

# ARCHIPELAGO

An International Journal on-line of Literature, the Arts, and Opinion  
[www.archipelago.org](http://www.archipelago.org)

Vol. 1, No. 3 Autumn 1997

*Story and Photographs:* STELLA SNEAD  
Early Cabbage

*Conversation:* About Publishing  
with MARION BOYARS

*Close Reading:* ROBERT L. O'CONNELL  
on PYNCHON'S MASON & DIXON

*Poems:* M. SARKI

*The Roundtable:* VIRIDITAS DIGITALIS  
in the Garden; ALFRED ARTEAGA: Beat;  
and 'Hecuba' in New York

*Endnotes:* The Devil's Dictionary; Economics  
for Poets

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# ARCHIPELAGO

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## About Our Contributors

Alfred Arteaga was born in East Los Angeles, Ca. He is the author of two books of poetry, CANTOS (Chusmi House, 1991) and LOVE IN THE TIME OF AFTERSHOCKS (forthcoming), and one of criticism: CHICANO POETICS: HETEROTEXTS AND HYBRIDITIES; and is the editor of AN OTHER TONGUE: NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY IN THE LINGUISTIC BORDERLANDS (Duke University Press). He teaches literature at the University of California, Berkeley. "Beat" appears in HOUSE WITH THE BLUE BED (Mercury House, 1997).

'Hecuba' is a Bosnian woman who lives with her husband and son in New York. She is of mixed background and marriage. Until 1992, she and her family lived in Sarajevo, where she practiced law; an historical accident found them visiting America when the recent war began. Recently she played the role of Hecuba in an all-Bosnian cast of *The Trojan Women*.

Robert L. O'Connell is an historian and the author of three books: OF ARMS AND MEN; RIDE OF THE SECOND HORSEMAN; and SACRED VESSELS (all, Oxford University Press). He is completing a novel, FAST EDDIE, about the life of Eddie Rickenbacker.

M. Sarki's (rogue@jcc-uky.campus.mci.net) poems have appeared in *ARCHIPELAGO* (Vol. 2, No. 2) and a number of other on-line and bound periodicals. He lives in Kentucky and makes his living selling brick.

Stella Snead was born in England in 1910. She studied with Ozenfant and Henry Moore and for fifteen years was known as a Surrealist painter whose works were said to be "amongst the most interesting of the strong surrealist movement in [England] in the 1930s and 1940s." During that period she had eleven solo exhibitions. She migrated to America, living in New York, then Taos; and in 1956, began photography, while traveling in the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Greenland. She lived in India for eleven years. She has exhibited in a great number of galleries, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; Kodak House, London; Lincoln Center, New York; Donnell Library, New York; Gallery Chemould, Bombay. Photographs by her are in the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the International Center of Photography, and Harvard University Archive. She has published eight books: *DROWNING CAN BE FUN? A Nonsense Book* (Pont La Vue Press, New York, 1992); *ANIMALS IN FOUR WORLDS: SCULPTURES FROM INDIA*, texts by Wendy Doniger and George Mitchell (University of Chicago Press, 1989); *BEACH PATTERNS* (Clarkson Potter, 1975); *SHIVA'S PIGEONS*, text by Rumer Godden (Chatto and Windus, London/Viking Press, NY, 1972); *CHILDREN OF INDIA* (Lothrop, Lee & Shephard, NY, 1971); *THE TALKATIVE BEASTS* (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1969); *SEVEN SEVEN* (Folder Editions, NY, 1965); *RUINS IN JUNGLE* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1962). She lives in New York.

V. Digitalis (bz2v@virginia.edu) is a book editor and reviewer who ought to have better things to write about than gardening, but apparently doesn't.

### Recommended Reading

*"Any day I may walk down 125th Street, say from 8th Avenue on over to Lenox or Fifth, I can see people gesturing wildly on the street; I can hear wild political statements; I can see dope addicts; I can see people acting out wild fantasies; I can see people clinging to rural ways in a hopped-up, whirlwind industrial environment; I can see youth gangs acting fantasies of violence.*

*"Of course, I can do that on 6th Avenue and 42nd Street, too.*

*"I can see clashes of taste in dress, music, religion, morals -- everything.*

*"I see a whole chaotic world existing within the ordered social pattern -- with the cops on the corner, the busses running on schedule, the subways on schedule, and so forth -- everything that it takes to keep a big city operating -- and I can see a million contradictions to that order.*

*"I can see all the details of experience which we pass by daily and never stop to define; or, when we do, we attempt it only in sociological terms which cut the heart out of it. As far as the individual man who is caught up within this experience is concerned, he is living out the chaos within the recognized order and though he might be only vaguely aware of it his sense of reality is affected. He is more apt to get a sense of wonder, a sense of self-awareness and a sharper reflection of his world from a comic book than from most novels."*

**-Ralph Ellison**

from "What's Wrong with the American Novel?"

*The American Scholar*, 1955

**Sarah Gaddis** (*SWALLOW HARD*, Atheneum): "In a flashback of an obsessive relationship, the novelist and translator Lydia Davis leads the reader in circles as she shifts beginnings and endings and perceptions in this tale of loneliness, bitterness, and wit. Each scene of the unraveling affair, which is recounted by an unnamed woman and takes place in a fictional

California coastal town, is at times as visually stark and stunning as a Hopper painting, at times fractured, as if seen through a prism. As readers we are invited to take the responsibility of confidante seriously from the first, circular sentence to the last." **Lydia Davis**, **THE END OF THE STORY** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995; High Risk Books, 1995; Serpent's Tail, 1996)

**K. Callaway** ("Estonian Letters," ARCH. Vol. 1, No. 1): "Five hundred years of Sephardic life, culture, and struggle in the Diaspora, through the lens of Victor Perera's own family -- and, most beautifully, through the Ladino sayings remembered from his childhood. As Isabel Allende says on the cover, "This is a precise and beautiful narrative.'" **Victor Perera**, **THE CROSS AND THE PEAR TREE** (Knopf, 1995; University of California, 1996; Flamingo, 1997.)

"Much better than merely good travel meditations, Philip Marsden's books are also deeply ethical investigations -- loose-ended ones, and warranted. The first is about his journey into the heart of Armenia in memory of the Armenian genocide; the second tells of his years-long friendship with an elderly Polish woman living in Cornwall who takes him to search for her lost world in the new Poland. Excellent travel-writing: we could use more of this kind of sensibility-at-large. And the writing itself, in long stretches, approaches perfection." **Philip Marsden**, **THE CROSSING PLACE** (Flamingo, 1993; Kodansha, 1995) and **THE BRONSKI HOUSE** (Flamingo, 1995; HarperCollins World, 1997)

**George Garrett** (**THE KING OF BABYLON SHALL NOT COME AGAINST YOU** and **WHISTLING IN THE DARK**, Harcourt-Brace): "In a season of Civil War books, some of them highly praised and commercially successful, quietly came **NASHVILLE 1864**, by Madison Jones; his first book in some years, a lean, evocative look at the 'Battle of Nashville from a child's point of view. Of Jones' fiction Flannery O'Connor wrote: 'He's so much better than the ones all the shouting is about.' That condition is unchanged." **Madison Jones**, **NASHVILLE 1864: THE DYING OF THE LIGHT** (J.S. Saunders, 1997)

"It has also been a season of Hollywood novels. Muriel Spark adds some new wrinkles to that genre; most of her story takes place in London and France and involves the gifted American film director Tom Richards, his complicated family life, and the dangers and daring of his craft." **Muriel Spark**, **REALITY AND DREAMS** (Houghton-Mifflin, 1997)

"The central figure of Anthony Burgess' latest and evidently last work is an artist also, a painter and a composer and a great seducer, and **BYRNE** is unlike any novel you have read or will read in a long time, being written entirely in fluent verse, four out of five parts in Byronic *ottava rima*, with one section of virtuosity in the Spencerian stanza, all of it, believe it or not, lively and accessible reading." **Anthony Burgess**, **BYRNE: A NOVEL** (Carrol & Graf, 1997)

**Viriditas Digitalis**: "Among the many things that surpass my understanding is the remarkably insufficient attention given to Frances Newman's audacious and lacerating novels. Writing in the late 20s, Newman -- an aristocratic southerner who died, an apparent suicide, at 40 -- presented in these two books a profoundly modern rendering of female interior life. Appalled contemporary (male) readers were astonished to learn that said life included a vigorous absorption with matters sexual and (worse) a cynical recognition of the pitifully circumscribed possibilities that society offered even the most privileged women of the time. Nevertheless, such famed literary curmudgeons as H.L. Mencken and James Branch Cabell lauded the brilliance of Newman's heavily ironic stream-of-consciousness work. Within the last few years the University of Georgia Press has reissued both novels in its Brown Thrasher series, so perhaps they will eventually find the appreciative audience they deserve." **Frances Newman**, **THE HARD-BOILED VIRGIN** and **DEAD LOVERS ARE FAITHFUL LOVERS** (University of Georgia Press, 1994)

**Katherine McNamara**: "Anna Maria Ortese, the very fine contemporary Italian writer, was called a 'magical realist'; if that is so, hers is a psychically rigorous, not fantastic, mode: a realism that refuses to invent what it does not *know*; that is, refuses to tell a falsely-'magical,' comforting story. Very little of her work exists presently in English: two (soon, three) American

translations, one from England. Each translator may be commended for having pitched his tone exactly so as to convey, in its proper American and English timbres, the beauty of her formal style. Hers is, I think, real literature, which is always an endangered species." **Anna Maria Ortese, THE IGUANA, and A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Stories Vol. 1** , tr. Henry Martin (McPherson and Co., 1994 and 1996) and **THE LAMENT OF THE LINNET**, tr. Patrick Creigh (The Harvill Press, 1997) See Archipelago, Vol. 1, No. 1, "The Great Street."

### Interesting Sites and Resources

C-Span ([www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org)) Booknotes: On Saturday and Sunday nights, C-Span 2 broadcasts interviews with writers, publishers, and bookstore owners, then makes these and other book-related matters available on the web.

The Financial Times ([www.FT.com](http://www.FT.com)): For those who want to watch intelligently not merely the movement of stocks but the expansion of capital, this newspaper (on-line; in print) is essential.

The Harvill Press ([www.harvill-press.com](http://www.harvill-press.com)) publishes, among many estimable authors, Richard Hughes, Richard Ford, and in translation, Anna Maria Ortese (THE LAMENT OF THE LINNET), Ismael Kadare, Javier Marias.

The Irish Bookshop (<http://irishbooks.com>) is the place in New York where books of and from Ireland, in English and Irish, can be bought. The shop will take phone, mail, and e-mail orders.

The Lilliput Press ([www.iol.ie/~lilliput](http://www.iol.ie/~lilliput)) is an Irish publisher which, since 1985 has brought out four volumes of the essays of the late Hubert Butler. Their list includes a number of notable Irish writers. Hubert Butler's "The Artukovitch File" appeared in our last issue.

McPherson & Co ([www.mcphersonco.com](http://www.mcphersonco.com)) publishes such writers as the fascinating Mary Butts (THE TAVERNER NOVELS), Howard McCord, Anna Maria Ortese, and the performance artist Carolee Schneeman.

Mercury House ([www.wenet.net/~mercury](http://www.wenet.net/~mercury)) is a not-for-profit literary press in San Francisco. Members of the staff used to be associated with the respected North Point, before that imprint closed its doors. The press has just published Alfred Arteaga's HOUSE WITH THE BLUE BED.

Politics and Prose ([www.politics-prose.com](http://www.politics-prose.com)) is the largest independent bookshop in Washington, D.C., with a full and beautifully-chosen stock-list and a nicely-arranged web site.

The Village Voice Bookshop ([www.paris-anglo.com](http://www.paris-anglo.com)) lives in the heart of Paris, and makes American and English books available to customers on several continents, via phone, fax, post, and e-mail ([yhellier@worldnet.fr](mailto:yhellier@worldnet.fr)). Odile Hellier, the proprietor, is a Contributing Editor of this publication.

## EARLY CABBAGE

STELLA SNEAD

In the late and somewhat preposterous years of the 20th century, a curious and highly unexpected discovery was made which caused a goodly amount of scholarly speculation and some shimmering delight in a certain few.



*Fig. 1. Early Cabbage*

These few are not well-known, not the leaders of our faltering western civilization who constantly bum their way around the world, spreading its

catchy but less salubrious aspects. These aggressors are not necessarily politicians, traders, technical advisers or even do-gooders. Some are bold and forthright travellers seeking to burrow into the remaining crevasses of those societies still enduring, although quietly disintegrating, in remotest jungle or desert. And now fast upon the traveller's disappearing heels come the ubiquitous tourists, blandly thoughtless, exuberantly acquisitive. They want to take it all home: red mud in the hair, bones through the nostrils and ears, paint on bodies, patterned gashes in flesh, the often beautiful but weirdly uncomfortable clothes and jewellery. They wallow delightedly; they do of course acquire objects, but mainly it's photographs. In a horde of fifty or even only twenty, there will be no more than two or three safari-suited bodies not slung with cameras and lenses. These often inexperienced paparazzi angle, contrive, and snap, or let us say shoot -- if they are even mildly professional.

Oddly enough it was two of these most casual world prowlers who unwittingly brought back the first intimations of the above-mentioned discovery. It consisted of a single, rather blurry, photograph of what appeared to be ancient script. This first tantalizing piece of evidence came to light some twenty-five years ago, say in the mid- or late 1960s, and was taken during the wanderings of a feckless pair of hippies, neither of whom could remember which of them had snapped the shutter, or where. It seems they paced the world in a leisurely manner and with a meager cash flow for a number of years. They seldom looked for anything in particular, their only plan being to move from one place to the next. This they certainly did. Starting in the Balkans, they covered much of the Middle East, parts of Central Asia, India, Nepal, and Indonesia, finally coming to rest in Australia: the wife with child, the husband with a job, their photographs still in an uncatalogued jumble. In the fullness of time they gave the script photo to an Afghani student who later specialized in the decipherment of arcane languages; he brought it to a University in India where he showed it to a colleague. They were both mightily intrigued but thoroughly baffled. Whenever anyone in their field visited the university -- if considered worthy and sufficiently erudite -- he or she was consulted. Unfortunately the results only yielded a further accumulation of puzzled scholars.

Over the years the original two-degree-laden fellows never forgot their joint enigma for very long. After they both became full professors and had more opportunities to travel, they carried with them the by now rather over-examined photograph. Once it was to a Conference of Cryptologists in Khiva, a desert city not usually visited by outsiders, in the Russian Uzbekistan. Later they spoke of their find at the well-attended meeting of the Mongolian Branch of the society of Advanced Scriptorial Studies in Ulan Bator. At the latter, in particular, many fervid and sometimes bitter arguments took place; but never was there a ghost of a solution. Two of the most illustrious and venerable of these savants died admitting ignorance; others retired; but the two original discoverers kept up the grueling search. They labored through many a hidden library, and in the dusty scriptoria of far-flung monasteries



where the books were unbound, printed by hand, and (often) wrapped in cloth. They looked at characters written on silk, on tablets of stone or baked clay, on woodbark or palm leaf, on papyrus or parchment. They found nothing even, in consolation, approximating what they longed to find, and were saddened, for they too were getting old.

