

CARTON 3:19

WILD TREES PRESS

BRASIL, JOANNE

1985-1986

2017/193  
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CHOICE

FEB '86

Language and  
Literature

English and  
American

**BRASIL, Joanne. Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que. Wild Trees, 1985. 135p 85-51251. 14.95 ISBN 0-931125-01-4; 8.95 pa ISBN 0-931125-02-2**

This first novel tells of a young woman, Cecyl, who moves from Phoebus, Virginia, where her parents run the segregated Billy's Bar-B-Que, to Boston where she has a variety of roommates, takes janitorial jobs, attends college, becomes an astrologer, marries a Brazilian, visits Brazil, and, after her husband's death, returns to Phoebus to find that "It's the new days now, honey," as her father says, and the Bar-B-Que is now integrated. This short novel reads pleasantly, but for all her adventures, Cecyl seems to merely drift along, only slightly affected. The style, which uses little direct dialogue, tries for a "told to," resolutely ordinary speech pattern that, with its vaguenesses and imprecision—"Slowly I began to understand why so many other people seemed to feel bad so much"—begins to thud on the reader's ears. Still, Cecyl is an interesting, engaging character whom the reader roots for. Having got this "personal" novel out of her system, Brasil may next write a more gripping work. Mildly recommended for general readers and women's studies libraries.—*J. Overmyer, The Ohio State University*

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# Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que

By JOANNE BRASIL  
*Wild Trees Press*  
P.O. Box 378, Navarro, CA 95463  
135 pages. \$8.95 paperback

Everyone in Tidewater knows about eating dirt cheap at Fuller's, but another Phoebus restaurant stakes a claim to fame in this quirky first novel by a former resident of the Peninsula. (JoAnne Goetkin Brasil, now a resident of Berkeley, Calif., was graduated from Kecoughtan High School in 1965.)

"Phoebus, Va. is a little town just big enough to support one X-rated movie theatre, one dirty book store, one band, one grocery, . . . one pawn shop, one library, and two bar-b-que places." That's how JoAnne Brasil's narrator, Cecyl, describes the town where she spent the latter part of her childhood, after moving to America from Ireland. Cecyl's father owns one of those two bar-b-que places, thus the title of the book. The other place is no competition for Billy's because this is the early 1960s. De facto segregation is alive and well in Phoebus; the other bar-b-que place is for blacks.

Prejudice manifests itself in less obvious ways too. Cecyl's sixth grade teacher teaches two sides of slavery — the good and the bad. But Cecyl "just didn't feel white. I didn't feel black either. But I didn't have that feeling of whiteness," she says.

Cecyl spends her afternoons in Billy's, filling salt shakers and staring with longing across the street at Big Mamma's Barber Shop. Big Mamma is black; when she has no business she and her friends dance around the barber shop. Cecyl wants to take part in the dancing, but, of course, she can not.

Racial prejudice eventually drives Cecyl north to Boston. Unable to find any other job, she becomes a janitor in a cheap boarding house, where she associates, for the first time in her life, with the poor, the black, and the dispossessed. (I'm not sure if Brasil knows it or not, but so far her story is running as a sort of negative parallel to black writer James Alan McPherson's "Gold Coast," whose young narrator works as a janitor in an apartment building near Harvard and observes the lives of his white tenants.)

In Boston, Cecyl learns that prejudice is a many-splendored thing and by no means stops flourishing at the Mason-Dixon line. She watches as Cambridge is invaded by what she calls "Post-War Babies, or Hippies," and observes that they live "in some ways a lot like the slaves did in the Old South," i.e., in crowded, make-shift groups without much to eat. Cecyl makes some hippie friends, experiments with drugs and generally drifts into her 20s looking

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She finds some meaning in astrology for a while, takes English courses part-time at a university, and eventually meets Mario, who captures her heart. Mario is a jazz musician who drinks a lot and is too artistically pure to hold down a real gig. After a trip to South America to meet Mario's parents, Cecyl's marriage dissolves.

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And for Tidewater residents, reading about Phoebus with its old veterans from the VA Hospital stopping in at Billy's "for free empty jars to take to the bootleg house" is good fun.

—Annette McPeters

Ms. McPeters resides in Newport News and is a free-lance writer.

# A Savory Chew

## *Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que*

Joanne Brasil

135 pp., Wild Trees Press, \$14.95,

\$8.95 paper

### *Deborah Brown*

It's appropriate that Joanne Brasil's first novel suggests food in its title. This tasty treatise about the coming of age of a circa 1968 late bloomer/baby boomer gnaws at the social conscience, nibbles at pretentiousness and sinks its teeth into racial injustice. At only 135 pages, it goes down easy — offering the reader a savory morsel to chew on here and there.

Brasil favors a very simple, conversational style that — like good conversation — meanders from one subject to another. Her easily distracted heroine serves up thoughts on subjects ranging from astrology and living together to orgies, stray dogs and James Brown. Cecyl, the main character, is also very vulnerable, somewhat naive, but has a survival instinct that makes her a credit to her gender, even her species.

*Escape From Billy's Bar-B-Que* is hardly great literature, but it does have its moments — some humorous, some sincere, some both. It will be interesting to seek what Brasil does for an encore.

# New Directions Review of Books



Scala/Art Resource, NY

From the cover of *Immodest Acts*.

**IMMODEST ACTS: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy** by Judith C. Brown (Oxford University Press, New York) \$14.95.

## HOLLY METZ

With each chapter, the life of the 17th century Italian Abbess of the Theatine Convent of the Mother of God, Benedetta Carlini, unfolds. The author intends us to "understand and not judge" the nun's dramatic spiritual visions, which, when investigated for ecstatic authenticity by the papal nunzio's representatives (and later classified as demonic possession) brought the revelation of historically unmentionable lesbian acts.

Brown makes clear that during the 17th century there was no category of persons known as lesbians. Freedom of choice did not exist for women occupationally, although placement in a convent was considered an attractive alternative to forced marriages and domestic servitude. The book's footnotes stimulate speculation about Renaissance society which may have contributed to Benedetta's form of sexual expression and provide 20th century ideas about the prevalence of ecstatic experience in oppressed groups.

But Brown also acknowledges the mystery that veils Benedetta's story. The charismatic experiences of the former mountain girl were the manifestation of a potent mixture of yearning, power and spiritual gifts. Even when Brown reveals the shapes and colors of this life, its vigorous essence is inaccessible—the interweaving of sexual personality and spirituality, which is, three centuries later, still unacceptable to the Church.

Holly Metz's writing appears in the *New York Times*, *Progressive*, *Commonweal*, and other publications.

**CRIMINAL TRESPASS** by Helen Hudson (G.P. Putnam) \$17.95.

**NATIVES AND STRANGERS** by Louisa Dawkins (Houghton Mifflin) \$18.95.

## RENEE SIMSON

The Bildungsroman, a novel dedicated to examining the rites of passage into the adult world, has traditionally focused on a male protagonist. Women and children were perceived as never really growing up, hence it was inconceivable to view them as the main figures of a Bildungsroman.

With the advent of the Women's Movement, all this has changed. Two talented writers, Laura Dawkins and Helen Hudson, have created two memorable female protagonists whose paths they trace from childhood through early adulthood, searching for their identity, gaining their rites of passage in a world filled with obstacles imposed by both sexism and racism.

Both protagonists feel they are trespassers in a society which does not accept them. Rannee, the main figure of *Criminal Trespass*, grows up as part of a poor black family in the deep South and decides early in life, that she does not want to be like her Mama "who escaped no further than to the back porch" and "was nothing but a box for a baby." By the end of the novel, Rannee realizes that she holds her own "key to the kingdom," that she must trespass on her own terms, at her own pace, in her own way.

*Natives and Strangers* is the story of Marietta, a white girl who grows up in East Africa during the 50s and 60s. Like Rannee, Marietta has difficulty in establishing and maintaining a sense of identity.

Both heroines' quests probe significant dimension of female life, but Rannee's is more clearly delineated and easier to relate to. The panorama for *Natives and Strangers* is so vast (at times like a soap opera) that Marietta often seems dwarfed. We are never allowed to probe the depths of her emotions; she always appears cool, detached, in charge. Even at the conclusion of the novel we are not sure she has attained a sense of self. Hudson, on the other hand, leaves us in no doubt that Rannee has sorted out just what criminal trespassing is all about and has defined her role in the world of which she is a part. Both books are important new approaches to the traditional Bildungsroman.

Rennie Simson teaches in the Department of Afro-American Studies at Syracuse University.

## Short Views

**JAGUAR WOMAN and the Wisdom of the Butterfly Tree** by Lynn V. Andrews (Harper and Row) \$15.95.

## ARLENE B. HIRSCHFELDER

Lynn Andrews has been apprenticed to Agnes Whistling Elk, Canadian Native American shaman. Two earlier works by Andrews—*Medicine Woman* and *Flight of the Seventh Moon*—describe her spiritual quest under Agnes Whistling Elk's guidance.

