

# ARCHIPELAGO

An International Journal of Literature, the Arts, and Opinion  
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Vol. 3, No. 2 Summer 1999

*Story:* ZUXIN DING  
Young Mrs. Wei

*Four Poems:* EVA HUNG

*Letter from Japan:* RALPH E. PRAY  
Transformation

*Letter from Greece:* SANDRA CUSHMAN  
An American Traveler in the Balkans

*Natural History:* CORAL HULL  
December 7, 1997, The Rattle Snake

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Whatever He Says Is Gospel

*Poem:* ERROL MILLER

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*Recommended Reading:* James Wintner,  
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**Joel Agee**'s beautiful translation of *PENTHESILEA*, by Heinrich von Kleist, won this year's Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize "for an outstanding translation from German into English." This astonishing poem in the form of a play was the subject of the Editor's Endnotes, "Passion," Vol. 3, No. 1.

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## THE STORY OF YOUNG MRS. WEI

Zuxin Ding

Rain pelted down on cottage-roofs in Qijiangkou in Ningbo, China, on a cold autumn night in 1937. The weeping willows bent over the bloated Yong river, their branches ruffled. Waves swept against the banks, almost driving ashore the three small boats moored there. The furious elements conducted a prelude to a tragic symphony composed by the young wife of a farmer. The husband lay on the bed gasping for air. He tried to speak. Breath was more important than words. The young wife knelt at his side; her tears fell as thick as raindrops outside the cottage. Their only son, Xiaobao, was asleep in the crib. The husband's gasps became laborious. The young wife sprang up and threw herself upon him, crying out, "Jiqin! Jiqin! How can you leave us alone in this world!" The cry startled the sleeping boy and he also began to cry. But the cries of mother and son couldn't wake the man who had stopped breathing and slept for good. "Oh, let me go with you to the other world," sobbed Young Mrs. Wei, as her hands loosened from the body. She fainted.

The next day, Young Mrs. Wei herself broke the news of Wei Jiqin's death to his grand-uncle, Wei Yuzhong, head of the Wei clan. Wei was seventy-one, a big landlord, a tough patriarch who had been magistrate in a neighboring county. Any major clan event had to be reported to him, and he had to approve it. He was the driver of the carriage of the Wei, people said, and he kept a tight rein on it. He had a wife, a concubine, four sons, and a daughter.

"Ah, what misfortune befalls the Wei, that such a brilliant young man should have met his untimely death," said Wei Yuzhong to Young Mrs. Wei. "You have my great sympathy. Here is a hundred *yuan* as my contribution to his funeral expenses."

The man called Old Wei measured his words to his grandniece-in-law. He cleared his throat, as if choked by grief for his grandnephew, before continuing: "I'm an enlightened man. You would have my consent to remarry, if it were not for Jiqin's son, Xiaobao. He is the only male descendent of your family. You and I have the duty to give him a good education. The fifty *mu* of rice fields ought to be enough for you both to live a decent life. If you run into difficulty, don't hesitate to let me know. I'll do my best to help you. I am head of the clan, and so I must take care of every member."

He clapped his little Manchurian cap on his head.

Young Mrs. Wei stood deferentially before the old man, her head low, her hands down. Torn between anticipation and despair, she was thrown into confusion. After an agonized silence, she burst out: "Don't people say that you can marry freely now when your husband dies?"

"Who has told you such nonsense?" Old Wei replied sharply. "I wouldn't say a wife must remain chaste after her husband's death — if she has no son, nor any way of sustaining herself, though there are many who would prefer death to remarriage. That is the virtue of Chinese women; it is also a sign of what in the West they call true love between man and wife."

His stern speech silenced Young Mrs. Wei and everyone else. People knew it would be futile to contradict what the old man said. He was not only leader of the clan but an influential man in the city. Wei Lihua had to withdraw.

Wei Lihua, known as Young Mrs. Wei, was a daughter of a peasant of medium-sized holdings. Her maiden name was Shen Lihua. She had finished her primary schooling at fifteen, as a pretty girl well known in the neighboring villages. Her late husband, then aged nineteen, was a recent graduate of the middle school. He had courted Shen Lihua for a long while, despite his mother's opposition.

"I asked the fortune teller for advice. He said that the date and hour of her birth were not compatible with yours. They will offend mine, also," his mother had scolded. "Besides, her father is poor, a very small farmer. You and she are not of equal status. No child of the Wei would marry such a girl."

But the son's passion for Shen Lihua defeated his mother's opposition. Ten years before, Old Mrs. Wei had been widowed. Since the death of her husband she had endured much mental torment while rearing her only son, Jiqin.

"Society has changed. A parent's word no longer counts. I have to consent, but I do it reluctantly," she told her relatives and friends.

As fate would have it, a year after her son's marriage the mother died of typhoid fever without ever seeing her grandson. Three years after her mother-in-law's death, Lihua became a widow.

Thus, Young Mrs. Wei became the talk of Qijiangkou and its neighboring villages. Some pointed their finger at her, calling her untouchable, an evil-courting woman. But others felt sympathy for her and her unfortunate family. When her son, Xiaobao, played with other boys and girls, the people whose minds were dominated by superstition quietly took their children away. The boy began to feel rather isolated.

Young Mrs. Wei had a neighbor, Mrs. Zhang, five years older than herself, who had married a cotton salesman from Shanghai, Mr. Zhang. She had returned to Ningbo three years after her husband's death. She had a son called Xiaoyong.

Young Mrs. Wei employed two farm hands, Uncle Fan and Liu Dahai. Uncle Fan had been a small-farmer once. He had owned ten *mu* of rice fields; but a drought in 1926, and an illness the next year, had ruined his fields and his health. He had sold the land and gone to work for the Wei. Liu Dahai was twenty-seven. He was a capable hand, good at ploughing, transplanting, weeding, spreading manure. He had been born into a poor peasant family. When he was nine he began to work in the fields, shouldering a part of his family's burden. During the big flood of 1928, his family's thatched cottage had been washed away; his old grandmother and his father were drowned. His mother sold their three *mu* of land to bury the dead. Weeping, she had torn herself away from her only son, and remarried. The boy was then seventeen. He was forced to live with his uncle, also a poor peasant. Though he worked hard for his uncle, he was not treated well; the old man had not even been able to feed his own family. At eighteen, Dahai had gone to work for Old Mrs. Wei, earning his living as a farmhand. The Wei had liked their young hand, who was honest and hard-working.

Now that Old Mrs. Wei and Mr. Wei were dead, he worked all the harder. With Uncle Fan, Dahai managed to plant the fifty *mu* of rice fields, so that Young Mrs. Wei and Xiaobao lived a fairly comfortable life. Young Mrs. Wei ran a small *dofu* shop, partly because she wanted to earn some cash, partly because she was a bit bored at home. She knew how to make *dofu*; her father had been good at it. She soaked the beans overnight; early in the morning she ground and boiled them. Around eight o'clock, Dahai would come and put the bean mash in the big, bag-shaped press, then

squeeze until the bean-milk flowed into pails. Finally, he would mix a little brine with the milk, so that the *dofu* set. Young Mrs. Wei herself sold the *dofu* in the workshop. The white, jelly-like *dofu* brought approving comments and sold well.

Little by little, the daily meeting of Young Mrs. Wei and Dahai gave rise to feelings they had never known and could not explain. Casually, their eyes met; fingers brushed against fingers. One's head bowed, the other's lifted. Their hearts beat with what they had no words to say. By eight o'clock, Young Mrs. Wei would look innocently out the window, as if to watch birds in the trees or frogs in the pond. She would pull firewood from the oven, then put it back, for no reason at all. Minute by minute she grew more restless. She brushed non-existent dust from her clothes. Her face flushed, and not just because she stood too close to the oven. Her hands trembled a little as she struggled against any thought of passion. She tried to stem the emotions rising to flood her mind. Her struggle ceased when Dahai crossed the threshold, but she never looked at him directly, or smiled at him, or revealed what a young widow should never show a man. In summer it was so hot in the workshop that Dahai stripped to the waist when he worked the press. The muscles of his arms were taut. Young Mrs. Wei stole glances at his broad chest. Oh, the strength of a young man! How it challenges a young widow. "Food and sex are part of human nature," says Mencius. Her heart beat wildly. She exerted every ounce of her strength to recover her composure. She said to him: "Shall I bring the pail over?" when the pail stood next to Dahai. She had to be careful; people would begin to gossip.

It was a late-summer morning, close and cloudy. Dahai had finished weeding and was on his way to the *dofu* shop. When he saw heavy smoke rising in the distance, he knew the cause at once, and ran desperately to the workshop. A mule stood by a pond: he mounted quickly, using a willow-withe as a whip. Within minutes he had reached the shop, which was wrapped in flames. He leaped from the mule and rushed into the burning building. He found his young mistress lying unconscious beside the millstone. The window belched heavy smoke; the angry fire licked at his clothes. He lifted her in his strong arms and carried her outdoors, where he lay her down on a carpet of grass. The sleeves of her blouse were burnt. By that time, the neighbors had arrived. They laid her in an ox-cart and took her to Mrs. Zhang's house. Mrs. Zhang settled her in a small room, and vowed to take care of her and her young son.

When Young Mrs. Wei opened her eyes, the two women wept. Mrs. Zhang did not know how to comfort her neighbor; yet, who but another widow would know her heart? Hot tears stung Young Mrs. Wei's burnt face. When Mrs. Zhang told her that Dahai had rescued her from the fire, her tear-washed face glowed. "Oh, it was he. . . ." Her sentence ended with a sigh. She closed her eyes again.

"There, there. He's a good man, and he's honest," said Mrs. Zhang. "You can recuperate here. Who will care for us? Men can remarry any time they choose when their wife dies. The law says, One man can have only one woman. Bullshit! Old Fang Minyuan at Xilong Village has already had four concubines! Last month he bought a fifth one from a brothel! Has the law done anything against him? The town magistrate even praised him! Says he has rescued a prostitute and made her a decent woman. A good deed, indeed! When Dahai comes to my house I'll ask him to dinner. You can join us. He has saved your life, after all."

Mrs. Zhang was filled with indignation against the injustice of it all. Young Mrs. Wei opened her eyes again; they were filled with tears.

The next day, Dahai passed by Mrs. Zhang's house. He walked briskly, then halted, then strode away; but Mrs. Zhang's son called after him: "Dahai, my mother asks if you would repair a broken door. Would you like to come in?"

Mrs. Zhang seated Dahai in the outer room and chatted with him about rebuilding the *dofu* shop, and forgot about the broken door. Dahai said it wouldn't take much time or money to rebuild; but as for how to do it, he had to listen to his mistress's thoughts. Mrs. Zhang laughed gently: "Let me take you to see your mistress: she's in the inner room. I'm very interested in *dofu*, too!"

She led Dahai into the inner room, then withdrew and left him alone with Young Mrs. Wei. Young Mrs. Wei lay on the bed moaning softly, her eyes closed. The burns still hurt badly. Dahai stood in front of her, at a loss for what to say or do, but Young Mrs. Wei felt the heat of his body. She opened her eyes, and saw the man she had just been dreaming about.

"So you came," she murmured, with an effort. "How did you get here? Did anybody see you?"

"I was passing by, on my way to my uncle's," stammered the young man. His face had turned as red as Young Mrs. Wei's. "But how bad were you burned? How did it happen?" he asked in a low voice.

"One of my arms still hurts very much." Hesitantly she began to draw her right arm from under the blanket. In spite of herself, she uttered a small cry. Her cry pierced his heart, and he fell at her side and helped her move her arm.

"I was too careless. I laid too much straw in the oven. I left for just a minute for —" she paused, "for the latrine. When I got back, the straw was burning outside the oven. I tried to beat the fire down." She stopped speaking, choked not by the memory of smoke, but by excitement.

"Ah, you should have left the shop at once and called for help!" For the first time, Dahai criticized his mistress. Her account of the accident had hurt him.

"The beam caught fire so quickly," she went on. "I knew I was in danger. I was going to leave, but the smoke choked me. I crawled away, a few steps, but it smothered me and I was coughing. I had nearly passed out when I felt someone carry me in his arms. —I didn't know it was you." The tears she shed now could have put out the workshop fire.

"When I saw the fire on your arms I rushed for you and carried you out," he said. "Funny, I didn't even know my left arm was hurt." He showed her the burn. She touched it gently.

"Does it hurt now?" she asked, with a little smile.

"No, no, not at all. I never felt it hurt."

"So you're a brute, not a human being. You don't feel hurt."

"Oh, brutes feel hurt. They shriek and dodge when I crack my whip."

"Then you're worse than a brute."

Mrs. Zhang's voice called, "Dinner's ready."

"You'd better go," Young Mrs. Wei said. "I can't sit up and eat. In a few days I'll be home again. I'll see you then."

His eyes spoke a swift, bright good-bye to her, and he left.

Dahai was not only a good hand, but a playmate for Xiaobao. In spring, he brought the boy small fishes or shrimps in a bottle, and in the fall, brought grasshoppers or crickets in matchboxes. He helped Xiaobao when other children tried to bully him.



The Fifth Day of the Fifth Moon is a traditional festival known to the West as the Dragon Boat Festival. It takes its name from the boat race people hold to commemorate the great patriotic poet Qu Yuan, to search once more, they say, for the drowned poet in the river.

The Dragon Boat Festival of 1938 fell on a very hot day. Qijiangkou was a busy place. People had long been preparing for the boat race. For several days in a row children crowded along the banks of the Yong river, watching the boats being painted. A platform for distinguished guests was under construction. Old Mr. Wei, being an important gentleman of Qijiangkou, would of course be invited. In that season, farmers weeded in the early rice fields; but Old Wei summoned Dahai from his farmwork to help build the platform, because he knew carpentry. The day of the Festival neared. The villagers sped up construction. Boys crowded around the site, picking up bits of wood for sword fights. Young girls used left-over paper for making pinwheels and small flags. They all ran back and forth, shouting in their high-pitched voices, laughing and chasing one other. Xiaobao and Xiaoyong were among them.

"Hey! It's so hot, let's go swimming!" Xiaoyong shouted. A dozen boys shouted back, "Let's go!" They ran to the riverside, ripped off their clothes, and jumped in the broad Yong. The young girls stood on the bank watching them, waving their pinwheels and small flags. Periodically, a cheer went up for the boy who swam fastest. Xiaoyong and a boy with a shaved head were strong swimmers. They left Xiaobao and the others behind. Xiaobao stroked desperately, unable to catch up. The children saw him sink, gulping mouthfuls of water. The girls cried: "Help! Help!"

Dahai was nailing a board to the main frame of the platform. Hearing the girls' shouts, he looked, and spotted Xiaobao. He threw down his hammer and raced to the river. Stroking fast and powerfully, he swam against the current and reached the sinking boy, whose hair alone was visible above the water. Dahai grabbed the boy's arm and lifted him above the water. Straining, he dragged the boy to the bank. There, he laid him on the ground and pumped his stomach, until the boy threw up water. Soon he awoke and began to cry. Dahai wrapped the boy in his clothes and, carrying him on his back, squeezed through the crowd which instantly had collected from nowhere. Everyone was talking. Several old women whispered together, pointing at Xiaobao.

"That boy can survive this disaster. But, sooner or later, he'll certainly see his daddy and granny."

"That's right. That's a hundred percent certain. You bet he will. That Shen Lihua is a bitch of the worst kind. Young master Wei had only himself to blame. How could he be so blind as to marry this fox-woman, when the hour and date of their birth didn't match?"

"She is disgusting. I hear she's secretly attached to Dahai, who's a bumpkin with no money. He's her hired farmhand. How could she be so shameless and low? She's certainly tarnished the reputation of the Wei."

"We need to keep our eyes open. Such a wicked bitch will come to no good. She's murdered her husband and her mother-in-law. Now she's going to murder her own son."

"Such a shameless slut ought to be confined to her own house. Shouldn't be allowed to go beyond her front doorstep. I'll suggest it to Old Wei."

Amid curses and defamation, Dahai ran as fast as he could to Xiaobao's house. But he met Young Mrs. Wei on the way. The neighbor's children had told her that her son had nearly drowned. She had rushed from her house and down the river-path, where she met Dahai. How tightly the mother held her child. She wept bitterly. By the

time they had returned home, Xiaobao was still very weak, but he grabbed Dahai's leg and would not let him go. Young Mrs. Wei asked him to stay for supper. The three sat facing each other at the dinner table. None had any appetite. Xiaobao looked at Dahai with childish gratitude, and with his chopsticks pressed a piece of pork against the man's lips. Dahai kept his mouth closed, and it was smeared with pork fat. This provoked a smile from Young Mrs. Wei. She said to Dahai: "Eat it quickly, or the pork will slip from the cat's mouth." In spite of herself, she began to laugh; but then her face reddened because of her thoughtless allusion. Under pressure from mother and son, Dahai had to swallow the pork, but his head hung lower and lower. He stared at Young Mrs. Wei's pretty feet, his heart racing as fast as when he had carried the boy home. When supper was over, Xiaobao still wouldn't let him leave, but Young Mrs. Wei said, "Let him go. He'll come again tomorrow."

"Come with a praying mantis! Don't forget!" Xiaobao ran after him, shouting. Young Mrs. Wei halted at the front door, but her eyes ventured out into the dark night.

The rumor spread that Dahai had spent the night with his young mistress.

One day in early autumn, four ladies were playing mahjongg at Young Mrs. Wei's: Mrs. Zhang; Mrs. Li, from the neighboring village; Miss Rong, a neighbor of Young Mrs. Wei's and senior middle-school graduate; and Young Mrs. Wei.

"Why, you've grown thinner — what's wrong?" Miss Rong exclaimed, looking at Young Mrs. Wei's pale face. The other women looked up at her.

"She's still not recovered from her burns," said Mrs. Zhang.

"Oh, I'm all right. Only, I've lost my appetite," said Young Mrs. Wei.

"I'm afraid malicious gossip is worse than a burn," said Miss Rong. "How hateful those wicked tongues are! Nosing about into everyone's privacy. The 'three obediences and four virtues' still shackle women, even as our nation is changing. We are still bound by that feudal nonsense. I won't tolerate it anymore! I declare openly that I will have freedom in marriage. I'll marry whomever I love. I'll say to him openly, 'I love you,' and marry him. I admire any brave young man who defies feudalism! The brave man will win a girl's heart!"

Her vehemence left the other women speechless. They didn't quite know what "feudalism" meant, but they looked at Miss Rong with admiration, mixed with slight consternation.

"I don't care what those gossip-mongers talk about. I have a clear conscience. I've never done anything against my dead husband," said Young Mrs. Wei softly.

"What if you *had* done something against him!" cried Miss Rong. Her voice was raised. "Your husband is dead. Why should a living wife be made a walking burial-object? That's as bullshit as bullshit can be! Of course, when your husband is alive, you should be faithful to him. Still, it's not a one-way love. If the guy turns out to be unworthy of you, you just leave him. Divorce is a modern weapon against husbands like that. Don't mind how the village tongues wag, Lihua. Go your own way. If you have a man in your heart, don't wait to tell him you love him."

"Easier said than done." Young Mrs. Wei bowed her head and continued her game in silence; but her mind had lost its composure, and she lost the game that day. Miss Rong was the only winner.

The next day Mrs. Zhang brought some fresh sword fish from the market for Young Mrs. Wei. She cooked the fish but didn't eat much, for she didn't care for dead salt-water fish: it was too "fishy." She gave it to Xiaobao, and said she'd like to have some live silver carp to stimulate her poor appetite. Early the next day, Xiaobao went to

the rice field to find Dahai and ask him for some live carp. Dahai promised to deliver them later that day. At four o'clock that afternoon, Dahai brought Xiaobao a big bottle of live fish. The small fish darted to and fro, trying to break through their transparent cell. When Xiaobao cheerfully presented the bottle to his mother, Young Mrs. Wei was puzzled.

"I give you these to stimulate your appetite," said the boy, placing the bottle in his mother's hands. She couldn't help laughing, and said that such little fish were only playthings, certainly not grown up enough for the table. Xiaobao walked away disappointed. He told Dahai that the fish were alive, but they hadn't lived to be big enough for food. Dahai laughed and said he would get a big live fish one of these days.

Late one hot afternoon, Dahai came to Young Mrs. Wei's house stripped to the waist and with a fish-basket on his back. Xiaobao hadn't returned yet from Mrs. Zhang's, where he played with Xiaoyong and the other boys.

Young Mrs. Wei sat under the eaves, fanning herself, daydreaming. She was dressed in a short-sleeved blouse and a white skirt. The fair skin of her arms and calves was inviting; a man could hardly look away. She didn't notice the man's approach until the fish jumped inside the basket and interrupted her reverie. Before her stood the figure that had so often slipped into her dreams. For a moment she had no idea what to say, while Dahai tried to make an excuse for visiting her so late in the day. He was tall, robust, masculine; he stood before her, and his body gave off heat. She tried to rise, but her knees gave way. At last, she stood up.

"So you came."

"Yes, I came because Xiaobao said you wanted some live river-fish to stimulate your appetite. Here are two silver carp. I just caught them," he stammered, while unpacking his basket. Young Mrs. Wei's face flushed. She looked into the basket. One of the fish jumped, suddenly, and hit her on the mouth. She was more startled than the fish, and cried out, "Oh, what a naughty fish!" This set the farmhand laughing. Quickly his big hands subdued the fish. Then its mate leaped, and landed next to it on the ground. Young Mrs. Wei, feeling bold, placed her hands on the second fish, which began to flap madly about. She struggled to hold it as it grew madder and madder. Dahai, having tossed the first fish back into the basket, came to her rescue.

At such a desperate moment, of course, prudence, as described in *The Story of the West Chamber*, was impossible to exercise. Roughly he covered his mistress' hands with his own and pressed down on the huge fish. Flesh upon flesh: the contact thrilled them, and quieted the fish. They felt weak. And 's-s-s': the fish slid from between their joined hands and slipped under the leg of a chair. Young Mrs. Wei looked up into Dahai's face and smiled.

"How naughty and mad you are!" she scolded the fish. Her heart was madder than the fish's. She stood up.

"You can catch it in water, but you can't catch it on land! You really are a silly good-for-nothing. Now, gather them into the basket and clean them. I'll cook. I'm already hungry. Stay and share this delicacy with me." Her voice went from gentle to soft. She felt an inner warmth that was not from the autumn sun.

"Yes, Miss Rong is right. Women should break their feudal shackles. To hell with the 'three obediences and the four virtues,'" she thought.

That evening Young Mrs. Wei cooked a huge dinner. The appetite she had lost was fully recovered. Xiaobao clung to Dahai. Dahai hugged and tickled him till the boy

laughed himself almost helpless. It grew late. Xiaobao went to bed. And going to bed were the couple drunk on the bliss of youth.

Oh, let the shackles of feudalism break up, piece by piece! Let all wag their tongues as much as they like! The bed curtain falls, and two souls rise to paradise.

Dahai left Young Mrs. Wei's house before dawn, but gossip traveled fast through the village. "To think that a well-to-do widow should have fallen in love with a cheap hired farm hand!"

"I bet she's got a sexual mania," sniggered an elderly man in a dark green gown, who kept inhaling from his emerald snuff bottle. "Could it be that her desire can only be satisfied by such a rough hired hand? But will Old Wei tolerate it?"

"Dahai won't live long. No one who married her would live long," a wrinkled face said mysteriously.

"Such a bitch will ruin the reputation of the village. Old Wei will do something, I'm sure," a thin, bearded man said, grinding his teeth.

"Well you shouldn't talk about her like that. She wants to marry. That's her own business," a middle-aged woman cut in.

The news finally reached the ear of Old Wei.

"That slut dares to carry on a clandestine love affair. It's an outrage. She's ruined the reputation of the Wei. Tomorrow I'll send my men to bring her here. I'll make it hot for her," said Old Wei angrily.

"Oh, master," said Cuihua, his concubine. "Don't be so excited."

She then put her mouth to the ear of the old man. The old man nodded. "An excellent idea. Wonderful!"

The next day Old Wei summoned some young gangsters from other villages and instructed them personally about what line of action to take.

