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Cleveland State University

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Presidio, a Texas border town

also:
Eating the unthinkable
Margaret Atwood's fiction
ANNOUNCING

The Gamut

CARTOON PRIZE

First Prize: $500
Second Prize: $200
Third Prize: $100

Plus a number of Honorable Mentions.
All prize winners will be published in the June 1992 issue.

Format and content: All types of single-panel cartoons, with or without captions or other text, are eligible, including cartoons with political, gag, or other humorous or satirical content. No narrative strips, please. Entries must be black-and-white, no larger than 11" x 17". Clear photocopies are acceptable.

Entry fee: $3.00 per entry. If you are a current Gamut subscriber, one entry fee will be waived. Make check payable to The Gamut. An entry may consist of one to three cartoons, but each cartoon will be judged individually and must be able to stand alone. Contestants may submit more than one entry.

Deadline: Entries must be received or postmarked on or before March 2, 1992.

Judging and announcement of winners: The judges will be the editors of The Gamut plus an outside expert on cartoons. Winners will be announced on or before May 1, 1992. Entries will be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. For a list of winners, send a separate stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Entry blank: To receive an entry blank, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

The Gamut Cartoon Prize
Cleveland State University
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Cleveland, Ohio 44115-2440
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In 1915, Pancho Villa roamed the Chihuahua desert making forays into the United States to terrorize the border towns. See page 62. Photo courtesy of The Cleveland Press collection, Cleveland State University Archives.
During an interview shortly after his appointment, the new Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander, said that it might be necessary to start all over again if we were to improve the schools. He did not describe the process he had in mind. So I visualized the scene as it might take place. The Secretary is meeting in what I imagine is an elegant conference room with a group of people expert in education. In the following dialogue, the Secretary (S) asks questions and the group of educators (E) answer with a single voice, for the sake of economy and simplicity. There is also one parent (P).

S: Let us begin with the teachers. Where do we get the teachers for our new school system?
E: Why not hire the teachers that we already have? All of them are above average.
S: Shall we classify the students by age or ability?
E: Surely by age, otherwise we would need tests, records, a lot of needless bureaucracy.
S: How shall we insure that the teachers are properly trained?
E: Why not let the colleges of education guarantee that the teachers are qualified?
S: If these colleges cannot or will not do it, who else can be trusted with this task?
E: Let the labor organizations guarantee that their members are qualified.
S: Shall we require certain subjects, such as math and languages, or have a system of electives?
E: Electives are consistent with the spirit of freedom and personal responsibility that our country stands for.
S: Shall we insist that the students be taught so that they can meet national norms on country-wide tests?

E: That would encourage cheating, create stress in students and teachers, lead to national uniformity, and make the parents unhappy if their children did not pass the tests.

S: Shall we continue the practice of having interscholastic sports contests?

E: Certainly, it keeps the parents interested in education.

S: Shall we emphasize the use of television, films, computers, and other technological supplements to classwork?

E: Certainly, it keeps the students interested in education.

S: Whom shall we ask to supervise the school system?

E: Surely a school board elected by the people of the community, without regard to race, creed, age, educational experience, or any other qualifications would be most democratic.

S: Shall there be a Superintendent of Schools?

E: Unfortunately, such a person might interfere with the ability of the Board to form policy and appoint personnel.

S: Any other suggestions?

P: Mr. Secretary, may I speak?

E: Please do, we would all welcome the opinion of a parent.

P: It sounds as if these suggestions would combine to produce a school system as inefficient, incompetent, and corrupt as the ones we have now, and a cohort of students as intellectually lazy, illiterate, and ignorant as the ones now graduating from our schools and unable to get jobs.

S: You are right. Let us start again. Now let us begin with the teachers, but let us keep in mind that the American people believe they have better uses for their tax money than increasing teachers' salaries and improving working conditions for ambitious young people who might enter the teaching profession.

Signed: [Signature]
Once Upon an Island
The shifting sands and vanishing culture of Ocracoke, North Carolina

Ron Haybron

Once upon a time there was an island where I would spend my summers with my wife, my two sons, and my little white sloop. In those days, the island was little known and visited by few. Fifteen miles long, or a bit more, it was so narrow for most of its length that from the dunes along the ocean beach you could look right across the sand flats and the salt scrub to the sound behind. There were inlets at either end, mile-wide joinings of ocean and sound where tidal currents, wind-waves, and ocean swells met in a ferocious clashing.

Near one end of this overgrown sand bar was a brief thickening, a few hundred acres of higher ground, where red cedars grew to tree size, and the highest knolls were plush with live oaks and shrubs and grasses. There were marshes on the back of the island and a small, fine harbor opening to the sound through a narrow cut, providing shelter in all winds. Around the harbor— islanders call it the “Creek”—was a tattered old fishing village, inhabited by five hundred or so. And in summer, there were “strangers”—that’s what the natives called us off-islanders.

Some of the natives would never speak to a stranger, or even look at them, acting as if they weren’t there. A few of the inhabitants had never been off the island, had never been the thirty miles to the mainland. Their world was that scrap of sand, plus the surrounding waters, which they fished for trout down Teach’s Hole or for mackerel and bluefish at the inlet; or they had a string of crab pots or raked for clams, or went oystering on the shoals behind the next island over, or netted jumping mullet, or fished with gill-nets on the reef or pound nets in the sound.

It wasn’t easy to get to the island. There was a ferry, but getting to it took a ride through lonesome hours and across dank miles of mainland swamp, and it was so far from anything else that it was easy to get to the boat dock too late to catch the last boat. In that case you...
slept in your car or out on the ocean beach where the wind kept the mosquitoes away.

Coming to the village for the first time, with an eye adjusted to mainland appearances, was a shock—it was so small and shabby. Everything was worn down, wind-whipped and sea-gray. Only the flat-bottomed, wooden skiffs which were tied to stakes rowed along the shallows around the Creek showed a flash of color, bone white with rust-red anti-fouling paint on the bottoms. There weren’t any lights or signs and only a few paved roads. The rest were sand, rutted and fit only for walking or a four-wheel drive.

Water was from cisterns: rain water was used for drinking and cooking. Most houses had a separate water system, with a pump to bring up ground water for flushing the toilet and showering, and, if you were fussy, washing clothes. The islanders could drink the ground water, which looked like tea, but it gave strangers a horrible bowel complaint. If you ran your cistern dry, you had to haul water from the big one down at the docks on the Creek.

There was electricity, brought from the mainland by an undersea cable, but the island was at the end of the line, and the power failed nearly every day, even in clear weather. It was routine to light Coleman lanterns or candles or kerosene lamps to finish a late dinner. In those days, the island wasn’t so long past the days when there was no juice at all, and no one minded much, except the man who ran the grocery. His coolers were always burning out motors, from laboring with low voltage.

The grocery was at the end of the line too, and it regularly ran out of things, even basics. At the end of every summer, when the island women were canning figs, the store always ran out of sugar. Never seemed to remember to order more, from one year to the next. The selection of meat and produce was awful to non-existent. Usually the vegetable bin housed only a few tattered turnips or a bunch or two of carrots you wouldn’t feed to a hog in Ohio. The choice of meat wasn’t any better: a few chunks of salty fatback, all right for flavoring but not good enough to eat as a main course. Fish you got from somebody you knew or your own devices, and most years plenty of blue crabs could be caught with traps in the sound or netted in the ocean surf.

When somebody drove “up the beach,” leaving by ferry to take an all-day trip to the closest civilization—it seemed like the big city after a few weeks on the island—they were always asked to bring
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vegetables, fruit, maybe a piece of red meat, and always booze. The island was dry then, which meant most cars coming back on the ferry were low on their springs with the load of liquor and beer.

The first time I went over to the island, I stood at the bow of the ferry, watching its low, sand-bank shore take form through the mist as the car-loaded boat labored across the inlet, rocking in the low ocean swells. I asked one of the ferry-men how folks spent their time out there. He was an islander, a big, meaty man, with freckled, sun-red arms and a white forehead under his cap, and he was not much given to talking to strangers, but he did give me an answer. "Fish, fuck, and drink," he told me.

His accent was odd, like all the islanders then. People said it was like "Old English," or Cockney. "Tide" came out "toid." "Time" was more like "toim." "Pea" sounded a bit like "pay," "I" was "Oi," and so on. And there were many local words and expressions that you never heard anywhere else. In those days, it was about impossible to understand some of the island people. They had to be almost bilingual to deal with strangers, which is part of why some of them didn't like to talk to off-islanders. They didn't like the reaction their talk got, and anybody who came to the island was on their turf, in their country, and they were too independent to want to change the way they talked just so some mainlander could understand. Let the stranger go to hell.

Twenty-five years ago, most of the permanent residents of the island had been born there, or had parents who were born there. Most of the family names went back into the nineteenth century, or even earlier. The island got its first official, full-time residents in 1717, pilots to guide deep-water vessels through the inlet from the ocean side to nearby off-loading points on tiny islands in the sound. From there, cargo was transported in shallow-draft boats across the sound to ports on the mainland rivers. A few island names go back to those days, names like Howard, Garrish, Gaskins, Jackson, Styron, O'Neil. And a few were probably descended from pirates, who visited these shores.

**Being on the Island**

I liked the harshness of the weather. About the most durable thing out there was human flesh. Boat-motors went after five years tops, maybe less. A car could
freeze up and rust out in about a week. Battery terminals would corrode almost overnight, and plugs would foul and ignition wires damp out. Wood was better, but the salt in the spray and the grinding, incessant wind ate it away in time as well. The best house couldn’t keep the weather out. I remember sitting out a northeaster one June, sitting and watching the water bubble in around the electric plug on the north wall of the little house where we stayed.

The little house was on a tiny bay off the sound called Northern Pond or just North Pond. Years before, the Pond was almost land-locked, and there were houses to the north, but those places had long since washed away. A cemetery too, according to the man who owned the cottage. He told me of seeing a casket go to sea in a storm, as the land disappeared into the waves.

That’s the way it is on a sand island. It may seem solid and permanent, but it isn’t. In my days, out to the northeast of the cottage at the corner of the Pond was a net house. Early mornings, just after sun-up, a bald eagle used to perch there, getting his fishing eye. But he’ll not perch there again—the place tumbled into the sound a couple of years ago. The arms of land that embrace the Pond are being eaten away by the sound, while the little beach just outside our door grows wider every year, as if the line of the shore were being straightened out.

All those impermanences made the island especially important to me as a place to learn. It put a human scale on the mutability of nature, which you may not see so clearly in a place where the forces of geology take thousands of years to make their mark. I felt that, out there, the seam between the civilized world and the natural world was visible. Our covering of bricks and concrete, buildings and bridges is absent on the island, and the inner workings are pushed close to the surface. Of course, it’s just the inner workings of my mind that I could see there. All that’s really there is the sky and a few handfuls of sand and the sea, the God-awful, faceless, implacable, uncaring immensity of the sea. You felt big compared to mainlanders, ordinary alongside others on the island, and totally insignificant against the sea.

On the island daily existence was totally physical, right down in the brainstem. You never needed shoes, except to go ashore on one of the scraps of island back in the sound where there were myriads of oyster shells in the shallows that could slice a bare toe right to the bone. Dressing up meant putting on a shirt. No watch, no socks, no shoes. I grade a place in that order: no watch is a good start, no socks means you’re on the way, and no shoes is close to perfect.

The island was too far out for a radio to pull in many stations. You could get Southern church stuff and farm reports in the morning, but
not much else. Television was only moving shapes and the buzz of static. And after a while, you lost the desire to know about mainland life or to be tied to "back there," so the radio and the little portable T.V. both sat silent, circuits moldering in the salty damp. Newspapers came sometimes, maybe a day late, and there wasn't much in them anyway. All you needed to know could be read in the clouds, if you knew how, and keeping track of the time of the tide became automatic. Every morning, unless there was rain, I'd take my coffee out on the back porch to watch the sky over the sound a while and check on the tide. You could get into real trouble, sailing that water in a small boat, unless you knew the tide and had a pretty good idea of the weather for the next six hours.

After a few weeks of living by the tide and the shape of clouds and the strength of the wind, you lost the mainland rhythms. First the calendar lost its meaning, then clocks. Living that way makes you feel that we live in a made-up world, doing made-up things. After I had spent a season on the island, it took some time to get used to fitting my activities to the movement of a little black hand around a numbered dial. It didn't seem to make much sense, compared to watching a buoy to see when the tide turned.

Taking my morning coffee, I learned to know when a slow-flying pelican was going to tip off its wing and plunge into the sound with a splash, trying to catch a fish in its great bill. The terns hovered when they fished, pointing their fork-tail towards the water almost parallel to their sharp nose, the very picture of concentration. In August, a kingfisher would show up each morning, to perch on the spreader of the mast of my boat, and watch for fish. He'd suddenly dart down, snag a fish and resume his perch. And through all this, a green heron would pace back and forth along the collar of dried sea-weed which lined the little bay at high-tide mark, watching for small fish in the shallows. He looked like an old man with his hands clasped behind his back, but his green head darted out with a killing blow when he spotted his prey.

By the time I came out with my coffee, the skiffs from North Pond and the Creek had already been long gone to the gill nets out by Howard's Reef. You had to get out before daylight to catch them. They were at the nets by sun-up.

That summer I kept a journal.

Journal Entry: July 21

I went with Jake to tend his nets out by Howard's Reef. We met down at the Pond at 5:30. The sky was clear overhead and there was a light breeze from the south-west. Jake's boat was tied down by O'Neil's dock. We waded out to the skiff in dark, cool water, so still
it mirrored the stars until we pushed out ripples as we passed. Off to the right of the bay, on the old net house which Jake’s father had built many years before, perched the bald eagle.

We cast off from the mooring stake just at daybreak. The sun was pink behind scattered clouds to the east, and it lit up the tops of great heaps of cumulus above the sound to the south and south-east.

I sat near the bow to keep the nose of the skiff down to clear the shallows north of the Pond. As we rode off from the mooring stake, we picked up speed and the skiff slapped and slammed on the low wind-waves coming from the southwest, banged hard against the dark water throwing dashes of chill spray back on me.

The nets were on the backside of Howard’s Reef, in six or eight feet of water. There were seven of them, each trailing off down-wind from a stake jetted into the sandy bottom. We approached each one from the free end. I leaned out of the bow and grabbed each net. Jake cut the motor and tilted it up to keep it from getting tangled in the mesh (he called it the “mash”). The nets were old style, made of cotton cord. The new-fangled ones are monofilament—plastic—which is a lot more durable. The old nets are tied by hand and require a lot of mending after use, but the monofilament is expensive. The spacing in the mesh, about two inches square, decided the size of fish you caught. Small ones squirmed through, big ones couldn’t get their heads through the hole; the right-sized ones could poke their head in, but then got caught behind the gills as they tried to wriggle free, hence the name “gill-net.”

Jake said he used old-style net because it was “good enough,” but knowing him, I think part of it is that he likes the mending. In the old days, the men would sit around a stove at night, mending their nets and talking. There are tasks like net-mending that may not be the “best way” to do the thing, but that should be done. My grandmother would have hiked up her bifocals and peered through them and asked, “What are you going to do with all that time?” and if you’d answered “Go fishing,” she’d have laughed and said, “Well, when you’re tending nets you are fishing.” I think that was part of why Jake used the cotton mesh. While he was mending it, he was still fishing, fishing in the night, in the wind.
Once he stopped by early to tell me it was too bad to go out, and while we sat by the window and watched the light come up, he told me of a skiff swamping out there in the channel between the Pond and the Reef. It had happened about fifteen years ago on a stormy day. Three of the men had gone to the nets, togged up in their foul-weather gear. The boat took a wave, the motor swamped and went out, they dropped an oar and went broad-side to the waves. Quick as you could say it, they went down. None of them had flotation—one of the old men told me once that if you went into the water, best get it over with rather than drift around and bait the sharks—and they all went under, not a mile from shore. On many a dark day in a north wind which put the sound up and lined the Reef with breakers, I sat and watched that gray water and thought of those men halloing, fighting to stay afloat, pulled down into the weed-beds and swirling water by their heavy oil-skins.

Most of the catch was menhaden—Jake called them “fatbacks,” too oily to eat, no commercial market out here, only fit for fertilizer. These he shook out of the net. There were lots of blue crabs, tangled and grasping, and he mashed them against the gunwale with a pit-prop and shook out the bits and pieces with angry jerks on the net. There were a number of jellyfish too... stinging nettles, the islanders call them. We both got stung over and over, shaking them out of the nets. It felt like a rash of mosquito bites up and down our arms, not entirely unpleasant.

The catch wasn’t very good that morning. A sea trout, a speckled trout which had been chewed a bit by crabs, a medium blue, one spot, three croakers, and several good-sized pinfish. Jake gave them all to me, but he kept a few fatback for the pelicans, and as we motored back to the Pond, he tried to bait them close, but they stayed aloft and aloof.

When we got back to the Pond, I cleaned the fish, using a washed-up board. The gulls flapped and fretted around, ha-haing for the scraps. These fish were all one to two pounds, the trout was larger.

**Becoming an Islander**

The island lets me, for a time, become someone other than my normal self. When I first went there, I already had some experience fitting into novel circumstances. I knew enough to try to blend in, to keep a low profile, watch the natives and attempt to live as they did.

I didn’t expect to become an islander. A “stranger” can never be fully accepted, no matter how long they stay. I knew a young man from a Florida island who had been fishing with some of the island men for years, and you’d have thought he was one of them. But he
The author sailing on North Pond with Phyllis Wall. Photo: John Wall.

said to me one day, "You're okay, as long as things are goin' good. But if there's trouble, you get shut out, in favor of kin." That's a reality of island life, one that's hard for many people to accept.

But you can earn a sort of honorary status if you keep your mouth shut. I eventually got mine because I handled my boat well. Some of the old-timers on the island remembered the days when outboards were rare and awkward, and they fished from sailing boats. They knew that sailing in that water was touchy sometimes. One day when I came in from a brisk sail, one of the old men sort of doffed his hat to me, a kind of salute that said to me, "Good job on the water," and I knew I had a place. I wasn't accepted, but I was tolerated, my presence acknowledged, and eventually I felt more at home there than any place I've ever lived.

