

The Questionable Piece

Jeff Harper

Tony Lee Moral
The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Alfred Hitchcock known as the master of suspense, creator of such influential films as "Psycho" and "The Birds" brought about much controversy with the movie "Marnie". This film of a woman who steals from her employers and a controlling man who latter hires Marnie is dissected by Tony Lee Moral. Moral in his book, Hitchcock and the making of Marnie takes a look at the movie starting with Hitchcock deciding to produce a theatrical performance based on Winston Graham's novel through the end of production.

"Marnie", Hitchcock's movie proceeding "The Birds" has long been considered to be the turning point in Hitchcock's life as a director. Many critics have claimed this film to be the destruction of Hitchcock's unrivaled career while others have declared "Marnie" as a film ahead of it's time which has influenced many of the great directors of today.

Hitchcock, by some people, has been deemed unsuccessful with the production of this film for many reasons. At the beginning of casting Hitchcock had his mind set on Grace Kelly as the leading role of Marnie. Kelly later declined the role which upset Hitchcock and here was the beginning of many problems to come. Without Kelly, Hitchcock needed a leading lady and after seeing a young woman in a commercial with his desired look discovered Tippi Hendren. Hendren had very little acting experience but Hitchcock had decided that she would be the woman in whom he desired to play Marnie and that he would shape her to his extremely high standards. The role of Mark Rutland, Marnie's employer and latter husband would be played by Sean Connery.

During the screenwriting which would be performed by Evan Hunter there contained a rape scene. Hunter wished to leave out this scene believing that it was too graphic. As a result Hitchcock asked Hunter to reevaluate his thoughts on the scene and one month latter with no word informing Hitchcock of reevaluation Hunter was replaced, never to work with Hitchcock again. Although this set back the production Hitchcock found Jay Presson Allen and the screenwriting presumed from the beginning and included the rape scene.

More problems on the set would accumulate during the production that would lead to misconceptions of Hitchcock's knowledge. Seeing that Hitchcock made the power of his films through the camera's

angles, lighting, and the actors emotional skills he put less effort into backdrops and used mediocre projection while filming certain scenes. This would become a down fall within the production which critics would latter point out.

Hitchcock also known as a controlling man seemed to be losing partial interest toward the end of the production because of a falling out with Hendren who did not wish to be his puppet within the set and in her daily life. Besides his inability to control Hendren, Hitchcock seemed to be getting bored.

Hitchcock needed order and control but during the filming of "Marnie" he had lost that power and turned to heavy drinking. At one point Hitchcock asked, "Norman Lloyd producer of the television show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* to step in if he became incapacitated" (Moral 128), because of health problems to finish the production. Hitchcock finished the production in 1967 successfully.

Upon release of the film Hitchcock received mixed emotions from critics. Many believed that Hitchcock had tried to be perceived as an artist more than the master entertainer as which he was known. The film was picked apart by the critics and many believed that this was the decline in his career.

Not until the early 70's did critics proclaim "Marnie" as a success. Hitchcock was, "shown to have influence of all the major twentieth-century art trends-classicism, symbolism, mannerism and modernism" (Moral 191). Marnie was finally realized as one of Hitchcock's top ten productions by the British Film Institute.

Tony Lee Moral's extensive research of the making of "Marnie" reveals that although the production of this film was problematic it is still a profound piece of theatrical art. Moral's informative writing is very intriguing as it walks the reader through every step of the "Marnie" production. With the help of many crew members involved in "Marnie" Moral conducted his research and created a compilation of thoughts, memories, and artifacts to piece together his book. This book draws the reader deeper and deeper inside as you visualize the set, actors, and the director himself.

Upon completion of the book I watched the movie myself and I believe that Moral gave me a deeper knowledge of this film which did seem ahead of it's time. Moral helped me see things that I might not have acknowledged without his insight and I have come to my personal conclusion that this is an outstanding piece of work created by the master of suspense, Mr. Alfred Hitchcock.

Works Cited

Moral, Tony Lee. Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2002

**A Flagrant Misuse of Paper:
A Book More About Fashion Than Femininity**

Jessica Baker

Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930's Hollywood

Sarah Berry

University of Minnesota Press

\$52.95

Glitz, glamour, feminism, and the overwhelming lure of extravagance! ...At least that is what I think of when I think of 1930's American cinema. America in the 1930's was a time where the female stars of Hollywood fully flaunted their economic independence and their social autonomy-making statements against social norms in the articles of clothing and makeup that they wore—all the while influencing a whole generation of women that they did not need to have the “right kind of blood” to be considered elegant and sovereign. Advertising and movies pushed their way into mainstream American cinema and created the supply of makeup and clothing. However, cinema became the ultimate authority to influence and motivate a whole nation of women who desired social change, as well as change in themselves, in order to create their own type of demand—as well as simultaneously accumulating an increasing gross income during one of the biggest recessions in history. The political and social norms of the 1920's were challenged by the cinema and fashion of the 1930's, setting a full-fledged fight against traditional ideas about class, race, and gender—a fight that would inspire generations to come.

This is the kind of fascinating story that I was expecting, yet the book Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930's Hollywood, by Sarah Berry, refused to meet any of my expectations and became one of the most useless, boring pieces of literature that I have ever read. I was not in the least bit satisfied with the book Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930's Hollywood, a research book about the history of 1930's Hollywood costumes, by Sarah Berry, for many reasons. This book had a lot of potential to become an inspiring story about 1930's femininity became a form of feminism, how it inspired rapid social change through its clothing, how the flashiness of costume fashions on the big screen increased a woman's desire for autonomy—and, not to mention, the significance of all of this happening during the Great Depression! Yet throughout the book, Berry scarcely mentions the hard working women who were struggling to make ends meet during this difficult time, the lower--to middle classes, and instead discusses the trends and the tactical maneuvers of the cosmetics, garment, movie industry to a staggering, mind-numbing extent. In fact, it is not

until page one hundred and eighteen that Berry even mentions the depression, and only then does she give an insignificant quote, “[...] money could be made during the depression only by producing either a lot of cheap films or a few expensive ones.” Rather than mentioning the escapism that the extravagant movies brought to people during the Depression—escapism that made the movies of the 1930’s popular and brought wealth to the movie industry when many other businesses were failing--Berry talks about the decisions that these industries took in order to make money! The fact that Berry refuses to make any kind of meaningful message about the wide range of female experiences during the depression creates a flaw in the title of her book. It is for these reasons that the word “Femininity” does not deserve to be included in the title.

The book is bursting full of useless information, and even though it is relatively easy to make a meaningful message in this book by simply connecting the trend with society, Berry still manages to ruin a perfectly good thesis. The introduction of pants to women became one of the most significant female trends of the 1930’s because their “natural” social image with being masculine eventually became available and acceptable to women. Women had already worn pants for factory work during World War I, and wore them throughout the 1920’s in their own private homes, but they never wore them for regular daytime clothing because men were the only gender who could wear them; yet fashion transformed society, as Berry explains, because in the 1930’s, “casual menswear also provided a means of articulating a more transgressive femininity,” (143). By exceeding the boundary of social acceptability through fashion, this fashion trend both changed the social paradigm of femininity and inspired future generations to challenge those exact boundaries. However, Berry makes no such message in her writing. Though Berry shows that pants were a very important trend of the 1930’s, she clouds the true message of this trend. Berry states, “Female stars’ adoption of pants was, in the large part, a response to the French vogue for garconne lounging suits and beach pants of the late 1920’s, but it was also the elevation of American work and play clothes to the status of Hollywood streetwear” (143). Berry literally spits in the face of femininity with this ungrateful quote. Rather than point out the gender shock that was women wearing pants, Berry chooses to downplay their statement by saying that it was just another trend from the French, and that American cinema women simply transformed the pant from play clothes to Hollywood’s biggest fashion item. There are bits and pieces of a thesis in which fashion parallels society in Berry’s book, yet I found that she ruins this thesis by accrediting marketing aspects, culture changes (like the introduction of women’s leisure and sport activities), and publicity stunts as the reason for the

popularity of the pant, as well as many other items.