In *Jaguar Woman*, Andrews journeys to the Yucatan where she meets Zoila Guterrez, a shaman of Mayan blood, healer and teacher who helps her learn ancient rites, rituals, and lore including the profound secret of Jaguar Woman and the "mask of the earth." With Zoila and Agnes as her guides, Andrews learns the ancient Mayan ways and is more deeply initiated into the Sisterhood of the Shields, an order of women who guard the powers of womanhood.

Andrews becomes a jaguar spirit, has dreams and visions as well as encounters with four conflicting female energies that challenge and battle each other: nurturance, insanity, inspiration, and death. Andrews is told, "You must realize la ultima madre, realize who you are, and become who you are." The author shares her lessons with readers and opens us to ways women can tap the hidden powers of their own nature.

This book is not for scholars interested in authentic materials and documentation about Native American shamans and other sacred teachers. But it is for people looking for an adventure into self-awareness and inner knowledge and for those seeking knowledge about the power of women.

Arlene B. Hirschfelder is Education Consultant to the Association on American Indian Affairs, on faculty of New School for Social Research, author of books, articles, and bibliographies concerning Native Americans.

**A BRIDGE THROUGH TIME, A MEMOIR** by Laila Said (Summit Books) \$17.95.

## VERA GOODMAN

A rebel who has a love-hate relationship with the cause of her rebellion can best describe Laila Said. Constantly fighting what it means to be an Egyptian woman in Egypt today, she never feels completely comfortable as an Egyptian expatriate in America. Said extols her loyalty to an Egypt whose historical and current treatment of women she cannot tolerate.

Her story unfolds the events that finally lead to a break with the constraints of traditional female life.

A doctoral program in the theater in the United States sets the direction of her life's work as Egypt's foremost woman stage director, playwright and film maker. But her feminist point of view was anathema to the regime and she was not allowed to direct or produce any further theatrical work. Her last film in Egypt was about her grandmother, the village women and the practice of female excision, still an accepted part of life in that region. Said realized a sisterhood exists among these women, a force as ancient as time.

In the words of Gloria Steinem, this book is, "Honest, intimate, irresistible." Egypt may have discarded the best it had.

**THE UNPOSSESSED** by Tess Slesinger (The Feminist Press) \$8.95.

## SUE BECKWITH

Tess Slesinger's first novel, originally published in 1934, has been reissued in paperback as part of a "Novels of the Thirties" series. When first published, the book elicited reviews describing it as a psychological novel about Greenwich Village intellectuals, pseudo-intellectuals and Marxists. There was a wide variation of opinion as to its literary merit, hailed by some and disdained by others, and no mention was made of women's roles.

The introduction to this new edition by Alice Kessler-Harris and Paul Lauter relates Slesinger's work to what happened in the 20s and 30s. During the Depression, political avenues opened to some women and they took up the banner of social activism. Women constituted a considerable proportion of the Communist Party and a remarkable number published poems, stories, essays and novels in the Leftist press.

It is important to read Slesinger from the point of view of feminism and radical politics. From the afterward is this quotation: "Written out of an unprogrammatic feminism *The Unpossessed* expresses repugnance at the way ideological absolutes repress and distort private life and questions the relationship between individuals' political views and ideals and their personal behavior."

The Marxist-Leninist pact of 1939 and McCarthyism in the 50s put an end to the Leftist-Intellectual era in America. It is a part of our past that is fascinating to read about for those of us who can recall it and it should be equally fascinating and illuminating for new audiences.

**YOU MAY PLOW HERE**, the narrative of Sara Brooks, edited by Thordis Simonsen. With a foreword by Robert Coles. (W.W. Norton) \$12.95.

Although this document about an extraordinary woman reads like a novel, it is actually oral history—the record of Sara Brooks' life as told to Thordis Simonsen. Simonsen is a teacher and anthropologist. Sara Brooks, now 74, is a black woman who was employed for nearly 30 years in the Simonsen household. In the earlier part of this century, Sara lived with her large family in rural Alabama. Her father was a subsistence farmer whose family was poor, but no one suffered from real want. He and Sara's loving stepmother brought the family up in an atmosphere of pride, integrity, and high moral standards. But Sara married early to an abusive philanderer from whom she had to flee. She was forced to leave three of her children behind because she was unable to care for them. For the rest of her life, Sara struggled and succeeded in carving out a place for herself and her children. Sara exemplifies the qualities we cherish in women—self-reliance, strength, devotion to her children. In his foreword Robert Coles says, "The day will come . . . when a Sara Brooks will be honored at White House dinners and awards ceremonies as is any politician or military general: when a grateful nation will bow respectfully in eager tribute to the longstanding and exceptional contribution individuals such as Sara Brooks kept making, year after year."

**DESERT OF THE HEART** by Jane Rule (Naiad Press) \$7.95.

Originally published in 1964, *Desert of the Heart* has been issued by Naiad Press in honor of the release of the movie version. It relates a brief period in the life of Evelyn Hall, a college professor who goes to Reno to divorce her husband, George. The reader knows little about George except what Evelyn tells the divorce judge—he refuses to work, is afraid of responsibility, and afraid of love. Evelyn believes that she is the cause of George's gradual decline into mental illness, but she doesn't understand why until she falls in love with Ann. At a rooming-house where Evelyn lives for the required residency prior to divorce, she meets Ann. The two women bear a remarkable resemblance to one another, although Ann is young enough to be the daughter Evelyn never had. Ann is an attractive young woman who works in a gambling casino and doesn't understand why she is absolutely certain that she cannot marry the young man who loves her and whom, in a way, she loves. Neither woman seems to have any inkling of her propensity toward lesbian relationships, but they fall in love. An intelligently written novel, it uses and contrasts the sordid, frenetic gambling atmosphere of Reno with the surrounding desert—remote, serene, and unchanging as background and symbol. Yet a passivity and lack of passion permeate and weaken the book.

**GIVE ME YOUR GOOD EAR** by Maureen Brady (Spinsters, Ink) \$4.50.

A first-person narrative about Francie Kelly who weaves her experiences back and forth in time from her childhood dominated by a terrorizing, alcoholic father to the present when she is living with a dependent, hypochondriacal man. Francie is trying to break the chain of female weakness and male dominance that she saw in her family. Her parents' marital arrangement exemplified male control-female dependence, and it exploded into tragedy. Francie needs to understand and accept her mother before she can free herself from her past. There is only a hint of her future as a lesbian. This is a strong story, well-written but somehow inconclusive—her future as a lesbian isn't developed.

An afterword by Jacqueline St. Joan describes the founding of the feminist publishing house Spinsters, Ink., the publishers of this title among many others. Its founding came about partly through the rejection of Maureen Brady's work by male-dominated publishing houses. St. Joan's analysis of the institutionalized patterns and practices of the commercial publishing world gives us valuable insights into that world.

**ESCAPE FROM BILLY'S BAR-B-QUE** by Joanne Brasil (Wild Trees Press) \$8.95

A first-person novel written in the oversimplified, naive manner of young adult fiction at times reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut at his most simplistic. When we accept its style, however, the novel is warm and engaging. Cecyl, the heroine, leaves her parents' bar-b-que restaurant in Phoebus, Virginia to explore life in the North and especially to leave behind racial prejudice. She soon discovers her error regarding the lack of racial prejudice in the North, and she also is confronted with the problem of how to make a living with no education or experience. Cecyl becomes a janitor and goes on to relate her adventures in love, work, and getting a degree at University of Mass.

SUE BECKWITH

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Racial prejudice eventually drives Cecyl north to Boston. Unable to find any other job, she becomes a janitor in a cheap boarding house, where she associates, for the first time in her life, with the poor, the black, and the dispossessed. (I'm not sure if Brasil knows it or not, but so far her story is running as a sort of negative parallel to black writer James Alan McPherson's "Gold Coast," whose young narrator works as a janitor in an apartment building near Harvard and observes the lives of his white tenants.)

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for meaning without much success.

She finds some meaning in astrology for a while, takes English courses part-time at a university, and eventually meets Mario, who captures her heart. Mario is a jazz musician who drinks a lot and is too artistically pure to hold down a real gig. After a trip to South America to meet Mario's parents, Cecyl's marriage dissolves.

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And for Tidewater residents, reading about Phoebus with its old veterans from the VA Hospital stopping in at Billy's "for free empty jars to take to the bootleg house" is good fun.

—Annette McPeters

*Ms. McPeters resides in Newport News and is a free-lance writer.*

**BOOKS/PATRICIA HOLT****A Simple Nonconformist Who Tries Hard to Conform**

**Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que** by JoAnne Brasil  
Wild Trees, P.O. Box 378, Navarro, Calif. 95463; 135 pages; \$8.95

**B**erkeley writer JoAnne Brasil falls into a variety of literary traps in her first novel, "Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que," but ultimately she comes out a winner — and so do we.

