
Burned and Repaired

Sara Twitty

Repair

C. K. Williams

Farrar Straus & Giroux

\$12.00

Morning in the Burned House

Margaret Atwood

Mariner Books

\$15.00

The cover of *Repair*, a book of poems by C.K Williams, had a Pulitzer Prize sticker on the cover. I should have taken that as an omen when I first saw it. I hate it when they put a sticker like that right on the front. Granted it does help to find worthwhile reading material in warehouse sized bookstores, but there's also an obligation felt. Am I the only one who feels guilty after reading an awarded book and not being impressed? I have yet to read a book with the Pulitzer boasted on the front and feel it really deserved it.

The "rave reviews" for *Repair* bragged of its honesty. It was honest yes, but in a distant sort of way. Williams's poetry was a bit too ungrounded, too cerebral. His poem, "Space," starts with "The space within me, within which I partly exist: so familiar it is yet how little I know it, I'm not even sure of its volume; sometimes it expends behind me like a wing, sometimes it contracts, and while the world is often in it, it's rarely wholly congruent with it." His writing is intense thinking without a strong link back to earth the reader can grab onto and follow up into the space in his head. One feels like calling out 'paging Mister Williams, earth to Mister Williams, come in Williams, are you there?'

He seems so absorbed in himself and his deep track of thinking that he gives no par or acknowledgment to those who are reading his contemplations. One feels like an intruder who has come upon someone at the moment of epiphany, but not seeing how they got there, is at a loss to understand it. He alludes to a lot but he never seems to get round to actually saying it. Even his descriptions (while beautifully written) are far removed and seem to come from some remote observer. "That astonishing thing that happens when you crack a needle-awl into a / block of ice: / the way a perfect section through it crazes into gleaming fault-lines, / fractures, facets; / dazzling silvery deltas that in one too-quick-to-capture instant madly / complicate the cosmos of it's innards."

It's hard to get attached when there's such distance between the reader and the writing. Reading the poetry of *Repair* makes one feel like a partygoer holding a balloon. The brightly colored ball of rubber thought floats high above, out of reach, and attached to us only by a thin string stretching overhead.

Many people may well enjoy Williams's poetry; it is purely a difference

in taste that I prefer something more, tasty. I like to come away from poetry feeling well filled, with the savor of the images the words evoked still spicy and hot on my tongue. The writing that makes me leap cartwheels and wander through the day thinking *wow*, are volumes like Margaret Atwood's new book of poetry, *Morning in the Burned House*.

Atwood's poems are honest too, but they are also much more emotional, meaty, sad and saucy. She speaks of daydream musings, and of the tiny moments in life that crush your heart and then breathe it back to life with CPR. Her writing comes from the gut, and one can feel it as they read. That brings the reader much closer to the poetry, and to what is being said in it.

Down and dirty is her work. Like gardener among her earth and plants she's got her fingers muddied in the soil. Her descriptions are blunt, yet written with the artistic dexterity of a potter moving clay, depicting the burped up smell of cat breath and how men "...throw themselves on grenades/ and burst like paper bags of guts" (pg. 52) or like in 'A Sad Child' "you're sad because you're sad. / It's psychic. It's the age. It's Chemical. / Go see a shrink or take a pill, / or hug your sadness like an eyeless doll/" (pg. 4). Atwood says what really comes across her mind. Such hard and disturbing subjects as dreams of dead fathers, ghosts, feeling death or dead, and thinking on how the world really works. Her poetry is opposite of Williams because it reaches you, it makes an impression.

In fact Atwood's poems reminded me of talks I have with my girlfriends. Of how we lounge, intertwined in a pile of limbs having 'girl talk' about periods, pregnancy scares, depression and men. The talk is frank and openhearted. We don't use euphemisms, or skirt the issues. We want to say penis, we say penis. We want to say how it feels nursing old wounds, or acknowledging that sometimes we do mean to cause pain because we want them to finally *get it*, we say it. And Atwood says it too.

She says, in one poems character role, "... I tell/ what I hope will pass as truth. / A blunt thing, not lovely. / The truth is seldom welcome, / especially at dinner/" (pg. 50). Although when she speaks it's as a military historian, what she said sums up her way of writing. The things she writes are hardly good dinner conversation, because they are true, and not polite.

Stuff like Williams work makes me feel I'm sitting at a formal dinner with a line of five different forks and a meal the size of a sparrows foot on my plate. I'd much rather dig my teeth into a meaty piece of poetry like Atwood's. Her writing is like a barbecue burger that drips roast sauce down my chin.

In her poem "Red Fox" she thinks on how hunger changes people. "Why encourage the notion/ of virtuous poverty? / It's only and excuse/ for zero charity. / Hunger corrupts, and absolute hunger/ corrupts absolutely/... To survive/ we'd all turn thief" (pg. 17). She's right; hardly dinner table talk. You can talk about world hunger at supper only so long as you keep it 'objective', clipped and faultless.

People don't like to be faced with their faults, and they certainly don't want you to figure out they have them. It forces everything to a level of intimacy people don't want there. They just want to eat their noodles and forget about

the churning beneath the surface, pretend they don't exist until a later date, pretend they don't feel the same way. Williams may allow it, too caught up in his own distant philosophizing to notice yours, but Atwood doesn't. She dares those who read her work to confess their own musings on life. To compare them and see that though we may act so in public (playing a happy tune for the spy cameras we imagine are everywhere 'cause we've seen too many conspiracy movies) are we really any more fooled than she is?

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Rocking Chair Volcanoes

by Troy Bookout

Out of the Crater

Richard V. Fisher

Princeton University Press, \$18.95

There is nothing more exciting than seeing and experiencing the sight of a volcano as it spits scorching hot magma and causes destruction. I picked up Richard V. Fisher's book, Out of the Crater, expecting wonderful descriptions of volcano eruptions and a sense of experiencing them myself. Instead, I encountered a book full of lengthy descriptions of the after effects of a volcanic eruption. This book is definitely intended for those interested in the logistics of a volcanic eruption and the *after* effects of a volcano. Fisher is a very educated man and knows a lot about how a volcano works, but never intrigued me with the story of his life and his career. Fisher should read this book to the rocks he studied, because only the rocks, a few close friends, and volcano fanatics would enjoy this story.

It takes a certain kind of person to roam desolate lands in search of rocks that tell a story of the past. Richard Fisher is that person. Spending his whole life in the fields of volcanic devastation, probing for answers to exactly what happens when volcanoes erupt. Fisher spent many years studying the famous eruption of Mount St. Helen in Washington. "It was an intriguing and complex problem; the blast took no more than five minutes to pass any one locality, but it took me eight years of research to understand partially what had happened" (102). As I read the book, this is where I was hoping for personal accounts of the actual eruption. Instead Fisher passed over the eruption as if it was insignificant and barely mentioned the many people, including his friends, who died during the eruption. I would have been a lot more interested in the book if true life stories were told before the scientific hypotheses were explained in full detail. I felt no connection to the book, and Fisher's explanations of the eight years he spent studying this volcano was drier than the soil and rocks which he was studying. The book Krakatoa : The Day the World Exploded: August 27, 1883 by Simon Winchester tells an exciting story of one of the biggest volcanic eruptions ever recorded. The book gives real life examples of people who witnessed the volcano and recounts the 40,000 people who lost their lives in the eruption. Even the book Why Do Volcanoes Blow Their Tops?: Questions and Answers About Volcanoes and Earthquakes by Melvin Berger and Gilda Berger, designed for children 2 through 5 years old, is more interesting than Out of the Crater. At least the children's book has some colorful pictures to go along with the logistics of the volcanoes.

Although not a professional writer myself, if I had read through this book before publication, I would have caught some of the errors that take away from the book's credibility. Since this book's main purpose is to inform people

about how a volcano eruption works, and is not trying to keep its readers on the edge of their seats, spelling errors hold back its trustworthiness. Fisher asks questions throughout his book, and then answers the questions in full detail. "Why was the crater was so wide compared to its height?" (47) When the question does not make sense, how can a person understand the answer? Reading this quote, I suspect that no one read this book before it was published. Using more than one "was" in the question makes it read completely wrong. I was speed-reading and still noticed that the question did not read right. Later in the book, on page 55, another distracting spelling error occurred. "On the way, I visited the maars on Izu-Oshima, and island in Japan." The correct wording would be an island in Japan. Although this may seem insignificant and make me seem too picky, it is important to use correct grammar when trying to explain a scientific hypothesis if a person wants the hypothesis to be taken seriously.

Fisher not only bored me for 172 pages; he teased me with interesting stories that he never elaborated on. When he was researching El Chichon in Southern Mexico, he hinted at what could have been a very interesting story to add to his book, when his pilot did not show up to take him home. "We found out later that the pilot who didn't show up was killed in a gun fight with bandits during the week we were at the volcano" (121). Why even mention this story unless one is planning to tell an interesting descriptive story about what happened exactly? I was so sick of hearing about rocks and ash at this point in the book that I was ready for a real action-packed story, even if it was just a paragraph long. I am sure that Fisher experienced many exciting things throughout his career that was worthy of adding to this lackluster book.

Although Out of the Crater was not an intriguing book, Fisher still had his moments of appealing anecdotes. I guess being out in the wilderness by yourself for the majority of your life gives you time to think, plenty of time! Fisher touched on the idea of the environment and nature sporadically; he offered unique expert opinions of the way he thinks life works. "There is no environment where life does not exist-the deepest floor of the oceans, the Arctic and Antarctic, the jungles of South America and Africa, the arid deserts of the world" (134). Fisher studied in areas that were devastated by volcanoes, yet still saw creatures which were able to survive in the bleak conditions. I think Fisher enjoys solidarity, which makes him appreciate any other creature that lives in solidarity. Fisher's choice of what to study would be very depressing for the average person because much of where he studies is in ruined lands. I appreciate that Fisher can still find beauty in the field that he works in and cherishes any form of life that he comes across.

Not all aspects of Fisher's job are as bad as I am making it sound. He got to travel all around the world and work, see, and experience different cultures. Fisher made a very interesting observation after he visited China. "The Chinese culture differs greatly from that of western cultures, but the ignimbrites are the same" (153). An ignimbrite is a deposit of a pyroclastic flow or pyroclastic surge or both (174). What I think Fisher is trying to say is that even

though people live differently from culture to culture, we all live on this planet together and share the same amazing creations that God (or whoever) has provided for humans and all living beings to enjoy. Fisher spent his life studying ash and rocks around the world, but also silently studied the people who lived amongst the ash and rocks.

Fisher came up with many great hypotheses (which may or may not have been proven) later in his life. Maybe some day Fisher's research will serve as a tool to protect the many people who lose their lives during volcano eruptions. If I were the publisher, I would have encouraged Fisher to tell some stories that capture the reader. Maybe I am just too much of an adrenaline addict to enjoy books of this sort, but if I were to re-write one paragraph in his book (not that only one needed rewriting), it would go like this:

After three hot grueling weeks of studying volcanic ash in the ruins of Mexico I was ready to go home. To our surprise, the pilot never showed up to take us to the main city 10 elevated miles away. After the fatigue settled in, it was hard to motivate the crew and myself to make the journey on foot. I went out in search of a small town to grab a bite to eat and to rinse my face before we started the strenuous journey. I ran into a local man who ran a pony farm and talked him into guiding us on our journey with the help of some of his ponies. It was the end of the day when we departed, but with help from the bag of coca leaves he brought, the over 10 mile walk through the mountains went by like the breeze. Later, I found out that our pilot was killed in a brutal gunfight with bandits.

I think it is time to put the book, Out of the Crater, back into the crater for some other volcano buff to study because the only ash that is interesting in this book is the ash that it is collecting on the bookshelf!

Mamma Mia!

by Stephanie Blake

Paper Fish

Tina De Rosa

The Feminist Press

\$9.95

When I think about immigrants, I envision a sad life full of hard work with little pay and a huge heart full of hopeful dreams. I picture brave individuals who leave behind their beloved homelands in a desperate attempt to improve the impoverished lives of their families. They come to a new world in search of happiness, prosperity, and opportunity; but are these desires ever attained? Their neighborhoods are dangerous and dirty, and the homes are small and crowded. Everyday they are faced with the ugliness of inequality and racism. They spend their whole lives struggling to overcome these obstacles; but can they ever?

These are a few questions that I hoped to get answered when I first cracked open the book *Paper Fish* by Tina De Rosa. De Rosa's grandmother left Naples in search of a better life in Chicago. There she started a family which was raised with Italian traditions. Therefore, I figured "what a better way to get deeper insight into this type of lifestyle than from an Italian-American immigrant who experienced it herself." Apparently, I was wrong because I walked away from the book still wondering the same questions. The book would briefly toss us a glance into the life of an immigrant and then quickly draw back and focus on a jumbled-up story about a little girl named Carmolina. The readers are expected to feel sympathy for this child's tough existence, but I find it difficult to do so without the author illustrating some of the hard-ships she endured.

The only hints of Italian culture that I picked up were the occasional use of the foreign language with descriptions such as "faccia bella" or "bellissima" strewn about along with a brief description of a traditional Italian wedding toward the end of the story. Upon reading the afterword, I believe that the author was attempting to give cultural recognition to her heritage and break the stereotypes that Italians receive from groups such as the Mafia; however, she taught me nothing new. I may have picked up a few new useless words, but other than that, but I'm not so ignorant as to believe that every Italian is a member of the mob.

Nonetheless, I would agree with the author that our society gets the wrong portrayal of Italian-American culture from films such as "the Godfather", "Goodfellas", or a more recently popular "Sopranos". You know what I mean; the notorious well-fed, droopy faced, merciless tough-guys who are up to their elbows in rotten dealings, and enjoy intimidating people until they get their dirty money. They are a certain group of people that we focus on because they give us a sense of fear or fascination; or maybe even both. For the most part, these are the type of individuals who come to mind when the word 'Italian' is

mentioned. However, De Rosa didn't do much to help us overcome these stereotypical representations.

The old saying "don't judge a book by its cover" was strongly accurate, but opposite, in this case. The cover was intriguing and drew me in; contrary, it was the novel itself that disappointed me. The back cover read, "*Paper Fish* is populated not by wiseguys or madonnas, but by hard working immigrants"; though, the book never revealed these "hard working immigrants." It never explained the long hours, arduous labor, and deplorable conditions that these individuals endured; nothing more than the fact that the father was a policeman. The author fails to help us see inside the life of struggling Italian-American immigrants. At that time, 99% of Chicago's street workers were Italian, and faced severe weather conditions, language barriers, abuse, and low wages; their work conditions often resulted in health problems, such as tuberculosis (Digital History 2004). Nonetheless, De Rosa does not include any of that information; so where exactly are the "hard working immigrants" in her novel?

Thankfully, one important thing that De Rosa was sure to include was that the Italian-Americans faced enormous discrimination everyday. She expresses this when young Carmolina is approached by a group of boys who ridicule her and call her "dago" and "wop"; this was not an uncommon occurrence to these individuals. The Americans, unable to understand the differences in religious beliefs and customs, considered the Italian more of a liability than an asset to their community. They saw Italian immigrants as inferior, illiterate, dirty, lazy, and unable to contribute positively to society (Virtualitalia 2002). On the contrary, the Italian-Americans were hard-working individuals worthy of respect and equality.

