

THE READERS EXCHANGE

Ideas and Information for Readers



December 2000

Dear Friends,

PICKS OF THE ISSUE. There are a number of good books reviewed in this edition, notably *A Place of Execution*, a terrific mystery by Val McDermid, and *Paris to the Moon*, Adam Gopnik's wonderful account of his five years living in Paris. Among others, we very much liked Bonnie Burnard's *A Good House*, winner of Canada's 1999 Giller Prize, *Nothing Like It In The World* by Stephen Ambrose, and the most recent offerings by Wendell Berry (*Jayber Crow*) and Terry Kay (*Taking Lottie Home*).

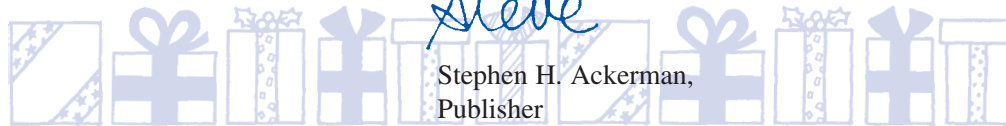
PROVOCATIVE PROSE. Ivan Doig's stirring memoir *This House of Sky* contains many wonderful passages, including this piece on dreams to which I think we all can relate: "In the night, in mid-dream, people who are entire strangers to one another sometimes will congregate atop my pillow. They file into my sleeping skull in perplexing medleys. A face from grade school may be twinned with one met a week ago on a rain-forest trail in the Olympic Mountains. A pair of friends I joked with yesterday now drift in arguing with an editor I worked for more than a thousand miles from here. How thin the brainwalls must be, so easily can acquaintanceships be struck up among these random residents of the dark."

THE SIMPLE LIFE. In conversations with friends about how we spend our time and what we would like to change, simplification has been a recurring theme. This is an elusive objective, however, as there are so many competing demands for our time and so many distractions in these rapidly changing, pressure-packed times. Reading Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow* about what life used to be like in a rural town made me think about the great difference in pace and lifestyle and priorities between that existence and what we have today. A simpler, slower, and more reflective life tends to foster relationship building whereas life in a sprint along with various aspects of the technological revolution creates distance. There are obstacles to switching off the fast-forward autopilot, but the attainment of a more simple life, it seems, would bring with it a stronger sense of community and togetherness. As Gandhi said, "There is more to life than increasing the speed."

AS WE COMPLETE OUR 10TH YEAR. . . we're making a wish . . . for a fireplace, for happiness and peace of mind, for music and conversation with family and friends, and for a great book to take you a world away. Best wishes for the Christmas season and for a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Ackerman,
Publisher



Reviews In This Issue

- **Nothing Like It In The World** (Ambrose)
- **Faded Coat of Blue** (Parry)
- **Drowning Ruth** (Schwarz)
- **A Place of Execution** (McDermid)
- **Lying Awake** (Salzman)
- **A Good House** (Burnard)
- **The Better Angel** (Morris)
- **Paris to The Moon** (Gopnik)
- **Jayber Crow** (Berry)
- **Off Camera** (Koppel)
- **Taking Lottie Home** (Kay)
- . . . And more

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- **Exchanging Thoughts**
- **Selections From. . . The Archives**
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- **The Age of Polar Exploration**
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THE
QUARTERLY
PUBLICATION
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BY
READERS

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Volume X Issue 4

READING . . . BETWEEN THE LINES



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

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

Ratings: This 0–10 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.

PARIS TO THE MOON

ADAM GOPNIK
(2000, 338 pp,
Random House)

10

We really do love Paris — the romance, art, cuisine, history, sidewalk cafés and more — and if you do too, you will love *Paris to the Moon*. Adam Gopnik, a writer for *The New Yorker*, left New York in 1995 with his wife and infant son and spent the next five years in Paris. Gopnik chronicles their adventures and their daily living (and coping) in the City of Light, but this book is so much more than just another show-and-tell by an American on a pilgrimage many have thought about doing. Gopnik is an exceptional writer and he brings Paris alive with his stories, observations and cultural insights about the major activities and concerns of Parisians. In one chapter entitled “The Strike,” he writes about the strike of the big French labor federation (and the issues and public reaction) that shut down Paris. In another he delves into the “Two-Café Problem,” the saga of two well-known left bank cafes, Les Deux Magots and Café de Flore. I particularly enjoyed chapters entitled “The Crisis in French Cooking” and “Couture Shock,” the latter about Parisian haute couture. This is a most enjoyable and humorous commentary about life in Paris, the Luxembourg Gardens, the tomato dessert at Arpege, the struggle to “save” the Balzac brasserie, the health club at the Ritz, and much more. This is the next best thing to being there and my copy of *Paris to the Moon* is marked in numerous places to remind me of things to investigate and do on the eagerly-awaited next trip.

A PLACE OF EXECUTION

VAL McDERMID
(1999, 404 pp,
St. Martin's Minotaur)

10

This crime novel has everything and you should not miss it. We spend a fair amount of time seeking mystery/suspense novels by writers who are not household names. You all know about Robert Parker, Stephen King, Elmore Leonard, John Grisham and the like, and you need little or no help on their works. Our pursuit of lesser-known writers ends in some dead ends but, once in a while, you find a real gem like Val McDermid's *A Place of Execution*. This is a superb piece of writing, with well-drawn characters, great plotting, and an excellent depiction of time and place. The story is set in and around Scardale, a village in the English countryside where many of the folks are related. It's an insular community that distrusts the outside world. On a cold December day in 1963, 13-year-old Alison Carter vanishes, and her frantic mother calls the local constable to report her disappearance. Detective inspector George Bennett, young and recently promoted, is brought in and takes charge of the case to determine just what happened to Alison. His investigation begins slowly as the cooperation of the family and the villagers is minimal, but evidence begins to be uncovered and the hunt is on. So as to preserve the great read and the surprises, I'll tell you no more. It starts a little slow, but be assured that this is a book of steadily mounting tension and unexpected twists that you will thoroughly enjoy. I'll certainly be looking over Val McDermid's prior works and be anxiously awaiting her next one.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

NOTHING LIKE IT IN THE WORLD

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE
(2000, 382 pp,
Simon & Schuster)

9

Everything historian Stephen Ambrose writes gets my attention. He makes history come alive and many of his excellent prior works have been reviewed in these pages, including *Citizen Soldiers*, *Undaunted Courage*, *D-Day: June 6, 1944*, and more. This book, subtitled “The Men Who Built The Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869,” is a rich and lively recreation of perhaps the greatest engineering triumph of the 19th century. Ambrose, a great researcher, has the gift of being able to assimilate huge amounts of data and weave it into a compelling story which captures time and place as well as the feeling and excitement of the event. He meticulously describes how two railroads were pitted against each other, the Central Pacific (CP) laying track eastward from Sacramento and the Union Pacific (UP) laying track westward from Omaha, both rushing to claim ownership of the most miles of track. The CP had to blast a route through the Sierra Nevadas, whereas the UP had to cover a lot more, albeit flat, terrain. They would meet to complete the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah in May of 1869. Although Ambrose deals at length with the more incredible engineering and logistical aspects of building the railroad, as well as the financial and political issues, this is first and foremost a human drama. He celebrates the people involved, not just the leadership, but the thousands who provided the muscle, particularly the Chinese and the Irish immigrants. Having written about Lewis and Clark in *Undaunted Courage*, and now the railroad, Ambrose’s next project will be to chronicle the building of the interstate highway system. This reader will not miss it.