Then one day a young American traveling in India searched them out. He was about the age they were when, so many years ago, their quest had started. He was employed, he said, as an apprentice assistant in the Photographic Archive of the Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. He told his eager audience that the Museum had been gratified to accept a collection of photographs, negatives and transparencies at the death of the photographer, a widely-traveled English woman who had specialized in picturing the Orient.



*Fig. 2 Early Cabbage*

“While sorting and cataloguing this large and diversified mass of material,” said the young man, “I came across these” -- and he spread before them a set of stunning black-and-white prints of the very script they had been trying to trace for over thirty years. The two professors were suitably dazzled; nay, they were ecstatic and at the same time tongue-tied. Then in a few minutes questions leapt from their lips, those intensely earnest queries of scholars nearing a breakthrough. But still, even now, there was no solution, and slowly the two gentlemen slumped in their chairs. The photographs showed the images but gave no clues as to when, how or where they had been obtained. On their back, on the upper right-hand side, was nothing but a string of numbers and letters: which were, decided the Archive Department, merely a code indicating what the photographer had done under the enlarger. Ruffling through them once again, the budding archivist turned up one print bearing two words in faded pencil, “Early Cabbage.”

There followed a deeply-dejected silence, until the Indian professor all but screamed, “This is the most brazen cruelty to scholars and researchers ever committed!” Stunned perhaps, his Afghani colleague slowly roused himself: “We won’t give up,” he announced calmly. “We must raise funds and go to New York where this infuriating lady recently died. We must interview everyone we can find who knew her.” Then with some urgency he added, “We must hurry to find these people before they also die, and before we do.” Their eyes shone for a few moments as they looked at each other, then slowed dimmed, as did the sun’s evening light in that university study. “It could all be a dastardly hoax,” said one of them.

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©Stella Snead, 1997, story and photographs.

GOOD FORTUNE'S OPPRESSION  
Pynchon, and How History Didn't Turn Out the Way  
We Thought It Would

ROBERT L. O'CONNELL

The best of times. Not just money and unemploymentwise. History, apparently just another Baby Boomer, chose rust over burnout, longevity over Juliet. So the Cold War didn't vaporize us; it slunk away muttering something between a whimper and a sigh of relief. And to most eyes the nuclear sword of Damocles -- though technically still poised over our heads -- doesn't look much more threatening than a plastic disposable razor. Apocalypse not now.

The worst of times. Americans, the quintessential bad weather animals, have sunk into lassitude, ill-humor, and channel-surfing. In doing so they wolf down mountains of taco chips and dream of fat-laden food that will trick their bodies into losing weight. Since they're already fat and ashamed, sex has become primarily vicarious (soon to be virtual) and focused on important issues such as distinguishing marks on the President's genitals. This also does double work as a political issue, since its competitors boil down to incomprehensible bipartisan gibberish on (a) illegal campaign contributions, (b) budget-balancing, and (c) the medical-industrial complex. Supposedly -- my source is a famous toe-licker -- Bill Clinton won the last election by emphasizing "little issues." What the hell else was he supposed to do?

He also cozied up to a bunch known as Soccer Moms. Now this was a group in real trouble, especially if they turned on the stereos in their Volvos while waiting out their neophyte Maradonas. Talk about a wasteland. Forget Oldies and Classic Rock, which are best enjoyed in elevators, or Rap: remember, these are Soccer Moms. Let's say our hypothetical SM bumps into what her kids are listening to: grunge, the Seattle sound, literally thousands of fuzz-toned hacks trying to sound like Pearl Jam, who didn't sound that good in the first place. Western Civilization's best bet is a major eruption of Mt. Rainier. Meanwhile, my guess is many an SM got a taste of the future and headed west in the family Volvo, leaving her Umbro-clad progeny to rot on the playing fields of Rim City.

I shouldn't pick on music. It's the same on the screen or on the Astroturf or wherever else popular entertainment is purveyed. Technical perfection mocking the absolutely vapid nature of what is on display. It's hard to tell who likes formulaic degradation, violence, and destruction more: the public or the producers. Disney, who once gave us Snow White and Bambi,

just picked up the movie rights for a book featuring a drug ring with a penchant for hollowing-out dead babies and filling them with cocaine. So much for mind-expanding drugs.

Now, assuming this isn't all anecdotal, things are really fine, and Americans as noble as always: is there a way around it, through it, or out of it? From a societal perspective, this presents real problems, since, if you accept my general thesis, our good fortune is our curse. He whom the Gods wish to destroy they give unto him his heart's delight; salvation demands really bad juju -- a new Depression, Yellow Peril, or maybe a juicy Civil War.... Purists and the trigger-happy might argue this is simply a fair exchange for some good down-home probity. But Pragmatists, Yossarianists, and other socio-political slackers -- the great majority of us -- would very probably prefer to let the good times roll. Damn the citizenry! Full prosperity ahead!

This brings me to the issue of personal integrity. Is it possible to avoid being slimed by good fortune? Not for me, certainly; I may actually lie below the norm, trimmerwise. No, this is a matter for those with at least a theoretical capacity for intellectual incorruptibility: stayers of the course, or at least those smart and funny enough to have some claim to group-think impermeability. Does such a Burberryman exist? Can we, unlike Diogenes, who after all lived in a jar, point a flashlight toward at least one honest *homo americanus*?

My candidate is Thomas Pynchon. I should point out that you can't trust my objectivity (always a bad idea), since I consider him to be the best writer in the English language. But I think he has at least one other very relevant credential. In the Age of Me -- a time so rich and varied in its narcissistic possibilities that even scribblers get to do adoration walkabouts and maybe even Oprah -- he has not only shunned the cult of personality, but pretty much everybody, me included. Outside of one recent grainy photo -- he's wearing a raincoat, incidentally -- he remains the Invisible Man. Maybe he's shy, or it's all a grand game of hide-and-seek; but for the sake of argument, let's say it has something to do with personal integrity: not a hatred of the electronic media (supposedly, he never missed an episode of *The Brady Bunch*), but a loyalty to the written word. Sort of like this: "I'm a writer. I tell you everything you need to know on pieces of paper. Fuck the rest." In any case he's been lying low since 1963, so I think it's at least reasonable to conclude that his is one stubborn fellow, the kind of guy who might actually try to match his freestyle against the tides of history.

Well, let's get to the real Exhibit A, the writing: stories, some articles, even liner notes, but mostly, novels. They're the crown jewels, since with Pynchon there seems to be a direct relationship between length and quality, as if the more he writes, the more neurons come into play. The shorter books, VINELAND and especially THE CRYING OF LOT 49, are certainly good by any reasonable definition of good. But it's his long books, V, GRAVITY'S RAINBOW, and (maybe) MASON & DIXON, that reveal his power and argue most effectively: "You better read me for the next fifteen hundred years, or those who know will regard you as a dumb shit."

So what makes him good? It sure ain't his plots. A more shambling writer it's hard to imagine. There is always a story line, sometimes even an intricate one; but like so many paths in the deep woods, it ends up disappearing into the underbrush. You try to follow, but it's nowhere to be found. Not exactly a recommendation for immortality, though it didn't stop Sterne. But still, what's the big deal?

In part, it's the complexity and sheer beauty of his language. Sentences and paragraphs first get battled through, then pondered, then savored, then read some more. And when you're through with this process, you wonder how anybody could have said it better. In fact, you're left with the same weird feeling provoked by Shakespeare: that no human being could possibly write this well. I predict that in the future there will be scholarly theses debated and convincing arguments made that Pynchon never existed, and that his books were written by (a) Tiny Tim, (b) a polymath New Jersey bricklayer, or (c) Jesse Helms (who is already known to lead a secret life). Can it be any accident that all his original manuscripts bore the postmark of Roswell, New Mexico?

Then there are his characters: so vivid that they persist in jumping off the page and acting out, sometimes in the most embarrassing fashion. For instance, Slothrop immediately attempted to flush himself down my toilet, and the Lady V stripped down to her very allografts on my fake Persian carpet. He has an obvious fascination with the interface between the animate and the inanimate, the fissure between quick and dead; and can make it work because he can gin up a plausible character out of virtually anything: an erudite canine, a horny mechanical duck, my God, he manages to breathe life into a malevolent giant cheese-wheel on the run. Characters, legions of characters, racing like rats through the maze of his imagination, manifesting every form of behavior from the most tragic to the most hilarious. Black humor? Consider the Marquis de Sod, who promises "E'll wheep your your lawn into shepp," or my favorite 40s war-toy, the Juicy Jap, a small infantryman with bayonet slots and a screw-off head for adding catsup.

But there's more, and this gets to the heart of the matter. Thomas Pynchon has an extraordinary mastery of history: not simply knowledge and understanding, but a capacity to bend it to dramatic effect. Pynchon grew up in the shadow of the Cold War and the real potential that mushroom clouds over Manhattan might envelop his adolescence in East Norwich, Long Island. I can speak to this, since I grew up around the same time and about ten miles away in Huntington. At that point, anybody with a cursory understanding of military technology and a sense of the preceding half-century might reasonably have concluded that Western Civilization was about to go out with a bang. After all, our very own Governor, Nelson Rockefeller, sent us all plans on how to build a backyard fallout shelter.

It is my contention that the notion that we were irrevocably caught in the undertow of events that would destroy us animates the first two of Pynchon's great works, *V* and *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*. It is this sense of foreboding, brilliantly articulated, that gives these books their power, and transfixes the reader. He was the prophet of doom; and as with all prophets, it

seemed as if God was whispering in his ear. In this context, the finite matter of plot became irrelevant: the plot was history, and we were its victims. That's why people sought him out: not because he avoided them; but because they were sure he knew what was going to happen; that he could recount the countdown to their collective obliteration. Surely he made some money and didn't have to punch a time-clock; but it must have put him in a difficult position. Rumor has it he wasn't the recluse he appeared to be, that he had friends, ate pizza, kept up a healthy dialog with the pleasures of the flesh. But still, he was perched on a high and dangerous flagpole, and he was up there alone: an ultimate testimony to his credentials as a bad-weather animal.

But what of Pynchon in better times, released like the rest of us from nuclear death row? This is where MASON & DIXON comes in. Plainly, it's a fine book, replete with the qualities that made and make him a great writer. Consider this:

Facts are but the play-things of lawyers, -- Tops and Hoops, forever a-spin.... Alas, the Historian may indulge no such idle Rotating. History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers, -- nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other, -- her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit, -- that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forever, -- not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All, -- rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common.

The book is full of passages of a similar caliber. Moreover, it's an historical *tour de force*, giving the impression of having been written literally from within the 18th century -- its concepts, its language, its fantasies, its visual and tactile landscape: everything is there, a recreation of the past so believable as to seem not to be the past at all, just a kind of parallel play-back joined to us by his disorderly tangle of lines. The characters are as sane and crazy and real and everything else, all at once, as ever. We watch George Washington smoke dope and Ben Franklin direct our heroes to Philadelphia's best laudanum, and never question this as a perfectly reasonable thing for a Founding Father to be doing.

There's only one problem. The book is about the Enlightenment, and, despite all Pynchon's efforts at investing it with an aura of dread, it remains, within the pages of MASON & DIXON, an optimistic time, filled with venturesome folks, unfolding a basically happy tale. There was indeed a darker side to the Enlightenment (witness Jefferson's agonized dependence on his slaves), but behind it all ticked a clockwork universe. And behind MASON & DIXON one senses a happier Pynchon. He's reputed to be married and have a child and enjoying both. Can it be that he sees light at the end of the 20th century? I suppose this is bad news for public rectitude and

individual free will, if good news for my thesis. Now, don't get the idea he's exactly blissed-out, nor has necessarily been corrupted by today's environment: it's just hard to make the case that he's totally impervious to it. History didn't turn out the way we thought it would, and now we have to pay the price, sitting back, enjoying ourselves, and waiting for personal, not corporate, annihilation.

So, Tom, if you're ever in town and feeling gregarious, stop by. We'll crack some brewskis and tell ethnic jokes.

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PLUMBING

The last link  
to a barren summer  
and a garden growing  
cold with neglect.

An earthworm tunnels  
toward some deepening,  
down into the deepest muck,

down into the dark  
below St. Augustine.

*M. Sarki*



APPENDAGES

Now comes this  
fluted follicle  
to separate

and choose:  
his horn between  
the liling seam,

his tongue  
inside the plume.

*M. Sarki*

## A CONVERSATION WITH MARION BOYARS

KATHERINE McNAMARA

Q: What should a writer expect from his publisher?

A: Loyalty.

Literary history, of which publishing is only a part, is marvelous and fluid. The publishing of books is itself a curious undertaking. In Europe and America, the organization, financing, distribution, and expectation of profit of the industry, that is, its entire structure, is different than it was ten years ago. Substantially, however, what has been changed? Do people read more bad books than ever? Fewer good books? Why should a marketer's opinion matter at an editorial meeting? What has become of the editor's art?

Was publishing ever so good as it's said to have been? What, indeed, was "gentlemanly" about it?

I thought I would ask some notables of an older generation what they thought about these matters. I wondered, What do publishers do? Why do they do it? What sort of lives do they lead?

In turn, they recounted experience, spoke of writers they published and did not publish, took note of the social and political hierarchies of their occupation, talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism, ruminated on the importance of language. They recognized that times have changed, but did not agree, necessarily, on why and how.

Excerpts of these conversations will appear regularly in ARCHIPELAGO and may serve as an opening onto an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current establishment, reflecting on its glories, revealing what remains constant amid the present flux. Despite their surround of gentility, these publishers are strong-minded characters engaged with their historical circumstances. Out of that engagement have appeared a number of books that we can say, rightly, belong to literature.

KM

*Marion Boyars, of Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd*

Marion Boyars began her publishing career in 1960, by buying half-equity in the firm of John Calder, who was known in England for publishing avant-garde writers, among them Samuel Beckett. In 1964, the firm took the name of both owners. For more than 15 years they published the work of novelists considered among the most avant-garde and literary in Britain, among them Beckett, William Burroughs, Henry Miller, Elias Canetti, Peter

Weiss, Heinrich Böll, Hubert Selby (LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN, prosecuted for obscenity); translations of the *nouveau roman*; the writings of modern composers, and books by social thinkers. In 1975, Boyars and Calder began to dissolve the company; by 1980, the list had been divided

Since 1975, Marion Boyars has published fiction, belles lettres and criticism, poetry, music, theater and cinema, social issues, and biography and memoirs.

