ARCHIPELAGO

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Contents

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K. Callaway has published two books, HEART OF THE GARFISH (University of Pittsburgh) and THE BLOODROOT FLOWER (Knopf), and is assembling a long travel and historical meditation based on time spent in Asia, Eurasia, the Russian Far East, and the Indian sub-continent, and on points in-between where she has not been. Currently she is Visiting Poet at the University of South Dakota.

Fidelio is an admirer of Charles Lamb and the devisors of crossword puzzles for *The Guardian* and *Financial Times*.

Henry Martin was born in Philadelphia and received degrees in English literature from Bowdoin College and New York University, where he also studied Romance languages extensively. He translates contemporary Italian literature and regularly contributes as a critic to a number of international art magazines, including *Art News* and *Flash Art*. In addition to his translations of Anna Maria Ortese (THE IGUANA; A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Vols. One and Two) and Giorgio Manganelli (ALL THE ERRORS), he has written a number of books about art: two volumes in collaboration with the Italian artist Gianfranco Baruchello (HOW TO IMAGINE and WHY DUCHAMP, both published by McPherson & Company); art monographs on

Arman, Adamio, and George Brecht; and various museum catalogues. Henry Martin lives with his wife, the artist Betty Skuber, and their son, John-Daniel, in the mountains of southern Tyrol not far from Bolzano, Italy.

Maria Negroni (mnegroni@criba.edu.ar) was born in Argentina in 1951. She holds a PhD in Latin American literature from Columbia University and was a Guggenheim Fellow. Three books of her poems have been published by Libros de Tierra Firme (Buenos Aires): DE TANTO DESOLAR (1985), PER/CANTA (1989) and LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO (1991). Her two latest collections of poetry, ISLANDIA and EL VIAJE DE LA NOCHE were published, respectively, in 1994, by Monte Avila Editores (Caracas) and Editorial Lumen (Barcelona). Bilingual editions are forthcoming of ISLANDIA (Station Hill Press) and LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO/CAGE UNDERCOVER (Sun & Moon Press). Ediciones Bajo la Luna Nueva (Buenos Aires) published CIUDAD GOTICA, her book of essays about poetry and contemporary culture in the US; her poems, essays and translations have been published in literary magazines in Latin America, North America, and Spain. In 1996 she returned to Buenos Aires where she taught a seminar on Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik, which she will teach again at University of London during the spring term, 1997.

Anna Maria Ortese was born in Naples. Her first book, a collection of stories published in 1937, was acclaimed as the work of a major new magical realist. (The critical phrase "magical realism" was largely the invention of the writer Massimo Bontempelli, who is also credited with having discovered Ortese.) She has written more than a dozen volumes of stories, novels, and essays, and has been the recipient of Italian literary prizes, among them Strega, the Premio Viareggio, and the Fiuggi. Although for fifty years her writing reached relatively small audiences, her most recent works have appeared on the Italian bestseller lists. In 1986, her novel, THE IGUANA, appeared in an English translation by Henry Martin, published by McPherson & Company (www.mcphersonco.com), who also publish two volumes of Ortese's stories under the title A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, the second volume of which is forthcoming. She now divides her time between Rapallo and Milan.

Frederic Tuten studied pre-Columbian art history at the University of Mexico and earned the PhD in American literature from New York University, where for fifteen years he directed the graduate writing program. His first novel, THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH, published in 1971, has just been reissued by Marion Boyars Publishers (New York and London). He is also the author of TALLIEN: A BRIEF ROMANCE (1988), and TINTIN IN THE NEW WORLD (1993). His newest novel, VAN GOGH'S BAD CAFE, has just been published by Morrow (New York) and Marion Boyars Publishers (London). In addition to writing for film, he has written about the Brazilian cinema; his reviews and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, and *Art in America*. Frederic Tuten is a Guggenheim Fellow and the winner of the DAAD Prize, with a residency in Berlin for 1997-98.

Anne Twitty's (anahuna@worldnet.att.net) translations of the book-length poems of Maria Negroni are forthcoming in the bilingual editions CAGE UNDERCOVER/LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO (Sun & Moon Press) and ISLANDIA (Station Hill Press). A selection of her translations from Negroni's ISLANDIA appeared in *The Paris Review* (Spring 1994); another will appear soon in *Mandorla*. She has also translated the Cuban poet Magali Alabau (HERMANA/SISTER, Editorial Betania, 1992; LIEBE, La torre de Papel, 1993). Anne Twitty was for some years editor of the Epicycle section of *Parabola*, which published her essays on myth, creation, and memory.

PROLOGUE:

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER:
THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH

FREDERIC TUTEN

I remember picking up *The New Yorker* at a newsstand and reading John Updike's review of my novel and riding home on my Raleigh roadbike and reading it again in bed. I remained in bed the rest of the day, thinking I'd gotten a spring flu from riding around the city and sweating like a crazy man on that bike.

It wasn't flu that had laid me out. It was the Updike review, stunning, out of nowhere, a long line dropped from the eminent upper earth with its message of greetings: "Chum, I've read you, read you carefully, and here are my thoughts." Updike understood a great deal about my novel, had come to its heart -- an organ many at the time did not believe the novel possessed.

Myself included, if heart meant personal anecdote, the common tissue of fictionalized autobiography. I did not want my first novel to be animated by that kind of warmed-over heart. I did not want to trade in the confidences of unhappy childhood, nor in the tale well told, peopled with colorful characters and larded with easily prized sentiments. I was sure I did not want to do the nineteenth century novel yet once again.

That would have been to be born old and exhausted. I would be just trotting out the plaster casts and anatomical models and replaying *The Raft of the Medusa*, only in contemporary acrylic instead of venerable oils. There were some models which pointed to my novel's direction, all the same. They seemed at the time fresh and important ways of thinking about writing fiction -- or at least about the kind of fiction I then wanted to write.

T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* -- its structure and not its cultural politics -- was one of these models; Eliot's idea of a work composed of fragments, mosaics of quotations arranged so that their configuration transcended the parts and gave resonance to the whole, and his hint that those fragments might make up an autobiography to shore against his ruin. I was taken by the idea of an impersonal fiction, one whose personality was the novel's and not apparently that of its author, an ironic work impervious to irony, its tone a matte gun-metal gray with just a flash of color here and there to warm the reader.

In a different vein, there was the idol of my generation, Godard. I liked the anti-cinema way he sliced quotes into his narratives, and how his characters read essays and declaimed directly into the camera. Godard's radical

format seemed not an end in itself, not some attempt at a purely abstract, non-referential cinema, as in the films of Stan Brakhage in America, but an essay in quickening the spent formulas of social and political cinema and of cinema itself.

I wrote THE ADVENTURES OF MAO at a most political time: the radical waves of '68 were hitting all shores; young people believed the Revolution was at the gate. China was near, its revolution still fresh and seemingly uncorrupted. In 1969, I published a thirty-nine page version of THE ADVENTURES OF MAO in the magazine *Artist Stain*, one of the many items -- stamps, seals, watches, rings, lithographs, cut-out figures, etc. -- included in a limited edition three-tier plastic box topped by Ernest Trova's sculpture, "Falling Man." Trova had asked me to write a piece on Mao's Long March for a magazine to be included among the items in the box-sculpture.

Except perhaps for length, I had no restrictions. There was a wonderful freedom in knowing that I could write as I wished, knowing that the work would be published and not be left to molder on a closet shelf among dead shoes and old diplomas. And for further encouragement, vivid experimentation was going on everywhere about me. Rauschenberg was combining disparate materials -- mattresses and rubber tires, perhaps even the kitchen sink -- with his paintings; Lichtenstein and his comic-book images were realigning our view of subject matter appropriate for art, and his work drove a new bright energy into painting, at a time when the vitality seemed endemic.

There was also something innovative in the literary mood of the late Sixties and early Seventies, some idea of refreshing the novel. (Of course, it was constantly being refreshed from the day it was born.) I'm thinking of the era of Steve Katz's THE EXAGGERATION OF PETER PRINCE, a novel interlaced with photographs and ex'd-out pages of text and of Donald Barthelme's extrapolation from Pop art, the idea that comic book characters could live in the pages of fiction as well as any characters one could invent or model after. There were other such off-register books in and about the period. But the innovative climate, on the whole, made up only a rare exception to the general and predictable weather.

THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH was my first published novel but not my first attempt at writing one. I had been trying short fiction since fifteen and wrote a novella set in Mexico when I was nineteen. Very Malcolm Lowry stuff: a young man in Mexico City -- love, drink, sorrows, the obsidian night of the soul. Somehow Jack Kerouac crept into the pages as well. Then another novel went on and off in my late twenties, a story about a young man on the Lower East Side who makes his way by collecting bottles and trash, his idea to live like an urban Thoreau, to the bone and unencumbered. I intercut the narrative with passages from WALDEN and from Emerson's essays and snatches of other early American writers. My room was filled with the American Transcendentalists, and once in a while Melville would rise from his chair and cuff their ears. I published sections of the novel years later but I never finished it.

I had come to write THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH after hearing many voices. All the way through into my early thirties I listened to John Dos Passos and Hemingway. To mix the metaphor, I'd no sooner unstick myself from the glue of Dos Passos' trilogy USA with its lyrical, proletarian appeal, then I'd find myself caught in Papa's tight web -- designed in planes, after Cézanne. No young writer today can imagine the power Hemingway's prose had for us then. You could take one of his sentences and twist it and shake it and slice it, and it would always return to its original shape. It was you who was misshaped at the end, turning even laundry instructions into a Hemingway line. In THE ADVENTURES OF MAO, I tried to rid myself of these siren voices by capturing them and teasing them. All those parodies of Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Malamud, Kerouac, done in an attempt to seize their essence through homage and to trap them in my pages, and once there, forever exorcise them and their serenades. These are the arrogant things the young dream up. Murdering Papas, ingesting them, and keeping their image respectfully distant. So, with its parodies and appropriations (an inventory of them is appended), its collage format and deadpan, textbook narrative describing the history of the Long March, THE ADVENTURES OF MAO was, I hoped, a book with no detectable voice in any one line or passage but one distinctly heard drumming through in the novel's structure.

THE ADVENTURES OF MAO was published in America in the fall of 1971, and in France -- thanks to Raymond Queneau -- *chez* Editions Gallimard in 1975, which has kept it in print. The novel owes its flickering English-language life to rare-book dealers. I have dreamed for years that the novel be reissued -- and now, twenty-five years later, here it is. Twenty-five minutes or twenty-five seconds later, it might well be. Though I notice I have become the portly avatar of the youngish man who wrote that novel, little else has changed.

It is not for me to say how well THE ADVENTURES OF MAO holds or does not hold its center, but I hope the novel has kept its interest in these years of changing cultural temper. I still read the book as a record of sensibility, filtered through masks and quotations, and as an autobiography of thought. The real Mao embodied the Revolution with all its contradictions, his vanity dictating its failure, intimation of which the Mao-character in the novel glimpses. But that is just a matter of history.

STORY:

THE GREAT STREET

ANNA MARIA ORTESE
tr. HENRY MARTIN

Even today I remain perplexed by the simple-hearted abandon with which, as a child, I constantly returned to that great street. I can offer no precise idea of what clear motive might have prompted the girl I was -- motive, or active sensation, or irrational urge -- to turn that street, which coursed like an arid riverbed through the eastern part of the city, into the locus of her daily walks.

Clearly, however, that young girl's penchant for this ancient and exotic street was anything but natural, or even rational. Something much larger than myself, something of which I had no possible realization, carried me there every day, as automatically as winds carry clouds, or as waves trail spray, or as night roams abroad with sleep and dreams.

Such a majestic, savage street! A river of rock; a colossal ship, anchored between banks of silence! A painting: a wonderful, melancholy composition that might have been entitled -- like a canvas which glowed with mysterious life -- "Freedom and Meditation"!

There was nothing in Naples to equal it. So strangely quiet yet animated, so open yet mysterious, it was one of the city's most solemn and wrongly neglected thoroughfares. No other place could have given the soul a finer sense of confusion and festivity, of bewilderment and joy, of freedom and fear; or could have billowed the mind with such delicate thoughts and veiled it with such painful, absentminded music. It carried the spirit, almost in flight, to the edges of a valley not shown on any of the maps of the world -- to a place where the view opens out, incomparably calm and clear, onto the constant coming and going of eternal Symbols and staggering Ideas.