Brasil has a gift for writing in a precocious, childlike style that rarely rings false or babyish. It's a risky style because the voice speaking to us is deliberately superficial, using such terms as "weird," "creepy," "cute" or "nice."

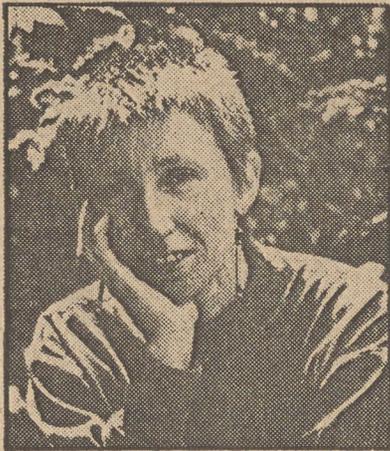
Yet the narrator, Cecyl, is no reborn Valley Girl: She is a nonconformist trying hard to conform, a loner who stops herself from exploring life with any depth or complexity. Listen as Cecyl tells us about life in her hometown of Phoebus, Va.:

"Since they still had racial segregation then (which they still do now, too, of course), they needed to have two barber shops and two bar-b-que places so they could keep all the Black people and White people separate. They had two grocery stores, too, but everyone was allowed to shop at both of them. I don't know why. The White people just said that that's the way you were supposed to do it."

**C**ecyl wants to accept without question everything about her hometown and, as we see later, everything about American life. She wants to accept segregation because that's the way the big people, the white people, say that things are done. Like a child, she refers to the universal "they," meaning (we assume) people in authority, and to a "then," meaning (we assume) her childhood.

Such vague references make readers struggle to understand Cecyl's meaning while she, it is clear, has basically given up. After moving to Boston, dropping out, working as a janitor and living in a "kind of semi-non-existence," Cecyl becomes a completely valueless person, an empty slate who goes around filling herself up with other peoples' notions of how to live.

Yet Cecyl is not alone — she walks and talks like all hippies, all drop-outs, all members of all lost



**JoAnne Brasil**

generations — and the sad fact is that American society, Brasil seems to say, offers a strange assortment of contradictory values to people who are both burned out and full of potential.

Cecyl witnesses race riots near Boston but notices that Urban Renewal does more damage; she observes sham and hypocrisy but in her attempt to be "respectable" cannot believe she has "a life of my own" to lead. She is irresponsible yet full of love; self-loathing yet close to a sense of integrity; muddy in her thinking yet clear-eyed as she observes the world.

Thus Cecyl's friendship with an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Potter, is a poignant expression of raw dependency edging close to the borders of love. Her attitude toward her "drunken bum" lover, Mario, opens up as many opportunities for self-dignity as self-destruction. And her understanding of slavery and its counterparts teaches us all to stop observing and start challenging life on our own terms.

**B**rasil's narrative wears thin after a while, making Cecyl sound whining and irksome when she should be funny and enchanting. And according to a biographical note on the back cover, JoAnne Brasil's life has followed almost exactly the same path as that of her protagonist, Cecyl. This may explain why the novel often has the ring of a memoir or journal about it, or feels out of control — not created as a work of fiction but reported as a life once lived.

Still, whenever Brasil's style bogs down or the story sounds redundant, hang on: This fragile novel packs a surprising wallop you'll feel for a long time afterward.

# 'Good Terrorist' is unmistakably Doris Lessing

By Mary M. Reefer

a special reviewer  
The Good Terrorist, by Doris Lessing (375 pages; Alfred A. Knopf; \$16.95)

A few months ago, Doris Lessing sent two novels under a pseudonym to several publishers, including one that had previously published her work. Had she submitted them under her own name, they would have had immediate acceptance. But they were rejected by all who read them, if indeed they did.

She was making a point, which is well taken, because it is difficult to believe that anyone familiar with Doris Lessing's work would be unable to identify her themes and style. Indeed, those who read her new novel, *The Good Terrorist*, through to its dark conclusion should have no difficulty in recognizing the mark of this fine writer.

The familiar themes are present: the dreary lot of the exploited and the greed of the exploiters. However, the unmistakable hallmark is that of the unwelcoming lives of women who become nurturers, neglecting their own needs. This was made particularly clear in her story "To Room

Nineteen" and in the novel *The Summer Before the Dark*.

There is an additional target for her satire in this new book: those people who play at being revolutionaries, getting their excitement out of marching in demonstrations and planting bombs that are not meant to kill but to gain media attention. Such games, however, can become dangerous.

Alice Mellings is one of these "good terrorists." At 36, she is a nurturing force who holds things together for a London splinter group of communists. Alice mouths the clichés of the radical left: People in the middle class are "fascist pigs," the enemy. At the same time, she feeds and mothers a group of younger revolutionaries who are working out their adolescent needs, believing that they are serving a useful purpose.

Occasionally Alice leaves her kitchen and the restoration of their "squat" to go with the others to throw a few eggs at Margaret Thatcher. But her real passion lies in mothering Jasper Willis, who takes all and gives nothing, including sexual love.

She is contemptuous of bourgeois morality, capable of steal-



Doris Lessing

ing from her separated parents. But she also is capable of turning the condemned house in London into a home after the workmen of the Housing Council had filled the toilets with cement and torn out the electrical wiring. She does this through manipulation, thieving and working diligently, with little help from her fellow

squatters.

There is no real unanimity in the group. Jasper and Bert would like to make common cause with the IRA, but the Irish revolutionaries sense their lack of purpose and turn them away, just as they are rejected when they offer themselves to Moscow.

The lesbian couple, Roberta and Faye, serve little purpose, because they spend their days in their bedroom; Jim disappears after losing his job because of a theft that Alice had committed; Philip, who repairs the plumbing and wiring, is there because he needs a place to live. These are summer soldiers.

There is a counterpart to the group at a house next door, also a "squat" for revolutionaries. But there is a difference—the neighbors are not playing games; they are real revolutionaries with apparent ties to Moscow.

One of them, who tinkers with explosives, proves to be the catalyst that brings the lesser revolutionaries to their Armageddon.

The foolish and dangerous activities of these disparate playmates is frightening, but it is Alice Mellings who commands the reader's attention. Ms. Lessing's treatment of her prota-

gonist is heavily ironic. Alice is the quintessential example of the Lessing woman who is allowing her nurturing instincts to dominate, who has lost control of her life.

Alice can weep at the destruction of a bird's nest when she is cleaning the attic, but is able to hurl a rock through her father's window. She can stick at the side of a man who needs her without loving her; she can take the contempt of the group, whose members also need her but consider her an inadequate revolutionary.

But she cannot listen to the words of her mother, who sounds very much like the voice of Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark*: "Oh, I did so want something decent for you, Alice... I just kept house and cooked and cooked and cooked. I would have been a good doctor, I know. You know what you would have been good at... But it turned out that you spend your life exactly as I did. Cooking and nannying for other people. An all-purpose female drudge."

How could anyone who has read the books of Doris Lessing not know *The Good Terrorist* as her work?

## Hindsight yields sweet and sour sports memoirs

By Christopher Lehmann-Haupt  
New York Times News Service

*I Never Played the Game*, by Howard Cosell with Peter Bonventre (380 pages; William Morrow; \$18.95)

*Distant Replay*, by Jerry Kramer with Dick Schaap (236 pages; G.P. Putnam's Sons; \$16.95)

Despite the loud noise it already has made with its disparaging remarks about other members of the sportscasting profession, Howard Cosell's latest book, *I Never Played the Game*, is not a pig's bladder full of hot and poisonous air.

Indeed it starts out on a lofty note, promising to dissect what Mr. Cosell calls "the Sports Syndrome," or the loss of perspective on sports in America that has been caused by "the unholy alliance between the three television networks and the sports print medium."

It includes a fascinating, if slightly repetitive, analysis of what the author thinks has gone wrong with the National Football League, and how its commissioner, Pete Rozelle, has lost his magic touch, mainly because he allowed himself to get drawn into a personal feud with Al Davis, the owner of the Oakland-Los Angeles Raiders. There is a portrait of former baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn that is even warm around the edges; it

insists that, far from being a stuffy man, Mr. Kuhn is a hopeless romantic.

Surprisingly, *I Never Played the Game* does not sound as if it had been written by a circus barker or a boxing ring announcer, as Mr. Cosell's earlier books (*Cosell by Cosell* and *Like It Is*) had a tendency to do. It is colloquial and punchy, although it has its predictable lapses into cliché. ("Those halcyon days of yore are gone for good.")

Still, it's remarkable how Mr. Cosell succeeds in transforming even the loftiest battle cry into the whine of the ego. Somehow every issue confronted and every anecdote retailed manages to end up being a testimonial to the virtues of Howard Cosell. Even what is meant to be an admiring portrait of boxer Sugar Ray Leonard gets turned into a vindication of the author's pugilistic acumen.

