

THE READERS EXCHANGE

Ideas and Information for Readers



Dear Friends,

December 2005

KEEPING INTELLECTUALLY FIT. Right from the beginning years ago, TRE has commented on the joy and importance of reading, and, when noted here, I know it's like "preaching to the choir". Reading is central to mental growth and, for children, a key to their performance in school, and in life. We are swamped with books and products dealing with physical fitness, but what about intellectual fitness? Reading, however, so essential for this, has fallen victim to whirlwind schedules and the electronic age, and I think we pay a price for this. We've always hoped to make reading more accessible and enjoyable. And to enhance intellectual fitness.

READING PROFICIENCY. Sadly, the reading scores for our children show little improvement, according to the results of achievement tests administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). More than a third of all fourth graders test at below basic levels, reading scores for eighth graders declined from the prior NAEP tests, and both grade levels fell below what the government deems necessary for them to be proficient. With insufficient reading discipline taught in the schools and at home (isn't reading the most critical of skills?), questionable teaching methods (in some states), and all those electronic distractions, some major changes are needed to get us on the right track.

DRESSED TO THE NINES is a expression, meaning, of course, dressed very smartly. Although the origin of this phrase is uncertain, "Nines" is said by some to be a corruption of *eyne*, the Old English word for "eyes," and thus the basis of the expression. I thought of this when NBA Commissioner David Stern, faced with the plummeting image of NBA players threatening fan interest in the game, imposed a modest dress code for the players to follow. Michael Jordan, I recall, was always "dressed to the nines" and brought credit to himself, his team, and professional basketball. Although many of the current NBAers today are "dressed to the minus sixes," and are certainly not role models, his attempt to buff up the image was met with accusations from a few players of "racism" and "messing with my space." The Stern directive also fed my continuing distress about the unattractive "down-dressing" in recent years. When did t-shirts and jogging shoes come in and sports coats go out of style?

CITIZENSHIP. George Kennan, in discussing government in his provocative *Around the Cragged Hill* (1993), explains that Alexis de Toqueville, in his 1830s work *Democracy in America*, expressed apprehensions that "democracy would lead to an excessive centralization of power in the respective country. What he feared primarily was not that the central power would become a cruel despotism, harshly mistreating the respective people, but quite the contrary: that it would spoil them by catering assiduously to their material needs and thereby dulling in them the consciousness of the responsibilities of citizenship." A prophetic statement, indeed.

WE'RE MAKING A WISH... For your health and happiness...For a fireplace, a quiet evening with family and friends, and a good book to take you a world away...For peace and understanding among people throughout the world. We send our very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Ackerman
Publisher

"Our 15th Year"

Reviews in This Issue

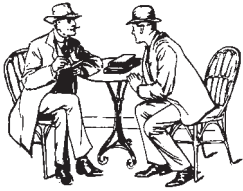
- **The World is Flat** (Friedman)
- **Chain of Command** (Weinberger and Schweizer)
- **The Greatest Game Ever Played** (Frost)
- **The Lady and the Panda** (Croke)
- **The People's Tycoon** (Watts)
- **The Widow of the South** (Hicks)
- **Cold Granite** (MacBride)
- **13 Steps Down** (Rendell)
- **The March** (Doctorow)
- **Stalin's Folly** (Pleshakov)
- **The Year of Magical Thinking** (Didion)
- **Wodehouse: A Life** (McCrum)
- **The Second World War** (Churchill)
- **The Tender Bar: A Memoir** (Moehringer)
- **A Crack in the Edge of the World** (Winchester)
- **The Lincoln Lawyer** (Connelly)
- **The Divide** (Evans)
- **The Planets** (Sobel)
- **Team of Rivals** (Goodwin)
- **So You Want to be a Producer** (Turman)
- **House Without a Key** (Biggers)
- ... and more

Features

- **Exchanging Thoughts**
- **Tony Turner's "A" List**
- **Jane's Selections**
- **TRE Favorites... A Decade Ago**
- **Dorothy Parker's Wit... and Poetry**
- **Children's Reading**
- **Measure for Measure**
- ... and more

THE
QUARTERLY
PUBLICATION
FOR
READERS
BY
READERS

Winter 2005-2006
Volume XV Issue 4



BOOK REVIEWS

TITLE
AUTHOR, NO. OF PAGES,
YEAR OF PUBLICATION,
PUBLISHER AND
RATING

Reviews and Ratings: Book reviews are written by the Publisher (SHA) or by one of the Contributing Editors and attributed accordingly. The 0-10 rating system was developed to provide some sense of the level of satisfaction of a book compared with other books. This is not a sophisticated evaluation. The rating is based on writing, storytelling ability, and the overall impact of each reading experience.

THE WORLD IS FLAT

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

(2005, 469pp, Farrar,
Straus and Giroux)

10

This is an excellent book, highly revealing to me, and I think all of you should read it. There are some dramatic developments going on throughout the world about the way we conduct business, and you should know about them since they have important ramifications about our future. Friedman, a superb chronicler, calls his first chapter, "While I was Sleeping and Explaining," and relates how he discovered the current phase of globalization. In recent years, a massive investment in broadband connectivity (an excess supply was created), cheaper hardware, and an explosion of software created a platform where intellectual work and intellectual capital could be delivered from anywhere. The world was wired for communications and, at the same time, the dot-com bust, the stock market crash, and a slower economy forced companies everywhere to cut their costs. They found a substantial source of savings in outsourcing, and India, China, and other countries were ready. Quietly, American companies have been "reinventing" themselves to improve their competitive posture in a world economy. Did you know that, in 2005, an estimated 400,000 U.S. tax returns were prepared in India? Or that when you ship your Toshiba laptop for repairs via UPS, that it is actually UPS that does the repairs? Or that most of those sales calls you receive in the evening from banks, credit card companies and others come from abroad? Friedman provides an excellent explanation of the new technological forces and cites many highly interesting examples of how companies are adapting. The CEO of India's Infosys Technologies Limited said to Friedman in conversation that the dramatic changes have resulted in, "the playing field being leveled." Ergo, the world is flat, creating great challenges for America, but also great opportunities as the world market for goods and services expands exponentially. (SHA)

THE GREATEST GAME EVER PLAYED

MARK FROST

(2002, 480pp,
Hyperion)

10

Subtitled "Harry Vardon, Francis Ouimet, and the Birth of Modern Golf," this is a wonderful read that golfers, those interested in golf, and sports fans should relish. Harry Vardon (1870-1937) was born on the island of Jersey (England) and became the Jack Nicklaus/Tiger Woods of his day. Francis Ouimet (1893-1967), was born in the U.S. and grew up in a poor family just across the street from The Country Club in Brookline, MA. The first one-third of the book covers the background of golf in England/Scotland and the U.S. as well as the backgrounds of Vardon and Ouimet as they moved toward their classic encounter in the 1913 U.S. Open. The balance of the book provides a stirring account of the U.S. Open in 1913 played at Brookline, which was to become such a central event in the popularity and growth of golf in the U.S. Vardon (then 42 years old) and his British colleague, Ted Ray, came over for the event with very high expectations only to encounter some very stiff competition from the unknown 20-year-old American amateur, Francis Ouimet, a former caddie who entered the fray reluctantly, and then principally to get a look at his idol, Vardon. I will not tell you how the U.S. Open proceeds (to save the fun for you) but I think you will agree that this is a great story, exceptionally well-researched and told. The cover of the book shows a picture of Ouimet, tall, skinny, and very young looking, striding down the fairway with his caddie, ten-year-old Eddie Lowery. What a strange pair they were in this major golf tournament. Several great readers had told me about this book and their recommendations were right on the mark! (SHA) P.S. There is a wonderful "bonus" chapter at the beginning of Part II (The Open) about the year 1913, which gives the reader a great overview of the times.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE MARCH

E. L. DOCTOROW
(2005, 363pp,
Random House)

10

Noted author E. L. (Edgar Lawrence) Doctorow has given this reader a large dose of enjoyable reading over the years, but not all have been in the top tier. *Ragtime*, I thought, was his best. *The March*, a novel of General William Tecumseh Sherman's legendary, bloody march (1864-65) through Georgia and the Carolinas is an excellent recreation of this historic event, one that animates the lives of people caught up in the march. After Sherman burned Atlanta, he marches his 60,000 troops east to the sea and then up into the Carolinas. The march resulted in many thousands of deaths and untold collateral damage as the Union force ran over the Rebels, pillaging and stealing and leaving a "scorched earth" in their wake. The story of Sherman's March has been told many times, but Doctorow's story takes its life and its novelty from the characters, some real and others made up. He brings them to life and chronicles just how they are caught up in and impacted by the event, a resonating blend of the personal with the tragedy visited upon them. Doctorow speaks of the war as, "a mindless mass rage severed from any cause, ideal, or moral principle," and a, "characterless entanglement of brainless forces," and when reading about the battles fought in this theater of the Civil War, it makes one wonder how the nation was able to unify after such a bloody, personal conflict. I believe *The March* will be regarded among Doctorow's better books. (SHA)

DOROTHY PARKER'S WIT...and Poetry



Dorothy Parker (1893-1967), the sharp-witted, hardliving writer of short fiction and member of the legendary Algonquin Round Table, was a master of wise cracks and put-downs. For example, when she was hired by *Vogue* to write captions for fashion illustrations, one of her memorable ones was, "Brevity is the Soul of Lingerie." After her mighty rounds of New York's fashionable speakeasies, she was often left with hangovers that, "ought to be in the Smithsonian under glass." After her husband's apparent suicide in 1963, she was asked by a meddling acquaintance if there was anything she needed, and Mrs. Parker dryly replied: "Get me a new husband." When the woman expressed disgust at what she considered the callousness of the remark, Mrs. Parker, her wit ever intact, sighed and said gently: "So sorry. Then run down to the corner and get me ham and cheese on rye and tell them to hold the mayo."