But like a queen cast out onto the ruin of a sidewalk, or like a sensitive woman forced to knock with silly ruses at the hearts of men, this unhappy street, which no one loved, seemed nearly to hope for a black-market purchase of the passer-by's attention -- in exchange for a word that might soften a hostile, scattered mind -- and decked itself at the start of its course with an ordinary, day-to day attitude of bourgeois charm and gaiety: bright colors and sparkling smiles such as might have been found in the customary run of time-worn beauties. And along this stretch where its path began, just above the piazza that bears the name of Dante, people quite generally liked it. The red buildings, including the Museum's cheery facade, the small, green, gracious parks, the string of shops with their invitations to delightfully

familiar purchases -- everything helped to give it the air of an easy if somewhat boisterous grace. The sky's high clouds, sailing with swan-like calm in perfect azure; the nearly continuous tide of students, vociferous and gaily multicolored, to and fro from the nearby schools; the traffic of the carriages, the trolley-cars' clang, the wandering songs of the numerous minstrels; the recurrent sight of little old women selling violets and mums; the sequence, or more nearly the chase of cinema posters, red and blue, yellow and black, on the white, sun-washed walls: all of it seemed like a panoply of cries and joyful smiles cast off along its way by the handsome street. Banal, self-satisfied invitations. Yes, at its start in Piazza Dante and then for a lengthy stretch, this great street was nothing more than a vibrant, populous artery, a stream of traffic, simply a bit more lively than others would normally be.

But then came the hour when the day descends, almost imperceptibly, behind a dense horizon of city roofs and balconies, an hour when the light is almost always splendid; and if at that changing and somehow pensive hour which announces approaching evening, one allowed oneself the full embrace of such affectionate apparitions, obeying the heart's inclination to be carried away by the currents of long and populous thoroughfares, and therefore accepting the street's seductive invitations, then, on setting out between its banks, one realized, suddenly, with a twitch, that something about it had changed.

It had become a different street. No longer the one whose first bright stretch, at morning, had seemed so merry and reassuring. The fine, clear colors which had prodded the shamefully banal minds of the passers-by, and chipped a breech in their apathy, little by little were dying out, silently, on the buildings' taciturn faces. Which seemed more gray and distant. Facades were no longer gladdened by cheerful displays of sweets or colorful clothing stores; there were only cold closed doors, and windows stunned and ajar. The very crowd which shortly before had thronged the street had suddenly thinned, as though having taken flight. The students lagged far to the rear. The trolley cars, the carriages, the cars, the bicycles, the movie posters and the newspaper stands, the wandering musicians and the aged ladies plying mums and violets had likewise receded. The street had widened unexpectedly. Evening's arrival had made it a river of astonishing breadth. A charmed silence, like a cold flush of moonlight, loomed up from its furthest reaches and flew steadily forward along its banks, carrying shudders and presentiments of mournful, unknown beauty.

And then -- as if the murmuring voices of the black trees, outlined in the distance at the sides of the street, or the gyrating wisps of bluish smoke shaped like animals, queens, gallows and flowers, which someone sent constantly upward into that livid sky, were not enough; as if the alarming impression of a river's waters, provoked by the curious gleam of the cobblestones, might not have sufficed to create an air of bewitched expectation -- strange things began to present themselves to the dazed observer's eyes.

One began to grow aware of stores and tiny shops which during the day were of no particular interest; of faded displays of second-hand books, or of cages with birds, or of plaster cemetery sculpture. On the street's two banks -- their lamps shining wan and astray in the darkness -- incredible doors now filled with lights and scenes that were still less credible. Heroes, birds, and pale dead youths were the core of these night-time displays.

A sweet, putrid odor of crumbling paper issued from some of those shops. Illustrated magazines stood in piles at the sides of the doorways and served as pedestals for columns of likewise illustrated books that generations of children, burning with a pure and turbid joy, had passed back and forth from one to the other of their little hands. Many of those children were now no longer alive, or had grown up into corrupt adults, or in any case preserved no memory of those readings they once had loved. Yet those books and magazines survived. How the colors of their covers glowed in the whiteness of the moonlight! How naive and devoutly rhetorical were the faces of the heroes, the smiles and tears of the heroines! And how laden with calm and heartfelt beauty the landscapes in which they moved: lakes and forests, mountains and seas upon which the gazes of ancient schoolboys had lingered and strayed! The flags of all nations sparkled in the sun on the masts of brightly painted wooden ships that majestically entered and departed from the world's most famous ports and traveled the most distant seas. Young sailors with heads of curls like girls, and salty old pirates as dangerous and happy as eagles, sang and boozed around villainous tables in the yellow gleam of a lantern which shed more gloom than light on smoke-filled vaults where bats had built their hanging nests. Cliffs crowned by storm clouds and jolted by forks of lightning slightly more grandiose than natural plunged down onto dark and deserted beaches washed by a constant, roiling surge of long steely waves, topped with eerie shocks of spray. And those noises, those confused and alarmed voices of waves full of muted explosions -- like frightened crowds in flight, or a train falling from a precipice, or the thunder of furious stampeding herds -- set savage lights aglow in the eyes of Yann of the ICELAND FISHERS, sitting dazed and alone before that sea. Other more ingenuous personages, disquieted and delightfully menacing, here and there paced back and forth among these curious papers. Colonel Cody, on horseback, followed by a pack of red coyotes, finely painted, shaded his eyes with his hand and peered toward the hollow of a flaming canyon: framed at his back by an aery valley with the sparkling blue ribbon of a mountain stream, or the gleaming veil that drops from a waterfall's diadem, he attempts to espy the hidden, insidious movements of the advancing enemy. Bearded and attired in skins, the aging Robinson Crusoe shows an always magnificent bearing of courage and hope; with his prehistoric rifle over his arm, he walks through a perfect morning to hunt wild goats in the paradisiacal valleys of his Island, his eyes clouding over with regret for the loss of England and his much-loved mother as he watches the fineness of the sky. THE EXPLORERS OF THE DEEP and the heroes of TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES BENEATH THE SEA advance like ghosts, distraught, ecstatic, and forgetful of self

in the midst of green tunnels dripping with water of the color of rubies and emeralds; they listen in primordial silence to fated songs of freely-running streams, of cool clear water that fills their throats and calms their terrible thirst. Gordon Pym, huddled on the floor of his dug-out boat as it tosses with neither light nor hope in the arms of an unknown sea, observes the approach, like an evil sun erupted from the floes of ice, of the Phantom of the Pole, knowing that soon it will devour him. When suddenly that terrifying landscape fades away. Canoes and clipper ships, pirogues and colorful junks carried their passengers down the rivers and along the coasts of all the most exotic lands, beneath the most favorable suns and winds. The world of youthful adventures mingled with the world of the passions, the joys of discovery with the joys of dreams, the pleasures of smiles with the finer frenzy of tears, expressing the desire to step beyond the truths of everyday and to grasp something newer and far more daring. The youthful heroes on the Paris barricades -- the sun and fury of the South, mixed with the virginal freshness of Nordic blood -- died with foreheads wreathed in splendor beneath the volleys of Bonapartist rifles. Cosetta gave her hand to Dea. Ghastly Quasimodo perished while cavorting on the edge of the abyss, in the immense music of Notre Dame, just as the sailor perishes in a vast clamor of the waves. The happy and vibrant youthfulness of THE THREE MUSKETEERS pelted fistfuls of light into the darkness of the Paris streets. One world shed its light on another; a caravan of images prepared the most suitable road, the most suggestive lights, for the ones that followed. Now comes the throng of DAVID COPPERFIELD, Mr. Micawber at its head, laughing and crying in the midst of his numerous offspring while climbing the gangway to the immigrant-laden deck of the boat which will finally take him to Australia, far from the horrors and delights of debtors' prison. Here are all the members of the Pegotty family, seated around the table of the fine Yarmouth houseboat while the fascinating Steerforth, still unaware of what his much-tried heart will decide, listens thoughtfully and attentively to the artless talk of Cam and Little Emily. Beyond the tiny windows, the sea slants out in evening desolation and voices its bewildered horror of all the events which are still to come. Germanic phantoms, painfully universal, throw open the doors to a world of truth and splendor. Ysolte caresses her plaits in the light of the moon. Young Werther walks absorbed among the alleys of his ancient city. Portraits of Schubert and Beethoven are so intense as to seem to show a hundred men in a single face. And then, suddenly, everything changes: the landscape, the sky, the tone of the times. Images arose from a space a thousandfold more ample than reality: Cossacks, Napoleon at Jena, tundra, Moscow covered with snow. Who might these men have been, so shabby and tired, but bearing faces that shone with immortal goodness and joy? The hoary head of the great Leon, husband to Sophia Andreievna, gleamed weakly in the gray air, against the grimy walls of Astopov's station where he waited, after telling the story of the earth, to depart for the skies. In the midst of tattered and afflicted rabble, madmen and boys, angelic princes and guileless monsters, Dostoievski shattered his chains; his suddenly

resplendent hands, in the infinite gray of this prison which comprises the whole of the earth, were the pure, liberating hands of Christ himself. Chekov, careless of the fearful rat which nourished itself on his lungs, recounted ironic fables of a bourgeois Russia, but his gaze from time to time slipped thoughtfully behind a wall: beyond it, shining in the pink of the moonlight, his venerable Cherry Orchard, the place where the winds of by-gone days go to die.

It's likely that, in the morning, a few innocent children or wandering students from time to time would stop enchanted before these shops, pondering a trade of the scant coins in their pockets for one of those books from the covers of which so many slightly sad but marvelous figures peered out at them. But then they would go away, and no one else would arrive for the rest of the day. Only the rain or the wind, the sun or the clouds in the turquoise sky offered a delicate consolation to those aging papers and ancient stories. A silence, or an air of endless meditation, or the tone of some forgotten song collected on those sidewalks, before those well-worn thresholds. Surely it was clear that the goals pursued by the owner or owners of those shops went far beyond all normal pecuniary interest. One hardly opens a shop in a desert; one doesn't create displays for an audience of clouds and paving stones. So those shops, as far as I could see, had to be theaters of Memory; they were part of a series of Signs and Symbols through which that ancient, contemplative street provided itself with a representation of the senseless beauty of living; of the dreams of the youngsters who came to visit it during the day -- those youngsters whose light-footed paces, alas, were only briefly the same.

And then, when the passer-by's fancy already had been pierced and perturbed by these apparitions, other scenes began to advance with ever waxing urgency. Whether their indistinct whiteness derived from the light of the moon or from the absence of blood in the veins of the figures composing them is something I could not say. But the shops full of stories and birds lay ever further behind them.

No lights shone at all in these tiny stores, of far poorer aspect than the ones before.

I had been told that modest artisans worked in those shops by day and crafted figures of youths: statues, medallions, and plaster busts with which to adorn the tombs of Departed Students, long or but recently dead, who lay within the cemetery nearby.

No one, however, could relieve me of the thought that those figures in white stone or plaster were something far more alive than effigies.

The blood, yes, had abandoned their veins, but not so long ago. These bodies remained still warm and charged with sleepy dreams.

The good artisan, who as sunset approached had been anxious to sit down at table with his sons, had left some of them unfinished and they lay about the floor, tiredly resting on a flank, with a hand beneath a cheek, just as in life those students at times had fallen asleep over a difficult problem or a tedious exercise in Latin. Curls no longer brown or blond, but the color of snow and eternal old age, fell across a temple; eyes were wide and empty, since their pupils had been stolen by headlong time. One group of these students, entirely naked, as though just risen from their beds, formed a hedge of slender bodies and eager, enraptured, downward-looking faces around a young companion who, seated and holding an open book on his thin knees, seemed intent on reading who knows what fables or vibrant poems. His mouth was half open, but his eyes were empty, except that a few drops of tears, likewise in plaster, ran down from their corners and across his delicate cheek. With the back of his other hand (such a very fine hand) he wiped them away.

Other figures held a foot just barely raised from the earth, and seemed to be taking leave of some cherished threshold while casting an affectionate backward glance, perhaps to a mother or to much-loved brothers and friends who waved good-bye. All around, on high, crude shelves, were small garlanded heads of younger boys: some gazed joyously upwards to invisible suns, others cast smiling glances at the charms of a lovely garden, another looked in timid enchantment at a sky to which soon he would have to bid farewell. Still another saw nothing at all; leaning slightly back on a shoulder, with a tiredness barely heavier than that of a boy in his first year of his studies, he seemed to be resting.