On an early autumn night in 1938, the waxing moon looked down on the Yong River, whose gentle flow, having lulled children into their dream land, hummed the night's millennial old songs for happy and unhappy folk. And the moon sharpened her eyes to observe the nocturnal activities of mice and men. She saw six living beings in black tunics, stealthier than the creatures of the night, move toward the house of Young Mrs. Wei. One climbed over the wall by standing on the back of another, then on the spine of a third. Noiselessly, he landed in the courtyard, then opened the bolted door for his comrades. One after another, they crept up to the window of the widow's room. Two carried ropes, another a sword, the rest, flashlights, clubs, or bare fists hard as rocks. They listened for the slightest rustle in the room, or any whisper in a dream. Some of them pressed their ears to the window pane. But they found nothing unusual, except a pain, self-inflicted, in their hearts. They waited, crouched or prone, their sides and knees aching. They endured this hardship for the sake of the hard money promised them by the head of the clan. Just as someone thought of withdrawing, the man with the sword heard a short snore. He waved the sword and broke the window, as with a flung stone. How quickly a man's feet can fly! They sprang upon the bed, and found two occupants, not one. What an assault followed! Clubs and fists rained down on the blanket from head to foot. Two flashlights pierced the darkness like lightning bolts. Tearing at the skin, binding trembling, resisting limbs fast, the attackers were victorious. They conquered the room in a blitzkrieg and captured its two residents.

The news was sent at once to Old Wei's hall. He was waiting in gown and cap, and he arrived in a sedan chair within fifteen minutes. He found Young Mrs. Wei's courtyard cold and damp, but bright with burning candles. The prisoners were

brought in on their knees before him. Old Wei frowned; then, he smiled. He ordered his men to cover the naked woman. The prisoners knelt on the stone floor, their backs and legs covered with a pattern of bruises. Xiaobao was trembling and crying, not knowing why his mother had been beaten and humiliated.

“What a nice scene you two have made! Shameless. Who could have expected it? You’ve disgraced the Wei. This is more than I can tolerate. According to clan discipline, both of you should be clubbed to death, or burned alive.”

Young Mrs. Wei bent her head low. She was overcome by an undeserved shame. Tears flooded her cheeks, but she showed no repentance.

“It is my fault. Dahai had nothing to do with it,” she said, between sobs.

“Well, well, it’s a ticklish matter, but we still have time to make amends,” said Old Wei helplessly. “I didn’t know this had happened tonight, until my men awakened me. I rushed here to see how to save the face of the Wei. I don’t want to wash our dirty linen in public. All of us present must keep this to ourselves. No one is allowed to speak of what has happened here, or he’ll be dealt with severely. As for the magistrate, he is my intimate friend, and I have men in court who can hush the whole thing up. Of course, I’ll do my best as head of the clan. But I’ll have to pay handsomely to keep their mouths shut and their eyes closed. If you can pay that money, I can assure you that what has happened here will be forgotten. Ah my grand-niece, you young women should behave more prudently.”

“Yes, I am willing to pay. But I have no cash just now,” Young Mrs. Wei nodded slowly.

“That doesn’t matter. I can advance it for you. You can simply give me the deed of twenty *mu* of your rice fields as a mortgage. Well. You men! Untie the ropes and let these two get dressed. You two must have had a hard time. Now,” he turned to his retainers, “all of you: go back to where you came from. This was really disgusting — no wonder you acted so fiercely. But she is my grand-niece. For my sake, keep the whole thing quiet. Let it pass. After all, she is a member of the Wei.” Turning to his grandniece-in-law, he said: “Where is the deed? I’ll need it now to raise mortgage money tomorrow.”

Young Mrs. Wei and Dahai struggled to their feet and got dressed. The widow took the deed from her drawer, and the young man limped away. The thugs had slipped off, one by one, before Old Wei returned to his sedan chair.

Old Wei was quite carried away by his windfall. He rewarded his concubine with kisses and a gold necklace. The kisses, and his bad breath, she avoided by slipping under the blanket, but the golden reward thrilled her. It was a testimonial to her wisdom, not his generosity.

A few days later the concubine whispered again in the old man’s ear, so long, so close to his face that her breathy instructions left faint lipstick marks on the old man’s face — a bit like an M, a little O: funny initials for “My Old Man.” Old Wei frowned, then was flattered. Money meant more to him than a good name or an honest woman.

For a week, Young Mrs. Wei shut herself in. Xiaobao was told to say nothing to anybody. Her old mother came to visit. Young Mrs. Wei told her that one foggy evening she had been stopped by three gangsters, who had tried to rob her of her rings. She had resisted, she said, but had been beaten from head to foot. It was a mercy that she had escaped with no broken bones.

Her story moved the old woman to tears. “What terrible fortune my daughter has had. First, she lost her mother-in-law; then, her husband. Now, robbed by gangsters, she almost lost her life.” Full of remorse, the old woman blamed herself for

her daughter's misfortune; for, its only cause, she believed, was that, in her previous life, she herself had done few good deeds.

Dahai, when asked about his bruises and his limp, blamed an unworthy friend to whom he had lent money two years before, and who had refused to pay it back. Instead, he had rounded up a gang of hoodlums and beaten Dahai with fists and clubs, nearly breaking his neck. "Kindness is requited with enmity," people couldn't help sighing.

But there also were people nosing around, hoping to discover new, more interesting information. Second Aunt Huang was trying to figure out why the bodies of Young Mrs. Wei and Dahai bore similar wounds in similar places.

"Odd," she said. "It's like they were Siamese twins. One is hit in the head, the other's head is bruised, too. One is beaten on the legs, and the other is limping. Two accidents on the same day. Two people seem depressed. The whole thing sounds fishy. Wheels are turning within wheels."

She gossiped to everyone she met.

"The world has changed. Morality is thrown aside, and all this horseshit about freedom to choose your husband or wife becomes the new rule. The whole world is degraded," said some of the elderly people, echoing Second Aunt Huang.

"You must respect the privacy of other people, good Second Aunt Huang," said Miss Rong severely to the old woman. "Matters of the heart are especially private. According to the law, intruding on other peoples' privacy is a sin."

"Where are your manners! Where's His Majesty's law!" The old aunt flared up. "I could be your mother. I carried you in my arms when you were a baby. Should you talk to me like that? No wonder His Majesty's law is no longer enforced. No wonder the world is in such disorder!" She walked away in anger.

Young Mrs. Wei's wounds healed gradually. One day while she was cooking, there was a knock at the door. She told Xiaobao to be certain who it was before he let the caller in. The caller wouldn't give his name, and his gruff voice was unfamiliar. Xiaobao refused to open the door. The knocks became loud bangs. Young Mrs. Wei came and, through the closed door, asked who was there. A rough voice shouted that he was "Zhu." Young Mrs. Wei said she didn't know anyone of that name.

"Bitch, you really don't know me? But I know you. I saw your pretty face, and I saw your naked hips. Open the door quick, or I'll break it down!" Young Mrs. Wei recognized the voice of one of the thugs. She didn't know what to do next.

"Quick, or I won't be so easy on you," the man threatened.

"But why have you come here?" she asked timidly.

Another loud bang on the door, which shook under the blow. Young Mrs. Wei opened it. "This man tore my underwear," she thought. The memory shamed her, and, in spite of herself, she hung her head.

"Mr. Zhu, sit down, please" she said meekly. Zhu, a tall man and robust, about thirty, threw himself into the chair.

"My master, Old Mr. Wei, says your affair is causing too much trouble. You're the talk of the village. The magistrate was outraged when people accused you of offending public decency. He would have sent the police here, but Old Mr. Wei begged him not to. He's spent more than three thousand *yuan* on your case. The mortgage on your twenty *mu* of land was only for two thousand. Not enough. He's worried."

"What is to be done?"

“Well, Old Mr. Wei says, if you give him ten more *mu* of land for another mortgage, the thing can be settled. He sent me to see if you’d agree to his terms. If you do, he’ll come tomorrow for the deed. If not, the police will come, instead.”

“I can’t answer such a question so hastily. I have to think it over. Please, ask Mr. Wei to give me three days’ grace.”

“I took all this trouble to come here for nothing?” Zhu rolled his eyes, threatening the dejected woman. She put two one-*yuan* notes in the palm of his hand. He shrugged his shoulders, delight mixed with contempt, and darted from the house, quick as a rat.

Night fell. The lamp was dim. Before its flickering light, Young Mrs. Wei looked very thin. She opened the drawer and took out the deeds. She examined them, put them back, and shut the drawer again. She began to sob. “The horrible scandal. Malicious gossip. Blackmail,” she thought. “All of it a sword against my neck, a millstone on my back. How can my son and I live if ten more *mu* of land are gone? Will they extort money from me until nothing is left? Who can tell? Is no one fair and honest enough to protect me? Can I marry Dahai, as I wish to? It’s impossible. How women suffer under this feudal sun. They have no freedom to choose their men. Now that war has broken out, the world ought to change. But change never comes here. Old Wei and his kind always do exactly as they like. My fate is sealed, there’s no escape. Oh Heaven, Heaven, have you no mercy on Women! Why do you connive at Old Wei’s trickery? Don’t you tell us: ‘Good will be rewarded with good, and evil with evil’? Why can Old Wei and his kind enjoy everything at others’ expense? Oh Dahai, my dear, people say you and I have committed adultery. If it was that, it was justified. We’re both unmarried. We love each other. We want to marry. Who prevents us? We’re insulted, bullied, blackmailed. Oh Dahai, let’s leave this hellish world. I would rather suffer in Hell, where there is no hypocrisy.”

She grew quiet, and sat down at a small table. She scribbled a few words on a piece of paper, then hanged herself on the roofbeam.

*Dear Mama:*

*I’m sorry, I can’t stay with you anymore. I’m leaving this terrible world.*

*Please take care of my son. Everything I have is yours.*

*Lihua*

Young Mrs. Wei’s cry to Heaven, her appeal or her accusation, was lost on the stone-hearted Universe. Her son, Xiaobao, wept. Her old mother wept. A few people sighed; a few were angry; but others giggled and even laughed. That afternoon, a body was found floating on the Yong River, and was identified as that of Liu Dahai.

*Author's notes:*

One *mu* equals 0.165 acre.

In Old China, people believed in *fortune-tellers*. On the basis of the hour and date of their child's birth, they predicted whether his or her marriage would be a happy one, or whether it would court evil or bring misfortune to the family.

"*Food and sex are part of human nature*": The quotation, a famous one, is taken from Mencius (340 BC-278 BC), Chapter 11.

*Fifth Day of the Fifth Moon*: Qu Yuan (340 BC-278 BC), a patriotic poet of the State of Chu, drowned himself in a river when he learned that the State of Chu was about to fall.

'*fox-woman*': implying 'of a fox spirit'. In Chinese culture, a fox spirit usually refers to a female. She is pretty but loose in morals.

*sword-fish*: as called by Northeastern Chinese. It is a fish shaped like a belt; some English people in China also call it 'hair-tail fish.'

"*...pork will slip from the cat's mouth*": In Eastern China, a girl is often compared to a piece of pork, and a boy to a crying cat who wishes for the piece of pork, i.e., to marry the girl.

*The 'three obediences and four virtues'*: A feudal code of female behavior, enforced over two thousand years, until 1949. The three obediences were to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to son after the death of the husband. The four virtues were chastity, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work.

*The Story of the West Chamber*, a play by Wang Shifu of the Yu Dynasty (1279-1368). The play describes how a poor young scholar, Zhang Hong, falls in love with the daughter of the ex-premier Cui Yungying at a temple; and how, under the careful arrangement of Cui's maid Hongniang, they succeed in their love affair.

*in her previous life*: According to the Buddhist belief in transmigration of souls, human beings are subject to repeated cycles of life and death. When a person dies, his or her soul will, after a length of time, migrate to a foetus, to be reborn. If that person has done many good deeds in the previous life, he or she will be rich and successful in a subsequent life; and vice-versa.

"*Where's His Majesty's law?*": 'His Majesty' here refers to Fuyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He had long since abdicated. At that time, the year 1938, he was the puppet emperor of Manchuria, which was controlled by Japan, but some rural old people, ignorant of the situation, still regarded him as their ruler. As for the 'world' being in 'such disorder': the War of Resistance against Japan's aggression in Manchuria had been going on for about a year by then.

See also, "The Arched Bridge," Shi Zhecun, tr. Zuxin Ding. *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 4.



## FOUR POEMS

Eva Hung

### *A Kind of Small Talk*

'Do you know what it's like to die?'  
    Imagine a Chinese daughter asking her father this.  
'No. Just gone, not here anymore, I suppose.'  
    Father replied, accepting  
    once again the un-Chineseness  
    nourished by his life's decisions.

And so we made the crossing.  
I tried to talk about death:  
Knowledge acquired at second hand  
From a string of names—Segel,  
Klubber-Rose, Book of Living and Dying—  
You'd know them if you've travelled  
This way with someone you loved.  
You'd have been just as certain  
About the truth their every word told.

Then it was his turn.  
He talked about the funeral:  
No religious ceremonies, just something  
Simple and dignified  
Like your grandma's years ago.  
A large hall in the funeral parlor, but not the largest;  
Obituaries in two papers—named them both.  
You'll wear black, of course, not the Chinese white.  
We both smiled at the unthinkable thought  
Of us in a white wailing paper-money burning funeral.

We spoke in snatches, two conspirators  
Plotting in the intimate semi-darkness  
Enveloping the hospital room  
When the nurse was out of hearing.

*Fragments of a Life / a Death*

He is my first cousin—  
 In Chinese terms my brother—  
 Firmly and comfortably middle-aged now  
 With a business a Canadian passport  
 A housewifely wife two young daughters  
 His gait betrays the beginnings of a paunch.

At the funeral he sat in the second row  
 Behind the immediate family, but up close.  
 When was it that I last saw him?  
 A birthday party? New Year festival?  
 It had to be two or three years ago.  
 His proximity seemed unreal, his  
 Familiar face vaguely unfamiliar.  
 Our lives are parallel lines now  
 Running close, contact denied.

Then he touched his gold-rimmed spectacles  
 Eyes slightly misty.  
     I turned away.  
 ‘Eighth Uncle was the one,’ he said,  
 ‘Who bought me my first pair of glasses.’  
 I saw again  
     the quiet neglected boy  
 Looking at a new world through his glasses  
 Taken to a new school by Eighth Uncle  
 With unvoiced promises  
     of fees and books and other necessities  
 Knowing Eighth Uncle was not wealthy.

He is my first cousin—  
 In Chinese terms my brother.  
 Father saw to it  
     that it was so.

*I Never Dream of My Father*

I never dream of my father  
Cycling twenty miles each way to work.  
A small market town called Tai Po sent him off at dawn,  
The green valleys of Lam Tsuen cheered him on,  
Steep mountain paths pulled him up then  
Down to the Yuen Long Plains  
And a tiny village school.

Heavy rickety bike  
Black paint peeling:  
The kind used to make deliveries of  
Rice and paraffin and other daily necessities.  
He probably bought it third hand.

He cycled in the damp spring,  
In torrential summer rains,  
In the short golden autumn,  
In the wintry cold, his hands numb.

He was young then  
With a young family on his shoulders  
An old one in his heart  
The sandwiched generation

I never dream of my father  
With or without his bike

*My Father at Sea*

He was twenty  
 maybe twenty-one  
 slim, solitary  
 controlled—  
 at least convincingly so.

He took on board valuable possessions:  
 a thin quilt, a small pillow,  
 a cardboard case with a change of clothes.  
 He had his own cabin—  
     not much larger than a bed—  
 It was private space, the first he'd ever had.

The small ship swung  
 like a cradle in abusive hands.  
 He ate his meals, drunk his tea,  
 made his rounds, did the accounts  
 in countless oceanic parabolas.  
 He held more than his dinner down

The crew, all older men—  
     in the sense of 'old'  
     'most half a century ago—  
 was impressed by two things:  
 his sea-worthiness  
 and his diploma in civil engineering

In the good old days respect was easily gained;  
 no need to swear, flex muscles or turn to drink  
 Rough weather was a small price to pay  
 for this balmy time in the sea of his life.

It could have been his vocation.  
 But politics had its say  
     the China coast became forbidden land  
 grounding all merchant ships.  
 The war was in Korea,  
 one of its victims in Hong Kong

He was twenty-one  
 maybe twenty-two  
 grounded forever  
 except for short rides on passenger ferries.

## TRANSFORMATION

Ralph E. Pray

As a temporary resident of Japan from New Mexico, anxious to see as much of the country as possible, I left Yokohama to climb Mt. Fuji in late July. For the Japanese, to climb to the peak is the spiritual cleansing pilgrimage of a lifetime. Between 50,000 and 100,000 people of all ages walk up the mountain each summer season. I believed I was making the trip to see and photograph the surrounding view, and carried a camera on my journey.

The train leaving Yokohama dropped me off at Fujinomiya, a town at the base of Mt. Fuji. Not ten feet from the train car exit I was approached by an obviously friendly Japanese man about my age.

“I speak English,” he smiled.

“I need help and my Japanese is very poor,” I replied.

“Do you climb Fuji today?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered. “I have two days to visit your famous mountain and to climb to the top.”

“Where are your friends?” he asked.

“I’m alone,” I answered, “and travel very fast.”

As we conversed further it became apparent that his English was far better than my Japanese, and he understood even more than he could say. He was Ishikawa, a school teacher.

“You need a walking stick. You can buy one in the shop,” he explained, pointing to a nearby store.

The six-foot sticks of freshly carved wood were sturdy and fit the hand snugly. He picked one out, for which the shopkeeper received 120 yen.

“Come with me. You can start over there.” He pointed to a group of white-clad people lining up near a wide path, the starting point to climb Mt. Fuji.

“Why do the people wear white?” I asked.

“It is a tradition on Fuji,” he answered. “It is a ceremony.”

There is a saying about Mt. Fuji which translates into something like “A wise person climbs to the top of Fujiyama.” Viewed from my laboratory in far-off Yokohama, the majestic Fuji appeared to be a pinnacle from which Japan could be briefly held in the eye.

Now, at the base of the mountain, the only American in that part of Japan, on the only mountain in sight, my climb began. Mt. Fuji is not really a *climb*. It is a long, long zigzag walk on a firmly packed volcanic cinder path.

Entire well-provisioned families; large groups of chattering children dressed in neat uniforms; young couples with glances skittering over each other; solitary, frowning old men; and attractive women in unusual all-white kimonos, with silk parasols; were all walking single-file at the same pace up the winding trail. For several hours during the splendid summer afternoon I passed hundreds of people of all ages, talking in both English and Japanese. All of the teachers walking with children spoke a little English and appeared anxious to try it out on me. They particularly enjoyed

answering questions addressed to them in English, and made no attempt to teach Japanese words.

Every thirty minutes or so the trail widened, and a small rock house perched on the edge with family members hovering over an outdoor black stove. A teapot warmed on the grill. Each time I approached a teahouse, an old woman would come forward and bow repeatedly, calling in a sing-song invitation to come to the stove. A small cup of green tea was offered and, as one reached for the cup with one hand, the walking stick was gently disengaged from the other. A branding iron was then removed from the charcoal pit and the hot end applied to the stick. One of the teachers explained to me that each teahouse has its own brand, and as the mountain is ascended the stick becomes covered by the distinctive burn marks.

Late into the day, and halfway up the 12,388-foot mountain, many of the uniformed children crossed from the path going up to the path going down. I then found a large teahouse in which sleep was possible for a few hours.

Gray dawn arrived early and the trek continued up the side of the Divine Mountain. At about 10,000 feet of elevation the physical challenge began for me, and the hurried pace required a strong concentration on achieving the pinnacle.

Then, as the sun rose over the Pacific, all of the blues and greens rippled brightly out of the grayness below. Everything beautiful was now separate and far away from the plain cinder mountain. From high on the side of the massive declivity Fujiyama was no longer seen as a silken thread running through the everyday lives of the island people.

At the top of sacred Fuji-san I found a small post office, a shrine, and a teahouse. A friendly Shinto priest greeted me in front of the shrine and pinned a red-colored ribbon on my field jacket.

The objective of my climb, to see and photograph the vast expanse of land and sea below me, was forgotten. The camera, and the eyes, were useless beside the exhilaration of arrival. After viewing Fuji from afar in all its daily earth-sky transformations, and finally arriving at its peak, I began to understand the true reason for the stepwise ascension. One does not purposefully view Japan from Fuji. What is best perceived from the place where the earth meets the heavens may occur with the eyes closed.

Still out of breath from my pursuit of the peak, I wondered if seeking out spiritual awareness had more to offer than attaining it. Thus the suggestion of spiritual awareness is pictured in the mind on a higher plane than its possession. And climbing to the top of the mountain is to go to this suggestion.

It is really a journey into the heart, with a singular, strange, and unforgettable arrival at the great friend in the sky.

## AN AMERICAN TRAVELER IN THE BALKANS

Sandra Bain Cushman

In 1993, my husband, Stephen, and I moved our young family to Corfu for six months. The move was rugged. The winter was rugged, too. Icy winds sliced down off the snow-covered Albanian peaks, two kilometers away across the water. We had expected a sunny, travel-poster Greece; we had been poised to fall in love with Corfu, the Odyssean paradise. Instead, we moved right past the love affair into the marriage. From the start our relationship with Greece was a serious one. The water pipes froze every night. The phone and electricity didn't work when it rained, as it did in torrents through February and March. We spent a full week in February huddled in front of the olive-wood fire keeping warm next to racks of wet laundry. Heating oil is three or four times more expensive in Greece than it is in America.

It had dawned on us during that winter, when cold winds in Athens burned the skin off my fair ("ksanthos Amerikanos") two-year-old's cheeks, that Greece is a Balkan country. What we deduced meteorologically was borne out politically. Steve was teaching at Ionian University for the Fulbright Foundation, and for months during the conflict in Bosnia, he looked out from his classroom onto the decks of French and American aircraft carriers. Among them was the *Theodore Roosevelt*, which this past May mounted attacks on Serbia from the Ionian Sea.

When he expressed our nervousness about the political instability in the Balkans to his students, wondering if it was safe for our children to be in Corfu, they pointed out that in Greece we were much safer always than in America. Greeks, they told him, do not carry hand guns.

This past May, I returned to Greece for the fourth time, further straining my relationship with that Balkan nation, this time to accommodate the NATO air war in Yugoslavia. At the Athens airport, as I waited for my bag to appear, the warnings we received before my departure (my husband would be arriving in two days) came to mind: the British professor who informed Steve, "The only place you don't want to be in Europe right now is Greece"; the prospective landlord who, when told about my coming trip, grew suddenly grim and warned me to be careful; the friend of my mother who phoned daily to see if we had come to our senses and canceled; the friend of mine who left panicked messages begging me not to go.

A slightly tattered, yellow Dunlop bag tipped off the belt onto the carousel. Pinned to the side was a large tag reading "Doctors Without Borders." My first brush with the war. At the various airport information desks — the EOT, the tourist police (no hand guns here, but lots of thievery) — I received conflicting advice about finding a bus to nearby Varkiza. One woman told me, brusquely, that there was no bus; another, that I would have to go first to Piraeus, 45 minutes in the wrong direction before doubling back. I asked two policemen, who assured me that my bus was 50 metres up the road. Out of earshot, I laughed out loud at the characteristic Greek inconsistency in giving directions. I passed a line of air-conditioned buses, CHAT tours, cruises, Americans traveling with other Americans in behemoth coaches.

As I walked on in the mid-day heat, following the directions of the *astinomikoi*, because those were the most appealing, I hit a stretch of deserted road. I belted my packs a little more securely, remembering our friend who had had her purse grabbed in Athens the week before. Turning to pull a strap tighter, I ran straight into a bank of anti-NATO posters. Suddenly, I wasn't worried about losing my valuables. Hearing a scooter slow down behind me, I was worried about being an American in pro-Serb Greece.

At the main thoroughfare, I stopped at a kiosk for directions. I sensed hostility in the voice of the woman who directed me down the road to a station that, I found later, did not exist. After casting about in the heat for another 15 minutes, I discovered the stop I wanted was right in front of her kiosk.

The mid-day sun was blazing. A man in a van finished talking on his cell-phone and spun his tires aggressively inches from my foot. Boarding the bus, I imagined I felt cold stares on my back, on my bags with their prominent American logo. I asked the driver a question and was stymied by his barrage of Greek. A woman whose face had seemed a shade too hard the moment before, softened. "To telos," she said, and turned away. The end of the line.

On the next bus I began to draw into myself. It was I who made no eye contact, I who stood stiffly, inaccessible. When the bus approached a town, I turned to a woman on my right. "Varkiza?" I asked in Greek. No, she replied, Voula, Vari, Vouliagmeni, then Varkiza. "All Vitas." I couldn't help myself, referring to the Greek letter beginning every word. We struck up a conversation. Where she lived. Where I was going. How expensive hotels were in the spa town of Vouliagmeni.