The atmosphere of defensiveness and vindictiveness leaves an unpleasant aftertaste. Where Mr. Cosell seems to set out on a crusade in golden armor, he ends up sneaking home with a water pistol loaded with bile.

An altogether different spirit prevails in *Distant Replay*. A sequel to *Instant Replay*—the diary of a professional football season that Jerry Kramer published back in 1967, after he had thrown the famous block that

beat the Dallas Cowboys and put the Green Bay Packers into the first Super Bowl (against the Kansas City Chiefs)—*Distant Replay* describes a reunion of the team members of that championship season.

*The Boys of Kramer* it might have been called, and it is an inspired idea considering the prominence of that Packer team in the country's consciousness and the legacy of its myth-inspiring coach, the late Vince Lombardi. And Mr. Kramer delivers, up to a point. The affectionate portrait of Mr. Lombardi that emerges from the Packers' collective memory serves as an antidote to the manic apostle of victory into which the passage of time has distorted the Lombardi image. Winning wasn't the only thing. Trying to win was.

It's interesting to learn about the origins and fates of those Packers—Fuzzy Thurston, Ron Kostelnik, Willie Davis, Boyd Dowler, Carroll Dale—how so many of them came from families dominated by mothers, how so few of them were prominent players when Coach Lombardi first got hold of them, how so many of them have gone on to become millionaires, even though most of them earned annual salaries of \$15,000 or less.

But the motor runs down after a while. The book is a little too full of Mr. Kramer's middle-age

crises. Although he says life after pro football has brought him down a peg from the days when he was telling Frank Sinatra how to sing a song, he is still self-absorbed enough to write more than his readers need to know about the travails of growing older.

For all his enthusiasm, he clearly gets bored with writing about some of his less prominent teammates. And nothing much happened at that reunion. A cocktail party. A golf tournament. An introduction to the crowd fans at Lambeau Field. The rest was hugs, Lombardi anecdotes and a lot of talk about love.

Besides, Mr. Kramer fails to credit sufficiently one vital element of the team's success. It wasn't only that Mr. Lombardi built better characters seven ways to Sunday. It was also that Commissioner Rozelle had arranged for their national exposure on Sunday. The Packers weren't just winners. They were winners in a new electronic age, and they won in brighter colors than anyone ever had before.

Which brings back the story told by Mr. Cosell. Perhaps these two books should be read together, if at all. Mr. Kramer's honey is an antidote to Mr. Cosell's gall. Taken by themselves, one is a little sour and the other too sweet.

## Memories of history and father

### Trivia derails Yael Dayan's moving story

By Stephen E. Winn  
staff writer

*My Father, His Daughter*, by Yael Dayan (289 pages; Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.; \$17.95)

Writing a book about a famous relative presents several obvious hazards. Yael Dayan ran into most of them in writing about her father, the Israeli general and politician. The result is a superficial portrait of Moshe Dayan that presumes a knowledgeable audience yet offers it little.

Anyone interested in the Middle East will find parts of *My Father, His Daughter* rewarding. It offers a dramatic account, for example, of Israeli preparations for the Six-Day War. Interesting tidbits about Mr. Dayan, such as his hatred of his trademark eye patch, are scattered throughout the book.

But the book spends too much time on the author rather than her father. It has the frustrating inconsistency of a diary, often wandering into trivia while leaving events and questions of consequence unexplored. The reader is treated to a description of the author's nursery, routine childhood events, her favorite teachers, her first bra and so on, but learns almost nothing about her development as a young novelist.

Stitched into this diary is an account of her father's life and the national and international events in which he played a part. The result is as disjointed as might be feared from the book title. A discussion of Egypt's relationship with the Arab world, for example, is followed without transition—without even a new paragraph—by a description of Miss Dayan's 40th birthday.

The largest unanswered question is the author's motivation for this warts-and-all approach to her father's life, which included some humiliating episodes. Miss Dayan professes great love and admiration for him, and describes repeatedly the tears she shed on his death four years ago. Yet her final chapters concentrate on the controversy over Mr. Dayan's will, which shocked Miss Dayan and her brothers by leaving almost all of his wealth to his second wife. The "epilogue" degenerates into bitterness toward her. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Miss Dayan's book represents a form of revenge against this woman and her father's memory.

Stephen E. Winn is an editorial writer for The Kansas City Star and The Kansas City Times.

### Rhapsody

Although it is commonly used to identify an improvisatory musical competition, rhapsody is derived from the Greek term for "selections from epic poetry."

## Books in brief

### Child's-eye view of the South

*Escape From Billy's Bar-B-Que*, by Joanne Brasil (135 pages; Wild Trees Press; \$14.95)

This humorous first-person narrative about growing up in the 1960s is only the second publication of Wild Trees Press, a publishing company put together by Alice Walker (author of *The Color Purple*). It is Joanne Brasil's first novel, and she cuts her fiction from the broad cloth of her own life.

Like the book's heroine, Ms. Brasil grew up in the redneck South, where she experienced racism firsthand, moved to Cambridge, Mass., attended "U Mass," got into astrology and finally had a short, but sweet marriage with a South American.

The funniest parts chronicle this poor Southern woman's run-ins with what she calls "the Post-War Baby Hippies," all trying as hard as they can to live in the very poverty from which she wants to escape. This is a happy book, although sometimes it's sad, and my only objection to it is that the voice Joanne Brasil has chosen to narrate her tale is the voice of a child, rather than the full-fledged adult woman she must be. —Peter von Ziegeler

### Through a glass darkly

*A Stay by the River*, by Susan Engberg (247 pages; Viking Press; \$15.95)

There are some cozy domestic scenes in Susan Engberg's latest collection of short stories, but at no time does the reader seem invited into the lovefest. Instead, he presses his nose to the window, removed from the heart of the matter.

Ms. Engberg's characters, for the most part, are a happy breed rarely found in modern fiction. Instead of being bitter or crippled by inaction, they are overwhelmed and awed by the promise found in their own energy, in a child or in a potential relationship.

The title story, reprinted in the 1977 O. Henry Prize anthology, finds a woman visiting her married friends in their rustic homestead by a river. The visitor is

awed by the picture-perfect marriage in the post-card setting. The wife and mother, however, admits she feels inadequate in the face of all the good fortune crowding in on her. Her friend cannot see that, and frankly, neither can the reader. Somewhere, the true heartbeat of the story is too muffled to decipher.

Other stories give an inkling of unrest in paradise, but somehow, the characters are too pale to cast a convincing shadow, despite the author's eloquent descriptive passages. —Betsy Kline

### Good guns

*The Oxford Book of Military Anecdotes*, edited by Max Hastings (514 pages; Oxford University Press; \$17.95)

There are a variety of reasons for *The Oxford Book of Military Anecdotes*, ranging from the legitimate to the comic. Legitimate: G.F.R. Henderson's portrait of Stonewall Jackson; Voltaire's view of Joan of Arc. Comic: a potpourri of anecdotes for retired generals to use on the lecture circuit.

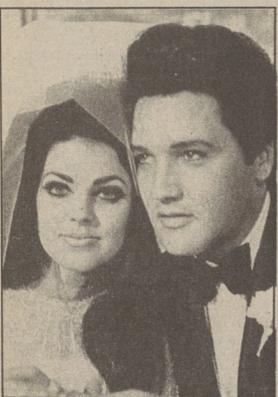
Max Hastings has done an admirable job of culling and editing what must have included thousands of potential items. The anecdote settings range from Caesar's campaigns to the Yom Kippur War. The quality of the writing varies, and the stories sometimes require a knowledge of the relevant history for the fullest appreciation. Some readers will find the volume enjoyable, but the casual reader probably will find it heavy going.

Such books generally are not as widely read as even the driest scholarly history, but they serve the purpose of making readers and military historians return to the old and broken ground for fresh insights. This one is meant to be a slow and selective read and it is that, yet it succeeds in its larger purpose by reminding that throughout history too many men and women have loved war too well. —John Randolph Zapor

### Oh, tell us more

*Elvis and Me*, by Priscilla Beaulieu Presley with Sandra Harmon (320 pages; G.P. Putnam's Sons; \$16.95)

It's been more than eight years and countless books and maga-



Elvis and Priscilla Presley... much about little

zine articles since the death of Elvis Presley at age 42. Still, the public's thirst for details surrounding the life and death of the legendary king of rock 'n' roll seems insatiable.

Enter *Elvis and Me*, a long-awaited volume of reminiscences by his former wife, Priscilla Beaulieu Presley, now a minor-league star in her own right by way of the popular "Dallas" television series.

There's the panting aplenty in these pages, although those seeking really salacious details may best be advised to look elsewhere. Most of the book's 320 pages are devoted to an almost anti-climactic account of the couple's antics (by way of Polaroid snapshots and fantasy enactment) to consummate their love affair. When "it" finally happens, precious little is left to hold readers' interest.

