinforming voices on the public airwaves have been busy advising the nation to "get over it," time to "move on." But like a character in one of my favorite novels, I am stuck on the threshold of the stairway, whereas those moving-on souls among us have rushed right past, down to the dance floor. Vincent Bugliosi ends his piece, "None Dare Call It Treason" (*The Nation*, February 5, 2001)

continued on page 9

Prompt Sonata, No Sooner Come

Hung windchimes, clearstruck kin of velocity toss, tones
 rimming into channeled ear. Through mute earth up pop shapes.
 Passing on errand, I catch the drift, stop—my puzzled head
 tilts toward perhaps recalled hint. Small bells of disbelief
 suspend in cluster, summoning
 springing among crusts of snow a frontyard populace.
 Out of pastel air windflowers peer—what is this swung
 astonishment of early aftertones,
 this dazed current? What are these tuned and
 transported triplets? What Ho and Presto Change-O

I am pingponged, bonged beheaded at beholding beside myself
 this arrayal purecast of arrived aliveness, this barely held excess.
 The rooted breath is brushed upsprung through me—
 I am that space
 where rings of charmed sound wand,
 each sheer hue fabricated heady, fearless in sheen
 atop slim cutout shiver. I stay, dangled in flurry,
 signing hop of heart. Blown off exterior course,
 my timepiece pings its crystalline accord alone
 with chimed wind, now heeding only hanging rung chance:

So that on cue one striped attuned bee,
 about to hum through vanishing coloring book outline,
 at lip of chromatic cup is sipping appeared
 vibes of village elves: Rigadon and Roundalay-Away-Whirl
 Too much, I say, I am
 willing to believe anything, everything, it is more
 than can be borne for long. I speak in tongues
 dipped saturate.

Impasse: List of Things to Do.
 Signing heart of loss, leading self away

Prompt sonatina, formed well and truly tipsily proportionate
 from spectrum stream—I am that blind deafmute dancing
 to your tune, wavelengths scaled rippling, dinging glazed
 in windchime key: Small miracle,
 no sooner come than your quick of birthright
 is denied. We earnest sorts may join in only
 briefest revel at celesta height with you. Then have to
 again carry portioned time. Noted: Must seal
 the mossbright door, snowhuff shifting down winding stairways.
 Clung closely, now reverberance is distanced, return permitted only

as belled in almost sleep: Three tones taking pop-up shapes exchanging
 transparencies. Then what is this weighted edict? This valved fright—
 breath knocking that which breathes us,
 lip synch dubbed by heart's percussion. This tapping for denying
 memory on waking, this cautionary tale that you will
 swallow us whole, will render us
 unfit for daily discourse: And lovesick, tonestruck, touched
 totally alliteratively topmost, spaced beats chambering
 all coming things, giddily tinting every/our unique selves: We
 unvanquished, each time first time we Alive-Alive-O

Carol Rubenstein dedicates this poem to the frontyard gardens and gardeners of Ithaca, NY, where she resides.

Reflections From a Farm in Fauquier County

Filtered traces run through the subroutines,
 echoes of viral compounds and urges,
 the utility of which in any
 ordinary sphere remains open to
 religious conversion.

Take an idea
 and bend it to a pretense of logic.
 Park daffodils in an unlikely season
 and watch as the fox slips from the canal
 into unregistered suburbs.

Even
 as a falcon wanders from downtown to
 soar over the high bridge and ponder, perhaps,
 its influence over herons and terns
 the planet conspires with tales of progress.
 As if we could leave behind the eras
 we locked in walnut cases, as if dust
 made a barrier impenetrable even
 to memory and imagination.

Every day
 part of me positions itself to run
 with the blacksnake-harried vole, the bush hog
 bearing down, my world falling in on me
 in a cascade of severed wildflowers,
 surrender,
 and a moment later the scene
 of the blades moving past me, the snake caught,
 chopped, and flayed, laid out in quivering brilliance.

M.A. Shaffner's poems have appeared in *Prarie Schooner*, *The Formalist*, and *Imago*. His book, *The Good Opinoin of Squirrels*, was published by *Word Works*. He lives in Arlington, Virginia.

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 Jack Goldman

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 Barbara Adams, Kevin Macneil Brown,
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 Dan Burgevin, Allison Dailey, Jack Sherman

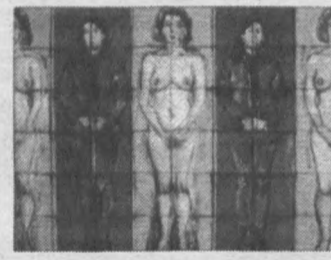
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Dangerous Encounters

James McConkey

Familiar Spirits: A Memoir of James Merrill and David Jackson

by Alison Lurie

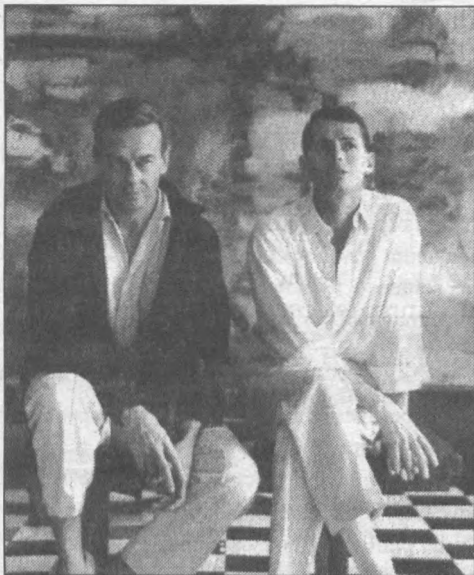
Viking, 2001

181 pages, \$22.95

Alison Lurie and I have been friends for decades. During my years as a teacher, she came, now and then, to my classes to give a guest lecture; my wife and I are frequent guests of hers in Key West, where she introduced us to the world that is the environment of her 1998 novel, *The Last Resort*; she has given me a fleeting appearance in a couple of her novels.

What have I done in return? I put her in the only ironic or satiric novel I ever wrote, one set far out in space in a world that is the mirror image of our own. I transported her to my world in outer space because of a news story I had read in *The Ithaca Journal* while I was writing that novel. I learned from the article that Alison had been part of a group removed by the police for participating in a Day Hall sit-in that was protesting Cornell's refusal to divest its funds from corporations doing business in segregated South Africa. Did I mention Alison by name? No, I simply called her "a famous novelist." I stole the actual words she had used to explain her action to the journalists covering the event, even as I stole from another writer who once taught at Cornell—Vladimir Nabokov—the name "Zembla" for my mirror image of South Africa. I reported that this famous novelist said that "investing money in Zemblan industries that paid lip service to equitable hiring practices was like buying sheets with a clear conscience from a company that declared itself an Equal Opportunity Employer even though its major stockholder and customer was the Ku Klux Klan." I took this witty and marvelously acute insight into my own fiction, without ever acknowledging its source!

And so I jumped at the opportunity offered me by *The Bookpress* to review Alison's most recent book, *Familiar Spirits*, for it was a book I had already read, in advance of its publication date, and admired. Can one, though, write objectively about the work of a person for whom the reviewer feels affection? Such a question mirrors (and "mirrors" is a word



Rollie McKenna

most appropriate to this review) the much larger problem that must have concerned Lurie—let me refer to her henceforth by her last name, as evidence of my own attempt at objectivity—as she began this memoir of two people whose lives were entwined with her own, the poet James Merrill and his long-time companion David Jackson.

Merrill is now dead, and Jackson, while living, has become a "ghost" deprived of physical mobility and most of his memory. Both of them, though, were Lurie's long-time friends, and for them she had—and in memory still has—admiration as well as deep affection. She first met Merrill in 1950, while on a "postponed honeymoon" in Austria with her first husband; Merrill struck her then as "an intellectual and an aesthete" contemptuous of the ignorance of others. A few years later, Alison moved to Amherst with her family, for her husband had taken a position on the college faculty. Merrill, a graduate of Amherst, returned as a visiting writer, bringing along David Jackson, his new companion. And it was really through Jackson, a person more relaxed and open than Merrill, that her friendship with the pair began. All three of them were writers, though Merrill then was relatively unknown and neither Jackson nor Lurie had achieved any reputation at all.

Both Merrill and Lurie went on to distinguished careers—Merrill as a poet, and Lurie (though this memoir is not about her own accomplishments) as a novelist, essayist, and respected authority on children's literature.

Despite his talent, Jackson, though, remained unknown, a novelist whose work was constantly rejected. But Jackson as well as Merrill aided Lurie's confidence in herself by praising her own rejected manuscripts. Both were well-off financially—Merrill was the son of the broker whose firm still bears his name, and Jackson was the son of a successful California businessman. They paid the cost of publishing her memoir on V.R. Lang—a book which finally brought her to the attention of an editor for a major publishing firm, resulting in the acceptance of the novel that really inaugurated her career. (Several times in *Familiar Spirits*, Lurie refers to the importance of chance or luck in determining success, and in this memoir of a famous poet and a failed novelist she emphasizes—quite rightly, it would seem—not only Jackson's literary talent, including his eye for the salient detail, but the extent of his contribution to his lover's success.)

Most memoirs—especially those dealing with friends and acquaintances, the names of the more famous ones liberally distributed throughout the text—leave me dissatisfied, either for their flattery or betrayal of friends and family members or for their use of well-known others to flatter the person doing the writing. This one succeeds admirably, as a work of art that happens to be about two friends with tragic flaws. Part of its success I can attribute to an unerring sense of what—in a literary work—constitutes good taste or manners; part of it to an affection and respect for each of her two people that permits—in fact, requires—Lurie to view them as less than infallible, and part from her ability to view herself with some of the same objectivity that permits her a clarity of insight into her dual protagonists.

"Protagonists" is a word usually used for the central characters in fiction and drama. It is applicable here because *Familiar Spirits* reads much like a novel, one in which the narrator plays a minor role as she observes the other characters develop and alter with the passage of time; in particular, it reads like a novel in the tradition of those works of fiction that build upon the myth of Narcissus peering into the mirror of a pool, enamored by his own reflection. In this book, though, the pool is replaced by the spirits conjured up through the use of an Ouija board.

In her foreword to *Familiar Spirits*, Lurie says that "in writing about two friends who played—I think dangerously—with the supernatural, in the shape of an Ouija board, I am in a way playing with my own invisible Ouija board—trying to contact the spirits of the dead. One danger for me, as for them, is that these spirits may speak in my own voice and not their own."

One of the pleasures of reading this memoir comes from the awareness of the teller's shaping hand; but I am convinced by the telling that Lurie, unlike these two friends, has not been deluded. The memoir is as much about Real People as it is about the spirits who become

Imaginary Friends—two phrases I capitalize because they earlier served her as novel titles. The research she accomplished for the second was quite enough to make her wary of any occult truths. In fact, her skepticism about the reality of the evidence provided by the spirits to her friends brought a strain to her relationship with them, as they became ever more engrossed over the years in the Ouija board.

What accounts for a growing obsession with ghostly presences that slowly shut the pair off from the reality of sunlight and daily encounters? It began as play, something pleasurable that reflected their attachment to each other; the existence of spirits from the dead was fun to imagine, a miraculous happening that (as Jackson himself once said) was similar to the miracle of their own youthful love for each other. Jackson became the Hand, the one responsible for communicating with the spirits, Merrill the Scribe of what, through Jackson, the spirits revealed. Lurie gives a number of plausible reasons for the hours, the years, they spent receiving and transcribing the messages. From those messages, Merrill (who had no particular beliefs himself) was able to construct an elaborate metaphysical system that—fanciful though it was—enabled him to create the long and ambitious poem upon which his fame is most firmly based, *The Changing Light at Sandover*. It is possible that Jackson—who in a true sense was the unacknowledged co-author of that poem, his unconscious (and maybe sometimes his conscious) mind responsible for the actual messages—found in the Ouija board an outlet for his own frustrated creative energies. And—especially for Merrill—the spirits had a particularly seductive appeal, for they praised him, their voices telling him of his attractiveness, his importance, his talent. (Early on, it should be noted, the guiding spirit had instructed the Hand and the Scribe to place a mirror behind the Ouija board so that the two of them could see each other and the guiding spirit could see them.) Upon the completion of the poem held to be his masterpiece, Merrill remained so fully under the enchantment of the spirits that he sought out their equivalent in an actual lover who physically resembled his ideal conception of himself and whose words soothed him with constant praise. Jackson had succeeded only too well in communicating with the spirits; Jackson himself—aging and alcoholic—would no longer do.

The ending of this reflective but always enthralling account I can leave out, assuming that the reader will see that its outcome, like all tragedy, is inevitable. I assume further that the reader of this review will want to experience the story for him or herself by reading the entire book, including the questions that Lurie raises at the very end that begin with the crucial query, How much should one risk for art?

James McConkey is the author of several novels and memoirs.

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Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic

Alice Koller

Book Business: Publishing Past, Present, and Future

by Jason Epstein

W. W. Norton & Company, 2000
188 pages, \$21.95

Two of the books on my desk when I cleared a place for *Book Business* turned out to be connected unexpectedly with Jason Epstein's book, as did a certain disaster that had happened a few days earlier in California and that will happen predictably soon in the East and elsewhere.

One of the books is *Scythian Gold: Treasures from Ancient Ukraine*, a Harry Abrams book published in 1999 in association with the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and the San Antonio Museum of Art. *Scythian Gold* is the catalogue of an exhibition held at those museums and at the art museums of Brooklyn and of Los Angeles County the same year, the magnificent objects on display having been loaned by two Ukrainian museums and photographed for inclusion here with the cooperation of the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences. These twenty-five-hundred-year-old objects, mostly jewelry or ornaments attached to clothing, or handleable as bowls, jars, spears, or quivers for bows and arrows, were made by the nomadic Scythians of the Ukraine from gold they mined from rivers or beneath mountains or, rich enough from selling their grain to merchants around the Mediterranean, bought from the Greek artisans from whom they learned the craft of working precious metals and casting in bronze, and then, after using them every day, had them buried with themselves and their horses in burial mounds (kurhans), the richest twenty-one meters high and one hundred meters in diameter. The kurhans and the superb treasure they held have been known about since Herodotus, but they were excavated only in the late eighteenth century. Many of the objects photographed here, dazzling our eyes as they obviously did those of Lynton Gardiner and Bruce White, highly experienced photographers of art objects, were found only in the last few decades. A few hundred persons seem to have collaborated to bring about this exhibition and this book. Dr. Ellen Reeder, Walters Curator of Ancient Art, who edited the volume, contributed her own loving and coolly expert essay to those of her American and Ukrainian colleagues. I'm not (necessarily) reviewing this book, but I am suggesting how difficult it was to put it aside.

The other book is Geoffrey O'Brien's *The Browser's Ecstasy: A Meditation on Reading*, published by Counterpoint last year. (I'm not reviewing O'Brien's book either.) Jason Epstein mentions O'Brien as being among the newer generation of contributors to *The New York Review of Books*, which he founded along with the two people who are still its editors, his former wife Barbara Epstein and Bob Silvers. O'Brien, a poet, is editor in chief of the Library of America series, which Epstein also founded but is now no longer associated with, and to which he devotes more than a dozen pages, a good many of them lambasting current Library policies and those who make them (not mentioning O'Brien, since editors don't make policy).

The connection between Epstein's book and O'Brien's isn't this shared history but rather what each of them tries to imagine about books: Epstein about the future of the codex, O'Brien about the time before there were codexes at all, before there were papyrus scrolls, even before stone, clay, or metal suffered themselves to be incised.

Jason Epstein has held two jobs during his entire life. In 1950, fresh out of Columbia, including a year of graduate school, he began working in the editorial department of Doubleday. His time in graduate school

taught him that being an academic wouldn't immerse him in books as deeply as had his undergraduate education, but that publishing would do that and more: he could share with like-minded persons all the new good books he always found. At Doubleday

I kept the walls of my office bare and my desk drawers empty. I was prepared to flee in an instant without a backward glance. It was this illusion of freedom—this belief that I wasn't really there at all—that made it possible for me to spend a lifetime in the business.

Thus could he understand the passion with which Nabokov, whose editor he was, kept expecting to return to St. Petersburg. That was why

he and Vera never settled down in the United States but lived like cuckoos in the rented houses of Cornell professors on sabbatical leave, ready to fly to his family estates as soon as they were liberated.

In 1958, Epstein joined Random House (which had just bought Knopf), and in 1966 RCA bought Random House. Soon Bantam bought Doubleday. Some years later, the German conglomerate Bertelsmann bought Bantam, and then, three years ago, Random House. So you could say that Epstein, as editorial director at Random House, was, after more than fifty years in publishing, still in touch, even though only in cold corporate touch, with his very first employer. In the musical chairs of recent publishing, that's an astonishing achievement. Epstein was the first recipient of the National Book Award for Distinguished Service to American Letters, which the Association of American Publishers created for him. With inextinguishable admiration, they also gave him the Curtis Benjamin Award for "inventing new kinds of publishing and editing."