Among book-people, she is considered a beautifully educated, very literary publisher with a strong list, particularly, in fiction and music. She publishes a number of Eastern European writers in translation and is, herself, fluent in three languages. How she succeeds financially is much speculated about, as her books are expensive; she is said to be very aggressive at selling rights. She is also said to be observed closely by agents and other editors, who have been known to take her authors away; with rueful pride, she acknowledges this. Odile Hellier, of the Village Voice Bookshop in Paris, praises her for having resuscitated the career of Julian Green, the nonagenarian Virginian novelist and diarist who is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and of the Académie Française, and whose work is not well known in America.

Marion Boyars Publishers was to be found in a narrow building on a side-street in Putney, a busy little London village south of the Thames, beside a men's hairstyling salon and a Pakistani take-away restaurant. A small display-window held a dozen or so recent volumes. This was a publishing "house" in the old-fashioned parlance. Inside, the editorial office accommodated five people, all of them capable editors, who read amid tall bookcases lining the walls. Authors' photographs hung in the stairwell; desks were piled with books, papers, manuscripts. There were word processors but no computers. The fax machine worked erratically. The piles and stacks did not indicate disorder: this looked to be the sort of establishment run on idiosyncratic but perfectly reasonable lines. Upstairs, under the roof, the director's office was a room smaller and more crowded with bookcases. The air was dense with cigarette fug.

Marion Boyars, director of her firm, was a tiny woman of indeterminate age and bright, sharp eyes. Her mouth was handsome; she smiled widely and often. Her voice was soft but emphatic, her accent not quite placeable; she was born in America but in 1950, had come to England to live, and had adapted its form to her intention. She was pleased her visitor did not mind the smoke.

Acquaintance was made, the tape recorder set up, the cigarette lit, the invitation given to go ahead. She was asked to reflect on why she became a publisher.

*Why She Became a Publisher.*

BOYARS: It's a strange business. I find it very difficult to understand why anybody can do this now. You learn something about yourself: what you

know; what you want. And I knew that I was not a writer. -- One's curiosity is challenged, and it's a complex field.

McNAMARA: You went into publishing because it seemed the thing to do?

BOYARS: Only for me. What I did, actually, was unusual at the time: I bought half a publishing company. I had a lot of confidence in myself, and I wanted to start a career that was intellectually stimulating and demanding. My financial advisor showed me an advertisement in *The Bookseller*: the publisher John Calder was looking for a partner. My advisor looked into it and thought it was a good idea. And then I met John Calder, and I liked him, and so I bought 50% equity in the firm. That was in 1960. We began at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

And we had adventurous times together, especially during the first ten years. The Calder & Boyars imprint published some of the best pioneering writers of the 60s, people like Samuel Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet, Georges Bataille, Ivan Ilich and John Cage, Hubert Selby, and so on. Our writers were often controversial -- we published in the fields of fiction, music, the social sciences.

But our relationship deteriorated. In 1975 we slowly dissolved the partnership: we created two new imprints, John Calder, and Marion Boyars. By 1980, the separation was complete. We had appointed an arbitrator to divide the old C&B list, but the division was uneven, in John's favor, whereas I had bought 50% equity in the firm.

I had a wonderful lawyer. I called him up and said, "What should I do?" "Fight a little," he said. And I fought a little; unsuccessfully. We continued to share premises, sales, and distribution, until I moved to these offices in 1984.

My goal in publishing was to give voice to exciting new ideas, you see, ideas which excited me. This list is a reflection of my own interests: I want to share these ideas. Many of the writers we published have become modern classics. I had some very good books from the old Calder & Boyars. The big money-maker is still ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST. That was my book.

But there is also a good percentage of failures.

*She Was Their Mascot.*

*Publishing used to be called a gentleman's occupation. It is perhaps best to remember that "gentleman," in its primary meaning, does not mean mere good manners, but is a class or station in society; and furthermore, that good manners may be wielded as deftly and cruelly as any other weapon.*

BOYARS: There was a strange club, a secret club for men who owned their publishing houses. Very few of them are left now; most have had to sell, and many of them have lost their job. But then, they were very elegant.

There was a trip to Russia, the first delegation of British publishers to Russia, all the big boys of publishing, and me. It was because of that trip that I was invited to join the club.

McNAMARA: How did the trip to Russia come about?

BOYARS: There was going to be a delegation of British publishers to China. I had published a book about China [Julia Kristeva, *ABOUT CHINESE WOMEN*]. I was interested in the women, as women do the work in most countries; and I was an independent publisher. I was not accepted, because the Chinese wanted scientific and language publishers. The Publishers Association then promised me that I could select my next trip, and I chose Russia. I was part of the first English-language group to go; it was around 1981. A person from the Foreign Office briefed us beforehand, instructing us not to speak of politics.

Most of the group were scientific, or language, or specialized publishers. They said, "Why don't you write an essay about fiction, translation, poetry, the theater?" So I went to the hairdresser, wrote my little essay, Arthur [Boyars, her husband] typed it, and it was published in their fifty-four languages.

But then I talked to them about literacy. "The benefits are not what you think they might be," I said. I was proved right! Now the Russians want only potboilers.

But I made them laugh. Then I was assailed by a Russian who knew I had published a dissident. Arthur had translated him [Yuli Daniel, *PRISON POEMS*], but I had no political agenda and I wouldn't engage them on political grounds. Then they tried to get me on my husband's translations: Montale, Eluard.... All the others there knew what I was doing, and enjoyed it. They knew I wasn't going to get caught out. And so, for two days we had a fine time, because we laughed. It didn't last, of course, but my team saw how an atmosphere could be changed.

When we got back, they all had their limousines waiting for them. I had a husband waiting. (*Great laugh.*)

After the trip to Russia, the club secretary asked me to join. I was treated as their mascot. And I enjoyed it enormously. Some outsider actually found out about it and wrote articles. He called me; he said, "I found your name on the list of members." I said: "There isn't a list of members, surely!" It was a secret; so, somebody must have betrayed us. He said, "Anyway, you are a member of this club?" And I said: "Yes; of course." He said, "What are you doing there? Is it for price-fixing? What's the use of this club?" I said: "It is a social club!"

McNAMARA (*laughing*): What did you observe in this club?

BOYARS: Well, it was very interesting, because although you were supposed to be among a group of people who were *not* going to tittle-tattle -- because that was the only rule: you *didn't* tittle-tattle -- and I'm sure they didn't: it was all about, oh, you know, talking about the currents of publishing, and some commercial things about discounts to booksellers and chains, and other kinds of stuff -- they were not entirely truthful! I said to one of them, "What kind of discount do you give Waterstone's?" "Oh, nothing special." Well, of course you do. Forty-five percent is what you give them. (*Laughs.*) Now, this is very interesting. If they had been women, they would

have said they give forty-five percent. This not coming straight out: they were not frank....

Now, Carmen Calill, the founder of Virago, is an interesting woman, actually. She gets what she wants, and she wants the right thing. She's very good.

She's rather out of it now (*Virago has been sold to Little, Brown, which is owned by Time-Warner Communications*). But the only way Virago could continue was by selling.

McNAMARA: Virago was a wonderful imprint.

BOYARS: Wonderful, a wonderful imprint. They went wrong when they published people other than the classics.--

She used to be very nice when she first started and we had something in common. She was very supportive. We used to say hello and were friendly.

I had a court case in America, somebody had cheated me. We won, in a sort of way; of course the lawyers took all the money. But I had to make a deposition. They asked me all sorts of questions which didn't apply to me, but applied to her. They thought I was Carmen. I noticed it; and of course I could hardly contain myself with laughter. They think one woman is like all others. (*Laughs.*) After the meeting I was laughing. One of the lawyers noticed, and I said, "Well, you're very funny." "No, no," he said, "there's something specific you're laughing about." "Something specific? No. What?" "Oh come on," he said: "you don't want to tell me." I said: "Nothing to tell." I wasn't going to tell!

But I mean....

McNAMARA: What did you mean when you said you were the publishing establishment's "mascot"?

BOYARS: "Brave little publisher."

McNAMARA: Right.

BOYARS: I'm sure they didn't take me seriously, and they kind of liked me. I made them feel liberal and generous. I had a sense of fun, and I didn't take myself too seriously. I'm small. I think that has something to do with it. If I were taller, if I had a large face, they would have been intimidated.

I don't like this kind of role. I'm quite serious. They found Carmen Calill difficult, because she wasn't like a little pet.

### *Schooling.*

McNAMARA: You've lived in England since 1950.

BOYARS: I'm actually an American, but I went to school in Switzerland. I went to NYU, in New York; then, before graduation, I came here to get married. And they started a university, called Keele, in the Midlands, where I lived. So I went to Keele.

It was 1950, and there were as many undergraduates at that time in the whole of England as there were at Columbia and NYU combined: very elitist;

and then they opened university education up, and now it's wide-open. But at that time, for a girl to get into university was still rare.

There was a wonderful man called Lord Lindsay of Birker, Alexander Lindsay. He was a moral philosopher who taught at Balliol, and was made a peer. He was very, very socially concerned -- he was Labour. He invented my university.

I lived in Shrewsbury, along the Welsh border. There was a university in Birmingham. I had been at NYU already. I was too young to be a mature student, and they didn't recognize my NYU credentials. And this college was being started, and it was work I admired, and so I went along. Lord Lindsay was a very open man. He had brought a new course to Oxford, PPE -- politics, philosophy, economics, called "Modern Greats," which I took at Keele. For me it was absolutely wonderful, because it started with 150 students and 25 dons. You had the most personal education you could possible hope for; I mean, not only the tutorial system, which they used to have and is now almost gone, but you were *with* these people, you even had coffee with them. Lord Lindsay loved the students, he liked to talk with them, very much, over coffee.

Keele was the first university founded after the war. He had great ideas. It actually has a very good music department and a very good American literature department. His idea was to create a campus that didn't exist at the time in England. He felt that English education was too narrow. And so he invented the foundation course. During the first year, it was a core-year course. You had lectures in every discipline: it made it possible for you to switch over from an arts subject to a science subject, if you wanted to; even for the degree course, the requirement was that you had to take at least one social science and one hard science, so that even the people in literature would have to take, say, an economics course. I took physics as a subsidiary, which was dubbed Physics for Fools. I rather liked it: it didn't teach me much physics, but it taught me, and showed me, how the scientific mind works. I was interested in methodology. I didn't know much about real science, and so, this gave me an insight, a little insight; and that was his idea, you know: to have a much broader education.

McNAMARA: That would have been a way of communicating between the "two cultures."

BOYARS: That's right; I'm sure [C.P.] Snow's book had something to do with it, too. Lord Lindsay thought that with all the specialization there was, the scientists didn't understand the arts students, who certainly didn't understand the sciences.

I actually lived outside my college. It was residential; and I was married and so couldn't have a room; I boarded during the week. One of the professors gave me a room. He was a professor of philosophy who was really more interested in poetry, and his wife was a writer. We would spend our evenings reading poetry. I had a second education living in that home.

And I had a car. I was the first student who was allowed to have a car, and it was great fun. It's only 30 miles from Shrewsbury. I would drive over at

80 miles an hour. I had an old Ford V-8 two-seater, and when you opened up the trunk there were two more uncomfortable seats in there. And this was the fastest car on the road!

I was the only American, that's number one. Number two, I was the only one who drove a car. And number three, I was the only one who was married.

McNAMARA: So you broke all the rules.

BOYARS: I broke every one of them. I had a very good time there. But, when we got our degree, Lady Lindsay said: "What are you going to do now dear?" She was like a little empress. I said: "Have babies." "Oh, dear," she said. I said, "Well, I'm married." "Well, that's all right then."

So that's what I did: I had babies.

McNAMARA: And then you decided to be a publisher.

BOYARS: I graduated in 1954, and then Susan was born in 1955, and the youngest one was born in 1957. And then I went to London in 1960, with my two little girls, and became a publisher.

McNAMARA: They really were little girls.

BOYARS: They were tots. It was a difficult life. My husband and I got divorced in 1962; he remarried almost immediately, but died in 1969. I moved to London and brought up my children. Later, I met somebody nice -- Arthur -- and we married in 1964.

In 1960, I went into a business that no woman had ever thought of going into under her own steam. I was actually the first woman publisher who didn't inherit her business or assume it by marriage. I mainly broke the rules because I didn't know them.

*Is There A Literary Culture? If So, What Does It Look Like?*

McNAMARA: What is a literary culture? Is there one? Are there many?

BOYARS: Undoubtedly, but it's too difficult to define. I mean, the non-literary culture couldn't exist without the literary culture. Everybody knows about Marx and Freud, but you don't have to read them: they're essential, part of the lifeblood; but you don't have to be part of it. Language develops because of literature. It doesn't develop because of television.

McNAMARA: That might be argued.

BOYARS: Yes: I know it can be argued; that's why I say it. I don't think television has that much of an effect on "culture," though it is informative, while literature has a lot of effect. This is why, when people say obscenity in literature doesn't "do" anything, I think they're wrong. Literature "does" something. I think obscenity and the forbidden, taboos, as such, are not important in themselves; but they are necessary subjects. It is the *art* that is made of them that refuses to allow us to remain complacent. These things make us reach beyond ourselves, move, grow. They are very important. And through art, we can actually do something positive. We become aware of life through it.

McNAMARA: Certainly, not all books are literature.



BOYARS: Certainly not.

McNAMARA: And much of what makes a literary culture--

BOYARS: --is language. It is the use of language, the ends to which it's put. It's *how* you put it on the page. People write to me and they say, "I've written a novel about a such-and-such a subject." I'm not very interested in that. I'd like to know *how* you've done it, what you've done. Carlo Gebler, an Irish writer, has a new manuscript. Let me read you two lines: "My name is Douglas Peter; I am a Russian scholar. I am married to a Russian woman, and have been for forty years. I'm extremely miserable."

Wonderful. It's got everything there. And that's in the juxtaposition. You could do the same thing in a newspaper report, but it wouldn't be the same. I think this is what writing is.

*Subsequently, she bought the book, entitled W9 AND OTHER LIVES; it will be published early in 1998.*

Of course it's refined, of course it's shaped: it's actually a lot of hard work. I know people who like to say that someday they'll be a writer. Maybe. You need a lot of practice.

McNAMARA: A lot of practice, and stamina.

BOYARS: And you know, I just like it, I like books and ideas. They have a habit of growing. There is a radio program: three people choose a book, often an old one, and discuss why they like it. I think the one that I would choose, although I haven't read it in many years, is *TO THE FINLAND STATION*. It's a beautiful book, I remember, but also it opened my eyes. I've never been a Marxist; and I've studied political philosophy and economics, I've had plenty of opportunity to become a Marxist, but I never took to it. But he [Edmund Wilson] tells us how it is possible to become a Marxist, and he's the only writer who's done that. He opened my eyes when these things were very important, during the McCarthy era, and so really one had to sit up and listen. And I rejected it. But this book was to show me what was the attraction. And I must read it again.