Nor is Mrs. Presley's prose likely to increase heart palpitations substantially. Intimate details revealing the man behind the superstar legend are conspicuously absent, and only a passing effort is made to separate myth from reality.

Instead, the book vacillates between a chronicle of the maturation of a 14-year-old child-woman thrust into the roller-coaster world of superstardom and the physical and mental deterioration of an aging, insecure rock star.

Heady stuff? Not really. Sel-

dom has so much been said about so little. —Paul Hohl

### C'est la 'Vida'

*Vida*, by Delacorta (180 pages; Summit Books; \$12.95)

The author of *Lola, Luna, Nana and Diva* has shipped his hero and heroine to the New World—California, to be exact—and what you have are two characters in their rightful element.

Gorodish, the French 40ish classical pianist, and his nymph, Alba, soon to be 14 and probably really Gorodish's (the big tease in the Delacorta novels is when will Alba lose her virginity to Gorodish) have jetted from Paris to Los Angeles and a new caper. This unlikely couple solves crimes for big bucks.

Crime-solving is not really the main thing in Delacorta's novels, however. Parody and satire are where he's at. The trouble is it is hard to satirize a parody.

The plot goes like this: There's this nightclub owner named Vida who is keeping jazz alive in America while moonlighting as a Mafia hit man. She does her thing with her trusty Welrod, and the cops trace her because she always uses the same gun. She's on the run. America falls in love with her. She seeks sanctuary with an architect trying to put tension back into his life. His name is Pharaoh because all his buildings look like pyramids. He has an ex-wife, a psychoanalyst second wife and three teen-age children earning their way in the world as a composer, an artist and an entrepreneur. The composer's big concert is conducted by a monkey; the artist paints nude retired blue-collar workers and the entrepreneur is a billionaire at 12 from buying and selling things like Marilyn Monroe's sheets. Doesn't this sound just like California? Where's the satire?

Seriously, folks, if this kind of nonsense doesn't upset you and if you don't really want much mystery with your plot, Delacorta is fun and games. A regional note: He also teaches under his real name, Daniel Odier, at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma. —Judith McCluskey

## There's always next year

### Bibliofiles

By Steve Paul  
The Star's book review editor

Well, the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation has picked the first 10 recipients of its \$25,000 awards to writers, and you're not one of them.

Leading the field in the program's first year was Nebraska native Wright Morris, a novelist and essayist who now lives in Mill Valley, Calif. Mr. Morris' latest book, the memoir *A Cloak of Light*, was published this year. He published his first novel in 1942.

This region also was represented by Jorie Graham, a young poet who teaches at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop.

The other winners: Raymond Abbott, a novelist who lives in Louisville, Ky.; Douglas Crase of New York, a poet; Stuart Dybek, associate professor of English at Western Michigan University; poet Linda Gregg of Northampton, Mass.; Howard Norman of Cambridge, Mass., a professor of ethnology at Middlebury College whose first novel will be published next year; James Robison of Brookline, Mass., whose first book of short stories was published this year and whose first novel is scheduled to be published in 1986; James Schuyler of New York, a poet and fiction writer; Austin Wright, professor of English at the University of Cincinnati.

The \$250,000 in tax-exempt awards, given Oct. 31 in New York, is the largest private program of individual support exclusively for writers, officials of the New York foundation say.

The recipients are selected through an anonymous process. In 1986, don't call them, they'll call you.

### And...

● Roger L. Welsch, a professor of English and anthropology at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and an expert on Plains folk art and humor, is scheduled to speak Friday at the annual dinner meeting of the Kansas City, Kan., Friends of the Library.

The dinner is at 7 p.m. at the West Wyandotte Branch of the Kansas City, Kan., Public Library, 7628 State Ave. Tickets for non-members cost \$9 each. Reservations should be made by Monday; call 621-3073, Ext. 222.

● Phyllis Janik, poet and fiction writer from Chicago, is featured on "New Letters on the Air" at 8:30 p.m. Monday on KCUR-FM (89.3).

### Best sellers

The top-selling titles as ranked by *The New York Times*.

### Fiction

1. *Texas*, by James Michener (Random House; \$21.95).
2. *Lake Wobegon Days*, by Garrison Keillor (Viking; \$17.95).
3. *Secrets*, by Danielle Steele (Delacorte; \$17.95).
4. *Contact*, by Carl Sagan (Simon & Schuster; \$18.95).
5. *Galapagos*, by Kurt Vonnegut (Delacorte; \$16.95).

### Non-fiction

1. *Elvis and Me*, by Priscilla Beaulieu Presley with Sandra Harmon (Putnam; \$16.95).
2. *Dancing in the Light*, by Shirley MacLaine (Bantam; \$17.95).
3. *Yeager: An Autobiography*, by Chuck Yeager and Leo Janos (Bantam; \$17.95).
4. *Iacocca: An Autobiography*, by Lee Iacocca with William Novak (Bantam; \$19.95).
5. *I Never Played the Game*, by Howard Cosell with Peter Bonventre (Morrow; \$18.95).

### Futile

For the Romans any material that could be easily poured out of its container was dubbed futile. Soon the word served to characterize any gesture or act that proved useless.

Contributed by Robert Willson, chairman of the UMKC English department and a word buff.

# 'La Perichole' is Offenbach at his most delectable

By Blake A. Samson  
The Star's music editor

The UMKC theater department and Conservatory of Music are preparing a delicious confection, Jacques Offenbach's "La Perichole."

"It's a brilliant piece," music director Glenn Block says enthusiastically, "and this production is moving along at such a high level. I think it will turn out to be one of the better ones we've done. We're lucky to have strong actors with very strong

sound.

Glenn Block will conduct the UMKC Conservatory Orchestra at the 8 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday performances in the Spencer Theater at the Center for the Performing Arts. Assistant conductor Robert Debbaut will conduct a 2 p.m. Sunday matinee. Tickets cost \$10, or \$8 for students and senior citizens.

First produced in 1868, about 10 years after Offenbach's success with "Orpheus in the Underworld" and two years after "La Vie Parisienne," "La Perichole" confirmed that the composer had that rare talent—a knack for comedy. Six years later, he reshaped it, greatly improving the score.

"The whole thing thumbs its nose at opera," Mr. Debbaut said. "Tongue-in-cheek, it pokes fun at bel canto, at Beethoven and Verdi. The dungeon scene—a dungeon for recalcitrant lovers—is straight out of 'Fidelio.'"

The score is a delight, he said, full of melody, bustling with wit and verve, light in touch. It is, in short, very French, a typical specimen of the genre—the operetta—but an especially appealing one, for Offenbach's humor is unfailing.

Offenbach, both conductors noted, is a master of many moods: vivacious choruses, seductive arias and duets, tongue-twisting solos and ensembles, and sheer frivolity. There's not a dull note in the score.

"It's French Gilbert and Sullivan," Mr. Debbaut said. "French scores all have that brightness. Their instruments are lighter and smaller of bore, and the strings are played with a different touch. Their music is traditionally light and frothy."

The dialogue must be spoken with a certain theatrical flair,



The viceroy of Peru (Robert Brand, left) threatens to steal the street singer La Perichole (Karen Garner) from her partner, Paquillo (Kip Wilborn), in Jacques Offenbach's comic operetta "La Perichole," opening Wednesday at UMKC.

he played the works of Adam, Herold, Auber and other masters of the French school. Paris was teeming with new operas by Meyerbeer, Halevy, Donizetti and Bellini.

Performances in numerous Parisian salons helped build his reputation as a composer of light and entertaining music. From 1850 to 1856, he was music director of the Comedie-Francaise. In 1855, he formed his own company, the "Bouffes Parisiens." He wrote more than 90 works—vaudevilles, ballets-bouffes, bouffoneries musicales, revues, one-act comic operas, operettas, pantomimes and operas-bouffes—in collaboration with the leading librettists of the day.

His five best known works—"La Belle Helene," "Barbe-bleue," "La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein," "La Perichole" and "Les Brigands"—were written for the Theatre des Varietes during the 1860s. He was at work on the score of his masterpiece, "Les Contes d'Hoffmann," until his death at age 61 in 1880.

Offenbach loved dance meters and wrote many celebrated barcaroles, lilting waltzes, galops, a ländler, a bolero, a polka, the famous can-cans.

It is a challenge to find the right touch—the elan—that is essential to Offenbach's works. The spirit is not so much boisterous as it is sprightly. There's a natural zip and sparkle to the music, a spring to the rhythms and a sheen to the score.

"The number of verses and waltzes that reoccur form various kinds of leitmotifs or themes," Mr. Block says of "La Perichole." "You can hear them as an undercurrent throughout the opera."

**"The whole thing thumbs its nose at opera. Tongue-in-cheek, it pokes fun at bel canto, at Beethoven and Verdi."**

—Robert Debbaut, assistant conductor

voices, people who can command the stage and sing very well."