Then came the question I dreaded. "Apo pou eiste;" Where are you from? I had worked this out ahead of time. Not what I had been advised to say — "From Canada" — but my own difficult truth. "Dustikos, apo tin Ameriki." Unfortunately, from America. Unfortunate for our conversation. Silence ensued. The bus whizzed past a Domino's Pizzeria. Shaking my head, I spoke. "O polemos." The war. The woman replied fervently, but not unkindly. "Einai poli kakos." It is very bad. Wholly bad. "Yes," I replied, "for everyone." I meant the sting in my voice. I was thinking about the rapes and massacres of Kosovar Albanians, against whom the Greeks harbor deep enmity. She, I felt, was thinking only of NATO's bombardment of the Serbs, whom the Greeks treat as friends and allies.

As the woman got off the bus, she turned and said, "Sto kalo." I returned the salutation. "Sto kalo." To the good.

I returned to Athens by bus from Varkiza to meet Steve. Near the National Gardens I ran straight into an anti-NATO demonstration. I wheeled around and walked in the other direction, away from the mass of people yelling through megaphones. Our few hours in Athens were punctuated by commentary about the war. The refined Athenian who owned the hotel drew her finger across her neck and said, emphatically, "Al-bright." The clerk in the pharmacy wanted to discuss the *vomvardismos* with Steve.

Days later, travelling by train west from Patras, we heard war planes for the first time. We heard them before we saw them: supersonic aircraft slicing through the sky over our heads. We were told they were Greek planes, on reconnaissance no doubt; old ones, bought from the U.S. after Vietnam.



We were on our way from Diakofto to Kastro, a small town in the western Peloponneses, where the Gulf of Corinth opens into the Ionian Sea. I had been in Greece a week, Steve five days. The Greek *filoxenia*, or famed hospitality, had prevailed so far, though the war was never far from anyone's mind. For every Greek face that hardened against us, two opened up, questioning, answering, lamenting. We had determined to keep to ourselves, hoping to appear less conspicuous; yet war-talk, punctuated by the inevitable "Apo pou eiste;" awaited us at every turn.

In Diakofto our caution had been justified. The grandmother with her baby grandson, the young men hanging out by the village spring, the middle-aged men on their street-side balconies, the alarmingly handsome gray-haired man: their eyes pierced us. Who were we? Were they suspicious of us, as they would be of any strangers in their midst? Or did these eyes that stayed on us moments too long express feelings about the war? We were certainly NATO. French? German? American?

We stopped before an anti-NATO poster and translated it. We noticed that the two offending flags were those of the European Union, on the upper right, and the U.S.A., on the upper left. With nineteen countries in NATO, one of which was Greece, the math was simple. The United States was perceived in Greece as eighteen times more responsible for the bombing than any single European nation. Below the flags in bold letters was written:

NATO  
oplo ton imperialiston  
EXTHROS  
ton laon tis eirinis

We translated this as:

NATO  
weapon of the imperialists  
ENEMY  
of the people of peace

The poster had been put out by the KKE, the Greek Communist Party, and was stamped with a red hammer and sickle. Walking back through town, I wondered which of the people we passed had put up the poster.

Early the next morning, we boarded a rack-and-pinion railway in Diakofto, bound for the mountain village of Kalavrita. We were going to visit the monument commemorating the 1943 Nazi massacre of the men and boys of this small Greek town. We arrived and, approaching a kiosk, I worked out my question in Greek. "Pou einai to mnmeio yia tous pethamenous;" Where is the monument for the dead? The woman was clear as Homer's gray-eyed Athene. She held my gaze as she directed us to the terraced stone path up the hill behind the village. On the way, I imagined Simon, my eight-year-old son, Sam, my twelve-year-old son, and Stephen, their father, being shoved brutally up the slope by the butts and points of Nazi machine guns. I imagined myself left behind to grieve for them.

When I reached the first marker, a large vertical brown stone tablet, Steve was beside me, and through my tears and his courageous silence, we translated together:

ON 13 12 1943  
ON THIS GROUND THE  
GERMAN CONQUERORS  
EXECUTED IN A MASS  
THE ENTIRE MALE POPULATION

OF KALAVRITA FROM TWELVE YEARS  
OF AGE AND ABOVE

I found no comfort in the fact that Simon, our younger son, would have been spared. How could we have survived together what I could barely survive alone? How much harder to compound the grief, the guilt, the loss?

The monument brings to mind the Vietnam Memorial on the Mall in Washington. This one, though, is white and reflects the fierce glare of the Greek sun. Huge tablets of white marble obscure a view of the higher ground where the executions took place. In order to reach the large white cross above, one must walk through the stone panels bearing the names of the slain. The first two list all those eighteen and younger who lost their lives. A boy of twelve, several of thirteen, fourteen. Below the final ascent, a sculpture stopped my progress upwards. It was a haunting likeness of a woman wound into brownish-grey stone, her grief turning her in on herself like a fetus, her face twisted so that before reading the plaque, I didn't know whose face it was: one of the men's, one of the boy's, or one of those left behind?

The inevitable coach pulled up as we reached the cross, and Steve and I braced for the onslaught of tourists. But out of the bus poured the Greek children who had been on our morning train, girls and boys from the *skoleio*, some perhaps as old as eleven. They scampered about, laughing and playing, while their teachers struggled to focus their attention on the monument and the history. Their history.

Looking out over the valley below, I knew that any valley in Kosovo would look much like this one, and that, right now, massacres similar to this one were being committed by Serbs. Would the Greek schoolteachers be teaching this to the children?

Back in the village, we again approached the kiosk, this time looking for the clock that was stopped at the hour of the execution. The woman, who, I suddenly realized, could have been a small girl in 1943, directed us to the lower, left-hand clock on the church and asked gently. "Germanoi;" Germans? "Oxi, apo tin Ameriki." This time I was glad to say it. No, from America. She gave me a big smile.

Later, at lunch time, Steve and I were trying to call home from a *taverna* in a tiny hamlet along the train line. Steve had enlisted the help of a Greek man from Australia, named Michael, who was negotiating with the owner of the *taverna* about using his phone for our credit card call. Suddenly I heard shouting, and, moving closer, heard Michael quickly translating. "He says 'Tell Bill Clinton to stop killing people. If he wants to kill Milosevic, tell him to go find Milosevic.'"

Arriving in Kastro just before *mesimeri*, or siesta time, we checked into an apartment for the night, and were greeted warmly by Katherine, a lovely woman who spoke seven languages. We inquired about a meal and were steered toward the tiny *taverna* run by a toothless grandmother named Toula. While we ate, Toula's five-year-old granddaughter, Nikoletta, played in the street where we sat, riding her bicycle, singing, inventing games. At the end of our meal Toula sat down at our table. She had no English, so we made do with our limited Greek. When she described the casualties from the NATO bombings that she had seen on television, tears ran down her lined face. We poured three small glasses of Toula's amber-colored wine. "Stin eirini," we toasted. To peace.

The next morning, before taking a ferry to the Ionian Islands, we talked again with Katherine, whose English was almost flawless. The subject, again, was the war and America's role in it. This time I articulated what I had withheld on the bus to Varkiza. "But what about the treatment of the Albanians by the Serbs?" Katherine's answer

amounted to “Yes, but...” The conversation moved quickly away. Again I was haunted by the impression that the suffering of Albanians is inconsequential in the minds of Greeks.

That evening we ate downstairs in the family restaurant. The wine this time was the color of garnets, and again the toast was to peace. After our meal, Katherine’s sister-in-law, Eirini, sat down at our table. We were charmed by her vivacious personality, and even more by her theory of politics. She spends several months of the year in Germany, and has decided that every person needs to have two *patrides*, or fatherlands. If this were so, Eirini surmised, we would all see the world in a less nationalistic, hence a less dangerous, way. We would be more inclined toward diplomacy, less inclined toward war.

How affirming, I thought, that her name is the name for peace; how curious, remembering what the Germans had done at Kalavrita.

We came home at the end of May. In the Peloponneses we had heard bitter recountings of past injustices perpetrated against the Greek communists after the Second World War, when the nations of the West had turned against the former Greek Resistance. We had seen NATO painted on rock walls with swastikas in the “O,” along with *swastika* = \$. Greeks had told us that America makes money by bombing Yugoslavia. We had seen signs and red paint on stone walls and abandoned buildings denouncing Americans, calling us *foniades*, murderers of the Serbians.

And, there was the NATO list of *lathi*, mistakes: bombing the refugee convoy; bombing the Chinese Embassy; bombing the maternity hospital. Katherine in Kastro told us about this, in detail: women giving birth in bunkers; tightly swaddled newborn babies being lined up “one after another after another” in an underground shelter.

But Greeks had ignored the persecution of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. They supported the Serbs, the Serbs supported Milosevic. Days after our return, he was indicted as a war criminal by the Hague Tribunal.

I must remember that NATO, led by my country, waged war and killed civilians. At the same time, I must remember that the Serbs massacred over 10,000 villagers in Kosovo. Above the monument in Kalavrita which marks the execution ground of over 1,000 men and boys, there is a small crypt-like structure. Around it, spelled out in whitewashed stones, read the words:

OXI PIA POLEMOI. EIRINI.  
No More Wars. Peace.

Setting white rocks in the ground is a simple gesture of hope, easily eclipsed by the enormity of the present war. Yet again I cannot help myself. *Elpizo*. I hope.

December 7th, 1997  
THE RATTLE SNAKE

Coral Hull

To live in this place he lost everything but his diamond scaled skin, then he even shed that before a goshawk swooped on him with talons spread, the cool air rising up through the claw from the tiny rocks of Arizona, the rattle snake was muscle rippling through air, he was a small river coursing its way through the sand along the valley floor, his eyes were catatonic black glass, reptilian, old and bright, you cannot wander in without being mystified, I saw the rattle snake extend his mouth to the size of a rodent and consume that which he had poisoned, before that moment the rodent hiding in the sandy ditch, her well constructed daytime nest, a wary crazy eye, her nervous body the only thing she had apart from the desert she lived in, the poor hungry rattle snake consuming her, with his endless stare, the look one very hungry human being might have, when trying to consume a section of food the size of a plate, because we have to eat, the look in the eye says, 'I am filling myself with food' it is a mindless helpless look, a look with a one-track mind, I have to fill myself with food look, whereas the desert rodent has the I am dead look, I did not want to suffer and die, but now look what has happened look, I am gone into the rattle snake's mouth, the scaly pink tail flicks good-bye, we are all relieved when the rodent's body is eaten, and the rattle snake is full, we hope that he will not have to kill for the rest of the summer, and we hope he wont be killed by the hungry goshawk, everything is starving on the desert of Arizona, is setting out its dinner table, everything else wanders right onto that plate and loses its life, the snake is driven by hunger down into the valley to the hunting grounds, it might look graceful and almost spiritual, but the rattle snake is muscling its way towards filling itself up, so that it can go on, we are thankful that the snake only has to hunt once every three weeks, and the rattle snake is thankful because his effort and existence

are at stake, with hunting there is the risk of food never caught, killed and consumed, there is the risk of death by hunger, with lingering hunger comes the trail to the dead world, the trail to death is being dug, the safe life is going in to dig at the first hunger pang, the desert sun reflects off the dry water of the ripple on the rattle snake's back, the death valley is a food bowl ingested into rivers of life, towards winter the rattle snake makes his way back to the cave, muscling away from the hunting area at the valley's bottom and up into the foothills, each year he shares the cave with other rattle snakes, he looks for a cave on the southern side, so the sun can warm the rock at the entrance, last year he was here, he rattled his way in past the other coils, including a poisonous lizard called a gilar monitor, he muscled past them and found a position, they all slept together for four months throughout winter, their heart beats quietened in the soft dry dust, every year they would all return to the same cave, from the refrigerator to the blankets, nobody knows about rattle snakes and that they take the same path each year for the rest of their lives, or that with each year of their survival another notch appears on their rattle, making it stronger and harder so that it can shake itself at the sun, at the blunt-nosed wood pig who comes too close into a clearing, and at the tricky goshawk casting her shadow on the rock, we are sorry for the little rodent, yet we are pleased that his small rattle has another notch, that something is surviving and becoming stronger in Arizona.

## Simon Perchik

Ankle deep it's Spring, these stones  
 already green —to keep from falling in  
 he's taught himself to limp, stutters  
 while I bathe the invisible dog  
 that clings to his chest, whose fur  
 bristling with gooseflesh half at the controls  
 half iron pail for the drinking cup

—he must dread the splash  
 is trained to wade slowly and where  
 the waves are buried, where these stones  
 harden, climb to that same altitude  
 they once flew —a sky  
 still slippery, filled all at once  
 with 12 dark-green stones

and he looks up, says my fingers  
 as if the spray reminded him  
 how his first breath is now too matted  
 though it tries to leap, its huge jaw  
 licking its paws —a few months each year

he wobbles into a water  
 that's falling off the Earth and he says  
 his fingers are too heavy, says  
 hold him, save him.

A Conversation about Publishing  
with SAMUEL S. VAUGHAN

Katherine McNamara

*“ I think the reader has rights.”*

*It has been remarked that book publishing as a so-called gentleman’s occupation began to change about the time the phrase publishing industry came into use, around the mid-1970s. If true, it marks nicely the beginning of the kind of change I have been interested in tracing in the business of making and selling books.*

*Is it true, however: has the gentleman’s occupation changed so much, so quickly? Perhaps my assumption is faulty? An editor and publisher of long experience told me that he’d like to take the notion of “gentleman’s occupation” and kick it in the head. I liked this and asked him to say more. He did, and a lively conversation ensued.*

*Substantially, however, what has changed in the business of making and selling books? For I think it can be agreed that enormous change has occurred. What sorts of people went into publishing then? Are they a different sort now? Are there fewer good books, more bad, than ever? Is the art of editing no longer practiced well in the trade? How can we speak of publishing “houses” after conglomeration? Do conglomerate managers know anything about books? I have been inquiring of distinguished representatives of an older generation, and of my own generation of the Sixties, what they thought about these questions.*

*Generously, these persons have told how they entered the book trade; spoken about writers they’ve published and declined to publish; described the (changing) class structure of their domain; talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism; described their way of practicing responsible publishing. Without exception, they are serious readers, usually of more than one language. They recognize that times have changed. They speak with wary-friendly observation of the generations coming up.*

*Excerpts of these conversations will continue to appear regularly in Archipelago and may serve as an opening into an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current corporate structure, reflecting on glories of its own, 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

*See also:*

*A Conversation with Marion Boyars, Archipelago, Vol. 1 No. 3*

*A Conversation with Cornelia and Michael Bessie, Vol. 1 No. 4 and Vol. 2, No. 1*

*A Conversation with William Strachan, Vol. 2, No. 4*

*“What He Says Is Gospel,” George Garrett, in this issue*

*Samuel S. Vaughan, Editor-at-large, Random House  
Former Editor-in-chief, President, and Publisher, Doubleday*

Samuel S. Vaughan entered the publishing trade in 1951, as a desk man for King Features Syndicate. The following year he joined the syndication department of Doubleday, where he learned the craft of cutting books into serials, then selling rights to newspapers. He was promoted to advertising manager (1954-56), then to sales manager (1956-58). From sales he moved to editorial, becoming a senior editor in 1958. Ten years later, he was made executive editor of Doubleday. In 1970 he was named publisher and president of the company and remained so for the next twelve years. From 1982 till 1985 he was editor-in-chief of Doubleday. The list of titles (it is incomplete) should indicate that he learned the art of publishing books from the ground up. He has done nearly every job in the trade, he supposed, except printing. "The equation of the publishing business is what I think I understood, and what the publisher is asked to understand and to deal with," he said. "It is the *major* elements that the publisher can affect. I liked all parts of publishing. I like the editorial job; I like the publishing and promotion, the advertising job; I like the sales jobs. It was important to me to give everybody a fair shake."

Sam Vaughan is known as a man of his word. "You can take what he says as gospel," the novelist George Garrett told me. A woman of wide experience in the business, whose first job had been as his assistant, said simply, "He is a great man."

Sam Vaughan, though claiming to be semi-retired, is at present editor-at-large at Random House, once a competitor of Doubleday; now both large companies are owned by the same German publishing company. A visitor to the Random House skyscraper signs in, is given a badge, and takes an express elevator to an upper floor, where she is met by a tall, courteous man resembling James Stewart in aspect and voice, who apologizes (unnecessarily) about his small, book-filled office. Thoughtfully, he has provided coffee. He is interested in what the other publishers have had to say, seeming to converse with them as much as with his caller. He takes issue with received ideas, and he is careful about facts.

I spoke with Sam Vaughan in the Spring of 1999; twice we met at his office, the third time at the august Century club, where he gave me a pleasant luncheon. He expressed interest in the theme of "institutional" memory, while commenting wryly on the capacity of his own. His is a fine, dry humor, without irony but rather, enlarged by compassion and honest indignation.

*A gentleman of contraries*

KATHERINE McNAMARA: You've, very engagingly, called yourself a "contrarian."

SAM VAUGHAN: It's a stock market term, and I'm not much of a financial wizard, but I just don't agree with much of the conventional current comment about publishing. Although in the beginning I did, because I was learning. Now I'm beyond learning.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What are you contrarian about?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, we're still selling trade books by the pound, pricing them according to weight, not intrinsic value, or the limits of the presumed market or audience as reflected in the first printing, or their likely ability to pay. Publishers are still letting untrained, inexperienced people loose on books, refusing to train or develop them except by the ancient system of an unstructured apprenticeship. And,



we allow myths to perpetuate. For example, I'm trying to write an introduction to a new edition of a fairly well-known publisher's memoir — that's an oxymoron — called *AN OCCUPATION FOR GENTLEMEN*, by Frederick Warburg. I want to talk about the impact of the title, because people have picked up on it: that this was such an occupation. What I'd like to kick in the head is the idea that publishing was an occupation for gentlemen. It has led to many misconceptions about the origins and nature of publishing.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Why do you say this?

SAM VAUGHAN: The word *gentleman*, it seems to me, doesn't have a precise definition, but it implies a person of independent means, who doesn't really have to work. In the Warburg memoir, the title comes from an anecdote. He was in conversation at a party with a man who was the head of Marks & Spencer, the big retailer. When Mr. Warburg said he was in publishing (after the usual 'What do you do?' kind of thing, which was not so common in London then) Mr. Marks-&-Spencer said, "Is publishing an occupation for gentlemen or is it a real business?"

I don't mean to say that there never have been gentlemen, by whatever definition, or gentlewomen, but the history of books and publishing is not a history of gentlemen dabbling in a pleasant occupation. As far as I can tell, the first books were in the hands of literate elites, meaning the church and high priests, scholars and scribes, who despite their exalted position were not exactly gentlemen. Then, following Gutenberg, publishing was often in the hands of printers and ultimately booksellers. They were tradesmen, sometimes middle-class. That's what we came out of, in large part.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Do you think the term "trade publishing" began, in fact, with the jobbing printers?

SAM VAUGHAN: As far I know, it begins with publishing for the retail book trade, as opposed to publishing for schools. A big part of publishing, now and for a long time, has been for schools and colleges and for libraries. I think the reference was to the book trade, i.e., booksellers.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: When would that have come about?

SAM VAUGHAN: I don't know that. English publishers in the 1920s and '30s had what they called a "trade counter" in the publishing house. The trade counter was — I'm laughing because of the contrast with the current scene — where the 'trade' was supposed to come and pick up their books. In a really aggressive house the publisher might have a person or two who took books out and carried them to the booksellers.

English publishing, when I first started to visit London, in the 1950s, was sort of frozen, *en gelée*. I remember an English publisher who did a lot of visiting back and forth. We were each doing the same book. I said, "Our jacket for the book is just ready, would you like to see it?" He said, "Well, yes, that would be very nice." We got the jacket out for him to look at. I held it up. He stared at it for awhile. I said, "Like it?" "Yes," he said, "but don't you think it's a little 'market-seeking'?"

That was a leftover attitude. In any case, I don't know whether the English were ever so uncommercial as they appeared to be.

On the other hand, German publishers tend, by-and-large, to be well-trained for business. My young assistant, Mr. Ulf Büchholz, is a case-in-point. He was trained by Bertelsmann [*owners of Random House, Inc. and Doubleday/Bantam/Dell*] in Germany. I once was one of the authors of a report for the Publishers Association, which I titled "The Accidental Profession." In Germany, publishing is much less

accidental. The bookseller is a professional, trained in a sort of guild-fashion. The relationship between the bookseller and the publisher is one of mutual respect.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: So, the phrase “the accidental profession” is yours?

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. We found that almost none of us had set out to be in book publishing — but were.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: How, then, did you come into this trade?

SAM VAUGHAN: I was like Mr. Marks-&-Spencer: I had never thought about book publishing as an occupation. I had thought about magazine-, but not book-, publishing.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: How were these different, would you say?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, I’d been an editor as an undergraduate of a magazine, a humor magazine first and a literary magazine second. And therefore I wanted to work in magazines; it was a form I thought I knew. But, fortunately for me, I didn’t work in magazines. Of course, in the ‘50s and ‘60s, mass-circulation magazines were about to encounter very heavy weather, and some disappeared.

The interesting difference, from the point of view of the writer, between a magazine- and a book-publisher is that, when you write for a magazine, the magazine owns the piece. You’re writing in the magazine’s voice, or you’re at least being edited by the magazine, and it tends to have a certain style. When you write a book, you’re really writing for yourself: you lease what you write to the publisher. So when publishers say, “I bought a book,” they misstate the case slightly. What they do is make a contract that gives them the right to vend the book in various forms, for a period of time. The author, always downtrodden and always fragile, is nonetheless the owner of what he or she created.

### *Learning the business*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you talk a bit about your background, where you were raised and educated?

SAM VAUGHAN: I was raised in Philadelphia, in the city itself, in the section called South Philadelphia. And my wife was born a block away. Well, Jo is half Italian by ancestry and I’m not at all Italian by ancestry. My folks were leftover WASPs, and so I had the delightful experience of learning how to be a WASP minority. With a name like Sam, and a long nose, and a Welsh surname, going to school was quite colorful. But because my parents spoke English, I had a head-start program of my own, and, therefore, my teachers treated me very well, and I got the idea I was smart. And, despite the evidence of later years, I never quite gave it up. I went to Penn State, and, as I said, I majored in putting out undergraduate magazines. Terrible student in high school and in college. But I did learn something about pasting up off-set proofs, selling advertising, and trying to get writers — people who said they were writers — to write.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You read, though; a lot?

SAM VAUGHAN: I’m poorly-read. I suppose a number of people in publishing secretly feel that, because we’re surrounded by books. We had some books in my house, and my parents were readers; but I’m not well-read in any formal sense. I’m a person who needs a Great Books curriculum. When I got to college they tested us in English and I was put in an advanced-placement freshman class. All the teachers of advanced freshmen decided they were sick of the classics, and they taught, instead, off-beat books. Instead of *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*, they taught Olive Schreiner’s *THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM*—

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: A wonderful book....

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. Well, I read *EYELESS IN GAZA*, when I might have been reading *WAR AND PEACE*. Not to say that one book is bad and the other book is good; it's just I missed a lot.

After an interlude in the Marine Corps, I got out of college. There was only one place for me to work — an idea planted in my head by my peers — and that was New York. I came here and got a job, through a college-magazine friend, at King Features Syndicate, a Hearst organization. The big business there was comics. I had the most minor of editorial jobs, called, according to the union, a “desk-man.” I did proof-reading and the preparation of boiler-plate, the stuff that was sent out to small newspapers that couldn't afford to compose their own Sunday puzzle pages. I wrote *Minute Mysteries*, in one of which the bad guy's name was Italian. My boss rapped my knuckles; even back then he said: “You can't do that.” That was a lesson in what's now called political correctness: or, simply, avoiding stereotypes.

My boss was a good guy named Clark Kinnaird. He was very concerned, when he hired me, about whether or not I could, as a married man (I was married as an undergraduate, and had a child), make it in New York on \$77.50 a week. I assured him I could; and did; and three months later, he was even more appalled when he fired me.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: A man with a heart.

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, it wasn't his doing. William Randolph Hearst had had the bad taste to die right after I was hired, and right after he died they started to clean house, and so, last one in, first one out. There was nothing unfair about it; I mean, they got rid of lots of people.

But Mr. Kinnaird did his best to help me find a job. After I had shopped around for awhile he said, “Would you like to have a job at the *Washington Star*?” I said, “I'd love it.” He sent me out to Washington, New Jersey, to a paper there at that time, for a job that I, in turn, didn't get. In any case, I made the rounds for months, and, meanwhile, delivered the mail in Washington Heights, and got a job at Doubleday, in a small arm of their rights department they called the Syndicate. I came in at the tail end of the time when books were fairly widely syndicated in newspapers in this country. The papers carried books in serial form. Doubleday had books that had made a lot of money by licensing them to outside syndicates, books like Fulton Oursler's *THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD*. The money had to be divided 50/50 with the syndicate, and then 50/50 with the author, so the author got 25%, the publisher got 25%. Then Doubleday, in its wisdom, decided to do it themselves. So, I got this job preparing books for syndication; also traveling to sell them. I wasn't notably good at it, but I got to see the country.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: How did you prepare them? Did you actually do the editing, divide them into usable chapters, and so on?