TONY TURNER’S “A” LIST

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, has a great sense for books of quality, and grades his books on a scale of A to F. With Tony’s permission, we are printing herewithin (and in future issues of TRE) a few favorites from his most recent edition.

ANIMAL DREAMS (Barbara Kingsolver)



This lady can write! It doesn’t matter whether she is describing a leaf, town-square, people — whatever — the descriptions are beautiful. A young woman returns home (to Grace, Arizona) and finds environmental catastrophe, personal contacts, recollections and people who will help chart her life. The story combines flashbacks (well done here, although not usually), dreams and Native American legends in a creative way. The story is a “B,” the writing style better.

THE QUIET GAME (Greg Iles)



In Natchez, Mississippi, a prosecutor-turned-novelist takes on old South money and aristocracy who have committed a host of flagrant crimes — and threatened his family. The story reaches to the head of the FBI and other senior villains. The author mixes well the fiery tempers and prejudices of the late 60’s with present day atmosphere. Cleverly constructed and suspenseful.

THE MALTESE FALCON (Dashiell Hammett)



I found a facsimile edition of the 1930 original in a used bookstore in Naples, Maine. Published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., a company still in the business. Yea for that! It is great fun to see what books looked like 70 years ago. I’ll not insult you with the plot, but you should read this one. Sam Spade is Bogart (except for the height). The film dialogue is directly from the book — saves on screenwriters. Different, fun and terrific.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

THE SPECIAL PRISONER

JIM LEHRER
(2000, 227 pp,
Random House)

8

This is a good novel and well worth your time but, for some reason, it did not pack the wallop that I thought it should. The book takes its title from the designation that the Japanese gave American aviators held prisoner during World War II. Since the airmen were those responsible for wreaking havoc on Japanese cities, they were treated with incredible cruelty. It was noted that 96% of American POWs survived in Europe, 60% in the Pacific, but only 5% of the special prisoners. This story involves a young B-29 pilot, Quincy Watson, who is shot down over Tokyo and spends the rest of the war in a Japanese POW camp. He is one of the few survivors, but he is badly tortured and maimed, and witnesses the unspeakable torture and killing in the camp, most of which was administered by a brutal, sadistic officer nicknamed "The Hyena." Fifty years later, the 71-year-old Watson, now a retired Methodist bishop of San Antonio, sees the torturer in an airport in Texas. He tracks him to a hotel room in San Diego and confronts him with the horrible events in the POW camp. Watson, who had spent his life first quelling his anger and then joining the church finds his memories flooding back and seriously challenging the "safe place" where he had parked the sordid events of the past. The events in the hotel room mark another major change in Watson's life. The novel jumps back and forth between the past and the present during which Lehrer examines the questions of forgiveness and guilt with passion. This is an easy read, and an emotional one, and the images and descriptions of the atrocities in the POW camp will remain long after the book has been completed. What is our "real" capacity for forgiveness and how does one deal with this?

POLITICS . . .

. . . And Democracy

I think we all got fed up with the give and take in the 2000 Presidential campaign. In addition to the political rhetoric, we were (again) bombarded with all the things the Federal government was going to give us or do for us. It was a contest of who could promise the most. What happened to the spirit of JFK's "Ask not what the country can do for you, ask what you can do for the country"? All of this sent me back to a little book titled *Commager on Tocqueville* (reviewed in the Fall 1993 issue). Henry Steele Commager, a distinguished historian, noted that Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was "one of the great and enduring works of political literature." He calls the book, written in 1835-39 "the most illuminating commentary on American character and institutions ever penned by a foreigner." As relevant today as ever, Commager applies Tocqueville's predictions and questions (and warnings) to our present time. Noting that "The central problem not only of democracy but of government itself is the reconciliation



of liberty and order — who shall bridle Behemoth, who shall curb Leviathan? It is the oldest, as it is the most difficult, problem in politics." Commager explores five major questions raised by Tocqueville as he examined America's experiment with democracy but, against the backdrop of current political campaigns, the subject of centralization and democracy intrigued me the most. With candidates promising the world to voters, all to be provided by the Federal government, the issue continues to be highly relevant. Tocqueville thought there were great dangers in centralization, and there were three tenets to his thesis: one is that centralization is both inevitable and irresistible; two, that the danger is not so much in centralization of authority as in centralization of administration; and three, that such centralization leads to tyranny. So, the message rings through, we should be vigilant, make less demands upon and lower our expectations from government else the Leviathan grows unchecked. The Behemoth we must bridle is ourselves.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

LYING AWAKE

MARK SALZMAN
(2000, 181 pp,
Knopf)

9

We've met Mark Salzman on several occasions and heard his dynamic presentations. He is talented, has great enthusiasm, is very funny, and, as this work amply demonstrates, highly versatile. *Sister John of the Cross* is a middle-aged nun cloistered in a Carmelite monastery in contemporary Los Angeles. Almost totally shut off from the outside world, she has spent many years there in the service of God living the spare Carmelite life. After years of spiritual drought, she begins receiving God's grace in the form of intense mystical visions, but they are accompanied by excruciating headaches. This state of grace has given her the ability to write beautiful poetry and to be published. The story turns when Sister John discovers that her visions are the result of epileptic seizures, specifically temporal-lobe epilepsy. She then is faced with the decision of whether to undergo surgery and risk losing the "connection" to her deep spiritual illumination. This is a spare work (it can be read in one sitting) which captures the simple life in a Carmelite monastery as well as the relationships among the nuns. On a deeper level, Salzman probes the foundations of faith, the nature of spiritual illuminations, the meaning of prayer and the sources of artistic inspiration. *Lying Awake* exposes the reader to a world apart, that of a Carmelite, and in a deceptively simple but highly informed manner, gives us a satisfying, provocative read.

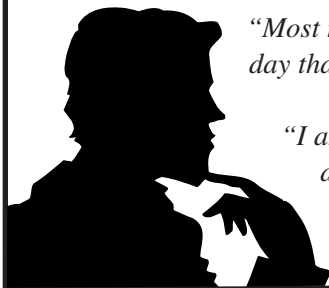
NO GREAT MISCHIEF

ALISTAR M. MacLEOD
(2000, 283 pp,
W. W. Norton)

7

Alistar MacLeod is one of Canada's most distinguished writers and, with my appetite whetted by a positive review, dove into this book anticipating a great read. I was somewhat disappointed. Although there were some excellent and highly interesting writing segments, there were also lower points and multiple diversions which muted the narrative impact and ultimately, the satisfaction with the read. This is a multigenerational tale of the Scottish MacDonald clan who crossed the Atlantic and settled on Cape Breton Island (Nova Scotia) in 1779. Two hundred years later, Toronto orthodontist, Alexander MacDonald looks back at the history of his family's emigration from Scotland while caring for a dying, alcoholic older brother. He also reflects back on his own (and twin sister's) upbringing by his grandparents after an accident on an ice floe that took the lives of his parents and an older brother when he was three. Alexander's narration jumps back and forth between the crude, somewhat chaotic past and the comfortable present. The strength of the book comes from the family stories, the best of which was the depiction of his summer spent in the mines with his wild older brothers. I also enjoyed aspects of the family history but, overall, this was an uneven effort which for me, failed to generate a compelling narrative impact.