The island is seldom regarded indifferently. I remember an exchange with a visitor from Canada, who left his auto running, windows up like a space ship visiting Mars, while he got out to survey the bleak sand flats and ocean shore.

"Is that all there is?" he asked me. I told him yes.
"Where is the town?" he asked, and when I pointed down the island to the roofs and chimneys visible above the trees, he said, "If this is it, I'm getting out of here." Whereupon he got in his car and roared back towards the ferry dock.

**Staying the Same Through Constant Change**

The tiny sand bar, nowhere more than five feet above the level of the sea, precariously narrow, looks incredibly fragile in the sea, especially from the air. One islander, after seeing his home from an airplane for the first time, wrote, "I couldn't help wondering if the early settlers would have been so intent on moving there if they could have seen what I saw now."

The appearance of impermanence is not an illusion. Where the island is today is not where it will be tomorrow. It is one of a string of islands—travel writers inevitably refer to them as a necklace—that define the eastern coast of North Carolina, running from the Virginia state line in the north two-thirds of the way down the state. The more famous features of the Outer Banks include Kitty Hawk, where the Wright brothers first flew a heavier-than-air craft, and Cape Hatteras and the Diamond shoals offshore. This latter area is called the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" because so many ships have been lost since 1585 when Europeans first sailed these waters.

Because these islands are simply large sand bars, they are not stable land forms. Instead, they retain essentially the same shape and location from year to year by existing in a state technically labeled as "dynamic equilibrium." That is, the apparent stability of the Outer Banks is a consequence of the balancing of a combination of otherwise disruptive forces. They stay roughly the same by constantly changing.

The influences that affect the islands in normal times include the cycle of tides, the prevailing winds, waves breaking on the shore, and longshore currents (water flow parallel to the beach in a prevalent direction). Generally, these agents achieve a rough balance and to casual inspection the islands appear remarkably constant from one week to the next.

But there are other forces at work which can affect great changes in the islands in a few hours' time. Each year up to thirty "northeasters"—winter storms—batter the Outer Banks, bringing storm waves and unusually high tides. These storms erode beaches, damage water craft, and sometimes knock down buildings.

Most of the storm damage on the Outer Banks is due to these winter upheavals, though their big cousins, the warm-weather hurricanes, are the most spectacular agents of change for the barrier islands. Winds can reach 200 miles per hour and the storm surge, a
vast dome of high water sucked up under the eye of the hurricane by the very low pressure, can rise to 25 feet above normal sea level.

The northeasters, though frequent and sometimes quite destructive, are facts of life on the Banks. And severe hurricanes are relatively rare and not always so fearful as imagined. The last big one on the Outer Banks was in 1944.

Of course hurricanes can be deadly. Injury to thousands of people and damage in the billions have resulted from the 100-odd hurricanes that have struck the Atlantic and Gulf coasts just since 1900. Besides, these big storms can produce massive changes in the configuration of the barrier islands. Sometimes the inlets which separate the islands from one another are closed in a big storm, or others opened. The U.S. Geological Survey describes thirty inlets in their book *The Outer Banks of North Carolina*. Of these, ten are currently open, but only one has been continuously open since the coming of the Europeans. The inlets provide the avenues from the open sea to the sounds behind the Banks, and are also the drains for the rivers of eastern North Carolina.

But there is another force at work, one that over years may be more significant to humans on the Outer Banks. The level of the sea is rising and the islands respond by moving. Geologists believe that at the end of the Wisconsin glacial period around 14,000 years ago, sea level was 300 feet lower than now. The rest of the water was of course frozen. Then, the North Carolina shoreline was fifty to seventy-five miles farther east, near the edge of the continental shelf which is now submerged by the sea.

The ancient coast was lined by dune fields made from sand formed from the erosion of the then-mighty Appalachians far to the west. When the glaciers began to melt and the sea level slowly rose, the waves in storms began to wash over these dunes, shifting them gradually westward and forming them into a line of sand bars, the ancestors of the present Outer Banks, with the ocean on their eastern flanks and broad sounds behind, separating them from the receding coast of the mainland.

Sea levels continued to rise. Storm waves eroded the beach, carrying the liberated sands across the low islands, depositing them in the sounds on the mainland side. By this process, the islands retreated before the advancing sea, dwindling on the ocean side, growing on the sound side, but roughly maintaining their bulk as they moved slowly to the west. At the same time, the sounds were also moving west, inundating more and more of the broad mainland shelf.

Until recent times, nothing opposed that westward march. The evidence of island migration is easy to find on the modern ocean
beach, which is littered with black, fossilized shell fragments. Many of them are from oysters, calm-water clams, and salt-marsh snails, all species now found living in the sounds but not in the ocean. Thousands of years ago, these shellfish were buried in their beds by the moving islands. In recent times, erosion of the ocean beach has exposed them, betraying the former location of the sounds. Beds of peat are also found in some ocean beach locations, likewise testimony to the fact that the sound-side marshes were once further east.

The rising sea sets the stage for migration of the barrier islands, but it is the waves that move the sand. One night I went to the beach to watch the surf, row on row of breaking waves from large swells, six to eight feet from trough to crest. They had been generated days before by storms hundreds of miles out to sea. During a storm, the winds push against the surface of the water, humping it up into waves. These rolling hills of water spread out from the storm like ripples from a pebble thrown into a pond, becoming rounded as they leave the influence of the wind. At this point, they are called swells. Watching from the beach, one sees long dark ridges of water rise up, to grow steeper and steeper as they travel into shallow water. Finally, the drag of the bottom so impedes the motion of the lower part of the wave relative to its top that it “breaks,” with the crest tumbling down into the trough ahead, converting the smooth, green swell into a welter of foam. When this breaking wave reaches the shore, it delivers up the energy originally invested in it by the storm winds. Depending on the shape and size of the waves, they can build up the beach by depositing sand carried from deeper water, or erode it and move it offshore. Generally, beaches build during the summer and erode in the winter.

This cycle is superimposed on the relentless rise of the level of the ocean, about one foot per century. For each foot, the surf line may move 100 to 1000 feet because the slope of the continental shelf is so gradual. With this, hurricanes and the more frequent, strong northeast storms of winter move sand across the islands, and this process is never reversed. Inevitably, nature’s efforts make the islands creep towards the west.

Or did so, until modern times. In recent decades, increasing numbers of people wanting to live on the Outer Banks have tried to stabilize the position and shape of the islands to allow construction of communities and the highways and utility lines to supply them. Since 1933, the federal government has emplaced hundreds of miles of sand fence to form a line of dunes from Currituck Banks in the north to Ocracoke Inlet, paralleling the beach line and “protecting” the highways and houses behind.
Sea oats are growing on the crest of the dune and American beach grass is on the slope.

These fences act just like snow fences. Wind-driven sand, like snow, is dropped when the air-flow is disrupted and dunes of sand result. Extensive plantings of hardy species such as sea oats (Uniola) anchor the sand and stabilize the line of dunes and the islands. Thus, it was thought, could the shifting islands be tied down for continued and profitable human use.

Meanwhile the level of the sea keeps rising, and according to the Geological Survey, “the shoreline of the Outer Banks has been moving toward the mainland at the rate of 3 to 5 feet per year for more than 100 years.”

The Ocean Beach

Near sundown, one of my favorite places is the beach near the north-east end of the island. My wife and I frequently drive there, twelve or thirteen miles from the village, to walk the beach and watch the sunset. The dunes are fringed by sea oats, which grow in clumps and have long, stiff stems topped by a rich plume of seeds by late summer. These plants are decorative, with their gold-colored seeds waving like banners, and people used to collect them for dried flower arrangements. But they are now protected by law on this stretch of coast, because the germination rate of the seed is very low, and they are needed to protect the dunes from wind erosion.

Interspersed among the Uniola and occurring in isolated clumps on the beach side of the dunes is American beach grass (Ammophila). It is hardier in cold climates than Uniola, and is the most common dune stabilizer immediately north of the island and on the shores of the Great Lakes. As sand-bearing wind encounters these plants, the velocity of flow drops below that necessary to carry the sand grains along. This not only prevents the dunes from being blown away, but also adds to their bulk.

The beach is very broad here, perhaps 400 feet from the dune line to the surf. It was that way twenty years ago when we first came
here. In the intervening years, it eroded to become less than 100 feet wide for a considerable time, but now it has rebuilt.

Further up the beach, closer to the inlet, are orderly rows of wooden pilings, all that is left of the life-saving station which served ship-wrecked sailors until 1940 when its function was replaced by a Coast Guard station at the village. In some years, these pilings stand up free like the ancient monoliths found in England and Brittany. At other times, they are lost beneath the drifting sands, and for one year I remember, the beach had so eroded that these pilings projected from the surf.

With no solid foundation—drilling shows the sand and sediment beds here are thousands of feet deep—the islands exist in a state of perpetual change. If one factor is varied, such as the pattern of storms, the island changes shape in response.

Geologists divide the beach into two regions: the backshore, a flat shelf extending from the dunes to the high tide line, and the foreshore, or beach face. The foreshore slopes seaward and extends to the low tide water level. (On this coast, the tide range is about three feet.) The juncture of these zones is called the berm.

On the beach we were visiting, the berm is cluttered by clumps of dried seaweed thrown up by the biggest waves of the last few high tides. My wife, with her artist’s eye attuned to patterns, noted these little piles are so regularly located as to seem placed by plan. To me, the scientist, the sparseness of the weed indicates that there are few offshore weed beds and a relatively clean sandy bottom just off shore. This jibes with the fact that there are very few seashells on this beach, since there is little cover for the mollusks. The backshore is littered with shells, but these are mostly black fossils, from the time when
the island was located further east and this was the bottom of the sound.

The backshore is relatively devoid of life, except near the berm. The ghost crabs dwell here, sand-colored, nocturnal scavengers. Just before sundown, they emerge from their burrows in the sand to prance about as if on tip-toes. Their black eyes perch on the end of stalks, giving them a curious, alert appearance. One night, I came alone to this beach at night, to build a drift-wood fire and cook my dinner. Scores, perhaps hundreds of ghost crabs gathered all around me, just at the edge of the fire-light, rustling and jostling. It was eerie and somewhat disquieting, to sit surrounded by the patient horde.

On the foreshore, where the breaking waves run up to expend the last of the wind energy that made them, is the swash zone. This is the realm of the coquinas and mole crabs. Coquinas are bivalves, a species of clam, no more than a half inch long, delicately and variously colored in bands of red, blue, yellow, violet, brown. I stood in the swash and watched them moving up the beach with the incoming tide. As the run-up from a wave approached, they popped up out of the sand all along the beach and allowed themselves to be washed up the foreshore. When the water slowed, they all upended themselves with a foot extending from the end of the paired shells and burrowed out of sight. Their twin siphons, tiny tubes to take in and expel water, poked above the sand to ingest plankton. After the water receded, the coquinas popped out again for a ride on the next wave.

Mole crabs are egg-shaped, the color of wet sand, an inch or so long. These elusive creatures also live in the swash zone in large colonies, moving up and down the beach with the tide. They also burrow rapidly into the sand and deploy long, feathery antennae with which they filter plankton out of the water. As the name implies, they spend most of their time buried. If someone scoops up a handful of sand in the swash, several mole crabs may spill out.

Too Independent

Too much independence is one of the things that got the islanders in the end. Most of them made some
or all of their living on the water, and water people are cussedly
independent. If you are going to fish in salt water for a living, you get
used to not depending on other people or you drown. And under
those broad skies, you get used to letting your spirit swell up to full
size, not the way mainland people have to live, anxious and scurrying.

But there is a weakness in independence. The islanders could
never agree on any plan. So when the off-islanders came with their
money and need for mainland things like swimming pools and VCR's
and city water, there was no way to resist. They knew the power of
the hive, of organizing and compromising, of focusing attention,
getting out the vote. Their sing-song, lock-step, choir efforts drowned
out the baffled roars of the island folk, who could be surly and baleful
and menacing, but who had no power against the county and the state
and the Big Government, the ones with the guns and cars with blue,
flashing lights, and writs from the court.

If there had been a brawl, if the islanders and off-islanders had
squared off as the shrimpers do sometimes at the dance-hall, full of
beer and bluster, there'd have been no contest. The island men could
lose a tooth or take a broken nose as part of the fun. They didn't need
an orthodontist to maintain their social standing. But they had no
defense against the onslaught of court-orders and statutes and
regulations and mainland law, and, most of all, mainland money.
Each one, alone, turned belly up to the developers and the mainland
money, and they let their land go and watched their taxes go up and
lived to see their children without even a place to set an old trailer.
In the end, it was their independence that did them in.

Of course, you have to give some credit to greed. A few years
ago I talked to an old woman I'd known from my first summer about
the changes happening to the island. She reminisced about the days
when she was a girl, when breakfast might be a few biscuits with
nothing on them, when during stormy weather there might not be
any driftwood to fire the stove and the house was cold and damp and
dark. "But we were happy," she exclaimed. "We never fretted about
doing without, 'cause everybody was the same."

In those days, there was little cash, and a good-sized piece of land
might be traded for a sack of flour or sugar, or some beans. Now,
everything was changed, with land bringing a fortune from the
off-islanders eager to get any scrap for a summer home. She told me
it had made people greedy, even her own kin, and the sense of the
community, of everybody being willing to help the other fellow had
gone. "Now all they care about is who's got the most, and they only
come around to see if I want to sell."

And the skyrocketing land prices had brought huge increases in
taxes. Another widow told me that a lady from one of the big cities
up the beach had offered her a quarter-million for her home, “but what would I do? Go sit in a nurse-home on the mainland?”

It was a pattern seen many times in many places. The vacation crowd discovers an out-of-the-way place where everyone is dirt poor so nothing costs much. It is “unspoiled” because it is remote. But when the tourists and developers get wind of it and it becomes fashionable, land prices shoot up. The natives, overwhelmed that “that old swamp” could be worth money, sell out for what they think is a ridiculous price.

The land money goes for a new pickup, a big refrigerator, a T.V., maybe a new boat motor. Meanwhile the building has started and the vacationers begin to flock, with money to spend. Now there are jobs, waiting table, making beds, cutting grass, fixing, repairing. There’s never been so much money in the little town and everybody is dreaming big and beginning to think business.

At first, no one is too bothered that the tax bill shows a big increase—ten percent up, half-again more the next year. Those summer people want city water and a good fire department. They got real cranky about the time when the alarms went off and most of the volunteers were stone drunk after the big fish fry and the engine broke down, then wouldn’t pump when they finally got it to the scene.
For a while, it looked like the whole village might go up, and dammit, you can’t protect your property that way. These places are worth money! Serious money!

Then the tax doubles. The county commission have discovered that this little old beat-up town that has never paid its way is suddenly a money-maker. Why, we are going to need a lot of revenue to keep those roads up, run all those extra ferries, upgrade the school. Besides, those mainlanders have plenty of money. The businesses will just up their prices and pass the taxes along.

The boom in land values has made everybody in the town who owns any real estate rich on paper. But their pension is still only $325 a month and now the tax bill amounts to more than that. The widow is paper-rich but cash poor. She can’t pay her taxes and she can’t even afford to eat anymore, what with the prices they get down at the store. Nobody fishes anymore. There’s too much money ashore. She can sell out and have a tidy sum, but of course it won’t buy her anything on the island, so she moves to the mainland and sits around alone watching the soap operas and remembering the good old days, when they were all hungry.

**Endings**

This story doesn’t end well. I don’t go to the island anymore. Around the Creek, the old houses have given way to a crowd of multi-story motels and eateries. Everyone seems taken over by the scramble for dollars; there is a frenzy where there used to be peace. One of my old friends died of a heart attack in the midst of an argument over a few feet of shore-front, and the former idealists are now realtors.

One of the most blatant attacks on the character of the island came with the erection of a monstrous four-story brick motel. The builder explained himself in an interview in a recent book: “If it had not been me, it would have been somebody else...” And he went on to talk about the fact that the traveling public today is sophisticated and they want a lot of amenities, that people wanted conveniences, comfort, something to do.

Perhaps it was the swimming pools as much as anything that demonstrated how things were going. Just a half mile away was a stretch of ocean beach, wild beach with nothing on it, that goes for at least fifteen miles, and people wanted a pool. The island had been a place for people who didn’t want a pool, and now it’s full of people who want pools. They are the kind of people who don’t understand wanting to be a little uncomfortable or inconvenienced or a touch afraid. They wear watches and clean shirts and socks and never go barefoot.
Margaret Atwood in Fiction

Mary Grimm

I know I was all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual. (Marian MacAlpin)

I can’t believe I’m on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south... (nameless narrator)

I planned my death carefully; unlike my life, which meandered from one thing to another, despite my feeble attempts to control it. (Joan Foster)

I don’t know how I should live. I don’t know how anyone should live. All I know is how I do live. I live like a peeled snail. (Elizabeth Schoenhof)

It was the day after Jake left. I walked back to the house around five. I’d been over at the market and I was carrying the shopping basket as well as my purse...the muscles in my left shoulder were aching, I hadn’t been keeping up the exercises. (Rennie Wilford)

We slept in what had once been the gymnasium...I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in miniskirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. (Offred)

‘Stephen says time is not a line,’ I say. Cordelia rolls her eyes, as I knew she would. “So?” she says. This answer pleases both of us. It puts the nature of time in its place. (Elaine Risley)

These are the women who inhabit Margaret Atwood’s books, beginning their stories, revealing their needs, self-deprecations, intimations of disaster, unanswered desires—all these troubles being the essence of story, and the list of them adding up to plot. As we read them, we listen.
And why do we? Why read the novels of Margaret Atwood, or any novels at all for that matter, knowing as we do that they are fiction—false?

In a recent book, Roger Schank, a psychology researcher, says that our love for fiction, for stories, is not an acquired taste, but a part of our neurological makeup. Stories are the structure on which memory is built, so we crave stories because our brains need them.

Does this explain the impulse we have to find the writer in her story? There's no denying the fascination of the biographical hunt—the evidence, the trail you can follow from one book to the next, hot on the track of the writer. It's almost as if the reader is looking for some larger story, the story behind the story—the creation myth that belongs to the author. But, on the other hand, is this right? Isn't it a variation of the impulse that makes some of us want to read about the doings of celebrities in The Star or the National Enquirer?