McNAMARA: Are there books you think of as a, or the, foundation of a literary life?

BOYARS: Well, yes; *WAR AND PEACE* is certainly one of them. Plato's *REPUBLIC*, Shakespeare's plays. World literature -- the Russians; Thomas Mann, Rilke. Poetry. French classics. Updike, Joyce, Hemingway. There are so many books that have had an impact on me. -- I've read all my life. A lot of things had to be crammed down my throat when I was going through the educational process, but I'm very grateful for it. I mean, music, literature, poetry become just part of one's background.

McNAMARA: Do you think there was a time when the readership was more secure than it is now?

BOYARS: No; no. I'll give you an example: George Gissing, *THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF HENRY RYCROFT*; wonderful book. When it was published, in 1902, it sold sixteen copies.

McNAMARA: When Stendhal's *DE L'AMOUR* appeared, it didn't sell. His publisher said to him: "This book must be sacred, because no one will touch it!"

BOYARS: I don't think this age is any less intellectual than any other age; nor do I think the sensibility of people is impaired. On the Continent, people read more. In France and Germany, they think it's part of their culture to read.

McNAMARA: Do they buy the books, as well?

BOYARS: Of course, because there it's very important to do it. You go into a German household and they have bookshelves. You go into an English household and they do not have bookshelves.

*My original question continued to disturb her. She thought her comments were pointless, as no one could presume to "define" a "literary culture." She spoke about writers America has produced.*

BOYARS: Think of Melville, for instance, and Henry James; think of Bellow, and Updike. Innovative writers! Nowhere else could their novels have been written, and they have influenced writers everywhere. Frederic Tuten [VAN GOGH'S BAD CAFE], who thinks he is a European in spirit, is not: he's very American. No European could do what he does. This is where the literary language is developed: in America, with your wonderful mixture of peoples and languages and different sorts of experience; more so than in England, where we're hide-bound by grammar and convention.

*I pointed out that, although indeed we have good writers, much debate goes on in this country about the non-literary, entertainment-ridden, consumerist popular culture that is now, everywhere, called "American."*

BOYARS: All the Anglo-Saxon countries are unliterary, but they produce remarkable writers. John Cage [EMPTY WORDS; SILENCE], after all, was a remarkable writer, though he was a musician. There was Allen Ginsberg (d. April 5, 1997); there were the Beats: poets who were exceptional in their time. Perhaps the debate goes on because Americans, unlike the English, have always been self-deprecating.

### *Obscenity and Taboo. A Book On Trial.*

BOYARS: I think there are some really key books -- one I think is a key book, not easy to read, is *NAKED LUNCH*, by William Burroughs (d. August 2, 1997), although I didn't terribly like his later work.

*Burroughs was published in England by John Calder and Marion Boyars. In 1963, Arthur Boyars, who was a friend of John Calder, assembled a collection of Burroughs' writings for the Literary Annual published by the firm. Calder and Boyars published *NAKED LUNCH* the following year. At about that time, the firm's name was changed to reflect their joint ownership; Marion had married Arthur, a translator and literary man informally associated with the firm, and preferred to use his name to her father's and her previous husband's.*

McNAMARA: You said that obscenity and taboo are important to society, and that it is important for literature to break taboos.

BOYARS: I think every good artist breaks taboos. Because you have to; you *have to*: because the writer shows us where we are.

McNAMARA: In America the taboos often center around what is considered sex, or sexual representation.

BOYARS: Oh yes; it's very puritanical, provincial. What can you do?

McNAMARA: What significant taboos exist here, and don't exist in America? Or, the other way around?

BOYARS: Well, English society is almost impossible to describe, because the moment you understand it, it escapes. Now, the English are envious, and the taboo breakers bring this out. Very interesting politics here. We had a Prime Minister [John Major] who was a socialist under the Tory label, and we have (*laughter*) a Prime Minister [Tony Blair] who is a Tory but under the label of socialism. Very interesting.

The Thatcher business was awful: what she did was awful, and it was awful how they turned against her. She came from a different class, and was ambitious and made straight for what she wanted. They hated her, because she was a woman, and because she broke all the rules of the men's clubs and did things in a different way, and because she used her handbag as a weapon. But, before she fell, they were all prostrating themselves. It was disgusting. You attack authority at the time authority is in power; not when it's finished.

You've heard about the Oz case, from Australia? One of those underground magazines, put out by four young chaps. They commissioned some kids to do a kids' Oz issue. The kids broke every taboo, they had no respect for anybody. They had a Teddy Bear who had an affair with another Teddy Bear. And they were taken to court over that.

McNAMARA: In this country?

BOYARS: Yes! It went on and on. I was there most of the time. It was fascinating, of course. They got a highly respected social scientist, and they asked him the serious question -- at the Old Bailey! -- "Would you tell us about the sex-life of Teddy Bears?"

You wouldn't think that such stupidity can be committed by such sophisticated people, but it can, and they do it. The '60s and '70s were of course the ground for breaking taboos.

McNAMARA: You were prosecuted for obscenity.

BOYARS: We [Calder & Boyars] had an exhausting court case, a huge obscenity case brought against Hubert Selby's book *LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN*. It went first to Magistrates' Court, then to the Old Bailey, then on appeal. We won the appeal, in 1969, but we lost twice before that, and we were, for a time, paralyzed.

But I didn't know we were going to win -- we could have been sent to prison. But it wasn't we who were in the dock, it was the book. When they prosecuted, the book was held up in the dock by a policeman. We were too well-behaved, we were Establishment ourselves. We were not pornographers, we were very respectable publishers. If we had been pornographers, we, not

the book, would have been in the dock. Yet, we lost the first two rounds; and the lawyers were against an appeal. The reason they gave us was, we had suffered enough, they wanted to protect us from more heart-ache. But I think there were several reasons. They just didn't approve of the book, really.

But I never considered not appealing. We behaved in a most elegant way: we withdrew the book from sale; we made it known that we were not going to have the best-seller we could have had. And they knew that. If we had not been, we would have been in danger of being sent to prison. In fact, they gave us only a fine: £100 -- I mean, no one gets fined £100; it's nothing. We didn't pay the fine and in fact, they paid for the appeal: if you win an appeal, they pay. So, I never considered not appealing; but we did something that had never been done before: we actually had our own transcript.

Just before the case started a salesman came to our office and wanted to sell me a tape recorder; this was the '60s. I said, "Hmm, not a bad idea, can you sell me one that would tape in a large room?" He said, "How large?" "Well," I said, "I'm not quite sure, I've never been there before." "What do you mean," he said, "you want a tape recorder, you don't know how big the venue is? Is it a theater?" "No, it's not a theater. Well," I said, "it's the Old Bailey." "Oh." So he sold me a tape recorder. Then I rang my lawyer, and I asked him if we could bring it in, and he said, "I have to ask the Clerk of Court." He called me back and he said, "This is the first request ever; therefore, there's nothing against bringing it in." And so we did. And my assistant and I: we didn't only spend nine days in court, but nights, typing it up.

McNAMARA: It's a job.

BOYARS: It's a terrible job.

McNAMARA: You couldn't have gotten a transcript? There would not have been an official transcript?

BOYARS: Yes, there is an official transcript; but it is not verbatim. It is what the man who takes it down he thinks he has heard; and the lawyers do, actually, the same. So, on the second day of the trial, when I came with my transcript and said to the chief barrister, "This is what happened yesterday," he said, "Well, I don't need to read this, I have my notes." I said, "Yes, but your notes are not really accurate." He was very angry with me. But: they actually withheld the official transcript from us. You have to appeal within six weeks; and they withheld it, they just didn't send it. We didn't need it, on the strength of our own. We got rid of our lawyers, and I hired John Mortimer, the novelist and playwright, who was a divorce lawyer and had never been concerned with this kind of thing. The first thing I did was to play the tape for him for an hour or so; and from there he did wonderful things.

The transcript, our own, is now in our archives, at the Lilly Library in Ann Arbor, at the University of Michigan.

*During our second conversation, in April, in New York, she spoke by phone to Hubert Selby's agent and, upon hanging up, said, pleased, "Well, we have a new Selby." She had just bought, in draft, his latest novel, to be called THE WILLOW TREE. "It's very good," she said, "I read it, and my editor read it. He wrote very long notes, almost a page-by-page analysis, to help with the*

editing. And, in fact, the author is feeling very well. He is starting with those notes: he's got wonderful editing notes." "What a dream," I said, "to have editing notes." "A dream to have that," agreed Marion Boyars. "And then he and Ken Hollings, my editor, will get together. The agent asked how long would it take him -- six months, a year? 'No,' he said, 'I'll do it this summer. By the end of the summer you'll have a manuscript.'"

McNAMARA: Wasn't the trial of LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER in 1959? Didn't anybody learn from it?

BOYARS: Well, they didn't actually have any other cases. Oh, there were some pornography cases, but nothing that was claimed to be literature. And in fact, some of our witnesses were people who had advised the Director of Public Prosecution not to prosecute.

McNAMARA: Was there any such case afterward?

BOYARS: Oh, yes, many cases; but none of new works of literature, they have never done new works of literature again.

McNAMARA: Can you think of books that might have fallen under the category of obscenity in literature?

BOYARS: Oh, absolutely: I published one of them. I published *STORY OF THE EYE*, by Georges Bataille. It's very short; it's about children's sexuality. And Bataille was very subversive. I didn't want another court case -- you can do that only once in your life, you can't do it more than once -- and so I put in it an essay by Susan Sontag, called "The Pornographic Imagination." It's marvelous, but very general, not about this particular book. Roland Barthes wrote an essay which actually dealt with this; it's called *The Metaphor of the Eye*; I had it translated by Jim Underwood. Roland Barthes was of course very respected.

I then also put in a Publisher's Note: I took responsibility personally. Then we sent it to the printer. He called me about two weeks later and he said, "I cannot print the book." "Why not?" "Well, you know, the apprentices...." -- there's always an apprentice. I said, "All right": because the printer is also the person responsible; certainly in England. They have got the right to say no; and I think one has got to respect that. So I said, "I completely understand, you're under no obligation to print this book, don't worry, I'll find somebody else. -- You do realize, of course, that we're publishing this book 50 years after publication in France; it's actually a classic. And you do realize that Georges Bataille was a Catholic, and a scholar, and he was just -- you know, just one of those people who went against the stream. He was not a nobody, you know, not a pornographer."

I saw that the printer knew all this. I talked about the book and its contents, and Susan Sontag. And he said this, and I said that. And then he called me back the next day, saying he "couldn't put it down, and we're going to print it"; and he did. And then, about two months later, Penguin bought it for the Modern Classics series. "Remember," I said, "it will be a classic." The printer had said, "I remember your saying that." Well I'll tell you: when I told the printer about Modern Classics, he said, "Oh, thank God!" It's fantastic: it has sold thousands of copies.

The **Publisher's Note** reads:

The shortness of this important erotic classic -- now translated into English for the first time fifty years after its original French publication -- enables us to include in this volume two essays that deal with the genre and style of *STORY OF THE EYE*: Susan Sontag's essay on aspects of the literature of sex, **The Pornographic Imagination** (from *STYLES OF RADICAL WILL*, 1967) explores a literary form that is, despite its manifold representation in English and Continental writing, seldom accepted in our puritan Anglo-American canon. Roland Barthes' **The Metaphor of the Eye** (from the magazine *Critique*, 1963) discusses in depth the language of *STORY OF THE EYE*, a major example of French Surrealist writing, a movement which is at last beginning to receive serious critical attention in England and the United States.

*Obscenity, Censorship, and the Avant-Garde.*

McNAMARA: The first trial of Hubert Selby's *LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN* was in 1966. You published Henry Miller [at Calder & Boyars] before that.

BOYARS: But we were never prosecuted for that.

McNAMARA: Why was that, do you think? Was there a reason?

BOYARS: Well, we did something rather unusual: we wrote the Director of Public Prosecutions, who in England decides whether a case is going to go forward or not. We said, "We are going to publish Henry Miller."

McNAMARA: You had reason to think you might be prosecuted.

BOYARS: Certainly: Henry Miller was very dangerous. There were about five other publishers who wanted to publish him. The advance was the same from all of them. We had put in our contract that, if we were prosecuted, we would fight; nobody else was prepared to do that. That is why we got it.

So we wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions and said, "This is what we're going to do." He wrote back, two days before publication -- the book was already distributed -- saying he was not going to prosecute. This was 1963, before the Hubert Selby book.

McNAMARA: They didn't give you a reason?

BOYARS: They thought the prosecution was not going to be successful. They got copies of the book and had a panel of readers, and they wrote their opinion. They couldn't prosecute then, because we would have produced the letter in court. And that was the end of it. We were the only ones who knew, and we didn't tell anyone. And then, we couldn't keep up with the printing!

McNAMARA: Because *TROPIC OF CANCER* caused such an outrage?

BOYARS: Because we didn't tell anybody about the letter. They sold the book under the counter.

McNAMARA: And they didn't have to?

BOYARS: Of course not; but they didn't know that. The book cost 25 shillings at the time. Thousands of checks were sent us. We lost a lot of money: we didn't know how to deal with this avalanche of checks and cash, and in England you have to write an invoice for each book, otherwise you'd

be cheating on tax. We didn't have the staff, we had to get people from the street to help us, and they stole money. Still, that was TROPIC OF CANCER. Then we wrote the same letter when we published LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN.

McNAMARA: And they decided to--

BOYARS: No, they didn't; they said, "We have not decided. Sorry to be unhelpful." In the end, it was a private prosecution. A Member of Parliament, Sir Cyril Black, brought the charge. Private prosecution was then made unlawful by Roy Jenkins, now Lord Jenkins, who was Home Secretary. He inserted a clause into a criminal-justice bill. I went to see him: a very elegant man, wonderful, friendly, etc. He said, "Don't worry. I'll put in a clause." I said, "Are you going to debate this in Parliament?" "No," he said, "because there are thousands of clauses; they're not even going to notice." And they didn't.

*The Member of Parliament who brought the charge against the book was the object of an amusing, and self-defeating bit of mischief made by Maurice Girodias, publisher at the Olympia Press of literature and high and low pornography.*

McNAMARA: You knew Girodias.

BOYARS: I adored him!

McNAMARA: Why?

BOYARS: Oh, he was the most charming man in the world, incredibly generous. We used to go to Paris from time to time, Arthur and I, and we'd go and sit down in a restaurant; and we would say, "We'd better leave the third chair empty, because Girodias is bound to find us." And he always did! Not always, but many times, many times. Whereupon the Champagne would flow, and he would pay the bill.

The last time I saw him, he had fallen on very difficult days.