Instead of sketching an outline of *Book Business*, I leave to you the pleasure of discovering for yourself this genuinely civilized man who writes as well as many of the authors whose editor he was. Readers will be hard-pressed to find in the pages of his book a list of those authors, nor can a list even be accumulated from his comments on other matters. But that's what being civilized is: modesty and grace accompanying accomplishment.

Two statements on widely separated pages caught my attention. The statements are intimately connected with one another and lie at the very heart of publishing, no matter how distant they may seem from the concerns of many readers of this journal. Bennett Cerf wrote the first after Random House acquired the house of Alfred A. Knopf, saying that both publishers could

shut down for the next twenty years or so and make more money than we're making now, because our backlist is like . . . picking up gold from the sidewalk. (p. 17)

Perhaps you wonder how a business can make money if it closes down at all, let alone for two decades, and perhaps 'backlist' is an unfamiliar term.

The second statement is Epstein's after a few months at Doubleday, when Harry Downey, the production manager,

showed me how to find the point at which a book breaks even by subtracting from net revenues received the costs of paper, printing, binding, royalty, and advertising, together with various overhead allocations, and dividing the remainder into the cost of composition, plates, artwork, and so on. (p. 59)

Book Business was initially a series of three lectures delivered in October 1999 at the New York Public Library at the invitation of its new Center for Scholars and Writers. The

audience that heard these lectures was therefore exceptionally knowledgeable about publishing. When Epstein expanded the lectures into this book, I'm betting that he did almost nothing to make his text less sophisticated than his spoken words. Still, a lot of information about how books are priced is packed into the sentence I quoted, and, betting again, I think many of his listeners must have smiled at how skillfully he did it.

The "break-even point" is the point at which publishers begin to earn their profits, and this formula, if you know how to read it, tells you how the calculation is made. It is how Cerf's backlist could have enabled two closed publishing houses to pick gold up from the sidewalk (or, as I say it: "Publishers don't print books: they print money."). There isn't space enough in this journal to explain how the formula leads publishers to their gold-mines, but 'net revenues' is a key phrase. It means: the amount bookstores pay publishers for a book after deducting an average discount of 42 percent from its cover price. 'Received' added to the phrase lets publishers delay (the clause is in every publishing contract) sending royalties on to authors for a couple of years.

Actually, the word 'net' itself is key. Authors should always see it as though it were printed in 72-point red capital letters. It marks the dividing line between authors and publishers, and authors are always on the wrong side of it. Hold on to your purse whenever a publisher says 'net' to you.

What does that mean? Well, notice first that the formula mentions royalties in the same breath with paper and printing. Most authors know that their royalties are based in some way on how much a buyer pays for the author's book. But few authors know the difference between royalties that are based on a percentage of net profits and those that are based on a percentage of cover price. If your book sells 25,000 copies with a cover price of \$20, you would lose \$22,500 if your royalties were based on net profits (rather than cover price) at the percentages that publishers are once again trying to offer authors in book contracts. I say "once again" because that way of paying royalties, which used to be called 'share-profits', was abandoned almost a century ago in favor of a stepped-up series of percentages of the cover price. In this fairer way of paying royalties, the standard formula is: 10 percent of the cover price for the first 10,000 copies sold, 12.5 percent for the next 5,000 copies, and 15 percent for all copies thereafter. Best-selling authors can get higher percentages, not only for hardcover rights (which is what I've been talking about so far) but for every other kind of publication right that can be exploited.

In the share-profit or net-profit method, royalties are calculated on how much money is left from sales of a book after publishers pay all their expenses. What's left from sales after expenses are deducted are profits: this is what publishers and authors share. Printers/publishers used to say to authors: "We're in business together. You supply the manuscript. I supply the printing, paper, binding, (which all has to be done in offices where I pay rent, heat, light, salaries of my employees, including salespeople and certainly me), advertising, and a one-time charge for the cost of composition, plates, artwork, and so on. I have to pay for all that from money that I receive from sales—which of course is already less the 42 percent discount I have to give booksellers so that they can buy the book at a good enough price to make a profit from it. Once I pay for these things, THEN you and I will share the profits." And authors replied, "Whatever you say."

So it wasn't that the newer method came into being because authors understood the difference between the two bases for paying royalties, combined the strengths of their reputations, fought for the better deal, and won. Some authors, too few, did this a few times,

but they couldn't hold out long enough. Dickens and Twain, exceptions to whole collections of rules, fought by becoming their own publishers. But most authors won't/don't do such things.

What happened, rather, was that late in the nineteenth century, in England, a new category of participant-agents entered the relationship that had existed for nearly four centuries between author and publisher alone—or between author and printer, who used to be the only "publishers" there were. Agents, seeing how ignorant authors were of their own best interests, explained to publishers what only authors seem not to know: that without authors there is nothing for publishers to publish. Publishers, recognizing an equal opponent when they saw one, allowed as how they'd rather have 40 percent of something than zero percent of nothing, and thus were born the standard royalty rates that have existed unchanged until as short a time ago as the past half-dozen years.

Agents are now in charge of publishing. In the current state of things, agents earn so much money from best-selling authors that they can choose which authors they want to represent. Without an agent today, authors who aren't already well known are in big trouble.

Yet, as unaware of contemporary events as they are of the entire history of their profession, authors seem to want only one thing: to get their work published. Whether they're paid for their work, whether they're even paid fairly for their work, seems to be the last thing in the world that interests them. Everybody in publishing except authors knows that about authors. And now that most authors are agentless, publishers, who still need books to publish, are offering book contracts to authors with royalties payable as a percentage of net profits. But that's not all. Knowing that authors are wilfully ignorant of most things about publishing, publishers are including clauses in those book contracts that capture electronic publishing rights for the indeterminate future "for technologies not yet devised," at royalties "to be determined when the work is published" or so pitifully meager that even net profits seem handsome.

It will not surprise the reader who has come with me this far to learn that the push to publish electronically rests on an assumption that few people who are in the thick of it are even troubling to conceal: that it is not necessary to pay royalties to authors at all. Although some responsible persons in scholarly publishing realize their obligation to pay royalties, scholars elsewhere are already being asked to give up their right to royalties "for the greater good of their fields" in exchange for electronic publication of work that, in the sorry state of university presses, might not otherwise be published. An acquaintance who occupies a very high position in the world of scholarship told me that he sees no reason why professors should be paid for the books they write. "Not be paid for their work?" I asked in amazement. "They are paid," he answered. "Publication is part of what they're paid for as professors. It adds to the prestige of the positions they occupy. Their colleagues praise and honor them." Later the same day, and quite by accident because of something else I was doing, I found the following statement in J.K. Lasser's *Your Income Tax 2000*, and sent it on to the man:

Royalties from writing books are self-employment income to a writer. Royalties on books by a professor employed by a university may also be self-employment income despite employment as a professor.

He immediately backed down. He hadn't really meant that they shouldn't be paid, he said, but only that they probably wouldn't earn much from royalties.

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Castrato Tenoros

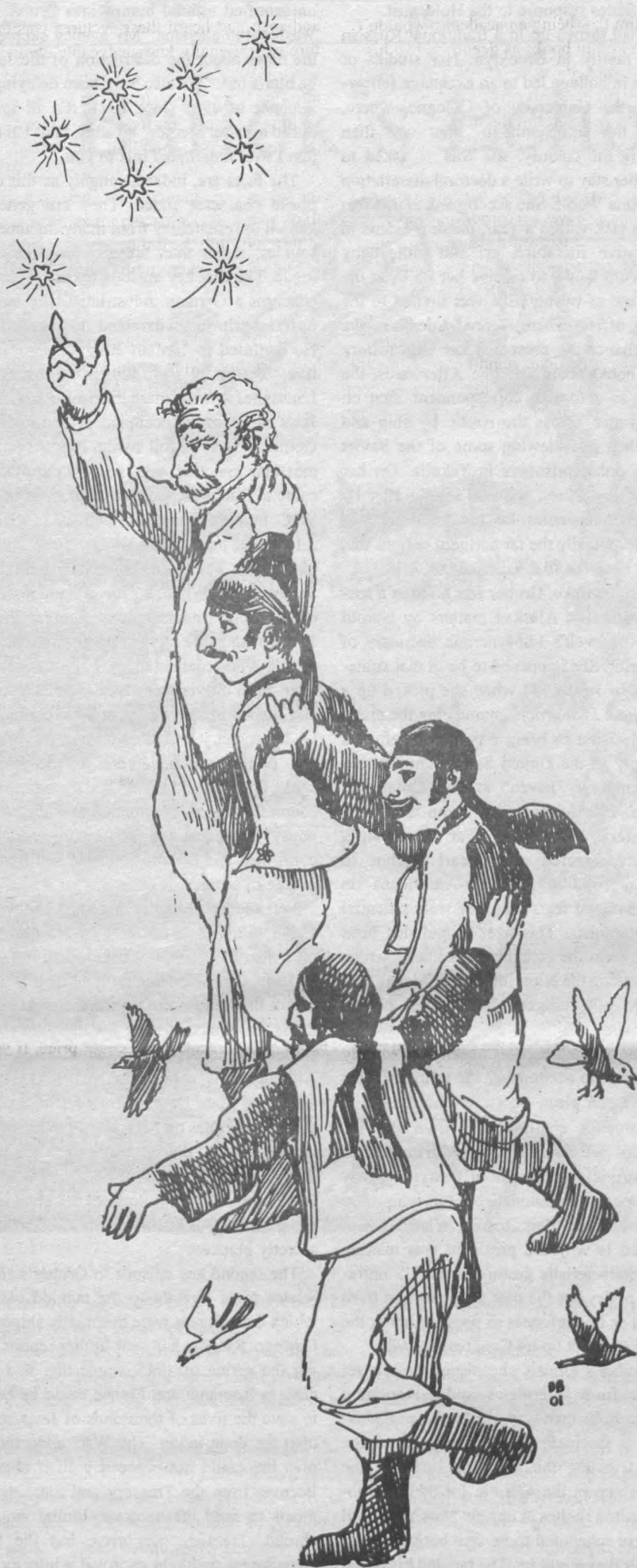
Gail Holst-Warhaft

Last month a series of articles appeared in the Canadian press exposing an elaborate literary hoax that had fooled many of Canada's leading critics and writers and some of Greece's too. In October 1999, *Books in Canada* had run an article about a Greek seaman poet named Andreas Karavis, whose *Saracen Island* had been translated into English by well-known Canadian poet, David Solway. By the time suspicions were aroused and Solway confessed to having invented Karavis as an alter ego, the new poet had been touted as a possible Nobel Prize candidate, a retired Orthodox priest remembered meeting him on an island, and a youthful photograph of the poet had appeared in the Greek press. Solway, who has, in fact, lived on various Greek islands and feels passionately about the country, admits he played a naughty trick on the Canadian literary establishment, but claims his fellow countrymen were suffering from a bad case of "Atwoodism" which needed a breath of invigorating Aegean air. He also felt that, as a poet, he had reached some sort of impasse and needed a new voice to write in.

I found Solway's deception endearing and perfectly understandable. Living in Quebec, he was running short of inspiration, the sort of everyday poetic magic that once permeated the Greek air and still finds its way occasionally through the smog of Athens. I wonder, sometimes, if I haven't invented an alter ego myself—an ingenue musician who found herself playing in Greek bands. Even the photographs I saved sometimes look as phony as the picture Solway took of his dentist wearing a Greek captain's hat which he attached to his "translations." There is one concert, though, that I have preserved on an audio cassette. It involved no Greek musicians and was probably one of the most unusual concerts ever staged in Athens.

Having played with Theodorakis and written a book about *rembetika*, Greece's urban blues, I had returned to my home in Australia in 1976, to pack up all my possessions, including my harpsichord, for a long stay in Greece where I planned to write a new book about the music of Theodorakis. In the midst of making these arrangements, I received a letter from a friend in Paris. Hartley Newnham was Australia's leading counter-tenor, a musician I greatly admired, and he had just sung in a production of Monteverdi's *Orpheo* in Vienna. Would I be interested in accompanying him in a concert in Athens? He thought the Australian government would agree to sponsor the concert and we could do a short program of Renaissance music. His pianist friend Nicholas Roudey also planned to come to Athens to accompany him in some modern European music.

I wrote back to say it was a wonderful idea. There was a small problem; I was, once again, without a harpsichord. Mine was on the high seas, and I knew no one in Athens who was likely to have one. I was also rather daunted by the idea of accompanying a musician I felt was in another class from myself. Hartley informed the Australian Embassy in Athens we would do the concert and told them to help me find a harpsichord. After a few telephone calls, someone remembered attending a concert at the Goethe Institute in Kolonaki, a posh district in Athens, where there was a harpsichord. I called the Goethe Institute whose staff were not sure if there was such an instrument in the building but finally located it in the basement. It was a terrible instrument: I knew because I had once owned one—a double-manual Neupert of the sort that helped give "Early Music" a bad name. Nevertheless it was agreed that I could have it for the concert, but only for that day. The Goethe Institute would have it tuned and brought to the British Council's headquarters in Kolonaki Square where the concert was to be



Dan Burgevin

held. That meant we had to find a piano to rehearse on until then.

Hartley arrived two weeks before the concert, looking, as usual, like an ageless angel. His blond hair was a mass of curls, his face lit up with delight at everything he saw in Greece, and he was perfectly sure the concert would be a success. I had tracked down a piano in the house of an Athenian architect and his German wife, and they graciously allowed us to practice on it for several hours each afternoon. Hartley had chosen an astonishing program of Frescobaldi, Purcell, Caccini, Hugo Wolf, John Cage and Michael Tippett. He also decided he would like to learn some songs by Mikis Theodorakis. Did I have any suggestions? Of course I did. We would do one of the marvellous settings of Garcia Lorca translated by Odysseus Elytis, a song from George Seferis's *Mythistorema*, and "On These Marbles" from the *Couplets* by Yannis Ritsos.

Several days before the concert there was a press conference. Such a concert was a rare

event in Athens. We had no idea then just how rare. The first question Hartley was asked was what a counter tenor was and whether it was the same as a castrato. The Greeks were familiar with the tradition of castrati in the Ottoman period, some of whom were extraordinary singers. Hartley answered, in his surprisingly deep baritone voice, that not only was he not a castrato, but that unlike some counter tenors, he did not have a naturally high singing voice; he had simply discovered he could throw it into falsetto quite easily and that his high register was more interesting than his low. His answer seemed to disappoint the reporters who had come because of the novelty of the event and wanted something more exciting to write about than a man with a high voice. One reporter could not resist the temptation of a sensational article. He announced in his paper, that there would be a concert by a "castrato tenoros" at the British Council on January 25th.

The article shocked Hartley and filled the British Council auditorium to overflowing. Pianist Nicholas Routley, a superb musician

who had accompanied Hartley in dozens of concerts, arrived from England the day before, making me still more nervous about my inadequacies at the keyboard. The Neupert had been delivered and tuned and stood beside the grand piano, but I had barely managed to touch it before the audience began to trickle in. We had agreed to end the program with Theodorakis, and I decided to play the last piece, the rousing neo-rebetic "On These Marbles," on the piano.

I managed not to disgrace myself in the Purcell and, by the time we reached the florid Frescobaldi, I was able to actually listen to Hartley's pure but surprisingly rich textured voice and remember how it had moved me the first time I had heard him sing in a tiny art gallery in Sydney. Nicholas moved to the piano and together they performed a group of Hugo Wolf's songs—an amazing feat for a counter tenor. Then came Cage's *Solo for Voice II* which appeared to make the Greek audience uncomfortable, followed by Tippett's *Three Songs for Ariel*. Before the Theodorakis, we did Dowland's glorious "I Saw my Lady Weep" and "Sweet Stay Awhile," and I began to positively enjoy myself. There was a collective gasp from the audience as Hartley began to sing in Greek, and the applause after the first two songs was thunderous. Then Hartley made an announcement in English which he asked me to translate: "This last song is to establish that I am not a 'castrato tenoros.'" Again there were gasps from the audience, at least half of whom must have thought they were spending the evening with a relic from the Ottoman era. As I switched to the piano and thumped out the 9/8 of a *zembekiko*, Hartley dropped his voice an octave and a half and sang the lyrics which had been sent by one of Greece's most celebrated artists to another during the last years of the military dictatorship. Exiled on the island of Samos, poet Yannis Ritsos had written a series of short poems he called *Eighteen Songs for the Bitter Homeland* and sent them directly to Theodorakis, exiled in Paris:

*On these marbles evil rust can take no hold
nor on the chains of the Greeks nor the
wind's foot*

*Here the light, here the shore—gold, azure
tongues—on the rocks, the deer chip a w a y,
they eat iron.*

Before he had finished the first line there was a delighted burst of laughter from the audience and, by the end, Hartley had not only won back his damaged reputation but the audience's hearts. My foreign and Greek friends were enchanted, not only by the music, but by the Jamaican bartender, hired for the occasion by the embassy, who poured them serious quantities of the hard liquor they could not afford in those days in Athens.

