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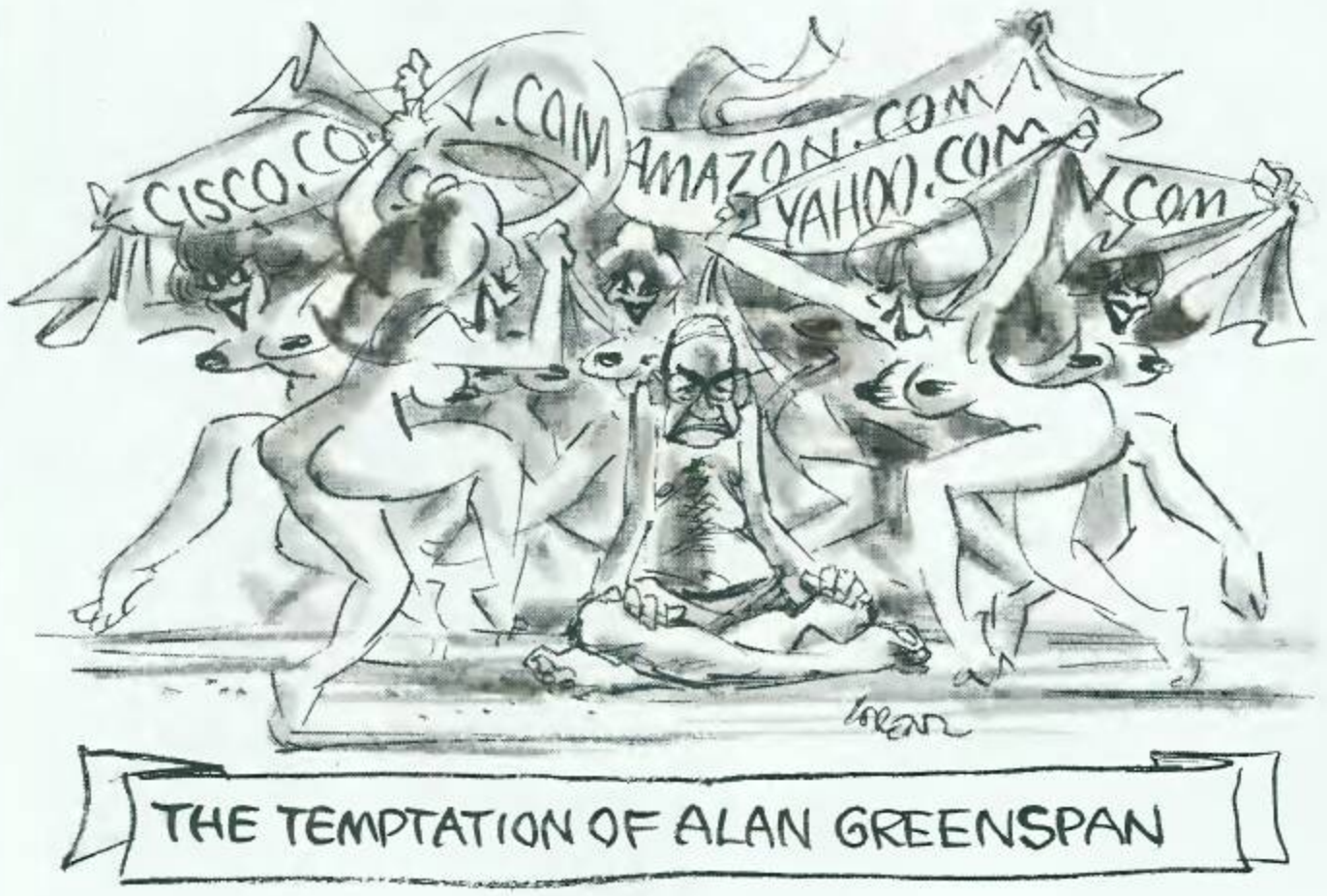

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THE MAIL

CAPITAL IDEAS

John Cassidy's article about the economist Friedrich von Hayek ("The Price Prophet," February 7th) notes that, despite Hayek's support for the capitalist system and its encouragement of information sharing, even he realized that it had its limitations. Proof of those limitations can be found in Jonathan Weiner's account of the Heywood brothers' struggle against Lou Gehrig's disease in the same issue ("Curing the Incurable"). Weiner writes that "the big drug manufacturers aren't interested in investing research funds in a disease that claims only twenty-five thousand patients." Today's anti-government politicians need to understand—as Hayek did—that allowing the laws of supply and demand to determine where resources are allocated when it comes to human health (and human lives) is fundamentally different from allowing those laws to decide how much our shoes or airplane tickets are going to cost.

Simone Pfeiffer
Canada

Friedrich von Hayek claims that free-market capitalism provides the widest and freest dissemination of information to guide consumer choice, which supports the wisdom of the market, which, in turn, leads to the most efficient allocation of scarce resources, which maximizes social welfare through the satisfaction of consumer demand. Leaving aside the problem of those disenfranchised by the marketplace (future generations, for example, and those too poor to "vote" by buying goods and services), how can present-day consumers express their wisdom of choice when critical information is withheld by companies? For example, I'm sure that some of the people who boarded the Alaska Airlines flight that crashed in January would have declined to buy tickets if they had known that the airline had initially determined that their plane needed repair—a decision that the company reversed after further tests. Similar examples, from the long-hidden hazards of cigarettes to confidential settlements after car crashes, abound. The power of firms to keep consumers uninformed seems to thwart the disciplinary function of informed consumer behavior that drives Hayek's model of the theoretical economy.

Jon R. Koppenhoefer
Springfield, Ohio

In his tribute to Friedrich von Hayek John Cassidy notes, in parentheses, some things that the guru of unrestrained capitalism "neglected," things "such as inequality and pollution." These minor omissions—man's relations and responsiblities to his fellow-man and to nature—betray the limitations of both Hayek's work and the economic system he championed.

David F. Noble
Toronto, Canada

POP HISTORY

Congratulations to Frank Gannon for having the audacity to "pop" a few of the major poets in "The Norton Pop-Up Anthology of English Literature," his February 14th Shouts & Murmurs. "Pop-Up Video" couldn't have hoped for a funnier or more inspired Valentine. We've popped everything from the "Today" show to the World Series to New York City's annual Halloween Parade. But it took Gannon to show us that the hypertext we use to revitalize classic music videos works just as well over the plain, old, un-hyper text of the classics. Just wait until we get our hands on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Paul Leo
Producer, "Pop-Up Video"
New York City

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.


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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AIDA
A musical based on the Verdi opera. With music by Elton John, lyrics by Tim Rice, and a book by Linda Woolverton and David Henry Hwang. Robert Falls is the director. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

AMERICAN BUFFALO
William H. Macy leads the cast in an Atlantic Theatre Company staging of David Mamet's 1975 play. Preview on March 15. Opens March 16 at 8. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

HOUSE ARREST
Anna Deavere Smith's latest one-woman show, in which she explores the office of the President of the United States. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
Cherry Jones and Gabriel Byrne star in O'Neill's 1943 drama, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan. In previews through March 18. Opens March 19 at 6:30. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting Congreve's "The Way of the World." In previews through March 18. Opens March 19 at 7. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

THE WAVERLY GALLERY
Eileen Heckart portrays an aging Greenwich Village art dealer who must give up her gallery, in a new play by Kenneth Lonergan. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

THE WILD PARTY
Joseph Moncure March's Jazz Age poem is the basis for Michael John LaChiusa and George C. Wolfe's new musical, starring Mandy Patinkin, Eartha Kitt, and Toni Collette. With music by Mr. LaChiusa. Mr. Wolfe is the director. In previews. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE ALTRUISTS
Nicky Silver's new comedy, starring Veanne Cox and Sam Robards. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

AMADEUS
From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			15	16	17	18
19	20	21				

ANCESTRAL VOICES
A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play, in which a Buffalo grandmother disrupts her family when she divorces her husband to marry his best friend. Sundays at 7:30 and Mondays at 8. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

ARMS AND THE MAN
A Roundabout Theatre production of Shaw's 1894 play, under the direction of Roger Rees. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

BAD BOY NIETZSCHE
Richard Foreman's forty-seventh play. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

BIRDSEED BUNDLES
Lola Pashalinski and Valda Setterfield are in the cast of Ain Gordon's latest play. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Closes April 2.)

THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS
In this exuberant take on "The Comedy of Errors," the action has been shifted to a hip-hop realm, but the basic ideas remain the same. Like the Shakespeare original, "Bomb-Itty" is witty, lewd, allusive, and chaotic, and it plays fast and loose with stereotypes, but the four extravagantly talented writer-actors (who play all of the parts) make it seem altogether new. (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play has reopened at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre. A triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, it's a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE COUNTRY BOY
A young Irishman returns home after fifteen years in America, in a drama by John Murphy. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes April 2.)

DAME EDNA: THE ROYAL TOUR
Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Donald Margulies's new play is a perceptive depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THE DIRECTOR
Through the character of a theatre director who tries to find truth by playing abusive mind games with everyone he knows, the playwright Nancy Hasty asks whether acting (which is essentially lying) can reveal deeper truth. It's a smart play, and, though it's not entirely satisfying intellectually, John Shea's brilliant performance as the director almost makes it seem so. (Arclight, 152 W. 71st St. 279-4200. Closes April 1.)

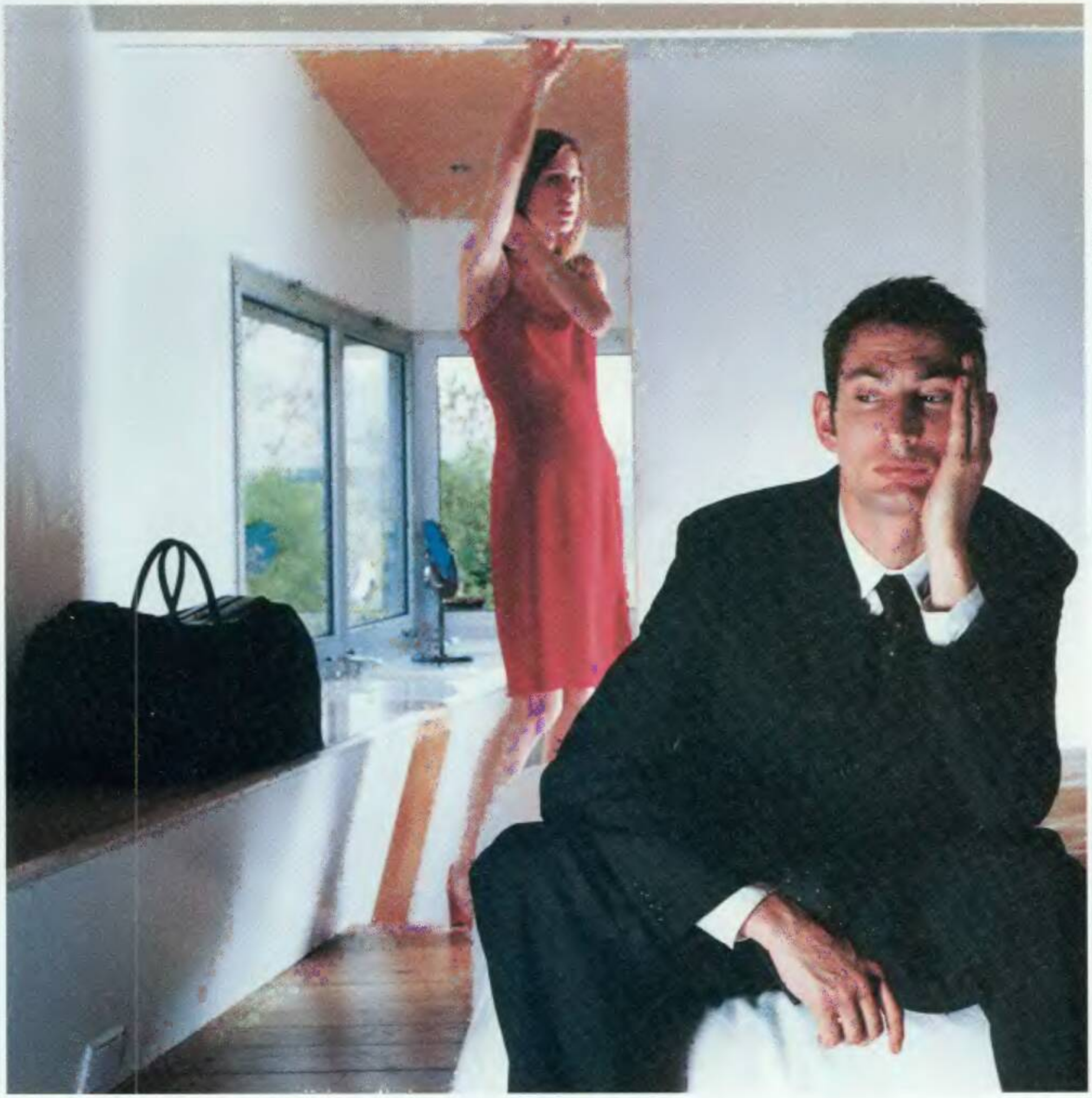
AN EMPTY PLATE AT THE CAFÉ DU GRAND BOEUF
John Rando is the director of this comedy by Michael Hollinger, in which a restaurateur goes on a hunger strike. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes March 25.)

ENOUGH ABOUT ME: AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF VARLA JEAN MERMAN
The alleged love child of Ernest Borgnine and Ethel Merman shares songs and stories from her painful life. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

FUDDY MEERS
There is such a thing as inspired nonsense, but don't look for it in David Lindsay-Abaire's comedy, which is an exemplar of expired nonsense. The play relies heavily on handicap humor: one of the characters is blind in one eye, and has a limp, a lisp, and an ear that's a "twisted mass of burnt scar tissue"; another has garbled speech as a result of a stroke; another is—ha ha ha—dyslexic. The excellent cast, featuring J. Smith-Cameron, Robert Stanton, John Christopher Jones, and Patrick Breen, makes the most of what cleverness the play does contain; nonetheless, you may leave the theatre with the feeling that you just attended a Helen Keller-joke marathon. (3/6/00) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

LAS HORAS DE BELEN: A BOOK OF HOURS
A Mabou Mines adaptation of poems by Catherine Sasanov. March 15-19 at 8:30. Continues through March 26. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

IMPERFECT LOVE
The tightrope between love and ambition is delineated with passion, charm, and wit in this retelling of the story of the great Italian actress Eleonora Duse and her playwright lover Gabriele D'Annunzio (here called Gabrielle Torrisi), written and directed by Brandon Cole. Cole also co-wrote last year's movie "Illuminata," which explored the same territory on a larger canvas; as a miniature,



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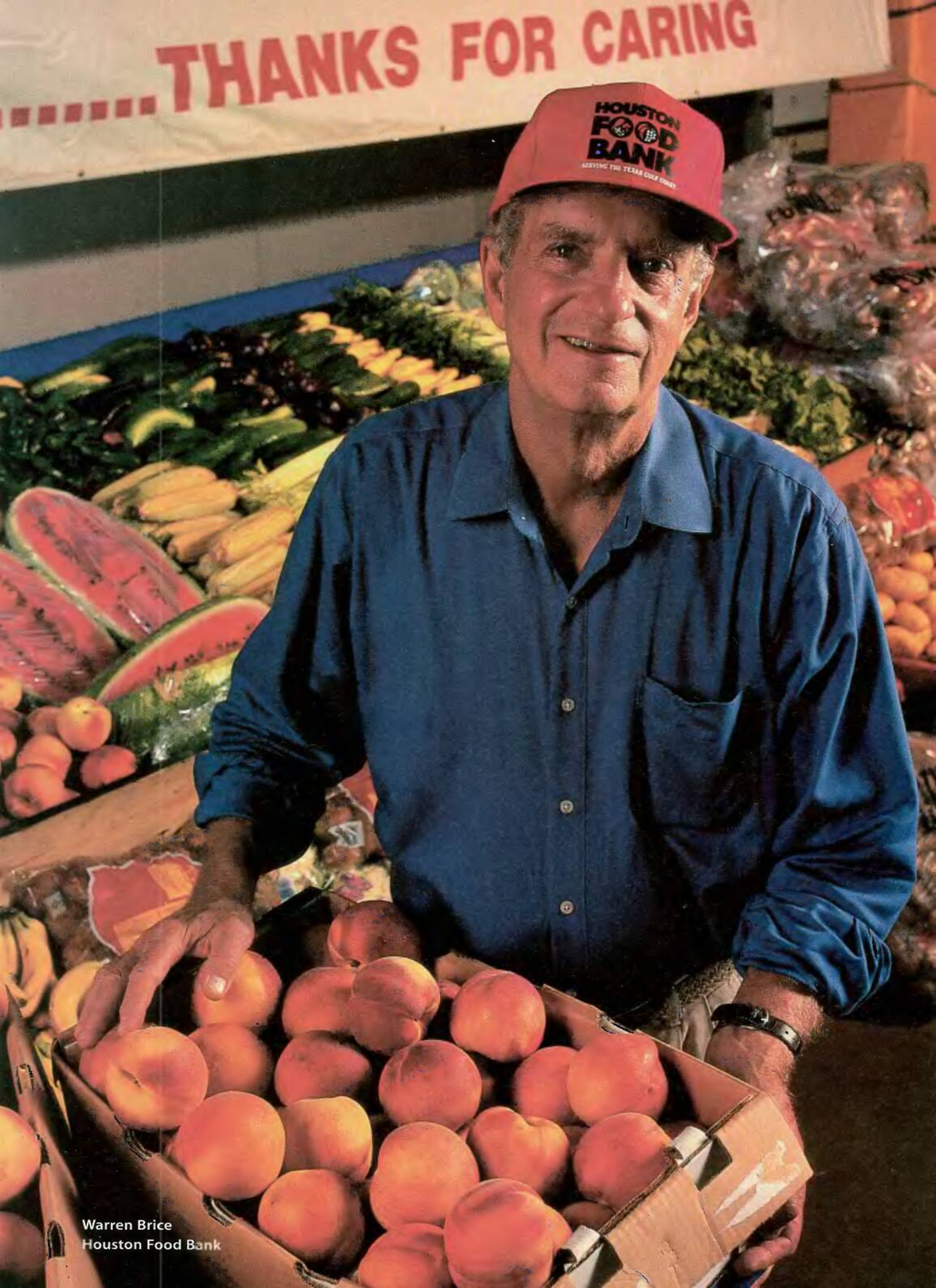

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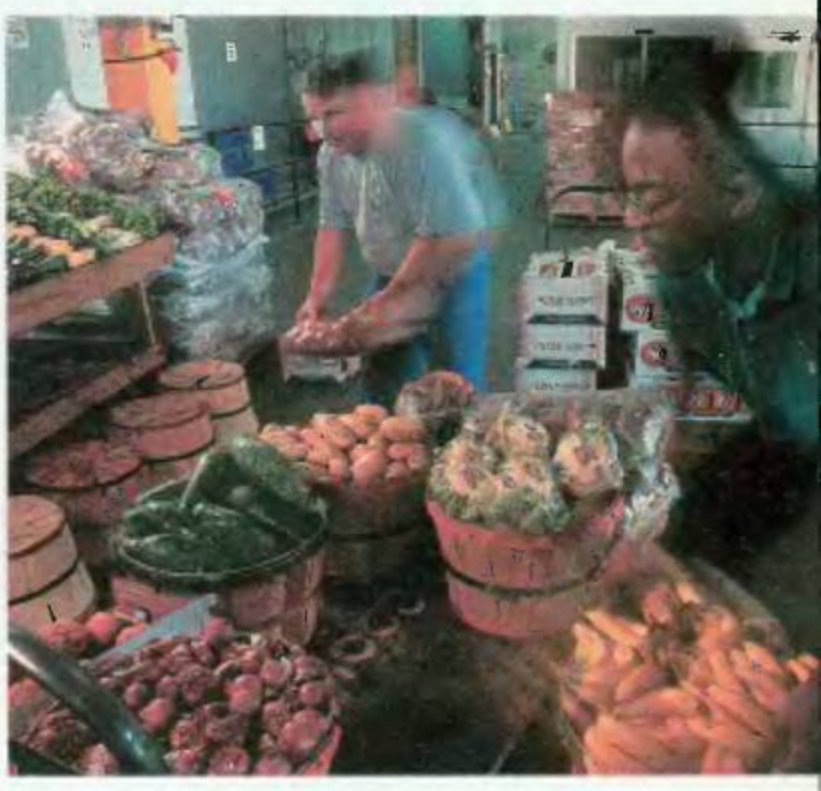

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in which every detail counts, every aspect of this drama—from the sumptuous costumes to the perfectly turned lines to the splendid acting—is just right. The cast includes Leslie Lyles, Christopher McCann, Ed Hodson, Peter Dinklage, and John Gould Rubin. (New York Performance Works, 128 Chambers St. 969-0166.)

JACKIE MASON: MUCH ADO ABOUT EVERYTHING

The comic is back on Broadway with his latest show. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

JAMES JOYCE'S THE DEAD

Playwrights Horizons' musical version of the short story. (11/8/99) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

KISS ME, KATE

With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE MOMENT WHEN

A new play by James Lapine, starring Illeana Douglas, Phyllis Newman, and Mark Ruffalo. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes March 26.)

1953

The British poet Craig Raine's modern verse adaptation of Racine's "Andromache." (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 877-568-0359. Closes March 19.)

SATURDAY NIGHT

Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and the lyrics for this show forty-five years ago, when he was twenty-five, but it is only now having its New York première. Set in Brooklyn in the twenties, it's about a group of young men and women caught up in the classic struggle between love and money. (Love wins, natch.) The book, by Julius J. Epstein, is pure corn, but Sondheim's work transforms it into delicious popcorn; his wise, funny lyrics in particular make this musical much more than a mere curiosity. Under the direction of Kathleen Marshall, the good cast brings out the shine on the show's shoes. (3/6/00) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes March 26.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SOUTH OF NO NORTH: STORIES OF THE BURIED LIFE

Nine short stories by Charles Bukowski, adapted into a seamless evening by Leo Farley and Jonathan Powers (who also co-directed). Bukowski is played with acerbic intelligence and fond humor by Stephen Payne; his world of carnival barkers, small-time boxers, too much alcohol, and too little money becomes vivid and significant, particularly because the production allows the audience to see not just Bukowski's art but also the inspiration behind it. (29th Street Rep, 212 W. 29th St. 465-0575. Closes March 26.)

SUEÑO

MCC Theatre presents a new translation, by José Rivera, of the Calderón de la Barca drama "Life Is a Dream." (120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes March 19.)

SWING!

A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

"The Moment When," by James Lapine, at Playwrights Horizons.

TAKING A CHANCE ON LOVE

A musical revue about the life and work of the late, overlooked lyricist John Latouche, staged by the York Theatre Company. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes March 26.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE

Charles Busch's new comedy, about an antidote to midlife malaise, stars Linda Lavin, Michele Lee, and Tony Roberts. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE TIME OF THE CUCKOO

Arthur Laurents' 1953 play, set in Venice, about a romantically deprived American woman (or spinster, as they called them in the old days) who gets a chance at a vacation affair with an Italian shop owner. It's a lovely production of a dated play, with roundly good acting. The fine actress Debra Munk plays the lead with a chirpy-angry edge ("I love being alone," she tells other guests at her pensione as they depart, by twos, for dinner). Her performance may seem as if it's spinning out of control once the romantic going gets rough, and you find yourself hoping the poor Italian doesn't take her on, but it's an accurate portrait of the character she has chosen to portray: a woman too far gone into lonely desperation to elicit much sympathy, even from herself. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST

Philip Seymour Hoffman and John C. Reilly star in Sam Shepard's 1980 play, under the direction of Matthew Warchus. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Eve Ensler's one-woman show is now being performed by a rotating three-woman cast. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories are touching and memorable. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

WAITING IN THE WINGS

In the best of Noël Coward's postwar plays, old gallant theatricals duke it out in a retirement home, where they fire off some terrific one-liners. Although the play itself is somewhat creaky, the pros who bring it to life here aren't: Bette Henritze, Elizabeth Wilson, Rosemary Harris, Dana Ivey, and the evergreen Lauren Bacall. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

WASTE

Harley Granville-Barker's 1907 drama about a Tory sex scandal. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE WILD PARTY

In taking Joseph Moncure March's dark cautionary poem about a group of Prohibition-era profligates and turning it into a musical love story between an angry vaudeville clown and a louche flapper, the composer Andrew Lippa and Manhattan Theatre Club have ended up with a crass, overplayed muddle of mixed intentions and missed opportunities. There's plenty of talent on display—a great set by David Gallo, mostly good costumes, a few fun songs, and, especially, a terrific performance from Brian D'Arcy James, as Burrs the clown. But most of the tunes build to the typical pop-maudlin crescendo that blights contemporary musicals, and they're sung generically, without regard for character. If, however, you're a particularly big fan of in-your-face lasciviousness—the women spread their legs for the audience as casually as other women yawn; the male chorus could work for Chippendales—there's plenty to hold your attention throughout. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 2.)

WOYZECK

The Axis Theatre Company's version of Büchner's unfinished play. (One Sheridan Sq., near Seventh Ave. 807-9300.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CATS
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FOOTLOOSE
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH
Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

JEKYLL & HYDE
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

Continued on page 19, overleaf.

LARA TOMLIN

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MISS SAIGON
Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.
PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
WIT
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

MARGIE GILLIS
The solo dancer, daughter of two Olympic skiers, presents six solos, including "Blue," set to the music of Leonard Cohen, and "Loon," set to the calls of that reclusive bird. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 14-18 at 8 and March 19 at 2 and 7:30.)
KEELY GARFIELD'S SINISTER SLAPSTICK
The choreographer presents "My Sister Was a Refugee," the final installment of a trilogy that began with "My Father Was a Spanish Captain" and "My Mother Was a Four-Alarm Fire," along with other works. (92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Project, Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 415-5553. March 16 and March 18 at 8 and March 19 at 5.)
"OUT OF BREATH"
The choreographer Kyle de Camp uses F.B.I. transcripts, interviews, film clips, and other primary sources for an evening-length one-woman show (with d.j.) that follows New Wave hottie Jean Seberg, who moved from the lead in Otto Preminger's "Saint Joan" to a supporting role with the Black Panthers. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5893. March 15-18 at 10.)
TRINITY IRISH DANCE COMPANY
For the St. Paddy's Day weekend, the twenty-member step-dance company (two men, eighteen women) offers works in the Hibernian tap tradition. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. March 17 at 7, March 18 at 2 and 8, and March 19 at noon and 5. Through March 26.)
"SOUL DEEP"
Urban Bush Women and the David Murray Octet collaborate on a two-part piece ("Saturday Night" and "Sunday Morning—From a Whisper to a Shout") that moves from jazz partying to praise dancing. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7289. March 17-18 at 8.)
"SPEAKING IN TRUTH"
Works by five African-American women choreographers: Alexandria Bangoura, Hope Boykin, Kerri Edge, Jamie J. Philbert, and Laila Sibongile Sales. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. For reservations, call 718-481-6773, ext. 2. March 17-18 at 8.)
"CARMINA BURANA"
The Ballet Contemporáneo de Caracas presents the work choreographed by John Butler in 1959, based on a thirteenth-century song cycle composed by monks turned minstrels. (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadow–Corona Park. 718-760-0064. March 18 at 3 and 8 and March 19 at 3.)
"SHIKU HAKKA—THE EIGHT SUFFERINGS OF MAN"
The Indalo Artists, under the direction of the choreographer Shigeko Suga, blend flamenco and Butoh styles in a work based on sufferings enumerated in Japanese folk tradition: birth, death, sickness, aging, hatred, missing your squeeze, and being broke or frustrated. (La MaMa, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. March 16-18 at 10 and March 19 at 5. Through March 26.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

D'ANGELO
With the possible exception of pre-"Purple Rain" Prince and "Sexual Healing"-era Marvin Gaye, never has a male singer exuded so much salaciousness. On "Voodoo," his sophomore effort—released almost five years after his impressive début, "Brown Sugar"—this chiselled, twenty-six-year-old vocalist/pianist, who began playing at the age of three, has put the soul back into modern R. & B. (alongside female R. & B. singers like Lauryn Hill and Macy Gray). The richness of D'Angelo's sound comes from the fact that he uses real instruments, as opposed to the digital samples that plague most contemporary R. & B.; his songs sound like they were actually written, rather than programmed. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 307-7171. March 16-17 at 8.)
"LOUIS ARMSTRONG: ONE HUNDRED YEARS"
You don't have to be a Wynton Marsalis-like jazz zealot to appreciate the impact that Armstrong had on the twentieth century, and continues to exert. If American culture swings, it's because of Armstrong's warm spirit, his soul, and his astonishing achievements as an instrumentalist and singer. Joining Jon Faddis and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band in celebrating the master will be brass virtuoso Clark Terry and Armstrong-band vets bassist Arvell Shaw and pianist Marty Napoleon. A celebration like this should take place once a year rather than once every hundred. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 16 at 8.)
THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND
The boys from Macon, working their way through a thirteen-night stand. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 16-18 and March 20-21, all at 8.)
THE CHIEFTAINS
It wouldn't be St. Patrick's Day without a visit from Ireland's musical ambassadors. From their late-fifties work as members of Sean O'Riada's visionary ensemble, Ceoltoiri Chualann, to the years of collaboration with such big names as Van Morrison, James Galway, and Mick Jagger, these instrumental wizards have been doing for traditional Irish music what Bill Monroe did for the rural American string band—treating it with a respect and dignity that lift it well above any salt-of-the-earth contentiousness. Their latest album, "Water from the Well," is their most traditional in years. For this show they'll be joined by Art Garfunkel and the Tuvan throat singers Yat-Kha. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 17 at 8.)
JOAN JETT AND THE BLACKHEARTS
Twenty-five years after her work with the seventies all-female band the Runaways made her the original riot grrrl, and nineteen years after "I Love Rock 'N' Roll" made her a wealthy young woman, Joan Jett has become something of a post-punk elder statesperson. Her 1999 CD, "Fetish," found her exploring a few adult themes, but don't expect any shortage of wailing guitars and snarling vocals here. With the Donnas, an all-girl teen-age version of the Ramones who are more attractive (both physically and musically) than their heroes, and the garage rock of Vancouver's Smugglers. (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. March 17 at 10.)
TOM JONES
The hirsute pantie magnet brings his titanium lungs and ball-bearing pelvis back to New York. No worse for the wear at fifty-nine, Jones is enjoying yet another comeback in Europe, and his latest CD, the aptly titled "Legend," suggests he'll keep roaring forever. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 18 at 8.)
ANI DIFRANCO / GILLIAN WELCH / GREG BROWN
A heavenly singer-songwriter troika. Buffalo-born DiFranco, as famous for her indie entrepreneurship as for her feminist folk, is flanked by the haunting traditional bluegrass twang of Welch (who's actually from Los Angeles) and the solid, beef-stew-seasoned, good-ol'-boy voice of Brown, whose singing remains sexy and sweet even when it's sour. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 20 at 8.)

THE *STILL* CENTER *For the past eleven years, the dancer Rachel Lynch-John has teamed up with the choreographer Keely Garfield. Their wordless duets—tender, elusive pieces that cover dark, psychological territory—replace the lift-and-letdown conventions of the boy-girl pas de deux with the loaded tugs, hugs, and brushes of sisterly contact. The sardonic Garfield is the unmistakable auteur of the pieces (the latest, "My Sister Was a Refugee," premières this weekend), but much of their reflective quality comes from Lynch-John's powerful reserve. Her balance and calm are riveting—the perfect foil for Garfield's aching and ironic invention.*

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BLARNEY STAR
43 Murray St. (732-2873)—March 17: Flutist **Catherine McEvoy** joins her fiddle-playing brother **John** and pianist **Felix Dolan** for a night of fine Irish music.
BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—March 16: There are other deep-voiced, mordant misanthropes with secret reserves of sensitivity, of course, but none who have been at it as long as **Warren Zevon.** Recent albums flagged a bit, but his latest, "Life'll Kill Ya," finds Zevon in surprisingly good form. With **Jill Sobule,** a feisty post-punk feminist whose work brings to mind a cross between Liz Phair and Gertrude Stein. March 18:

ROBERT MELEE

Great Big Sea—four guys from Newfoundland and their mandolin, accordion, bass, and bodhran (a goatskin drum)—writes and performs revved-up pop and chanteys. March 20-21: **Cracker** has given up its erudite alternative honky-tonk to play something even stranger: FM-style classic rock. The band's most recent album, "Gentleman's Blues," suffered as a result, but onstage David Lowery's ferocious charisma and Johnny Hickman's fiery guitar still deliver a worthy Southern-boogie blowout.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—March 18: An extremely worthy triple bill of local acts, featuring **Peter Salett, Spottiswoode and His Enemies,** and **John Carlin.** Singer-songwriter Salett has a talent for engaging narratives which is complemented nicely by a rich voice and a set of thick sideburns. / Spottiswoode, the backbone of the tight sextet bearing his name, writes astringently morose ballads about love, and his deep, rough-hewn voice will make you think of Leonard Cohen. / In the early nineties, the smoky-voiced singer Carlin achieved minor celebrity as the front man for the alternative-rock outfit 700 Miles, which had two albums out on RCA, but his recent self-produced work is stylistically more sophisticated and more rewarding.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 16: Ireland's **Saw Doctors** bring their biting Celtic punk to town. March 17: **BR5-49,** a high-powered hepcat quintet from Nashville which mixes frenetic covers of rockabilly and country-and-Western classics with its own time-warping originals. March 21-22: **Peter Murphy.** The Boris-Karloff-in-leather-pants lead singer of Bauhaus cut quite a figure back in 1979, when he was chanting "Bela Lugosi's dead" in a sepulchral monotone. His recent work, by contrast, is all sunshine and joy.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—March 16: The young lead singer of **Antony and the Johnsons Orchestra** possesses a sweet and haunting voice reminiscent of Brian Ferry and a theatrical, pansexual stage presence that recalls early Marc Bolan. March 17-18: **Marc Ribot y los Cubanos Postizos.** Appropriating the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders, Ribot's "prosthetic" Cubans are a postmodern, post-Cold War pleasure.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—March 15: The **Donnas** and the **Smugglers** (see Concerts—Joan Jett). March 19: Milwaukee's **Promise Ring** turns out a style of music called, variously, emo-core, emo-rock, and just plain emo, which is short for "emotion." Their sound is located between the wrath of punk and the sap of pop. It's carefully crafted, earnest, and surprisingly articulate.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 17: **Rogue's March,** the fiery rocking band of Hibernians led by the barroom-seasoned baritone of Joe Hurley. With the country, folk, and rock sounds of the **Health & Happiness Show.**

SHINE
285 West Broadway, at Canal St. (941-0900)—March 16: **Red Rooster** delivers raw acoustic blues tunes that feel like they're straight from an impromptu jam circle at a backyard summer barbecue.

WETLANDS
161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—March 17: **Black 47.** Under the leadership of the tradition-shaking Celtic music gadfly Larry Kirwan, this raucously rocking crew has become an American version of the Pogues—only with a wider musical point of view and fewer barroom-brawl wounds. March 18: The **Promise Ring** (see Maxwell's).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—March 16-18: The guitar-organ-drums combo that **John Abercrombie** has led for the past ten years has given his work an urgency and focus that reaffirm his standing as one of today's most imaginative post-bop guitarists. Joining the trio for this engagement will be **Mark Feldman,** whose lustrous violin improvisations aided Abercrombie's accomplished 1999 album, "Open Land." Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through March 19: **Roy Haynes's** seventy-fifth birthday celebration. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through March 17, the big, unabashed voice and even bigger emotions of **Betty Buckley.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Peter Mintun** is in attendance.

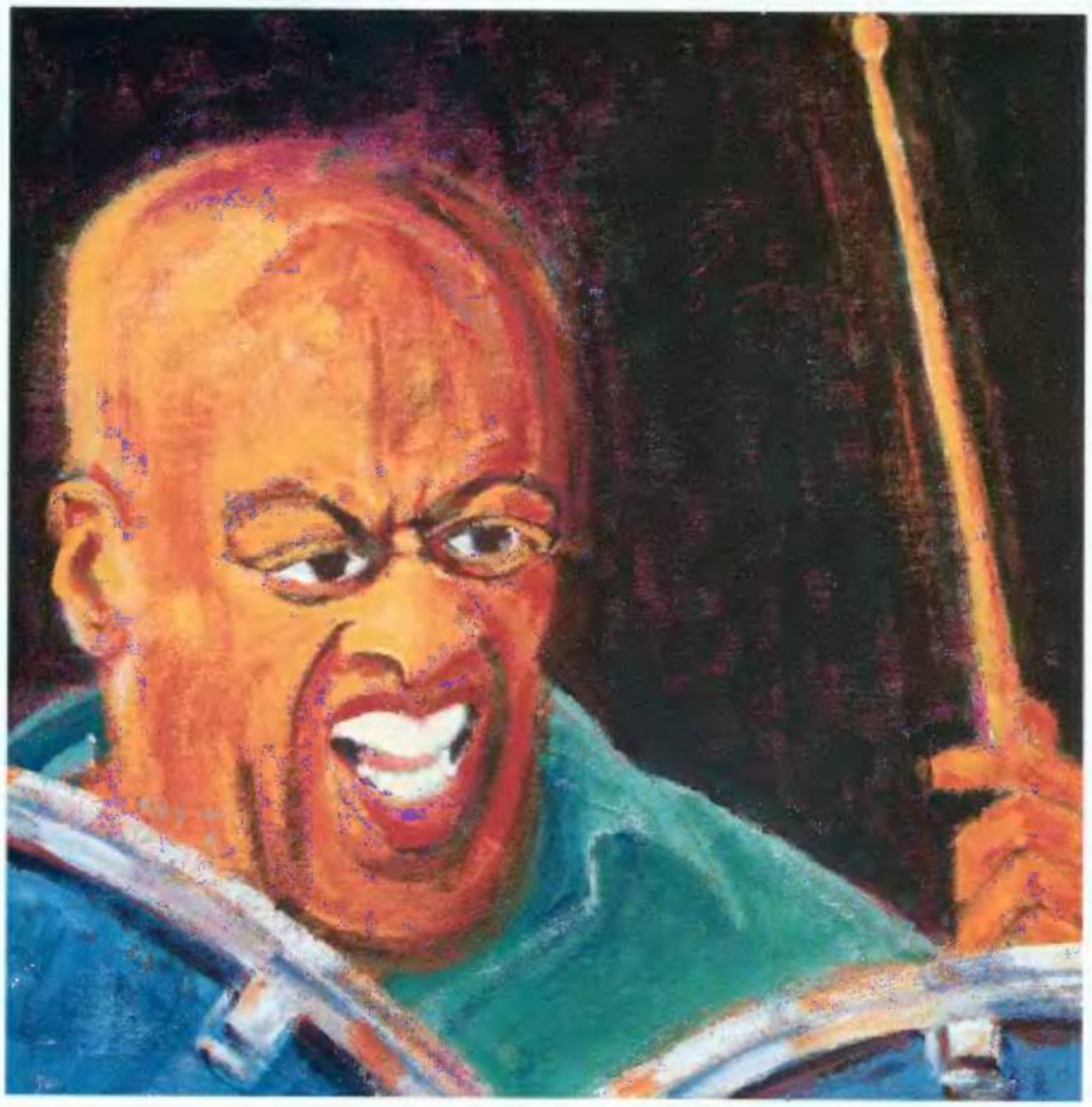
IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 19: The **Illinois Jacquet Big Band.** Every chance to hear the great tenor saxophonist Jacquet should be grabbed—his wide-as-Texas tone and melodic eloquence is matched by a bull-out-of-the-pen exuberance. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** Dining.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—March 15-19: **Don Sickler's** weeklong celebration of the trumpeter and composer Kenny Dorham was one of last year's musical highlights. Now the invaluable arranger and trumpeter salutes some more horn legends, among them Miles Davis and Booker Little. The former has had his share of deserved praise; the latter could use a whole lot more. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—**Pat Metheny** (here March 15-18) often makes his most satisfying music with just barebones support. His new album, "Trio 99-00," finds the guitarist romping free and easy over a wiry foundation provided by bassist **Larry Grenadier** and drummer **Bill Stewart,** the same exemplary rhythm team that accompanies Metheny at this rare club appearance. March 16-19: The **Jason Moran** trio. Pianist Moran belongs to that shifting conglomerate of innovative young players which centers around saxophonist Greg Osby, who, a decade ago, was a smart upstart like his protégés.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—March 17-18: The **Hamiett Bluiett Group.** Shunning the conventional range of his cumbersome instrument, Bluiett can coax unnatural and beautiful sounds from the baritone saxophone. Whether he's growling like a bullfrog or improvising in ambulance-siren tones, all of Bluiett's explorations are grounded in the bedrock of blues and gospel music.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Jazz doesn't want for master pianists, but there's only one **Tommy Flanagan,** who starts a two-week run with his trio on March 14. Tone, touch, taste, technique—he's got it all. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.



MICHAEL CRAWFORD

BEAT POET *Roy Haynes, the sharp-dressing icon of modern jazz drumming, will have pianist Chick Corea, saxophonist Kenny Garrett, and bassist Christian McBride onboard at the Blue Note this week to help him celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday. Since all four musicians have played together before (Haynes's association with Corea stretches back to the early sixties), expect an intense party. The whip-snap pulse that powered the beat behind Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughan, John Coltrane, and Stan Getz—to merely scratch the surface of the master drummer's résumé—remains as crisp and inventive as ever (see Jazz and Standards).*

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Signs of wear on small limewood carvings of Mary and the baby Jesus memorialize five-hundred-year-old "caresses and kisses of worshippers," according to a label in the Metropolitan Museum's **"Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages,"** a show of some sixty works in wood and stone by the German artist (and his school) who, amid the Northern Renaissance, brought Gothic style to a peak of elegance and eloquence. It helps to imagine those caresses. The sculptor's religious figures appear restrained to the verge of impassivity, though swathed in ravishing, intricate draperies that can seem stirred by divine winds. In truth, the works evoke pure raptures of medieval piety. For many, the perfect art of this unfamiliar master comes as a major discovery. Through May 14. ♦ **"Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt."** Through May 7. ♦ **"Painters in Paris: 1895-1950"** presents more than a hundred modernist works from the museum's collection, by thirty-eight masters. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Walker Evans,"** a comprehensive retrospective, the photographer's first. Through May 14. ♦ **"The World of Scholar's Rocks."** Through Aug. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Making Choices,"** the second cycle in the MOMA 2000 exhibition, covers 1920-1960, with nearly every room in the museum slated to focus on a separate aspect of the volatile period. This first phase of the three-part opening features galleries devoted to eleven shows, including "Art Is Arp," "Kahn's Modernist Monuments," "Man Ray, Photographer," "Paris Salon," and "War"—to be followed by fourteen more. The exhibition opens March 16. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—With green laser beams ricocheting through a six-story waterfall, and hundreds of TV screens providing ambient noise and light, the Nam June Paik retrospective looks, from ground level, like a sure-fire crowd-pleaser. Instead it leaves one disenchanted and puzzled. A surprisingly meagre selection of works, casually charming installations that pair TV sets with fish, candles, or plants, fill the museum's long, spiralling ramp. At the top of the rotunda, photographs of Paik's early performances have a frisson of glamour, thanks to the willingness of his collaborator Charlotte Moorman to take off her clothes. For the most part, though, the father of video art comes off as an unexpectedly slight figure, a likable, playful avant-gardist whose imaginative resources have seldom matched his commitment to the idea of innovation. Through April 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Hayden Planetarium, in the new glass-sheathed Rose Center, looks like what might have arisen if Sony had commissioned I. M. Pei to build the Centre Pompidou. Space Show tickets, designed as 3-D postcard-size "passports to the universe," let you enjoy a twenty-minute cosmic journey, narrated by Tom Hanks, which goes from Earth to the Milky Way out to the Virgo Supercluster, then through a black hole right back home. You can cruise the new building, size up exhibits that boggle the mind with postulations like "On this time line, each step you take is seventy-five million years long," and watch a mini star show that begins, "Hello and welcome to the big bang. I'm Jodie Foster." Reservations for regular Space Shows are advised, and available at 769-5200. ♦ **"Body Art: Marks of Identity."** Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Hiroshige: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo"** showcases the museum's complete set, one of the finest extant, by the influential master of the woodblock print. Through April 23. ♦ **"The Guennol Collection: Cabinet of Wonders"** presents more than forty objects donated by the museum patrons Alastair Bradley Martin and his wife, Edith Park Martin, whose collection is noted for its range—the exhibit includes a Cornell box, a carved Zuni frog, a Babylonian dog sculpture, and a Beatrix Potter watercolor. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York."** With more than a hundred and forty artists, this exhibition is so populous it could almost qualify as a sixth borough (candidates were selected from the existing five, as well as Westchester and New Jersey). The show was assembled collaboratively in just five months by P.S. 1 and the Museum of Modern Art, with residency and youth (just a handful of the participants are over forty) as the only apparent curatorial criteria. If any trend emerges from the welter, it's simply that anything goes. The curators sometimes force works together—Justine Kurland's provocative photographs of women in the wilderness hang opposite Brad Kalhamer's Twombly-ish painting "Happy Girls with Eggs," to the benefit of neither. It's hardly surprising, then, that the artists with rooms of their own—generally those who create videos and installations—look the best. Or sound it, in the case of Stephen Vitiello, whose electro-acoustic sound collage, sampled from accordion, bass, and violin, occupies an otherwise empty room like a little slice of heaven. Other standouts include Jeremy Blake's mesmerizing abstract digital projection and Julian LaVerdiere's show-stopping shipwreck lying in state, which had the throngs queued up solemnly to pay their respects at the mobbed opening. Through May 16. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MAURIZIO CATTELAN / TACITA DEAN
This Italian artist is emerging as the art world's designated jester. His new work at Marian Goodman is a seven-foot-tall, painted polyester-styrene elephant wearing a white sheet with eyeholes and a trunk hole crudely cut out. The beast's painted eyes look through you with a pachydermal thousand-yard stare, eloquently abashed—henceforth you will not forget that a shy elephant makes for a really tremendous quantity of shyness. Also at Goodman are two looping films by another internationally rising star, Tacita Dean. Shot in England, they are enchanting pastorals. One of them, seven minutes long, centers on a strange old concrete military installation. The other records an hour spent in a seaside pasture during last year's solar eclipse. It features cows that react oddly to the false nightfall and, while neither shy nor bold, are absolutely adorable. Both shows through March 25. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

"EARTHLY FORMS"
A spectacular triple bill, featuring three masters of biomorphic abstraction: Jean Arp, Alexander Calder, and Isamu Noguchi. With their shared love of smooth-contoured form, the three sculptors turn the gallery into a whimsical gymnasium, full of undulant shapes in wood, bronze, stone, and painted steel. The similarities are fascinating, but above all, the show trains us to see differences: the jaunty sociability of Calder's suspended forms, like little midair tea parties; Noguchi's perforated planes, with their anatomical allusiveness; and the obstinate, resourceful simplicity of Arp. While the curators deserve plenty of credit, this is the kind of show that couldn't have gone wrong. Through March 18. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

Short List

ROMARE BEARDEN / ROBERT BLACKBURN
Bookstein, 50 E. 78th St. 439-9605. Through March 25.

JOSEPH DI GIORGIO
Kouros, 23 E. 73rd St. 288-5888. Through April 1.

NANCY GRAVES
Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550. Through April 20.

PHILIP GUSTON
McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 688-5951. Through April 5.

YVONNE JACQUETTE
DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2119. Through April 15.

ABBY LEIGH
Maxwell Davidson, 41 E. 57th St. 759-7555. Through March 25.

ANDY WARHOL AND CECIL BEATON
Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 489-3331. Through May 20.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

BRUNO FAZZOLARI
For anyone who has ever groaned at the dreary bravado of Carl Andre's floor sculptures, Fazzolari's installation offers a happy, ruefully funny antidote. On the floor of the gallery's back room is a rectangular formation of nine hundred and sixty-one trompe-l'oeil crackers, each painted a delicate shade of golden yellow and incised with the word "LEIBNIZ." Sadly, Fazzolari's other faux foods (Brussels sprouts, pizza, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, etc.) lack this one installation's sardonic bite. Through March 25. (Debs, 525 W. 26th St. 643-2070.)

DAVID IVIE
Nocturnal melodramas, painted by an artist who was trained as a Jungian therapist. In Ivie's tiny, almost monochromatic images, the moon shines down on tentacular woods where figures carrying flashlights conduct mysterious searches. Despite their manifest debts to older artists (Munch, Ryder, and above all, Edward Gorey), Ivie's images have a cozy, spooky, reassuring charm of their own: they're ghost stories your analyst might tell you. Through March 25. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

THOMAS NOZKOWSKI
Abstract paintings composed of bright, beguiling, cartoony shapes: trapezoids and teardrops, tweaked grids and ovals, glowing gerrymandered districts whose contours stretch, crimp, and intersect. Nozkowski is often seen as the late-modernist equivalent of a petit-maître, inventing Chardinesque refinements on the language of Malevich. But he has also been, for many years, an editor at *MAD* magazine, and some of his sideline rubs off in these latest pictures, each the product of a sly, tinkering eye. Through March 18. (Protetch, 525 W. 22nd St. 633-6999.)

KRISTEN OPPENHEIM
Anyone visiting 303 Gallery this month will be haunted by the artist's whispers, which shift through a labyrinth of narrow white corridors with the aid of four speakers. Occasionally, one of the hushed phrases emerges with clarity—"As my image in the mirror fades away," for example—but for the most part the layered sound remains elusive, like a word on the tip of your tongue. Through March 18. (525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

PATRICK STRZELEC
Three handsome abstract sculptures fill this storefront gallery. There's a mammoth necklace of lipstick-red rubber and steel, a boulder made of plaster and copper, and—dominating the others with its sheer size and simplicity—a lovely tangle of welded arcs, like a jungle gym that has been put through a trash compactor. Through March 25. (Grimm, 505 W. 28th St. 564-7662.)