Her poetry also reflected her wit, as is evident from the following two works taken from *The Poetry and Short Stories of Dorothy Parker*.

WISDOM

This I say, and this I know:

Love has seen the last of me.
Love's a trodden lane to woe,
Love's a path to misery.

This I know, and knew before,
This I tell you, of my years:

Hide your heart, and lock your door.
Hell's afloat in lovers' tears.

Give your heart, and toss and moan;

What a pretty fool you look!
I am sage, who sit alone;
Here's my wool, and here's my book.

Look! A lad's a-waiting there,
Tall he is and bold, and gay.

What the devil do I care
What I know, and what I say?

—Dorothy Parker

ONE PERFECT ROSE

A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet
One perfect rose.

I knew the language of the floweret;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.

—Dorothy Parker



BOOK REVIEWS

CHAIN OF COMMAND

CASPAR WEINBERGER
AND PETER SCHWEIZER
(2005, 360pp,
Atria Books)

10

Caspar Weinberger served as Secretary of Defense in the Reagan Administration following which he was publisher and chairman of *Forbes* magazine. Peter Schweizer is a well-known writer, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, and the author of several books, including *Friendly Spies* and *Victory*. Both Weinberger and Schweizer are Washington insiders and their collaboration here results in a riveting thriller that will have you rapidly turning pages from start to finish. This gets a 10 for entertainment value in the suspense/thriller category. The President of the United States is assassinated by a gunman at Camp David and Secret Service agent, Michael Delaney quickly becomes the prime suspect. Vice President Morgan Boyd was also hit in the attack which stuns the nation. Boyd is quickly sworn in as President while Delaney, knowing that his pistol killed the President, goes on the lam to ferret out just what happened so he can nail the real killers and clear himself. A number of terrorist attacks are launched in cities across the country and Boyd proposes some unprecedented actions and uses of the military in the name of keeping Americans safe. Delaney draws on his extensive Special Forces and Secret Service training to avoid detection in the massive manhunt, while figuring out who is trying to frame him. The chase turns deadly and Delaney gets help from the President's new terrorism czar, Colonel Mary Campos. This is a terrific suspense story that gets an added kick by virtue of the authors' knowledge of the Washington scene, particularly of military and security organizations. (SHA)

THE LINCOLN LAWYER

MICHAEL CONNELLY
(2005, 404pp,
Little Brown)

8

I have read and enjoyed a number of Michael Connelly's books over the years and he has turned out a consistently good string of police procedurals. In *The Lincoln Lawyer*, he shifts gears and delivers an excellent legal thriller which I thoroughly enjoyed. His principal character here is a sleazy defense lawyer by the name of Mickey Haller who works for drug dealers, prostitutes, and con artists and conducts his business from the back seat of a Lincoln Town Car. He has two ex-wives and has alimony, child support, and a big mortgage! He pays off little people who help him pull off his sleazy tricks to secure and retain business. His ethics are "flexible" and he operates in that gray area of manipulation, part-truths, and endless negotiation, showing contempt for the law. When one of his minions, a Los Angeles bail bondsman calls and tells him that he has a "franchise" client for him, a client that can afford to pay high fees, Haller is certainly up for a big pay day, but wonders just why a successful real estate broker from a wealthy family would pick him as his lawyer. His new client Louis Roulet, is charged with aggravated assault and attempted murder of a prostitute he met in a bar. The case looks like a set-up, but as Haller and his investigator continue to gather evidence and information to build the defense, the story takes a sharp turn and takes off in an entirely new direction. More will give away the story but I think mystery readers will be hooked and well-satisfied with *The Lincoln Lawyer*. Incidentally I met Michael Connelly at the Los Angeles Central Library, and he told me that the idea for this book came from a stranger he sat next to at a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game. Good ideas come from many sources! (SHA)

THE LADY AND THE PANDA

VICKI CONSTANTINE CROKE
(2005, 299pp,
Random House)

8

Author Vicki Constantine Croke has been covering pets and wildlife for more than a decade and writes the "Animal Beat" column for *The Boston Globe*. Subtitled "The True Adventures of the First American Explorer to Bring Back China's Most Exotic Animal," this book relates the true story of Ruth Harkness who, in 1936, trekked to China to capture a giant panda. This New York socialite was married to wealthy adventurer Bill Harkness who, just after they were married, left for China in hopes of becoming the first westerner to capture a giant panda. He failed in this mission and died in China in 1936, leaving Ruth alone and in difficult financial straits. She quickly decided to adopt her husband's mission and, when she arrived in Shanghai, was derided and scorned about her lack of experience and organization to take on such a mission. Fortunately, she was able to engage as her partner the handsome and capable 22-year-old Quentin Young, and their bare-bones expedition got under way. The author recounts their mission to the remote, forbidding mountainous terrain in



BOOK REVIEWS

Continued from page 4

southwest China on the Tibetan border, the home of the mysterious, hard-to-find giant panda. She and Quentin miraculously find a baby panda, successfully take the panda out of China and keep it alive. Arriving in the U.S. with the baby panda, the story became an international sensation and China, for Harkness, had become a spiritual haven. Drawing on her access to a trove of letters and interviews with family members, the author produces a well researched/written story which I thoroughly enjoyed. (SHA)

THE PEOPLE'S TYCOON

STEVEN WATTS
(2005, 536pp,
Knopf)

9

Subtitled "Henry Ford and the American Century," *The People's Tycoon* is an excellent, comprehensive biography of the Michigan farm boy who became one of America's business legends. Henry Ford (1863-1947), using his innate talents as a tinkerer and engine repair man, invented the prototype of his Model A in 1898 and established the first step of what would evolve later into the Ford Motor Company. With the introduction of the Model T in 1908, Ford became the top company in the automotive industry and assumed a leading role in shaping America's new consumer economy and culture. Ford wanted to manufacture a car and price it within the means of ordinary citizens and he was well aware of his new car's cultural and social impact and the satisfaction that auto ownership would bring. Watts traces Ford's rise to fame and his ascendancy as a folk hero because of the Model T and his support of high wages for workers such as the "five-dollar" workday, which doubled factory worker's salaries. While performing numerous deeds in the realm of education and other philanthropic ventures, he was notoriously anti-Semitic, violently anti-Union, and anti-intellectualism. Watts illuminates just how Henry Ford embodied both the promises and the pitfalls of American democracy and the burgeoning consumer economy. His reputation was seriously impacted in the 1920s by his anti-Semitism and his continued (and ill-advised) reliance on the Model T in the face of the growing competition from GM and others. Ford was a complicated person and the author does an excellent job of exposing all sides, personal and business, and the environment within which he operated. (SHA)



Pronunciation...

... FOR THE CAREFUL SPEAKER

The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations, is an enlightening and enjoyable reference work by Charles Harrington Elster. Readers, we believe, really do care how to pronounce words as well as how to use them. Many of us mispronounce words frequently and other people do notice. So, here are a few of Elster's entries to build your confidence in the art of pronunciation.

PRELATE	PREL-it (rhymes with <i>smell</i> it).
PRELUDE	PREL-yood. Don't say PRAY-lood or PREL-ood.
PRESTIGIOUS	pre-STIJ-us, not pre-STEE-jus.
FRACAS	FRAY-kis, not FRAK-is.
COMMINGLE	kuh-MING-gul, not koh-MING-gul.
JOCUND	JAHK-und. The first syllable rhymes with sock.
INAUGURAL	i-NAW-gyur-ul, not i-NAW-gur-ul, and especially not the beastly i-NAW-grul.
ZOOLOGY	zoh-AHL-uh-jee, not zoo-AHL-uh-jee. There is no <i>zoo</i> in <i>zoology</i> .