THOUGHTS ABOUT . . . LIFE



"Most modern calendars mar the sweet simplicity of our lives by reminding us that each day that passes is the anniversary of some perfectly uninteresting event." — Oscar Wilde

"I am prepared to believe that a dry martini slightly impairs the palate, but think what it does for the soul." — Alec Waugh

"We used to build civilizations. Now we build shopping malls." — Bill Bryson



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

FADED COAT OF BLUE

OWEN PARRY
(1999, 352 pp,
William Morrow)

9

I read this highly entertaining novel of historical suspense after getting the idea from Linda Armour (Lake Forest, IL). Set in Washington in 1861 as Lincoln becomes President and the Civil War is beginning, this book is rich in history, feels very authentic, and is a great whodunit. In a Union camp just south of the Potomac, a sentry finds a corpse in the early morning hours. The victim is abolitionist Anthony Fowler and the media praises this officer as a martyr while condemning the Southerners for his assassination. Captain Abel Jones, a Welshman who fought for the Queen in India and was wounded at the Battle of Bull Run, is asked by General George McClellan (Commander-in-Chief of the Union Army) to investigate the homicide. Abel, now serving as a clerking officer, is reluctant to handle the case because of his inexperience, but McClellan persuades him to do this service for the country. Abel finally accepts the assignment and begins his inquiry by talking to the sentry, interviewing the brigade surgeon, Mayor Tyrone (one of the great characters in the book), and traveling to Philadelphia to talk with Fowler's mother. As Jones' investigation deepens, a web of secrets and sinister relationships are uncovered and he places himself in harms way. You will very much enjoy the character of Captain Abel Jones and the building suspense provided by the author. This excellent novel of history and mystery, a highly readable examination of moral values, was the first of Parry's planned books featuring Abel Jones. The second, *Shadows of Glory*, was published this fall and is definitely on my reading list.

JAYBER CROW

WENDELL BERRY
(2000, 363 pp,
Counterpoint)

9

I always enjoy reading Kentucky poet and novelist Wendell Berry who, with *Jayber Crow*, brings us another story set in the fictional town of Port William, Kentucky. Berry is a great observer of life, and of relationships and, in chronicling the history and lives of the people of rural Port William, takes us back to other, more simple times. Jayber Crow was the town barber from 1937 until 1969 and now (1986) he looks back over his life in Port William and environs as well as that of his neighbors. Jayber's parents and later his aunt and uncle who were acting as guardians all die making him an orphan at age 10. After spending time in an orphanage and then attempting college, he wanders back to his roots in Port William during the 1937 flood and, almost immediately, becomes the town barber. In a small town, the barbershop becomes the place to drop in for conversation and news, and Jayber, from this position of vantage, becomes an observer of the town and its people and, most importantly, the changes. Using Jayber as his narrator (reporter), Berry's Port William and its rural populace come to life and, in a very simple, measured fashion, describe the undermining of the traditional life of the town. Berry illuminates the dilution of the intimacy previously enjoyed by rural families caused by "progress" (cars, new farm equipment and easy credit) as well as the social and commercial changes occasioned by interstate highways, discount stores and the like. In this and other Berry works, he focuses on the role of community in shaping character, the decline of rural America, and he emphasizes that nurturing and salvation must be local and that fixation on the new technology available to us can undermine our environment and economic base. He is a wonderful writer, an incisive por-trayer of life changes and the evolution of relationships, and a joy to read.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

THE WHITE RHINO HOTEL

BARTLE BULL
(1992, 406 pp,
Carroll & Graf)

7

Bartle Bull writes about Africa and, in addition to this book, has written *Safari: A Chronicle of Adventure* and *A Café On the Nile*, the latter, an excellent novel of adventure reviewed in the Spring 1999 issue of TRE. This story is set in British East Africa (the future Kenya) immediately after World War I (1918-1921). The end of the War has brought a new wave of settlers to East Africa, those displaced as a result of the war as well as those hoping to capitalize on the promise of Kenya as it grows. Bull's remarkable set of characters intersect at the White Rhino Hotel, where deals are made, schemes are hatched, relationships begin and end, antagonisms are created and news of the area is passed along. But this is a book of Africa and as the author follows the adventurers in their struggles to establish themselves in the post — World War I environment, there is a battle with a python, a raid by safari ants, and subsistence with the natives and the wildlife. I enjoyed this forerunner of *A Café On the Nile*, but I liked the latter much better. *The White Rhino Hotel* has many passages of adventure and romance and there is a good feeling of time and place, but somehow, it rambles around and, despite the colorful characters and their travails, does come together well. Read *A Café On the Nile* if you have not done so.

LOST GIRLS

ANDREW PYPER
(2000, 385 pp,
Delacorte Press)

6

Lost Girls, Andrew Pyper's first novel, was a number-one bestseller in Canada last year and earned a starred-review in *Publisher's Weekly*. However, the book fell well short of these accolades with this reader. The principal character and narrator is Bartholomew Crane, an arrogant coke-snorting criminal defense attorney from Toronto. His firm of Lyle, Gederov & Associate is known in legal circles as Lie, Get-Em-Off & Associate. Crane, the associate part of the firm, is assigned the "lost girls" case by his firm, a case in which two schoolgirls are missing and presumed drowned in Lake St. Christopher in the backwater town of Murdock, Ontario. Crane treks to Murdock to defend Thomas Tripp, one of the girl's teachers, who is accused of murder based on somewhat flimsy evidence. After checking in to the decrepit Empire Hotel, Crane discovers that Tripp is uncooperative and seemingly insane, blaming the disappearance of the two girls on the ghost of a woman who had drowned in the lake some 50 years ago. With the limited evidence (and no bodies), Crane is confident that he can get the man off, but odd things begin to happen as he plots his defense and confronts a long-repressed tragedy from his own past that has a bearing on the case. The story is much more about Crane than it is about the lost girls or a courtroom drama and, although it was written well enough to keep me reading, my interest flagged at times, a victim of excessive length, some elements of redundancy, and a thin plotline with too much leakage.

DO YOU KNOW WHY . . . ???



. . . strips of dried beef are called "beef jerky?" In the days when the West was being settled, meat was often cut into long, thick strips, dried in the sun, and carried in saddlebags until needed for a meal. The name given to the meat was *charqui*, a Spanish word meaning dried meat. When the meat was beef, the dried strips were called "beef charqui," which was later pronounced — and spelled — "beef jerky."

. . . there are often two buttons in the center of the back of a coat with tails? The buttons were there so that the wearer could button up the tails before getting on a horse. Of course, the buttons serve no purpose now.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

OFF CAMERA

TED KOPPEL
(2000, 320 pp,
Knopf)

8

I'm usually not up late enough to watch *Nightline*, but Ted Koppel, a 37-year veteran of NBC news, has anchored this show for the past 20 years and won just about every television award imaginable. This book, subtitled "Private Thoughts Made Public," is written in diary form with entries for each day of 1999. These entries cover the major events and personalities of 1999 along with many of the principal issues that were aired during the course of the year. The book is also about Ted Koppel and his family and takes its life from the candid thoughts and opinions of Koppel, given free reign here, not restrained by the more programmed, formal *Nightline* structure. I enjoyed this book, particularly Koppel's observations and opinions, a few examples of which are as follows:

"I believe that most American children are too coddled and that far too much attention is paid to the wishes and opinions of youngsters who haven't lived enough or learned enough to be treated as the equals of the adults who should be molding them."

*"Nevertheless, as stimulating and enjoyable as travel can be, there is, as Dorothy noted in *The Wizard of Oz*, 'no place like home.' Indeed, these days, so many people are traveling to so many places so much of the time that remaining stationary might soon become the most sought after kind of relaxation."*

"If television isn't covering the story and Americans are reading less and less, I suppose it is inevitable that we will become dumber and dumber. And that's very dangerous indeed."

"When all is said and done though, one is left with the impression that even at the greatest of universities, the struggle for ever more donations and endowments dominates the lives of deans and administrators every bit as much as campaign financing dominates the lives of our politicians."