Before Hartley left Athens, the owners of the piano, who had become our friends, suggested we all go out to a Cretan tavern together. I loved Cretan music and dance and knew that Hartley would enjoy it too, so we all set off one night with a group of our hosts' friends. I found myself sitting next to a Greek man who owned a grocery shop and seemed to know a lot about Greek music. We both watched and listened intently as the lyra and the laouto, the pair of instruments that always accompany Cretan music, played, and a line of Greek men danced. The lyra is not, as the name suggests, a plucked instrument, but a small viol which is bowed upright, balanced on one knee. Curiously, the strings are stopped with the backs of the finger-nails, and a player who performs regularly develops black grooves on his nails as a result. The laouto is exactly what you might expect: a folk lute, except that it is rarely used to play a melodic line. Instead it acts as a percussive base to the lyra. Cretan dancing is, with the possible exception of Pontian dancing, the most dramatic in the Greek folk repertoire. The drama is heightened by the traditional

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Too Little, Too Late

Harvey Fireside

The story of Ruth Gruber occupied four hours of a CBS docudrama, "Haven," on February 11 and 14. The script was based on two of her books, *Ahead of Time: My Early Years as a Foreign Correspondent* (Wynwood Press, 1991) and *Haven: The Unknown Story of 1,000 World War II Refugees* (Coward-McCann, 1983). The former book is a memoir of Ms. Gruber's student days during the final Weimar and early Hitler years in Germany, followed by feature assignments from the New York Herald Tribune in Stalin's Russia and the Arctic. The latter picks up the Gruber story about ten years later, in 1944, when Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes assigned her to escort 982 "displaced persons" from camps in liberated Italy to temporary refuge in a former army camp at Oswego, New York. The wartime saga is the centerpiece of the series, filmed in color, with flashbacks in black and white to fill in memories of the characters from their experiences under the Nazis.

Natasha Richardson makes the Brooklyn-born Gruber into a believable, though bigger-than-life, figure. The real person that emerges from her books is not as physically or psychologically imposing as her cinematic persona. She did indeed surmount a series of bureaucratic hurdles on behalf of her refugee charges, but less by bravado than as a highly intelligent woman, barely thirty years old, who had a knack for communicating with people from all walks of life. Instead of focusing on her political savvy and genius for improvisation, the TV drama jumps from one dramatic confrontation to another. The breathless pace distorts Gruber's account of everyday events in the books, as an accidental eyewitness and investigative reporter of the

United States response to the Holocaust.

She had grown up in a traditional Russian Jewish family in Brooklyn. Her studies of German in college led to an exchange fellowship to the University of Cologne, where, despite the anti-Semitism that was then sweeping the country, she was asked to extend her stay to write a doctoral dissertation on Virginia Woolf. She accomplished this formidable task within a year, passing exams in comparative literature, art and philosophy magna cum laude, to receive her Ph.D. at the record age of twenty. She was invited to the mayor's office, where Konrad Adenauer, the future chancellor, presented her with history and art books about Cologne. Afterwards, she worked as a foreign correspondent, first on two voyages across the Arctic by ship and plane, then interviewing some of the Soviet Union's gulag prisoners in Yakutia. On her return to the States, she was sought after by Washington agencies for her knowledge of Russia, especially the far northern regions that she had been the first American to visit.

Through a fluke, Gruber was hired as a special assistant on Alaskan matters by Harold Ickes, Roosevelt's idiosyncratic Secretary of the Interior. She happened to be in that strategic spot in June 1944 when she picked up a *Washington Post* article announcing the president's decision to bring a thousand refugees from Italy to the United States. They would find "temporary haven" at Fort Ontario in Oswego. This former army camp was to be administered by the War Relocation Authority, created after Pearl Harbor to imprison 100,000 Japanese-Americans on unsubstantiated fears that they were potential fifth columnists. This agency had just been transferred to the Interior Department, which was releasing the Nisei internees and was now ready to put refugees from Hitler behind barbed wire.

Gruber persuaded Ickes to send her to Italy as his agent to accompany the refugees. This much we can glean—between the usual diet and cosmetics commercials—from the TV miniseries. We can also watch with moist eyes as the suspicious citizens of Oswego slowly warm up to the traumatized survivors who stumbled into their town. What is not explained is why the president was making this uncharacteristic gesture, when US immigration policy for the past six years had been to admit as few refugees as possible under the quota system set up by Congress in 1923.

In Gruber's *Haven*, she pieces the answer together from interviews and government archives. In its own way, the bureaucratic history is as fascinating as the voyage of the Henry Gibbins, the ship that brought the refugees across the Atlantic for their temporary wartime shelter in upstate New York until they were scheduled to be sent back "home," wherever that might be. The tangled historical plot behind this operation is merely touched on in one of the final TV episodes, when an

unidentified official bumps into Gruber on a Washington elevator. "My agency suppressed the news about the destruction of the Jews," he blurts out. "We also have been delaying the issuance of visas since 1941. It's all spelled out in a secret memo," he adds, "but I'll deny that I ever mentioned this to you."

The facts are, indeed, roughly as this composite character stated. They are generally known to researchers from many documented sources, rather than through imaginary dialogue. The first key episode retold by Gruber concerns a German industrialist who made a business trip to Switzerland in August 1942. He confided to Gerhart Riegner, representative of the World Jewish Congress in Lausanne, that the mass extermination of "all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany" was in full swing. Riegner had the message encoded and sent via diplomatic cable to Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the WJC in New York, as well as to Sydney Silverman, head of the WJC's British section in London. The State Department intercepted the cable to Wise as "unsubstantiated," on orders from Undersecretary Sumner Welles. The British cable had gotten through, however, and Wise received the gist of it three weeks later from Silverman. Wise was devastated and rushed to see Welles in Washington. The Undersecretary prevailed on him to withhold any public announcement of the Riegner cable, until it could be verified by independent sources. Only three months later did Welles notify Wise that the information had been confirmed and he was now released from his pledge of secrecy.

Yet another Riegner message, known as Cable 482, was transmitted by US diplomats on January 21, 1943. It listed specific figures of Jews, who were being killed then at a rate of six thousand a day in Poland, while hundreds of thousands of others were being shipped to concentration camps in the East. Although this cable was relayed to Rabbi Wise, the State Department sent instructions signed by Welles on February 10 to its officers in Switzerland, that no further private cables like Riegner's were to be transmitted. Henceforth this communications channel on the specific steps leading to the Holocaust was secretly blocked.

The second key episode in Gruber's *Haven* relates more directly to the tangled plan by which the refugees were eventually shipped to Oswego. Riegner had sent further reports during the spring of 1943, suggesting that officials in Romania and France could be bribed to save the lives of thousands of Jews scheduled for deportation. The WJC endorsed the plan but could not proceed until it obtained licenses from the Treasury and State departments to send the necessary dollar amounts abroad. Treasury concurred, but the State Department withheld approval while six crucial months passed. Finally, Treasury Secretary Robert Morgenthau ordered Josiah E. DuBois, Jr., his assistant general counsel, to "investigate the whole thing."

DuBois followed the trail that led to a confidential State Department memo concerning the February 10 instructions to disrupt further cable traffic from Riegner. At the risk of jeopardizing his job, Donald Hiss, head of the Foreign Funds Control office at the State Department, showed DuBois the latest Riegner cable as well as the Department's internal memo to suppress such messages. DuBois was not allowed to copy these documents but Hiss let him take notes. He later incorporated them into a memo describing the State Department's obstruction and cover-up. It was titled, "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews," dated January 13, 1944.

DuBois charged that State Department officials had:

not only failed to use the Governmental machinery at their disposal to rescue Jews from Hitler, but have even gone so far as to prevent the rescue of these Jews...

They not only have failed to facilitate the obtaining of information concerning Hitler's plans to exterminate the Jews of Europe but in their official capacity have gone so far as to surreptitiously attempt to stop the obtaining of [such] information...

They have tried to cover up their guilt by (a) concealment and misrepresentation; (b) the giving of false and misleading explanations for their failures to act and their attempts to prevent action; and (c) the issuance of false and misleading statements concerning the "action" which they have taken to date.

DuBois identified Breckinridge Long, Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the Visa Division, as the ringleader of this conspiracy. He cited Congressman Emanuel Celler, of Brooklyn, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, who named Long "the least sympathetic to refugees in all the State Department. I attribute to him the tragic bottleneck in the granting of visas...It takes months and months to grant a visa, and then it usually applies to a corpse." Celler further accused Long of inflating the number of 500,000 Jewish refugees admitted to the United States that he had given to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. To the contrary, Celler said, the majority of these immigrants were not Jews but "ordinary quota immigrants coming in from all countries." Instead of filling the annual quota of 150,000 immigrants, "during the last fiscal year only 23,725 came as immigrants. Of these, only 4,705 were Jews fleeing Nazi persecution."

Morgenthau was deeply angered by what he learned from the DuBois report. He changed its title to "Personal Report to the President" and pared its eighteen pages to nine. Armed with this document, he went to see President Roosevelt on Sunday morning, January 16, 1944. According to Gruber, he told the president that if these cables became public "the whole world would know of the anti-Semitism in his State Department." The scandal, he said, "could reach into the White House itself." Though Gruber does not spell it out, the implication is clearly that FDR was now in a bind. It must have been apparent to Morgenthau that the president had tolerated, if not ordered, the State Department's suppression of news about Hitler's genocide of the Jews.

It has been evident to me while reading Breckinridge Long's papers at the Library of Congress that Long had close, longtime ties to Roosevelt to whom he had outlined his actions "tightening up on immigrants" at the White House on October 3, 1940, leaving with the assurance that the president "was 100% in accord with my ideas." (See "Down by Law," *The Bookpress*, Oct. 2000.) By May 14, 1943, Long grudgingly confided to his diary, "It may, for present purposes, be accepted as more than Jewish propaganda that a large number of Jews have been killed." If you subtract the estimated two million victims, Long calculated, you were left with 4,314,136 potential refugees. The United States had already taken the biggest share, which he rounds off to 300,000 "yet this country appears to be in the isolated position of not trying to get relieved of those it has taken." Long embodied the anti-refugee attitudes of senior State Department officials, trying to keep the number of immigrants as low as possible.

In any case, six days after his session with Morgenthau, Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board, comprising the Secretaries of State, Treasury and War. Of the three, only Morgenthau had any interest in rescuing Jews, but he managed to have one of his division chiefs, a young attorney named John Pehle, made executive director of the WRB. This agency could now serve as a vehicle to float new proposals without running into the veto powers of Breckinridge Long. It provided

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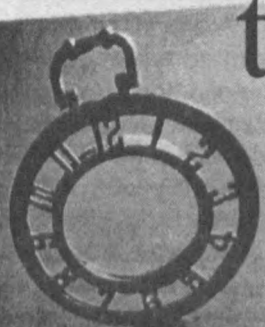
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Bartók's Echo

Kevin Macneil Brown

The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók first visited the United States in 1927-28. He visited again in 1940, initially for one month in the spring, then later for what became a permanent stay. Bartók died in 1945 in New York City.

I am a maker of sounds, but lately those sounds have gone silent for me, and I am haunted only by images. The clearest of those images is before my eyes now, outside the open window: in the late summer green of this place called Vermont, in America, one tree has begun to turn red beneath blue sky, under shining sun. Here, the air is hot and dry by day, clear and chill at night. In the mornings, a damp, cold fog rises up from the little river lined with railroad tracks in the valley below. By noon, the fog lifts, and I can see far beyond this strange tree, to lines of distant mountains. Blue-grey and stony, they rise above the green slopes where the sun sets.

The other images are fading quickly, which is a fine thing for that of the view from the ship that brought me here. I do not wish to always remember that grey Atlantic, Godless, cold and endless, that stretched before me as I stood on the deck. Unfortunately, I suspect that I will always be remembered that way, as I was photographed, gazing out across the rails of the ship—a man leaving his home in fear, pride, anger, sorrow, driven away by the realities of a barbarian invasion. As we turned toward the fortieth year of our century, a mechanical horror descended upon my country and the rest of Europe; inhuman men destroyed humanity with hatred and terror.

Ah, but the image of home—not cold, not grey, not hard and stony, but my sweet, sweet Hungary! Flowers, wet earth, small cobbled streets rich with people, songs, the smells of cooking...my heart breaks to think of it on this hot day of silent trees. At home, there were birds singing in every tree. Here in Vermont, in August, there is only the harshness of crows across the sky. No wonder I feel this terrible silence from inside.

Perhaps I mentioned that I am a man of music. In my youth, I studied the great composers of our European music, and mastered the masters, if I dare say so myself. After this, my ears opened to the folk songs and dances of my homeland. I have such sweet memories of my youthful wanderings, alone or with my dear friend Kodaly, sleeping in the country, collecting songs like a bird watcher collects glimpses. Such hard work, with such flashes of joy! Later, I did the same in northern Africa. My ears opened to a universe of sound—all music became like the physicist's atoms of energy and meaning. Every atom



Allison Dailey

vibrated in my whole being. I cannot bear to think that all this can be reduced to the ashes of human beings destroyed in war, or, for that matter, to the view of a bare granite mountain top visited only by the cackling shadows of crows.

Perhaps it is my constant tiredness that brings these thoughts—my exhausted, fevered energy as I walk the country roads here, or pace the dark wood rooms of gracious Agathe's cool, comfortable summer home. My dear Ditta does all she can to lift my spirits: the walks, picnics, reading out loud in the evenings. Thanks to her I can still laugh, still smile. But, secretly, I am crushed by this silence. It is a silence not of the world, but of myself. Though I wander the hills each day, I fear I am drying up like those red leaves on

the tree, as if the blood of my heart is showing on the outside.

But today, something strange and wonderful happened, and I write this in the hope that I can shed light on this dark thing inside me, this shadow that I fear grows larger each day.

This morning, after the usual fog had lifted and we had breakfasted, I played piano (working through some Bach) then set out to catalog some pieces from my huge trunk of manuscripts—local songs, brought from home. There are so many regional styles, and my intent is to organize and sort them. It is, of course, a large task, one that makes me tired just to think about. As I sat at the rough-hewn, crowded table that serves as my desk here, I heard Ditta and Agathe's voices outside, laughing like schoolgirls.

"Bartók Béla!" Ditta called, "Come out here. There is something we must show you!" I was only too glad to be interrupted, and went outside to join them. Still giggling, in a chaos of English and Hungarian, they led me out into a sun so bright it hurt my eyes. It took me a brief while to figure out that it was a sound they wanted me to hear that was causing all the excitement. We walked a short way up the steep dirt road above Agathe's house to a small, overgrown clearing by the side of the road. In the clearing stood an old wooden barn, broken down, letting blue sky show through where the boards were missing. As we approached it, Ditta clapped and shouted; I heard a quite striking echo—first, distinctly from the barn's side, then two more repeats, softer and more distant, from the hills around us.

"Béla," said Ditta, breaking into my concentration of listening, "Isn't it a lovely echo? Like the one at home in Tihany..." In a flash, I remembered a place in Hungary: hillside, stream and cataract. With the memory came an echo of laughter from years ago. "I must listen again. It does not seem to be as strong an echo as the one in Tihany," I said, and began to clap and shout myself. I listened for the sound's return, shouted again, stopped to listen. Then, the strange thing happened. I stopped listening and the words flew out of me, all in Hungarian: "Tree, rock, stone, sound, music, echo, song, bird, Ditta, Bartók Béla, echo, Tihany, Tihany!" I shouted loudly and for a long time, stopped as the circling echo spun around my head and Ditta and Agathe stood silently watching me. It was like an exertion, this shouting. My shirt was damp with perspiration, and I was a little out of breath.

The three of us walked down the hill together, and I was grateful for the help of gravity to bring me back to the house. To Ditta and Agathe I said, "It is not as good... not as good an echo as the one in Tihany at all." But this afternoon, as I sit at my table and work, that echo crowds out the rote of black notes on the musical staves and begins to replace the grey ocean, even the brittle red leaves of the tree outside my window. The scientists say an atom never stops moving. In autumn, when all the leaves have fallen from the trees and have made a thin mulch on this hard land, I should like to imagine that restless echo under it all, waiting to be heard.

Kevin Macneil Brown is, in no particular order: a composer, writer, record store manager, father, husband and long distance runner. His work explores landscape and memory, and the mysterious connections between the past and the present. He lives in Montpelier, Vermont.

The Pear Considered

Chris Metzger

The first time I saw a pear in all its glory was on a school trip to the Cleveland Art Museum. In those old days, people who came to Cleveland's rescue proudly referenced the Cleveland Symphony (which rarely appeared in Cleveland) and the Cleveland Art Museum. Nowadays, they brag about the Rock n' Roll museum, too. But I digress. The point is the first time I ever saw a whole pear was when I saw a painting of one. I was nine or ten, who knows? Whatever age it is when they air the kids out by taking them to museums and concerts.