BOOK REVIEWS

THE WIDOW OF THE SOUTH

ROBERT HICKS
(2005, 418pp,
Warner Books)

9

This excellent historical novel of the Civil War is built around the battle at Franklin Tennessee on November 30, 1864. One of the bloodiest battles of the war, over 9,000 were killed there in the brief span of five hours. The “widow” of the title is Carrie McGavock, a lonely Confederate wife who is mourning the death of three of her children. Her home, Carnton Plantation, is commandeered by the Confederate Army just prior to the battle for use as a field hospital. The battle and the aftermath is then recounted by different participants and witnesses and Carrie and her faithful, Creole slave, Mariah, administer to the wounded and dying. She is taken with Confederate Sgt. Zachariah Cashwell, an Arkansas soldier who loses his leg, and their platonic relationship shakes her out of her stupor and her depression, and ignites a renewal in her life. This relationship between Carrie and Cashwell becomes the emotional center of the novel. Some 1,500 of the Confederate dead are buried in a field near Carnton and, when an insensitive neighbor threatens to plow up the field after the war, Carrie is appalled and fights to rebury the dead to a new, properly-marked cemetery on her own property. This is a well-told story, rich in historical detail and is highly recommended. The *Author’s Note* at the end provides additional facts, photos of the McGavocks and the cemetery, and the after-years of Carrie and the town of Franklin. Hicks notes that the story is often told that, when Oscar Wilde made his infamous tour of America in 1892, he told his hosts that his itinerary should include a visit to, “sunny Tennessee to meet the widow McGavock, the high priestess of the temple of dead boys.” She became famous without ever leaving her farm as she tended the dead (and wrote to their families), and became a national embodiment of the grief that the Civil War had brought to the whole nation. (SHA)

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL
(1986, 4,532pp,
Houghton Mifflin Company)

Allegedly, someone warned Churchill that he might not come out so well when they wrote the history of the war. Churchill is supposed to have replied that he would make sure his story was told as he wanted it-by writing it himself. I read Volumes III and IV this summer. Last summer I read I and II. I think every American should read it. Perhaps you were too young during the war, as I was, to understand what was going on. Perhaps you were born in the 60 years since the war and are totally ignorant of history. Perhaps you lived through the war and are too old to remember. Reading these books will give you an illuminating perspective on our time and our leadership. It is staggering, for example, to read how Japan defeated the British and conquered all of East Asia so quickly and so effortlessly. It is enlightening to read how, when London was bombed relentlessly for 59 consecutive nights, Churchill exhorted his colleagues and the media not to show panic among the people, instead to emphasize their courage, their optimism, and their determination to survive. Churchill does not shy from acknowledging the mistakes made by himself, his military, and other world leaders, or the naïve idealism of Roosevelt, the vanity of DeGaulle, and the ruthless megalomania of Stalin. Nonetheless, it is clear, these were great leaders, men of stature, will, and vision at a time when their countries desperately needed leadership. We forget how totally the Germans and the Japanese had succeeded, how hopeless it all looked by the time America was drawn into the war at the end of 1941. The only things that slowed down Germany and Japan were two oceans, impassable barriers in that simpler time. The West, including the U.S., was defenseless, totally unprepared for what happened to them. By the end of Volume IV, the Allies have occupied North Africa and defeated Rommel, the Russians have turned back the Germans at Stalingrad, preparations are being made for the invasion of Europe, and we are in a desperate race against the Nazis to develop an atomic bomb. Next summer I will read Volumes V & VI. I can’t wait to see how it comes out. (Contributing Editor, Ernie Chambers, Sherman Oaks, CA)



BOOK REVIEWS

A CRACK IN THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

SIMON WINCHESTER
(2005, 417pp,
Harper Collins)

9

April 18, 2006 will mark the 100th Anniversary of the San Francisco earthquake and I noticed that several books were being published about the event. I chose this one by Simon Winchester (*The Professor and the Madman*, *Krakatoa*, and others) because he is an Oxford-trained geologist and a great storyteller. We were at the Los Angeles Central Library to hear Winchester talk about *A Crack in the Edge of the World* and, as usual he was informative and entertaining. Interestingly, his research found that the 1906 disaster in San Francisco was dealt with in a rapid, highly effective manner, whereas the response to Hurricane Katrina almost 100 years later left much to be desired. Subtitled “America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906,” the book is a combination of a geology lesson, travelogue (Winchester traveled from the eastern end of the North American plate in Iceland to the western edge in California), and history lesson in his reporting of the events that preceded the earthquake and then the tragedy that destroyed San Francisco. In his remarks at the Library (and in the book) he explained the theory of plate tectonics introduced in the late 1960s and how the planet is in a constant state of flux. He described a number of earthquake-prone areas in the U.S., but the most vulnerable location is along the San Andreas Fault in California, where the North American plate meets the Pacific plate and gradually move apart. The San Andreas Fault, which runs right under San Francisco, is some 750 miles long and runs in a north-south direction. Winchester notes that with the regular movement, the two plates are now about 17-feet out of kilter, creating an enormous amount of kinetic energy that will be cut loose in the future without warning. This is a “living planet,” Winchester emphasizes, and the book leads one to wonder about the vast forces of nature, and how we should be preparing for the next inevitable massive earthquake. (SHA)

THE WORDS WE USE...

AND MISUSE

The shape of the English language is not rigid. We often confuse meanings and develop bad word usage habits. Here are a few examples taken from *The Elements of Style* (Third Edition) by Strunk and White.

DISINTERESTED/UNINTERESTED

If we have to go into court, we want a *disinterested* judge and a *disinterested* jury — that is, we want our liberty or our property to be subject to persons who have no selfish interest in the matter. We would not want them to be *uninterested* in the case, once the trial began. To be *disinterested* is to stand neutral in a cause. To be *uninterested* is not to care.

KIND OF

Except in familiar style, not to be used as a substitute for *rather* or *something like*. Restrict it to its literal sense: “Amber is a kind of fossil resin,” “I dislike that kind of publicity.” The same holds true of *sort of*.

AS TO WHETHER

Whether is sufficient.

FARTHER/FURTHER

The two words are commonly interchanged, but there is a distinction worth observing: *farther* serves best as a distance word, *further* as a time or quantity word. You chase a ball *farther* than the other fellow; you pursue a subject *further*.

THE TRUTH IS/THE FACT IS

A bad beginning for a sentence. If you feel you are possessed of the truth, or of the fact, simply state it. Do not give it advance billing.



BOOK REVIEWS

13 STEPS DOWN

RUTH RENDELL
(2004, 340pp,
Crown)

7

Veteran English writer Ruth Rendell has published 62 books and sold some 20 million copies worldwide. This reader has had many enjoyable hours of reading with Rendell, but I do not regard *13 Steps Down* as one of her best. There are two principal characters in this story. One is Mix Cellini, who makes his living repairing fitness equipment, and Mix has two obsessions. One is with Nerissa Nash, a beautiful supermodel who he has been stalking, and the second is with the real-life Reggie Christie, an infamous London serial killer who was hanged some 50 years ago. Mix is a tenant of the elderly Gwendolen Chawcer who lords over her decrepit London mansion St. Blaise House, pinching pennies and reminiscing about the one man in her life that seemed to show some interest in her, and whom she hasn't seen in over 40 years. This story develops very slowly as the delusional Cellini struggles to gain the attention of Nerissa and then goes over the edge when he brutally murders a date who dared to criticize his beloved, and hides her body under the floorboards in his apartment. This is a cleverly-written story highlighted by excellent characterizations, Rendell's patented evocation of time and place, and a brilliant portrayal of an ordinary man's descent into monstrosity. The book, however, did not have the narrative drive to make this a first-rate read. (SHA)

THE DIVIDE

NICHOLAS EVANS
(2005, 403pp,
Putnam)

8

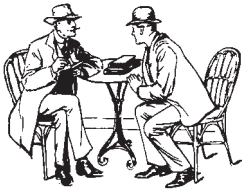
I have read all of the Nicholas Evans' novels (*The Horse Whisperer*, *The Loop*, *The Smoke Jumper*, and now *The Divide*) and have found them to be engaging stories. They are characterized by generally good writing, interesting base-building and character development, and a steady increase in story intensity. With that said, I think *The Divide* is a step down from the other Evans offerings in that the structure and the story did not hold up as well. At the outset, a body is discovered by two back-country skiers encased in ice. She is soon identified as Abbie Cooper, a young woman from an upper middle class family who had gone missing. Her divorced parents, Sarah and Ben come to claim her body: Sarah from Long Island and Ben from New Mexico where he lives with his girlfriend, Eve. There is great acrimony and Sarah suggests to Ben that it was his exit from their marriage that triggered Abbie's alienation and ultimately, her death. The author then goes back to recount the background of the seemingly happy Cooper family and how it all came to this. The façade of togetherness between Sarah and Ben is broken when Ben meets Eve at a dude ranch in Montana called The Divide. Abbie takes her parent's split badly and while at the University of Montana, majoring in environmental studies, goes off the deep end after meeting a shady eco-terrorist. The story, a bit overwritten at times, is strongest in its depiction of the gradual disintegration of a marriage and the consequences of the family break-up. *The Divide* is part thriller and part family drama, tragic, and redemptive and an entertaining read. (SHA)

COLD GRANITE

STUART MACBRIDE
(2005, 458pp,
St. Martins)