Short List

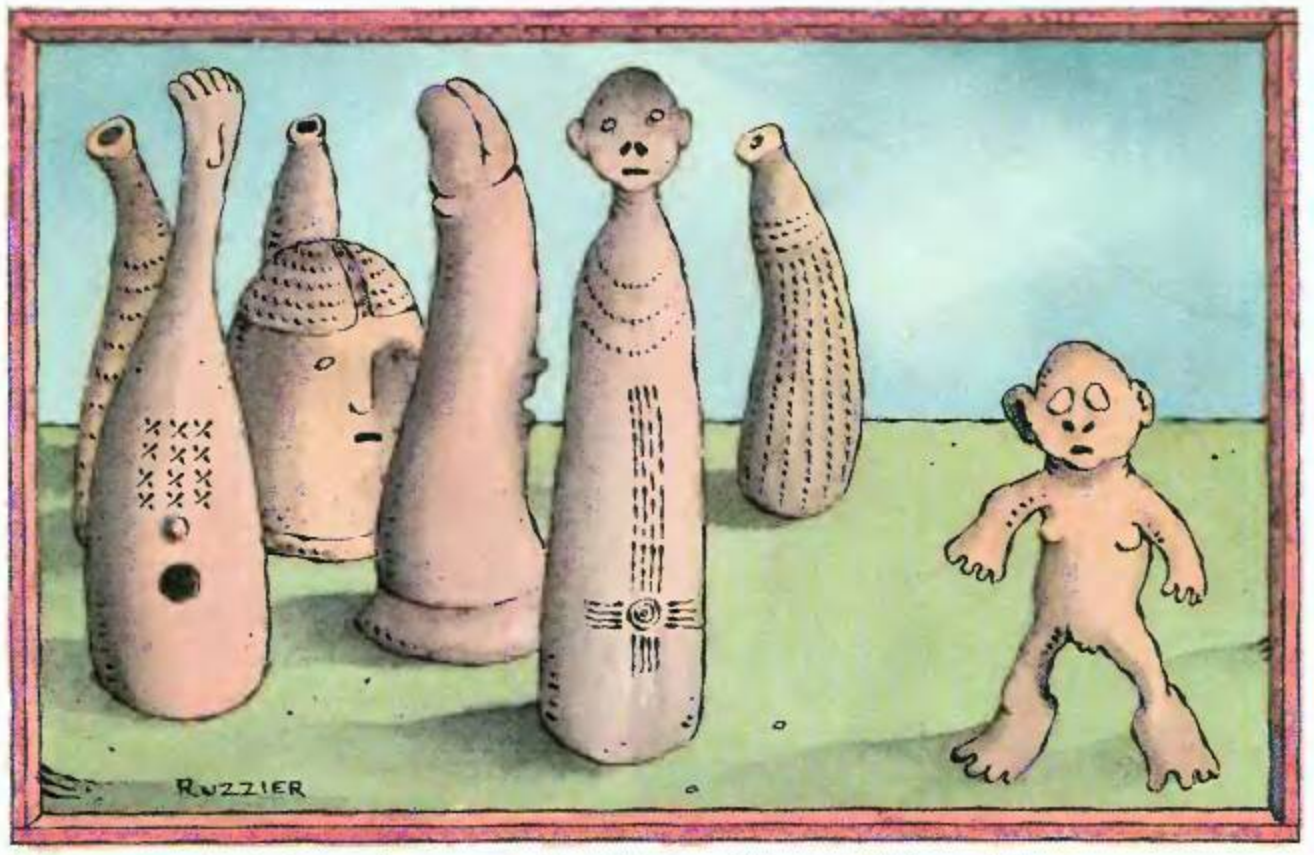
RITA ACKERMANN
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through April 15.
LAURA COTTINGHAM AND LESLIE SINGER
Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 229-2829. Through March 25.
RENEE GREEN
Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366. Through April 8.
JOSIAH MCELHENY
Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 929-2262. Through March 25.
UGO RONDINONE
Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-2000. Through April 15.
YOSHIRO SUDA
D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through March 25.
DAN WALSH
Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through April 15.
OTTO ZITKO
Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through April 15.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

BURA / SIMON FROST
A beautiful exhibition of thousand-year-old funerary vessels from the necropolis of Bura-Asinda-Sikka, in what is now Niger. These elongated clay vases were filled with the deceased's clothes and belongings and then buried, like supernatural duffel bags. Decorated with abstract faces and geometric designs, they occasionally sprout small eerie heads, as though the enclosed spirits were ascending, tuber-fashion, toward daylight. Accompanying them are a group of drawings by Frost, an English artist who spends his time obsessively repeating hundreds of tiny marks. Compared to the numinous elegance of the urns, Frost's grayish patterns seem like some kind of dreary, penitential labor. Both shows through April 1. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441.)
EBERHARD HAVEKOST
Impressive paintings by a German artist weaned on Gerhard Richter and the pause button of the VCR. The freeze-frame effect is a weird blend of velocity and stasis, underscored by the paint handling, which alternates between blurriness and clarity, as in "Passage 1," where the smeary feathered strokes of a pine branch converge with the smooth white surface of a building façade. Havekost's paintings are pictures of pictures: sometimes taken from the television, sometimes from the world, they eradicate the difference between the two realms, bringing painting straight to video. Through April 22. (Kern, 558 Broadway. 965-1706.)
"FISSURE"
Two pairs of jeans and underwear lie crumpled on the floor. Next to a nearby open window, a tiny broken manacle dangles from an empty perch. There's something missing in these sculptures by the Danish team of Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset; that's precisely the point of this group show, which could be subtitled "Mind the Gap." Also included are drawings by the late Guy de Cointet, who employed DaVinci's technique of "mirror reverse text" to create graceful work in which the meaning of the words themselves is subsumed by poetic decoration. Through March 18. (Staff USA Gallery, 495 Broadway. 925-9700, ext. 117.)
"SHEER REALITIES: CLOTHING AND POWER IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILIPPINES."
This entrancing exhibition examines the rise of mestizo culture, the Filipino mixed-race middle class whose customs and dress borrowed from both Spanish and indigenous traditions, but remained distinct from both. Artifacts range from heavily beaded bags by the Bagobo people to an elaborate silver toothpick holder in the shape of a pineapple. That tropical fruit, considered a symbol of hospitality, plays a starring role in the sartorial saga. Its fibers provide the basis of piña cloth, a sheer fabric favored by mestizos in their delicately embroidered shirts and blouses, examples of which are seen on mannequins and in revealing nineteenth-century portraits. Through April 22. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Square E. 998-6780.)

Short List

CHRISTINE BORLAND
Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through April 22.
LUCIO FONTANA
Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through March 25.
JUDY FOX / KATHARINE KUHARIC
P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Both shows through March 25.
KELLY E. LAMB
Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through April 1.
KENNY SCHARF
Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300. Through March 25.



Funerary vessels from the necropolis of Bura-Asinda-Sikka, at Blum.

SERGIO RUZZIER

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Asia week at New York's auction houses begins with sales of Chinese art. March 21: Highlights of the opening two-session sale include *ming-chi*—tomb sculptures from the Han and Tang dynasties—assembled several decades ago by the late, legendary collector and self-taught scholar Ezekial Schloss and his wife, Lillian. ♦ Also on March 21: A single-owner sale of snuff bottles. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.) ♦ Note: From March 18 through April 2, Christie's is exhibiting important pieces—none of them for sale—from three major Chinese institutions: the Capital Museum, Beijing Art Museum, and Ding Ling Museum.) ♦ At Christie's East: Asian decorative pieces. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430. March 20.)
SOTHEBY'S
March 15: American paintings, drawings, and sculpture. ♦ March 16: Contemporary art works, with an emphasis on ceramics. ♦ March 21: Sales of Japanese and Korean art works in many genres, as well as of approximately three hundred wood and ivory netsuke from the renowned Raymond Bushell collection. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)
DOYLE
Asian art works, including many contemporary Chinese paintings and Korean ceramics from the Koryo and Choson dynasties. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. March 20.)
ANTIQUORUM
An auction of modern watches and jewelry. (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave. March 16. For information, call 750-1103.)
TRIPLE PIER EXPO
Six hundred dealers move in for the first of two weekends. (Piers 88, 90, and 92, Twelfth Ave. between 48th and 52nd Sts. March 18-19. For information, call 255-0020.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

ELLEN BROOKS
These color pictures of blanket forts immediately summon the concealment and comfort of childhood retreats. In the adult space of the gallery, their dappled light and solitary air create a similar serenity. Through April 1. Leslie Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450.
GREGORY CREWDSON
Crewdson stages surreal color tableaux with a Hollywood-worthy production crew; his credits list lighting, set, and costume designers, along with coördinators of aerial operations and taxidermy. One picture peeks out a front window at a pregnant woman standing on the lawn in her underwear—alone amidst the alien bungalows. Through March 25. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)
LARRY FINK
Backstage at fashionista hives like the Thierry Mugler and Versace shows, it would be hard not to find comely subjects worth a few rolls of film. Larry Fink, a documentary photographer who most recently captured the less prepossessing world of boxers, does more than just frame pretty faces. He enhances the elegant flawlessness of models and the glamour of their entourages with an intensity that transforms off-the-cuff moments—a Bardot look-alike touching up her makeup before stepping into the lights; a Claudia Schiffer doppelgänger leaning back to receive a chivalric kiss on the neck at Elaine's—into masterpieces of a kind. Through March 25. (Revolution, 525 W. 22nd St., 4D. 463-8037.)
MICHAEL FLOMEN
These large-scale gelatin silver prints become increasingly problematic the longer you look at them. At first glance Flomen seems to have got himself up to the moon with camera in tow. Or has he spent a lot of nights in the desert? Or are those lint flecks? The truth is far less unlikely or exotic. All the pictures are of Flomen's snow-filled pasture in Vermont—it turns out he's just a magician in the darkroom. No matter. For spatial tranquillity, technical elegance, and pure

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wonder, the results are worth being beguiled by. Through March 25. (Ricco Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

ED KASHI

Kashi has spent more than four years photographing elderly Americans. The result, "Aging in America," is a penetrating look into a large, often underappreciated segment of society. Through April 6. (SABA, 116 E. 16th St. Mondays through Fridays, 10 to 6; Saturdays, by appointment. 477-7722.)

MARVIN E. NEWMAN

Seven photo-essays spanning a decade (1951-60) vouch for Newman's versatility and range. Pictures taken on a snowy day in a poor Chicago neighborhood are as sensitive as Bruce Davidson's or Helen Levitt's work; a series portraying Mickey Mantle on the ball field is pure photojournalism; a collection of circus prints is moodily garish. Newman's studies at Chicago's Institute of Design, where he met Edward Steichen, are evident in his Coney Island essay: the elimination of gray tones reduces a child playing on a sandy beach to a gestural inkblot against a white background. The effect is startlingly surreal. Through March 25. (De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

ONLY CONNECT

OH, BEHAVE!

When the world was a simpler, smaller place, the rules of decorum were, oddly, more elaborate. At least according to **Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home** (http://www.bartleby.com/95), the canonical 1922 text by that Emily Post lady—or, rather, Mrs. Post. In thirty-eight brisk chapters, Mrs. Post dispenses advice on the opera, teas, formal dinners, dances, weddings, christenings, and funerals. Those expecting relentless moralizing will be disappointed; Post acknowledges that "at out-door games, or at the circus, it is not necessary to stop talking." But one should always remember: "A gentleman does not bow to a lady from a club window."

Mrs. Post was not exactly a cultural relativist; "good manners," she wrote, "are good manners everywhere." But travelers should heed the advice of such sites as **The Guide to Finnish Customs and Manners** (http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/guide.html), which uses brief essays and cartoons to help first-time visitors navigate Scandinavia. Unlike Americans and Brits, Finns prefer being addressed with titles intact "in a professional or official context: Doctor Virtanen, Architect Pohjanpalo, Director General Kannisto." With advice on everything from smoking to saunas, this site will ensure that you never again make the mistake of addressing an older Finn using the second-person singular.

Not every foreign domain is located on a map. **Netiquette** (http://www.albion.com/netiquette), based on the book by Virginia Shea, reviews the rules for behavior in cyberspace, though they are sometimes vague (Rule No. 1: "Remember the Human") and sometimes tautological (Rule No. 2: "Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life"). The site also includes a Netiquette quiz and a catalogue page that peddles the print edition of Shea's book.

Finally, **Etiquette Hell** (http://www.thinds.com/jmh/ehell) collects horror stories from various nuptial train wrecks. Under "Tacky Toasts" you can read of the best man who accused the groom—his brother—of getting more women than him and then burst into tears. In "Bridezillas and Their Groomonsters," you'll learn of the groom who passed out once and threw up three times—during the ceremony. Mrs. Post would not have approved.

Short List

E. O. HOPPÉ
Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through April 22.
MARY ELLEN MARK
Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through April 22.
TRACEY MOFFATT
Matthew Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through April 8.
JAMES RAVILIOUS / HUMPHREY SPENDER
Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Both shows through April 8.
LOUIS ROBERT
Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through April 15.
GARY SCHNEIDER / "THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF 'FORTUNE' MAGAZINE"
International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6. Schneider show through April 9; 'Fortune' show through May 14.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"La Cenerentola," with Theodora Hanslowe, Gregory Kunde, Alessandro Corbelli, Simone Alaimo, and Julien Robbins; conducted by Bruno Campanella. (March 15 at 8.) ♦ The company's new production of **"The Merry Widow,"** presented in an appalling English translation, reaches its final performance, with Frederica von Stade, Korliss Uecker, Plácido Domingo, Tony Stevenson, and John Del Carlo; Andrew Davis. (March 16 at 8.) ♦ **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** with Sonia Ganassi, Michael Schade, Thomas Hampson, Mr. Del Carlo, and Egils Silins; Mr. Campanella. (March 17 and March 20 at 8.) ♦ **"Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk,"** by Shostakovich, with Catherine Malfitano, Vladimir Galouzine, Mark Baker, and Sergei Koptchak; Valery Gergiev. (March 18 at 1:30 and March 21 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)
NEW YORK CITY OPERA
March 15 at 7:30 and March 18 at 1:30: "Tosca." ♦ March 16 at 7:30 and March 17-18 at 8: "Porgy and Bess." ♦ March 19 at 1:30: Virgil Thomson's "The Mother of Us All," in the production created two summers ago at Glimmerglass Opera, spotlighting soprano Lauren Flanigan in the role of Susan B. Anthony. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)
AMATO OPERA COMPANY
Presenting "Manon." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. March 17-18 at 7:30 and March 19 at 2:30.)
"LA GIOCONDA"
Robert Bass leads a concert version of Ponchielli's opera, with soprano Jane Eaglen, mezzo-sopranos Florence Quivar and Elena Obraztsova, tenor Richard Margison, bass-baritone Simon Estes, the Collegiate Chorale, a children's choir, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 18 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
At Avery Fisher Hall, Valery Gergiev conducting. March 15 at 6:45: A short concert for the after-work crowd, comprising Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (the "Pastoral"). ♦ March 16, March 18, and March 22 at 8 and March 17 at 11 A.M.: Scriabin's orgasmic "Poème d'Extase" and Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Leif Ove Andsnes as soloist), in addition to Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony. (875-5030.)
ARTEK
Gwendolyn Toth directs the singers and period-instrument ensemble in sacred cantatas and secular madrigals by seventeenth-century German composers, including Heinrich Schütz, Franz Tunder, and Dietrich Buxtehude. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. March 15 at 8. ♦ St. James Cathedral, Jay St. at Cathedral Pl., Brooklyn. March 17 at 8. For information about tickets to either concert, call 212-967-9157.)
STONEWALL CHORALE
Nancy Vang directs the forty-member choir, the nation's first gay-and-lesbian chorus, in Pärt's "Berliner Messe" and Chris DeBlasio's "The Best-Belovéd." (Calvary Church, Park Ave. S. at 21st St. March 18 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 971-5813.)
CANTICUM NOVUM SINGERS
Harold Rosenbaum directs Bach's six motets, with cellist Myron Lutzke and organist Edward Brewer providing the continuo. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. March 18 at 8.)

Larry Fink's off-the-runway fashion work shows models at ease (see Photography).

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY
Gerard Schwarz conducts Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 4 ("Mozartiana"), Shostakovich's "Hamlet" Suite, and, with Joseph Kalichstein as soloist, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 18 at 8 and March 19 at 2.)
RUSSIAN CHAMBER CHORUS OF NEW YORK
Nikolai Kachanov directs Rachmaninoff's "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom," Georgy Sviridov's "Springtime," Poulenc's "Gloria," and a new work by Hampson Sisler. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 18 at 8. ♦ St. Ignatius Episcopal Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. March 19 at 4. For information about tickets to either concert, call 718-445-5799.)
JUPITER SYMPHONY
At Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, Jens Nygaard conducting. March 20 at 2 and 7 and March 21 at 8: The name of Donald Francis Tovey (1875-1940) is known to all serious concertgoers of a certain age. Perhaps the most astute musical analyst from the first half of the twentieth century, his lectures and essays—including many of the music articles in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" (eleventh edition and following)—elevated popular musical discourse throughout English-speaking lands. Though he mostly inspired a deeper appreciation of the classic masters, he also helped listeners understand some of the modernist threads that were then complicating the tapestry. Tovey was also an eminent professor (at the University of Edinburgh), a respected concert pianist, and an esteemed composer of orchestral, chamber, and solo instrumental works (not to mention an opera, "The Bride of Dionysus," which was premièred in 1932). This week, Tovey's rarely played Piano Concerto (composed in 1903) gets three workouts, with Makiko Hirata as soloist, in a program that also includes "The Lark Ascending" (with violinist Arturo Delmoni) by Tovey's longer-lived contemporary Vaughan Williams and the Symphony No. 2 by his adored Brahms. ♦ March 23 at 2 and 7: Music by Mozart, including his late Piano Concerto in B-Flat Major (K. 595, featuring Adam Neiman). (152 W. 66th St. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)
BACHWORKS
To celebrate Bach's three-hundred-and-fifteenth birthday, Bradley Brookshire directs the chorus and period-instrument orchestra in the composer's Cantatas No. 51 ("Jauchzet Gott," with soprano Olga Makarina) and No. 198 (the "Trauer-Ode"), and plays the A-Minor Prelude and Fugue (BWV 894) as a harpsichord solo. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. March 21 at 7:30.)
ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK
Lyndon Woodside directs Bach's "Saint Matthew Passion." (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 21 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

BACHMANN-KLIBONOFF-FRIDMAN TRIO
Performing Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio, in a lunchtime performance. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. March 15 at 1.)

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SYLVIA MC NAIR
John Corigliano takes perverse pride in pointing out that he composed his cycle "Tambourine Man: Seven Songs of Bob Dylan" without the benefit of ever having heard a Dylan performance, either live or recorded. This, he avers, allowed him to select Dylan's texts strictly on their poetic merit; since he encountered them in an anthology of lyrics, without any assumptions about how they might be interpreted, he felt free to set them to music of his own symphonic predisposition rather than to something recalling the poet's folk style. Ms. McNair, a soprano, offers the première of the set, along with Falla's "Siete Canciones Populares Españolas" and a handful of French *mélodies*. Pianist Martin Katz assists. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 15 at 7:30.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO
Performing piano trios by Schubert (his "Notturno"), Dvořák (in E Minor, the "Dumky"), and (with violinist Ida Kavafian and violist Steven Tenenbom assisting) Elgar's Piano Quintet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 15 at 8.)

DANIEL SWENBERG
Performing eighteenth-century lute suites by Sylvius Leopold Weiss and Jakob Lauffensteiner. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. March 16 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

PAUL O'DETTE
What's going on that all these lutenists are playing recitals on the same day? O'Dette is one of the finest; his recordings (for Harmonia Mundi) of Dowland's complete lute works should be in every music lover's CD cabinet. In this recital, he offers a heaping handful of that composer's works, as well as works by the Spanish Baroque composer Santiago de Murcia. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. March 16 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 16-17 at 7:30: Violinist Mark Peskanov and soprano DeBorge Pinnington present the première of their collaborative work "Chart I," in a concert that also includes Mozart's Horn Quintet (with French hornist William Purvis) and Schubert's Octet. ♦ March 18 at 7:30 and March 19 at 4: Ms. Pinnington is featured in Schubert songs arranged for string quartet, and Charles Neidich is featured in clarinet quintets by Anton Reicha and Mozart. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

MUSIC BY KURTÁG
György Kurtág was born in 1926 in what was then Romania and is now Hungary. He has won an enthusiastic following among intellectual musicians, who appreciate both his reverence for the mainstream of classical music and the elegance and intricacy with which he interlaces apparently disparate aspects in his compositions. In this concert, soprano Susan Narucki, clarinettist Charles Neidich, violinist Daniel Phillips, violist Kim Kashkashian, and pianist Robert Levin join for a concert that spotlights several of his pieces, including his Schumann-inspired "Hommage à R. Sch." and his "Kafka Fragments." (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 16 at 8.)

NEW YORK GUITAR FESTIVAL
David Torn, Vernon Reid, and Benjamin Verdery take to the stage to play and discuss contemporary guitar music, focussing on the influence of Jimi Hendrix and rock music on modern concert works. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. March 16 at 8.)

SEÁN DUGGAN
The pianist, a Benedictine monk who was the 1991 winner of the District of Columbia's Johann Sebastian Bach International Competition for Pianists, is currently performing Bach's complete keyboard works (arranged in roughly chronological order) in fifteen recitals at the Church of the Holy Innocents. March 17 at 7:30: A grab bag of preludes, fugues, and other short pieces. ♦ March 19 at 5:30: The first two-thirds of the "Well-Tempered Clavier," Book One. ♦ March 21 at 7:30: The end of Book One and the beginning of Book Two of the "Well-Tempered Clavier." (128 W. 37th St. No tickets necessary. The cycle continues through April 9.)

VERONIKA KINCSES
The soprano, a longtime soloist of the Hungarian State Opera and a recipient of the Kossuth Prize

(Hungary's top cultural award), performs a recital that includes arias by Cilea and Puccini, in addition to folk-song settings by Bartók and Kodály. Pianist Anikó Péter Szabó assists. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 18 at 2.)

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD

This instrumental sextet, which came together for a student performance of Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music in 1996, has needed to commission a repertoire in order to create a place for themselves in the chamber-music community. Their joyfully uninhibited approach to performing, along with their tendency to not play pieces until each of the players can render them from memory, has endeared them to numerous composers, three of whom—David Schober, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, and Thomas Albert—have provided the group with works for this program. (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. March 18 at 8. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

AN DIE MUSIK

The chamber ensemble offers a quintet by J. C. Bach, a string trio by Haydn, Arnold Cooke's Oboe Quartet, and Beethoven's C-Major Piano Quartet, in addition to a new piece by Bruce Adolphe. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. March 19 at 4.)

STEPHEN HAMILTON

The organist plays Marcel Dupré's "Le Chemin de la Croix," with readings of spiritual poetry by Paul Claudel interpolated between the movements. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. March 19 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Presenting a Haydn flute trio, Yehudi Wyner's Horn Trio, Ezra Laderman's "Duetti" for Flute and Clarinet, and Schumann's Piano Trio in F Major. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 19 at 5 and March 21 at 7:30.)

MAURIZIO POLLINI

The pianist performs both books of Debussy's "Études," in addition to Boulez's Piano Sonata No. 2, one of the most challenging works ever written for the instrument. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 20 at 7:30.)

PIANO CENTURY

The Juilliard School's yearlong survey of twentieth-century piano literature reaches the nineteen-eighties, offering works by thirteen composers, including Perle, Ferneyhough, and Schnittke, performed by students from the conservatory. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, Lincoln Center Plaza. March 21 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

GWYNETH WENTICK

In her New York début recital, the Dutch harpist is assisted by several colleagues in music by Handel, Debussy, and others. Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 21 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS

March 16 at 7: By Mark Z. Danielewski, from his novel, "House of Leaves." (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 17 at 10:30: By Dorothy Friedman-August, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Susan Maurer, and other contributors to the newly published anthology "Downtown Poets." (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ March 20 at 7:30: By poets Edwin Frank and Barbara Hamby. (Fordham University, 113 W. 60th St. Tickets at the door.)

TALK

March 15 at 7: Poet Susan Wheeler moderates a discussion about poetry criticism with critics Marjorie Perloff, Helen Vendler, Stephen Burt, and Michael Scharf. (Wollman Auditorium, Cooper Union, 51 Astor Pl. For more information, call 254-9628.)

WALK

March 17 at 3: Adventure on a Shoestring offers a St. Patrick's Day tour of Hell's Kitchen. For more information, call 265-2663.

BOOK CURRENTS

Go, Speed Racer!

"He chanted as he flew, and the car responded with a sonorous drone; the miles were eaten up under him as he sped he knew not whither, fulfilling his instincts, living his hour, reckless of what might come to him." So wrote Kenneth Graham of Mr. Toad stealing a car in the 1908 classic "The Wind in the Willows." Of course, that kind of exhilaration is not unique to amphibians. Michael Keyser experienced a similar high when he drove his father's brand-new green Porsche 911 from Stuttgart to Siena, in 1968. Other thrill rides followed. As Keyser writes in the newly reissued **SPEED MERCHANTS** (Bentley), within a year he was fielding his own motor-racing team and travelling around the world to photograph races.

With this year's Daytona 500 in the rearview mirror, readers can take a pit stop to look at other new books about the racing game. Behind-the-windshield perspectives fill **MY GREATEST DAY IN NASCAR**, edited by Bob McCullough (St. Martin's), which gives inside information about such strategies as "drafting," "slingshotting," and "pitting." Rich with pictures, **NASCAR GREATEST RACES**, by Tom Higgins (HarperCollins), documents the twenty-five best races in the history of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, from the first (it took place in 1948 on a 2.2-mile course made partly of hard-packed sand) to more recent contests.

BURNIN' RUBBER, by George Sullivan (Millbrook), tailors the history of stock-car racing to young readers, beginning in the nineteen-thirties, when "runner cars" snuck illegal whiskey past watchful sheriffs. There is also a helpful vocabulary list that explains, for example, that getting "broadsided" is the same thing as getting "T-boned."

—Nicole LaPorte

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

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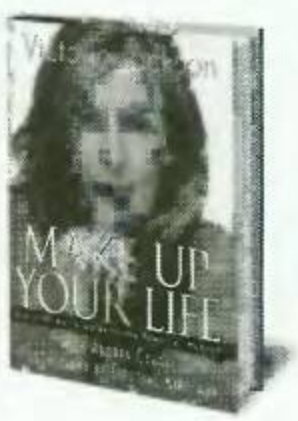

The top makeup artist and founder of Victoria Jackson Cosmetics offers women a realistic regime for looking good and feeling great. Practical make-up tips, beauty essentials and health advice fill the pages of this absolute guide to maximizing your potential.
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(Times Books)

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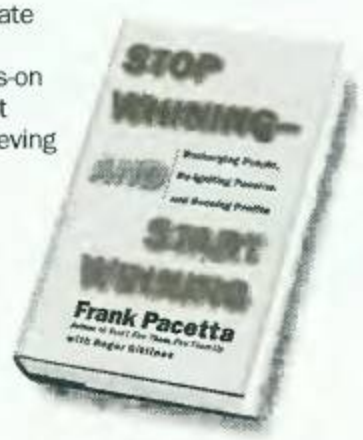
by Frank Pacetta with Roger Gittines



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MOVIES
OPENING

BEYOND THE MAT
A behind-the-scenes documentary about the world of professional wrestling, featuring Mankind and Jake the Snake. Directed by Barry Blaustein. Opening March 17. (Union Square.)

THE CARRIERS ARE WAITING
A comedy by Benoît Mariage, about a Belgian father and son who enter a car-door-opening contest. In French. Opening March 15. (Film Forum.)

COTTON MARY
A historical drama set in post-Independence India, about the relationship between a British woman and her Indian nurse. Directed by Ismail Merchant. Opening March 17. (Paris.)

ERIN BROCKOVICH
Julia Roberts plays a legal secretary who builds a poisoning case against a water utility. Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Opening March 17.

FINAL DESTINATION
A sci-fi thriller in which the survivors of a plane crash begin to die mysteriously. Directed by James Wong. Opening March 17.

THE LIFESTYLE
A documentary by David Schisgall, about middle-aged swingers in California. Opening March 16. (Pioneer Theatre.)

SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM
Director Craig Baldwin uses clips from low-budget sci-fi, old television broadcasts, and high-school instructional films to create an alternate history of the twentieth century. Opening March 17. (Cinema Village.)

TRASH
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening March 17. (Quad Cinema.)

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

AMERICAN BEAUTY
This amazing and impassioned fantasia about American loneliness begins as satire and ends with a vision of the sublime. The defeated suburban patriarch Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), condemned by his withdrawn daughter (Thora Birch) and his hyperorganized wife (Annette Bening), drops out of his job and misbehaves badly. After Lester's marriage gets blown apart by squalls of comic contempt, the movie, which was written by Alan Ball and directed by the British theatre maestro Sam Mendes (it's his first film), opens up and takes in Lester's suburban territory—the dissatisfactions of the business-mad nineties, in which the gospel of selfishness leaves people clenched and isolated. The bitter satirical riffs slowly give way to a mystical appreciation of the vagrant beauty trapped beneath the surface of life. The hard-edged, almost hyperreal cinematography, by Conrad L. Hall, and the editing, by Tariq Anwar and Chris Greenbury, shift back and forth between dream and actuality with mesmerizing beauty. With Mena Suvari as a teen vamp who is terrified of being ordinary, and Wes Bentley as a young drug dealer who uses his video camera to discover the hidden connections among things.—*David Denby* (9/20/99) (Beekman, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, State, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

THE BEACH
A cautionary tale for travellers, in which Richard (Leonardo DiCaprio) arrives in Thailand, learns of a mythical beach, and makes the elementary mistake of trying to find it. He and his companions swim to Paradise, and soon human malevolence is running high, thanks to the tensions among the happy campers who live by the water. There is the scary Sal (Tilda Swinton) and the charming Françoise (Virginie Ledoyen), both of whom already have boyfriends, and both of whom hit on Richard. (Someone should have explained to them that a crush on DiCaprio is not exactly an unprecedented emotion.) The film skitters along nicely for the first half; from then on, it grows dark and deadly, as Richard—and sometimes the images on screen—start to go mad. (When the whole thing briefly turns into a video game, are we meant to ponder the crowded horrors of Western consciousness, or merely to be annoyed?) The director is Danny Boyle, the screenwriter is John Hodge, and the producer is Andrew Macdonald; together they made "Shallow Grave" and "Trainspotting," and you wonder whether they were wise to quit the Scottish turf they know so well. This movie, which was adapted from the bestselling Alex Garland novel, wants so badly to be a cult film that it forgets to be any good.—*Anthony Lane* (2/14/00) (Criterion Center and Union Square.)

BOILER ROOM
A sensationally entertaining melodrama about young outer-borough louts in Canali suits who sell stocks of dubious value from a fly-by-night brokerage firm. Like "Wall Street" before it, this movie—written and directed by the twenty-seven-year-old Ben Younger—might be described as an ambivalent love letter to the outrageous hustle and greed of the great American bull market. Younger wants us to enjoy the young men's gleeful exhibitionism and powers of persuasion. At the same time, he depicts the brokers' triumphs as a low-life rampage. Amused, clear-sighted, and objective, "Boiler Room" has been made without false piety or hypocrisy. It stars Giovanni Ribisi as a young man lured into the brokerage house, and Ron Rifkin, in a brilliant performance, as his disapproving, federal-judge father. Among the young actors who play brokers, Ben Affleck, Vin Diesel, and Nicky Katt stand out.—*D.D.* (3/13/00) (Chelsea West, Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

BOYS DON'T CRY
A delicately conceived but fearless movie. In small-town Nebraska, a young woman named Teena Brandon (Hilary Swank) clips her hair into a butch cut, flattens her breasts, puts on boys' clothes and a boy's swagger, and passes in the world as Brandon Teena, handsome young dude. What she feels is pure exhilaration, the excitement of leaving her past behind and becoming a lover; what we feel is dismay and fear. Brandon falls in with a group of derelict, white-trash kids and attracts the languid beauty Lana (Chloë Sevigny), who allows herself to think that Brandon is a man—with inevitably disastrous results. The movie is a fine, terrifying tragic poem that is also, at times, subversively funny: the women who like Brandon seem to want the feminine as well as the masculine in a lover. Director Kimberly Peirce, who wrote the screenplay with Andy Bienen, embraces a full-bodied lyrical realism in which nothing is exaggerated but nothing is avoided either.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

THE CIDER HOUSE RULES
The director Lasse Hallström has come to specialize in grownup movies about kids and teen-agers, especially of the luckless variety. This new picture, adapted by John Irving from his own novel, teems with scores of the little beggars; the tale begins at a snowbound orphanage in Maine, where Dr. Larch (Michael Caine) tends to the bodies and souls of the unwanted, even extending his skills to an illegal abortion practice. His protégé is Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire), who is set to follow in Larch's footsteps until those of Candy (Charlize Theron) appear. Homer departs for the wide world, where he learns about apples and sex, in that order. As an older and wiser man he returns to his destiny, although the getting of that wisdom has been oddly unengaging. The orphan scenes have an imaginative solidity that fades as the film proceeds, and you can't work out whether the gruelling social issues, like incest and abortion, are the subject of the movie or simply ballast. As apple movies go, this one lacks a core.—*A.L.* (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

THE CUP
Khyentse Norbu, a Tibetan incarnate lama, directed this spare, simply produced picture that tells the story of a group of young monks who ask their abbot for permission to rent a television set so they can watch the final match of the 1998 World Cup. Norbu shot the film at Chokling monastery in India, and all of the "characters" are actual monks, who mostly play themselves. The Tibet typically shown to us by Hollywood is so freighted with consequence that it's refreshing to see a monastery depicted as a kind of New Age prep school, complete with a jocular give-and-take among the masters and pupils and surreptitious peeks at girlie magazines. A thirteen-year-old novice, Jamyang Lordo, shines as a cheeky troublemaker who worships the Brazilian superstar Ronaldo. ("He has a shaved head, but he is not a monk.") All is not lightness, though. The Chinese occupation of Tibet is frequently hinted at, and the young monks' love of soccer, while mirthful and humanizing, shows the difficulty of preserving Tibetan culture in exile. Norbu does much here with very little; his film is a testament to the power of understatement. In Tibetan and Hindi.—*Michael Agger* (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DIRTY HARRY
This 1971 right-wing fantasy about the San Francisco police force as a helpless group (emasculated by the unrealistic liberals) propagandizes for paralegal police power and vigilante justice. The only way that the courageous cop Dirty Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) can protect the city against the mad hippie killer (Andy Robinson) who terrorizes women and children is by taking the law into his own hands. Harry, who knows what justice is and how to carry it out, is the best there is, a Camelot cop; he got his nickname because he's the dedicated trouble-shooter who draws the dirtiest assignments. He is our martyr—stained on our behalf. As suspense craftsmanship, the picture is trim, brutal, and exciting; it was directed in the sleekest style by the veteran urban-action director Don Siegel. It's also a remarkably single-minded attack on liberal values, with each prejudicial detail in place—a kind of hardhat "The Fountainhead." Harry's hippie adversary is pure evil: sniper, rapist, kidnapper, torturer, defiler of all human values. This monster—who wears a peace symbol—stands for everything the audience fears and loathes. The action genre has always had a fascist potential, and it surfaces in this movie.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; March 20.)

GHOST DOG: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI
Part satire, part comic book, Jim Jarmusch's new film is set in a future that's one beat beyond the present and takes place in a generic cityscape

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called the Industrialized State. Forest Whitaker stars as a hulking, dangerous, yet curiously gentle samurai known as Ghost Dog. He follows the austere precepts of the samurai code but is also partial to gangsta rap and high-tech weaponry. His master is an Italian mob underling who serves a family in hilarious decline: they operate out of the back of a Chinese restaurant and cannot make the rent on their social club. Jarmusch keeps the camera moving slowly, attending to details, and the rap soundtrack by RZA (of Wu-Tang Clan fame) gives the whole undertaking a fuguelike quality. When the movie becomes a showdown between two ancient codes—the samurai and *omertà*—Jarmusch playfully aligns the pretend violence of cartoons with the stylized violence of Hollywood, leading to an enigmatic ending that is thoroughly unnerving. It's like an elaborate joke without a punch line. The setup, though, is worth it, thanks to Whitaker's quiet, powerful performance; in Jarmusch's hands he becomes a beacon of purity in a collapsing world.—*M.A.* (Angelika Film Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, and 42nd Street E Walk.)

HARD EIGHT

Paul Thomas Anderson's recent movies have won a following for their epic attempts to mesh heightened, surreal imagery with seamy banality, whether in the booming porno world of "Boogie Nights" or the apocalyptic San Fernando Valley of "Magnolia." But some of us prefer his sturdy début, from 1996, in which a wise old gambler named Sydney (Philip Baker Hall) tutors and protects a shambling orphan (John C. Reilly) and a woebegone cocktail waitress (Gwyneth Paltrow). Hall is a marvel of emotional containment in his portrayal of Sydney, who bristles with hard-won knowledge from an enigmatic past. Anderson places us under the spell of this courtly stranger, then breaks the spell, brutally. The result is a more coherent contrast between movie reality and real reality—and a more profound statement on paternal responsibilities—than either of Anderson's later films. Reilly and Paltrow are both poignantly befuddled, and Samuel L. Jackson brings a merry theatrical menace to his role as a self-described security consultant who rubs Sydney the wrong way.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 16.)

THE INSIDER

Midnight calls, clandestine meetings, threatening E-mail messages, not to mention cell phones used as obsessively as lances and shields in a jousting epic: the circuits never stop burning in this self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who wanted to bring Wigand's information to the public. The two men—one stolid, the other self-dramatizing—make an odd but satisfying couple; they are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against venal or merely smooth corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a rising line of tension and paranoia which leads, paradoxically, to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending. Mann and Eric Roth wrote the screenplay, which is based on actual events and on Marie Brenner's reporting in *Vanity Fair*. With Bruce McGill and Diane Venora.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

MISSION TO MARS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, and Union Square.)

THE NINTH GATE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Opening March 17, "Beyond the Mat," a professional-wrestling documentary.

NOT ONE LESS

In a rural Chinese village, a thirteen-year-old student (Wei Minzhi) becomes an emergency substitute teacher. When one of her charges, a ten-year-old boy, leaves to find work in a vast, nameless city nearby, she abandons her post, and sets out to find him. The great Chinese director Zhang Yimou shot this film in a style that might be called austere fabulism. He uses documentary techniques—casting nonactors and presenting the raw concrete walls and dirt roads in all their authentic ugliness. Yet the story is shaped like a fable from the silent-film days, and one gets caught up in it. It becomes a slow-motion chase movie, and the persistence of the young teacher gives the film a tone of hilarious monomania. Intentionally or not (it's hard for an outsider to tell), Zhang reveals the meanness and impersonality of contemporary Chinese society.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

ORPHANS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (State.)

SWEET AND LOWDOWN

Sean Penn, in cream-colored suits and matching hat, a cigarette dangling from his lips, gives one of the best performances ever seen in a Woody Allen film. He plays Emmet Ray, the notorious (and made-up) jazz guitarist from the thirties, a great artist who was also a worm and a loser. Emmet handles his instrument almost as well as his idol Django Reinhardt, but he's the victim of his own neuroses and obsessions. His not knowing himself at all is turned into a joke, but it's also played for pathos—incomprehension is Emmet's soulfulness, mysteriously linked to his elegant playing. The picture is made up of short vignettes framed by "memories" of Emmet spoken by various experts, including Allen himself, and the entire movie is caught in the loving grip of jazz-world nostalgia, with its stylized glamour of thirties clothes and cars—the tawdry life on the road, in which the greatest art was made on the run. With the English actress Samantha Morton, hatted and crumpet-faced, her body hidden in a shapeless dress, as the mute girl who falls for Emmet. The golden-hued cinematography is by Zhao Fei. The contemporary guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli do the playing. In all, one of Allen's finest achievements.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.)

TOPSY-TURVY

Mike Leigh's brilliant re-creation of the most famous partnership in the British theatre—the collaboration of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the glory era of imperial rule. There are elements here of a traditional bio-pic—failure, triumph, intimations of immortality—but none of the stodginess and self-congratulation that usually plague the form. Sullivan (Allan Corduner), a libertine who nevertheless had serious pretensions as a composer, and Gilbert (Jim Broadbent), formal, irascible, and asexual, but a great theatrical pro, are so dissimilar in temperament that they can hardly bear each other's company. Leigh suggests that the combination of sentimental languor and incisiveness produced the art of "The Mikado," whose preparation and first performance take up the second half of the movie. The authentic period stage lighting produces a glow on the painted faces; the fragile beauty of Sullivan's tunes is piercing when they are played, as they are here, at slower tempos than we are used to hearing. In all, one of the greatest movies about the theatre. With Lesley Manville, Timothy Spall, Ron Cook, and Wendy Nottingham.—*D.D.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Village Theatre VII.)

TRASH

An absurdist 1970 porno-comedy about an impotent junkie (Joe Dallesandro) who drags himself around while various women try to arouse him. His sort-of wife is played by a goofy female impersonator, Holly Woodlawn, whose intensity amidst the general dejection is crazily—and entertainingly—incongruous. The wife's highest aspiration is to get on welfare, and to accomplish this she pretends to be pregnant, but the welfare investigator (Michael Sklar) wants the fabulous-forties shoes that the wife found in the garbage can, and she refuses to give them up. The picture is steeped in a sense of grotesque parody, though most of the time it's as enervated and limp as the hero. The knocked-out couple do their put-on of marriage, and we are invited to laugh at their outcast status and their meaningless lives and to feel sorry for them. This Andy Warhol production was directed by Paul Morrissey, who lingers over needles going into flesh and puts a nimbus around the messiest head of hair. With Jane Forth as the indolent housewife in the modern apartment that the hero tries to burglarize.—*P.K.* (Quad Cinema.)

WHAT PLANET ARE YOU FROM?

Garry Shandling plays a humanoid sent to Earth from an all-male planet. His task: to impregnate an earthling and thereby set off a population war against us. His equipment: a motor-driven vibrating penis that buzzes and buzzes and won't give up. Shandling has big soft lips, a red face, and a squelched, outrageously bland manner that allows him to deliver startlingly acid lines (mostly to the female characters) as if they were entirely reasonable. His humanoid touches down in Phoenix and meets up with a quivering ex-alcoholic plagued by low self-esteem—Annette Bening at her most soulful. These two are perfectly pleasant together, but they are trapped in an idea that doesn't expand into much of anything. Directed by Mike Nichols,

MARCELLUS HALL

"What Planet Are You From?" plays like a ten-minute TV skit that has been teased out to full length and treated as though it were the perfect material for a brilliant comedy of manners. It isn't.—*D.D.* (3/13/00) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square.)

THE WHOLE NINE YARDS
Matthew Perry, who is sometimes the only thing that keeps "Friends" on its toes, attempts yet another leap to the big screen. He plays a Montreal dentist whose next-door neighbor (Bruce Willis) turns out to be a hit man hiding from the Mob. Throw in a deep-voiced heavy (Michael Clarke Duncan) and a couple of fiercely disappointed wives (Rosanna Arquette and Natasha Henstridge), and soon everyone wants to kill somebody else. Perry and Willis—the scared and the smooth—are not a bad pairing, and Perry gets the chance for some jerky slapstick (he bounces off Clarke Duncan as if off a vast rubber wall), but the film is too hectic and scattershot to give the actors much room. Visually, this may be the dingiest film of the year so far, although Amanda Peet, in her role as a death-crazed dental assistant, cheers things up considerably. The director is Jonathan Lynn, who doesn't quite have the courage to carry off this black comedy; the mood of loving contentment which triumphs at the end feels like an insult.—*A.L.* (3/6/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

WONDER BOYS
A pleasant dud from director Curtis Hanson and screenwriter Steve Kloves. Michael Douglas plays Grady Tripp, pothead campus novelist and hero to undergraduates, who cannot finish his new book and gets drawn into all kinds of social complications. Douglas gives a surprisingly mild and rueful performance, but the movie has very little dramatic interest and quickly slides into whimsy. The vibrant Frances McDormand is the university's chancellor, with whom Tripp is having an affair; Tobey Maguire is a maddeningly elusive writing student who may or may not have talent; and Robert Downey, Jr., drifting through a fey, meaningless performance, is a visiting New York book editor. "Wonder Boys" isn't sloppy; it's been made with love, but one looks at it in bewilderment, amazed that so much care has been taken with desultory material that seems all wrong for the movies. Adapted from Michael Chabon's novel.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

AGNES BROWNE
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (1/22/99)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

CONDO PAINTING
Angelika Film Center.

DETERRENCE
First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.

THE HURRICANE (1/10/00)
Criterion Center and Union Square.

MAGNOLIA (12/20/99)
Chelsea Cinemas, Sutton 1 and 2, and Union Square.

MIFUNE
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THE NEXT BEST THING
42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.

PITCH BLACK
Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.

REINDEER GAMES
42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

THE SIXTH SENSE (8/23-30/99)
Criterion Center, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.

42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of director Claire Denis. All films are in French, with English subtitles. March 18 at 2: "Chocolat" (1988). ♦ March 18 at 4: "Keep It for Yourself" (1991) and "The Hoop Skirt" (1992). ♦ March 19 at 2: "I Can't Sleep" (1994). ♦ March 19 at 4:30: "No Fear, No Die" (1990).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—March 16 at 7 and 9: "Made in U.S.A." (1966, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ March 17 at 7 and 9: "The Distant Journey" (1948, Alfred Radok). ♦ Through March 26: "The Havana Film Festival in New York," a selection of features, shorts, and animations representing forty-one years of Cuban cinema. The festival opens on March 18 at 7 with a screening of Juan Padrón's parody of gangster films, "Vampires in Havana" (1985; in Spanish).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—March 15 at 7 and 9:30: "Personals" (1998, Michael Sargent). ♦ March 16-17 at 4:30 and 8 and March 18-19 at 2, 5:20, and 8:45: "The Saragossa Manuscript" (1965, Wojciech Has; in Polish). ♦ Two films with soundtracks composed by Philip Glass. March 20 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Candyman" (1992, Bernard Rose). ♦ March 21 at 7 and 9:30: "Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters" (1985, Paul Schrader). Schrader and Glass will introduce the 7:00 screening.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through April 6: The "Neo-Noir" film festival, a selection of films that reinterpret the classic noir elements of crime, corruption, and paranoia. March 15: "Klute" (1971, Alan J. Pakula) and "Cruising" (1980, William Friedkin). ♦ March 16: "Hard Eight" (†) and "House of Games" (1987, David Mamet). ♦ March 17-18: "The Last Seduction" (1994, John Dahl) and "Red Rock West" (1993, Dahl). ♦ March 19: "Jackie Brown" (1997, Quentin Tarantino). ♦ March 20: "Dirty Harry" (†) and "Death Wish" (1974, Michael Winner). ♦ March 21: "The Hot Spot" (1990, Dennis Hopper) and "The Underneath" (1994, Steven Soderbergh).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 14 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Les Silences du Palais" (1996, Moufida Tlati; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through April: "From Automatic Vaudeville to the Seventh Art: Cinema's Silent Years, 1893-1928." March 16 at 1 and March 18 at 2:30: "Napoléon Vu par Abel Gance" (1927, Gance). ♦ March 16 at 6 and March 17 at 2:30: "Tokyo Chorus" (1931, Yasujiro Ozu). ♦ March 17 at 6 and March 19 at 2: "Variety" (1925, E. A. Dupont). ♦ March 17 at 6:30: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith). ♦ March 17 at 8: "Civilization" (1916, Thomas H. Ince, Raymond B. West, and Reginald Barker). ♦ March 18 at 2: "Seventh Heaven" (1927, Frank Borzage). ♦ March 18 at 5 and March 21 at 6: "Don Juan" (1927, Alan Crosland). ♦ March 18 at 6: "The Coward" (1915, Barker). ♦ March 19 at 2: "Les Deux Timides" (1929, René Clair). ♦ March 19 at 5: "Ella Cinders" (1926, Alfred Green). ♦ March 19 at 5 and March 20 at 2:30: "Flesh and the Devil" (1926, Clarence Brown). ♦ March 20 at 6 and March 21 at 2:30: "Humoresque" (1920, Borzage).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway (864-1414)—The films of John Waters and Pedro Almodóvar. March 21 at 7: "Matador" (1986, Almodóvar; in Spanish). ♦ March 21 at 9:15: "Desperate Living" (1977, Waters).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through March 19: "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema Today," a program of contemporary French films. All films are in French, with English subtitles. March 15 at 1 and 6:15 and March 18 at 2: "Pas de Scandale" (1999, Benoît Jacquot). ♦ March 15 at 3:30 and March 19 at 2: "La Puce" (1999, Emmanuelle Bercot) and "Les Vacances" (1999, Bercot). ♦ March 15 at 9 and March 18 at 4:15: "Peau d'Homme, Coeur de Bête" (1999, Hélène Angel). ♦ March 16 at 1 and March 18 at 7: "Le Vent de la Nuit" (1999, Philippe Garrel). ♦ March 16 at 3:30, March 17 at 9, and March 19 at 8:45: "C'est Quoi la Vie?" (1999, François Dupeyron). ♦ March 16 at 9 and March 19 at 3:30: "Le Créateur" (1999, Albert Dupontel). ♦ March 17 at 1 and 6:15 and March 19 at 6:15: "La Débandade" (1999, Claude Berri). ♦ March 17 at 3:30: "Belle Maman" (1999, Gabriel Aghion). ♦ March 18 at 9:15: "Peut-Être" (1999, Cédric Klapisch).