My introduction to Margaret Atwood: I got her first novel, *Edible Woman*, out of the library not too long after it was published in the late sixties. I was reading books by women then, with excitement and desire, because I was a woman, and because I wanted to write. And Atwood's book was just the sort to appeal to me, because of the ferment of the times and in my personal life: the story of a woman, Marian MacAlpin, who is dissatisfied with what has been offered to her, a woman who is looking for a different way to live. I read it fast, pushing for the end as I always do. I read with interest how Marian becomes engaged even though she thought she didn't want to, how although she is sure she is very happy, she is less and less able to tolerate various forms of food. I read with fascination the growing list of foods she finds she can't eat (beef, eggs, rice pudding, even, toward the end, an apathetic carrot) and about the counterplot seduction of a hapless male friend of hers by a woman intent on making him a father. The novel is resolved when Marian makes a woman-shaped cake and offers it to her fiancé, who flees in alarm. I confess I was annoyed. I may have thrown the book down, a bit of harmless acting out. My life then demanded something more definite: I wasn't interested in symbols.

But as the seventies went on, I continued to read novels, a great many of them by women, and Atwood continued to publish. I read one and then another of her books, and sometimes a short story that I came across in a women's magazine or a literary journal. My opinion of her books grew with her increasing skill, and when *The

Her earlier books were somewhat blurred in my memory, but surely, I thought, they hadn't been that wonderful, surely they were very different from Handmaid. I meant to go back and look at them again, but with one thing and another, I didn't think of it again until 1988, when I read her most recent novel, Cat's Eye. I had to go back, I had to see what she'd done, where she'd started. So I began again at the beginning, with Edible Woman, and I read my way through the list of her novels, seven of them, stretching over nineteen years.

I had never before read the works of a writer this way, and I found it illuminating. Reading them all in a row like that, I could note the changes in the writer: her growing attention to craft, each book less clumsy; her experiments with voice and form. I could see reflected in the books the changes in the world as well, the loosening and tightening of society's strictures, the new views and angles that the seventies and then the eighties have brought.

But I noticed more than that. I was by then a writer myself, and a writer reads differently. It is not that a writer is constantly in the critical mode, evaluating rivals, on the alert for bad writing (or good writing that can be assimilated). I continue to read for the pleasure of the story, for the chance to step into someone else's world and live there for a while. But I notice things now that I might not have when I was a novice. At least part of my mind is with the writer as I move through her book: what has she done here? that is very nice, will she take advantage of this theme here? ah, she does...and so on. And this extra set of perceptions combined with the unusual compression of reading nineteen years of novels in less than three months showed me some things about Atwood that I had never noticed before.

There were surprising similarities: in Bodily Harm I read about Rennie's restricted upbringing in a god-bound, narrowly religious town, and realized that Elizabeth's rigid, puritanical Auntie Muriel in Life Before Man was one of that town's natural inhabitants. I listened to the enormously fat Joan Foster in Lady Oracle talk about her use of and hate for food and saw her as sister to Marian, the edible woman. She's using things over again, I said to myself, at first with...
proval. Has she no inventiveness? Must she go over the same ground in each work? But as I read on, I became fascinated at the patterns that emerged, the preoccupations that revealed themselves: with food, with the images that women have of their bodies, with violence—attraction and repulsion, a distrust of women, an identification with men. And there were certain incidents that appeared constantly but in different guises, a pushing, I came to think, for the truth of them.

I found that I could chart the flow and change of experience, Atwood's experience, as shaped by Atwood's consciousness. This was my game for a while, happily making my way through the books with a pen and notebook at hand, noting down connections, cross-references. Her descriptions of food as other things, often disgusting: "guava jelly...of the consistency of ear wax" (*Bodily Harm*); writing with sugar-water to attract ants that spell out words (*Lady Oracle*); rice pudding like maggots in cream (*Edible Woman*). Her images of bodies as other things: as a plant with tentacles, as a toaster (*Bodily Harm*); as a log or a tree (*Surfacing*); as a baby-making machine (*The Handmaid's Tale*). I felt glee when I recognized Josef Hrbik, the Hungarian refugee art teacher who seduces Elaine in *Cat's Eye*, as a darker version of Paul, the refugee Polish count, writer of nurse romances, in *Lady Oracle*. I pondered the significance of the careers Atwood had chosen for her protagonists: three writing-related—advertising (*Marian, Edible Woman*), gothic romance writing (*Joan, Lady Oracle*), feature writing (*Rennie, Bodily Harm*); and the nameless narrator of *Surfacing* is an illustrator, Elaine in *Cat's Eye* a painter—artists, so often stand-ins for their writer-creators. And what is the significance of the odd women out, Elizabeth the museum curator (*Life Before Man*) and the handmaid Offred?

I went on to divide the novels into two groups: hot and cold. The cold novels had a cool surface, a detached voice that recited the facts of the story, holding the reader off, as in *Surfacing*, where the narrator has become more and more frozen into her life, so numb that the disappearance and possible death of her father hardly touch her: she has to re-enact them in order to feel again. The hot novels are intimate, aggressive; the narrator addresses the reader in a confiding, sometimes pushy tone, as in *Lady Oracle*'s Joan Foster, whose life spills out willy-nilly on the page.

I could see Atwood creating and re-creating herself for us on paper, taking her childhood in the north of Canada and making it fit the old log cabin in *Surfacing*: "The house...built on a sand hill, part of a ridge left by the retreat-
ing glaciers; only a few inches of soil and a thin coating of trees hold it down"; or the nomad camping and motel existence of Elaine's family in *Cat's Eye*, whose father is an entomologist looking for infestations of significant caterpillars in the wilderness of Canada.

But before we are writers, we are readers, and before that we are listeners, our ears open for the stories of the world, and ultimately this saved me from cross-referencing myself into a literary corner. Although it would be possible to extract every bit of repeated, reflected, recreated life in a writer's novels, possible to catalogue and arrange it all, computerized perhaps for quick reference, what would I have at the end? A mishmash, a mess. No matter how you dissect, melt down, rearrange, you can't extract the eggs, milk, flour from the completed cake, the iron ore from a roll of stainless steel.

Atwood has written a short story called "Happy Endings," a piece of metafiction that features the multiple plots that might be written about the hypothetical standard characters John and Mary. Near the end she points out that the real plot, the real story is always the same: "John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die." We all know that story. That is not what is interesting; it is the how and why of it that holds us captive in our chairs, turning the page, it is what goes on in between the first word and the last, the permutations that follow "once upon a time."

And as for the writer as reader, what is interesting is how well this other writer is doing it. Is she getting better? Is she an important writer, or merely interesting? Is *Cat's Eye* in 1988 a better book, a better retelling of Margaret Atwood's story than *The Edible Woman* in 1969? Yes, it is.

It is just as fascinating, and just as ultimately useless to look to Margaret Atwood's novels for the story of women in our times as it is to look for the story of Margaret Atwood. Certainly, both these stories are there, or some forms of them are. But that is not my point.

The point is that anyone's activity is autobiographical—not just the work of the writer—that we reproduce in our occupation and in our living the conditions, events of our lives, our parents' lives; the things that formed us form our labors, whatever they may be. If we are engineers, our bridges are autobiographical. If we are married, the shapes and shadows of our parents' marriage can be distinguished in ours. If we dig a ditch, the mark that the shovel makes in the earth tells a story about our life.

The odd thing about writers is that their labor is made of words, and words are the signs we have to explain the world to each other,
and to ourselves. It is difficult, perhaps, to read the Van Sweringens' lives in the lineaments of the Terminal Tower, or Woodrow Wilson's in the League of Nations—although they are there, absolutely: encoded, encrusted with resolutions, reactions, repudiations. But to read a book, to read Margaret Atwood and find the writer in her stories—that is relatively easy. It is written out for us, made plain, in the writer's own voice.

I heard Atwood read from *Cat's Eye* shortly after it was published, at Oberlin College, to a large audience of college students. She read a variety of sections, including one of the most disturbing and powerful parts of the book, about the narrator's attempt to control her life and her pain with self-mutilation. She read in an ironic tone, looking slyly at her audience now and again. And they responded with an intimate attention; amazingly, they laughed. But, I thought, it's not funny. She was reading it to elicit laughter, and I found this disturbing. But now—and this is ever so much more important than whether Margaret Atwood, like her character, bit her skin until it bled—I think the Oberlin students had it right. I think it was the uneasy laughter of recognition, the laughter that allays fear, that says we are all in this together, we are the same. This is the story we are looking for when we read, the story that fits our brains one to another, the story that steals memory from oblivion and enshrines it in words.

**Novels by Margaret Atwood**

*The Edible Woman* (Little Brown, 1969)

*Surfacing* (Simon & Schuster, 1972)

*Lady Oracle* (Simon & Schuster, 1976)

*Life Before Man* (Simon & Schuster, 1979)

*Bodily Harm* (Simon & Schuster, 1982)

*The Handmaid's Tale* (Houghton Mifflin, 1985)

*Cat's Eye* (Doubleday, 1988)
Rarae Aves
Drawings by Peter Baker

As a child I was an avid student of bird behavior in the forests of coastal California and the bogs of central Georgia. Hence birds of various types, all unreal, often figure in my drawings. The humanomorphic drawings are usually comments upon people I have known and often disliked. The drawings have no objective significance however. They are made to break the monotony of miniature shipmodel construction, which is my primary interest, although I am presently employed as a university teacher because drawing and model building don't pay well.

I have studied with William E. Berg and Wilbur B. Quay, and my geometric tendencies are strongly influenced by Richard M. Eakin; all three are now retired. My intense use of fine detail was inspired by the drawings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Spanish illustrator and political activist Santiago Ramón y Cajal.

The drawings were made with 0.13 and 0.18 millimeter Rotring drawing pens from Koh-i-noor Rapidograph Inc. Magnification was provided by a 3.5x binocular magnifier which clips on to a pair of single correction eyeglasses. I have used various papers over the years, but recently Grumbacher Artcraft All-Purpose heavyweight white drawing paper has been employed because of its superior ability to withstand the tearing action of the very sharp pens I use. Illumination is provided by a small halogen lamp with a spring-loaded adjustable arm.

—Peter Baker

Peter C. Baker, a native of San Francisco, received a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of California at Berkeley. He is now a professor, teaching embryology, in the biology department at Cleveland State University. His drawings on the following pages are reproduced full size.
Catbird.

Melancholy Bird.

Injured Bird.

Diving Bird.
The Bearded Stranger in Formal Attire.

Dancing Alone.

Spring Festival Dancer.
Back Off Man
You're Too Piercing!

There!
New Directions in Music
A young composer surveys developments in concert music since 1950

Eleanor F. Trawick

In 1941, shortly after his arrival in the United States, Igor Stravinsky completed an arrangement and orchestration of The Star-Spangled Banner in homage to his newly adopted country. When the composer sent the manuscript to Eleanor Roosevelt as a gift, she refused it, and Stravinsky also encountered legal difficulties, stemming not from copyright infringement but from a law against "tampering with national property." Stravinsky remarked, "My major seventh chord in the second strain of the piece, the part patriotic ladies like best, must have embarrassed some high official."1

Half a century later, all that fuss over a major seventh chord seems rather quaint. The years following the Second World War saw radical changes in music, not just in the sounds coming out of the concert hall, but even in the way composers thought about their craft. Many composers set out to extend and refine the twelve-tone technique developed by Arnold Schoenberg in the 1920s. Others (and sometimes the same composers) staged an assault on the boundaries defining "music," expanding that term to include aspects of stage performance, chance, noise—anything imaginable and then some. Musical Dadaism flourished: LaMonte Young’s Composition 1960 no. 5 provides a relatively inoffensive example:

Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.
When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside.
The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away."2
The more academic composers of the era may have scorned this sort of gimmickry, but they shared with the Dadaists an indifference to (if not outright disdain for) audience reactions. In 1958, Milton Babbitt published a now notorious article in *High Fidelity* magazine. "Who Cares If You Listen?" argues that the gulf between audiences and composers is natural, even advantageous, since it will allow the increasingly scientific investigations of composers to proceed unhindered by aspirations to popularity. Babbitt's essay was an extreme statement, but it merely took sentiments already widespread among composers to their logical next step.

Today there is less talk than thirty years ago about "revolutions" in music. Rather, the trend is towards synthesis and consolidation—neither of which, however, need imply conservatism. The many compositional schools that competed a generation ago seem to have blurred together, particularly in the United States. Many composers still use the highly organized serial composition techniques that predominated after the Second World War. Some composers have made increasing use of electronic and computer technology over the last twenty-five years, resulting in a very different sort of music from what had gone before. Still other composers have turned away from these modernist paths to write "minimal" music based on repeating harmonic patterns, or performance pieces, or music that in one way or another bridges the gap between the "serious" and the "popular."

**Serialism**

Perhaps the technique most daunting to concert audiences over the past fifty years has been serialism, which grows out of the twelve-tone system of Schoenberg and his students Alban Berg and Anton Webern. A twelve-tone piece is based on a *series*, or row (sometimes more than one)—a particular arrangement of all twelve pitches (i.e., on a piano, all the white and black keys in an octave). Here, for example, is the initial series of Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1926):

![Serial series example](image)
The composer may transpose the series, play it backwards or in an inverted (upside-down) form, or may sometimes only use fragments of it, so that the whole series is not literally present. Twelve-tone composition is sometimes interpreted as meaning that "you cannot use a note again until you have used all the other eleven." But because the series may take many different forms, in actual practice this is rarely the case even in a small section of a piece. In fact, a twelve-tone row is less a series of notes than one of intervals (distances between notes). The series from the Lyric Suite is a very special one because it contains all the possible intervals; different forms of the row will retain this property even though the actual notes may be completely different.

In twelve-tone technique the highness or lowness of the notes is assumed not to matter. Every C is equivalent, whether it is middle C or the C at the high end of the piano keyboard. Twelve-tone manipulations require viewing the notes not as a scale, where one note is below another, but as a continuous circle.

More recent composers have extended serial principles to features other than pitch, such as the duration, loudness, register, and instrumentation of notes. As serialism became more all-encompassing and as composers tried to develop more fully the relations they had set up within their materials, pieces became ever denser and more complex. If it is difficult to hear the working-out of a row of twelve pitches in, say, a Schoenberg piano piece, it is virtually impossible to understand what is happening in one of Pierre Boulez's orchestral scores, where several different series are interacting. Most composers would explain that they do not expect audiences to follow the serial developments in their works, that the surface features—the interplay of instruments, the changing colors, the shape of the lines—are still important, and that the serial structure
is more a source of raw material than a means of producing a finished product.

By itself the use or absence of serial techniques cannot predict what a piece will sound like, whether it is valuable or not, or even whether it is accessible to an audience, any more than can the presence or absence of tonal relations. Serial compositions do tend, though, to throw overboard the familiar features of nineteenth-century music. Melody is fragmentary, even pointillistic. The complicated rhythms obscure any sense of a regular beat. The music frequently demands great technical virtuosity from the performers. And the mathematical nature of serial procedures makes it easy, particularly for second-rate musicians, to compose music of purely cerebral rather than sensual appeal.

Some have carried these tendencies to their logical conclusion. English composer Brian Ferneyhough, for example, generates pieces from many layers of mathematically derived relations. His three Time and Motion Studies frankly compare the performers' task (and, some would say, that of the audience!) to the frenzied and mind-numbing gyrations demanded of production workers by Frederick Taylor's system of scientific management. Pieces like this one have (understandably) given serial music a reputation for being utterly incomprehensible, and unfortunately it is the sort of reputation that can become a self-fulfilling prophecy for all serial pieces.

On the whole, though, the trend in recent years—in the music of Peter Westergaard and Donald Martino, for instance—has been towards greater simplicity and a closer connection of surface features to the deeper musical structure. Charles Wuorinen's music, though usually grounded in serial techniques, is almost neoclassical, not in the way it sounds, but in the composer's willingness to consider development, form, and texture by analogy with the music of the past. Without being in the least backward-looking, Wuorinen's music...
demonstrates his assertion that the tonal and serial systems can be seen as constituting a larger whole. There is a constant concern with balance and symmetry, with building up and then releasing tension, with coherence and economy of materials. For Wuorinen, these considerations have the force of natural laws, and they cannot be annulled just because contemporary composers declare them outmoded.

*The Blue Bamboula,* for example, a piano piece of Wuorinen’s from 1980, is an engaging work which plays wittily with the conventions of virtuoso solo technique. The crashing octaves and *tremolo* passages and the lightning-fast runs up and down the keyboard recall the flourishes of late Romantic piano concerti. Consonant intervals—thirds and fifths—create a full, almost tonal, harmony. More recent works by Wuorinen, such as his *Third String Quartet,* likewise seem to refer to the music of the past, asking which of its conventions and materials are still serviceable for music today.

**The New Technology**

Electronics and computers have played a growing role in the new music. It was predicted at one point that, as machines became more and more refined, live performance (in more than one sense of the word) would become obsolete. Fortunately nothing of the sort has happened. Composers have used technology both to create newer and more flexible sounds and to aid in the actual composition of works. First analog electronic studios and later computer technology seemed to promise composers the ability to create any imaginable sound. Once one understood the acoustic properties of a sound, the argument went, it would be possible both to synthesize it and to manipulate and develop it in new and profound ways.

The quest proved to be more difficult than anticipated, however. Natural sounds turned out to be far richer and less predictable than their bare mathematical approximations. Furthermore, proficiency in electronics and (especially) computers requires a long apprenticeship—one which is initially far removed from most composers’ real musical interests.

The spread of personal computers and the availability of commercial synthesizers, designed for pop musicians but useful for composers of concert music as well, gave a boost to computer music. Now even small university music programs have access to computer technology, and many composers can afford their own desktop digital synthesis systems.

Computer-synthesized music is too diverse to categorize except very broadly by the technique of its production. John Chowning, who pioneered many of the basic synthesis techniques, uses the computer
to create delicate, constantly evolving washes of complex sounds in works such as \textit{Stria} and \textit{Phoné}. Some of Charles Dodge's most interesting pieces (\textit{Speech Songs}, \textit{The Story of Our Lives}) rely on digital transformation of spoken texts to produce eerie hybrids of song and speech. Roger Reynolds has worked extensively with digital processing of instrumental sounds. And Paul Lansky's more recent compositions embed digitally processed speech within appealing rhythmic music; his pieces such as \textit{Idle Chatter} have had enough popular appeal to play on commercial radio.