One group struck me with particular force: it stood at the threshold of one of these shops and portrayed a twelve-year old schoolboy. A lovely young woman led him by the hand and pointed out a path that remained invisible to those who stood outside in the street. The young woman's lips were slightly parted, and surely her words were wise and kind, her promises prompt with consolation. So, why, pulling back from that compassionate caress, distraught and bewildered by a pain too intense for tears, did he turn his face toward the door and cast his avid gaze out of that vast silent room, in hopes of seeing someone who might be rushing to his aid? It seemed that rivers and mountains and crystalline waters, turquoise skies and wind-blown trees with rustling boughs, and days spent running on the hill...and luminous repose and blessed maternal caresses, and home and school and unruffled childhood all lay on the other side of the threshold he had crossed; and that they called him, and he wanted with all his heart to return to them, to his fond, now-abandoned Life. But already the pupils of his eyes had dried and vanished, and his hand -- owing perhaps to a lack of attention on the part of the mason who had shaped it, or perhaps for some deeper, more terrible reason -- the fingers, alas, of that delicate schoolboy's hand, which lifted to entreat those sacred gifts, were missing; his hand was a skeletal stump and could no longer grasp or hold onto anything.

No outside noise or light had the power to shake these unhappy students from their sad immobility and desperate calm. The books they read, their dreams, smiles, good-byes, and tears, everything about them now had the air of finality, suspension, eternal fixity.

It was here, one felt, rather than anywhere else, that the beat of the great street's heart pulsed at its most majestic, most intimate, most spiritual and distressed.

These doors, these displays, were followed by no others.

Via Foria -- the name of this great street -- slipped away toward the gray recesses of the Botanical Gardens; away as well, it seemed, toward an even vaster park; away like a voyager too exhausted by the morning's wonders, the midday songs, and the evening's melancholy sweetness to be able now to look forward to anything more than a quiet stroll, free from even the palest of memories.

First published as "Grande via" in the collection *L'infanta sepolta*, Sera Editrice, Milan, 1950, and later in the collection *L'alone grigio*, Valecchi editore, Florence, 1969. Published by arrangement with McPherson & Company Publishers from the author's forthcoming collection, A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Selected Stories Volume Two.

CLOSE READING:

THE HUSBANDS AND DEFORMATION OF BOOKS

FIDELIO

1

Christopher Logue's growing Account of THE ILIAD, his English re-making of the Homeric poem, was thrilling in its first two parts, WAR MUSIC and KINGS. If you knew Homer, you often gasped in admiration at the way Logue cut and fit the original, then made up new parts, to compose a work that stood on its legs in English yet rightly evoked its source. If you didn't know your Homer, the excitement came from the energy and coherence of Logue's version, and from the sound of it. These hundreds of lines were meant to be performed, would have been gorgeous to hear. You looked forward to the third volume.

And when it came, you were perplexed. It was called THE HUSBANDS, and you couldn't figure out what was going on in it. You thought Logue preferred, had mastered, a narrative style of inner calm, clarity of gaze, sequence. You had the sense that a single consciousness was following the action, was on top of it, making hip, intelligent, even inspired similes, yet standing where you'd be, among the less with your eye on the lords. It, that consciousness, knew the lords, their speech, love of fame and honor, love of war which made those prizes available; yet it knew the fighters also, their longing for home, how they were suckers for demagogues. It saw everything, even the Gods in their Elizabethan bustle and arrogance (WAR MUSIC) and their Edwardian spite (KINGS). Reading, you felt an almost physical leap of Imagination into the fervor of war. You felt as you do before the Elgin Marbles: your mind clear as water.

THE HUSBANDS works differently. It opens with a shout of soldiers; cuts (back in time) to the handing over of Helen to Menelaos; fast-forwards (in Eternity!) to breakfast in Heaven; and comes to rest on a beautiful, steady image of flowing tide, simile for the Greek army spreading across the plain before Troy. Four beginnings in sixteen lines. This is viscerally sickening, even on rereading, because (you feel this), it's dis-ordered, de-formed. Not that war isn't disordering and deforming: but that you feel in these lines that

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Books discussed in this review:
WAR MUSIC, An Account of Books 16 to 19 of Homer's ILIAD, Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York, 1987. KINGS, An Account of Books 1 and 2 of Homer's ILIAD, Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York, 1991. THE HUSBANDS, An Account of Books 3 and 4 of Homer's ILIAD, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1995. THE HUSBANDS, Faber and Faber, London, 1994 .

something else has been deformed. Logue is usually, rightly, praised for moving the action with cinematic speed, his equivalent of Homeric narrative devices. He's often successful, even brilliantly so; though, equally, there are many lines in which he achieves effects that movies probably can't deliver. But if THE HUSBANDS moves in disjointed episodes (it's also the most expository of the books so far), it works less like cinema and more like a movie that might as well have been directed by Quentin Tarantino. The brutality of the poem's opening montage -- image, *cut*, image, *cut, cut, cut* -- shocks you. The energy that should have been released by the language comes instead from mere sensation. It's not what you've expected, and you react: A mind, *consciousness*, has been chopped to bits and tossed in your face. Something in this technique is cruel, even stupidly cruel, as in the movies.

If cinema is the trope of narration in Logue's poem -- the volumes rely on each other and might be counted as parts of a whole -- then the poem lives (of course) in a tricky environment. If Logue's wonderful Account re-interprets Homer "for our time," then our time is marked not only as the bloody, Leninist century it's been, and to which his version of the *poem of force*, in Simone Weil's perfect phrase, is a sharp reply; but also by the Hollywoodization of -- at least -- popular culture. Its influence is everywhere, not least in publishing, not least among writers, even poets. It contaminates readers. There are so many bad books, forced plot-lines, blank-eyed inward-turned poems, movie-land action effects, that the contamination puts us all -- readers, writers -- at (temporary?) risk. Logue's poetic accomplishment is large, and his publishers are distinguished; and suggesting they've been influenced by coarser tastes isn't my game. Rather, as a reader I've been trying to figure out what's not right with this book, what gets between me and it. I want to try to recognize its intention and find out where its energy comes from.

2

THE HUSBANDS is based on Books 3 and 4 of THE ILIAD, in which "[d]received by God, and abandoned by Achilles, Agamemnon leads the Greeks across the plains for an assault on Troy." The book opens this way:

> "A drink! A toast! *To those who must die.*"
>
> "On my land, before my sons,
> Do you accept this womb, my daughter, Helen, as your wife?"
> "I do."
> "Her young shall be your own?"
> "They shall."
> "You will assume her gold?"
> "I will."
> "Go. You are his. Obey him. And farewell."
>
> Breakfast in Heaven.

Ambrosia alba wreathed with whispering beads.
"In the Beginning there was no Beginning,
And in the End, no End," sing the Nine to the Lord.
And Hera's eyebrows posit: "Now?"
And now Athene goes.

Think of those fields of light that sometimes sheet
Low tide sands, and of the panes of such a tide
When, carrying the sky, they start to flow
Everywhere, and then across themselves:
Likewise the Greek bronze streaming out at speed,
Glinting among the orchards and the groves,
And then across the plain -- dust, grass, no grass,
Its long low swells and falls -- all warwear pearl,
Blue Heaven above, Mt Ida's snow behind, Troy inbetween.

Line sixteen ("Think of those fields of light that sometimes sheet") is where the skittering energy comes to ground. This feels like the true opening of the book and it is, in the English edition. Not an uncommon event: the two editions, American and English, of THE HUSBANDS are notably different. For convenience I'll call them editions A and E. Edition E continues:

And what pleasure it was to be there! To be one of that host!
Greek, and as naked as God, naked as bride and groom,
Exulting for battle! lords shouting the beat out
'One --'
Keen for a kill
'Two-three'
As our glittering width and our masks that glittered
Came over the last row of the plain and

'Now'

(As your heart skips a beat)
'See the Wall.'

The Wall is the rampart of Troy, "majestic on its eminence." The poet's eye has taken us in a smooth, unbroken survey of all it beholds from sea-edge to the gate of the besieged city, pictured as a fortified town in some far corner of the wild East, near the Dnepr perhaps, where

Hector's moon-horned, shouting dukes
Burst from the tunnels, down the counterslope,
And shout, shout, shout, smashed shouted shout
Backward and forth across the sky,
While pace on pace the Greeks came down
With blank, unyielding imperturbability.

Greeks come face to face with Trojans. Agamemnon parleys with the massive Hector. The rhythm and energy of five-beat lines have carried us inexorably to this meeting of the lords of war, to wily Odysseus' little

diversion, and toward the longed-for, truce-braced single combat between Helen's two husbands, Menelaos and Paris. In the elegant economy of this long opening passage, the energy of the cool, silent Greeks has been met and exactly balanced -- a stand-off -- by the energy of untrustworthy, voluptuous, ancient Troy. Agreement is made; weapons are laid down.

The scene shifts. Hera and Athene, no friends of Paris, will not stomach the proposed peace-through-combat. They hurry off to make trouble. Next, we are shown Helen in her atelier. Her women groom her to be displayed before the assembled hosts as property and prize, and we learn, *sub rosa*, how much she and Paris are hated. Here Logue devises a sly juxtaposition of warring passions portrayed via a piece of embroidery: "The atelier. On Helen's frame/'She will be fought for. In an hour....'/*Achilles Reaches Troy*, a nine-year work...." A witty invention, a needle-dart of ridicule. In Homer, Helen's tapestry is a diorama of the war. But -- implies this new one -- who is more unlike Paris than Achilles?

> He has the kind of look that perfect health,
> Astonishing, coordinated strength,
> Pluperfect sight, magnificence at speed, a mind
> Centered on battle, and a fearless heart display
> When found in congruence.

(But Achilles sulks in his tent, we know, refusing combat on the Greek side because greedy Agamemnon's insulted his honor. And he doesn't love women; they're only property, the spoils of war. He is best among the Greek lord-warriors, themselves "Excellent killers of men.")

End of the first act.

This section, fifteen pages of coherence in edition E, is lovable. It's made with the clarity of a single impulse, the poet's mind in active contemplation, his assured recitation. "Greek, and as naked as God, naked as bride and groom,/Exulting for battle!" is even kind of sexy. It's also a little staid. I'm not disturbed by it, as I was reading edition A. I don't like feeling this, or thinking it, but must admit: the disordered American version carries a little charge, puts small electric smacks on the skin. Where do they come from? Why do I like them? I *don't* like them. It was the Tarantino effect that got me.

3

In the second part, called "Music," THE HUSBANDS moves from balance to imbalance, from truce to treachery. The Gods pull levers of energy. Some lean toward Troy, others toward Greece; or, micromanaging, a Goddess now loves Troy, now Greece, depending on where Divine interest is best served. Nine years of war are coming to a close. Everyone has suffered. Ancient, noble Priam, king of Troy (the only Trojan the Greeks trust), is going to sacrifice to the Gods in the name of all, to seal the truce. Anticlimax. The Gods won't

have it. They like drama, they like pulling their stage-levers. That's one source of (narrative) energy in the poem: their plotting.

Before the armies meet, Helen is to be displayed before Priam's court. This is Troy: exotic, barbaric, charged with erotic energy. Her attendant whispers:

> "You carry Aphrodité in your breast.
> Pull down your dress and let your body say
> *Is this not worth a ten-year war?...*"

Logue makes a marvelous transference, a metamorphosis, when -- to instruct Helen in "kingly" behavior before this court -- he has Aphrodité incarnate in old, wrinkled Teethee, Helen's slave. He is very good at making the Gods appear; he knows how it's done, in every variant. Here, the voice of the nattering old woman goes from "squeaky" to "clear," and Helen's attendant, reporting to us, confides: "I sensed we were in trouble. Tu was green. At the same time/I wanted to be kissed and licked all over./This is how Aphrodité sounds when she commands our flesh...."/ It is a delicious image in a terrifying passage. You feel some of the shockwaves Aphrodité sets off when she enters a room.

As Priam readies the sacrifice, Poseidon wants God, his Brother, to hurt the Greeks for mucking up his favorite bay. Hera and Athene want God to help the Greeks; they've never forgiven Paris for his sexual insult. No one wants a truce. Athene ("Magnifica" in edition E, "Choo-Choo" in edition A) is cute -- of all things -- when she cajoles her father. Hera, though, is the better bargainer; she'll give any three Greek cities to be destroyed in return for the sack of Troy. God agrees, with reservations, then decrees that, after this, NO GODS CAN INTERVENE ANYMORE. Men will have to fight their own war. He allows Athene to implant treachery in a patriotic Trojan, and the truce is unmade.

Menelaos and Paris have met in combat; Paris has fled; the Greeks appear to have won. Not quite, not yet: the Trojan, Pandar, fits an arrow to his bow and (Athene turns it downward) smacks Helen's remaining husband -- this is a breathtaking invention -- in the "pubic mound." The arrow must be extracted: "Makon will use his teeth his neck to draw/The head out of the gristle by its stump." Agamemon, shaken, murmurs: "(my God, that man takes pain,/As well as women do)...."