Despite the lack of facts to back up the novel's claims, you will have to prepare yourself for confusion when you dive into it; the story jumps back and forth numerous times. I have read many books that can get away with this because it adds a nice affect and maintains the readers' interest. However, with *Paper Fish* it was complete overkill; it did this so frequently that I didn't have enough time to think things over and really become aware of what was evolving in the story. In the beginning, it seemed to be ascending in chronological order, but all of a sudden it flashed to a chapter where the youngest daughter, who was yet to be born, was already five years old. Next we heard about the grandmother's life and a lost little Carmolina, whom we weren't even aware, had run away yet. Later on down the plot, there are more of Grandma Doria's reminiscences, followed by the engagement of Carmolina's parents, the mute older sister's story, and the death of the father; who is ironically alive a few paragraphs later. As if that isn't enough, we further bounce around through Carmolina's birth, with a huge gap linking to the wedding day of the same child.

To further add to my frustration and confusion was the switch between narratives. At some points, the narration would be directed at us, but strangely within the same paragraph, would switch and speak to the characters. For example:

Sarah stared at the priest at the altar; Dorian glanced

at her eyes. They would scream, Mama's eyes. They would scream and fall out of her head, bounce onto the church floor. Mama's eye's would scream and Daddy would get out of the coffin and ask her please to shut up, like he always did when Mama screamed. Inside the coffin Daddy smelled sweet, it made her sick to her stomach. When the box was open at the funeral parlor and the family marched in to slap Daddy good-bye, to knock him for good over there to the place where he was dead, they all made a long black line, like ants on the sidewalk, to wait to see him, and he smelled sweet. Everyone was too quiet and you could smell him, more than the flowers; he made you sick to your stomach. When you got to the front of the line like on the street for the seedman a long time ago when you were still Doriana and a little girl instead of 23 years old like now, you bent over to shove him hard and make sure he was dead (53).

As you can see, this is a clear example of switching narrative perspective. The pronouns are changed from him and her to you. You would instinctually think that this is just one character recalling a memory to another character; however, this is not the quotation of another character speaking to Doriana; just a very unusual writing style. I would often have to read over paragraphs twice to double-check instances such as these. Even in the event of a character speaking, the author would often leave out the quotation marks.

Even stranger is the fact that De Rosa's paragraphs are abnormally long. In fact, the paragraph mentioned above could hardly be considered a paragraph; it was more like a full page. There is even one section that continued on for two and a half pages with out the relief of paragraphs (pages 83-86)! It's almost as though she forget to include them as children often do when they are first learning how to write. Her "paragraphs" were loaded with run-on sentences as seen in the paragraph above. When the box was open at the funeral parlor and the family marched in to slap Daddy good-bye, to knock him for good over there to the place where he was dead, they all made a long black line, like ants on the sidewalk, to wait to see him, and he smelled sweet. I often had to debate whether I was reading the work of an intelligent eight year old, or an adult undereducated in the structures of grammar.

Many of the sentences just didn't sit right; for example: "It was her smile, they all of them always loved her smile, because the smile made her beautiful (5)." Sound odd to you? Try this one: "The tweezers in her hand was slick with the slickness of chicken flesh (9)"; did anyone happen to proof read her manuscript? With so many punctuation and grammar mishaps, it was difficult for me to focus on the bigger picture;

I was too busy correcting her writing than I was paying attention to it. If I were an English teacher, I highly doubt that there would be any way for me to get completely through this novel. About halfway through, I decided to block out the mishaps and just enjoy the remainder of the book; despite my efforts, it still never happened.

Aside from the grammar, I don't believe that I have ever heard more absurd analogies in a so-called novel. De Rosa writes, "They were beginning their day's work in overalls, smelling of potatoes and feeling like potato skin (5)"; what exactly does potato skin feel like? Or what about, "The body smelled green (6)"; what precisely does green smell like?

De Rosa also seemed to favor the use of repetition. Many of her sentences would begin with words such as "she would" or "she passed them in the streets"; each consecutively used a number of times. I believe the author would make a wonderful children's book writer; however, she just wasn't up to par for a novel.

The publishing process of *Paper Fish* has been much delayed. It was first printed in the 80's and went out of print within months; after only one thousand copies. De Rosa and her novel remained in the shadows for fifteen years; but in 1996, it was returned to print by the Feminist Press. Some praise it; others despise it, but for me, I think there was a reason why it went out of print in the first place...

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In The Middle of Nowhere: The Earth Speaks To You

by Adam Long

Soul of Nowhere
Craig Childs

You look out from your cliff side dwelling, eyes studying the landscape with an eye trained through many seasons of harsh dessert life. You know by looking at the position of the sun what season it is and where the best source of water and food will be today. After analyzing the weather and sun you determine today is the day to start collecting foods that will soon disappear during the onset of the coming winter. You know this because you have lived here all your life, and know the intimate details of living off this land. You don't see chaos in this dessert world but order in all its elements and cycles.

But wait a second you are not an Anasazi Indian you are sitting on a chair reading small black abstract symbols that are arranged to convey ideas from me to you. If you are hungry you can go to the nearest food service station where someone can prepare some tasty food and keep you on schedule for the day. Then jump in your car make it to your next scheduled event and go go go!

To live off the land is to intimately know the world we live in. In the last hundred years Americans have become less reliant upon the land around them and have become increasingly reliant on other people and parts of the world. The deserts of America have a way of overpowering and changing its visitors and inhabitants. In the Soul of Nowhere Craig Childs searches for past cultures, and attempts to discover what Native American cultures have learned from living in the harsh deserts of North America. These landscapes are so harsh and "unlivable" that Childs is empowered with discovering what caused people to live there. The book takes us on a vivid spiritual journey from the high deserts and mountain canyons of Mexico to the slot canyons of Utah, while attempting to discover what had lured people into these harsh worlds. Many of these places no longer have permanent inhabitants, yet the author seems to find comfort and meaning in this world that has been abandoned by the societies of today

The writing of Craig Childs graces the pages with a vividness that I have not seen before in nature writing. His accounts of experiences and places are so descriptive that I really imagine what it was like to be traveling through these subterranean canyons or skirting massive fins of red rock searching for rare artifacts. The land he takes us through seems very disordered and random, but Childs has a way of seeing beneath the surface and into the underlying nature of this world, with the help of the people who once lived in these

hostile lands. This book was a gift to me that made me feel as if I had experienced the real essence of the hostile desert.

In his search for evidence of once existent cultures Childs discovers much about how to live off the land by what others have left behind. Artifacts are few and far between but when found, the author has an uncanny ability to discover much about how people had succeeded in living off these hostile deserts. To really know the place where you live you must live off the land taking what it has and learning to live with that. The land becomes your instructor when you must live off what it gives you. The idea of living off the land has become very foreign and almost non-existent in the world we now live in. Since Native Americans inhabited these deserts, small cultures have become increasingly more interconnected and have lost their individuality or were lost completely.

Many people in our modern age couldn't find a way to live if they were thrown into the seemingly chaotic deserts of this world. The modern age has made people totally reliant on each other to survive. At this moment I am wearing clothes from China, Italian glasses, drinking tea from Africa, and writing on a computer made in Thailand. In our culture we are reliant on people from all corners of the world. But if you asked me to live in the mountains of my hometown without any connection to society, I would probably die a fairly quick death. In *Soul of Nowhere* Craig Childs discovers the remains of people who lived self sufficiently off the desert lands of America for hundreds of years. Craig is stricken with an intense desire to discover why these people wanted to live in the most barren corners of our continent in the first place. Ultimately, he can only imagine the answer to that question, but discovers how this place can speak to a person and unveil much about the universe. This book has helped me discover how in the desert many facts of life become apparent that are invisible while in cities.

From my experience in backpacking far away from the clocks and time of society I have realized that after hiking for many days into the wilderness, time becomes irrelevant. I become entranced by the cycles of the earth, sun, and moon. My perception of time becomes based on cycles, not a watch that I strap to my wrist. The most powerful moment of *Soul of Nowhere* comes when Childs discovers a Snake carved into the wall of a slot canyon in Southern Utah. Hundreds of years ago this Snake was meticulously set into the red stone of a narrow slot canyon. On the summer solstice a perfect arrow of light strikes through the head of the snake for only one minute. Childs shares with us the deeper meaning of the nearly thirty foot long serpentine snake. Having lived their whole life in the desert, the Anasazi who carved the snake knew more about the earth's cycles than many of us cities bound characters do. The curves of the snake perfectly correspond with the cycles of the sun and moon. In what may be the most powerful segment of the book he contrasts our interpretation of time with what really does exist.

If you sat in the dessert for a year with a clock and a Gregorian calendar, you would find that your time does not match what you see in the world around you. The snake, the stars, the sun, and the moon belong to an interlocking design. We fool ourselves with our inventions. The gears

of true time are not round like those of the clock. The earth travels at different speeds during different times of the year, slinging faster and slower around the sun, making European winters eight days shorter than those in Australia. Lunar and solar cycles set up a complex rhythm obeying doublets and triplets, not the singular boxes of weekdays and months. We are made to look like simpletons the way we spoon-feed ourselves with our artless time of minutes, hours, and days, leap years thrown in to jury-rig our twelve months so they don't fall into disrepair. We add and subtract sixty minutes of daylight savings time to our seasons to make our workdays more efficient, our heads buried in business while around us these flawless patterns pass like the hand of God. (128)

This desert world operates on a different time scale than that of the material world.

We are masked of this—outside world—by our daily workings in society. In our culture we can easily forget about what the world really is. Having surrounded ourselves with invention we are blinding ourselves from reality. But, more importantly everybody strives to find his or her own way to go about life. Not knowing about the world is just as valid as knowing it intimately. One may be totally satisfied with living a life in this material world in the pursuit of bettering society or that may be rejected to pursue being fueled by the energy of nature. There is no wrong way to go about life; you don't really have to go outside to be an explorer like the author. There are plenty of discoveries to be made inside our society or your own mind. Our job as humans is to interpret what we see around us into our own reality, because you can perceive the world the way you want to. It's a different place for everybody. At least we have writers like Craig Childs to open us up to the places and ideas that we can't discover ourselves.

Just a Hot Fuck or a Real Good Time

by Shawn Osborn

Feminine Persuasion

Edited by Betsy Stirratt and Catherine Johnson

Indiana University Press

\$35.00

Since the establishment of humans on this earth, vital juices have flowed, and opposite sexes have come together; to make love, to make life, to creating diversity. This chemistry secretly drives us all. We look for arousal. We sometimes look in strange places, but we always look, arduously searching for the indefinite; looking in magazines, looking in books, out on the streets—men, and women—always looking.

One way of truly seeing this succulent world that drives us is to look toward art. And in *Feminine Persuasion*, as edited by Betsy Stirratt and Catherine Johnson, which contains both art and essays on sexuality, you'll find yourself seeing things in a new way. This book explores the art of sex in an elegant way—through a beautiful collection of famous artwork; several renderings, some sculptures, and others photographs. This is not soft-porn, but does require a mature eye. It freely represents our exploration of sexuality and illustrates the vital drive concealed within us all. We're urged to survey. The book deeply probes sexuality.

Though you should know most of the historical artwork is from men, the book purely focuses on women—genuinely raising questions that reflect eons of repression. With relentless pursuit, I looked deeper into the pages, and deeper into myself—addictingly-provocative images capture reflections of beauty and of torment. The book chooses to focus more on art, some five hundred years ago until now. Yet, one can see the content *and* intent clearly. Sexuality is humanities finest device. Who are we to deny ourselves pleasure? And moreover; who are we if not curious? The need drives us all, and makes us who we are. Searching for more, I flip through the pages, again, and again. It makes sense now. Sexuality *is* okay. And everyone should know that. Adults can make their own decisions. And the diverseness of those decisions should also be okay.

University of Alberta Health Centre website, has an all-encompassing rundown on sexuality, specifically addressed to those searching to understand it—looking into sexuality has never been easier. What is “sexuality”? U.A.'s website states:

Although it's often misunderstood, this term refers to a lot more than just sex. It encompasses how we act, think, feel, dress, talk, and much more. We like the definition used by SIECUS (Sexual Information and Education Council of the U.S.): “Human sexuality encompasses the sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours of individuals. It deals with anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system; with roles

identity, and personality; with individual thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and relationships. It addresses ethical, spiritual, and moral concerns, and group and cultural variations.”

Sexuality “basically includes every aspect of being male or female.” U. A. maintains: Sexuality is inherent—“we’re all sexual creatures by nature.” It’s simply “part of being human. We can’t change our basic nature as sexual beings” (<http://www.ualberta.ca/HEALTHINFO>). This abstract and SIECUS’s definition “covers a lot of ground” indeed. Thankfully, research continues, and our maddening search is producing key insights into understanding female sexuality—freeing us all to explore.

We can’t look into female sexuality without surveying Dr. Alfred Kinsey research. He laid the foundation for the freedom from sexual repression. Published in 1953; his book *Sexual Behavior in the American Female*, hit the stands a bestseller. The world had prepared itself thanks to Dr. Kinsey’s previous exploits in male sexuality. His research on female sexuality represents years of work, and it produced some startling evidence. For instance; 62 percent, of the 6,000 women studied, masturbated, and 50 percent engaged in sex before marriage. His findings also showed that 13 percent, of the women studied, had at least one same-sex experience. “It was apparent from September 1953 that female sexuality could no longer be ignored, and that the world of men and women would never be quite the same” (v). Freedom of sexual expression was being born in America and this book, *Feminine Persuasion*, is a fiftieth anniversary tribute to Dr. Kinsey’s publication.

Looking through art’s portal we can see that “sexuality is a preeminent theme in art by women today, yet [up until] fifty years ago it was strangely absent” (24). The true female voice is just now being established. No argument that the art created by men, representing a woman’s needs, is beautiful too, but the real story is always better straight from the source. Women have fought long and hard for their identity, and deserve to be heard. *Aphrodite Women’s Health* boldly published in 2003, a claim that epitomizes the struggle that sexual women have endured; “Back in the 1800’s, if a woman was displaying signs of sexual excitement, her husband would take her to the doctor so that he could treat what was in those days diagnosed as ‘hysterical tension’.” With reports like this, it is no wonder that feminist art is only *recently* being produced by women. Until recently, women weren’t allowed to express their sexuality. I can barely image how repressed they must feel. However, I can image how many cases of ‘hysterical tension’ the doctors must have treated.

The repression women have endured shows in their passionate expressions today, like the intricate Ghada Amer, featured on pages 96-101. “She utilizes embroidered images and text to address the complex thoughts that contemporary women have about their own sexuality.” Amer’s work “posits the idea that *today’s* women have an altogether different view of [sexuality]” (96). Understanding the complexities of female sexuality is paramount. To further our understanding, gallant men should unite with women in this new revolution, and support the freedom of expression through the true female voice— for there has rarely been a greater need for chivalry.