Digital processing of "live" sounds, whether of voices or instruments, has been a fruitful source of materials. The sounds are recorded digitally—broken down into numerical "samples" (about 40,000 per second). The computer can then perform various transformations of the sampled sound, to produce music in which the original source can be heard, only in a strangely altered form: broken up, filtered, many layers of the same material combined, and so forth.

A fundamental handicap of computer-made music is that it lacks the excitement and human interaction of live performance. But computers have also been used to control and enhance the sounds produced by musicians playing before an audience. Todd Machover, a young composer at M.I.T. with a flair for creative uses of technology, has helped to develop several "hybrid instruments" such as a digital "cello" that takes performance cues from subtle differences in the player's hand position and bow pressure; he has also designed a glove equipped with sensors that let a musician "direct" various

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{wood_blocks_sound.png}
\caption{Sound wave of computer-generated "wood blocks." What we hear are rapid variations (oscillations) in the air pressure, often at a regular frequency. This diagram shows the oscillations of pressure plotted against the time elapsed (about a quarter of a second, total). Each of the large triangular shapes represents one striking of the wood blocks, a sound that is loudest at the beginning and decays rapidly. The first of these wood block sounds is low pitched; the waves are far enough apart that one can count them easily. The second is much higher: the frequency of oscillation is much greater.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fourier_transform.png}
\caption{Fourier transform. This is a "snapshot" of one moment from the "wood-block" sound—a segment right at the beginning of the first note. The tall spike towards the left marks where most of the energy of the sound is concentrated—around one narrow fundamental frequency. There are other peaks, shorter and less well-defined, on other frequencies close to the principal one.}
\end{figure}
digital instruments.

The use of computers to make compositional decisions, rather than simply as a sound source, began in this country in the mid-1950s with Lejaren Hiller and Leonard Isaacson's *Illiac Suite*. Hiller and Isaacson programmed a computer with detailed instructions and various possibilities for "composing" a piece, then transcribed the numerical output into traditional notation. In Europe at around the same time, Iannis Xenakis began using the computer to fill in the details of pieces whose large-scale, statistical features he himself set. In this sort of "algorithmic composition," Xenakis might, for example, specify that the overall range of a section of music steadily expands, while the number of notes per measure increases; running the program several times would produce several different versions of the passage, from which he would select (and possibly revise) the one that best suited his intentions.

Like digital sound processing, computer-aided composition has benefited from the spread of personal computers, as well as their increasing speed and power, although it has remained in many ways a poor cousin, less well funded and less explored. Younger American composers such as James Tenney and Laurie Spiegel have created surprising and interesting works using the computer as a compositional tool.

"New Sounds"

Repetitive or "minimal" music emerged in the United States in the mid-1960s, although its roots go back to the hypnotic, simple music of John Cage, LaMonte Young, and others from the previous decade. A minimalist work typically consists of short musical fragments, often clearly in a major key, which are repeated over and over as slight changes are gradually introduced. The interest lies not in the simple materials themselves, but in the gradual process of their evolution. Minimalism has gained considerable popularity and is perhaps the only contemporary concert music to be financially successful, thanks to its familiar harmonies and regular rhythms. Philip Glass's operas (*Einstein on the Beach*) and movie scores (*Powaqqatsi, Koyaanisqatsi*) have been enormously successful, as has the music of his younger colleague John Adams, who is best known for his opera *Nixon in China*.

Steve Reich was one of the first to write in this style and he has written some of the more adventurous minimal music. Reich has written about the idea of "music as a gradual process"—music where the actual sound from moment to moment is less important than the gradual process of change. His early works such as *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain* reflect this approach. Both consist of tape loops of
short vocal fragments which start out together but gradually become more and more out of phase; normal speech slowly and imperceptibly becomes an incomprehensible hum. Reich's later instrumental works such as *Four Organs* and the recent *Different Trains* use more familiar musical materials. *Different Trains* combines fragments of recorded speech with instrumental lines that imitate their rhythm and melodic shape. Recordings of train sounds provide a background. In one movement he portrays the trains he rode "from New York to Los Angeles" as a boy, and in the next the very "different trains" that German Jews were riding in the same period. The third movement combines elements of the first two.

Of particular interest are composers who have combined quasi-minimalist technique with more complex materials. Pauline Oliveros is known for her many mixed-media works, usually characterized by their slow pace and ritualistic, mystical quality. Many of her recorded works are for one or more accordions, which she herself plays. Some European composers, such as Louis Andriessen and Per Norgård (from Holland and Denmark, respectively) have used minimalist processes, but with more dissonant, sometimes Stravinskian, harmonies and more overtly dramatic shapes. Andriessen's *Hoketus* is about as minimal as a piece can get, and may exhaust the listener's patience before its twenty-odd minutes are up. His opera *De Staat* is

Excerpt from Steve Reich's *Piano Phase* (1980), a minimalist piece for two pianos or two marimbas. The double vertical lines with the pairs of dots mean that the material between the symbols is to be repeated the number of times indicated (4 to 8 times for measure 1, 12 to 18 times for measure 2, etc.). The symbol that looks like a percent sign means that the material is the same as the previous measure. The first player starts with a repeated figure, and is then joined by the second player, playing in unison. In the third measure, the second player speeds up ever so slightly, so that by the fourth measure the two are playing one note "out of phase." The piece continues in this manner.

Chart of speech material from the first two movements of *Different Trains*. Steve Reich. Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79176-2. Reproduced by permission.
more fully developed, but difficult to classify, for it fuses a number of contemporary styles.

John Schaefer has written of "a new type of modern music: music that falls into the gray areas between classical and rock, ethnic and jazz, Eastern and Western, electronic and acoustic." Some examples of performance art, in particular, fall into this gray area of "new sounds" and merit inclusion even in a survey of more academic music, since the composers address many of the same concerns as even the most rigorous serialist. Meredith Monk's theater pieces combine the composer's brilliant extended vocal technique with quasi-minimalist instrumental lines: the Dolmen Music and Turtle Dreams albums are large, composite structures. Laurie Anderson's performance pieces are more technologically oriented and include such striking effects as the live digital processing of her voice. Anderson's works, including the massive United States set, consist of surreal narratives with ironic musical accompaniment and interludes, referring to styles from Motown to minimalism.

Music has never been as diverse or as free from restrictions as it is today. If this variety has sometimes made it harder for young composers to find their own voice, it has also resulted in new discoveries and combinations. As with any experimental art form, the rapid developments in music have frequently left audiences bewildered, or even hostile. In past centuries, the most sophisticated art music shared a common
language—of harmony, melody, and rhythm—with music intended only as entertainment. Since the Second World War, this link seems to have been permanently severed. Most audiences in 1791 probably expected little more than pretty melodies and lively rhythms from concerts. Mozart’s symphonies gave them that, while containing much, much more. But the audiences in 1991 who go to a new music concert expecting entertainment will be disappointed. Most of the music they will hear will be unfamiliar, demanding active rather than passive listening.

Few composers today would be willing to adopt Babbitt’s “Who Cares If You Listen?” stance. From a purely financial point of view, experimental music is not profitable and will always depend on classical music patrons. And most composers do care if audiences listen. In the 1950s and 1960s, many musicians envied the prestige (and financial support) of the sciences, and a certain segment of the avant-garde worked to turn music into a science of sounds—experimental music in a very literal sense of the term. Today most composers think of their music in a more traditional way: like any art, it is an attempt to communicate.

Communication is a two-way street, and it requires a certain amount of good will from both sides. Audiences must learn to rate concerts on more than their entertainment value, and must be willing to listen actively to pieces—and even to listen more than once before passing judgment. By the same token, composers must be willing to take the time to teach their listeners what to expect and what to look for in their music. The arrogant assumption that the value of a piece is always in inverse proportion to its accessibility and popularity, and the rude insistence that “this piece requires no explanation, my music speaks for itself” are simply not acceptable.

Even the most modern composers share with concert audiences a delight in and reverence for the music of the past. All of us learned this music first. We learned to play it and to understand it because we enjoyed it, and we became composers because we admired those who had gone before. When the gulf between the new music and the traditional audience seems unbridgeable, it is worth remembering how much we share. We came from the same place, and we can find each other again.

Notes


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**Discography**

The purpose of this list is to refer readers to recordings of some of the works discussed in the article. I have restricted the list to titles mentioned in the article, or to the most recent or representative of composers' works. Where a recording is available in different formats, I have given the catalog number of the CD.


Reynolds, Roger. *From Behind the Unreasoning Mask, New World* 237. "...the serpent-snapping ey," CRI SD-495.


Tenney, James. *Saxony*, CRI SD-528.

Westergaard, Peter. *Mr. and Mrs. Discobolus*, CRI S-271.


An Inside View
Four Essays by Adam Starchild

During the past decade The Gamut has published a number of articles about crime, usually from the perspective of the courts, law enforcement officers, or ordinary citizens. Recently we received several essays from the perspective of someone inside the system, whose views are different. Mr. Starchild, whose four short essays follow, is serving a ten-year sentence for mail fraud and income tax fraud. Although we do not necessarily share his opinions or agree with his indictment of the system, we believe that this "inside" view provides a salutary questioning of popularly accepted ideas about crime and punishment.

—The Editors

U.S. Imports Criminals

The United States government is now importing foreign criminals to make up statistics and keep the drug enforcement bureaucracy in business. This new technique wastes taxpayers' money while the bureaucrats try to make themselves look good. It involves inflating the statistics and clogging the judicial system and prisons, by bringing in drug carriers who had no intention of ever entering the United States.

Many commercial airline flights between Latin America and Europe make unscheduled and unannounced refueling stops in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Normally when this happens in international aviation—and it is a routine event in all countries—the passengers either stay on board, or are taken to a secure transit lounge adjoining the plane.

But the U.S. Customs and the Drug Enforcement Administration are using this opportunity to search the passengers and baggage. Not surprisingly, they often find cocaine. Such passengers are then taken off the plane, charged with drug smuggling, and invariably receive a long federal prison sentence—often twelve or fifteen years. New prisoners are then flown to a federal prison in the United States, since there are no federal prisons in Puerto Rico. This costs the U.S. taxpayer approximately $20,000 per year for the imprisonment, plus the cost of the trial, which could be in the tens of thousands of dollars,
and much more if the accused puts up a real fight. Later there is the cost of immigration detention after the prison sentence, an immigration hearing or two, and the cost of deportation, including airfare back to the country of origin.

The case of Jorge Aguilar-Pena, a 30-year-old Colombian prisoner at the Sandstone federal prison in Minnesota, well illustrates the point. Aguilar was on board a Lufthansa German Airlines flight from Bogota to Zurich, with a stop at Frankfurt. There was no mention of a stop at San Juan. When the plane landed at San Juan, a few ounces of cocaine were found in the toe of Aguilar’s shoes. He received a four-year prison sentence, almost double the sentence recommended by the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The extra time was because the judge said he wanted it to be a deterrent to future smugglers, which is ridiculous since they don’t know about it, and since Aguilar wasn’t even trying to come to the U.S., much less smuggle here.

Aguilar’s case will cost the U.S. taxpayers at least $100,000. For this $100,000 a few agents at Customs and the DEA got to falsify their statistics and help make it look like San Juan is a hotbed of the international narcotics trade, thus justifying more money for that field office’s budget.

For no tax money at all, Aguilar could have been left on the plane unsearched and the German or Swiss authorities could have dealt with their own problems at their own expense—if they cared to be bothered. Multiply Aguilar by many arrests per week and you have an idea of the endless cost to the taxpayers. There are about 40 similar cases at Sandstone—about 5% of that prison’s population.

Apart from the dollar cost to the American taxpayer, there is a cost to our fundamental concepts of law and justice. One of the basic principles of American law is that there must be an intent to commit a crime before a person can be convicted of it. How can a person who never expected to be in the United States possibly have the intent to commit a crime here?

They might have intended to commit one in Europe, but that isn’t the same thing, nor is it an American problem. There is no reason for the American taxpayers to keep Europe drug-free. This type of activity by the government slowly erodes the government’s claim to be effectively fighting against drugs. And what would happen if other countries started kidnapping American citizens who happened to be flying through their airspace?
Confessions

Under American law, there is no requirement that confessions be written and signed, or recorded electronically. This may seem rather trivial, but when about half of all criminal convictions in the United States are achieved by use of a confession, it is not quite so insignificant. In America any policeman, informer, or common citizen can just raise his right hand in court and swear that another individual "confessed" having committed a crime, and this testimony will be treated as if the witness were swearing he had witnessed the crime.

If the jury believes the witness, it will render a guilty verdict. If it disbelieves the witness, it will render a verdict of not guilty. No evidence need be offered to support the confession. The only requirement is that proof must be offered that a crime was indeed committed.

Thus, if a bank were robbed by a man wearing a ski mask and reflective sunglasses, and the police made an arrest, and two witnesses were to testify at the trial: one the bank teller, whose testimony establishes that the bank was indeed robbed, and two, a policeman who testifies that the defendant made a full confession at the police station after his arrest—the burden of proof would then shift to the defendant to prove that he was innocent. If he could not convince the jury that he did not rob the bank, it would likely believe the testimony of the policeman who said that the defendant confessed to having robbed the bank.

This sad state of affairs is exacerbated by the fact that policemen and informers are both testifying for money (while a bank teller is not). Thus, while it is very rare that a bank teller would fabricate a story before the jury, among policemen and informers it is close to the norm—even in cases where a long investigation has produced reams of irrefutable evidence to the contrary in the form of videotapes, still photos, audio recording, fingerprints, and other evidence.

The policeman cannot help but paint the person he arrested as blacker than he really is; and the informer cannot help but lie on the witness stand for his "handlers"—lest they decide that his help was not valuable enough to reward, either in cash or on the day of his own sentencing.

Because of the fact that confessions figure so prominently in American jurisprudence, and because so few of them are recorded in any way, this issue should be highly controversial in the public debate over our system of law. But it is not, and in fact, very few Americans are even aware that a confession need not be written and
signed or tape-recorded before it can be admitted as evidence. And when sitting on a jury, they tend to believe every word of testimony against the accused, even if there is something strange about a policeman testifying that a certain individual “made a full confession down at the station” but that “it was not tape-recorded.”

So subtle and adroitly handled is the introduction and use of oral confessions, that the jury, the press, and the public are not even aware that no other evidence was introduced to show that the defendant ever confessed to anything.

As the prosecuting attorney examines his witness with a series of questions, the witness recounts a story that dovetails nicely with the facts of the case... a ski mask... sunglasses... etc. Then it is the defense attorney’s chance to cross-examine the witness. But what is he supposed to ask? Trying to prove innocence by asking a policeman or informer questions is largely a futile endeavor, especially since they have had a practice run at the pretrial evidentiary hearings in order to get their stories straight.

The true issue before the jury is whether any confession took place at all. And here is where a great fraud takes place. The defense attorney is prohibited from raising this issue before the jury. He is prohibited from asking: “How do we know that you are telling the truth? What evidence do you have that this man ever confessed to anything? Why didn’t you tape-record the interrogation? Doesn’t your police station have a tape recorder?... a video recorder?”

For those who say that there is no law prohibiting any defense attorney or criminal defendant from asking these questions, I agree that there is no specific section of the penal code which prohibits this line of questioning. But American criminal case law is well settled that a confession need not be written and signed, nor recorded electronically, and this is the great loophole through which vast quantities of perjured testimony pour every year. Any defense attorney who tries to raise this issue will quickly hear an “objection” by the prosecuting attorney, and a “sustained” by the judge.

The Altering of Court Transcripts

When other inmates first told me that their court transcripts had been altered, I simply didn’t believe them. Subsequently, I have discovered several published appeal cases in which altered transcripts were an issue: this most sacred obligation to report accurately is routinely breached.

In the Court of the Judiciary of Alabama, Case No. 21, “In the Matter of Charles M. Nice, Jr., Circuit Judge of the Tenth Judicial
Circuit of Alabama," the judge was suspended for six months for ordering the court reporter to delete large portions of a family court transcript.

A criminal defendant brought an action against a Wisconsin state circuit judge and the judge's clerk and court reporter for creating an entirely fictitious transcript and certifying that a hearing took place that was never held. The U.S. District Court dismissed the suit on the basis of absolute judicial immunity, and, on appeal, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago (case 810 F. 2d 723 [1987] for those who want to read it for themselves) held that the judge, court reporter, and clerk were cloaked by the traditional doctrine of judicial immunity.

Perhaps the most famous case of an altered transcript was in the United States Supreme Court in 1957 (354 US 156) in a habeas corpus appeal by the notorious Caryl Chessman. Shortly after the conclusion of the trial, the court reporter died without having completed transcription of a substantial part of his shorthand notes. A substitute reporter, a relative by marriage of the prosecutor, completed the transcription in collaboration with the prosecutor and police officers who had been witnesses at the trial. The record was settled in proceedings in which Chessman was not represented either in person or by counsel. Upon this record the Supreme Court of California affirmed the conviction. Remember, this was a death penalty case and Chessman was executed!

Neither the public nor the press, nor any criminal defendant or his attorney has the right to bring tape recorders into any federal court, and this rule is enforced by the threat of a criminal contempt citation and verified by metal detectors at the front entrance to the courthouse. Most state courts do not have metal detectors—yet—but they rely on hand-held metal detectors to screen out tape recorders on a case-by-case basis. The right to prevent the public and the press from bringing tape recorders into the courthouse has been
upheld on appeal on numerous occasions over the last twenty years. In addition, every several years, a court reporter is caught doctoring transcripts, and, on appeal, state and federal judges everywhere are granting them absolute judicial immunity. Why not give bank tellers absolute immunity for stealing money from the till? Shouldn't airline pilots have immunity for drinking on the job?

Doctoring transcripts is a form of obstruction of justice, and is tantamount to perjury, but those laws apply only to the public and to defense attorneys, not to government personnel.