6

At the halfway mark in *Cold Granite*, I began to wonder why I was wasting my time on what was unfolding as a mediocre mystery novel. Remembering what appeared about the book in the trade publications — “edge-of-your-seat page-turner” and a suspenseful and compelling mystery” — I labored on and, with a few kicks at the finish, landed at page 458. The setting is Aberdeen, Scotland (the Granite City) and the protagonist is Detective Sergeant Logan MacRae, who is back after a year-long convalescence caused by a crazed suspect's knife attack. He is immediately picked to head an investigation into a child's brutal murder. To make matters worse, the child's family learns of the death from a reporter before the police have a chance to notify them. DS MacRae, along with his sidekick WPC Jackie Watson, set out to find the killer and expose the press leak. Within days the number of murdered or missing children in Aberdeen jumps to five and the public is screaming for blood. To add to the pressure, a notorious defense attorney is able to secure an acquittal for an habitual child molester. Perhaps I'm being a little harsh with a 6 rating, but *Cold Granite* was overly long, contained too many sick characters and, in its length and somewhat digressive style, lost its narrative punch. (SHA)



BOOK REVIEWS

THE PLANETS

DAVA SOBEL
(2005, 231pp,
Viking)

8

Dava Sobel, a former *New York Times* science reporter is the author of *Longitude* (TRE Spring 1996), *Galileo's Daughter*, and *Letters to Father*. She has been a science journalist for 30 years and has won numerous awards, including the National Science Board's prestigious Individual Public Service Award and the Bradford Washburn Award from the Boston Museum of Science. *The Planets* is a little gem and, when I finished, wanted to go back and read it again. The book is a series of essays about the Sun, the Moon, and each of the nine planets, the latter of which, she notes can be remembered in order by the meaningless sentence "My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pies"... Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These are delightful little essays which, although at times a little too scientific, are informative, entertaining, poetic, and readable. Did you know that the Sun, "the planet's progenitor and chief source of energy, embodies 99.9% of the mass in the Solar System?" Everything else, all the planets, moons, asteroids, and comets, account for only 0.1%! And did you know that Jupiter more than doubles the mass of the other eight planets combined? And that the diminishing Pluto is close to be demoted from full planetary status? Sobel's lyrical prose illuminates the wonders and the mysteries of the vast Solar System (and beyond). When the miles are in the billions and the years are in the millions, it is indeed awe-inspiring and the imagination is seriously challenged. (SHA)

Children's Reading

By Brooke Von Der Ahe (age 11), Manhattan Beach, CA

INKSPELL

Cornelia Funke (2005, 635pp, Scholastic)

Inkspell is the fantastic sequel to the previously reviewed novel, *Inkheart*. In *Inkspell*, Meggie and Farid (a boy read from the book *Tales of the Arabian Nights*) are transported into the Inkworld. During their time in the Inkworld, Meggie and Farid look for Dustfinger, a friend and teacher to Farid. While looking for Dustfinger, Meggie's parents arrive in the Inkworld. Then, Meggie's father Mo is shot by an evil lady, Mortola, also known as the mother of Capricorn, an evil ruler dead because of Meggie's father. When Meggie finds out about her father's near death, she searches and searches for her parents. She is very distraught and hopes to see her father soon. Dustfinger, Farid, Fenoglio (the writer of the Inkworld) try to help Meggie by either creating schemes, rewriting the book, or even comforting her heart. They travel to help Mo and learn many new things about themselves, others and the Inkworld.

ANIMAL FARM

George Orwell (1947, 97pp, Harcourt Brace and Company)

Animal Farm is a wonderful story that made me laugh, and, unfortunately, also made me very sad. Old Major, a pig comes up with the idea to revolt against the people ruling the farm and have animals rule instead. Sadly, days later he dies, but the idea does not. The animals finally plan a scheme, led by pigs named Snowball and Napoleon. The plan works and the animals begin to live depending only on themselves. They call their new organization "Animal Farm." They make Seven Commandments for all the animals to obey. The animals decide to vote for a leader, and Snowball and Napoleon volunteer. When in the voting process, Napoleon lets his trained vicious dogs out and the dogs chase Snowball out of the farm, Napoleon is chosen the leader. Napoleon feels pigs are better than the other animals and gives them special privileges that often go against the Seven Commandments. Because of this, the animals are unhappy but continue to live their lives on this farm. All of the animals hope for equal rights, but do not receive them. I enjoyed reading this tale about friendship, bravery, loyalty and most of all leadership.





BOOK REVIEWS

STALIN'S FOLLY: THE FIRST TEN DAYS OF WWII ON THE EASTERN FRONT

CONSTANTINE PLESHAKOV
(2005, 326pp,
Houghton Mifflin Company)

9

Having signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in August 1939, Stalin felt he had gained some time to begin preparations for an attack on Germany. In the two years following the pact, Stalin purged the Red army of some 35,000 officers, including 37 top generals. He was confident Hitler would not attack Russia before 1942, giving him ample time to build his defenses and prepare his own attack on Germany. Despite many warnings from his intelligence in 1941, Stalin did not believe his own spies and even continued to send war supplies to Hitler up to June 1941. On June 22, Hitler launched a massive attack, catching the Russian army completely unprepared. In ten days of horrific losses and unbelievable errors of commission and omission, the Germans were within a few miles of Moscow, and 60,000 Russian soldiers were dead. Stalin was completely ineffectual during this time, spending most of his time at his *dacha*. He ordered several suicidal counterattacks, blocked requests for more modern weaponry, and refused to pull back his troops deep into the country to lengthen Hitler's supply lines and take advantage of the coming winter and mud season. That the Russian forces eventually forced Hitler out of the country is hard to believe based on the first ten days of the war. The success was brought about by the unwillingness of the Soviet soldier to give up his homeland, but the cost was ten million Soviet lives. (Contributing Editor Jack Kyle, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL)

WODEHOUSE: A LIFE

ROBERT MCCRUM
(2005, 384pp,
Norton, W.W. & Company)

Growing up in Atlantic City as the child of working class parents, I often escaped into the gilded, devil-may-care world of Jeeves. I devoured the P.G. Wodehouse books: They were exhilaratingly funny escapes. As an undergraduate at Columbia University, I wrote and directed a radio play based on *Uncle Fred Flits By*. I was also familiar with the lyrics Wodehouse wrote for Broadway musicals, so I enjoyed this book very much. I wish some editor had cut the 50-100 pages which I skimmed. (Elmore Leonard says the secret of his success is that he leaves out the parts that readers usually skip.) McCrum takes far too many pages recounting the plots of Wodehouse's numerous novels, plots not worth repeating. It is, after all, Wodehouse's characters and writing style that continue to delight half a century after the disappearance of the world he wrote about. I was surprised to learn that Wodehouse spent the entire Second World War interned by the Germans. In his frivolous, disassociated way, he seemed to take the invasion of France as a temporary inconvenience until the German army showed up and took Mr. and Mrs. P.G. into custody. Wodehouse made five infamous broadcasts for the Germans which he intended to be amusing and made his captors come off as jolly good fellows. It was quite a while before his countrymen could forgive him for it. The book is well worth the read, even if you occasionally find yourself dropping in and out of the narrative. (Contributing Editor Ernie Chambers, Sherman Oaks, CA)

TEAM OF RIVALS

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN
(2005, 944pp,
Simon & Schuster)

Doris Kearns Goodwin's best-selling *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* is an amazingly good book. Not only is the book beautifully written and elegantly structured, it has the great advantage of looking at Lincoln and the Civil War through a different prism. This is anything but a revision or update of Lincoln books already on the shelves. Goodwin pulls off her success by profiling Lincoln and simultaneously profiling his major rivals. Thus the reader sees Lincoln's evolving ups and downs in contrast to the evolving ups and downs of his major rivals. What also separates this Lincoln book from others is Goodwin's focus—about 35% of the book's 750 pages—on the race for the 1860 Republican Presidential nomination. She charts the race by following the increasingly intertwined careers of four ferociously ambitious and talented men—William Henry Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, and Abraham Lincoln. Thus, much of this book—written in comparative biographical mode—is about the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. I found the rise of Lincoln easily the best part of what is a very good book throughout. In telling the tale, Lincoln's very bumpy ride to the top (she makes it poignantly clear how often this man stumbled) is explained by the fact that over time he becomes smarter, tougher, more empathetic, more self-confident, wittier, and—surprisingly—more ambitious than all of his very talented rivals. The closing, larger segment of the book plays out against the backdrop of the Civil War. But Goodwin's twist is new. Lincoln breaks all political precedent (in fact, probably for all American Presidents) by filling his Cabinet's top spots with all his rivals. He even adds



BOOK REVIEWS

Continued from page 10

Edwin Stanton who earlier (1855) humiliated Lincoln in a famous patent case. Lincoln has assessed shrewdly that only his rivals have the requisite skills both to manage a horribly difficult war and to keep intact the fractious Republican Party—hence *Team of Rivals*. Lincoln also believes, correctly, that he has the political and leadership skills to suffer, control and channel the endless and spiteful jockeying ambitions that he has encapsulated into one Cabinet. Goodwin’s subtitle *The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* is that story. (Contributing Editor Bill Lilley, Washington DC)

SEIZE THE FIRE: HEROISM, DUTY & THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

ADAM NICOLSON
(2005, 340pp,
Harper Collins)

Adam Nicolson’s newest book, *Seize the Fire: Heroism, Duty & the Battle of Trafalgar*, is as good a read as his best-selling predecessor, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. Nicolson’s book on Horatio Nelson and Trafalgar is not military history. Instead it is a book with two distinct themes to which the military theme is subsidiary. First, Nicolson writes brilliantly that the smaller English fleet far outclassed the combined French and Spanish fleets because of the difference in the national cultures. England was industrializing, more middle class, entrepreneurial and rich; France and Spain were largely aristocratic, quasi-feudal and relatively poor. It showed in the fleets. The English ships were beautifully maintained machines; the seamen were able bodied and trained; the officers typically had more than 20 years of naval warfare experience. The French and Spanish ships were ill kempt, often unseaworthy; the seamen were untrained and unskilled; the officers were aristocrats with little naval experience and no real gifts for command. The telling difference: English ships could fire their guns three to four times faster than their continental rivals. The book’s second

Continued on page 13

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

All of us know the meaning of such common words as acres, gallons, pounds, inches and feet, and the other measures we use on a regular basis. Here are a few measures that are less frequently used in conversation and in the books we read, and are a little more challenging.