The basis for understanding sexuality has been laid thanks to the diligence of people like Dr. Kinsey, but the controversy is not over – by any means. Just look at the Janet Jackson Super Bowl bare-breast-blunder, and how America reacted, with such bitter appall, to a nanosecond of her exposed boob. Or was it the ringlet on her nipple that frightened the narrow-minded conservatives more? I don't know, but there is one thing for certain; we still have a long, rough road ahead of us before we reach a point that we can peacefully agree sexuality is okay. And as far as Janet's breast goes, my nine year old son sees more boobs in magazines like the *National Geographic*. And the advertisements, or fashion that we see almost everyday is more risqué. But, my son has been taught, like we all should have been, that there is nothing disgusting about a woman's breast. If in certain cultures women go topless, we must respect that. And if in art, or artistic performances women show their sexuality, that that too is okay. The message must be made clear; sexuality is okay. It requires empathy, respect and maturity.

Culturally speaking, nudity isn't indecent if you respect it. A naked female body is natural – not something ghastly. There shouldn't be any shame in seeing it. Janet understands this and she's a huge part of American culture. I would think she is just as shocked by the reaction as everyone else is to the action. Sexually artistic impressions sometimes challenge us to dig deep. Patty Chang does this in *Feminine Persuasion*. She is featured on page 102-107, and is another artist that challenges us to redefine our boundaries. Often provocative, her work stands out in a world still afraid of the repercussions from sexuality. She, herself is mainly the subject in her work, displaying "emotions ranging from abhorrence and disgust to sexual titillation" (102). Chang, like so many others, questions the boundaries imposed by our culture. Through her work, you'll find yourself transported to a world where sexuality is embraced with loving devotion, yet looking deeper, much deeper, one can see the attraction to diversity she poises in her art as well – a world of torment and subjection. This is a long way from the simplicity of *National Geographic*, yet these people, like Chang and Amer, adamantly present us with arousing images, like a portal into varying cultures. It helps us to understand sexuality better. It helps us to respect it.

In the serious world we now live in, it is becoming increasingly difficult to refrain from narrow-mindedly over-analyzing everything. And when it comes to sexuality and "sexual energy" we often don't leave ourselves an option. If we could scrutinize with respect, and not only entertain all available resources, like this book *Feminine Persuasion* does, but use them wisely, our horizons could be broadened to incorporate the beauty of sexuality, with ultimate respect, and enrich the sexual diverseness the human race deserves.

The University of Alberta Health Centre website talks openly about the self-defining "activity option," which includes all "forms of [sexual] expressions." U.A. professionally contends that "sexual energy is a creative force that can be channeled into sexual activity or into work, spiritual growth, or artistic expression such as painting or poetry" (<http://www.ualberta.ca/HEALTHINFO>). This is important because with respect and understanding, "sexual energy" can produce a very positive effect. And with the state our world

is in, we need that now more than ever.

Look no further, sexuality is laid out before us still waiting to be understood – still waiting to be accepted. Open your mind, and if you just can't understand it; look into it – it's okay!



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Tricks of Light – A Master’s Strokes

The insights of Daniel Arasse into the life of the Dutch painter Jan Vermeer

by Chris Sentieri

Vermeer: Faith in Painting

Daniel Arasse

Princeton University Press

Much has been said, written, and assumed about the Dutch painter Jan Vermeer in recent years. The enigmatic and elusive figure has inspired many art historians, art aficionados, budding painters, and even modern photographers to spend time trying to unravel the mysteries of his life and, more importantly his art. *Vermeer: Faith in Painting*, penned by author and art historian Daniel Arasse and translated by Terry Grabar, is a biography about the master painter from Delft, Holland that attempts to shed light upon his motivations for painting, as well as his inexplicable approach to the craft.

In this well written, nicely translated treatise on the Dutch master, Arasse takes a thorough look at what is known of Vermeer’s private and professional life. Arasse conducts an ordered search for clues that might help us understand the artist and his work. Through historical analysis, archival research and meticulous readings of the known works of the artist, the author imparts special insights into the artist’s mindset and his mystifying production techniques. Arasse seeks to provide plausible explanations for long-standing mysteries regarding Vermeer, such as why he painted so few paintings – he is believed to have finished fewer than 40 canvases in his lifetime, did the painter enjoy any measure of fame prior to his death, and how did the master achieve the now famous trademark effects considered unique to his works.

The book is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of Vermeer’s paintings. Many of the artist’s greatest works are presented in the book, as are a smattering of works by his contemporaries, including Metsu, De Hooch and Baburen. The viewing of Vermeer’s work side-by-side with that of other revered Dutch artists of the time reveals the artists superior mastery of light, shadow and perspective. (Fig.25-28)

However, it is a bit of a disappointment that each of the prints were not reproduced in full-color. Only a handful of the most well known are given color treatment, while the majority of the paintings are presented, quite unimpressively, in black and white. This would not normally be such a detriment, but considering the attention the author gives to describing such colorful paintings as *Girl in a Red Hat*, a painting that has been questionably attributed to Vermeer, it would have been nice to see the prints in full-color. That being said, I found the prints to be an invaluable reference throughout the author’s extensive interpretations of Vermeer’s canvases, flipping back and forth

to inspect key prints again and again in order to verify the author's observations for myself.

The author has clearly done some substantial research, as he cites a virtual mountain of sources in what amounts to a one-man debate about all popular notions of who Vermeer was and how he created his art. Arasse follows a trail of archival writings, art show reviews, public records, auction bills and court documents in hopes of discovering the truth about "the Mysterious Vermeer". (3)

...the kind of document that can be found in archives deal with questions far removed from the intellectual and artistic interests that might have concerned him [Vermeer]. Still, they do permit us to correct some long-held errors and put an end to some false ideas, fictions born of the ignorance of his admirers. The documents also have the merit of partially reconstructing the "social web," the common framework within which Vermeer established his personal "deviation." (6)

Arasse quotes these documents with liberal consistency throughout the book, as if invoking the voices of their authors to participate in his grand debate. This begins to get a bit confusing at times, as the dizzying array of quotes and citations leaves one wondering if the author himself has anything new to add. However, the questions raised and answers offered are valid ones, and the author does challenge popular conceptions about Vermeer as a man and as an artist.

For example, Arasse disputes the commonly held belief among art historians that Vermeer was a very poor man for most of his life. The author does admit that when Vermeer died in 1675, the painter was "heavily in debt," (13) a condition Arasse believes may have been induced by the "poor sale of his work," (14) coupled with national and domestic financial troubles.

Vermeer's poverty at the end of his life was not due simply to failure to sell his pictures. He also experienced a decrease in his family income as a result of the war [between France and Holland, in 1672], particularly a decrease in land rents from various holdings. And most especially, there was the increasingly exorbitant expense of rearing eleven children. (15)

But Arasse suggests that Vermeer's poverty was a late development in his life, and that, while the painter may not have capitalized fully upon his rare artistic talents, he lived comfortably for most of his life, had a reputation as "the greatest painter of Delft" (11) and was certainly a local celebrity.

Having converted to Catholicism at the age of 21, Vermeer married Catharina Bolnes and went to live with her in her mother's home in Papist's Corner, the Catholic section of Delft. Arasse asserts that the painter's conversion to Catholicism marks a pivotal moment in Vermeer's life, one that is often overlooked by Vermeer historians. Arasse believes that Vermeer's conversion to Catholicism, still considered a cult by the vast Calvinist majority at that time, was not merely one of convenience. He states that the artist was "deeply involved in the Catholic milieu," (18) and that this involvement contributed to his artistic inclinations.

According to Arasse, it was financial support from his Catholic mother-in-law that gave Vermeer the freedom to pursue painting as a purely artistic

endeavor. This might then explain how Vermeer managed to devote inordinate amounts of time to each of his paintings, producing only a few refined canvases each year, a fraction of the output of his more commercial colleagues.

In refusing to be ruled by social or commercial aspirations, Vermeer was able to use his paintings as a workplace, his laboratory for constant pictorial research. The meticulousness of this work is above all the expression of a need that is personal, individual, intimate. While Vermeer did not attempt increase his production of paintings so as to make more money, neither did he renounce painting for a more lucrative activity. As long as financial support provided by mother-in-law and his wife was sufficient for a comfortable life, he did not need to. (16)

Through Arasse's eyes we see Vermeer as a man consumed with the passion for excelling at his craft, a well-known artist who did not paint for money, who instead painted at a leisurely pace in hopes of advancing the craft itself. This picture of Vermeer is strikingly different than our perception of other notable Dutch artists of the period, such as Rembrandt or De Hooch who were as prolific as they were well paid. Arasse's view of the enigmatic painter from Delft also varies from the common portrayal of a poor, obscure Vermeer who traded paintings for crusty bread or jugs of milk. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1)



Jan Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*,
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

So if, as Arasse suggests, Vermeer's marriage into a wealthy Catholic family was the foundation for his unusual freedom as a painter, what then were the tools, designs and techniques this gifted craftsman used to paint his enduring masterpieces? Here, again, the author diverges from popular theories.

Upon close inspection of Vermeer's most mature paintings several unusual phenomenon are observable. In many it seems as though the viewer is seeing the room from an odd perspective through a badly focused lens. Room proportions are meticulously calculated lending a near three-dimensional quality. There is a certain consistent distortion or blurriness and what are often referred to as "circles of confusion", which are both effects produced by a badly focused camera or other type of optical device. (BBC 3) Then there is Vermeer's exquisitely accurate depiction of luminescent or light drenched objects and advanced depiction of shadows and depth.

These photographic qualities, which were likely considered unsettling at the time, have been the source of a great debate. Is it possible that Vermeer cheated? Much has been published regarding the idea that Vermeer used the *camera obscura*, a device available in his lifetime, which was used to project images onto flat surfaces. This would account for many of the phenomenon observable in Vermeer's work, including the painter's startling reproduction of light and shadow, the characteristic blurred effect and wide-angled photographic perspective seen in many of his paintings, etc. Yet, though Arasse acknowledges the likelihood that Vermeer would have dabbled with the device, he is dismissive of the notion that the painter used the device to produce his signature effects.

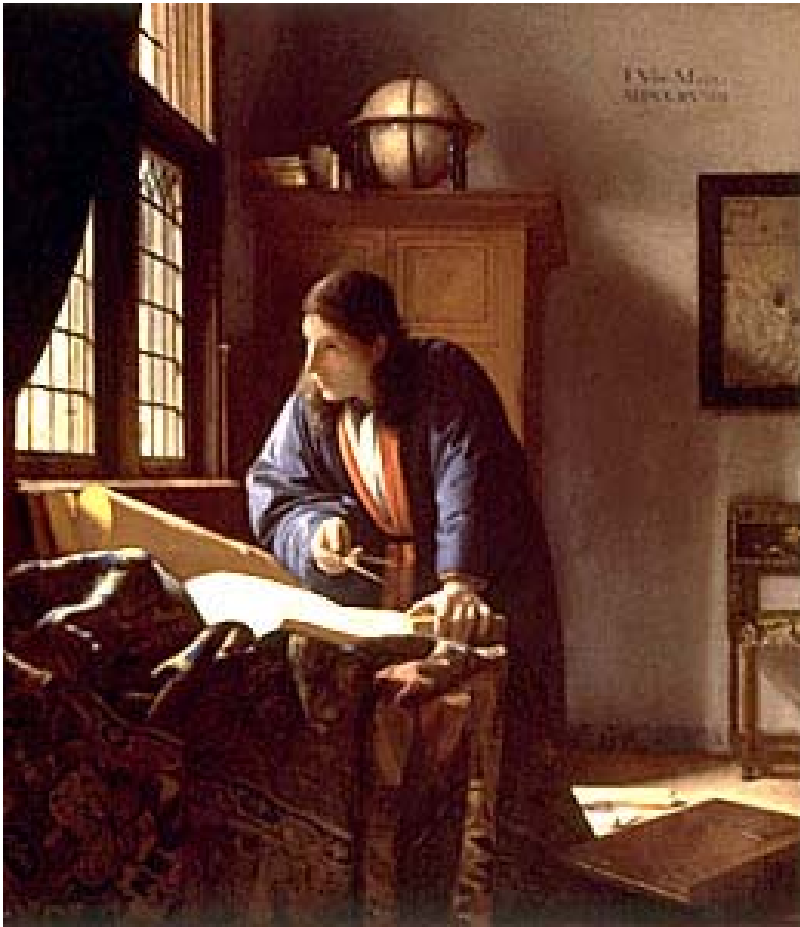
There is no cause for surprise that Vermeer should have used a camera obscura; it would be more surprising, in that period, if he had not. Like his contemporaries, he knew the camera obscura and he could have had recourse to it at any moment of the creative process. The problem is to understand how he used it and to what ends. (70)

Arasse proposes that Vermeer did not simply trace or copy a projection made by the camera obscura.

Far from transcribing the effect produced by an unfocused camera obscura, Vermeer uses the phenomenon freely, even arbitrarily, from a 'realist' point of view. The displaced use of a phenomenon specific to the camera obscura was an integral part of Vermeer's artistic choices. (71)

Arasse makes some convincing arguments against many such conceptions of the Dutch painter. Some of the evidence the author produces is sure to have the art world reevaluating their textbook biographies of Vermeer.

This book should appeal to anyone interested in Vermeer, art history, fine painting, and even modern photography. It is a brief but thorough exploration into the master's life, potential inspirations, and painting ideology. The book is well illustrated and translated, making it relatively easy for a novice art buff to glean some advanced concepts, while giving them a chance to see some of the finest most revered examples of western art in existence.



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Counterbalancing Individuality and Public Conformity in Cuba

by Gretchen Thesman

Before Night Falls
Reinaldo Arenas
ISBN 0670840785
Penguin \$14.00

Reinaldo Arenas' autobiographical novel, *Before Night Falls*, infused with reality and impressionism in which he is trying to negotiate his own identity while facing the violence of political repression. In his beloved country of Cuba, the novel intertwines his personal journey from his country home, in part of the Oriente province, through his revolutionary teenage years of serving under Fidel Castro's army. Arenas then takes us through his subsequent political persecution and imprisonment, and eventually his escape from Communist Cuba, all the while, exploring a culture that demands "public conformity but permits private deviation" ("Fidel Castro" 3).

One of the first childhood memories, and opening of both the novel and major motion picture, was of Arenas eating dirt as a boy. This was perhaps because of the scarcity of food, however there he stood naked with his cousin Dulce Maria as he "bent down and licked the earth" (1). The description of his childhood also paints a portrait of open sexuality in which a partner could be a relative and/or animal. No one was exempt from sexual exploration.

Arenas talks excessively about his open sexual life in the novel and how he even had as many as five thousand lovers during his youth. The novel was shocking with more than a little sexual explicitness. Arenas talks of his promiscuity through his literary descriptiveness using language of excess to describe the beastliness of his life that involved so much poverty and censorship.

A truck came from town and everything was loaded up:
bedsprings, stools, the living room rocking chairs. How my
grandmother, grandfather, aunts, mother, and even I cried! In that
hut with its thatched roof, where we had suffered so much hunger,
we had no doubt also lived the best moments of our lives. (33)

However, it is here where Julian Schnabel, the director of the movie, shies away from such explicitness, and understandably so. Instead the movie focuses on the celebration of Arenas' life and the life of other Cuban writers wrongly persecuted for their literary work.