SAM VAUGHAN: You would cut them into a week-long series, or a twelve part series, and it was learned by doing. It was surgery on the helpless body of the author. But I think we showed the cut versions to the authors, and they were usually happy to have some extra readership, publicity, and income.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Just for curiosity's sake, what was the money like?

SAM VAUGHAN: It ranged from \$50.00 to a couple of thousand. A paper would buy a series from us. A big paper in Chicago might pay \$2,000; a small paper anywhere might pay \$50.00. You had to give them territorial rights, because big papers tended to claim everything.

But one of the books my boss got interested in, when I was first there, was one by a young Dutch girl. He sold it to the *New York Post* for a small amount of money before publication. But what we got out of it was that the *Post* did its own version. Every day I went down to the *Post* and got, hot off the press, their installment. I came back and typed it on stencils. Then we went on the road to sell it. My boss sent me, naturally, to Philadelphia. I sat down with a man named Stuart Taylor, of the *Bulletin*. He was an elegant fellow; newspapermen could be elegant in those days. Thinking back to what I had told my boss, I said: “This isn’t exactly good newspaper material, it’s a diary of a young girl who was a real pain in the ass. Who could love a teenage girl? I mean, that’s the worst time of life to love someone.”

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: And the book was—

SAM VAUGHAN: THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL, by Anne Frank. That was its first title, I believe. —

Stuart Taylor listened to my story and bought it from me on the spot, for very good money. I almost fell off the chair. We in fact only sold it to about ten or twelve papers; but it was part of the publication “buzz,” as they would call it these days. I had no idea that the book would last forever. I guess I had certain sympathy for what we knew of Anne Frank’s life and death, but I just didn’t ‘feel the mystery’ at that point. That was my first observation of a publishing phenomenon. It’s an interesting study, a publishing phenomenon. I don’t mean ‘bestseller,’ I mean books as phenomena. That was also my first example of a book that passes from the intended audience to an incidental audience, one of which happened to be young women.

I don’t mean that they’re incidental, but that nobody said, “This is a book for young women.” Nobody said, “This is a book for Jewish people.” In fact, you didn’t say that in those days, not out of any sensitivity, but because that was before the revolution in which Jewish writers became some of our most interesting and important writers. We published EXODUS [by Leon Uris] in that period, which we called “the story of the birth of a nation.” We published [Herman Wouk’s] MARJORIE MORNINGSTAR, which we described as a “love story of a young girl in New York,” never saying the word “Jewish.”

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Indeed, I remember hearing about those books when I was coming up, and it never even occurred to me that they were, as it were, separate from me.

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, “Anne Frank” was published as an adult trade book, and it sold extremely well as such, but then passed on, over the decades, into the hands of young people.

That’s a good topic to explore, sometime: the book that, published for one presumed audience, transmutes itself for another. For example, the book that is published as an adult book, and gets taken up by kids. Or, the book that is published for children and gets taken up by adults. There’s a history in that.

### *Selling books for Doubleday*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: There you were in the syndicate department, selling syndicate rights; but that didn’t continue. Something changed.

SAM VAUGHAN: “Corporate culture” is a phrase used with a sneer, but any organization worth a damn has its own culture. Doubleday was proud of the fact that it trained its people well. It believed in certain sporadic attempts at formal training, but mostly, it trained by letting you move from job to job. In the first six years, I had three

jobs, along a curious path. None were in Editorial. Well, the syndicate, in a minor way, was editorial. But all were in publishing.

Then I was promoted to become advertising manager. I did that for a couple of years, and loved it, because I thought that the book advertising was terrible, stodgy, and still do. Routinely, book advertising today is no better than it was then. It's what I call "the parade of the rectangles." Run a picture of the book, write a headline, quote some reviews, and get it out. It's a very limited view of what you might say about a book and how to present it.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: What is an expanded view?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, I tried to show books in context. I tried to show that books didn't float in air, they existed somewhere: in your hands, in your home, in your travels, or wherever. I spent a lot of money on photography. I suppose the peak of all that was when we got a Publisher's Ad Club award [1956] for an action novel called MR. HAMISH GLEAVE, by Richard Llewellyn. A wonderful novel, I fell in love with it, and I probably spent too much money on it. But I got a photographer to go down to Wall Street. I said: "The character in this book is a member of the British Establishment, he has been spying for the Russians for a long time, he's about to leave the country." And I had some idea of a situation, but the photographer came up with something much better. He photographed our guy in his Homburg and his dark suit and his tight umbrella, running down a very long flight of steps outside one of those Wall Street buildings. You just don't see a man dressed like that running; it was a marvelous piece of work. I wrote some short copy to go with it, and it was a very effective ad. That's the kind of thing I thought should be done, and still do. There's one consistently brilliant advertising manager, Nina Bourne, at Knopf, who can make an ordinary review ad look extraordinary. She never stops amazing me, and amusing me, with variations on that theme.

### *A so-called company man*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: When you look back over the works you've published, do you find continuities; do you find themes?

SAM VAUGHAN: One of the virtues of growing older is that you find the themes and the connections of your own life. I came of age as an adult in the '50s. One big question at the time was conformity, and therefore conformity is important to me still. Or, perhaps, non-conformity, while pretending to conform. Books like *BABBITT* and *THE ORGANIZATION MAN* were formative books for me. They had a lot to say to me. I've always worked for organizations, fairly sizable ones, so the question of whether you become a so-called company man or not was somewhere in the air. I've been a bit of a fraud because I've "passed."

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Speaking metaphorically.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. I guess I looked the part. Once, a woman came up to me at a party and said, "Did you go to Princeton?" I said, "No." She insisted that I did.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Recently, I read an article about changes in publishing, with a similar theme. The author talks of a moment when publishers actually hired people who didn't have a 'good' college education, because they wanted to sell to the mass market. The claim he made was that, instead of the 'old school tie,' they used some other kind of criterion. I'm interested in that, because you very nicely go around that whole issue of class, while at the same time almost alluding to it in several of your pieces, as you did just now.

SAM VAUGHAN: Mike Bessie [*see Archipelago, Vol. 1, No. 4*] and I belong to an informal group of editors who meet for dinner six or eight times a year. The great Cass Canfield, who was the head of Harper for so long, once said to Mike, as we were sitting around the table: “Well, there’s nobody here who hasn’t gone to Harvard or Yale, is there?” Mike had to point out, gently, that there might be a few who hadn’t. But that expectation may have been typical of the sort of people they let into publishing then. Doubleday was more democratic than some houses, in that it was more accessible as a place to work. They published a lot of middle-brow stuff, and they had a more national view. It was not a New York house, although it was owned by an old New York family. I used to say to people who lived in Manhattan, because I lived in New Jersey, that I lived “on the mainland.” Doubleday was interested in publishing for “the mainland.” We had a bigger sales force than most, and we thought that St. Louis and Detroit and Houston, and so forth, were important.

So, there was, I suppose you’d call it, a democratic moment, which was good for people like me — and also for women, ultimately.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: People “like you” meaning, you went to Penn State instead of an Ivy League school.

SAM VAUGHAN: Sure. Periodically, we were assigned to read an out-of-town paper, to see what was going on. I love that expression, “out-of-town,” as if everything outside of New York were “elsewhere.”

### *Popular literature*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: When you joined Doubleday, it was still owned by the Doubleday family. Why do you say it wasn’t a “New York house”?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, their interests were not confined — I’m exaggerating, of course — but their interests were not circumscribed by the Hudson River, as some houses’ seemed to be. There were some houses which were very “New York.” They seemed to cultivate the high opinion of literary persons in New York, they thought most of the important reviewers and critics were in New York, and that most book readers were, too. It was a sort of Lincoln Tunnel vision. At Doubleday, we liked popular fiction, we liked popular history, we liked politics, all sides — I was going to say except for extreme radical stuff, except that, in the ‘60s, we got radicalized, too, to an extent. The house was what they called “Establishment” — we liked to publish ex-presidents and such — and, at the same time, not an elitist house. The house had a healthy attitude towards the rest of the country, which wasn’t charity: it was good business. The Literary Guild, which Doubleday owned and ran, was not famous for biographies of Joyce and Eliot; that was not their fare, while the Book of the Month Club might take on such substantial works.

It was also a family-owned house, and it tried to instill, loosely, and with some success, a family-feeling among the employees who stayed there. We had a sense of who we were, and what kind of things we wanted to publish, and also, importantly, what kind of things we didn’t want to publish. There were some popular books which we felt happy to leave to others.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: For example?

SAM VAUGHAN: Once, when John Sargent was our chairman, we were at Frankfurt [Book Fair], and he said, “I received some information that suggests that” — I think it was — “Jacqueline Susann is winking at us. What do you think?” I said, “John, do you really think she’s someone we want to publish?” That ended the

conversation, and ended the pursuit, at least on our side. Here I was being a snob; but it was the kind of book that wouldn't have done well on our list, handled by our people.

One book that somehow got on our list was based on conversations with prostitutes; this was in the early '60s, I think, and, although the author was given a contract, that book hit an invisible wall inside the house, so it was as if it didn't get published.

Now, Doubleday has one blot on their escutcheon that I know about, and anyone who knows literary history knows about, and it's this. *SISTER CARRIE* was under contract to Doubleday; but the then-Mrs. Doubleday objected to it on moral grounds, and so it was what a friend of mine, the publisher-author Dick Grossman — I think he invented the term — called “privished”: that is, it wasn't fully published.

And some of it was edited out, apparently. The nice irony was that, decades later, a university press, I think it was, re-published the novel, un-Bowdlerized, or in the original version. That rare person, a wholly objective critic, writing in *The Nation* or *The New Republic*, perhaps, said it was better as first published. Dreiser may not have had a cloven hoof but he did write with both feet.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You had a feel, surely, for what then was popular. Was what you meant by “popular” then, what “pop” means now?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, you're on to one of my favorite subjects. It wasn't exactly what pop means now, because pop now may include the avant-garde — and, after all, there's Pop Art, which is not art for the masses, in a way. So I don't think it means the same thing. I meant that Doubleday lived for the most part on fiction by Herman Wouk, Arthur Haley, Leon Uris, historical novels by Irving Stone, and the women novelists with three names who wrote clean romances.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That brings to mind Edna Ferber. Did you publish her?

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes, we did. We published Ferber, referred to around the house as “Miss Ferber.” When she died she left her desk and typewriter to us. It sat in the hall for a long time, until we couldn't stand it. We finally donated it.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: She was a presence, was she?

SAM VAUGHAN: She was a presence, and so were some of the other house authors. I never met Somerset Maugham, but Maugham was a presence. The house's first lists were built on a consummate Anglophilia: Conrad and Maugham and Kipling and any number of people came to the list from England. Mr. Maugham, as he was called, was a real presence, as if he had an office there.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You said that it was because of him that Ken McCormick was named the editor-in-chief? [*Kenneth McCormick (1906-1997) was editor-in-chief of Doubleday from 1942 to 1971.*]

SAM VAUGHAN: That's the story. It wasn't only because of Maugham, but his endorsement couldn't have hurt.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: May I return to my question about popular writing? What would you consider “popular literature”? Did it feel as if you, at Doubleday, were speaking with your readership? Because I suspect that there was a relationship, there, between publisher and readers.

SAM VAUGHAN: I once had a conversation with the great Bob Gottlieb [*former editor-in-chief at Knopf, then of The New Yorker*] — and I mean great. We were in a cab going somewhere and he said, “Tell me about popular fiction: I really don't understand it.” And he was one of the great editor/publishers of fiction, who was candid enough to admit that he didn't understand popular fiction.

I ‘inherited’ Arthur Haley as an author. Now, when I came out of college, I was like any other smart-ass entering publishing: I was in love with prose style. If you could write well, it didn’t matter to me what you wrote about. I learned at Doubleday, because of feeling respect for popular writers, a decent respect for the well-written, straightforward sentence; for the well-plotted, sturdy novel of the sort that Arthur did. At first I was contemptuous of it, I mean silently, secretly; but as I got to know something of the people who wrote those books, and something about the readers who read them, I dropped all that nonsense. What I would read for my own pleasure was one thing. Popular non-stylists could flourish: and why not? They had something that people wanted to read.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I asked the late Marion Boyars [Vol. 1, No. 3] this question: What is commercial fiction? Her answer was, “I don’t know!” But I would guess that it’s not the same as what you mean by popular fiction; or, not wholly.

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, it’s wonderful when a book that you and I might easily agree is beautifully written becomes popular. And that happens often enough to not be an aberration.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you give some examples of books that you consider such?

SAM VAUGHAN: COLD MOUNTAIN, recently; or SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS. But there are certain authors of whom it can be said that there is not much chance they will ever lapse into writing a ‘popular’ novel: they are too demanding of the reader. Now, some readers love to be demanded of. But, in general (if you can make a statement about a large group of people), they mostly just don’t want to be taxed heavily. Now, there are degrees of difficulty. John Le Carré is popular but not an easy read, because he writes in a style that holds back information with English reticence, but he certainly is a commercial author, and he sells like a mass-market author. There are gradations of difference between popular and mass-market. Our tendency to divide everything into this or that annoys the hell out of me, but we find it inescapable. The Europeans love to refer to publishers as “serious” or “not-.” We know what they mean, of course. But it’s such a damning indictment that any publisher would not be considered “serious.”

One of the things I dearly love about book publishing is its pluralism. I used what I call the “stewardess test.” When I was flying somewhere I would ask the stewardess what she was reading, because they have a lot of down time, sitting in those fold-down seats. She would usually say something like: “I’m reading Taylor Caldwell,” or Danielle Steele, or Barbara Taylor Bradford. But she might, instead, be reading Ayn Rand; or she might be reading WAR AND PEACE. Without meaning to, she refused to sit in a category. I have a file at home bigger than you are on the issue of what I call “pop and lit.” It’s an old argument that should have been resolved a long time ago. On the other hand, it fuels a lot of cocktail party conversation and reviews, so maybe I’ll subside.

I remember a list we published at Doubleday, in the 1950s, when I was advertising manager. It was a very important list to us because it had four big books on it: Truman’s memoirs; Robert Ruark’s novel SOMETHING OF VALUE; André Malraux’ VOICES OF SILENCE; and THE COLUMBIA HISTORICAL PORTRAIT OF NEW YORK. That’s pluralism; that’s diversity in publishing. That’s why I’ve never wanted to be known just as a literary editor: because I find it too confining.



*The mid-list*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Hovering, then, is a discussion about the mid-list.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. "Mid-list" is as imprecise as the expression "non-fiction," which, too, embraces everything from the Bible to Peanuts. It's the dreaded equivalent of "middling." Still....

The new chairman of Random House, Inc., Peter Olson, was nice enough to take me to lunch recently. He was speaking with an almost embarrassed smile about having taken over when the business was going so well. That doesn't mean that everything works, or that every division is doing well, but it means that, all over, the company is doing very well. "And," he said, "it's not only phenomenal books, the books like *THE CENTURY*, by Peter Jennings, and the Tom Brokaw book [*THE GREATEST GENERATION*], it's a lot of the mid-list." I was so delighted to hear a well-trained publishing executive speak affectionately of the mid-list. I've had other conversations with other publishers. When they start in on the mid-list, I've said to them: "If you published 500 books a year, 350 of them would be mid-list." We once published 500 books a year.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That's extraordinary, isn't it?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, it was extraordinary. But if you published five books a year, three of them would be mid-list. There's no escaping the mid-list. The fact is, the mid-list is the place where you lose the most money, and it's also the place where you make the purest profit when a book works. That's because you usually don't have so much money invested.

An editor named Tom Congdon, who had been at *The Saturday Evening Post*, told me one day his editor used an expression which haunted Tom ever afterward. He said: "I don't want a lot of little gray articles." There are little gray books: which doesn't mean they have no value or virtue. It means that a mid-list can be cluttered. Every book has a reason: a reason why the author wrote it, a reason why somebody decided it should be published. But it can also choke you, like too much wheat. On the other hand, there may be a baby in the bulrushes; you don't know.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Can you give a sense of the texture of a mid-list?

SAM VAUGHAN: No, I can't. A mid-list is the most assorted list. Books are graded in some kind of crude sorting. As for "mid-list": all that means is that the book is not an obvious candidate for super best-sellerdom; or it's not a first novel destined to be published merely because it should be published.

*ROOTS* was a mid-list book. *ROOTS* was not conceived, ever, by us as a blockbuster, as a phenomenon. You don't predict phenomena: that's why they *are* phenomena. But that book was signed up and written in the period when the attitude of the book trade was, "We've had enough black books, we've had a lot of them in the past decade, they're over." The book trade gets like that from time to time. Booksellers, in their wisdom, and in their sincerity, and in their dopiness, will make statements like that, and so do we. But what we couldn't see coming was that this book, which was not bought for no money — there was money put into it, over and over — was going to strike a nerve: we didn't see that. And, we didn't see the effect of Alex Haley's constant traveling and speaking to groups. There was an audience clamoring, practically hitting the door down, when we published. That had nothing to do with television. When the television series came along it multiplied the effect. Now, that's not a typical mid-list book, but it came out of the mid-list. After all, Alex had done an earlier book, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOM X*.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That's right. Had you published that book at Doubleday?

SAM VAUGHAN: Doubleday had it under contract and gave it up. It helps to recall the atmosphere at that time. Before the book appeared, Malcolm X was assassinated. Nelson Doubleday became concerned that, because of Doubleday's nearly unique situation — only Scribner had the same one: we had people working at street level in the Doubleday bookshops. There was real fear in the air. He became concerned that it might result in some broken glass, and people getting hurt. And so — I wasn't in the middle of this — we told Alex to keep the money we'd paid him and he was free to publish elsewhere, which he did promptly. It became a classic and sold forever, and nobody got hurt; but that's why, I was told, we gave it up. We managed somehow to keep on with Alex, and did the next book.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That's interesting. He wasn't 'your' author.

SAM VAUGHAN: No; we became friends but he was first Ken McCormick's, and then Lisa Drew's author. Alex has a remarkable persistence. He wasn't what I would call tough-minded, because he did some things that showed he was soft; but he was durable and persistent. That book: again, I only brought it up because it came out of the mid-list; but all 'phenomena' are interesting to follow.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Is it a canard that the mid-list is shrinking? We know that publishers are cutting back their lists.

SAM VAUGHAN: I hear it everywhere, and it's probably true. There are a lot of canards in publishing; but even fewer facts. I do think that the annual count of books published in the U.S. has declined or has held steady at a lower level than it might have been assumed. I think we were headed toward more than 50,000 new titles a year, though I don't think it's gone much over that. That's got to affect the mid-list, since the mid-list books are most books. But I don't know the facts. I know that the questions are asked: Who are we going to sell it to? Do we really need this book? — questions which, one way or another, have been asked for a long time, but are perhaps being asked more often than they were. I'm amused by the question: "Who's going to read this book?" because we know so little about readers. So it seems like a sensible question, but it's largely unanswerable.

### *Who needs this book?*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Your other question though, also is interesting because of all the directions it goes in: "Do we need this book?" Who's we? What does "we" mean?

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes, you're right. The editor may say, "*We* certainly do." It may mean that she needs the book, or he needs the book, as an ornament or as a potentially profitable part of his own individual list; or it may be that she sees a palpable need for the book out there. For example, Larry Ashmead, my friend at Harper, has always edited a differing stream of books, including books on what I call "popular diseases." I would first hear about a disease from Larry, and I would take his word for it that there was a need for a book to help people who had it, or thought they had it. Many books are done that way, because there is a real need. You may be premature; very often you are late in the field.

The question of need for books is interesting because there are so many books for which there really is a need. A lot of reading, a lot of bookselling, a lot of book publishing, is composed of utilitarian books. My favorite example is a book near the top

of our back-list — which was a 4,000-5,000-title back-list for years — called THE ASHLEY BOOK OF KNOTS. Now, the ASHLEY was a big, bulky book with, I suppose, every knot ever devised by man. We used to speculate about who was buying it. Somebody would say “Boy Scouts,” so we’d take that as part of an answer. I was very pleased to find that Annie Proulx used a quote from THE ASHLEY BOOK OF KNOTS for an epigraph in a chapter of THE SHIPPING NEWS, a most distinctive novel.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Or, it could be a book like GRAY’S ANATOMY. You see it everywhere, and all sorts of people buy it. I had a copy for years. Why? Because you might need it.

SAM VAUGHAN: Sure. We all tried to get the distribution of the MERCK MANUAL, for example. The RED CROSS HANDBOOKS are eternally useful. There’s a real, not very mysterious need for so much of publishing.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I’d like to put in a word, although I’m sure I don’t need to, for the serious or literary writers: people who write out of that other kind of need: because there’s no help for it. They themselves say that they *need* to write. Or, you’ll read a book and know that this book *has* to be in the world. It’s that other kind of need, a metaphysical need, if you like.

SAM VAUGHAN: So many books are, or seem to be, written out of a need to communicate with another human being. We all know that there’s a meeting of at least two minds in a good book. There is so much loneliness in the world. It’s one of my favorite themes. If a book has loneliness at its heart, it stands a good chance of finding an audience eventually.... After all, we go through life alone. Whether we’re lucky enough to have people around us whom we love, and vice-versa, or not, every person walks alone. Think of the loneliness of Lindbergh, of Anne Frank, of what someone recently observed as “the magnificent liveness” of the principle figure in THE STORY OF O, of Quixote. THE LONELY CROWD was a work of sociology which sold rather well; but I don’t think it was an accident. It was inspired.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: It was a late-’50s kind of book, if you want, appearing at the end of a time, but also becoming the mark of a time. And that would be, I think, your kind of book. It *was* ‘your’ book. Yes, I know you said that; but I can see why, now, in retrospect, having learned some of the themes that interest you.

SAM VAUGHAN: I guess what we’re talking about is the need to write, and the need to read, which are not very well summed up into simple statements. Many of the alarms about publishing are just that: alarms. I don’t think we generally realize that reading is not a passing fancy or an idle diversion. Reading, I really believe — or let me say, storytelling, one kind of story or another — is a human need as basic as bread. You don’t have to go far down the list of human needs: there’s something about the need for story that is immense. That doesn’t mean that people have to get stories in book form; but that’s one way to get them. As people will get stories, in whatever form they choose to get them in, whatever form they’re available in, some will tend to move in cyclical ways from books to movies to television to theater, and back again. We haven’t gone back to sitting around a campfire, but nevertheless, all the traditional means of telling stories are available. It’s only the illiterate who are really poor, in that sense.

### *The editor’s work*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you talk about the experience of making a book: finding the author; having the author find you; and, if you would, describe that whole adventure?

SAM VAUGHAN: It is that. If I liked fishing, I'd say it was like fishing. Where do the books come from? They come from writers. One of the great sources of finding writers is other writers. Probably the most efficient source, because there's less waste when a writer recommends a writer. If your insurance man recommends his adolescent son who has a gift for verse.... Know what I mean?

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Right.

SAM VAUGHAN: Another source, of course, is — these are all very obvious — reading. You have the greatest excuse in the world to read all the time. You can read anything. It's one of my challenges to myself, still, although I should get over it: when I pick up a magazine or a journal or a newspaper, I want to see if there's something in there that would lead to a writer or a book.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You have attached yourself to writers who write across a broad range of subjects. Do you find that still true? Have you narrowed your interests, or focused them?

SAM VAUGHAN: I've never wanted to be typecast as a literary editor, or a public affairs editor, or a history editor. It's very different than being a textbook editor, where you're expected to be, partly, an expert. I represent the 'great unwashed and unknowing.' I cherish my amateur standing. Also, it keeps refreshing itself more that way. I've often counseled younger editors who set out to be known as a literary editor not to put too much coal on that fire alone — be it, don't say it. Everybody has to be economically justified, sooner or later, and you have a better chance of doing it if you handle a range of books.

At times I've fallen into pockets of specialty. I did a lot of books by political figures, for a while, not by design but because that's the way it worked out.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: For example?