It was a Vermeer pear. There was this woman wearing a doily around her neck. She was staring out of the canvas, looking right at me. She had a blank, passive expression on her face; but her eyes were alive, you could see that. It is that trick artists do with a speck of white next to the pupil. She saw me and was not in the least bit surprised I was there. It was as if she were expecting me. In her left hand she held a little knife. In her right hand was a small dish holding a whole, unskinned red and green pear. Though I had never seen one before, I knew exactly what it was. That is when I decided I had to get out of Cleveland. No more canned and little square pieces of the

real thing for me.

Years later, I learned most of the Vermeers hanging in American museums are fakes, crafted by the famous Dutch forger who had been falsely accused of being a Nazi collaborator, but who was actually the opposite. I suspect my pear lady was one of the forgeries. The Board at the museum does not really want to look into this mess and I don't blame them.

But back to the topic at hand.

Did you know in the dictionary the first definition of the word PEAR refers to the tree? "A widely cultivated tree," it says. The item you eat from time to time is the fruit of the pear, also named "pear" (second meaning): It

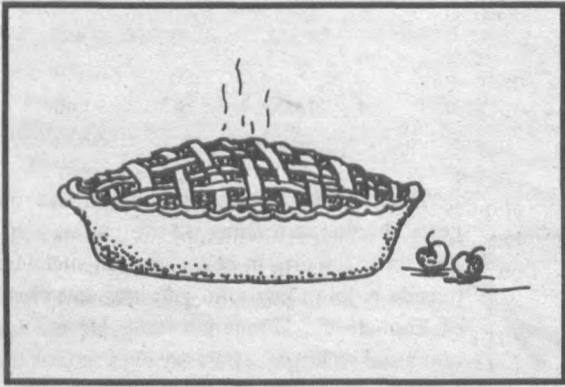
is said if you learn something each day you are getting ahead of the game.

Now, You can relax for the rest of the day.

I grew up in a suburb in the Midwest. There was money there. I'm not going to deny that, why should I? I'm not ashamed of circumstances over which I had no control. But enough of me. The point I'm getting to is back where I grew up the only pear I ever saw was from a can. I generally saw one or two cut halves of a pear doing a dead man's float in a clear, thick, syrupy sauce. This would have been the dessert for Wednesday lunch at

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Edible Haiku



candy canes
on the office tree,
the boss crooks a finger
—John Stevenson

restaurant lunch
everyone with a partner
me with my haiku
—Michael Ketchek

first day of fast:
oh, the beautiful
winter fruit
—Patricia Kelly

passing the jug
the warmth
of my hands
—Jim Kacian

Oreo cookie
split in half—
which side first?
—Eve Kaplan

Thanksgiving long gone—
in my dreams
still peeling potatoes
—Susan Weitz

here I am
stirring a pot of chili
snow falling
—Jay Cox

two spoons clank
over a banana split
lovers' quarrel
—Mary Russo Demetrick

feed the chickens
stack wood
a cup of coffee with cream
—Liz Stark

the Sushi-makers:
are they as lonely
as they look?
—Cory Green



Sunday dinner
he hides a Brussels sprout
under chicken bones
—Ferris Gilli

steering through
the intersection avoiding
a bagel
—Tom Clausen

at the roadside stand
choosing elderberry pie
for the sound of it
—Irene Zahava

as we eat
the waiter's cologne
fills the water glasses
—Kathleen Thompson

warm bread, apple butter
third grade
running home
—Ebby Malmgren

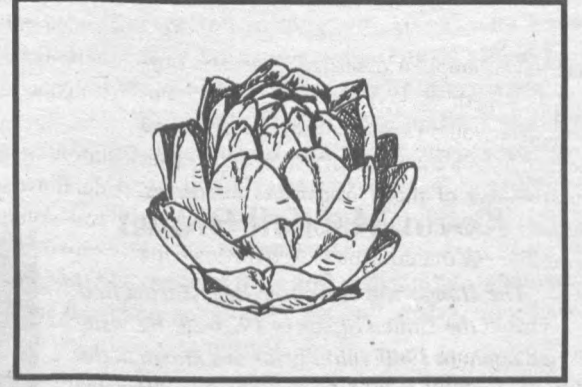
a pint of black beer
embraced
between two Irish hands
—Chris Bankert

ripe strawberries
red jewels in white yogurt—
how shall I share them?
—Ellen Richards

a blue bottle fly
in new spring light
finishes crumbs
—Joan Payne Kincaid

blueberries
stare up from the dish
snake eyes
—Naomi Strichartz

research greenhouse . . .
tomato plants
still smell like tomato plants!
—Kathy Kramer



Grandpa woke up
age three eve of nineteen-hundred
to steak juice and bread
—Tina Wright

armored leaves
give way to artichoke's
soft heart
—Debbie Allen

outside the window
marshmallows of snow
inside: hot chocolate
—Louise Budde DeLaurentis

young and loose
she cooked
her goose
—Joyce Holmes McAllister

soup, chow mein, ice cream
all for 35 cents—
year: 1941
—Mort Levinson

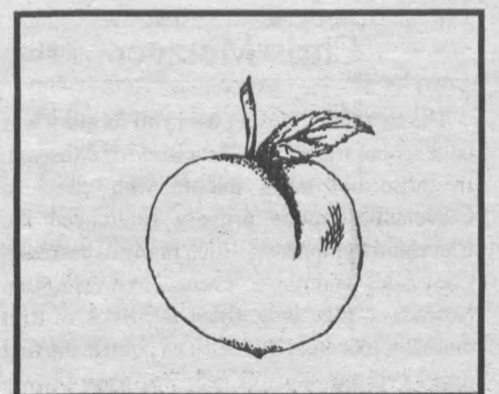
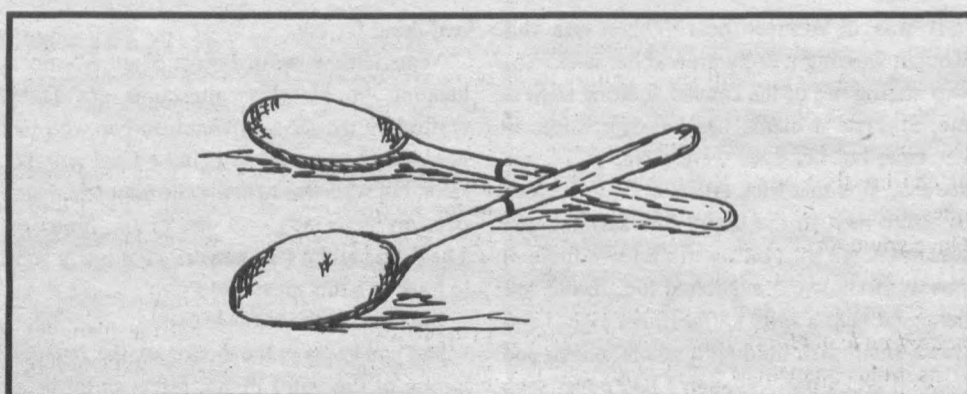
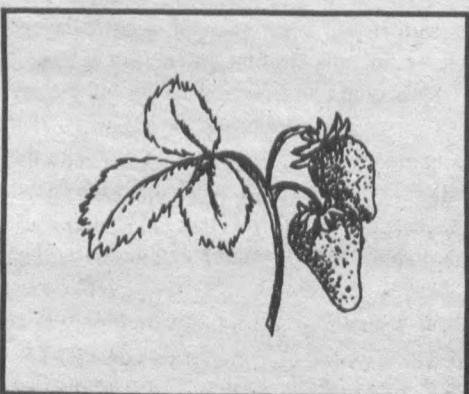
hummingbird hovers
outside the window—
we sit drinking sweet tea
—Michele Bazan Reed

second honeymoon—
feeding each other nibbles
of ripe persimmon
—Claire Gallagher

apple picking
we polish off a few
on the way home
—Yvonne Hardenbrook

soon
we will be eating cherries
together
—Ann Brewster

winter solitude
in a world of one color
the taste of peaches
—Wendy Smith



Composing Biography

Kiko Nobusawa

I shall not attempt to describe Sebastian's boyhood with anything like the methodical continuity which I would have normally achieved had Sebastian been a character of fiction... the result would be one of those 'biographies romancées' which are by far the worst kind of literature yet invented. So let the door be closed leaving but a thin line of taut light underneath.

A responsible biographer's credo? No, a fictitious narrator's howlingly disingenuous disclaimer, for he then continues on to "let that lamp go out too in the neighboring room where Sebastian has gone to bed," and on to "let the beautiful olivaceous house on the Neva embankment fade out gradually in the gray-blue frosty night, with gently falling snowflakes lingering in the moon-white blaze of the tall street lamp," and on even further. The result is a *biographie méta-romancée*: Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*.

It is, of course, that very light under the closed door which drives biographers, romancées or non, and magnetizes readers, whether academically or voyeuristically-inclined (the former rarely excludes the latter). We want to know what human existence was like for exceptional people, and how extraordinary minds worked under what kinds of conditions. Was Sebastian Knight really asleep behind that door, and if so, what was he dreaming? Or was he "mouse-quiet" and "lying in bed, wide awake, staring into the darkness," thinking about what? As the biographer Richard Holmes notes in *Sidetracks*, his recently-published second collection of essays (Pantheon, 2000), biography should "bring the inner life of a human being signifi-

cantly closer to our own experience of it." It is not completely clear whether Holmes means that biography should elicit empathy—by bringing the subject's life closer to our own experience (of life)—or that it should foster a holistic appreciation—connecting the subject's personality with his or her legacy as we know it. Holmes probably means both, as demonstrated by the fine balancing act of his two-volume biography of Coleridge.

In a *New York Review of Books* article about Marie Antoinette biographies ("A Royal Mystery", 2/8/01), P. N. Furbank discusses how "a 'historical biography' has more in common with a novel than with history. It tends, like the novel, to appeal to the standards of private ethics and the psychology of private life; and this, which makes admirable sense in a novel... produces an effect of unreality in a... biography." In other words, tipping the scale too far in the "empathy" direction leads to the aforementioned *biographie romancée*. But the other extreme, a dry-as-sawdust accounting of dates and documents, despite the grudging inclusion of glossy illustrations, is more catalogue than book, of little interest to readers outside scholarly professionals. Holmes' success lies in his conviction that biography "is still largely unhampered by critical theory, still flourishing outside the groves of academe, still maverick and impassioned, still genially in touch with a general readership," but which nonetheless has him in dogged pursuit of every last manuscript scrap and Greek footnote. By weaving together documentary minutiae, literary texts, poetry, travelogues, and late 18th-century medical practice, while all along surreptitiously slipping in measured doses of perfect-pitch "emotional projection," Holmes manages to build up such a vivid Coleridgean presence that, by the middle of

volume two, we no longer question when

Coleridge reached Grasmere on 1 September 1808... [h]e made one of his spectacular arrivals at 11:30 at night, waking the whole household, booming down the tall, newly painted corridors of Allan Bank, admiring and greeting Wordsworth thought him 'in tolerable health and better spirits than I have known him to possess for some time.' Southey... declared him offensively noisy and fat, 'about half as big as the house.' (p. 146, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-34*, Pantheon, 1998)

The ultimate test of biographical success, then, is whether a character comes so to life for us that he or she becomes understandably and indispensably connected to the surviving legacy. That is to say, in the case of an artist, that biography must forge a credible, substantive link between inner life and creative vision, or else it is mere gossip-mongering.

Many biographies, even well-respected ones, fail on this point due to the biographer's misinformed, naive, or sentimentalized understanding of the creative process in question. This is especially true with musical biography, particularly for composers, since the layperson's familiarity with musical creation is rudimentary at best (an earlier essay on this topic, "On Writing About Music", appeared in the December 2000 issue of *The Bookpress*). Unlike our everyday experiences with writing—however unliterary—and, at the very least, our childhood attempts in the visual arts (remember those moments of triumph and disaster with dripping watercolors and clumps of wet sand or play-dough?), few of us have actively contrived to compose music. We are lucky enough if given an opportunity to practice, literally, the art of recreating pre-existent works on a musical instrument, so we rarely

move beyond that arduous enough endeavor; grappling with abstract musical elements to produce a piece "from scratch" is left to specialists.

And so, while it is generally imaginable for us to quill away by candlelight with Samuel Taylor behind that closed door, or to flex and splatter-paint with Jackson over a wide-angled floor, the idea of composing symphonies strikes us as nothing short of miraculous, unfathomable even with a piano to plink on first (or to roar on, in the case of tragically deaf Beethoven, or to cough over for Chopin). Attempts to discuss or depict a composer at work therefore become utterly arcane, platitudinous, or wildly fantastical in the popular imagination: we can squint at Beethoven sketch studies, nod about how Mozart spun silken melodies, and gape at Schumann clutching his head when Katherine Hepburn as Clara admonishes, "But Robert, you must com-*pose!*" (in *Song of Love*, with Uncle Brahms as houseboy). In reality, witnessing a composer at work is probably pretty dull fare. If only Schubert had, say, posed for a portrait while scribbling *lieder* on café table napkins (how did quills manage on linen?), the way Nabokov demonstrated, for *Life* magazine, how he pencilled *Lolita* on 3-by-5" index cards while sitting in the Véra-chauffeur car.

Intelligent biographies that do justice to the personality and oeuvre of composers are, thus, rarely achieved. Happily, we have cause for celebration with David Cairns' double-decker *Berlioz* (University of California Press, 2000), an epic as exuberant as its protagonist. Cairns' writing is especially remarkable in that he manages to incorporate discussion of the musical works without referring to any print-

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The Pear Considered

continued from page A1

Hawken School. It was considered a down day for dessert in general. But Thursday was not far off, and that would bring a square of Sealtest Vanilla with a generous ladle of Mac & Winnie's butterscotch or maybe even chocolate sauce. So, I guess you could say the canned pear in my bowl was a harbinger of good things to come, if you could make it through.

When supplies really got low in the kitchen, they would bring out the dreaded fruit cup. If you fished around in your helping you could find, along with other wonderments, pieces of pear cut in little squares about the size of dice, only a little smaller. I remember I used to ponder over who cut all that fruit up in those exact same squares. And was she pretty? Maybe she looked like that lady in the Vermeer.

I like my pears painted by the Realists. By now you could have figured pears by the Cubists are not to my taste. Nor do I like to have one's impression of a pear. "Let me see the thing, Damn it! Can you paint it or not?" I want to say.

I was never deceived by the money-mongering Picassos or the Warhol publicists of the world. Gauguin's pears were flat. Who ever saw a flat pear? The Fauvists painted purple pears because they were inherently color-blind dilettantes who did not understand the palette.

Dalí's disgusting pears dripped and drooped over ant-infested deserts. As if a pear needed to acquire any meaning from the Surrealists, give me a break.

Today's commercial artists would put a pear in a cow's hide and if it were digitalized it would slowly revolve until it changed its shape to a cube, out of which would miraculously pop a computer which you could rent for \$29.95 a month.



Oil on Canvas

Barbara Mink

No!

Show me a Caravaggio pear next to a hunk of pecorino all in front of some Roman guards while they are about to have a snack after having nailed the Christ to the cross up on Golgotha. Or a Jarrett pear done in her warm neo-realism, encased in a simple, antique Venetian frame... and I will show you a man contented with his travels.

But now let us leave the painterly art of the pear and briefly visit with the pear in other venues.

Have you noticed it was not the pear which God forbade us to eat? Nor is it the pear, upon which we slip and suffer droll mishaps to the *Schadenfreude* of others. It was with the grape and its fluid emanations which did Delilah bring the heroic Sampson to shame and ruin. Paris was humiliated by the apple. It goes on and on. No one writes or tells stories about

persimmons, or pomegranates, for no one knows what they are. Are they fruits or vegetables, do they come from trees or shrubs, or what? Just like the tomato. I mean what the hell is that? Some say it is a fruit; others a vegetable. It has to do with seeds, trees, pits, single or multiple. Arguments rage on, nations go to war, but everyone knows what a pear is, with the possible exception of the people in Cleveland, who can't tell a good Vermeer when they see one—but I digress again. Those in the know, know what a pear is and they know it does no harm and it is good.

References to the pear in literature are not frequent, because it is such a difficult subject to treat well and could reveal the inept for what they are. Only the best of writers dare address the topic.

Tom Robbins in his classic *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* was talking about the pear when

he had his immortal Chink wax wise with, "When it gets sloppy, eat it over the sink."

Mickey Spillane built us a web of intrigue where his voluptuous Margo died holding the pear between her breasts.

And as we all know, Hemingway's first draft of *The Sun Also Rises* had Jake and Brett sharing a pear in the back of the Parisian taxi cab. Jake drooling out, "Yes, it is nice to think so, and this is a damned fine pear you have here. It is good."

Metzger, in his much beloved *The Return of the Storm* wherein he re-wrote the saga of Noah, had the boat filled with vegetables and fruits instead of animals; and Meshack, Shadrack and Nebednago sat around naked eating all the pears, except for, but then you should read it for yourself...