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The Art of Luxury in

The Museum of Television & Radio, above and right

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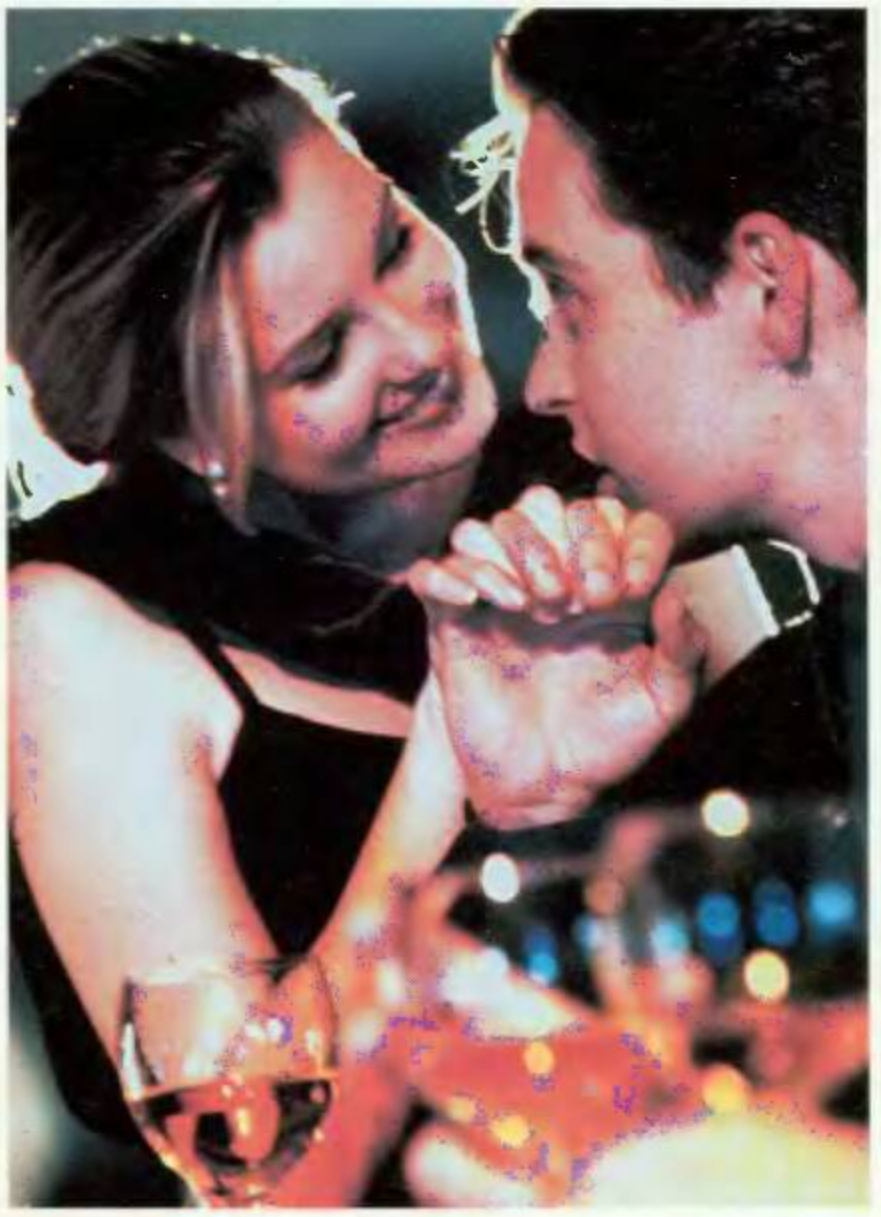

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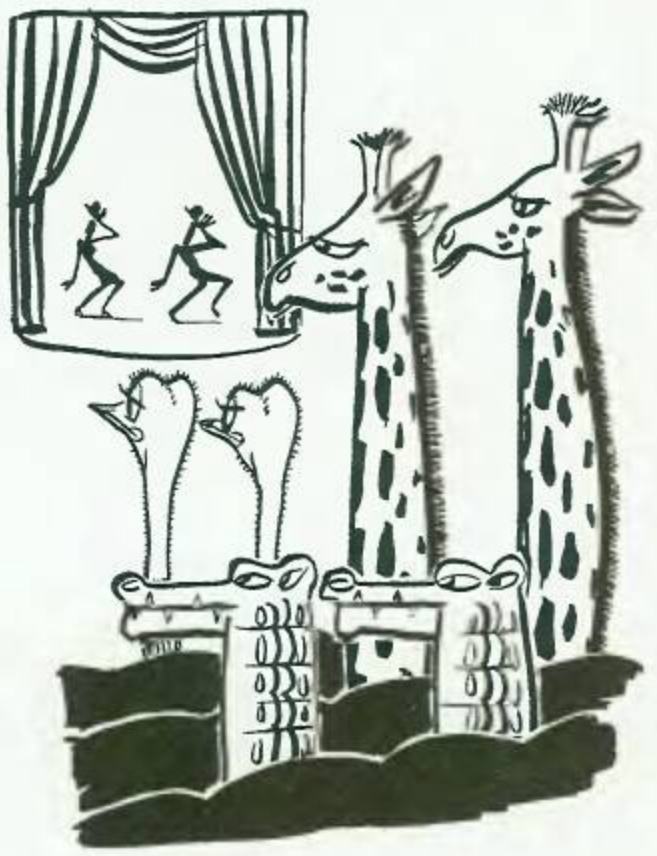
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Two by two, they marched into the ark, and two by two they continue to come at us. This thought is pressed forcefully by the news that two musical versions of "The Wild Party," that odd bit of Jazz Age doggerel by Joseph Moncure March, are about to open in New York, or, rather, that one version has opened and another is just about to. How is it, one wonders, that such a thing can happen? The poem, which wasn't exactly "Paradise Lost" to begin with, has been lying around since the twenties. Men have been born and have died, "Oklahoma!" has opened and "Dude" has closed, and throughout all that time no one has thought, Ah, an all-singing version of "The Wild Party"—the very thing for the American musical theatre. And then, all at once, two companies independently come up with the idea. What synchronicity is at work to make an idea just barely worth having once suddenly happen twice?

The first thing to note is that this is merely the all-singing version of what has by now become a general principle of replication, of the absolute twoness of absolutely everything. Senator Gores came in twos and so do Candidate Clintons, and President Bushes may yet do; but the cineplex provides the real testing ground. Brian De Palma's Mars movie will be followed this fall by another Mars movie—both having been shot in Petra, Jordan, the rose-red city half as old as time, which is, apparently, a double for the red planet. We've had two Wyatt Earp movies, two volcano movies, and not just two cosmic-debris-crashing-into-earth movies but two cosmic-debris-crashing-into-earth-plan-to-nuke-it-fails-then-surprise!-succeeds-at-the-very-last-second movies. And there are equally menacing developments in book publishing: two new translations of the Bhagavad Gita are now hurtling toward the bookstores. (Time to send Bruce Willis up again with the nukes.) We'll have two R.F.K. biographies, two Mao biographies, and two Ruskin biographies, as last year we had two lives of the French writer whom, as it happens, nobody in America reads but everybody wants to read about. The well-lined old girl had been sitting around for years, unnoticed beyond the walls of the Palais-Royale, and suddenly we were in Colette City.



This is a small version of a big problem. It recalls the nineteenth-century suspicion that we are creatures of a force greater than us—call it History, call it the Spirit of the Age, call it C.A.A.—which speaks and makes everything walk in one direction, leaving double footprints in the sand. *Go to Jordan and make a Mars movie*, it says. Western civilization arrives at its necessary moment and, just as Leibniz and Newton were bound to invent the calculus at the very same time, determines that one producer is bound to put "The Wild Party" on in a New York theatre while another producer puts it on next door.

But the real mystery isn't that two people will come up with the same idea; it's that nobody is deterred by the possibility that his or her work may have become redundant. For it is inevitably the case that somebody gets it out there first. Knowing that Scott was on his way to the South Pole didn't stop Amundsen, and knowing that Amundsen, the more experienced man, had joined the race did not, alas, stop Scott. This is what gives the fighting spirit to all men who start out second in a race with a big idea: who's to say my asteroid

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can't beat your comet, my antz your bugs, my slightly sleazy Brechtian Fosse-esque Jazz Age musical your slightly sleazy Brechtian Fosse-esque Jazz Age musical? In the event, both volcano movies spouted money, both space rocks struck gold. The road company of "The Wild Party" will probably be knocking 'em dead in Minneapolis even as the other road company, of "The Other Wild Party," is packing 'em in in St. Paul. It is not building a better mousetrap, but building a second mousetrap moments after the finish of the first mouse, that makes redoubled America secure in the knowledge that we're No. 1.

—Adam Gopnik

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

A CHAT WITH THE SENIOR SENATOR FROM NEW YORK

"Photonics." If Hillary Clinton wins her race for the United States Senate, this single word from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan may end up being as famous as the advice Benjamin Braddock receives in "The Graduate": "Plastics." Chatting in his hideaway office in an unmarked cranny of the Capitol recently, a few days before his seventy-third birthday, Moynihan exhibited his trademark combination of big-picture cosmology and street-level smarts. As the Senator sees it, photonics—the use of light rays to transmit data—may prove key to the First Lady's political salvation.

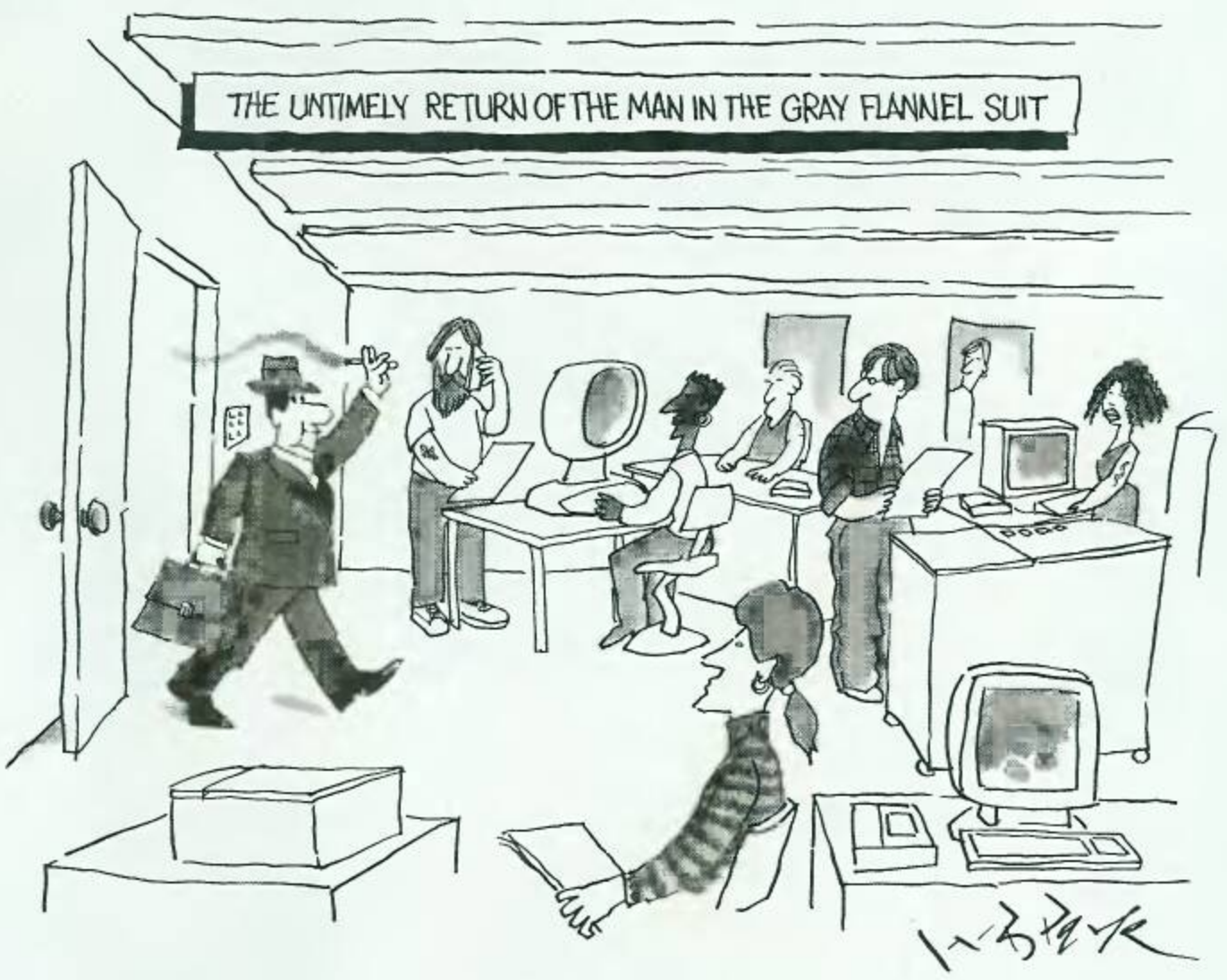
"The problem is, upstate New York is just being passed by," Moynihan said. "It's not that the unemployment rate is high, but people are just leaving in droves. The photon will be to the next century what the electron was to the last, and we could have a great corridor for photonics along Route 17"—an aging highway that runs east-west not far from the Kodak and Xerox facilities in Rochester. At Moynihan's urging, Mrs. Clinton is adopting this rather obscure economic-development cause as her own. "She's found something that no one else has said," the Senator asserted of his would-be successor, whose campaign he views with restrained optimism. "She's picked people she knows and depends on, and she's a formidable absorber of information, and she did pick up on the upstate New York decline."

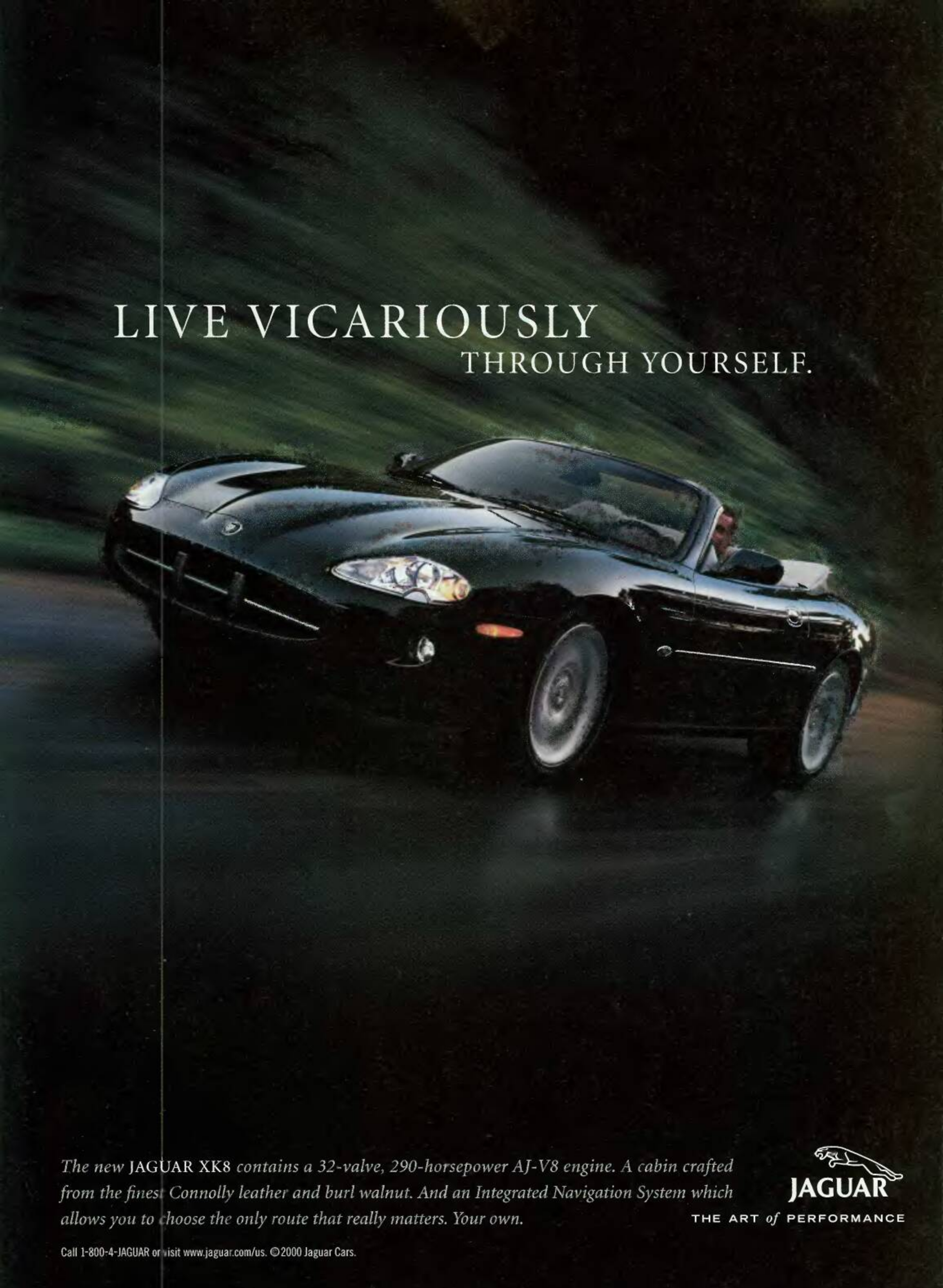
Will Mrs. Clinton win? "New York mayors don't get elected anything in New York State," he said, "and people with a conspicuous identity outside the state don't win, either." So? "It will be a very close race," he said.

In this year's Presidential contest, Moynihan has been perhaps the best-known supporter of his former Senate colleague Bill Bradley, whose campaign was clearly in its final days when we spoke. "This was a wonderful, gallant exercise," Moynihan said, "and with a difference of six thousand votes in New Hampshire things might have been very different." According to Moynihan, Bradley's hands-on approach to the details of his campaign helped doom the effort. That was never the style of Moynihan campaigns, which were managed by the Senator's wife, Liz. "Liz always said the candidate is not allowed to make any decisions," Moynihan said. "They do what they are told, they go where they are told, they say what they are told. That always worked rather well for us."

Moynihan's legendarily frosty relations with the Clinton-Gore Administration have carried over into the current race. In endorsing Bradley last September, Moynihan asserted that the Vice-President "can't win" the Presidency, and Gore's victory over Bradley hasn't caused the Senator to reëvaluate that view—much. "Gore is going to have a hard time," he said. "But maybe I'll be proved wrong again." As for the spirited race between George W. Bush and John McCain for the G.O.P. nomination, Moynihan had a rather surprising view. "The fact is that the Republicans have put up two people, either of whom would be a fine President," he said. "One of the reasons it's so personal between them is that there is so little political difference between them."

Moynihan has only recently recuperated from a difficult back operation, and the suspenders on his tweed pants were hanging loosely over his tall, spindly frame. Although he's facing the last ten months of his twenty-four years in the Senate, he said he generally sees things moving in the right direction these days. "Some time in the sixties or seventies, civic reputation in New York began to accrue to people who *prevented* things from happening. We're just getting back from that," he said. (His most beloved project, the imminent reconstruction of Pennsylvania Station, could be Exhibit A.) "There was this idea for a long time that we couldn't do anything big," he said, a





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smile flickering above his checked bow tie, "but, you know, we're starting to see it's rather nice to do something big."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

THE SPORTING LIFE

AN N.B.A. UNDERSTUDY TAKES THE COURT

Etdrick Bohannon's brief, happy career as a New York Knick began one afternoon late last month when he arrived at practice with the Fort Wayne Fury, the team he had been playing on in Indiana. The Fury's coach called him over and told him that he was wanted in New York that evening. "Stop playing with me," Bohannon says he replied. The coach assured him that this was no joke, and Bohannon hurried to the airport, leaving behind the team bus and the 7-Eleven dinner stops of the Continental Basketball Association, the N.B.A.'s "developmental league," for a ten-day contract with the Knicks. LaGuardia was iced in, and he spent eight hours on a layover in Cincinnati. But when he finally arrived in New York, at eleven o'clock that night, he was surprised to see that a car and driver were waiting to take him to his hotel. "In the C.B.A., you carry your own bags," Bohannon says.

A player on a ten-day N.B.A. contract is basketball's equivalent of a Broadway understudy; it's a stopgap hire to fill a roster spot when a player is injured—in this case, Marcus Camby, who had strained a ligament in his knee. The Knicks retained Bohannon, who is twenty-six, primarily to play the part of Camby in practice. The money was good (the league minimum for ten days is nearly twenty-three thousand dollars), and Bohannon was well suited for the role. He is tall and rangy and, like Camby, is an energetic presence near the backboard.

In addition to the Fury, Bohannon's basketball résumé includes two high schools and the universities of Arizona and Tennessee. He has been on two other N.B.A. teams, the Indiana Pacers and the Washington Wizards, though he hardly played at all—four minutes in two games with the Wizards. For a professional basketball player, he is something of an ascetic. He lives alone in Fort Wayne, and his only family is the grandmother who raised him. In New York, when he was not at practice, he was in his hotel room in White Plains, watching tapes of games to prepare for practice. "I wouldn't know one part of New York from the next," he said. "I don't hang out and do the other things."

Bohannon understood that after Camby's knee healed the Knicks would most likely no longer require his services. But he was in no hurry to leave. Sitting on a bench in the Knicks locker room, in front of a locker that bore his name on a metal plate, he said that he had seen other players return "down there" to the C.B.A., crushed by the realization that the N.B.A. no longer wanted them. "You have players who come back and go into a shell—'I'm here again,'" he said. The Knicks trainer, Mike Saunders, walked by to hand out paychecks, and Bohannon accepted his envelope with the tired nonchalance of his new teammates.

"I don't look at this as a ten-day," Bohannon went on. "A lot of people don't understand the opportunity they have in life." He played ferociously in practice, once knocking a backboard screw loose in a slam dunk. In pre-game shoot-arounds, he was the last player to leave the court. In warmups, he retrieved the ball for Patrick Ewing, so that the team's remote star would not have to do it himself. The other players, Bohannon was quick to say, had been cordial and encouraging. "Larry Johnson talks to me all the time," he said. During games, he sat on the floor at the far edge of the bench, as if he did not want to get in the way.

"I'm having a great time. This is where I'm supposed to be," he said, sounding like a man who believed that a lapse in confidence might jeopardize his chance of staying on. On the tenth and final day of his contract, Camby's knee was not yet healed, and the Knicks signed Bohannon for another stint.

They also rewarded him with a chance to play. He appeared twice on the Garden floor, both times in the closing minutes of routs by the Knicks. Bohannon played like a man eager to impress—hands in the air on defense, running the floor, falling as he fought for a rebound. And last week, in an otherwise forgettable game against the Vancouver Grizzlies, he scored his first three points in the N.B.A.

—*Michael Shapiro*

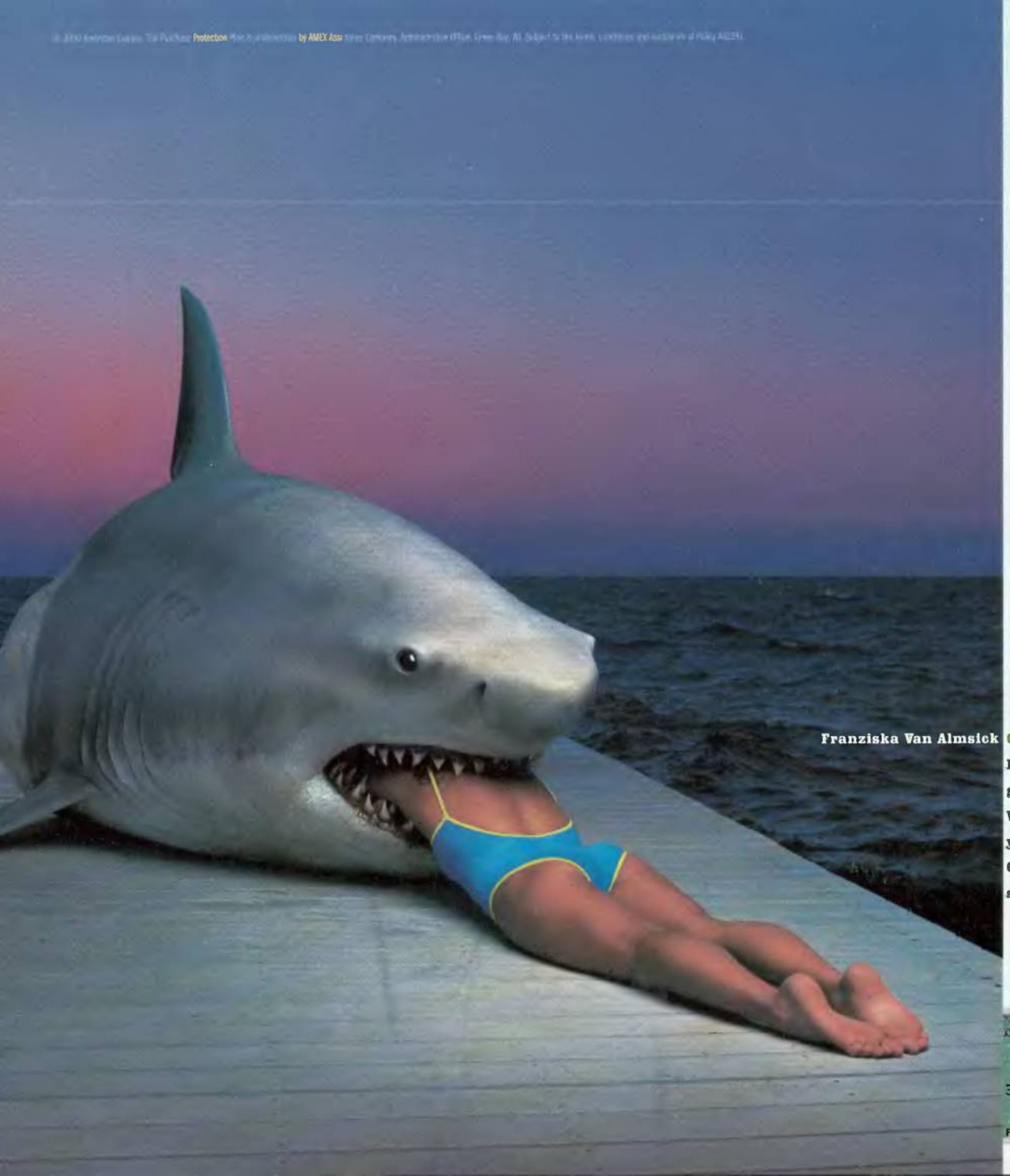
INK

A HOME-EC BIBLE AND W. H. AUDEN

Cheryl Mendelson is the author of the strangely compelling new book "Home Comforts," a manual about housekeeping which aims to reintroduce the pleasures of hand washing and linen folding and table setting to modern folk who have become dependent upon an efflorescent service economy, with its dry cleaners and maids and Chinese-food delivery guys. Cheryl Mendelson is also the wife of Edward Mendelson, a professor at Columbia University, who is the biographer of W. H. Auden and the executor of Auden's literary estate.

W. H. Auden

The coincidence of the Mendelsons' interests is a provocative one, since Cheryl Mendelson takes neatnikness to a level that almost qualifies as camp: "You need not wash the freezer every week," she writes, as if doing such a thing had ever occurred to you. Auden, on the other hand, was the author of a cycle of love poems about his home, "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," who was nonetheless notoriously slovenly in his housekeeping habits. In an oft-repeated



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"I'm a Reagan Republican. That's probably why I smile and wave for no reason."

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story, Vera Stravinsky, while visiting Auden's apartment on St. Mark's Place, found what she thought was a bowl of dirty water on the bathroom floor and flushed it down the toilet, only to discover that it was, in fact, a chocolate pudding she was to have been served for dessert.

Edward Mendelson recently sat down in the couple's extremely neat Upper West Side kitchen ("When you finally achieve a modus vivendi with your kitchen, you have been acculturated"—"Home Comforts," page 103), poured coffee into attractive earthenware cups ("When you have visitors in your home for more than a few minutes, hospitality calls for you to offer them refreshment"—page 70), and discussed the poet's reputation for slobbishness, which, he insisted, has been exaggerated. "The reports of Auden's horrible housekeeping tend to come from deeply fastidious people, like the Stravinskys, who carried around their own medicine chest," he said. "His home was cozy. I know a lot of people never seemed to notice that it was messy." Contrary to an account offered by Robert Craft, Stravinsky's protégé and biographer, of having a drink chez Auden—Craft says that one first had to find a glass and empty it of cigarette butts—Mendelson said, "Cups were not used for ashtrays. An ashtray was displayed. It was a Vesuvius of cigarette butts, but it was an ashtray."

Mendelson admitted, though, that Auden's apartment was dirty. When he first visited St. Mark's Place, in the late sixties, "There were cracks in the glass on the dining-room table, and all the cracks were filled with crumbs." Clearly, Auden had not learned the lesson on page 60 of Mrs. Mendelson's book: "You can brush the crumbs into a tray used for that purpose or into a plate." Auden would likely not have cared for the book's bedroom guidelines, either, which admonish, on page 663, "Don't put bags, purses, briefcases, shoes, and similar things on the bed; they have been on too many floors, sidewalks, and other questionable places." "Auden liked heavy weight on the bed," Mendelson said. "Many visitors have reported coming in and finding that Auden had piled the rug on the bed, as well as the blankets." Nor, it seems, would the advice on page 104—"When you are cooking something complicated, there is nothing like being surrounded by towering heaps of food-encrusted bowls and pots to give you a panicky feeling"—have got much attention in the Auden household. "In the summer of 1972, I went to visit Auden in his house in Austria," Mendelson said. "There were papers strewn all over, and the kitchen was an appalling mess of dirty dishes, out of which Chester Kallman"—Auden's longtime companion—"produced this staggeringly delicious turkey-and-veal sausage. I was struck by the degree of amazingly delicate cuisine that came out of this messy kitchen, which I suppose is the analogue of the poems coming out of the messy household."

Auden once told Edmund Wilson that he hated living in such disorder but that it was the only way he could work. If his shade were to come back and visit the Mendelson home, it would likely have to throw a few books and pots around in order to produce any poetry. The book-lined apartment is sprawling and light-filled and very tidy, though not oppressively so. A cleaning lady comes in for about four hours a week, but otherwise the Mendelsons do the chores, and they save many of the worst ones, like scrubbing the kitchen floor, for themselves.

In spite of Cheryl Mendelson's ascendance as a kind of Martha Stewart for the Ph.D. set, Edward Mendelson claims that he was the more fastidious of the pair when they first met, a decade ago. "I had an Indian bedspread, the pattern of which included a rectangle that was exactly the same size as the bed, and I was very particular about insuring that the pattern lined up correctly with the edges of the bed," he said, smiling at the follies of bachelorhood. That bedspread, he added, is long gone. Then Professor Mendelson offered more coffee, and, it seemed, an inward thanksgiving for a habitat of his own.

—Rebecca Mead

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THE CAMPAIGN

AUTHENTIC IS OUT, AND THE RACE WILL ONLY GET UGLIER

In the moments before John McCain and George W. Bush began their debate in South Carolina on February 15th, there was a terse but instructive exchange between the two men. Bush had just unleashed his astonishing post-New Hampshire assault; surrogates were already accusing McCain of abandoning his fellow Vietnam veterans, of favoring the "union bosses" and waffling on abortion, and of other assorted acts of personal depravity. "George," McCain greeted his opponent softly, reproachfully, shaking his head.

"John," Bush responded, with apparent sorrow, "it's politics."

"George," McCain said quietly, jaw taut, "*everything* isn't politics."

In the most exquisite shorthand imaginable, the two Republicans had crystallized the recent political season, which ended with a sickening thud on Super Tuesday—the essence not just of their race but of the Democratic contest between Al Gore and Bill Bradley as well. Both of these campaigns were mostly concerned with matters of style, but style in its most profound sense—the question of how politicians talk to us and how they comport themselves. The race was so compelling because the public was offered competing romantic and pragmatic visions of public life. Romance lost.

For Bush and Gore, "politics" is an impersonal, somewhat alien exercise—synthetic, distasteful, but necessary as a means to the end of victory. Their campaigns consisted of transparent ploys and talking points, and not much else. They are political holograms, images built for the arena, down to the way they dress. For the romantic challengers, by contrast, "politics" was a calling that could be mentioned in the same breath as "honor"—both qualities were integral to their quirky personalities, and their personalities were integral to their quirky campaigns. McCain provided the breathless public spectacle of a warrior in full flight, speaking his mind, heedless of the consequences. Bradley's was a less gaudy but no less courageous drama: that of a private man offering himself without frills, driven purely by the substance of his beliefs. There was an arrogance inherent in both visions, an arrogance that was at the root of their respective failures—because, in the end, the natural tics and spikes and troughs of their personalities required more patience and effort from the public, and offered fatter targets to their opponents, than the burnished, tactical cynicism that fuelled the winning campaigns.

Unfortunately, it seems that Bush and Gore have learned the same profoundly depressing lesson from their near-death experiences: the way to win is to be as unlike Bradley and McCain as possible. Spontaneity is dangerous; candor is ridiculous; the appearance of authenticity is useful, but an afterthought; toughness is far more important than righteousness. And anything you can get away with is permissible—changes of wardrobe and personality, warp-speed conversions on matters of substance like campaign-finance reform, even the politicizing of breast cancer. (Bush later admitted that his ads accusing McCain of cutting funding for breast-cancer research were misleading.)

Al Gore and George W. Bush

As a result, it is likely that the next six months will be as depressing as the last six were exhilarating. The common belief in the political community is that the general election will be a latrine, and that is undoubtedly true: the predictable, heavily scripted jabs have already begun. In the first two interviews I saw Al Gore give after Super Tuesday, he used the phrase "risky tax scheme" no fewer than four times to describe George Bush's proposed tax cut; Bush will pulverize the phrase "no controlling legal authority" to similar effect. Even most efforts by the candidates to appear positive and substantive will, in truth, be tactical and negative: Gore's immediate challenge to Bush to drop soft-money contributions and thirty-second television ads and to debate twice a week was offered solely to put Bush on the defensive. (It worked against Bradley, so why not try it again?) It is possible, but not likely, that at times the campaign will drift into the appearance of a real debate—each man has distinct ideas about education, Social Security, and economic policy—but such debates will be crippled, as the health-insurance debate between Bradley and Gore was, by the candidates' unwillingness to spend as much time explaining their own ideas as they do attacking their opponent's plans.

George W. Bush will be at a distinct disadvantage in such a contest. Al Gore has proved himself brilliant at this game. Over the past few months, his aggression has been exceedingly artful: he distorted the substance of Bradley's proposals and picked away at the periphery of his legislative record, but never attacked the former Senator personally. Bush was more desperate, and less honorable, fending off McCain. He also betrayed, from time to time, stray wisps of humanity—embarrassment, dumb pride (that smirk), implicit remorse ("John, it's politics"), and even a certain willfulness in spending so much time talking about issues (remedial education, charitable social work) of limited interest to Republican audiences. One imagines that Bush, a genuinely congenial fellow, has been severely discomforted by the campaign that he has been forced to run. But there will be no room for such personal luxuries as discomfort or humanity in this election. Al Gore will not waste time in self-indulgence. He will not risk letting us get to know, or love, or even like him. He will attempt to demonstrate his fitness for office by proving George W. Bush's weakness, and Bush will do the same. It won't be anything personal, of course. Just politics.

—Joe Klein

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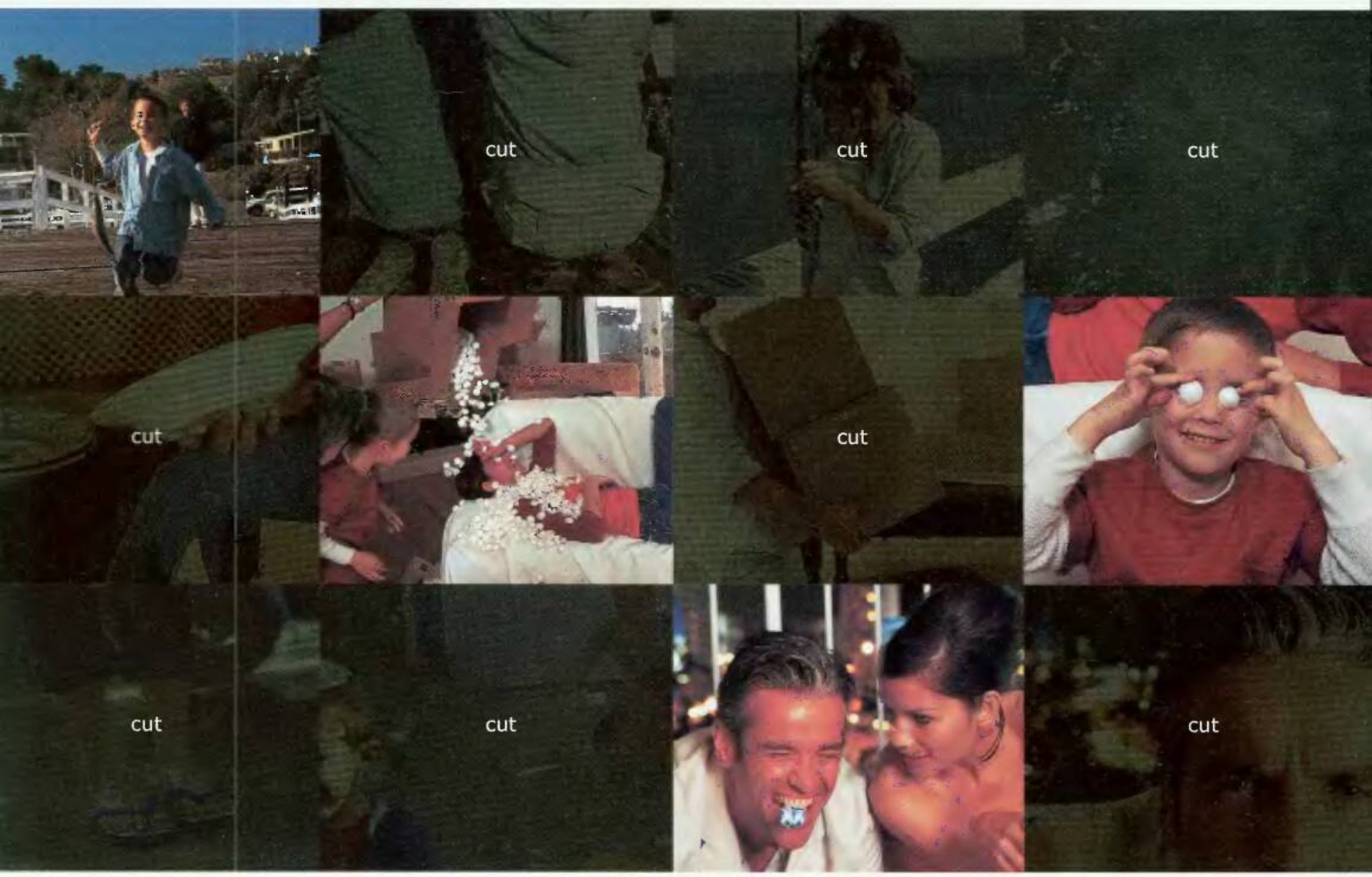

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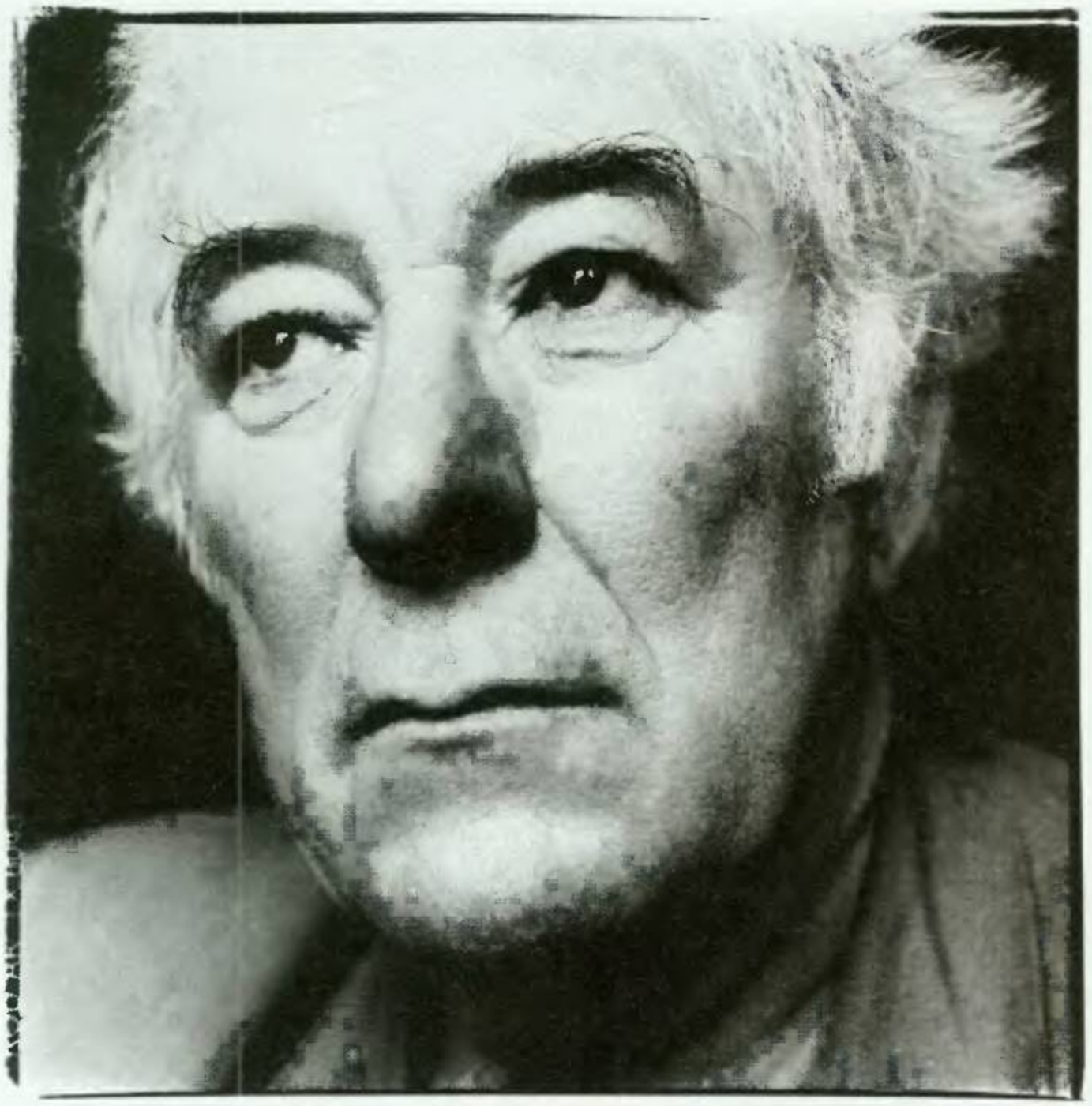
LIFE AND LETTERS

THE FAMOUS SEAMUS

The author recalls growing up with Ireland's Nobel laureate in Literature.

BY SEAMUS DEANE



Heaney didn't play football, and musically he was hopeless. Photograph by Steve Pyke.

Journalist to famous and tired-of-being-asked-it comedian: "Tell me, sir, what is the secret of—"

Comedian, impatiently: "Timing, timing."

That's one of Seamus Heaney's jokes. Once he had become famous, he told jokes, with a nice smirk of irony, about famous people being pestered. He began to be famous in 1966, after the publication of his first volume of poems, "Death of a Naturalist." I've now known the famous Seamus, "Seamus Heaney," longer than I knew him before the fame, when he was just Seamus Heaney or Seamus Justin Heaney, or Heaney, S.J., as his name appeared on examination lists at schools and universities that we attended together for eleven years. If you were named Seamus, you needed another initial, to distinguish you from the throng of Seamuses that emerged in Northern Ireland in the thirties and forties and have continued to emerge ever since. The name Seamus was the Irish version of James and a signal that the Northern Irish Catholic community was loyal to the Gaelic, and not to the British, account of things. I remember my distress on being told that Seamus was not a real Gaelic name at all. Legend had it that it derived from James, indeed, but from the English James: King James II, the one who, by losing to the Dutch King William of Orange, in 1690, insured the Protestant succession in England and a version of it in Ireland—whence all our woe. And, because that King James had been such a wimp, he was called Seamus *a'Chaca*, meaning Shitty Seamus. Not a noble lineage.

> Christ, it's near time that some small leak was sprung
>
> In the great dykes the Dutchman made
> To dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus.

That poem, "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," was published in 1975 in a volume called "North." The first poem in that volume, "Singing School," was dedicated to me and remembered the local Protestant militia, the B-Specials, a thuggish lot who patrolled the roads at night during and after the I.R.A. launched a campaign at the end of 1956. To be called Seamus then was a giveaway, and identified you as a Catholic, or a Fenian, or a Teague:

> "What's your name, driver?"
> "Seamus . . ."
> *Seamus*?

It was a name that always seemed to need a qualifier of some kind, even if only a raised eyebrow, until Heaney made it rhyme with "famous." Then the name Seamus was his in a special way. I became Seamus *eile*—Irish for "the other Seamus." A nice qualifier. Otherhood via brotherhood.

Seamus Heaney and I met at St. Columb's College, in 1950, when he was eleven years old and I was ten. St. Columb's College is a diocesan grammar school for boys in the city of Derry (as we called it), or Londonderry (as the official title had it). Derry is only a few miles from the border that separates Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland. It has a historical resonance for Protestants, because they endured a famous siege there in 1689 by the Catholic armies of King James II, and also for Catholics, because between 1922 and 1972 the city was notorious for discriminating against the local Catholic majority. The Protestants remained in power by openly gerrymandering the elections.

Although some of the teachers at St. Columb's were laymen, the president in those days was always a priest, and the school, like all Catholic schools in Northern Ireland, was controlled by the Catholic hierarchy and, specifically and beadily, by the local bishop, His Lordship Neil Farren, who was a small round

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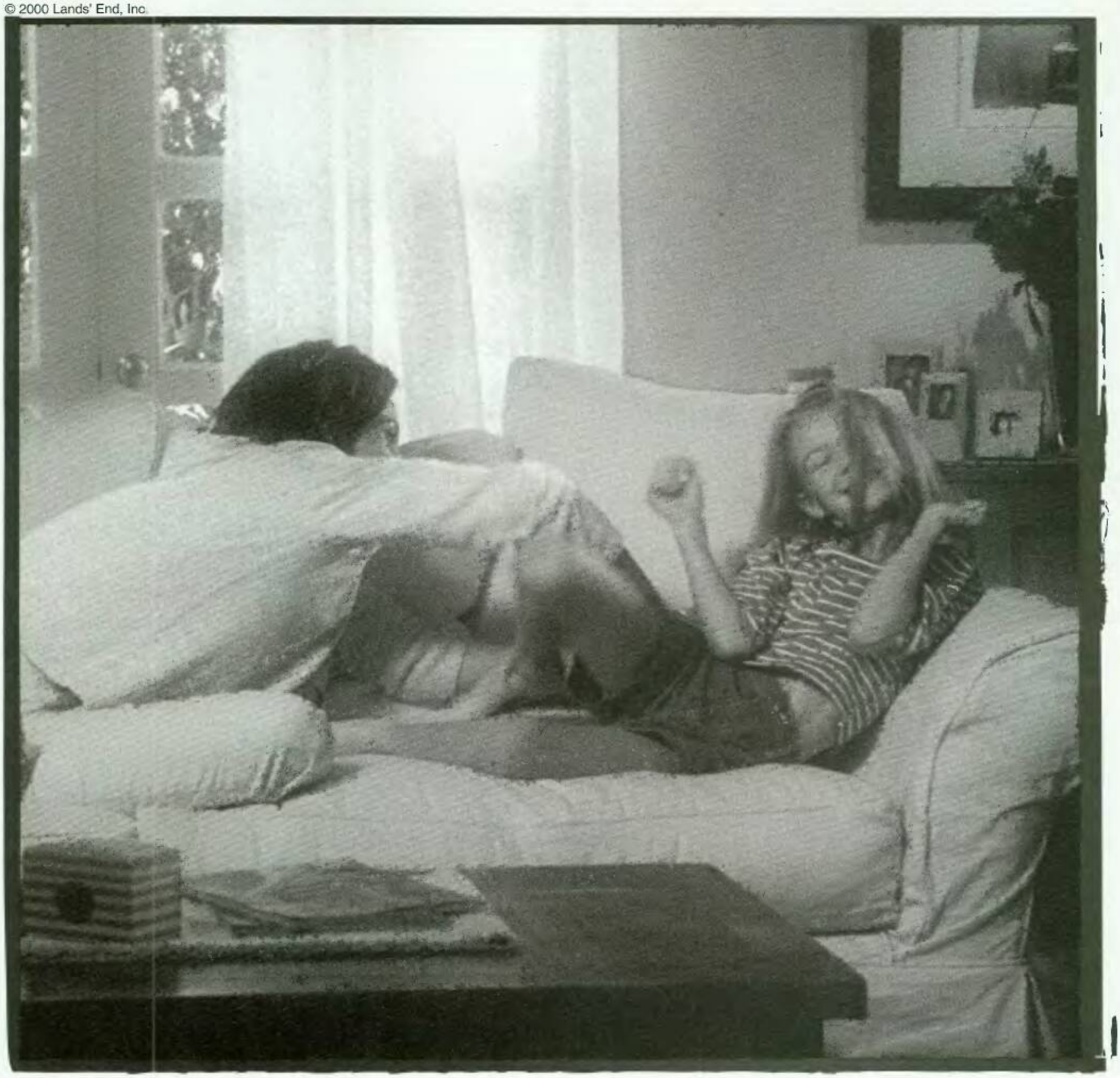

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man with a piping voice and an air of implacable authority.

The school was divided between boarders and day boys. I was a day boy; I came from the city. Boarders came from the city's hinterland—in County Derry and County Donegal. The countryside that the boarders came from seemed to the day boys strange, and indicated a wildness. Beyond the city, all civility ceased. Heaney was a boarder from Bellaghy, which was near Swatragh and Maghera and Magherafelt, on the far side of the mountain range. The names of those places, with all their "gh"s squatting on wide vowels, seemed designed for the boarders' accents. Boarders talked so slowly that sometimes you thought a sentence had been spoken when in fact only a place-name had been. The names seemed to be divided equally between liquid, or open-vowelled, and frozen, or consonantal, combinations. This, for instance, was how Heaney later described the local river, the Moyola:

> The tawny guttural water
> spells itself: Moyola
> is its own score and consort,
>
> bedding the locale
> in the utterance,
> reed music, an old chanter
>
> breathing its mists
> through vowels and history.

This was in contrast with another local name, Broagh:

> its low tattoo
> among the windy boortrees
> and rhubarb-blades
>
> ended almost
> suddenly, like that last
> *gh* the strangers found
> difficult to manage.

The fate of boarders seemed to us day boys a dismal one. They lodged in the college, ate the lousy food, and had to attend regular supervised homework sessions before and after dinner; their sole recreation seemed to be walking around the looped driveways that encircled the wide, sloping lawn in front of the college buildings. Years later, when I read Heaney on Wordsworth, I smiled at how he concentrated on Wordsworth's habit of composing "somehow aided by the automatic, monotonous turns and returns of the walk." This was Wordsworth as boarder, Heaneyfied into that forever ambling monotony that seemed to me typical of the boarders' existence when class was over.

Day boys escaped at 3:30 P.M., or later if we stayed to play soccer on the bumpy, grassless, stone-studded pitches that were officially used for Gaelic football. Gaelic football, a cross between soccer and rugby, was for the country boys, the boarders; day boys played soccer—although some teachers jeered at our lack of national spirit or at our sly evasiveness when we were faced with the uncompromising physical confrontation that Gaelic football involved.

Heaney didn't play football, either soccer or Gaelic, except when required. He would smile from the sidelines. He had boarder friends—Hugh Bredin (now a philosopher), Tom Mullarkey (now an architect), Desmond Kavanagh (now an orthodontist)—and they spoke a strange language among themselves, switching from jokes to bog Latin and on to composite phrasings that included French and Irish, English and Latin, and maybe some Greek. They had crystal sets in the dorms, on which they listened to—what? Radio Athlone, the national station of the Free State? The BBC? I imagined that they had a splintered, ethereal vision of the world beyond as it came hissing through those clever and pathetic sets. Whereas we, the day boys, went home and listened to the loud popular-music world of Radio Luxembourg on our regular valve radios.