Will Graham, the conservatory's director of opera, is staging "La Perichole" with Karen Garner and Kip Wilborn as the lovers La Perichole and Paquillo.

Robert G. Brand plays Paquillo's rival, the viceroy Don Andres. A mythical Peruvian kingdom is the setting for "La Perichole," one of Offenbach's most tuneful and amusing works. Richard Huston designed the set; Gwen Walters, the costumes; Deidre Fudge, the lighting; and Scott Gregory, the

lines turned just right for laughs. Mr. Debbaut gave a brief summary:

"La Perichole and Paquillo are street singers. In the fashion of the Spanish gentry back then, the viceroy likes to dress up in peasant clothes, incognito as it were. The rich man can buy anything he wants. He starts making offers she can't refuse. But if she's to be the viceroy's mistress, she must be married to someone else—the Spaniards know the way of love—and who better to marry but Paquillo. Neither knows, however, they're being forced to marry the other."

Mr. Block said: "The more I delve into it, the more I find. On an immediate level, in the foreground, there's this frothy stuff, but deep down there are all these implications. It can get to be pretty serious.

"Composers always have been intrigued with masks and disguises. Offenbach himself had to change his name because he was Jewish. He disguised himself. In some ways, it's about the fraudulent ways people go through life."

Born in 1819 in Cologne, Germany, the seventh of 10 children

to bookbinders Isaac and Marianne Eberst, Jakob (his name had yet to be Gallicized) took quickly to music, learning the violin at 6, the cello at 9. Jakob, his older brother, Julius, and their sister, Isabella, formed a trio and played in Cologne's restaurants and taverns. In 1833, their father took his family to Paris to expand his children's musical education.

Jakob studied at the Conservatoire de Musique and became a cellist with the Opera-Comique, where now known as Jacques Offenbach (after the German town where he lived),

born in 1819 in Cologne, Germany, the seventh of 10 children

to bookbinders Isaac and Marianne Eberst, Jakob (his name had yet to be Gallicized) took quickly to music, learning the violin at 6, the cello at 9. Jakob, his older brother, Julius, and their sister, Isabella, formed a trio and played in Cologne's restaurants and taverns. In 1833, their father took his family to Paris to expand his children's musical education.

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Sunday, November 10**  
Western Art Show, Alameda Plaza Hotel  
Public viewing—Noon to 5pm  
Auction & Sale—5:30pm  
Jr. Breeding Sheep Show, Sheep Arena—9:00am  
Roll of Excellence Charolais Show, Royal Arena—9:00am  
Brangus Show, Royal Arena—9:00am  
Hereford/Polled Hereford Steer Show, Royal Arena—1:30pm  
Hereford Jr. Heifer Show & Shorthorn Jr. Heifer Show, Royal Arena—3:00pm  
**Monday, November 11**  
Polled Hereford SOP Show, Royal Arena—9:00am  
Border Cheviot Sheep Show, Sheep Arena—9:30am  
Hereford ROM Show, Royal Arena—12:00 noon  
Southdown Regional Sheep Show, Sheep Arena—1:30pm  
Hampshire Sheep Show, Sheep Arena—6:00pm  
Saddle Horse Show, Kemper Arena—1:00pm  
Saddle Horse Show, Kemper Arena—7:30pm  
featuring: \$5,000 Hackney Pony Four-Year-Old and Under UPHA Classics Grand Championship  
**Tuesday, November 12**  
Saddle Horse Show, Kemper Arena—9:00am  
Saddle Horse Show, Kemper Arena—1:00pm  
Saddle Horse Show, Kemper Arena—7:30pm  
featuring: \$12,000 American Saddlebred Fine Harness Three-Year-Old and Under UPHA Classics Grand Championship; American Royal Saddle Seat Equitation Championship; Five-Gaited Mare Stake

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Hunter Classic Nov. 15  
Saddle Horse Amateur Exhibitor Championships Nov. 15  
United Missouri Banks Grand Prix Nov. 16  
Saddle Horse Championships Nov. 16

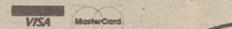
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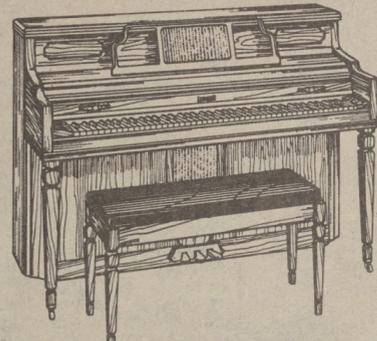
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## BOOKS IN BRIEF

*The Breaking of Bodies and Minds: Torture, Psychiatric Abuse, and the Health Professions*, edited by Eric Stover and Elena O. Nightingale, M.D. W. H. Freeman, 319 pages, \$21.95, hardcover; \$11.95, paperback.

When the torture rack gave way to the science of pain, some doctors and psychiatrists jettisoned the pre-eminent medical ethic: *primum non nocere* (above all, do no harm). This remarkable collection of essays documents the insidious involvement of health workers in modern torture and presents us with a program to end the practice.

The book is evenhanded and comprehensive. It includes the testimony of Jacobo Timerman, the Argentine newspaper editor who was hideously tortured, and then revived and monitored by a physician so that Timerman could withstand further assaults. And there is the moving story of Soviet psychiatrist Anatoly Koryagin, sentenced to prison and internal exile for 12 years in 1981 for trying to help Soviet dissidents being held in psychiatric hospitals.

But *The Breaking of Bodies and Minds* is more than a simple gathering of like

experiences. It also reports on growing human rights activism by doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, and forensic scientists. In June 1984 a delegation organized by the American Association for the Advancement of Science traveled to Argentina to help in the exhumation, identification, and examination of corpses of the "disappeared." The information has already been useful in pressing murder cases against former army officers. This fine book should encourage more such ventures.

—Douglas Foster

*What To Do After You Turn Off the TV: Fresh Ideas for Enjoying Family Time*, by Frances Moore Lappé and Family. Ballantine, 192 pages, \$7.95.

This book is not about television but about families. Though it invokes the many reasons why TV is destructive to children's growth, it is much more interested in all the varied ways children and adults can live together. Bringing together memories of her own youth, of when her children were young, and contributions from a myriad of friends and their families, the author of *Diet for a Small Planet* and coauthor of *Food First* comes up once

again with a straightforward, personal, folksy, and ultimately practical approach to making life a bit more reasonable and humane.

If anyone doubts the need for this kind of book, consider that in one study conducted on the impact of television on children, more than half the youngsters selected television over their fathers when forced to choose. Lappé recognizes the ominous signals of a culture lost in a funhouse mirror; but with the exception of the first and last chapters, she does little analyzing. Leaving that for others, she looks instead at the big empty space vacated by TV, and fills it with countless stories, games, and images of a creative everyday life that seem so natural and resourceful you can't imagine they never occurred to you before. A portrait of intimacy is created that everyone can recognize, if not remember.

—Laurel Taylor

*Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que*, by Joanne Brasil. Wild Trees Press, 135 pages, \$14.95, hardcover; \$8.95, paperback.

This is a chatty, neighborly novel about Cecyl, a young woman who leaves her small, segregated southern

## Heart Of Gold

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56

ciological thesis, then it must draw us into the lives of particular men and convince us that we know them.

It may be that Gloria Emerson should be turning from reporting to fiction. A turn to fiction would require her to abjure the generalization that stops the music, to shape the invertebrate vignette. As it is, her book doesn't work: its real virtues are carried downward and away by its weaknesses. What is rich in material drowns in form; everything is reduced to the same waterlogged consistency—the dampness of empathy never dried out by an equally unsatisfactory air of objectivity. Above all, Emerson fails to examine the most compelling emotion her book projects, the fact of her own deep love—for "some men" and for their world. Instead she has crowded the foreground with momentarily intense but always sketchy minor characters, leaving some central drama of living and feeling entirely in shadow.

Ann Snitow's last article for Mother Jones was "Holding the Line at Greenham," February/March 1985.

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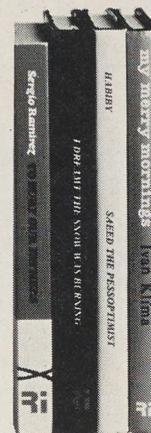
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MJ 86

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

town in the '60s to settle in Boston. Nothing comes easy to Cecyl. In Boston, where she works as a janitor, she discovers hippies, acid, the protest movement, poverty, love, and heartbreak, struggling all the while to keep herself fed. Sweet and somewhat simple, Cecyl is a rescuer, though she is told early on that "one thing about being a rescuer is that you never get to rescue anyone hardly, you just stick to them and practically drown yourself with them." In the end, stuck with a "genius" husband who drinks too much and is chronically unemployed, she takes the first steps toward rescuing herself by going back to work and staying in college, where she has found a part-time haven.