And now for a little lesson on diction. Pear is pronounced *p-hair*. One should take a gulp of air into one's lungs before attempting to say the word. Do not say *p-air* or *pare*. Some people who treat English as if it were a second language get confused because they think the last three letters, when left alone, should make the *ear* sound; but when coupled with the *p* it in fact obliges the *EEE* sound return to the *ER*. Others get confused because the first three letters: *P*, *E*, and *A*, together make the *EEE* sound as well, like in *peeve*...but when the *R* is added: Guess what? the *ER* sound returns, again. As in *pear*. Failing the ability to casually suggest an *H* immediately after the *P*, it is suggested one settle for *peyr*, a sound widely used by linguists. Those who look for reason, or rule of law to explain these matters appreciate neither the subtle joys of our language, nor the marvel of mystery. A mystery, you see, is something to which you will never find the answer, but the more you look into it the more you will learn. Therefore, let us consider the pear.

Chris Metzger lives in Hudson, N.Y.

Calendar of Arts Events in the Ithaca Area

MARCH & APRIL 2001

Gallery Night of Ithaca, at six downtown Ithaca galleries, 116 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca. 277-4933 Friday, March 2, 5-8 P.M.

Works on paper by Ricardo Benaim and Daphne Solá at Solá Art Gallery, DeWitt Office Complex, 215 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca. 272-6552. Reception during Gallery Night, Friday, March 2 and runs through March 31; Mon-Sat, 10:30 A.M.-5:30 P.M.

Fifteen Centuries of Korean Ceramics at The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University. 254-4563. Runs through March 4; Tues-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Paintings by Anne Marie Zwack at Community School of Music and Arts, 330 E. State St., Ithaca. 272-1474. March 2-April 3; Daily, 9 A.M.-5 P.M.

Figurative Explorations: New Work by Betsy Shults at 171 Cedar Arts Center, Corning. 936-4647. Opens Tuesday, March 6 at 5:30 P.M. and runs to May 4; Mon-Fri, 10 A.M.-8 P.M.; Sat, 10 A.M.-2 P.M.

Capturing Youth: The Exploration of Teenage Culture Through Photography, features work of Larry Clark and Adrienne Salinger at the Dowd Fine Arts Gallery, Dowd Arts Center, at corner of Graham and Prospect Sts., SUNY Cortland. 753-4216. Runs through March 9; Tues-Sat, 11 A.M.-4 P.M.

Dreams, Myths, and Realities: A Vincent Smith Retrospective; Works by a contemporary African American painter and printmaker at The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University. 254-4563. Runs to Mar 18; Tues-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Friends of the Cold Season: Pine, Plum and Bamboo—Images of winter from Chinese, Japanese & Korean art at The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell

University. 254-4563. Runs through March 18; Tues-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Puppets by Lili MacCormick at Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, 205 Genesee St., Auburn. 315-255-1553. Runs through March 22; Tues-Sat, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.; Sun, 1-5 P.M.

Architectural Drawings of Julius Schweinfurth at Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, 205 Genesee St., Auburn. 315-255-1553. Runs through March 22; Tues-Sat, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.; Sun, 1-5 P.M.

Metro-North: Abstract Painting from Metropolitan New York at Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, 205 Genesee St., Auburn. 315-255-1553. Runs through March 22; Tues-Sat, 10 A.M.-5 P.M. Sun, 1-5 P.M.

Formulation/Articulations: Folios on Color Theory by Josef Albers at the Dowd Fine Arts Gallery, Dowd Arts Center, at corner of Graham and Prospect Sts., SUNY Cortland. 753-4216. March 22-April 20; Tues-Sat, 11 A.M.-4 P.M.

Kathryn Spence at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University. 254-4563. March 24-May 27; Tues-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Spring Bouquet: floral and botanical works by seven artists at The Corners Gallery, 903 Hanshaw Rd., Ithaca. 257-5756. March 24-April 28th; Mon-Fri, 10 A.M.-5:30 P.M.; Sat, 10 A.M.-4 P.M.

Gallery Members Work at Gallery Forty-One, 41 Lake St., Owego. 687-2876. Runs through March 30; Tues-Sat 11-5; Thursday 11-7 P.M.

Once in a Blue Moon: Downtown Owego Artwalk, with art on display in windows of local stores, by local artists at

Gallery Forty-One, 41 Lake St., Owego. 687-2876. March 30; Friday 5-8:30 P.M.

Uncommon Threads: Contemporary Artists and Clothing at The Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University. 254-4563. March 31-June 17; Tues-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Both Ends of the Rainbow: Annual exhibit of art by Children and Senior Citizens at Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, 205 Genesee St., Auburn. 315-255-1553. March 31-April 29; Tues-Sat, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.; Sun, 1-5 P.M.

Licht Père et Fils: sculpture and paintings by Rob and Fred Licht at The Upstairs Gallery, DeWitt Office Complex, 215 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca. 272-8614. Runs through Mar 31; Tues-Sat, 11 A.M.-3 P.M.

Central New York Furniture Craftsmen Competition: Furniture and Accessories at The Upstairs Gallery, DeWitt Office Complex, 215 N. Cayuga St., Ithaca. 272-8614. April 3-28; Tues-Sat, 11 A.M.-3 P.M.

Annual Faculty Show at Handwerker Gallery, Gannett Center, Ithaca College. 274-3018. Runs through April 4; Mon-Fri 11 A.M.-5 P.M.

Greater Ithaca Art Trail Show at Red Newt Cellars, 3675 Tichenor Rd., Hector. 546-4100. Gallery@rednewt.com. Opens April 5; Thurs-Sun, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.

Paintings by Dora Donovan at State of the Art Gallery, 120 W. State St., Ithaca. 277-1626. April 5-April 29; Thurs, 12-6 P.M.; Fri, 12-8 P.M.; Weekends, 12-5 P.M.

Work by local artists from the Leidenfrost Collection at Leidenfrost Winery, 5677 Rte. 414, Hector. 546-2800. Runs through April; 10-5 P.M., 7 days a week.

Watercolors by Barbara Mink at Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars, 9224 Route 414, Lodi. 582-6011. Runs through May; Mon-Sat, 10 A.M.-5 P.M.; Sun, 12-5 P.M.

Andy Warhol: Endangered Species at the East Dickenson Gallery, Roberson Museum & Science Ctr., 30 Front St., Binghamton. 772-0660. Runs through June 3; Mon-Sat, 10-5 P.M.; Sun, 12-5 P.M. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$4 for students and seniors.

Painter, Prankster, Personality: Murals of Hugh Troy at DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, 401 E. State St., Ithaca. 273-8284. Runs through June 23; Tues-Sat, 11 A.M.-5 P.M.

Prints and paintings of local lands by Susan Titus, Antique Asian and African Bronzes, at Titus Gallery, 222 the Commons, Ithaca. 277-2649. Ongoing; Tues-Sat, 10 A.M.-6 P.M.

Associates Members Show at The Ink Shop Printmaking Center/Olive Branch Press Gallery, 120 Brindley St., Ithaca. 277-3884. Ongoing; Tues-Fri, 12-6 P.M.; Thurs, 12-8 P.M.; weekends by appointment.

Breon Nina Dunigan and Bob Bailey at the String Room Gallery in the Main Building at Wells College, Aurora. (315) 364-3260. March 7-April 6; Opening reception March 7 from 7-9 P.M.; Mon-Fri, 8 A.M.-5 P.M.; Wed nights, 7-9 P.M.; Sat-Sun, 1-5 P.M.

If you would like your arts event listed, please contact Lee-Ellen Marvin at the Constance Saltonstall Foundation at 607-277-4933 or at artsfound@clarityconnect.com.

Composing Biography

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ed excerpts (the bane of non-specialists); musical scores appear only as manuscript reproductions included in plates and on the end papers. However, Berlioz was one of the most literary of 19th-century composers, so Cairns' no-notation approach is largely possible thanks to the inherently literature-based nature of the compositions. Furthermore, both the life and works of Berlioz are marked by a certain tragic flaw (strikingly like Coleridge, by the way: classical education, unrealistic romances, opium addiction, career as polemical journalist and favorite lampoon target, creative vision outscaling technical command, lifelong struggle against defeat, and a dated

and yet radically modern quality to the art) that make for great biography. Berlioz himself was aware of this. "I came into the world quite normally, unheralded by any of the portents in use in poetic times to announce the arrival of those destined for glory," he sighs with mock wistfulness, at the opening of his *Memoirs*, "Can it be that our age is lacking in poetry?"

Our age may indeed be lacking poetry, but it unfortunately abounds in biographical doggerel. Bad Chopin biographies lead the pack by far, followed by reels of the "Theo, send more paint" brand of bio-pics, and of course the habitual *biographie romancée* plus its more frank incarnation, *the biographie sexuelle*. Then there are the spin-offs that capitalize on superstar cachet: Mozart's Vienna, Chopin's

Paris, Monet's table, Frida's kitchen—if conjecture-bios and bio-conjectures are not enough, we can also eat, drink, and wallpaper like the greats. This is not to deny that we can derive much fun and pleasurable insights from these pursuits. But we should be wary of asserting authenticity, just as Holmes learned "a lesson in the presumption of the biographer who assumes he can step like a tourist into the past," when he realized that he was fixated on the wrong window in the building once inhabited by Coleridge. Still, this does not deter him from seeking the "handshake across time," as he likes to characterize biographical inquiry, which "confirms our need to find the self in the other, not always to be alone."

On the last page of Nabokov's novel,

Sebastian Knight's biographer realizes that he, too, has fallen into this trap of mistaken authenticity. Or has he? Who is trapping whom in this mélange of writer, reader, subject, fact and/or fiction anyway?

Whatever his secret was, I have learnt one secret too, and namely: that the soul is but a manner of being—not a constant state—that any soul may be yours, if you find and follow its undulations. The hereafter may be the full ability of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any number of souls, all of them unconscious of their interchangeable burden. Thus—I am Sebastian Knight.

Kiko Nobusawa lives in Ithaca, NY, but would welcome a research grant, or any such respectable means of support, to write from Paris or Toronto. Can it be that our town is lacking in brioche?

The Bookpress is now accepting submissions for the annual Ithaca Festival special issue

"The Greatest Place on Earth"



Deadline for submissions is May 5.

The Bookpress - 215 N. Cayuga St. - Ithaca, NY 14850

CAFÉ DEWITT

BRUNCH

Sunday 10-2

Crispy Com Fritters
Lemon Soufflé Pancakes
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Columns of Air

Joel Ray

Night, and spring aromas outside the window. The suspensions of "Dear Old Stockholm" were interfering with his math when he looked up from the desk and saw the houses across the street lit up in flickering red light. Then he heard faraway voices through the open window, and his landlady shouting up the stairs "The bowling alley's on fire!" Coming around the corner onto the avenue, he saw a crowd of people standing on the bank across from the fire, all looking up, illuminated in flames that were blowing up hundreds of feet above the middle of the commercial block. He ran across the avenue, avoiding the arriving fire trucks and the firemen connecting up their hoses. He heard a roar, the crowd quickly growing, yelling and exclaiming as in the middle of the flames there were little bursts here and there, like bottle rockets exploding. Someone said it was beer cans. Another started singing, "ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall..." As the hoses began to play into the flames he realized, ah, God, the Profile is burning...

He had discovered the Profile as a freshman and it had come near to wrecking his grades. Five white guys in their twenties and thirties playing the standards, especially from the new Miles Davis albums, and the piano player sounding close enough to Red Garland that his untutored ears could tell little difference. Those block chords, and the light rippling touch on the slow blues. "Bye Bye Blackbird," and "Green Dolphin Street," and "If I Were a Bell." In his real life the tenor player was a dentist; he stood straight up with his eyes open and his elbows jutting out to the side as he blew his languid solos; and Frank the portly young alto player, hunching his body around his horn, eyes shut, off in another sphere, was an insurance salesman; and the drummer a teacher of some sort and a very quiet, shy man off the stand. They were the first jazz musicians he had seen outside of New York, and were thrilling in their solos and sharp and together in the themes, and the rhythm section could lay down a slow stroll, a gallop, or a heartbeat. It made his neck hairs rise when after several weeks of regular attendance the hornmen acknowledged him with nods as he came in.

He had heard of a black club across town, a blues place, and the stories were daunting—knife fights, the whiskey flowing, whites not welcome. The stories varied in intensity and hostility depending on the teller's attitudes, and whether he was interested in the music or in a spectacle. In his hometown there was no such place that he knew about. The capital was more hip, though maybe white attitudes were more hostile, too, because colored people were more visible, the town more of a crossroads. Many years later he would regret not having had the courage to visit that place and see and hear for himself instead of believing what his friends said. And he would guess that if it had been their club burning no crowd would have been standing around cheering and counting beer bottles.

It wasn't long before the TV truck arrived. Three guys got out and began stringing cables and putting up tripods for lights and getting a big camera set up. When they turned on the lights he was disoriented for a moment; they were astonishingly bright and washed out the darker light from the fire. The crew filmed the fire and the trucks and hoses and firemen, then one of the men stepped into the light and the camera turned on him and he began speaking into a microphone, speaking fast and almost breathlessly as though he had run to the fire from the TV station.

After a while all the beer had fallen from



Dan Burgevin

the wall and the crowd began dispersing, as the fire continued to burn. He walked back around the corner to his apartment, feeling out of step and out of sorts, wondering if anyone in that crowd had given a shit about the Profile—or the bowling alley for that matter. As he walked in, his landlady was watching the fire on TV. How strange it was to see the pallid colors and the flat smallness of the scene; and the man speaking on the screen in the bright light as though he were the attraction.

When the embers had finally cooled in a few days and the police tapes had been removed, he went into the fire and took his own pictures, of the twisted steel girders, the blackened beams, the wet soggy trash all around, and of the pit that used to be the Profile. He saw remnants of the bar and the staircase. The booths, the bandstand, and the upright piano were all gone.

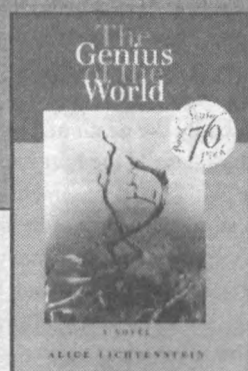
Some years later, after a sojourn up north, he was back south, living in a town not far from the capital, and there was a little jazz club out on the edge of town, and one night on the bandstand there was Frank the altoist, playing with new people. He thought happily that yes, by God, the music does go round and round. They reminisced about the Profile scene. Frank told him that the dentist didn't play much anymore, and the piano player had moved away. "But I'm still at it. Can't imagine not playing." "You sound great, Frank. What memories. But that rhythm section, don't you miss that?" "Oh, yeah, those guys just lifted you up," Frank said. "But you know what we always called it: 'the Profile for awhile.'"

Joel Ray is a former editor of *The Bookpress*. He lives in Ithaca.

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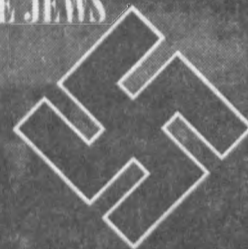
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NATURE AND POLITICS
IN THE PURSUIT OF AN
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Anatomy of Grief

Emoretta Yang

The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses

by Gail Holst-Warhaft

Harvard University Press, 2000

240 pages, \$39.95

I saw this guy a couple of years ago at a guitar demonstration in the DeWitt Mall. Moustachioed and balding, of medium height, with a little paunch, a pleasant face and a winning, bemused expression, he was wearing a t-shirt that must have been a gift from affectionate family and friends: the t-shirt was as black as any fashionable end-of-century uniform, but arranged on the front in a descending column of rainbow colors were the words:

DENIAL
ANGER
BARGAINING
ACCEPTANCE
FIFTY

The burst of laughter that accompanies the reading of that fourteen-syllable American haiku may or may not ease the angst of aging, but in the release, it also underscores a certain tension in the language of grief that has been building up since the late 1960s. Call some part of this tension the ironical melancholy of American baby boomer sensibility—reaching age fifty equals: death!—and don't lose the particular kick of dolefully sticking it to that generation whom journalists and other writers at the time colluded in describing as mistrustful of anyone over age thirty. Once the laughing and the appreciation of this kind of American capacity for self-mockery are given their due, what's interesting is not just the attempt to master anxiety about death and loss; it's the terms that set up the joke. The four stages of grief, as observed and described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, have become so much a part of our national lexicon that one needs only to list those four words in sequence for the universe of bereavement to be evoked: the kicker comes when one rapidly understands "fifty" as a displacement of "death," the difference between the two terms being so radical, the gap so abrupt, that we can't help but guffaw.

As influential, and as necessary, as *On Death and Dying* (published in 1969), proved to be, in some ways it's too bad that Kübler-Ross's real compassion as well as her gift for engaged observation, her patient representation of the situation of the dying, have ended up being so stylized and reduced to the formula she outlined—a necessary sacrifice, I suppose, to the demands of increasing professionalization. "Grief counseling" arose in response to Kübler-Ross's attentive work and to genuine need; and it is perhaps not so much the transformation of her observations and insights into a congealed formula as it is the fact of so many successive public traumas that has brought grief counseling into this odd place where it seems the lineaments of consolation have to be re-designed, according to this template, with every loss.