McNAMARA: He also published Terry Southern [as did Marion Boyars: BLUE MOVIE].

BOYARS: Girodias was actually a very naive man. He was not very cautious. He went from Paris -- he was thrown out of Paris publishing -- and he came to England and started an imprint here, and was going to publish a book about Moral Rearmament. The Moral Rearmament Society offered him £50,000 for not publishing the book. Girodias, being a principled man, turned them down. Thereupon -- *The Times* ran a whole page of bankruptcies -- they printed a page imitating *The Times'* bankruptcies page. It was not published by *The Times* but by the Moral Rearmament people. It declared him bankrupt and said he was shutting down his business. Whereupon, he went bankrupt. He was not rich.

*Another account of this story, differing in details, but not in essence, appears in John de St. Jorre's VENUS BOUND The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press and Its Writers (Random House, 1994).*

He then went to America and started another imprint there, and somehow didn't make it work. One of the things he did was to publish a pornographic book, and he called it SIR CYRIL BLACK. Sir Cyril Black was the Member of Parliament who had started the case against us over the Hubert

Selby book. The book Girodias published was not about him, but Girodias called it that. Then he wrote to me about it. I said, "Argue! (They were bringing a libel case against him.) Why don't you argue that by sheer chance this is something you invented? 'Is there a Sir Cyril Black?' -- that sort of thing." "Oh, no," he said, "I am defending you! I did it on purpose, as a revenge!" Well. So, he was very naive. Did you ever meet him?

McNAMARA: I've only read about him.

BOYARS: You would have liked him. He had a nightclub in Paris -- this was unbelievable. This was very early in our acquaintance -- It was a lovely evening, a private room, and I was a very naive young woman. He told me about flagellating people, and described all sorts of sexual practices. (*Laughs*) He was a kitty-cat, he didn't try to seduce me. But I didn't even know about these things, you know, I thought he was very amusing, to try and frighten me. I liked him very much. And he was very unhappy in New York. He married a Cabot or a Lodge, can't remember which one. [She was a Cabot.] She was a doctor.

He went back to Paris in the end. He said to me once....

We're not talking business. This is a lot of gossip.

McNAMARA: It is, but we're getting to issues.

*The discussion turned to the internet -- she has had some copyright problems with Microsoft over a book which she had published and which they later re-published on CD-ROM without her permission -- and various Western governments' attempts at censorship particularly in the matter of pornography, which is apparently thought by non-users to be rife, and available at the click of a button.*

BOYARS: It's the people who like to control things who do this, you know. It really doesn't harm you very much. We saw a film in New York called *Chasing Amy*. It will never come to England; we have film censorship, and this film is very explicitly gay, sexually. Every film has to be licensed, you see, before it can be shown. It was true in the theater, until the 1960s: you couldn't bring a play to the stage without the approval of the Lord Chamberlain. It took years to abolish that part of the law; but we still have film censorship.

McNAMARA: What do they censor for?

BOYARS: Sex and violence, you know: sex and violence. Actually, they are less interested in sex these days. I don't know about the United States: is there censorship there?

McNAMARA: People don't like to use that word. There is a rating system--

BOYARS: Of course they don't like to use it, because it's an explosive word: but that's what it is!

McNAMARA: Actually, there is a phrase edging its way around the book-publishing world: "market censorship," meaning that publishing decisions aren't editorially determined. Indeed, very good books are often turned down, because editors are basing decisions to publish on estimated "markets."

BOYARS: I'm a censor, in a way; we're all censors: we do not publish certain books. We don't necessarily *not* publish them because they are too



explicit sexually, although we have been known to do that. In the LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN case, there were a number of English publishers who kept their distance. One very kind publisher actually tried to collect money for us -- it's very, very expensive to defend yourself, you know -- and some very distinguished publishers nearly refused. We were asked by some publishers to withdraw the book, or not to appeal.

But, an interesting thing happened. The solicitor Lord Goodman, whose firm defended us in the first two trials, was Chairman of the Arts Council. He convened over 100 people and proposed a scheme whereby there would be pre-publication censorship, because he felt that what happened to us should not happen to other people. I mean, his motivation was perfectly good; and all the people in the arts were there: the filmmakers, the theater people, the publishers, the writers: it was really a most distinguished gathering of people in the arts. And they talked -- he talked -- for about an hour and a half: about forming a committee of the arts, to censor beforehand, so there wouldn't be such a trial again.

Eventually I stood up and said: "It doesn't matter how benign the censorship body is, it is still censorship, and that is something we don't want." Goodman was a rather big, bulky, important man, and he collapsed. He was so angry with me he didn't speak to me for two years. Because, suddenly, everybody thought about it and said, "Well, this is in fact pre-publication censorship." You see, they had just got rid of theater censorship.

And as a result of my intervention a committee was formed at the Arts Council. He was so angry about the whole thing that he put the partner who had defended us in charge of this committee; he had been our solicitor. He was a wonderful man: I've never admired anyone quite as much as him. And, after two years of discussion, he went against the committee. And so Goodman did not prevail; but he almost did. Because everybody could see that the publishers were all in favor of it: they didn't want to have the enormous expense of defending a book, and they all thought this "pre-publication review" would protect them. But of course, it would have done exactly the opposite. And it was very easy to change the feeling of the meeting. I said: "All censorship is bad, even benign censorship. I'm very much against it, in any form."

McNAMARA: You've said you were an avant-garde publisher.

BOYARS: I've said, "I used to be an avant-garde publisher; now, I'm old-fashioned in my ways, because publishing has changed."

McNAMARA: You also said, "Language develops because of literature, it doesn't develop because of television." I said that was arguable; and you said: "Yes, that's why I said it: because it can be argued." You were speaking of what is called obscenity and forbidden subjects, taboos, and about bringing -- or not bringing -- them into art.

BOYARS: The artist is doing it.

McNAMARA: The artist is doing it. Through art people can be made aware of these subjects, in a mental context: the artist makes them available through our higher facilities. Am I overstating the case?

BOYARS: No, not at all. I think art has a way of changing something that could be very vulgar, into something that is cerebral.

McNAMARA: What if this makes a false change. Is that possible?

BOYARS: That's bad art. If there is no artistic integrity, I don't think it's going to work, I don't think it's going to make anyone aware of anything except what is disgusting: and that's bad art.

McNAMARA: You published avant-garde writers, for serious readers. I myself don't think there is an avant-garde anymore.

BOYARS: I agree with you.

McNAMARA: And so, if erotica and obscenity were a way of opening the mind to what it refused to know, as Miller and Selby did; then, that seems not still to be true. So, what do you think, now, would be our taboo subjects?

BOYARS: War. Suicide. Incest. Racism, in two ways: what's happening with black people; the way the Chinese are spoken of, now that they are considered a rival for markets.

Genocide. There are things going on in the world that are like the Holocaust; extraordinary cruelty is still going on. The Holocaust literature certainly has shown us what we must know. But one of the terrible things is that people who are exposed to genocide now are denied. The plight of the Jews is something that has been told time and time again, and I still find it shocking. But, if people were really that shocked I don't think it could go on, yet it does.

Now, very often we are told about these things in a newspaper article, and then we seem to forget. Television is too fleeting, as a matter of fact. You see, the goalposts have been changed. It's very difficult to shock people these days, except with actual life. Life is very, very shocking now. I am often very indignant, and that has to work itself out, somehow. Language should shock.

*Commerce.*

McNAMARA: What makes a book commercial?

BOYARS: Ah. Ho. I don't know.

McNAMARA: How do you gauge a market?

BOYARS: I don't know how to do it -- it's no good, I know, but I can't gauge a market. There are publishers, I know, who look at a book and weigh it. We have published quite a few books that sold well -- ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, which is my all-time best seller, was out of print. I thought it should be in print. I certainly didn't know the whole world was waiting for somebody to attack the structure of asylums; but there it was.

The truth is, I don't know any other way. I can read a manuscript and love it, but I cannot tell if it will sell. How do they know; how do they do it? I'd like to know.

There were things I thought should be in print, forbidden subjects. LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN was one of those books. I must have published it because I wanted to shock the world. I was shocked.

McNAMARA: What was your shock?

BOYARS: Well, my knowledge of the Red Hook district of Brooklyn was nil. My knowledge of homosexuals was nil. This is simply not something I know about. It was my instinct, somehow, that this should appear, and that it was all very authentic. I never questioned the veracity of that book. And you know, it was very powerful.

McNAMARA: There is a cohesiveness and an intelligence to your list: it seems to me the literature of a refined or observant taste.

BOYARS: Well, it has quality. That is always hard. These are things I like; fortunately, enough readers agree with me. Of course, there have been many failures.

McNAMARA: Esthetic failures?

BOYARS: No: I'm not sorry I've published any books that are on the list. I've published books I thought would sell well, and they didn't: I still find them interesting. There has been some attempt by me to share something that I like, and shape the culture.

One of my best authors is Ivan Illich (*MEDICAL NEMESIS*, etc). He shares my ideas about authority and responsibility. What he says is not: "You shouldn't go to the doctor." What he says is: "You are responsible for your own health." He doesn't attack doctors, he attacks the medical establishment.

A lot of people minded that he wouldn't tell them how to live. They came to him with problems; he said: "You solve it." That's all. I admire that, because it was so easy, so easy, to have done the opposite, when he could have become president of the world at the time, he was so popular. Extraordinarily modest man. Yet, Cuernavaca was the most undemocratic place you can imagine. He's very authoritarian. He's very severe, in many ways. But also, the people around him would of course take care of him, protect him.

We published his recent lectures a little while ago [*IN THE MIRROR OF THE PAST*]. He's putting together another volume, and I said, "Yes, I'll publish it." He's such a beautiful man. And it was a terrific adventure, publishing him in an active way. But it was also very hard work.

McNAMARA: What is hard work, to a publisher?

BOYARS: In the first place, you are getting involved with money every minute of the day. I find that such hard work. You have to be careful, but terribly precise, and there must be no mistakes. And so, we proofread, and proofread.

You have to try and sell the books. That is more work. And I have to do the money again. Publishing really exists, you know, as a business, and the money aspect I find wearying. I've always found it hard; most people do. You see, if you work for a large company you don't have to earn the money first to pay expenses, all you have to do is have a bloc of money to draw upon in advance. It's much harder work to own your own house.

McNAMARA: Do you work with agents?

BOYARS: I understand the agents, and the authors' going to them. I work quite happily with agents, because I see them, I have lunch with them, and the whole thing is kind of domesticated. They think I'm slightly eccentric, publishing books no one else wants; but they know my word is good.

McNAMARA: How are contracts important? Did you ever do anything on a handshake?

BOYARS: I don't believe people have good enough memories for that. It's got to be done properly. Though my office doesn't look tidy, I can find anything in it. I keep careful records. I know exactly what I'm doing at any time.

But I have superb books coming in. I hope it doesn't matter that the times are hard.

I used to have commissioned salesmen. That wasn't working properly; and then a firm of representatives, who were part of a huge distribution contract, offered themselves. I called all my reps and I said: "Look, this offer sounds good," and they released me to this new contract. But they're not selling, either. I asked why, and never got an answer, after 15 tries. One question, asked 15 times! This is what it means to work with a big firm.

McNAMARA: How long do you keep books in print?

BOYARS: It's very rare that we don't reprint a book. I have an awful lot of books with very small printings; but we reprint. We re-jacket books, and we paperback them. It's very rare that I don't re-do a book. It's actually a list that should go on.

McNAMARA: I've been told that other publishers admire your books and try to get the authors from you. Is that true?

BOYARS: Who told you? Yes, it's true. It's mostly the agents who do that, but sometimes the editors, as well. I had published Tim O'Brien: two books, *IF I DIE IN A COMBAT ZONE* and *NORTHERN LIGHTS*. His publisher was Sam [Seymour] Lawrence. Sam sent *GOING AFTER CACCIATO* to me. I wanted to publish it and I made an offer. Tim called me and said: "Marion, please, what did you offer?" "Three thousand pounds." Not a fortune, by today's lights. "Is that all right?" I said. "I swear it will be all right," he said; "I don't want to leave you, but Sam told me he had accepted an offer from someone else."

I called Sam and asked what was going on. "What makes you think that?" "Tim called me." "Tim called you? You have no business talking with him!" I said: "Hey, hold it. You introduced us. I worked with him on *NORTHERN LIGHTS*. I bought the first book and the second book: why shouldn't we have become friends? Why shouldn't he have talked to me?" He put the phone down, and I put the phone down.

What Sam Lawrence had done was call Tom Maschler, who was at Jonathan Cape, and said: "Marion has offered £3,000." Tom had a lot of money. He said, "Triple it."

Sam Lawrence finally said to me, "Will you forgive and forget?" I said, "Forgive, willingly; but forgetting is impossible."

Very few authors come back after an event like that. Michael Ondaatje -- well, it's my fault it happened. He sent me a manuscript of *RUNNING IN THE FAMILY*. I read it and thought it was wonderful, though a little precious. So I wrote him a letter, and I said: "I think you should, etc. ... wonderful, etc. ... be sure to send me a revised copy." The agent was very angry, because I criticized. Actually, it didn't harm my relationship with Michael very much.

He's a very nice person, he's got a major publisher now, and he won the Booker.

So, these things do happen. They're bound to happen. I don't like them much.

McNAMARA: How many new books do you publish each year?

BOYARS: About 20. The back list is very long.

McNAMARA: Is there a typical press run?

BOYARS: Well, I don't do many books under 2,000 copies, and we don't do many over 5,000. But *COMPUTER ONE* [by Warwick Collins], for instance: we'll probably print 10,000. Everybody's very impressed with it. And I under-print, rather than overprint, unfortunately. So that means that I reprint, and then all the books come back again. The publishing industry is the only one that accepts full returns. Sheer madness!

*Buying Rights. Selling Books.*

McNAMARA: I'd be interested in your opinion about publishing rights on the internet, generally and specifically. Let's say a book is published in more than one English-speaking country, and I want to reprint something from it, an essay perhaps. I've got the author's agreement; he understands that no money is involved; now I need the publisher's permission. I think it good to get permission from the other English-language publishers, as well as from the U.S., because our readership is international; especially if the author involved is not American. This is assuming that the publishers have electronic rights. What do you think about this sort of thing?

BOYARS: Well, I think this whole thing has not been resolved. And when an exchange of money is involved -- not in your case, but in mine, for example [reference to a pending dispute] with CD-ROM reprints -- I maintain that the law has not been tested. I maintain that it's like xeroxing, quoting, etc. I get hundreds of letters about this sort of thing. They say, "We would like to reprint such-and-such an essay from one of your books. We will not distribute in England, therefore we want only North American rights." I would say, "That's fine," and I would quote a fee; and they pay it, and distribute in North America. On the other hand, they may plan to distribute world-wide in English. In that case, I say, "Yes, you have permission for world use, and the permission costs more money than in England only." Or they say, "We only want to distribute this in England": there is an alternate fee for that. Or they say, "The main thrust is in America, but we want to sell a few copies in England." "Fine," I say, "in that case I will make it cheaper for you than I would if it were originating in England." And in my opinion, that is how it should work; but it hasn't been tested. In other words, there is no case law. There was no case law with xeroxing until Kinko's fell into a trap. At NYU, professors asked for xeroxed copies of published materials for the students in their courses. Kinko's xeroxed material without permission and had a huge court case because of it. They are very cautious now.