Even if the entirety of this book is supposed to be just about fashion, it is still a very dull read. The writing was mundane, and not in the least bit witty or close to provoking intellectual thought. Undirected narrative kept this book at a purely research-based level, and was not even close to sounding analytical or profound. For example, Berry goes over stale details about fabrics and silhouettes. Berry claims, "The reproductions were modeled in Harper's Bazaar, proving that Hollywood design had finally entered the world of elite fashion as well as Macy's and Bloomingdale's. These and other designers gave female stars a more soignée, sophisticated look," (15). This example of literature can be found throughout the book and, to me, cannot be more insignificant. Berry blandly discusses the way in which high society and Hollywood starlets got their clothing, and this type of mindless information is jumbled throughout the duration of the book in a flat, and emotionless manner. I really like 1930's fashion, but really, I do not care to hear anything about fabrics or lighting, and I must be honest... one of the very few things that kept me motivated to continue reading this book were its pictures of actresses in their luxurious garments. To be quite frank, Hollywood design shows up much too often in this book for my taste, and the writing did not entice me to keep on reading.

The only interesting chapter of Berry's book was "Hollywood Exoticism," in which she discusses the moves that 1930's cinema took in order to attract people to theaters, as well as buy their products. The popularity of exoticism, or something that is intriguingly unusual or foreign, was prevalent in mainstream Hollywood cinema and in society because it became "a more escapist paradigm of cultural tourism," (130). People of the 30's began to watch "exotic" movies simply for their mysterious cultural allure, or what "Ella Shohat calls Hollywood's 'spectacle of difference,'" (98). However, "Oriental," Islamic, Spanish, Hawaiian, and Latin peoples became sexually and culturally exploited by 1930's cinema by both stereotyping their cultural backgrounds as uncivilized and untamed, and associating their non-white skin with lust and sexuality. For example, the introduction of the "Latin Lover," (110) and the Islamic harem gave Americans distorted forms of fantasy that stereotyped foreigners as nothing but hypersexual savages who preyed on young women. However, "Orientalism" became one of the most exploited exotic identities of that time. Berry included a primary quote, stating, "Photoplay exclaimed in 1939 that 'all smart women are going Oriental for fall,'" (137). Advertising needed a "fresh look," something that was far different from the pale blonde that became the main icon of glamour in the early 30's, and with the numerous cul-

tures to pick from in the world, they exploited the identities of many traditional cultures in order to make a quick buck. Besides the fact that exoticism was popular, discrimination was still apparent in both society and in cinema and casting discrimination caused for most non-Anglo roles to be given only to white actors. In fact, Berry states that Anna May Wong, a very prestigious and talented Chinese actress, was denied the leading role in *The Good Earth*, and instead was asked to play the role of Lotus, the maid. Wong refused and Luise Rainer, a white Australian actress, was given the main role. Berry states the information of the 1930's and makes a meaningful message by exposing the racist tendencies of 1930's cinema and society. By introducing interesting and shocking information about the exploitation of ethnicity as a fashion trend and a marketing technique, as well as makes an effort to bring attention to the social atmosphere at that time, Berry successfully executes a powerful and concise thesis in this chapter. In fact, if Berry had followed this exact pattern throughout the book, the title of this essay would be a lot different!

Personally, I was expecting an intimate book of research that explored the reasons for the popularity of 1930's cinema and fashion, related back to the importance of 1930's women, and gave insight to the financial advantages that the 1930's film industry had over other businesses; and instead, I got an unexpressive book that spouts-off a collection of worthless research about cinema stunts, advertising techniques, and trends. I know that a good part of this book was supposed to be about Hollywood fashions and trends, and I enjoyed some parts of it, but I found that reading research that strictly goes over cinema trends does not tell me anything about the women behind the clothing. I found that there was no real message behind this book—and for that reason, I am forced to say that Berry is very selfish to think that trends of the 1930's were so crucial that she had to discuss them throughout the entirety of the book, and then completely downplay their social significance. Because none of my expectations were met, I strongly recommend that people who do not have an interest in 1930's cinema not read this book; and for the people that do have an interest, I recommend that they approach this book with extreme caution—it can be very boring and can leave you feeling like you have wasted a lot of your time. I found that this book had a lot to do with fashion and little to do with femininity, and in my opinion, I found that it was a flagrant misuse of paper.

Roots: To Find or To Forget

Erica Scott

David's Story
Zoë Wicomb
Feminist Press
\$14.95

While I was in elementary school, I remember being assigned more than one project on tracing my ancestors. These assignments were a way to discover where we came from, our roots and what ethnicity we were. During one such assignment, in fifth grade, I recall sharing my heritage in class. I said some races with more pride than others because of the fact that they were more unusual or seen as better because of other preconceived ideas about race. For example, I took pride in the fact that I was Swedish, but my English heritage was so common that it did not seem that important. My German blood, on the other hand, did not make me proud because of the idea in my ten-year old brain that German equaled Nazi, which equaled bad. Later I found that the whole reason my last name is Scott is that my grandfather changed it after World War I because our German last name had reflected my family as being German, which scared people during that time. Often, people try to find their roots, but it is just as common for people to try to forget heritage that may be looked down upon.

In *David's Story*, many South Africans are in the same dilemma. As apartheid is ending in the country, people are discovering that they are free to be African, or part European and part African, but what do they want? This story is of David, as well as those who are close to them, and of their struggle to find their ethnic identities, while also fighting against him.

Zoë Wicomb weaves together a narration of David's life events, a narration of historical events, and an account of the personal interviews David has with an unnamed narrator, who may represent the author or another person. The present of David's life collides with past events as fiction meets fact without any boundaries between them. A wonderful narrative is created, though while reading, one must distinguish between the multiple narratives in order to fully understand the story.

David begins a search that leads him from his home in Capetown to Kokstad, with the intent of finding out about his Griqua roots. The Griquas were one of the earliest aboriginal tribes that were found in Africa. These peoples' history is "part of [David's] history" (27). He wishes to find out about his African blood, but neglects his European heritage. I think that David does this because European ancestry was not desirable to have during this time in South Africa.

This is addressed through the viewpoint of his wife, Sally, in an argument one evening, "Next thing you'll be off overseas to check out your roots in the rubbish dumps of Europe, but no, I forget, it's the African roots that count" (27). David was part of the movement that showed resistance towards the apartheid and its leaders before it ended. African ethnicity was considered an advantage. Just as "whiteness" in other countries throughout history has been a sign of being higher on the social ladder, so proclaiming how African one is may have been prized when one was involved in the movement. One thing that really stands out to me is that a leader who worked to liberate South Africa from racist regulations also is bound by unspoken prejudices towards Europeans, even though he is part European.

Sally struggles with her ethnic identity as well. Her given name had been Saartjie, but even her involvement with the movement failed to prevent her from changing her name to a more European name, Sally. Then, at a time of liberation from apartheid, she questions the newfound freedom of being ethnic. Though it may be a trivial matter, her statement still reflects her confusion of what is considered the right way to be, "Straightened hair looks nothing like European hair; it looks only like straightened hair; it's different. I'm sick of people with their so-called ethnic bushy heads" (29). Sally may have been a part of the resistance to fight for freedom for natives, but I think this quote reveals that she does not even like part of that native heritage. It seems to me that she almost despises her natural hair; a defining factor in determining the ethnicity she fought for.