That distinction between boarders and day boys became for Heaney and me a convention within which we described our differences. Each of us could caricature himself happily: Heaney slow, calm, solid, country-cunning; Deane quick, volatile, city-smart. Heaney had bulk; I was a wisp. Musically, he was hopeless: he liked comic ballads and knew all the words, and he did *céilí* dancing—a kind of traditional crossroads dancing—whereas I liked anything from Peggy Lee to the jazz of Django Reinhardt and Cannonball Adderley and the arias of Caruso, Björling, and Tagliavini. I knew the opera music from 78 r.p.m. records belonging to one of my father's brothers. Both Heaney and I were satisfied that such a shorthand was available to us. Each could be the other's Other, the other Seamus.

Once we almost starred together, in "The Merchant of Venice." But we got only as far as an audition on the school stage, where a pile of cushions formed the set. The class was watching. A love scene. Heaney was Lorenzo, I was Jessica. Shirt-sleeved, I lay back on the cushions and put my left hand behind my head, the elbow crooked. In my right hand I held a purple rose. Heaney's face, crowned

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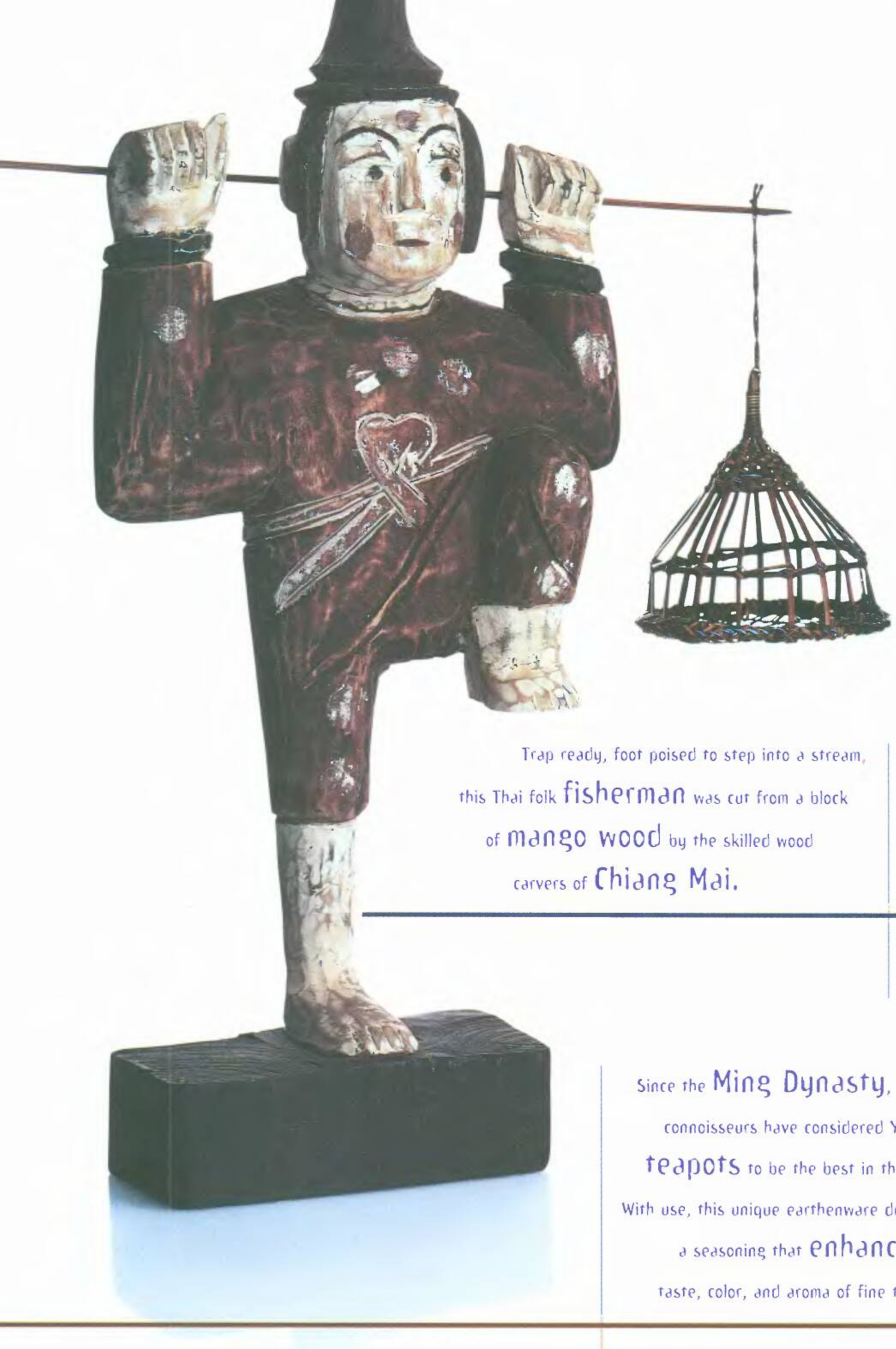

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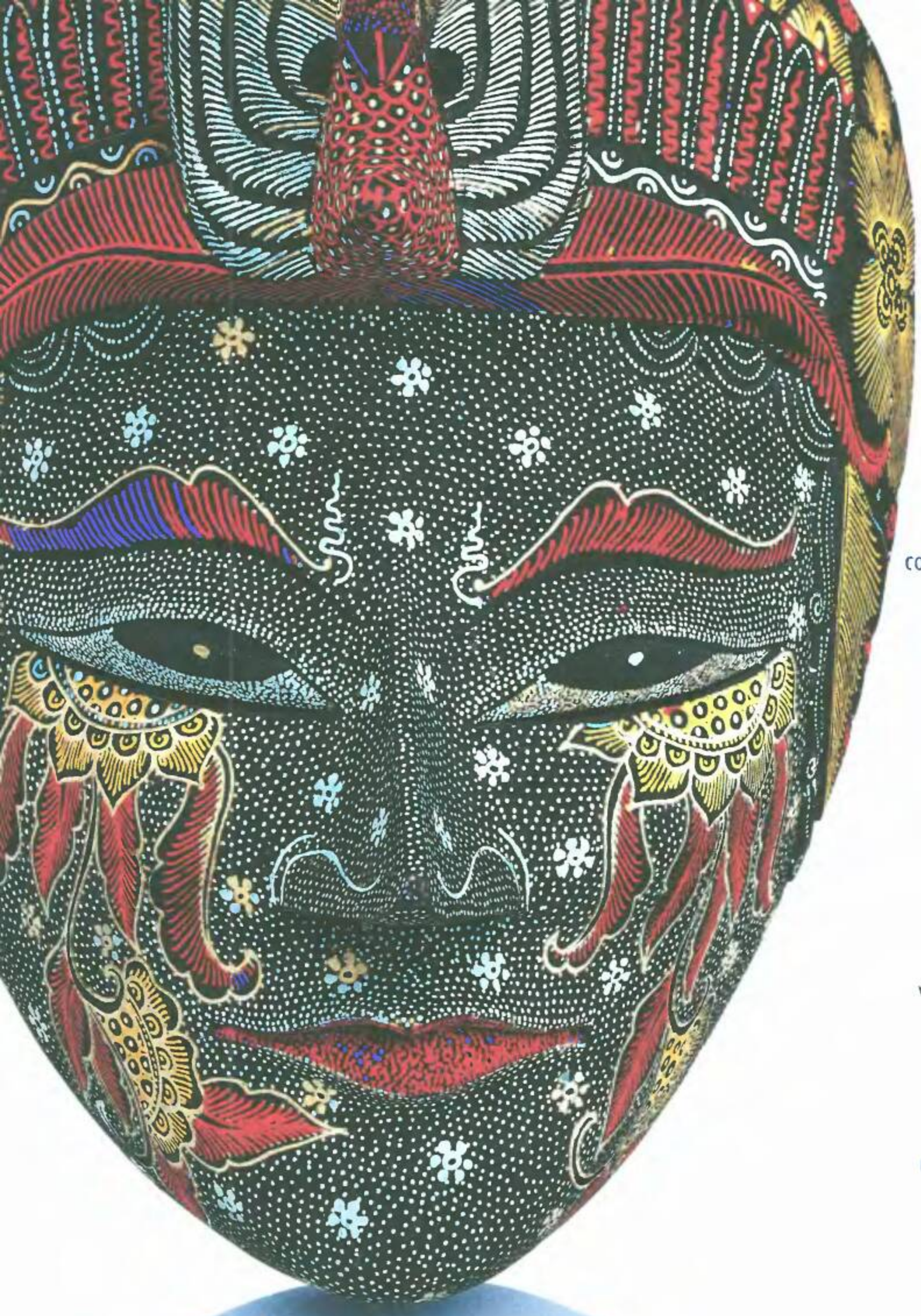

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by a tricornered hat with fraying gold stitching, leaned over me. He was controlling himself, just. I closed my eyes.

"Nearer," shouted a voice. "Get closer."

I could feel his breath on my cheek. He made a noise. Swallowing his spittle.

"Sit, Jess—"

His voice broke and he half fell on me. We were both helpless for a moment.

"Stop that at once. Start again. Both of you. Stop giggling like schoolgirls."

The voice came from below the stage. Rusty Gallagher, the teacher who always produced the Christmas play, was there, his neck twitching inside his tight, striped collar, as usual.

"Right, Jessica, recline. Re-cline!"

I reclined. I tried to imagine I was being kissed by a girl I knew. It almost worked for a moment. Then I felt and heard Heaney's voice again.

"Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven . . ."

He moved his hand, and his weight fell on my leg for a moment.

"Jesus, you gom."

We rolled about laughing. Rusty was really angry now, standing above us on the stage, his crinkled reddish hair showing little beads of sweat at the roots. We had been rehearsing all morning and he was past it.

"Get up, the two of you. You're out. Maybe you can make it as stagehands—that'd be the height of your powers. Heaney, I'm disappointed in you. I thought you had more sense. And a nice little Jessica you'd have been, too," he said, pulling my ear. "If only you could speak two consecutive words."

It was in our last two years in St. Columb's, 1956 and 1957, that we really began to know each other. We both won university scholarships but delayed taking them up, and stayed on for an extra, transitional year. In an English class we took together, there were only four of us—Michael Cassoni, Paddy Mullarkey, Heaney, and me. Cassoni and I were the day boys. Cassoni was socially smooth, fond of poker and girls. He wasn't really interested in school. Mullarkey was almost shyly pragmatic. For him, literature was a bit airy-fairy. That left Heaney and me and our teacher, Sean B. O'Kelly, who was a man of such sweetness and enthusiasm that even at sixteen or seventeen years of age we appreciated how fortunate we were to have him. He took

NIGHTS OF '57

It wasn't asphodel but mown grass
We practiced on each night after night prayers
When we lapped the college front lawn in bare feet,

Heel-bone and heart-thud, open-mouthed for summer.
The older I get, the quicker and the closer
I hear those laboring breaths and feel the coolth.

—*Seamus Heaney*

us through Chaucer's "General Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales," "Hamlet," "Paradise Lost," Wordsworth and Keats, Lamb and Hazlitt, Hardy, Hopkins, Shelley, Tennyson, and Arnold. Since our scholarships had already been won, all we needed to aim for was a State Exhibition, a sort of super-scholarship, which provided an additional financial boon. It was a perfect year. Heaney and I became fast friends.

I remember reading Hazlitt, and of his recognition that the memory of the sun coming through the window of the blue room where he first read Rousseau was forever afterward part of his understanding of Rousseau's work. It seemed so obviously true to us then, reading his essays in the red octavo edition we used, with its close-printed pages, Sean B. half leaning out the window into the incoming sunlight with a haze of motes dancing over his suit, Heaney crouched slightly over the book beside me, the town spread out below the hill where the school stood. We absorbed those texts deeply, drank them like hot tea and then felt the faint sweat of pleasure come out on our skin as they reacted within us. Even when we giggled at the occasional sentence ("Those are the Irishman's balls" was one: Hazlitt's description of Cavanagh, the fives player), or at an error in reading "Hamlet" aloud ("And in the cup an onion shall he throw"—"onion" instead of "union"), the glee then became part of the text thereafter. Heaney misremembered this in his poem "Granite Chip":

> Saying *An union in the cup I'll throw*
> I have hurt my hand, pressing it hard around
> this bit hammered off Joyce's Martello Tower.

In reading these authors, with their heavily impregnated allusions and references, we gazed as through a lattice at the mysterious world of writing, where people with names like Sir Thomas Browne, George Herbert, Beaumont and Fletcher, John Dryden, moved dimly among their titles and citations.

Now and then, a chill came off the page. In Hardy's "The Woodlanders," an early sequence of words rolled out like a premonition. To move from the Hintock plantation to the deserted highway, Hardy wrote, involved the "exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn." Sean B. O'Kelly read that out; I remember looking sidewise at Heaney and found that he was looking sidewise at me. The air between us was cold. Sean B. asked us if we liked it. We shook our heads. We didn't like it, but we were impressed by the force with which we didn't. So small and tight was our knowledge that we heard in Hardy's words echoes of our other authors: Keats's "forlorn" in his "Ode to a Nightingale," Wordsworth's large therapies of recovery in "Tintern Abbey"—a poem we knew by heart. I think it was the first time a literary work made me feel miserable and isolated, and I saw Heaney resisting the misery and isolation, then accepting them, then overriding them. I recognized then—also for the first time—why Heaney responded so fully, with such timbre, to Wordsworth. Like Wordsworth, Heaney was of the healing school of readers and writers.

Despite the fact that we were environed by examinations, I remember those last years at school as leisurely, literary, almost excessively privileged. It was not a matter of ignoring the outside world; that would have been difficult, even for adolescents. In 1957, an I.R.A. campaign had just begun, and the local police were more aggressively sectarian than ever before, especially at night; unemployment in our area was running at nearly fifty per cent; housing was appalling; discrimination, with a Sten gun behind it, was what we knew of British democracy—with one glorious exception. That was the introduction of the welfare state, the great socialist experiment of the postwar years in Britain, which guaranteed secondary schooling for every British subject up to the age of fifteen, provided unemployment insurance, and dispensed free medicine under the auspices of the National Health Service. The unionists who ran Northern Ireland opposed and delayed this legislation as long as they could, for it struck at their sectarian system of inequality. But it had to be implemented. When it came to the crunch, it was London, not Belfast, that ruled Northern Ireland. Quite appropriately, it was education that delivered the first serious injury to the unionists' blind bigotry: advancement was now to be achieved on the basis of merit, not on sectarian affiliation. As a consequence, school became vital to us. Learning had an extra dimension to it, an extra pleasure; it now carried a political implication, a sense of promise.

In the autumn of 1957, Heaney and I started university together—Queen's University, in Belfast. Even here, we were in the same English class. The outstanding teacher was Laurence Lerner, a poet and critic from South Africa, who appeared to recognize as familiar much in the Northern Irish political landscape. He opened a lecture on Shakespeare, in a downtown Presbyterian hall, with the remark that Shakespeare was very probably a Roman Catholic. This lost him half his audience straightaway. In a tutorial group, he asked his students if they really believed that they could distinguish between Catholics and Protestants by any feature other than their names or the schools they had attended. Usually, everybody said yes: Prods were better dressed (because they had jobs, because they were Prods), and had thin mouths, blue noses, pinched, disapproving faces with starched expressions; Teagues had dirty shoes, curly hair, and nervous eyes, and didn't wear suits. Lerner did not teach

us anything that was in itself new, but, being South African he reordered the local tyranny in our minds, by showing us how deeply introjected the sour hegemony of our sectarianism had become.

In retrospect, I think that his lessons were silently meant to teach us how to read literary texts in a living way—reminding us that our lives, too, were embroiled with these books. I remember the oddness of seeing Protestant working-class Belfast for the first time: I would cross its most notorious street, Sandy Row, and hear the Saturday-night evangelicals screaming and raving through loudspeakers about Popery and repentance, and pass by the clamorous shops, and smell the sweet aromas from the Erinmore tobacco factory, above the railway bridge, and then return to my rented room in a nearby Catholic neighborhood, to read Milton and Dickens—whose seventeenth- and nineteenth-century worlds were suddenly coexistent with my own. I knew the bitterness of Protestantism, and its philistine pride, but for the first time I began to sense its magnificence. Lerner brought the streets of Belfast and the poems and novels we read into contact with one another. It was a salutary lesson.

In our second year, Heaney and I lived in the same digs—in Mrs. Clifford's house, in Park Road. One of the other residents was also from our secondary school and was a boarder from Heaney's part of the country. He hated Heaney, though, and took every opportunity to rile him. Why? Heaney had been head prefect at school, a residual grouse. But it was surely because Heaney was Heaney: calm and sly, recognizably a south-county Derry boarder and recognizably something other, unforgivably foreign. One night, the animosity climaxed in a fight. Hearing the commotion, I opened the door to find the two of them rolling in a furious, wrestling embrace on the floor. It was comic, but it was also serious. It was an early instance of a peculiar kind of hostility that Heaney could provoke. Heaney was always "well in" with those in power—teachers, professors, and the like. At the same time, he was conspiratorially against them, holding them at arm's length by his humor, his gift for parody. To many people, this seemed merely to be an exercise in cunning, and it was. But it was also Heaney's way of dealing with his own contradictory sense of himself: his authority and his uncertainty. The balance between these is not delicate. The authority usually wins out, but it needs the self-doubt to keep it from hardening, to keep vulnerabilities open.

As undergraduates, we began to write poems and, especially in the long summer vacation, to exchange them. Then, in our second year, we started publishing our work in student magazines. At this stage, almost all Heaney's poems were pastiches, poems molded around the contours of poems by the writers he favored—Hopkins, Frost, and Dylan Thomas being the ones I recall most from then. Even in poetry, we seemed to keep the boarder and day-boy contrast alive. Heaney went in for sturdy, muscular "nature" types; I went in for the "metropolitans"—Wallace Stevens, Rim-

baud, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate. Also, I was drinking quite a lot and generally played the delinquent; Heaney did not drink, became an official of the university Catholic Students' Society, attended lectures, went to the library, wrote his essays.

I remember (with some embarrassment) an issue of the English Department student magazine, *Gorgon*, in which I published a long, shapeless poem, full of vacuous profundities, based on Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," and in which Heaney had a short, shapely poem entitled "Aran": it was as modest as mine was pretentious, as precise as mine was vague. Laurence Lerner asked me if I had noticed Heaney's poem. I had, but I wanted to hear what Lerner had to say about mine. Of course, *that* was what he had to say about mine, but I was too dumb to realize it then. Lerner did encourage me to write poetry, but I recall a letter from him in which he told me that these days a poet was still young at forty. That made me snort in derision. I told Heaney. He smiled and handed me a book of poems, "Domestic Interior," by Lerner. He had been reading Lerner's poems; I had been reading Lerner's letters. The contrast was typical. Heaney was serving an apprenticeship. I was just being an undergraduate. Lerner put it nicely. Heaney, he said, was trying to write poems, and I was trying to write poetry.

We graduated in 1961. I went back to Derry briefly, to teach in a secondary school there, and then went on to Cambridge University to do doctoral research on the European Enlightenment.

Heaney stayed in Belfast, teaching in a secondary school. In the next five years, Belfast, and Queen's University in particular, became the site of a new literary energy. An English poet, Philip Hobsbaum, arrived to start a series of workshops. Heaney, Michael Longley, and other Belfast poets participated in them. A Belfast festival was inaugurated; it published several pamphlets of poems by these two, their friend Derek Mahon, and others. Heaney wrote to me in Cambridge and inveigled a sequence of poems from me which, unfortunately, was also published in that series. An exchange of letters on these poems was the first intimation I had that there was a new sense of excitement in the literary world of Belfast. It was also the first solid indication to me that Heaney was turning to a career as a poet. We lost contact after that for about two years. The Northern Revival, effectively the literary predecessor of, and then companion to, the Northern Troubles, initially passed me by—and then I had a surprise visit from Heaney in Cambridge.

He had just been married, and he arrived with his wife, Marie, bearing a copy of his first book, "Death of a Naturalist," news of a prize that went with it, and, wonder of wonders, a bottle of whiskey. Heaney the teetotaller had gone. Heaney the poet had arrived.

Within a few months, I left Cambridge to teach in America, where I stayed for two years. I came back from Berkeley and its storms and riots in 1968, just in time for the civil-rights marches in Northern Ireland. By then, Heaney was a central figure in the Irish literary world, which had altered so much that I scarcely knew anyone in it. In the spring of 1969, he published his second volume, "Door Into the Dark"; in the next few years, with "Wintering Out" (1972) and, above all, with "North" (1975), he won widespread recognition both at home and abroad.

The early poems are like an acoustic autobiography. Heaney dwells on the names of places and people, their formal and official titles, their informal and demotic variants. Like any Irish countryman, Heaney has to lock a personal name into a place-name so that he can get a fix on the whole history and geography with which each is freighted. Names, titles, accents, nicknames, pronunciations are like a syrup in which a complex politics is suspended; they indicate class, sectarian divisions, family lineage, belongingness, even degrees of intelligence.

Throughout the first four volumes, he remained formally conservative. His poetry was concerned with retrieval, rediscovery, reënactment. But it was clear, too, that every disinterred memory, every recaptured sensation, came in a nimbus of radiant light and feeling that made it seem new. After these early volumes, he began to expand the territory he was exploring. With "North," he got out of Irish bogs and into Viking ones. All the Viking corpses and artifacts so beautifully Brailled onto the page were also relics of tribal revenge and violence. The poems are both repressing atrocity and acknowledging it. Their bearing upon the Northern Irish landscape was sadly vivid, vividly sad, for they mutate suddenly into an image of a living girl, tarred and feathered and tied to railings outside a church, to punish her for consorting with British soldiers:

> I who have stood dumb
> when your betraying sisters,
> cauled in tar,
> wept by the railings,
>
> who would connive
> in civilized outrage
> yet understood the exact
> and tribal, intimate revenge.

During those early years of the Troubles, Heaney was teaching in Queen's University, in the department where we had been students together. In Belfast, Heaney, increasingly well known as a voice from the nationalist community, received the occcasional threatening phone call, and was eventually singled out for attention by Ian Paisley's newspaper, the *Protestant Telegraph*. In 1972, he left his university position to live in County Wicklow, twenty-five miles south of Dublin, and to concentrate on his writing. I was married by then and was teaching at University College, Dublin. A couple of years later, while house hunting in Dublin, my wife, Marion, and I saw, and considered bidding for, a house that she said the Heaneys would love; the next day, they saw it and bought it. Now we were once again in the same city.

In those years, it was easy to meet often. Sometimes we talked in pubs, or in one another's houses; more often, it seemed, we talked while driving the winding road down to Wicklow through Shangannagh, Shankill, Newtownmountkennedy, under the hill of the Sugar Loaf above Kilmacanogue and the Glen of the Downs, into Ashford, then a right turn toward the Devil's Glen, below which his gate-lodge hideaway stood. It seemed to rain a lot, specifically on us. I now recall half a dozen conversations as a hypnotized

drone dominated by the metronomic dunk-dunk of the windscreen wipers clearing their half-moon snapshots of gleaming road and dripping trees.

One night in October, 1976, after I had given a talk at Heaney's invitation, at Carysfort Training College, in Blackrock, County Dublin, where he was teaching in the English Department, and had taken a lot of tea and buns, we agreed to go back to my house in our separate cars for a redemptive whiskey. I was driving ahead of him. A motorcyclist swerved in front of me, and, when I turned my car to avoid him, it began to ascend a lamppost, which blazed whitely through my window while one of the wheels erupted through the floor. I managed, somehow, to lift my legs away from being crushed just as the car gave up its attempt to travel vertically and slammed despondently to the ground. I tried to open the door, but it had jammed, and there was Heaney's face at the window, frantic, and Heaney dragging on the door handle, beating the glass. I finally emerged, to be met by one very upset poet. After the police had done their business, Heaney drove me home. I was totally unhurt. As we sat—Marion, Seamus, and I—in the living room, drinking strong tea and talking about the accident, he seemed to go into sudden shock, and began talking in the slow, drawly way of the boarder. "Och aye," "Man, dear," "Them's the boys," and other phrases from the rural dialect emerged, with much head shaking and rattling of the teacup. He came out of it soon enough to tell me that he had thought I was a goner, "you fucker, you." We agreed that driving and drinking tea were not a combination to be recommended or repeated. But it had been a close call. Such a boarder he was, and, when I saw his shock and distress again, such a friend. It almost made me shy to think of it.

Robert Lowell had become one of Heaney's better-known friends after they met in London, in the early seventies. In 1977, at Heaney's request, Lowell gave a reading in Kilkenny, about seventy-five miles southwest of Dublin. I wanted to attend, but I was delayed. By the time I got there, the dinner afterward was well under way and a massacre of literary Ireland appeared to have taken place. Various figures were lying about in chairs or slumped over tables as though they had been shot. In the midst of it all sat Lowell, drinking whiskey and milk alternately. He summoned me over to talk to him, since I seemed to be the only person still conscious. A long monologue ensued, in which Lowell wondered about poetry and power, the relative status in world history of Shakespeare, Virgil, and Dante, on the one hand, and of Napoleon, Stalin, and Hitler, on the other. He was talking very fast, his eyes darting like fish, and he grabbed my arm every so often and then apologized for having done so. "Should we take poetry—all of that—seriously at all? Tell me yes, give me reasons." But he wouldn't have listened if I had replied. Still, in his distress, he managed to look very senatorial and upright

amid that scene of magnificent debauch.

Heaney revered Lowell's patrician authority, his Daedalus-Icarus combination of the classical and the Romantic, repeatedly driving itself to the point of breakdown. I guess Heaney showed too much respect for people who took risks, because he disliked in himself a characteristic that he felt was a failure. He was, indeed, as cautious as a cat, and instinctively played safe, was nice to everyone, entertained (in every sense of the word) multitudes of people at his home, among whom the percentage of hangers-on must have been considerable. But, as usual, Heaney was also fomenting a little rebellion in his more recondite provinces of feeling. Heaney, the man who writes poems, can sometimes rail at Heaney the Poet, the public persona. The authority of reputation is not identical with the authority of the writer's voice; it may undermine it. What Heaney observed and admired in Lowell was his way of dealing with this conflict.

In the nineteen-eighties, Heaney became a more pronounced and profiled figure; he was appointed the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard and the Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Like Robert Lowell, he began to have the appearance not so much of someone who writes poetry as of someone who embodies an idea of poetry, the stamped-on-a-coin look of impersonal gravity. But the poetry itself, especially after the publication of "The Haw Lantern," in 1987, was becoming lighter, moving off the sucking, dragging ground and into the air. Milosz, Brodsky, and Walcott would eventually become his new mentors and friends, new exemplars for the complicated passages he was tracking from conditions of oppression to those of freedom, from dispute, clamor, and violence to serenity, ocularity, and wisdom, from the transformation of memory into the condition of reverie, a Yeatsian maneuver.

This process continued into "The Spirit Level," the winner of the 1996 Whitbread Book of the Year and the first volume of poetry he published after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1995. But it was his third Whitbread winner, his translation of the Old English poem "Beowulf" (1999), that reminded readers of the battle that lies at the heart of his work. The deadly combat between the dragon and Beowulf is not only a story of a fight with a monstrous and evil force. It is also an emblem of the struggle between civilization and its opposite. If freedom has the air as its natural habitat, violence clings to the ground. Yet, like the dragon, it can rise from its buried lair and infect the air: the "ground-burner" is also the "sky-roamer." Since his undergraduate days, Heaney has been fascinated by this poem. His translation is one further act of retrieval, taking an Old English poem into the ambit of Northern Ireland, where the ancient combat between monstrous violence and the search for peace is even now being refought at a political level.

In Heaney's work, peace needs a space that is not emptiness: it needs to be a rich space, brimming with light. In one of his essays, Heaney remembers a chestnut tree that was planted in front of his house the year he was born. Later, when his family moved, the tree was cut down. In his early forties, he "began to think of the space where the tree had been" and "to identify with that space." It is remarkable how fond Heaney becomes of empty spaces that only light can fill; how within them there remains in the memory the trace of a physical object that defines the emptiness. It is a parable of what happens in his poetry, how all the *quidditas*, *haeccittas*—the thinghood of things—is transmuted into an air that remains alive and actual. I remember meeting his parents at their home; his parents meeting mine at our graduation from university; the ready sympathy between them; then their deaths. The sense of the space that they vacated and created for both of us was like a resource, for which Heaney found the appropriately confident words:

> Do not waver
> Into language. Do not waver in it.

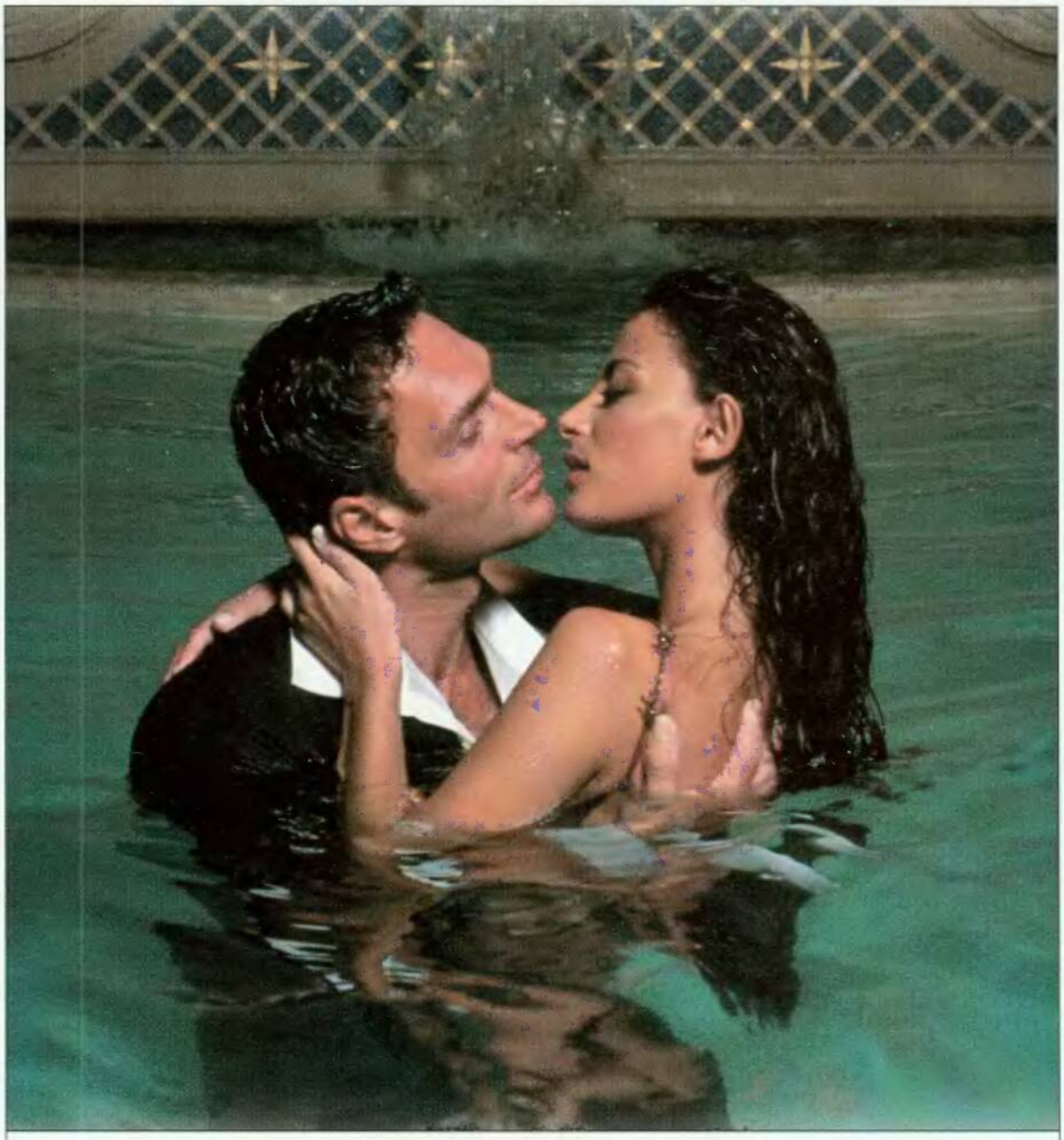
Stockholm, December, 1995. The tall, brooding houses, the candles and braziers that everywhere rebuked the early dark and the glittering cold; the sheen from Lake Mälaren beyond the windows of the Grand Hotel. There was a smile in the air that emanated from the Irish guests, including old friends of Heaney's, among them Ann Friel and David Hammond; from friends and publishers like Matthew Evans, Caroline Michel, Peter Fallon, Helen Vendler. Faber & Faber, someone suggested, should get a Nobel Prize for winning Nobel Prizes. In the glare of a prize like this, a sense of unreality emerges. That was readily heightened by the staggering bill for drinks that David Hammond, a singer and filmmaker from Belfast, received after he had sat in the bar for the first evening, on December 8, like a master of ceremonies, inviting all and sundry whom he knew, and many whom he did

THE AUGEAN STABLES

My favorite bas-relief: Athene showing
Heracles where to broach the riverbank
With a nod of her high helmet, her staff sunk
In the exact spot, the Alpheus flowing
Out of its course into the deep dung strata
Of King Augeas' reeking yard and stables.
Sweet dissolutions from the water tables,
Blocked doors and packed floors deluging like gutters . . .
And it was there in Olympia, down among green willows,
The lustral wash and run of river shallows,
That we heard of Sean Brown's murder in the grounds
Of Bellaghy G.A.A. Club. And imagined
Hosewater smashing hard back off the asphalt
In the car park where his athlete's blood ran cold.

—*Seamus Heaney*

Let's make a wish



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not, to join him. We pored over the bill together, converting kronur into pounds and then looking at each other in wild surmise. "Can't be," he said, and we did it again. But it was. He had spent the price of his air ticket twice over.

So, too, with the prize. "It can't be" was one reaction that ran in me. But it was so. After a false alarm, a couple of years earlier, when a rumor swept Dublin that he had won, here it was. Heaney, when I finally met him coming out of the elevator, was exhausted, burdened by a heavy cold. Burdened, too, by this immensity. At a reception later that evening in his suite, and at another the next day, at the Irish Embassy, he seemed to have become more dignified and at the same time more shy. The shyness reminded me of a pen name he had used when he first started to publish poems in the university magazine—"Incertus." Yet with this shyness there was a leonine air.

The next evening, as I watched him receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, sitting there on the stage of the concert hall, to the left of the King and Queen of Sweden, shifting the boxed medal in his hands, I began to feel a certain emptiness. That feeling was still there in the great banquet room of Stockholm's Town Hall, when he spoke to more than a thousand guests seated at tables and announced that he found it hard to believe but knew it was true that he had won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The celebrations were a mixture of solemnity and exuberance. In the middle of the meal, the musical accompaniments that had been supplied by various choirs and musicians in a gallery above gave way to a moment straight out of the Eurovision song contest. A group of men and women, in Nordic folk outfits, began to descend the stairs, singing; halfway down, their leader suddenly leaped on the wide balustrade, straddled it, and began to slide down it backward, yodelling over his shoulder. That capped the sense of unreality.

What was the emptiness? I felt that I was witnessing two things: the real celebration, the real prize, the real achievement, and a simulacrum of that. The difference between them was like the difference between the moment of winning the prize and the moment of having won it. I remembered that I had once addressed a letter to Heaney with

Fodor's

TASTE OF BRITAIN

Everyone knows that London is one of the most vibrant cities on the planet. But travellers should take note that the Cool Britannia revolution has spread well beyond London. This summer all of Great Britain will be hopping with events, festivals, and exhibitions. Some are traditional, others brand-new, but all are worthy excuses to spend quality time across the pond. Fodor's choices of unique hotels and restaurants will make your visit to Great Britain ever more pleasurable.

SCOTLAND'S TARTAN FLING

An ancient village with long links to Scottish royalty, Braemar is home to the mother of all Highland games, the **Braemar Gathering** (013397/55377; September 2). This year the festivities will feature the finest pipe bands and Highland dancers, as well as burly athletes competing in "tossing the caber," "putting the stone," and other uniquely Highland events.

© Catherine Karnow

Nikes, kilts, and cabers: Scots compete at Highland gatherings.

Scotland's version of an alpine village, Braemar also boasts **Invercauld Arms** (013397/41605). With its magnificent views overlooking Braemar Castle and the Grampian Mountains, this handsome, stone-built Victorian hotel is in the heart of Braemar. Beautifully restored public rooms lead to comfortable guest rooms with floral drapes and reproduction antiques. The restaurant serves international cuisine with Scottish overtones, not least in the use of local fish, game, lamb, and beef.

While in Scotland, plan a visit to the **Edinburgh International Festival** (0131/473-2001; August 13–September 2). This flagship of arts events has for more than half a century attracted performers from classical to experimental music, dance, and theatre.

The sheer élan and Edwardian splendor of **The Balmoral Hotel** (0131/556-2414) makes staying at this former grand railroad hotel a very special introduction to Edinburgh. Sunday brunch is a particular joy at the **Indigo Yard**, one of Edinburgh's hippest venues, with a good menu and an even better interior.

BRIGHTON'S BRIGHT LIGHTS

With its rich cultural mix—Regency architecture, long pleasure pier, pavement cafés, lively arts, and, of course, the exotic Royal Pavilion—Brighton is a sparkling, eccentric, and cosmopolitan city by the sea. **The Brighton International Festival** (01273/709709; May 6–28) is one of England's biggest arts festivals. More than six hundred events will cover drama, music, dance, visual arts, and literature.

If you're looking for extra special accommodations, check out **Horsted Place** (01825/750581) in Lewes, just eight miles northeast of Brighton. Popular with the Royal Family, it is beautifully furnished and has such remarkable features as a Gothic library with a secret door that leads to a hidden courtyard. The dining room offers superb haute cuisine—try the roasted guinea fowl.

AT HENLEY, LIFE IS BUT A DREAM

Mention Henley to Britons, and even those who have scarcely manned a skiff will conjure up idyllic scenes of summer rowing. Indeed, the **Henley Royal Regatta** (01491/572153; June 30–July 4), held on a long stretch of the River Thames, has made the charming riverside hamlet famous throughout the world. This year, Henley's riverbanks will become one gigantic, opulent lawn party as five hundred thousand visitors, including members of the Royal Family, descend en masse for the regatta.

Right in the middle of things is the **Red Lion** (01491/572161), a wisteria-clad, sixteenth-century hotel that overlooks the river and town bridge. Guests have included King Charles I and Dr. Samuel Johnson. An oak-beamed restaurant has recently been installed, with a menu offering everything from a cappuccino to a three-course meal.

Four miles northwest of Henley lies **Stonor Arms** one of the showpiece restaurants of the Thames region. Dating from the eighteenth century, the inn's main lure is its formal dining salon. The food is as good to eat as it is to look at—local game, duck confit, lamb shanks with leek polenta—and there's a comprehensive wine list.

© Catherine Karnow

Pimm's and strawberries and cream are de rigueur at rowing's most elegant Henley regatta.

FOODIES QUEUE UP

Yorkshire makes an indelible impression: Poets have immortalized its ruined

This supplement has been adapted from Fodor's Travel Publications.

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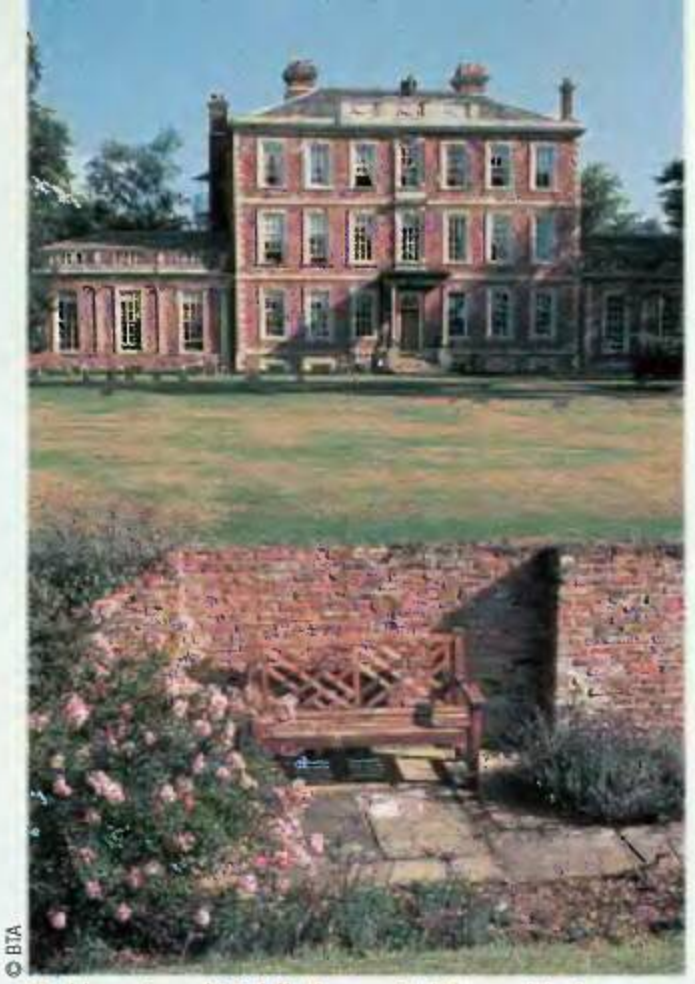

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York's restored Middlethorpe Hall has added a new health spa.

special advertising section

city of York is hosting a mouthwatering exhibition called **"Eat, Drink and Be Merry"** at the historic Fairfax House (01904/655543). The exhibit covers a range of gastronomic history—from Jacobean Banquets to the Victorian table of Mrs. Beeton's Breakfast to the monasteries; its hamlets are almost too pretty to be real; and the wild and heather-covered hills are as haunting as any "Wuthering Heights" reader could hope for. Though travellers need no excuse to visit this vast and brilliant landscape, this spring there is an added inducement. Through June 4th, the

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Chic enclave at the Met Bar in Park Lane.

SAVOR SCOTLAND

Salmon plucked from the world's freshest waters . . . succulent lamb cooked as you like it . . . single-malt and exquisitely blended Scotch whiskies: When planning your visit to Scotland, allow ample time to attend a food festival. It's one of the best ways to sample the indigenous cuisine and meet the locals.

Come spring and summer, regional foods are highlighted via competitions, cooking demonstrations, and exhibitions. Traditional dishes are presented for visitors' delectation: *Arbroath smokie* (wood-smoked haddock); *Forfar bridies* (meat pies); *neeps and tatties* (mashed turnips and potatoes); black bun (a rich, dark-colored fruitcake); and haggis (the country's best-known spicy delicacy) are among them. Often music is part of the fun at a food festival, with a *ceilidh* (traditional Scottish dance) held on at least one night.

Upcoming gatherings include the **Perthshire Food Festival** (April 22–30) at various venues in Perthshire County and Perth; the **Arbroath Sea Festival** (August 12–13) on the North Sea coast between Dundee and Aberdeen; and the **Highland Food Festival** (June 2–10) and **Skye & Lochalsh Food Festival** (September 22–30), both in the Highlands located in northwestern Scotland.

© Catherine Karnow

Connoisseurs of fine spirits will also find themselves in a festive mood. **The Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival** (April 28–May 8) celebrates Scotland's whisky-making heritage at several locations along the River Spey. Enthusiasts can partake of tours and tastings at distilleries rarely open to the public, and meet master blenders and distillery managers who share their passion.

TRAVELLER'S NEWS IN BRIEF

The singing voice in all of its myriad forms will be roundly celebrated when **The BOC Covent Garden Festival** (May 13–June 3) observes its tenth anniversary carnival of opera, musical theatre, concerts, and cabaret . . . Epicurean alert: **Food of Love** (0208/333-1169) now provides behind-the-scenes sampling tours to London's most exclusive chocolatiers (dark, light, truffles, and more) and cheese emporia (mouthwatering stilton, camembert, and brie) . . . For Britain's best billeting, **As You Like It** offers self-catered vacation accommodations—fabulous flats, charming cottages, magnificent manor houses, and country castles—in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales . . . To promote travel and tourism to all of Great Britain, **The British Tourist Authority** (BTA) has tourist information centers in both New York (551 Fifth Avenue) and Chicago (625 North Michigan Avenue) . . . Currently under construction, the **Seven Seas Mariner** is scheduled to debut on her maiden voyage in March, 2001. She will luxuriously accommodate 708 guests and will be the first all-balcony, all-suite vessel in the Radisson Seven Seas Cruises' fleet . . . Travellers who would avoid driving on the "wrong" side of the road can let **Rail Europe's BritRail Pass** smoothly transport them to the far corners of Britain (or to the heart of London, for that matter). Forty per cent discounts on the Eurostar to Paris are available through April 15th. Visit www.raileurope.com for travel times between British and European cities . . . A virtual map of England, Scotland, and Wales can be found at **Tayside & Thames'** new Web site (taysideandthames.com). Click on your intended destination to view one of T&T's seventeen country-house hotels . . . Bent on increasing worldwide demand for luxury British products and services, forty prestigious British firms—including the BTA, Jaguar Cars, Asprey & Garrard, and the Royal Shakespeare Company—have formed a marketing consortium, **The Walpole Committee** (212-370-7180), to foster the growing international perception of Britain as a vibrant and dynamic cultural and commercial nation.

CULTURE AT SEA

Not only have Cunard Line's Queen Elizabeth 2 and Caronia been given a twenty-three million dollar face-lift for the year 2000, but both luxury liners are also introducing a series of thematic cruises.

The QE2 has cruises designed to acquaint passengers with British culture, offering themes such as Gardens of Great Britain, Arts and Culture of Great Britain, and British Comedy and British Theatre, as well as its ever-popular Floating Jazz Festival and Big Bands at Sea. Caronia (formerly the Vistafjord), which has been refurbished to exude a decidedly British sensibility, is featuring cruise topics equally diverse and diverting. They include Food and Wine from Around the World, the Future of African Wildlife, Eco Issues of the New Century, and Taste of the Bayou. Now offering longer cruises worldwide, Caronia has adopted the traditional Cunard red and near-black livery, and its grand ballroom has been completely redecorated. A new "veddy English" pub called the White Star Bar has been added, and there is also a new lounge with an equally British sounding name, the Piccadilly Club.

For further information, call **800-5-CUNARD** or visit **www.cunard.com.**

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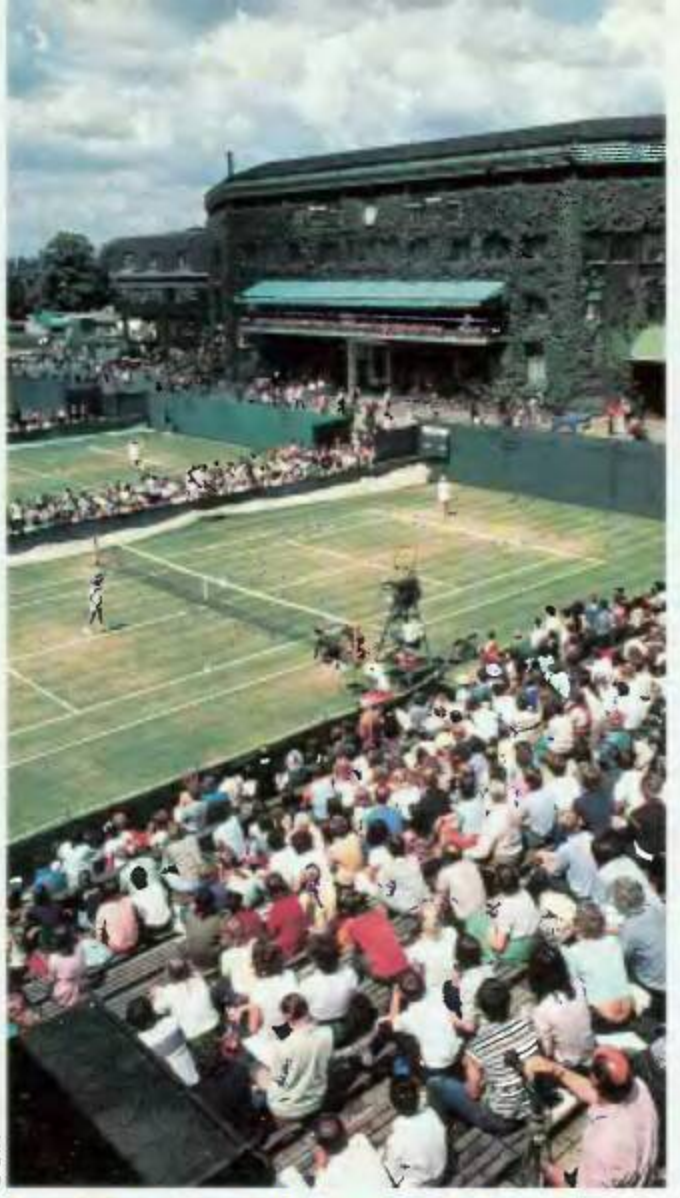

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Grand Slam action at Wimbledon side courts.

("FOODIES QUEUE UP" continued)

millennium place setting that features ergonomic, new-wave flatware.

With so many choices of excellent lodging in York, it can be hard to make a decision. One of the most spectacular options is **Middlethorpe Hall** (01904/641241), an eighteenth-century mansion ten minutes from York's city center. The uniquely decorated rooms are filled with antiques, paintings, and fresh flowers; the extensive grounds feature a lake and a seventeenth-century dovecote; and the vast garden grows fresh vegetables for the hotel's modern British restaurant.

ALL-ENGLAND LAWN PARTY

From its rich history and festive atmosphere to the distinctive courts themselves, there's nothing quite like the **Wimbledon** fortnightly (0181/946-2244; June 26–July 9). It's pro tennis's only Grand Slam tournament still played on grass. This summer Pete Sampras and Lindsay Davenport will vie once again for the championship of the much-heralded event.

Whether you're looking for the pampering of a grande dame hotel or the latest hip hostelry as a home base for the games, London will not disappoint. One of the more stylish hotels to arrive on the scene is the **Metropolitan** (0207/447-1000). This latest Park Lane grand hotel is the preferred address for fashion folk, music moguls, and Hollywood starlets. The lobby is sleek and postmodern and all of the rooms have minimalist beige-and-white décor. The Met's restaurant, leased by Nobu Matsuhisa of Nobu in New York City, is among the swankiest in town. **The Met Bar** is the hangout of choice for the chic London set.

THE SAVAGE SPLENDOR OF NORTH WALES

Set against the fierce beauty of North Wales, Llangollen is the birthplace of the **International Musical Eisteddfod** (01978/860236; July 3–9). The eisteddfod tradition goes back to the twelfth century. Originally a gathering of bards, the eisteddfod of today is more like a competition or festival. Choirs and dancers from all corners of the globe come together for an unusual and colorful arts festival.