It should be noted that airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration have no qualms about allowing passengers on commercial aircraft to bring and use different kinds of electronic equipment despite the possible risk of interfering with airplane communications. If a tape recorder or a video camera or a laptop computer is no danger on an airliner, then why should it be a danger in a courthouse—unless it is because they cannot allow the press and the public to have an accurate record of the proceedings?

It seems obvious that the claim that cameras interfere with the dignity of the courtroom is a red herring, designed to conceal the real issue of the doctoring of court transcripts by judges and prosecuting attorneys, especially the latter.

Make Victims the Focus

There are nearly a million Americans behind bars. Unless priorities are changed, by the end of 1992 American prisons will hold more people than the states of Alaska, Wyoming, Vermont, Delaware, Montana, or Nevada. We have, right now, the equivalent of the population of North Dakota behind bars.

All over the country, prisons are full to overflowing. Most people seem to equate getting tough on crime with putting more people in jail for more infractions, but few people want to pay the price, either in higher taxes or in the inconvenience and potential danger involved in having a jail or prison near their homes or businesses.

It is time to ask hard questions about the situation that has evolved in the United States and much of the Western world, wherein we rely on imprisonment as virtually the only way to deal with crime. Such reliance leads to prison overcrowding, often does not serve justice, and almost always results in unsatisfactory treatment of the actual victim.

It is surprising to most people that early legal systems which form the foundation of Western law emphasized the need for offenders and their families to settle with victims and their families.
Thus Old Testament law, the Code of Hammurabi, Greek, Roman, and early Anglo-Saxon law all emphasized compensation and restitution directly to the victim of a crime.

The focus changed with the Norman conquest of England. William the Conqueror, as part of a political struggle to entrench his power, took control of the process of handling crimes. His son, Henry I, consolidated his power by defining a crime, not as an offense against a specific victim, but as an offense “against the king’s peace.” Thus criminal punishments were no longer viewed primarily as ways of restoring the victims of crime, but instead as means of redressing the “injury” to the king.

This concept allowed Henry to enrich his treasury by taking a portion of the compensation due a crime victim under the old Anglo-Saxon code. Over time, the amount confiscated from the victim increased, and eventual restitution was seldom ordered—the defendant was simply fined.

Under such a system, the victim has no remedy except in civil court. His only function is to serve as a witness. Criminal actions today are brought in the name of “the people” instead of the actual victim.

If we worried more about restoring the victim than the injured dignity of the state, we might find that justice would require less jail and more restitution. If we went a step further and were careful to define as crimes only actions in which a specific complaining victim can be identified, we would find our problems of jail overcrowding dissolving in the universal solvent of common sense.
Hungry? How about some roasted conger eel or palmworms basted with orange juice? Prefer your food fried? Try some battered sheep trotters, brain cakes, or deep-fried turtle. Too fattening? Taste some broiled puppy, creamed fish roe, stewed squirrel, or poached skate liver on toast. Enough to take away your appetite? Then why do you pay good money to eat baked snails, fried oysters, and raw fish eggs (caviar)? Why, in fact, does anyone choose to eat certain foods while rejecting others? Are people’s food preferences based on rational considerations or entirely the result of cultural insulation?

Why some people eat one thing and refuse another is inherently fascinating. Nutritionists and dieticians, social scientists, policymakers, and members of the food industry approach this question with zeal. Anthropologists doing fieldwork among South American Indians or Pacific islanders have had personal exposure to unaccustomed foods and seemingly-bizarre food-related practices. When anthropologists say “food is good to eat and good to think,” they are referring to more than just their own enthusiasm for their adventures in eating. They are also referring to the increasingly wide knowledge their colleagues have gathered about the relationship that people’s food practices have to their other customs and beliefs.

Beliefs and behaviors related to food and eating have important cultural implications within all societies. Besides its utilitarian function of sustaining life and growth, food has social and symbolic value. Food is a primary mechanism for initiating and solidifying social ties of kinship, friendship, and political alliance. It serves as a medium of economic exchange, an indicator of gender roles, a marker of social boundaries and social rank, a measure of a society’s well-being, and a central focus for enculturating individuals with group customs. Because of food’s centrality in the social life of any society, anthropologists have carefully studied the social and cultural factors that influence food selection.
The food selection process

By definition, food is any ingested substance that provides the nutrients necessary to maintain life and growth. While most mammals limit their diet to either plant or animal food, human beings regularly utilize both. As a result, the variety of foods that humans eat is enormous. They eat animals that range in size from ants and termites to giraffes and whales. They eat snakes and rodents, blood, cows' tongues and intestines, monkeys' brains and sheep's eyes. Sometimes they even eat other humans. They eat leaves, berries, flowers, stalks, and roots. Occasionally, they ingest clay and laundry starch. They eat food that is raw, baked, boiled, roasted, fried, sautéed, or even rotted. Humans eat almost anything that does not swallow them first (Farb and Armelagos 1980, 197).

Given the wide array of potential food, perhaps it is not surprising that people in all societies select, consume, and utilize only certain portions of the available food supply. But why are certain foods selected while others are ignored? Particular foods are not themselves innately edible or inedible. Foods rejected by one culture may be treasured in another. For example, while insects and rodents are generally anathema to Western palates, Australian aborigines regularly munch on grubs; Japanese devour fried bees; tribal people in southern India trap rats for food; and termites, caterpillars, and ants form a regular part of the diet of some American Indians and West Africans. While in contemporary U.S. society people can be jailed for not feeding their pet dogs, in China people feed upon them.

The process of selection that determines which foods finally reach the table can be viewed as an intersection of various ecological, technological, social, psychological, and cultural factors. Within any given geographical environment, some factors affect the ease and reliability of obtaining, transporting, storing, distributing, and preparing various foods. The nineteenth-century inventions of mechanical refrigeration and vacuum-packing, for example, made fresh foods more convenient and affordable for British working-class laborers who had clustered in cities at the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

For any society, the socioeconomic and political systems play instrumental roles in controlling the production and distribution of food. In traditional, small-scale hunting-gathering societies such as the !Kung Bushmen of Africa's Kalahari desert, the production of
food is for subsistence only and everyone shares in its quest. Typically, the women gather roots and berries while the men hunt animals. Food distribution is based on reciprocity and kinship. Because these societies are both small and egalitarian, food is shared among all members of the group and everyone eats approximately the same food.

Not all societies share so equitably. In certain Melanesian and New Guinean societies where political offices are neither inherited nor elected, a type of leader known as a "big man" utilizes his feast-giving power to gain political followers. Driven by a desire for prestige and approval, the big man gains status (and, thus, a band of loyal followers) by performing acts that demonstrate both his ability to accumulate wealth and his generosity. Superior status, in these societies, is accorded to whoever can sponsor a large number of feasts in his lifetime. Resembling the potlatches which operated in aboriginal times among the Kwakiutl Indians of the northwest coast of British Columbia, this system requires a surplus of food to be produced and then redistributed by aspiring big men among society members through celebratory "competitive feasting."

Each feast requires an intensive planning and preparation effort on the part of the potential big man. He urges relatives, friends, and neighbors to grow more yams, increase the size of their pig herds, catch more fish, and collect more banana leaves and coconuts for him in order to enlarge the quantity of food he can display at the feast. One such feast observed among the Koaka-speaking people of the Solomon Islands included 250 pounds of dried fish, 3000 yam and coconut cakes, 11 large bowls of yam pudding, and 8 pigs, all of which was produced by the extra effort organized by the young man hosting the feast (Harris 1978, 99-100). In addition, some of the guests who anticipated the success of the host brought presents of food. These contributions raised the total to 300 pounds of fish, 5000 cakes, 19 bowls of pudding, and 13 pigs. This wealth of food was divided into 257 portions (not all of which were equal), one for every person who contributed labor or food for the feast. The host himself kept only the remnants, satisfied that social prestige was a sufficient reward.

These feasts—which are considered successful only if guests can "eat until they [are] stupefied, stagger off into the bush, stick their fingers down their throats, vomit, and come back for more" (Harris 1978, 95)—often are considered to be bizarre examples of conspicuous consumption which enable rival hosts to judge each other by the amount of food they provide. They have, however, a rational explanation as well. Competitive feasting raises the level of food production to provide safety in case of crop failures or war. In societies that lack formal political institutions capable of integrating
independent villages, it also helps to pool the productive effort of larger populations. Finally, it helps equalize fluctuations in productivity among villages occupying different microenvironments, since the biggest feasts each year occur where rainfall, temperature, and humidity have been most favorable (Harris 1978, 101).

The relationship between the political system and the food system is very different in large-scale, modern, industrialized societies. In the United States, governmental food policies affecting food production and distribution often reflect political pressures. For instance, U.S. federal farm subsidies, federally-funded food programs, and even the federal government’s Basic Four Food Group model of nutritional recommendations all benefit the meat, dairy, and food processing industries. Recently the Agriculture Department delayed indefinitely the publication of its Eating Right pyramid, a chart for nutrition education that emphasized the dietary importance of grains, cereals, fruits, and vegetables. Meat and dairy producers argued that the pyramid depicted their products negatively and successfully prevented the release of the chart to the public. This reversal of dietary policy underscores the conflicts arising from the dual role of the Agriculture Department as the federal agency responsible for educating the public about nutrition at the same time it represents the food industry.

The interplay of governmental policy and food distribution has been of current interest in Cleveland, where the flow of food “donated” to food banks by several local grocery chains is about to end. A federal class action suit in the 1980s accused three local supermarket chains of price-fixing. The suit’s settlement required the grocery chains to donate food to local hot-meal programs and other emergency food providers.

“Lifestyle” factors

Food selection within the context of a given political system introduces a number of “lifestyle” factors at both the group and individual level. In the U.S., for example, income, occupation, education, rural or urban residence, stage of life, and household composition all influence food choices.

In our society, affordability is a prime factor in limiting what foods can be purchased by certain individuals or families. A recent study (Emmons 1990), for example, showed that only low- and middle-income shoppers paid attention to the cost of food, while high-income groups paid more attention to nutritional value. Thus low-income consumers purchase high-carbohydrate foods (Bisquick, pancakes, cornmeal, grits, and graham crackers), high fat foods (bacon, sausage, hamburger, lunchmeat), and very high carbohydrate and
fat combinations (macaroni and cheese): foods that “fill you up.” High-income shoppers, on the other hand, purchase fresh vegetables, olive oil, brown rice, turkey, and foods that serve the current interest in vegetarianism (tempeh, hommus, soy milk, and soy cheese).

Occupation affects food choices by influencing where and with whom meals are eaten and prepared. College students, for instance, often select their food from vending machines and snack haphazardly while on the run throughout the day, whereas families with young children and one stay-at-home parent have regularly scheduled, home-cooked meals.

Education can influence people’s knowledge about nutrition and can affect their willingness to try new foods. Where they live can determine the ability to grow or have access to fresh foods.

Household structure affects who obtains, prepares, distributes, and consumes food. An American household with children who watch cartoons on television is apt to have a pantry stocked with the sugar-coated cereals featured in commercials, while an adult living alone may rely more heavily on frozen dinners. Similarly, in an underdeveloped region of Northeastern Brazil that was undergoing technological change due to the introduction of sisal agriculture in the 1950s, heads of households could not avoid depriving their young children of adequate diets in order to sustain themselves for the strenuous activity of working in the sisal industry. As a result, their children suffered delayed physical development (Gross and Underwood 1971).

Stage of life affects what foods are considered appropriate for consumption by whom. Almost all societies have rules that specify which foods infants, pregnant and nursing women, adolescents, and the elderly should eat. In India, for example, both children and the elderly are encouraged to drink milk and to avoid non-vegetarian foods that are thought to be harmful both to the digestive system and intellectual development. In the U.S., a pregnant woman’s craving for things such as pickles and ice cream is well-known, and what teenager does not thrive on hamburgers, fries, and Coke?

Psychological factors

In the food selection process, psychological factors are just as influential as the political and sociological ones. Because of food’s symbolic potential, its dietary inclusion or exclusion can help fulfill an individual’s needs for a sense of belonging, status, and self-esteem.

Food is often used to show that an individual belongs to a group. To symbolize their attachment to common roots, for example, Black Americans living outside the South eat “soul food.” Eating crawfish
symbolizes the ethnic and regional identity of Cajuns in southern Louisiana. Ice cream and apple pie are symbols of national identity for North Americans. A first course of spaghetti makes a meal Italian. The practice of “taking prasadam” (i.e., eating only foodstuffs first offered to Krishna) serves as an initiation rite into certain Hindu sects. In all of these cases, food functions as a boundary marker that separates “insiders” from “outsiders.”

Food can often express social status, as illustrated by the competitive-feasting tradition described above. Commensality (eating at the same table) demonstrates social units, since eating with someone connotes a certain degree of social intimacy and equality: “A man does not eat with his enemy” (Mauss 1967, 55).

In order to establish social hierarchy, men may eat separately from women and children, hired help separately from employers, and physicians in hospitals separately from nurses. In Polynesia, the right to eat certain types of food like turtles, sharks, eels, and flying foxes is the privilege of people of rank, and sanctions (including death) are imposed upon commoners who eat the forbidden food. In India, caste membership determines not only with whom one can dine, but also for whom one can cook. In Chinese culture, food styles distinguish contrasting economic classes and specific rules exist in revolutionary literature regarding the number of animal and vegetable foods permitted at a banquet.

In contemporary U.S. society, people display their social rank by preparing the “gourmet” food that approximates the haute cuisine characteristic of the French élite. In addition, we convey nuances of information about the
relative social status of guests who may be invited only to cocktails (for lower-status people or mere acquaintances) rather than dinner (for social equals or close friends). Women invite newcomers to the neighborhood for coffee in the kitchen because neighbors are in a category different from social friends.

Along with the need to belong and gain status, the need to develop self-esteem can also be fulfilled through food. In the 1970s, for instance, middle and upper-middle class women in the United States used their participation in the gourmet-cookery fashion for this purpose. In giving lavish dinner parties, they demonstrated their organizational abilities, their knowledge of social graces, their specialized knowledge of food, and a near-professional level of expertise in food preparation. Thus, by preparing a gourmet meal, they were able to obtain in the domestic workplace many of the same rewards (such as pride in one's work, reputed expertise in an activity appreciated by others, the challenge of learning new things, and variety of activity) that women employed outside the home valued.

Another type of self-actualization gained through the medium of food is the feeling of power and control experienced (though at high physical cost) by people suffering from the disease known as anorexia nervosa, which primarily consists of voluntary starvation. Afflicting as many as one percent of girls between the ages of sixteen and eighteen in the contemporary U.S. (few anorexics are men), this eating disorder reflects the strain experienced by many women in attaining control of their lives in twentieth-century North America. Anorexia nervosa is frequently linked to a variety of forces at work in contemporary U.S. society. Factors such as the contradictory expectations of families for girls, the objectification of women and degradation of their sexuality, the institutionalized powerlessness of women, and the cultural slighting of female experience and female values have been blamed for this condition. There is a powerful irony in the spectacle of voluntary starvation in the abundant food productivity of North America (Counihan 1985, 78).

**Food and culture**

Culture, the learned and patterned rules of behavior that govern human conduct, often affects food choices. Some people believe that these rules may come from inherent mental structures that can classify and generate patterns in a manner resembling unconscious grammatical rules. All societies, for example, classify their food into such binary categories as hot or cold, raw or cooked, male or female, sweet or sour, and good or bad. Thus people in all societies follow certain classificatory rules, even though the content of the rules may vary according to each culture.
Food preferences can be perceived as the result either of adaptation or of cultural structure. The adaptive perspective emphasizes people's conscious choice of certain foods on the basis of their understanding of their environment. On the other hand, the structuralist perspective emphasizes people's unconscious choices of foods because the human mind has classified them as "edible" or "inedible."

The classic example of dietary behavior that seems irrational to outsiders but which actually has great adaptive value is the case of the sacred cow in India, where Hindu doctrine prohibits the slaughter and consumption of beef despite the widespread presence of hunger and starvation among the human population.

In India today, large numbers of aged, seemingly useless cattle aimlessly roam the countryside and city streets, defecating, blocking traffic, producing little milk, and competing with humans for food. In such a context, where famines are common, why don't the people kill their cattle for food? Why, instead, are beef-killing and beef-eating tabooed? Why are cows venerated to the point that government agencies maintain old-age homes for them? How can Indian "cow love" be explained?

Students of this paradox have discovered the adaptive value of the scrawny zebu cows of India and claim that the Indians' elevation of the cow to divine status improves the ability of their food production system to support human life. The Hindu prohibition against beef consumption has several adaptive functions: the oxen (along with male water buffalo) play an essential role in traditional Indian agriculture by serving as draft animals for pulling plows and carts and for threshing grain; the cattle provide manure which is collected and used for fuel, fertilizer, and household floor covering; their scavenging habits help convert grass and other items of no direct human value into commodities of human utility like milk and dung. Although the quantity of milk zebu cows produce is slight in comparison to American dairy cattle, nonetheless it helps to meet the nutritional needs of many poor people who subsist on the edge of starvation. In addition, when they eventually die from natural causes, they also provide meat (as well as leather for sandals) to members of the lowest-ranking castes who consume beef in spite of the teachings of Hinduism.

From an adaptive standpoint, then, the Hindu taboo against beef-eating makes perfect sense: in a country where modern industrial techniques of agriculture are unsuitable, it insures the protection of a
valuable source of power, fuel, and fertilizer that might otherwise be consumed during times of famine. In fact, according to studies of energy costs and energy yields, India makes more efficient use of its cattle than the United States does, not because the animals are particularly productive, but because of scrupulous utilization of every part of the animal (Harris 1978, 26).

The case of the Hebrew dietary prohibitions provides an example of cultural analysis from a structural perspective. Among Orthodox Jews, a complex set of laws exists which governs food and its preparation. Certain plant and animal species are approved for eating, while others are not. Whatever foods are approved must be prepared correctly and they must be consumed only with certain other foods.

Most plant species are approved, but not all animals. Cows, for example, are approved but not swine. Fish are approved but not shellfish. Some birds are approved but not the ostrich or pelican. Reptiles and flying insects are prohibited. What accounts for this seemingly arbitrary division of animals into edible and inedible categories?