We're baffled by the absence of form or rite. A teddy bear is placed, as a sincere offering to a dead infant, near the site of a mass bombing; a photograph, a video, is taken of the toy, published and broadcast, and, the next time (because, infuriatingly, in a gun-struck world, the next time is all too countable), teddy bears proliferate: on fences, at the foot of quickly-fashioned crosses, in the arms of mourners, even when the victims are nearly adult. The extension of the language of grief in America has become so broad and, some would say, debased, that it has slipped over into some bizarre moments, as when, in the uncertainty after the presidential election, news media showed people repeating that they wanted election returns right away so that they could "get on with their lives," or when, as Bob Herbert pointed out in a *New York Times* editorial (11/16/2000, "Running

from the Vote"), "While doing everything possible to thwart a meticulous count of the Florida vote, Governor George W. Bush and his top gun, Secretary of State James A. Baker III, have been crying out for days for 'closure,' as if the nation were grieving rather than trying to find out who really won the election."

I'm relatively sure that anyone who has found life eclipsed by the death of a close relative or friend has, despite the best intentions, had to struggle with the debasement of this language. This slippage may just be the way "discourse" works, and there are many kinds of loss, short of death, or even beyond, that we mourn, casting about for an appropriate idiom. Is the formulaic language of grief in our times in danger of glossing over more turbulent reactions to injury, risking repetition of the bad effects of "denial," which that language sought to unmask? Is the language of grief, as it evolves either in a secular world, or in a mixed society of conflicting religious beliefs, or in the light of a scientific community increasingly self-conscious of its social and societal investments, again turning into some set of stultifying, homogenizing platitudes?

The literature about death, dying and their concomitants—either within or without a universalizing belief system—has been significantly amplified since 1969, notably from within the medical and therapeutic professions and in the work of journalists like Bill and Judith Moyers, but, again and tellingly, with the focus on individual experience and personal psychology. The tensions, both internal and external, psychological and civic, that have been accumulating in our ways of talking about death and grief, may make the time ripe for a broader kind of understanding.

It's in this context that I've read Gail Holst-Warhaft's *The Cue for Passion*, a brilliant and illuminating, graceful and challenging book, that examines the theme of grief, personal and public, and the forms it takes, in examples drawn from literary works, anthropological studies, the classical world as well as our own time—in order finally to argue for an appreciation of the particular but shared energy that underlies grief, its "cue for passion," (taken from *Hamlet*), an energy ready to be tapped, channeled, seeking release, always in relation to an audience or community. As its subtitle "Grief and its political uses" might suggest, the book doesn't draw on the idiom initiated by Kübler-Ross (whose work is only fleetingly alluded to), with its focus on easing individual suffering.

We know enough about the self-absorption of the sick and injured to conjecture that, for the newly bereaved, perhaps even just the word "political" weighs heavy and unbearable. Nothing feels more personal than grief and, in our culture anyway, where it's accepted for the grief-stricken to withdraw from normal social rhythms, grieving occupies a space at the opposite end of the political realm, or certainly on the margins. Yet, in some roundabout and interesting way, *The Cue for Passion* addresses the legacy of Kübler-Ross, and while not bashing its therapeutic aims, implicitly questions its focus on the individual. Finally, Holst-Warhaft, with a breadth of scholarship that is no less stunning for being so unflashy, guides the reader through a worldwide perspective on the expression of bereaved emotion, giving our own therapeutic approaches a boost, plumbing grief for the intense life it can disguise, an "aliveness" that will end up beyond sober "acceptance" of the reality of death to something more like transformation, of self, of society.²

At the most accessible level of this accessible book, a reader will learn much about the rest of the world. Holst-Warhaft's research into the forms of mourning arrived at by other cultures and other times ranges wide and by turns fascinates and astonishes. Even a quick survey of the first chapter, titled "Tears," on

lamentation, brings to light a host of populations in which mourning entails the performance of ritual songs of lamentation, wailing or keening; a certain amount of expressive violence is tolerated and even encouraged. In the attitudes of clergy in Sheffield, England, of Israeli soldiers and statesmen, of Andaman Islanders, she quickly discovers important gender divisions.

It is women who play a dominant role in the lamentations that make up the mourning rites of many of the world's cultures. In this respect Holst-Warhaft extends the work she began in her 1992 book *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. Along with the French classicist Nicole Loraux, Holst-Warhaft postulates the ritual laments by ancient Greek women as the origin of classical Greek tragedy. In *The Cue for Passion*, she finds female lamentations beyond the classical world, in modern Greece, Romania, Finland, Bulgaria, Ireland, the Toraja of South Sulawesi. All along the way, Holst-Warhaft stays alert to the threat to social order embodied by these laments and to the controls that attempt to keep such displays from erupting into social breakdown.

But the book isn't just a cabinet of curios, or bits of exotica gathered from around the planet about death and mourning; there is always present the drive to explore what these disparate phenomena—for example, the funeral of Princess Diana, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Memorial Quilt—have in common. And for political analysis, Holst-Warhaft's interpretation, drawing on H. Bruce Franklin's work on the POW-MIA movement in the aftermath of Vietnam—the prolongation, as she sees it, of the conflict in Southeast Asia, while the United States tried to come to terms with its defeat in an effort not just to confer meaning on the deaths it incurred but to justify the violence it inflicted—is as eye-opening as any in showing how effective were the forces, governmental, military, civilian and Hollywoodian, in prolonging the grief of the families for jingoistic ends. She spells out this interpretation in a chapter with the simple but evocative title of "Bones," putting the understandable desire of families to take possession of the remains of their dead in the context of Biblical and classical attitudes.

By contrast to the inflammatory, misguided or cynical actions on the part of those involved in POW-MIA effort, she finds other moving accounts of the reburial of bones, practiced in the private circle of families in more rural, traditional societies; in these examples, drawn from Greece and Vietnam, it is the bones of a dead parent that are exhumed after all flesh is gone, bones that are then washed and dried clean, touched and examined before being reburied. Whatever initial dismay we or the practitioners may feel, Holst-Warhaft makes clear in her reading that the act of handling these dry bones, cleansed of all trace of decay, can proceed from grim revulsion to tender care. In the wrenching absence of remains, is it fair to extend an impossible promise of recovery?

The chapter titled "Laughter" treats the manic side of mourning, that is, comic, sexual or drunken excess as a response to a death, sometimes even in the presence of the corpse. There are apparently many instances of such conduct that strike a North American as inappropriate. But solemnity in funerals is not universal and may be relatively modern, according to Holst-Warhaft; in some parts of Europe, such as the Balkans, bawdy funeral games were common until the Christian church stopped them in the seventeenth century. Rowdy wake games, which in addition to drinking and nudity also enacted parodies of church ritual, continued in rural Ireland into the nineteenth century. What Holst-Warhaft discovers in these wake games and in a variety of mythical sources describing similar rituals is the topos of exposure, and in particular,

the resort of exposing the genitals to break a mood of mourning or depression.

Holst-Warhaft takes on this material, which is some of the most opaque and baffling the book will present. Freud in his well-known essay on mourning and melancholia touches on some of the same phenomena, which he describes as an observed resurgence of sexual libido among the intimates of the recently deceased, but his efforts to explain it still leave room for questions. Holst-Warhaft mentions that essay, but is understandably less interested in Freud's working out of theory than in presenting some examples from a broader scope of classical and anthropological sources. In a section discussing how funeral and festival, mourning and ribaldry, come together, Holst-Warhaft finds the mythical and controversial figure of Baubo, mother of Demophon. In an attempt to draw the goddess Demeter out of her grief-stricken fast, Baubo lifts her own skirt, exposing her genitals, causing the goddess to laugh, to break her somber mood and drink, taking up the processes of life again.

Holst-Warhaft makes clear in her discussion and its extended footnotes that the myth and the figure of Baubo has stirred a lot of debate (she makes an important appearance as a drawing in another of Freud's essays, where, like the classical statuettes, she is represented as a large head on legs, hair drawn up, the face, where the belly should be, serene, faintly smiling, with her genitals represented on her chin.). For Holst-Warhaft, Baubo performs the act of self-exposure as a deliberately funny ploy to shock the bereaved Demeter back among the living.

The trope of exposure is discussed elsewhere by Neil Hertz, in his excellent book *The End of the Line*, in the somewhat different context of the sublime, but there may be more extended connections to be made between death and exposure, mourning and the sublime. In Hertz's discussion, which draws on a Hugo memoir of Paris in 1848, the figure of the woman climbing the barricades and challengingly exposing her lower naked body to the soldiers is one of terror and frightfulness; in Holst-Warhaft's discussion, Baubo's self-exposure to Demeter occasions laughter; both are understood as acts of aggression, but with different aims. I wonder if the difference in affect—laughter or terror—has anything to do with the sex of the intended beholder, but in any case, there seems more—or less!—to chew on here.

The chapter titled "Disappearance" presents the clearest picture of what Holst-Warhaft sees as a positive, politically transformative response to death. Her report details the situation surrounding the formation of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo during the military rule of Argentina from 1976 to 1983. The women who formed this opposition group had not been political, and when their children were abruptly "disappeared" (Holst-Warhaft reflects on the passage of the verb from intransitive to transitive), their initial devastation was private, withdrawn, paralyzed by helplessness. Their grief leading some of them to search for their children, they began to recognize each other, their numbers grew, and despite the great risks from the regime, they formed a grass-roots organization and marched regularly into the center of Buenos Aires to demand an official account of the fate of their children.

In sections that contain narration to equal the best kind of investigative synthesis, Holst-Warhaft details this story of "women transformed by the intensity of their grief not into reckless heroines, but into a community of determined political activists." In their activism and determination, their world grew; their focus shifted to the more abstract goal of justice and accountability, their political savvy grew to the point that, unlike the leaders of the

continued on page 11

Not Getting Over It

continued from page 1

with an outcry that captures the profound sense of moral and civic outrage many of us share over this sorry episode in our nation's history:

...That an election for an American President can be stolen by the highest court in the land under the deliberate pretext of an inapplicable constitutional provision has got to be one of the most frightening and dangerous events ever to have occurred in this country. Until this act—which is treasonous, though again not technically, in its sweeping implications—is somehow rectified (and I do not know how this can be done), can we be serene about continuing to place the adjective "great" before the name of this country?

It is difficult to say what most outrages and insults me about the Court's deed—whether it is the sorry state of American politics today, with its low-voter turnout that invited the intervention; whether it is the post-modern, apolitical, and ahistorical drift in the public forum that has yielded this politics as pastiche; whether it is the Republican Party that has become, since 1964, utterly unrecognizable and hell-bent on criminalizing every behavior that does not conform to its vicious, narrow-minded, totalitarian zealotries; whether it is the corporate media that facilitates the shameless travesty of the political process; or whether it is the Democratic Party's loss of any principle of ethical conduct, this party which I have continued to support despite everything because the "choices" are nil and nil, this party whose latest president is too self-ish and tone-deaf to realize that he is making it virtually impossible for another Democrat to be elected to the presidency in my lifetime—when does his stumbling stop? Whether it is the unsound modalities of corrupt political values and practices that would permit even the Supreme Court of the United States to personally attach itself to the will of a single American family (and a fairly mediocre one at that), be damned who knows it! Whether it is the deliberate and prolonged stultification and infantilization of the American public, many of whom must now believe, given the way that election events have been "packaged," that what happened down in Florida is a "black problem," or a "stupidity problem," or a "Florida problem" that has nothing at all to do with them; or whether it is the "religion" of money in a society that talks only about money, even when it is talking about something else, a society that has lifted the "CEO" to culture hero status, while religion itself is manipulated by cynical political actors; and finally, whether I can trust my sixth sense which tells me that we are drifting, not all that slowly, toward some destination that the American people, for the most part, have neither intended, nor endorsed. If any one of these items were not so, I would rest a good deal better tonight.

As a rule, I am not an alarmist, and as a university teacher, I have vowed not to bear bad news to the young, or anyone else, for that matter. But my sense that we are already in trouble, precisely because we have "moved on" to the dance, is ineluctable, while, not unlike Attorney Bugliosi, I cannot imagine what is to be done. Even though they got a few things quite wrong—like that three-fifths of a human being clause that pertains to African humanity—the founders of the Republic appear to have thought of every possible access route to unchecked power and to have cut it off at the pass; they anticipated every contingency, it seems, by closing every conceivable gap through which some trickster might slip. But they might have stayed in Philadelphia still one more day because they left the nation's Supreme Court out of their ultimate calculations, as nothing stands above it, except the Constitution itself and the "imagined community" that it accommodates. But now that that document has been brought down to Clarence

Thomas's shoe size and Antonin Scalia's sneering, big-bellied pomposities, where are we?

The Slavonian critic and intellectual, Slavoj Zizek, examines cynicism as a political force and form of ideology in the opening chapter of his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.³ We are accustomed to think of cynicism as a personal response to the human sport and in any case, to assign it limited import in the play of large and public matters. But according to Zizek, cynicism is the ruling culture's response to what he calls "kynical subversion,"

the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm: the classical kynical procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology—its solemn, grave tonality—with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime noblesse of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power. (p. 29)

The cynicism of the ruling culture, Zizek goes on, answers kynetic subversion by recognizing and correcting for the distance between the ideological mask and the reality. Having acknowledged the divergence, cynical culture "still finds reasons to retain the mask." While the US does not exactly fit this model, in as much as the "popular" and the "plebeian" forms here are often enough—and it is mind-bending—simply extensions of the dominant ideology, for our purposes here, this knowing better, but doing it anyway looks rather like the Republican-inspired cultural synthesis that would stage and stand behind any subversion of the law if it satisfied the raw will to power: this party was going to win the past presidential election whether or not it actually did (and I will die believing that it did not), and whether or not it had to tear up the United States in the process. Republican operatives and many Republican lawmakers were fully prepared, and we should understand that they still are, to engage in civil warfare against all other Americans, if need be, in order to have their way. (In a recent speech Justice Clarence Thomas openly advocated "cultural warfare.") No one who watched those rowdy Republican operatives outside the election offices in Miami-Dade, or who remembers the utter zeal with which the Clinton impeachment was pursued can doubt that we are witnessing a lethal form of politics.

Zizek goes on to say that the traditional critique of ideology "no longer works," because we are living in a "post-ideological" era. The reactionary forces in the United States have successfully managed to make analysis of any sort look foolish, thanks to the lingering effects of the so-called "Reagan Revolution." Despite this, I believe that, now more than ever, we need the good offices of close reading and hard analysis and the courage to tell the truth. I will never accept this illegitimate presidency and those cabinet appointees that couldn't wait to take power; I will not do so, no matter how many people boogie past me to the dance floor. That red and blue map, used by network TV on election eve, is not a joke—the "Cold War" inside the United States is heating up. (Clarence Thomas is calling for an end to public civility.) If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, now comes their time.

Notes:

¹One of the best available summaries of the civil rights era is provided in: John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1998).

²Vincent Bugliosi, "None Dare Call It Treason," *The Nation*, Vol. 272, No. 5 (February 5, 2001), pp. 11–19; the passage from which the quotation comes appears on p. 19.

³Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); Part I: "The Symptom": 1: "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?," pp. 9–55; all quotations from the text come from this source, with page numbers parenthetically noted.

Hortense Spillers lives in Ithaca, New York, and teaches courses in African-American literature at Cornell University.

Noblemen

Crossword by Adam Perl

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
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Solution on page 2

ACROSS

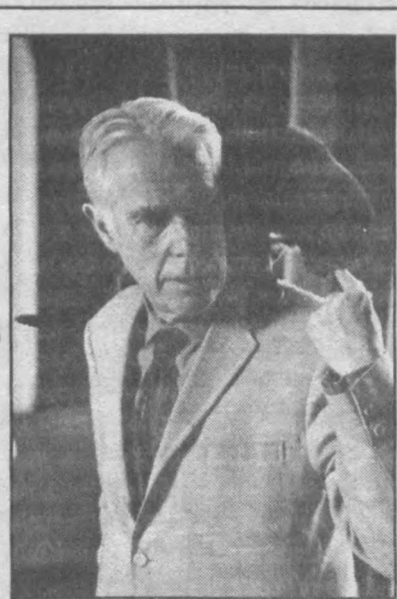
- 1. Pound of letters
- 5. It's often bid
- 10. "and ____ thou slain..."
- 14. Anon
- 15. Sean and William
- 16. The largest of the seven
- 17. Jazz great
- 19. Nails
- 20. Raft
- 21. Careless
- 23. Portfolio contents
- 26. Feds
- 27. Compass dir.
- 28. Charge
- 29. Rural mother
- 31. "It can't be ____ that"
- 33. Socials
- 35. One with a pole position?
- 37. It may be deadly
- 38. Jazz legend
- 43. Little devil
- 44. Bass, for one
- 45. Diamonds, e.g.
- 47. Lack of warmth
- 51. Acid

- 53. Ring decision
- 54. Dress up
- 55. Singer James
- 57. Morose
- 59. Speakers' rewards, often
- 62. "Le ____, c'est moi"
- 63. Similar
- 64. Jazz pioneer
- 68. Attractive
- 69. ____ salts
- 70. Russo of films
- 71. Some are great
- 72. Paris site
- 73. Whirlpool

DOWN

- 1. Computer key
- 2. Madhouse
- 3. 18th c. French philosopher
- 4. Bonne ____
- 5. NYPD alert
- 6. Watergate figure
- 7. Map detail
- 8. Puzzle
- 9. Impotence
- 10. 70's Secretary of State
- 11. Rise

- 12. Burnt ____
- 13. Samples
- 18. Where to see Turners
- 22. "You're ____ trouble!"
- 23. Not fore
- 24. Tournament rating
- 25. Lottery
- 30. Wing
- 32. They often work underground
- 34. Nose part?
- 36. Ala. neighbor
- 39. Eastern bigwig
- 40. Poorly
- 41. Endured
- 42. Goddess of victory
- 46. It's heavy, man
- 47. Ionian island
- 48. Concoct
- 49. Start
- 50. Star's partner
- 52. Jejune
- 56. "____ soit-il"
- 58. French flower?
- 60. Roll part, perhaps
- 61. Stravinsky ballet
- 65. Cockney's abode?
- 66. It may be tight
- 67. St. Luis Rey



To Keep the Ball Rolling

The Memoirs of Anthony Powell

To earn the reputation of a literary giant within the generation of Waugh, Orwell, and Greene is no mean feat. Powell's four-volume memoirs, originally published between 1976 and 1982, now available in an abridged and revised form for the first time in the US, portrays Powell as a man and an author, as well as providing a unique history of British literary society.