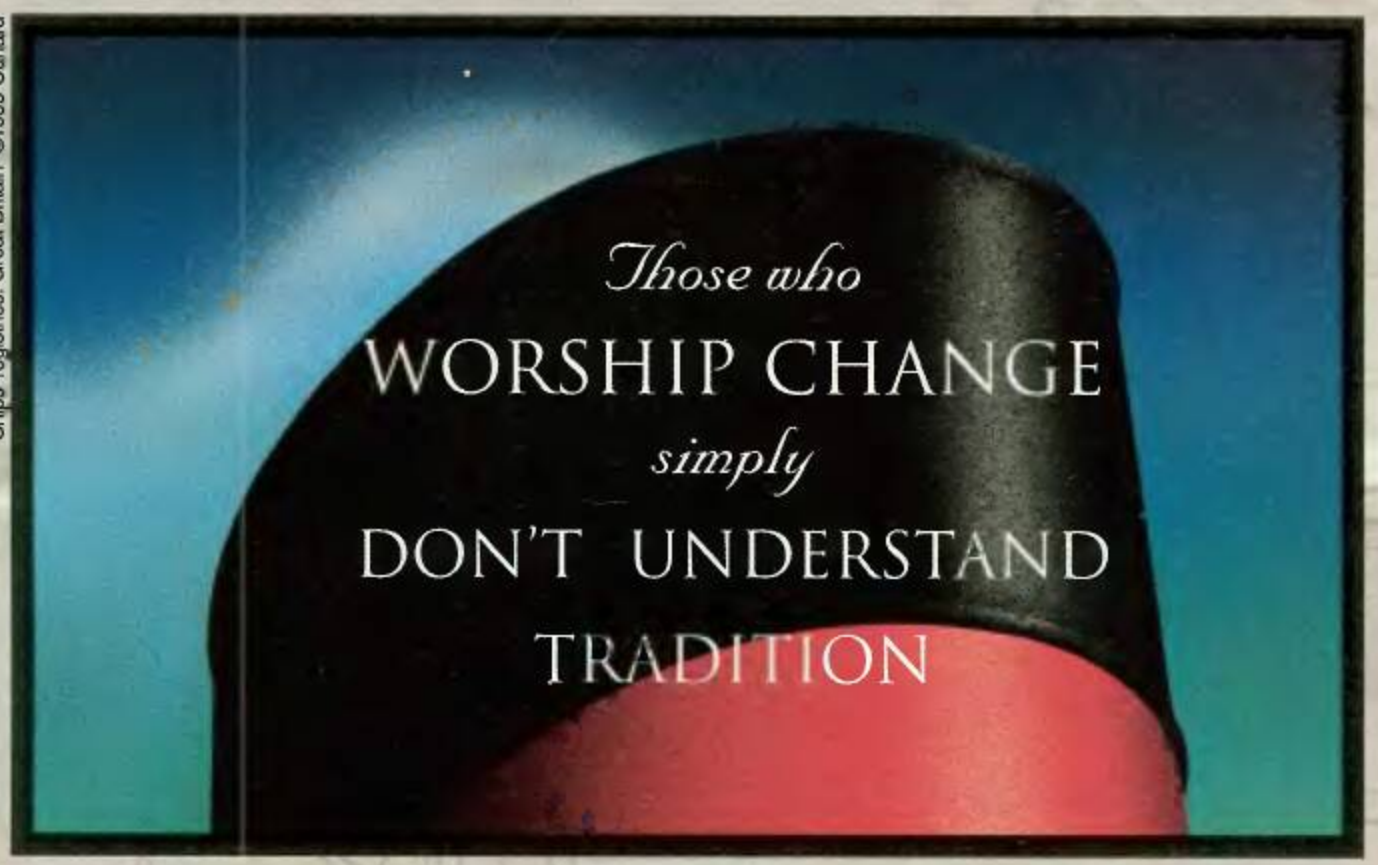
Fron Deg (01978/860126) is your best bet for a place to stay in town. This immaculate mid-nineteenth-century guest house,

© BTA/ETB

Summertime eisteddfod celebrates Welsh culture.

set beside the Llangollen Canal, has elegant rooms furnished with antiques and paintings.

Eighteen miles southwest of Llangollen, the country mansion **Lake Vyrnwy Hotel** (01691/870692) provides the ultimate sporting holiday: guests can fish, birdwatch, play tennis, bike, sail, or take long walks around the estate. The award-winning cuisine makes good use of local trout, pheasant, and duck.



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3. Contestants may submit one (1) entry per household. All submitted entries become the property of *The New Yorker*, and will not be acknowledged or returned.
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5. One grand-prize winner will be selected at random on or about June 19, 2000 from all entries received. All entries must be received by 11:59 p.m., PST, June 12, 2000. All decisions of the judges are final. One Prize will be awarded. The prize winner will receive a written notification on or about June 26, 2000. Prize is a trip for two to London, including three nights/four days accommodations at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel (double occupancy), coach round-trip air transportation provided by British Airways from the major airport nearest winner's home in the U.S., and a Hertz Rent-a-Car (economy size) for three days. Meals, additional transportation, and other expenses are not included. Approximate retail value of prize package is $3,000 depending on point of origin and date of trip. All other expenses are the winner's responsibility. The trip must be completed by May 31, 2001; scheduling is subject to availability and blackout dates. Income and other taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winner.
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7. The odds of winning depend on the number of entries received. Prize is not transferable. No substitutions for prize except by sponsor in case of unavailability in which case a prize of equal or greater value will be substituted.
8. Employees of *The New Yorker* magazine and their families are not eligible to enter.
9. Acceptance of prize constitutes consent to use winner's name and likeness for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes without further compensation, except where prohibited. The winner may be required to sign an Affidavit of Eligibility, and winner and travel companion may be required to execute a Liability/Publicity release, which must be returned within thirty (30) days from the date of notification of winning or an alternate winner may be chosen.
10. For name of winner send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Fodor's Taste of Britain" Great Getaways Sweepstakes Winner, The New Yorker Marketing Department, 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036 after June 19, 2000.

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his name in quotation marks on the envelope—"Seamus Heaney." He liked that. But Heaney was aware, too, of the chemistry that alters a writer who has gained fame and transforms him from what he is to what his reputation is. I felt as though I were seeing him recede into an abstraction, another one of the Irish Nobel winners, up there with Shaw and Yeats and Beckett, an object of national pride, a writer reified into a prize. Yes, that was the emptiness.

Would we ever be as we had been? Would his fame now leave me, and others, feeling that we, I, had nothing left to say except that we had remained ordinary, whereas he had become extraordinary? It was a powerful, spurious emotion. I recalled a phrase he had used in an essay about dramatizing the strains between "collective historical experience" and "the emerging self." He hoped that he could do so "by meeting shades from my own dream-life who had also been inhabitants of the actual Irish world."

And I could already hear the jealous murmurings that were to come, especially in Ireland: "He got it too early. That's him finished now." On that evening in Stockholm, no one could have predicted that, over the next four years, with "The Spirit Level" and "Beowulf," Heaney would intensify the earlier conflict in his work between a serene freedom and a haunting violence. Reading his version of "Beowulf" now, I find it strange that the Swedes of old should return again in the aftermath of Beowulf's death:

> Nor do I expect peace or pact-keeping
> of any sort from the Swedes.

Today, these lines rise menacingly and ironically above my memory of the Swedish King and Queen as they rose at the end of the celebrations, and we with them, to lead the Nobel laureates out of the hall.

As I watched Heaney move with the others at a steady pace, I thought, Here it is, December, 1995, and, whatever is said hereafter, the moment has not only chosen Heaney but Heaney has also chosen the moment. I imagined shouting across the tables and above the applause, "Tell me, Seamus, what is the secret of—" And him turning, smiling, without breaking stride, and answering, "Timing, timing." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

IF NOT NOT ELECTED...

BY BEN GREENMAN

Fresh from a round of victories in last week's Super Tuesday primaries, the Presidential campaign of George W. Bush has begun to gear up for the general election with a series of new television advertisements that both fend off the accusations of negative campaigning levelled by Senator John McCain and, for the first time, make use of the Texas Governor's persistent difficulty with the English language. Dubbed "double-negative ads," the new spots show Bush in front of a stark white background, delivering an impassioned plea to voters:

"Throughout this long and lengthy process, I have been criticized by others who are also part of this long and lengthy process for running negative campaign ads. But my critics should not not criticize themselves, for many of them have been nothing if not negative themselves.

"Let me clarify. Some other candidates, both those who are not in my party and those who are not not in my party, have called for an end to all negative campaign ads. They have said that these ads are not respectable. But, with all due respect, these candidates have not respected their own disrespect. In South Carolina, for example, Senator McCain did not decide not to run a television ad that accused me of stretching the truth like President Clinton. Now, he will tell you that this ad did not run in places that were not in South Carolina. This is true, but it is only part of the story. The rest of the story is that it did run in places that were in South Carolina. As anyone who is not the least bit unfamiliar with my record can tell you, I do not stretch the truth—or tell lies, for that matter. What would I stretch them around? It should not be overlooked, also, that the other candidates, whether Republican or not Republican, are not entirely innocent of these false charges either. I am not saying that the Vice-President is guilty, but I am saying that if he were to be accused of stretching the truth in a court of law, he would have to plead not not guilty, if he were honest about his record. But if he were honest about his record, he would not be the kind of man who would be accused of dishonesty in a court of law, would he not?

"As the dark tunnel of this campaign becomes something that is not a

BARRY BLITT

tunnel, let us review what did not go unremarked upon in these recent primaries. My victory did not happen because those Americans who were not at the core of the Republican Party did not vote for me. It was more a result of the fact that those Americans who were not outside of that core did not vote for other candidates. This does not suggest that other candidates are not anything but unpopular with the people who are not part of the Party's core, does it? Mr. Gore claims to have won his Party's support, and it is true that he did not lose. But I would remind the Vice-President that not losing is not necessarily winning. And losing is not necessarily not losing.

"Supporters of the Vice-President, as well as those who are not unsupportive of him, have said that my campaign tactics, as they like to call my campaign tactics, will not play in the general election. Well, to those critics I say that so long as these advertisements do not practice a kind of untruth they will not not play in the general election. Why, you may ask? I ask you, Why not? The power of the truth is not weaker than the power of what is not true.

"I cannot undo the negative ads I have run. And I cannot undo those I have not run. So as I prepare my preparations for the next step of this process, what would my critics have me do? I am not certain that they would not have me do nothing. But I will not do nothing. I will do something, and lots of it. Some of the something that I will do will be simple: to remain not undedicated to making sure that this nation is not unsuccessful. But some will be difficult. And, as my critics no doubt know, it is not easy to be President if you are uneasy with what is difficult. This is easy enough to understand: what is not as easy to understand is why one man who is not afraid to do what is not easy would do what is easy, and spread untruths about a second man who is also not afraid to do what is not easy.

"In conclusion, I would just like to conclude by saying that I trust American voters not to be unaware of what they should be aware of, and that I think that their awareness of their own awareness is what will insure that I am not the candidate who is unelected come election time. Thank you." ♦

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THE LAST FLOOR SHOW

What will become of the New York Stock Exchange?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

There are a lot of people on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange who, it seems, want to talk about death. Brokers routinely have days in which they are "butchered" or "killed" or "annihilated," but dying on the floor is not regarded as an entirely metaphorical prospect. Chest pains, I was told, are common, and I spent a day standing beside one morbid clerk who seemed to view his colleagues as so many funerals waiting to happen. "See that guy?" he whispered to me at one point. "He has a pacemaker. He's a young guy." Eventually, I asked the chairman of the exchange, Richard A. Grasso, what to make of all this talk, and he assured me, only half jokingly, that the exchange had trained medical staff on duty at all times.

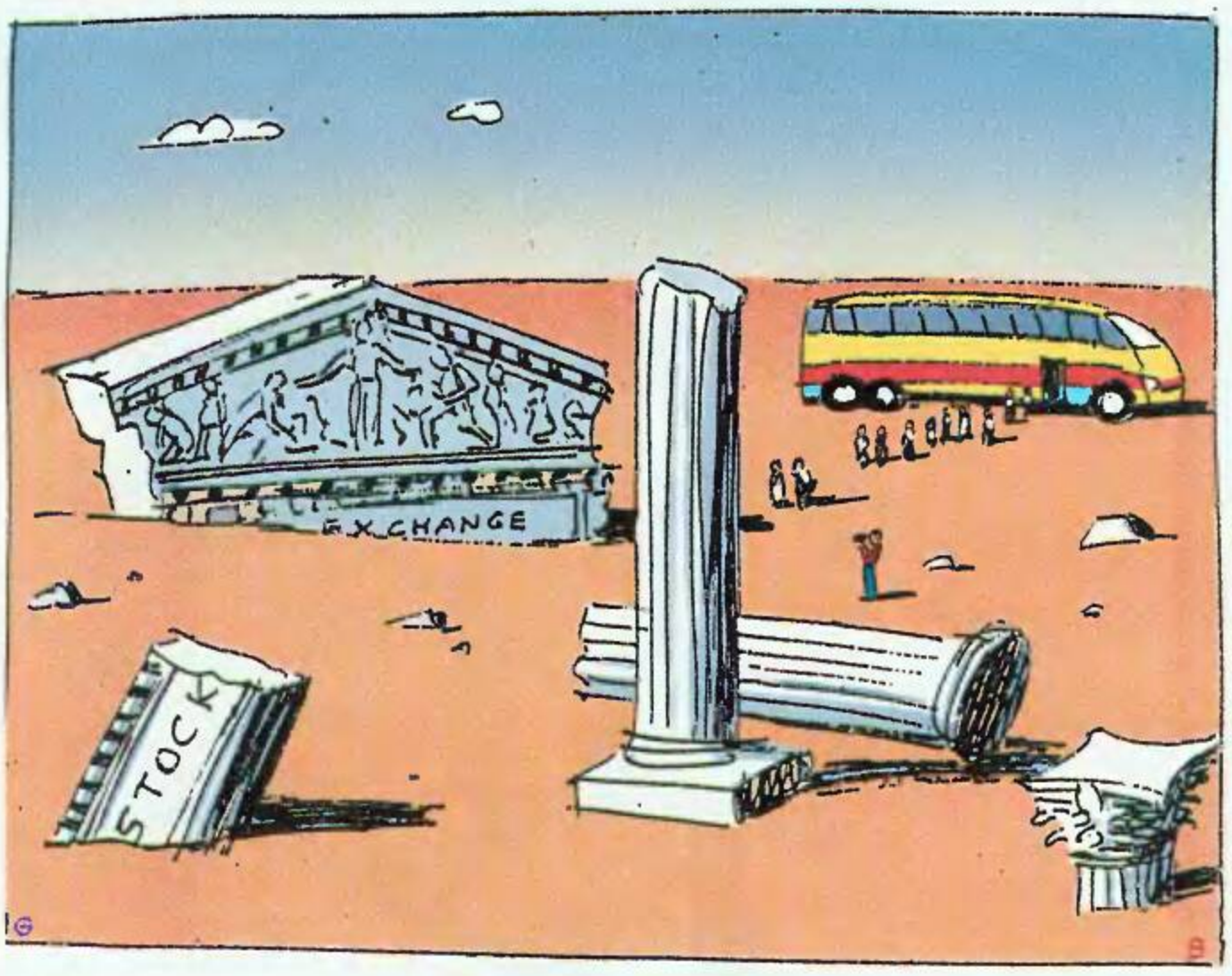
Currently, there are three thousand and twenty-five companies listed on the Big Board, with a combined market capitalization of more than sixteen trillion dollars. The bull market has pushed volumes up to the point where now, on a completely ordinary day, some billion shares will change hands, and on a day when something out of the ordinary happens, as occurred last week, when the Dow dropped by nearly four hundred points, it is no longer surprising for a billion two hundred million shares to be traded. The floor of the New York exchange is thus far and away the busiest in the world, a distinction that would be more meaningful were it not also one of the last.

Just about everywhere but in New York, stock trading has become an electronic enterprise, transacted via computer rather than face to face. Over the last few years, the London, Paris, and Frankfurt exchanges have all abandoned their trading floors, and even though tourists routinely show up at the N.Y.S.E.'s glassed-in viewing gallery asking for directions to its rival, the NASDAQ, that exchange does not, of course, exist in a physical sense, and never has. Meanwhile, the new trading systems that are being unveiled practically every month all employ the latest Internet technology in lieu of human contact.

That the N.Y.S.E. could have found itself in this anachronistic position—it is, even now, planning to build itself a bigger trading floor across the street—is an embarrassing, if familiar, irony. A business so successfully squeezes out its rivals that eventually it comes to see itself as immune to the normal pressures of competition. It uses its considerable political sway to protect its near-monopoly franchise, only to discover—too late—that at the very moment of its greatest preëminence it has become obsolete. Told in this way, the exchange's story is almost too hackneyed to be useful as a business-school case study.

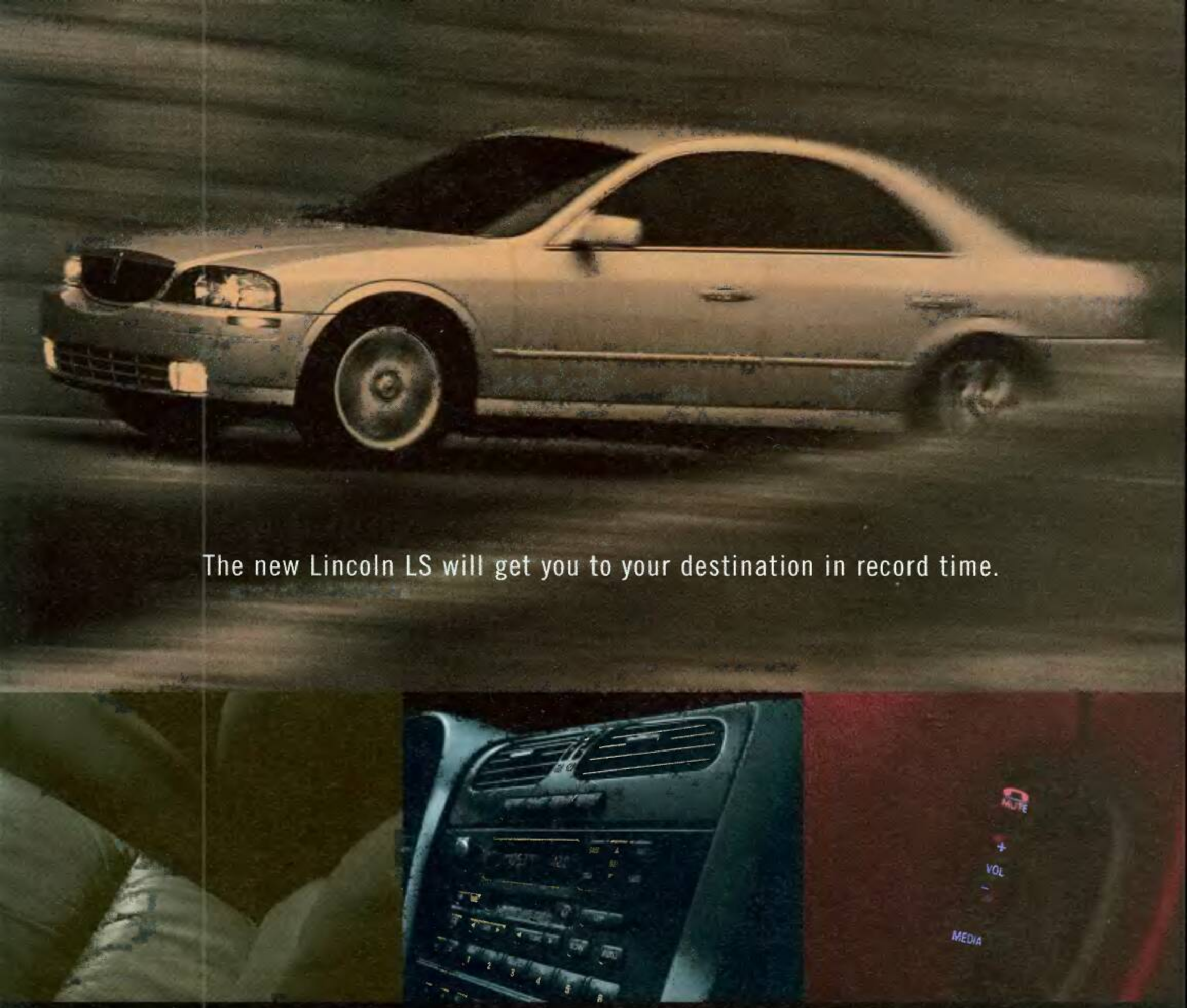
Yet the men and women of the N.Y.S.E. still resist this rather obvious narrative. Virtually everyone I spoke to at the exchange offered the same, frankly John Henryesque, argument that the people killing themselves out there on the floor could still outperform any machine, if not in terms of speed, then at least in terms of judgment and reliability. They seemed to hold this conviction as earnestly and as unself-consciously as the many track-layers, car-assemblers, and steelworkers who, without benefit of Wall Street's clear-sightedness, believed their contribution to American capitalism to be similarly essential.

There is not enough space on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. This is partly for contingent reasons—there are several thousand people working in an area designed for far fewer—and partly for intrinsic ones. At the N.Y.S.E. every stock can be traded only at the post of the specialist to whom that stock has been assigned, meaning that the efficiency of the entire system is inversely related to the distance between the posts and the floor brokers' booths. All of which is to say that to stand on the floor as an outsider is to be at all times in someone else's way.



GUY BILLOUT

Richard Plum is a specialist who works for Phoenix Partners, a small firm that employs a total of about thirty people. He is thirty-three and tall and blond and good-looking in a vaguely gloomy way. Plum studied psychology at Hobart College, which makes him somewhat unusual on the floor, where there are a lot of people earning mid-six-



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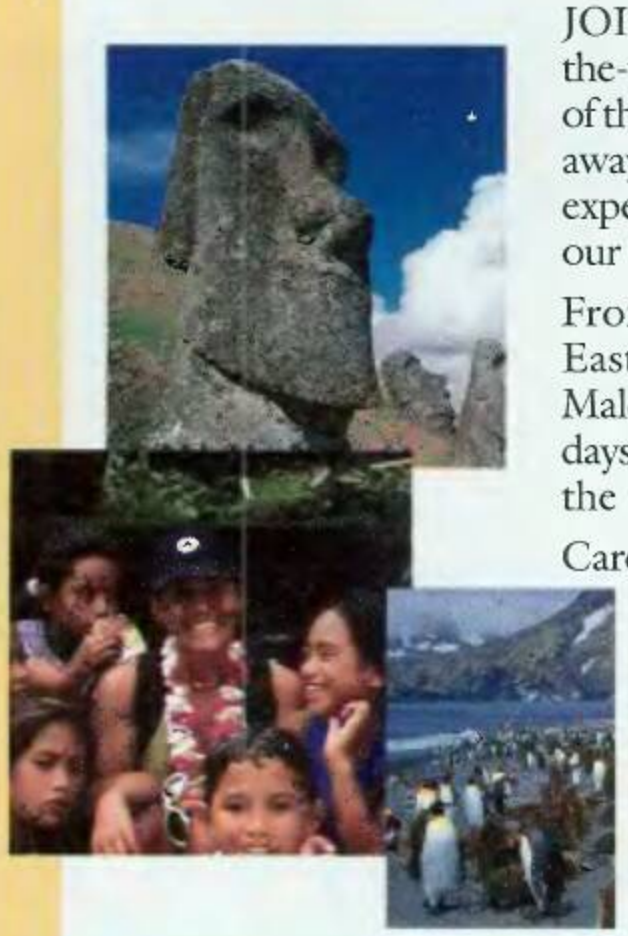

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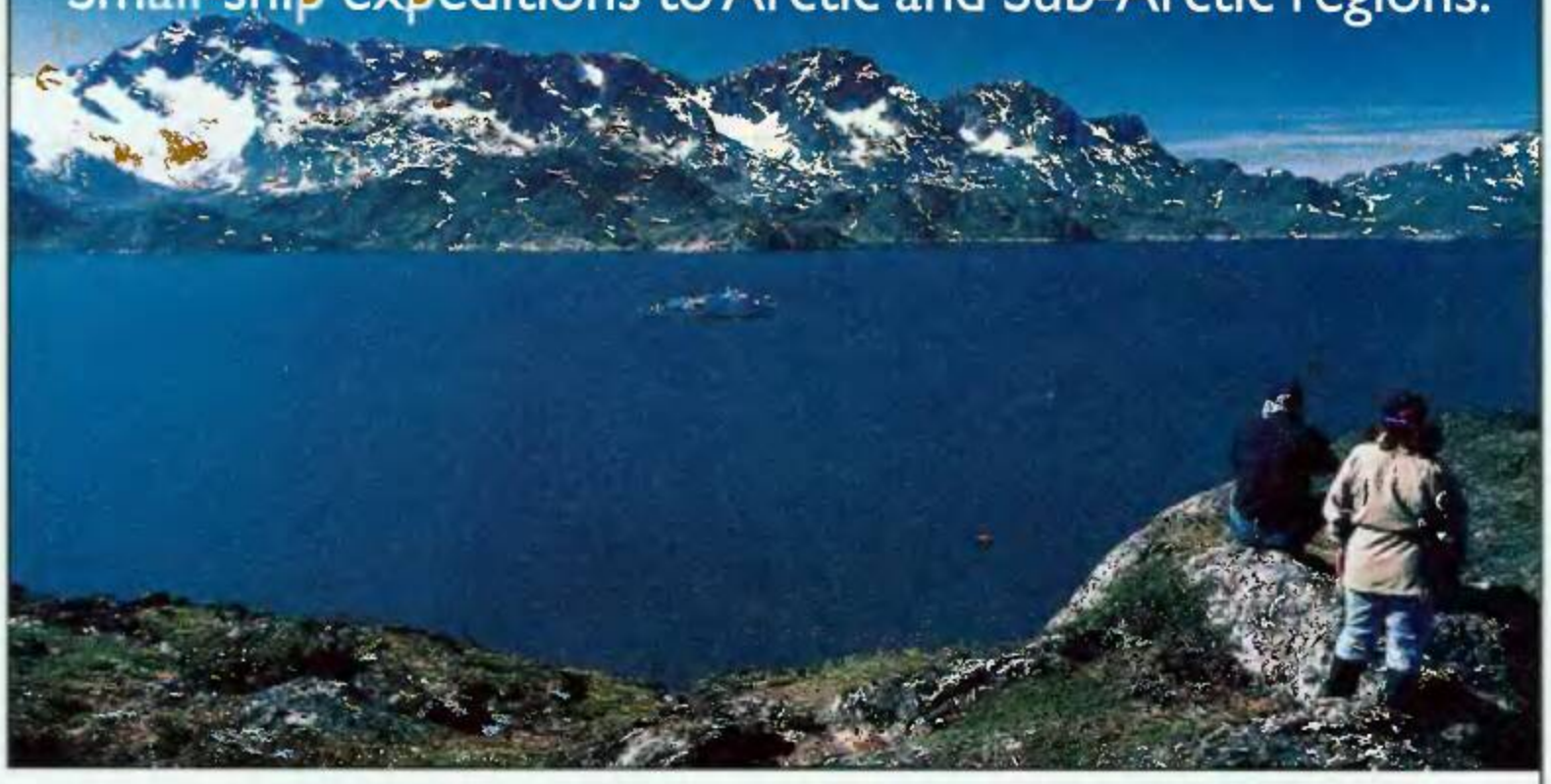

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figure salaries who started working straight out of high school. But Plum's father was also a specialist, a familial connection that is still surprisingly common. I encountered several father-and-son teams on the floor, and, perhaps because of the lousy working conditions, they reminded me of the men I once met who were drilling a water tunnel under Queens and could trace their lineage back through several generations of sandhogs.

Plum was extremely generous and allowed me to spend parts of several days with him, even though each time I did so I'm pretty sure I managed to cost him money. His post is in the middle of the so-called Blue Room—the trading floor is actually spread out over four separate rooms—at one end of a structure that looks like a bank of ticket windows which has been twisted into a figure eight. Like all specialists, Plum stands on the outside of the post—there is a battered red leather fold-out seat he can use if he has time to sit down, which he rarely does—while his clerks work in ridiculously cramped conditions on the inside. Above and behind him are two flat screens that display quote information for his stocks: CBS; Championship Auto Racing Teams; Westwood One, a media company; and Price Communications, a cellular-phone company. In front of him, attached to a tentaclelike arm, is another flat screen that has been programmed to show prices for stocks of companies that compete with his, like Time Warner and G.E., which owns NBC. Next to him, at chest level, is yet another screen, which shows the contents of his electronic display book.

Orders arrive at Plum's post in several ways, but the vast majority of them are transmitted directly into the electronic book, over what is called the Designated Order Turnaround, or DOT, system. DOT was introduced in 1976, and, in a structural sense, is one of the few concessions the exchange has made to the computer age; before it arrived, every order had to be hand-delivered to the specialist by a floor broker, as most large orders still are.

One effect of DOT, which has since been upgraded and is now officially known as SuperDot, has been to speed up enormously the pace of trading; the exchange boasts that the average turnaround time for an order is just twenty seconds. Still, no transaction of a hundred shares or more can take place without the specialist's making it happen, which means there is almost never a moment when his attention is not required. After several hours of trying to transcribe Plum's rapid-fire patter, I gave up and turned on a tape recorder: "One trades for the figure. The figure for a thou at a teeny, take 'em. A thou trades at a teeny. Six hundred trades at a teeny. Four hundred trades at a teeny. Six and nine trades at a teeny, cross 'em all in there. Show five thou at two teenies; figure bid for fifteen thou. CBS, figure for fifteen thou at a teeny, sold. Fifteen thou trades at the figure. I sold you ten thou at the figure; I'm DOT." The "figure" is whatever whole-dollar amount the stock is trading at—in this case, I believe, it was sixty—while a "teeny" is floor lingo for one-sixteenth and is understood to mean that much more than the figure.

Plum's busiest stock is CBS; over the course of an average day, roughly two million shares will trade hands. On behalf of his firm, Plum is likely to have bought a few hundred thousand of these, and to have sold another few hundred thousand, or, in his words, to be "in and out of" close to half a million shares. While Plum's primary responsibility is to serve as a sort of auctioneer, matching up other buyers and sellers, one of the many peculiarities of the specialist's job is that, at the same time that he is collecting valuable information about who is trading his stocks, he is also allowed—indeed, in many circumstances obligated—to trade in these same stocks. The exchange describes the job as maintaining "a fair and orderly market"; another description could be supplying liquidity or simply keeping the trading moving. If, for example, someone wants to sell stock and there are no buyers, the specialist is expected to step in and purchase some for his firm's inventory, and at a price that is reasonably related to the price of the last sale. To minimize the conflicts of interest that are inherent in the job, the exchange has developed strict rules governing the specialists' behavior, the most fundamental one being that they can never step in to buy or sell if someone else wants to make the same trade. Fully a third of the exchange's staff is devoted to monitoring trading activity and making sure the rules are followed.

The specialist's job struck me as almost impossibly stressful; in addition to acting as an auctioneer and a principal, Plum is often asked to serve as an agent for floor brokers who want to trade in one of his stocks but also want to be

"Somehow, on you it doesn't look shaved—it just looks bald."

"Have you popped all those pills I prescribed?"

• •

trading with someone else in a different place at the same time. At any given moment, he may be standing in for three or four brokers who are trading in two or three different stocks, and for each of these transactions there is a lengthy order form that has to be filled out by hand. When, on a particularly busy day, I saw one of Plum's partners shove a piece of paper in his mouth and chew it like gum—a nervous habit, he told me—I felt I could understand the impulse, if not quite the mechanics.

The specialist's job can clearly be quite lucrative—according to the exchange's own figures, net return on capital is twenty per cent—but it is just as clearly quite risky. One day when I was hanging out with Plum, the price of CBS dropped by nearly two dollars a share, and he lost a lot of money; though he was cagey about exactly how much, I got the impression that it was probably more than my net income for the year. At the closing bell, he held out his hand to show me. "I'm shaking like a leaf," he said.

Afterward, we went out for a beer at a restaurant called Bull Run, around the corner from the exchange. Plum, who is a bachelor, is polite and reserved in a way that suggests a firm upbringing. He told me that although he was concerned about a lot of the new electronic markets that are springing up—"Obviously, you've got to be scared"—he did not think computers could ever effectively replace the specialists on the floor. The reason for this was not unrelated to the beating he had just taken; what the specialist system offers that other systems do not, he pointed out, is someone who is under obligation to trade even when no one else wants to. "When you want to sell stock, you'll want me there," he said. This argument is one I heard a lot, and it struck me as a curious one, since it suggested that the moment the average investor learned to appreciate the New York Stock Exchange would be precisely the moment he lost faith in the market and decided to dump his investments.

Island is an electronic communications network, or E.C.N., that has set up shop at 50 Broad Street, just halfway down the block from the stock exchange, in a suite of offices that is currently being upgraded from grungy to nondescript. Founded four years ago by a couple of software developers, it now handles roughly one out of eight trades for stocks that are listed on NASDAQ. Last June, it applied to the S.E.C. to become a stock exchange in its own right, to try to compete directly with the N.Y.S.E.

Island's entire trading operation consists of one specially programmed off-the-shelf Dell computer and four hundred other computers that feed it orders. The company employs about sixty people, some of them so young that they were not able to get into last year's Christmas party at a local bar. Island's president, Matt Andresen, is a former day-trader who keeps his hair at stubble length and wears a Mephistophelian goatee; he is twenty-nine.

Andresen has the vaguely goofy yet supremely self-assured affability familiar from so many profiles of Web entrepreneurs. A few weeks ago, I went downtown to meet him and found him sitting behind a huge desk that looked as if it had just arrived from OfficeMax. On it were several pictures of his fifteen-month-old son, and two flat-screen computers. Andresen hit a few keys on one of the computers, and Island's orders for Dell popped up.

A screenful of Island orders does not look very different from the screen of the specialist's display book, except that Island's graphics are a lot snazzier. In both cases, the important data are contained in two columns of limit orders—orders to trade the stock at a specified price—one column for buyers and another for sellers. Each line in the columns lists the number of shares to be bought or sold, and at what price. But with Island's system there is no human intermediary; if someone wants to buy at the same price at which someone else wants to sell, the two orders are electronically crossed and disappear from the screen. (Only brokerage firms can post orders through Island, not individuals.) Island's entire order book, meanwhile, is open to the public on the Internet, meaning, at least in theory, that no one has an information advantage over anyone else.

Island, which is eighty-five per cent owned by Datek Online Holdings, deals mainly in small retail orders and is, at this point, the nation's second-largest E.C.N. The biggest is Instinet, which deals almost exclusively in large institutional trades. New E.C.N.s are being created all the time, with increasingly aggressive names, like Strike or Attain. Merrill Lynch owns stakes in five alternative trading systems, Goldman, Sachs in six. For a variety of reasons, these systems have yet to draw the same kind of volume away from the N.Y.S.E. as they

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have from NASDAQ, but they are clearly a threat, and one of the reasons for this is their cost structure. Island charges a transaction fee of just seventy-five-thousandths of a cent per share.

Andresen likes to speak in little parables, which on the day I visited seemed surprisingly often to involve dental care. "Let's say you guys make toothpaste," he said to me at one point, pulling an industrial-sized bottle of ibuprofen out of one of his desk drawers. "What would happen if I came up to you, not maybe in a suit but in a T-shirt, and I said, 'If you take one of these pills once, you never have to brush your teeth again, ever.' And let's say that I'm going to give this out free over the Internet, in the hope that I can get some advertising revenue. Your entire structure is based around a different business model. Are you a bad person? No. It's just that someone else found a way to do it in a disruptively different way. That's what Island has done. We have a very, very simple business model."

Andresen is laughingly contemptuous of the notion that the New York Stock Exchange, because of its structure, would perform better than Island during a crisis, though, as he himself notes, he was only in the eleventh grade at the time of the last crash, in 1987. When I raised this issue, he responded by calling up the Island page for A.O.L. (Island already does some trading in N.Y.S.E.-listed stocks, but the volume is minuscule.) "A.O.L.'s traded eighteen million shares today at fifty bucks a pop, and it's, like, one o'clock," he said. "So let's say that Alan Greenspan drops dead now, O.K.? Let's just say, hypothetically, that this would cause the markets to drop twenty per cent immediately. So what does the specialist do? The specialist will buy a hundred shares every quarter point the whole way down. That's what his obligation is. Let's say a hundred shares every eighth of a point down. Is that going to hold up A.O.L.? A.O.L. is trading eighteen million shares on a nothing day. It's going to trade twenty-five million shares in an hour. So what can one person do?" Andresen may have been understating the specialist's obligation, but his basic point still holds.

Toward the end of our interview, Andresen brought up the topic of the N.Y.S.E.'s plans for a new exchange. The plans have been in the works for several years, but, given the changes that are transforming stock trading, there are many who doubt whether the new exchange will ever be constructed. Andresen predicted that it would be, but that, instead of a trading floor, there would be a shiny new data center. "I do not believe that the floor is a healthy thing," he told me. "You've given time and place advantages and then you have to police them. Why not have a market where no one has any time and place advantages, ergo there is nothing to police?"

Two weeks ago, the Senate Banking Committee held a hearing at the S.E.C.'s regional headquarters, in lower Manhattan. The topic was the future of trading, and a lot of the emphasis was on how, in technological terms, the American exchanges were being outpaced by their international competitors. Senator Charles Schumer, of New York, related the cautionary tale of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, which allowed itself little by little to fall behind its rivals until suddenly, one day, "we never heard of the New Orleans exchange again." Senator Phil Gramm, of Texas, told the story of the American futures markets, which, in their battle against computerization, seem to have succeeded mainly in driving business to a fully automated exchange in Germany. The chairman of Goldman, Sachs, Henry Paulson, Jr., and the chairman of Merrill Lynch, David Komansky, both urged the N.Y.S.E. to be more aggressive in embracing new technology. Finally, it was time for the exchange chairman, Richard Grasso, to speak. "We see continued value in our time-tested, agency auction model," he insisted. "It will be our model for the foreseeable future."

Grasso is a slight man, with a raspy voice and a shiny bald head, who has worked on the exchange his entire adult life. Even in the estimation of N.Y.S.E. critics, he is a shrewd businessman, with a very difficult job. The exchange, which is owned by its members, was founded two hundred and eight years ago by a group of merchant brokers who met under a buttonwood tree, and at pretty much every juncture since then the members have resisted any sort of change that might adversely affect their

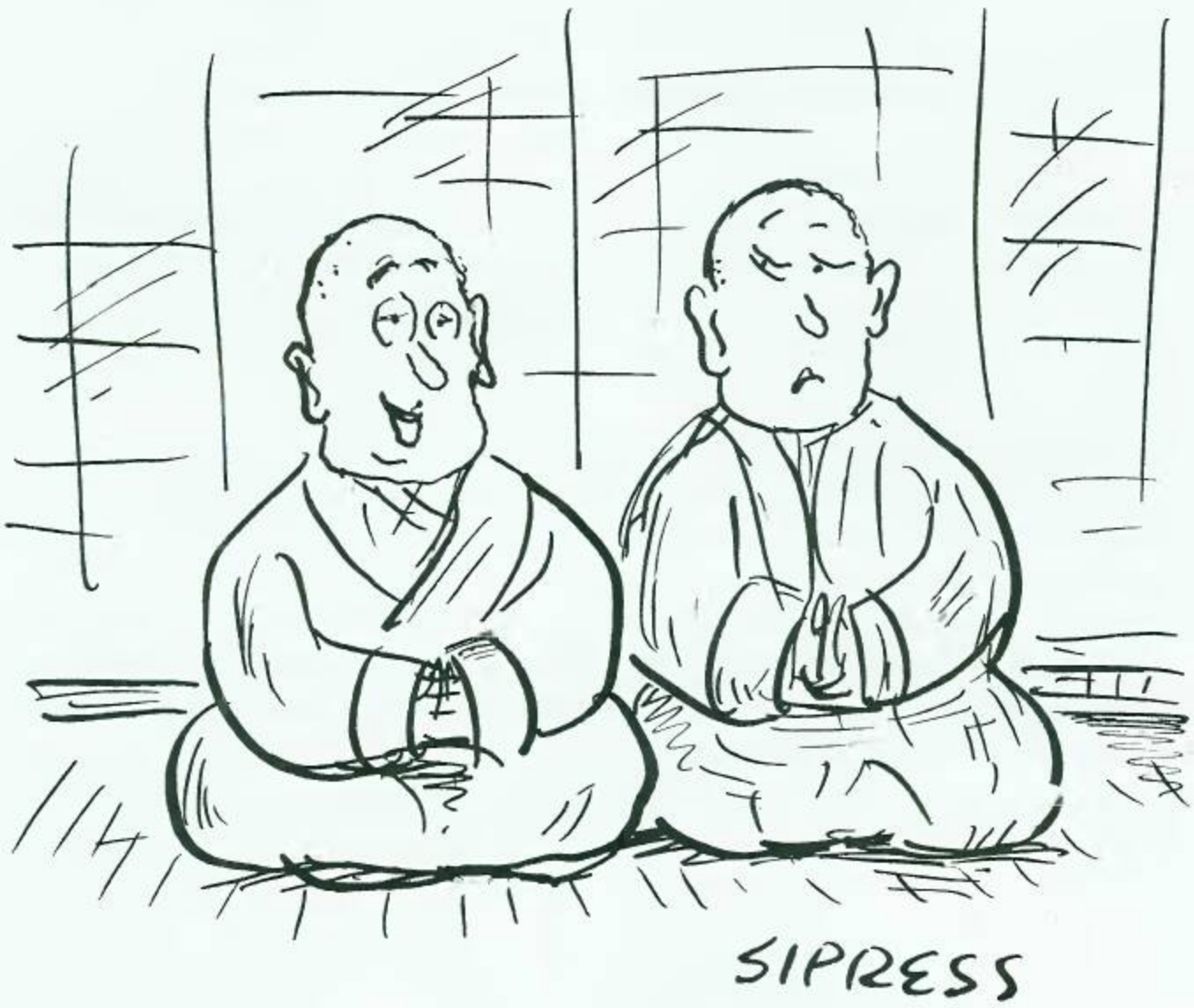
livelihoods. The N.Y.S.E. currently has a thousand three hundred and sixty-six seats, and even though many are held by huge multinational firms like Goldman and Merrill, which have one vision of its future, there are plenty more held by small specialist or independent brokerage firms, which clearly have another.

Last summer, when Grasso announced plans to take the N.Y.S.E. public—plans that continue to be debated—a lot of people assumed that he was hoping to use the cash raised by the offering effectively to buy out members who were about to become, as they say on Wall Street, redundant. When I asked Grasso about this recently, he did not answer directly but said, "I've always been very candid with my members. Either you embrace technology as a strategic weapon or you die."

Grasso is frequently asked about the future of the trading floor, and he invariably argues that it should be kept, even as he maintains that the exchange is moving expeditiously toward more computerized trading. (Among other things, the N.Y.S.E. is planning to introduce a new system that will allow automatic executions of orders of up to a thousand and ninety-nine shares.) "What we've done is combine people and technology at a singular point," he told me. To do otherwise, he said, "I would argue is a much less efficient business model."

When it finally does happen, the passing of the floor of the stock exchange will be a loss to New York, and not just because a lot of people could find themselves out of a job. It will mean that yet another quirky, colorful subculture of the city will have succumbed to the levelling forces of globalization. Standing in the Blue Room one day at the closing bell, I found myself thinking that, even as an outsider, I could understand a lot of the passion for the trading floor, which, though clearly inspired by economic self-interest, at the same time speaks to something larger and less easily calculated.

At the end of the day, the floor is awash in paper—abandoned buy and sell orders, wadded-up quote slips, ripped "cap" orders, and bits of scrap paper, in blue, pink, and white. There are gum wrappers and empty cookie packages and crumpled napkins and extra takeout menus and countless used packets of Sweet'n Low. The trash is unattractive, but also oddly expressive. Like the detritus on the midway of an old-fashioned county fair, it is, indisputably, a human mess. ♦



"My mind is especially empty today."

ANNALS OF JOURNALISM

THE REGULAR GUY

Under Donald Graham, the Washington Post has prospered as never before—but at what price?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Every morning, Donald Graham, the publisher of the Washington *Post* and chief executive officer of its parent company, gets up early at his home in the District of Columbia and takes the subway to work. On some mornings, Graham slips a quarter into the vending machine at the top of the Metro escalator to buy a copy of the newspaper that his family has controlled since 1933. Reporters sometimes kid him about it. "I didn't get the Final at home," he explains.

Four days a week, Graham has breakfast at a hotel with his top deputies. Recently, the lineup has included Mondays, with Alan Spoon, the president of the Washington Post Company; Tuesdays, with Leonard Downie, Jr., the executive editor of the newspaper; Thursdays, with Fred Hiatt, the editorial-page editor; and Fridays with Boisfeuillet (Bo) Jones, Jr., the paper's president and associate publisher. For lunch, Graham often takes a cab with one or another of the paper's editors to the ethnic restaurants in Washington's Adams-Morgan district and then walks back to Fifteenth and L Streets, where the paper has its offices. He also talks occasionally by telephone with Warren Buffett, the Nebraska-based investor, who owns a sizable amount of Post Company stock. At least once a month, Graham flies to New York for meetings at *Newsweek*, which the Post Company also owns. Graham attends few parties, travels little for pleasure, and rarely takes time off work. At about three in the afternoon on the day I first met him, Graham told me that he was just leaving to speak at a chamber-of-commerce dinner in Prince William County, a distant but growing Virginia suburb. "Figuring rush-hour traffic, I guess I'll be back by nine," he told me.

In two decades as publisher and eight years as C.E.O., Graham, who is fifty-four, has run the nation's second-most important newspaper in a way that reflects a disciplined, almost ascetic existence. He is focussed on, even obsessed by, a single goal: maintaining the *Post's* extraordinary market dominance in the Washington area. "We are not a national newspaper," he told me. "We are a local newspaper for a place that happens to be the capital of the United States. We're writing for the people who run the government but also for the people who clean their offices." Because the *Post* is so widely read in and around the capital, it remains a low-cost, high-efficiency vehicle for advertisers in the region. "A lot of what makes the *Post* a good business is that if you put an ad in to sell shirts, you'll sell a lot of shirts," Graham said.

Thanks to Graham's attention to the local market, the paper has thrived economically. (So has Don Graham. His shares in the Washington Post Company are worth around four hundred and twenty-five million dollars.) The *Post's* current daily circulation is about eight hundred thousand, down only a little more than a percentage point since 1990. At a time when virtually all big dailies have lost a far greater percentage of readers—over the same period, circulation is down nine per cent at the Los Angeles *Times* and twenty-three per cent at the Philadelphia *Inquirer*—the *Post* remains solidly profitable.

But it can be argued that changes Graham has implemented to help make the *Post* a financial success have also affected the tone of its writing and reporting. In recent years, the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have become more national—and sharper—in their coverage. The *Times* in particular has challenged its readers with a more sophisticated and literary journalism. The *Post* has taken a different path: under Don Graham, it is no longer the scrappy, irreverent paper that it once was. The stories, especially local stories, are more thorough, and more responsible. The embarrassing scandal, in 1981, involving a young reporter named Janet Cooke—she won a Pulitzer Prize for a series of reports about "Jimmy," an eight-year-old heroin addict who, it turned out, didn't exist—is less likely to recur in today's newsroom. But the swashbuckling *Post* that was memorialized in "All the President's Men"—the *Post* that audaciously let two young reporters named Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein persist in their pursuit of the Watergate story, and thereby redefined investigative journalism—has also been left behind. The zest and spirit that produced both the paper's embarrassments and its investigative triumphs are gone. "The *Post* can still do the great stories," Bob Woodward told me recently. "The question is the culture. Does it reach toward that, or is it content with the routine B performance? Sometimes the *Post* doesn't get out of the routine B performance."

To a significant extent, Graham has made these changes on purpose. And though the *Post's* scaled-back national ambitions amount to a considered economic decision, they are a product of the publisher's soul as well. The *Post* remains a family business, and the story of the newspaper's transformation is in many respects the story of Donald Graham's father figures—the one he lost and the one he found. Donald Graham inherited a newspaper shaped by a brilliant newspaperman, his father, Philip Graham. What he will pass on to the next generation of the family is a paper that adheres to the practices of a brilliant businessman, Warren Buffett.

Once a year, on a late-fall afternoon, a space is cleared in the *Post's* vast, third-floor mailroom, and hundreds of the paper's employees gather to honor the three annual winners, from the business, production, and editorial departments, of the Eugene Meyer Awards. The awards serve as the paper's official memorial to Donald Graham's grandfather, who bought the paper at a bankruptcy sale. Past winners include such

Once the national gadfly, the Post has become defiantly unpretentious, provincial, and decent—like Graham himself.

DAVID LEVINE

well-known *Post* writers as David S. Broder and Tom Shales.

Graham, who presided at the most recent ceremony, greeted the crowd and introduced Katharine Graham—or, as he described her, "My very own Pulitzer Prize-winning mom." (The prize was for "Personal History," a best-selling autobiography.) Mrs. Graham is eighty-two, and hip replacements have left her with an unsteady gait, but she maintains a regal bearing. "The award is given to support the principles that my father established," Mrs. Graham said. "Quality, excellence, hard work—and endurance, I guess." She got a chuckle out of that last line and then turned things back to her son, to introduce the award winners.

Don Graham does not much look like the scion that he is. There's a widely believed rumor at the *Post* that he buys his clothes at a discount place near the office. The story isn't true, but Graham does have the ability to make even an expensive suit look like a sack. Ratty V-neck sweaters also contribute to the downmarket look. Graham retains the muscular build and shambling style of a high-school jock, and has an open, all-American face, with a kind of perpetual

cockeyed smile. Though he grew up in Georgetown, Washington's toniest neighborhood, he speaks with what sounds like a Midwestern accent. One Saturday night a few years ago, a *Post* reporter stopped by a popular home-supply center in the area, to take advantage of a sale on mulch. "When we got there, we saw Don in line ahead of us, to get the mulch on discount," the reporter said. "It was amazing. We were with our two-year-old, and, of course, Don remembered the kid's name." (Graham's ability to remember the names of even the most junior employees and their spouses and children is renowned around the paper.) The thought of Katharine Graham setting foot in such a store on a Saturday night, or any night—no matter what the price of mulch—seems improbable.

As Graham cited the award winners, he didn't introduce them as much as speechify about them. One of the awards went to a well-liked twenty-five-year veteran named George Solomon. "So how did George Solomon come to be the sports editor of the Washington *Post*?" Graham began. "As it happens, I know that story rather well."