There are several explanations as to why Jews do not eat pork. The physical uncleanness of pigs, the possibility that they may cause disease, and the use of the taboo to maintain Jews' distinctiveness from their non-Hebrew neighbors have all been suggested. None of these, however, is an accurate and sufficient explanation of this food taboo. But if this particular food taboo is seen as part of the whole tradition of Hebrew dietary prohibitions, it is possible to attribute it to the unconscious workings of the mind.

The case for allowing some animal foods to be eaten while others are rejected can be seen as compliance with the Biblical notion of

Two Rabbits, a Pheasant, and Seville Orange on a Stone Ledge by Jean Simeon Chardin (c. 1760). Some people find dead animals appetizing.
perfection and wholeness. Only animals that conform completely to the plan of the Creation in regard to their classification as creatures of the earth, the sky, or the water are allowed to be eaten. Out of each of the three elements (earth, sky, water) was created one kind of animal. Each animal, thus, is tied to one and only one element. According to Biblical decree, the animals of the earth must walk, fish must swim, and birds must fly.

Any animal that does not fit perfectly into its accorded element is an anomaly and is not, therefore, approved for eating. Fish have scales and swim; therefore, they are edible. Shellfish, on the other hand, have legs and can walk, even though they live in water; therefore, they are prohibited. Likewise, ostriches are rejected because they have wings, but don’t fly. Even finer distinctions are made among the animals that live on earth. Approved for eating are four-footed animals that both ruminate (chew their cud) and have cloven hooves. Cows fit both criteria; therefore, they are fit for human consumption. Swine, though they have cloven hooves, do not chew cud; therefore, they are prohibited.

The “rule of completeness” that governs which animals can or cannot be eaten helps explain a complex set of dietary prohibitions that are found in various parts of the Bible. While this code has been deciphered after the fact, the assumption is that, throughout Biblical and more recent times, people instinctively followed these prohibitions because certain inherent structures of their minds unconsciously generated the classificatory rules they needed to follow.

Another example of this structural analysis is the explanation of why some groups theoretically will always eat deer meat, sometimes eat horsemeat, and never eat dogmeat. The solution is that edibility relates to household distance: we eat animals that roam far in the fields; we may eat meat from animals that are pastured near us; but we never eat meat from animals that inhabit our homes. In a parallel way, we can always marry distant relatives, we can sometimes marry cousins, but we can never marry members of our immediate household. Incest rules, thus, are parallel to dietary rules, and demonstrate the consistency of the rule-making structures in the human mind.

**Changing food habits**

Food preferences are obstinate cultural traits and food habits are often the last of the behavioral systems to change. Nonetheless, people do, voluntarily or by necessity, give up old foods and begin to eat new ones.

The current trend in the U.S. toward lowering the consumption of red meat, sugar, salt, cholesterol, and fat is a good example of
people changing their food habits voluntarily. Following the guidelines in the Surgeon General's 1988 report on Nutrition and Health, many Americans are radically changing their diets in the interests of health and longevity. Because we have an abundant and varied food supply and because many people are becoming adventurous eaters, the adoption of new food preferences is relatively easy. Even some of the fast-food restaurants are making an effort to offer foods that are in better compliance with health concerns. Maintaining our new food habits, however, is not always easy, as attested by the many failures to adhere to weight-loss diets.

While voluntary changes in food habits can be rewarding, it is often the case that external forces deprive a culture of their traditional foods. In time of drought, for example, people in South Asia adapt their diets to greatly reduced resources. First, they deplete their home resources, gathering unripe vegetables from their gardens and unripe fruit from their trees. As the water supply dries up and fish are flushed from the deep pools, they increase their consumption of fish. As the drought worsens, they stop feeding the chickens and ducks that can find food for themselves. They feed their pet dogs less. They begin depriving their livestock of food, choosing to eat the unripe grains and greens of inferior quality themselves. The livestock survive on hay in the sun-scorched fields and on a starchy liquid gruel made from water in which rice was boiled for human consumption. If the drought persists, the people eat some of their livestock (goats), but try to spare their cattle on whom they will depend for farming when the rains do finally come again.

Too often, people change their food habits as a result of political or economic changes within their culture. An example is the Miskito Indians of eastern Nicaragua, who used to grow manioc (also known as cassava, a root used to make bread and tapioca) as their main crop and depended almost entirely upon the sea turtles they hunted as their source of protein. One turtle could feed the entire community for several days, and all members of the community shared the turtle meat. Lured by cash payments from turtle-packing companies, the Miskitos hunted the sea animals to the verge of extinction. When they began to collect turtles for commercial gain rather than for subsistence, their own supply of turtle meat became depleted. Because the men in the society had to go farther out to sea in search of turtles, they were away from home for longer periods of time, and consequently they spent less time helping to prepare their gardens for the planting of root crops. As a result, the supply of both turtle meat and manioc was greatly reduced and the people had to purchase food items (flour, rice, and beans) with the money they received from selling turtles. Recently, an international treaty has prohibited the
commercial buying and selling of turtle meat (although some countries, like Japan, have not complied). The Miskitos have gone back to farming and the government has put money into teaching them better agricultural practices, but the people are still poor. Their turtle population, as they say, is "hiding."

The food choices that individuals and groups make are neither as simple nor irrational as they first appear to be. Whether people are guided by the limitations of their environment, by their brain’s unconscious structures, or by more obscure psycho-social motives, they are appeasing their appetites in ways that echo the principles of their culture. The next time someone offers you beetles en papillote or frog leg fritters, realize what a complex choice is before you. □

References


The December sun is disappearing behind the mountain ranges across the river; if I look away for a moment another section is gone and the mountains, row after row of them receding south into Mexico, have turned an even deeper blue. The desert air cools so fast that the highway guard rails groan as they contract. Otherwise, there is not a sound.

I am on the rim of the Colorado canyon of the Rio Grande. It’s a sluggish, almost tepid river when it leaves New Mexico’s high country, but five hundred miles later, at Presidio, Texas, it joins the Rio Conchos and squeezes dramatically through narrow canyon walls.

That is where Mexican snipers ambushed a party of three rafters on the morning of November 19, 1988. The attackers were just kids, really, bored with hunting and possibly strung out on something they’d smoked. They shot down on the rafters from the canyon rim. “There’s no way anyone can escape from there,” said Presidio Justice of the Peace Raul Ramos. Presidio is the most isolated point-of-entry on the Texas border and its 5000 inhabitants are not used to random violence—that happens back in the cities, back East, they say. And now, because of this one incident, the whole country thinks Presidio is some lawless frontier town.

The rafters made it to the beach under gunfire and hid behind some rocks. Jamie Heffley, 32, was shot in the left shoulder and side. Her husband Mike, 40, was shot in the back and killed while trying to protect her. Jim Burr, their guide from Far Flung Adventures, was shot in the leg while escaping downriver in the raft.

Burr hid until dark and then, despite his wound and the fact he had lost both shoes in the river, managed to climb the canyon walls. He limped to the highway and waited all night for help. The next morning he was finally found by a rancher on Farm Road 170, east of town.

By then the authorities knew something was wrong: the raft had shown up downstream with its picnic cooler shot full of holes. The
Border Patrol, the Sheriff's Department, the Texas Rangers, U.S. Customs—and half a dozen camera crews—converged on the canyon that morning. Jamie Heffley was quickly spotted by helicopter, lying under some bushes near her husband's body on the beach. She had spent the whole night outside exposed and wounded and was in such a state of shock she "barely knew what she was looking at," according to Mario Vargas, superintendent of the Border Patrol at Presidio.

On the canyon rim, on the Mexican side, shell casings were found for .22, .30-.30, and .44 caliber weapons. Tracks led across the sand and rock of the Chihuahua desert. While the U.S. authorities conducted their investigations, a Chihuahua State Judicial policeman followed the tracks on horseback for ten miles to the small Mexican village of El Mulato. There he lost them in the confusion of the dusty streets; but on the trail he had found an iron shoe that had fallen off one of the suspects' mules. The policeman walked around town looking for a mule with one new shoe, and on November 29th Cesar Hernandez Valenzuela, 16, was arrested, along with three other local youths—including one who lived on the American side of the river.

Presidio Sheriff Rick Thompson called the shooting an "international incident." Under international law the suspects could be tried in either country for a cross-border shooting. It is not the first time world politics have converged on this little Texas town.

In 1915 U.S. Cavalry and Air Corps were stationed nearby to defend the border against Pancho Villa and his army, who had begun to attack American towns in an effort to destabilize relations between the two governments. And sixty-odd years later Mexican exporters, smelling a profit in the Russian grain embargo, apparently bought grain by the trainload from the United States and simply turned around and sold it to the Russians at a slightly higher price.

I learned this from a Santa Fe railroad worker named Homero, who happened to be sitting next to me at the bar of the Presidio American Legion Hall. The Hall is simply a big, bare room filled with cafeteria-style folding tables, but it's the only place in town to get a drink after ten o'clock at night. When I walked in, there were six men leaning against the bar, talking loudly and listening to Mexican tunes from a jukebox against the wall.

"Every night during the embargo trains full of grain crossed the border into Mexico," Homero told me. "Eight, nine trainloads a night. We were working double shifts just to keep up. Now, I don't know for sure where it was all going, but I'll tell you one thing: the Mexicans sure don't eat that much grain."
Homero was dressed head-to-toe in new denim and looked to be in his early thirties. We’d been introduced by a man named Paul, who was madly buying rounds for the entire bar and didn’t seem to know either of us.

The place closed down with little ceremony around midnight and Paul bought a couple of six-packs from the bartender and suggested that the three of us go back to his apartment to continue what we were doing. We tore through the still town in our three cars and were soon in Paul’s bare kitchen, talking and drinking beer.

Paul eventually called his ex-wife, who owns a restaurant in Amarillo, to tell her he had just finished his exams for a semester of classes in school administration. After they had talked for a while he said: “Here, I want you to say hello to a new friend of mine,” and he put a surprised Homero on the line.

Homero’s end of the conversation was little more than a series of “Yes, Ma’ams,” and “No, Ma’ams.” He finally told her in one long, elaborately-constructed sentence that she was lucky to have a man such as Paul as her ex-husband and that he was even luckier to have a woman such as her as his ex-wife.

He sat down afterwards looking as if he had just survived tea with the Queen. “I must admit, I felt a little uncomfortable talking with your ex-wife,” he said to Paul.

It turned out to be a matter of machismo—or worry about it, really. “You know, in Mexico you can lose a friend by talking to his ex-wife,” he explained to me. “Hell, you can lose your life talking to a man’s ex-wife.”

Paul grunted and passed around three more beers. Homero continued explaining what machismo means in the country where he was born.

“It has nothing to do with Rambo,” he said, “though a lot of people think that. You know what macho is? It’s this: I’m divorced, like Paul here, and I’ve got three kids who live with my ex-wife. I don’t make a lot of money but let me tell you, those four people have never been in need of anything in their lives.”

Paul, who is Hispanic like Homero, grunted in even stronger agreement.

“In Mexico macho means taking good care of your woman and kids.”

The party broke up around two in the morning when all the beer was drunk and Paul declared it was time for him to go to bed. Before Homero left I asked him why, in his opinion, no one had objected to Mexico playing middleman during the grain embargo.
"They kept everyone happy," he said. "The Russians got their food, the Americans sold their wheat, and President Carter got to look tough."

If he's right, the grain traffic through this little port is a very well-kept secret. Almost as well-kept as the plans to turn Presidio from a small desert town into one of the most important points-of-entry on the Texas border.

Presidio is a flat, dusty place with one paved street. Within a block the town falls off into a patchwork of trailers, adobe houses, junked cars, horse corrals, empty lots, and eventually desert. The Town Hall is a handsome building that appears to be adobe covered with cement; clustered around it are Hendrix, Miles and Hendrix, Customs Brokers; Jimmy McNiel—"Comprador de Ganado" (cattle broker); and the Presidio Lumber Yard. Down the street is Nieto's department store, Spencer's department store (side-by-side, and both dating back to the turn of the century), and the Catholic church, with two giant palm trees in front. Then there is the river, Ojinaga, Mexico, and the Chihuahua desert beyond.

Freighters these days, people in this dusty border town tell me, are getting too big to fit through the Panama Canal. The cost of shipping by rail from Los Angeles is high—though for now it's the major route—and some smart Mexican economist realized it would be much faster to unload freighters at the Pacific port of Los Mochis, Mexico, and send the freight across the continent by rail from there.

As it happens, Presidio sits on the shortest rail route between Los Mochis and the United States interior—from the Chihuahua Al Pacifico railroad to the Santa Fe line. The Mexican government has already spent $95 million to rebuild the railroad, and Presidio is planning a $5.2 million freight-forwarding facility that will be able to load 44 trucks at a time. According to the Presidio Chamber of
Commerce, the new route through their town will be as much as 2000 miles shorter than traditional routes from South America and the Far East, and freight forwarders won't be plagued by the two-day delays common to ports like El Paso and Laredo.

For now, however, there is not a single doctor in Presidio, Mayor Bob Anderson is moonlighting as a Customs inspector, weighing Mexican cattle until ten o'clock at night, and a faded billboard outside town advertises homesteads at $95 down and $25 a month.

The twentieth century, one has the feeling, is about to smack this little town right between the eyes.

Presidio is the very end of the line; any further south and you'd be in Mexico, any further west and you'd be absolutely nowhere. It is the only official border town on a scorching and nearly uninhabited stretch of desert between El Paso and Del Rio, Texas, and it regularly shows up on the daily weather maps as the hottest place in the state.
To the north are the vast Texas plains and to the east is the dry and broken land of Big Bend—land that remained essentially unexplored until 1899 and is still so remote that Mexican smugglers make drug drops there by plane.

The U.S. Border Patrol headquarters is pretty much the first building you see when you drive into town—besides the Lely airport, where a lone Cessna waits under a metal hangar. It is a collection of pistachio-green offices and garages with pistachio-green trucks parked out front (the St. Regis Café in town and the interior of the American Legion hall have also, for some reason, been painted the same color green). There are 13 agents stationed in Presidio, and they are responsible for over a hundred miles of river bank on either side of town, and 25 miles of canyons, dry washes and hillsides extending inland from there.

“We have sensors in the ground that respond to the rhythm of someone walking or running,” says superintendent Mario Vargas, a quiet, handsome man who has to think for a moment when I ask his age (he comes up with 42). “If someone triggers the sensors we go out in trucks or on horseback and look for tracks. There are certain routes that illegal aliens use and that’s where we check. The problem for them here isn’t crossing the river, it’s getting to a big town—they take a week’s worth of food and walk from windmill to windmill refilling their plastic water jugs. They’ll walk all the way to Fort Stockton like that, 150 miles. Any tracks we cut in the sand we follow because no one but illegal aliens is on foot out there.”

In the winter the flow of illegal aliens drops to a trickle—they like to be home for Christmas like anyone else, says Vargas—and drug-smuggling becomes the Border Patrol’s main concern. Ninety-seven pounds of marijuana were seized from a truck in Presidio the day after the river shooting, and 237 pounds were taken at the nearby town of Alpine a week later. The Border Patrol in Alpine has a dog trained to smell a bag of marijuana hidden in the middle of a truckload of onions.

“Because of the crackdown on employers who hire wetbacks there’s going to be more and more drugs coming across the border,” Vargas says. “These people have to earn a living somehow. If a guy has five hungry kids at home and he can’t feed them, he’s going to smuggle—hell, I would too. And he’s the guy you catch, not the kingpin. We caught a mule, once—that’s what the carriers are called—who was taking 43 pounds of grass to Odessa. We asked him what he was getting paid. ‘Fifteen hundred dollars,’ he said. That’s a lot of money to him.”

It’s more money, in fact, than he could earn in Mexico in a year, even if he could get a job. Bill Bishop and his son, owners of the
largest farm in Presidio (2800 acres), tell me in concerned voices that a Mexican laborer earns three dollars a day—"for a ten-hour day," the son adds, in case I considered it a bargain for eight.

They are both relaxing in the farm office with their cowboy boots up on the desk, and when they use Spanish names it is without a trace of accent. I am impressed; I have rarely seen an Anglo treat the Mexican culture, language, and poverty with such respect.

"At the farm we only hire people from Presidio and we pay minimum wage—except to the packers, who follow the season from coast to coast and do piecework. They can make a thousand dollars a week. Most of them are Hispanic but once we had two college ball players who were working all summer to pay their tuition. My God, those guys were big, as big as that door."

In season the Bishop farm employs a hundred field hands. Now, with only a little plowing going on, the work force is down to about ten, and many of the others have shifted to the Presidio stockyards: Baeza, Alvarado, Rio Grande. A half-million head of cattle a year are trucked in from the Mexican interior, inspected by Customs at the
Presidio pens, and then shipped to slaughterhouses around the country.

The cattle trucks from Mexico use the old bridge at the far end of Johnny Surrat’s Rio Grande stockyards. The former Customs house is in ruins now, its windows smashed and the inspection area filled with the cars and trucks of Surrat’s men, but the bridge is still in good shape. It’s a flat, crooked affair of big timbers and mortared stone that starts at the levee and crosses a hundred yards of sandy floodplain before spanning the channel. White flood-gauges stick up out of the bank. The river that is referred to in Spanish as “The Fierce River of the North” is so shallow and braided by sand bars here that I could easily throw a stone across it into Mexico.

The new bridge was built two years ago and I can see it from the top of the levee, swooping gracefully up from the lettuce fields a half-mile away. At the near end is the modern brick Customs building and the covered inspection area—filled with bulletproof booths, mechanical jacks for getting at the underbellies of cars, and gleaming steel counters where Customs agents dissect people’s luggage.

The border check does a lot of business during the day. Presidio is the closest source of American goods for the people of Ojinaga and they often come across for things they can’t get at home—blue jeans, for example, bought a dozen at a time at Nieto’s department store. At night the inspection area is ablaze with yellow lights and the flow of cars is steady, but not heavy. I walk over to the bridge after dinner, hands in my pockets, to watch the endless ritual of people crossing an international border that divides families, businesses, an entire community, right down the middle.

At one point a group of teenage girls pulls up to the inspection booth in a huge, battered Pontiac. The Customs agent has a few words with the driver, peeks in the windows, looks at some papers, then waves them on. In the next bay over, meanwhile, a middle-aged couple sits glumly on a bench watching a team of three inspectors take apart their van.
“If it seems random, it is,” says Gary Epps, a wiry, blue-eyed Customs agent from Oklahoma. “We search every third car—or every ninth car, or every green car. Or,” he adds, “the cars of people who look suspicious.”