The issues of ethnic identity were also revealed from the historical perspective about the Griqua people as they attempted to regain their native land from the hands of the Dutch. The Grikwas knew who they were ethnically, but had no place in society because of the Dutch government's order to either assimilate or leave the area of Africa that they controlled. Consequently, some left, following a leader by the name of Le Fleur into unforgiving land so that they would not have to give up even their ethnic identity. Because of this action by the Dutch government, Griqua descendants are left to only search for their ethnic identity. The Griqua chief himself, Le Fleur, identifies so much with his ethnic blood that he does not care about his other heritage, "Of his European ancestry, well, that blood was by now so thin, so negligible, there really was no need to take it into account" (88).

These few examples of the content only touch on the greatness of each tale that is related in the book. Wicomb narrates David's present life while incorporating past events that enhance the story by giving background to people and events. However, this sometimes leads to confusion because Wicomb puts so much information in each section because she intends to help the reader understand later events. Personally, I didn't really begin to understand and piece together a story

until I had read at least seventy pages. In addition, though page breaks separate the stories of David and Le Fleur, and the interviews, the reader needs a moment to adjust to each new topic—almost like giving your eyes time to adjust when stepping from darkness to light. I think that this confusion is due to the characters being abstract, with each account varying in length. Another important aspect that a reader must adjust to is the lack of quotation marks when one is speaking or thinking. I believe the book as a whole pushes your mind to be an active reader and forget preconceived ideas of the structure of a novel or story.

While reading *David's Story*, I began with complete confusion, then realization that I understood what was going on, to enjoyment of the story. I was not satisfied when the story was finished, for I found that I wanted more. I wanted to know more about David, those surrounding him, and the Griqua people. The author's narration was amazing in that it pushed me to examine what part of my ethnicity I value and why. Is it because society tells me to value it? Or, is it just my own pride in what I am?



Stephen Lestat

When the Writer is On-Fire

Rita Jones

When the Messenger is Hot
Elizabeth Crane
\$21.95

There are several themes that intertwine the short stories in the book When the Messenger is Hot, by Elizabeth Crane. Each of the sixteen stories is based on the life of a central female character. Many of the stories are about love or the character's relationships with men. In several of the stories the main character is a recovering alcoholic and in others she is dealing with the death of her mother. Many times, the story focuses on a woman who lives in New York or has recently relocated from New York. Fortunately, Crane is able to write each story in such an amazingly unique way that they never become monotonous to the reader. Crane's distinctive use of punctuation to convey the feelings and personality of her main character (as in lack of or few commas and periods in order to express the flow of a woman with emotions that seemingly pour out of her) and her experimentation with different tools used in writing (her exaggerated use of footnotes in "The Super Fantastic New Zealand Triangle") help to make each story new and fresh for the reader. It seems as though while writing this book, Crane threw out all of the strict rules associated with the use of the English language and instead went wild with the tools that it provides.

The second story in the book, "Something Shiny," is where Crane introduces many of the themes that become consistent throughout the book. The main character, Wendy, is a female writer who lives in New York and, as the reader discovers about midway through the story, she is a recovering alcoholic. The basis for this story is that the main character writes her memoir early in her life (she is in her thirties) and it chosen to be made into a movie. During this process, the actress that is going to be playing the part of the main character in the movie, moves in with her. The story begins almost innocently with Wendy agreeing to let the actress, Apple Fowler (who's description conjures up images of Kirsten Dunst or a young Julia Roberts) move in with her but sets up some guidelines, such as Apple is not allowed to answer her phone. The actress, in order to fully experience Wendy's life begins observing her every move, at first just taking notes, then emulating each of her ordinary and unrealized habits.

It's immediately bizarre to me to see someone writing something down when I'm in the middle of doing

something absolutely mundane, something that as a writer I hadn't previously considered was worth writing down, like hand-washing a sweater, which of course is not something Apple has ever witnessed, which perhaps would seem even more unusual to a nonchore-oriented person when followed by using a tweezer to pry out the sink stopper, which broke ages ago, one of those numerous daily adjustments I stopped thinking about as anything that even needs repair, like the way I play my answering machine messages back on my stereo because the machine records messages but won't play them back, or the way I serve Leo (my pug) his Alpo out of my Chrysler Building mug on the sofa every night because he won't eat until I'm eating, and he won't eat won't even eat of the floor by the table because it's too far from me, which I personally think is really considerate on his part, and therefore I do not mind fixing him his dinner in my Chrysler Building mug seeing as how he's so obviously trying to keep me company, all of which Apple scribbles down as somehow being crucial and noteworthy character traits.(Crane, 17)

As days go by, Apple begins boldly intruding into Wendy's life. She begins copying Wendy's style of clothing, she answers Wendy's phone and she rudely shows up at one of Wendy's alcoholics anonymous meetings, disregarding the fact that Wendy told her specifically not to go.

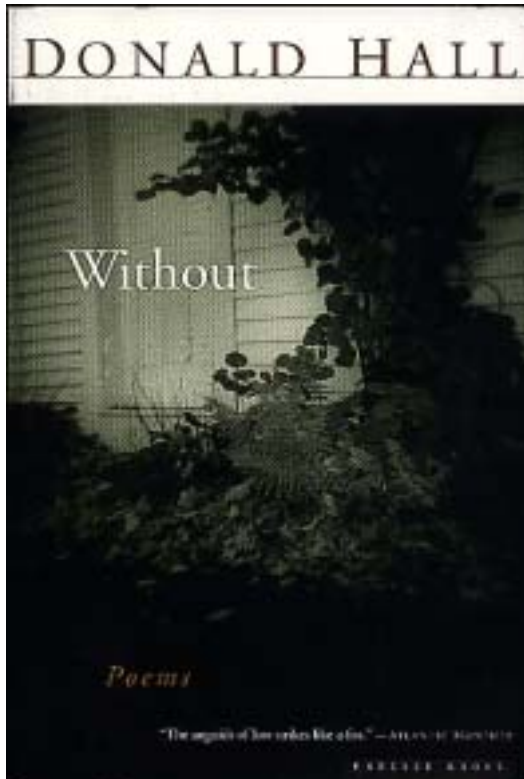
As the story builds, Wendy's character begins to become invisible to the outside world, literally. When she speaks to people they see right through her. Apple fills her void. She begins dating Wendy's ex-boyfriend and there are pictures of her in magazines with Wendy's friends and family. The character of Wendy seems to deal with this in an almost nonchalant way. She continues on with her life, spending most of her time inside her house and resigning to the fact that someone else now lives her life.

The way in which the main character in this story deals with these uncommon and amazing circumstances is common to many of the female characters in Crane's short stories. Many of her characters deal with unusual situations in non-dramatic ways. Crane does not follow the typical style of creating a story wherein there is a build-up, a peak and then a conclusion. Instead, Crane creates a problem or an event and then many times the story ends immediately or without much resolution. Although this may seem as though it would be frustrating or unfulfilling to read, it is not. It is actually refreshing. Beyond that, it

is truthful. Life is full of extraordinary situations that are many times experienced without a dramatic finale.