Logue uses vivid images of feminine power; interestingly, they appear strongest as God allows Heaven its last bit of intervention. Paris' cowardice and the Trojan arrow crank up the war again. Now it's left in the hands of men, mortals, who are going to die like flies. The book ends on a plaintive, Arnoldian note, ignorant armies clashing by night.

4

I hunted up the English edition after reading in passing that lines had been cut for American publication.

It's true: many lines have been cut from the American version, yet if I prefer the beautiful first section (up to "Music") of edition E, I'm not certain that some of the later changes aren't better for the poem.

THE HUSBANDS is important because you -- almost -- see (and so, might feel) why this war began. No matter what the lords of Greece say about why they've thrown in their lot with Agamemnon and Menelaos, this war's fought *because of beauty*. Real (not commercial, Hollywood) beauty, god-owned and -given: Aphrodité's, Helen's, Paris'. It's not a force on the soul that the Greeks (read also, Anglo-Saxons) can comprehend. They get it only by analogy: honor, fame, hurt male pride. It's an interesting question: is this book essentially undramatic -- expository; with little agon -- because beauty is so difficult to represent? Particularly in a poem that's been so visual, audible, nearly tactile about war as Logue's Account has been. How can we *see* Helen? She's said to be the visible representative of Aphrodité on earth. How can we comprehend her effect on humans?

Nonetheless, beauty pulled the lever that started the war. Helen left Menelaos and went to Troy with Paris ("the man of my dreams"):

> Me, nude on the rug, you, little big girl,
> Still with one thing on: 'Shall I be naked too?' you said,
> And then: 'Watch me get rid of it!' and threw it off,
> And then yourself into my arms,
> Into my arms the world all gone,
> And the sun rose early to see us.

Not in edition A, which is too bad: necessary information is unavailable. Even so, these lines, too, are a bit staid. Paris was stronger, earlier, on the plain where the armies faced each other, when clever Odysseus turned Agamemnon's offer of truce into the husbands' duel. Languorous, soon to be proven a coward (that is, protected by the Goddess of Love), the armored Paris drawls to Hector, his massive brother:

> "I take no credit for my beauty or its power.
> God gives to please Himself....
> Not to have fallen in with Helen
> Would have been free, original, and wrong."

He is, in his way, a conventional man.

Before her two husbands' combat, Helen is to be exposed before Priam's court. In edition E, there is a talky passage, in which lesser characters tell about Helen's glamorous effect on the Trojans, their heart-felt admiration of her beauty and their desire to see her go back to Greece. Helen, pitying herself, coyly asks forgiveness. These lines have been cut from edition A, losing more

information, and losing Helen herself as a speaking creature. But they have been replaced by, I think, a brilliant evocation of her effect on men. This verse condenses what is scattered and dulled by surrounding speech. It comes as close as we get to what this book wants to do: convey -- with as much affect as it's done for masculine war-violence -- the engorging effect of sexuality, especially feminine sexuality, and the human erotics of god-given beauty.

> Then 50,000 faces turn, and tilt,
> And sad to sight, the colour of the plain;
> and Fate, called love, possessed them.
> Still as it was, the moment grew more still,
> As softly, as on a holiday, alone,
> When seaside zephyrs stir a consecrated grove,
> Parting their lips, as one, stressing each syllable
> The thousands said:
> "Ou mem'me'sis..."
>
> "Ou mem'me'sis..."
>
> This boy who came from Corinth
> Where the water is like wine;
> "Ou mem'me'sis..."
> This man from Abigozor on the Bosphorous;
> And this unlucky nobody from Gla.

Here is where the true energy of THE HUSBANDS erupts. *Ou mem'me'sis!* It ought to have infused the book, as war-energy charges the rest of the poem. In this verse is the erotics of war, as -- if -- poetry can evoke it.

5

How do you recognize a poem's intention? Poets have long been known to publish variations of a work, even change it at the root; Auden and Marianne Moore come to mind. Your job as reader is to observe closely and, if questions come up, see if you can answer them in the "spirit of the poem," even though you live in the world. In that world THE HUSBANDS is, you have to think, a work still forming. It's distracted by possibilities, the movie-cuts, which don't have any *necessary* order. It knows men at war, and war-love, but its erotic energy -- its knowledge of carnal beauty and the power of beauty -- hasn't been released yet into the poem's true shape. The two editions don't quite make a whole. But Logue isn't finished with them, and he knows -- you sense; you see the signs -- what the erotic *means*. It's enticing to wonder what he's going to do about it.

DIATRIBE:

CONFESSIONS OF A LOVER, SPURNED

BENJAMIN H. CHEEVER

Dear Reader,

Do you remember me? We were in love. Or rather I was in love with you. I remember everything: the way the sheets smelled, your sour breath in the morning, your tangled hair. You went into the bathroom. "I look horrible," you said. I didn't think so. I've always had a weakness for runny eyeliner. I made you scrambled eggs and coffee. But that was before. This is now. Now I hate you.

You've betrayed me. You aren't a reader anymore. You're a customer. The customer is always right. I hope you like it. I don't.

I spent half a lifetime mooning around about how I'd write a novel, and you'd get it. Publication is like archery. That's what I imagined. You let go of the string. Your hear the arrow whizzing through the air. Thunk!

That's what I thought before I published anything. Since then I've shot an arrow into the air. Several arrows, actually. They didn't lodge in the breast of a friend. Or anybody else for that matter. Maybe they're still up there, defying gravity.

I was so afraid of writing. Shouldn't have been. People don't read books very much. Although they sure do talk about them. The morning Christopher Lehmann-Haupt gave my first novel a great review, I must have gotten fifteen congratulatory phone calls. Fully half of my well-wishers had no intention of reading the book. They'd read the review. They were calling up to congratulate me on the review. But then I hadn't written the review. Shouldn't they have been calling Christopher Lehmann-Haupt instead?

O.K. O.K. I know what you're thinking. "He's not much of a stylist. He wrote a couple of coming-of-age novels. I already came of age. Besides which, if I'm going to read something by Cheever, I'd rather it be by John Cheever."

But listen, Dear Reader. This isn't the issue. I didn't expect a zillion lovers. I expected one or two. And afterwards, I expected them not to be so embarrassed.

"I've read your book," they say. Which means that they've spent roughly five hours on a project which may have taken me as many years. I'm supposed to smile bravely and thank them back, knowing that it's not enough. It's as if I did something to them, instead of having done it for them. It's as if I spent the night, and afterwards, while they were making breakfast, I

snuck back into the bedroom and stole their grandmother's Georg Jensen broach.

I made a boo-boo. I wrote a book that will never be on *Oprah*.

Sex hasn't always been like this. I'm not a virgin. When I worked at *The Reader's Digest*, and before that, when I worked at *The Rockland Journal-News,* I'd write anonymously for the bulletin board. Sometimes I'd be in the hallway. A man would stop, read my work, and chuckle.

Was I a regular E.B. White? Probably not. And yet somebody had invested the one minute and seven seconds required to read what I'd written. And afterwards, he didn't think he'd been gypped.

I wasn't the only writer who composed for the bulletin board. When I was at *The Rockland Journal-News*, we had a star writer who used often to get his content-free articles on the front page. He wasn't a bad guy, just another victim of success. His name was John Costa. He wrote an article about rabies: "Although there has not been a case of rabies reported in the tri-state area in forty years, Rockland County Health Officials continue to fear an outbreak of the disease that...."

So somebody else -- I believe it was Bill Tucker (he went on to ghost Newt Gingrich's CONTRACT WITH AMERICA) -- wrote a parody. The by-line was John Costerica: "Although there has not been a single case of bubonic plague in the tri-state area in forty years, Rockland County Health Officials continue to fear an outbreak of the disease that swept through Europe during the Middle Ages, carrying off...."

It was a funny story. Bill had given us something precious, something for which we were utterly thankful, a shot of unalloyed joy. Which is what I'd expected writing to be about.

There are still bulletin boards, of course. Perhaps Web magazines like this one can replicate that sort of candor and immediacy. But I remember when books were intimate as well.

When I was eleven, and it was raining, and there was a family expedition, I decided to stay put and to read THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO instead. I read until I fell asleep. I woke up and read again. I was eleven, remember, and had long suspected that there were women out there, and that some of them were wicked, or at least weak. I had had no idea. Suddenly I wanted to grow up. However many cars they sell, Mercedes will always be a woman to me.

Other peoples' writing has actually saved my life. When I was in college, I broke up with a girlfriend once, just after our courtship had reached the point where neither of us had any friends. Perfect isolation. That's what we used to mean when we said true love.

She went to one school, I went to another, so I was all alone. With a roommate. This was a roommate I didn't much like. He had a girl friend I liked a lot. I had to get out of the room every afternoon so that he could screw her. I went to the library and read from the collected poems of William Butler Yeats.

I suppose you think I got the better deal. I doubt it. Maybe Lori Baker chewed with her mouth opened. Maybe Lori Baker was a castrating bitch, but I didn't know that. She looked pretty good to me. And I can say with absolute certainty that if my roommate had ever come to me and said, "Look, Ben, I want to read Yeats this afternoon, and Lori wants to screw you," I would have been supremely happy.

Never happened. Although there were a couple of days when I was too sick to go to the library, and so my roommate and Lori went ahead and pretended I was in the library. Dormitory doubles are quite small. I was careful not to look, but I couldn't help but hear my roommate and his girlfriend. I knew what it sounded like to turn the pages of William Butler Yeats. What they were doing sounded like a lot more fun.

But then Lori Baker wasn't available to me, and William Butler Yeats was. Which is one of the great things about books, they're easy. Books are sluts. Books are whores. Anybody can get intimate with a book.

I used to sit alone in the stacks at Antioch and read those poems, and reread them. I was just some kid, some lost and lonely kid at one of the two billion colleges in the state of Ohio, the Buckeye State, and yet I had William Butler Yeats all to myself. I had that man's heart in my hands. I got much closer to him than I got to anybody else I knew. I read his biography, his autobiography, even his turgid work of philosophy. Mostly I read the poems. And I won't say I understood those poems, but I did know one thing, and that was that I was no longer alone.

Ever read "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come To Nothing"? Listen to that title. There was once a man, a great man, who didn't insist on success in those he loved. Here's how that poem ends:

> Bred to a harder thing
> Than Triumph, turn away
> And like a laughing string
> Whereon mad fingers play
> Amid a place of stone,
> Be secret and exult,
> Because of all things known
> That is most difficult.

In the preface to SURPRISED BY JOY, C.S. Lewis tells us, "I have been emboldened to write it because I notice that a man seldom mentions what he had supposed to be his most idiosyncratic sensations without receiving from at least one (often more) of those present the reply, 'What! Have you felt that too? I always thought I was the only one.'"

Like Yeats, Lewis meant to break my isolation. Like Yeats, he succeeded.

So that's what I'd hoped to be: a lineal descendant of Alexandre Dumas, John Costerica and William Butler Yeats.

Which hasn't happened.

Books have become products. Which makes readers customers. Which

often makes readers fools. Meet a publisher at a cocktail party and he or she (often it's a she) will say they published this or that horrid book. I smile and nod. Judge not.

And then my new friend, the publisher, will smile slyly and say the same horrid book -- it's always the publisher who described the book as horrid in the first place -- sold X-hundred thousand copies. As if the volume of sales made the bad book good.

Now this is the sort of reasoning I can't wrap my mind around. If you've published a bad book, that's unfortunate. And if you sold a hundred thousand copies of this bad book, well then, that's got to be worse.

Think of books as products and it follows that readers are customers. Which may help explain why readers have gotten so tetchy, so unthankful, so suspicious. You don't need to work to be a customer. You need to work to be a reader. It's almost as hard to read well as it is to write well. And it's almost as rare. Reading, like love, is a long row to hoe.

Customers have been told that they are always right. And they believe it. Which makes them somewhat more than human, or else a good deal less. Customers are like sheep, all they need to do is stand still while somebody else works the electric clipper.

More and more the books out there don't really require a reader. Often they're written by doctors, politicians, or men and women who have retired from a long and shameful career in advertising. Often these books have pictures and charts. They tell you how great you are. They make no demands on your character or intellect. Unless you consider credulity a demand.

Did you ever notice, though, how when you read those diet books, you don't get thin? And when you read those romances, you don't get along with your spouse? And when you read that easy philosophy, the world itself is not made comprehensible, but instead becomes even more strange and threatening than it did before you let yourself in on all that good news?

It's escapism, and people are always telling me, "I read to escape."

OK. But there is real love out there. There are people who have been over the top. And they'll tell you about it. They'll share knowledge that was dearly won. If it's winter, they'll tell you it's winter. They may even insist on a coat and mittens. They'll be bossy, argumentative, and real. Like real lovers in a real life, with runny eye make-up, sour breath and appetites. Avoid these books and you're going to miss a lot.