Customs, he says, pays insiders to keep tabs on the drug operations (this is called “developing information”). They often know when a big shipment is due and even who’ll be carrying it. In the parking lot out back, says Epps, there’s a Bronco pickup shot full of holes from a recent drug deal that went awry.

“We probably don’t catch more than ten percent of the drugs that come across the border,” Epps guesses. “The situation is bad because the Mexican police are involved in trafficking too—it’s hard to expect them to say no when there are such large amounts of money involved. And they are not—shall we say—subject to the same controls as the police in this country. The Federal Police are second in power only to the army and there are no search warrants over there, no Miranda rights, no right to an attorney. If they want you to confess to something they lace seltzer water with chili sauce and pour it up your nose.”

Crossing the bridge to Ojinaga on foot seems to concern no one—not the United States officials, not the Mexican officials, who are busy talking and don’t even look at me (though on the way back they make me pay 20¢). The town smells of burnt garbage and is very dark. There are huge areas of open space, just rubble and trash, and great wide avenues without people or street lamps. The houses barely look inhabited. Occasionally a car jolts by, raising a cloud of dust. There are packs of dogs.

The center of town is a cobblestone plaza with an elegant white church and a stone fountain that has no water. The shops are closed but they are still lit and couples walk by looking in the windows. Off the plaza the streets get dark very quickly and gangs of young men roam in the shadows from bar to bar. The army barracks is an old adobe building directly behind the church and at the gate there is a cluster of soldiers with automatic rifles slung across their backs. In a residential area near the river I ask directions of a well-dressed gentleman on a street corner and, when he raises his arm to point, I see tucked into his waistband a little snub-nosed .38.

In 1986 Mexican Federal police killed a local smuggler named Pablo Costa, who had told an El Paso reporter he’d bought practically every cop in northern Mexico. Apparently the heat really came down from Washington after that, and the Mexican government was forced to take action. The killing did bring a certain calm to Ojinaga’s streets, though. Until then, gunfights between rival drug rings would break out on the street in broad daylight. One attempt on Costa’s life
resulted in 13 dead, including two bystanders. Costa himself never went anywhere without an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, and survived numerous such attacks. During these confrontations local police, armed only with .22 pistols, would wisely hide like everybody else.

The town has changed for the better; it doesn't necessarily seem like the kind of place where bad things happen. It does, however, seem like the kind of place where anything could happen. No one's out to get you, as a foreigner, but that doesn't mean you're entirely safe. You still might find yourself in the middle of something you couldn't have foreseen, can't possibly understand, and have no likely way to get out of.

Gary Epps told me the story of a friend of his who was put in jail in Mexico for smuggling cocaine. The authorities demanded bribes and bled the family dry for years, but never actually released him. The young man finally died in his cell.

I think that one over while I walk back across the bridge towards the harsh yellow lights of the Customs area in the United States.

People in Presidio make jokes about their town. With a population that is 98% Hispanic, it is referred to as “the only Mexican town with a Texas address.” It is also called a suburb of Ojinaga which, for all its unlit streets, boasts a population of 40,000, eight times that of Presidio.

Many families have members on either side of the river. The impression Presidio gives is a sleepy Mexican village that has had an influx of spur-jangling cowboys from the Texas heartland. To their credit the families of some of the “newcomers” have been here a hundred years and, if there is any resentment among the Hispanics that they hold most of the businesses and civic posts in the town, it doesn't show.
The history of the border—of Texas, essentially—is so close to the surface here that one can almost smell it. It's in the family names of the local stores; it's in the lives of people who still walk down the wide streets of the town. An adobe fort along Farm Road 170 was built in 1848 by Ben Leaton, who had moved to the area for the grim business of collecting bounties on Indian scalps (he was later killed in a gunfight with an Ojinaga sheriff). John Spencer came here around the same time to become the area's first rancher, and his descendants run the department store that still bears his name. Ramon Barriba, a local roper who works at the Brite ranch in nearby Valentine, was born only four years after that same ranch was attacked by Comanche Indians from Mexico—in 1917. And Pancho Villa and his followers, roaming the Chihuahua desert like a wolfpack, occasionally stopped at Nieto's department store to load up on clothes, food, and guns.

"When Villa came to town he came here," says Miguel Nieto, motioning with a hand at the store that he and his son now run. Ceiling fans slowly turn the still air of the huge room. The floors are hardwood, the walls are adobe covered with plaster, and the shelves have everything from lariats and saddles to sleek new refrigerators.

"He would pull up front with his wagons and load them with whatever he needed for the war. He had a credit account with my father. And you know what? He always paid."

Villa, an illiterate Mexican peasant, was playing a dangerous game. In 1914 he had helped a local governor named Carranza overthrow the repressive regime of Porfirio Diaz. When Carranza declared himself president Villa pledged a new revolution of his own and began attacking American towns across the border—most notably, Columbus, New Mexico. His strategy was to bring the wrath of the United States down on Carranza for not being able to stop the violence in the north.

It almost succeeded. After 63 Americans were killed by Villa during a six-week span in 1915, President Wilson sent General Pershing on a hot, lumbering raid into Mexico to put the guerrillas down.

Of course Pershing's column didn't stand a chance. They were slowed down by motor cars that kept overheating and Villa was on home ground in the Chihuahua desert. The invasion merely served to enrage Carranza, whose forces fired on U.S. Navy ships in Mazatlán and eventually battled the invading troops themselves. Germany, sensing an opportunity, secretly pledged its support to Carranza if he wanted to recover the "lost territory of Texas, New
Mexico, and Arizona." Carranza didn’t quite dare, Wilson calmed
down, and war was averted.

By 1920 Carranza had been overthrown and killed. Three years
later Villa—"retired" at his ranch—was ambushed and shot dead.
The war established a tradition of violence in the area but it also gave
rise to an important new article in Mexican law: Article 33, which
carefully restricts foreigners from taking wealth out of the country.
American business interests in Mexico were a major reason why the
United States involved herself in the war.

A Mexican resident of the Rio Grande told a journalist recently:
"Here in Mexico there are only two articles: Article 33, and Article
.30-.30."

Villa would have agreed.

Two roads meet in Presidio: Route 67, which starts in Chicago
and doesn’t stop until Chihuahua, Mexico; and Farm Road 170, which
starts at Big Bend and ends sixty miles up-river from town.

Farm Road 170 splits from the main road at the Border Patrol
compound. There are signs along the shoulder that warn when the
road is about to dip into a dry wash that cannot be crossed during
floods—or at high speeds. I can drive seventy most of the time on the
little two-lane but sometimes, suddenly, have to screech back down
to forty. The fields and occasional trailers peter out after a few miles
and soon I am sliding alone down the road past the mesquite and the
greasewood and the low, sandy hills.

These hills are the eroded flood plains of Pre-Cambrian and
Pleistocene rivers. Further west, the Franklin mountain range was
formed when the land was pulled apart and fissured like moist cake.
The sections that sank, called grobins by geologists, are now the
valleys and the sections that rose, called horsts, are the mountains.
The Franklin range is "a tilted horst that has been rotated sharply
west."

I am heading steadily towards this tilted, rotated land and it
becomes increasingly difficult to keep up high speeds on the road. I
do not see another car all the way to the small town of Ruidoso, forty
miles distant. There are a dozen houses in Ruidoso, a dog in the
middle of the road, a leather boot in the middle of the road, a huge,
caved-in adobe church, and the Estrea del Norte Mercancias en
General (North Star General Store, but spelled wrong). I keep going
right through town.

Candelaria is another twenty miles after that, and there the
pavement ends. A few miles later the dirt ends and there is just river
and desert for a full hundred miles until the tiny town of Esperanza,
Texas—which has nothing less than Interstate 10 as its main street.
If there isn't much to Ruidoso, there's even less to Candelaria. Candelaria residents probably go to Ruidoso for a night on the town. There are two houses, another house on a hill, and an iron cage on a rock that apparently once served as the local jail (if it was sunny, you got hot; if it rained, you got wet).

But there is a general store in town to rival Ruidoso’s. Its shelves are half-stocked with canned food, straw hats, and bottles of medicine. It has been owned since 1947 by two widowed sisters, Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Howard, who were born in Marfa around the turn of the century and have lived here their whole lives. They were already teenagers when Comanches attacked the Brite ranch in 1917. They saw Villa’s exploits, the glories of the local cotton boom (killed by the Elephant Butte Dam in New Mexico in 1916), and will probably see Presidio’s freight-forwarding boom as well.

I walk outside again and take a footpath that leads past an old tractor and through a maze of low fields and irrigation ditches. I cross a soggy pasture, open a fence gate, close it behind me, then top an earth levee and follow that through swampy brush towards the Rio Grande.

These fields, I know, were once full of cotton. Candelaria was a thriving town until the dam dried up the river valley, and local cotton gins kept many people busy and relatively well-off.

Prosperity could return. Presidio has applied for a grant to build 600,000 gallons of water storage. Once that happens, according to Mayor Bob Anderson, industry can come in and the town will be moving 300 trucks a day on a new highway. And maquiladoras will be built—twin-plants on either side of the border that enable American manufacturers to legally take advantage of cheap Mexican labor. By international treaty of 1965, the manufacturers pay tariffs on the value of the labor they hire rather than on the value of the finished product, which is sold back in the United States.

These are big plans for a small place but, like the freight-forwarding scheme, there’s no reason they shouldn’t work. Presidio, in the process, will be profoundly changed. The entire county has a yearly operating budget of barely $1 million, and the average wage in town is under $200 a week. Unemployment is 14%. The only reason adobe houses are no longer built is because banks refuse to finance them. By American standards, this land is poor.

And yet, Ojinaga is poorer, and can’t help but benefit from affluence across the river. At the very least, Americans will wander over and spend money on all the things, good and bad, that money can buy in a Mexican border town. American manufacturing plants may also provide enough jobs so that a Mexican man with five hungry children won’t have to smuggle marijuana across the border at $1500
a trip—he can work all year at home and make exactly the same amount.

The path I'm on follows the spine of the levee for about a mile and then ends at a grassy little strip along the Rio Grande. The riverbanks are pocked with cow tracks and the cows themselves graze peacefully on bushes in mid-stream. Barbed-wire fences, treating the river as if it were no more than an extremely wet field, span the channel from bank to bank.

There is a town on the other side—I can see its white church and low, mean adobe houses—and a little foot bridge to cross over. The bridge has been engineered from an assortment of fork-lift pallets, tree limbs, truck chassis, and 3/4-inch steel cable. On the American side the cable is anchored to the riverbank by a huge wooden stake; on the Mexican side it is wrapped around a junked car that has been securely buried in the mud. The concept of an international border is obviously very abstract here; these people probably walk to Candelaria like most people go to the corner store (it is, in fact, their corner store).

The bridge is two feet wide, 150 yards long and springs and sags like a good trampoline when I walk across it. On the Mexican side I pass an old schoolbus filled with river rushes—undoubtedly stored for livestock—and a man carrying two logs and a machete. The town itself seems deserted except for a lone, white-haired drunk who is slowly, unhurriedly throwing rocks across the plaza.

"What's the name of the town?" I ask him.

"San Antonio del Bravo," he answers, red-eyed.

"Do people go back and forth on the bridge a lot?"

"Si," he says, "todo el tiempo." All the time.

I ask him how long it takes to drive the sixty miles of dirt road between here and Ojinaga.

He thinks for a moment and then waves four accusing fingers in my face.

"Cuatro horas," he says, glaring at me.

He knows damn well it's only an hour by the paved road on the American side, I think to myself as I turn and walk back towards the bridge.
The Academic Library
Hannelore B. Rader

The library is not a museum in which to share treasures but an instrument used in an intimate relationship to instruction and scholarship...in the library no one tells students what to read;...the library is a place of learning...a place where questions are not stifled in ready answers but provoke thought, and where one thought leads to another.—Oscar Handlin

Demands on libraries in colleges and universities are increasing, not so much because hordes of users are breaking down the doors on the way to an education but because the variety of materials in such libraries is growing and costing more than they can afford.

Books of course are the basis of any library, but there are also periodicals escalating in number and cost, newspapers, government and other reports, maps, prints, to mention only materials on paper. Then there are slides, fiches, microfilms, records, cassettes, disks, and the newest media: CD-ROMs and of course on-line computers. Access to these non-paper media requires machines that are expensive to buy and to maintain, not to mention the supplies (paper, ribbons) they use.

Books, the base of the whole pyramid, unfortunately age physically as well as intellectually. Librarians are not concerned about the aging of the content, but they are concerned about the possibility of their books falling apart. Books printed before 1810 or so were made of rag paper, which is apparently immortal. Those books are generally vulnerable only to bookworms, which eat their way through the paper, and other insects, which live on the glue used by the binders. The covers dry out and the thread holding the signatures breaks, but the paper holds and therefore repairs can be made. The more recent books—from this century and the last—were printed on paper made of wood pulp treated with acid, which after some exposure to air becomes brittle and breaks into small pieces. Perhaps half of all library books are subject to this process of deterioration. Control of temperature, humidity, and light can slow this process but it cannot arrest it. Copying such works is a solution, but microfilm readers are
cumbersome and duplication on archival (acid-free) paper and storing in acid-free containers is expensive.

Behind these difficulties is the specter of rising costs due to inflation. Annual budget increases do not come near matching the new price lists of everything that a library uses. Under normal circumstances libraries increase in size at a standard and enormous rate, doubling every fourteen years (that's 14,000% growth every century). Every day around the world some one thousand books are published, of which a significant fraction are in English; and one new periodical is begun each day, of which a minority survive more than a year.

The cost of books has risen in a startling fashion, speaking only of books needed by academic libraries. If we compare the price of books during the last three decades alone with the rate of inflation (the CPI) during the period, we have the following frightening picture (keeping in mind that academic books cost more on the average than trade books and that therefore these averages underrepresent the cost of books to academic libraries).

A simple example may illustrate this trend. In 1955, the University of Chicago Press published a book for the bicentennial of the publication of Samuel Johnson's dictionary of English (256 pp.), at a price of five dollars. In 1990, Cambridge University Press published a monograph on the same subject (249 pp.), at a price of $49.50, an increase of almost 1000%. During those thirty-five years, the Consumer Price Index as a whole rose from 80 to 401, an increase of 500%. So the cost of this book rose at twice the rate of all the commodities included in the CPI (food, gasoline, rent, medical costs...).

Yet the price of periodicals has risen at an even greater rate. Within the past decade, quarterlies even in the humanities have gone from $10 per year to $40, $50, and more: Linguistics costs $250 and the

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Burlington Magazine $328, with the library subscription usually double the individual rate. Since library budgets include a single amount for the acquisition of printed materials, this must be allotted to both books and periodicals. As recently as ten years ago, the ratio was half for books and half for periodicals, but the more rapid increase of cost for periodicals has forced libraries to move the ratio to nearly three-quarters for periodicals and one-quarter for books, a situation which is grievous for scholars and students in the humanities and social sciences.

For the most part, purchasing decisions about books and periodicals are made cooperatively between librarians with training in a particular subject field and faculty members. Scientists depend on periodicals, humanists rely more on books. Therefore, whatever the cost—and it can be astronomical (Brain Research, a monthly, is $6842 a year, Beilstein, a serial, is $30,000 a year)—science departments must have periodicals, sometimes a duplicate set within department seminar rooms. For humanists, periodicals are much more numerous, though cheaper, and much less often used except for a limited number of central ones, but humanists are not willing any more than scientists to forego the convenience of having subscriptions at hand. For a Department of English, it is not uncommon to expect the library to subscribe to perhaps 500 journals in language and literature, not counting those ordered by departments of languages, classics, rhetoric and composition, and other cognate fields, such as history and philosophy.

The more complex the library becomes, the higher the costs for support staff. Labor-saving retrieval devices, such as computerized catalogues, save labor only for the user, not for the librarian, who must learn to use the new technology and spend a great deal of time teaching users to deal with the new machines. The variety of equipment in today's library compared with the 1940 library requires more staff and more highly trained staff, hence higher costs. The beneficiary is the scholar, whose legwork has been significantly reduced by the fact that he or she does not need to go to the catalogue to learn about the location of a book: the catalogue is now in the faculty member's office, on the computer screen. Nor do scholars need to travel to a remote location for books not available in the library, because they can call for interlibrary loan service. Perhaps the scholar should consider making a contribution to the library's funds from the increase in income that results from the greater productivity made possible by the efficiency of the modern academic library.

Indeed there is no good way out of the vise created by the pressure between increasing costs and static funding. Legislatures
funding public universities are impatient with demands for new buildings, additional space, more equipment, more money for materials, more support staff. The only available solution in this quandary involves greater cooperation among libraries and more efficient technologies. Cooperation among libraries has been practiced for some time on a small scale. Borrowing each other's books has been a feature of the operation of public and academic libraries for half a century or more, but it is both a slow and an expensive process. Even by using the OCLC system, the request must be sent to more than one site and the requested book may be in use, too delicate to send, lost, or otherwise unavailable. The process may be relatively fast (an average of ten days from request to delivery), but in some cases it can take months. It is also not without cost: the average cost of mailing a book is about one dollar per item, but if the expense of maintaining an interlibrary loan system is included the cost rises to perhaps $15 per request.

Consortium arrangements have been worked out where several libraries within easy distance of each other have agreed to specialize in addition to the computerized catalogue of available books, many reference departments have installed online terminals which provide information about articles in general or specialized fields (medicine, education, modern languages and literature, psychology).
in certain fields to avoid duplication. Thus Library A may specialize in European linguistics, Library B in Near Eastern, and Library C in Far Eastern. The consequence of course is a reduction of efficiency for the user, who must travel to the outlying libraries or send for the book at some cost and delay of work until it arrives. Such arrangements, however, are likely to continue and increase in urban areas because the inconvenience to the user is not a quantifiable dollar item.