Crane's experimentation with the English language is sometimes a little over-the-top in this book of short stories. In one she creates a kind of story within a story by using paragraphs of footnotes throughout it. In "The Super Fantastic New Zealand Triangle," Crane tells the story of unrequited love. She writes about a long-distance sexless romance and explains the story's history through numerous footnotes. Although this is a distinctive way of writing, it is exasperating to read. It is easy to become sidetracked by the footnotes or to become overly involved in their story. Crane could have used only slightly fewer footnotes and her technique would have been successful.

When the Messenger is Hot, is a compilation of stories about women and their lives, loves and losses. Elizabeth Crane tells these stories through her unique and bold style of writing. She seems to be less concerned with impressing people through her writing skills than she is with telling brilliant stories in unusual ways. This in itself is tremendously impressive. Each short story in this book is captivating. It is an excellent read, one filled with stories that are not easily forgotten.



Awakening

Nicole Frager

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

By Dai Sijie

184 pp. New York:

First Anchor Books.

\$10.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress is a moving story of friendship, love, and the power of enlightenment. Two boys on a journey to manhood are taken away from society and put to work under the re-education plan of Chairman Mao. During this time of hardship, they come to discover treasures unknown to them. Through their discovery of hidden literature, these boys are awakened to a passion within themselves to strive for a life outside of the ordinary confines of the rigid society they have been brought up into. On their journey, the boys encounter the tailor's daughter, a "wild orchid" blossoming against a world of gray. Through their love for each other, along with their newfound enlightenment, the three young souls are transformed forever.

"Picture, if you will, a boy of nineteen, still slumbering in limbo of adolescence, having heard nothing but communism, ideology and propaganda all his life, falling headlong into a story of awakening desire, passion, impulsive action, love, of all the subjects that had, until then, been hidden from me" (Sijie 57). Their discovery of Western literature inspires the boys to explore their lives. Even though they are confined to the mountainside, they are able to venture out in their minds. They journey to far away places, and their eyes are opened to their rights as human beings to break out from oppression into a world of endless possibility and opportunity. The more they read, the more alive Dai Sijie's novel becomes. The written word ignites their willpower, exploding into a lust for life and love. They are given a gift, and with it, this story unravels into a powerful exploration of the strength we are capable of.

The character of the little Chinese seamstress radiates this newfound beauty and sincerity longed for within the boys. She paints a picture of their passion, a free heart pulsating with life. Her delicate features and her open mind and heart awakens their thoughts and sexuality. "Her eyes had the gleam of uncut gems, of unpolished metal... In her pearls of laughter I caught the musky fragrance of wild orchids stronger than the secret of the flowers lying at her feet" (Sijie 24,88). The author describes more than just a girl. In her eyes, he captures the essence of life and the pursuit of love that inspires indefinitely.

What is most enticing in this novel is the endearment shared

between the two boys. Their survival, not just physically, but also the kind that comes from within the heart and mind, holds firm against each other. Their bond is filled with warmth and strength. Their admiration for one another is moving, and it drives them to continually explore their lives. Through each other, these gripping characters discover where they are going, and although the book does not say where they end up, its passion keeps you believing in them even after the last page is read.

Dai Sijie's novel is refreshing to the mind and body. His words feel familiar, and at the same time they ignite a wild longing to jump into this journey of passionate youth. He allows you to live vicariously through the boys' characters. I felt as if I was reading what they were seeing and touching what they were feeling. Their drive is captivating and made me want jump out of my skin into theirs. I was able to fall in love and feel the anticipation of discovery through this novel. It's nice to read a book that entices me on every page and moves me on every level. Thanks.

Works Cited

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The Devil's Dictionary: An Insult to Lucifer

Nate Kotila

The Devil's Dictionary by Ambrose Bierce
Published by Oxford University Press, NY 1999.
Retail price: \$11.95

Throughout this book Ambrose Bierce tries to make himself seem quite the devil's advocate through his definitions. None of which could be found to be devilish, they are merely definitions for a person that is full of cynicism and hate. This man could have used his talents more intelligently by creating a book of poetry or a book of jokes, since some of his definitions are quite funny. But as a person interested seriously in making evil definitions, he did not succeed.

If Bierce wants to be associated with The Devil he should disassociate himself from using definitions that sound a little bit Christian such as: "Koran, n. A book which the Mohammedans foolishly believe to have been written by divine inspiration, but which Christians know to be a wicked imposture, contradictory to the Holy Scriptures (Bierce, 105)." It seems as though Mr. Bierce is a Christian feeling a need to insult the Muslims from this little spout of wisdom. Instead of trying to come up with devilish definitions he tries to belittle people in, most of the time, neither witty, nor mature ways. A cruel and undeserving definition of a martyr, someone who dies for a cause, is given as: "One who moves along the line of least reluctance to a desired death (Bierce, 123)." I can't figure out why a human would be so bold as to accuse a person who died for a belief of wanting to die. Death is sometimes necessary for a goal to be achieved, but it is never desired. It would be better (though admittedly not the best way to put it) to say that a martyr is someone foolish enough to have thought that they were making a difference and then died before the completion of their task. This is not the best, but it is at least better from a devil's standpoint. There are huge differences between being cynical and being devilish. The Devil is not at the level of mortals, He is in another realm all of his own and does not stoop to the levels of the human race. Cynicism is a shallow trait wherein one hides from their fears behind a wall of insults always ready to strike out at the next person.

One of the few things in this book worth reading is the poetry. The majority of it is not by Bierce, but one of his talents is managing to find interesting poetry to go along with his work. Many of his definitions start with a short cynical definition and are followed by some fairly decent poetry.

Cat, n. A soft, indestructible automaton provided by nature to be kicked when things go wrong in the domestic circle.

This is a dog,

This is a cat.

This is a frog,

This is a rat.

Run, dog, mew, cat,

Jump, frog, gnaw, rat.

-Elevenson

(Bierce, 24)

The beginning is a horrible description of animal abuse followed by a childish, slightly humorous bit of poetry. There is much poetry in this book that is better, but it is too long to quote. Seems Mr. Bierce had a knack for spotting talent in others, but was too full of hate to use his own talent to the best of his ability.

Now that I've said all I can in criticism of Bierce, I have to admit that there were little shreds of talent that came through in his work. Through his work a person reading can learn about his opinions of the world, and sometimes can even get a bit of a laugh out of it. Bierce hits home with some of us when he states that a prescription is: "A physician's guess at what will best prolong the situation with the least harm to the patient (Bierce, 151)." There have been many times that I have felt this to be true and it caused me some laughter to see that someone had put it onto paper. Along with "prescription" he has other witty, sometimes intelligent, definitions as well, including, "gallows", "ghost", and "lawful". All in all I wouldn't suggest this book to anyone seriously into getting a "Devil's Dictionary" because this book is most certainly not that. I would, on the other hand, suggest this book to anyone that wants to occasionally get a laugh while reading it, or to anyone with a closed mind and wants a broader outlook on the world. At the price of \$11.95 though, I would not suggest purchasing this book, rather I would recommend that one go check it out at the local library and read it that way, for though occasionally funny The Devil's Dictionary is a bitter disappointment.

Heartfelt Tales Lost Amid Dull Narrative

German Estrada

The Circles I Move In

Diane Lefer

Zoland Books

\$19.95

Luz reluctantly rose her eyelids out of the dream-filled sleep she had drowned in during the distant and empty night. The blindingly bright sun crept through the bedroom window like a tiptoeing burglar, whose crime was to rob her of the blissful dreams she had created. Its warmth, which heated the room, was an unwelcome presence, for its inescapable announcement notified her that the day had begun. She knew the sublime-less day well, since it had become routine and had left a stale taste lodged deep in her throat. Without relent she choked on the dull repetitive bone which was her life. She turned her head toward the clock and found 9:01. The rat race had begun and she was late.