A GOOD HOUSE

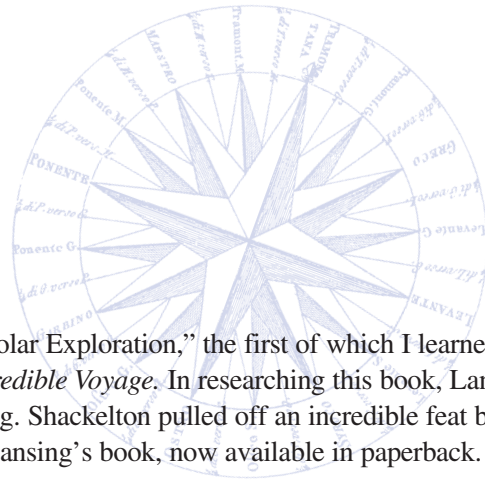
BONNIE BURNARD
(1999, 309 pp,
Henry Holt)

9

Bonnie Burnard's first novel *A Good House* was a number-one bestseller in Canada last year and won the 1999 Giller Prize, Canada's most prestigious literary award. This is a deeply moving novel, stylishly and simply written, in which the ordinary moments of life become luminous and meaningful. The story begins in the town of Stonebrook, Ontario in 1949. The war is over, hopes are up, and we meet the Chambers, an ordinary family consisting of Bill and Sylvia and their three children, Patrick, Paul and Daphne. The story starts off subtly with the reader becoming acquainted with and being drawn into the everyday lives of the Chambers. Just when you are lulled into believing that nothing could happen to upset their simple little world, things do begin to happen. There's an accident, a tragic illness ending in death, the children take varied courses in their lives, the family expands, marriages fail and, of course, the world changes. The book is a chronicle of the Chambers family over a period of 50 years. This is a rich work of fiction, crisply written and eminently satisfying. The story kept reminding me how much changes with time, how much a family expands, the diversity of experiences within a family group, the myriad of intra-family relationships and how they strengthen and weaken, the tragedies and the resiliency and the enduring familial love. This is a wonderful book and is highly recommended.

THE AGE OF POLAR EXPLORATION

By Gary Vanderweil (Cohasset, MA)

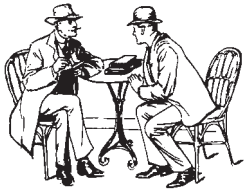


I wanted to recommend four outstanding histories on the “Age of Polar Exploration,” the first of which I learned about in TRE: Alfred Lansing’s 1959 book, *Endurance: Shackleton’s Incredible Voyage*. In researching this book, Lansing interviewed all of the participants of the voyage who were still living. Shackleton pulled off an incredible feat by bringing his entire crew safely home and it is vividly described in Lansing’s book, now available in paperback.

THE ARCTIC GRAIL by Pierre Bertan chronicles the British men, Admiralty officials, and also Scandinavians and Americans who, at great personal risk and hardship, sought adventure, fame, rewards, and honor for their country in a series of quests for the Northwest Passage and the North Pole. In addition to the two and three year voyages, sunless winters, sub-zero temperatures, storms, and the difficulty in provisioning, the unpredictability of the Arctic ice pack made the quests all but impossible. The ice pack was constantly in motion, some years breaking up early, other years late or not at all, sometimes thawing out and disappearing over vast expanses, other times staying solid for years on end. Perhaps one of the most famous of the early explorers was Sir John Franklin, who led a two-ship expedition with three years of provisions in search of the Northwest Passage in 1845. The ships sailed from England in May, stopped in Greenland, and were never seen again. All 129 men were lost. Franklin’s tale is just one of many covered in this 600-page book which I found hard to put down.

SAFE RETURN DOUBTFUL by John Maxtone-Graham, another book I found hard to put down, describes the 19th century searches for the North and South Poles. The North Pole searches centered on the so-called “American Way,” a long bay between Greenland on the East and Ellesmere Island on the West. The explorers were always hopeful that when they exited the bay they would be greeted by an ice-free expanse of sea leading to the North Pole. In 1897, an intrepid Swede, Salomon Andree, made a balloon attempt to reach the North Pole, carrying the ubiquitous sledge and provisions in case he was forced down. Andree and his two crewmen were never seen alive again. Thirty-three years later, an expedition ship north of Spitzbergen found their last camp, diaries, and bodies. As we all know, the North Pole was finally reached by the American Robert Peary in 1909. The South Pole expeditions were as fraught with adventure, hardship, and death as were those to the Arctic, and Maxtone-Graham’s book does an excellent job describing these expeditions, which reached their climax with the 1911 race to the Pole between Norwegian Roald Amundson and the Englishman Robert Scott.

THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH. This excellent history by Roland Huntford focuses entirely on the Scott-Amundson race. The book sets the context of Arctic and Antarctic exploration and tracks the parallel careers of Scott and Amundson, culminating in the planning and conduct of their respective South Pole expeditions. Scott reached the Pole a month after Amundson. England’s initial reaction to this defeat was that Amundson was underhanded to even try to compete for the Pole, Scott having declared his intention first, and that it was only a matter of lucky breaks that allowed Amundson to win the contest. Huntford has a different interpretation. He paints Scott as a lackadaisical planner and bumbling leader in contrast to Amundson, who excelled in planning and was effective in his leadership role.



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

THE INCUMBENT

BRIAN McGRORY
(2000, 344 pp,
Pocket Books)

8

This is a good political thriller by Brian McGrory, former White House Correspondent for *The Boston Globe*. *The Incumbent*, his first novel, amply demonstrates his knowledge of Washington, his storytelling ability, and his insider's view of journalism at the national level. Our protagonist/narrator is Jack Flynn, Washington Correspondent for a Boston newspaper. He is invited to play golf with the incumbent President, Clayton Hutchins, just 12 days before the election. During the round of golf, Hutchins offers Flynn the job of Press Secretary in his new administration. On the 16th green, shots are fired wounding both the President and Flynn and the lone gunman is killed by the Secret Service. Flynn thus finds himself on the inside of an apparent assassination attempt, the scoop of a lifetime, and is confronted with a major life decision. Should he join the President's staff as Press Secretary or investigate his eyewitness story? Tempted as he is by the President's offer, his reporter's instincts pull him toward getting the story, particularly when his newspaper colleague proves that the gunman is not who the Secret Service claimed he is. Flynn presses his investigation to get the story and in the process, he is contacted regularly by an unknown tipster telling him "Nothing is as it seems." Flynn suspects an FBI cover-up and places himself in harm's way. This is an entertaining, fast-paced thriller with lots of surprises and suspense. It falls short in the plotline credibility category, but was otherwise a worthwhile read.

DROWNING RUTH

CHRISTINA SCHWARZ
(2000, 338 pp,
Doubleday)

7

I read this novel after reading two good reviews. The one in *USA Today* noted that "*Drowning Ruth* is a riveting first novel combining barren landscapes, sinister secrets, and strong doses of 'it was a dark and stormy night' melodrama," and another in *Time* said that "this unusually deft and assured first novel conveys a good deal more than thrills and chills." The movie rights were purchased prior to publication by Miramax for director Wes Craven. Set in Wisconsin in 1919, nurse Amanda Starkey suffers a nervous breakdown and returns to the family farm to recuperate. Her parents had both died in the 1918 flu epidemic and the farm was occupied by her younger sister Mattie and her three-year-old daughter Ruth. Mattie's husband, Carl, is still recovering in France from his wartime injuries. Mattie too is soon dead and, when Carl returns home, he wants to know what happened. *Drowning Ruth* then becomes a story, a somewhat eerie one, of family dynamics and one of solving the mysteries. Schwartz tells this through flashbacks, through Amanda's mind, through Ruth's mind, and the balance through regular third-person narration. This structure, I thought, was awkward and broke up what I thought could have been a more suspenseful read. For me, the book did not live up to its promise, with tension and narrative momentum always just a little out of grasp.