SAM VAUGHAN: Early on, I handled one of the books written by a man named Ezra Taft Benson, who was Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture. I 'inherited' a contract with him, from Adam Yarmolinsky, who was, briefly, an editor with Doubleday. It was for a staff-written book called *FREEDOM TO FARM*, I believe. The book was dull, and I've never been terribly interested in agriculture; but I got to know him a little. He decided, at the end of his time there in Washington, that he would write a memoir, which he did, because he was the only cabinet member to spend the full eight years with Eisenhower. So I went into that Mormon household a number of times. Mrs. Benson fed me, while I worked down in the basement on the manuscript and photographs. We got a rather good memoir out of it, because Secretary Benson, who was a church elder and became head of the Mormon Church, was a good storyteller. We also got some news out of it, in that he recommended the ticket of — I think it was — Nixon and Rockefeller, at the time: anyhow, it was a peculiar, or surprising, pairing, because he was more conservative than anybody else in the Eisenhower administration.

I went from there to doing a book by a man named Lewis Strauss, who was the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and had been nominated by Eisenhower to be Secretary of Commerce, and, for almost the first time since the Civil War, had been denied that innocuous post by the Senate. I pursued him for a book.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Was there a reason he was denied? It was just a little before my time.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. The reason was that he was a powerful friend and a powerful enemy, and he had become an opponent of Robert Oppenheimer, and thus, the fans of Robert Oppenheimer in the Senate. He believed Oppenheimer to be a security risk. Oppenheimer's principal defender was a senator, from New Mexico, I

believe, and he collected all his due-bills from his colleagues, and they denied Lewis Strauss the nomination.

Strauss wrote a book called *MEN AND DECISIONS*. It was reviewed on the cover of the *New York Times Book Review*, was taken seriously, sold very well, and exposed me to a kind of mind, and kind of person, that — again, I was about as likely to become friends with an ex-Kuhn, Loeb banker as I was with a farmer. I liked that about politics: it made me open my cheerfully-closed mind.

And then, it turned out that we got a contract for Eisenhower's post-Presidential memoirs. Ken McCormick had been the editor of *CRUSADE IN EUROPE*, the book published after the war. But he was the chief editor and couldn't spend the time required to do these two volumes; so I got posted to Gettysburg, at age 28. It was a good assignment. It taught me the usual lesson, which is: There are not two sides to every story, there are 24 sides. And it exposed me to a seemingly-genial, seemingly-bland, likable individual who had been turned out of office the way we send most of our presidents out of office, which is, in tatters, at a low point in public esteem. He was said to be the "chairman of the board" and "didn't really know what was going on."

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: It was not long after the U-2 incident.

SAM VAUGHAN: Not long after. And of course, he turned out to be a lot more complex than that. I watched the process go on, which still goes on, which is: the Eisenhower reappraisal industry. It's become a major activity in academia. It happens with other presidents, too.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Truman, for instance.

SAM VAUGHAN: Sure. So, that's the kind of thing that got me into politics. I worked with Republicans for a long time, because I was the only editor of my age and stage who spoke Republican. Most editors were liberals and left, to whatever degree they were left, and Democrats therefore; and so, there weren't many editors in our place, as middle-of-the-road as it was, that you could put with a Republican. I enjoyed myself. I had fun.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Are you saying that you were a Republican?

SAM VAUGHAN: No. I wasn't a Republican. And I'm not. Although my wife thinks I am.

Eventually, I came to work with Hubert Humphrey and Ed Muskie, and others; and I liked them, too. But, the experience of working on the other side of the street, politically, was very good for me. It is the dark side of my personality that I like politicians. How could you resist a guy like Humphrey? He overflowed with ideas and energy and invention and compromise and ideals, and all that stew! But then, eventually, when I edited a book for Senator Muskie, published on the day he withdrew from the presidential race, the book not only sank like a stone, it sank without a trace. And I'm afraid I burned out at that point. I've been less eager to get back into it, and have not done much in that line.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you say more about the adventure of finding and working with writers?

SAM VAUGHAN: When you start out as an editor, you don't have writers. You don't have what they used to call 'the following.' All the senior editors have all the writers, seemingly, and all the agents go to them, seemingly. But if you put out your lines, and you exert yourself — you read a lot, you write a lot of letters, and you make a lot of phone calls, and you see a lot of movies; you go to agents' offices and you try to get established, in their eyes, as a person — you eventually begin to see proposals and manuscripts. And it becomes cumulative, so that, when you're really an established

senior editorial person, you're still looking, but things do come to you just because you're there. You get to be known for handling certain kinds of books well. Or, simply, because you and the agent like each other; or you like a kind of writing, and when the agent turns up a writer in that category, you may get a shot at it. That part is fun — sort of disorganized; not measurable.

I have some good friends among the agents, but I've never been quite as dependent on agents as many editors. Not by design; it's just the way it is.

And I love the business of commissioning a book, when you have the idea for the book and you go out to find the writer who might want to do it.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you describe such a book or situation?

SAM VAUGHAN: When I was in the political stream, it occurred to me that the great unwritten presidential memoir was FDR's. And so, I talked to a friend, who was working part-time as an editor for us, named Eric Larabee. We'll come back to him, because he had a wonderful expression I want to tell you about.—

Anyway, I said to Eric: "Find me somebody who might take this idea up, if it is an idea." He introduced me to a writer named Bernard Asbell, who had written a book about the end of FDR's life. We had a drink one day, and after we skirmished around politely, Asbell said, "What do you have on your mind?" I said, "I want you to write Franklin Delano Roosevelt's memoirs." He said, "He's dead." I said, "By God you're right, he is."

I said, "It seems to me that any president trying to write a memoir has to do a certain number of things in preparation. Why don't you just do that?" Well, Bernie Asbell is the kind of writer who is an editor's dream. He always gives you more than you asked for. He did this as a kind of report to Roosevelt, saying he'd been hired to help prepare for the memoir, and had taken the liberty of drafting some chapters. That's the way he got into it. He had captured the voice immaculately.

Turned out, he could only do the New Deal years; he couldn't do the whole life because it was just too full. So we did that book, which, thanks to Asbell, was a real *tour de force*, subtitled "A Speculation on History." What didn't happen was what sank the chance of doing the sequel. I expected the idea to outrage historians — and it didn't. They didn't get ruffled at all.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: They probably loved it, especially the younger ones.

SAM VAUGHAN: And several senior ones, too. Well, let me tell you about Larabee's line, because I think it bears on so much. It has to do with, well, the readership and, quote, marketing. He wrote an essay once called "The Imaginary Audience." Part of the argument was, The audience does not sit there fully assembled, waiting for the performer. The performer assembles the audience.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That's nice.

SAM VAUGHAN: That, to me, is a mantra. The idea that the audience is sitting out there saying, "Send me a book about a Civil War soldier walking home from the war, or a story about the relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II" is, by-and-large, nonsense. The author assembles the audience; the artist does; the musician does.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: The word of the moment, the one that goes along with "sell," is "branding." It seems to me that it's a sort of rubber-stamp idea, "branding." Well, Eric Larabee wasn't talking about something like "branding," was he? And you aren't? You're talking about the artistry of it.

SAM VAUGHAN: If 'branding' would work in the case of books, all you would have to do is do the same book over and over again, with variations. Some of that does happen. Some people would say John Grisham does it, or Stephen King does it. But

that's to underestimate the writers. Their books are never quite alike. They assemble an audience with certain predilections. But they're both adventurers, in a certain way, and they don't get credit for taking risks. They get credit for being acts, and formula writers, and pop stars. So, I don't think 'branding' works for human beings the way it does for soap or corn flakes.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: There's an awful lot of talk about it, though, in publishing, as if they think it might work.

SAM VAUGHAN: In publishing, there's always a certain amount of rueful envy of other businesses which are, seemingly, so logical.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: And that make 'product.'

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes, and that make 'product.' Ken [McCormick], the gentlest of men, would throw a man out of the room who said "product."

### *George Garrett*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You're a senior editor; writers come to you—

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes; meanwhile, you continue to 'trawl.' You never give it up, really. And that becomes so satisfying, in a way. Although publishing means having to say you're sorry, quite a lot. But the only thing worse than having to say you're sorry is having nothing to say anything at all about.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: One of the writers who came to you was George Garrett. Would you talk about George Garrett, who, I want to say, is an American man of letters, the genuine article, in a time, perhaps, when that occupation is under-appreciated.

SAM VAUGHAN: It certainly is; and, to be literal, in George's case, he's a man of letters written on long yellow pads with a Mont Blanc fountain pen. When you take on George, as a friend or as an author, or both, you have to put a wing on your office to file the letters in. They're wonderful to have: scurrilous and libelous and funny and generous. I don't recall quite how we got together. The first manuscript I had anything to do with was DO, LORD, REMEMBER ME. But I can't tell you, at this moment, how I got to see it.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I think he told me it was rather by accident.

SAM VAUGHAN: My facts are no more reliable than George's, so take that into account. [*See comments from George Garrett, following.*]

I think I got that manuscript in the mail, from an agent. It was kind of tattered, beat-up. There had been no attempt to pretend it was a virginal submission. I liked what I read, but I was uneasy about it. And then, before I did anything, which always takes time, another version of the manuscript arrived which was just as clean and presentable and dressed-up as I could imagine. We went ahead and published it.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You're saying he'd done something more than erase the marks and—

SAM VAUGHAN: I'm not even going to attempt to say what he did, because I just don't know.

I remember the first book in the Elizabethan trilogy [THE DEATH OF THE FOX; THE SUCCESSION; ENTERED FROM THE SUN]. I heard about that; not from George, I think, but possibly. It was under contract, or under option, to a company like Appleton-Century-Crofts, which was busy going out of business at the time. They not only didn't offer him a contract, they didn't have anybody there to read it. So, it came over to me.

It was intimidating, because it was in three bright-orange boxes that took up half the office. I began to read it and of course was swept away, and still am. I got in touch with George, and we made a contract for it. I said, “George, the only editing I’m going to do on this” — because it’s long — “is, I’m going to draw a pencil line in the margin of any page where I fall off the rails, or fall off my chair, or fall asleep, whatever kind of barometer: because only you know what’s really important in this book, and I don’t know nearly as well.” So that’s what we did, apart from little dinky stuff like chasing the inevitable repetitions, and so forth.

I had the great fortune: I knew that it was a wonderful book, and it should *look* wonderful. The company I was with was not known for producing wonderful-looking books, because a lot of books were made close to book-club specifications, cheaply-made. Our printers had two kinds of paper. One was the cheap paper, and one was Bible paper. If a manuscript was beyond a certain length, it got printed on Bible paper. George’s manuscript was beyond all lengths, so we got it printed on Bible paper, which had some finish, some feel, texture. It looked like the goods, and it was the goods.

We did the second novel in a couple of years, and the third Cork [Corliss] Smith did, at Harcourt. I don’t know whether I had left Doubleday at that point, or whatever had happened, but in any case, the trilogy was finished with Cork, elsewhere.

Speaking of writers as a source of writers, George is a great friend to writers. He’s spent more of his life writing for little magazines and going to writers conferences than almost anybody I know. He has 10,000 friends and 10,000 due-bills, things owed to him which he doesn’t invoke very much at all. His wife, Susan Garrett, is good writer, too.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Yes, she is: a very good writer. I loved TAKING CARE OF OUR OWN. A fine book; and the newer one [MILES TO GO] is, also.

### *Hannah Green*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You are the editor of Hannah Green’s posthumous novel. Would you speak about that?

SAM VAUGHAN: It’s not a novel, but it has a novelistic quality. Hannah Green wrote one of the most admired novels of the time, *THE DEAD OF THE HOUSE*. The posthumous book she left is quite different. For some reason, she never quite finished it: which is part of the challenge of the moment. It was finished; but she didn’t *think* it was finished, and she kept delivering it to me and taking it away. I used to talk and commiserate with her friend and teacher Wallace Stegner about Hannah. We both wanted to kick her hard in her fanny, because she would never finish the book. I didn’t think she was going to die before she did: that came out of nowhere, and should have stayed nowhere.

Anyhow, it’s a book about one day out of many seasons spent in a small village in France, called Conques, which sounds like the conch shell: apparently, the village is shaped like one. In that village reside the bones, or the relics, of St. Foy. Hannah and Jack Wesley, her husband, an artist, used to spend part of the year in that village. Hannah entered into a relationship, you’d have to say, with St. Foy; that is, St. Foy was a living presence to her. Now, this was a Protestant girl, from Ohio, I think, who was having a sort of Roman Catholic experience.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Initiation into the mysteries.

SAM VAUGHAN: I think you’re right. Actually, her love has no denomination. It’s a total immersion into the life of a little girl who lived a long, long time ago and was a



martyr to her faith. And so, Hannah's written this book which is partly meditation, partly poetry; has, I said, certain novelistic aspects; and, finally, is a love song to the village and the people of the village. The problem — I've never faced it before — is, I know how much Hannah resisted editing. Not that I edited *THE DEAD OF THE HOUSE*, but I was around the publishing house [Doubleday] when it was done; I think Ann Freedgood was the editor. But I know Hannah was very skittish about editing; polite but nervous; and therefore, I don't feel that I have a free hand. So, what I've done is this. There are two people involved with Hannah, out of many who liked or loved her. One is her husband; the other is a writer named Sarah Glasscock, in Texas, and whose first novel I edited [*ANNA L.M.N.O.*]. I think Hannah sent it to me. So, it's a love affair all around. I like Jack, and I like Sarah, and I liked Hannah; and vice versa.

Sarah helped Hannah with her book by typing endless drafts or versions, and if anybody on earth knows what Hannah's intentions were, it's Sarah. Having the widower and the colleague, or amanuensis, to rely on, I did some work on the manuscript. Then I gave it to a copy editor, named Virginia Avery. I gave her the background of the book and said, "I don't know how much you or I should be allowed to do. Why don't you edit a piece of it the way you would any other book? We'll show it to Sarah; we'll show it Jack Wesley; and, if they have no problem with it, we'll go ahead." And that's where we are. Because, on the one hand, I owe it to Hannah not to over-edit her writing. On the other hand, I owe her the duty of getting the best book out of it that we can, which is the task of the editor of any book. Having these other people helping to mediate the whole thing eases me immensely.

### *Economics of publishing*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Bill Strachan, the director of Columbia University Press, talked to me earlier about how things have changed. [see *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, no. 4] Trade houses, as they really could be called once, used to build their lists from editors' recommendations; but now, he said, perhaps bitterly, that method has changed. Now, in conglomerate publishing, marketers can have the final say about the list; and in academic publishing, peer-review committees, rather than editors, can reject books.

SAM VAUGHAN: I'm interested, as you know, in the overlap and merging of what were once the duties and standards of university presses with what were once trade standards, and how their borders are as shaky as the Balkans'. It works in different ways in different houses and among the various kinds of publishers. At Random House, the marketing people do not have the final say on which books we publish, by and large. The editor proposes and the Publisher disposes, i.e., says yes or no. At other houses it works the same way; at still others, the marketing voice is loud, and in some cases decisive.

I'm not against the latter, by the way, depending on what kind of book is being considered. With a novel, or a book of poetry, the marketing director should not decide. Where a marketing person becomes publisher you have quite a different situation, of course. But as publisher, a marketing person should not be only a marketing mind, but should take the larger view. If the book at hand is a reference book on trees, say, or Italian cookery, the marketing voice should well be quite strong, especially when you know there are dozens of competitive titles in the marketplace already. I'm surprised, in fact, that the marketers don't come into the act earlier than they do, at least here.

But, a university press has obligations which a privately-held trade house doesn't have. As Bill said, I believe, some university presses publish a certain number of regional books to pay their debt to people of the region. That's an honorable thing to do, and sometimes makes money. But much publishing goes unplanned. The irony is that editors, in the conversations of others in publishing, are usually considered to be not very businesslike, to be a bit crazy, not to be able to add up a column of figures. That's how we're stereotyped.

Nonetheless, despite what is said about editors, we take full responsibility for negotiating contracts; for working out the economics in advance, projective economics. As for the list itself: unless there is some directive — “we will do this kind of book,” or “we don't do that,” which is rare — the list represents the combined interests, contacts, and, sometimes, friendships, of the editors. I think there could be a bit more planning involved, but I hesitate to say it, because maybe that day is coming. Many kinds of publishing you do in a general house, for example, like tending to the back list, are often honored in conversation, but not given very much attention. If you have four or five good gardening books, then you ought to have a couple of gardening books in development at all times, because if you've begun to publish in that niche, you want to add to it. And it makes sense to have strength in certain categories, if not in others. So I do think a measure of planning could be introduced in some houses. — But editors fight organization. We'll always think of ourselves as grossly underpaid, overworked, misunderstood, and downtrodden. Or if not downtrodden, half-trodden; and yet editors, like authors, like poets, are durable.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Well, *poetry* is durable. *Editing* is durable.

SAM VAUGHAN: Editors feel constantly under attack — but don't quite get wiped out. They go through convulsions at times, but they are like the theater: Always dying, never quite dead.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You said a smart, interesting, amusing thing in your *Daedalus* piece, about the conglomeratization of publishing. You wrote: “It seems to me that the real risk when ‘nonbook’ people come into publishing is not that they know so little about books, but that they know so little about money.” Would you speak more to that?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, an example is Harold Geneen, whom I became friendly with when he did a book called *MANAGING*. Harold Geneen was the principle exponent of conglomeratization. When he ran IT&T he owned several hundred companies. He would meet in Switzerland, monthly, with the heads of his companies, because it was the only way to get them together. He had a brief case for every company. Hal Geneen said to me that he had sold off his book publishing company, because he didn't understand it.

Now, I don't know who advised him on the purchase in the first place; but, when you look at the financial history of many publishing houses, it's no secret that, as we are fond of saying, you can usually do better by putting your money in the bank. Some of the great owners have been asked, in the course of their lives, “Why do you invest your money in book publishing?” The answer is, “Because we *want* to invest our money in book publishing.”

That's a statement of a willful, independently wealthy capitalist. And if such a one of them really wants to be in book publishing—

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: —he damn well will!

SAM VAUGHAN: I had a boss once, when I was in my 20s. I got promoted. He took me to lunch. He said, “Now, what makes you think the Doubleday family is going to

want to be in books, ten years from now?: And I said, “Because they want to.” I was grateful to him for making me try to think ten years ahead. I was accustomed to thinking about ten minutes ahead.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: The conventional wisdom is that people don’t think ten years ahead. They think two cycles ahead.

SAM VAUGHAN: That is something I’m not terribly cheerful about. The up-and-at-’em, rattle-dazzle publishers who want to produce a good balance sheet for the next quarter, or the next year, are thinking short-term. They’re not thinking about whether they’re going to leave behind a publishing institution that’s worth more than it was when they found it. And since publishing doesn’t usually respond, even economically, to what you do in a year, or a couple of years, it’s a form of short-term thinking in what is, at heart, a long-term activity. I think there’s a dangerous tendency to want to make this year look good, and next year look good; and not to worry about the people who may have to tend the garden, five or ten or twenty years from now. That may be a sea-change in publishing. I think it probably is.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: That people are looking at the short term rather than the long term.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. Not that they’re looking at the bottom line. There never has been a time when they didn’t look at the bottom line, more or less severely, or more or less myopically. But by putting seed-money down, it will reward you in some years to come, not in the next quarter. Partly, the situation is aggravated by publishing companies going public, where you have to keep an eye on the value of the stock. And as an author once said to me, the stock market is really a paranoid schizophrenic.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: A paranoid schizophrenic gambler.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes, right. A Barthelme.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Two Barthelmes. (*laughter*) [*see* *The New Yorker*, *March 8, 1999*]

SAM VAUGHAN: I’ve had the luck in working for family companies, never having to worry about what the stock was doing.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Is that true also of Bertelsmann?

SAM VAUGHAN: It seems so. Families are quirky in their own way, but, for example, if publishers were as rapacious as we are often held to be, if we were as money-minded as we are now held to be, books would be published much more quickly. Because if you’re putting out millions to invest in a new list of books, you would think you would want your money back as soon as possible. But publishers insist on taking nine months, or ten months, or twelve months, or five years, to do a book. That’s not very smart, economically, but it’s part of the practice of the business. I can’t understand why someone hasn’t come in on that problem: that you can improve the cash flow by getting the books out sooner. Authors would like it. At least at first. But the books might get under-published, for there are reasons why the process takes a long time, and maybe should.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I think there is a certain pressure in some quarters. Not long ago, an editor of my acquaintance, who is young, beautifully educated, smart, publishes very serious books, and runs the adult trade division of a far-flung conglomerate, told me (because I asked him), that he could bring a high rate of return — I think he claimed 15% — while publishing very good books. He did indeed publish very good books, many of which I read. However, the question I didn’t ask, and should have asked, was: “What books have you turned down that you would have liked to have to have taken, because you didn’t think they would earn enough money?”

I suspect this is a more important question, even, than I think it is. It is the sort of question that might have to do with the mid-list authors I hear about so often, whose third or fourth book isn't being taken by their erstwhile publishers.

SAM VAUGHAN: It is a good question. I'm thinking about the DeLillo novel [UNDERWORLD]. I know an editor who read it in manuscript. She said, "It's really a very ambitious novel, he's really out to scoop up a whole handful of this society and culture at this time." You could tell that she really was quite taken by it. She is one of the very best editors I've ever known. And at the end, she decided not to encourage the house to pursue it up the auction ladder. It wasn't because she was afraid it wouldn't sell: she was afraid that she might have a lot of trouble selling the book in the house after we bought it.

You see, in effect, a book gets bought by a house more than once. The first time is when the contract is offered. Then it goes off everybody's screen except the editor's, for the year, or two years, or five, or ten, it takes the author to write it. It comes back, and, despite the fact that you have a contract, and that the contract may be big, it has to be sold again, in a psychological way. Now, if you've put out a lot of money for a book, and everybody knows it, it makes the editor's task a bit easier. All the flags fly when the book comes through. But that's for a very few books. The other books have all cost money. But whether the book costs \$50,000 or \$200,000, that fact, by-and-large, does not persuade anyone in the house. They've got to be persuaded by example, by the manuscript itself, ideally. Anyhow, she was concerned that the task of selling it a second time might not work, and she didn't want to go through that. Scribner's bought the DeLillo. I think they made something of a success of it. I don't know whether they made of it a publication commensurate with what it cost them.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: And, they don't have a backlist of DeLillo's books. Everything he wrote is in print, but not at Scribner.

SAM VAUGHAN: That's a very good point. But on the other hand, it may have been an investment beyond the book itself, to persuade everybody that Scribner is alive and well. There are, sometimes, those extra considerations.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Do you think that New York trade publishing is more oriented toward, more interested in, more attentive to, the big book than it used to be?

SAM VAUGHAN: I don't think so, Katherine. At least, not for so long as I've been around. I've just described to you a publishing list of the early 1950s: I mentioned four big books. I'm a typical publishing animal, so I can remember that kind of event. I had instructions from my boss; there were two things I had to do: Get along with the sales manager, and not overspend. I went into see my boss at the beginning of that year, and I said, "There is no way we can do these four books, to say nothing of the rest of them, and not overspend. So, I just want you to know." He took that all right, because he knew we couldn't publish a recent ex-president, or couldn't publish André Malraux, or couldn't publish a big, important book like the COLUMBIA HISTORICAL PORTRAIT OF NEW YORK, and he couldn't put the Ruark novel over without—

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Right. Without investing—

SAM VAUGHAN: — further in publicity, promotion, and advertising. So, chasing the big books at some risk to the others is far from over. On the other hand, if you don't do that successfully often enough, you don't have a publishing house to include the other books. It's commonly thought that the other books pay for the big books. It also can be argued that the big books pay for the other books. Certainly, it can go either way.

In a smaller house, public or private, if they have to put out several big authors in a hurry, the question is, how much money do they have to work with? In a bigger house, there is seldom a real shortage of capital; but there may be constrictions on what you can do in any year. Fortunately, not every book has to be pursued to the same degree. You couldn't get most authors to agree about that, of course.

The question implied is: What is publishing, if it's not working hard to make people know about the book? The definition of publishing Marion Boyars used, and that I use, is: "to make known." It's not, To make better; it's not, To make money: it's *to make known*. But there are ways of "making known" that don't cost a great deal of money. They usually cost a lot of time and effort. Because you know there are books where you can hear the jungle drums beating, and it's not a result of advertising.

### *Marketing, or selling books*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: When the English publisher said, "Oh, aren't you market-seeking?", were you? That is to say, I hear the word "marketing" and I roll my eyes. Is marketing different than, say, advertising, or simply selling? What's the difference, now, between that, and what you were doing, when you worked for Doubleday selling books?

SAM VAUGHAN: That's splendid. We share the same annoyance at the word. It's an attempt to make grandiose what was formerly known as a series of separate functions called selling, promoting, publicizing, advertising, packaging. The use of the word "marketing," I think, must have been the way, at one point, to get a raise. So, if you're a marketing manager, you think of yourself as much more than a salesman, or saleswoman.