We make quite a lot of money, actually, from xeroxing. The author gets half, we get the other half. In England, they have two organizations for xeroxing: one looks after the publishers, the other looks after the authors. When I first started, I would divide it and give the author half. The authors just put it in their pocket, until I found out that actually they had already got their half. So, next time, I only wrote a statement, no words were exchanged.

But I think one should ask for the rights. Now, the other bone of contention is that contracts written before, say, 1990, do not specifically say “electronic” rights. And some agents maintain that, because it doesn’t say so, you don’t have the rights. But I say, It is exactly the same as reproduction and therefore I am entitled to these rights. Because the future, in my opinion, is that books will go on, but in much smaller quantities. There will be smaller print runs, and more CD-ROMs. Or, it will be as you are doing, publishing on the internet.

McNAMARA: What rights does a publisher expect and feel entitled to have?

BOYARS: We call them “volume rights,” which means “text rights.” You have the right to publish the text in any form. You can then publish in hardcover, in paperback, you can authorize excerpts of that text. This is a contentious point. Some people take the phrase literally, to mean you have the right to publish the text as a book. But “publish” means “to make public.” The writer creates the text; the publisher makes it public. I hold that that text is what the publisher should make public, by whatever means are available to him. The bookseller-publisher once only bought book-rights. But “volume rights” means, I contend, that the publisher should have the right to share in the proceeds of that text reproduced in its unadulterated form: as a book, or a xeroxed copy, on the internet, or when libraries scan the book. I think that if the book is read on-line, or is downloaded, somebody should pay for it.

Now, film rights are not an automatic extension of volume rights. *Changing* the text is not an extended right. If a novel is made into a play or a film, that is the author’s right: the text belongs to him; he is in charge of what can be done to alter it. When I buy English rights, in most cases I don’t have film rights. In the case of this chap [Mark Fyfe, ASHER], I do even have film rights. And we sold an option on it to a producer: with, of course, the author’s approval.

I bought this on the strength of, oh, 50 pages, and then he wrote it under my guidance. I didn’t *write* it, you know: but we discussed it day in and day out. “This should stay in, and this should go out. Why not make this a bit more clear,” etc. It’s a complex process. I wanted clarity; my editorial criterion is clarity. If you want to say something, say it: don’t expect the reader to put it in himself. A lot of new authors think the reader should sit down and work it out, and then read it again, and then read it again. Those days are over.

McNAMARA: Joyce thought that. Faulkner thought that.

BOYARS: Well, a lot of writers think that. But people won’t: if it’s not clear, they don’t read it.

McNAMARA: What is the job of the publisher, if he buys volume rights?

BOYARS: You have to try to sell the book! I mean, you have to exploit the book; you have to do something for it. You don't get response to it for nothing. That stack next to you is 50 advance copies of the futurist novel *COMPUTER ONE* [by Warwick Collins]. We have great hopes for the book, we're going to pepper the world with publicity. I've already offered it to mass-market paperback publishers, and I've taken it to places like *The New York Times Book Review*. They need to have the book about five months before publication. The pub. date is November. It's ready to go to press; it's just that it's only been announced, the catalog isn't printed yet, and it's not in our current catalog.

I need a lot of lead time, and I'm going to do a lot of things with it to interest people in it, interest them in the author. I work very much with the author: he has ideas, I have ideas. One is really trying to make the book known, and so you use everything you've ever done on the book, if you have great confidence in it, which I do.

McNAMARA: In America, the independent-bookstore structure is so fragile.

BOYARS: It's even worse here, if you want to know. There's no "structure" at all.

McNAMARA: Is that because of the end of the net book agreement?

*The net book agreement prevented English booksellers from discounting the price of new books; it collapsed in September 1995, when several large publishers and a major book retailer withdrew from the agreement; other publishers soon followed. Earlier this year, suit was brought by the government's Office of Fair Trading to abolish the agreement, as it was now ineffective. A defense of the agreement was mounted by a number of publishing and literary figures, including John Calder. In the meantime, Waterstone's and Dillon's, the two largest booksellers, have launched web sites; a British-based on-line bookstore now exists, as well as Amazon, the US-based on-line book service. The British sites will also offer books published in the US, before they appear in England. In 1996, 101,504 new titles (including 9,209 new works of fiction) were reported to have been published in Britain, compared to 95,064 in 1995.*

BOYARS: The net book agreement has made absolutely no dent. It isn't that every book is sold at a discount, it's that the booksellers want huge discounts. Our discount structure will change completely. We used to give 25%; we now give 45%. Our books are not even costed that way.

McNAMARA: Meanwhile, the price of books goes up.

BOYARS: Of course it does, because you have to recoup.

McNAMARA: In the States, the terrible analogy some publishers have made is: The cost of a book is the same as the cost of three movies. It's the wrong analogy, from my point of view, unless you're interested in Jeffrey Archer or Patricia Cornwell, let's say; then, yes: they are the cost of three movies.

BOYARS: Well, I don't think it's the price, I think it's the fact that books are simply not sold properly. Barnes and Noble have just emptied their shelves -- it makes you despair.

McNAMARA: What would they do if they were selling books properly?

BOYARS: Well, the books are there: I think they should keep them on the shelves. The shelf-life is so terribly short. If they were only to keep the books on the shelves. People do go in to the shops to browse.

McNAMARA: I told you about the well-known American novelist whose book was published in late Spring. Two days after the books appeared in the stores, Michiko Kakutani reviewed it for the daily *New York Times*. She had liked the novelist's last book -- a blurb from that review appeared on the cover of the new book -- but she demolished this one. It was a virulent review and unaccountable. But the novelist is a pro: she took it in stride. The worse news was this: the day the review appeared, Barnes and Noble began shipping returns. This she learned from her editor.

BOYARS: It's a real horror story. If publishing were like any other industry, they would not have accepted the returns.

McNAMARA: Can they *not* accept them? The publisher was Knopf, dealing with Barnes and Noble: large corporation to large corporation. The *Sunday Times*, on the other hand, gave the book a good, an intelligent, review.

BOYARS: I would have talked to them, I would have said, "This is not fair, this represents a lifetime's work, to become a writer. You don't treat people like that, you don't!" And they might have kept the books, I'm sure I would have prevailed. You have to be concerned about other people's feelings.

*Barnes and Noble advertised the book in its summer catalogs.*

Anyway, you asked me about volume rights. This is what you buy, in theory: you have total right to exploit anything that you can do with it. We actually have a clause in our contract about "any means." This is why I insist on this business about electronic rights, about "means now invented and that might be invented in the future": because things change all the time, and you mustn't cut yourself off from the market.

I'm very positive about the internet, electronic bookselling and so on. I can see there's future in it, additional markets. And the booksellers are doing badly, on the whole. The independents are in a dreadful situation. They are being persecuted out of existence by the chains.

McNAMARA: How will distribution change with the web, do you think? I believe you mentioned, for example, that Amazon takes a big discount from you.

BOYARS: Not from us! No, no; they make an arrangement with Ingram [the distributor/wholesaler], but they do give a discount to the customer. You see, the book business in America is very different from the book business in England. America is a huge country, and wholesalers are most important. We have wholesalers, too, but they're no good. The American wholesalers take every one of our books: such a thing does not exist that they do not take our



books. They may take 5000 copies, or they may take 500 copies, but they take them. In the first place, they know that they can return them; in the second, the smaller bookshops buy from the wholesalers, they don't buy much directly from us, not in America. But they do take a very high discount. Baker & Taylor and Ingram [wholesalers] now take 55%.

Now here, it's completely different. Bookstores buy directly from the publishers. Baker & Taylor were going to start up in England. I went to the London Book Fair, and there was a Baker & Taylor stand. I said, "Welcome, welcome, welcome." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said: "Well, I publish in America as well, and I love Baker & Taylor, you're doing a marvelous job." He said, "You'd welcome a proper wholesaler?" "Very much," I said. But they couldn't make it. The chains -- Dillon's, Waterstone's -- deal only with the publishers, the big publishers, and with us, too.

But in America, the scale is enormous, with book warehouses around the country. The library system is better, also. In England, the libraries have no money, so they can't invest. Each county has its central library. They buy one book -- one each of any title -- for the whole county; and you'll be lucky if you get to read it in six months, because you know there are already 500 people ahead of you who want to read the same book.

McNAMARA: Libraries now are scanning books, most often older books, into their systems. The books then can be read on computer, though I don't know if they can be printed out. What do you think about that, and how does it affect your business?

The NY Times, Sept. 2 (after our last conversation), reported that certain librarians have been consulting the leading American bookselling chains for advice about buying and shelving books; this follows the lead of several trade publishers, who have been reported consulting representatives of the chains about contracted books and, in at least one instance, about a manuscript.

BOYARS: Well, this is of course the whole question of the future. I think eventually what's going to happen is that, instead of printing 5000 copies, it will be 3000; and the rest of them will be scanned or made available by computer. This is why I'm so keen on this copyright idea. That way, the publishers get paid: because you put just as much effort into a book if you print 1000 or 10,000 copies. That is why subsidiary rights are important. There is a financial investment, and there is a moral investment. I have only 20 new books a year: I've got to exploit them, I've got to. I don't forget a book. I think that's why authors like a smaller publisher, who's invested a life in them.

It's an advantage and a disadvantage, this investment. Look at the time I spend doing things. I mean, look at Selby's book, *LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN*. I fought for him, went to court for him for two years. In the end, we won. We pay him handsomely; his book still earns well. But I didn't know we were going to win. He was very grateful.

McNAMARA: What is the best question you were ever asked about being a publisher?

BOYARS: "What does success mean?"

McNAMARA: Your answer?

BOYARS: "Survival."

Now I'm not so sure I would say that. That was many years ago. I think you should have financial success. I'm not commercial. I think it is a very good thing to be: I'm just not that good at it, and I'm very sorry. Once in a while I see that sort of success. But the list, which is very difficult, really doesn't make much money.

I would like to sell the imprint, but there are no buyers. One very large book company offered to buy my "top 50 sellers." I said: "What about the others?" "Not interested," he said. I turned down the offer.

McNAMARA: But your list sustains itself.

BOYARS: Yes. Oh, it does. I've never remaindered, I don't believe in it. We make a small profit.

*Going to Stockholm.*

BOYARS: I published [Elias] Canetti for ten years before he won the Nobel. We have published a number [six] of Nobel winners. Some of the time there is a change in sales, but most of the time not, because they are foreign writers. Faber [and Faber] have all the English and Irish Nobel Prize winners -- Golding, Seamus Heaney, and so on. We have the same number, but in translation.

McNAMARA: What is it like to go to Stockholm?

BOYARS: It's wonderful. I went for Canetti. Now, Canetti was not a very nice man. When he won the Nobel he had been trying to get published elsewhere in England, but nobody wanted him. I was the only one; I wanted to publish him, and I had three books [KAFKA'S OTHER TRIAL, etc]. He was ashamed of us, I think. He didn't want us to come.

It had really never occurred to us to go. Then, at Frankfurt [Book Fair] everybody said, "Ah, you're going to Stockholm?" "Of course, you're going to Stockholm?" Well, why not?

His main publisher was a German publisher, very good, and a good friend. The man who was running it then had trained with me as a very young man, and he said to me, "Why go to Stockholm? It's not interesting. I've been to Stockholm." Very nicely, he sort of said, Don't go to Stockholm as his English publisher.

But I wanted to go, and I told Arthur -- you've met Arthur, he's a very sensible man -- and he said, "Fuck Canetti! How do we know we're going to have another Nobel Prize winner, ever?" --But we did.

Arthur said to hell with him. He was absolutely right. We weren't celebrating Canetti, we were celebrating ourselves. And it's fun, and it's very glamorous. We thought there was just the ceremony and the dinner -- it's a terrific event, everybody in Sweden is involved. But there was much more to it. We went the week before -- there were parties galore, very nice parties. It was really great fun. I wrote it up for the *Independent*.

Then we went for Kenzabure Oe [HIROSHIMA NOTES, etc].

We also published others: Heinrich Böll, Samuel Beckett, Claude Simon, Eugenio Montale, Oe, of course, and also Canetti. And we published every one of them before they won the Nobel Prize. Every one. And we nearly got it last year, because there were three Polish possibilities. The other two were a wonderful poet named Zbigniew Herbert, and Tadeusz Rozewicz, whom we publish [THE CARD INDEX, etc]. He's also a playwright and short-story writer. [Wislava] Szymborska is very famous in Poland, and has a very nice nature, and cares about the world. And Rozewicz doesn't have the large canvas. She has it. They chose the right poet. They are all very good.

I think my Danish writer, Henrik Stangerup, has a very good chance. You said you read *BROTHER JACOB*. We have a new novel coming out [THE ROAD TO LAGOA SANTA], an historical novel about a Danish paleontologist who for reasons of health had to leave Denmark, and in 1833 went to the jungles of Brazil. He discovered fossils and so on, did brilliant work on the theory of evolution, but could not go on, because of his strict religious principles. But he never returned to Europe. Stangerup is fascinated by this: What really happened to him? Why couldn't he remain at home?

McNAMARA: You publish a number of translations. Is it a different thing to edit a translation than to edit a manuscript written in English? Would you describe the process itself, and the differences?

BOYARS: It's completely different. Ideally, you have read the original, but very often, you haven't. I don't read Danish, though my father was of Danish origin. I speak French well, and can read it, and German. I can't read Danish, Norwegian, Italian, or Spanish, but you know from the translation what's wrong with it. I think it is a question of experience. You look for traps. I have three languages; with three languages, you have to know *something*. With German, I can read Dutch, somewhat, or even Swedish and Norwegian, because they're very similar. But I also know something about the structure of the language. You can find certain similarities. So: the Scandinavian languages have very small vocabularies and very long sentences. You break them up, and you make the language more sophisticated in English.

It's completely different when the book has already gone through the editing process. I publish the translation after an editor has done the work in the original. Now, with an English writer you ask for something different. My main question is: Is it clear? What do you intend to do, and have you achieved it? Can you shape it?

You have to choose the right moment; you have to be very tactful; and you have to do this because you *want* to do it. No personal vanity. It happens with many publishers that they feel they have to change things, even though this might destroy the artistic integrity of the work. That can be very arrogant, very, very disrespectful. I mean, if you don't like something, say so. But not for the sake of your authority. You and the author have to remain harmonious.