In the seventies, the sports section was in terrible shape, and the executive editor at the time, Ben Bradlee, plucked Don Graham from an obscure corner of the company to run it. Graham has described the period that followed as his happiest year at the *Post*. Under Graham, and then under Solomon, the section became a big success. Or, as Graham put it in bestowing the Meyer award, "The sports section today is George's creature—great columnists, great beat reporters, outstanding photography, top layouts. The *Post* is everybody's paper in Washington, and the sports pages keep that promise."

Even in a business known for its cynicism, the people in the mailroom radiated an unfeigned warmth—for the award winners, for the paper, for the Graham family, and for Don Graham. Near the end of the ceremony, I happened to be standing next to Bradlee (now a vigorous seventy-eight, he still keeps an office at the paper), and he blurted out, "Most of the goddam children of publishers ought to be on leashes somewhere. But look at him! He's the greatest!"

Graham's aversion to pretense and his commitment to a regular-guy persona are odd, to say the least, for he is an erudite man—possibly the only newspaper publisher to have served as a speaker at the annual dinner of the Trollope Society, in New York. Odd, too, because in the many accounts of his father's life that have appeared in print the same adjectives recur: brilliant, dazzling, unforgettable. Yet Philip Graham also expressed his intelligence in unconventional ways. A lawyer who never practiced law, a Harvard prodigy who never wrote anything of consequence, Phil Graham built his considerable legend on the force of his personality—his charisma, humor, and ability to get things done. The great achievement of his brief life—he died at forty-eight—was to create the idea of the modern *Post*.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Phil Graham's family scraped together a living in the Black Hills of South Dakota and, later, in the swamps of the Florida Everglades. Eventually, he went to the University of Florida and then to Harvard Law School. There, with little warning—"He had basically drunk his way through college," Mrs. Graham told me—Phil compiled an extraordinary career as a student. He became perhaps the most favored of Professor (later Justice) Felix Frankfurter's many protégés, and his friends were convinced that he would someday run for the Senate, and, eventually, the White House.

"Phil was the golden boy," says Bradlee, one of the few people still at the *Post* who knew him. "He was charming, he was funny, and he had, appropriately, a great confidence in his skills."

In Washington, just before the war, Graham met Eugene Meyer's tall, shy daughter Kay, and they fell in love. After the war, Phil and his bride, along with their two children, Elizabeth (Lally) and Don, returned to Washington to plan their next steps. With some misgivings, in light of his political ambitions, Phil agreed to his father-in-law's importunings to join the paper. In time, Mr. Meyer became so besotted with his son-in-law that he sold the young man and his wife title to the *Post* for a pittance. At the age of thirty-three, Phil set out to remake the paper.

Meyer had bought the *Post* at an auction in 1933, for eight hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, but by the nineteen-fifties Graham had persuaded him to invest millions in the paper, to

"We're thinking maybe it's time you started getting some religious instruction. There's Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—any of those sound good to you?"

make it a national power. Graham recognized that the paper's future depended on gaining a monopoly in the morning, and that meant buying the bigger, more profitable *Times-Herald*. As Mrs. Graham wrote, "Our life depended on getting the *Times-Herald*." In 1954, when Don was eight, Phil brokered the deal that saved the *Post*, arranging for Meyer to buy his larger morning competitor for a total price of nearly ten million dollars. ("The canary swallowed the cat," Walter Lippman wrote.) At the time of the purchase, Eugene Meyer made a remark that has been repeated many times: "This will make the paper safe for Donny."

Don Graham gave a slight sigh of irritation when I asked him about his grandfather's famous prediction. "Well, he didn't say it to me," he said. "I think the first I heard about it was in a book somewhere. My dad never, ever gave me an ounce of family pressure or expectation."

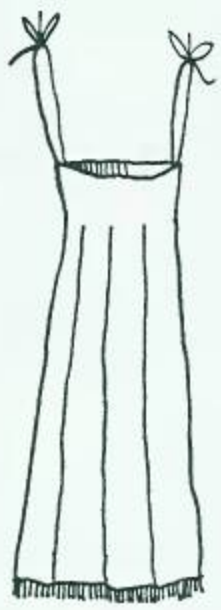
We were talking in Graham's office on the seventh floor of the Post building. Graham has run the *Post's* parent company for almost a decade, but he has never moved his main office up to the eighth floor, where the corporate officers sit. He remains with the people who run the newspaper, next door to Bo Jones, a schoolmate from St. Albans and Harvard. Graham has decorated his office with photographs of his wife, Mary, whom he met at Harvard, their four children, and favorite colleagues from the paper. Notably, in a city where the "ego wall" is practically an obligatory decorating touch—Katharine Graham has an enormous one in her study in Georgetown—Don doesn't have a single picture of a politician or a celebrity. He appears in almost none of the photographs, not even the family ones. More than one person who knows Don Graham talked to me about his "passion for anonymity."

Notwithstanding Graham's protests, he does seem to have been bred from birth for his current role. According to his youngest brother, Stephen, who, at the age of forty-seven, is a graduate student at Columbia (writing a Ph.D. dissertation on George Eliot), "It was kind of presented to me that Don would work on the paper. It was just kind of in the air. It looked like a thought-out progression, with the end predestined." (Graham's older sibling, Lally Weymouth, who is as mercurial as Don is even-keeled, is a conservative sometime columnist for the *Post*. Bill, the third-born, is a lawyer and money manager in Los Angeles.) As Mrs. Graham told me, "Don was always the one." In Ben Bradlee's words, "This is a guy who is really overpowered by a sense of duty—as an owner and as a citizen."

That became clear after Graham graduated from Harvard, in 1966. "When you went to college in those days, you didn't sit transfixed worrying about your first job," he said. "You knew you were going to be drafted, and I was drafted. I didn't think there was any reason not to go to Vietnam. I felt if there were going to be Americans there, I didn't see why I shouldn't be one of them." Of course, it wasn't that simple. Only a few members of Graham's class went into the military, and he easily could have found a way out. He didn't even try. Graham served as an information specialist, mostly writing press releases about G.I.s for home-town papers, but, even so, the experience of seeing the war up close was sobering. "I really didn't make up my mind that I wanted to come work here at the *Post* until I was in Vietnam," Graham told me. He showed me a photograph he had taken there, which was on the wall of his office. "This is a soldier explaining to a woman that he had to blow up her house and relocate her family," he said.

"When I got there, I felt that this was just nothing like what I had read about it," he went on. "Over there, I found myself thinking, What could be more important than a newspaper trying to get facts right?" Again, this is not the lesson that everyone would take from the chaos and disorder of Vietnam. While many of his fellow-vets dropped out, Don Graham bored in. When he returned from the war, Washington had just been through the riots that followed the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in April of 1968. "I really felt that I didn't know the city anymore. I thought I wanted to do something that would help me learn." Then, in a truly un-Georgetown act, he decided to try to get on the Washington police force. "Police work seemed challenging and mysterious, and the cops were desperate for people."

Graham took the police-academy entrance exam, passed, and became a cop. He served for about a year and a half, mostly driving a one-man patrol car, in a dangerous northeast Washington neighborhood that few tourists see. Then, in 1971, when he was twenty-six, Don Graham went to work at the *Post*, as a reporter on the metro desk.



Graham's initial reluctance to be seen as following his father is understandable. In the years after the purchase of the *Times-Herald*, Phil Graham worked with a frightening intensity to build up the paper—and to raise his own profile. He became a close adviser to both Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy, and, many say, brokered the deal at the 1960 Democratic Convention that put L.B.J. on J.F.K.'s Presidential ticket. The following year, Phil bought *Newsweek* for the Post Company.

During those years, Phil Graham was suffering from what would today be called manic-depression. He alternated between bouts of furious activity and episodes of immobilizing lethargy, and aggravated his condition by drinking excessively. In the early sixties, he began a painfully public romance with a young woman from *Newsweek*. There was talk of divorce, then a reconciliation with Katharine, and then a dramatic breakdown in Phoenix, in January of 1963. President Kennedy sent a plane to return Phil to Washington, where he was hospitalized.

By the summer, Graham's doctors thought he was well enough to visit Glen Welby, the family weekend house, in rural Virginia. He arrived on August 3rd, had a quiet lunch with Katharine, and then the two of them decided to take a nap. While his wife slept, Phil went to a downstairs bathroom and shot himself with a rifle.

Don was eighteen, working as a summer intern for James Reston in the Washington bureau of the *Times*, following his freshman year at Harvard. He was at his parents' house in Georgetown when he received the call from his mother.

Late one evening, when Graham and

I were talking in his office, I tried to raise the subject of his father's death, and he put a quick stop to it. "His illness and death, I just can't get to," he said. "It's too hard."

Once, when I asked Graham a question about his father, he answered, "He was just extraordinary, in a way that's very hard to capture." Then he mentioned Warren Buffett. "It's just as hard as explaining why Warren Buffett is a good businessman." The synaptic link was not difficult to explain. Few people have been as important to both Don and Katharine Graham as Buffett.

In 1971, Mrs. Graham received a letter from Buffett, whom she had met just once. In the letter, Buffett informed her that his holding company, Berkshire Hathaway, intended to buy more than five per cent of the Class B shares of the Post Company, and he had plans to buy more. Earlier, the Post Company had been structured so that the Class A shares alone had voting rights, and these belonged exclusively to the Graham family. Still, the idea that a then little-known investor was accumulating a huge stake in the company unsettled a lot of people. "Kay had people telling her, 'Stay away from this guy. All these people are sharks,' " Don Graham told me. (Don refers to his mother as Mrs. Graham, Kay, or "my mother," as the circumstances warrant.)

Mrs. Graham chose to welcome the mysterious investor and invited him to serve on the board, a job Buffett has held ever since. According to both Don and his mother, that decision marked a critical turning point for the company. "Hiring Ben as her editor was the best decision my mother ever made," Don told me. "But getting Warren involved was an awfully close second." In "Personal History," Mrs. Graham is coy about the precise nature of her relationship with Buffett, calling him "eternally interesting and fun to be with" and noting that "people's eyebrows shot up" about their close ties.

Buffett joined the Post Company at around the same time Don Graham did, and Graham remembers going with his mother to meet with him. "I asked him every question I could think of," Graham said. "I quickly saw that this was the smartest person I had ever met. Warren talks so clearly that, in a way, he's very deceptive. A lot of us flatter ourselves that we are influenced by him, but we always know there are deeper layers within him that we can't see. It's like saying my chess is influenced by Gary Kasparov or my basketball is influenced by Michael Jordan."

As Graham observed, Buffett's investment philosophy is ostensibly simple. "The key to investing is not assessing how much an industry is going to affect society, or how much it will grow, but, rather, determining the competitive advantage of any given company and, above all, the durability of that advantage," Buffett said in a recent speech. "The products or services that have wide, sustainable moats around them are the ones that deliver rewards to investors."

Donald Graham's career as publisher of the *Post* can rightly be seen as an exercise in moat building. "Warren was once ungracious enough to say to me that he invests in companies where even average managers can produce above-average results," Graham told me half-jokingly, but the point was clear. As the only major morning paper in a growing capital city, the *Post* could scarcely have failed economically, especially after the *Star*, its main competitor, folded, in 1981. According to a recent survey, the *Post* reaches forty-six per cent of households in the Washington metropolitan area on weekdays and sixty-one per cent on Sundays. In the newspaper business, this is called "penetration," and no major paper in the country can compare with the *Post* in this regard. The Boston *Globe*, which serves a similar-sized region, reaches twenty-seven per cent and forty per cent, respectively. The New York *Times*, with its vast local population, reaches just nine per cent on weekdays and thirteen per cent on Sundays.

Alan Spoon, Graham's chief deputy at the Post Company, summed up the paper's philosophy in the clipped, analytical tones of marketing-speak. "Penetration-pricing on circulation," he said, explaining the paper's insistence on keeping its daily price at twenty-five cents. "Mass market. Service to advertisers. Low cost per thousand. Cover local things. Only a fraction of our audience is following what's going on at the White House." (After eighteen years with the company, Spoon announced last week that he was leaving to join a venture-capital firm.)

The touchstone of Don Graham's leadership of the *Post* has been heavy investments to protect its local market share, and it is here that the paper's strategy has parted most dramatically from that of the *Times,* with its national orientation. The *Post* has only five bureaus around the United States but has expanded its bureaus in the Washington suburbs to twelve, and it publishes four zoned weekly supplements, with detailed coverage of smaller suburban regions. Soon, thanks to sophisticated new presses, the *Post* will offer zoned editions to even more differentiated suburban regions. By contrast, the *Times* has only ten bureaus in the New York area but eleven others in the United States, and twenty-six foreign bureaus. The *Post* has twenty-one foreign bureaus.

The *Times*, unlike the *Post*, now positions itself not as a paper of New York so much as a paper of the élites, wherever they might live. As Michael Barone, a *U.S. News & World Report* columnist, observes, "The *Times* target market is anyone who lives within forty-five minutes of a Saks Fifth Avenue." The *Times* has raised its daily price to seventy-five cents and concentrated on selling its upscale demographics to advertisers. In Graham's office, there's a little newsstand sign boasting that the *Post* is "Still twenty-five cents." A vast, rather than an exclusive, readership remains for him the *Post's* preëminent goal.

When Graham and others on the business side of the paper talk about the "competition," they are usually referring not to the *Times* but to the many small dailies and weeklies that dot Virginia and Maryland. "We've got this five-hundred-pound gorilla to deal with," said Luke West, the managing editor of the *Potomac News*, a daily that competes with the *Post* in Prince William County. "They have a heavy marketing effort out here." Indeed, under the *Post's* onslaught, circulation of the *Potomac News* has fallen from twenty-six thou-

sand, in 1996, to twenty-one thousand.

"If a local daily ever passes a metro daily in circulation, the metro daily never gets it back," said one person familiar with the *Post's* business strategy. "Don Graham believes in this penetration business model totally, as a matter of faith. When Don Graham sees the *Potomac News*, it's like he's staring death itself in the face."

Warren Buffett, who now owns about seventeen per cent of the Class B shares, remains very satisfied with the Grahams. He invested about ten million dollars in *Post* stock at a time when shares were selling for the current equivalent of about six dollars a share. Last week, shares sold at just under five hundred dollars. I asked Buffett what his ten-million-dollar investment was worth today.

"It's worth about eight hundred and fifty million," he told me, and, indeed, Buffett has called the Post Company his favorite investment. "I've been an admirer of the product and the financial results," he said. "And I'm very happy owning it."

"You were hungry? Case dismissed."

For the world outside Washington, the popular image of the *Post* was fixed forever by the movie version of "All the President's Men." In spirit, if not in every detail, that drama of investigative journalism provided a reasonably accurate picture of the *Post* in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Those were years of enormous expansion at the paper—growing circulation, new bureaus, and journalistic success on a grand scale. It was an exciting, vertiginous time, and Mrs. Graham and Bradlee enjoyed an extraordinary professional symbiosis. The pinnacle, of course, was the *Post's* lonely pursuit of the Watergate story; the nadir was Janet Cooke.

In 1991, Don Graham chose Len Downie as Bradlee's successor, signalling that the days of such dramatic swings were over. Downie had made his name as a *Post* reporter with an exposé of corruption in the District of Columbia court system, and though he had done time in different parts of the paper, including a stint as the London bureau chief, he remained, at heart, a local-news guy, and thus a kindred spirit of the new C.E.O. Bradlee courted controversy; Downie, like Don Graham, avoids it. As Mrs. Graham told me, "Ben's personality did sort of spark the paper, but it's easier when you're building something. We had absolutely no money, and then we started to make money, and we put it in the paper. When you get full grown, so to speak, it makes it harder to take the risks that Ben and, I guess, I took. Size and success make you more cautious."

Graham clearly takes the *Post's* financial success as a validation of its editorial direction, and he has consistently promoted its new leadership from within. Almost all the top managers at the paper have spent most of their careers at the *Post*. After the death, last year, of Meg Greenfield, the longtime editorial-page editor, Graham chose Fred Hiatt, a quietly competent eighteen-year *Post* veteran and member of the editorial-page staff, to succeed her. Like Downie, Hiatt can be counted on to make few dramatic changes.

Maybe it is the *Post's* monopoly status that accounts for its lack of urgency. "The paper is a little slower off the mark now," Ben Bradlee told me. Indeed, when we talked, Bradlee spoke candidly about what he believed were the paper's flaws, notwithstanding his obvious affection for Don Graham. "There's no more making people grind their teeth and say, 'Jesus Christ!' " Bradlee said. "The editors of the paper are just as tough and hard to push around as they ever were, and I know Don worries about making sure that's always true. He just doesn't like controversy."

With the *Star* long gone as a competitor, and the *Times* regarded as serving a different market, the *Post* often behaves as if it had all the time in the world. Bob Woodward, who still writes for the paper now and then and runs the newsroom on occasional weekends, says, "It's not as alive as it used to be."

Downie acknowledges the contrast that he and Graham pose to their predecessors. "Neither one of us tends to be a social person," Downie told me, unsmiling. "He's not Katharine, and I'm not Ben. We're the dull guys. We joke about it."

It is possible, of course, to dismiss the assessments of Bradlee and Woodward as the grousing of old-timers, but their views are widely shared by many people now at the paper. This is especially evident in the Style section. For more than a decade after Bradlee founded the section, in 1969, Style developed a distinctive voice—bitchy, funny, sometimes smugly fatuous, but always readable. With writers like Myra McPherson and Sally Quinn, the section's profiles and cultural coverage stirred controversy long before the term "buzz" became fashionable in media circles. Bradlee doted on Style (and married Quinn), but Downie largely leaves the section to its own devices.

In the parts of the paper geared principally to the world outside Washington—the op-ed page, the Sunday Out-

look section, Book World, and cultural coverage generally—the paper has apparently lost the ambition to challenge the *Times*. It's possible to see, in the decline of Style and other "softer" sections, the cost of Graham's aversion to pretense. Notwithstanding the *Post's* educated readership, the paper rarely challenges its audience about books, ideas, or culture. The lead book critic, Jonathan Yardley, who serves as a sort of in-house intellectual, epitomized this attitude in a recent column about "various cultural and literary sites aboard the Internet." The column consisted mostly of complaints about unreadable books by vaunted authors, including Cervantes, Henry James, George Eliot, and James Joyce. "Proust? Schmoost!" As with the *Post* generally, Yardley is so afraid of playing the snob that he sometimes plays the fool.

Like Downie, Graham has little interest in frivolity. The publisher's favorite kind of journalism is one that, like his approach to business, reflects his decent, steady personality. Graham would never be so impolitic as to name a favorite reporter at the *Post*, but the person he mentioned most often to me was Katherine Boo, an investigative reporter on the metro desk. She recently wrote a Pulitzer-worthy front-page story of more than eight thousand words on the death of a hundred and sixteen people in group homes for the mentally retarded which were run by the District of Columbia. "Unless we do that story, there is literally no other way that their story will be told," Graham said. As one reporter says of Graham and Downie, "The stories that they get excited about are those that comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. There is always a sense about the underdog." These investigative projects sometimes suffer from a kind of gigantism that may limit the number of people who actually get through them—not all readers can face an enormous four-part series about the deplorable conditions of chicken workers in Delaware—but a commitment to the little guy remains a signature of the paper.

So does a persistent skittishness about race. The *Post* has struggled for decades with the problem of being a white-run newspaper in a mostly black city. Throughout his long tenure as mayor, Marion S. Barry won votes among low-income African-Americans by playing on their resentment of the *Post*. Intimidated, the paper responded to his criticism by publishing an abundance of patronizing, feel-good stories about the District and by conducting a much-belabored affirmative offensive in the newsroom. In 1998, Barry was replaced by the less confrontational Anthony Williams, and the racial environment in the city, and at the *Post*, has calmed.

As part of Graham's philosophy of ubiquity in the capital, there's a bright-blue *Post* vending machine on what seems like every street corner in the city, and the design features an actual front page of the paper. As it happens, the lead story that the *Post* chooses to advertise is "PRESIDENT, HILL DEBATE MORE CUTS." The headline is indicative of the process-oriented coverage in the *Post*. Although people at the *Post* call national political coverage "the franchise," because of its importance to the paper, it's a rickety asset these days. Typical front-page stories have headlines like "GOP RAISES THE ANTE ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS," "CLINTON WILL SUBMIT SOCIAL SECURITY PLAN," and "CLINTON, GOP TO MEET ON BUDGET FIGHT." Around the *Post*, one often hears that the paper simply must chronicle this sort of tedious wrangling. It's not that coverage of the federal government has to be dull—as the *Post's* own stories sometimes demonstrate. Michael Grunwald's sharp analysis of campaign contributions by the airline industry cut through weeks of plodding coverage of the campaign-reform saga. But, for the most part, the routine remains routine—as does the *Post's* commitment to local minutiae.

Indeed, Downie has an almost obsessive interest in weather and traffic. The weather section always occupies a full page, and sometimes two pages. Last month, the *Post* devoted almost half its front page and four full inside pages to a story called "Incredible Journeys," which examined a day in the life of several Washington commuters and concluded, after thousands of words, that traffic is bad. Recently, the paper gave front-page play to a story revealing that a local highway would be completed in 2007 instead of 2006.

Yet the *Post* has never yielded on its commitment to investigative reporting, a great passion of Downie's. Surely no newspaper in America, including the *Times*, devotes as many people to long-term investigations. Last year, for example, the paper won a Pulitzer Prize for a series detailing how officers of the D.C. police department shot more citizens than those of any other department in the country.

The series had an unhappy postscript for the paper. Two of the four authors soon left the *Post*, one for academia and the other for the Chicago *Tribune*. In re-

"I'm sorry, dear, but you know how I feel about intra-marital sex."

cent years, the *Post* has suffered a considerable brain drain, which has included such writers as Rick Atkinson, Blaine Harden, Eric Lipton, Gustav Niebuhr, Eleanor Randolph, Benjamin Weiser, Pierre Thomas, and Laurie Goodstein, several of them lost to poaching from the *Times*.

There has been one significant exception to the *Post's* customary caution: the Internet. Though the company does not separately declare the results of its Internet division, last year's annual report suggests that in 1998 it lost about sixty-seven million dollars on these operations. Post Company stock has dropped by about eighteen per cent in recent months, at least in part because of the prospect of even more short-term losses on the Internet. Earlier this year, Graham named Bo Jones associate publisher of the *Post* and placed him in day-to-day control of the paper because, Graham said, he wanted to focus his own energies on the Internet.

To many in the newsroom, the Internet seems like a way to make a pitch for some of the *Times'* national dominance. After all, a move to net-based journalism could make irrelevant the enormous investments the *Times* has made in nationwide printing plants and distribution networks. In truth, though, the *Post's* Internet offensive reveals no such grand ambitions; it merely reflects, once again, the gospel according to Buffett.

In the newsroom, the chief advocate for washingtonpost.com, the paper's on-line edition, is Steve Coll, who was named managing editor of the *Post* in 1998. At the time, Coll had had a terrific career at the paper—he won a Pulitzer for reporting, served as a distinguished foreign correspondent, wrote four books, and edited the Sunday magazine, all before he turned forty—but he had never held a management job in the *Post's* huge fifth-floor newsroom. When Graham and Downie tapped him, it was regarded as an unusually bold move.

With a prematurely receding hairline, Coll could pass for Graham's, or Downie's, younger brother. And yet, by *Post* standards, Coll's approach to his job has been unconventional. His goal, he told me, was "to start the conversation and create the models for what really innovative and powerful literary journalism might look like."

One day when I visited Coll's office, he handed me a copy of a memo that he was just then E-mailing to the newsroom staff. Late last year, the *Post* went back to the future and started publishing an afternoon edition—on-line. Capitalizing on a surge in Internet usage around lunchtime, the *Post's* Web site puts out "PM Extra," with staff-written pieces about the developing stories of the day. (The company also started an alliance with NBC and MSNBC, designed to turn print reporters into pundits.) As Coll said in the memo, "Within a few months, we will be even further along. I kid you not: Reporters will be wandering into the streets not only with notebooks in their pockets, but occasionally, with little video cameras in their hats. A great way to cover a riot, for instance." Within minutes, Coll was getting joking requests from reporters for "hat-cams."

Still, notwithstanding the considerable ambitions of Coll and others, the Internet, too, seems likely to be folded into Graham's localized vision for the company, as another form of moat-building. "There are myriad opportunities in the Internet," Bo Jones told me, "but the greater Washington area will always be our focus. When the guy was brought in to run our site, I opened a map of the city and suburbs and said to him, 'This is what we are interested in.' "

Two years ago, Don Graham was treated for prostate cancer. His treatment was successful, and he seems fine, but the scare raised the question of succession in the family business.

As of now, Katharine Weymouth Scully, Don's niece and Kay Graham's oldest grandchild, is the only member of the next generation to work at the *Post*, and many people both inside and outside the family have great hopes for her. After working in the legal department of the paper for two years, Scully, who is thirty-three and grew up in New York, became associate counsel and director of business affairs of Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive. That Scully has been placed in the Web business strikes many as a measure of the importance Don Graham assigns to that part of his company.

Scully, who is tall, like her grandmother, has an easy poise and an unpretentious manner. "The moron in the next generation," she joked as we squeezed into her tiny office in the Web site's quarters across the Potomac, in Rosslyn, Virginia. "Whenever my mother wanted us to read the paper, it was always, well, 'Don was reading the newspaper at nine,' " she said. "He was the perfect one. And I was, like, Puh-*leeze*, give me the *Post*." (The New York *Post*, that is.) Scully and her husband, who is also a lawyer, live just three blocks from her grandmother, in Georgetown, and they are especially close. Scully has a warm relationship with Don, but, she told me, "He's so different from Grandma. He operates behind the scenes. I socialize with Grandma a lot more than Don does. I like going to parties."

Donald Graham does not. I never saw him happier than when he took me to see one of the *Post's* new printing plants and watch a day's run come off the presses. For all the attention to the Internet, the company just spent two hundred and thirty million dollars on new printing plants in Virginia and Maryland. ("Twenty million under budget," Graham told me proudly.)

Graham sprinted ahead of me through the plant, speaking with knowledge and enthusiasm about how the process has been refined over the years. A thin mist flowed out of pipes on the ceiling, keeping the paper damp and giving the air an inky glaze. "There are the great sweeping things, like breaking big stories," he told me. "But there are also the small, incremental things, like making things slightly better. You know, our forty-nine-year-old presses in the old place had the best year ever in the last year before we shut them down. Every year, we made them a little better."

That, in the end, has been his vision for the Washington *Post*, and it has brought him, and his company, a quiet kind of contentment. We were standing about thirty feet above the shop floor when the presses began to whir, and he pointed to the sinuous twists of the paper surging through the rollers. "Look at that!" he said. "I wish I were a better photographer, so I could capture the way that looks." Graham smiled. "That's the problem with my coming out here. I get carried away." Then he became serious. "You know, the process of printing a newspaper is really beautiful." ♦

HIGH-HEEL HEAVEN

A visit to the madcap world of Manolo Blahnik.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

The first thing I noticed when I entered the two-hundred-year-old town house in Bath that serves as Manolo Blahnik's weekend retreat was the alligator. About three and a half feet long, with olive-brown skin and black hatch marks flecking its body, it was sprawled imperiously across a Queen Anne table at the end of the foyer. The jaws were parted, and the teeth shimmered in the fading light.

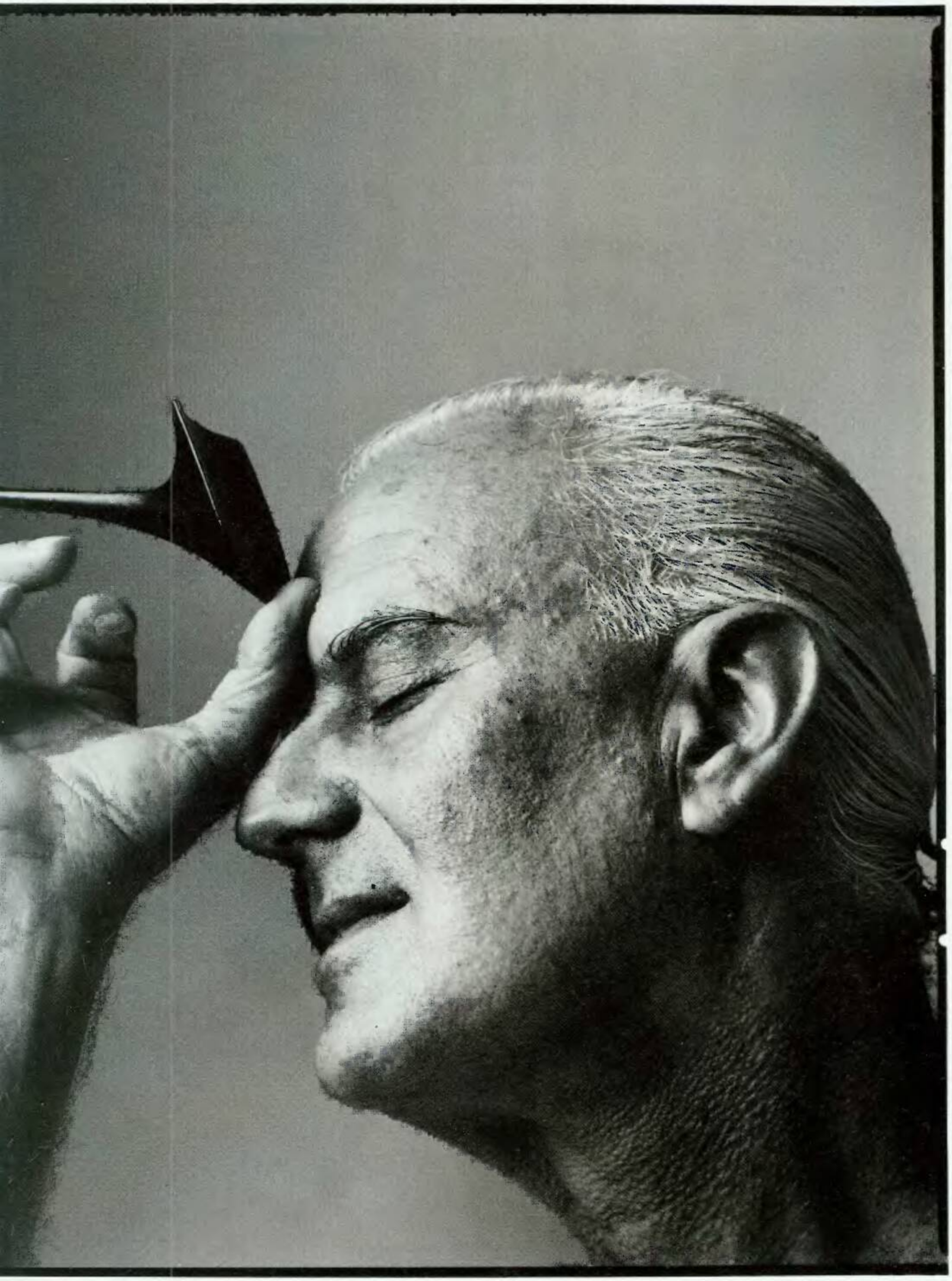
It was a dismal, rainy afternoon, and we had just come from lunch—though Blahnik had been in no mood to eat. He has a bad back, and it was giving him so much trouble that day that he wore a brace. We rushed through the meal and then walked along the cobblestoned streets toward his house, which sits in the middle of one of those Georgian crescents that provided Jane Austen with just the right setting for "Persuasion." He perked up the second we arrived. Opening the door, Blahnik swept into the hallway and cried out, "Honey, I'm home!" Then, with a manic swirl, he tossed his powder-blue cashmere sports jacket across a bust of the eighteenth-century actor David Garrick, raced toward his alligator, and embraced it. With the stuffed animal nestled in his arms, Blahnik turned, and, in a voice that somehow blends the diction of Winston Churchill with the accent of the Gabor sisters, said, "There is simply no creature on earth that compares to a Louisiana alligator. Not iguana or python or ostrich or anything else you might want to make into a shoe. I suppose saying that makes me an enemy of the people. I'm sorry. I say kill them humanely, with a shot or something. But give us the skins. I mean, can you imagine where I would be today without wonderful babies like this? Cahnn you i-*maah*-gine?"

Apart from its symbolic stature—as something forbidden, luxurious, and astonishingly expensive—alligator skin is no more essential to the shoes of Manolo Blahnik than lesser leathers, or, for that matter, the dozens of other materials he relies on: satins, silks, brocade, crystal, silver lamé, sequins, rhinestones, buckles, bangles, beads, Velcro, pearls, neoprene, rubber, rawhide, chinchilla, lace, mesh, or (for the first time this year, but only for a few of his luckiest and wealthiest customers) diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. They are all just grace notes in the symphony of footwear Manolo Blahnik has composed over the past thirty years.

In most seasons, the product of another designer—a perilously high-heeled sandal by Jimmy Choo, for example, or a snakeskin sling-back by Christian Louboutin—will become the shoe of the moment. But Blahnik persists, and his creations have become an obsession for thousands of women (and not a few men). With their delicate straps and definitive spikes, Blahnik's shoes are objects of such fanatical devotion that one can easily imagine a fetish known as "the Manolo" retroactively airbrushed onto the pages of "Justine." "Manolo Blahnik's shoes are as good as sex," Madonna has said. "And they last longer." Joan Rivers, who has been an adherent to the cult of Blahnik for many years, and who claims to exercise each day in a pair of his flats, put it more directly. "His shoes are slut pumps," she told me on the phone one day while she was on her treadmill. "You just put on your Manolos and you automatically find yourself saying 'Hi, sailor' to every man that walks by."

Shoes have always had meaning. The Chinese bound the feet of women, and the Victorians forced them into confining footwear; simple, comfortable shoes emerged during the French Revolution

PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN



"Is that your cell phone or are you just glad to see me?"

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to go along with the idea of equality. Manolo Blahnik's shoes are about sex—bold, even slightly menacing sex. They are erotic and feminine and extravagant without ever quite becoming vulgar. They represent a kind of haughty independence. Joan Crawford would have worn them. So would Dorothy Parker. In the fulsome language of Hollywood trade papers, fuming starlets no longer walk out over the selection of the wrong leading man; they "put their Manolo down." When society women don't get what they want, they "wheel on their Blahniks" and flee, heels clicking. The aura of Blahnik hovers over the television series "Sex and the City," where, as Carrie Bradshaw, Sarah Jessica Parker programs her answering machine to say simply, "It's Carrie. I'm shoe shopping." Parker was a Blahnik fan before she knew who he was. "You have to learn how to wear his shoes—it doesn't happen overnight," she told me. "But by now I could run a marathon in a pair of Manolo Blahnik heels. I can race out and hail a cab. I can run up Sixth Avenue at full speed. I've destroyed my feet completely, but I don't care. What do you really need your feet for, anyway?"

Blahnik's shoes often cost twice as much as those of his competitors, yet many models sell out overnight. They seem to weigh little more than a fistful of feathers and are always made by hand; dozens of people attend to each shoe before it is finished. Still, I wondered if Blahnik's workmanship was really so different from that of other designers. To the uninitiated eye it can be hard to tell. So I called Cynthia Marcus, who is in charge of ladies' shoes at Neiman Marcus, which sells about thirty thousand pairs of Manolo Blahniks each year (at prices that start at about five hundred dollars), to ask where, exactly, he fits in. There was silence on the line while she took a deep breath to roll the question around in her head. "Honey," she said finally, "how important is Manolo Blahnik? I'll tell you. If he wanted me to change the name of the store to Neiman Blahnik, I'd do it in a heartbeat."

The best shoes in the world are made in Italy, and Blahnik keeps four factories there working constantly. He sells nearly a hundred thousand pairs of shoes and boots in America every year and could easily double or triple that number, yet he has no desire to expand. You cannot buy Manolo Blahnik shoes in most European countries or in many American stores. Although he is a citizen of Spain, he makes only token efforts to sell shoes there. He has no stores in Italy, relies on a single outlet in France, and works out of the same cramped shop off the King's Road in London that he has used for twenty-seven years. Blahnik has turned away many offers to make him part of the new wave of conglomeration that has consumed the fashion industry. His sister, Evangelina, and his American partner, George D. Malkemus III, run the company. But as a designer Blahnik works alone. He has no deputies, assistants, entourage, or hangers-on. He draws every shoe himself, and in many cases he also stretches the leather, glues the soles in place, and whittles the last—the wooden form used to shape the shoe. When his shoes are ready to ship, he will sometimes stand on the factory loading platform with a lighter in his hand, singeing loose threads.

Blahnik calls his house in Bath "the shoe mausoleum," and he spends as much time there as possible, because he says it's the only place he can truly escape or relax. But Blahnik never escapes, and he never relaxes. He travels constantly between London, where he lives, and Milan, with trips to America and Asia. ("Those little Japanese women are simply mad for me," he said one day, as I watched him sketch shoes for Japanese *Vogue*. "Can you imagine?") Blahnik,

who is fifty-seven, works incessantly, turning dozens of ideas into richly detailed and provocative drawings for the three hundred styles of shoe he will make each year. "If you don't come see what I have in Bath," he said one day when he invited me to visit, "you cannot possibly understand how strange I really am."

Blahnik has a daunting, almost imperial bearing; he was born to wear a cape. A friend once described him as Claus von Blahnik—as played, of course, by Jeremy Irons. He dresses crisply, in bespoke clothing. His silver hair is always gelled and his aquiline nose seems to hover in the air like a small bird. It is impossible not to notice him. The Four Seasons in Milan, which is the preferred billet for the nomadic fashion crowd, is often filled with the most jaded people on earth. Yet, once, as I was waiting in the lobby, I saw a dozen heads turn away from Naomi Campbell to a more distant figure: Manolo had entered the room. And, as soon as he did, Campbell's head turned, too.

Like many of his colleagues at the top of the fashion business, Blahnik is used to getting his way. He can be petulant and eccentric in several languages. In Milan, where he spends nearly three months a year, he *must* have Room 212 at the Four Seasons. At the St. Regis in New York, it's the tenth floor or nothing. Blahnik will travel to America only on what he calls "the quick plane"—the Concorde. At home, he eats little; on the road, when he can't dine in the hotel, he tries to eat at the same restaurant each night. Blahnik takes three baths a day. ("Are you kidding? When it's hot, I take six.") He calls his eighty-five-year-old mother, in the Canary Islands, almost as often as he bathes. He would never dream of travelling without his version of the nuclear football: a custom-made leather valise full of bone-handled hairbrushes, antique shaving utensils, fifty-year-old Italian linens, and an ample supply of silver mirrors, all of which would have been standard equipment for a gentleman's portmanteau two hundred years ago.

Manolo Blahnik has the attention span of a kitten. He rarely finishes a sentence. One minute he will be talking with passion about Nubian folk music, which he reveres. And the next he is launched on a critique of young designers, who he feels are far too reliant upon MTV and other artifacts of an instant society. ("These little kiddies today, they don't even know what a shoe is. To them design is what they see in magazines. It's not based on human life. They will suddenly scream, 'Oh my God! My collection is going to be so very Anna May Wong,' because they stayed up late one night and saw a movie. *Please.*") He reads widely in English and French, and fluently enough in Spanish and Italian. ("My life is a torrential river of books," he told me, and then went on to describe, in torrents, the plot of the latest novel by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who is one of his favorite writers.)

Blahnik appears to have seen every movie, and he loves discussing casts, crews, and antecedents. Once, I asked whether he had seen the most recent film version of "Romeo and Juliet." He answered, but it is never possible to discuss one film with Blahnik unless you are willing to talk about ten: "Do you mean the Baz Luhrmann 'Romeo and Juliet,' with Claire Danes? I loved it. . . . I loved it. The best 'Romeo and Juliet' in my memory was Renato Castellani in the fifties, early, with what's the name of that girl, I don't even know the name of that girl now, the English girl . . . and Laurence Harvey. Too old, both of them. But a *beeeautiful* movie. And then I loved also the other version with Zeffirelli. It was cute. The teen-age one. Don't push me to go on, I'll go mad. But I love that new one that was set in California. It was MTV nonstop.

But that's all right. I'm not mad about that child, though. Leonardo. The boy."

For a man who inhabits a world ruled by ephemera, Blahnik despises change. He got so upset when the Spanish company that produced his favorite pomade went bankrupt that he considered trying to buy and revive it. (Not long ago, when we were together in Milan, he saw, in one of the city's most expensive pharmacies, a French hair gel, Tenax, his chosen substitute. After the clerk said that the store had sixty-one tubes in stock, he promptly bought them all.) So when Blahnik told me that I would have to travel to Bath and see his shoe archive to appreciate him in all his strangeness, I was pretty sure he was selling my imagination a bit short. I had no idea.

Manolo Blahnik only has eyes for feet. He says that he simply cannot stand the thought of a naked body. When he stops by the Prado, the Louvre, or the British Museum, as he does often, he can talk about the sculptures with great sophistication and in precise detail as long as you ignore the torso. He can distinguish the work of Praxiteles from the Aphrodite of Doidalses with a glance at their chiselled toes. He will talk about the feet of fishermen for hours. (They are ideal, Blahnik says, because a life spent barefoot on the sand "rubs them to perfection.") He also has opinions about arches (the higher the better) and the proper alignment of a woman's toes (the second toe should be slightly longer than the big one). Slovenliness appalls him, and the words "clean" and "groomed," when applied to a human being, are the highest accolades he has to offer. ("Jennifer Aniston came into the store last year. She's a cute little girl, groomed to perfection, and, my God, is she *clean*.") Blahnik cannot abide bright shades of nail polish, or even the newer, more fashionable muddy dark shades; he finds them all vulgar. ("You should use crimson or a nude color," he says, sternly. "Or clear varnish. And that is all.") He can stare at heels all day, and then go home and draw them all night. "I'm simply mad for extremities," he said. "I always have been. The rest of the body seems so dull to me."

Thinking about shoes seems to give Blahnik the energy of a switched-on teen-ager. At lunch, he had been sour and in pain. By the time we arrived at his house, which is shrouded in wisteria, his mood had changed completely. Blahnik likes to work there; the ground floor has an airy study with a large drafting table and a mesmerizing picture of James Dean. "I don't like beautiful boys in general," he said when he saw me staring at the photo. "But he was so much the *most* beautiful boy." In his bedroom, Blahnik has a Horst photograph that his sister and her daughter gave him; it's of a pair of disembodied legs and feet. He told me that Horst, whom he admired greatly, died in November because "he couldn't bear to confront the new century." When Blahnik talks about artists whose aesthetic vision he admires, his voice soars an octave. And it soars often. "Manolo lives for beauty," André Leon Talley, an editor at *Vogue* and one of Blahnik's oldest American friends, told me. "He is the Proust of shoes. Ugliness makes him bleed." There are books lying everywhere in the house, essays mostly, and biographies, but also great piles of art books, on subjects ranging from medieval churches to nineteenth-century stonemasonry. There are also dozens of videos—everything from "Alphaville" to "Pleasantville" to "Z."

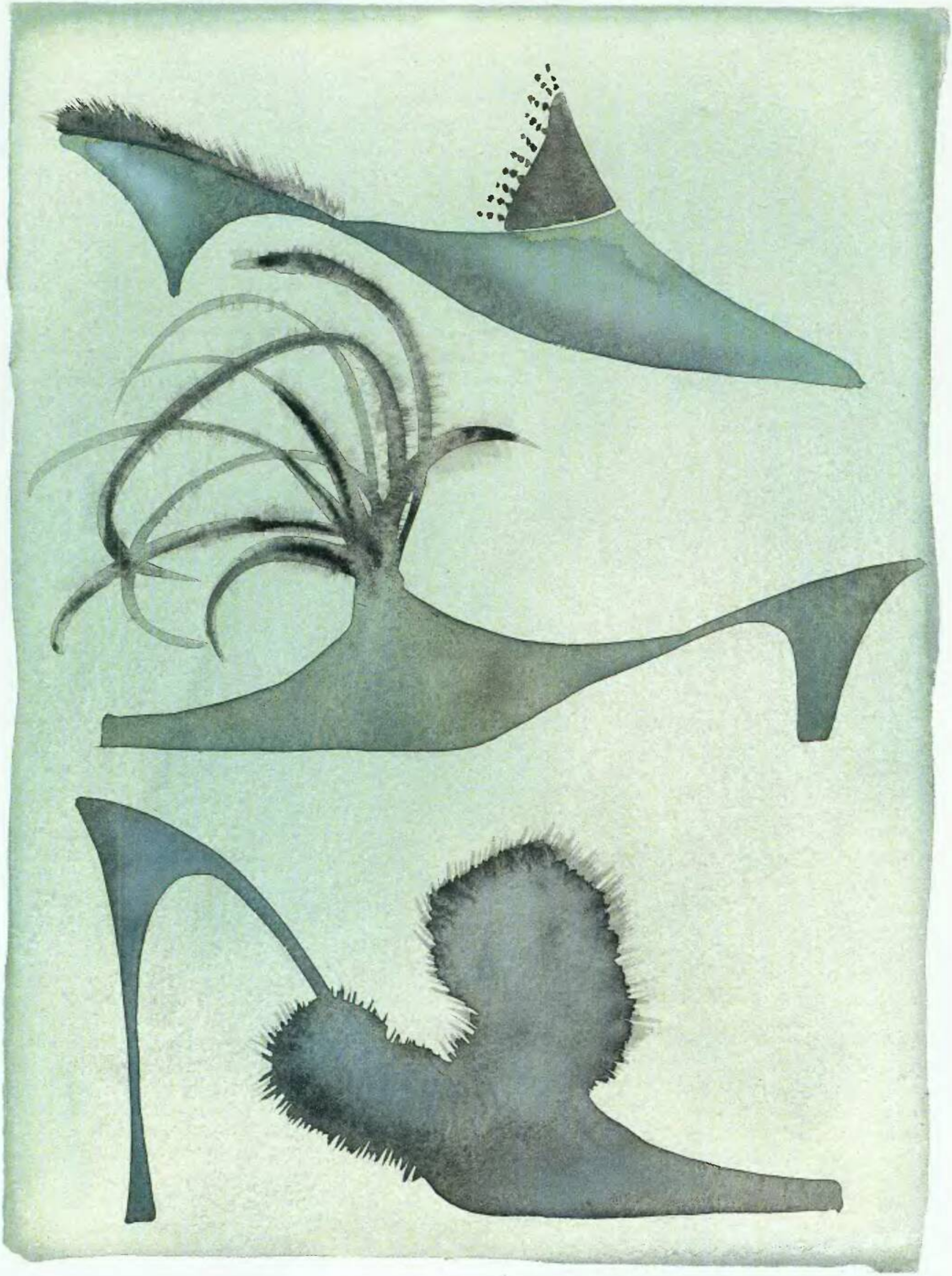
By the time we climbed the great stone staircase to the third floor—which is where the shoes begin—Blahnik was practically vibrating. He told me that the house, which offers sweeping views of the pale tiles and red rooftops of Bath, had once been occupied by the actress Helen Mirren. She should see it now. The drawing rooms were built for tea dances and whist. Now every room has cupboards that stretch from the floor to the ceiling, and each shelf is filled with shoes. Imelda Marcos wouldn't believe this place! Pumps! Sling-backs! Sandals! Mules! Shoes in the bathroom and the attic and the closets and the halls. Shoes stuffed into boxes and packed under beds. Shoes have taken over the guest rooms, the bedrooms, the studies. There is only one from each pair, but there are thousands, and they represent almost everything Manolo Blahnik has ever made. "Look at this place," he said with real pride as we reached the landing. "There are shoes here to make you vomit."

When Blahnik opened the first of the cupboard doors on the third floor, it was as if he had stumbled into a children's fable, something he had never seen before. He gasped. "Look. Look at these shoes. Look. This is what I love," he said, picking up a shoe that would seem, to most eyes, the antithesis of his style. It was flat, dark, heavily brocaded. A court shoe with almost no heel. "These are the things that people don't want from me. The people want high heels. They want sex. They want danger. That's the disease. I'm so incredibly bored with sex. I don't want to hear about it ever again."

Blahnik was whipping through his collection now. He grabbed a satin mule, the shoe he is perhaps most famous for—the decadent backless bedroom slipper that he reinvented as a bawdy street shoe. It is a style that has been copied by every other designer. "Here it is. The mule. It's horrible! What was I thinking? If a shoe fetishist saw this, he would go nuts." Then he grimaced. "I have one, you know . . . a shoe fetishist. He is in prison somewhere in America. He writes me letters. Sends them by express mail. He is a madman. He says"—and now he slipped into a perfect imitation of Hannibal Lecter—" 'The only thing that will get me through the day is seeing a pair of Manolo Blahnik heels.' Do you have any idea how much that freaks me out?"

This seemed a bit odd coming from the man who took stiletto heels from the world of prostitutes and introduced them into society. Didn't you create it all, I asked? What was the point of the Absolut Blahnik advertisement, for example, the one with the model drifting on a raft in the moat of the Vittskövle Castle, wearing only a bathing suit and a pair of Blahnik's shiny, spiked, black leather boots, which crept up above her knee—boots that would have sent Leopold von Sacher-Masoch into an uncontrollable frenzy? It's not as if the sexual power of the high heel were unknown. High heels change a woman's posture and her gait. They accentuate the length and contour of the ankle and leg while curving the foot, making it seem smaller. High heels are an erotic pedestal. They tilt the breasts

MATS GUSTAFSON



From the Blahnik archives, shoes embellished with beads, feathers, silk embroidery, silver mesh, wolf fur, and chinchilla.

forward, pull the stomach in, and push the rear out. And that's before you take a single teetering, contorted step. As William A. Rossi observed in his bizarre 1976 book, "The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe," "Women have always had an affinity for fragile foundations and willowy walking, and men have always responded erotically to the sight of it."

Blahnik knows this well. "I understand that some people associate high heels with sex," he conceded. "To me, there is so much more. I happen to love artifice in a woman. Without that, there is no mystery. High heels create artifice. It's the way you walk. You create a motion, a space, it's sinuous. You become a living sculpture. Even if it's not successful sometimes. It's so exciting. It's the transformation that I live for. The sexual part means nothing."

This kind of talk drives George Malkemus crazy. Malkemus, who has run the American end of the business for nearly twenty years, is a pleasant, compact fellow with a good head for numbers and an uncanny ability to endure Blahnik's tectonic shifts in mood. "I have heard it a thousand times," he told me. "All I can say is that when Manolo sees the shoe, just when he sees it, it's orgasmic. For him, that shoe isn't really about sex. The shoe *is* sex."