The only child of a single mother whose love has deserted her, Arenas and his mother moved in with his grandparents and aunts whose lovers had also left them. Living in the countryside the large family barely grew enough to feed themselves. As an idealistic teenager, bored of working in a factory, he joined the revolutionary rebel forces of Fidel Castro and fought against the

dictatorial government of Batista. However, the war proved to be more propaganda than reality.

Arenas was selected for further education and was sent to accountant's training in a remote camp in Havana where Marxist-Leninist text were taught by Communists. Disenchanted with Castro's regime he joins a small group of writers and artists and begins to write. In 1967, at the age of twenty-four, he published his first novel, *Celestino antes del alba* (*Singing from the Well*). The novel was about a child, persecuted by his family as well as by the impoverished conditions of his rural existence, who must rely on his imagination in order to survive. In actuality, the novel depicted his own life. The parallel excitement of his intellectual and sexual growth is both restrained and intensified by the political repression that threatens to end them both.

By this time Castro had declared homosexuals as political outcasts, imprisoning all he caught. "Castro had strong views on morality. He considered that alcohol, drugs, gambling, homosexuality and prostitution were major evils" ("Fidel Castro" 1). Due to a misunderstanding, Arenas was arrested, however managed to escape. He finds an inner tube and tries to float to America, unfortunately he does not get far because quite obviously it is next to impossible. He is found and once again imprisoned at El Morro Castle.

One thing to be said about the movie is that it in no way compared to the elaborate descriptions of the novel. This is one part of Arenas' story that was not captured by the art of film. In the novel Arenas says, "...toilets full of shit and flies that fed on the shit buzzed around us all the time. My ward was near the toilet and I had to bear not only the stench but also the noise of bowel movements...our bodies were so impregnated with the stench that it became part of us" (184). The fact that he talks about his imprisonment in length and detail shows that it was a huge and demoralizing chapter in his life. The movie could have been even more powerful if some of these scenes would have been included. For instance, the part of the novel where Arenas continues to vividly describe the intolerable conditions of prison life.

Heat in Cuba is always unbearable: humid and sticky. But if one happens to be in a prison by the sea, with walls more than a yard thick, no ventilation, and two hundred and fifty people in one room, the heat becomes really intolerable. The bed ticks and lice of course reproduce at alarming rates; there were clouds of flies in the air, and the stench of shit became even more pungent. (195)

After serving time in jail for a crime he did not commit, Arenas was forced to denounce his novels and even his friends, stating that he would agree to obey the laws of Fidel Castro and write only positive things about the government. This also meant that he was going to be under the watchful eye of Castro's men and any wrong move would result in more horrors of imprisonment. Arenas therefore decides to go along with the manipulated arrangement.

The film keeps a fine balance between the chaotic political events surrounding Arenas and the passion in which he lived and wrote. The novel

itself proves that Arenas was an incredible writer, and the richness and complexity of the Cuban culture is evident in the imagery used throughout the novel. More of a series of scenes than a continuous story, the novel presents a detailed look at the way most Cubans, not just homosexuals, negotiated both private and public identity.

It is sad to read how a human being was treated in a communistic country. When freedom is taken away from the soul the body disintegrates, and fortunately for Arenas writing was his savior. At one point in the novel Arenas recalls advice given to him by Jose Lezama Lima, "remember that our only salvation lies in words: write" (230)! I think that Arenas achieved his own "salvation" through his literature, and especially his autobiography *Before Night Falls*. This novel is perfect for anyone seeking Latin American literature, gay studies, human rights issues, or even the art of autobiography.

Arenas wrote even when death was closing in all around him. He survived AIDS to write this novel and that in itself gives its readers hope. Tragically, Arenas killed himself ending his life in 1990 at the age of forty-seven, but not before the world got to experience his masterful pieces of literature.

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Poetry Explodes At The Edge Of Madness

By Miguelanjel Acosta

Fernando Pessoa & Co.

Fernando Pessoa

Edited and Translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith

Grove Press

\$14.00

Every time I think of the process of writing some generalizations come to my mind. I imagine a writer sitting in front of a computer trying to re-create events from the past, imagining new ones, or mixing both. The writer is always worried about a complex set of characters and situations that can only live in his/her mind. A good writer can create a universe that readers can recognize and identify with, no matter how different the situations and settings are from the ones they experience in their daily lives. In regards to poetry the process is slightly different. I still think of a writer, but this time the computer is not that necessary. He/she can be writing on any piece of paper, and what comes out of it is usually the universe that surrounds him/her. Lorca would have never written Poet In New York if he had not moved to New York first. The same with Neruda and The Heights of Machu Picchu. There is also another group of poets that use historical events as an inspiration for their work. Others have gone in a different direction and their stories are related to the future. In both situations the settings are the landscapes in which the poet finds a way to express his/her own feelings and experiences. One may say that the style used plays an even more important role in the process, but to me, good poetry will be always about human emotions and how the poet can reveal them. Poetry is the transmission of universal feelings and ideas from the poet to the reader.

Fernando Pessoa was born in 1898 in Lisbon, Portugal. Most of his poetry was published in literary journals where he worked or owned, and remained uncollected during his lifetime. The only book that he published was *Mensagem*, in 1934, a year before his death. 50 years later his sister donated a chest with more than twenty seven thousand documents written by him. Since then his work has been published in more than twenty languages.

The first thing that one finds out from reading the introduction of the book is that to Fernando Pessoa, "being a poet was by not being, by pretending, by achieving complete insincerity" (3). Pessoa accomplished this principle by creating more than seventy alter egos that he called heteronyms, each one of them with an imaginary biography, philosophical outlook, and particular style.

Pessoa defined his use of the term heteronym by distinguishing it from the term pseudonym: "A pseudonymous work is, except for the name with which it is signed, the work of an author writing as himself; a heteronymic work is by an author writing outside his own personality: it is the work of a complete individuality made up by him, just as the utterances of some character in any of his plays would be" (Monteiro).

In the introduction Zenith does a poor job trying to explain the origin of Pessoa's pathology. But the comprehension of this phenomenon is fundamental in order to understand the man behind the mask. A closer examination of his biography reveals that he created the first of his heteronyms—the Chevalier the Pas—right after the death of his father and brother when he was six years old. Like every lonely child who creates imaginary characters to populate his universe, Pessoa used the Chevalier the Pas to fulfill the enormous emptiness left from the departure of his father. By the age of eighteen, three of his siblings had died, and the number of heteronyms kept growing.

It seems that during his entire life Pessoa tried hard to avoid the pain that came from the real world, finding refuge in his literary universe. "The drama of Pessoa was that there was no drama, except for the literary kind. 'Real life' hardly existed for this fragmented soul, or it meant little to him" (35).

Pessoa understood that he was a complex human being made of different layers of consciousness. For each one of those layers he created a separate voice. It seems as if that was what prevented him from becoming insane. But it wasn't an easy process; he suffered violent depressions that almost led him to an insane asylum three different times.

In the poem *I'm Sorry I Don't Respond*, Pessoa talks about his crisis of identity:

Each of us is many persons.
To me I'm who I think I am,
but others see me differently
And are equally mistaken.
Don't dream me into someone else
But leave me alone, in peace!
If I don't want to find myself,
Should I want others to find me? (5-12)

The book focuses on three main voices that emerged from Pessoa: Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reiss, and Alvaro de Campos, plus Fernando Pessoa the orthonym, considering himself as another alias.

Alberto Caeiro was a shepherd who lived outside Lisbon. He wrote in free verse and only accepted as true what he could feel with his senses. In "The Keeper of Sheep" he wrote: "I think with my eyes and my ears/ And with my hands an feet / And with my nose and mouth" (52).

Ricardo Reiss, the sad epicurean, was a doctor that move to Brazil after the proclamation of the first Portuguese Republic in 1919. he wrote metaphysical and neoclassical odes. He reflected Pessoa's desire to avoid any kind of pain in the poem "Follow Your Destiny":

It's good to live alone,
And noble and great
Always to live simply.
Leave pain on the altar
As an offering to the gods. (11-15)

Alvaro de Campos was a naval engineer, and he is the one that most resembled Pessoa's personal feelings. In some way he was everything that Pessoa could not be. He traveled a lot while his creator never left Lisbon. He was "living out much of what his progenitor only dreamed of" (141). Campos shared with his creator the constant fear of insanity, and the anguish that came when there was nothing to believe in. In the poem "This Old Anguish" he wrote: I'm an inmate in an asylum without an asylum. / I'm consciously crazy, / I'm a lucid lunatic,"(16-18).

It was impossible for Pessoa to create an infinite number of heteronyms, so he expanded the universe of his characters, applying Cantor's theorem to a finite number of subjects. Georg Cantor was a Russian-born German mathematician who developed a theorem about infinite numbers: "Given any infinite set, you can always come up with a larger infinity by considering its 'power set' – the set of all its subsets" (Holt 86). Having three subjects, one can create eight different sets out of them. Thus, Pessoa created endless relations among his heteronyms. They read, translated (Pessoa was proficient in English and French), and criticized each other.

In the poem Autopsychography Pessoa gave his definition of what a poet is:

The poet is a faker
Who is so good at his act
He even fakes the pain
Of pain he feels in fact. (1-4)

I mentioned earlier that to me good poetry is always about human emotions and how the poet can reveal them. How can a poet generate true feelings in his readers when the emotions that he described were never felt by him? I think that is the main problem that one can find in Pessoa's poetry. No matter how good a fake can be, it will always be one. A good example of this is what we see in the process of film making currently. No matter how incredible a digital effect is, it will never be as good as the real thing. This theory does not mean that Pessoa's poetry was just a fake. In fact, behind all the layers that he created one can find a unitary corpus that reflects his inability to connect and understand the universe that surrounded him. It is Pessoa's negation of himself that makes him so unique. His belief that a man cannot comprehend life by being one person, that the only way of achieving a supra understanding is by being more than one, is his major legacy, "How should I know what I'll be, I who don't know what I am? / Be what I think? But I think of being so many things! (37-38, 174).

To truly understand Pessoa's poetry, one has to establish a nexus between his life and his work. I think Zenith could have done a better job presenting the man behind the masks. The fact that he decided to answer the question of Pessoa's sexual orientation with a simple "Who cares?" (24), made me unsure about Zenith's real comprehension of the Portuguese poet.

The fact that Pessoa didn't make a clear distinction between the real and the imaginary world forces the reader to look at both in order to capture the richness

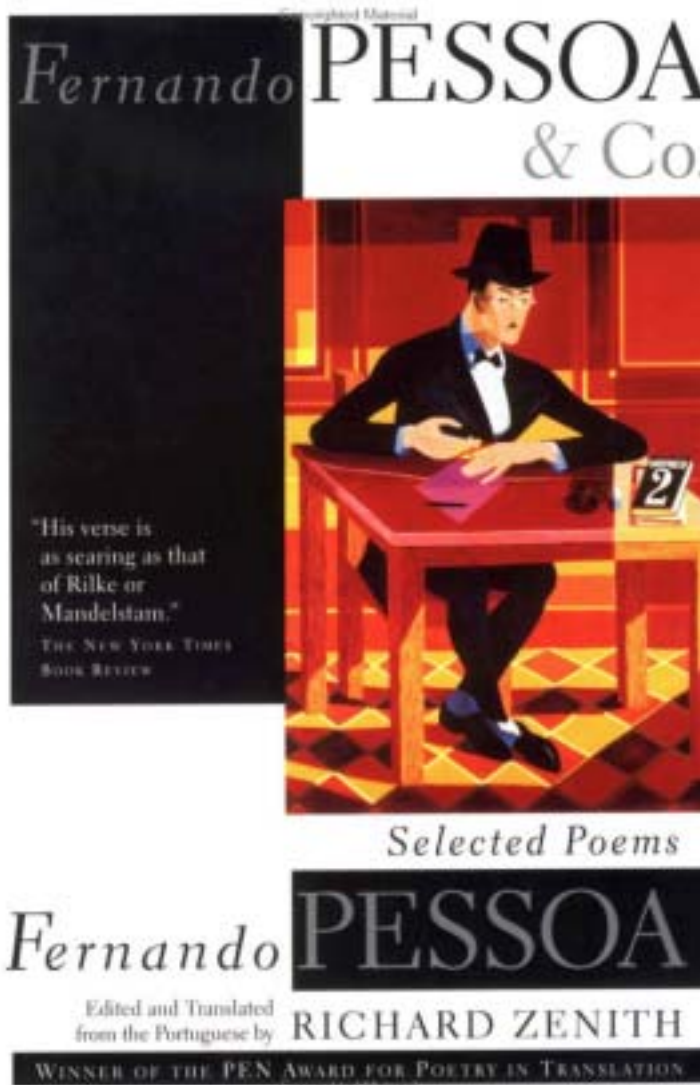
of his poetry. If Pessoa divided himself so that he could reach a higher understanding, the reader has to unify all the pieces in order to complete the process. This task may be asking too much, but the final experience elevates the poet and the reader to a superior level of being.

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Struggle or Die

by Alyson Provox

Diary: A Novel

Chuck Palahniuk

US \$24.95, Hardcover

Doubleday (2003)

ISBN: 0385509472

“You have endless ways you can commit suicide without *dying dying*” (Palahniuk 18). The book begins with Peter, the husband of the main character, who has just attempted suicide, in a coma. His wife, Misty, is in her own variety of coma; a more common kind of “coma” resulting from overuse of alcohol and over the counter painkillers. “It’s a game anyone can play. This is just Misty’s own personal coma./ A couple drinks. A couple aspirin. Repeat.” (18). She plays drinking games with herself throughout the day: whenever something goes wrong, she takes a drink. Many of the trappings of our modern world (materialism, addiction) are the physical elements of waking “comas” which we are all in, merely to get through the day. Everyone has a certain percentage of things they do which they dislike, or even hate. Some people have higher percentages than others. Like many people, when I have to do something I don’t want to, I want some kind of a reward. Something to get me through. Sometimes it’s a special food, sometimes it’s other indulgences: bad television, selfishly wasting time. There are little drugs we take: alcohol, coffee, cigarettes – just to get through the day. Some people reward themselves with shopping, a new toy. Others reward themselves with sex. Anything that can be considered an addiction can be part of a Misty-style, waking “coma”. In this avoidance of the uncomfortable we create new realities: thinking about what we wish we were doing. We all play pretend: we wish we were somewhere else. All of these tiny coping mechanisms which we have, they lead us into waking “comas”, slowly removing our senses from not just what we were trying to avoid, but everything; life itself. “You have endless ways you can commit suicide without *dying dying*” (18).