THE BETTER ANGEL

ROY MORRIS JR.
(2000, 244 pp,
Oxford)

9

Subtitled "Walt Whitman in the Civil War," I thoroughly enjoyed this little slice of history and biography as well as the revelation of another aspect of the life of one of America's greatest poets. As the Civil War began in 1861, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) was at a low point in his life, relatively unproductive, and wasting away his nights in New York. His brother, George, joined the Union Army and, when he was wounded at Fredericksburg, Walt headed south to Washington to find him. Thus began the Civil War's transformative effect on Whitman. Trudging from hospital to hospital to find George, he came face-to-face with the shocking conditions in the hospitals, the horror of

Continued on page 11



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

THE BETTER ANGEL

ROY MORRIS JR.
(Continued)

the injuries suffered by the men, the suffering and the dying, and the inadequate medical care. Whitman felt the loneliness and needs of the wounded and dying and began a relentless schedule of visits to the hospitals to see the men, speak with them and listen to them, give them small gifts, and to comfort them. Although he held a modest government job to support himself, the hospital visits became the major activity of his day. His hospital observations and his experiences with the men became fertile ground for his poetry and his articles, and he continued with these activities until the end of the war, earning him the enduring love and respect of thousands of Civil War soldiers. I thought this book was a wonderful combination of history and biography. This was the Civil War from a different perspective — the wounded and the hospitals and the startlingly low level of medical science at the time — and the revelation of an important life segment of Walt Whitman, the “Good Gray Poet” and self-proclaimed “Soldier’s Missionary.”

DISOBEDIENCE

JANE HAMILTON
(2000, 273 pp,
Doubleday)

6

It appears that I am decidedly in the minority vis-a-vis reactions to this book. Most reviewers give the book very high marks, whereas I do not. I loved Jane Hamilton’s *A Map of the World* (TRE Fall 1994), enjoyed *The Book of Ruth* (TRE Spring 1997), but *Disobedience* is not in the same league with these works. The story comprises one-year in the life of the dysfunctional Shaw family and is narrated by 17-year-old Henry Shaw, a high school senior. Henry intercepts e-mail messages between his mother Elizabeth, a pianist, and violin maker Richard Pollico, learning that his mother is having an affair with him. As he eavesdrops on the liaison between “Liza38” and “Rpoll”, their e-mail monikers, Henry’s emotions take flight as he digests and considers just what to do with this information. His father Kevin, a socialist high school history teacher (axed from his job in Vermont), seems unaware of her infidelity while his 13-year-old sister Elvira remains obsessed with the Civil War, dressing in period costumes and participating in battle reenactments outfitted as a boy. *Disobedience* is about domestic relationships and teenage uncertainty, an exploration of family bonds and tensions, loyalties and disguises. Hamilton is a good writer and treats the problems and the idiosyncrasies of the Shaw family with compassion, but this book never came together sufficiently and was not enlivened with any sense of immediacy to make it a satisfying and insightful read.

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 William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White.

EACH AND EVERY ONE. Pitchman’s jargon.

Avoid, except in dialog.

It should be a lesson to each and every one of us.

*It should be a lesson to every one of us
(all of us).*

AS YET. Yet nearly always is as good, if not better.

No agreement has been reached as yet. *No agreement has yet been reached.*

COPE. An intransitive verb used with *with.*, In formal writing, one doesn’t “cope,” one “copes with” something or somebody.

I knew she’d cope. (jocular)

I knew she would cope with the situation.

CHARACTER. Often simply redundant, used from mere habit of wordiness.

Acts of a hostile character. *Hostile acts.*



CURRENT BOOK REVIEWS

TAKING LOTTIE HOME

TERRY KAY
(2000, 294 pp,
William Morrow)

9

Terry Kay (*To Dance with the White Dog*) is a wonderful storyteller with a light, warm touch that makes for very entertaining reading. Set in 1904, baseball players Ben Phelps and Foster Lanier have just been cut from the Augusta Hornets, short-circuiting their dreams of greatness. While on the train out of Augusta, they meet the beautiful Lottie Barton, a poor girl who has taken up with a traveling salesman to escape her grim existence. Ben returns to his hometown of Jericho while Foster takes up with Lottie and they join a traveling carnival. Their lives intersect again when the carnival comes through Jericho. Several years later, when Ben is engaged, he receives a letter from Lottie telling him that Foster is dying. Without giving away the story, Lottie does return to Jericho with her little boy, and makes a profound impact on Ben's mother and other town folk. You will like the characters in this book, and will feel their emotions as the story unfolds. I very much enjoyed this turn-of-the-century tale of small town living, a story about love, dreams, life decisions we make to pursue those dreams, and our capacity to love and care for one another.

SCAR TISSUE

WILLIAM G. TAPPLY
(2000, 276 pp,
St. Martin's Minotaur)

8

In this, his 17th Brady Coyne novel, William Tapply exhibits his clean, crisp writing style in a suspenseful whodunit. Brady Coyne, a small-time Boston attorney, receives a call from an old friend and client, Jacob Gold, to tell him that Gold's 15-year-old son Brian and his girlfriend Jenny were involved in a tragic accident. Their car went off the road into an icy river and Jenny is dead and Brian missing, presumably swept away and drowned. Brady rushes to their home in suburban Boston to lend his support, goes to the accident scene and, as he gathers information about the accident while the police search for Brian, more questions arise about the simple explanations offered. The local chief of police is uncooperative and seems anxious to get rid of Coyne, who begins to suspect that Brian is alive. The plot thickens as he uncovers evidence that he is pressured to reveal by a politically ambitious DA. Mystery readers will enjoy this yarn and find Brady Coyne to be a very likeable protagonist.



SHORT STORIES By O. Henry

O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), an American short-story writer. A popular and prolific writer, he was noted for his sentimental stories about the lives of ordinary people and for his mastery of the surprise ending. He served over three years in the federal penitentiary for embezzling funds from a bank and the stories he heard in prison provided the ideas for many of his writings. The pen name is an abbreviation of the name of a French pharmacist, Etienne-Ossian Henry, found in the *U.S. Dispensatory*, a reference work he used when he worked in the prison pharmacy. His story collections are wonderful works to keep close at hand for those moments when time is limited and you are in the mood for a quick dose of reading enjoyment. I picked up *The Gift of The Magi and Other Short Stories*, a slim (89pp) paperback with sixteen of O. Henry's best stories and have read several of the more notable ones, including *The Cop and the Anthem*, *The Gift and The Magi*, and *The Last Leaf*. His stories provide wonderful entertainment that should not be overlooked.

SELECTIONS FROMTHE ARCHIVES



Much of our time in book selection is devoted to reading reviews and evaluating new publications, which, of course, pleases contemporary authors and their publishers. This section of *The Readers Exchange* is included to remind us of the many wonderful books published in the past.