Cecyl's description of growing up in Phoebus, Virginia, is hugely entertaining, and populated with an array of eccentric characters (like Mrs. Matt, the sixth-grade teacher who, in the interest of fairness, teaches both the good and bad sides of slavery in the antebellum South.) And *Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que* manages to touch on issues of race, class, and gender without sounding like a tract—no

small feat. You won't read this first novel for its polished prose. No, it's more like a long telephone conversation with a friend: repetitious, sometimes irritating, often funny, and occasionally touching.

—Deborah Branscum

**Famous People I Have Known**, by Ed McClanahan. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 196 pages, \$13.95.

Ed McClanahan is an itinerant voyeur who loves to party. In this series of autobiographical sketches, he seeks the truth of raunchiness at a syrupy pop concert in Virginia, in a drug-happy community in California, and in honky-tonk bars everywhere from rural Montana to his home state of Kentucky. This self-deprecating humorist, who makes his living teaching college kids to write, finds enlightenment through observing a variety of arch and soulful characters, a few of whom (Ken Kesey, Jean Genet) are "famous"; all of whom should be.

Among the latter is Little Enis, a.k.a. Carlos Toadvine of Hogue Holler, Kentucky. In the 1950s, McClanahan dis-

covers this rockabilly musician who resembles a shorter, stockier Elvis Presley; but "his guitar playing [is] distinctly saltier, his inflections . . . just a shade flatter, twangier, down-homier, his bump and grind at least as lewd and spirited as anything the big E himself had thrown at us on *Ed Sullivan*." Fifteen years later, the author returns home from a dismal round of teaching jobs to find Enis near death and impotent from liver disease but still capable of giving patrons at a seedy topless bar the performance of their lives.

McClanahan both loves and laughs at his characters and conveys that difficult tension well with a mixture of anecdotes and epigrams. Occasionally, his sentences run on aimlessly like the beer-soaked and marijuana-clouded scenes being described. But the best ones resemble the despairing chuckles of a good country song: "Andy Warhol, as everybody knows, has promised us a future in which we'll all be famous for fifteen minutes. But don't vote for him, folks; fifteen minutes isn't nearly enough." I'll drink to that.

—Michael Kazin

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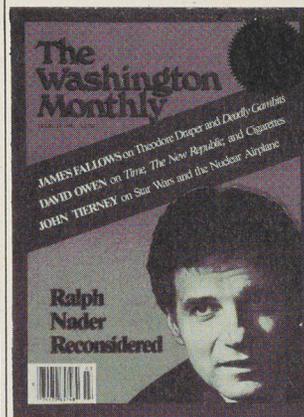
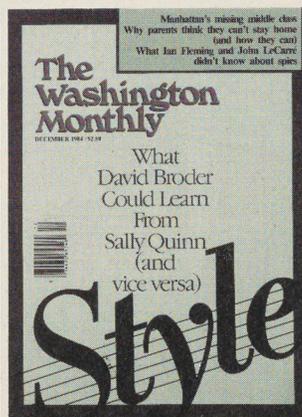
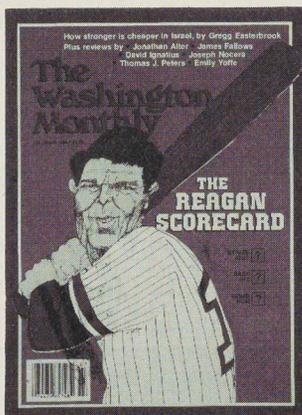
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MJ16

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***Hidden Hawaii - The Adventurer's Guide* by Ray Riegert. Ulysses Press. 369 pp. Paper \$11.95. (travel)**

"This book is not intended for those tourists in plastic leis who plop down on Waikiki beach, toast for two weeks, then claim they've seen Hawaii when all they've really seen is some bizarre kind of Pacific Disneyland," Ray Riegert makes clear right away, in his Preface. Riegert maintains that "the less money you spend, the more likely you are to discover paradise"; and so the purpose of *Hidden Hawaii* is "to save you dollars while leading you to paradise." Paradise, for him, is to be found at places like the Islands' isolated beaches and campsites, their secret fishing spots, and their lush and exotic inlands. In this book the author shares his enthusiasm for the places and activities of the Hawaiian Islands with the reader. And as in the other travel book he has written, *Hidden San Francisco and Northern California*, in *Hidden Hawaii* Riegert also gives the relevant facts (e.g., location, prices, hours) of just about any restaurant, hotel, beach, museum, etc., that a vacationer, conventional or unconventional, would want to know about. Though *Hidden Hawaii* is written especially for those interested in traveling economically, the author does not assume that this means that they are all interested in "roughing it"; the book is "a handbook for living both in town and in the wild."

*Hidden Hawaii* is comprehensive and detailed. Among other things, Riegert notes grocery stores, health food stores, and specialty shops on all of the islands. He doesn't miss a beach; and with each one, he rates the facilities, surfing, fishing, etc. There are maps and comments on the best hiking trails on each of the islands. Nearly every page of this hefty guide burgeons with information, directions, and commentary. The first fifty or so pages are general information on the Hawaiian Islands — history, contemporary life, travel considerations, and attractions. Though Riegert is writing especially for a particular type of traveler and he has definite opinions about the Islands and enjoyable features of them, any guidelines by which he selected the material of his book seem non-existent. His comments on establishments, campsites, etc., offer some guidance — but these are mostly entertaining, rarely sharply critical; and "Throughout the text, hidden beaches, remote locales, and points of particular interest are marked with a star." But even so, the reader is overwhelmed by the material.

This plethora of material is not necessarily a bad thing. But it does mean that *Hidden Hawaii* is not for those who are merely curious about the Islands or vaguely dreaming about going there. It is for those who intend to go there before long, who will find the book worth poring over to plan a personalized, memorable, and highly enjoyable trip.

maps, illustrations, bibliography, index  
ISBN 0-915233-01-0

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## ASSORTED REVIEWS

***Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que* by Joanne Brasil. Wild Trees Press. 135 pp. Cloth \$14.95. Paper \$8.95. (novel)**

by Corinne Perry

*Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que* is a sensitive first-person novel of a young working class woman's simultaneously painful and humorous maturation.

Born in Ireland and raised in Virginia, author Brasil's innocent yet observant Cecyl, in the hope of finding "something different," flees the prejudiced South by boarding a bus for Boston. Cecyl's expectations are quickly dashed however as she experiences the different though ever-present social and racial barriers that exist in the North also.

On her own, Cecyl gradually begins to shed her cocoon of innocence, growing wiser both from her own experiences and from those of each of the different people who pass through her life. In simple — almost conversational — style, Brasil describes Cecyl's struggle and hopes to escape poverty and injustice, to secure an education, and to both define and attain the "more to life" that others around her often mention.

After a few noncommittal affairs with men, Cecyl meets and quickly falls in love with a talented but tortured musician named Mario. For the first time since leaving her parents' home, she is able to regard herself as "part of an us" rather than as an outsider trying to find a place to belong. But for Cecyl love is not a lasting answer.

Mario's sensitivity and idealism combined with a indulgent upbringing make it impossible for him to cope with life without drinking. Before long, Cecyl awakens to the hard truth that Mario is an alcoholic well on his way to self-destruction. Unable to save Mario from himself, Cecyl's torturous relationship with him eventually comes to an end. Yet Cecyl does not grow embittered or sullen; as she has throughout the course of all of her experiences, she becomes stronger, fuller, wiser. At the end of her story, Cecyl has still managed to keep her basic sense of optimism — and I, for one reader, found her a beautiful character.

There are many novels about men coming of age. *Billy's Bar-B-Que* is about a woman coming of age. Besides the subjects of a woman's relationships with men and the domestic parts of her nature, this novel explores one woman's feelings, thoughts, and experiences relating to certain social and political realities. While the novel gives only glimmerings of its heroine Cecyl's depths, it does describe brightly and engagingly such things as the people of her life, her reactions to the political and social realities, her disappointments, and her hopes.

Wild Trees Press is a small press recently started by Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, and Robert Allen, a former editor of *The Black Scholar*.

ISBN 0-931125-01-4 cloth  
ISBN 0-931125-02-2 paperback

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Corinne Perry is working on a novel about a Korean War hero.

**How to Raise a Brat** by Dr. Kenneth N. Condrell. Loiry Bonner. 200 pp. Paper \$9.95. (parenting)

by Christine Polk

Dr. Condrell uses a refreshing approach to the subject of parenting. In *How to Raise a Brat*, Dr. Condrell's premise is that "once you have learned what to do wrong, you will know with greater confidence what to do right." He talks about common mistakes that parents make; and then he says, "Let's take each one of the preceding mistakes, turn them around into positive actions, and see how you can. . ."

Each chapter focuses on a major area of parenting — for example, jealousy and sibling rivalry, school problems, bedtime problems, nurturing family life. The chapters on teenagers and divorce are especially informative. Moreover, the book is well-organized with headings throughout each chapter so that a reader can easily refer back to a specific concern or interest.