As Misty starts to “wake up,” and to notice more in the novel, Palahniuk begins to leave clues to the reader to lead them to believe that he is expressing himself through Misty (McGowan 1). Misty, a painter, is 41 years old: the same age as Palahniuk. “Everything you do is a self portrait...everything is a diary” (Palahniuk 132-133). He says this repeatedly, and he is referring back to himself, a writer writing his own diary, creating his own self-portrait. He says:

The lining of your stomach is a document. The calluses in your hand tell all your secrets. Your teeth give you away. Your accent. The wrinkles around your mouth and eyes. Everything you do shows your hand. (137)

and this is Palahniuk's diary. The diary of someone afraid, confused, and in pain. A real artist. The culture at large likes to view art as something revered, sacred, and dislikes looking at the pain of artists, their struggle. As an artist, you are envied, looked up at, considered financially (and sometimes emotionally) unstable, but very little thought is given to the dark underbelly of art making. "As an artist, you organize your life so you get a chance to [work], a window of time, but that's no guarantee you'll create anything worth all you effort. You're always haunted by the idea you're wasting you life" (168). This quote, and the other parts of the book related to the perils of artmaking, are comforting to me, as a visual artist. Sometimes I feel like I'm wasting my time, but thinking that Chuck Palahniuk, the famous writer, also does, makes it better. He suggests that this very pain and suffering is valuable:

According to Plato, we don't learn anything. Our soul has lived so many lives that we know everything. Teachers and education can only remind us of what we already know./Our misery. This suppression of our rational mind is the source of inspiration...Suffering takes us out of our rational self-control and lets the divine channel through us. (188)

Yet, in "Diary," Misty the artist is used by her community for their own gains, reminding us that, despite romantic ideas, society loves art more than artists. But despite her negative relationship with art, I finished the novel with a positive feeling for my own art and life, despite fear and avoidance. Perhaps it is because, after Palahniuk shows the dysfunctional relationship between artists and capitalist culture, and tells of all of the pain and agony of, not only artists, but modern humans, he reminds the reader that, while it may be painful, "We are here. We will always be here," and, ultimately, that kind of assurance is more comforting and more real than being told that everything is going to be alright. (Palahniuk 254, Smith 2) So, while there may be "endless ways you can commit suicide without *dying* dying," we are also, "all of us immortal. We couldn't die if we wanted to" (Palahniuk 18, 260).

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“When life is unfair, beat life”

By Jordan Kreyche

Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game

Michael Lewis

W. W. Norton & Company

Hardcover, \$24.99

What happens when the problems that have been bred into our economic systems show up in our nations past time? When the shortfalls of capitalism are evident even when you turn on the TV to watch the boys of summer. In the economic world the company that spends the most money, will for the most part, end up making the most money. This is the normal rule, in baseball, until one man came and changed all that, his name was Billy Beane. He was the Neo to baseball's Matrix. He didn't just bend the rules, he broke them. He put together one of the least expensive teams in the league, contrary to the rules it was one of the more successful clubs. Billy Beane is a revolutionary in baseball general managers, and now his disciples are starting to spread into the world of general managing, and spreading Moneyball, across the league.

Lewis/104-8799318-1027943" I was drawn to this novel as an extraordinary fan of the Oakland Athletics. Moneyball was a bible to the fans. You just weren't as good of a fan unless you have read, and completely understood the works of Michael Lewis. I initially didn't buy into this hoopla. I mean, how much can one book say about the inner workings of a baseball teams front office.

Billy Beane wasn't just known for revolutionizing the art of putting together a quality baseball team. Back in high school Billy was looked upon by major league scouts and general managers, as one of the greatest prospects in history. Billy had what is considered the 5 skills; speed, fielding ability, ability to hit, ability to hit for power, and throwing ability. He had the baseball face, he was what old time scouts looked for; a good looking kid would could do anything, straight out of high school. Beane didn't have the mentality to make it as a big league player. With his insight gathered from the experience of being all of what the scouts wanted, and still failing, he developed a different approach to player talent. Instead of a bunch of 60-year-old salt and pepper haired old men, with a mouth full of chew, Beane's method was more aimed at to recent statistician graduates and computers.

The actual scope of the financial difference in baseball borderlines on absolute absurdity. The playing field was not just uneven; it was slanted in odd directions with piles of money on one end and spikes on the other. Lewis writes: "It read like an extra credit question on an algebra quiz: You have \$40 Million to spend on twenty-five baseball players. Your opponent has already spent \$126 million on its own twenty-five players, and holds perhaps another \$100 million in reserve. What do you do with your forty million to avoid humiliating defeat?" (Pg 119). The answer lies in research, and almost machine like ways of

thinking. Billy Bean's philosophy removes the human element. Personality never shows up in a box score and is not a stat that can be tracked by Beane and his team in the front office. This advanced way of thinking removes the possibility for the players mind to get in the way of their performance, much like Billy's did in his own personal experiences.

The book its self has been given much criticism for unearthing the secrets of a new philosophy in a very competitive environment. Lewis dives so deep into the front

office that you feel as if you are watching a confidential meeting through the cooling vent. Beane's tactics are not always the most straightforward or looked upon with great respect. He sometimes swindles, and flat out "rips off" other teams. Look at it as Robin Hood, stealing from the rich and helping to build a small market baseball team.

In Major League Baseball's complete and utter knowledge they asked Billy Beane to testify on his teams success. Major League Baseball did all of this to find out how to help make small teams more successful, acting on this information is something too intelligent for the MLB to think of doing. At this meeting Beane put up a slide that said the following:

"MAJOR LEAGUE"

- Movie about the hapless Cleveland Indians

In order to assemble a losing team, the owner distributes a list of players to be invited to spring training. The baseball executives say that most of these players are way past their Prime. Fans see the list in the paper and remark, "I've never even heard of half these guys."

Our situation closely resembles the movie.

(122)

Beane is still able to keep his sense of humor about the fact that he is completely over matched in terms of money. He delivers a product that can perform and compete with teams that are paid sometimes as much as three times his own team's payroll.

Most of the players for the A's aren't superstars; they cannot afford to pay their superstars. So after a superstars meager contract is up they are sent elsewhere in free agency, sometimes to the same team with the three times greater payroll. The majority of the players are either young, old, or have something wrong with them that gets them overlooked by other teams. Be it Scott Hatteberg the ex-catcher, with a ruptured nerve in his elbow, Scott Hatteberg's career as a catcher, and as a major league player seemed to be coming to an end. He received a call from one of Beane's assistant (now the GM for the Los Angeles Dodgers). Beane's assistant, Paul DePodesta, called Hatteberg at 12:01 am, the day that he was released and told him that the A's were ready to sign him, soon Hatteberg would become the A's everyday first-baseman. When Chad Bradford

pitches his knuckles come millimeters from scraping on the dirt. He is unconventional in every sense of the word. In baseball, like many things dominated by money unconventional is one of the dirtiest words. But strangely the stats were still there, Bradford dominated at any league in which he would play. Soon he was traded to the A's for next to nothing, where now he has blossomed into one of the most successful and dreaded set-up men in the league. This is the story of the losers who win.

Moneyball is an excellent read for anyone, a great read for a baseball fan, and an absolutely required reading for any A's fan. The story telling of Lewis perfectly patches together two separate stories, the story of Billy Beane, and the story of his Oakland Athletics.

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The Other Side of the Story

by Lauren Cyr

True Notebooks

Mark Salzman

Alfred A. Knopf

\$24.00

True Notebooks is a remarkable book. Salzman starts teaching at a juvenile hall in Los Angeles, teaching writing to what society would call “hard-core juvenile offenders”. All of his students are facing life-long sentences, mostly for gang related murder. Salzman shows the reader how these offenders are no more than misguided kids, who just need direction. True Notebooks makes the reader question our current juvenile justice system, and makes the reader realize that we need to rehabilitate these kids not sent them to prison.

Salzman does an incredible job in describing and giving life to his characters. He shows the reader that these juvenile offenders are just like other kids; they can love, hate, show anger and fear. These go against society’s stereotypical idea of what juvenile gang killers are; cardboard people that have no feelings whatsoever.

A good example from the book is when Salzman plays the cello for a room full of juvenile offenders. He decided to play “ ‘The Swan’ by Camille Saint-Saens” he says that it “always made me think of my mother,” as he composes the song he “glanced at the audience and saw a roomful of boys with tears running down their faces,” (124). This shows the reader that these boys can and do love. Thus, the image of a room full of adolescent boys shedding tears of love for their mothers has an incredible effect in one’s mind.

Another feeling that is shown throughout the book seems to be anger towards the juveniles’ fathers. All seem to either have had a father who beat them or had abandoned them as a young child. All the boys seem to believe that the abuse and abandonment caused by their fathers had something to do with them; that they were doing something wrong. Many of the boys still feel that it is their fault that their fathers left them. One day when the writing topic was about fathers, one in the group seemed to be able to or want to write about their fathers. Then a boy in the class named Toa broke it all down for the rest of the boys by saying:

“...Everybody got something to say on that subject. Thing is, when you hatin’ on your dad, you jus’ hatin’ on yourself. Cause in your heart you believe it all your fault, even if it aint’ ... if you can’t write about it, you still believing’ it” (303).

After Toa’s speech there was some sort of healing process through the boy’s narratives that took place that day. It wasn’t a counselor that had told them this – it wasn’t even the teacher – this was told by one of their peers who went through a similar experience.

Salzman provides information on how lousy the boy’s defense attor-

neys are. This happened when he went to one of his student's sentencing hearings. He found that the attorney (public defender) doesn't even meet with their clients until the day of the trial. He saw how the lawyers don't even set up a proper defense. It was stated in the book that the normal defense usually lasts only a half hour to forty-five minutes (287). The rest of the time the prosecutor spends convincing the jury why so and so should go into prison. What is a juror supposed to do? The defense is weak and the prosecutor is doing a wonderful job at convincing the jury.

This book proves that our society has no problem writing young juvenile offenders off. Yet is it right for our justice system to send a kid to prison for life? I believe that no kid under the age of 18 should be sent to prison for a majority to the rest of their life. Instead, I believe that our state should look more closely at the cause, why these kids did what they did. I believe that a program would be better for these kids. Life long Prison sentences are not the answer for young offenders, regardless of their crime. These kids are still young so there is still hope for these kids to change through rehabilitation.

Most of these offenders come from broken homes, where they receive no direction, structure, or discipline. They lack proper role models, mostly a proper male role model. These kids need to go to programs to be re-educated day in and day out, with proper role models (criminal behavior class lecture 2/29/04- 3/9/04).

A good rehabilitation program that California has today is called CYA, (California Youth Authority). This program offers offenders' help in all different areas with educational, specialized, supplemental, and free venture programs. All these programs help the offender get the help that they need in order to be able to function in society.

CYA deals with all sorts of offenders starting from petty theft all the way to murder in the first degree. CYA has treatment programs to deal with certain offenders needs like counseling, drug treatment, sex rehabilitation, anger management, and many more. CYA also provides education programs, such as a high school diploma, GED, college courses with an Associate of the arts degree. It provides work experience, and vocational programs (CYA Programs).

These programs are offered at the CYA so that once the offender gets rehabilitated he/she may do something with his her life rather than having to resort to crime. Parenting classes are also very important. Since many of the offenders in CYA come from or were raised in dysfunctional homes, it is important that they learn parenting techniques so that their children can grow up in a functional home and don't have to turn to gangs for family.

CYA is the best program out there for juvenile offenders, but unfortunately there is only so much room. There is still time to change our current way of dealing with juvenile offenders. More effort can be put into expanding these programs. These kids need re-education not prison.

How can society judge whether or not a 14-yr- old is unfit to live in society for the rest of their lives? The 14yr old that committed a mur

der is not going to be the same person when he or she is 28. There is still hope for a 14 yr old, regardless of their crime.

Sulzman made me realize how backwards our juvenile system is today. He made me realize that these kids are not bad people, just forgotten by society. They need help not incarceration. Many of these juvenile offenders have real talent; they just need encouragement. True Notebooks is an inspiring book that makes you feel as though you know these kids. You can feel their pain and suffering as you are reading. It makes you see a whole new side to their story, this book makes you want to change the current way that we are dealing with juvenile offenders.

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Dude, Read His Book

by Hillary Lee

Dude, Where's My Country?

Michael Moore

Warner Books, \$24.94

Are you ever bummed that almost *every* political book written now days is dry, repetitive, or just plain boring? Or all of the above? They almost always lack the suspense and excitement of many fictitious romance or thriller "reality" novels. Michael Moore's book *Dude, Where's My Country?* is quite the opposite. This is a book that will have you reading word for word, anxiously waiting to hear what he has to divulge next.

If you're into politics at all (especially if you're angered by Bush and his Oil War), this is a book I would highly recommend. In this incredibly expository, if not controversy book about the personal life and business dealings of our current president, George W. Bush (also known as "Dub-Ya"), and his family, Moore reveals secrets mostly unknown to the American society. (While any lazy citizen could put out some effort and dig up some of this information, I'm surprised at the vast amount of knowledge Moore has in this area, and it's quite obvious that he's done some research. He is incredibly passionate about his subject.) What this man knows is amazing, surprising, and, yes, disgusting, and it's great that someone is finally telling it to our people.

Moore's political views are easily identifiable in this book. Known for his openness, and even bluntness, he had this to say about our president a time ago:

...We like non-fiction and we live in fictitious times...we have fictitious election results that elects a fictitious president...we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons...we are against this war, Mr. Bush. Shame on you, Mr. Bush, shame on you...

This was said by Moore on national television, at the (2003) 75th Annual Academy Awards. (In *Dude, Where's My County?* not only does he mention this appearance, he contends this to be one of the only anti-war pieces aired on television concerning the Iraq War.) His book is written in much the same way, with many parts of the book directly addressing the president himself.

Most Americans might be surprised to learn that you and your father have known the bin Ladens for a long time...Mr. Bush? Are you close personal friends, or simply on again, off-again business associates?

Always a lover of exposing the wrong-doers of our corporate America,

Moore's major breakthrough came in 1989 with the creation of his documentary *Roger and Me*, chronicling the devastating economic effects of the downsizing of General Motors in Flint, Michigan. (This also happens to be Moore's hometown, where at the age of eighteen he was the youngest person ever to be elected to the school board.) He continued on from there with many great books and documentaries, habitually humorous, as with his most current, *Dude, Where's My Country?*. When put into context, the message Moore's giving in this book, in many countries could have him imprisoned. He ingeniously lightens it with humor in just the right way that he still gets the point across, but without pissing off as many people. ('Cuz you know at least *one* Republican is gonna burn this book!) In chapter two, for example, when talking about all of Bush's fabrications (or moreover, flat out lies), Moore divides the key lies into what he calls "Whoppers." (And yes, these are named after the oh-so-fattening fast-food king of beasts.) As Moore says:

George W. Bush has turned the White House into
the House of the Whopper, telling one lie after
another, all in pursuit of getting his dirty little war.
It worked.

He goes into detail about each lie that Bush is presenting to us, as well as how phony it is.

Allow me to present to you the tasty menu the
Whopper-in-Chief served up special just for you.
I'll call them "The Iraq War Combo Meals"

I found that Moore's work was always strongly said, though through much of it I found a grin on my lips.

While the book in itself is great, even superb, the writing, or furthermore, some of the choice of comparisons, could have been improved I thought.

If, after the terrorist attack on the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, it was revealed that President Clinton and his family had financial dealings with Timothy McVeigh's family, what do you think your Republican Party and the media would have done with that one?

While this is not wrong or untrue in any way, I think that perhaps he could have used an example that was a little more relevant. I mean, what the heck does the Timothy McVeigh bombing Oklahoma, have to do with the fact that OUR PRESIDENT is doing business with SAUDI ARABIA ROYAL FAMILY? I think one is just a *wee* bit more important than the other. Now, if he were comparing the business dealings with the Saudi Arabia Royal family to a business partnership between the president of the United States and Germany during World War Two, that might make more sense. However, I love the book.