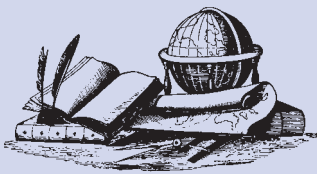
"I can not understand the rage manifested by the greater part of the world for reading new books. If I have not read a book before, it is, to all intents and purposes, new to me, whether it was printed yesterday or three hundred years ago." (William Hazlitt)

THIS HOUSE OF SKY (Ivan Doig)

Ivan Doig writes about Montana and we have enjoyed several of his novels in that setting. He writes about Montana because he grew up there and *This House of Sky*, his first and arguably his best book, is about his family and his experiences in the deep Montana country. First published in 1978 and subtitled "Landscapes of a Western Mind," *This House of Sky* is an elegant, touching read that was a National Book Award nominee. Doig was brought up by his father Charlie and his grandmother Bessie Ringer among the shepherders and the folks of small town saloons and valley ranches. The family continually struggles to make a living and fight the elements. At its core, however, this work is about links to our past, about understanding our family ties and experiences, and about appreciating our heritage and the nature of our own being because of it. These are powerful issues to think about in these times, and Doig admits that, because of his own divergence in lifestyle from that of his father and grandmother (and their ancestors), he was motivated to write the book to remember and preserve that legacy. This is a superb piece of writing and verges on classic status. The chapters of the book represent phases of his life focusing on the key people in those phases, and, at the conclusion of each chapter, Doig muses about the subject of memory in what I thought were brilliant dissertations (see back page). *This House of Sky* is rated a 10, a wonderful read and highly recommended.

THE MUSIC ROOM (Dennis McFarland)

As you might imagine, our house overflows with books. As such, the paperbacks are relegated to the garage and, occasionally, I rummage around out there to see if there is anything that has been missed. While in a recent garage foray, I uncovered *The Music Room*, published in 1990 and read (so I discovered) by one of our sons for his course work at Boston College. Martin Lambert, a San Francisco record company executive, is separated and facing divorce when his younger brother Perry, a composer, jumps out of a window in New York. Mystified by Perry's suicide, Martin goes there to find the reasons for this act, and his trail leads him from his brother's ex-girlfriend (who is pregnant and with whom he falls in love) to his friends, and to the troubled history of his wealthy Virginia family. Seeking the causes of Perry's suicide, he is forced to face his own ghosts and find the roots of his own identity, acknowledging the pain of parental abuse and alcoholism. This takes him to despair, to acceptance, and ultimately to the beginning of redemption. This is a good novel about the far-reaching consequences of a family's dysfunction. Rated an 8.



About the Words We Use

"One forgets words as one forgets names. One's vocabulary needs constant fertilization or it will die." — Evelyn Waugh

"The short words are best, and the old words are the best of all." — Winston Churchill

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind." — Rudyard Kipling

THE INCREDIBLE SUCCESS *Of Harry Potter*

BY STEVE GRIFFITH
(LOS ANGELES, CA)

The talented J.K. Rowling has seven books planned to chronicle the seven years of Harry Potter's attendance at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The four books published to date have been a literary phenomenon — particularly in the category of “children's books.” Following the release of the fourth book, all four volumes were on the *New York Times* bestseller list at one time! This has never happened to any author, let alone a series for young readers. Why? Well, my best guess is: Parents are starved for good material to read to their children; children of all ages respond to a good story; and Rowling has combined many elements of classic British storycraft to create this very successful series. Fear not you older readers, there are solid values and thoughtful material throughout this intriguing series. These books are head-and-shoulders above anything else in the field and are rated 10.

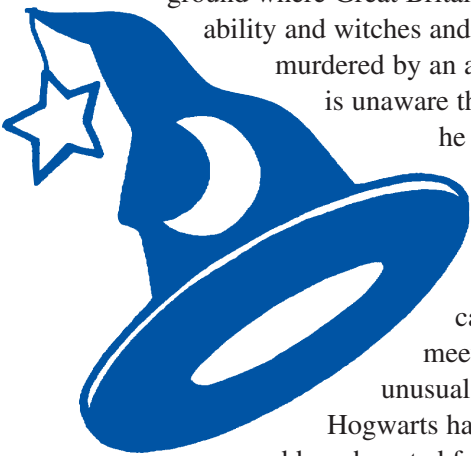
HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE (Vol. 1) (1997, 309 pp).

The first book introduces familiar themes from Dickens and from Conan Doyle combined with a fantasy background where Great Britain's and the world's people are divided into “muggles” who have no magic ability and witches and wizards who do have such talents. Harry is an orphan (whose parents were murdered by an arch-evil wizard), he is raised by a nasty uncle and aunt, the Dursley's, and he is unaware that he is the famous son of two famous parents until, on his eleventh birthday, he receives the fateful letter of admission to Hogwarts. His uncle's frantic efforts to prevent Harry from learning about his parents and their talents is thwarted, and Harry is finally introduced to the non-muggle world when he must shop for school supplies in a very unusual street in London. Hagrid, a demi-giant who was sent to assist Harry, helps our hero buy black robes, a pointed hat, a cauldron, a personal owl, and the most necessary item of all, a wand! Harry meets his nemesis, Draco, while shopping. Then, it's off to Hogwarts via a most unusual train track 9 and 3/4; here he meets two new friends Ron and Hermione.

Hogwarts has the familiar feeling of Dracula's castle set somewhere in Scotland surrounded by a haunted forest. Here, Harry joins a house, Gryffindor, as do Ron and Hermione; and Harry discovers a talent for Quidditch, wizard's sport played between houses, soccer played on broomsticks with four balls. Harry and friends help unravel a mystery and he meets his arch-evil opponent who will try to destroy him in each episode. Humor, mystery, action, good versus evil all set in a fantastic, but not too fantastic, British venue make for a fun read for both parent and child (grandparent and child, too).

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS (Vol. 2) (1999, 341 pp)

Back at the Dursley's, Harry must endure a wretched summer cut off completely from all his new friends; Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley have little use for poor Harry and his new found talents! Hooray! Ron and his



brothers rescue Harry in their dad's flying car. Back to London for school supplies and Harry is off to his second year at Hogwarts. But, Dobby the house-elf, has visited Harry to try to keep him away from Hogwarts — it's too dangerous for Harry! "Disaster will strike!" First, Harry and Ron miss the Hogwarts train and have to fly the car up to school where they crash into a tree. Then, he must endure the new professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts, Gilderoy Lockhart (the Al Gore of Hogwarts since he claims to have defeated virtually all evil doers and written a book about each victory). He encounters Moaning Myrtle, who haunts the girl's bathroom and was the victim of foul play by Harry's evil enemy 50 years ago. Worst of all, when several Hogwarts students are turned to stone, Harry is the prime suspect! Of course Draco Malfoy is there to stir the cauldron too. Odd characters galore, don't the Brits just love zany characters; Professors Dumbledore and Snape, good old Hagrid, Percy the Prefect (Ron's older brother), the hated houseman, Flich, and his cat, and the Gryffindor ghost, Nearly Headless Nick — just to name a few. Mysteries within mysteries, don't the Brits love mysteries! Why can Harry talk to snakes? Who is the aptly named Riddle who attended Hogwarts 50 years ago? And how can Harry find the Chamber of Secrets? Oh? Yes, Harry really enjoys playing Quidditch.



The Harry Potter books would make for wonderful Christmas gifts and, since they are now available in paperback, the cost can be abated. Volumes 3 and 4, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, will be reviewed in the next edition of *The Readers Exchange*.

Pronunciation. FOR THE CAREFUL SPEAKER



Last year, we initiated a column on pronunciation and noted a few entries from *The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations*, an enlightening 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 more of Elster's entries to build your confidence in the art of pronunciation.