This, I suppose, is a typical morning for Luz, the main character in *“Huevos”*; the story of a young timid teenage girl who grows into a woman while working at a store called La Estrella de Oro. In the dry heat, she sweeps the Mexican pavement, she guards the cash register behind the counter and protects the huevos displayed in the center of the store, all the while dreaming of a better life; however, her lack of courage to break free from her bleak town and the oppression cast on her simply for being a woman, prove to be overwhelmingly unbeatable.

Luz yearned for the stars infrequently grasped by the women in her village. She howled for them under the moon’s shadowy gaze like a drowsy dog and her ambitious spirit left her vulnerable to the repercussion of her failures. Like all the short stories in *The Circles I Move In* by Diane Lefer, *“Huevos”* deals with a strong female character struggling to overcome internal and external obstacles; be they sex abuse, drug abuse, loneliness, fear or oppression. The theme that unifies these fictional stories amid diverse topics, are their pessimistic conclusions. Lefer’s, at times, optimistically blinded characters are fiercely struck down by life’s cruel hand. There bleak yet realistic climaxes solve nothing and serve as a testament to man’s inevitability. The characters gain nothing from their ventures, yet they press on because life goes on.

Luz carries the burden of man and vainly attempts to darken this beaming light radiated through all women. One of Luz’s assign

ments at La Estrella de Oro is to care for the huevos, which are a symbolic representation of the female reproductive cell. Luz observes the women in her village and she realizes that breeding is a self made prison. If she decides to procreate, then her dream of a better life in a distant place will, without question, go unfulfilled. She often complains of immature and spoiled children making her job difficult by endangering the eggs. On two separate occasions, Luz heroically saves the defenseless eggs from a bouncing soccer ball. The ball or balls, in this instance, symbolizes the male reproductive organ.

La Estrella do Oro is located on Calle Independencia , which translated into English means Independent Street. There is a message within the title of the street which to author is attempting to convey to the reader. Luz revolts against the trappings of her society and struggles to be free; however, her rebellious efforts are unsuccessful and after many years of hoping, her spirit is broken.

Each day brought the torture of anticipation. Luz would hear the kick and children shouting. There were six grandchildren now. The ball would bounce and rebound and slam and crash, and a chill would slowly move up the shopgirl's spine. When the ball flew over the rail, she held her breath. It would hit the floor and roll behind the counter or into the street. The children would laugh with relief. Behind the counter, Luz clenched her fists and waited. The ball couldn't miss forever (65).

In the conclusion of her story, Luz realizes what is echoed throughout *The Circles*

I Move In, that time proceeds our existence. Our inevitable demise is the loss of only scenery in the never-ending and ever-changing story of life.

Lefer's powerfully gripping stories move the soul. Her dynamic cast of characters, through all their faults and foolishness, possess a human quality, which lingers close to the individual. Lefer's wit and use of symbolism softens the blow delivered by her brutally honest perception of life. Her writing style is an excellent way to present the message, which I believe she is attempting to convey; however, her lack of dialogue and over-use age of narrative, at times, was dull. I recommend *The Circles I Move In* albeit reluctantly.

The Right to Feel Deprived

Sonya Gonzalez

In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land

Ariel Dorfman

2002 Duke University Press

176 pages

I have racked my brain over how I was to begin this review. I wanted to write about feeling deprived, about feeling cheated of freedom, about being forced to leave my own home. And yet, as week after week went by, I was unable to find anything within myself that felt this way. I realized then—more than ever—that all my life I've gotten everything I have ever wanted. This made me feel horrible. I didn't want to think of myself as one of those spoiled teenagers, driving my own car while dangerously talking and laughing on the cell phone my parents pay for. But that is exactly what I am. As sad as this realization is, I did not come upon it until after I had begun to read Ariel Dorfman's poetry, which shows that his poems have the power to open my eyes to a world I would have known, and to make me appreciate all the luxuries I have in my life.

In one of his latest books, *In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land*, Dorfman tells with all honesty of the challenges and pains he and his fellow Chilean people experienced under the dictatorship of General Pinochets. For example, in *Beggar*, he writes:

And the one person who could see me,
see the silhouette of my fingers with
his eyes,
is also awake and far away
in another kind of cage
sharing the corner of a blanket,
in a hut jammed with twenty other men,
and a guard who doesn't let him
out to breathe the night,
to fill himself with the relief of a
Chilean summer night,
the cool, fragrant Chilean summer night,
as if the door locked on the outside
weren't enough
and the barbed wire beyond that
and the street patrols beyond that
and the walls inside all their heads
beyond that
and the borders with dogs beyond that,

he could understand me.
What's happening to us is too real. (81,
lines 14-31)

In this poem, Dorfman not only sympathizes with men who are imprisoned by the Chilean government, but he parallels himself to one of those men, making his descriptions even more intimate and honest.

The book consists of poems from past publications as well as ten new poems. In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land is also Dorfman's first bilingual publication. Every one of Dorfman's poems reads with such fluidity and powerful imagery that I found myself—being a spoiled teenager and all—easily wrapped up in the stories of loss, hopelessness, and confusion.

I have to sleep
with your memory
to find you
and sometimes
if I'm lucky
you'll come back
later
in what are generally
my dreams. (41, lines 2-10)

His poems not only opened my eyes to how thankless I had been living my life, but I was also made aware of how trivial my own problems are. I looked back on my life up until I had begun reading Dorfman's poetry and remembered myself as an eighteen-year-old girl who thought the end of the world was when a boy I had a date with didn't call the next day. I felt not only stupid, but embarrassed that I had let other people see me this way. How could I correct all the hare-brained choices I had made pre-Dorfman? The only solution I could think of was to try to find an answer from the source of all these questions. I looked to Dorfman's poetry once again, only this time I did not go into it reading for the despair and tragedy, this time I was searching for the hope.

Sure enough, once I looked close enough, I realized that the nightmarish images of Dorfman's poetry did not end in sorrow. On the contrary, most of his poems left me feeling satisfied and hopeful.

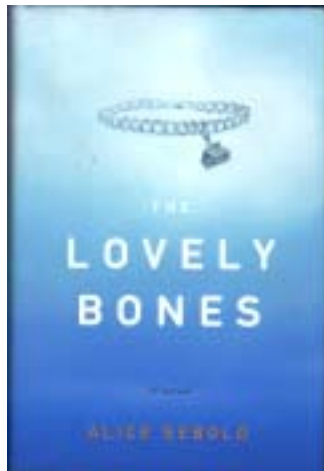
I know that's not how one does
things,
I know that's not good breeding.
but you don't know how I like

to think the day will come
when we read
the September 4th cards
together
the two of us together and talking
beside your night table. (67, lines 117-

126)

Suddenly, the pity I had initially felt towards these poor Chilean people, prisoners of their own country, transcended into great respect. These people were not wallowing in their hardships, they were finding ways to cope with what they had been dealt. If these people, who were faced with exile, imprisonment, and death on a regular basis could find the possibility of living the next day as fully as they could, then I could surely live my life without any complaint.