To give it its due: part of the idea behind the word "marketing" was, in its finest manifestation, to think, not of what *you* have, or what *you* are, but: what does *the customer* need, or want, or can be helped by, or provoked into needing or wanting? That's a perfectly decent idea; but much nonsense goes on under the heading of marketing. It's the subduing of importance, in a funny way, of the salesman. I'm using "salesman" as a narrow term.

I used to know the names of all of our sales reps at Doubleday. When I started there, we had ten or 12. We went to 30 or 35; we went to 80 or 90. I don't know how many they have now; but now they're *corporate* sales forces: they sell for the corporations. Therefore, editors have much less contact directly with the sales reps; from the point of view of the editor, contact has been cut off, or cut down. We go through what they call marketing people; and the marketing people speak to the sales people *for* us, or for themselves.

The old way had its abuses. In that smaller world, you'd go into a room for a sales conference with your reps, and you'd present the books directly to them. It used to be said that a book could be made, or killed, in that room. There was some truth in that. Certainly a book could be *made*. I saw books made, regularly, by an impassioned presentation, or by a very good one. Whether a book could be killed: I suppose that some books were really damaged by the process; but on the other hand, there was a natural limitation on how negative a sales rep could be, because if he only opened his mouth to say "The book won't sell," eventually, he wouldn't be selling it, or any others.

Now I will join the chorus of the complainers. Our principal form of contact with the sales reps is in the form of the written fact-sheet, which as somebody said, has to be revised four times, and the audio cassette.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: The fact sheet is not the same as the P&L, the profit-and-loss statement?

SAM VAUGHAN: No, the fact sheet is a basic house description of the book. Calling it a fact sheet, basically, is to glorify it, because editors don't deal with "facts" so much as hopes, dreams, wishes and lies. It'd make a good movie title, wouldn't it?

That basic house description is circulated to just about everybody. We also do an audio presentation as a supplement; but that's all. There are meetings in which we may be in a room with one or two or three marketing people, of whom a couple may be in direct contact with the trade. I think something is lost there. It was a two-way education: we learned from the reps, and they learned from us. They had the smell of the road on them, they came into the room and slapped the dust off their chaps and tied up their horses, and said, "The books on such-and-such are not selling." We might or might not accept it, but we would take it as a piece of important information; and we were performing the traditional rite of the history of the traveler who would come back and tell you what was going on in China.

On the other hand, some editors were wizards at presenting. There's a perception in publishing, now, that to present a book, they should be polished and accomplished speakers. Well, there are a few editors who have leaped through the barriers, to talk directly at the sales conference. But some of the best presentations I've ever heard were by people who weren't so terribly good at speaking, but who knew a lot about the book they were doing. Jason Epstein, an editorial genius, is in many ways a terrible presenter, but in many ways a wonderful one, because he knows what he's talking about and he has such strong opinions.

I remember when Jason started *The Anchor Review* at Doubleday, in an attempt to run a journal along with the new line of paperbacks. He hired a couple of editors. One of them was Nathan Glazer. I had read *THE LONELY CROWD*. Glazer came in with his wild, woolly hair and his horn-rimmed glasses, and he sat up there and presented a book. He used phrases like "wrought-iron culture." It was like a graduate seminar, and I was dazzled. He was the prof. I never had. And it was all part of the ferment. Nathan Glazer wouldn't stand a chance at a sales conference today.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Do you notice that the marketing people have come from some place that was not devoted to books?

SAM VAUGHAN: When you work in a place like this, you notice that the marketing people are really good readers. There's a perception that all sales people care about is discounts and commissions and bonuses. But I don't know many who survive, at least, not in a house like this, who aren't readers, and who don't have some basis for their opinions. I'm not saying that all are well-read: I'll say, They read.

Now, in the old days, sometimes the rep could be negative. But he couldn't make a living being negative. He might be wrong about the book, but if there's anyone forgiven for being wrong about the book, it's the editor. There's no business that's so forgiving of mistakes as this one.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Why would you say that?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, how long would you last in television, or movies, or magazines, if you make as many mistakes as we make over the course of a year or two?

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Do you mean that in editorial or commercial terms?

SAM VAUGHAN: All kinds. If you make a big, noisy mistake, say, getting a house to pay too much for the book, that's an obvious mistake. If you publish ten promising first novels and none of them rise to the point of ever being more than promising, that's another kind of mistake. Now this is, or certainly has been, a very forgiving

business. Everybody's worried about profit/loss statements being shown to editors and lashed over their bare backs. I've been shown profit/loss statements about my books, I think, twice. They're used a lot; but I haven't had them used on me, so to speak. But many editors will talk as if they had been routinely beaten.

Now, I don't know about all houses. I've only worked really, for two. I've done some books for other houses, though not from inside. If anything, publishing is really lax, in that regard. I find it interesting, if bracing, and a little chilling, to read the profit/loss statements on the books I've handled in any given year. Some books you think have made money, haven't; some books you think haven't made money, have. But you get to see the economic components of what went into publishing the book. Doubleday used to own its own presses, still does, and, periodically, we'd be encouraged to fly down to the plants, supposedly to see how the books were being printed. The subterranean motive was to have us see the remainder pile. They used to say, "Well, her novel really did pretty well, it sold 5,000 copies, and we only took 3,000 copies back." If you walk by 3,000 copies of a book, sitting on skids, you see a lot of paper and glue and press time, to say nothing of the author's life. It's a chilling experience.

*Closely-held corporations in the history of publishing*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You've spoken about the differences in working for those three family-held publishing companies that were held, in fact, by different kinds of families: the Doubledays, the Newhouses [*former owners of Random House, Inc.*], and now — is Bertelsmann A.G. [*present owner of Random House, Inc*] a family-held corporation? Closely-held, in any case. I'll suggest that, possibly, the family-held, or the closely-held, corporation is a sort of third entity, in publishing. There is the non-profit, effectively no-profit, press. There is the publishing conglomerate. But the third kind of publisher, the privately-held corporation, is also an interesting kind of entity. It is larger, let's say, than an independent press; it is a corporation rather than a small company.

SAM VAUGHAN: I think most of the history of the two or three centuries of American trade publishing will be spun out in the story of publishing houses which were privately-held or closely-held. I don't think publishers became public property to any degree until fairly recently. Even now, I think they've become attractive to the investors because they see us as being part of the media world. While we are, to an extent, we also are not; we are related to but don't quite blend in with the other media. The virtue of working for a privately-held company is that you don't have to pay attention to the day-to-day or month-to-month vicissitudes of the stock market. This just doesn't enter into your thinking. But if you're working for a big publicly-held company and you're watching stock prices every day, or somebody is, it does get into your thoughts.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Or they're watching return on investment.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. And, as I said to you before, it, if the acquiring company has done their homework, and they've really used due diligence, they could have seen that almost no book publishing has produced the kind of return on investment that they desire.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: And it doesn't change. No matter what anybody does.

SAM VAUGHAN: Hasn't for a long time.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: What you say also implies a necessity of a very good back list.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes, it's a really big part of it. Year after year, with a good back list, the work of authors and previous publishing people shows how we go on selling those books, and creating a cash flow irrespective of what the new books are doing, which help you to weather the inevitable ups and downs of the charts.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you speak about your editorial relationship with Doubleday? It was a large corporation, wasn't it, but, also, it was owned by one family?

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes. It was both, in a funny way, a mom-and-pop shop *and* a large "impersonal" corporation. It wasn't impersonal, but people thought it was. I saw a piece in *The New Yorker* recently, about Goldman, Sachs, one of the great Wall Street houses. A woman said to her boss there, "Look at what I sold this week." He said to her something like, "We don't say 'I' sell things." That's exactly the way it was at Doubleday. I tried never to say *I* published anything, because I didn't really believe I did. It was a collective act; but it was also part of the house culture to be respectful of all of the other people involved in publishing, from the printers to the assistants to the sales reps. It wasn't just the ownership, or the editors.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Broadly speaking, do you think that's changed? That is to say, respect is a difficult attitude to come by, now. The notion of dignity seems to have gone away. Do you have any thoughts about this?

SAM VAUGHAN: I admire your announced theme, or inquiry, of "institutional memory." Mine is as shaky as most, but I had lunch last week with Eric Major, who is the director of religious publishing at Doubleday, which has always been an important part of our publishing there, as it is not here [*at Random House*], for example. Eric came to the States from Hodder & Stoughton in London, a house once somewhat similar in makeup to Doubleday. I said to him, "I suppose every evidence of the old Doubleday is gone." He said, "Yes, it has really changed — but there are traces of it in the corridors." You don't eradicate the traces very easily.

I think one of the most profound changes in publishing is, in effect, the disappearance of family names, the name that meant a family, from the spine of the book. Usually, when a book said Harper it meant *Harper*, and therefore, a kind of book; not a rigid category, but a kind of standard. Or there was Lippincott, or Scribner's, or Doubleday. Lists had a shape and a coloration. Harper in the Cass Canfield-Mike Bessie-Evan Thomas heyday had a lock on public affairs books: they published a lot of the Democrats in office, because Cass was an important Democrat. Doubleday insisted that it didn't have any politics, or any religion, meaning any single one, but you could tell the lists had a certain distinction, along with a great deal of out-and-out commercial publishing. Nowadays, we're all after the same books. Again, I'm over-generalizing.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You mean you're after the same types of books?

SAM VAUGHAN: Types of books, and, sometimes, literally the same books. You can't tell much about who the house is, and much about the general run of publishers, with distinctive exceptions: New Directions, Farrar, Strauss, and, to an extent, Knopf, but I'm still not getting at what really counts. With the disappearance of the names — well, the names may remain but the people who bore them are not there. All of the standards and fancies and prejudices of the people who owned the name are gone. It used to be that, as I say, a house wouldn't do a certain kind of book because it wasn't "us." These days, I don't see that happening. Also, there was an air in the well-known houses of — I don't know if *noblesse oblige* is the word or not. We felt we had a duty to



publish poetry, for instance. We might or might not have had certain editors who loved poetry, but the attitude of the house was that we published some poetry; I don't see that, currently, in many places.

### *The Publisher*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you talk about your term, or your stay, at Doubleday? You were not only an editor, but also editor-in-chief and publisher. What did you do you, how did you manage, that triune obligation?

SAM VAUGHAN: I think I told you I worked in several departments before I got to editing books. I wanted to edit books; but I'm far from sorry I worked in other departments. And, eventually, I was executive editor, which meant, in those days, number two. I thought in due course I could become the editor-in-chief. But when the general manager of the Doubleday division left to go to Houghton Mifflin, a man named David Replogle (like the globes), I inquired of his superior the names on the list of candidates. I wanted to see whether they included people I could live with. He showed me the list and asked, "Do you want to be on it?" I said I hadn't thought of that. He put my name on the list, and they offered me a job as publisher.

Nicely enough, the title of publisher had not been used since the time of the original Frank Nelson Doubleday, who founded the company. The term "publisher" was not commonly used in trade publishing at that point, though it's now used everywhere. To be called a publisher was kind of an honorific; it was something people said about you, rather than what you said about yourself. But it was so nice of them that I accepted. It pleased the ham in me. But I said, "I will only do it if I can continue to edit some books every year, because I don't want to be divorced from editing. I like the craft part of it." So, that was the deal. I did it for about a dozen years, and then I did become editor-in-chief, which was really a lateral move, but they wanted to get me out of the chair I was in. And I did that for a couple of years, until I decided to leave.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I will quote to you from something you wrote: "Among the roles of the publisher are to help console the author during the temper tantrums, to soothe his paranoia, to stimulate him when he is blocked, and so on."

SAM VAUGHAN: I resisted the title of publisher in part because I always felt that the publisher was the person who put up the money. Somebody has to pay for all of this exercise. Then I came to realize that that power or authority could be delegated to you, so I was really delegated to spend Mr. Doubleday's money, or the family's money, by investing in several hundred new books each year, and tending to that big back list I mentioned. The way I saw the role was like how Fitzgerald, in a wonderful passage in *THE LAST TYCOON*, understood the studio system. He said something like this: "You can take Hollywood for granted like I did, or you can dismiss it with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand. It can be understood, too, but only dimly and in flashes. Not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads."

And the equation of the publishing business is what I think I understood, and what the publisher is asked to understand and to deal with. It is the major elements that the publisher can affect. I liked all parts of publishing. I like the editorial job; I like the publishing and promotion, the advertising job; I like the sales jobs. It was important to me to give everybody a fair shake. I used to have a weekly publishing meeting, which I was asked to run, because Mr. Doubleday wanted to be sure that everybody's point of view should be represented who had a right to be heard. I had no trouble with that.

That's the way Eisenhower ran his cabinet, and the way I don't think a cabinet has been run since, which is: everybody has a right to speak on any aspect they want, but in the end, you know where the buck stops, and where you say yes or no. I liked the power, if you will, of saying *yes* more than anything else about the job. I was willing to use that power to say *no*. I tried to say it as rarely as possible, but you had to, sometimes. I also liked the chance to let everybody be heard. Because when you have six or seven or eight departments represented, you're beginning to get a little cross-section of America. As Mr. Clinton would say, "It's inclusive."

The publisher has to have some role in maintaining standards. That is, is the book good enough of its kind? Now in a big house you can't know all of the books, so you have to bet on the people rather than the books.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: "The people" meaning, your people.

SAM VAUGHAN: Right. There were some people, some editors, say, who were sponsoring books whose word I would take absolutely; and there were others I might have some question about. But if the house has standards....

We were once confronted with a proposal to publish, or reprint, the official Nazi Party handbook. It was so banal and so bureaucratic, so much a run-of-the-mill sort of document, that it was chilling. What really pleased me was that a young editor came into my office after our meeting. He was steamed! I thought he was going to take my head off. He said, "You can't publish that book!" I said, "Why not?" And he said, "It's a terrible book! If it gets into the wrong hands it would—" His name was Mark Haeefe. I explained to Mark that the question of that particular grotesquerie in history had been much discussed at the time of *MEIN KAMPF*, when Houghton Mifflin was offered it. They had decided to do it, but I think not without a lot of debate. I said, "We've decided not to publish this Nazi Party handbook, but not for the reason you give. Yes, it might fall into the wrong hands, but it will also fall into the right hands, and it will show how bureaucratically, how systematically evil can be organized."

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: And why did you decide not to do it?

SAM VAUGHAN: It was a question of a crowded list, and how much attention would we have to give it? You'd spend a lot of time explaining it away, I guess. But I was pleased with him for *caring*.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Along that line, are there books or authors you passed on that you later regret having lost, or not having chosen?

SAM VAUGHAN: Sure. I'm afraid the list would be longer than I care to remember. One of them was just a simple business decision: I was friendly with a writer named Jim Fixx. I knew him when he had just been fired as the editor of *Life* magazine. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Not much, I've joined Mensa just for the hell of it." I said, "What's that like?" And he said, "It's not too tough. You don't have to be all that smart." So I said, "You know, Jim, if you have nothing to do, we have some interesting books on back list involving games. You might do a book of games for super-intelligent people, who are really smart, and believe it." He did that. He wrote a little book called *GAMES FOR THE SUPERINTELLIGENT*. It sold a lot of copies, and so we did a second.

Next, he sent a proposal for a book about running. His agent wanted some outrageous sum of money, \$25,000 or \$35,000. As it happened, I knew something about running. Now, a publisher should guard his ignorance; but I had a friend who was an expert in running and track and field; I'd been hearing about running for years; and therefore, I thought the running wave had come and curled and crashed. So I decided not to put the money up. The book became a number one best-seller for Random

House. I wrote him a letter saying, “It looks like I goofed.” That’s the type of book that you turn down with no great issue involved. But I think you want something more profound than that.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I am thinking for example about Mike Bessie turning down Frantz Fanon’s *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*, which is still a bit of a scandal, I suppose, in that household. [See *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 4] He also turned down *LOLITA*. You didn’t turn down *LOLITA*; or did you?

SAM VAUGHAN: *LOLITA* was, in effect, declined but I didn’t personally do it. Did I tell you it had been previewed by Jason Epstein in the *Anchor Review*? Well, it is interesting, because it does reflect on that “house culture” business. I first heard about *LOLITA* from Jason; I think I was in sales then. He gave me the Olympia Press edition. I read it over a weekend. I thought it was pretty interesting, not very pornographic, certainly not terribly erotic. But the talk about it was, it was dirty. Jason was doing a periodical then, a journal called the *Anchor Review*, in the Anchorbooks format. He put a piece of it in the *Anchor Review*, I think to sort of test-fly it. But it didn’t succeed, because the word had proceeded the book that it was really dirty or pornographic, so he wasn’t allowed to do it.

Now, you take that decision for what it is; but there’s also background. Not many years before, the same house [*Doubleday*] — I wasn’t there then — published Edmund Wilson’s *MEMOIRS OF HECATE COUNTY*, a novel which was also accused of being scandalous or pornographic. The house defended it in the Supreme Court, I think, or the Supreme Court of New York State; and lost. They lost in court, and, I guess, lost on appeal, or couldn’t appeal, I don’t know which; but the book couldn’t be sold in New York, for quite awhile. I think that experience soured the chairman, who was himself a lawyer. I think he had gone to the mat for the earlier book, and he didn’t want that exhaustion and expense, and also, being typecast, again. Now, I’m giving this to you secondhand. So, you see, there was a context for the declining of *LOLITA*.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: What comes to mind is that book by John de St. Jorre about the Olympia Press, *VENUS BOUND*. A little sideline: I remember when *The New Yorker* published the chapter from that book about Dominique Aury as being the real author of *THE STORY OF O*. My husband [*Lee Goerner, late editor and publisher of Atheneum*] and I were having dinner with an Italian publisher, who said, “Why did they publish that chapter? We all knew she was the one.” Lee and I looked at each other and looked away. *We didn’t know*.

SAM VAUGHAN: I loved working with St. Jorre on his book because it was written in so cheerful a manner. It was great fun; it was full of publishing lore. I didn’t think it would sell very well, because the number of people interested in the backstage lore of publishing did not seem to be enormous.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I notice that readers do seem to follow this series in *Archipelago* of conversations with publishers; so I think, yes, there is some sort of interest. I can’t put my finger on it, except that people want to know how things work. Not necessarily technically — they want to know who these people are.

SAM VAUGHAN: I think you’re right. It’s become much more so as publishing people get to be much more visible. It used to be part of the compact that you stayed out of sight, that the “gentlemanly” publishers didn’t care to be identified. You were publishing your authors; they were the ones who went public. But that has all gone by the board. The celebrity editor is a feature of the current scene. Michael Korda’s book [*ANOTHER LIFE*] is coming out here [*at Random House*], and the expectation is that he will sell very well, because he’s a good storyteller.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: He is, in a certain way, a popular writer.

SAM VAUGHAN: Yes I think that's true, and I don't think he is striving for any more than that.

*The editor, "retired"*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you repeat what Jason Epstein said about retiring?

SAM VAUGHAN: The reason we were chuckling about Jason was, he said "in retirement" he only wanted to do about eight or ten books a year. Well, if you want to have eight or ten published books a year, you have to be working with 30 or 40 or 50 authors, because they don't all deliver at the same time. Some authors take a year to write a book, and some take a lifetime. Your network, or your stable, or whatever unlovely image you use, has to be fairly sizable. This has nothing to do with the things that come in under the heading of serendipity.

Throughout most of my working life as an editor, I felt I should produce between ten and 20 published books a year. Some years more, some years less. Increasingly, it's become a matter of doing less, partly because the amount of preparation time each book takes is much more than it used to take. You want to produce enough books to pay your way; but you also cannot produce as many books as you might, say, edit, because editing is not the sum total of what you do. You have to reserve part of your time and energy for the promotion of that book, and the author of that book, within the house, and then a certain amount of it outside the house. At the moment, I'm only working on three or four books actively, which are in some stage of publication or other. Ordinarily, it would be many more.

I had a book a couple of years ago by a super photographer, on pickup trucks. If the agent had sent it to me six weeks before, I would have sent it right back. But in the intervening six weeks, I had been West with my sons, and my youngest son was crazy to have a pickup truck, and that dialed me into the American love of that particular kind of vehicle. And so we did a book which was a-typical for me, and it sold extremely well, which is a-typical for me. That's strictly serendipitous.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: This is worth saying, too: you've talked about how authors really don't like to know that their editor is working with other writers.

SAM VAUGHAN: Ideally, not. The writer wants to think that he or she is the editor's—

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: —the editor's only love!

SAM VAUGHAN: He might have a couple of others, in principle. But, as one of my authors, Fannie Flagg, says: "Don't tell me about the others! You may have other people, but I don't want to hear about them, or their work!" That's understandable. A writer wants almost exclusivity. The writer wants prompt response, which I've never been good at, but the editor who reads the manuscript overnight is beloved by his author. There are some, like Bob Gottlieb and others, who will do that, or will do it on occasion.

What I try to practice is what I call the 'slap-and-pat' theory of editing. Almost everything that's written needs some criticism. Almost everything that's written needs some praise, or deserves some praise. So you try to mix praise with criticism. Ideally, you do it sincerely. That is, you don't praise what you really don't like; but you praise what you really do like. You don't write 12 pages of things that are wrong, without remembering to find something else you like, that is already right. There's a theory of

editing that says you should read with a pencil in your hand; and there's an opposing theory which says you should put the pencil away. I do it sometimes one way, and sometimes the other.

Occasionally, there is a manuscript which doesn't need a thing. That has happened, in the years I've been doing this, two or three times. I wish I could retrieve the authors' names: they deserve to be enshrined. There is a kind of writer who is thoroughly professional. One of my mentors, Lee Barker, really admired the 'thoroughly professional writer.' The one who doesn't whine. The one who delivers on time. The one who delivers a clean manuscript — which used to be more of a problem than it is now. The one who doesn't need a lot of line-by-line work. I've had the happy experience of reading something and saying, "This will do fine." But most things — some of the best things — do deserve some talking over and/or working over.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: In one of your pieces, you quoted Robert Giroux on the difference between line editing and book editing. Giroux said: "The truth is that editing lines is not necessarily the same as editing a book. A book is a much more complicated entity and totality than the sum of its lines alone. Its structural integrity, the relation and proportions of its parts, and its total impact could escape even a conscientious editor exclusively intent on vetting the book line by line."

SAM VAUGHAN: I'm still a little shocked by the fact that some editors, apparently, feel that they only have to do the big stuff, and they leave the lines for somebody else. You can leave it for the copy editor. I have great regard for copy editors: they make the author and the editor respectable. But I don't leave anything undone on a manuscript that I think I can do, even if I overlap with the copy editor. Now, my sense of punctuation is as erratic as the next guy's. But some other things I think I know something about.

One colleague of mine, Betty Prashker, said she likes to edit the author's head: by which she means, the kind of editing she enjoys is talking over the manuscript with the author. That's distinct from laying a hand on the manuscript. And I like that, too, although I've never found it wholly satisfying; but it's terribly important, and there are some editors who seem to practice their trade that way.

Some editors are demon line-editors. The danger Bob Giroux speaks of there is, you can spend a lot of time in the trees, and miss you-know-what. I'm beginning to edit a novel right now. I've talked it over with the author. I'm now going to write him a ruminative kind of paper, and talk it over further, because talking with him at first has clarified his intentions, and therefore, my thoughts; and so, I'm going to do a gabby paper which will go further with that process. Then, he will revise and extend what he's done, and he'll give it to me again, and I'll begin to edit, coming in closer on lines. It's kind of a long way around, but it works for him and me. I will edit it several times. And he is a famous, very professional writer.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I can imagine how many writers will read what you've just said, and sigh.

SAM VAUGHAN: There is a lot of useful wasting of time between the writer and the editor. I told you we went last night to see this tribute to Mike Nichols, at the Lincoln Center Film Society, and they were talking about how effective he is as a director. He uses a lot of metaphors, he quotes from a lot of other people, and he quotes from a lot of movies. He doesn't tell actors how to act: he tries to put things in their heads which will bring out the best in them. That's analogous to a certain part of editing. You just have to talk for a while; or, if you can't get together, write back and

forth, and see what erupts. By the way, the art of letter writing is not dead; it's alive and well.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You like writing. It's clear in the publications you've been good enough to send me: there's an obvious pleasure in the sentences.

SAM VAUGHAN: I do find pleasure in the play of language and ideas. I also write, as many people have said before me, to find out what I have to say. I write to clarify my own thoughts, or to bring some order to them. Recently, I sent a young scholar-writer an e-mail letter, talking about her book; and, 24 hours later, sent her another one, which turned out to be the one I should have written in the first place. But having written a decidedly imperfect one the day before, that second one helped me to crystallize what I really wanted to encourage her to do. And she said so; but that was fine — she was ready to quit after the first letter, and she was happy after the second.