McNAMARA: Have you ever gotten to the point where you wanted to publish the book but what the author wanted, finally, was completely unacceptable to you? Have you ever given up?

BOYARS: Not many times. I always say to the author, "I will argue till the cows come home, but it is your book." And once I have committed myself to something I will try to help it succeed.

On the whole, I will give in, but it isn't automatic. And you do a lot of compromising: "You win this one, I win that."

*Author and Publisher.*

McNAMARA: What should an author expect from his publisher?

BOYARS: Loyalty. It's very important.

You can go too far with your loyalty. You can, you know, bind yourself into a difficulty with an author, if you find his work is deteriorating, or if he wants more than you can give.

But you should have a loyalty to your author, which doesn't mean you have to approve everything. But I do stand by the authors. I really do have an interest in their fame and well-being. And it's good when you like the person. I like my authors.

They are the ones who create. I don't, and I never will; all I do, after all, is facilitate, it really isn't a creative act. I pledge my know-how and give them money to live. They're the ones who take the real risks.

I think attention, listening, is part of it, too. Frederic Tuten [THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH], for instance, needs to have a publisher who listens to him. They need that -- it's not like being a mother; it's a completely different thing.

McNAMARA: And writers are not like children, although they're often called that.

BOYARS: No! It's just that you have to listen to people. I think that much of the trouble of the world is that nobody listens.

*Afterward.*

*At the end of our third, last meeting, in her London office, as the day was ending, I was packing up the piles of papers and books she had given me, and we exchanged a few words about how long this conversation would be, and how I might cut it. I was hemming and hawing, when she said, suddenly:*

BOYARS: Yes, I think one of the great difficulties about having been a publisher for such a long time -- I don't know if it's me, or if it's the general standard of writing, now -- but it's very difficult to get excited over so many of the books I see, so many of the manuscripts. And I have a horrible feeling it's not only me.

Books Mentioned in this Article Published by Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd

- Georges Bataille, STORY OF THE EYE  
Samuel Beckett, (with John Calder)  
Heinrich Böll, ABSENT WITHOUT  
LEAVE  
----, BILLIARDS AT HALF-PAST NINE  
----, THE CLOWN  
William Burroughs, NAKED LUNCH  
(with John Calder)  
John Cage, EMPTY WORDS  
----, FOR THE BIRDS  
----, M: Writings 1967-1972  
----, SILENCE  
----, X: Writings '79-'82  
----, A YEAR FROM MONDAY  
Elias Canetti, KAFKA'S OTHER TRIAL  
----, THE VOICES OF MARRAKESH  
----, THE NUMBERED  
Warwick Collins, COMPUTER ONE  
Mark Fyfe, ASHER  
Carlo Gebler, W9 AND OTHER LIVES  
(forthcoming)  
Julian Green, THE DISTANT LANDS  
----, THE STARS OF THE SOUTH  
----, THE APPRENTICE WRITER  
----, SOUTH  
----, THE GREEN PARADISE:  
Autobiography, Vols. 1-4  
Ivan Illich, MEDICAL NEMESIS  
----, DESCHOOLING SOCIETY  
----, SHADOW WORKS  
----, IN THE MIRROR OF THE PAST:  
Lectures and Addresses, 1987-1990  
Ken Kesey, ONE FLEW OVER THE  
CUCKOO'S NEST  
Julia Kristeva, ABOUT CHINESE
- WOMEN  
Henry Miller, TROPIC OF CANCER  
(with John Calder)  
Eugenio Montale, POET IN OUR TIME  
Terry Southern, BLUE MOVIE  
Tim O'Brien, IF I DIE IN A COMBAT  
ZONE  
----, NORTHERN LIGHTS  
Kenzabure Oe, HIROSHIMA NOTES  
----, NIP THE BUDS, SHOOT THE KIDS  
----, TEACH US TO OUTGROW OUR  
MADNESS  
Michael Ondaatje, COMING THROUGH  
SLAUGHTER  
----, RAT JELLY  
----, THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY  
THE KID  
Tadeusz Rozewicz, THE CARD INDEX and  
Other Plays  
----, MARIAGE BLANC and THE  
HUNGER ARTIST DISAPPEARS  
----, THE WITNESSES and Other Plays  
Hubert Selby, LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN  
----, THE DEMON  
----, REQUIEM FOR A DREAM  
----, THE ROOM  
----, SONG OF THE SILENT SNOW  
----, THE WILLOW TREE (forthcoming)  
Claude Simon, (with Calder)  
Henrik Stangerup, BROTHER JACOB  
----, THE ROAD TO LAGOA SANTA  
Frederic Tuten, THE ADVENTURES OF  
MAO ON THE LONG MARCH  
----, TALIEN  
----, TINTIN IN THE NEW WORLD  
----, VAN GOGH'S BAD CAFE

Marion Boyars Publishers, 24 Lacy Road, London SW15 1NL  
Distributed by Inbook/LPC, fax 1-800-334-3892.

See also:

Frederic Tuten, Prologue: THE ADVENTURES OF MAO ON THE LONG MARCH, Vol. 1, No. 1.  
Endnotes, Vol. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 3

THE ROUNDTABLE:

## In the Garden

It may be premature to announce this, but summer is just about over, and I couldn't be happier. The tragic faces of school-bound children delight the eye as far as one can see. In the manner of a cartoon cat dreamily picturing Little Mister Canary as a tiny roasted carcass on a platter, I imagine these tanned urchins crammed into their uncomfortable desks, fidgeting endlessly through World Geography while, out beyond the playground, insolent adults swaggeringly reclaim the wide open spaces. Soon, my little dears; very soon.

But this is a relatively minor payoff compared to the sheer joy of seeing the tail end of summer itself, with its alternating napalm'd droughts and monsoon rains. As is usual in August here in the upper South, the garden -- well, to be specific, my garden -- is a class 4 disaster offering countless opportunities for the tactfully averted eye. Those gold-banded lilies which, verdant and leonine, sprang adorably out of the dirt in April have now achieved a height of five to seven feet and suggest the stark remains of a palm grove after a fire. The Japanese beetles have overstayed the contractually specified six weeks and are roiling on the surface of every rose not otherwise destroyed by the elements. The tomatoes, victims of an ill-considered experiment in which they were allowed to sprawl along the ground rather than being staked up

-- Live Free or Die! -- have provided plenty of compost for themselves but, to date, little fruit. Evil caravans of nut grass have journeyed undisturbed into the bearded irises and set up thriving colonial outposts there, and other places, too.

I acknowledge that many of these misfortunes could have been avoided if only I had not found it so blasted hot outside. In spring I was all business, digging and weeding and hauling around big loads of X or Y, but as the heat set in I began to see more and more clearly the need for staying at the office until seven or eight or possibly nine in the evening, and then soon enough weekends were taken up with a careful examination of the fall nursery catalogues that had begun to pour in on or around June 15. Well, what would *you* do, given a choice between grubbing around in the rose beds in thousand-degree heat or lying on a comfortable sofa in an air-conditioned living room, looking at handsome pictures of rare and pristine daffodils that can be had for only a few hundred dollars a bulb? All right, then.

But forget about that; it's time to look ahead. As the temperature gradually drops, certain green stirrings may be discerned. About a week ago I noticed that the Boursault rhododendrons have left off their mule-eared sulking and broken out in new leaves, at least in clusters here and there. A group of cinnamon ferns that had grown crackling dry and, I assumed, cashed in their chips are unrolling a few lurid replacement fronds. The late-blooming hosta "Royal

Standard" -- common as dirt and nothing to write home about leaf-wise -- has begun shooting up elegant stalks of waxy white blossoms that are heavily jasmine-scented and good for jamming into a vase with other flowers more showy but less fragrant.

I'm particularly pleased to see a constellation of buds appear on the tangle of *clematis paniculata* (now, I think, classified as *c.* something else, but I can't recall what) that has hog-tied a bed full of floribunda roses and annuals in front of the house. If you don't know this worthy, it's an energetic species that covers itself with a multitude of vanilla-scented white stars for a couple of weeks in late August and September here in Virginia. I bought it in pots for several years running and planted it in a variety of sites, where inevitably and without formalities it would expire. Then I gave up, and shortly thereafter it popped up unannounced in one of the flower beds, apparently self-sown. During the summer I periodically yank out big hunks of it that have got into places where I don't want it and leave the rest as a sort of billowing groundcover. For some months it slithers around among the flowers before exploding into bloom itself at the end of the season.

Certain trees and shrubs are now making minor displays of confusion: some of my azaleas are showing the odd flower or two, and recently I noticed that a *magnolia soulangeana* on the street where I work was blooming sparsely and with some embarrassment, as though it had jumped out of a cake

at the wrong time. There are also some "curiosities" out there like those bearded iris that have been bred to bloom both at their proper moment in the spring and then again, superfluously, in the fall. I don't approve of this and I suggest you put any idea of them out of your head.

We are, of course, still some weeks away from the most gratifying part of the fall -- the time when the gardener goes forth into the mercantile wilderness, hell-bent on gathering zillions of bags of bulbs from every nursery in a hundred-mile radius. Many times these bags will be tucked away in dark corners to await planting at the most favorable moment: they will then be discovered sometime in the following July, soft as marshmallows and perhaps covered with a fine green fur of mold.

When they escape this fate, however, bulbs are a particular, and peculiar, pleasure -- not just for the flowers they will turn into, but for themselves. I am not talking about daffodils and hyacinths, which are big and flaky in a disheveled way, like aged onions, or about *fritillaria imperialis*, the so-called crown royal, which not only is big and ugly but stinks to high heaven. (And incidentally, the flowers are perfectly awful-looking.) I mean the tulips, particularly the smaller species like *t. turkestanica* and *t. tarda*, and the little species irises, *reticulata* and *danfordia*, and several other minor bulbs. When in good shape (i.e., neither rotten nor desiccated) they are plump and shiny -- the tulips very much like chestnuts or buckeyes -- and they

look and feel wonderful in the palm. Get as many of them as you can: they look best planted in generous sweeps, and the squirrels will be digging them up and eating them as fast as you can get them in the ground.

One more thing. I am sorry to have to mention it, mainly because I hate doing it myself, but fall means tidying up. Which is to say, among other things, cutting the grass after frost even though "it's not going to grow *that* much more," because otherwise it will look exceptionally crummy all winter long. You are free to guess how I know this. Once growth has slowed it's time to pull on those wellingtons, get the hell out there, and root up all, or most, or anyway some, of the pernicious weeds that entrenched themselves over the summer, and to clear out the remains of the vegetable garden and the defunct annuals. Unpleasant things overwinter in this detritus -- both pests and diseases -- and additionally you don't want to spend some hushed winter evening gazing mistily out the window at a spotless blanket of snow punctuated by a row of dismal blackened cucumber vines on a sagging trellis. No: what you want from snow is a blank slate from which every trace of last year's gardening catastrophes has been erased, and upon which the shifting kaleidoscope of next year's anticipated wonders can be projected courtesy of good old limitless hope, a certain amount of purely medicinal alcohol, and a few hundred housebound hours with some really top-notch garden catalogues.

## -Viriditas Digitalis

see "In the Garden," Vol. 1, No. 2

### §§§

## Beat

Part of the magic of dance is that it resists an essential impossibility through physical acts, through real leaps of faith. As an articulation of the body in rhythm, dance coordinates movement with beat, whether up, down, or off. Beats are read as a pattern, and the body moves rhythmically in dance. The impossibility is simply that dance relies on a faith in rhythm. For while the dancer perceives rhythm as a syntax of beats, rhythm's value for dance lies in its telos, in a pattern projected into the future. Rhythm structures events that do not yet exist.

Dance rests on the projection of rhythm, the sense of which rests on the relation to, and the matter of, time. It is faith, perhaps, faith that a next beat will come to be, that allows rhythm to be realized, and that allows the body to synchronize movement with the beat in the rhythm of dance. Or if not faith, even a weak and naive one, it is physical fact, or if not actual fact, it is practical correlation, that informs the keeping of time and that inspires one's keeping on time in the series of motor and musical events.

Dance configures beats in a sense of rhythm and coordinates body movement in anticipation of rhythmic repetition, but as it does, what is its sense of time? Does the



dancer, for example, experience the present instance of each beat in a passage of time, perhaps as an event that punctuates the flow of temporal matter or that moves forward on a line of time? If true and factual that time is the medium upon which rhythm is projected, then is dance, to some degree, not so much the anticipation of actual beats as the measuring out of identical temporal fragments? Time as such then would be the medium, flow, line, or fabric, upon which events, from musical beats to human births, happen. Dance in this sense would constitute movement as an analog to the flow of time and perhaps only secondarily as an expression of beat.

But it is possible to consider dance in the first instance a correlation of movement to beat. Instead of rhythm defined as the organization of time, as musical theorists would have it, rhythm could be considered an organization of events, each beat an event with its own life, each its own whole. Such dance would be structured on the rhythm of events as they transpire, on the lives of whole events, which are not identical bits of perfectly parsed time. The possibility of dance would not be based on the fact, fabric, and flow of time, but on the realization of events, on the occurrence of beats.

A present concern in literary criticism, once again, is the anti-Semitism of T.S. Eliot. Because of his stature and his dominance in modernist poetics, most especially in England, Eliot's prejudices are discussed and apologized for more often than are those of Ezra Pound

or Henry James, for example. Eliot, the Missourian who became an "Anglo-Catholic Royalist" "more British than the British" is treated in something of the way that Shakespeare is: his stature nullifies serious accusations of anti-Semitism. It is a tautology applied to a writer essential to the canon: since he is great, he is great, or in a deductive variation, since his work is great art, it must be of great spirit. Eliot's depiction of a Bleistein or Shakespeare's of Shylock cannot be evidence of anti-Semitism, or so the logic goes.

The current reading of Eliot makes a distinction that seems to me similar to the problem of dance. Eliot can be a great artist and an anti-Semite; I find nothing in aesthetic theory or moral philosophy that precludes either. But one can take note of how one reads his anti-Semitism, whether in themes or in bits. The two extremes differ in that one emphasizes the general sense of the flow of meaning while the other emphasizes each literal event, one at a time. Those who emphasize theme read Eliot backwards, from a general meaning that explains individual events. Such a reading finds that the whole makes sense and makes sense of the constituent parts. To put it musically, the sense of rhythm makes sense of the individual beats.

On the other hand, locating Eliot's anti-Semitism first in the constitutive elements of *The Waste Land*, such as in the etymological, metaphorical, and grammatical bits, emphasizes the construction of meaning along other lines. The individual events of the text come

to accrue meaning through syntax, through a logic of synecdoche and sequence. The lack of capitalizing *jew* or the etymology of Bleistein can be identified as fragments in the logic of Eliot's anti-Semitism, or can they? Critics of this reading of Eliot often argue that each such poetic event, on its own, is benign and can appear prejudicial only to those so disposed to finding anti-Semitism.