Dr. Condrell's advice is sensible and realistic. "We are easily misled by seemingly simple solutions and fads. Second, children are the real experts. . . if we can simply learn to hear what they are saying." Condrell avoids psychological language and theorizing. His style is simple to understand, never preachy, and often amusing. He uses many anecdotes and examples to illustrate mistakes and to clarify guidelines. "If you have ever been in a car with a screaming kid, you know what I was going through." His book is for parents. From it, they will have what they have already learned reinforced and expanded upon; and they will learn new ideas and approaches. Because *How to Raise a Brat* is short and concise, it is easy to go through chapters that are of no immediate concern, but might help one to understand friends', relatives', or neighbors' children.

As a child psychologist for twenty years, Dr. Condrell has witnessed many "parents causing pain to children," but also "how awful parents were feeling as a result of the way their children were treating them." In *How to Raise a Brat*, Dr. Condrell does not sentimentalize children; nor does he accept the dream of being a perfect parent. He remarks in the Preface that parenting is exasperating and that it is normal to reject children at times and one should not feel guilty about it. Dr. Condrell does not automatically take the child's side; he has sympathy for the parent's viewpoints and difficulties, unlike many child psychologists.

"There is no way on earth that parenting can become easy or trouble-free. However, I can tell you many things about children that will help you a great deal." Dr. Condrell lives up to his promise. Despite its gimmicky title, which can be misleading, *How to Raise a Brat* is a very useful and informative book. It can be used profitably not only by parents but by parenting groups.

ISBN 0-933705-00-X

Christine Polk, a mother of two, is a teacher and consultant in elementary education. She has led parenting groups.

10/ JAN/FEB 1986

**light year '86** edited by Robert Wallace, with drawings by Leonard Trawick. Bits Press. 279 pp. Cloth \$13.95.

(poetry anthology; humor)

by Paul Duling

Can serious poets be humorous? Robert Wallace is out to prove they can with his annual anthologies. His third, *light year '86*, includes "name" poets like X.J. Kennedy, William Jay Smith, George Starbuck, John Updike, May Swenson and others (142, short two of being gross).

There are puns, parodies, narratives, limericks, villanelles, sestinas, open forms. Most were published in the 80's, some in the 60's and 70's, one in 1949. Trawick's drawings are appropriately amusing. Some lines are, for poets, surprisingly awkward.

The editor has a commendable cause — trying for quality, sometimes finding it. Some of the pieces are playful or sly; few are deep or perceptive. Every reader will discover a gem here and there:

PARKING METER

*The dial is a robber-red.  
When you insert  
the franc piece  
in its side-lips,  
twist its ear  
to make it listen:  
you need to leave  
something in its watch.  
And all of a sudden  
it's awake -  
ticking up to say:  
I agree,  
I only stand  
and wait for thee.*

Alamgir Hashmi

A few poets use the esoteric or surreal language common to recent poets - one reason why so much poetry is incomprehensible to the public, turning them off from public readings or from buying poetry books. Can this language be extended to humor? Not for the public, but it may be a test for poets' humor. For example, Roger Weingarten's "The History of the World" has three pages of:

*. . . you can't xerox a stuffed nose  
leaning from a Lady Godiva  
chocolate covered peach to a bowl of gelatinous  
red and yellow antihistamines.  
Raiders of a nose shaped pyramid  
of the Upper Nile opened a delicatessen. . .*

Some of my friends write like this and think it's funny. Fortunately, most of the entries are not like this. Even the above poem is saved by its last lines: ". . . a stuffed nose can live twenty-seven thousand/days without a break, but a clean handkerchief/will die of heartbreak in a dark pocket."

Continued on next page. . .

Paul Duling has published two books of poetry, *Lunch Hour Girls! Lunch Hour Men!* and *Love Until the Sun Goes Down*. He has been widely published, and read in the United States and Europe.

## Two Blinks and a Growl

**I**HAD TO BLINK TWICE when I saw the cover illustration of "The New Directory of Western Book Publishers and Production Services," just published by Bookbuilders West (170 Ninth St., San Francisco 94103, \$10.95). Inside, this 120-page paperback is a much-needed and long-awaited gem. Its listing of publishers is a bit sketchy, but then a 20-page section covering the entire Western states is bound to exclude smaller houses.

Elsewhere, though, chapters on manufacturers and services involving composition, binding, color separation, paper, design, editing, cloth, data conversion and technical illustration appear complete. For people on the production side of publishing, this book will be invaluable. It also reminds us that publishing in the West, and specifically in the Bay Area, is very much an industry in its own right.

I blinked after examining the book's amusing cover illustration called "View from the West." This is a takeoff on that famous Steinberg map from *The New Yorker* in which buildings, mountains, states and bodies of water are made large or small according to the bias of a particular region.

In the perception of cover artist Jim McGuinness, Bay Area publishers view the book industry in the East as a handful of tiny, quaint houses with such names as George Braziller, Harper & Row East, W.H. Freeman and Little, Brown. We acknowledge the University of Chicago Press, but basically our consciousness resides with a hearty, flourishing, crowded and wonderfully diverse Bay Area publishing scene. Here the artist shows such huge and imposing houses as Sierra Club Books, Harper & Row (San Francisco division), Sunset, UC Press, Shameless Hussey, Dharma and others. And here, smack in the middle of the Bay Area book industry, is the tallest skyscraper of all, Random House.

Random House? Blink. They're doing an insightful map on the Bay Area scene and they make Random House the leader? All that Random House has out here is a college textbook office. This is our "View from the West," with Random House at the helm?

The cover could have made a great cult poster within the industry; as it is, it's kind of nutty.

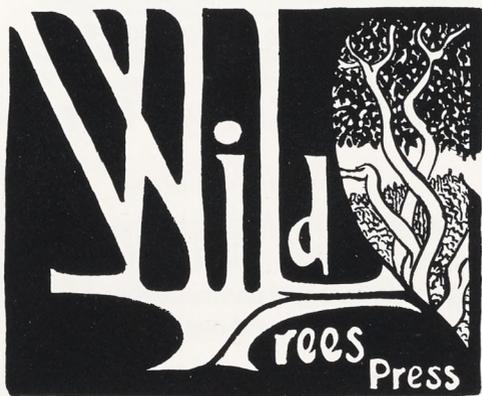
**TO FILL OUT YOUR** knowledge of local publishers large and small, see the newly issued third edition of "The Guide to Bay Area Book Publishers" (San Francisco Review of Books, P.O. Box 33-0090, SF 94133, \$4.95). This 40-page listing emphasizes the editorial side of publishing and includes publishers, book publicists, literary agents, associations and book reviewers. Random House is not listed.

**THAT BOOK PARTY** for Joanne Brasil, author of "Escape From Billie's Barbecue," at Modern Times Bookstore (968 Valencia St.) this Friday will be a special celebration indeed. It was at this bookstore a year ago that Brasil read publicly for the first time. Her work-in-progress so moved Modern Times bookseller Jean Pauline that "I suggested she contact a friend who's an agent," who in turn got her to Alice Walker, who in turn got the book published at Walker's own press, Wild Trees. "So the circle will be complete on Friday when Joanne reads again from the work she presented first at the Open Fiction Reading." ■

Patricia Holt is Book Editor of *The Chronicle*.

## FALL 1985

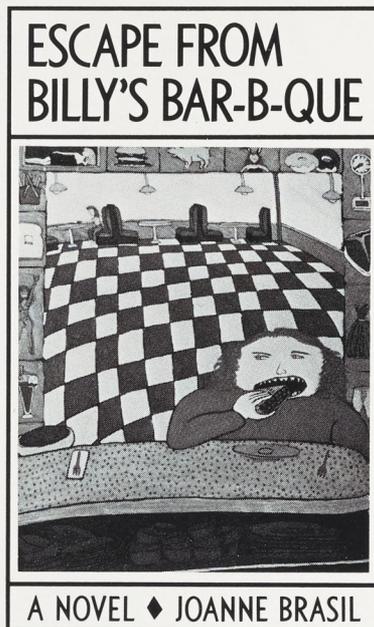
Wild Trees Press was formed in 1984 by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker and Robert Allen, former editor of *The Black Scholar*. In the small press tradition of "publishing only what we love," Wild Trees Press is devoted to bringing out works that evidence high literary quality and social insight.



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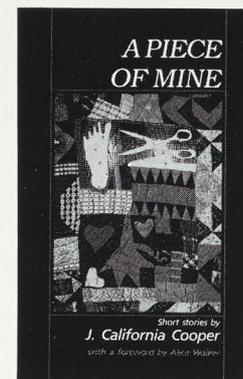
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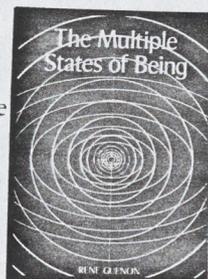
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