WINTRY

WIN-tree, not WIN-tur-ee

SCION

SY-un (rhymes with lion)

MYOPIC

MY-AHP-ik. Do not say my-OH-pic

MACHINATION

MAK-ih-NAY-shin. Do not say
MASH-ih-NAY-shin

HANDKERCHIEF

HANG-kur-chif. Do not say
HANG-kur-cheef

LIEGE

LEEJ. Do not say LEEZH

GUILLOTINE

GIL-uh-teen, not GEE-yuh-teen.
Pronounce the l's

WASTREL

WAY-strul. Do not say WAH-strul

Jane's Christmas List

By Jane Ackerman



COMING HOME (Rosamunde Pilcher)

After reading *Winter Solstice* and enjoying it so much, I went into SHA's library of books (mine having been relegated to the attic) to search for more of Rosamunde Pilcher's books and found *Coming Home*. What a wonderful week I have had reading this book . . . all 728 pages . . . and, believe me, you will not skip over any of it. It is the story of Judith Dunbar that begins when she starts boarding school. Her life is upset when her mother and younger sister leave her for four years to join their father in Singapore, with Judith to be looked after by an aunt in Cornwall. Once in school, she becomes fast friends with Loveday Carey-Lewis and becomes very close to her family, and their wonderful home, Nancherrow. This book takes you through World War II, with Judith coming-of-age and learning to deal with all the joy and sadness of life and adulthood. This book took five years to write and the author says she really believed it to be the capstone of a lifetime of writing. This is a fabulous book and I am so glad I did not miss it. It's a 10.

THE SKY IS FALLING (Sidney Sheldon)

I started this book at 2:00 on a Sunday afternoon and did not get up until I finished it at 6:00. Dinner wasn't quite as elaborate as had been planned, but I really enjoyed my day. Dana Evans is a Washington news anchorwoman still suffering from the trauma of covering the news in Sarajevo. The book opens with the murder of Gary Winthrop, a wealthy philanthropist from a popular, high-profile family. He was the fifth and final member of his family to be killed in a series of accidents, all within a year. Dana begins to investigate, believing there is something sinister about these deaths. She is confused by the fact that everyone just loves this family, but then begins to uncover some unbelievable facts. Her chase for the killer becomes highly suspenseful, placing both she and her son in jeopardy. This is a great, not-to-be-put-down mystery novel! No wonder Sidney Sheldon has sold over 300 million books and is the most translated author in the world!

MIDNIGHT PLEASURES (Eliosia James)

SHA brought this book home insisting that I read and review it. What's a girl to do? . . . This is a woman's book, a light read which will leave you in a happy frame of mind. Set in Regency England, Sophie, our heroine, is a very brainy young woman who is determined not to marry a womanizer like her father. Of course, she falls for Patrick, who is simply the biggest rake of all. She refuses to accept his proposal and instead gets engaged to his best friend, a very stodgy man. To say more would give it all away, but this is an engaging book which has received good reviews. For those of us who like romance novels, this may be one of the best of the season!

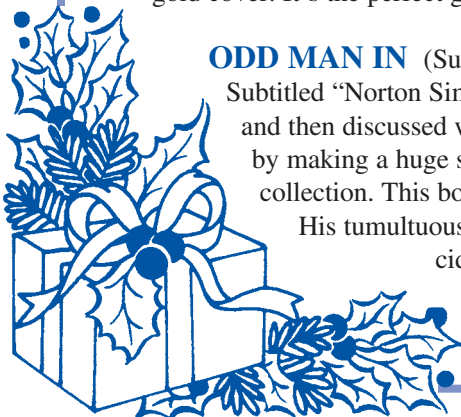
HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS (Johanna Lindsey)

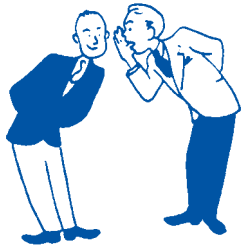
If you are looking for a small book and an ideal stocking stuffer, this is it. The story is set in England and is about Larissa, whose father is away on business and long overdue in coming home. Larissa is in dire straights, caring for her sick brother, facing bankruptcy, and, eventually, eviction from her home. Left with no choice other than life on the streets, she accepts hospitality from the Baron of Windsmoor, who is the cause of all her problems. The Baron is a product of an unhappy childhood, with cruel, uncaring parents incapable of love or compassion. When Larissa enters his life, he is totally captivated but determined to take advantage of her. What he doesn't count on is Christmas and the true meaning of love. This wonderful little book has some interesting twists and turns, and is packaged in a festive, attractive, gold cover. It's the perfect gift for a friend, but you will want to read it first!!

ODD MAN IN (Suzanne Muchnic)

Subtitled "Norton Simon and the Pursuit of Culture," this book was selected by my Book Club to be read and then discussed with the author. Norton Simon was a very complex and interesting person, who began by making a huge success out of Hunt Foods and then went on to pursue his passion of building an art collection. This book gives you insight into his unique personality and his obsession with power and art.

His tumultuous life included a long-time marriage which ended in divorce, a son who committed suicide, and his later marriage to the actress Jennifer Jones. The author, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, does a superb job of holding your interest and providing an overview of Los Angeles in the post-war years. It's a sensational book and rated a 10.





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, then 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. . .

GEORGIANA: DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE (Amanda Foreman)

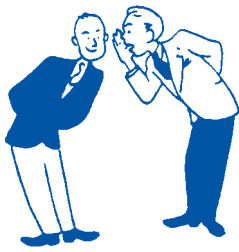
This book is about a beautiful, fashionable, young woman who, at 17, married a man 10 years older, a man so in love with his mistress that he did not give his new wife the attention she craved and required. He was a member of one of the most distinguished families of England and was considered a bore. She became much sought after as an icon, set fashions which were copied around the world, loved the party circuit, was unhappy at the dull family country home, and drew a crowd wherever she went. Yet she suffered from bulimia, feelings of inadequacy, and of not being loved or lovable. She had everything and yet she never knew happiness. Although this story took place in the 18th century, it has been repeated in our time with Georgiana Spencer's great-great-great-great —niece, lady Diana Spencer and the Prince of Wales. The only activities considered acceptable to the aristocrats of this time were fashion for the women and politics for the men, although women got involved with politics and men with fashion. Involvement with politics allowed Georgiana to develop and indulge her extraordinary talents of persuasion and she actually effected political changes, some of which changed England forever. But she was vilified, parodied by the press and pamphleteers, and was forever damaged by this foray into politics. No woman dared to involve herself in politics in an out-front manner for another 100 years. This book, which won the Whitbread Prize for Biography, grew out of the author's research for her doctoral dissertation for Oxford and, as such, is very detailed and extensively footnoted. It is not a casual read. If you choose to read this book and persevere, pay attention to the myriad of detail. I think you will be rewarded. Otherwise, you can wait for the movie! (Vicki Corbell, Los Angeles, CA)



ADDING TO 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 conversation. Here are a few such words, with abbreviated definitions and some rough pronunciation guidance.

PEDANT ly	A person who displays learning ostentatiously. Also, someone who focuses too narrowly on rules and book learning. (PED unt)
MOUNTEBANK	A charlatan; one who sells worthless medicines; a fake or imposter. (MOUNT uh bank)
LUCRE	Profits; financial rewards; money. (LOO kur)
FRISSON	A brief shudder of excitement; a thrill. (free SON)
DEFALCATE	To embezzle. (dih FAL cate)



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

NETWORK REVIEWS. . .