Moore's other works include bestseller *Downsize This!*, as well as the New York Times best seller *Stupid White Men* (prequel to *Dude, Where's My Country?*). He is also the creator of several documentaries, most notably *Bowling for Columbine*. His television series *TV Nation* was also quite a success, along with the much celebrated *The Awful Truth*. Every American should read *Dude, Where's*

My Country?, whether Republican or Democrat. (But those Republicans could really learn something from it!) This is a great review of how Bush & Co. are destroying our country, and our world, through the need for power, money, and oil. When this stops is up to only us, and how we come together as a society, to prevent this monstrosity we call our presidential campaign.



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A Day in the Life of the Homeless

By Kyra Brown

Punk Chicken and Other Tales
Stephen Lestat
Lompico Creek Press, \$16.95

Although the United States is one of the richest nations in the world, many Americans fall below the poverty line. The majority of these individuals find ways to keep roofs over their heads and food in their refrigerators. Our government gives assistance to those who qualify in the form of programs such as low income housing, welfare and food stamps. Unfortunately, a small percentage of these people still end up living on the streets and are referred to as homeless. 3.5 million people experience homelessness each, with the average duration of homelessness being six months (informationclearinghouse.com). In the book *Punk Chicken and Other Tales*, Stephen Lestat gives us a glimpse into the lives of Berkeley's homeless. He has intimate knowledge of the homeless because at one point in time he himself lived on the streets of Berkeley. Lestat brings us into his world through a series of short stories he calls works of "faction" (part fact and part fiction). For me, this book was a reminder that there are those out there who are less fortunate than the majority of people. It wouldn't kill us to all take a few moments out of our busy lives and try to help those who are less fortunate. We can offer help in simple ways like some left-over food or a warm blanket that we no longer need; the homeless would really benefit from our kindness.

The majority of the stories in Lestat's book take place on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue. He describes a world overrun with "gutter punks" and "gutter hippies." Lestat writes, "...the Berkeley Gutter Punks had snuck over and dyed my facial hair purple. They were always trying to convert me from the peaceful ignorance of Berkeley Gutter Hippie to the more Klingon type life of a Berkeley Gutter Punk." Having never been to Berkeley, I wondered if Berkeley was truly as he had described in his stories. Another author wrote, "For a glimpse of Berkeley's identity, venture one block east of Telegraph to People's Park. Today, it is a homeless encampment, and unless you are down on your luck – or dressed like it – you're not likely to be made to feel too welcome there (zaentz.com)." The writing of this other author leads me to believe that Lestat's descriptions of the streets of Berkeley are indeed accurate. He does a wonderful job of capturing the essence of the city; he almost makes me feel as though I have been there before.

In one of his stories, "The Rat Owners Guide to Dining Out," Lestat describes an all too familiar scene for those of us who have encountered the homeless while dining out:

Here's how it works: you find a restaurant that has windows overlooking the

sidewalk. First you need to position yourself directly in front of the window giving yourself the highest level of visibility. Next it's important to look sad, unhappy, and not just hungry, but famished. Third, never look at the patrons directly; always look at the food moving your head with the motion of the fork?" (55)

This reminds me of an experience I once had while I was eating out. A man sitting a couple of tables away from me began staring longingly at my plate. He looked a little disheveled, and if I had to guess I would say that he was homeless. When I was done with my meal I had a pile of food left on my plate that I couldn't eat, and I wanted to give it to the man that had been staring at my plate. Unfortunately, I had no way of knowing whether or not he was actually homeless, and if he wasn't I didn't want to insult him by offering him my leftovers. After leaving the restaurant I had felt bad that I had made no attempt to offer him some food. Lestat's story hit home for me, although I was on the other side of the fence I can really relate to the story.

Although Lestat is a genius when it comes to writing vivid descriptions, I feel that he could have brought the readers further into his world. He wrote a very creative series of short stories, but I would have enjoyed the book even more if it were in chronological order, broken up into chapters instead of individual stories. I would like to have learned more of his feelings about having to live on the streets. I know that if I were homeless I would be absolutely terrified that I would never have a home, and angry that my life had turned out that way. Lestat never showed any sense of fear or frustration; it seemed as though he was emotionless. All of Lestat's stories are very humorous; he writes:

The pleasing rattle of another homeless person's "minivan" broke our meditation and April emerged from the mist. Now, April knew aliens and she met with them every Tuesday and Thursday night in a small alley off Telegraph Avenue. According to April, there were several different races of aliens hanging out in Berkeley at any one time" (3).

I think that he could have done a much better job portraying his emotions and bringing us further into his world.

One issue I have with the author is his simple style of writing. Although he gives detailed descriptions that clearly paint a picture in your mind, he writes as though his target audience is junior high school children. I assume that this is not his target audience because he uses a lot of profanity and inappropriate situations for young children. I feel that the vocabulary and writing style could have been a bit more sophisticated. Perhaps he wrote like that on purpose to personify homeless individuals. For me the writing was not necessarily bothersome—I rather enjoyed it—but I think that more mature readers may be turned off by this quality.

Overall, I think that *Punk Chicken and Other Tales* is an excellent piece of literature. Lestat's interesting tales about life on the streets kept me engaged, and at times I had a hard time putting the book down. I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking for some light, fun reading that doesn't require any critical thinking. If Lestat wrote another book, I wouldn't hesitate

to read it. However, the book did leave me wanting to read more stories about the homeless. I have searched for more books on the subject, but I have come up empty handed so far. I hope to also become involved in a program dedicated to helping the homeless; Lestat is living proof that the lives of the homeless can be drastically improved.



Diane Ravitch

The Bowdlerization of the Human Experience

Elizabeth Crawford

The Language Police

Diane Ravitch

Alfred A. Knopf, 24.00

Imagine for a moment that one of your freedoms as an American has been violated. Companies and authorities that you trust to act in the best interest of your freedom are willingly and knowingly betraying your trust. Their actions deliberately contradict the First Amendment and other foundations of our society. Imagine further that these actions restrict our ability to *learn*. Not just restrict, but attempt to define what we are allowed to *learn*. Pretend that the focus of these controls is children within public school. To achieve this control, words, thoughts and ideas are censored out of children's textbooks and reading material. Authorities say that they are trying to protect our children. Imagine that this has gone on for years, intentionally hidden from public view. Are you angry yet? Are you scared yet? Imagine for a moment that we are not pretending. With the book *The Language Police*, author Diane Ravitch divulges the commonplace practice of textbook and standardized test publishers to censor educational materials under the pretense of sheltering children from ideas that might damage them.

Ravitch's first exposure to censorship came in 1998 as a member of a review panel for a national assessment test. A secondary review panel was instituted to detect any reading passages that might contain what is known in the industry as "bias". Ravitch speaks extensively of what she feels has become "the new meaning of bias" described by Riverside Publishing as "any symbols, language, gestures, words, phrases or examples that are generally regarded as sexist, racist, otherwise offensive, inappropriate, or negative towards any group...anything that is controversial or emotionally charged". Upon first exposure the sentiment seems well intentioned and enforced to protect the beliefs and the safety of children in school, however the line has been crossed. A line exists in the gray area between sensitivity and censorship. As an American my expectation was that in order to prevent excessive control authorities stayed as far away from the line of censorship as possible. Ravitch revealed my mistake. Publishers are dangerously prone to censoring material, sometimes if only to make their job more convenient.

To best explain the degree to which "bias" is avoided, Ravitch gives examples of reading submissions that her panel approved, but that the bias reviewers did not. The rejection that shocked me was based on a concept called "regional bias". The passage described dolphins, including a legendary dolphin that guided ships through dangerous waterways. The passage was deemed to contain "regional bias" because it took place at and around the sea, which is biased toward children that live in coastal areas. Ravitch explains that "regional

bias...means that children should not be expected to read or comprehend stories set in unfamiliar terrain...No reading passage on a test may have a specific geographical setting; every event must occur in a general locale”.

Even more disturbing was the exclusion of a passage about owls. A Native American member of the review board explained that owls are a taboo subject for Navajos and that in some cultures the owl is associated with death. Therefore owls may not be mentioned, referred to, represented or illustrated on any test. The problem with this of course is that “owls exist. They are real birds...not creatures of imagination. Nevertheless, to avoid giving offense, the tests will pretend that owls don’t exist. Owls are to be deleted and never again mentioned to the highly vulnerable and sensitive schoolchild”.

Interestingly, Ravitch does not blame the publishers for the compulsive sheltering of students. Because text book and test makers must have their material approved by individual states and school districts, activist groups can easily influence the decision process by expressing concerns to local officials. Eager to appease parents and the community, school districts will rarely approve a book if enough noise is made for rejecting it. The activist groups come from two sides - the religious right and the political left. Both groups demand that books containing topics and words that violate their beliefs are banned from public school systems: the right reacting to subjects like divorce, unemployment and disobedient children, and the left demanding that every ethnic culture and belief be included equally in everything children read. What is a publisher to do? Having spoken to numerous publishing houses Ravitch says that from the constant uprising against “bias” material, publishers learned “that the best way to get approved by a school district is to avoid controversy and eliminate anything that has the potential to offend anyone;” leaving textbook content similar to what Ravitch describes as “thin gruel”.

Even as a consistently concerned student, I’ve never been one to follow trends in textbooks, so I was appalled, but convinced that children are exposed in school to enough other reading material to balance out the “ideal society” presented in their texts. The censorship doesn’t stop at textbooks. As publishers get more comfortable with the act of erasing thoughts from new material they are expanding to impose censorship on *literature*. Altering classic and historical novels because they might cause discomfort is unacceptable. And no author is safe. Ravitch lists authors that are consistently censored and in some cases banned from school districts. These authors include Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, Ray Bradbury, Shakespeare, J.D. Salinger and William Golding. There is no leniency for traditional literature either as stories such as Beowulf and Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales are also submitted to “chop shops”.

As evidence of this massacre, Ravitch provides a myriad of examples and quotations from censored textbooks and literary anthologies that when observed outside the sleepy stupor of study are absurd. After the chapter on how *historical accuracy* is ignored for the sake of censorship, I was left wondering how I managed to pilfer the fact that not many African Americans were present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence from my high school education and whether or not multiculturalists from the left were, at this mo-

ment, hunting me down, desperate to convince me otherwise.

Are you scared now?

Ravitch's "will stop at nothing attitude" does inspire hope in the reader that is as equally convinced as she that Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and George Orwell's *1984* are foreboding. Unlike textbook publishers, Ravitch does not attempt to shield her readers from the brusque reality of censorship. She emphasizes the severity of these patterns and bravely projects its effect on our society and freedoms in America. However, her assurance that the language police can be stopped is just as assertive. In her conclusion Ravitch presents steps that individuals or groups can take to prevent censorship and the banning of literature that includes supporting independent publishers, increasing awareness of the problem and supporting the higher education of teachers.

My own exploration of the censorship mentioned in this book was met with a surge of outrage from hundreds of schools and parents across the country. Censorship is no longer continuing unseen. A growing list of novels speaking out against censorship shows authors everywhere fighting for their right to free speech by using it. The emphasis of these writers is overwhelmingly focused on *stopping* and *preventing* censorship in our schools. As expressed in Joan Delfattore's *What Johnny Shouldn't Read*, in which Delfattore "advocates self-publishing by local school districts (as the) most effective weapon against censorship" (UIUC), authors agree that the keys to success are removing the market pressure and heightening awareness. Organizations such as the American Library Association lead the charge in increasing awareness by providing candid facts about censorship and lists of "the 100 most frequently challenged books" (ALA), as well as opportunities to get involved. The future for censorship opponents will not be an easy one. Many sources I found exposed censorship on a global scale including China and Japan as countries that are also showing tendencies of editing textbooks for bias (Indiana).

As horrified as I am Ravitch convinced me that there is hope and that she is trustworthy to pursue it. A true advocate of great literature and free speech she insists that

Great literature does not comfort us; it does not make us feel better about ourselves. It is not written to enhance our self-esteem or to make us feel that we are 'included' in the story. It takes us into its own world and creates its own reality. It shakes us up; it makes us think. Sometimes it makes us cry.

After reading the evidence Ravitch exposed I wanted to cry. I wanted to bang my fists on the activists' doors and rub their noses in what they had done,

but I didn't. Driven by what I know about the power of the individual and where our influence lies, I quietly sat down and opened my copy of *Fahrenheit 451*.

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Inside Lynch's Brain

by Davis Banta

Lynch on Lynch
Faber & Faber
\$16.00

Since his film debut, *Eraserhead*, David Lynch has both impressed and confused the viewing public with fare as strange and varied as *Blue Velvet*, and the television series *Twin Peaks*. I myself have often gone away from a Lynch production thinking "Wow, that was great...what the hell was it?" *Lynch on Lynch* may provide more answers than can be found anywhere else, however vague they may be.

The book *Lynch on Lynch* is a collection of interviews with the director divided up by each film and/or period in his life. In addition to dealing with his films, the book also devotes a few chapters to his other interests, such as his work in painting and photography.

The interviews are all conducted and compiled by Chris Rodley, who met with the director on a number of occasions spanning from 1993-96. Unfortunately, since the interviews end with a discussion of his film *Lost Highway*, and I have seen no updated editions of the book, yet, this means that readers will not get any additional info on either of his later films *The Straight Story*, or *Mulholland Drive*. Unfortunate, particularly since it would be interesting to read how David Lynch ever got involved with any film coming out of the Disney company (*Straight Story*), much less one that was actually good.

The book starts off on the subject of Lynch's early life, from childhood to when he left for college. Lynch never goes too deeply into his childhood, describing it as a fairly normal Midwestern life, save for a few familial eccentricities he cites, such as his sister's deep fear of peas.

When Lynch moved away to college he planned on being a painter, but opportunities to get involved in film kept appearing, and he came to want his pictures to "move" more. Besides becoming a film director, the other way he solves this problem is by painting using "organic" materials...examples being painting a piece of meat into a canvas for ants to find, and covering a ball of cheese with clay shaped like a face, of course leaving an open mouth for the ants to get at the cheese through.