You'll be reading what's hot. You'll be able to buy the T-shirt, see the movie, join the debate. But when the days get short and the wind blows chill, you're going to be just as stupid as you were before you read all those splendid escapist best sellers. And you're going to turn to the other fat, naked sheep in the corral and trade diet tips: "It's simple, you just believe in yourself and eat protein. It's simple, you just believe in yourself and eat fat. Gosh it's cold out here. Didn't we have wool once?"

LETTERS FROM ABROAD:
From time to time we expect to publish informal reports from writers traveling in countries not their native lands. Our intention is to offer our readers glimpses of territory they might not ordinarily see for themselves, through the agency of individual eyes and voices. These Letters are meant to be works in transit, leading us, perhaps, to destinations we had not anticipated.

ESTONIAN LETTERS

K. CALLAWAY

Oct. 17, 1993, Tartu

Dear C.,

"La Traviata," Saturday evening, for 16 cents. Tartu is the intellectual capital of this country and the seat of its major university. Theater troupes, an orchestra, eight museums, botanical gardens, a big university library. Treffner School is a science school for the gifted. The students are pretty good at English. I'm teaching them conversation. They are a joy to work with. A nice flat (free), already stocked; plenty in the shops (pricey), and a good selection of foods (pricey for Estonians).

Nov. 9, 1993, Tartu

This is an extraordinary place. I have lots of guesses, and intuitions mount daily. Left on three days' notice, after a call from the Soros Foundation in New York; one of their appointees didn't show up here. It was quite a scramble. I arrived not having slept for 108 hours, and went straight into teaching. I came without a scrap of information on the people, the country, their language. Therefore my antennae here are stretched to the max as I try to read what I see, stripped of language and with no gestalt, like someone raised without cues in a forest, then dropped into babble. It can be a peaceful state -- I find myself utterly passive, a blank receiving-set, observing small human behaviors in order to read the people. An Eastern hardness in there, somewhere. Not a sentimental people. They dispense with most European small talk and niceties, though are physically very polite.

Finally found one excellent book in English by chasing down its author in person (no English books for sale in Estonia yet), an historian. So I have a start. They've had a very rough time of it, indeed, for fifty years. The middle generations find it hard to smile, now. Not true of the young people -- or the

elderly. As one student put it to me this week, the old people "remember freedom."

I am quite on my own. There seems to be no curiosity about this lone foreigner, and their usual ethic has not lent itself to giving much assistance. Not European, here: rather, it is something else. Strangely interesting. Rather a sad people, I think. Their way with each other is not our way with ours: theirs, to me, seems alien, foreign, puzzling, and unreadable. Tartu‘s culture is Germanic, old-fashioned: a sort of tattered Wurtzburg. Good "Rigoletto" the other night!

December 27, 1993, Tartu

This is a prestigious secondary school and the producer of many of Estonia’s leaders, so the stakes (i.e., students’ minds) are high. The preceding style was Soviet, harsh, and though all the teachers are very good, they teach languages by an old method. It’s why they called in a native speaker: they thought hearing one was the key to making the students talk. Of course, that wasn't the problem. You have to make the students *want* to talk, so much so that they forget they're trying it in English. The students are stunned to be allowed to speak their own minds.

I know, of course, that the slightest introduction to such freedom of *logical* thought, with full attention to what they’re saying -- to language itself, the connection of real feeling to real thought: that difficult job -- will not easily be forgotten once sampled, and will stand them in good stead no matter what happens now in, and to, Estonia. To simply link up what they meant with what they said -- to mean what they say -- well, as you can imagine, this is exactly what was not allowed under the Soviets.

So I am lucky, in a way, to have landed here at this particular school I think, and will continue with everything I have to do what I can for these ninety 14-to-17-year-olds under my conversational charge. Since I want to know what they *think*, the stakes are rather high; and, no, it is not a normal English class in conversation. This is a think-tank in broken English, and one never, but never, knows what will happen next.

The university is here, up on the hill. The city is medieval (founded 1047) and leveled several times; the oldest buildings are handsome, 18th-century; it’s a good-looking town, Hanseatic in appearance. The university library has almost nothing in English: the books are Estonian, German, Russian and Hungarian.

There is no translation into English of the Estonian national epic, assembled by Kreutzwald last century, “Kalevipoeg.” At least, none in print. This pamphlet [Felix J. Oinas, KALEVIPOEG KUTKEIS (“in fetters”), no bibliographic information] quotes a little from one section.

With great difficulty I also tracked down some political history books on the Baltics (difficult, from here, that is, and in English). One, I found by

tracking down the author, himself, here in Tartu, and buying the book from him -- he happened to have one copy in English. Almost nothing of the literature itself is available in English, the poetry or the fiction. Jan Kross is the major author, and *is* in English -- just not in Estonia. Jaan Kaplinsky a good poet; he lives here in Tartu, though I haven't met him. Also in English: there, the library did have two of his books. He's excellent. But there are hundreds of others, none translated. Yet.

So I have really found very little. My area of interest is still taking shape, but it's in the poetry as it abuts against/is part of local archaic religious practice. Sound. Music? Rhythm. Sacred syllables. Everywhere they are used in conjunction. To what sacred end?

The unfamiliar feel of Estonia, and Estonians: it is tied to their world view. It is utterly unromantic, persevering, furtive, mystical, unusual. Their poetry (pre-German) is incantatory, not tied to meanings, but to pure sound; is shamanistic, and survives in every household in the countryside, sans the religious connection; but the taste for that even shows in some country students' papers as they open up and write. It is an odd, fascinating way of organizing a response: circular, accruing along the way, a rhythmic beat meant to produce a close response. I have a sensitive country girl in one class, and her paper was utterly different from anyone else's.

Then, I read this, in the book by Endel Wirk, ESTONIAN LITERATURE, Tallinn, 1970, on *Regivärss*, the most ancient, incantatory remnants, now sung as songs:

> "[T]he fact that initial rhyming predominates in the oldest of old poetry should be correlated with one of the salient features of the Estonian phonetic system: all native words are stressed on the first syllable. This helps to explain why alliteration is so widespread in Estonian folk literature... the need for alliteration is so imperative that at times it may even dictate the choice of words, thus affecting or even deforming the sequence of ideas ... at times quite nonsensical.
>
> .... The varied moods and images are expressed in a regular trochaic rhythm which may appear rather monotonous at first sight, but which is actually subtle and flexible enough... Estonian is characterized by certain distinctive and complicated quantitative relations of sounds and syllables that are not to be found in the Indo-European languages....In essence it may be considered to constitute an original poetic medium which differs sharply from the metrical structure of European classical poetry.... The subject-matter is often brutal, but the tragic narrative is muted by the hushed tone and the shocking details are toned down or only indirectly suggested beneath the iridescent veil of parallel variations. This trait has perhaps something to do with the national character....

These are the *Regivärss*, dating back some two thousand years. One hundred seventy thousand were collected in the last century, and reside in a building up on the hill where a scholarly committee is still working out the Estonian language and developing it for present use -- working hard at it. There are some three thousand basic *types* of *Regivärss* that have so far been discerned in this collection.

That's all I know so far -- a few hints I've run across. But there is something else, another line of hints. There has been no time to do much about this second line, as it is hard to formulate the question in English so that Estonians would understand me:

A Canadian teacher with whom I have become friends mentioned that an Estonian woman doctor had confided something odd to her last year -- that it is widely and quietly held by Estonians that they were led here originally to stop in this corner of Europe because they could respond to some kind of spirit-aura or power in the land in this corner; and so they stayed. That their shamans had taken them from spot to spot, and had found a major response here.

Yesterday, the day after Christmas, I took a long walk with one of the English teachers. This woman is elegant, about fifty, rather high-strung. To my surprise her tastes are quite mystical and dualistic. There were bad spots as well as good spots, she said; everyone knew this. Present-day houses were laid out with no attention to this fact. (Aavo is her son: the young cultural anthropologist whom I will tell you more about later). And we had set out at her suggestion to see an art exhibit by an Estonian man whose paintings, when you looked at them, were believed to affect your health for good or ill. (The exhibit, when we reached it, had closed.) She told me yesterday, too, that Aavo has a professor at the university who has written some articles on this arcane mystico-history of the Estonians, so perhaps in time I will hear more about it.

December 27 (2), Tartu

It occurred to me the other night that the only answer to an alien poetic response is poetic, from one's own spot in the universe. That answer would be a long letter-poem written at white-hot speed. It would be an unvarnished, unfinished, sound-reply to a strange melodic system tied to an even stranger stand in the world. In a curious way, there is no idea here of the individual, not the way we know it. The Eestis are a cohesive people by means of their language. Their challenge is not only linguistic (your sounds against mine: will they measure up?), but about surviving, lasting, in such a world, throughout history and prehistory. Their stand is: by means of avoidance on the surface, and fierce adherence amongst ourselves to our *music*-language, we have always survived. Here is who we are. Who are you? What is your own base of security-in-sound?

No search for personal power, here; no need to overcome anything: that's the feeling. And utterly insular. Personally, they seem neither to care nor not care about the Russians -- nor about me, one stranger. For their lives go on at a more inaccessible level that any of that; are shared with one another by repeating reassuring sounds, rapidly and softly. There is no hostility to the stranger. He simply doesn't exist.

And this is always hard for an outsider, of course. When you speak, you feel you are not heard -- even when the conversation is in English. It seems to have no impact. *They cannot hear it.* And, no doubt, this is how they have survived!

The songs throughout time have always been sung by women, says Oinas (at Indiana). The culture-carriers. In the classes, it is the girls who are conservative, shy, mostly silent. The boys are more than half-westernized, and want to be Europeans. Not so most of the girls.

Feb. 23, 1994, Tartu

What a time they're having here, with everything! So unused to world mail coming in and going out on this scale that workers have to be restrained on every item. Even the envelope-addressing system used by senders had to be done the other way around -- big diagrams in the main post office: name first, not last. Country last, not first. Whole thing towards middle-to-right lower quadrant, not upper left. Every item of every daily endeavor is like this. Little wonder a few foreigners' letters sit somewhere for a while. All seem to make it through, eventually.

Talked AIDS education for a week with my 90 students: nothing was being done; they'd heard nothing, and HIV is in Tartu. Adult attitude dismissive. So, I did it. Very interesting, and not as hard as I thought it would be. Nothing available here anywhere -- finally found one small book from Canada in the university library on the hill (very little available to doctors here at that library under any language), and with that, I ran 10 sessions on AIDS / HIV, fairly explicit ones but of course had to talk about lots else, too, to watch out for their feelings. Sent out pleas for information to the obvious places; WHO in Geneva responded massively and at once. A whole free series of the latest books on AIDS and AIDS education. I'm of course donating these to the library. I wouldn't like to tackle this subject again, though, unless I had to, as here: catcalls, no support from the staff. But a dear friend of mine died from this in 1988, so when I learned the situation here I didn't think at all, just acted, and am providing growing files of information as it rolls in. Best I can do. The kids of course disgusted that no one had told them, as they should be told. Wrote to dozens of places outside the country for help; got fairly well wound up about it. You know how one does.

It is now Estonia's Independence Day. Touchingly, they say it is their 76th. They count it from February 24, 1918.

This is heavy KGB country: half a mile from where I type is/was a big strategic-bomber airport; Tartu was closed even to Estonians. Foreign lecturers have been allowed to come to Tartu (as of three years ago), but not allowed to stay overnight. This place was covert, closed, and also the location of their country's major university, which turned out to be a haven of sorts for Jewish professors who could make it out of Soviet Russia. It was a little safer here. So it was a sad combination -- great scholarship going on, some of the finest in the whole Soviet empire, in a city oppressed by and thick with KGB and Soviet military. This was also the center of the resistance, when it came at last. Led by students at the university and by some of their teachers. All went to Treffner, where I'm teaching: a hotbed of nationalism, always has been. For fifty of its hundred years, this school could not be called by its real name but was simply listed as School No. 1. Hugo Treffner was a patriot.

Feb. 24, Tartu

I find being here an odd exercise in seeing how long I can last away from the full expression of my language. I see that I have always been in countries where English is plentiful, if local in color, and me not tied down to one spot. So this is new. Being away from a person or two with whom to speak English is grievously hard. ... The trouble with being away from your language in this country of foreign sounds is that *their* needs demand the finished thought, which then they echo. Is that Finno-Ugric up against the Indo-European? I, or we, need the incomplete thought, the energy released between people who build quickly on uncompleted phrases, and in those brief silences between the words. Those leaps. The understood. The understood as part of a vast common ground, the contrapuntal playing-ground where all the real exchanges take place *outside of language*. But through language moving very freely and very fast. None of this is possible, none of it available on paper or outside one's language matrix.