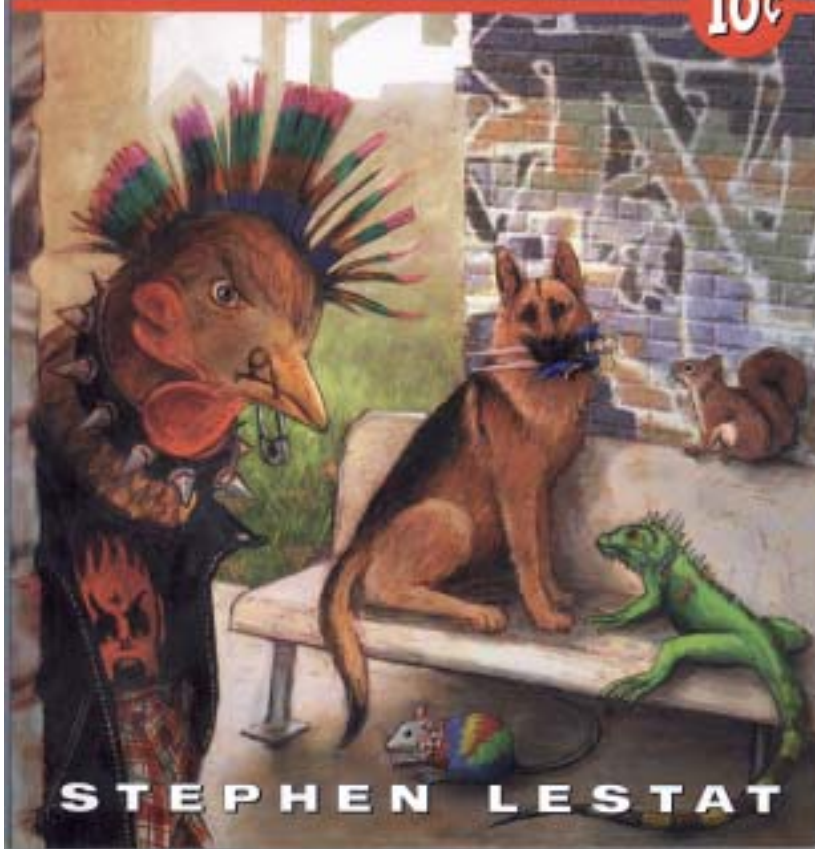
Dorfman's book, In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land, is more than a poetry book brimming to the edges with imagery, metaphor, and rhythm. The poems I read from this book forced me to question things I had once taken for granted, and challenged me to come to terms with things I felt unsatisfied with. Filled with personal testimonies and intimate details, Dorfman accomplishes more than simply writing a poetry book. As I read his poems I became detached from my feelings of consciousness, and was transported to a place where Dorfman himself was confiding in me. Dorfman definitely accomplishes what he had set out to do; he not only establishes an intimate setting for the reader, but he really does present poems that need no explanation—they are more than just words on paper, they are the voices of those in Chile who are unable to speak for themselves. "If a poem cannot speak for itself, it has failed" (ix, preface).



PUNK CHICKEN

AND OTHER TALES

10c



STEPHEN LESTAT

Former Street Urchin Tells All:
An Insider's Guide to Life on the Street

Janet Thelen

Punk Chicken and Other Tales

Stephen Lestat

Lompico Creek Press: CA, 2003

\$16.95

Have you ever met an urban chicken with a lip ring named Ralph? What about a pet rat known as Tank and his Berkeley Gutter Punk owner Knife? Well, you'll meet Ralph, Tank, and more when you step into the world of author Stephen Lestat in *Punk Chicken and Other Tales*. His first book includes the story "Punk Chicken," winner of the 2002 Charlotte Parkhurst Prose Award. Lestat writes with a compassion for humanity, maintaining a sense of dignity for each character by portraying their stories with respect. Picking up where Jack Kerouac leaves off, these stories take the reader down the highway of life offering a personal view of homelessness, alcohol, and drug use. Lestat's stories provide a window into life on the street while most of mainstream society turns a blind eye to these important social issues.

"As a homeless person, or houseless person," Lestat said, "you tend to look at the street as your home." He describes the sleeping accommodations as "moist earth gently giving way under my disposable bedding of corrugated cardboard"(47). He uses this first-hand knowledge in the story "Punk Chicken" which takes place on the streets of Berkeley. His trademark writing style combines humor, wit, and imagination. The Berkeley Gutter Punks are found in abundant numbers, along with hippies, and the ever-present drug dealers usually, "between Dwight and Durant" in the area known as "the park. (50). Their counter part, often animals, have names, personality, and an almost "human-like quality" which shows their close relationship to the people and environment around them:

Ralph and Kip were the best panhandlers on the avenue. Ralph was a chicken. Now Ralph was not your ordinary chicken, no sir. Ralph was a cannibalistic, fire-eating, alcoholic chicken—and a smart one to boot. Kip was a punk rocker, one of the famous or should I say infamous Berkeley Gutter Punks. (97)

In order to survive on the street one must learn how to earn a

living. Panhandling can be successful, but there are certain techniques to use and Kip and Ralph had been good teachers. Lestat suggests that one way to gain experience was to have on-the-job training:

Always read the shoes, Kip would tell me. See that man over there? He's wearing two-hundred-dollar Italian loafers. Take him down. (101)

Lestat explains that there's a pecking order to earning a living on the streets, "an unspoken rule in the brotherhood of panhandlers, which says in part to give ample room to your fellow competitors. So I would usually head off toward some potentially prosperous real estate to conduct my transactions" (101).

A punk chicken is not the only type of pet on the street. There are also rats, and in another tale, "Rat Owner's Guide to Dining Out" this particular rat was named Tank. He "wasn't just an ordinary rat but a tie-dyed rat" that had been "lovingly adopted by the Berkeley Gutter Punks." Tank's "colors spoke the same independence and defiance of authority". While I have pets as part of my family, I'm not partial to rats, especially when you wake to find one on your face, "I opened one eye and peered directly it into the face of my little friend. His teeth were canary yellow and his eyes baby aspirin pink" (45).

After reading *Punk Chicken*, I have become more aware of homeless issues outside my community. I believe that while urban areas, like Berkeley, are able to provide services and shelter to help get the homeless off the street—not all members within its community embrace the homeless—nor do all the homeless always choose to seek assistance. And as the population increases so does tension, sometimes resulting in tragedy. Recently a 56-year-old homeless man in Salinas died after he was "doused with a flammable liquid while sleeping," said writer J. Michael Rivera of *The Californian*.

Living on the street is not always a pleasant experience but it is a reality. It takes a special talent to tell these true-life stories with a sense of humor. Lestat has that ability, capturing your full attention, which is not an easy thing to do when the homeless carry their lost American dreams upon their back. I feel that by using the technique of laughter to view the situation, it makes it easier to convey the message of a growing and important issue: homelessness.

How about a little diversion to ease the hardship of living on the street? Drugs and alcohol may be the first choices because they are easy to get. Lestat describes the Berkeley street scene, "The hippies tended to hang in the front of the park, the drug dealers that supplied the hippies hung in the back and the run of the mill confused alcoholics like myself hung in the middle hoping for a little spill over from either end" (50). But drugs and alcohol can be costly, and sometimes

you can pay the ultimate price: your life. According to *Sentinel* staff writer Robyn Mooremeister, the headlines said it all, "Transient found slain at old Camp Paradise." Mooremeister reports, "The former homeless encampment where Hunter's body was discovered, known as Camp Paradise, became infamous three years ago because of the high level of organization among its homeless population and its later stand off with the city of Santa Cruz." The article concludes with a comment by a 10-year shelter volunteer, "Now it's a really unsafe place. People go there to do their heroin."

Stephen Lestat, accomplished metal sculptor and mixed media artist turned writer, attended the Rhode Island School of Design. A skilled craftsman, his choice of 3-D words are used as a sculptor transforms raw material into shapes, firing personality and life with an artist hands. "I fell in love," Lestat said, "with it as an art form because you can create the characters and the characters end up telling you what they want to be. It's the relationship with you and the characters."