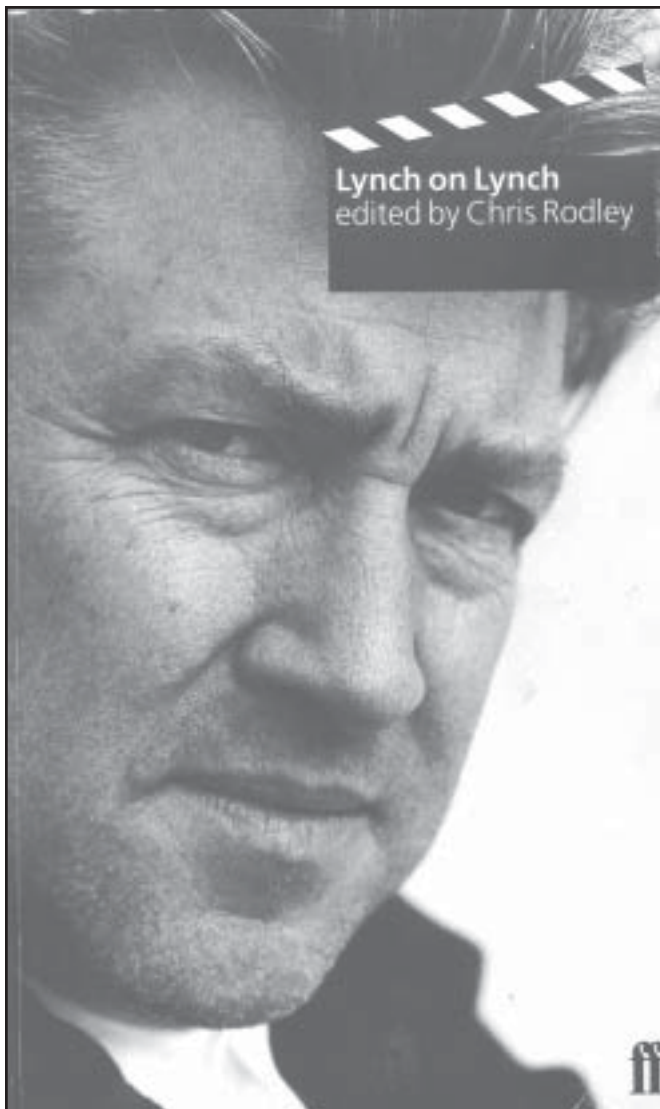
When the discussion turns to Lynch's first feature-length film, *Eraserhead*, the director is open and talks clearly about some of the specific elements of the film (the look, music), but refuses to divulge how "the baby" was created; preferring simply to say "we found it". He says that if he told all the technical details of how it was built it would take away from the mystery the creature has in the film. He'd rather people just watched it instead of thinking to themselves "and that's where the lever went, and there's..."

Another trait that the director doesn't like to talk about is "the meaning" of the symbols and strange sequences in his work. He likes audiences to get involved in the film and bring their own interpretations to it. He is perfectly willing to disclose his feelings about his films, and how some of his ideas occurred to him, providing he doesn't have to make any firm declarations as to what something specifically means.

Lynch comes across in these interviews as a strangely folksy, charming

character—a self-described “Jimmy Stewart from Mars”. He doesn’t strike you as the type of person you’d think of having directed a film with a cameo appearance by Marilyn Manson as a porn star (*Lost Highway*), or where a Kafkaesque hero dreams of singing woman who resides in a radiator (*Eraserhead*)...which is kind of disturbing.

Lynch on Lynch serves as an interesting character study of a director, and still one of the most valuable sources of information on his work. Lynch and his interviewer Rodley provide a great framework of information that can be used to analyze the director’s body of work. Even his new films that aren’t covered in the book should be easier to understand once you become familiar with some of Lynch’s recurring symbols and themes.



Zen Zimmer

by Jeremi Plazas

After the Fire

Paul Zimmer

University of Minnesota Press.

Writing a book about compassionate living and love of nature can often earn you such labels as °peacenik° and °hippy.° In turn, this can easily create obstacles for readers to understand the message communicated. More challenging is presenting those topics in a context that is suitable for all. In his book, *After the Fire*, Paul Zimmer discusses issues such as kindness in everyday life and the importance of nature, in a manner that is not obvious and overbearing. Instead, the topics are intertwined with a personal discussion on growing old and finding a comfortable settling space. The book is a powerful philosophical essay disguised as an innocent biographical work, which teaches us that living in peace and compassion brings happiness and fulfillment.

Zimmer repeatedly touches on the topics of brutality and violence. Always, describing it as something that diminishes humanity, that lowers our societal standards. It is a stall, sometimes a regression, in the evolution of mankind. Not only will humanity fail to evolve if it uses violence as a mean towards any end, but it will diminish itself by stubbornly using destructive means of interaction. Zimmer recollects that °Arthur Koestler once suggested that if the human race is to survive it will have to be tranquilized en masse° (102). It seems necessary for our survival that we be able to compose ourselves to a reasonable, non-violent behavior. However frank his views are though, they are always subsumed within a personal context,

As a young man I learned an emphatic lesson: never trust brutality as representative of anything worthy. Yet I admit to my fascination with war stories, boxing, and football. Violence is part of my human heritage, but I know it does not enduringly signify superiority, prestige, manhood, or humanity. When it prevails, our species is sullied and diminished. (113)

By denying brutality, Zimmer is making a powerful statement but also momentarily leaving the reader in the dark as to what his views and alternative suggestions are. That is why, displaying an elaborate and stretched out argumentation, he expresses those views later in the book, through his relationship with Christianity.

Indeed, throughout the book, Zimmer sounds like a spiritual man. L. K. Peebles mentioned in her own analysis of the book that °It is a virulent combination—the lack of power to change our present, and the lack of willingness with which to try. It is no wonder that so many of the aged become spiritual fanatics, spending whole days in prayer or meditation.°She clearly acknowledges the presence of a strong spiritual emphasis in Zimmer’s book. Neverthe-

less, he seems to struggle with his own faith in organized religion, °It seems that I should believe in *something*, but I believe only that it is presumptuous for any individual or organization to claim possession of the main line on a 'supreme being' or 'the one true faith'" (186). He is successful though, in communicating his general spiritual belief, consistent with his denial of violence: °So what do I think? Compassion. I believe that goodness is compassion. I can say this for certain" (183).

Interestingly, this line of thought is very similar to Buddhist practice, as explained by the 7th century Buddhist scholar, Shantideva, in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*: "If with kindly generosity/ One merely has the wish to soothe/ The aching heads of other beings,/ Such merit knows no bound" (36). It is clearly beneficial, according to Buddhism, to practice generosity, kindness, and compassion, and all these values are positively discussed in Zimmer's book.

To reinforce this conviction that compassion is necessary as a social value if humanity hopes to reach higher spiritual levels, Zimmer doesn't fail to recollect the lack of it in religious history:

But there are people who believe that compassion is a weakness undermining the preservation and protection of a goodness they feel certain of. They make holy wars over this. The slaughter is appalling. (183)

Justly so, he points out the holy wars of history which were supposedly fought in the name of a supreme being as one example of violence unjustified and counterproductive. This last recap of violent religious history shows that knowledge isn't always pleasant. Knowing about our violent history can be exasperating but it is the only way to learn from it and avoid repeating it in the future: "Although wisdom is imperfect and sometimes painful, it is the best we can hope for" (226).

Coupled with a powerful non-violent argument is Zimmer's second omnipresent topic: his love of nature. He shares his admiration of animals and respect of the natural world by including us on his Sunday morning walks with his dog, and his excursions into the forest to attempt a bit of deforestation. His respect for trees in particular is only exceeded by his subsequent feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment.

The trees precede me and will survive me. They do not exist for my edification, nor do I exist for theirs. They are my privilege, but I am not a privilege to them. I am a much happier person now that I have finally come to this conclusion. [_] I am content simply to live quietly for a brief among them. (29)

His recognition of the living presence of trees and other plants is admirable. The transition process from city-life to the country side has apparently brought

him great peace of mind.

In this process of “finding his place”, Zimmer had to fit himself within a social environment but also a natural one. He had to learn to live in harmony with his neighbors made of flesh, bones and wood. It was not always easy:

For a while we found large piles of fur-filled dung each morning in the middle of our deck. It wasn't a dog or a raccoon, it wasn't a fox or a wolf, so we figured it had to be a coyote neighbor sneaking up at night to squat and drop a sign, giving us the equivalent of the coyote middle finger. (88)

Zimmer seems very affected by his close animal neighbors. He expresses that concern, sometimes quite humorously, sometimes more dramatically, as in his poem “Dog Music,” about his departed singing dog Wanda: “She was a great master and died young,/leaving me with unrelieved grief,/her talents known to only a few”. Once again in a personal context: his own life in Wisconsin, he describes how much importance should be attributed to the natural world around us. It is crucial to be in harmony with nature if we claim to wish for peace of mind.

Zimmer's experience before and after deciding to become a poet, is full of references to living with compassion and learning to love nature. Maybe unknowingly, Zimmer teaches us one of the most important lessons in our existence: if we expect to live in kindness and peace, we need to practice that same kindness and love to others and our environment. Many might say that *After the Fire* is not about that, but rather describes Zimmer's salvation from a depressed, self-deprecating state to “settling down” into a comfortable, creativity-enhancing, space. But I believe the book tells us that living in peace brings fulfillment and joy.

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A Life of Disguises

By Lana Beardslee

The Shape of Things to Come

Maud Casey

HarperCollins \$12.95

As I was browsing through the bookshop, picking up books at random, I came across The Shape of Things to Come, written by Maud Casey. After reading the first couple pages, I found myself cracking up as the book's heroine, Isabelle, bored with her current monotonous and meaningless temp job, decides to strip off all her clothes and climb onto the office copy machine to copy her naked body. Her theory is that she doesn't really need to be there, and a copy of her will suffice.

I have no other option. I unbutton my white work blouse and let it slide to the floor. I unhook my bra, tossing it onto Louise's desk where it lands in her inbox... I step out of my sexless work skirt, roll off my nylons, climb on top of the copy machine, and go to work (3).

This kind of offbeat humor continues throughout the book and makes it a fun read, but the underlying theme is a more serious one. Isabelle has no idea who she is, or who she wants to be. And in a society where the pressure to decide these things is immense, Isabelle puts herself in different disguises to hide her lack of identity and "deny life's weight" (2).

This theme is prevalent in society today. Everyone has worn a disguise in his or her life, one way or another. Whether it's the polite mask you wear when meeting your in-laws for the first time, or the serial bomber who lives as a postman during the day. We even have a national holiday dedicated to disguises. Disguises can mask your vulnerabilities, and make you impervious to harm. If no one knows who you really are, they can't hurt you.

Isabelle works as a temp, where "Flying toasters and bubbling fish screen savers are the only evidence of life" (3). She finds herself with no direction, no house, no family, and no ambition to get any of them. Then she looks into the mirror, and realizes she's thirty-three and has "never had a grown-up hairdo" (1). This makes her realize her hair is only the tip of the iceberg.

Until today my life had been a source of amusement. Bad dates and worse jobs were fodder for future stories told to my future husband and a close-knit circle of future friends in the comfort of my future home. I'd always harbored hope for better things... But today my quivering reflection says to me: It is conceivable that you will work at the phone company and go home to Jell-O for the rest of your life (2).

When she is fired from her job for lewd behavior with a copy machine, she returns to her hometown of Standardville.

The theme of disguises is extremely prevalent in Isabelle's new life. Isabelle gets a job as a "secret shopper" where she is expected to dress up as different people every day. She uses this to create identities for herself, mainly

confidant, successful, businesswomen, who have real jobs and families to come home to. "This woman has a husband and a child who consider her competent, capable of whipping something up in the kitchen when there seems to be no food in the refrigerator. She knows that hairspray gets out ink stains...and club soda gets out everything else" (126). Isabelle slips into these disguises as if she is trying on clothes at the mall; this identity is too bossy, just like these pants are too snug. She never seems to find one that is comfortable, because the only skin people are comfortable in is their own, Isabelle just needs to realize this. I think everyone relates to this feeling. It's said that growing up is hard but once you through awkward adolescence and graduate college everything is supposed to fall into place and you magically have the life you've always wanted and are happy with who you are. "Guarantee theory: Eventually you find yourself in that home, with that husband, with some small children who need you... with a job that makes you occasionally happy" (2). Obviously, this is not true for most of the world. Some people, like Isabelle, never figure out who they are, so they disguise themselves and harbor a false hope that maybe this disguise will be the one.

When Isabelle and her ex-boyfriend Dennis find themselves kicked out while having sex in a random back yard, they decide to drive around town naked. Their nakedness is another form of disguise for Isabelle. Being nude makes everything unreal, like a cartoon. To her, clothes are a symbol of reality and if she has none on it makes it easier to deny reality.

The incongruity of being naked and upright in a car makes the whole world magically silly...Every house is a cartoon house, filled with cartoon families who hit each other painlessly over the heads with frying pans and eat huge mutton chops with reckless abandon (166).

Dennis is empathetic towards Isabelle's need to disguise herself. He also is uncomfortable in his skin and their rekindled relationship is largely due to their ability to hide from reality together. " "That's dangerous you know...Not being naked anymore" (167).

This book has an interesting plot and characters that are easy to relate to. Though I did enjoy the book, a lot of the time the author tried to relate Isabelle to too many other characters. Casey could have concentrated on Isabelle's struggle with her own identity and it would have been a book in itself. Another part of the book that lacked was the ending. It's predictable and Casey doesn't give the reader any insight on Isabelle's thoughts or feelings when the book ends. It would have been nice to be in Isabelle's mind when she realizes she has to find her own identity and stop borrowing others.

This book made me feel like I was going through life with Isabelle and when I was done it made me grateful that I am doing okay so far with my own identity. Trying to be so many different people and constantly wearing different disguises is very hard and in the end damages a person beyond repair.

To live and die in L.A.

Guiangelo Famalaro

Understand This

Jervey Tervalon

William Morrow; \$19.00

Having gone into this project reading several positive reviews, praising Jervey Tervalon's Understand This with words like "urban masterpiece", "dazzling", and "wire-tight", I was surprised when left with my own thoughts of "lukewarm", "cliché", and "uninspired", after putting it down. Although there are several redeeming qualities to the book, such as a fresh writing style, a less-than-Disney-ending, and a trip one of the protagonists takes to check out UCSC, I was left with a weak plot and a lack of compassion for any of Tervalon's characters. I do feel, however, that if there is one thing I take away from his book, it is the understanding of just how hard it really is to be born into, and rise out of, the ghettos of South-Central Los Angeles.

Understand This starts out its plot with the murder of a young man named Doug in South-Central Los Angeles. The rest of the book centers around the lives of several high school students and their families who struggle in coping with the concentric rings rippling out as a result of his death. Mr. Tervalon also develops several plot intricacies involving love, hate, abuse, and revenge that struggle in building depth and complexity to this story, but give shape to our comprehension of how harshly different the relationships and interactions with people are from my own, when they are cultivated under some of the most emotionally stressful conditions imaginable.

Throughout this book, a young high school girl named Margot, who commands the role of a central character, is constantly harassed and verbally abused by her peers because of the cultural inequalities and tolerance for the disrespect of women that are so obviously common in the ghetto. One morning on Margot's way to school she hears, "Hey Miss Thang, Hey bitch come on over!...Got something for you!... 'I don't have to look over there to know some fool is grabbing his little thing. Long as they don't throw a bottle at me'"(26). Margot has no idea who this guy is or where he's from. She is obviously used to this behavior because she shows no sign of outrage or insult by a remark that would leave most women incredulous and appalled. Another example of this comes forth when Ollie, a high school student turned drug dealer after inheriting the business of his diseased brother Doug, approaches Margot looking for her boyfriend Francois. "She's looking at me...just staring like I'm a dog or something. I want to hop that fence and yoke her ass...I'm grabbing the fence about to hop over, I'm gonna get her but those fucking dogs come running snarling and shit"(71). I believe that many of the young men who inhabit a place like South-Central act the way they do toward women because of an imbalance of power between men and women within the societal structure of America. This is only exacerbated by the poverty and lack of resources that

diminishes the possibility of upward mobility for the people who live in these conditions.