Well, on paper, yes, but ... that's only half of what one needs, in the end.

Paper answering paper, book as commentary on book -- is that the best we can do? *It's too slow*. One is grateful, nonetheless, that books exist where love is lacking: think what it would be like with no expression of this at all. But my question has been dogging me for five years: is art enough?

So sometimes I shy away from it and from the spoken language around me, just to see what will happen, how the mind will manage, what its values might be. What it needs, wants, is. It has now been twelve years since I left New York and my own community of friends, an abiding one. Yet what I have seen in those twelve years I could not have found even in that lively circle. I must continue, then. Much work needs to be done.

March 24, 1994, Tartu

I am exhausted by all the differences here, and by all there is to learn; as well as -- or especially -- by the need to sleep *and dream* in order to absorb it all, the dreaming never keeping pace with the discoveries. And with the dreaming comes a feeling of satiety, that same feeling after a crying jag or from grief -- a drowsy feeling of no-fear because one has bottomed out and finished, finally; so one can again be in-the-world as a witness.

By the way, it's an odd problem in this society for people like us (I mean, for Americans): the slightest mention of the word "spirit" -- that's as far as I've ever gone in school, just that one word -- and extreme discomfort all around you. Or the word "religion," even if you're very careful to use it in a polymorphous, culture-rich context. Nothing doing. And naturally, use of any other related word is out of the question. So that around Christmas time, things were extremely interesting: a Christ-less Christmas. Gifts, but no God. The whole core meaning excavated out. I found it very lonely.

And of course, the major thing wrong here is exactly to do with the spirit. They seem to be operating individually with a suppressed life of the spirit, and the results are barrenly apparent. If you want to do something and won't get caught, do it. Or do it if you cannot be stopped. The mafia are (some of) the kids' heroes, and have even been given a history dating back to the Middle Ages. I almost threw up. Nothing I could say would shift their opinion. Their attitude, and perhaps the going attitude: What crushes you, you might just as well look up to. Or, pretend to.

But this brings us right around to the subject you are dealing with: the archeology of American consciousness, as you so beautifully put it. This Estonian attitude is not, can never be, anything like what we have become. I see from being here how radically Romantic Americans -- all Americans -- are, at heart. What I am noticing is profoundly post-Romantic, or is a gray, jagged reaction to that bad working form of Romanticism that was Marxism-in-action. Here, 14-year-olds know enough to sneer openly at the word "hope." Their papers are full of hopelessness. This, at the school which produces Estonia's leaders in every field.

What we would call "giving up" (I am made a fool of every time I try to counter their profound, sometimes very innocent, nihilism), is here even among teenagers merely a sensible option. This lesson I learned from them only yesterday. In the middle of such lessons, you can see why I must dream to catch up; these are blows to my hope for all of humankind. I had thought humankind basically good: my students laugh with delight at such naiveté. And -- I have a feeling -- this is the mind-set (hated word) in all of Eastern Europe and former Soviet bloc countries, as well as in Russia itself. Americans are the last idealists, it would seem.

However, they also look at us, to us, with something like longing for our optimism. They need it. Not *our* variety -- ours is felt as an insult; it's too unknowing. A muted optimism brushed over here and there, dusted up a little bit with a decorous silence towards subjects too ugly to talk about just yet, would be more to everyone's taste, here in the lost parts of Europe. They

are also envious of our kindness towards one another and towards everyone; this, apparently, *they can't feel at all*, and wish they could. So they are not jealous of our wealth. But of our basic happiness.

And -- we *are* happy. And no, it isn't fair. So we feel guilty about it and go traveling to learn how to temper this happiness with another reality. Instead, we end up even happier than we were to begin with.

So it is easy to patronize Americans, but that is a mistake. It is the one thing we can't stand, because it assumes superiority, and deep down we believe that freedom is superior to knowledge (that's what's radical about our Romanticism). You quote DeVoto who says of emigrants that they displayed "the inability to get along with one another...tending always to reduce society to the family" and so on -- this prickly independence has not shifted one iota among those still drawn to "frontiers" in America. And elsewhere. I notice here, for instance, that I am bellicose in comparison with Estonians, even in comparison with the kids. Even they describe their best national characteristics as being "calm, private, hidden, even-tempered, liking to be alone, cold, and peaceful." They describe the Russians as being sociable and entirely credulous: their word! Estonians are oak trees. Russians, birch forests. Americans, maple trees; the Finns, junipers. That, according to my 17-year-old, 11th-form class.

I begin to understand the damage of Vietnam. Who we are does not fit anywhere in the world, except at home, where there is, almost, room in which to direct such violence. Romanticism still leads to violence. Maybe that's what Individualism matures as, after all. Instead of pointless anarchy and petty cruelties for no reason, you finally get to be violent, thanks to an ideal, one that is both unassailable and insupportable: "*instinct*." Our version bears watching. It is not much better than the German variety; we've just got more space in which to exercise it, and less history to hang it on.

Frontier. Wilderness. The West.

"I found myself reading a child's own story of how he came into consciousness" -- you say -- "of a vast, animate land, and of himself as being unmothered there." *Animate land. Unmothered there*. Most pioneer families I know of (my family is one) are shot through and through with an unnamed, unrecognized, full-blown pantheism. They do not know they believe this; they think it's in the Bible. It is straight from the 18th century Europe they came from; it's all that remained after lost generations in the wilderness, harsher than family letters and most history have so far reported. My mother's family, for example, kept Keats but lost the use of fork and spoon. Could quote Wordsworth but in some cases could barely write, and had very little one-room-schoolhouse schooling. Fathers went away for years; mothers raised piles of children, farming them out unseen for whole childhoods. That was the frontier, the actuality. In letters between women of the family, later, it was coded; by the children -- my mother's generation, -- repressed as memory entirely, and the locales forbidden, even though all the family tombstones for 150 years lay there. The founding of the Midwest was

rough on civilization as practiced by the women on the children. And there was a lot of violence, all unreported.

The West: that bar in outback Montana two men of the West took me to, to show me the real Montana: when they entered with a woman (me), guns were taken out and displayed on the bar, one by one. A warning. "This is the true Old West," said my Texan friend, chuckling. He nodded to the art work over the bar. An old reversible picture: a Gibson Girl, and in a blink, a skull instead. "That," he said, "is how the West still feels about women." And we were then politely asked to leave. Beauty and death. Death and beauty. Posited against them, both worshipping them and fearful of both: the violent man, *himself worshipped by the beauty*.

April 13, 1994, Tartu

Two items: Firstly, my adventures with my young friend Aavo, a graduating cultural anthropologist. To describe properly what he revealed to me by way of information and Estonian delights would take a long article; but for now: (a) in the locked basement of the National Museum of the Estonian People here in Tartu, by means of artful talking, he was able to have the chief ethnologist open it up for the two of us last week, and I was walked through the entire treasure of peasant Estonia, which has never been displayed. Implements, small to large, very large -- whole tree-trunks hollowed out as grain-holders and feeders; ice-skates made out of what looked for all the world like human femurs cut lengthwise, blackened with age; horse-collars; ladies' wooden saddles; all manner of bowls, ladles, beer mugs, butter-churns, pitchforks, shovels, wool-carders, spindles, spinning-wheels; everything for life made out of wood very lovingly, and everything smooth from long use. All of it, apparently, collected from the island of Saaremaa. Tree-trunk wash-barrels... We walked quietly through the lost peasant history of the island, where it had last obtained. Tens of thousands of articles. No more than a dozen Estonians have ever seen what's in that basement. They need a museum to put it in, and have never had one; a new one is already designed, and a place to build it reserved, but there is no money to do it with. Perhaps twenty years from now, indicated the ethnologist, who did not speak English. The door was locked again with a giant, hand-forged key in this crumbling building, used as part of the university for classroom and storage only.

Upstairs, the Kreusenstern collection, also locked up: saw that, too. Not so large as I had thought, but there were some exquisite items. The exhibition of Aleut, Tlingit, and Haida artifacts may be mounted mid-May for the first time ever, including these items, never before on view. The Soviets tried hard to take them, but failed somehow. Mostly Aleut and what looked like very high-quality Haida materials. Hats and fishing gear from the Aleuts; beautiful obsidian carved ceremonial pipes and hats from the Haida, and some masks, totemic objects, sacred things. It made me sad. And one most exquisite Aleut hat quite covered in carved, three-dimensional ivory figures

to do with ocean hunting. In another building, said Aavo, was the other half of the collection: bark clothing being restored. I'd say there must have been, then, perhaps a hundred items altogether. The cupboards were also full to the high ceiling with artifacts from other native cultures around the world, all collected by German explorers in the 18th century and part of the 19th -- Dorpat's (Tartu's) heyday. Well, the 18th century wasn't: the town was gutted and only twenty-one people lived here. The revival began in the very late 18th century and went rapidly throughout the 19th, on many scientific fronts, including linguistic and ethnological, regarding Estonians.

Over a million songs have been collected and are stored in the Literary Museum (a working scholarly institution rather than a museum per se), also up on the hill, where everything else is. Tens of thousands of these are the old shamanistic *Regivärss*. These treasures must remain out of my reach; there is no psychic rope left with which to learn this language, a decision I made for my own good some months ago. It is all I can do to stay sensitive to the atmosphere and the body language around me; and to read about them in English in the few books available up at the library. These few means are so richly suggestive that I found the idea of taking on the language, which would reveal the full force of who this people were, as too much for me. Just as in South India, it is quite enough just to be here without knowing too much, for the first long stay. To have taken on Tamil, and therefore Tamil literature, philosophy, *et al.*, would have driven you quite mad because it amounted to becoming Tamil. I am not a scholar: I become what I see and am surrounded by; therefore I automatically, it seems, proceed with caution and reticence, yet with open eyes, when in a culture very different from my own. I enjoy being this odd way, but it wants protecting.

The first item had to do with Aavo; the other thing: living shamans, in Estonia. They are here.

Now, Aavo gets involved with shamans, it would seem, wherever he travels. He has spent considerable time as a freelance ethnographer and just plain adventurer in places it is not allowed to go to, and among people who were meant by the Soviet authorities to remain completely sealed off from any visitors. These were the Nenets, both Forest and Tundra tribes, on the other side of the Urals, and the Yakuts, I believe. He has notebooks, slides, and movies; went there with two young friends three years ago. That means they were all 17. A year later, he talked his way across Siberia and via Uelen into Alaska, on his way to visit Native Canadian tribes, but the Canadians wouldn't let him in as he had only fifty dollars. He worked with a trapper out of Chicken, Alaska, to earn money to return to Estonia, but instead, received a scholarship from Harvard, and spent it driving to Mexico, when he'd never driven before; the wreck of a car; many adventures, but the highlight was living for a time with the Zunis and the Hopis. *At each stop he learned the language*. In doing so, he was each time admitted by way of courtesy, being a young man, to sweat lodges, male ceremonies, and shamans' circles, being sincerely prone to such interests. All this before the age of eighteen.

So when this young man began to talk about Saaremaa, following a rare question from me (I don't ask questions; I wait for contexts, and just listen): "Last October I was told something about a man on Saaremaa. Is there such a one?" is all I said. Aavo's face lit up; this man was a friend of his, and he told me a considerable amount about him. He had visited the man, he said, on Midsummer's Eve last year. Well, C., there is far too much to tell; I will have to do it in person, sometime. Linguistically, according to Aavo, the word *noid* on its own means a bad witch, misused as such by German ethnologists in the 19th century; it had no bad connotations before that for Estonians. But *noid* preceded by a place-name indicates for Estonians a *living "witchdoctor"* -- their own word for it, in English -- and is entirely positive. They are around; a famous female shaman died quite recently, he said; but the most famous of all lives now on Saaremaa. The Soviets moved him there, and gave him an herb farm. No one was allowed to go to Saaremaa during the Soviet time, although it was the largest island, because from there you could row to Sweden and escape. But they put this *noid* on an herb farm because plants talk to him, and he to them. I believe Aavo, who said that his shamanic friend can also translocate. I do know that this man looks Asiatic and was an orphan, from somewhere in the countryside. Under the Soviets, no shamans were supposed to exist; however, this man was flown to Moscow many times to treat every single Soviet president except Gorbachev. They deposited him on Saaremaa to keep the Estonians from seeing him, themselves.