FURLONG. Used principally at the race track, a furlong is 220 yards, or 1/8 mile.

ROD. A rod is 16 1/2 feet (5 1/2 yards).

FATHOM. The word fathom comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “embrace” or “outstretched arms,” and one fathom is roughly the distance between the fingertips of a man’s outstretched arms. To use this as a measure of water depth, a weighted line was lowered into the water until it touched bottom and then pulled up again. The length of line that had been under water was then measured by repeatedly stretching the lines between outstretched arms. If this could be done eight times, the depth was eight fathoms, and so on. Of course, the actual distance between a man’s fingertips would vary with the size of the man, so the fathom was eventually set at six feet.

LEAGUE. A league is 3 statute miles. A statute mile is 5,280 feet, whereas a nautical mile is 6,076 feet.

KNOT, by the way, in nautical usage, is a unit of speed, not distance, and has a built-in meaning of “per hour.” Thus, a ship travels at 10 knots, not 10 knots per hour. A knot is one nautical mile per hour.

HECTARE. A metric unit of measure equal to about 2 1/2 acres.

PECK. 8 quarts or 1/4 bushel.

STONE. A unit of weight in Great Britain equal to 14 pounds (6.4 kilograms).

TRE'S FAVORITES... *A Decade Ago*

Book Selections from *The Readers Exchange of December 1995*



SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS (David Guterson)

This superb novel, beautifully written and suspenseful, won the 1995 PEN/Faulkner Award and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award, among others. The story takes place in 1954 on San Pedro Island, north of Puget Sound. A local fisherman has been found suspiciously drowned and a Japanese-American man is charged with his murder. This book is, at various moments, a love affair between a Japanese girl and a Caucasian boy, the story of the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII, a courtroom drama, the impact of war on body and mind, and the portrait of life in a small, isolated community.

BURGUNDY STARS (William Echikson)

When I wrote this review in 1995, there were 20 Michelin three-star restaurants in France, five of which were in Paris. Can you name them? (See answer below). For foodies and restaurant buffs, you will very much enjoy this book. It covers a period in 1991-92 during which time the great chef Bernard Loiseau was striving to attain a third Michelin star for his restaurant, La Cote d'Or in Saulieu, a small Burgundy farm town 150 miles southeast of Paris. It was a highly interesting book and a great inside look at how the top restaurants operate, how they select their food for preparation and the wines for their lists, how the kitchen hierarchy works, and how much that third star means to their financial success (and their egos!). The author followed the demanding and demonstrative Loiseau around for a year to get the story. Sadly, Loiseau committed suicide in February 2003. Oh, yes, the five three-stars in Paris at that time were Lucas Carton, Taillevent, La Tour d'Argent, L'Ambroisie, and Joel Robuchon (Jamin).

DANCING AT THE RASCAL FAIR (Ivan Doig)

The story begins in 1889 on a wharf in Scotland as two young men, Angus McCaskill and Rob Barclay, are preparing to board a ship with other "Scotland-leavers" to go to America. They make the difficult crossing and head for Montana to connect with Rob's Uncle Lucas. They settle in Two Medicine County at the base of the Rocky Mountains, and the book traces their lives, and those of their neighbors, over the next thirty years. It's about the building of homes, raising families, becoming sheepherders, and coping with the rigorous winters. And it's about Montana, where Ivan Doig grew up. Woven in with the efforts of the settlers to carve out new lives in America's West, there is a love affair of heartbreaking intensity and an uncertain friendship between Angus and Rob. Doig is an excellent writer and this sweeping story is a rich tale with characters that come alive.

COMING HOME (Rosamunde Pilcher)

I love Rosamunde Pilcher's books and *Coming Home* joins *The Shell Seekers* and *September* as wonderful entertainment. With Pilcher, you just settle in and let her take you along. The novel is about Judith Dunbar, an English girl, and her family and friends. The story begins in 1935 when Judith is 14 years old and ends right after WWII in 1945. She enters a private boarding school when her mother and younger sister leave for Ceylon (and then Singapore) to join her father who is in the Foreign Service. We are taken first through the pre-war period with her as she makes new friends and finds a new family, and then through the shattering war years and the immediate aftermath. Pilcher is a wonderful storyteller and writes with great insight about human nature and life's fundamentals.

NORTHWEST PASSAGE: The Great Columbia River (William Dietrich)

A 1995 review of this book said "I have been reviewing books regularly in these pages for nearly ten years now — several hundred books in all — and in that time I cannot recall many books that so gripped my attention and moved me as William Dietrich's *Northwest Passage*. It is a marvel of history, nature writing, politics, and common sense, extensively researched, lovingly written, and splendidly woven together in an epic story of a magnificent river and humanity's conquest of nature." The principal story here is about how the beautiful, wild Columbia was transformed from its natural state to a docile river run by engineers and regulated by its fourteen major dams. From its source in Canada to the Pacific at Astoria, Oregon, its damming for hydroelectric power and land reclamation has had a profound impact on people and the environment. As this occurred over the past 60 years or so, there was little in the way of an argument about the trade-offs and what was being lost — the dislocation of Native Americans, the imperilment of the river, and the almost total elimination of the salmon runs.



BOOK REVIEWS

Continued from page 11

theme, the dominating one, is Horatio Nelson. Nicolson warns in his introduction that there are those, then and now, who have found Nelson wanting—too reckless, too flamboyant and too blood thirsty, who point to the reckless scandal Nelson has made of life by 1805. Nelson has deserted his wife callously; he has stolen a friend's wife Emma Hamilton, “the most beautiful woman in Europe;” he has fathered an illicit daughter and flamboyantly named her Horatia. Not to worry, Nicolson writes, just the man for the job. It is only Nelson who can guarantee that the English fleet will keep Napoleon from crossing the Channel with his superior land armies. For it is Nelson who has transformed the English naval fighting machine into a no-holds-barred killing machine. He has seized the fire. Nelson's legendary courage (by now he has lost one eye and one arm, all in battles) and his love for his seamen are reciprocated by their love for him and their willingness to follow him unhesitatingly. His unparalleled leadership skill with his fleet captains has converted them into “a band of brothers,” Nelson's conscious ploy on Shakespeare's Henry V at Agincourt—“we happy few, we band of brothers.” All of this is in sharp contrast to the sorry state of affairs in the rival fleets. The book's beautifully written closing chapters complete the theme—just the man for the job. Nelson closes on the French and Spanish fleets off Trafalgar and sends coolly his last, most famous dispatch to the fleet—and to history—“England expects that each man will do his duty.” Nelson goes in first; he is wounded horribly and dies with great gallantry. The French and Spanish fleets are annihilated. England is saved. (Contributing Editor Bill Lilley, Washington, D.C.)

THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING

JOAN DIDION
(2005, 227pp,
Knopf Publishing)

10

“Life changed fast. Life changed in an instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.” Coping with illness, death, and grief is painful yet unavoidable. This is part of life's cycle and one of the most difficult challenges human being face. Joan Didion's daughter, Quintana, although very ill, was alive when this book was published; and she passed away a few months ago, adding more change and loss for Joan. John Gregory Dunne and his wife, Joan Didion, collaborated both professionally and personally for 40 years: They created books, screenplays, and articles together. They enjoyed a remarkably close relationship with their only child, Quintana, who was hospitalized with pneumonia in December 2003, only a week before John collapsed and died at the dinner table in their New York apartment. A year after his death, Joan's grief develops into *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a time to review their lives together, their day-to-day experiences, and the sense of loss and loneliness this gifted author felt trying to come to grips with her loss. Her poignant and powerful memoir should help the reader through their own sense of loss and find ways to digest it all and move on as Joan has done. (Contributing Editor Anne Petroni, Santa Ynez, CA)

THE TENDER BAR: A MEMOIR

J.R. MOEHRINGER
(2005, 368pp,
Hyperion)

8

We have always enjoyed sitting at the bar and having a cocktail before our appointed dinner reservation time. It always seems welcoming, active and friendly, and people feel comfortable starting conversations there. Thus, although I tend to shy away from memoirs, I was drawn to *The Tender Bar*, billed as the author's love affair with his hangout, a paean to the life and culture of the local tavern. J.R. Moehring's father abandoned him and his single mother struggled mightily with little or no resources to make a meaningful life for him. At a very young age, he found his comfort, his security blanket, and companionship at the local bar. Moehring's refuge was a bar called Publicans (formerly Dickens) located on Plandome road in Manhasset, Long Island (NY), where his Uncle Charlie was a bartender and a patron. Although local bars tend to offend us on various levels—the booze, the cheap furnishings, the odor, and perhaps our perceptions of the clientele—but Moehring found companionship here, taken in by the “regulars” who filled the absence of his father and taught him about life. His telling of the friendship found and the hilarity and the support at Publicans, an ordinary place filled with ordinary people leaning on each other to deal with life's ups and downs, is well told, capturing the essence of the corner tavern. *Tender Bar* made me think about the pub tradition in England and its importance in providing a convivial, conversation-laden gathering place for folks to have a spot and commune. (SHA)



BOOK REVIEWS

THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH AND OTHER UNCERTAINTIES

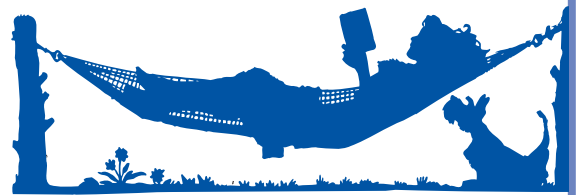
FAIRFIELD GOODALE, M.D.
(2005, 317pp,
iUniverse, Inc.)

8

The title of Fair Goodale's remembrance tweaks the readers curiosity: What are the truths, which are the uncertainties? The answers are revealed in this story of his life to date. Growing up in New England, attending prestigious schools where he admits to dim academic potential, he leaves Harvard for pilot training in WWII during which an experience at Buchenwald turned his life in an unexpected direction. His marriage to his second cousin developed with deep love and respect. Pursuing a medical career, living with small children in a converted cow shed near London, moving frequently to many teaching jobs on the East Coast, and living presently in California's Santa Ynez Valley. Fair has quite a story to tell! Injected with his poetry, humor, and observations of his life with a family of five and a variety of animals, *The Absolute Truth* is a fine read. (Contributing Editor Anne Petroni, Santa Ynez, CA)

Jane's SELECTIONS

By Jane Ackerman



WITHOUT MERCY

Jack Higgins (2005, 288pp, Penguin Group)

I would not miss one of Jack Higgins books, because I love the reading pleasure he provides, which is a little crazy because murder is the game here. However, by now the English team is almost like your very own English family. The cast of opponents in *Without Mercy* is a bit different, beginning with Max Zubin, a Russian entertainer, who is forced to impersonate Josef Belov, an important man in charge of a huge oil company, who cannot be known as dead. Pressuring him into this is Igor Levin, Major Asimov, and a beautiful, young Russian woman, Greta. The English team of Ferguson, Dillion, and Billy Salter, tough, hard-drinking, and very up to the task, take up the chase. As *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* says, "Jack Higgins is the dean of intrigue novelists. He has no equal." I couldn't agree more and you will love the ending of *Without Mercy*.

MANSFIELD PARK

Jane Austen (1996, 416pp, Signet Classics)

This is the story of Fanny Price, the older daughter of a very large family. When her aunt offers to take her in to live with them to ease her family's financial burden, Fanny goes to live with the wealthy Bertram family. As was to be expected, she is asked to fetch, carry, be with, do the odd job no one else wants to do and, at the same time, is not really included. In fact, she is neglected. The one bright light is Edmund, the son who is kind, thoughtful and handsome, and he totally captivates Fanny. As in all of Jane Austen's novels, every detail is described, providing the reader with a true picture of life at that time, while still holding your interest. I read recently that everyone should be an expert on and collect one author. Jane Austen is my choice. Barnes & Noble publishes a collector's library and all of her six novels are in it. These attractive little red books are very modestly priced and when you travel, fit neatly in your purse. They are the perfect gift, and reading them makes you feel so good!

AN AFFAIR WITH A HOUSE

Bunny Williams (2005, 240pp, Stewart, Tabori & Chang)

What's Christmas without a new coffee table book... and this one is simply great!! Thirty years ago, Bunny Williams fell in love at first sight with a manor house which had been for sale for years in a quiet Connecticut village. It was the local, large, white elephant. Her goal was to bring it back to life, and what a job she has done! The manor house included 12 acres, a pool house, a guest house, a barn, porches and gardens. I've had the book for only two weeks and I have already read it twice. It is just a treasure, full of beautiful rooms. Warm and charming in decoration, great explanations, recipes, and lots of Bunny Williams valuable tips on making your home everything you want it to be. This book is a winner and a stunning example of what a woman can do when she puts her mind to it!



BOOK REVIEWS

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PRODUCER

LAWRENCE TURMAN

(2005, 288pp,

Crown Publishing Group)

Before you protest that you are neither a movie producer nor do you aspire to be one, consider this. You either love to go to the movies or complain that they don't make 'em like they used to. Either way, I think you will be fascinated by this insider's look at how and why movies get made these days. Turman presides over the famed Peter Stark Producing Program at USC. He speaks from long and distinguished experience, having produced over 40 feature films, the most notable of which, *The Graduate*, is considered among the 100 Greatest Films of All-Time. It is ironic to read that the same executives who today consider the decision to make *The Graduate* a no-brainer were the very same executives who passed on the project when Turman first came seeking their support. Turman is refreshingly candid in talking about himself and his peers. The chapter entitled, "How Hard is it?" is a page-turner, recounting his experiences working with Mike Nichols, Judy Garland, William Goldman, Paul Newman, and many other legendary figures in the movie business. Certainly a "must" for anyone thinking about going into the business of making movies, which includes all those students enrolled in film courses and all those dot-com and real estate millionaires who think they have the gift. If you know anyone who falls into any of these categories, make sure they read this book before they make another move. (Contributing Editor Ernie Chambers, Sherman Oaks, CA)

ORIGINS OF WORDS AND PHRASES

The derivation of words and phrases we use in conversation is an interesting study. The following entries are taken from *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*.

HOBSON'S CHOICE. Toward the end of the 16th century, one Thomas Hobson operated the leading livery stable in the university town of Cambridge, England. Devoted to the welfare of his horses, he established a firm rule that each customer in turn must take the horse nearest the door when he arrived. He tolerated no picking and choosing, insisting that this strict order of rotation be followed. Thus, when someone offered you *Hobson's choice*, you were actually being offered no choice at all.

SCUTTLEBUTT means gossip, but originally it referred to the lidded cask ("scuttled butt") from which the ship's company obtained drinking water. Just as personnel in offices and factories today gather round the drinking fountain to exchange the latest rumors, so sailors since the days of John Paul Jones have clustered at the scuttlebutt to pass on the latest rumor.

WITH A GRAIN OF SALT. If you take something *with a grain of salt*, you are viewing it with considerable skepticism. The phrase, a direct translation of the Latin *cum grano salis*, indicates that just as you would anticipate a very small quantity of salt in a dish served you, so you look for little truth in the statement made.

RED TAPE. The practice of tying official documents with tape of a reddish hue began in 17th-century England. By the 19th century its use to mean inaction or delay caused by official sluggishness had become well established. Early in the 1880s, Washington Irving described a bureaucrat thus: "His brain was little better than *red tape* and parchment."

PLAY A HUNCH. We often hear the phrase *play a hunch*, meaning, "act upon intuition or premonition." It goes back to the gamblers' superstition that good luck would follow if one touched a hunchback on his hump.

NOT A FIT NIGHT OUT FOR MAN NOR BEAST was first used by W.C. Fields in a mock temperance lecture called "The Fatal Glass of Beer." It was also Fields who said: "It was a woman who drove me to drink — and I never remembered to thank her."



BOOK REVIEWS

HOUSE WITHOUT A KEY

EARL DERR BIGGERS

(1925, 316pp,
Amereon House)

8

When we were at the Halekulani Hotel in Honolulu in late August and having lunch at the “House Without a Key,” the back of the menu noted that novelist Earl Derr Biggers (1884-1933) created the Charlie Chan series while staying in a Halekulani cottage in 1925. *House Without a Key* was his first Charlie Chan mystery and was built around a murder that occurred on this very spot. Biggers apparently based Charlie Chan on Chang Apana, a Chinese detective on the Honolulu police force in the 1920s. I have always loved the Charlie Chan movies and loved the banter with his “number one son,” but it was the Halekulani menu that prompted me to read the book. In *House Without a Key*, Dan Wintership, a member of a prominent Boston family living in Honolulu, is murdered at his Waikiki beach-front home. At the time of the murder, cousin Minerva is living with him on an extended stay, and Minerva’s nephew John Quincy, is on his way from Boston to bring her home. John Quincy is drawn into the murder investigation and he and Minerva are shocked to find that they are dealing with a “Chinaman.” With little to go on, but with patience and wisdom, the pieces come together and numerous suspects emerge. Meanwhile, John Quincy begins to enjoy the Islands as he lends an assist with the case, and a budding romance occurs. *House Without a Key* is an enjoyable mystery with good characterizations and a wonderful portrait of Hawaii during the 1920s. (SHA)



TONY TURNER’S “A” LIST



Contributing Editor Tony Turner (Paradise Valley, AZ) is a great reader who, for many years, has written book reviews for a long list of his friends. He reads a variety of books and has a great sense for books of quality. Here are Tony’s notes on recent favorites.