University of Chicago Press - 472 pages - \$27.50 cloth

The Stage Was His World

Barbara Adams

Ghost Light

by Frank Rich

Random House, 2000.

311 pages, \$24.95

Memoirs are a tricky business. They're generally less predictable than autobiographies, which are nominally committed to a certain degree of comprehensiveness, perspective, and scope. A memoir, though (if any distinction between the genres remains) is a slippery fish—an indelible image flashed in and out of consciousness, or rather a series of such images, hyperreal yet evanescent. Only the author's stance and web of selective narratives show us how to think and feel about these glimpses and fragments of a life we're given.

A successful—evocative, haunting—memoir, like Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, depends on fiction—not just the routine invention that memory always engages in, but the writer's creation of a new world, a new atmosphere and consciousness, coded with its own set of meanings. In the most memorable and literary memoirs, one forgets the self-aware narrating self; in the more pedestrian, one can see almost nothing else.

It is that laboring, naked self that I saw more often in first reading the recent memoir, *Ghost Light*, by former *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich. Now a cultural and political writer for the *Times*, Rich, its chief theater critic from 1980–1993, was highly respected and equally maligned. His reputation as “The Butcher of Broadway,” a wanton destroyer of fledgling productions, was, I feel, largely unjust. Re-reading his intelligent, careful and above all attentively detailed reviews, I'm struck by his sustained passion and respect for the theater. Like all critics, Rich had his preferences and prejudices, but he was light years away from the spotty reportage, personal attacks, and random viciousness of *New York Magazine's* John Simon.

The basic decency that characterized Rich's critical style also appears in his memoir, but transmuted into an observant earnestness that's disconcerting until the reader settles down and accepts that authorial voice. Raised in the now idealized fifties, first-born and small for his age, smart and shy, young Frank found his middle-class, suburban world torn apart in second grade by his parents' separation and divorce in an era where the very words seemed unmentionable, the concepts inconceivable. Rich thinks of himself as having been raised in “a broken home,” and frequently alludes to his own brokenness, which he tried to mend by diligence at school as well as other familiar strategies children often use to cope with the adult world: being good, being invisible, having tantrums, and, also in Frank's case, studying to be as brilliant as the TV game show contestant his mother admired.

But his most successful coping mechanism stemmed from his parents' love of music. His father, of German Jewish stock, toiled endlessly in his own father's Washington, D.C., shoe store, which he later owned and expanded; his youthful passion for jazz was eventually replaced by the lighter pleasures of musicals, which his wife, raised in Brooklyn by a Russian Jewish family who'd moved to D.C., adored. She'd listened to the new musical *South Pacific* repeatedly the year that she was carrying Frank, and his earliest and few joyful memories of their home were from his parents' shared delight in show tunes.

Upon learning this fairly early in the memoir, the reader has to make a choice—either you are fond of musical comedy or you're not, and if you don't accept the conventions and pleasures of this particularly American genre, then it probably won't be easy to engage in young Frank's fascination and his subsequent obsession—for it was no less—with the theatrical universe. But then, if a critic is not also

a major literary or other cultural figure, why else does the reader open such a memoir if not to indulge further in the critic's proclaimed subject?

Having also been influenced by the strains of *South Pacific* (as well as *Flower Drum Song* and a host of other musicals), I had no trouble accepting this initial premise. As Rich notes, while adults often tried to hide the truth from their not unperceptive children, musicals of that day at least acknowledged the pricks and pains of life, bringing them to a harmonious, if bittersweet, resolution. Here is Rich describing the thrill of the first overtures he listened to on his parents' new stereo:

What grabbed me the moment Dad put on the record [of *The Pajama Game*] was the blast of sound at its very start. It pulsed through me as it did through the house, like an electric jolt. . . . The sound was just music, not really a song at all. It began with an impressive rumble of drums, which was then followed by a blare of trumpets announcing something (but what?), and then by another part of the band, softer and slower, playing a tune that was so catchy—almost caressing, really—that I found myself wanting to sing along with it even though I didn't know if there were words or what the words might be. The melody was soon picked up by more instruments and then still more as the sound swelled. I felt I was being raised higher and higher by the force of the music, as if I were bouncing in the waves at Rehobeth Beach. . . .

Such passages communicate a child's feeling accurately enough, if not the adult's reflections. (Admittedly, I was seeking the adult, not the child, when I picked up the book, hoping for some behind-the-scenes perspective of the critic's life and opinions. But Rich's memoir begins in early childhood and ends after his first year at college at Harvard.) Rich's style throughout is relatively straightforward, especially compared to the acumen and sophisticated locutions of his reviews. It's as if by re-entering the memories of childhood and adolescence, he returns to a child's less complicated perceptions. Yet his is no crafted child's viewpoint and voice as in Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha*, no subtly woven adult perceptions through the boy's eyes, as Frank McCourt gives us in *Angela's Ashes*.

No awareness, either, of the small smattering of clichés—some variant of “it felt like an eternity” occurs six times—or that much more than a clean, workmanlike style is needed to lift a life tale to poetry. Particularly in the opening chapters (not that the style changes much, but the reader becomes accustomed to it, and reasonably interesting things start to happen), Rich remains steadfastly diligent, as diligent as the lonely boy was when he reconstructed, in detail, the sets of show's he'd seen inside his father's old shoeboxes, and for an audience of one—his mother—repeated the performances.

There's something even a little embarrassing about watching an accomplished writer trace the conventions and discoveries of the personal essay. Details and facts predominate, and Rich's mention of 1950s cultural icons—like bomb shelters, Chef Boyardee spaghetti, and Hostess cupcakes “with their squishy white fillings”—is baldly ordinary, as if they had never before been invoked. Rich's smooth narration does contain a surprising wealth of recalled detail, pieces set carefully in place to tell a story, yet somehow without much feeling of intent or direction, except blindly forward.

That said, there is a recurrent motif of loss, the child's first presentiments of the ephemeral nature of things. And if this note sounds too frequently, Rich nevertheless does provide the reader with a genuine immersion into the anxieties of childhood—the stigma of being from a “broken home,” of being the “runt” in day-camp athletics; of helplessness in the face of divorce, re-marriage, and household moves; all sudden and unmediated by adult explana-

tion. He catches the personal isolation of a sensitive boy who doesn't even begin to fit in anywhere until high school, when he's sent to a Berkshire arts camp and finally finds his cultural peers.

The divorce precipitates years of insomnia, which will torment young Frank until he reaches college and shapes a life of his own. His mother soon re-marries, to a corporate lawyer, also with a son and daughter. Joel is big and booming and vulgar (he's not above helping himself to food from strangers' plates), and Rich bitterly describes his cheapness and petty scams to gain privilege, like posing as a doctor to get better tables at restaurants. Gradually, the boy's distaste develops into hatred as his fitfully violent stepfather bashes his own children (the son ends up in an institution) and eventually Frank—there's an appalling yet familiar scene where the father drags and scrapes the boy down a dirt road at a family summer camp, and another where he pushes him down a flight of hotel stairs in public view. Only Frank's increasingly shy sister Polly escapes Joel's anger; their mother, we learn almost in passing, as if Rich had to avert his eyes even in the retelling, is repeatedly slapped in the couple's frequent arguments. Frank's own father urges him to keep a list of the abuses, but the boy's hoped-for rescue never comes.

Frank's few halcyon memories of singing around the stereo in his first home are replaced by a succession of theatrical memories, for theater becomes the boy's way of escaping the felt misery of his life. In many ways, this memoir is a parable of art redeeming life: reading offers a refuge, television can cradle him to sleep, movies are a serious escape. And theater provides the most perfect alternate reality (better than the cardboard packing box he and Polly make into a retreat)—from the early lure of “Bali H'ai” and “Never-Never-Land” to the later “promise of bolder happenings” and better worlds.

The most striking aspect of Rich's experience is the single-mindedness with which he pursues his obsession. Very young, he memorizes not only songs but their order; once taken to Washington productions, he mentally rehearses every line for days after. Besides building miniature sets, Frank has his own theatrical billboard of clippings where he changes the “marquee” often, and begins an enormous collection of playbills, even scrounging them from trashcans on Broadway, with his mother's fond approval. Instead of comics and baseball cards, Frank is absorbed in *Variety* and the *New York Times'* theater listings.

From the very beginning, Frank unconsciously uses musicals to externalize and define his emotions; later he mines their stories to make his life bearable and believable. Every show offers a chance for identification, especially those like *The Music Man*, *Gypsy*, and *Carousel* with their alienated children. *The Pajama Game* and *The Most Happy Fella* provide or deny clues to the mystery of adult relationships; Gwen Verdon in *Redhead* teases awake his pre-adolescent sexuality. Flushed with spectacle and heightened emotion, Frank finds a world where, for a few hours, everything makes sense, however poignantly.

He develops passionate loyalty and empathy for performers, even attending matinees that “need” audiences; the first time he skips out on one show to slip off to another (trading Mary Martin in *Jennie* for Barbara Cook in *She Loves Me*) is fraught with an unfaithful lover's guilt. Ironically, Frank's exposure to so much theater—from D.C. to Broadway to London—comes about through Joel's own love of it (he hauls the family off impulsively for New York theater binges). Not to mention the perks of money, location, and privilege—Joel is a friend of L.B.J.'s and has dinner guests like Kenneth Galbraith. Frank's sullen tolerance of his stepfather is, he knows,

a discomfiting compromise.

Rich provides a largely unannotated glimpse into the world of the Washington liberal elite in the 1960s, and his brief views of political and theatrical luminaries are necessarily from a distance. Frank sees John Gielgud in *The School for Scandal*, with Jackie Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson sitting in the row behind him, the president slipping in for the second act. For \$3.72 an hour, he becomes a ticket-taker for several years at the National Theatre, a job Warren Beatty once held. He escorts patrons to their car the evening riots are feared after King's assassination. Lauren Bacall winks at him from the rehearsal stage of *Cactus Flower*. Thrilling perhaps, but no closer to the real thing than Frank's stacks of playbills.

The historical backdrop is seen, tellingly but simply, from Frank's teenage perspective—his discomfort at finding his grandparents' decades of discarded furniture in the home of their aging black maid; his use of the sudden social intimacy following JFK's assassination to get to second base with his girlfriend.

School and family and the Vietnam war are not enough to pull Frank from his focus on the stage. One theatrical anecdote stands out: best friends with the son of Joe Stein, who wrote the book for *Fiddler on the Roof*, Frank gets to watch rehearsals with a volatile Zero Mostel and chart the show's progress from chaos to sensation. As the productions accumulate—Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!*, Lotte Lenya in *Cabaret*, Paul Scofield in *Lear*—theater-going readers might be tempted to envy this privileged young man who was in the right place at the right time. Yet Rich admits “The theater had showered me with love, but I had yet to learn how to love anything but it.”

In the last part of the book Rich chronicles his somewhat ordinary relationships with first girlfriends and his far more interesting friendship with a man. Clayton Coots, who is probably gay (teenage Frank never decides, or cares), is a theatrical company manager with a glamorous if lonely lifestyle. Rich includes some of Coots' affectionate, if prosaic letters, and it is clear that their connection is the warmest and most genuine in the memoir.

Only in the last four pages does Rich exchange the youth's narrative voice for the adult's, as if the pain of recollection had had to be masked to this point. We learn in hasty, almost indirect summation what became of his mother, and Joel, and even Clayton, with whom he'd long lost touch. In the end, Rich's memoir tells the story, not just of the making of a recognized critic, but the survival of a frightened child. His “ghost light” is the book itself—as in the theater, squarely placed to keep away the demons.

Barbara Adams reviews regional theater for *The Ithaca Journal* and *The Ithaca Times* and teaches writing at *Ithaca College*.

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Anatomy of Grief

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American POW-MIA movement, one of the mothers could say, "The bones don't interest us. What are we going to do with the bones?" Holst-Warhaft points out that this absence of the corpses became a metaphor itself

Their political *raison d'être* was based not only on the recovery of bodies—the hope of recovering their children alive soon faded—but on holding those responsible for their deaths to account. The offer of officially exhumed bones was, they recognized, an inadequate gesture of compensation...By now...the authorities were dealing with a hard core of professional activists proud to be carrying on the tradition of their children. Grief, for these women, had become a path to a life they never dreamed of, one with its own rewards.

In addition to Holst-Warhaft's marked gracefulness as a writer, one of the impressions I keep about *The Cue for Passion*, even as it manifests a kind of polemic, is its construction almost like a musical composition. There is a kind of variation in tempo and timbre of each chapter: some are more thickly analytical; others, like the chapter on AIDS, with its generous explications and quotations from the work of poets writing about the illness, are more demonstrative. Holst-Warhaft's introduction (let's face it, not all book intros do this) is very much like an overture; reading it gives you clear statements of the themes of her chapters. And, scholarly as the book is, the titles of each chapter are not pedantic or academic, but in a series of single concrete nouns, each triggers some expansion of affect that a more abstract noun might overly condense, using emblems to evoke what each chapter is trying concretely to represent and analyze: "Tears," "Laughter," "Bones," "Disappearance," "Plague" and "Memorials." Why do I make so much of such a seemingly incidental choice? It's partly a matter of asking how one comes to "trust" an author; someone who titles chapters this way seems to be aiming as much for a family—invented, imagined, extended—as for an academy.

Interestingly, for a book that by its title and cover (the jacket shows a Manuel Zanbrana photograph of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) establishes an ethical, activist imperative as its frame, Holst-Warhaft's introduction immediately opens with a discussion of *Hamlet* (from whose Hecuba speech, she extracts the book's title) and *Electra*; in other words, two artistic inventions, literary artifacts, not figures, or events in the flux of historical time, not a mutable population targeted for anthropological research; she will return to *Hamlet* in the book's epilogue.

Framing an ethical imperative in such a way—that is, using powerful, mythic figures drawn from a fixed aesthetic document, and a canonical one at that—is not an uncommon choice but is sometimes done in ways that are either more blatantly polemical, "sentimental," or, as it were, naive, glossing over troublesome aspects of language or the contradictory phenomena of history or psychology. But Holst-Warhaft is not a naive appropriator of myth. The reader sensitive to the myriad impasses that again and again push us into an ethical-aesthetic bind, the reader who might at first be made uneasy by the "activist" orientation of the book or criticize it for eclecticism in the broad reach of its examples, might be surprised and won over by Holst-Warhaft's introductory discussion of *Hamlet* and of *The Libation Bearers*, since, as she makes clear, the dilemma that *Hamlet* and *Electra* face is one of finding the words to give their grieving emotions expression, that is: the classic, always fascinating (some might say privileged) one of blockage. That the emotions they feel are violent has as much to do with the conflict

they endure in finding the right medium, the right form, to express them. Each of them has suffered a loss that is as bitter in the psychological effect as in the real, the murder of one parent by the other. It's an injury that calls for the equalizing violence of murderous revenge, but, caught between loyalty to a mother and loyalty to a father, each is prevented by both external moral restraints and internal psychological ones from any ethical or personal resolution. Impossible as their choices are, there is this strange residue: the riveting beauty of the soliloquies they deliver.