He likes Aavo because they both like vodka. More and more it's becoming clear that, throughout Soviet Asia and even here, in Estonia, vodka is a screen. If someone is said to be "just an old drunk" you can pretty well bet that he is also something extraordinary, but hidden. This even applies to one or two particularly gifted and learned university professors. The most beloved people in every sphere are referred to as this: drunks; disheveled; broken; dissolute; of no value. This protects them from too much (formerly) Soviet interest. Also, to gain access to them you must drink vodka with them in great quantities -- a kind of initiation. They invariably show no effects of it, being extraordinary people or graced in some way; you must get roaring drunk, I suppose so as not to remember to divulge the secrets told you, or so they cannot be given credence if you do. So when Aavo reported spending Midsummer's Eve with the Saaremaa shaman last year, it was to drink vast quantities of vodka.

I now discount such provisos to any story; they are certainly true, but they are never the point; they are a peculiar test of *you*. And Aavo hinted -- though he is notorious about lagging on the follow-through with such things -- that maybe I could come along this midsummer. I won't hold my breath. But there is no question that, should it happen suddenly, I will indeed drink lots of vodka though I no longer drink any alcohol at all. I will plunge in, certainly trusting this shaman, and myself, absolutely -- even joyfully. Not the least bit afraid of anything in my psyche, nor in his. And Aavo's terribly

life-positive. To know of even such a one who is living gives me joy, C. They still live. They live. Even here, after all that's happened.

I have a student who is surely a natural along the same lines. Külli is small, pale, and very disruptive -- not much interest in learning. (Unusual at a special school where you have to take an exam to get in. She's here for some reason to do with her scores, apparently.) Pale as death itself; I thought, perhaps ill. In the hallways, I have caught her (she didn't know I was nearby) making howling sounds, or screeches. I thought them just cutting-up noises, but they certainly were different in intensity from other students' "noise." Then, this week I played the first game with my students (I don't believe in learning this way, but had promised them).

It was the simple, British pastime for families on trips, the game of "I spy." ("I spy with my little eye something beginning with --.") To make the game more interesting, I encouraged them to make it difficult -- “I spy” could be something without shape or weight, a quality, a mood, a feeling, an ingredient of something else, or inside the body. Külli guessed instantly about half the time (the other half, she did not speak); the others grinned sheepishly, lowering their eyes, not surprised at all. I did a double-take, and said, "Oh!" Külli looked at me with scorn: at last I had understood what she was capable of. She could read others' minds.

Now, I had just described this as being the interesting part of the game: when relaxation was combined with acute attention to mean they were simply using part of the ninety percent of their brain not normally employed; it wasn't "mind-reading," I said, sounding like the teacher who knew all. She looked at me with pity, like someone feeding sugar-cubes to a dumb old field-horse. Normally, she doesn't speak any English, only Estonian, to disrupt the others. "Oh," I said. Külli smirked.

So it goes. This is quite a place; these are quite a people, C. I have grown very fond of them, though could never stay here. It is a treat and an honor to have had a few glimpses of what they are about, and if you asked me, I'd say that overall one could guess that Estonians are shot through and through with a very old sort of magic; are a maddening people, therefore. You will not get in. Nor should you. All outside readings by Russians and us or anyone else reflects only the mask, a series of masks, thrown up quickly by Estonians to keep the inner thing protected. My students have written papers about it, but they are private ones -- I have promised -- done by way of metaphor (rye bread!). I am very close to my students in a very, very distant way. That is the best that can be done. I am not a person to them, not quite; but they have relaxed enough to use me as a vehicle for what they want to think and say; that alone is extraordinary luck for me, and I think, Okay. Even: Good for them. The usual benefits, in short, of writing. But I must be very careful to guard this material that has passed through my hands. I am using it merely to inform my understanding. Rye bread. Sauerkraut. Apples. Blood sausage.

April 13, 1994 (2), Tartu

Everything is pointing me to Saaremaa. My old Encyclopaedia Britannica (1910 edition) told me that, in pre-Roman times, the considerable amber trade was controlled by chieftains on Saaremaa. The island is to the north of the amber coast, which now lies within the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, inside Lithuania.

I am trying to find out about a curiosity, rather, a missing curiosity, now a legend of sorts. Is the story Lithuanian? No, pan-Baltic, probably. There was a room entirely made of amber. After World War II it disappeared, and still has not been found. It is called, simply, the Amber Room. Its name pops up in conversations and in articles with fair frequency. The image holds richness and power, especially, I think, throughout and following 50 years of Soviet drab. This mellow, priceless mystery has crept into Baltic minds and stands for something. I think the legend is growing.

Postscript: In the National Museum's locked cabinets, Aavo and the director also showed me a Setu god. I have yet to hear the story; there wasn't time. Down the ladder came a box about two feet long. An open box: inside was a blackened, heavy, wooden figure about 20 inches long. Roughly carved; merely suggestively: a head with marks for eyes, slight nose; no mouth, as I remember. I think, no neck; the body also rough-hewn as if skirted; no body parts shown; merely shoulders, then rough hack-marks on the darkened old wood: and the whole figure appended to a wooden X. Aavo took it out with great care and respect; and replaced it like a baby. Indeed, though it had the weight and shape of a baby, life-sized or larger, it was clearly meant to be a standing adult figure. He said he'd tell me the story about this famous statue later; but we haven't got around to it yet.

While showing his slides of his stay with the Tundra Nenets, he told us of his run-in with their local god. In one slide it looked much the same as the Setu god, though swaddled in rags. It had to be upright at all times, 24 hours a day, and throughout all history never allowed to fall over. People -- keepers -- took turns guarding this totem inside the tipis wherever they went; they were migratory. Aavo came upon it one day by accident, and after that, they cautiously allowed him to be around their wooden god.

The Setu god: now in a cupboard in Tartu.

POEMS:

from
EL VIAJE DE LA NOCHE / NIGHT JOURNEY

MARIA NEGRONI
tr. ANNE TWITTY

la jaula en flor

El tren nos deja en el gran canal de una ciudad helada y majestuosa. Ah, los pájaros volverán a atravesar este invierno y el precio de las noches pálidas, sin luna. Oigo cómo silbás una canción que yo compuse, y no sufro. Sufrir me distraería de este sitio donde ni vos ni yo tenemos nombre. Te dejo, semidormida, en un hotel que es un barco y me alejo pensando en nuestra casa futura, esa isla que todavía no existe, esa promesa nueva de despojos. No siempre es fácil entender por qué huímos. El país nos abandonó hace tiempo con algunas penas y un miedo de no ser nada sin ellas. La ciudad donde dormís ahora se mece como queja, golpea contra el muro desolado de los muelles. Yo comienzo a desvestirme en una jaula que florece. Te amo. Es Estocolmo la que viaja, no nosotras.

Cage in Bloom

The train leaves us at the grand canal of an icy and majestic city. Ah, the birds will fly once more across this winter and the price of the pale nights, moonless. I hear you whistling a song I wrote, and do not suffer. Suffering would distract me from this place where there are no names for us. I leave you, drowsy woman, in a hotel that is a ship and walk away thinking of our future home, that island that does not exist yet, that promise of fresh depredation. It isn't always easy to understand why we are fleeing. Our country abandoned us some time ago with a few pangs and a fear of being nothing without them. The city where you are now sleeping rocks like a lament, thuds against the desolate wall of docks. I begin to undress in a cage sudden with blossom. I love you. We are at rest. It is Stockholm who travels.

The Great Watcher

Tejía un tapiz que contenía el laberinto de esta ciudad y del palacio, y le encargué a un *ragazzo* de pies ligeros que se extraviara allí, hasta encontrarte. Me di cuenta de que el tapiz me traería otro amante. No importa, siempre ocurre así: lo verdadero empieza o termina ausentándose. Te esperaré en una sala redonda, constelada de pájaros, en el umbral de esa puerta Ilena de noche y mundo, que da a lo inalterable. Como si dedicara un poema a una niña, se lo diera inconcluso para que lo urda cuando el sufrimiento deje de parecerle un mundo más real, espacioso. Yo haré más largo el camino a lo indecible. Yo seré el acto de tejer. Vos, el leopardo de cuernos múltiples que ha aparecido ahora en el brocado verde y observa todo como un heraldo, misteriosamente.

The Great Watcher

I was weaving a tapestry containing the maze of this city and the palace, and I sent a swift-footed *ragazzo* to lose himself in it until he found you. I understood that the tapestry would bring me another lover. It doesn't matter, that is how it always happens: truth begins or ends by evaporating. I will await you in a circular room, constellated with birds, on the threshold of that door full of night and world, which opens onto the unalterable. Like dedicating an unfinished poem to a little girl, giving it to her to warp when suffering no longer seems a more authentic, spacious world. I will elongate the road to the unsayable. I will be the act of weaving. You, the leopard of multiple horns that has just now appeared on the green brocade and is observing it all like a herald, enigmatically.

el diccionario infinito

Un empleado de rostro aceitunado controla mi pasaporte en un mostrador de American Airlines. Sin énfasis, como quien suele mandar, dice:
--Su computadora.
Yo dudo un instante pero su mirada es tan dulce. Su voz un arrullo. Es arduo seguir sus movimientos. Toma mi computadora, la pasa por su máquina de escribir (que es mucho más grande) y ¡me borra la memoria! Desencajada, ciega de furia, exijo hablar con el gerente, casi no puedo respirar, gritaré, me pondré pálida, desgraciado, nada me compensará de esta pérdida. El empleado me mira divertido.
--También lo perdiste todo -- dice -- al salir de Egipto.
Su sonrisa dura una eternidad. Como un viento en el paisaje de un cuadro. 0 cuervos sobrevolando un campo ensangrentado. Llega el gerente de buen humor y enciende la computadora. La pantalla empieza a arder como una salamandra. Aparece un diccionario infinito. Su primera palabra es *Shams*.

The Infinite Dictionary

An employee with an olive face checks my passport at an American Airlines counter. Evenly, like one accustomed to authority, he says:
"Your computer."
I hesitate a moment, but his gaze is so tender. His voice a lullaby. Hard to comprehend what he does next. He takes my computer, passes it through his typewriter (which is much larger) and -- erases the memory! Beside myself, blind with rage, I demand to speak to the manager. I can barely breathe. I'll scream, turn pale, you fool, nothing can make up for what I've lost. The employee regards me, amused.
"When you left Egypt," he says, "you lost everything then, too."
His smile lasts an eternity. Like a wind in a painted landscape. Or ravens circling a bloody field. The manager arrives, good-humoredly, and turns on the computer. The screen begins to flame like a salamander. An infinite dictionary appears. Its first word is: *Shams*.

diálogo con Gabriel II

A Gabriel le aburre soberanamente el pasado. Lo que llama, no sin cierta ternura, las tragedias privadas. Por eso, cuando le cuento cosas que han ocurrido en el tiempo, me mira sin pestañear y enseguida se desentiende.
--Las anécdotas -- dice -- pueblan y confunden, y el camino es estrecho. En esto de existir, conviene quedarse en lo oscuro: no hay más elocuencia que la de los enigmas. El corazón lo sabe. Por eso se mueve en silencio, evitando avanzar y también huir. Sin el reproche que es lento, sin la atadura de los sentimientos, sin la urgencia de la ambición, la ruta hacia la nada resplandece: las cosas flotan como en la mirada de un dios, en una topografía invisible. Créeme, la pena no es necesaria. Sólo un cuerpo traslúcido. Un apego a los sitios devastados. Una vocación a la luz, brillante como la sabiduría de jugar. Algún dia, tomarás el cuaderno que está desde siempre esperándote y empezarás a construir tus paredes de canto y después, a saltarlas.

Dialogue with Gabriel II

Gabriel finds the past supremely boring. What she calls, not without a certain tenderness, private tragedies. That is why, when I tell her of things that have happened within time, she gazes at me, unblinking, and immediately disengages herself.
"Anecdotes," she says, "abound and confuse and the path is narrow. In this business of living, it is better to remain in darkness: nothing is more eloquent than riddles. The heart knows this. That is why it moves about in silence, avoiding advance or retreat. Without reproach, which retards, without the fetters of emotion, without the urgency of ambition, the route toward nothingness glistens: things float as in the sight of a god, in an invisible topography. Believe me, eternity is a ballerina on tiptoe. Pain is unnecessary. Only a translucent body. An attachment to forgetfulness, devastated sites. A vocation for light, brilliant as childsplay. Someday, you will take the notebook that has awaited you forever and begin to construct your walls of song and then, leap over them."

el diluvio

Una amazona galopa frente a mí en un corcel blanco y me Ileva a conocer páramos dichosos: montañas empinadas, una estepa de piedras, un lago azul que crece cada vez que lo miro. Al niño que soy lo hipnotiza ese riesgo. Le recuerda el azul de tus ojos, restos de alguna luz o de algún Ilanto, las noches en vela, tu alarma envidiosa por mi cuerpo que crece. Me protejo de esa añoranza en un hotel decadente, erigido en la cima de algún promontorio. Ahora, también llueve. Me asomo. Celosías verdes, olor de verano. Como no puedo dejar de mirar, la estepa será pronto un mar y el hotel un buque titilante a orillas del viento. Hemos comenzado a zozobrar. Ya no hay quien detenga esa luz que nos arrasa de cuajo y nos Ileva como un ángel a la intemperie más pura.