Obsessives stalk Blahnik. On the train from Bath to London one day, a woman recognized him and started talking about shoes. After a few minutes, he stood up and said, "Madam, I am sorry to say that I am visiting my niece, who lives in Swindon. I must now leave the train," and he fled. One terribly famous movie star used to wander frequently into his New York store and sit for hours, watching women try on shoes. Blahnik appears each year in America with his new collections for Neiman Marcus, and women swoon when he shows up. "When Manolo goes out to our Beverly Hills store, it's an absolute mania," Cynthia Marcus told me. "You cannot believe what happens. We will do two or three hundred thousand dollars' worth of business in a couple of days. In one store. The women fall all over him. They bring him bags full of shoes to sign. They are insane."

Blahnik autographs all the shoes, high on the arch, so his signature won't wear away. It is a peculiar fact about Blahnik that women feel they can tell him anything. Customers will describe the most intimate details of their sex lives—and the effect his shoes have had on them. There are times when their comments leave him gasping for air. "Sometimes I just have to say, 'Madam, please, I must ask you to refrain,' " he told me in Bath as we worked our way through his shoes. "Honestly, where were these people raised?"

In June, a book about Blahnik and his work will appear in England, and, with the help of his twenty-six-year-old niece, an architect who recently graduated from Cambridge, he has spent a good deal of time cataloguing and organizing his shoes. The book is written by a British journalist, and Blahnik has no connection with the project, although he was granted the right to approve the pictures. He views the book mostly as a way to put his designs into some coherent order. But Blahnik wants me to see that, while he loves his work, he doesn't take it all that seriously. He pulled out a classic hiking boot made in Corinthian leather and a construction boot with a three-inch heel. ("Isn't this *faaab*?") "This is called the Prairies," he said of another. "Look, it's an Indian moccasin in high heels. And this is quite funny, and what about the L. L. Bean look over here. And look, look! There are work-boot high heels. Isn't that camp? And these are high-heeled gardening shoes. Very practical."

He means that, by the way. Blahnik says he loves it when women wear his shoes in the mud. He may be obsessed with cleanliness, but he likes his shoes to get a workout. "Best of all would be in stables," he told me. "I want them to be dirty." Blahnik remembers the genesis of every sandal or sling-back that lines the wall. "Look at this—isn't that sick?—it's for a wedding in Africa, where the girls have to walk in high-heeled boots." He held out an elaborate and beautifully made ankle boot, fashioned from pony skin, with open toes and lots of eyelets.

I asked what he meant about a wedding in Africa. "I don't know. I made it up. It's not normal. You wouldn't wear it in England. It has to be hot. In Africa you can wear this. Not here. In Africa." He raked through dozens of shoes at great speed. "This one is Kate Moss's favorite shoe. Absolutely. She has about a million pairs." Next, he grabbed a feathery mule that he said would have been perfect for Marilyn Monroe. He went on to cite her famous remark about not knowing who invented the high heel but that "all girls everywhere owe him a lot." He talked about her for a while, so I asked whether he had heard Elizabeth Hurley's recent comment that she would have to kill herself if she ever became as fat as Monroe. Blahnik froze. "Marilyn Monroe fat?" he shrieked. "How *daaarrre* the bitch? How dare she talk that way about Marilyn Monroe, the woman who marked the century?"

Blahnik claims that he wants his shoes to be comfortable. He noted that while Roger Vivier—who is often credited with inventing the stiletto heel—was a brilliant designer, "it must also be said that he nearly crippled an entire generation of women." A surprising number of Blahnik's customers did tell me that his shoes are relatively easy to wear. I heard from quite a few others, however, including some of his fans, who said that they were among the most highly refined torture chambers ever invented. One friend bombarded me with E-mail calling him a misogynist and a psychopath. "There are lots of women who think high heels are an evil conspiracy to cripple women by men who didn't like their mothers," Valerie Steele told me. Steele is the chief curator of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology and the author of "Shoes: A Lexicon of Style." "It's all really kind of silly." Still, walking around in three-inch heels can't be as pleasant as sinking your feet into a pair of anatomically correct Birkenstocks (a word, by the way, that Blahnik can't bring himself to utter). I asked if he ever felt sorry for all those women teetering through their lives on the spikiest of high-heeled shoes.

"Oh, my God, they love it," he said. "How could I feel sorry for them? Sorry. Sorry for who?"

By now, we had made it to the fourth floor, and Blahnik's enthusiasm showed no sign of flagging. "Oh, this is Madonna's shoe from the 'Evita' première. I

love Madonna, you have to admire her. She hides her lack of talent so well."

On a wall nearby, there is a picture of Blahnik from 1971, when he lived in Notting Hill. A mop of hair is piled on top of his head. With bangs. He looks mod, swingerish, almost cool. He is much more distinguished-looking now.

"Some kind of bitter ones say the doctor orders them to stop wearing my shoes," he continued. "They say, 'I can't wear this and I can't wear that.' I say, 'Madam, buy flat shoes.' It is not my understanding that anybody anywhere makes a person buy an expensive high-heeled shoe. There are women who like the shoes I make. For other women, there are other shoes." Then, as an afterthought, he added, "My mother cannot even walk in flats. She doesn't know how."

We reached the final set of cabinets near the back of the house—his fantasy collection, full of pastels and flowers. "This is the Escher," Blahnik said, pulling out a psychotropic pump. "This was for Marianne Faithfull when she did drugs. Look at the lime-green sandal. It's the C. Z. Guest look. I did this one for Bianca. Look at the little foot. She has such tiny, tiny feet. Look. That was my first shoe. My very first shoe—1971. How embarrassing." It's a giant platform heel in turquoise and yellow. He hates platforms and never made another. "They are hideous. Simply hideous. Anything to do with the current rage makes me sick. Did you ever watch the fashion channel? If you look at it for ten minutes then you realize how horrible and stupid this business is. How shameful and pretentious."

There was just an attic left, and it could be reached only by a dangerous-looking ladder. I passed. "Nothing there but shoes," he cackled. "Shoes. Shoes. Shoes. It is so sick. Isn't this just the sickest thing you have ever seen in your life? Come on, be honest."

Before I could say a word, though, Blahnik let out a long, deep sigh. "Oh, God, I'm in Heaven."

Manolo Blahnik was born in 1942, in the Canary Islands. He remembers it as a "paradise" of Renaissance buildings, colonial houses, and spare, empty churches. Blahnik's father, who died in 1986, was originally from Czechoslovakia, and his mother

From top: Manolo Blahnik at his factory in Milan; the designer sculpting his new heel for spring/summer, 2000; the finished product in his Manhattan boutique. Photographs by Michael Roberts.

is Spanish. They ran a banana plantation there because, as Blahnik put it, "on the Canary Islands before the war there was nothing but bananas and me and my sister and my parents." His mother, who still lives in Santa Cruz de la Palma, was a soignée sophisticate who travelled to Paris and Monte Carlo and Madrid to shop. At home, she used to whittle clogs because she wasn't impressed with the workmanship of the town cobbler. "As a boy, I got attracted to peasant shoes," Blahnik told me. "My mother would make Catalan espadrilles with a black ribbon in the middle. I thought that they were so exciting. I still do."

It was often a lonely childhood, though Blahnik says he never minded. For fun, he would capture lizards and make shoes for them out of tinfoil that his mother saved from cartons of Camel cigarettes. Blahnik also made shoes—of ribbon or lace—for dogs, cats, birds, and anything else he could get his hands on. "I lived a complete fantasy as a child. There was nothing there but what came out of our brains." Even after the war ended, Blahnik said, the Canary Islands remained isolated. "We went years without publications from Europe or the Iberian Peninsula. We got everything by boat from Argentina. My mother had *Vogue*, of course, and *Bazaar*, and my father took *Time* and *Life*. We would wait every Friday for the boats to dock with all those packages of magazines. I can still see them wrapped up so neatly and tied in bundles. And that was my life. Can you imagine?"

By the time he was twelve, Blahnik and his sister, Evangelina, who is a year younger, were as inundated with culture as two children living on a remote Spanish island could be—piano lessons, ballet, instruction in several languages, even Swedish gymnastics. "We tried everything," he recalled. "We had this magical setting for our youth. I live there still in my memory." Blahnik remains close to his sister, who runs the European part of the business from their office in London. Evangelina has the same silver hair as Manolo and the same aristocratic bearing, yet she is as reserved as her brother is flamboyant.

Blahnik's father had hoped he would become a diplomat. ("Can you imagine?

Me? Patiently dealing with the fate of nations?") After studying politics and law at the University of Geneva, he quickly moved into literature and architecture. From there, he went to Paris before settling in London at the end of the sixties. For a while, Blahnik thought he wanted to design stage sets. With a friend, the photographer Eric Boman, he travelled to New York in 1971, because "that was where you went to make it."

"When you are young, you don't have a clue," he told me. "You just think you can do it if you try." Paloma Picasso, who is a lifelong friend, arranged for Blahnik to show his drawings to Diana Vreeland, then the editor of *Vogue*. "My God, how I was terrified. I am still terrified thinking about it. She looked at my drawings," he went on, "and then she started to scream." At this point, Blahnik broke into what I can only imagine is a pretty fair Vreeland imitation: " 'How *amuuusing*. Amusing.' That is all she kept saying. 'Amusing.' She asked me how long I was in New York, and she said, 'You can do accessories very well. Why don't you do that? Go make shoes. Your shoes in these drawings are so amusing.' I did what she told me. It was like a commandment from God."

Blahnik went home and got to work. He started small, needed little money, and succeeded at once. But he didn't really know what he was doing. "It took many years to realize how to do shoes, learn how to make them lovely and arty and technically perfect." In fact, his first collection was infamous. "I forgot to put in heels that would support the shoe," he told me. "When it got hot, the heels started to wobble. It was like walking on quicksand." Blahnik remains in London for convenience. "It's like an airport to me," he said. "Though I do like certain things about the English. The madness, the eccentricity. London is like a multi-multi whatever. It's fusion. It's everything. But I sometimes wonder if I should have stayed in America. I worship the American women, after all. They are as tough as nails, and they have these incredible minds. They scare me. I love that."

"She did only twenty-eight of the thirty-two fouettés in the 'Black Swan' pas de deux . . . or are my eyes deceiving me?"

I caught up with Blahnik and George Malkemus around Christmas, in Milan. Spending time with them when they are together is a bit like being thrust into the cast of "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?" ("This is my idea, George, and they are my shoes. Can I talk?" Blahnik blurted out at dinner one night, when Malkemus was describing a plan to make limited editions of shoes that will cost as much as fifteen thousand dollars a pair. "I swear, George, if you interrupt one more time I will stab you.")

When Malkemus is in Milan, they spend most of their time at the factories, making sure that Blahnik's vision will translate into enough shoes—and the right shoes—to satisfy their customers. ("I could care less whether a shoe I make sells," Blahnik told me more than once. "That's what I have George for.") Malkemus agrees, sort of. When I visited him at Blahnik's boutique in Manhattan, he showed me a pair of sling-backs called the Carolyne, named for the New York socialite Carolyne Roehm. It is Blahnik's most successful shoe. "This is beauty and sex and what every woman wants to have on her foot," Malkemus said. "Now, look at this shoe"—he pointed to a sandal with fringed leather running in various directions down the foot. Malkemus squirmed when he touched it, as if it had fleas. "Manolo adores this. Will we have this shoe in the shop? Of course. Will we sell more than ten pairs? Never."

Blahnik's favorite factory is run by a family with whom he has worked for twenty-five years, but, on our way there, he asked me not to mention their names. "There are only a few things that can really get me going," he said. "Industrial espionage is one of them." Malkemus turned from the front of the Mercedes to tell Blahnik that, for

the third time in as many weeks, a fairly well-known competitor had asked this factory to make his shoes.

"I can't take it anymore," Blahnik shouted as we pulled up to a tidy suburban building that looked more like a school than a factory. "It's not right. It's not ethical. I don't go to people's homes, to where they have been for twenty-five years, and steal from them. 'I want your shoes. I want your factory.' How demeaning. How vile. How can he even face himself?"

A handsome woman named Nadia walked us through the factory to the office. It is not unusual for other successful designers to fax their drawings to Italy and then to check in from time to time. Blahnik would make every pair of shoes himself if he could. I watched as he cut patterns—just as a dressmaker would—and shaped the fabric to fit the last. He then laid strips of masking tape across the shoe so that he could glue on pearls, sequins, or beads.

"So opulent. So modern. Madame Vreeland would have gone mad for these." Blahnik was looking at a new baby-blue-and-lavender crocodile shoe with jewels set into the heel. "I can hear her now," and he put his high-dame voice back on—" 'Give me opulence. Give me opulence. Nothing less will do' "—before slipping back into himself. "These could be for the Queen of Naples Ball. Maybe. Or for a tryst. Yes. A trysting shoe. But these shoes are so ridiculous. Who has the money to spend four thousand dollars on a crocodile shoe? What am I doing, George? Have I completely lost my mind?" I watched as he scraped an almost invisible drop of glue from the side of a thousand-dollar stiletto.

"What will happen to your brand when you stop?" I asked. The question surprised him. "Well, I'm not going to turn myself into McDonald's, if that's what you mean. They're just shoes. I'll make as many as I can, and when I die I suspect the world will survive."

Lunch had been spread out along the worktables, but when a secretary announced that the man who makes their finest lasts had arrived Blahnik was out of his seat in five seconds. He dove across his desk, narrowly missing a plate of mozzarella. He grabbed a dozen drawings. "My God, George, get the others. We must hide the drawings."

"I'm sorry you're having a hard time, Roy. Please forgive my Schadenfreude."

"What's going on?" I asked, when the sheaf of papers had been temporarily deposited in the trash basket.

Blahnik looked at me darkly. "That man is very talented," he told me. "There are not many like him left. But I don't trust him. He talks to Prada. I know it. He talks to Gucci, he talks to everyone."

After returning from the factory, we decided to take advantage of the late shopping hours. The warm weather and Christmas season had conspired to fill the stores along the Via della Spiga with half the population of Milan. It was hard just to make our way down the old stone streets.

We passed a billboard that displayed a vintage 1960 ad for Moët & Chandon, which featured a picture of Cary Grant and Kim Novak. "Oh, Kimmy, Kimmy, Kimmy!" Blahnik shouted, loud enough to turn heads. Then he ran up to the ad and kissed the Plexiglas that covered her face. "I adore you. Just adore you. I always have." We looked at the Christmas decorations in a few windows, but soon it was time to make our way back to the hotel. Before we did, though, I asked Blahnik if there was a "right woman" to wear his shoes, a muse. "Not at all," he said. "They don't have to be glamorous. I don't care who wears them. After I make them, the rest doesn't matter." Malkemus rolled his eyes and whispered, "Bullshit." Then he pointed to an elegant young Indian woman. She was dressed in a plain sari and a cashmere shawl. She moved as if there were a cushion of air between her and the ground. "Manolo," Malkemus said mischievously. "Look at that." Blahnik turned, but said nothing as she strode by. Then he let out a kind of yelp.

"Did you see that, George!" he shouted, completely beside himself. "She was wearing my clear heel. She was wearing it, George, and it looked perfect. It was made for her. My God, George, what a joy. Wasn't she beautiful? Wasn't she absolutely beautiful?" ♦

PORTFOLIO BY HELMUT NEWTON

BELLE DE JOUR

Nothing says springtime quite so much as a romp around Paris in your underpants. Pitchers and catchers may have reported to spring training; tax day might have come and gone; but nothing celebrates the vernal equinox like whipping off your fleece-lined Uggs and wool-blend trousers, getting a Brazilian bikini wax, and strolling over to the Eiffel Tower just as you are.

Panties were everywhere on the runway this season—well, not literally everywhere, the way they might literally be everywhere on, say, the stage at a Ricky Martin concert, but they were everywhere in the fashion sense of everywhere. At the big spring fashion shows in Milan and Paris panties were what was being shown on the hottest height-and-weight-proportional runway girls (that's fashion slang for supermodel, in case you don't speak Garmento). There were panties paired with little chiffon blouses and panties paired with peplumy things and panties paired with classic white tanks, worn with nosebleed high heels and, in inclement weather, a hat. The leg (that's Garmento for "legs," by the way) is nude or casual-Friday dominatrix. At ease, gentlemen!

Wearing tailored spread-collar shirting with nothing but Spanky Pants broadcasts an almost dizzyingly compounded message. The look is Take a Letter, Maria from the waist up, and Hello, Big Boy! there on down. Nothing has whipsawed between naughty and nice this energetically since Catherine Deneuve (at left) played a housewife/hooker in the 1967 film "Belle de Jour." The poignant contrapuntal theme—most clothes have one, at least the bridge lines through couture—is a sweet reference to a tot in a top and a diaper, although this does not account for the stiletto heels. Whatever. The rise of the panty has shifted the paradigm: instead of hemlines, now it's briefs versus bikinis, and to thong or not to thong. I see London. I see France.

—Susan Orlean

BOTTOM LEFT: PHOTOFEST

Left: An outfit by Valentino includes high-cut frilled hot pants. Above: Gucci's concealing top with revealing white pants.

Dolce & Gabbana's summer look—part lady, part tramp—includes a fox hat and a vinyl micromini skirt over shiny briefs.

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY SASHA LALLIC

Versace teams a delicately frilled top with bright-patterned bloomers and yellow snakeskin stilettos.

FICTION

FORBIDDEN

BY EDNA O'BRIEN

In the dream, there is a kidney-shaped enamel spittoon, milk white, and a gleaming metal razor such as old-fashioned barbers use. My mother's hand is on the razor, and then her face comes into view, swimming, as it were, toward me, pale, pear-shaped, about to mete out her punishment, to cut my throat. Then, with a glidingness, it is over, and I wake shaking, having escaped death not for the first time. In dream, my mother and I are enemies, whereas in life we were so attached we could almost be called lovers. I believed that the universe resided in her being. She was the hub of the house; the rooms took on a life when she was in them and a dearth when she was absent. She was real mother and archetypal mother. Her fingers and her nails smelled of food—meal for hens and chickens, gruel for the calves, and bread for us—whereas her body smelled of drifting things, depending on whether she was happy or unhappy; the most pleasant was a lingering smell of perfume from the cotton wad that she sometimes tucked under her brassiere. At Christmastime, it was a smell of fruitcake soaked with grog and the sugary smell of white icing, as stiff as starch, which she applied with the rapture of an artist.

We lived for a time in such symbiosis that there might never have been a husband or other children, except that there were. We all sat at the same fire, ate the same food, and, when a gift of a box of chocolates arrived, we looked with longing at the picture on the back, choosing in our minds the flavor we preferred. That box might not be opened for a year. Life was frugal. It was on a farm in Ireland, the harvest and the hay subject to the hazards of rain, and always hovering over her and us was the spectre of debt. Yet there were touches of grandeur, silver cloches like so many ironclad knights stationed along the sideboard, and mirrors with cupids kissing and cuddling. In drawers upstairs were folds of silk from the time when she worked, long before, at the silk

CHEMA MADOZ, "LE RÊVE DES OBJETS"/AGENCE VU

counter of a department store in Brooklyn, the name of which ranked second only to Heaven. On Sundays, for Mass, she would hurriedly don her good clothes, which had been acquired in those stylish times, or the clothes that had been sent by relatives over the years—voile dresses, cut on the bias, that seemed to wash over a body, over hers. I would beg her to re-don them in the evening so that we could go for a walk and, in summer at least, enjoy the evening intoxication of honeysuckle in other people's gardens. We did not have a garden, we had plowed fields and meadows. Somehow I thought that a garden would be a prelude to happiness. The flowers I could principally feast on were those painted on china cups and plates, splotches of gentian in cavities of moss, or, branching on the wallpaper, rosebuds so compact, so lifelike that one felt one could squeeze them or pluck them off. Our walks bordered on enchantment, what with neighbors, in some flush of affectation, greeting us profusely, and the possibility that we might walk out of our old sad existence.

She was beautiful. She had brown hair with bronzed glimmers in it, and blue-blue eyes that held within them an infinite capacity for stricture. To chastise one, she did not have to speak, her eyes did it with a piercing gaze. But when she approved of something everything seemed to soften, and the stream of bluish light was like stained glass melting.

On those walks, she invariably spoke of visitors who were bound to come in the summer and the dainty dishes she would prepare for them. There was a host of recipes she had not yet tried. Sometimes her shoes hurt and we had to sit on a wall while she rolled down her stockings and mashed and massaged her poor reddened toes. Once, a man we scarcely knew came and sat down beside us. He wore a torn flannel shirt and spoke in a wild voice, asking us, "Any news, any news?" She laughed over it afterward and said he was a yokel. I sometimes thought she would have liked a city life, a pampered life where she could wear good clothes and a divine pair of court shoes that glittered like filigree. Yet at heart she was a countrywoman, and as she got older the fields, the bog, her dogs, and her fowl became more important to her, were her companions once I had left. I had always promised not to leave. I promised it aloud to her and alone to myself as I looked at the silver knights on the sideboard and the tinted rosebuds on the wallpaper.

Our house had quarrels in it, quarrels about money, about drinking, about recklessness, but, not content with real fear, my mother also had to summon up the unknown and the supernatural. A frog jumped into the fire one night and she believed it was an augury for the sudden and accidental death of a neighbor, all the more so because when she cleaned out the ashes next morning there was no trace of a frog, not even a charred skeleton. Likewise a panel of colored glass above a vestibule door broke again and again, and she insisted that it was not wind or storm but a message from beyond. One evening, sitting in the kitchen in some dread, she conceived the thought that a man, a stranger, had come and stood outside the window preparing to shoot us. We moved to the side of the window and sat side by side on two kitchen chairs, barely breathing, waiting for our executioner. We sat there till morning, when the phobia was replaced by a real one, her husband, home from some all-night card game, still half-drunk and vexed at having to return to us, venting his rage.

She and I were Mendicants together, cooking, making beds, folding sheets, doing all the normal things in the so-called normal times and at other times cowering out-of-doors, under trees, our teeth chattering in a mad musical duet.

I cannot remember when, exactly, the first moment of the breach came. There were tiffs over food that I refused to eat and barbs about nonsensical slides that I put in my hair. I began to write—jottings that had to be covert because she would see in them a sort of wanderlust. She insisted that literature was a precursor to sin and damnation, whereas I believed it was the only alchemy that there is. I would read and I would write and she, the matrix of what I was writing, had to be banished, just as in a fairy tale. One day, she lost her temper completely when I read aloud to her a quotation of Voltaire's which I had copied out—"Illusion is the first of all pleasures." She looked at me as if I were a likely candidate for the lunatic asylum, twenty miles away. Many had gone there and we had seen them go, dragged by their relatives, fighting and shouting to be let out of a car, or else sitting in a state of numbness.

"Illusion," she said, and went on with her task. She was pounding very yellow oatmeal with boiling water, and the vehemence with which she did it was so great she might have been pounding me. From literature to, worse, venery. Those passions, those liaisons that were in novels, that were in Tolstoy, the recklessness of a Natasha willing to elope with a cad was the life I now craved. She sensed the impulse in me, and a current of mistrust sprung up between us. She searched my eyes, she searched my clothing, she searched my suitcase when, as a student, I returned home from Dublin; the few books I had brought with me she deemed foul and degenerate. The battle was on, but we skirted around it. I wrote fanciful pieces for a railway magazine, and she seethed. She would tell me what others—neighbors—thought of what I had written, tears in her voice at my criminality. Flings, youthful love affairs were out of the question. I eloped with a man I had known for only six weeks. She hated him after merely seeing a photograph, but she nevertheless insisted on my marrying to give the seal of respectability to things, and there followed a bleak ceremony that she did not attend. With uncanny clairvoyance, she predicted the year, the day, even the hour of the marriage's demise. Ten years and two children later, when it ended, she delivered her ultimatum. It was sent poste restante, and I read it in a street in London, where I was then living. She enjoined me to kneel down on the very spot as I was reading and make the vow to have nothing to do with any man in body or soul as long as I lived, adding that I owed it to God, to her, and to my children. She lamented my being young and therefore still in the way of temptation. She had reclaimed me.

Then came years and years of correspondence from her. She who professed disgust at the written word wrote daily—bulletins that ranged from the pleading to the poetic, from the philosophic to the apocalyptic. I never fully read them, being afraid of some greater accusation, and my replies were niceties, squeezed in with bribes and money to stave off con-

frontation. Yet there was something that I wanted to ask her about in the vague belief that known things and guessed things are imparted to us in some inexplicable way. I sensed a ghost inside her. There had been an infant before me that was born prematurely and had died. I believed that some drastic transaction had transpired between them. Why else was its name never uttered, prayers for it never said, and why did we never visit the grave, where even the four letters of its name were not inscribed on the tombstone underneath that of distant forebears. She had not wanted another child. There had been three children by then, and, with waning finances, they were hardship enough. By being born two years later I had in some way usurped her resolve.

For twenty-odd years I had postponed opening the bundle of letters that lay in a mildewed leather trunk, silent enjoinders that I often meant to destroy. Then one day, deluding myself that for my work I needed to revisit rooms and haunts that had passed into other hands, I lifted the little brass latch. It was like being plunged into the moiling seas of memory. Her letters were deeper, sadder than I had remembered, but what struck me most was their hunger. Here was a woman desperately trying to explain herself and to retie the cord that had been summarily cut. There were hundreds of them, or maybe a thousand. They had come two, three a week, always with apology for her not having written in the intervening days. I read them and stowed them away. She would wonder whether I was at home or away, wonder how soon we would meet again, wonder what new clothes I had got, or if any piece of furniture in my house had been moved about. She would swear to cross the sea to England even if she had to walk it, and strenuously I postponed those visits. She would send things from her linen press, and the letter that preceded the parcel went like this—"I sent you yesterday eighteen large doilies, eighteen small ones, and four central ones. I didn't get to wash and starch them as it takes so long to iron them properly, when starched." The next letter or the one following would be about toil—she had drawn one hundred buckets of water and sprayed the entire avenue with weed-killer. One Sunday, she had gone for a walk. It was a scorching day, she said, and she felt a strange kind of energy, an exhilaration as when she was young. Up there on the slopes of the mountain there were ripe blackberries, masses of them on the briars, and not wishing to have them rot she picked them to make blackberry jelly. Without basket or can, she had to remove her slip and put the blackberries inside it, where they shed some of their purple juices. In her letter, she wished that she could hand me a pot of clear jelly over a hedge and watch me taste and swallow it.

She had her eye out for a home that might suit me, although I had no intention of going back to buy a house or a plot of land. One was called Gore House, named after an English landlord, long

since dead. She said it was a pity I had not bought it instead of the German who not only never set foot in it but had bought it when he saw it from the air, travelling in his private jet. Continentals loved the place and therefore why not I?

The letters about her dogs are the most wrenching. She always had two dogs, sheepdogs, who sparred and growled at one another throughout the day, apart from when they were off hunting rabbits, but who at night slept more or less in each other's embrace, like big honey-colored bears. They had the same names, Laddie and Rover, and always met with the same fate. They had a habit of following cars in the avenue and one invariably got killed while the other grieved and mourned, refused food, even refused meat, listened intently to the sounds of dogs barking in the distance, and in a short time died and was buried with its comrade. She would swear never to get another pair of dogs but in a matter of months she was writing off to a breeder several counties away and two little puppies in a cardboard box with a nest of dank straw would arrive by bus and presently be given the same two names. She gloried in describing how mischievous they were, the things they ate, pranks they were up to. One May morning, she looked out and thought it was snowing, but when she went outdoors she found that they had bitten the sheets off the clothesline, chewed off small pieces, and spat them out.

Her life got increasingly hard. There were floods and more floods, as she put it, and heating oil got costlier each year, while the price of cattle went rock-bottom. People were hoarding their own beef, but, as she said, for that one needed a deep freezer, which she did not have. A mare that my father loved and had dispatched to a trainer was expected to win a big race but merely came in third, thereby quashing all his hopes of riches. Not having the means, she nevertheless lived for the day when she could afford to get me a chandelier and to have it so carefully wrapped that not a single crystal would get broken. I did not have that much of a wish for a chandelier.

As she got older, she admitted to being tired, and sometimes the letters were in different inks where she had stopped writing or maybe had fallen asleep. Death was now the big factor,

"I'm hearing a lot of buzzwords from you, but I'm not getting a buzz."

• •

the six-mark question that could not be answered. She was bewildered. She began to have doubts about her faith. One morning, she went blind for a moment, and from that day onward she hated night and hated dark and said she lay awake fearing that dawn would never come. Life, she maintained, was one big battle, because no matter who won, nobody did. She began, as things grew darker, to implicitly forgive my transgressions, whatever they might have been. I was going to America, and she asked me to track down a gentleman at an address in Brooklyn. He must have been a sweetheart. She had written him the previous summer at an address that someone had given her, but the letter had been returned after many months and much handling. She believed that it had been opened and therefore read.

It was like finding a phantom room in a house I thought I knew. I remembered something that as a child I had squirmed at overhearing. We were in a hired car, my mother, a newly married woman called Lydia, and myself, waiting outside a hospital for a coffin to be brought out to the hearse. My father and the driver had gone inside. Lydia chain-smoked, laughed a lot, and was vibrantly happy. My mother was delighted that we had given her a lift and became talkative. Normally guarded with neighbors, she began to tell this stranger of her glorious time in Brooklyn, the style she had, the dances she went to, the men she met. Pressed on that point, she said that, yes, there was one in particular, dark, handsome, and with a beautiful reserve. He had been such a gentleman, had given her little gifts, and on their Sunday outings had seen her back home to her digs and shaken her hand on the doorstep. Yet one night, passing a house of ill repute, with its red lights and its tasselled curtains, he had nudged her and said that maybe they should go in there and see what went on. She did not say if the friendship had been broken off abruptly, but what was clear by a little shiver in her body, in which desire and disgust overlapped, was that she had probably loved him and would have gone through that forbidden door with him.

Her last letter broke off after only a couple of lines. She was in a hospital in the city and had quarrelled with her son over her land. "My hand is shaking, as am I, with what I have to say," she wrote.

It remains unfinished, and so I wait for the dream that leads us from the inner room and that ghastly white spittoon, up onto the mountain, that bluish distance, half-earth, half-sky, toward her dark man and the zest of her youthful ways, to begin our journey all over again. ♦

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FRONT ROW NOTES

BY SANDRA BERNHARD

Well, another New York fashion week has come and gone. The collections felt like a return to places long forgotten: the rock-and-roll seventies, high society, Detroit. And, as usual, the real scenemakers weren't on the runway but sitting in the audience or dashing around backstage. Mary J. Blige, Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott, Toni Braxton—all the ruling divas were out in force, parading in distressed denim with appliquéd faux-fur hearts, shocking-blue feathery boa jackets, midriffs ablaze. Some of the girls were packing heat in their G-strings. This new diva posse is the last in a long line of fashion royalty. They know how to take risks with a confidence and commitment that used to be reserved for the likes of Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly.

All told, it was a very sexy week. How could it not be, with companies like General Motors underwriting the proceedings? Sadly, fashion has gone the way of big business. The "suits" have asserted themselves, and their presence can be felt on the runway. Kors, for instance, showed an "anthracite pinstripe cashmere flannel vest," an "anthracite cashmere flannel skirt," and a "silver fox boa" (as the program stated). You know, "urbane luxe," "the mysterious allure of the fedora," "Chrysler chic."

At Oscar de la Renta, everybody was freaked out when the people from PETA stormed the catwalk, but it was one of the most inspired moments of the week. It was well thought out and carefully planned, and, like a good old Helmut Newton photo, it was dangerous and sexy as hell. But, despite PETA's efforts, fur prevailed: Anna Wintour showed up the next day in a short chinchilla chubby, and André Leon Talley toted a gigantic Nija fur purse (Nija?). They seemed to have no fear; clearly, they would rather wear fur than go naked. Perhaps that's for the best.

Calvin Klein broke camp as always, and showed in the meat district, around the corner from Pastis (that's next to Jeffrey), and the crowds were just as eager to get in. Calvin continued his minimalist motif; everything he showed was in spruce, or prune, or raisin, or juniper, or mulberry. But never mind.

Shania Twain is no fool. She might tote a big old hatbox around in the middle of the desert, but when it comes to looking chic she goes straight to Marc Bouwer. Like some of the other boys, he was all about glamour this season. And of course we can't forget the other Marc. (Note to aspiring fashion designers: If you are named Mark, change the spelling immediately.) Marc Jacobs's was the first runway that looked as if you could actually land a plane on it, and when the girls came out looking like stewardesses it made me long for the time when travel was still glamorous. The critics called it seventies redux, but for me it brought up images of a woman who enjoys an icy Martini and a Nembutal suppository.

After all this, it was good to get a dose of European flavor at Helmut Lang. If Marc Jacobs and Michael Kors represent the new high society, then Helmut is the champion of the kids who like to keep it simple. Sometimes Helmut is so sleek, spare, and unadorned that wearing his clothes makes you feel like you ought to go shopping. But, when you do, don't be surprised if everything looks familiar. The immediacy of fashion coverage these days, from the Internet to cable, resembles a Presidential exit poll—you know too much, too soon. As Kal Ruttenstein, the Bloomingdale's buyer, whispered in my ear during one show, "Now everybody's a fashion expert." ♦

HAIR BY THOMAS McKIVER; MAKEUP BY LIZ MARGIN

Sandra Bernhard in a fashionable mix of Louis "Sex in the City," socialite Cornelia Guest, fashion

PHOTOGRAPH BY ARTHUR ELGORT

Vuitton and Prada at Michael Kors's February show in Manhattan. Fellow front-liners, left to right, include (in profile) Kristin Davis, from consultant Ellin Saltzman, the International Herald Tribune's Suzy Menkes, and Anne Christensen, of the Times Magazine.

THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

RUINED CHOIRS

How did Shostakovich's music survive Stalin's Russia?

BY ALEX ROSS

On a January evening in 1936, Joseph Stalin entered a box at the Bolshoi Theatre, in Moscow. His custom was to take a seat in the back, just before the curtain rose. He had become interested that month in new operas by Soviet composers: a week earlier, he had seen Ivan Dzerzhinsky's "The Quiet Don," and liked it enough to summon the composer for a conversation. On this night, the Bolshoi was presenting "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk," a dark, violent, sexually explicit opera by Dmitri Shostakovich. Stalin enjoyed himself less. After the third act—in which tsarist policemen are depicted as buffoons who arrest people on hastily fabricated pretexts—the Leader conspicuously walked out. Shostakovich, who had been expecting the same reception that Stalin gave to Dzerzhinsky, went away feeling, he said, "sick at heart." Two days later, *Pravda* published an editorial under the headline "MUDDLE INSTEAD OF MUSIC," which condemned Shostakovich's opera outright. "From the first minute," the anonymous author wrote, "the listener is confused by a deliberately disordered, muddled stream of noise." The composer was playing a game that "may end very badly."

In 1936, Shostakovich was twenty-nine years old, and he was the brilliant young man of Soviet music. His First Symphony, which he completed at the age of eighteen, had been taken up by orchestras around the world. He had dedicated himself—industriously, if not enthusiastically—to works on Communist themes. His first opera, a setting of Gogol's "The Nose," typified the impertinence of art in the early Bolshevik years, and his second, "Lady Macbeth," was hailed—before Stalin saw it—as the prototypical Soviet music drama. For the benefit of the proletarian establishment, Shostakovich declared of his opera, "I wanted to unmask reality and to arouse a feeling of hatred for the tryannical and humiliating atmosphere in a Russian merchant's household." At the same time, his satire of the police must have struck a sympathetic chord with audiences who were living under Stalin. It's impossible to say whether Stalin himself took offense at the police scene, or the graphic bedroom sequences, or the spasms of dissonance produced by the orchestra. Perhaps he simply felt, with his genius for destruction, that this young man needed a comeuppance.

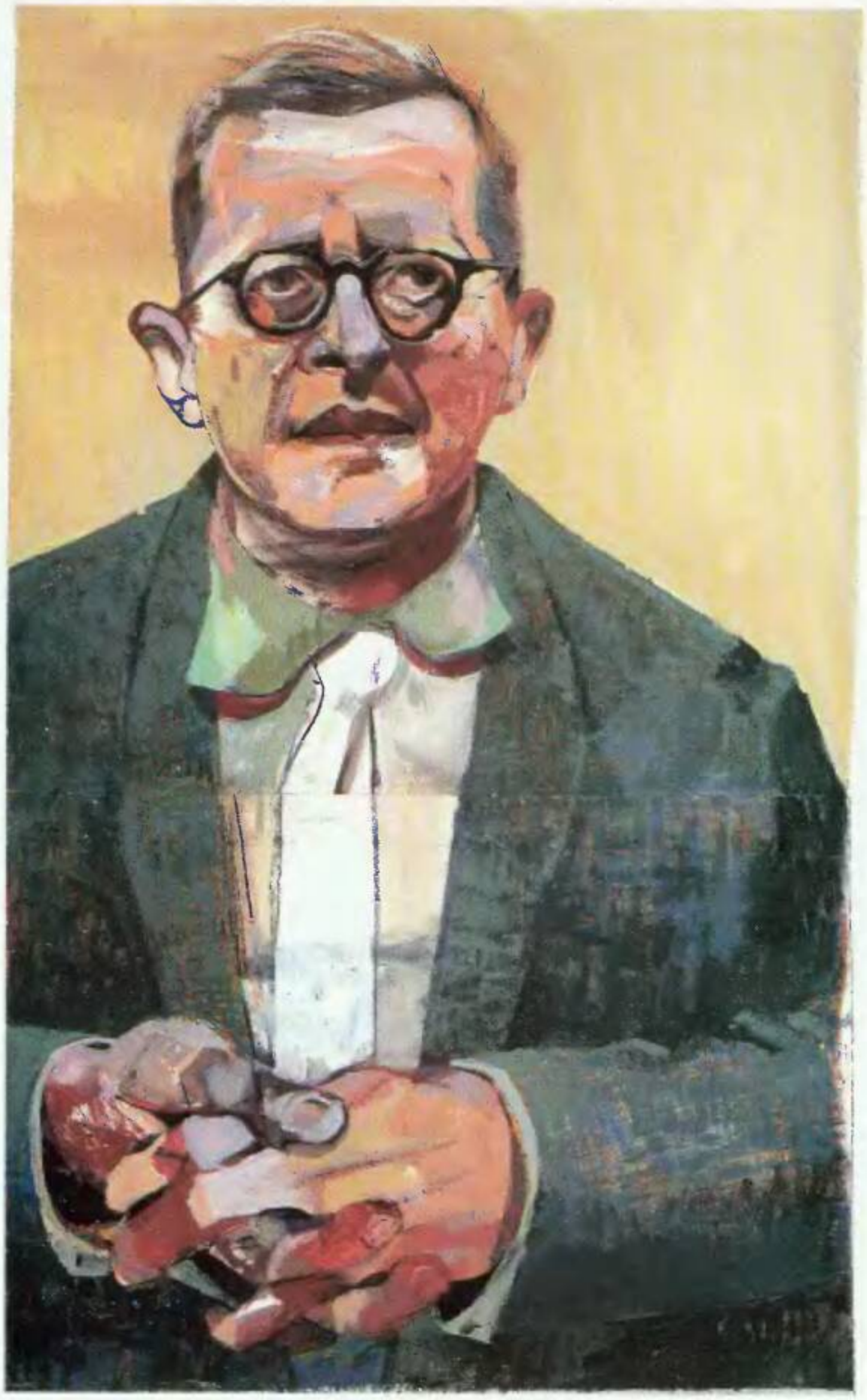
Shostakovich lived the next two years of his life in a state of abject fear. *Pravda's* denunciation of "Lady Macbeth" coincided with the beginning of the Great Terror, and Shostakovich was immediately declared "an enemy of the people." He is said to have slept in the hallway outside his apartment, so that when the N.K.V.D. came to take him away his young family would not have to witness the scene. He finished his Fourth Symphony, a surreal, desolate piece in a Mahlerian vein, and withdrew it when cultural officials warned him that he was still on the wrong path. In April of 1937, he set to work on a new symphony, in a simpler style; two months later, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a Marshal of the Soviet Union, who had been a supporter and friend of Shostakovich's for many years, was shot for his part in a nonexistent conspiracy. As the N.K.V.D. rounded up Tukhachevsky's circle, Shostakovich was called in for questioning. In an impeccably Gogolesque turn of events, the composer found that his appointed interrogator had been arrested, and that no one else was interested in his case.

When the Fifth Symphony had its première, in November of 1937, it sent the audience into convulsions. During the third movement, the proudly sorrowing Largo, many broke into tears. During the finale, people around the hall got to their feet, as if royalty had entered the room. The ovation afterward lasted for forty minutes. The game had not ended badly, for the moment: Shostakovich had written a piece that had aroused the love of the masses, and he had done so in a clear style that passed muster with socialist-realist aesthetics. The Fifth went on to achieve enormous popularity in the West. Shostakovich, in the remaining forty years of his career, proved to be one of the few twentieth-century composers who could hold audiences in thrall, and interest in him has only intensified since his death. This season, in New York, he is everywhere: "Lady Macbeth" is currently playing at the Metropolitan Opera; many of the symphonies have appeared on programs around town; and the Emerson Quartet has just recorded and performed the fifteen string quartets. Back in 1982, when the Fitzwilliam Quartet played the cycle at Alice Tully Hall, there were many empty seats. When the Emerson repeated the feat last month, the hall was full, and people were begging for tickets.

But something funny has happened to this composer on his way to immortality. Audiences are listening to him more intently than ever, but they are being urged to listen in a very different way. Shostakovich, once pegged as a propagandist for the Soviet system, is now exalted as its noblest musical victim. He has been canonized as a moral subversive, a conscientious ironist, a "holy fool." The ending of the Fifth Symphony, which was once described as a paean to Stalin's Russia, is now described as a subrosa denunciation of it. Such a hundred-and-eighty-degree rotation of meaning is curious, to say the least, and the arbi-

trariness of the change—the music is still said to represent Stalin but, now, critically—suggests that the new interpretation may be no more valid than the old one. The Fifth has become a hall of musical mirrors in which our own unmusical obsessions are reflected. The notes, in any case, remain the same. The symphony still ends fortissimo, in D major, and it still brings audiences to their feet.

When I began listening to Shostakovich, in college, I came across a record of a Soviet radio broadcast of one of the composer's public speeches. I put it on, expecting to meet the masterful personality behind the Fifth Symphony. Instead, I heard a man speaking hurriedly in Russian while an interpreter, sounding like a voice-over man in a driver's-ed film, intoned such deathless phrases as "We are all a vital part of the times we live in" and "Soviet art rests foursquare on the ideas and principles proclaimed by the great Lenin." This was an introduction to the enigma of Shostakovich, who made an art of saying nothing memorable in public. After any performance of his music, he would declare, "Brilliantly done." When he was shown something by another composer, he would say, "A remarkable work." He mastered Soviet doublespeak, and artfully mocked it in his correspondence: "1944 is around the corner," he wrote to his friend Isaak Glikman. "A year of happiness, joy, and victory. This year will bring us much joy. The freedom-loving Peoples will at long last throw off the yoke of Hitlerism, and peace will reign throughout the world under the sunny rays of Stalin's Constitution. I am convinced of this, and therefore experience the greatest joy."



RICCARDO VECCHIO

Twenty-five years after Shostakovich's death, the war for his mind goes on: Was he a craven apparatchik or a secret dissident?

This façade was shattered in 1979, with the publication of "Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich, as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov." Volkov, a young Leningrad musicologist, had interviewed the composer in the early seventies and smuggled his manuscript out of the Soviet Union. In "Testimony," Shostakovich rages against Stalin and offers provocative reinterpretations of several of his most familiar works. The book introduced many readers to Shostakovich's biting wit, and they began to hear the same tone in his music. A revisionist school of interpretation developed, as critics went hunting for subversive messages in Shostakovich's ostensibly socialist-realist symphonies. The quartets were likewise glossed as "private diaries" of the composer's anguish under Soviet domination. It was in this light that the Emerson played the cycle; the program notes quoted from such great dissident figures as Osip Mandelstam, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Joseph Brodsky, implying that Shostakovich belonged in their company. The Emerson also participated in "The Noise of Time," a production by the Théâtre de Complicité, in which Shostakovich's music under-scored a multimedia collage of his tormented life.

Not everyone has bought into this outspoken posthumous dissidence. A year after "Testimony" appeared, an American scholar, Laurel Fay, wrote an article questioning the book's authenticity. A second camp was formed—one that declared that Shostakovich had never strayed too far from the Party line, and that to call him a "dissident" made a mockery of the term. The musicologist Richard Taruskin declared that several of Shostakovich's major works conformed all too well with Soviet ideology. In his book "Defining Russia Musically," he wrote that the satire of the merchant class in "Lady Macbeth" coincided chillingly with Stalin's murderous campaign against the kulaks. Fay recently published "Shostakovich: A Life" (Oxford), which paints the composer as a fearful, accommodating figure.

In the last few years, the war for the mind of Shostakovich has only escalated. Polemics and counter-polemics are flying over the transom. Allan Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, two Volkov admirers, have responded to Fay's attacks on "Testimony" with a seven-hundred-and-eighty-seven-page volume entitled "Shostakovich Reconsidered," and buried

in it is a good case for the memoir's authenticity. The authors observe, for example, that the composer's signature appears on the first page of the Volkov manuscript, on which it is written, "Looking back, I see nothing but ruins, only mountains of corpses." Shostakovich, therefore, could have been under no illusions about the kind of project he was engaged in. Unfortunately, "Shostakovich Reconsidered" is a pedantic, fanatical mess of a book, a kind of hardbound Web site, in which fresh information is lost in reams of third-hand factoids and musicological daydreaming. All participants in the debate, in fact, have graphomaniac tendencies. Ian MacDonald, another critic of the revisionist persuasion, has posted a fifty-thousand-word review of Fay's biography on the Internet. Fay is preparing a response to "Shostakovich Reconsidered"—an article about a book about an article about a book. "Muddle Instead of Music" would be a good title for an omnibus anthology of the whole affair.

Here is a possible compromise: "Testimony" does tell us what Shostakovich was thinking about at the end of his life, but Shostakovich at the end of his life was a desperately embittered man, whose pronouncements on his own work are not always to be trusted. "Testimony," in other words, may be authentic, but it may not always tell the truth. By the early seventies, when Volkov conducted his interviews, Shostakovich was wracked by illness and clouded by medication. He had acquired a poor reputation among those who were trying to resist the excesses of the Soviet regime, and, in 1973, he enraged the dissident community further by signing a letter of denunciation against Andrey Sakharov. The composer may have wished to improve his image in the eyes of the younger generation, of whom Volkov was a representative. So he went back over his published work and argued that what had seemed doctrinaire was in fact subversive. This is what he said of the Fifth Symphony:

> I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in "Boris Godunov." It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, "Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing," and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing." What kind of apotheosis is that? You have to be a complete oaf not to hear that.

It is strange for an artist to hector his audience in this fashion. Shostakovich was usually as vague as possible when he spoke about his music, and his belated, belligerent specificity about the meaning of the Fifth seems to protest too much. Nothing in the score supports such a reading. And even if the composer had wanted a sardonic ending, attempts to perform it sardonically have proved unconvincing. A hundred orchestral musicians cannot play their hearts out in a major key and sound insincere about what they are doing.

Shostakovich's revisionist account of the Fifth has caught on because the circumstances of its creation make us uncomfortable. It's hard to accept that a composer wrote his best-loved work under the gun of a totalitarian regime. Listening to the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies side by side—one sprawling, dissonant, and spooky; the other strict, conservative, and uplifting—leaves no doubt that in 1936 and 1937 Shostakovich did make an abrupt and partly involuntary stylistic swerve. Yet most of us prefer the straitjacketed Fifth to the wildly gesticulating Fourth. Most of us, like it or not, share Stalin's taste for the tonal and the tuneful. The revisionist interpretation, conveniently, gives us the luxury of listening on two levels—the intellectual and the emotional. First, we ponder the theory that Shostakovich set out to write a meretricious grand finale, hedging it in with ironies and ambiguities. Then we connect emotionally with the unironic, unambiguous power of the sound. We nod our heads sagely at the program notes, and sway in our seats to the thudding of the drums. If we are inspired, we can jump to our feet at the end—sardonically, of course.

This raises a question about the famous première in 1937, at which people stood up in awe while the music was still playing. If, as the revisionists claim, all good Russians understood the coded message "Your business is rejoicing," why didn't they remain seated? More likely, they were getting to their feet because the music was rejoicing, in spite of everything—proudly, darkly, improbably. Shostakovich deployed an arsenal of

preëxisting musical devices to give his finale maximum impact. He looked back, in particular, to the transcendent finale of Mahler's Third Symphony, which is as cosmically free of irony as anything ever written. Mahler's coda is in the same key as Shostakovich's, and it has the same repetition of triads, the same device of timpani repeatedly pounding a two-note figure (D and A), even the same touches in the orchestration (trumpets piercing the general mass of sound). It's telling that conductors slow the drumbeat in the last three bars of the Fifth, in defiance of Shostakovich's score but in accordance with Mahler's—they are getting the two symphonies confused. This is not to say that Shostakovich's ending is an altogether happy one. By adding a fiercely pulsating A in the strings and the winds, he gives his celebration a seething edge. But it is a celebration all the same.

Evidence for the ultimately triumphal character of the Fifth crops up in, of all places, "Shostakovich Reconsidered." That book excerpts some lectures by Maxim Shostakovich, the composer's son, who has long been an authoritative conductor of the symphonies. "The Fifth Symphony is his 'Heroic' Symphony," Maxim writes. He quotes his father as follows: "The hero is saying, 'I am right. I will follow the way I choose.' " The interpretation that Shostakovich offered his son contradicted what he told Volkov—the ending, he implied, was sincere and in his own voice. The symphony, in other words, is the conventional Romantic story of an individual overcoming adversity. That Soviet propagandists co-opted it as a glorification of Stalin shouldn't stop us from hearing glory of a different kind. The hero of this symphony has the freedom to imagine joy, if not to experience it. Call it an angry joy—a lunge for a better world.

The Fifth Symphony is a statement of awesome confidence, but it emerged from conditions of fear. During the remainder of Shostakovich's career, fear took its toll. The success of the Fifth, and the even greater wartime success of the Seventh Symphony, the "Leningrad," made the composer a potent propaganda resource for the Soviets, and he began to feel trapped in his position. After the war, he failed to produce the Beethovenian "Victory" symphony that Stalin had been expecting, issuing instead a largely frivolous Ninth Symphony with a vaudeville finale. A second campaign against formalism erupted in 1948, and Shostakovich suffered another sickening fall from grace. A new trend emerged in his dealings with the regime: instead of lying low, as he had done after the "Lady Macbeth" crisis, he went out of his way to humble himself in public. At the 1948 proceedings against formalism, during which most of the accused composers avoided personal appearances, he read aloud a speech that was stultifying in its banality and disconcerting in its masochism. He later claimed that the text of this speech had been forced on him, but other participants in the affair were apparently able to speak in their

It begins

own voice. Prokofiev, for one, sent in a reply that was prickly and condescending in tone.