When Lestat next returns to Berkeley, he will have his own *Punk Chicken* under his arm. Most likely it won't take long for word to hit the street that Lestat (AKA: *Laughing Wolf*) is back in town. This time he will read from his rags-to-literary-riches first book at the reputable, Cody's Bookstore. I offer a word of warning: the book contains adult language and subject matter, but if you're looking for an action-packed, high-octane drama—a true-life adventure in the gutter of life—you'll find all that and more in the eye-opener, *Punk Chicken and Other Tales*, an insider's guide to life on the street.

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Nothing Can Be Taken For Granted In a World Where Love Can Be Painted As the Color Of Chocolate

Clare Hayford

Weetzie Bat

Francesca Lia Block

The book I have reviewed is *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block. I love this book! When I set out to read a book I absolutely crave the aspects that she includes in hers. Ms. Block congers up the perfect potion for great novels in her writing. She spends her time painting a few specific images and leaves out, for the majority, any in-between action. Instead of stating that the two men drove home, she describes in detail about how they drive and what they are doing while they sit in the car. “They sang along with Dionne Warwick. They stopped for all-you-can-eat pea soup at Anderson’s Pea Soup.” She describes the characters Dirk and Duck driving home and, in just these few words, manages stir at the least three of your senses.

Before debating specifics of this book in particular, it is necessary to set a few things straight. Francesca Lia Block has a very consistent writing style. Throughout her novels she uses similar plot twists, with never-disappointing, colorful language. When discussing any one of her novels with someone who hasn’t read her work, there is the need to address the idea of the character names to avoid at least some confusion. The list of main characters in this book extends from such names as Dirk to the name Weetzie Bat. By far, the most confusion is fought around the name My Secret Agent Lover Man. It is an ongoing joke that when someone talks to his girlfriend, they have to refer to him as Your Secret Agent Lover Man. The names that Ms. Block comes up with are the first of many efforts made to thrust you headfirst into the world created for dreamers.

Francesca Lia Block continues her scene with the two men driving down the freeway on their long journey home.

“Dirk made plans for when they got home—they would start working on My Secret Agent Lover Man’s new movie (called *Baby Jah-Love* and starring Cherokee and Raphael as brother and sister whose parents have been separated because of racial prejudice but who are reunited by their children in the end); they would take a trip to Mexico and drink tequila and lie in the sun and play with Cherokee and Witch Baby in the water. They would start having jam sessions and write new songs, start training to run the next L.A. Marathon; they’d become more politically active, Dirk said.” (page 68)

In just one paragraph she explains subtly the two men’s situation in life. She doesn’t state that Dirk and Duck are young, wild, passionate men;

she describes the way that they act being that they are young and wild and passionate. This makes her writing easy to read from one perfectly molded scene to the next.

Everyone can relate to her characters, thanks to her writing style. It makes no difference what kind of person you are. There is some portion of this book that you can find true to your own life. Whether it's a physical attribute or merely a shared opinion, throughout the pages you find yourself written into the personalities of the protagonists.

The characters she writes about are not typical people; they are people who have far from ordinary life styles. There are four young friends raising one baby girl, with little knowledge of who the father is. She sprinkles this book with no less than an appearance of a magic genie, a wild array of daily activities, and an outrageously eclectic wardrobe.

“She was a skinny girl with a bleach-blonde flat top.

Under the pink harlequin sunglasses, strawberry lipstick, earrings dangling charms, and sugar-frosted eye shadow she was really almost beautiful. Sometimes she wore Levi's with white-suede fringe sewn down the legs and a feathered Indian headdress, sometimes old fifties' taffeta dresses covered with poetry written in glitter, or dresses made of kids' sheets printed with pink piglets or Disney characters.”(Page 4)

Her writing is like a seventeen course meal, improving with every new addition. She has a way of cooking up the most mouth-watering images. Pictures of beautiful people in edge-of-your-seat situations and places you really wish existed exactly the way that she describes them. It is not a “first they do this, then they do this” kind of writing. She has no need to narrate; she puts you in the scene with the other characters, with your own secret superhero identity.

The book is more than an escape, it is a trap. It is a piece of writing that makes you more aware of every aspect of your own life. A novel that you wish you lived in, not because everything is just hunky-dory all of the time, but because of the way that even the most horrible life landmarks are described in a playful way. Things go good, things go bad, things go wrong, things even go weird, but the changes never seem out of place. She uses a rainbow of vocabulary, and a whole world's worth of crazy situations and scenarios to portray her own ideals of a life of love, peace, and forgiveness. She has a decadent way of telling a story that appeals to your taste buds and your ears as well as your eyes.

Her choice of words draws in themes that are playfully written with utmost fun in mind. They leave you with an empowered feeling—a feeling that you could fly if you really concentrated hard enough on sprouting wings. I would describe her writing as delicious. Her style is highly pleasing and agreeable to the senses. It's tasty. The naming of her characters is a mere sip of the ocean of the unique world that she escorts

you through. You are taken through a jungle of wild things. Some are beautiful, some are frightening and others can be seen as cute, but they all rely on each other to maintain the balance of the whole.



Heather Wilkerson

Breath of Haiti

Maureen Quinn

Breath, Eyes, Memory

Edwidge Danticat

Vintage Contemporaries, Random House

\$12.00

It is said that we write what we know, and in Edwidge Danticat's first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, although the story is not strictly autobiographical, we get a glimpse into what it was like for her to spend her childhood in Haiti, and come to the US at the age of twelve. "Breath" tells the story of Sophie, raised by her aunt in her native Haiti, and sent up to New York to be with her mother when she is twelve years old. With Sophie's story comes the story of her female lineage; we learn about her grandmother, her mother, her aunt and how in turn they have all shaped each other. Danticat makes a very natural link between Haitian culture and its relationship with mothers and daughters. Her descriptions, especially of Haiti, are ripe with beautiful imagery, giving the reader a fulfilling sense of what Haiti is like. Some passages are almost surreal in their poetry, yet they still flow easily within the story.

Interestingly enough, I have read Danticat's novels backwards. *The Farming of Bones* I read in highschool, a vivid and shocking chronicle of the slaughter of Haitians in the Dominican Republic in 1937. I read *Krik? Krak!* for a global literature class that I took with a Haitian-American instructor, a collection of short stories, jumping back and forth between Haiti and America, and among mothers and daughters. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is clearly her first novel, as her natural ability and style only become more developed, and more practiced, and she chooses to tackle more gruesome and difficult subjects in her later novels. It only makes sense that a first novel would be some form of a memoir.

The first part of the novel takes place in Haiti, when Sophie is twelve years old, being raised by her Tante Atie, and learns that she will soon be leaving her home to rejoin her mother in New York. Here, Danticat does a wonderful job setting up a background of the relationship between Sophie and her aunt. Having been raised solely by her aunt, and having no memory of her mother, Sophie regards her aunt as her maternal figure, and loves her as one. The story opens with Sophie making Tante Atie a mother's day card with a poem for her: "My mother is a daffodil, /limber and strong as one. /My mother is a daffodil, /but in the wind, iron strong" (Danticat 29). While

showing the reader how a twelve year old Sophie views her aunt, the poem also introduces us to a few themes of the story. This story is about mothers and daughters, and it is about women who are strong. It is about this maternal relationship withstanding the worst kinds of hardship. These words continue to pop up throughout the story as a reminder of not only of Sophie's ties to her aunt, but also of the general theme. As Sophie's grandmother tells her to comfort her fear in going to her mother, whom she does not remember, "Your mother is your first friend" (24).