The Deluge

An Amazon gallops up to me on a white charger and takes me to a smiling wilderness: steep mountains, a rocky steppe, a blue lake that grows larger each time I look at it. The young boy who is I is mesmerized by this risk. It reminds him of the blue of your eyes, remnants of a particular light or a weeping, night vigils, your envious alarm at my growing body. I shelter from this nostalgia in a declining hotel, erected on the summit of a promontory. Now it is raining as well. I peer out. Green shutters, the odor of summer. My eyes transfixed, the steppe will soon become an ocean and the hotel a boat twinkling on the banks of the wind. We have begun to capsize. There is no one left to stop that light that razes us and like an angel bears us off to absolute exposure.

el libro de los seres

Como siempre, el taxista me lleva a un sitio donde no quiero ir. Una vez me extravió en la calle Siria, otra vez aparecí en Retiro a cuatro cuadras de mi casa materna (cuando yo deseaba ir a la discoteca Roxy, en Manhattan). Ahora acaba de anunciarme que me dejará en Tetrópolis. Pero esta vez, no protesto. Apenas me pongo un poco triste, sin saber que hubiera sido lo mismo si me hubiese llevado al lugar que yo queria (de existir ese lugar, pongamos). En la radio se oye una música extraña, cortésmente le pregunto qué es. El taxista parece ofendido:
--Esto no es música, están recitando el Qurán.
Me deja en una ciudad luminosa y vacía, sin puertas ni alfabetos ni cementerios. Una ciudad de silencio, insomne, entre el amanecer y Turingia.
--Ha de saber -- dice el taxista -- que el único libro que cuenta ya ha sido escrito y se canta sin música y es la música más laboriosa e intraducible que exista, como una agonía.

The Book of Being

As usual, the taxi driver takes me where I do not want to go. Once I was lost on Syria Street; another time I appeared in Retiro, four blocks from my mother's house (when I wanted the Roxy disco in Manhattan). Now he has just announced that he will leave me in Tetropolis. But this time I don't object. Just feel downhearted, uncertain; at my original destination (assuming such a place exists), would anything be different? The radio is playing strange music; politely I ask him what it is. He seems offended:
"This isn't music; they are reciting the Koran."
He leaves me in a luminous empty city, no doors or alphabets or cemeteries. A city of silence, insomniac, between dawn and Thuringia.
"You should know" -- says the driver -- "that the only book that matters has already been written and is sung without music and is the most laborious and untranslatable music in existence, like a death agony."

el techo del mundo

Venecia sitiada en pleno inviemo. Un cinturón de ejércitos feudales, ágiles como el desdén, aguardan la señal para atacar: buscan las fronteras de cierta región inexplicable, eso tan frágil que -- dicen -- se prostituye a lo invisible. Los venecianos se mueven como hormigas, se alistan a devolver la afrenta en el corazón de la batalla. En medio de la barahúnda, tomo de la mano a un niño, lo llevo al embarcadero y lo acuesto conmigo en una góndola mirando el cielo. Desde ahí, podemos seguir el mudo viento, el latido inintencional de la ciudad, la fiebre de la laguna helada, los caballos que atraviesan el cementerio en dirección a Mestre y también, más allá, los guerreros que llenan las riberas como cuervos, sus negras banderas de seda flameando como hordas de un motín siniestro. Ah, el cielo es un espejo. Y la escena una danza estática, insaqueada en su belleza.
--Algo quiere fracasar sin dejar huellas -- digo --. La forma es el disfraz del tiempo.
Después nos quedamos, el niño y yo, rumiando el curso de las estrellas.

The Roof of the World

Venice under siege in the dead of winter. A cordon of feudal armies, agile as disdain, awaits the signal to attack: they are pursuing the frontiers of a certain inexplicable region, something so fragile that -- they say -- it becomes the whore of the invisible. The Venetians swarm like ants, enlist to return the insult in the heart of battle. In the midst of this tumult, I take a child by the hand, lead him to the dock, and we lie in a gondola looking up at the sky. From there, we can follow the mute wind, the unintentional heartbeat of the city, the fever of the frozen lagoon, horses riding through the cemetery toward Mestre and too, farther on, warriors who line the banks like crows, their black silk banners flaming like hordes of a sinister mutiny. Ah, the sky is a mirror. And the scene an ecstatic dance, undespoiled in its beauty.
"Something wants to fail without a trace," I say. "Form is the masquerade of time."
Then we remain, the boy and I, pondering the pathways of the stars.

téoria del buen morir

En el clima azulado de una ciudad de piedra, me están enterrando. Veo la escena y digo:
--Déjenla. ¿No ven que está viva? ¿No ven el movimiento de su cara?
--Es verdad -- dice alguien --. Todavía no ha llegado su tiempo de morir. No ha practicado bastante. El duro amor no ha sido escrito en su alma, algunos tabiques entre ella y la vida siguen en pie. Falta que algo se encamine a su centro, como una interrogación. Que abrace la osadía de la petición y la entrega. Que clave un signo sobre la arena de su imagen, a ver lo que la boca hace del silencio. Debe vivir.
Me dejan entonces vivir. El desconocido habla todavía, pero no logro entender. Dice algo sobre la Buena Muerte: un secreto, un error imperioso, amar de cerca, algo así. Después se evapora en un reducto de sombra y yo, entre afligida y contenta, me subo a un tren y abandono la última ciudad del mundo.

Theory of a Good Death

In the bluish climate of a stony city, they are burying me. I watch and say:
"Leave her alone. Can't you see she's alive? Don't you see her face twitching?"
"It's true," someone says. "It's not time for her to die yet. She hasn't practiced enough. Love's exactions have not been written on her soul; there are still a few partitions between her and her life. Something must advance to its center like a question. Must dare petition and surrender. Must thrust a signpost into her sand image, to see what the mouth makes of silence. She has to live."
So they let me live. The stranger is still speaking but I can't understand him. He says something about the Good Death: a secret, an indispensable error, loving face-to-face, something like that. Afterwards he evaporates into a stronghold of shadow and I, half-troubled, half-content, board a train and abandon the last city on earth.

ENDNOTES:

> *This is the West Indies, this is that realm which once, in its innocence of history, mistook the lantern of a caravel for a light at the end of a tunnel and paid for that dearly -- it was a light at the tunnel's entrance. This sort of thing happens often, to archipelagoes as well as to individuals; in this sense, every man is an island....*
>
> Joseph Brodsky on the poetry of Derek Walcott

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ART and CAPITALIST RELATIONS and WHY PUBLISHING ON THE WEB MIGHT BE INTERESTING

"The publication in toto of Ulysses in 1922 was indubitably the most exciting, important, historic single literary event of the early Paris expatriate literary colony."-- *Janet Flanner*

I was thinking of where a literary colony might be found, nowadays, and decided that, if one exists at all, geographically and culturally it would be an archipelago. A fine, hard word, *archipelago*, evoking rock-ribbed peaks with green life clinging to their slopes, rising from some vast, erosive ocean. Evoking too, a terrible human history.

Since 1989, the world has changed, politically, historically, culturally. That was a water-shed year, perhaps the real turn of the century: the year of the Velvet Revolution and the opening of the Berlin Wall, that led to the collapse of socialism and the triumph of unregulated capitalism; the year that began with a death-sentence laid against an internationally-known novelist. Our minds have been different since then.

Contemplating that rather large idea I happened upon three articles of recent weeks which seemed to throw a more precise light on the context in which this journal was about to appear.

In an article in the *TLS* (January 31) entitled "The real scandal of *Ulysses*, How literary modernism came to retreat from the public sphere," an American academic named Lawrence Rainey follows the publishing history through France, England, and the States, of Sylvia Beach's limited edition of Joyce's novel. Prof. Rainey holds that the "market dynamics of the limited edition," meaning an edition designed and priced high enough to be sold to collector-subscribers, eliminated the "ordinary" reader as the normal buyer, reader, and critic of the novel; and "transformed" the buyer of such an expensive book from simple reader into "investor/patron." Further, in order that an "investment" in this relatively rare object, the limited edition of ULYSSES, bear value, the book had to be "sold" *a priori* as great literature, before

the slow accretion of critical reading judged it so. This is the true "scandal" of this great (we can say now) novel, argues Prof. Rainey: "For the market-place is not, and never can be, free from systemic distortions of power ... and its outcomes cannot be equated with ... norms of equal and universal participation in discussions about cultural and esthetic value. The operations of the market are not an adequate substitute for free agreement; they are operations of an entirely different order."

Some readers may have thought the last point obvious, if not directly relevant to ULYSSES. But perhaps the point is not so obvious as it should have been, for the February *Atlantic Monthly* ran a lucid, primer-like essay by the financier-philanthropist George Soros, who urges us to understand that our social "belief in the magic of the marketplace" is pretty well mis-placed. The "doctrine" of laissez-faire capitalism, he argues, which holds that the unregulated pursuit of self-interest best serves the common good, doesn't allow for the "recognition of a common interest that ought to take precedence over particular interests." And, he warns, unless we can "temper" the unbridled dynamics of the market-place with a strong, social belief in a common social interest, the "open society," which our present system, however imperfectly, qualifies as being, "is liable to break down."

Soros' argument was nicely poised against the feature in *New York* magazine (February 10), called "How to Make a Best Seller, The Inside Story of One Publishing House's Attempt to Turn a Literary Novelist into a Marketplace Superstar."

(A solecism: Although Viking is named, there is no "publishing house" in this story, except by convention. Viking, an imprint, belongs -- like Penguin USA, the imprint -- to Penguin Worldwide, which is a conglomerate. Penguin Worldwide is owned by Pearson PLC, a British holding company which also owns the *Financial Times*, Mme. Tussaud's, and diverse other firms.

(Penguin's conglomeration includes, besides these two venerable imprints, the respectable Dutton and, lately, the mass (or down)-market Putnam Group; an organizational chart, so to speak, not noted in the article. Head of Penguin Worldwide is Michael Lynton, who came from Disney's publishing arm, Hyperion. In the words of the man he replaced, Lynton understood "brand loyalty," corporate jargon the precise meaning of which escaped me.)

With fortifying mug of coffee at hand I read how Viking is "marketing" a novel whose title and author will remain unnamed here. Rather, call him the writer's Everyman, and say his story is the Pilgrim's progress: the fable of a young believer, a writer of "what the business has curiously come to call 'literary fiction'," who endures every possible trial as he slogs his way toward heaven, or "uptown," (according to his well-regarded agent) "up there with Tim O'Brien, say, or Richard Ford." Actually, the author is only youngish (45) and has written two good, although not high-selling, novels; a contemporary Writer's Everyman, W.E. in short, whose

trial is that our temptations grow more subtle and interesting as we grow older and more vulnerable to them.

For W.E. is in the hands of a publisher who asks: "Well, [W.E.], what are you going to do for me?" And you understand almost at once that poor W.E., with his fragile bag of beliefs slung over his shoulder, is expected to enhance his publisher's career within the Viking/Penguin Worldwide/Pearson's conglomerate. But she is an "impassioned and lawyerly" sort, and perhaps W.E. is right to hope. When the word came that two Viking books, by Mary Karr and Terry McMillan, were on the New York Times' bestseller list, she "leapt up." "'Yes!' she said, pumping her fist. 'Who says we can't sell literature here?'"

We encourage readers to write us. We encourage them, also, to put this issue on their hard drive, by clicking on the download link and following the instructions thereon. ARCHIPELAGO can then be printed; it will appear on paper as we have designed it, and fill about 50 pages. We urge our readers then to pass the journal on to other readers. We are interested in the notion that the Worldwide Web might also be a publishing medium and a distributor of literature; we think serious readers exist in Buenos Aires, London, Paris, and New York as well as in the Dakotas, Key West, Modesto, Charlottesville. We believe they have more in common than they might have supposed, and will be interested to learn if we are right about this. We also hope that when they disagree with us, and with each other -- we suspect that this might often be the case -- they will let us know. We are certain that well-formed arguments about literature, the arts, and opinion help keep our minds open.

KM

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In the Spring Issue of ARCHIPELAGO *(on-line June 1): a report from Larry Woiwode on the hard winter in North Dakota, a conversation with Marion Boyars about publishing, and an appreciation by Richard Jones of the Anglo-Irish writer Hubert Butler.*