JULIE AND ROMEO (Jeanne Ray)

I bought *Julie and Romeo* after reading about it in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine. Jeanne Ray's daughter, the novelist Ann Patchett, had written a humorous article bemoaning her career of "serious" writing and mediocre sales while her mother, a nurse for heaven's sake, and a first time novelist had written a "funny, sexy, charming" book that was selling big. I wasn't disappointed. *Julie and Romeo* is a love story loosely based on the Shakespeare play, but the lovers in this case are 60-year-olds and the family meddlers are children, in-laws, a former husband, and an octogenarian mother. This little book (226 pages) is a one-night read. It is wise, witty and thoroughly modern — a perfect gift for someone who needs cheering up. It is also well written, a "Book Sense 76" — one of 76 great books for July and August, picked by an independent booksellers association. I am enclosing the "Book Sense 76" for September and October, which I picked up at an independent bookstore in Wolfeboro, N.H. I was so pleased to read recently that sales at independent bookstores are up. Wish you would give a plug to the Dutton's of the world that provide services no Amazon.com or Border's ever could/would. I hope they can hang in there. (Judith Jones, Pacific Palisades, CA)

Publishers Note: Here's to the independent bookstores, where real service exists and the "feel" of a bookstore prevails. We use a number of them and hope you will too.

TALES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC (James Michener)

Lyn and I just finished James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. This is the Pulitzer Prize winning novel that chronicled some of Michener's experiences in the Pacific during World War II. It was first published in 1946 and has been around in paperback for quite a while. It was the basis for the Rogers and Hammerstein musical "South Pacific." It's a definite 10 and a must read. The sequel, *Return to Paradise*, is also good, but not in the same league. *Tales of the South Pacific* contains 19 interrelated stories about the men and women caught up in the war. Each story is terrific and you don't want them to end. The last paragraph of Michener's *Introduction* gives us some insight as to why this is an important book. It reads: "They will live a long time, these men of the South Pacific. They had an American quality. They, like their victories, will be remembered as long as our generation lives. After that, like the men of the Confederacy, they will become strangers. Longer and longer shadows will obscure them, until their Guadalcanal sounds distant on the ear like Shiloh and Vally Forge." (Steve Miller, Pacific Palisades, CA)

BUMP & RUN (Mike Lupica)

The author is a highly regarded sports columnist for the *New York Daily News* and is syndicated nationwide. He is a regular on ESPN's weekly show, *The Sports Reporters*, and has authored 11 books, *Bump & Run* his latest. Contrary to the opinion of some female readers, I believe that there are books written for men only, and this one qualifies, *The Raiders' Broads Support Club* is an exception. "Bump and run" is a type of defensive coverage on wide receivers. The story, which is insightful, outrageous and very funny, involves Jack Malloy, his inheriting half the control of the New York Hawks, the teams' single season drive to the Super Bowl, and Malloy's clever efforts to obtain approval from the other owners as the new team owner. This involves a new type of bump and run. Along the way, two women (one the president of the team) provide companionship and difficulty in permanent choice. You will enjoy, among others, quarterback Bubba Royal, wide receiver ATM Moore, owner Corky Dupont III, agent Mo Jiggy, and 400lb. defensive tackle Johnson Johnson. The book is recommended as a more than adequate substitute for two



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

NETWORK REVIEWS. . .

Sunday afternoon “ho hum” NFL games. (Jud Gibbs, Los Angeles, CA)

AT HOME WITH BOOKS (Ellis, Seebohm & Sykes)

Book lovers always encounter pleasant surprises. As I left the Jonathan Club in Los Angeles recently, an interesting display caught my eye at the entrance to their excellent full service “wine shop.” The standard book display topped by the tilt-up copy directed customers to this book. Coffee table it was, but further inspection discovered a rare find providing a wealth of information and suggestions about books and collections thereof. The various styles are fascinating: An airy, light-filled loft; a restored barn with old beams; book walls which move; book shelves in a bathroom and in a kitchen. Supplementing the 40 libraries illustrated are professional advice special sections including “How to Organize your Library,” “How to Start a Collection,” “The Art of the Bookshelf,” “Bookplates,” and “The Enemies of Books.” The book, subtitled “How Booklovers Live and Care for their Libraries,” accurately describes its delightful content. Purchase a copy, it will be on and off your coffee table many times. (Jud Gibbs, Los Angeles, CA)

BRIDGET JONES’S DIARY (Helen Fielding)

This is a highly enjoyable and entertaining read. The author, Helen Fielding, has structured the book to read like a diary, beginning each entry with a tally of the day’s indulgences (2,654 calories, 16-1/2 cigarettes, two alcohol units, six hang-up calls to Robert, etc.). It spans one year in the life of Londoner Bridget Jones, a 30-something, single, professional, searching for romance, love, self-improvement and the courage to stand up to her overbearing, histrionic mother. Bridget spends more time than she’d like battling social and familial pressures, single-minded men, and smug married advice. If you’ve ever been single and a woman, you will undoubtedly identify with her plight and the various interactions she has with her friends, co-workers, family and potential husbands-to-be. With a rich cast of characters, this book will have you chuckling from cover to cover; but read it soon before the movie comes out next year. (Lisa Furst, Los Angeles, 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 the *Dictionary of Word Origins* by Jordan Almond (DWO) or *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* (Fifteenth Edition) (BD).

FROG. *Why is a Frenchman called a “frog?”*

Because the shield of Paris has frogs upon it and because Frenchmen eat frogs — which the uneducated English once considered very queer indeed. (DWO)

BLADE. *What is the reason a gay young-man-about-town is called a gay “blade?”*

The Anglo-Saxon word for “branch” or “sprig” was blaed — and the gay and foolish young man called a “blade” was usually the young son of a nobleman — in other words, a new sprig or blaed of the family tree. (DWO)

LINKS. The word “links” in its use as a field of play for golf derives from Old English *hlinc*, “ledge.” This came to apply in Scotland to a narrow strip of coastal land with course grass and sand dunes. An example is Lundin Links on Largo Bay, Fife. Such areas of land provided the terrain for the first golf courses, with the coarse grass serving as the “rough” and the sand dunes adapted to make bunkers. (BD)



EXCHANGING THOUGHTS

and for the last chapter . . . 

“GIVE ME THE SIMPLE LIFE.” Music today often seems more about rhythm and sound impact (and loudness!) and less about lyrics, but there are exceptions. We have been enjoying a wonderful CD by Steve Tyrell entitled *A New Standard*, in which he sings our old favorites such as “I Can’t Get Started with You,” “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm,” “I’ve Got the World On a String,” and more. Listening to Tyrell made me “hear” and reminded me of the messages contained in some of these older numbers. For me, this was most apparent in the popular “Give Me The Simple Life” a wonderful song from the 20th Century-Fox film “Wake Up and Dream,” with lyrics by Harry Ruby and music by Rube Bloom. The following lyrics contain a wonderful message that underscores some of our themes and bears consideration today as much if not more than ever.

*Folks are blessed, who make the best of ev’ry day
Living by their own philosophy
Ev’ryone beneath the sun must find a way
And I have found the only way for me.*

*A cottage small is all I’m after
Not one that’s spacious and wide
A house that rings with joy and laughter
And the ones you love inside.*

*I don’t believe in frettin’ and grievin’
Why mess around with strife
I never was cut out to step and strut out
Give me the simple life.*

*Some like the high road, I like the low road
Free from the care and strife
Sounds corny and seedy but yes indeedy
Give me the simple life.*

*Some find it pleasant, dining on pheasant
Those things roll off my knife
Just serve me tomatoes and mashed potatoes
Give me the simple life.*

*Life could be thrilling with one who’s willing
To be a farmer’s wife
Kids calling me pappy, would make me happy
Give me the simple life.*



Jane Says: After nursing SHA for a month subsequent to his surgery . . . “Notice to readers! Just be happy I’m such a good nurse, for had it not been for my healing capabilities, this issue would have been filled with recipes and love poems!”

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