Holst-Warhaft frames her thesis by evoking "The Theater of Mourning" (my emphasis), thereby explicitly identifying another current running underneath and throughout the book, one that has only peripherally to do with the corrective current? I wanted to identify at the beginning of this review. This second current, I believe, although Holst-Warhaft doesn't state it in exactly these terms, explains why *The Cue for Passion* has the power and persuasiveness it does, and why it should claim the attention of anyone interested in the strange, fluctuating relationship between what we experience as life and what we curtain off as "art." Implicit, perhaps even explicit, in what Holst-Warhaft's writing is hunting for in the tracks of our tears is that always compelling, because always shifting and permeable boundary, where life becomes art and where art transforms life. It may be a cliché—but so are rituals cliché—to say that grief, as that which death leaves behind, is one of the names we give that boundary. Seamus Heaney, whose book *The Redress of Poetry* explores the connection of poems to injury and loss, was asked in an interview about the role that commemoration plays in his own poetry. "The elegiac Heaney?" he is quoted as answering, "There's nothing else."

Notes:

¹Readers of *The Bookpress* will be familiar with Gail Holst-Warhaft as a poet and a teacher of modern Greek literature and music at Cornell. Her translation of poems by Nikos Kavadias was awarded a prize from the Columbia University Translation Center; she worked with groups opposed to the military dictatorship in Greece and lived in Greece for several years. In 1975, after the fall of the colonels, she played as a musician in the orchestra that accompanied Mikis Theodorakis on tour, and subsequently wrote a book on the life and work of the resistance songwriter; another memoir of that tour appeared in *The Bookpress* last November.

²Seen in the light of Kübler-Ross's subsequent meditations on the meaning of death, where the mainstream therapeutic community was unwilling to follow, "acceptance" of the bone-fact of death, the end-term of her famous four stages, may not be starkly sobering; it's moving toward congruency with a Buddhist view. We may not exactly have a word to name the emotion that goes with that Buddhist acceptance but in any case, the perspective is very different, as people have long pointed out, from a Judaeo-Christian notion of the "transformative" powers of redemption.

³That this corrective current is manifesting itself is demonstrated by a brief glimpse from a "60 Minutes" program from October 2000: a woman whose child had been killed owing to bad tires on an SUV some months before the Firestone/Explorer scandals were exposed, explained her decision to come into the light of national media. (I paraphrase): "If I had come out sooner and not spent the time weeping, maybe those other children would be alive. But maybe there are still some who can be saved, if I speak out now."

Emoretta Yang worked as a curator of Asian art at the Johnson Museum of Art and as graphics editor of the journal *Diacritics*; a Review of Contemporary Criticism; she has collaborated with artist Kumi Korf on an artist's book, *Silk and Secrecy*. Most recently, she has worked with a group under the direction of Catherine Porter (*The Libation Bearers*) on the translation from French of a compendium of articles on the state of knowledge in ancient Greece, published last December as *Greek Thought* (Harvard University Press). She lives in Ithaca and Ludlowville.

Too Little, Too Late

continued from page 6

access to Jewish Palestinians, such as Peter Bergson, who had been campaigning for rescue camps to be set up in abandoned US army camps, as well as in Turkey, Palestine and North Africa. In a memo of April 22, 1943, Long had quoted "General Strong" as advising that sending refugees to Muslim countries would pose such a "military problem" as to "preclude considering the matter." In the face of the negative response to refugees by generals and diplomats, the Oswego camp was destined to remain the solitary example of what could have become a massive rescue operation.

In a meeting with FDR in the spring of 1944, Pehle suggested opening a series of "emergency refugee shelters." The president allowed he was willing to consider opening a single camp for one thousand people. They would have the status of temporary visitors outside the quotas and would have to sign statements agreeing to return to Europe at war's end. The proposal was moved by Morgenthau and debated at a Cabinet meeting on May 24, with only Ickes openly in favor. The president, Morgenthau added, was still "a little afraid." Then came D-Day and speeches by seven members of the House offering resolutions to open "free ports," where refugees could find shelter from the Nazi terror.

On June 14, President Roosevelt endorsed the temporary, limited haven for a thousand refugees at Oswego, in a formal message to Congress. Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, left the decision of their postwar fate in the hands of President Truman. The CBS drama has Gruber barging into the Oval Office just as Truman is watching the first army films of corpses at a liberated concentration camp. In this fantasy, she melts the

heart of the president, who immediately decides to let the refugees remain in the United States. In fact, Truman acted only after protracted wrangles involving several executive departments and congressional committees. Even then, his order specified that the Oswego contingent would first have to fit open slots in existing quotas, which had not been filled during the final war years. Finally, on January 17, 1946, the refugees were bused across the Rainbow Bridge to the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, where the American consul handed each a visa. Finally, the buses brought them back to the United States as legal immigrants.

Historians are still debating the stature of President Roosevelt as a leader and humanitarian. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., is among the defenders of FDR's role. He said in a 1994 PBS documentary, "If you look in the larger context, no one did more to save the Jews in Europe than Franklin Delano Roosevelt by his opposition to Hitler, by changing the United States from an isolationist nation to a nation prepared to go to war." This positive evaluation must, however, be balanced by the critical questions raised by David S. Wyman and Gruber, among others. If, indeed, something like 250,000 Jews were saved by the United States from Hitler—adding less than 0.2% to the US population, we need to ask why it was done in such dilatory and grudging fashion while six million were left to die. As detailed by Gruber, many of the refugees from the Oswego camp went on to achieve success in business, professions, science and the arts, but she confesses her regret that so many other poor souls had to perish because of our government's lack of courage.

Harvey Fireside is a visiting fellow in the Peace Studies Program at Cornell University.

Castrato Tenoros

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Cretan costume, which consists of full breeches tucked into knee-high boots (white for grand occasions, black or brown for every day) a shirt—often black—with an embroidered vest over it, and a crocheted black silk head-scarf tied low around the brow in piratical fashion. Never mind what the women wear—if they dance at all, they are simply a foil for the moustachiod Cretan men.

The queen of Cretan dances, and of the musical repertoire, is not the most rapid and showy of dances—the *sousta* and *pentoza-li*—but the *syrtos*. It is the first dance I learned in a Cretan village where the fifteen-year-old daughter of the local butcher spent two days teaching me not only the steps but the way the body is held in such a dance. As the musicians played a *syrtos* that night, the line of dancers, led by a group of young men, moved off to the right. The boy in the lead began to improvise, leaping and twisting like a wild goat, keeping his balance by holding the handkerchief of the next young man in line. The grocer and I smiled at one another as we watched, anxious not to miss a note of music or a movement of the flying feet. Further down the line an older man with a heavy moustache and an expressionless face, seemed to walk rather than dance the steps. The young men had taken turns in the lead, each one displaying his grace and lightness more eloquently than the last. Now the old man quietly moved up the line to take the lead. To a casual observer, it was an anti-climax. The old man, who was not wearing the traditional Cretan costume but a business suit, scarcely seemed to move. Only the small triangles of his pointed shoes hovered, delayed, syncopated, flirted with the lyra-player's phrasing. The grocer's eyes were fixed steadily on the old man as he danced. He turned to me and said softly: "The young men were talking to the birds. The old man is talking to the stars."

I felt, as I often did in Greece in those days, as if language had been reinvented, as if what was being said was as perfect, exhilarating, restrained and magical as the old man's dance. I translated what my neighbor said to Hartley who seemed to think I had made it up. As the lyra and the laouto began another *syrtos*, a young man who had watched me following the dance asked if I would like to join in the next dance. Dancing in a tavern is not spontaneous in Greece. You do not, as many foreigners think, simply get up when the music moves you. The head of a table pays the musicians and usually specifies which pieces he wants them to play. Then he and the *parea* or group that he came to the tavern with dance. It is an honor to be asked to join a group of dancers, one which should be accepted gracefully. I began to dance with the group, and felt I was doing well enough, especially when I was asked what village I came from, but when I returned to the table, my neighbor had another surprise for me.

"You have taken many of the colors of Greece," he said, "but not yet the color of a marble column. When you see the marble column dance, then you will have taken the last color." I was so overcome, I didn't know what to say. I thanked him for what I took to be a compliment, but what I really wanted to thank him for was his language. How can people speak like this? I said to myself, and as we left the tavern I decided this man just might have an answer. "What makes you Greeks so full of poetry?" I asked him. Neither abashed nor flattered, he answered me seriously:

"It's a small miracle. The poet takes a screwdriver and fixes the stars in the universe."

Gail Holst-Warhaft is an independent writer and translator of Greek poetry. She is the author of *Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Harvard, 2000).

Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic

continued from page 4

Jason Epstein opens his final chapter, "Modern Times," with a ten-page tribute to Norbert Wiener, predictor fifty years ago of our world today. In the 1950s, Epstein used to visit Wiener in Cambridge where they talked. Probably Wiener talked while Epstein listened. Although Epstein recognized Wiener's genius at the time, it wasn't until much later, when he tried to understand what has been happening in trade publishing since 1980, that he also recognized Wiener's prescience: linked computers could constitute an "unmediated open-ended seminar," reducing to nearly zero the distance between author and reader.

They could also provide a solution to the distribution problem: getting books to readers with the least labor, time, and cost. But this problem had arrived, unseen initially, with the great revolution of movable type. Before then, the few people who knew how to read also knew where the books were: in monasteries, in private libraries, in the palaces of princes who employed copyists. Getting to the books involved onerous travel and having the resources and connections to exact permission to use them. But when cartloads of inexpensive copies could be made, the problem became that of getting books to readers. Because books take up space: in warehouses, stores, and trucks that run between them. Space costs money: rent, heat, light, security, insurance, gasoline, maintenance. And new books are always being made: sixty thousand new titles a year (titles, not books). Old tomatoes and bread can be swept off shelves so that there's room for the fresh stuff, but *Robinson Crusoe*?

Leonard Schatzkin focused fully and imaginatively on the distribution problem in 1979 when he wrote *In Cold Type*, proposing some procedures that would have been easy to implement. Perhaps if publishing had not been such an irrational (I should say "nonrational") industry and had adopted his ideas, events quite apart from the proliferation of computers might not have shoved publishing into its

present rapidly imploding game. If the five giants who now own all of American publishing ever give up on it and go home, the separate houses that have been compelled to coexist in their sheltering arms might shake the cobwebs off themselves, stare fearlessly out at the real world, and find new ways to do what only people who both love books and know business can do. (The giants only love business and (therefore think they) know books). But even privately owned, smaller publishers would have to take into consideration the Internet and people at their own computers.

Hand-held readers, one of the options Epstein mentions, are no solution. In September 1997 the American Council of Learned Societies, the Association of American University Presses, and the Association of Research Libraries sponsored a conference on "The Specialized Scholarly Monograph in Crisis." Available at <http://www.arl.org/scomm/epub/papers/index.html>, the contributed papers deserve to be widely read (the link to ARL's site is valuable for its own sake). Because of their overriding concern with what's *in* books (as opposed to some of the concerns of their more commercial colleagues), those who attended this conference—representatives of major university presses, major research libraries, concerned faculty, and administrators—could cast hard eyes on what's new, washing away its surface allure so that they could elicit only what's good. Most of them agreed, from their own experience and from what few data have been reported, that hand-held readers are like reading books on-screen: nobody likes doing it for any longer than is absolutely necessary, and only a very short time elapses before the person reading the thing prints it out. The people who reached this conclusion aren't neo-Luddites: they're merely pointing out that nobody has yet figured out the solution. Or perhaps even the problem.

Epstein's hope lies with printing on demand: just-in-time printing rather than (in the witty phrase of Scott Bennett, University Librarian at Yale) just-in-case printing. From a directory on your computer, you transfer materials you choose to a machine at places such as Kinko's, say, that will print and bind your single copy and have it waiting when you drive there to pay for and pick it up.

Epstein has seen this technology, and "the future that it implies cannot be evaded." His forays into the Internet to sell books and get them distributed taught him this: Online commerce rewards unmediated transactions between producer and consumer. It abhors

middlemen, a vestige of earlier and obsolete technologies, and devours their cash.

Not that there won't continue to be bookstores, he adds.

Kinko's or PIP couldn't print and bind *Scythian Gold* as a single copy on demand, but not just because the technology for single-copy printing is still at a fairly low level, even for text alone. *Scythian Gold* contains two hundred pages of color photographs, some on the same page with long descriptions, and thus more costly. Other color photographs are interspersed among an additional two hundred pages of text. The light that blazes from these pages is there because the reproductions are high-resolution halftones, probably from a screen cross-ruled at least 300 lines to the inch, but also because the paper is smooth and

thick. *Scythian Gold* sells for \$60. Even then, subventions came from a private donor and a federal agency. If on-demand machines of the foreseeable future could print color photographs that make their subjects as breathtakingly *present* as of those I'm now looking at, the high-quality paper that contributes the rest of the light would still be necessary, and the cost would be prohibitive. There will always be bookstores, or at least physical places from which books are sold, because books such as this golden one have to be looked at and its pages turned before you buy it. And who would publish it in the first place, why would hundreds of people work together to assemble it, unless it could be somewhere to which people could be lured to marvel at it, or to come upon it unexpectedly while seeking some other book, or just browsing? Such tangible, let alone economic, considerations are not to be sloughed off.

California's power shortage that began in January and will sweep the country before it can be prevented is another (maybe the) economic consideration relevant to the future of the codex. Yes, California had, under its very own rules for deregulating the power industry, allowed out-of-state speculators to buy up the generators that the state's utility companies were no longer permitted to own. And yes, with their monopoly on the sources of power, those speculators had raised the price of electricity to nearly thirty times what it had been the month before. But while everyone was trying to think up and put into practice a solution that would keep lights on and water running, would most of all keep companies who just wanted to stay in business from moving out of California, I was riveted by a report I heard during one of first nights of the crisis. From somewhere in Silicon Valley, a man (who?) remarked that no one who had voted for or planned the deregulation had taken into account the huge and growing numbers of computers and the huge and growing quantities of power they used. So far are we from trying to cut down on sales of computers that we lament their supposed leveling off. Stock market investors pull back temporarily but will plunge in heavily at the merest whiff of growth. And libraries and publishers are tumbling over one another in their scramble to store humankind's five-thousand-odd years worth of written knowledge in computer databases that are to be our primary sources of education and of information about everything else. But all of that equipment plugs into wall sockets. In the East we thought we were hearing Californians scream "Foul! They were saying for all of us: "Help!"

Before there were books, muses Geoffrey O'Brien in *The Browser's Ecstasy*, there was the time of the walking book. . . . In such a world, knowledge exists when it is present. It consists of what can be called up from memory at a given moment, and waxes and wanes with age and health and circumstance. Wisdom is a person who walks into the room and sits down. . . . Knowledge is limited to what a human can carry around with him.

But then, after too many centuries, a millennium or two, of singing the songs that had been sung to them, the reciters kept propping up their memories every few months or years by using mnemonic devices that were themselves increasing even as they lengthened the song ("rhymes and meters, three wishes and

seven brothers, systematic catalogues of ships and dynasties"). Only then was something first written down: because they got tired of carrying it and because they couldn't afford to drop it.

This imagining backward brings to mind Ray Bradbury's imagining forward in *Fahrenheit 451*, named for the temperature at which book paper (it's made of wood pulp) catches fire. Groups of people banded into communities when all books were being confiscated and burned, and each person memorized a different book, walking around day after day reciting it aloud to themselves and to one another.


It is indeed something to marvel at: how books continue to defeat every attempt to end their lives, whether the effort be individual and physical—removing them from a school's bookshelves, ripping out their pages, heaping them onto bonfires—or whether it be collective and intellectual by saying (how loudly it must be said!) that they're obsolete.

At least one of the distinguished persons through whose hands the manuscript of *Book Business* passed ought to have corrected two matters: one an outright mistake, the other a major misconception. In the Preface (page x), Epstein says that 'alpha' and 'beta' ("and so on...") are phonemes. They are not. On the following page, he says that spoken language is a technology. If you think of human beings as static, enflashed skeletons that somehow see, throw, catch, bend (who can enumerate the list?) objects, including themselves, you might possibly consider that uttering the vocal sounds that we all recognize as language but whose characterization we still can't agree upon is among the listed items. But a technology is something we can choose whether even to use, while language, like the capability for throwing or for bending, is an integral part of the self-moving physical entities we are. Epstein correctly views writing as a technology (he was tracing the path from there to movable type and then to electronic connection). But apparently he was uncomfortable with the conceptual disjunction between writing and speaking, so he categorized them together as technologies that differ only in that one is oral, the other written.

The designer of *Book Business* used a squarish typeface, "Mrs Eaves Roman," with display type in "Mrs Eaves Petite Caps." I dislike the face and these names intensely, and I hope it will have a short life. Spacing between letters and words is noticeably inconsistent from page to page. Maximum spacing is most common, compelling your eyes to swim helplessly along the line. Publishers less honorable than Norton use this device to make buyers believe they're getting more book for their money, hardly the kind of "making public" Epstein deserves.

Buy this book and read it straight through the first time. It won't be effortless, although it will seem so. Then use it as though its pages hold a collection of keywords that don't happen to be in alphabetical order. By entering them *ad libitum* into a real or virtual library catalogue, you can find your way into and among most of the important facets of the making of books.


Alice Koller's degrees are in philosophy. Both her books were in the library at Cornell when she arrived in 1999 as a Visiting Scholar in English.



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