Shostakovich suffered under the Soviet system, but so did many other people. After a point, the fact of oppression fails to justify his actions. During the Khrushchev thaw, he became, if anything, more deeply implicated in the Communist hierarchy. He recited every speech that was put in front of him, he signed manifestos and denunciations without reading them. In 1960, he joined the Party, an unnecessary action, for which he gave conflicting explanations (one being that he was drunk). There were elements of defeatism in his philosophy. "Don't create illusions," he would tell his colleagues. "There's no other life. There can't be any." The text of "Testimony" is laced with hopelessness: life is miserable, it says, nothing can change, one must grow hard, death waits at the end. Shostakovich condemns two "patented saviors," two men of "false religiosity," who thought they could save the world. They are, incredibly, Stalin and Solzhenitsyn.

In the late sixties and early seventies, Shostakovich did write many works in which resistance to authority was a running theme: the texts of his vocal works spoke of poets murdered by tsars, rebels dancing on the scaffold, exiles expressing the conscience of a country. In his Fourteenth Symphony, he set a poem by Apollinaire entitled "The Zaporozhian Cossacks' Answer to the Sultan of Constantinople," in which the "evil butcher of Podolye" is denounced in tones distinctly reminiscent of the Scherzo from the Tenth Symphony—the piece that "Testimony" calls a "portrait of Stalin." But such music was more the projection of a dissident career than the enactment of one. It offered no hope for action and change. For genuine dissidents, such as Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky, Shostakovich was part of the problem. In an interview, ironically, with Solomon Volkov, Brodsky attacked the effort to locate "nuances of virtue" in the gray expanses of Shostakovich's later life. Such a career of compromise, Brodsky said, destroys a man instead of preserving him. "It transforms the individual into ruins," he said. "The roof is gone, but the chimney, for example, might still be standing."

Ruins, however, can be beautiful to behold. Shostakovich was never able or willing to write another convincingly "heroic" symphony, but he found other avenues of expression, most significantly in chamber music. He wrote his first string quartet in 1938, in the wake of the Fifth Symphony, and the quartet medium became for him a refuge from the anxiety of symphonic public speaking. In the new realm, he could explore the technical limits of his musical language, which is based on an intricate array of Russian modal scales, and also test the psychological limits of his narratives, in which seemingly simple and innocent ideas are revealed as their opposites. A banal melody is often heard over a changing and blackening array of accompaniments, so that its meaning is altered and destroyed; in the same way, a plain chord twists around and falls apart as long lines of eighth notes snake through it. Shostakovich is a master manipulator of mood: he can show panicky happiness slipping into inchoate rage, and then crumbling into lethargic despair. In the hands of the Emerson Quartet, which played with unprecedented brilliance, the quartets seemed, even more than the symphonies, a complete emotional world.

The Emerson ended its series with a recital of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Quartets. These works have a pared-down, thinned-out quality, as if a gust of wind had blown random pages off the musicians' stands. When the quartet played the Fifteenth again, as part of Théâtre de Complicité's "The Noise of Time," the piece acquired a positively unreal and deathly aura: the members of the ensemble wandered about the stage, with silent figures shadowing and mimicking them. The Emerson's performance, staggering as it was, may have made too much of the obvious gloom of the Fifteenth, which, like so much of Shostakovich's later work, also has its share of quotations, quirks, and private jokes. The vacant tread of the opening, in the muted, claustrophobic key of E-flat minor, is descended from

the Andante of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, while the second theme, in open-air C major, brings to mind the lofty first theme of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony. Such out-of-nowhere quotations in late Shostakovich produce a feeling of free-floating movement and deep musical space. Even as it comes to the end of the line, the music begins all over again, with the basic building blocks of tradition.

Shostakovich's career was a spectacular one, mixing scenes of triumph and terror. But it is not enough to match up the events of the life with the events of the music, because the music is still more triumphant and more terrifying. You can hear the agony, and you can think about the agony in Shostakovich's life, but Shostakovich wrote agonized music from the beginning to the end of his career, no matter who was running the country. Russian composers long ago perfected techniques of agony, formulas of lamentation. Tchaikovsky's musical suffering led biographers to emphasize the suffering in his life, and, when the biography was exhausted, enthusiasts embraced a spurious rumor that the composer had committed suicide. Something similar has happened with Shostakovich. The strong feeling in his music has led people to imagine a man who was engaged in a great battle with the system. But the hard facts reveal a smaller, weaker figure—a man who strived at all costs to create conditions in which he could work in peace.

Perhaps the most revealing observation Shostakovich ever made about himself came in a letter to his favorite pupil, Boris Tishchenko, less than two years before his death. He told Tishchenko that he had been thinking about Chekhov's story "Ward 6," the tale of a doctor who halfheartedly performs his duties at a squalid provincial hospital. "When I read in that story about Andrey Yefimovich Ragin," Shostakovich wrote, "it seems to me I am reading memoirs about myself." This was a strange comment, since he was at that moment engaged in dictating his memoirs to Volkov. But certain passages of "Ward 6" eerily illuminate the rants of "Testimony":

> Dr. Ragin was a great believer in intelligence and honesty, but he lacked the strength of character and the confidence in his own right to assert himself in order to see to it that the life around him should be honest and intelligent. He simply did not know how to give orders, to prohibit, or to insist. It was almost as though he had taken a vow never to raise his voice. . . .When deceived or flattered or handed a quite obviously fraudulent account for signature, he turned as red as a lobster and felt guilty, but he signed the account all the same.

Late at night, Ragin broods over his condition: "I am serving a bad cause, and I receive a salary from people whom I deceive. I am dishonest. But then I am nothing by myself, I am only a small part of a necessary social evil. . . . It is the fault of the time I live in." He finds solace in the thought that suffering is universal and that death destroys all human aspirations in the end. Immortality, he says, is a fiction. When he dies, of a sudden stroke, he is mourned by no one. At that point, the resemblance to Shostakovich breaks down. ♦

DANCING

DEVIL OR ANGEL

Paul Taylor's mixed feelings.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Paul Taylor got his start dancing in Martha Graham's company, and, like some other Graham veterans, notably Merce Cunningham, he found his early choreographic style by turning his back on hers. Where her dances were psycho-epics, his, at the beginning, were anti-psychological, anti-epic—conceptual. In a now historic 1957 concert he premièred the defiantly named "Epic," in which, for twenty minutes, to the sound of the telephone operator saying "At the tone, the time will be . . . ," he executed ordinary movements he had seen on the street—a clear tribute to the "found" music of John Cage, who collaborated on that concert.

But, unlike Cage and his disciple Cunningham, Taylor didn't linger long in the realms of the aleatoric. He went back to the human drama, and with a fresh perspective, for his rebellion had allowed him to find his own way. Graham's psychology was romantic: the high fate, the bloody knife. Taylor's was more modern, more mixed and strange and accurate. In his version of "The Rite of Spring"—it is called "Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rehearsal)"—there is a knife. Indeed, a baby is killed. And the effect is *comic*. The sorrow comes later, in a cataclysmic solo for the mother, during which, however, you never quite forget the joke of the little bundle's demise. Taylor takes us down a winding road—through vaudeville, old movies, comic books. (The "Sacre" has cops and gangsters and a hero in Clark Kent glasses.) He laughs at the clichés, and invites us to do so, and then, after these disarmings, plops us down in the meaning of life.

That's his game: ambivalence. It's the story not just of his dances but also of his autobiography, the 1987 "Private Domain," where he makes his addiction to mixed feelings seem the product of sexual confusion, the fact that he liked men as well as women. (Or perhaps—it's hard to tell—he liked men when he was supposed to like women.) I find this analysis oversimple, and I wonder if he hasn't had too much psychotherapy. Never mind. If he believed it, it was going to end up in his dances, and it certainly did. Sexual bewilderment is central to his work. Often he casts his pieces with uneven numbers of men and women, so that the two sexes can't pair off comfortably. Or, if they pair off, the reigning emotion is a sort of glutinous brother-sister tenderness—misty gazes, baby holds. This is a weakness of his. Another is that his ambivalence is an unstable compound. It sometimes breaks down into pure sentimentality (the brothers and sisters) or pure horror, or a pat juxtaposition of the two. In the 1991 "Company B," his idea was to play off the upbeat songs of the Andrews Sisters, and the happy dances of that period, against another fact of the period, the Second World War. But the pairing was none too delicate, with these would-be cute kids bopping among the corpses. Two years before "Company B," Taylor made a comic piece, "The Sorcerer's Sofa," that featured an analyst, a couch, and a mother figure upholstered with flapping blue dugs. I think he did have too much therapy.

At other times, though, he has proved a wonderfully subtle psychologist. The list of examples is long—"Private Domain," "Runes," "Cloven Kingdom," "Polaris," "Nightshade," "Le Sacre du Printemps"—but the most shining instance, to me, is the 1983 "Sunset." Here, as in "Company B," we have a war story: a group of soldiers meet a group of girls in a park. We also get all of Taylor's hang-ups—the Manichaeanism, the avoidance of sex, the tendency to turn women into angels or devils (angels, in this case). And in "Sunset" those elements come together to produce a piece of the utmost beauty and poignance. It was back in repertory during the Taylor company's recent season at City Center. I cried a bucket.

Taylor and dancers, including (from left) Francie Huber, Maureen Mansfield, and Andrew Asnes. Photograph by Anders Overgaard.

Even in his more recent, less piercing work, Taylor often sees truths that others have yet to uncover. Three years ago, for the first time that I know of, he made an all-out sexy dance, a tango dance, "Piazzolla Caldera," with honchos and babes and push-up bras. Not stopping there, he included a men's duet, and it was utterly different from the demure, "our love is real, too" homosexual numbers that have been popping up on our stages since the seventies. Taylor's two men climb up each other's fronts, roll off each other's backs, knock each other down, and land in a pile. They are fun and rough and sexy and a little ugly, and they will probably do more for gay rights, not to speak of truth, than all the chaste embraces staged by today's young, less sexually "confused" choreographers.

Taylor's new works this season were thin, transparent: you could see through them to earlier works in which he said the same thing more powerfully. According to the advance press, "Arabesque," to a medley of short pieces by Debussy, was arabesque in its Arabic costumes (to me they looked Greek) and also in the sense of ornamented, curling, foliated. That's what the hands were like, very fancy, in contrast to the blunt style in the legs. But what the dance was really about, as usual, was good and evil. The

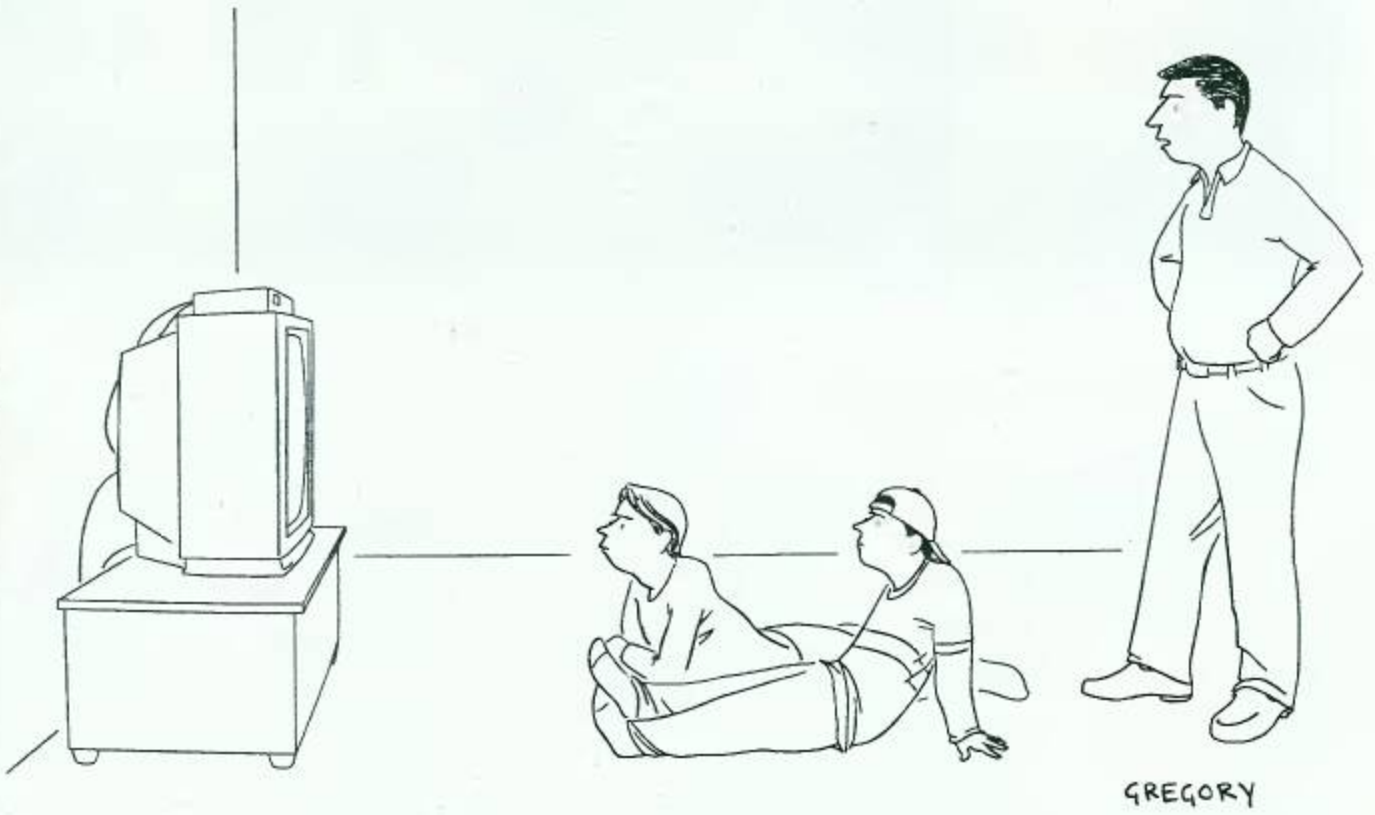
eight-member cast is one of Taylor's "creature" societies, not quite human, not quite something else. In the first few movements, they do nice, Tayloresque things—they run on the diagonal, they sit and watch others run on the diagonal. Yet already we see specks in the Vaseline. Those ornamented hands start to look a little weird. Also, someone goes blind.

Finally, in the fifth section, we get the lowdown. To the famous flute solo "Syrinx," that wistful number, Silvia Nevjinsky, a beautiful Portuguese dancer with legs like pylons, does a solo, and it is not wistful. She bunches her fists, torques her arms, shakes her black hair. At first she seems afraid of something; pretty soon, we're afraid of her. She beams her crotch at us. She does a spider walk. If we met her in the forest, we'd be in trouble. This soon passes, however. The ensemble returns, with Nevjinsky reminding us only now and then, by shaking her nasty little foot at somebody, of the nightmare we just saw. The group reprises the opening dance, and then the piece is over. It doesn't stay with you for days, like "Sunset," but it stays for a while. "Think about it," Taylor is saying. "Life is dangerous."

As for the other new work, "Cascade," to Bach, Taylor told reporters that here he was interested primarily in symmetry, and in trying to see how much of it he could get away with. He was also clearly interested in classical ballet, a form that he has repeatedly insulted in the past. One part of the piece looks a lot like Balanchine's "Rubies." "Cascade" doesn't say much, but it's easy on the eyes. The costumes—by Santo Loquasto, who also designed "Arabesque"—were gorgeous, glinting things, like Florentine brocades. (Often, the less ambitious a dance, the more ambitious the clothes. Costume designers can be good psychologists, too.) And it was a pleasure just to see again, in a new light, Taylor's traits—the runs, the doll-like arms, the misterioso solo—for which, as for a friend on a quiet day (you go to the movies, you don't say much), one can by now supply the meanings.

Taylor will be seventy this year, and though it is probably true, as the *Times* recently said, that he is the most popular choreographer working today, his career has not been easy. By the time he published his autobiography, he had already suffered bleeding ulcers, amphetamine addiction, and what sounds, in the book, like a nervous breakdown. Nor did his troubles end there. In my one interview with him, in 1991, he told me—as his press representative tried to catch his eye and get him to shut up—about a severe depression he suffered in the late eighties. He also described a recent ulcer operation, in which he was relieved of half his stomach.

In all the arts, there is no harder job than that of choreographer. In order to get your dances done right, you must have a company of your own, but once you have a company it becomes a noose



"Instead of just sitting around, why don't you kids go out and co-opt some black culture?"

around your neck, as Taylor points out repeatedly in his book. Seasons are booked years in advance. Whether or not the muse arrives, the opening night does. You must supply new works—basically, two per year—with whatever force you can muster. And if it is only a memory of force, the critics are there to point that out.

In the meantime, your dancers, the people you have trained and in whose personal, unduplicatable characteristics you have sunk your best thoughts, are constantly leaving you. They get married; they get tired. A whole chunk of your art walks out the door. This season two of Taylor's longtime dancers, including the irreplaceable Thomas Patrick (face of a child, force of a tank), were gone. I am told that Andrew Asnes and Francie Huber may also be leaving soon. Asnes is Taylor's foremost male virtuoso. He can pick up a woman—without bending, as I recall from "Le Sacre du Printemps"—and quietly transfer her to a sitting position on his shoulders. As for Huber, she occupies that role—the spirit, almost always female—which we see at the center of most dance companies. What would Taylor do without her? Did blue walk out on Picasso? Did C Major leave Schubert?

Taylor will carry on. One of the touching things about this season was that while Huber, of course, did the dark solo in "Cascade"—she was also the star of "Sunset," and I will never, in my life, forget her—Taylor gave the creepy solo in "Arabesque" to Silvia Nevjinsky, who joined the company only four years ago. He is trying to deepen her, relax her. He is trying to make her a star. The other empty chairs he has filled, for the time being, with Michael Trusnovec, a powerhouse who could conceivably take Asnes's place (he should shed the mannerisms, though), and Annmaria Mazzini, a tiny, fierce person. Others—Heather Berest, of the beautiful profile, the blithe jump—he is bringing along. He has been doing this job for almost fifty years.

I wish that, in recognition of his professionalism, someone would give him the money to hire an orchestra for two weeks. Like other major troupes—Graham, Ailey—Taylor's company is now routinely performing to taped music. In "Cascade," the Bach sounded like something in an elevator. ♦

BOOKS

SHORT CUTS

More tricks of the screen trade from William Goldman.

BY TAD FRIEND

Everyone knows that movie stars are shorter than they look onscreen, but the actual measurements are shocking. For starters, Jean-Claude Van Damme is a mere four feet eight inches, and Keanu Reeves hangs by his knees from a chin-up bar every morning (reading the Upanishads, as it happens) just to reach four feet three. Leonardo DiCaprio? Three feet tall: he has to climb onto a milking stool to kiss his co-stars. And yet he towers over Tom Cruise, who is only nine inches high; his film sets are built to one-eighth scale.

All this may sound incredible, but it's the gospel truth—at least, the gospel truth as seen by people who work closely with the stars, get paid millions of dollars, and then write backstage Hollywood memoirs unmasking them as much, much smaller than life. To a remarkable degree, the acrid zing of a screenwriter's or a producer's autobiography derives from its height put-downs. In "Laughing Matters" the writer Larry Gelbart reports that dealing with Dustin Hoffman on "Tootsie" taught him an important lesson: "Never work with an Oscar winner who is shorter than the statue." The producer Julia Phillips, in "You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again," squashes Richard Dreyfuss, describing how he "pulls himself up to his full height, which is not much." And Robert Evans, in his camp classic "The Kid Stays in the Picture," has the writer Jules Feiffer referring to Hoffman as a "little fuck"; a rival studio head releasing Al Pacino from his contract with the sour valediction "the midget's yours"; and Evans's own boss, Charlie Bluhdorn, saying, "Hollywood—I thought it was glamorous. Everyone I meet is under five feet tall!"

But then, this is a town where Michael Eisner, the chairman of Disney, called his former deputy, Jeffrey Katzenberg, a "little midget," while the little midget's business partner, David Geffen, deprecated Eisner in kind: "As tall as he is, he's a little guy." Tininess was a local preoccupation even fifty years ago: in his memoir, "A Child of the Century," Ben Hecht, who wrote such gems as "The Front Page" and "Gunga Din," dryly observed, "When you overpay small people, you frighten them."

The latest shrimp-fry is William Goldman's memoir "Which Lie Did I Tell? More Adventures in the Screen Trade" (Pantheon; $26.95). Seventeen years ago, Goldman, the screenwriter of such films as "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and "All the President's Men," wrote the best Hollywood book in memory, "Adventures in the Screen Trade." It was a funny and remarkably frank autobiography, equal parts screenwriter's handbook and exposé, full of snarky stories about Dustin Hoffman (jeez, nobody seems to like the guy) and Robert Redford. In chapters apparently flung together by accident, Goldman revealed how a movie becomes a hit—also by accident. His line "Nobody Knows Anything" became an industry motto, endlessly invoked to explain why a student film like "The Blair Witch Project" soars, while the mighty "Godzilla" sinks gently to the bottom of the sea.

In "Adventures" Goldman portrayed stars as necessary annoyances, and he discreetly advised budding screenwriters about how to win their favor: never describe a male lead as tall; instead, give him "presence" or "the grace of a young athlete." But now Goldman has aged, he's stuck writing piffle like "The General's Daughter," and his annoyance has turned to outright animosity. In "Which Lie Did I Tell?" he indulges what he calls his "obsession" with "stars' stumpiness." Movie stars "have lifts in their shoes, their loafers, their slippers," he writes. "I know one who had lifts in his socks." We see Goldman lingering in the pool at the Hôtel du Cap so that he can climb out alongside Sylvester Stallone, who is perforce barefoot. After standing next to Stallone poolside, Goldman, who is

six feet one, is finally able to verify (with a theodolite? a waterproof micrometer?) that Stallone is precisely five feet seven inches tall. Stars "are not remotely what the world believes them to be," Goldman exults. "Most of them are smaller than you think, and all of them are more frightened than you think."

So why is it the writers who sound small and frightened?

The most personal moment in "Which Lie" occurs when Goldman discusses the famous scene in "There's Something About Mary" in which Ben Stiller can't go to the prom with Cameron Diaz because his MacGyver has got stuck in his zipper. (It's curious how the names of old TV cop shows suggest euphemisms for male genitalia: Banacek. Barnaby Jones. Spenser: For Hire.) Goldman writes, "This movie hits me as hard as it does because I am—as so many of us are—Ben Stiller," though, he insists, "taller."

> My high school days involved living with a deaf mother who told me I caused her deafness...and a drunken father who stayed in his second-floor room for four years....I couldn't bring friends home, not with that secret on the second floor, and I didn't date, because who would go out with me, and my schoolwork went to shit and I stayed home a year faking sickness and as I lay there what I thought of was how beautiful *she* was going to be, and how good our life together.

As a man who lives in dread of having metal talons seize his Adam 12, Goldman clearly understands the snares of desire. The "*she*" in the passage above can only be Hollywood, which has always called like a mythical siren to artistic types stuck in the heartland. Up close, however, the place is far less charming: in his memoir Ben Hecht portrayed his wrecked romance with "Madam Hollywood," whom he described as a girl "with flaccid tits and a sandpaper skin under her silks; shined up and whistling like a whore in a park; covered with stink like a railroad station pissery and swinging a dead ass in the moonlight."

In fact, Hollywood is not so much a Venusburg as a court in Edo-period Japan, rife with intrigue and self-serving agendas masked by a pretense of collaboration and false politesse. When a studio executive says "I love your work!" it means "Who let you past the guards?" "We're going to make your movie!" means "Six months from now you'll read in *Variety* that we're making a cheaper movie just like your idea." And "This is the best first draft we've ever seen!" means "You're fired."

Goldman has spent decades seething at all the doubletalk, and he delights in explaining how things really work. Screenwriters, he writes, are self-loathing minor courtiers who have to wheedle and flatter to stay close to power. At each studio, the power lies with the one person who can green-light a film. That person knows that he or she will inevitably be fired someday, but also that this fate can be postponed by signing big stars to appear in films that resemble previous hits. If you land Brad Pitt and Anthony Hopkins, you can't really be blamed for the stuporous "Meet Joe Black"—it *should* have worked. (Of course, per "Nobody Knows Anything," what should work rarely does.)

So the studios always need scripts with alluring lead roles to attract the big stars. And, as Goldman observes, "Stars do not—repeat—*do not play heroes*—stars play *gods*. And your job as a screenwriter is to genuflect, if you are lucky enough to have them glance in your direction. Because they may destroy your work—*will* destroy it more often than not—but you will have a career."

Stars read scripts expecting to see themselves, by page 10, blazoned as Olympian figures (with striking but one-size-fits-all physical characteristics).

Goldman indulges what he calls his "obsession" with "stars' stumpiness."

GERALD SCARFE

Here is how Goldman's screenplay introduces Butch Cassidy: "Thirty-five and bright, he has brown hair, but most people, if asked to describe him, would remember him as blond. He speaks well and quickly, and has been all his life a leader of men, but if you asked him, he would be damned if he could tell you why." A bit later, Goldman sets up the character-defining scene where Butch cheats to win a fight: "Butch delivers the most aesthetically exquisite kick in the balls in the history of the modern American cinema." (George Roy Hill, who directed the movie, wrote a stinging parody—which Goldman, to his credit, included in his earlier book—of how the writer of "Butch Cassidy" would gloss Shakespeare: "And it's the most agonizingly beautiful dawn you've ever seen and the ghost appears and it's the most staggering-fucking-looking ghost anybody ever saw.")

And then the stars screw it all up. Their insecurities drive Goldman berserk. He describes having to nod sagely and brace for disaster when Chevy Chase mused that Goldman's script for "Memoirs of an Invisible Man"—a farcical, well, Chevy Chase movie—should probe more deeply "the loneliness of invisibility." When Michael Douglas decided to star in "The Ghost and the Darkness," Goldman's script about man-eating lions, he insisted that Remington, the white hunter he was playing, should have a tear-jerking history of family tragedy. Goldman reluctantly did as he was told, because the alternative was to be fired and watch another writer mangle his movie. "Michael wanted the audience *moved* when Remington died," he writes, declaring that this mawkish addition doomed the film. "'Oh, you cannot know the depth of my pain' is what that seems to be saying to the audience. Well, if I'm in that audience, what I think is this: *Fuck you.*" At sneak previews, he adds, audiences rated Remington as merely the fourth-most-likable character, well below a pair of supporting actors. Ha!

Massaging a star's ego is a necessary indignity, but the real sell-out occurs when a writer assuages the producers' anxieties about a film's commercial potential. To do so, he or she must suppress any philosophy more complicated than a belief in the triumph of hopeful pluck. Goldman makes a useful distinction between "Independent films," which unsettle us, and "Hollywood films," which reassure us with "truths we already know or a falsehood we want to believe in." "Most people want to be told nice things," he writes. "I cannot repeat that too often to anyone who wants to screenwrite for a living. You can be Bergman if you have

the talent, you can tell sad human stories—but do not expect Mr. Time Warner to give you $100 million to make your movie."

As Goldman recounts his war stories, it becomes clear that a writer of blockbuster pictures is essentially a Mr. Fixit, a crafter of narrative contrivances and jaunty catchphrases (which, because they propel the movie's trailer, are known as "trailer lines"). Goldman, who hasn't written a distinguished movie since "The Princess Bride," in 1987, seems to have grown resigned to rote work. He tells us that he agreed to write the 1994 hit "Maverick" simply because he "*knew it would be easy.*" "All I needed to do was pick one of the old TV shows"—"Maverick" episodes—"that had too much plot, expand it, and there would be the movie." Then he discovered that the TV series was rambling and plotless: "*Nothing for me to steal.*" ("Adventures in the Screen Trade" was evidently more conducive to such recycling, and readers of the new book will recognize quite a few echoes of its predecessor.)

"Which Lie" closes with a partial screenplay, "The Big A," which Goldman wrote as an exercise so he could have several screenwriter friends doctor it before readers' eyes. This section will be irresistible to students of the form, because of the range and shrewdness of the writers' responses—and their brutality. In one note, Scott Frank, who adapted "Get Shorty" and "Out of Sight," observes, "I don't love the characters. I'm not even sure they ARE characters—at least not in the sense that goes beyond types or attitudes." And Tony Gilroy, who wrote "Devil's Advocate," wonders, "Who the hell is this thing for, anyway? I mean, not to sound like the lowest MBA Hollywood scum here, but who's supposed to be watching this? If it's for kids, it's way too boring. If it's for adults, then where's the meat?"

And, indeed, "The Big A," about a private eye and his family, is a pastiche of beats lifted from "It Happened One Night" and "The Philadelphia Story"—and from another source, closer to home. Goldman's hero, Climber Jones, is "a good man in a bad world." Near the beginning of the screenplay, he makes coffee in his crummy apartment, slowly "coming to life," then drives to a huge mansion and speaks laconically into the

microphone at the gate: "To see Mr. Sinclair. Climber Jones." Compare Goldman's 1966 film "Harper," starring Paul Newman as a private eye who is "a good man in a bad world." Near the beginning of the screenplay, he makes coffee in his crummy apartment, slowly "coming to life," then drives to a huge mansion and speaks laconically to a servant at the gate: "Lew Harper. To see Mrs. Sampson."

Three and a half decades later, Goldman either figured no one would notice the similarities or didn't notice himself. He's coasting, pretending to believe that he's still big and it's the pictures that got small. Yet he clearly knows better, which is why he keeps referring to himself as "little Billy Goldman." The book's epiphany occurs when a preposterous thriller he wrote, "Absolute Power," closes the 1997 Cannes Film Festival. He acknowledges that it's not a great movie, but revels in the moment when "little Billy Goldman" mounts the red-carpeted steps to the première. "*Made it, Ma.* Top of the World!" he concludes—lines belonging to Jimmy Cagney, a famously short movie star.

Screenwriters, whose Kojaks seem to be perpetually caught in the zipper, have always smarted at the ignominies of their trade. Usually, they wait until the end of their career to lash out. Ben Hecht had left Hollywood behind when he wrote his scathing memoir; Robert Evans was washed up before he published his; and when Julia Phillips's book came out she hadn't eaten an important lunch in years. Like them, William Goldman belittles the stars who have made him feel small—but he does so, with lunatic candor, while still hoping to get work. He may have come to hate the process by which movies get made, but he never stopped loving what movies can do.

Underneath the trash talk, all Goldman wants is one more chance to tell a great story to a waiting world. He's living a movie cliché, really: the old gunfighter, soured and down on his luck, who still has a few bullets left in his, um, Baretta and is looking for a last chance to save the town and redeem himself. Goldman made it to the top in Hollywood because deep down he wants to believe that consoling myth. And we've helped keep him there because, deep down, so do we. ♦

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BRIEFLY NOTED

House of Leaves, *by Mark Z. Danielewski (Pantheon; $19.95).* This extravagantly ambitious début comprises at least three texts: a first-person narration by a young L.A. tattoo artist named Johnny Truant; the manuscript that obsesses Truant, a quasi-academic piece of film criticism by a mysterious old man named Zampanò; and the film that obsesses Zampanò, a documentary called "The Navidson Record," which, "Blair Witch"-style, tells the story of a young filmmaker who moves into a house with his wife and two children, only to find that strange things are afoot. Throughout, Danielewski sets off a barrage of typographic pyrotechnics: some pages are Talmudic, with columns of commentary packed alongside the main narrative; on others, paragraphs are turned upside down, or are reversed, to be read in a mirror. The huge critical apparatus creates the impression that "House of Leaves" is a highly organized text, but this seven-hundred-page tome could have used some intensive editing to draw out its better moments. Like a grad student drunk on Borges, Poe, and David Foster Wallace, Danielewski has a certain brash charm, and, underneath the special effects, he may be making a point about the exhaustion of narrative in modern literature. Still, creating a hermetic, self-negating leviathan of adolescent intertextuality may be more fun than reading one.

The Fly-Truffler, *by Gustaf Sobin (Norton; $19.95).* This slim novella reads like a poet's almanac. Cabassac, a professor of the vanishing Provençal language, discovers that eating truffles induces dreams that allow him to commune with his dead wife. Along with a lode of truffler's lore, the author gives us fine renderings of food and landscape: a forest of holm oaks, "icy pink" peach blossoms that mark the end of the season, "a narrow wedge of moon-white goat cheese." In a setting of such closely felt life—and despite a few spells of overblown prose—the sad portents and flights of magic realism seem as natural as the mistral.

Rudyard Kipling: A Life, *by Harry Ricketts (Carroll & Graf; $28).* An irresistibly readable biography of the first English writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Commonly remembered as a jingo, Kipling is here portrayed as a high-strung, precociously creative man inclined toward overwork, overexhaustion, and (unfortunately for his reputation) overstatement, especially about politics. Kipling introduced new characters into English literature, among them the Army's enlisted men and the Empire's Indian subjects, but, despite his feel for underdogs and outsiders, he lost the respect of British liberals with his vociferous support for Britain in the Boer War. By the time Kipling died, in 1936, his belief that Anglo-Saxons had a moral duty to run an empire had been seriously challenged, but he continued to attract readers around the globe. Ricketts, a poet, is invaluable in analyzing the subtleties and the modernist techniques that went into Kipling's popular, accessible work.

Tigers in the Snow, *by Peter Matthiessen (North Point; $27).* Whether the author will see a tiger in the wild or whether the reader will have to settle for his vivid descriptions of tigers in the wild (the "meaty breath," the "mask of snow and fire") lends this volume its suspense. Pacing amid gorgeous photographs by Maurice Hornocker, Matthiessen does his best to enliven what is essentially a prose census of *Panthera tigris*, whose numbers have diminished alarmingly along with its habitat and its prey. The author is to be admired for adding his voice to a passionate movement, whose advocates have established preserves in the Russian Far East even as hungry humans compete with the tigers for food. But this book also makes you feel helpless, as if you were reading one of those plaques about endangered species which are posted in front of their "habitat" at the zoo.

THE THEATRE

EXPECT THE EXPECTED

Banking on laughter.

BY JOHN LAHR

Somewhere in the middle of Charles Busch's jolly "Tale of the Allergist's Wife," directed by Lynne Meadow (at the Manhattan Theatre Club), Marjorie Taub, the eponymous Upper West Side culture vulture on the verge of a nervous breakdown, announces to her dubious doctor husband, Ira, that she feels a novel coming on. She sees it as a response to Schopenhauer's treatise on "The World as Will and Idea," in which the heroine will be a cloistered nun in nineteenth-century Munich. "Must everything be an entertainment?" she asks. "If you want that, go to the circus. Watch a plate-spinner." The voice of the boulevard has spoken. The joke, like the play itself, is a smug bit of commercial plate-spinning.

Marjorie, who is overeducated and underemployed, sees herself in the avant-garde of suffering. ("To quote Kafka, 'I am a cage in search of a bird.' ") In her intellectual pretentiousness, however, she is a gaudy incarnation of the boulevard's contempt for ideas. In fact, as Marjorie herself admits, she has never had "even one original thought." In this piece of slick flimflam, there is attitude but no character, laughter but no insight, action but no plot, suffering but no pain. What we have here, in other words, is a Broadway hit.

Busch's money-spinner is calculated to delight the largely Jewish middle-aged and middle-class New York audience by benignly reflecting back its folkways and byways (the 92nd Street Y, the New School for Social Research, Fairway, even the Clinique counter at Saks), with the sure knowledge that, whatever the upheavals in the story, by the finale life will be restored to the status quo. For generations, this conservative folderol has been the cheap and cheerful staple of what Eugene O'Neill called the Broadway "show shop," and the boulevard certainly knows how to make its goods alluring. This is where those super salesmen called stars earn their commission. In "The Allergist's Wife," it's the dexterous Linda Lavin, as Marjorie, who makes Busch's words dazzle.

Lavin is a cunning sourpuss with

Tony Roberts and Linda Lavin punching up platitudes in Charles Busch's new play.

great timing, who has earned her chops over the past three decades, delivering the lines of some of the best comic playwrights in the business: John Guare, Jules Feiffer, Neil Simon. She is Nancy Walker's natural heir. Small but not demure, Lavin has backbone; even when she shuffles around the stage in her black slippers, she walks like a guardsman on parade. Her forehead and her eyebrows furrow in semaphores of withering irony. When Marjorie's mother calls attention to her "*farbisseneh* face," Lavin shoots her one of those killing glances. "'*Farbisseneh*.' You didn't even speak Yiddish till you were sixty-five," she says.

Lavin also has a hilarious slow burn, and she can yell. Driven to a frenzy by her chronically constipated, foulmouthed eighty-year-old mother, Frieda (the hilarious Shirl Bernheim), who is forever pleading with her daughter to call Dr. Kevorkian and let her die, Lavin rushes to the laptop to search for someone in cyberspace to dispatch the old bag. "And I will pay," Lavin brays until the veins on her neck bulge. "I will pay top dollar for this service. And pronto. Wednesday soon enough? Tuesday? Monday? . . . You're history, Mother. Say your prayers, 'cause you're going down."

Marjorie's psychological dilemma is sad and well observed; but, true to show biz, this is translated into cuticle despair. When we meet her, she has attempted suicide, is still mourning the death of her shrink, and has had a violent outburst at the Disney Store. "Within three minutes you dropped six porcelain figurines," Ira complains. "They tell me the Goofy alone was two hundred and fifty dollars." Ira, a self-congratulatory cornball given to calling the Iraqi doorman "kemo sabe" and to quoting the compliments paid to him by his sinus patients, is amusingly underplayed by Tony Roberts, who never tips the wink to his character's insufferable megalomania. What Busch catches is not so much a nuclear family as three neutrinos of narcissism caroming around an overdecorated living room.

Into every Jewish situation comedy a little *tsuris* must come. Here, the force of mischief is a hastily sketched, name-dropping trickster named Lee (Michele Lee). She befriends Marjorie and revives her appetite for life, only to play havoc with the family's social and sexual lives—although, in the current winded state of situation comedy, most of her antics take place offstage. For her waywardness, she is banished from the Taubs' safe world, but not before Marjorie, speaking of her family, sounds Broadway's comforting grace note of shallow optimism. "We have travelled a mountainous road full of land mines, but we will endure and you know why? You know why?" she asks Lee, before hard-shouldering her. "Because love triumphs. Love, acceptance, faith and forgiveness, my little partisan army has all of that in abundance."

Boulevard jokes are about enchantment; their intention is not to test life but to distract from it. Great comedy is about disenchantment. "Wake up. Stop dreaming" are the first lines of Joe Orton's classic farce "Loot" (at the American Repertory Theatre, in Cambridge). As part of his shock tactics, Orton takes farce, the quintessence of theatrical escapism, and turns every reassuring stereotype upside down. In the play's ghoulish high jinks—a mother's corpse is tipped into a cupboard so that money stolen by her son and his polymorphously perverse friend can be hidden in her coffin—Orton calls into question public attitudes about, among other things, mourning, sexuality, the Church, and the police. "You're at liberty to answer your own doorbell, Miss," the oafish, corrupt Detective Truscott says. "That is how we tell whether or not we live in a free society."

Orton feeds his characters into the fun machine and makes them bleed. The innocent are punished; the corrupt get away with murder. The play's credulous Irish widower, Mr. McLeavy, is framed by the rest of the predatory characters, who split the stolen money. "I'm innocent! I'm innocent!" shouts McLeavy as he's carted off to prison and to certain death in the cells. "What a terrible thing to happen to a man who's been kissed by the Pope!"

"If 'Loot' is played as no more than farcical, it won't work," Orton said. His words were reprinted in *A.R.T. News* but they evidently went unread by the director, Andrei Belgrader, who should be issued with a subpoena by the Joe Orton Benevolent Association for doing grievous bodily harm to the text. In this production, actors drop their pants, tumble

ERIC PALMA

over and into the coffin, lug the nude corpse across the stage, blow whistles, don garter belts and high heels, and play to the audience instead of to one another. These excrescences are like so many pigeon droppings on a windshield; you can make out what's in front of you, but with difficulty. Orton's play is turned into just the sort of timid romp that the playwright was rebelling against. Instead of daring, there is foolishness; instead of the appearance of propriety, there is ludicrous vulgarity. At the curtain call, as if to put an exclamation point on the director's frivolousness, there is a bubble machine; froth covers the stage.

In order to test boundaries, which is the job description of Orton and his comedies, you have to establish them. There's no sense of containment here, in Anita Stewart's inappropriate set, whose size dissipates the farce's energy; in the acting, which, except for the British ringer Jeremy Geidt, as Truscott, is unrestrained and woefully unsubtle; or in the accents, which, Geidt apart, miss the rhythm, the music, and the nuance of Orton's wonderful wit. As for the rest of the cast, I prefer to match their anonymity onstage with anonymity on the page. Belgrader and his henchmen have committed an act of imaginative vandalism; so think of this omission as a kind of Actor Protection Program.

But there's no protecting the playwright Nicky Silver from his own self-indulgence in "The Altruists," directed by David Warren (at the Vineyard). The play's unexplored thesis is that all political commitment is an act of selfishness. As a contrarian credo, it's something to build on, but for this cranky task Silver seems to have neither the tools nor the structure—no plot, no evolved characters, no persuasive point. Instead of making drama, he makes noise. If his diatribe against do-gooders proves anything, it's that philistinism lives Off Broadway as well as on it. Some talented actors, including Veanne Cox and Sam Robards, try to breathe life into this stillborn creation, but it's too immature to survive; this was a play for the drawer, not for the public. At one point, a character recalls attending a protest play. "I don't remember what it was about, or who was in it, just that it was absolutely unwatchable." This, at least, rings true. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

SPACED OUT

Higher beings, Devil worshippers, and Glaswegians in mourning.

BY ANTHONY LANE

What is our place in the universe? Are we really alone? How did we come to be? Is there intelligent life on other planets? If so, does it have to sit and watch Brian De Palma movies? In fact, given the new De Palma movie, how can we prove that there is intelligent life on *this* planet? Close analysis of the film confirms a high level of technical competence, but little beyond the capacity of an educated robot; apart from that, I could find only trace elements of coherent thought, and my wit meter barely nudged above zero. All in all, the endless vacuum of space has finally got the movie it deserves.

"Mission to Mars" is set in the year 2020, when combustion engines are collectible antiques, and when mankind is finally packing its bags for a trip to the big red one. Luke Graham (Don Cheadle) leads the charge; he pitches camp on the rocky surface, and all goes well until he and his colleagues find something white and sharp sticking out of a mountain of sand. This turns out to be—you guessed it—the nose on a giant face, and it doesn't like to be tickled. Luke's fellow-astronauts are sneezed to smithereens, and he scrambles back to base. A rescue party is duly dispatched from the World Space Station, consisting of Woody Blake (Tim Robbins), his wife, Terri (Connie Nielsen), the recently widowed Jim McConnell (Gary Sinise), and the faintly bemused Phil (Jerry O'Connell). After a violent disagreement with a meteoroid shower, most of them make it to Mars; before we know it, they are standing inside a pure white space, like extras in a David Bowie video, with a holographic alien weeping at them and showing them pictures of dinosaurs. "Life," we are informed, "reaches out to life."

What is it about zero gravity that causes hardheaded movie directors to lose their way? Do their brains drift out of their ears or something? "2001: A Space Odyssey" went for the pure white look, too, while the lesson of "Contact" appeared to be that eternity is one big beach. The only person who has kept his balance is Ron Howard, who will be interested to see how many key components "Mission to Mars" borrows from "Apollo 13"—Gary Sinise, for one thing, plus a pre-launch party scene at the beginning and

ROBERT RISKO

A trip to the big red one: Brian De Palma's "Mission to Mars."

the line "Let's work the problem." He will also be relieved to note what a complete hash it makes of them. The rule is, I suspect, that space travel is so extreme and unnatural an experience that the simple recounting of true events is wildness enough; to supply imaginative additions of your own is asking for trouble.

"Mission to Mars" is one of the first blockbusters of spring, and it is depressing to be reminded, so early in the year, of all that can go wrong. I never thought I would be immune to an Ennio Morricone score, but his reflex ruefulness is all wrong for interplanetary travel; we want to be blasted forward, not set adrift in the past. Then there is the sad matter of the dialogue, which feels hasty and undercooked, as if everyone's attention had strayed to the special effects; though Tim Robbins performs a spectacular space walk, in search of a leak in the craft's hull, the spectacle is ruined when he reports back, "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack." How many script conferences did it take to polish that perfect line? Even some of the effects misfire; whenever the astronauts set off the little jet boosters on their backpacks I thought of nasal sprays. In both tone and timing, the picture feels off from the start, and the only light-footed moment comes when Woody and Terri enjoy a smiling, weightless dance on the rescue ship—"My last chance to be graceful," he says to his wife. The De Palma of old, who was wise to the comedy of malicious camp, would have arranged for the happy couple to make out in space and enjoyed the sticky results; the new De Palma, the one who made "Mission: Impossible," wouldn't dream of anything so unseemly. To make two movies with "mission" in the title suggests a dwindled ambition; De Palma films are now tasks to be completed, rather than exercises in style.

Still, I never belonged to the Worshipful Company of Brian De Palma Apologists, so the fact that the maker of "Dressed to Kill" has expanded, or slid, into these thundering, anonymous pictures provokes only minimal anguish in my breast. The case of Roman Polanski is more troubling; he, too, has a strong body of work behind him, fortified with nervous intelligence, but, unlike De Palma, he continues to probe his own wounds. Should we applaud such stamina, or is it merely cause for regret that the richly textured trauma of "Repulsion" or "Knife in the Water" should have faded and flattened into the disappointment of "Bitter Moon," "Death and the Maiden," and his latest picture, "The Ninth Gate"?

Polanski, who himself resembles an unsupervised goblin from the bottom right-hand corner of a Bosch, has repeatedly picked his way through the diabolical, and "The Ninth Gate" mines the same vein; Johnny Depp plays Dean Corso, a New York dealer in rare books, who is hired by Boris Balkan (Frank Langella, in terrifying dark-rimmed spectacles) to find an infamous seventeenth-century volume, "The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of the Shadows." There are three copies in existence; Balkan already possesses one, and now he wants to get his talons on the other two. Rumor has it that the book contains user-friendly instructions on making contact with the Lord of the Underworld, who is notoriously bad at returning calls. I was charmed to find that the film is at its scariest when it is most bibliophilic—when Corso, magnifying glass in hand, realizes that some of the engravings in the book are minutely signed not by the author but by "LCF." (Fill in the missing letters.)

Polanski can be the most ominous director alive, and the first hour of "The Ninth Gate" has a sure whiff of sulfur about it. Our hero's quest takes him to Portugal and Paris, from the charms of Lena Olin to those of Emmanuelle Seigner (the official muse to Polanski, who seldom misses a chance to exhibit his beloved's bosom to the world), and from professional inquiry to eternal desperation; it also drags him down into the tacky merchandising that so offends the good taste of aspiring Satanists. After "Eyes Wide Shut," I have had my fill of hoods and ritual mumblings, but any hopes that Polanski could provide the required makeover were dashed by the

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sight of Johnny Depp making love to Miss Seigner, a green-eyed angel of destiny, beside a flaming, desolate castle. This is exceptionally good news for anyone in the secondhand book trade, a business not usually associated with outdoor copulation; for Polanski-watchers, on the other hand, it means that the spell has been broken yet again.

Peter Mullan's feature-film début, "Orphans," is about a Glaswegian family—or, at least, about what happens to a family when the center cannot hold. The most important member is conspicuous by her absence; as the film begins, the body of a mother lies in a casket, attended by her four grieving children. There is the eldest son, Thomas (Gary Lewis)—clenched and bony, and a model of Catholic piety. Then come Michael (Douglas Henshall), with his mop of lanky red hair and his failed marriage; John (Stephen McCole), who went to college to please his mother; and Sheila (Rosemarie Stevenson), who is in a wheelchair—and who, as is usually the case with the disadvantaged, seems by far the most stable presence. It is the eve of the funeral; all that is required of the children is that they make it to the church on time, at ten o'clock the following day. Given their state, however, that is a monstrously tall order, and the night turns into an epic.

Why should you put yourself through the mill of this movie? Much of it is savage stuff; Michael gets stabbed in the gut after a couple of scenes, and he spends the rest of the picture leaking like an old boat, with his face slowly turning to gray-green clay. "Have you lost weight?" Thomas says at the end. "Four and a half pints' worth," Michael replies. He refuses proper medical help, calculating that if he can stay alive until morning he can show up at work in the docks, pretend to suffer an industrial injury, and claim compensation; if that is Michael's version of a good idea, imagine what the rest of his life must be like. John comes through unscathed, although in his case the spiritual damage looks irreparable; he spends his time tracking down Duncan, the man who attacked his brother, and the search unhinges him—he all but kills a child in his rage.

And yet he does not kill a child. The parent rests in peace; the children survive. As Mullan juggles the fortunes of his characters, you sense them facing the worst, whether in themselves or in others, and then skirting it by a whisker. When Sheila's wheelchair gets stuck on a cobbled alley, leaving her alone in the dark, you feel the silent seething of her fear; and when a strange figure approaches, playing a harmonica, you suddenly remember every horror film you've ever seen. But no; the figure is a bright young girl in a wizard's hat, and she happily sees Sheila home to safety and sleep. Some of the ordinary folk in this picture are meanness incarnate, with only their cowardice to keep them from murder; others verge on the saintly. Glasgow, it turns out, is just like anywhere else.

The real shock of the film, which should be slightly less amusing than a kidney stone, is that it makes you laugh. Each of the boys is hopeless in his own way, and even their efforts to raise Cain are endearingly doomed to flop. As John's partner in crime pokes a shotgun through a downstairs window, pressing the barrels against the backside of a man he dislikes, their plan—for want of a better word—is foiled by one of the dirtiest gags you will ever witness. The whole tale is small and feral, with a reek of foul-breathed profanity; it gets its teeth into you and won't let go. Scottish directors keep unleashing these wired, unabashed movies, as if to rebuke the sagging uncertainties of their English counterparts. (Some people would say that the same holds true of fiction and poetry.) Mullan knows the lay of his own land, and he knows just how much he can load it with; only in retrospect do you realize how steadily this mournful picture, with its odd braiding of the domestic and the apocalyptic, has relied on the Shakespearean basics. There are three sons, a lost daughter, and a pitiless storm; one of the characters floats along on gentle waves, another sings a lament; all are stirred and tossed by feelings that batter the bounds of reason. Most telling of all is John's avenging cry: "I'm gonna kill Duncan, I'm gonna kill Duncan." That rings a bell. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY RONALD SEARLE

"The Corset: Fashioning the Body" is on view at The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, through April 22nd.

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