IMMORAL (Brian Freeman)

This is the author’s first novel and has been selected by Bookspan as International Book of the Month. It takes place in Duluth, Minnesota (beyond cold) and Las Vegas, Nevada (beyond hot). Two teenage girls are missing and the mystery is what happened to them. The police lieutenant knows the father of one girl is guilty, but cannot prove it. Many twists in the plot make this a good first effort.



CRUSADER’S CROSS (James Lee Burke)

This is another story in Louisiana with Dave Robicheaux back on the police force in Iberia Parish. Dave and his younger brother are rescued from a sandbar by a young girl when all are in their teens. The younger brother falls for the girl, who is, in fact, a prostitute. She disappears, and many years later other events lead to renewing the search for her. There are a series of murders and old problems with the underworld of New Orleans. What is most rewarding is the author’s writing about the history of New Orleans and environs, which will give a reader far greater insight into the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. The author’s descriptive writing style is lyrical and poetic.



CHURCHILL AND AMERICA (Martin Gilbert)

This fine biography/history is by the author of *Churchill: A Life*. Most folks are not aware that Churchill’s mother, Jennie Jerome, was an American. Winston first visited the United States in 1895, when he was 21. He visited the U.S. 14 times. Churchill’s ties with Roosevelt during WWII are widely known; however, there is new material here. His ties with Truman contributed to the Marshall Plan. Sir Martin Gilbert was appointed Churchill’s official biographer in 1968, and has drawn upon personal correspondence, press conferences, articles and speeches to present a wonderful portrait of the Anglo-American relationship.



ECHO BURNING (Lee Child)

This is another mystery involving Jack Reacher, a former officer in the Army Military Police (Criminal Investigation Division). Reacher is a wanderer and finds on the road a Hispanic woman who is being badly beaten by her husband. The setting is Echo, Texas a sun-scorched land with some very unpleasant “good old boys.” The psychology of abuse and desire for retribution are a key element of the plot. There are many unexpected twists and turns in this riveting story. Child is a talented writer and has his protagonist deal with the moral issues with a wicked sense of right and wrong.





EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

WHAT THE EXCHANGE IS ALL ABOUT. This section of TRE is designed to report reading comments and ratings from the members of the TRE network. As with movies, restaurants, hotels, etc., the best opinions and thoughts about books often come from our friends and acquaintances. When you've completed a book, please jot down your comments and a rating and either mail them to 3275 Oakdell Lane, Studio City, CA 91604, fax them to (818) 769-2367, or E-mail them to www.TRESTEVEA@AOL.com.

NETWORK REVIEWS. . .

GRAND SLAM

Mark Frost (2004, 512pp, Hyperion)

Bobby Jones was a golfing legend in his time and is still an inspiration to golfers all over the world. His feat in winning the British Amateur, the British Open, the U.S. Amateur and the U.S. Open (the Grand Slam) in 1930 was a remarkable achievement. In the context of its time — the stock market crash and the dawn of the Great Depression — this book is also a fascinating story of the search for an American hero (similar to *Seabiscuit*). Relating it to our time, it is highly unlikely that Tiger Woods, or any other highly gifted golfer, will ever be able to duplicate Jones' achievement. Mark Frost is an accomplished author who also wrote *The Greatest Game Ever Played*. Another golfing story, it describes Francis Ouimet, at only 20 years of age, defeating the world's best (and far more experienced) golfers at the 1913 U.S. Open in Brookline, MA. While *Grand Slam* centers much of its narrative on Bobby Jones, it provides interesting background material about economic, social, and political events in the first half of the 20th century. Colorful figures like Grantland Rice, Bernard Darwin (grandson of Charles), Ted Ray, Harry Vardon, and Walter Hagan appear in the book and make early golfing events relevant to the times, as well as exciting and suspenseful. Bobby Jones was born into an affluent Atlanta family and was a self-taught golfer who played in his first U. S. Amateur at age 14. The reader will be fascinated at his determination and struggle during major championships. But the strain of competition exacted a ferocious toll on his physical and emotional well being, ultimately crippling him to spend the last half of his life in a wheelchair. At the pinnacle of his success, revered in England as well as America, he disappeared from public life to practice law to devote more time to his family. But he continued his interest in golf. In the early 1930's, he purchased the land and helped Alistair McKenzie design Augusta National Golf Club. Each spring, at the time of the Masters Invitational Golf Tournament, we are reminded of Bobby Jones, his contributions to the game, and his unique history of successes. Golfers and non-golfers alike will enjoy this book because Mark Frost is a skilled writer and he has researched his material extremely well. Golf is a game that reveals much about the character, lifestyle, and values of the player. Mark Frost has captured those qualities, not just in Bobby Jones, but in each of the characters he portrays. And he fits them into the context of American life at an interesting and troubling time. Take the time to read *Grand Slam*; you will not be disappointed. I rate it a solid 9. (Steven Jones, Pacific Palisades, CA)

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Our Board of Contributing Editors was formed several years ago to expand the reach of coverage and opinion in *The Readers Exchange*. We have come to rely on our CEs and believe their efforts have had the desired objectives. They are a diverse group of men and women who have different reading preferences and bring varying perspectives to the newsletter.

Robert H. Bunzel (Piedmont, CA)

Ernest Chambers (Sherman Oaks, CA)

Mary Doggett (White Sulphur Springs, MT)

William Dohrmann (Stonington, CT)

Hugh Evans (Los Angeles, CA)

Judith G. Jones (Pacific Palisades, CA)

John D. Kyle (Ponte Vedra Beach, FL)

William Lilley, III (Washington DC)

Donna Mellenthin (Studio City, CA)

Ann Petroni (Santa Ynez, CA)

Tony Turner (Paradise Valley, AZ)

BILL LILLEY

William Lilley III, a new TRE contributor, is the founder of a Washington-based information company iMapData Inc. that delivers globally-based spatial intelligence over a web-based, geographic platform. iMapData focuses on the acquisition, display and correlation of critical infrastructure databases. Bill has had a distinguished career in business, government service, journalism, and academia. Bill is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, received an M.A. and Ph.D from Yale University and taught American history at Yale. He typically reads histories, biographies, and mysteries. He lives in Washington D.C. and can be reached at wlilley@imapdata.com.



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

NETWORK REVIEWS...

THE GREAT INFLUENZA: THE EPIC STORY OF THE DEADLIEST PLAGUE IN HISTORY

John M. Barry (2005, 560pp, Viking Penguin)

John Barry has produced an important work of medical history, one that is not just for doctors and scientists, but one that is highly readable for a non-medical audience as well. This book about the so-called Spanish Flu of 1918, which killed as many as 100 million people world wide in just one year, reads like a thriller. Barry focuses on what was occurring in the U.S. at the time, the dismal state of American medicine at the turn of the last century, how America's entry into WWI spread the virus, how dedicated researchers were frantically trying to find the cause of the disease and create vaccines, and how ill-prepared America was to deal with this disaster. He is able to connect the state of public health, disease, and politics in fascinating detail. For anyone interested in the birth of scientific medical education in America, this is the book for you! (Gayle Wilson, Los Angeles, CA)

AMERICAN GOTHIC

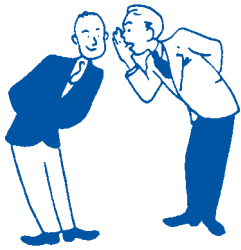
Thomas Hoving (2005, 176pp, Chamberlain Bros.)