### *The community of the book*

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: I'd like to ask the question, "Do we have literary culture?" But I think I'll alter it because I like very much your expression "the community of the book." Would you speak about that?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, I don't want to grapple with whether we have a literary culture. It usually satisfies a need, speaking of needs, of certain writers and publishing people to think we have a culture that is antagonistic to the writer, to the poet or painter. But, quite apart from that, to whatever degree it's true or false, we do have a community of the book. If you take the librarians and the teachers and the booksellers, and the writers and the editors and publishers of all stripes, and the people connected with the process at one remove, the printers or sales reps: they all, when you press them against the wall, would say they are in favor of the book. There's a kind of friendliness toward the book; there's still a kind of respect that the book doesn't always deserve. Even though we don't elevate our writers to the status of the National Academy of France very often, there's still a kind of automatic respect for the book — which I think we are eroding, by the way, with promiscuous publishing and promiscuous writing. But it's still there.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Would you illustrate what you just said?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, at the moment, I'm very conscious about having read last week a book-industry study-group report which says that the sales of the general trade books are off by three percent from the previous year, something like that. So far, we haven't heard the beating of the breasts, which is the favorite background music of publishing. I flip through the pages of the *Times Book Review*, and I find it basically boring. And if I find it boring — and I make my life out of it — what must other people think of it? We all have civilian friends who are not part of an active literary culture, but they are literate, and they read books, and they're not slaves to reading, but they want books as part of their lives. One of them said to me one day, about certain people who were getting a lot of attention, "Who *are* these people? Why should we pay attention?" That's not a bad question.

Also, there's a question of the book's reliability. Once, a reader tended to believe more of what was in a book than was in the *Daily News* or the *National Enquirer*. That was based on the research necessary, the time and art a book required. These years, we are publishing books by well-known authors, books of presumed facts, which are as unreliable, as "unsourced," as the Internet. There is much talk about how journalistic

standards have slipped. Whether that's true or not, there are writers and editors who don't seem to have a grasp of even the most rudimentary journalistic standards.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You wrote an article for *Daedalus* called "The Community of the Book," which opens: "The community of the book, it seems safe to assume, consists of those for whom the written word, especially as expressed in printed and bound volumes, is of the first importance. Little else may be safely assumed, including the question of whether it is, in fact, a community."

It's a lovely piece, and perhaps replies to my earlier question as well as any response might. I was quite taken, as well, by this: "Let's look briefly at two of our common concerns — reading and, that neglected and maligned figure, the reader." In all of this, your special concern has been for the reader. You are very much, I think, as an editor, on the side of the reader: not as opposed to the writer, by any means, but, you're definitely there for the reader.

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, I think the reader has rights. They have the right to say, "I like it" or "I don't." They don't have to articulate why. They have the right, in most cases, to clear writing, not willful obfuscation. There's a difference, as you well know, between the subtleties of art and what I see is an almost perversely obscure style on the part of some writers. Readers are usually willing to work pretty hard, especially if they've bought the book and taken it home. The idea of the coffee table book that sits there unread: I never have believed that. If you like to read, and you've paid 30 bucks for a book, you're going to work pretty hard to read it. In all the criticisms of publishing and our consumer society, there's not enough standing-up for the reader. The reader doesn't have a single voice.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Nor should it be a single voice. There should be any number of voices.

SAM VAUGHAN: Right. Readers have the power of the purse, and when they exercise it negatively, I can't get angry. Also, another thing, and I think it's related, because I think there's a value which makes the reader not just a reader. The reader completes the creative act, closes the circuit. The writer puts down words which attempt to convey a vision or a version of reality, say, and the reader follows through, finishes the vision, and of course affects it. It is a creative act complementary to the writer's original act. We all know that novels, poems, essays and short stories compete with movies and plays and television and so forth. Many people participate in all of those, or lots of them. They go in and out of them with varying degrees of intensity. I'm one of them. I go to the theater not at all for two years, and then I go to five plays. If the theater can hold me, I keep going back, and if it disappoints me, I turn away, at least for awhile. I think that happens with books, too. There is a moment where you look at the papers and you say, "There's not a movie I want to see!" You look at television and say, "There's nothing on that I want to see." You look at the book pages and say, "There's nothing I want to read." We are really trying to say something more than that.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: There are surely books that you haven't read that you mean to.

SAM VAUGHAN: Oh, really. (*laughter*)

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Let's say you can go into book-hibernation this summer: what would you read?

SAM VAUGHAN: Well, at the moment, I'm not waiting for the summer, or hibernation, which may never come. I'm listening to a series of tapes, in the car, of lectures by acclaimed professors of the intellectual tradition of the West, about which I

can tell you not three sentences. It starts with Aquinas and goes through Machiavelli, so far, in whom I'm deeply interested, by the way. There is a great blank in my education, and so, this is part of 'high school at home' or, 'college at home.' I'm enjoying them so far, and I hope to continue. That's because I don't have much personal reading time, but the car is useful. The recorded cassette, by the way, the audio cassette, limped along for years and didn't catch on. Something caused it to catch on a few years back; I don't know what it was.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: Yes; but it has caught on. I often travel long distances by car, and recently began listening to taped books while driving. That is how I came to hear Jeremy Irons read *LOLITA*. He has a voice every bit as beautiful as James Mason's, yet very different from it, and, it seems to me, is reading that extraordinary novel with the most perfect intonation. Now I'm listening to a BBC production of the New Testament. I've never read the New Testament entire, and listening to it (perhaps because of those British accents) helps me understand a bit better why Nietzsche disliked Christianity. I'm surprised at that. The Gospel of St. John, on the other hand, is lovable. I've listened, also, to Shelby Foote read his book about the siege of Natchez. Once certain books were available unabridged on tape, I began to listen.

SAM VAUGHAN: It would be a good thing for all of us, not as duty, but because it feels good, to start each day, as some writers do, with a reading of the Old Testament; or, by listening to it. It is good in the same way that symphonic or classical music clears the mind and the head and the soul, all at once. It makes life seem more orderly and also longer-range, beyond the moment. You get a feeling of continuity when you absorb some of that beauty and serenity.

### *Afterward*

*In late May of this year, Bertelsmann A. G., the German publishing corporation that owns Random House, Inc. (including Knopf, Random House, Vintage, Pantheon, and other imprints) and Doubleday/Bantam/Dell (which includes other imprints, as well), announced that several formerly quite distinct imprints ("units," the New York Times called them) would be combined, including the distinguished but quite different paperback imprints Vintage (part of Knopf) and Anchor (part of Doubleday), which will have one director. Said the Times: "Critics call the move a triumph of corporate organization over literary values." While no doubt over-simplifying the matter, the Times' alarm was muted compared to the dismay heard among various editors and agents. In particular, women I spoke to were unhappy because so few of their sex remained at the highest levels. I phoned Sam Vaughan to ask what he knew about the reorganization, and what he thought about it. A man who, perhaps above all else that he stands for, wishes to speak accurately, he was reluctant to comment publicly before all the facts were in.*



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NEW SHOES (New York: Doubleday, 1961 & London: World's Work)

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*Others:*

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Diane Ackerman, Shana Alexander, Stephen Ambrose, Patrick Anderson, Bernard Asbell, Isaac Asimov, Laurence Barrett, Dave Barry, Brendan Behan, Ezra Taft Benson, Bill Bradley, Brassai, William F. Buckley, Jr., Herb Caen, Hortense Calisher, Bruce Catton, Charlotte Chandler/Fellini, Joanne Ciulla, George Cuomo, Max Eastman, Dwight D., Milton, and John S.D. Eisenhower, Duke Ellington, Paul Erdman, Fannie Flagg, Sarah Gainham, Ernest K. Gann, Larry Gelbart, Winston Graham, George Garrett, Ruth Gordon, William Goyen, Hannah Green, Josh Greenfield, Leonard Gross, Arthur Hailey, Alex Haley, Marilyn Harris, William Harrison, W.C. Heinz, Mohamed Heikal, Patty Hearst, Thor Heyerdahl, Sir Edmund Hillary, Rolaine Hochstein, Hubert H. Humphrey, J.R. Humphreys, Hammond Innes, Roger Kahn, Garson Kanin, Dr. Fred Kantrowitz, Richard Ketchum, Marvin Kitman, Stephen King, F. Sionil José, Eric Larabee, Gordon Lish, Alistair MacLean, D. Keith Mano, Kai Maristed, John Bartlow Martin, Martin Mayer, Eugene McCarthy, James Michener, James Mills, Gilbert Millstein, Malvin Moscow, Edmund Muskie, Paul Nagel, N. Richard Nash, David Niven, Louis Nizer, William Abrahams & the *O. Henry Prize Stories*, Jake Page, William Paley, Joe Paterno, Stanley Pottinger, Jean-Francois Revel, Nelson Rockefeller, William Safire, Pierre Salinger, Harrison Salisbury, Jonathan Schwartz, Winfield Townley Scott, W.B. Seitz, Israel Shenker, Bud Shrake, Nancy Sinatra, David Slavitt, Wilbur Smith, Elizabeth Spencer, Wallace Stegner, Alma Stone, Irving Stone, Lewis L. Strauss, Gay Talese, Alexander Theroux, Tommy Thompson, Ann Thwaite, Henri Troyat, Margaret Truman, Leon Uris, Immanuel Velikovsky, Earl Warren, Peter Watson, Tom Wicker, Paul Wilkes, Lauren Wolk, Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

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William Hollingsworth Whyte, THE ORGANIZATION MAN  
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Leon Uris, EXODUS

**Related articles:**

Conversation with Marion Boyars, *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 3  
Conversation with Cornelia and Michael Bessie, Vol. 1, No. 4; *and* Vol. 2, No. 1  
Conversation with William Strachan, Vol. 2, No. 4  
George Garrett, "Whatever He Says Is Gospel," *this issue*  
Endnotes: "On Memory," *this issue*

## WHATEVER HE SAYS IS GOSPEL

### George Garrett *talks with the* Editor of Archipelago

*George Garret, man of letters and friend, had suggested I ought to have a conversation with Sam Vaughan. Vaughan had published several of his books, I learned (though not first from Garrett), and had written the following: "But the finest historical novel I ever read arrived in two great boxes of manuscript written by George Garrett, poet, short-story writer, novelist, and teacher. George had written novels before, but nothing quite prepared me for the masterpiece that was DEATH OF THE FOX.*

*"The courage it required, indeed audacity, for this young American Southerner to take on Raleigh, Elizabeth's captain.... For me it was an exposure to two kinds of minds: the Elizabethan, so full of cunning and guile but so often in search of options and answers, none of them easy, in fact for wisdom; and the mind of a man, the author, who, in the Southern tradition, loves the past and seeks to recompose it, through fact and invention, in myth and song and smell, capable of re-creating the very humanity of those who walked the earth before us."*

*I asked George Garrett how he came to publish DEATH OF THE FOX with Sam Vaughan.*

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GEORGE GARRETT: Well, do you want the long story, or the short?

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I want the long story.

GEORGE GARRETT: I had written a novel called DO, LORD, REMEMBER ME. Gillen Aitken was then my agent in England. He had placed it with somebody, I've forgotten who. Meanwhile, it was placed in the United States with Charles Duell, of Duell, Sloan and Pearce, a very nice little publishing house. Candida Donadio was my agent at the time, but that book I sold myself. Mr. Duell was a very handsome, very elegant old-fashioned deal-maker. We met at the Yale Club bar to discuss the book.

Now, this book is red-neck-rowdy. I had no idea why this man with his elegant accent, his hat and umbrella; very nice, but the classic Yalie: I had no idea why he would be the least bit interested, other than the fact that he was going out with my cousin. But in a way, Duell, Sloan was an obvious place to send it, because Mr. Duell had published most of Erskine Caldwell, so red-neck-rowdy was what he liked. He was the last one there. Sloan and Pearce had vanished. It was a one-man operation, with a nice list, a small Knopf, so to speak.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: This was the early '60s?

GEORGE GARRETT: Must have been. I had written it in 1960, and had turned it in 1961, and Aitken had placed it pretty quickly. — No, he didn't, actually. The problem was, it was a very long book. I looked at it and suddenly realized that it could be cut *exactly* in half. Everyone was happy then. All I did was cut the comedy out of the story. It became very tragic. I managed to use some of the comedy in KING OF BABYLON, many years later.

Okay. We've done it: it exists in a version half as long. Mr. Duell accepted it. It was rowdier than it is now; he had seen the English edition.

Everything was going along fine. Then, the following thing happens: Mr. Duell suddenly calls me here at the University of Virginia, where I was teaching, and says, “Guess what? A very large publisher, which has no trade list at all, but publishes magazines, wants to buy Duell, Sloan, and Pearce.” It was *Better Homes and Gardens*. Their whole operation became known as Meredith Press. They had offered him, as he told me on the phone, a lifetime job there, and the ability to continue to publish his own list, under them, of anything that he wanted: with one exception: they’re *not* going to publish this god-damn rowdy red-necked novel. He said, “Now, here’s the deal. I will not accept their offer. I want to publish this. If *you* want to do it. It’s up to you. Here’s the rest of the deal: If you accept *this* idea, I will return the book to you. I will promise to publish, sight unseen, the next book you write: *anything* that you want to do. You just tell me a subject on the phone, right now, and the contract will be in the mail before the day is over.”

I thought for a minute and I said, “How about something about Sir Walter Raleigh.” He said, “Okay.” And I got, a couple of days later, a contract that said something about Sir Walter Raleigh, for a larger advance than I had ever had before. He also said that I was free to shop DO, LORD around — if I could do anything with it, which we doubted. On the other hand, all he had was the new topic, and they couldn’t turn that down; they had made that arrangement with him. I got the advance and commitment to publish this new novel. I thought, That’s fine. What could happen to Duell?

Well, Candida said, “I’ll send the book around.” The first place she sent it was to Sam Vaughan, at Doubleday. The story he told me at the time — he’s more dignified about it than I am; he’s a very dignified guy — was that the book was accepted and went immediately into production. I didn’t have much comment from him, just from the copy editor. He did comment about one thing. He had seen a “Rabelaisian scene” that is entirely based on flatulence, and it had to be cut because, he said, “Mr. Nelson Doubleday suffers from flatulence, and we don’t allow any books published here that have farts in them. It’s just a house policy. So you’ve got to take the fart out.”

Well, this was my first experience of editing by him. I said, “How about a very loud sneeze?” “Okay, then a loud sneeze it will be.” — “If only I hadn’t *sneezed*” begins the chapter in the Doubleday version.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Excellent. We can make an historical note about the Bowdlerization.

GEORGE GARRETT: Well, this has an end. LSU [Louisiana State University Press] brought out DO, LORD, REMEMBER ME, in their series Voices of the South. I said, “Would you guys mind doing the English edition instead of the American?” and they said, “Sure,” not thinking there was any difference. So, the only one that exists now is the ‘flatulent’ version.

I didn’t have much to do with Sam. In the interim I talked to some people in publishing, who said, “Well, he’s a really remarkable person, in several ways. One of them is that he is probably the *only* person, young or old, in publishing at the minute, who says what he means and means what he says. You can take whatever he says as gospel. There’s no excuse for paranoia dealing with Vaughan.”

Well, I did meet him, after the book was published. He had sent a letter of congratulations and said he’d noticed a few little things he wished we had had more time to work on, but “next time we’ll do something better.” We met in New York. I said, “Because of the fact that it went directly to the copy-editor and you really didn’t have much time to work on it, I’m going to ask you a couple of questions. One of them

is, Why did you do this book? Other than the fact that you like red-neck stories, why in the world did you do this book?"

He said, "You really want to know? I'll tell you." He said: "I had two young interns" — very attractive young women; I had seen them walking up and down the hall. The interns had a room in the Doubleday building, which he showed me, where they all go and have coffee in the morning. His interns were annoyed, he said, because all the others, working for other editors, had stories about the wonderful manuscripts coming over from Candida Donadio, and *they* never got any. They asked him why, and he said he didn't know why he never got any manuscripts from Candida Donadio, but that, if he ever did get one, he promised that he would publish it like *that*, sight unseen. And, sure enough, in came a manuscript from Candida, and it went to him.

There was another factor as well, he said. "We made much more money on the Eisenhower papers" — which was the big thing that he had edited — "in this quarter than we had anticipated, and so we were caught in a complicated tax bind, because we didn't pay enough. We had made a guess, and it was way off. We were so successful that we desperately needed some paper losses, right now. This came like a wonderful blessing to our publishing house."

I said, "As I understand it, you people classify writers as either 'prestige' or 'profitable.' What sort of niche do you have in mind for me, Mr. Vaughan?"

And he said, "Neither one, neither one." He said, "At the moment, I think of you as a *tax loss* writer. Don't put on a long face. Somewhere, at any given moment, there's always a publisher desperately needing a paper tax-loss. You could go right through life being valuable." He may have said other things, but that one sort of stuck.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: This may be the truest insight into publishing economics I've heard from anybody.

GEORGE GARRETT: Well, I accepted it as absolute truth. He may not remember it exactly that way. Then, there was the question, What next? And whatever it was I had in mind interested no one at Doubleday, so we amiably parted company.

Meanwhile, I had finished a version, a draft, of the Raleigh book [*which became* DEATH OF THE FOX, *first volume of the trilogy*] and turned it in to Mr. Duell.

But, by the time I turned it in, Mr. Duell was dead. His assistant, a young man named Ralph Woodward, had been absorbed into Meredith Press. And I had lost Candida ... we had just sort of drifted apart. I was agent-less, and had not kept up with the fact that Duell was dead. Meredith had quit doing fiction, so this would be their only work of fiction in years. This was later in the '60s. They said, "We're going to publish it, but if you want to send review copies out you're going to have to come to New York, wrap them yourself, mail 'em out. All we're going to do is print and bind. There'll be this big stack of books. It's up to you, after that." They also wanted their money back.

The manuscript kicked around for a while. A man named Perry Knowlton, my editor at Scribner's when I had done a collection of stories there, years before, had become an agent, and ran Curtis Brown. I thought, Well, I'd better have one. So I went to see him. Perry Knowlton sent it around to various people. There were many rejections. It was a rough and raw draft, and some people just can't see how you're going to take that and turn it into something.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: There's nothing like an editor with no imagination.

GEORGE GARRETT: They say, "This is not ready to go to the printer." That's right: but it's *going* to be. I'm working on it right now. I just wanted you to see the lines.

Ten or twelve publishers turned it down. I really thought nothing was going to happen. Then Knowlton called me and said he had had a call from Gottlieb [*Robert Gottlieb, editor, later editor-in-chief, at Knopf, then of The New Yorker*]. Gottlieb had heard about it. Gottlieb said, "I'm sort of an expert on Raleigh and the Renaissance, and if this book has any merit at all, I would really like to do it. So send it to me, and I can give you a prompt response."

Well, no prompt response. Nothing. I was to find out much later that, almost the same time he received the manuscript, he went on jury duty, and it was a long case. Eight, ten, twelve weeks went by. Meanwhile, summer had come, and we were at a remote ranch, the children, Susan, and I. Susan's parents had set us up at a very expensive, wonderful ranch deep in the heart of Teton National Park. The only other ones in the park were the Rockefellers. The nearest real phone was in Moose, Wyoming. I got a message that Mr. Knowlton in New York was calling me, and I should call back immediately. The only way to do that was to drive down to Moose.

I drove down from the mountains thinking this through. 'He wouldn't bother me, knowing I was out here in the deep boonies, if it wasn't — he must have gotten good news to tell me, otherwise I wouldn't have to come down here all the way, twelve miles, and contact him.' It turned out not to be that way at all. What Gottlieb had said was, he liked the structure, the general design of the book was perfectly fine, the content was okay: it was just the *language*. It was terrible. I said, "I'll change all the words!"

So, that was that. Perry then said, "Well, what do you think we ought to do with this?" I said, "I don't know. Seems to me like the last thing in the world he'd want, but why not send it back to Sam Vaughan? He was at least friendly." Knowlton said, "Oh, this is probably not a Doubleday-type book." I said, "Well, let's try it anyway."

So he sent it over there, with no explanation. Vaughan read it and said he would like to do it. We did that one together. And the next one, too [THE SUCCESSION]. He was more helpful, in a way, with that one, because we didn't have many big changes to make on the first one. Didn't have to change all the words.

Not long ago I wrote this incident up, and I was trying to think of a way to bug Gottlieb, if he should ever stumble on it. There's a book by Frederick Busch, just out, called LETTERS TO A FICTION WRITER. Letters about all kinds of things. Some of them are real letters, like Flannery O'Connor to John Hawkes, and some are made up, and some are to students. Towards the end of the piece I wrote, I tell that story about rejection, and describe what happened and how it really makes me angry again, so I get my guns and drive out into the country and set up a lot of bottles and cans and imagine I'm blowing Gottlieb away. Thinking, Some day, someone's going to say, 'Hey, somebody's out there who wants to blow your head off!' And, with the world the way it is, it could make someone nervous.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA: You probably don't want to publish that. Although, you already did.

GEORGE GARRETT: It's already out. It isn't quite put that way. This makes me sound like a very violent person.

So, Sam and I did those two books [DO, LORD, REMEMBER ME and DEATH OF THE FOX], and we did a book of three novellas, called THE MAGIC STRIPTease, and then we did THE SUCCESSION [*second volume in the Elizabethan trilogy*]. He then plugged me in to Bill Strachan [*former editor, Anchor Doubleday, now director of Columbia University Press*], to write introductions to a series of Anchor paperbacks. This was an annual of poetry and fiction by people from the Associated Writing Programs, people like Barry

Hannah and Carolyn Forché; many, many people. Strachan was a young editor at Anchor Books then. Sam Vaughan said, “Here, do these with George.” I don’t think Strachan had a lot to say about it, but he was very nice. There were eleven intros before the series died, and four of them were done at Anchor.

I was working on the last book [ENTERED FROM THE SUN, *third novel in the trilogy*]. Sam was by then publisher of Doubleday. They had a big dust-up there, and he ended up taking early retirement; he didn’t tell me any details about it. But I was stuck there, though I didn’t have to be.

By this time, Jane Gelfman was my agent. Doubleday had hired Herman Golub from somewhere; Harper’s. We didn’t owe them anything, at this point. Jane and I went to lunch with Golub and Steve Rubin, who’s now the big gun over there, I guess, and he said, “Let us do this book. Finish up your trilogy with us, and we’ll show you how we can publish it really well.” As if they hadn’t been trying too hard before that.

It was up to me. Jane said, “They’ll probably do as well as anybody else.” But she didn’t get along with Golub at all. I ended up publisher-less. The book came out in hard-cover, and I could see what was happening. The Germans had come in by then [*Bertelsmann A.G. bought Doubleday*]. Golub left there pretty soon afterward. But he and the agent had fought, and, while he was extremely nice to be with, he really wasn’t interested in the book. Meanwhile, Morrow had put the first two volumes in paper; but they dropped that line. I’ve got boxes of those books.

Then, Cork [Corliss] Smith brought all three of the Elizabethan novels in paper. Then he brought out WHISTLING IN THE DARK. Then he retired, but he went back, and he was the one who brought out KING OF BABYLON.

*George Garrett is the author of a number of books: poetry, essays, short stories, novels. He is Henry Hoynes Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Virginia.*

**(Selected) Works by George Garrett:**

George Garrett, KING OF THE MOUNTAIN (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957)

——, DO, LORD, REMEMBER ME (Doubleday, 1965)

——, DEATH OF THE FOX (1971)

——, THE SUCCESSION (1983)

——, ENTERED FROM THE SUN (1990)

——, THE MAGIC STRIPEASE (1973)

——, AN EVENING PERFORMANCE (1985)

——, WHISTLING IN THE DARK (Harcourt Brace, 1992)

——, THE KING OF BABYLON SHALL NOT COME AGAINST YOU (1998)

——, BAD MAN BLUES: A Portable George Garrett (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1998)

**Other:**

Frederick Busch, ed. LETTERS TO A FICTION WRITER (W.W. Norton, June 1999)

*See also:*

A Conversation with Samuel S. Vaughan, *this issue*

A Conversation with William Strachan, *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 4



## IN THE TWILIGHT OF A COOLER AUTUMN

Errol Miller

“They hovered in the twilight of a cool autumn...”  
William Alexander Percy

Linear landscapes, from last summer  
or Coney Island, perhaps, a peninsula  
of the Nineteen 40's intact in memory only,  
linked according to destination  
and seated very close  
to the Captain of the Ship.

They shall come and bloom again, the survivors  
of still blue dawns and amazing erotic downtown nights.  
Family and friends, lost in transformation,  
locked into Georgia's red clay,  
Alabama's limestone sill.