In a non-poetic example of the syntax of prejudice, the video tape of the LAPD beating of Rodney King broke down the movement of racism into its individual beats. On behalf of the police assailants, Stacey Koon and Laurence Powell, the defense attorneys slowed the video tape to its individual still frames, down to the individual events of the beating. They then challenged the jury to identify the exact instance of the violation of civil rights. The defense insisted that at no individual beat in the dance of police violence was it possible to identify a rhythm or theme of racism. After an acquittal and the LA riots, Koons and Powell were subsequently convicted of the lesser crime of denying civil rights. The defense for racist beating or anti-Semitic writing is that the individual need not participate in a rhythm.

In the end, it is not the passage of time or the freezing of time that matters so much in the story of a beating: each nightstick blow hurt with each individual strike, and the sequence of blows by which white LAPD officers on a fallen Rodney King beat out a pattern, beat out a racist rhythm. The story

of racism is a series of beatings, blow by blow in a rhythm whose theme is dominance. The dance of power, the movement of bodies to administer violence in the single beat as well as in rhythm, is a dominance that mystifies. Racism has no time. It is a pattern of beatings here.

-Alfred Arteaga

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## Hecuba, Writing from New York

August 4, 1997

Dear Katherine,

As promised, I write again. My husband, my son, and I spent our vacation in Montauk. Besides rainy weather we had a beautiful time. We fell in love with this small village some years ago and go there every few months.

Our visits are not for tourist purposes anymore; the village is already intimately ours. Every time, its beaches, smells, shades, sounds are closer to our hearts. The seafood in our not well-known small inn in the Montauk outskirts is excellent. They serve a little bitter wine. That exactly tastes as the wine I use to drink in a small village at the Adriatic coast. There I have a house and spent many summers and winters. Tastes and

smells are very important to me. After all, I am an Epicurean.

As we had come back, I got sick. Some virus attacked my teeth. I spent few days in the bed reading.

Maybe we will go in August for few days to upstate New York to the friend's house. I hope to cache the summery shine of the forest there. Summer is almost over, and I feel depressed. In summer I really live. In winter I vegetate.

My family dreams about buying a small and tranquil house of our own. We are tired of the city, but yet dependents of it. There are many combinations, but we are remaining indecisive.

I need a green yard to have the morning coffee there and eat warm black bread and butter for breakfast in it. I desire to listen birds, grow flowers, talk to my friends about books, and see my child playing freely at least a few more remaining years of his childhood. I always wanted to have a house to live in. From my infancy, I often unconsciously draw country houses with the smoke from the chimneys, large windows, and surrounding trees.

I have read "The Artukovitch File" again. I read "Independent Spirit: An Appreciation of Hubert Butler" for the first time, to learn about the author. Both articles impressed me. I appreciate the analytic, meticulous, and honest Butler's work. The second publication illuminated Butler's interest in such themes as the history of the former Yugoslavia, my once-homeland. I would like to learn Butler's skill to

"bury" an emotion as it is already out on the paper.

My feelings and my intellect become very "active." My intimate emotional turmoil related to the recent war in Bosnia and my painful impression of my father's suffering in the Second World War revived. My hatred against Ustasas intensified. I now know more facts, and I wonder why the Yugoslav Government has never revived all the facts. Which kind of flattering to the Catholic church was it? What was a "vis major" that prevented them to tell us -- to Yugoslav people -- the whole (hy)story? Who had the interest to hide; what was the interest?

As you know, I am born from Serb mother and Croat father. In my desperation and guilt of my belonging to the peoples which large parts of committed the war crime in the recent Bosnian war, I mentioned these facts to you many times. I also talked a few times about my father's fate in the Second World War because it still bothers me. The article about Artukovich provoked me to talk about that all again.

As a very young man, more teen-ager, my father in Sarajevo secretly collaborated with the partisans and against the Fascists. The domestic Croat Fascists were Ustasas, organized from Pavelic and Artukovitch. Bosnia and Herzegovina were a part of their "Independent State of Croatia."

My father was captured, imprisoned, beaten, and finally sentenced to death. His mother, a great Catholic born in Slovenia, also partisan secret collaborator, begged on

her knees in front of the Catholic priest for her son's life. Imagine the power and influence of the dignified cleric on the Ustashas. My father was freed, and he escaped to the mountains. Because of his involvement with Ustashas, the priest was sentenced to death and executed after the end of the war.

My father then survived; he died recently from the broken heart, immediately after the Bosnian war ended. As an idealist, he had never believed that Croats and Serbs could slaughter each other again, or both of them more severely do it to Muslims. He died with his ideal -- the common life of all Yugoslav people.

I do not blame my father's "rebellious" death. How he could survive the fact that the blood of all peoples to whom he and his successors belonged was shed in the fratricide war? And as a result Bosnia, his homeland, was destroyed, depopulated, and his child, grandchild, and son-in-law living abroad. His mother was Slovenian, his wife Serb, his son and daughter-in-law (my husband and my brother's wife) are Muslims. My dad did not have any problem with that, except for the fact that others, such people as Milosevic or Karadzic, wanted him to have the problem.

Reading your magazine, I wonder what is it that attracts South Slavs to keep trying the common life and building the Yugoslav state? On the other side, what is the self-destructive motive impelling them to demolish their unions in fratricidal bloodshed? I read many essays about this theme.

I consulted many opposite opinions, and I remained more ignorant than before.

I have known many facts about the Ustashas' role in the Second World War in my country. From Butler's essay I have learned more. I agree with his story completely. What he described was only a part of the Yugoslav catastrophe. Unfortunately, there was more.

In the Second World War the large part of Serb population was organized in the Chetniks' military, under the command of Draza Mihailovic. They collaborated with Hitler's army. I have seen numerous pictures of the smiling bearded Chetniks, sometimes accompanied by the Orthodox priest, over the headless corpses of Muslim or Croat victims. The fresh victim's blood was dripping from the knife, and the executor was pointing it proudly to the camera. (I do not hate Orthodox priests. My respected great-grandfather was one of them. I am just saying what I had seen.)

The part of Muslim population, organized in different kind of unities, also committed crime on the Yugoslav peoples. I write about these three groups of people because they are closely related to Bosnia's conflicts. Members of all of three peoples, on the other side, rejected fascists, too. They freed the country from the Nazis.

This is also a very simplified story about the role of some Yugoslav people in the Second World War. How many members of all of them were on the each side I do not know. I am confused now more

than ever because I read too many different statistics.

As you know, Ustashas and Chetniks reappeared in the last Balkan war. They were killing each other, members of their own peoples if they did not want to take a part in murdering, but they took the highest toll on Muslims. They slaughtered too many of Muslims in Bosnia. Serbs even committed genocide on Muslims.

I had lived common life with Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo for more than 40 years. I have still lived with them peacefully in New York. I do not see any reason why I couldn't coexist with my own people.

It is not possible to analyze the historical facts in this letter, but Serbs this time without any doubt started the "quarrel." They caused the tragedy and dissolution. The Croats' role in the Second World War can explain one of aspect of the recent Yugoslav breakdown. However, Serbs did not have any right to start a new catastrophe to avenge the history 45 years old.

There are many answers to the Balkans' problem. Causes are deeply rooted in the history. Even if they sometimes look controversial, almost every answer is the part of the complete truth, too. To write one objective Balkan history assumes well balanced facts, but who is going to say what is that balance?

Through the whole past, Serbs and Croats fought for control over the Balkans. They competed over Bosnia fiercely, dividing its population along the religious lines of the both Christian faiths, Catholic and Orthodox.

Struggling to save their own integrity, pressed between Eastern and Western Christianity in the Middle Ages, Bosnians first established their own Bogumil religion and Bosnian church sometime between 12th and 14th century. Later, under the Turk occupation, almost the same population undertook the Islamic religion. It has always looked the most logical to me that Bosnians had a choice of their own Bosnian nationality; the Communist Government had never offered this option. I heard about "Bosnaks" some time before the Bosnian war, as they formed a political party. The members were mostly Muslims, but also people of other nationalities who accepted the concept of Bosnia's integrity and common life there. Does the genesis look as an "accident"?

Mr. Butler made a great contribution to the acknowledgment of the Balkans' history. He "caught" a big fish. He put the large "puzzle" in the Yugoslav picture. Unfortunately, there were and there are more fish and puzzles. I wonder, how many human generations are necessary to pass to unscramble this mass.

Dear Katherine, your magazine is amazing. It is the refreshing paper. I enjoyed absolutely every page of it. Please, say halloo to your two young assistants. I would like to talk to them sometimes.

Love,  
Hecuba

see also, in Vol. 1, No. 2:  
"The Artukovitch File"  
"An Appreciation of Hubert Butler"  
"Hecuba in New York"

ENDNOTES:

*We have stopped reading, we have not the time. Our mind is solicited simultaneously from too many sides: it has to be spoken to quickly as it passes by. But there are things that cannot be said or understood in such haste, and these are the most important things for man. This accelerated movement, which makes coherent thought impossible, may alone be sufficient to weaken, and in the long run utterly to destroy, human reason.*

Lamennais (1819)

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THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY

*In the words of the man he replaced [at Viking-Penguin], Lynton understood "brand loyalty," corporate jargon the precise meaning of which escaped me.*

Endnotes, Vol. 1, No. 1

Ambrose Bierce, a cynic and journalist of the last century, disappeared into revolutionary Mexico around 1914. During the previous four or so decades he had compiled and published a list of trite words and euphemisms which he re-defined in caustic epigrams that mocked the usual hypocrisy and conformity of his fellow-citizens. Someone (himself?) called him "the American Swift," a clever analogy but not precise: he had nowhere near the wit and fury of the Irish Dean. *THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY* (the 1911 volume of his collected writings, reprinted by Dover in a handy dollar edition), read now, too often sounds bilious, disgruntled, and low.

That doesn't mean that such a dictionary is not needed. If a new one is to be written, and surely it ought, I propose the first phrase for it: "brand-name."

Book publishers used to speak a normal language with obvious referents. Publishing *houses* were privately or publicly owned companies whose purpose was to promote and sell the works of chosen authors to their proper readership and make a profit for their owners. Harper and Bros., Random House, Alfred A. Knopf, Simon and Schuster used to be publishing houses.

Within those houses were associated *imprints*; independent small presses were (and are) also called imprints. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, for instance, owns the imprint Hill & Wang, a list of titles not always noticed in the commercial trade but respected by serious readers. Marion Boyars Publishers can be called an imprint (but also, because Marion Boyars owns it, a house), with 20 titles per year.

But the terms are going away. You really cannot call Random House or Knopf publishing "houses," anymore, as they are owned, along with a number of associated imprints, such as Vintage, Pantheon, Villard, and so on, by a close-held family corporation headed by S.I. Newhouse. It strains the sense of the word to call Pantheon an imprint, when it is listed internally as

part of a financial entity called the Knopf Group. Is the once-respected Viking, which is now a junior partner in the Penguin-Putnam conglomerate, an “imprint”? It is not; no, something has changed. It is being called a “brand-name.”

Really. By book publishers.

Does the reading public know who publishes the particular books they buy? Do they care? Is this matter important?

It is important because, in the ordinary moral universe, words and the things they nominate do have an integral, or a strong, or at least a customary, connection to each other. “House” and “imprint,” “Harpers” and “Simon & Schuster” were terms and names you associated with the publishing of books; they were a part of what composed our literary culture. “Brand-name” is an advertising term used by marketers. What sort of people agree to use marketers’ jargon as the defining word?

Steve Wasserman, the editor of *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, appeared recently with several other guests on “Booknotes” (*C-Span 2, Sunday, September 7*). The topic turned to estimable and less estimable publishers, the term being used in the ordinary sense. Vintage was cited as an example of the former; HarperCollins, with memory recent of the publisher’s arbitrary cancelling of contracts with a hundred-odd writers, as one of the latter. Speaking deliberately, from behind a basilisk stare, Steve Wasserman said that after the conglomerations of the last decade, most of the publishers “left standing” have “debased the imprints started by their founders.”

Recently, in London, I was given a tour of the *Financial Times*’ (see below) on-line newsroom. The editor of FT.com is an experienced economics journalist named Paul Maidment. Over lunch, the word “brand-name” came up. I asked what it meant in his part of the world. Well, he said, consider journalism: *Time* and *Newsweek* are brand-names. Like the great newspapers, they used to have large bureaus around the world, staffed by dozens of journalists; with electronic competition they have all eliminated bureaus and fired journalists, leaving one or two stars to cover, say, the whole of Southeast Asia. Star journalists are themselves considered brand-names. (How could a person be a brand-name? I thought: it’s like selling yourself.) I suppose, he said, even “FT” is a brand-name.

I thought you would call it a title, or a logotype, I said, or even a trademark.

“You know what they used to call brand-names?” he said suddenly, a bit sadly.

“What?”

“‘Our good name.’”

#### ECONOMICS FOR POETS

I went to visit the *Financial Times* because I read their on-line edition several times a week and, new to the medium myself, wanted to see how they

did it. The on-line and associate print editor, Paul Maidment, generously showed me his operation and then, very politely, asked why I read the FT. I read it on-line, I said, because, where I live, it arrives by air-mail a day late. I admire the writing, the depth and breadth of the coverage, and the British-style journalism, in which reporters function as educated observers speaking from experience; no false objectivity dulls their perspective.

I also read the FT because, during several months in Europe two years ago, I became convinced that in order to understand the workings of global capitalism and its effects on all life around me, I had better learn about central banking, the European Monetary Unit (Emu), and the economic union scheduled for 1999. I had better study Asian politics and the "tiger economies." I had better read Alan Greenspan's speeches, or at least try to find out what they meant. And I had better locate all of this in a broader, well-informed context than any paper that followed only the daily fluctuations of the stock market could give me.

It seems to me that, after the terrible waves of mass firings, the so-called downsizings, of recent experience, the atomized American middle-class has surely learned the hard lesson: that in corporate life, not everyone, but truly anyone, is expendable. The French, before their recent election, were so appalled by the ferocity of "Anglo-Saxon" capitalism, as it looked to them, that they elected a leftist, Socialist government. The British, choosing Tony Blair and his New Laborites in astonishing numbers, trounced the despised Tories without undoing (it seems) the effects of Margaret Thatcher. Surely the citizenry of all three nations have paid close attention, each in its national way, to the immense power of global corporations vis-à-vis their democratic governments. In future issues I hope to publish reflections by informed commentators on these and related issues.

KM

See Endnotes, Vol. 1, Nos. 1 and No. 2  
A Conversation with Marion Boyars, p. 18  
Resources, p. 6.

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*In the Winter issue, on-line December 15: Ann Beattie, writing from Key West, a conversation with Cornelia and Michael Bessie, and a Chinese Modernist poem.*