The day after I finished Tomas Hoving's biography of *American Gothic*, I rushed down to the Art Institute of Chicago to see that painting again. So far I have resisted the impulse to make the arduous drive over to Eldon, Iowa (pop. 998) to see the farm house and the ogive window in the story which inspired one of the world's most recognized paintings, but because of this book, I am thinking about it. Hoving's monograph on *American Gothic* is a true gem. In sparkling prose he leads us through the life of this iconic painting, from its inspiration to its 1930 prize-winning to its current place as a beloved part of American pop culture. Along the way, he traces the external influences on Wood and points out details in the painting I hadn't noticed in four decades of acquaintance. Reading the book is also a bit like taking TRE's vocabulary quiz. Hoving uses words I have never heard of but, upon looking them up in the dictionary, I found he used exactly the right word, e.g. the "dolichocephalic" head of his dentist who served as the model for the Midwestern farmer. This book made ideal reading during our summer vacation. I rate the book an 8. (Willard Bunn, Lake Forest, IL)

MY DETACHMENT: A MEMOIR

Tracy Kidder (2005, 192 pp, Random House)

After I finished Tracy Kidder's *My Detachment*, I reread the early chapters, partly to check some factual details but largely because I was sorry to end the encounter between Kidder and me. This is an absorbing, emotional story, though Kidder's style is more like a reporter's than a storyteller's. *My Detachment* tells of Kidder's experiences as a second lieutenant in Vietnam, where he was sent in 1968, a few months after he was graduated from Harvard University. He commanded, "in a manner of speaking, a detachment [the Radio Research detachment] of eight enlisted men who performed an indoor sort of job, a classified mission called communications intelligence." He didn't see combat, didn't meet the enemy, but was physically hurt only in a fight. He saw the war as an interruption of his life. Thus the title. *My Detachment* is both his command and his attitude toward the men and the war in Vietnam. This memoir, written 30 years later, has three dimensions: Kidder's life before and during his time "in country" as a student, a developing writer, and a young man discovering love; his daily routine as a second lieutenant (he is eventually and incomprehensibly promoted to lieutenant); and his attempt to make sense of both. The writing is vivid, detailed, and deceptively simple. We see what he sees: Lackadaisical soldiers performing important duties while making no effort to pass inspections, officious officers, the torture of an enemy soldier, and bewildering military discipline. And we, too, ask the questions that he ponders in the privacy of his hootch (quarters): What is the point of this war? How and what do the other men think? Why do they do what they do? Could he behave that way? Kidder develops a fantasy about his time in Vietnam. In his letters home, he describes events that never happened and feelings he never had. For example, he knew only two Vietnamese, a barber and a house girl, but he wrote to his parents that he "performed kindnesses" for two Vietnamese boys and led his girl back home to think he wrote a 30-page story and read it to Vietnamese children who didn't exist. After his release, he wrote *Ivory Fields*, a novel which was never published, about a heroic lieutenant who led an infantry platoon and was killed. The fantasies show another dimension of war that Kidder discovers and shares:



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

NETWORK REVIEWS...

Continued from page 18

The self-conscious guilt of soldiers who did not see combat. In his later interviews of Vietnam veterans, Kidder heard, in addition to the terrible stories told by combat veterans, invented experiences from rear-echelon soldiers. These inventions take, “the place of things you didn’t do,” one of them says. “After a while, if you tell ‘em enough, the ones people like to hear, you almost start to believe them.” *My Detachment* isn’t a story, “people like to hear,” but it’s a true one. It presents all the confusion that surrounded and followed the Vietnam War. “I felt, increasingly,” Kidder says, “that everything I did was worse than pointless. And still, perversely, I wanted the war, with all else it had to do, to lend my life some meaning.” (Miriam F. d’Amato, Winthrop, MA)

WANDERING HOME

Bill McKibben (2005, 157pp, Crown Journeys)

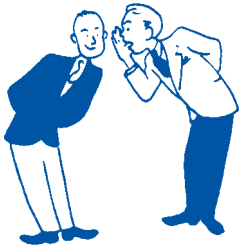
Crown Journeys is a series of literary travel books, matching interesting writers with interesting places. The writers are all known for their work in other genres. The only rule of the format is that the writers take their journeys on foot. In this book, subtitled *A Long Walk Across America’s Most Hopeful Landscape: Vermont’s Champlain Valley and New York’s Adirondacks*, Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, takes a three-week walk from his current home in Ripton, Vermont, near Middlebury College, to his home in the Adirondacks. He reflects on the deep hope he finds in the two landscapes and the contrast between diverse forms of human habitation and wilderness. McKibben writes with ease and humor and tells us, “the world contains no finer blend of soil and rock and water and forest than this laid out before me...” Along the way he visits with old friends and people who are trying to sustain traditional ways of living on the land and invent new ones from wineries to biodiesel. Joining McKibben on his walk lifted me out of the gloom of recent news and disasters and gave me a view of a brighter future. (Jane Carroll, Warren, VT)



BUILDING YOUR WORKING VOCABULARY

The key word here is *working*. There are many words that seem to fall on the fringe of an average vocabulary. We think we know the meaning of these words, but when we read or hear them, are not quite sure. They are, therefore, not regularly used in our writing and in conversation. The purpose of the TRE vocabulary section is not to stump you, but to sharpen your knowledge and use of words frequently used in books and/or heard in conversation. Here are a few such words, with abbreviated definitions and some rough pronunciation guidance.

- EVANESCENT** Vanishing or likely to vanish like vapor (ev-ah-NESS-ent).
- ZEITGEIST** The spirit of the time; the taste and outlook characteristic of a period or generation (ZITE-geist).
- PALAUER** Idle chatter; talk intended to charm or beguile (pah-LAV-er).
- OBVIATE** To anticipate and dispose of effectively; render unnecessary; prevent (AHB-vee-ate).
- PEREMPTORY** Putting an end to all debate or action; not allowing contradiction or refusal; imperative (Puh-REMP-tah-ree).
- VERNACULAR** The standard native language of a country or locality. The everyday language spoken by a people as distinguished from the literary language dialect (ver-NACK-yuh-ler).



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

NETWORK REVIEWS. . .

ORDINARY HEROES

8

Scott Turow (2005, 368pp, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)

Ordinary Heroes is hard to put down. It is an extremely skilled evocation of the horror, terror, and general madness that comprised the European theatre at the end of WWII, and subtle in its depiction of its main characters. If I cannot rate it higher than an 8 (well, maybe it is a 9), the problem is that Scott Turow has written some remarkable books (not his earlier legal thrillers, like *Presumed Innocent*, but his most recent books, in particular *Personal Injuries*, an extraordinary work with Balzacian nuance), and, as much as I liked *Ordinary Heroes*, it did not match those predecessors. Like many fathers, David Dubin, a well known Kindle County lawyer (Kindle County, a thinly fictionalized Chicago, is Turow's Paris) had told his son little about his WWII service. Shortly after the father's death, the son comes upon a cache of letters and other documents that reveal a remarkable story — the father's European service in the Judge Advocate General Corps had involved him in a picaresque manhunt throughout the European theatre for Robert Martin, a shadowy OSS figure whose legendary exploits were only matched by the uncertainties about his ultimate ambitions and loyalties. The search for Martin eventually involves Dubin with a broad cross-section of the U.S. Army, ranging from generals to privates to the upper ranks of the OSS. And Dubin eventually ends up forced into active combat in perhaps the bloodiest combat zone in Western Europe — the Battle of the Bulge at the end of 1944. The battle scenes have an immediacy and horror I have seldom encountered; Turow's descriptive gifts are on full display. The authenticity and anguish in these parts of the book reminded me at times of *The Naked and the Dead*. These adventures eventually lead to Dubin's being the only JAG officer court martialed in WWII. The core of the book is the events leading to his court martial, especially Dubin's involvement with Gita Lodz, a Polish refugee and compatriot of Martin, whose heroism and uncertainty of purpose rivals Martin. These events illustrate WWII's impact on even the smartest and most principled persons; Dubin exits WWII deeply and permanently changed from the man who entered it. If *Ordinary Heroes* fails to match *Personal Injuries* for me, it is because, despite their complexities, none of the main characters, with one exception, match the almost ungraspable complexities of earlier characters. Only General Teedle, a Patton-like character with an uneasy blend of arrogance, religious questing, and uncontrolled vice, puts you in mind of earlier Turow characters like Robbie Feavor in *Personal Injuries* (one spends the entire book trying, and failing, to take the measure of Robbie, a character of startling inconsistencies that somehow make sense). Nevertheless, *Ordinary Heroes* remains, overall, a compelling book. (David Gordon, Los Angeles, CA)



Jane Says. . . “This ‘hanging out and hooking up’ and traveling with SHA is almost more than I bargained for! His ‘have you got your ID?, got any extra \$1 bills?, go forward two more gates, sit here, did you bring a book?, have the pasta, it’s better than the chicken, do you want some air blowing in your face?’ What is a girl /baby to do? I know what I say, ‘Just thank you very much!’”

ABOUT THE READERS EXCHANGE &

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

The Readers Exchange is published to serve as a forum through which readers can exchange their thoughts about books. This purpose is served in two ways. First, current book reviews are provided by the Publisher and the Contributing Editors of TRE. These reviews are brief and to-the-point, and ratings are provided to assign a relative level of satisfaction to the book. Second, an exchange column is published to report the reading experiences of people in the TRE network. Through this medium, we hope to assist with book selection, heighten the awareness of reading for pleasure, and encourage non-readers to become active readers.

Subscriptions — *The Readers Exchange* is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by Stephen H. Ackerman. Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$45 per year. The International rate is \$55 per year. Call 818-769-8944 for subscription information and inquiries.

The Readers Exchange, 3275 Oakdell Lane, Studio City, CA 91604

Telephone 866-769-8944 or 818-769-8944 • Fax 818-769-2367 • E-mail TRESteveA@aol.com