Women in our society are already oppressed, and when put in a situation where academic education is extremely minimal, good jobs are very hard to come by. Food needs to be put on the table, and many women are forced into less desirable and lower paying jobs. They then may have to rely on a man to aid in providing financial security, which makes them dependent, and therefore thought of as inferior. In a place where physical superiority is valued so highly, there is a mentality and reality of brawn over brain, which doesn't play well to the female hand. And in a place where life and drugs are cheap, and street-smarts can shoot book-smarts, it becomes easier to understand how so many youths fall victim to the traps that lurk around every corner of the South-Central Ghetto.

It is said of the ghetto, that to get out alive, you either sling crack, or have a wicked jump shot. That seems to be the case for the kids of this book. Tervalon weaves the lives of his characters through a meandering maze of life in turmoil. The young men and their role models are all out to make cash by any means necessary, and fast. This path leads straight to the life of a drug-dealer, buying low and selling high, while watching your back without faltering, and trusting no one. So they run the slums, selling to whomever will buy, willing to shoot anyone who can't pay up; all for a chance to realize the dream of being a big shot and having the material wealth to gain the respect of others, and possibly a chance to get out of their hellish home. Illustrating this mentality is Ollie's love for the hustle, and his desire to make cash just like his brother did: "Couple more keys, make that dollar. What I'm gonna get, gonna get myself another Benz, naw, get me a Jeep, yeah, that be bumping. Gonna get more suits... Get me one of them Levi jackets with me painted on the back like I'm muthafucking star...From the street to the bank, more money" (75-76). To make his obsession even more pronounced, this thought process occurs while he is receiving oral sex from a hooker in the back of his car. These young men are driven to do whatever they can to make profit with the limited resources they have, and when seduced by the successful dealers with plenty of visible wealth, one is quick to drop the day in and day out monotony of the classroom and the low paying jobs they would no doubt be stuck with. One might think that living in such violence would make them lock themselves in their rooms and hit the books all day, but that is an outsider's perspective. The tone of this book has made it evident that these kids have become numb to the prospect of death because it runs rampant in their community everyday. They don't see anyone successful in their neighborhood other than the pimps and drug dealers, the Ballers and Gangsta-Rap role models who all flaunt excessive wealth and women, increasing the desire for material prosperity one-hundred fold. Furthermore, with the chance of getting shot or knifed on the way home from school for no better reason than your new shoes, most teenagers aren't willing to hang around and wait for the long term benefits of education to roll around to them.

Mr. Tervalon attempts to make the lives and times of these youths real to us by using a stream-of-consciousness style of writing that is meant to be

read quickly and keep the pace of the book up, while bringing us inside the character's head, allowing us to analyze their thought process and compare it to the actions and words they put forth to the world. Margot is the only one in the book who has kept up good grades, and whose parents have saved enough money so that she has the opportunity to visit UCSC as a possible college for her. While on the bus, she thinks to herself, "Sign says Santa Cruz is forty miles away, forty miles of listening to devil music with some pretty Oreo who's pissed off cause my suitcase strained his back" (131). When asked "Why are you so silent?", she responds, "I don't know, just thinking." This is how most of the book is played out; vocalized language with contrary mentally hidden agendas. To me, Tervalon's writing is reminiscent of Elmore Leonard without the wit or character depth. There is no true protagonist, much like the works of Leonard, and his writing contains mostly dialogue with some mental processes in between, but lacks the ability to pull off the gritty, biting, crude discourse that make this style shine.

I chose to see this book as an ethnography depicting the struggle of the human condition in urban America instead of the wearisome, bromidic monotony that smear the pages of this story. Any brilliance held latent in this story was lost to Tervalon's weak plot design and prosaic characters. From my experience, the only gift put forth by this book comes, not from any incredible writing ability that Tervalon possesses, but from the fascinating setting that he chooses for this tale. I am thankful for Tervalon's desire to write a story about youth living in the ghetto, and believe their story goes unheard partly because of the social stratification and marginalized status that residents of a ghetto inherently face. In addition, it takes an individual who has experienced what that life is like firsthand, and has been immersed in that culture enough to write a realistic portrayal of his character's lives. Being a white male that has lived in the mellow climate of Santa Cruz for most of his life, I do not fit that criterion. But with the background of teaching in ghetto schools and having close relationships with his students, I believe Tervalon does. From the localized slang expressions his characters employ, and the dilemmas they struggle with, to his minute details of the cityscape, it is obvious Tervalon is a man who knows what he's talking about. So in this light, I would like to recommend this book to anyone who wishes to hear the untold stories of the hardships that plague the streets of South-Central Los Angeles.

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

by 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 backs. 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 is used like a sculptor, transforming raw materials into shapes, firing personality and life with 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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I'd Rather Watch the Movie

by Matt Maurer

*What Goes Around Comes Around:
The Films of Jonathan Demme*
Michael Bliss and Cristina Banks
Duane E. Perkins, 20.00

Do you think there are any life lessons that could possibly be learned from a Hollywood produced movie? I personally don't think so. In Michael Bliss and Cristina Banks' book, *What Goes Around Comes Around: The Films of Jonathan Demme*, it is made clear that movie directors do expect the audience to get more out of there movies than just fantastical situations and imagery. This book not only uncovered the thick plots of Demme's films, but went into excruciating detail about every character's flaws. It talked about features of Demme's films that would otherwise go unaddressed. Demme was a master of nearly invisible side plots and underlying meaning. Most of Demme's work was hard for the public to grasp because of the complexity he instilled in every picture he shot. Despite the gaudy use of language and seemingly repetitive drone of words, this book was very insightful and interesting to read.

The only Demme directed movie I've seen was the recreation of Hannibal Lecter's life, *Silence of the Lambs (1991)*. This is what initially drew me to this book. The cover is a close up shot of a younger Anthony Hopkins. Hopkins played the leading role of Hannibal Lecter, in what many critics believe to be Demme's most successful film. His facial expression suggests that he is pleasantly aroused by viewing some sort of pain or struggle. I know you're not supposed to judge a book by it's cover. In this case, that is *very* true. Even though the cover looks interesting and mysterious – the let down is much greater than the reward.

Once you get past the cover, you are met by a hefty introduction. The idea seemed to be one of familiarizing the reader with Demme's work and giving you a touch of what's to come in later chapters. The authors also talk a lot about Demme's life and career as a director. Reading about just a small part of all that goes on in Demme's head was to me, one of the highlights of the book. Subtle things like, "...he takes pleasure in street singers, in a man who plays music with spoons, in a motorcyclist who takes his dog along with him for rides... - all of them people who express American individualism at its unselfconscious best," (8) show what Demme was really like as a person. Demme's life and thoughts not only make for good reading, but it also puts you in touch with what kind of person he is. I think it's important to know that he isn't much different than you and I. He doesn't seem arrogant or self-righteous. He's just a talented guy who has the opportunity to express himself artistically through the production of major motion pictures.

Now I don't remember how many times I fell asleep while reading the introduction. Even though the authors got a bit long winded, their knowledge of Demme's work and the English language were very impressive.

In the proceeding chapters, each film Demme had directed was grilled under a hypercritical microscope. Bliss and Banks really did their homework. The nearly surgical analysis of each of Demme's movies was inspiring. However, after reading Demme's own interpretations of his movies, they almost seem to lose their cinematic qualities. The mystery is solved, side plots are revealed and explained and any other questions about individual characters you might have are answered. I haven't seen most of Demme's movies, and after reading this book, I'm not sure that I want to. Although, the authors also addressed Demme's incredible plot developing skills as his career progressed. Sure, some of those early movies might be a bit on the corny side, but even at that Demme was very focused on the believability of his characters. After he had a few movies under his belt, he was able to create plots heavy enough to back the depth of his characters.

We as the audience and as the general public don't really need that much insight into our favorite movies. There would be no surprise if we all read books like *What Goes Around Comes Around*, before watching a new release. People see movies for many different reasons. No matter what the reason might be, relaxation is usually on the mind. If you don't want to psychoanalyze a movie, then you can take it for its face value, but most directors, including Demme work extra hard to fit those complex plots and characters in for the few of us that try to see deeper into the film. I could see how people would enjoy studying films in that manner. It would be a lot like poetry. Usually a poem doesn't mean the same thing for any two people. I'm sure you can see how easily that could cross over to the interpretation of film as well.

Demme always had a fascination with his characters. How he created them and then cast a certain actor or actress for the part was always a strong suit of his. Bliss and Banks make sure the reader recognizes Demme's abilities. Every main character in every movie is mentioned in each film review. There are some big names, many of which are able to pull off big parts with a high level of quality, the level of quality that Demme was after. Actors like Denzel Washington, Tom Hanks, Anthony Hopkins and Alec Baldwin. Actresses like Jodie Foster, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Melanie Griffith. There are many others of course, and all showing great talent for acting.

Another nice thing about this book are the photos that randomly appear. They are mostly shots taken on the sets of Demme's films during shooting. They don't tell much of a story to someone who hasn't seen the film, but they do offer a break from the overly wordy reading. As the author of a book like this, I'm not sure how hard it would be or how hard you should try to put photos with words to bring out a clear meaning, but I don't think it was done that well. All the photos had captions, but they were very simple, such as, "Mike and Angela's dance club date." (105) I guess the authors weren't relying too heavily on the photos for meaning—and if so, it wasn't clear to me.

If you are someone who is a big fan of Demme's work, this book might

be good and might be bad for you to read. It is interesting in the sense that Demme, despite his normalcy compared to social standards of the general public, is able to think up so many intricate works of genius. He is incredibly intuitive when it comes to creating a film that is both entertaining and carrying a lot of meaning. Of course he puts it on the viewer to see the meaning which may be more difficult than creating it in the first place. On the other hand, if you enjoy his movies purely for entertainment reasons, you can probably pass on this one. Demme's life and the way he thinks and is able to create something so powerful from his own thoughts and ideas is nothing short of a genius. If you are someone who has a profound love of the English language and want a good read with lots of big words that aren't ordinarily used on a daily basis, this could be a fun one for you.

When all is said and done, this book is bearable. It was my first experience reading a book that dealt so critically with something that I guess I used to take for granted. I don't think I would read it again, but I do know that I want to see the rest of Demme's films.

Progress Through Turmoil

by David Stearns

The 1960's in the United States could easily be considered the most crucial decade for a myriad of social, political, and technological advances and changes. With the election of a young and bright John F. Kennedy in 1960, everything in America seemed to be heading in the right direction. Kennedy had promised a "New Frontier" that had the entire country bubbling over with excitement. His famous speech that included the line "ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your country" made working for government popular again. His administration was rounding up the best and the brightest from all across the country and from all walks of life to propel America forward in every way imaginable. However this new spirit of American nationality did not last. In 1963, Kennedy was assassinated and once again things seemed to be up in the air. This was just the beginning of a decade full of events that shook the U.S. and the world. The book "From Camelot to Kent State...The Sixties experience in the words of those who lived it" elucidates well what exactly happened. This people's history goes in depth with 58 people who were involved with everything from the peace corps to battle hardened soldiers on the frontlines in Vietnam.

All too often history is recorded by the winners or the people who have control after something important happens. For that reason this book by Joan and Robert K. Morrison is a unique one because it incorporates everyone from the normal everyday Americans to Eldridge Cleaver. Everyone has a story to tell about what they did to help whatever cause they were pushing. The book doesn't solely focus on the anti-war sentiment or left leaning progressives; instead it recalls the experience of all people including those working for the government or the military on all the controversial topics and events of the time regardless of their political or social views. The writing is edited very loosely by the Morrises to convey the most accurate accounts of what happened. The language and social jargon of all the people included in this book is left the way they said it or wrote it with minor punctuation corrections.

The Distant Drummer section depicts the soldiers struggle and experience during the war and has some interesting information and insight into their views as soldiers. One very alarming interviewee is Clarence Fitch, an African American man who joined the Marine Corps in 1966 fresh out of high school who was stationed on the frontline during the Tet offensive in 1968. For Clarence, the Marines corps was a way out of his poverty stricken life back home. He was a politically aware man who had attended the march on Washington to hear Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech. He starts by saying "We weren't living in no vacuum in Vietnam. There was a certain growing black consciousness that was happening in the states, and also over there in Vietnam." He continues on to give the low down on the real war being fought not only between the U.S. and the Northern Vietnamese, but between blacks and whites fighting for the same side, and between officers in command and

their battalions. He goes on to say "It would still be more Caucasian bodies coming back than black bodies, but what Dr. King said was that blacks was at the time ten percent of the population (of soldiers) and 30% of the KIA's." The intense Civil Rights struggle did not stop at the U.S. border, it raged on 15,000 miles away among the people fighting to protect it. What was even more critical to the soldiers was the fight to stay alive, like any human would do they did whatever they needed to do to ensure their survival, even if it meant killing their new gung-ho commander who went completely by the book. "The lieutenant's bunker was maybe 10 yards from the bridge, and this guy went over pulled the pin on the grenade, held it for a couple seconds, and rolled it into the bunker." This sort of action was common from soldiers because their commanders were the greatest threat of all; they were the ones ordering the soldiers into sure death situations. Another way to eliminate a commanding officer was to wait until a firefight was under way and then simply turn one's fire from the usual enemy toward the officer, who was to tell where the bullet had come from. Just another casualty in a war with many.

The soldiers in the field and the people fighting in the extreme civil unrest stateside were in completely different worlds but were both aware of the enormous importance of the times. It often takes a negative experience or failure to find positive or truly be seasoned for success. Like the old Chinese adage roughly says, pray you live in interesting times, and that exactly is what the sixties offered. One must not overlook the tremendous solidarity that was witnessed among the nation's young people throughout those contentious times. After having their ideology dashed and ousted from the mainstream political agenda with the assassinations of one progressive leader after another, it seemed that hope would have been lost, but it only galvanized the young resilient populace. They were going to be heard even if it meant militant action, sometimes it's the only way.

Most of the people interviewed were relatively young during the sixties and were anxious to get out and change the world. "We felt that the president was watching us on television and he was going to pull out of Vietnam because there was just so many of us out there that day," said Julie O'Connor who was an ordinary college student in 1969. This was a common revolutionary attitude among the multitudes of college students and people all over the nation regarding all controversial topics not just Vietnam. However, this leads me to my one critical analysis of the book which refers to the insignificant recollection of people who champion what was important to them that bored me as the reader. Because they incorporate so many people I found myself skimming the sections where the person would talk about their own life that had no connection to the historical event that they happened to be connected to. Some sections were simply too long, the authors/editors let the people ramble on and on about irrelevant material.

The layout and presentation of this book was also very exceptional because if the reader wanted to focus on a particular event or specific information such as the Weathermen or the SDS (Theoretically speaking), as opposed to the book in its entirety, it would be possible. The book is broken down into 12

sections each with its own relating title.

All in all, this informative book on a very important time in our history is worth the read. History that is factual and without bias is desperately lacking in this country and it would be in our interest as well as posterity's to give accurate depictions of what happened in history rather than sugar coating and censoring it in order to push a selfish agenda. People already look back on the past with too much of a nostalgic view, making it look better than it was or altering the truth is detrimental to the success and progress of situations presented in the future. History does repeat itself and without knowledge from all sides of the spectrum, the same problems will continue to plague our world forever.