This first part of the novel also gives the reader a background in Haitian culture, and a background in the people Sophie leaves behind on her voyage to America, characters that come up later. She describes the walk to Sophie's grandmother's house: "We walked by a line of thatched huts where a group of women were pounding millet in a large mortar with a pestle...In the cane fields, the men chopped cane stalks as the sang back and forth to one another" (22). The way of life, and the roles of men and women are conveyed vividly. Her descriptions continue to allure the reader and capture the senses, especially in the colorful descriptions of Haiti: "I got up to watch the sun rise. I sat on the back steps as clouds of smoke rose from charcoal pits all over the valley. A few small lizards darted through dew-laden grass, their gizzards bloated like bubble gum" (112). Danticat has an intuitive sense for imagery; her descriptions are easy and natural, not forced or overdone, and they do their job in transporting the reader to another place.

Along with Danticat's knack for imagery, she also has a talent at for conveying a sense of Haitian society that is again natural and familiar. One thing that really struck me about this book was how she chooses to insert the issue of the political turmoil present in Haiti. It would be impossible write a story about Haiti without addressing the country's social and political problems. However, this novel is about Sophie and her story, not about the Tonton Macoutes occupying the towns; the soldiers terrorizing the people. So, Danticat sets the Macoutes as just another part of the background, as much as the lizards or the flowers she describes. They are not the point of the story, but they are a very real fixture in Haitian society. As Sophie walks through the market, she describes the different people and stands that she sees, among them are some Macoutes: "One of them was staring at me. He was younger than the others, maybe even a teenager. He stood on the tip of his boots and shoved an old man aside to get a better look...He grabbed his crotch with one hand, blew me a kiss, then turned back to the others" (117). Here, they are just another detail. There are a few specific incidents that are described as more eventful, but they are still backdrop.

The main reason I say this is clearly her first novel is that it is less tidy than the others. There are many odd details, especially about the pasts and personal lives of the main characters that seem erroneous and off topic, and ultimately go unexplained. There are instances where Danticat employs a bit of mystery, introducing some details that later develop into insightful background information, but sometimes her attempts to build mystery around her characters get lost on the shuffle and end up falling flat. Some of these details would have worked had they been explained, and some should have just been dropped altogether, as they only made things messy and confusing.

Even if Sophie's life does not exactly follow the same path as Danticat's has, we can only imagine that many of the expectations placed on Sophie, the day to day experiences she describes, and her own feelings dealing with moving and her mother, are taken from Danticat's own life. Breath is epilogued with a letter from Danticat to Sophie, telling her that her story, and the stories of her family are unique as well as they are stories shared by every Haitian woman: "...your secrets, like you, like me, have traveled far from this place [Haiti]...you are being asked...to represent every girl, every woman from this land that you and I love so much...of course, not all Haitian mothers are like your mother. Not all Haitian daughters are tested, as you have been" (236). Following reviews assuming that Sophie's story was meant to truly represent all women of Haiti, Danticat added this letter to pointing out that while Sophie shares something with other Haitian women, her story is still her own.



Amy Feron Mathews

Movies: A Piece of Everything

Kelly Galli

Power Screenwriting: The Twelve Stages of Story Development

Lone Eagle Publishing Company, LLC

U.S. \$19.95

How often have you said or heard others say, “But I saw it in a movie!” and labeled the speaker as boring, unintelligent and non-creative. Who but an idiot sites a film as evidence of human nature? They’re only around to remind people in later years what a narrow-minded and problem-filled the social world of a particular time period was, right? Of course right! many cynics retort. Michael Chase Walker is a screenwriter who has set out to prove otherwise. In his book Power Screenwriting he relates a compelling screenplay’s storyline to just about anything you can think of. Specifically targeted towards writers, the book is a step-by-step guide on how to develop an idea into a story and then into a movie, with plenty of room to stretch one’s legs and twist the rules a bit. In my opinion the book was surprisingly interesting and accessible. Examples of the many terms are pointed out among several well-known films. One learns a film is not only a story that has been interpreted visually but a reflection of the many struggles, aspirations and joys of a human life.

The inner or outer struggle of a film’s protagonist may represent what an audience member wishes they could accomplish in their own lives but for whatever reason do not. There are two main types of stories: those where the main character undergoes a change or one where s/he is an instrument for change. The author labels the former as more rewarding, for the more internal the struggle the more significant it is. As Walker points out on page 4,

“...the hero solves a personal problem and undergoes a change that endears him to us

forever. We are grateful for their experience because most of us do not have the time in

our busy lives to pursue self-transformation. Instead, we go to the movies. We pay

movie stars a lot of money to show us *how* to change...normal everyday distractions

obstruct them from the hard, introspective work of determining their purpose in life.”

It is true that to an extent, people watch movies to experience a sense of escape, to observe a situation either quite similar or quite different than one’s own. Walker makes a good argument in saying an audience will, instead of embarking on their own journey of self-discovery or

adventure, choose to watch another's, for the figures onscreen are deemed more interesting compared to ourselves. The turning point of a person's life can take years to unfold and finally present itself; the turning point of an actor's life in a drama or comedy needs only about half an hour. A protagonist, or archetypal heroes and heroines, invite us to accompany them, "...[crying] out from the nether regions of the psyche," "Watch me! Stay with me! Join me in the perils that lie in wait ahead and be transformed!" (p.53) Whether we ache from laughter, cry, or tense up in anticipation, a good film will not disappoint.

One type of archetypal hero written about in Power Screenwriting is the orphan, a protagonist with nothing to lose and everything to gain. S/he is not always literally an orphan, but someone who seeks more than the sense of belonging and conformity that most strive for and eventually attain. Everyone feels or has felt at times that one does not belong—"This sense of not belonging is a part of all of us. It connotes loneliness, a separateness, a yearning to be something that is not yet realized." (p.57) In different stages of their lives people feel the need to pursue a greater purpose, an internal or external journey that can lead to true happiness. Young adults in particular can relate to the orphan-like protagonist. They too are trying to find their place in the world, the niche where they are the most productive or happiest.

Also easily accessible to adolescents, teenagers and young adults is what Walker calls the Outlaw Myth. As Freud once said,

"Since the beginning of civilization, man has had but one choice: to conform or not to

conform. If he conforms he is a dead man; his life is over; his life decisions

predetermined by the society he aligns with. If he chooses not to conform, he buys

himself one more choice: to become outlaw or hero."(p.68)

This outlaw hero adds a sense of urgency and excitement to the screenplay. Walker says that though outlaws are undecidably immoral and selfish in their actions, they do possess a good quality that can lead an outlaw, if she so chooses, to escape its world and enter one where they have a second chance. But the choice to turn a new leaf is difficult for the hero because "Though we are repulsed by the unsavory nature of the criminal underworld, we endow the outlaw with status and wealth to show how much is a lot at stake for him should he decide to leave." (p.71) Will the hero choose a life of fairness and equality or continue of his or her path of destruction? What will he require in order to change? What obstacles will appear on the way? The answers to these questions and more are what an audience searches for when watching a movie.

Power Screenwriting is highly recommended to anyone interested in screenwriting. If you have always been curious if you

have the talent and are not sure whether or not you have what it takes to complete a screenplay, take a look. The book is also useful for film students or movie buffs who want to learn more about the art and the first step of producing a movie. Even those who claim to detest movies could afford to have a read in order to fully understand the parts of a film many find appealing. Walker teaches the reader that a screenplay requires careful thinking and planning and is much more interesting and rewarding than most people believe.



Eye Candy, Kelly Woods & Jamie Uyematsu