Across the hallway of time  
one red light flickers solitary. East  
or West Egg. Northern pleasures from the Jazz Age.  
Off the coast of Leucadia I wait,  
frozen into surreal place.

Like a lusty image come and gone, like  
gourds of November clinging to smokehouse walls,  
like the pulse of Niagara when the Master is finished,  
these silences hoard a greater grandeur of meaning.  
Far-off Atlantis nights, they haunt  
me with homesick ballads  
of Sasha preparing supper, of nomadic interludes  
drifting in and out of coastal enclaves.  
Later, in a twilight evening of perfection,  
white candles sputtered into avalanche,  
that onslaught of silt and flesh and bone  
stored in salty earth-capsules,  
hibernating until discovery.

Along the hickory hollows of the past  
I see a house, four-square, mourning on a hill.  
I see plants and animals dead and dying.  
I see moonbeams leaning against the corner  
of a nebulous world of make-believe.  
A man waits in his battered muddy pickup  
in front of Victory Baptist Church,  
selling summer produce.

And of course Blue and Gray  
sabers rattle across alluvial levees  
flecked with blood, a man is down  
in the canebrakes and other brothers join him.  
Thin ragged lines disappear into history.  
In the long ending, will it matter?

Lilac and wisteria, Natchez huddled  
on its dogwood bluffs, and Oxford's creme-stucco  
literature of rural loss, trashy dimestore people  
dying in the dust of Jefferson. I know  
I know the good ol' boys from High Point.  
I know I knew them when back then  
in slantback and cafes of Dixie.

These Delta dreams, enriched  
with horsetuff nouns & verbs, Aunt Rhoda's  
faded photograph, Mama's eternal rocking  
on a wide-brimmed white front porch.  
After receiving the guide-on I rode over  
to the Promised Land for another look.  
How far away, I thought, how far to go.  
Piano music drifted out of Graceland,  
and I simply closed up shop.



people. Reading Ellison here is good, in part as a reminder of something that must lie deep within this nation in danger.

“What’s wrong with those folks, Bliss, is they can’t stand continuity, not the true kind that binds man to man and to Jesus and to God. My great-great-granddaddy was probably a savage eating human flesh, and bastardy, denied joy and shame, and humanity had to be mixed with my name a thousand times in the turmoil of slavery, and out of all that I’m a preacher. It’s a mystery but it’s based on fact, it happened body to body, belly to belly over the long years. But then? They’re all born yesterday at twelve years of age. They can’t stand continuity because if they could everything would have to be changed; there’d be more love among us, boy. But the first step in their growing up is to learn how to spurn love. They have to deny it by law, boy. Then begins the season of hate AND SHAMEFACEDNESS. Confusion leaps like fire in the bowels and false faces bloom like jimsonweed. They put on a mask, boy, and life’s turned plumb upside down.

“Cause what can be right if the first, the *baby love*, was wrong, Bliss? Tell me then where’s the foundation of the world?”

Some of Ellison’s notes are appended to the text, among them this (wily) one:

Hickman, are you a minister-man or a minstrel man?  
I’m both, I’m afraid — But remember, the Word is tricky!

I saw that some of the most prominent early reviewers of *JUNETEENTH* sounded put out that Ellison’s editor and literary executor, John F. Callahan, had re-constructed the novel as he had, when Ellison had laid out no master-plan. (Why had *he* gotten to do it? was the subtext.) They seemed disconcerted that matters of race loomed so large in these excerpts, drawn from the uncompleted mass of manuscripts. The parentage of the boy Bliss, who grows up to become the race-baiting Senator over whose dying self Rev. Hickman watches, was meant by Ellison, they had thought, to remain unclear, more a trope than a biological placement. That the boy had a white mother (at least), but was reared into too-early manhood by a black man meant — what does it mean? But what *does* it mean? (One reviewer decided that the “Joycean riffs” were “interesting,” while the talk of the ordinary people — “the language of folklore and Christian mythology” — was often “less compelling.” The discrimination, I could only judge, of a tin ear.) Nothing about Ellison’s writing is simple; and it is glorious. There has not been its like recently.

Ellison also wrote: “This society is not likely to become free of racism, thus it is necessary for Negroes to free themselves by becoming their idea of what a free people should be.”

Ah yes, so we were reborn, Rev. Bliss. They still had us harassed, we were still laboring in the fields, but we had a secret and we had a new rhythm...

So tell us about this rhythm, Reveren Hickman.

They had us bound but we had our kind of time, Rev. Bliss. They were on a merry-go-round that they couldn’t control but we learned to beat time from the seasons. We learned to make this land and this light and darkness and

this weather and their labor fit us like a suit of new underwear. With our new rhythm, amen, but we weren't free and they still kept dividing us. There's many a thousand gone down the river. Mamma sold from papa and chillun sold from both. Beaten and abused and without shoes. But we had the Word, now, Rev. Bliss, along with the rhythm. They couldn't divide us now. Because anywhere they dragged us we throbbed in time together. If we got a chance to sing, we sang the same song. If we got a chance to dance, we beat back hard times and tribulations with the clap of our hands and the beat of our feet, and it was the same dance. Oh, they come out here sometimes to laugh at our way of praising God. They can laugh but they can't deny us. They can curse and kill us but they can't destroy us all. This land is ours because we come out of it, we bled in it, our tears watered it, we fertilized it with our dead. So the more of us they destroy the more it becomes filled with the spirit of our redemption. They laugh but we know who we are and where we are, but they keep on coming in their millions and they don't know and can't get together.

But tell us, how do we know who we are, Daddy Hickman?

We know where we are by the way we walk. We know where we are by the way we talk. We know where we are by the way we sing. We know where we are by the way we dance. We know where we are by the way we praise the Lord on high. We know where we are because we hear a different tune in our minds and in our hearts. We know who we are because when we make the beat of our rhythm to shape our day the whole land says, Amen! It smiles. Rev. Bliss, and it moves to our time!

(to be continued)

-KM

Ralph Ellison, *JUNETEENTH*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Random House, 1999)

*See also:*

Endnotes, *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2, 3, 4

Endnotes, *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2, 4

Endnotes, *Archipelago*, Vol. 3, No. 1 "Passion" -*Note:* Joel Agee has won this year's Helen and Kurt Wolff Prize for his translation of Heinrich von Kleist's *PENTHESILEA*, "for an outstanding translation from German into English." This astonishing poem was the subject of "Passion."

## Recommended Reading

In vain had books taught him of human perversity and the disasters that  
clung like shadows to man's fate; his heart refused to believe what his eyes read.

Gustaw Herling

THE TOWER

*Several readers, friends of Archipelago, suggest some good books:*

**James Wintner** [jhw@interport.com](mailto:jhw@interport.com) (Publisher, JHW Editions; Colophon Page <http://colophon.com>; PhotoArts <http://photoarts.com>):

“An understanding of some essential America derives, for me, from two literary masterpieces that ‘bookend’ this century: Sinclair Lewis’s *BABBITT* and John Updike’s *Rabbit* tetralogy. When I proposed to a discerning French friend that Updike was our generation’s worthy successor to Lewis, she replied swiftly: ‘Isn’t it obvious: *Rabbit/Babbitt—Babbitt/Rabbit?*’

“Shortly thereafter, during the questions following a reading from his *LILIES OF THE FIELD* (a pale volume in every respect), when I was able to ask Updike whether he had intended this homonymic acknowledgment, he said that he had not read *BABBITT* until after writing the second ‘*Rabbit*’ novel [*RABBIT REDUX*]. He had avoided Lewis, believing him a writer who had only made fun of the middle classes.

“How deeply wrong Updike was (I’m sure he saw that) in thinking Lewis made fun of *Babbitt*. Both writers are fiercely protective of their poor protagonists and their struggles to make their way in a miasma of American hocus-pocus. Both struggle valiantly, and unsuccessfully, to rise beyond their fates as mere pawns in a game they do not control, and can barely discern the rules of. Perhaps Harry Angstrom’s anguish is the more palpable, for he starts further down the social ladder than *Babbitt* does, and we watch his journey to almost-consciousness through several volumes that, more self-consciously than Lewis’, explore our American century. (But, then, we meet *Babbitt* at age 46).

“While Lewis pitied *Babbitt*, I believe, Updike loves *Rabbit*. Like God: watching and recording, pitying his bafflement at being a man; unable to intervene. I feel closer to Harry Angstrom than to George *Babbitt*, but that may be because the symbols that control *Rabbit*’s life are not very far from my own.

“It seems to me that Updike identifies more with Harry Angstrom than Lewis did with *Babbitt*. He is also able to be more honest about the mysteries of sex, the greatest ineffable. *BABBITT* is Lewis’s finest book: he wrote *about* America through *Babbitt*. For Updike, America *is* *Rabbit*: he is the Everyman, the sacrificial son. *Rabbit*’s is, certainly, a religious journey or vision quest. In every mirror he sees himself lacking. He is restless. When he goes up for that lay-up that explodes his heart (*RABBIT AT REST*), it’s the explosion of all that relentless dreaming, *Rabbit*’s desire to comprehend and master. There is no doubt, Harry Angstrom died for our sins.

“What we learn from these books are variations on the American mythos (our poor replacement for an ethos), as the culmination of the end of culture and community and, hopefully, the beginning of something new. Yet, it’s easier to capture the ‘heart’ of *Rabbit*. When I read the first book I was fairly amazed that a 28-year old could understand so much. Though it lacks the polish of the remaining ones (the volumes are pretty much separated by ten years, and the energy slacked off in *RABBIT AT REST*), the *Rabbit* novels are just an amazing streak of good writing. And, they are written in iambic pentameter: try reading one aloud. Once, unexpectedly, all I had to hand was a copy of *RABBIT IS RICH*. I had just finished reading it; so, I started again and read right through, aloud, with equal pleasure.” Sinclair Lewis, *BABBITT* (various publishers; first pub. 1929). John Updike, *RABBIT RUN* (Knopf, 1960); *RABBIT REDUX* (Random House, 1970); *RABBIT IS RICH* (Knopf, 1981); *RABBIT AT REST* (1990; all volumes in paper, Ballantine)

**Michael Rothenberg** [walterblue@earthlink.net](mailto:walterblue@earthlink.net) (Poet; publisher, Big Bridge Press; Big Bridge [www.bigbridge.org](http://www.bigbridge.org)):

“This book is a significant work that tracks down the beginnings of song. And to understand the beginnings of song is also to understand the beginnings of poetry. The poet and songwriter should find

this book enlightening. The troubadour, the story teller, song accountings of history of the tribe, and the rituals of daily life are encompassed in one body: Song/Poem. You don't agree? Okay, don't. But read this book and consider the possibilities." C. M. Bowra, *PRIMITIVE SONG* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1962)

"America is a candy store for music: Blues, Rock & Roll, Pop, Rap, Country, Classical, Bluegrass, R&B, Jazz, Native American, Gospel, Broadway, Soul, Heavy Metal. You want to eat it here, or have it wrapped to go? How did this diversity evolve in such a short time from one common soil? AMERICA'S MUSIC is a big, scholarly book. Its structure is its beauty: small chapters, bite-size servings, broken down with each musical movement, so that ingredients can be savored and understood to get the big picture. This is the greatest book on music I have ever come across, and makes it easy to get an in-depth survey of the glorious landscape of music in America." Gilbert Chase, *AMERICA'S MUSIC From the Pilgrims to the Present* (Chicago and Normal: University of Illinois Press, 1992)

"Did you ever think that the best music is the music we get to hear on the radio? Sorry to break your heart. The music we get to hear is the music the Music Industry wants us to listen to. Though there has been reform, the forces of capital, monopoly, mega-entertainment conglomerates, have continued to choke spontaneity and experimentation from the heart of music-makers. Music changed for America when the entrepreneur found out how much money there was in popular music consumption. Drugs, payola, you name it and we bought it. And we're still buying it. This book is 25 years old and still tells it like it is. The names have changed but it's the same old game. Take this picture and extrapolate to Music, Books, Film, and then you might be ready for the *really* bad news." Frederic Dannen, *HIT MEN* (NY: Penguin Books, 1975)

"This is a fascinating book by the percussionist for the Grateful Dead, Mickey Hart. It follows the origins of the drum in history, through myth, legend, and the personal quest of the author to unlock the power of percussion. Great pictures of drums from ancient times and faraway places. The first instrument seems to have been two bones knocking against each other, a drum. And the first drummer, appears to have been the daughter of a Sumerian King." Mickey Hart with Jay Stevens, *DRUMMING AT THE EDGE OF MAGIC, Journey into the Sprit of Percussion* (Harper San Francisco, 1990)

"Alan Lomax breaks it down. Co-founder, with folklorist/father John A. Lomax, of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, Alan Lomax takes us on a sensual and moody journey through the south in search of the Blues. In books I have suggested so far, I have looked at: the origins of song; the evolution of musical forms in the history of American culture; the history of a particular instrument, the drum, in the traditions of world cultures. Now, in *THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN*, we can take a deep look at one musical form native to America. The hardships and humor that survive in The Blues, an integral part of African American culture, are vividly retold by interview and story. We can understand why the Blues transformed mostly all forms of American music, from American Classical to Rock & Roll. This story is told by a master." Winner of the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award for General Nonfiction, Alan Lomax, *THE LAND WHERE THE BLUES BEGAN* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1993)

Odile Hellier (The Village Voice Bookshop, Paris; by phone):

"One book I loved very much: *ADA*, by Nabokov. What a wonder, the writing! Reading Russian, I'm all the time tuning into the Russian mind; and, reading him, I see the playfulness of his Russian mind translating itself into English. It comes through in the irony, the ridiculousness of the world, the distance between the character and what happens to him. How he plays: puns in three or five languages: French, English, Russian, sometimes German, sometimes Italian — *and* the language of the entomologist, with his complicated, ornamental descriptions of plants and insects: a Baroque playfulness, combined with tenderness and a totally subversive love. This book is about culture, society of course, with an ironical eye on the upper classes of France, England, and America, which he knows because that was his milieu. I cannot tell you the pleasure I had reading this book, how it stimulates the imagination: it takes you above the ground." Vladimir Nabokov, *ADA* (US: Vintage; UK: Penguin; paperback)

"It's incredible that Grace Paley would be in Paris just now, reading [at the Village Voice] these essays written over the years, given the political climate of the last week, the bombing of Kosovo, because these essays also dealt with political activities of the past. She's certainly against the bombing, as she was against the war in Vietnam, but although she did not speak about Yugoslavia, she understands that it is necessary to get rid of evil. Her life as an ecologist, woman, feminist, pacifist, an activist in many issues:

it is meaningful for me to have her here, now.” Grace Paley, *JUST AS I THOUGHT* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1999)

“Barbara Kingsolver’s new book is a quantum leap up from her previous novels — the scope, the canvas, the destiny: enormous; really wonderful. The book is about the imposition of cultures on other cultures. The title says it all: the preacher who carries his guilt with him to Africa, to the Congo of Patrice Lumumba. In a small village where the people speak Kilonga he wants to baptize the children by immersion, because he feels they live in darkness, though the river is filled with crocodiles! He speaks about ‘Patajesus,’ drawing on the Kilongan word for ‘truth’; but he pronounces it as ‘poisonwood,’ and so is totally wrong; he preaches not that Jesus is ‘truth’ but ‘poison.’ This is a real novel, of ‘real’ lives: the preacher, his wife, and their three daughters. Five different lives lived with humor and tragedy in moral, cultural and political situations; a masterpiece.” Barbara Kingsolver, *THE POISONWOOD BIBLE* (US: HarperCollins; UK: Faber paperback, 1998)

“I read a British book which you may want to know about, by a man who was in prison and then worked in a slaughterhouse. Despite the fact that it was a little bit difficult for me to enter that world at first, I found the author is very, very generous with his rather picaresque, rather deformed characters. A very generous book, funny at times in spite of the very, very, very dark world. It’s really a beautiful book.” Jimmy Boyle, *THE HERO OF THE UNDERWORLD* (UK/US: Serpent’s Tail, 1999)

“Jake Lamar is an African-American writer living in Paris who is best known for *BOURGEOIS BLUES*. His third novel, *CLOSE TO THE BONE*, is just out. His novels are always contemporary and interesting, about the African-American middle class which has money and education and goes back and forth between Europe and the States. He is a subversive kind of writer. He writes about African-American characters, but he’s not protecting them at all: he blurs borders, frontiers, lines between white and black. He debunks the polarization and, though he certainly speaks about racism, undermines it all the time. Racism is an issue, but not treated as we’ve been used to seeing it dealt with in novels. This is a new kind of African-American literature. He’s not carrying the banner of race, but describing a generation across colors.” Jake Lamar, *CLOSE TO THE BONE* (New York: Crown Books, 1999)

## Interesting Sites and Resources

### Independent Presses

Catbird Press <[www.catbirdpress.com](http://www.catbirdpress.com)> publishes, among other notable books, a number by Czech writers in translation, including *THE POEMS OF JAROSLAV SEIFERT*; a garland of these poems appeared in *Archipelago* Vol. 2, No. 3. *DAYLIGHT IN NIGHTCLUB INFERNO* offers Czech fiction from the “post-Kundera generation,” including work by Daniela Fischerová. Her “A Letter to President Eisenhower,” appears in *Vol. 3, No. 1*. Her *FINGERS POINTING SOMEWHERE ELSE* is due out this year. Robert Wechsler, publisher of Catbird, has written an interesting book-length essay, *WITHOUT A STAGE; THE ART OF LITERARY TRANSLATION*; worth reading.

Chelsea Green Publishing Company <[www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com)> in White River Junction, Vermont, specializes in books about sustainable living, with selections of environmentally friendly, thoughtful, and hopeful books. The editor in chief, Jim Schley, wrote us about our conversation with Michael and Cornelia Bessies (*Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 4; Vol. 2, No. 1): “As a younger editor who has every intention of emulating such ... predecessors, I find this conversation to be truly illuminating.”

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*, and *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 4), Ismael Kadare, Javier Marías. Many of their titles are available in the U. S., particularly at independent bookstores.

The Lilliput Press <<http://indigo.ie/~lilliput>> is an Irish publisher founded in 1984 by Antony Farrell. Some 150 titles have appeared under its imprint: art and architecture, autobiography and memoir, biography and history, ecology and environmentalism, essays and literary criticism, philosophy, current affairs and popular culture, fiction, drama and poetry – all broadly focused on Irish themes. Since 1985 they have brought out four volumes of the essays of the late Hubert Butler. Hubert Butler’s “The Artukovitch File” appears, with their permission, in *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 2.



McPherson & Co <[www.mcphersonco.com](http://www.mcphersonco.com)> publishes such writers as the fascinating Mary Butts (THE TAVERNER NOVELS), Anna Maria Ortese (A MUSIC BEHIND THE WALL, Selected Stories Vol. 2), and the performance artist Carolee Schneeman. A beautiful story by Ortese, "The Great Street," appeared in our first issue, and the writer's testament, "Where Time Is Another," appeared *Archipelago* Vol. 2, No. 4.

Online Originals <[www.onlineoriginals.com](http://www.onlineoriginals.com)> is an internet publisher of literature who take the position, one we find ourselves much in agreement with, that "Conventional book publishing has changed dramatically in recent years. Most of the world's publishers are now owned by a handful of media conglomerates, ruled in turn by their finance and marketing departments. To guarantee high profits, they tend to accept manuscripts only by only celebrity writers whose output conforms to the conventional mainstream market. ... We believe that the Internet is the way forward for all kinds of publishing. But for the benefit of our authors, we do not prevent them also publishing printed versions of their works at a later date." They deliver "book-like" texts by e-mail.

Station Hill Press <[www.stationhill.org](http://www.stationhill.org)> is a non-profit publisher run by the poet George Quasha. They publish writers of serious and surrealist bent, as very fine poetry and fiction. Among their writers are Maurice Blanchot and Spencer Holst (whose "The Zebra Storyteller" appears in Vol. 3, No. 1). María Negroni, whose work appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 1 and Vol. 2, No. 4, is the author of a beautiful work in poetry and prose, ISLANDIA, which they will publish this year, using print-on-demand; a noteworthy work of literature brought out by an interesting development in publishing technology.

Sun & Moon Press <[www.sunmoon.com](http://www.sunmoon.com)> is a fine, serious, literary press with a long backlist. They publish classics as well as contemporary fiction and poetry; writers and poets such as Arkadii Dragomoschenko (astonishing Russian poet), Paul Celan, Harry Matthews, Djuna Barnes, Paul Auster, Russell Banks. They will publish Maria Negroni's LA JAULA BAJO EL TRAPO/CAGE UNDER COVER, tr. Anne Twitty, in a Spanish-English edition; a selection appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 4.

#### Fine Arts

Colophon Page <<http://colophon.com>> is devoted to fine artists' books and works on paper. The attendant shop is the Mezzanine Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; with review and forum pages. Read Jeanette Watson's 'Off the Wall,' book reviews by the owner of the old Books & Co., at <http://colophon.com/offthewall>.

Fray <[www.fray.com](http://www.fray.com)>. Strange. Cool. Heartbreaking. A delight.

Octavo <[www.octavo.com](http://www.octavo.com)> is a digital publisher committed to conserving books, manuscripts, and antiquarian printed materials via digital tools and formats. They make original works available to readers and book lovers through partnerships with libraries, individuals and institutions. As a sample, they offer a PDF download of William Shakespeare Poems. We are always pleased when web publishers use PDF files, as we do for our Download edition.

Photo Arts <<http://photoarts.com>> A handsome site showing work of fine-arts photographers and photojournalists. They have just announced the formation of "Photography Today International," a consortium on-line of cool photographic sites in England, France and the U.S. The design and quality of reproduction are excellent.

The Private Library <<http://connoisseurweb.com/services/index.html>> A lovely surprise hidden behind a wall of *chinoiserie*, "Providing Services to Bibliophiles Since 1980." Kurt Thometz offers guidance on the development of collections, cataloging, organizing library software, conservation, and appraisals. "The Well Dressed Bibliophile" collects marvelous interviews with, portraits of Albert Murray, John Waters, Diana Vreeland, Fran Liebowitz, among others.

#### Literary Reviews

Arts & Letters Daily <<http://www.cybereditions.com/aldaily>> A portal site organized and selected for intelligent readers, directing us to information about books, authors, and commentary worth reading; nothing flashy or 'entertaining' here, thank goodness.

The Barcelona Review <<http://www.barcelonareview.com>>, Jill Adams, Editor. A fine, multi-lingual offering published in Catalonia by a multi-national group. Intelligent editing; interesting reading of younger writers from Europe and America.

Big Bridge <[www.bigbridge.org](http://www.bigbridge.org)> Edited by Michael Rothenberg, editor of OVERTIME, selected poems of Philip Whalen (Penguin, 1999), and Wanda Phipps, who bring an open-armed, '60s generosity to this "webzine." "We think walls are good for keeping out the cold and rain," they write: "They're useless in the creation and propagation of art." Big Bridge Press publishes chapbooks and handsome botannica.

The Cortland Review <<http://www.cortlandreview.com>> Established in 1997, this publication offers such poets as Charles Simic, Robert Pinsky, Henry Taylor, Mark Doty, Robert Creeley, Mark Jarman, Lloyd Schwartz, Neal Bowers, R.T. Smith, John Kinsella, and others. All poetry and most fiction appear in real audio format. They publish in February, May, August, and November, with Monthly features.

Jacket <<http://www.jacket.zip.com.au>> was founded and is edited by John Tranter, an interesting Australian poet whose work is published often in the *London Review of Books* and the *TLS*. "For more than thirty years he has been at the forefront of the new poetry, questioning and extending its procedures," according to his biographical note. In this quarterly literary journal he publishes the work of other writers generously.

London Review of Books <<http://www.lrb.co.uk>> One of the few reviews we read cover to cover; published on paper every two weeks and worth subscribing to. The on-line edition offers a generous selection, including a recent review by Iain Sinclair of James Sallis <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/sinc2106.htm>>, a writer we've admired for some years. Among his talents are a series of superb novels passing as detective stories: THE LONG-LEGGED FLY, BLACK HORNET, MOTHS, EYE OF THE CRICKET. He also translated Raymond Queneau's ST. GLINGLIN.

The Richmond Review <[www.demon.co.uk/review](http://www.demon.co.uk/review)> received approving notice (along with Archipelago) in the *TLS*. The founding editor, Steven Kelly, "lives and breathes" literature as an editorial consultant for various English publishers. He set up this site in October 1995, "when it was the UK's first lit mag to appear exclusively on the World Wide Web." Published ten times a year.

Renditions <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/renditions>> A magazine of translation, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Centre for Translation <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rct>>, edited by Eva Hung, whose poems appear in this issue of *Archipelago*.