A more promising solution is based on the ability of computers to store and retrieve information quickly. This ability is demonstrated in the new computerized catalogues now operating in many libraries, which work without cards. Books may be found by author and title, or by subject, as before, but now also by combinations of keywords, permitting a new level of search efficiency. For example, a reader using the old card catalogue wishing to find all the oratorios in German written between 1650 and 1750 would have to look under the subject “oratorio” for a list of composers and then look up each composer for the names of oratorios in German. Under the new system the search would be made by combining three keywords: “oratorio” and “German language” and the date range. Ultimately the same yield would result but the new system is faster and more convenient. Some searches, however, might not be possible using the old card system: a list of short story collections not by British authors, a list of Edgar Allen Poe’s stories available in a given library in audio and video format, all books available in Polish, and so on.

The key to efficient bibliographic searching is the appropriate indexing of materials. A proper bibliographic description of a book includes, beyond the essential facts (author, title, place of publication, publisher, date, format, and cost), a selection of keywords which describe the content. Thus Peter Gay’s biography of Freud might have as keywords: biography, Freud, psychology, psychiatry, history of psychoanalysis, as well as the names of prominent friends and disciples. This system has two fundamental weaknesses: the list is usually incomplete—should it include Charcot (Freud’s teacher), Minna Bernays (his sister-in-law), Dora (his patient)?—and therefore not nearly as useful as the researcher would wish; and it can deal only with subjects of research which have previously been considered appropriate or relevant—it cannot predict what use might be made of the material in the book: how scientists change direction, how they cover up their errors, revise their past theories, treat their co-workers, deal with political problems, with academic turmoil. . . . These are not standard categories and therefore do not appear in the list of keywords, thus foreclosing any use of this material by someone who does not already know what is in it.
Evidently, technology must at some time in the future go a step further and make the whole of the material in the library—every book, periodical, report, newspaper—machine-readable. That is, each such item could be held in a computer file that could be called up by a scholar in an office desiring to read it, who could make copies of certain parts, or search for combinations of key words, to reveal clusters of meaning not accessible by any other means, except the conventional one of reading and taking notes. For this to come about, we must stop thinking of books in the traditional way (printed pages between covers) and think of them as texts in computer files. This kind of change, though still distant, is not beyond reasonable expectation for the future. The scholar in an office would then not be limited merely to the contents of the local academic library but would have access to every book in the world! Once the conversion of books to machine-readable files is complete, the costs of acquisition, maintenance, and delivery would drop precipitously. That is the real future of the new library.

The Cleveland State University library, fairly typical of university libraries around the country, has taken some steps in the direction of this golden future. In addition to the conventional facilities, it has installed the NOTIS system, which includes the computerized catalogue (SCHOLAR). Instead of requiring the user to go to the card catalogue, SCHOLAR can be reached from any terminal in the library, and there are some in every area. The same system is accessible from faculty offices and at any time of day or night from faculty homes if these contain a computer with a modem. In addition to bibliographical information, SCHOLAR provides status information: whether the item is available, charged out, or lost. So far the OCLC system is not available in the same way for the simple reason of expense.

The reference department also has online terminals for various external databases such as DIALOG as well as workstations which contain databases on CD-ROM such as INFOTRAC or PSYCLIT. Both provide citations for articles, books and reports in general or specialized fields (medicine, education, modern languages and literature, psychology). The CD-ROM databases are the most impressive of the new bibliographies and hold enormous amounts of information on five-and-a-half inch compact discs (exactly like the music CDs). The bibliography of the Modern Language Association (PMLA) for the past ten years (some 100,000 items) fits on a single disk, which can be searched on the basis of author, title, and single and multiple key words—a great convenience. Each CD bibliography requires a "reader" and is attached to a printer, which permits the user to print
out selected bibliographical items found during a search. The increase in convenience and efficiency is considerable.

As the improvement in technology gradually makes headway and users and staff become familiar with it, costs will inevitably decline as they have elsewhere (consumer electronics, for example), and arrangements for controlling costs will succeed under the pressure of market forces. Old and rare books (special collections) are exempt from this process. There will never be more of them than there are now, and all libraries will find it necessary to preserve special examples of the old technology even when everything in books becomes electronic “information” and data is accessible only from a terminal. The library of the future will be different, certainly, but in many ways it will be better. And it will continue to be a place of learning.
Poetry

Danah Coester

Ruin

Little bared in your gutted gaze,
But fish shapes in a shadow pool. Unfilled spoons,
Upturned perpetuity. These shadows would be eyes.
Like lashless-rimmed, dim cavern mouths
Of unabashed ladyhood, smiled at,
Shushed by putti ascending, sweet beaming faces,
Fat hands, burning tow. Happy times.

Why would a stoic weep? Or are you
The melancholic who writes on night's head,
Caretakes her garland stars, knows all moon's
Latin sanity and a few gods? You wear
The pine laurel in your disheveled hair
And a cloak of fluted brooding. Bleached
Angel fable. Not even a blush,

Not even terracotta tints your heart-shaped
Waning heart that sways, a knotted quartz, from an iron pin,
Sort of a joke, really, clacking about in your breast,
Gulped stone dangling down your rigged throat,
Down your driven-through, mid-speak paper hollow,
Past that cupped sail between bird bones
Where you would drink kisses into your impending breath.

You see your neck is far too thin
To bear the weight of pride and a pediment, hence
The stake, and the lump of heart, a notion.
Thoughtful of your sculptor friend, this
Romance. Your flat patrons and your lover
Can't console the lack; ache burrows,
Jealousy and your ideal abound:

Danah Coester says, "As a journalist I've discovered for myself the myth of objectivity and have come to regard poetry as a fierce sort of journalism with its own obligations to reality, its own peculiar telling." Ms. Coester is working on her M.A. in Journalism at the University of Missouri (Columbia), and works as an art director for the Columbia Missourian Sunday Magazine and as a graphic designer. Her poems have appeared in Nimrod and Cream City Review.
Pearwood painted white, a pillar, gauze-drawn
Shades on a maiden porch, bird baths and plaster casts,
Our own cast poses, tilted necks and jutting feet,
Chiseled, sanded, blessed and licked.
So many columns, so many girls like you
Open-armed and offering their cold breasts,
Their struck gilt of flesh stone,

And oh, their alabaster hot, hot mouths.
In 1975 a group of French historians pooled their efforts in a special feature about treasonable wartime collaboration, their views appearing in a Paris quarterly. Arriving at a consensus, they identified three types of collaborators: collaborateurs par tactique (tactical collaborators), collaborateurs par conviction (collaborators through ideology), and collaborateurs par appétit (collaborators from greed). Tactical collaborators were people like Pierre Laval, a prewar prime minister who had lost power and wished to regain it by joining the winning side. Collaborators through conviction were what Rebecca West described as "sincere traitors," individuals who genuinely believed in the enemy’s dogmas and form of government. Collaborators through greed were profiteers who saw foreign occupation as a means of personal enrichment.

Where, in this spectrum, does one fit Ezra Pound? When Arthur Koestler wrote about "the Great Crank," he was referring to Adolf Hitler. He could as easily have been describing America's most controversial poet. Throughout a life that spanned nine decades, Pound surpassed all other literary figures in alternately stimulating, invigorating, and scandalizing his contemporaries.

Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, on October 30, 1885. On both sides of the family he was of old American stock. His grandfather, Thaddeus Pound, served three terms in Congress and his mother, born Isabel Weston, was descended from a president of Harvard.

In 1889 the family moved to Philadelphia. There Homer Pound, the boy's father, worked as an assayer in the United States Mint. Pound wrote his first poem at the age of eleven, in praise of William Jennings Bryan. In view of the poet's later economic theories, it is significant that he would direct his admiration toward the eloquent advocate of "Free Silver."

Following education at the University of Pennsylvania and Hamilton College, Pound left for Europe in 1907. Settling in London, he became a leader of the Imagist movement and won the respect of...
such established literary figures as William Butler Yeats and Ford Madox Ford. Pound also aided and encouraged younger writers like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis. During the London years his best-known works were *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1918) and *Hugh Selwain Mauberley* (1920).

Pound lived in Paris between 1921 and 1925. Then he moved to Rapallo on the Italian Riviera. To Pound, Fascist Italy represented the optimum in political and social organization. Earlier the poet had been attracted to the Social Credit theories of Major C.H. Douglas, which he saw as the most effective antidote to what he believed was Jewish control of international banking. Nowhere, in Pound’s opinion, was Douglas’s program being applied more intelligently than under Mussolini’s Fascist regime. Between this time and 1960 Pound wrote his *Cantos*, the long, uneven poem-in-progress for which he is now best remembered. While continuing his poetic career, he became increasingly active as a vituperative political and economic theorist. From his base in Italy Pound railed against communism, British imperialism, the New Deal, and Jewish finance.

With America’s entry into the Second World War, Pound stayed on in Italy. In early 1942 he began broadcasting anti-American and anti-Semitic propaganda over the Rome radio. The following year he was indicted for treason by the U.S. Attorney General’s office.

Seized by Italian partisans in May 1945, Pound was handed over to the American Army. He was sent back to the United States but, in February 1946, was ruled by a panel of psychiatrists unfit to stand trial. Pound was then committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., a facility for the criminally insane. At St. Elizabeths, Pound was visited by a host of friends and admirers, ranging from the leftist Jewish poet Allen Ginsberg to the neo-Nazi demagogue John Kasper.

Thanks to concerted efforts by members of the literary community, Pound was released from St. Elizabeths in 1958. That year he returned to take up residence in his beloved Italy. Pound died in Venice on his birthday, October 30, 1972.

In assessing the criteria formulated by the French historians, how can we weigh Pound’s Rome radio broadcasts? Having no high political position to regain, he certainly wasn’t a tactical collaborator. Even less was he a collaborator out of greed. For 120 broadcasts, beginning in the fall of 1941 and ending in July 1943, he was paid a total of $2,040, or $17 per broadcast (Tytell 1987, 263-52; Stock 1982, 391).

Does this leave us with the conclusion that Pound was one of West’s “sincere traitors,” publicly speaking against his country in
wartime because he was so enamored of Italian Fascism? And, as that psychiatric panel ruled, was he too crazy to stand trial for treason?

The issue is nowhere that simple. That Pound was a Fascist ideologue is without question. Mussolini received him in January 1933 and that meeting resulted in the sycophantic forty-first Canto. ("Ma questo," said the Boss, 'e divertente.' Catching the point before the aesthetes got there." Pound seemed not to realize that Mussolini's description of the cantos as "entertaining" was pretty tepid praise) (Tytell 1987, 229-30).

Pound was never bashful about expressing his Fascist views. Though the paid broadcasts did not begin till 1941, he had, at the behest of Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, been a guest commentator on Rome Radio since 1936. In 1944-5, when Mussolini's empire had been reduced to a puppet state in northern Italy, he indefatigably continued to grind out pro-Axis radio scripts and newspaper articles.

Was Pound then a crazed zealot determined to perish in the Fascist flame? Had he, in the best "sincere traitor" tradition, ruled out all thoughts of self-preservation?

To accept such a theory is to mistake illusion for reality. Far from seeking martyrdom, Pound avoided death or life imprisonment by devising a fail-safe system of breathtaking ingenuity.

When America entered the war, Pound was living in Rapallo and had been a paid broadcaster since January 23, 1941. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7 and four days later Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. Now technically an enemy alien, Pound could have done one of three things: joined the official exodus of diplomats and civilians from Italy; accepted internment by the Italians and remained silent; or taken the course he did.

There are conflicting reports about what happened between December 7, 1941, and the end of January 1942. News correspondent Reynolds Packard records that he warned Pound that further broadcasting could be interpreted as treason. Pound allegedly gave the Fascist salute and said he would continue defending Fascism against "Roosevelt and the Jews who support him" (Tytell 1987, 363). Another witness states that Pound had tried to board the last train from Rome to Lisbon but was refused admission following an argument with an American Embassy official (Stock 1982, 391). There were also family considerations. Pound's aged father had just broken his hip, making it impossible for him to travel. Also, the poet was reputedly angry over his failure to obtain a visa for the illegitimate daughter he had fathered by his mistress Olga Rudge.
So Pound stayed. But he didn't commit himself irrevocably till January 29, 1942, date of the first wartime broadcast from his host country against his native country. After seeking “wisdom from the ancients,” Pound decided he would not go into a “funk hole.” Instead, he had a mission to warn the American people against Roosevelt (who “violated his oath of office”), Jewish finance (“a few bloodthirsty kikes who own gold”), and England (which “made a thunderin’ and abysmal ass of herself”) (Doob 1978, 23-4).

All this time the safety valve was working. Before making that threshold broadcast, Pound secured an important concession from the Fascist government. Every one of his radio broadcasts was preceded by this announcement:

Rome Radio, acting in accordance with the Fascist policy of intellectual freedom and free expression of opinion by those who are qualified to hold it, has offered “Dr.” Ezra Pound [“Dr.” was a self-bestowed honorific] the use of the microphone twice a week. It is understood that he will not be asked to say anything whatsoever that goes against his conscience, or anything incompatible with his duties as a citizen of the United States of America. (Stock 1982, 393)

Noel Stock, Pound's friend and biographer, writes that Pound considered the reference to his duties as a United States citizen as proof of his innocence (Stock 1982, 395).

There were more strands to Pound's safety net than that introduction from the Fascist government. His most important weapon was the broadcasts themselves. Reading the speeches, one becomes immediately aware of two distinct personalities. The first is “Dr.” Pound, an erudite scholar who discourses learnedly on topics as diverse as monetary theory, Roman history, Céline, and Henry James. The second is O’ Ez, a splenetic, ungrammatical cracker-barrel philosopher who cackles venomous diatribes against Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Jews. The diatribes are interlarded with corny jokes and atrocious puns. O’ Ez may be malevolent but he cuts such a ridiculous figure that his malevolence becomes irrelevant.

Here is Dr. Pound on a leading political rascal of the Gilded Age: “[James G.] Blaine was thoroughly tarred with financial scandals. The worst of it was that the public knew all about his slippery doings. He declared during the campaign that his life was an open book. It was, indeed, but it had been opened by somebody else. For the first time in our history a major political party nominated as its candidate a man who was known to be dishonest” (Doob 1978, 279). On the history of credit: “The basis of credit was known in Siena at least by A.D. 1620. This knowledge went into the founding of the Monte dei
Paschi, a bank which still endures, and was the only bank in Italy that did not fail at the time of Napoleon" (Doob 1978, 259). On Céline: "Céline writes with the clarity of [Remy] de Gourmont: he is a great writer.... Céline denies that there is any fundamental and irremediable hate between the French and the Germans. It was my own conclusion after four years in Paris" (Doob 1978, 131).

Now here is Ol' Ez on Céline: "Yaaas, I'm talkin' of Céline. Last book suppressed I hear in Ole Brother Pétain's France. Don't like the subject. Some folks don't like the subject. Now WHY don't they like the subject? Céline was all out to save France. Reckon he is still out to pick up the pieces" (Doob 1978, 129). Ol' Ez is even more vehement about the landing of American troops in North Africa: "America ought not to be makin' war on Europe, and America knows it.... It might be a good idea to hang Roosevelt and a few hundred yids if you can do it by legal process...." (Doob 1978, 289). In the same broadcast he comments on "the wreckage of France, wrecked under yid control" (Doob 1978, 290). Elsewhere Chiang Kai-shek is re-christened "Chiang Kike Shek" (Doob 1978, 95), "Winnie" Churchill is accused of "allus shoutin' for gun sales" (Doob 1978, 133), and the term "Un-American" is one invented by "asinine females and tinhorn employees of Jews felt [Roosevelt]...." (Doob 1978, 387).

Yet, in the end, it was Ol' Ez who saved Dr. Pound. The poet literally clowned his way out of a life sentence at Leavenworth, the penalty meted out to such other American radio traitors as Robert Best and Douglas Chandler.

Pound was so preposterous that some Fascist officials suspected that he was an Allied agent and that the broadcasts were an elaborate code. These suspicions were voiced to Camillo Pellizzi, a member of the Institute of Fascist Culture who served as Pound's liaison with Rome Radio. "In Rome," wrote the harassed Pellizzi, "those in authority in the regime more than once asked me these questions: 'But what does this fellow want? Can we really be sure that there isn't a code of some sort in what he says? Can you guarantee that he is not a spy?'" (Stock 1982, 395-6). Pound got off the hook mainly because these same officials credited Pellizzi "with a particular understanding of the Anglo-Saxon man and mentality" (Stock 1982, 395). So they accepted Pellizzi's assurance that Pound was on the level.

Examining the portions of the broadcasts in which the Ol' Ez persona dominates, one is immediately struck by what a tin ear Pound had for American colloquial speech. He reminds us of an inferior novelist who depicts Englishmen as con-
stantly saying "old chap" and "yes, by Jove." Pound’s Americanisms are a farrago of archly contrived mispronunciations ("wuz," "sez," "mebbe," "ticheroor"), dropped "g’s" ("speakin’," "writin’"), and phrases so consciously cornball that they would have been rejected by the *Hee Haw* show ("whar England was a-floppin’ to").

Pound was a master of arcane word forms but ignorant of how ordinary Americans spoke. An arrogant elitist, an expatriate most of his life, he believed that the only way he could talk to the majority of his countrymen ("American boobs") was by lacing his discourses with snatches of Mortimer Snerd jargon.

The ultimate irony is that Pound was able to cheat justice not through his more moderate utterances but through his more extreme ones. Pound would surely have stood trial for treason if all his broadcasts had been in the rational and measured tone of, say, Lawrence Dennis, the "gentleman fascist" who contemplated *Der Tag* from his armchair at the Harvard Club. But he was saved by crazy O’Ez, the cantankerousyahoo who raved about "kikery" and "yitts" (Pound’s neologism for "yids"). It was such outbursts that convinced psychiatrists that Pound was too dotty to stand trial.

I have long suspected that Pound’s more extreme anti-Semitic vulgarities were mainly for show and part of the loony O’Ez image he had so ingeniously constructed. Not that Pound was free of anti-Semitism. He apparently believed that Roosevelt (“Frankie Finkelstein”) was Jewish and that world Jewry was run by a shadowy directorate called the Kahal. Yet in three broadcasts (4/30/42, 3/21/43, 6/1/43) he counseled against pogroms aimed at “little Jews.” Though urging action against “big Jews,” he stopped short of advocating final solutions. As Pound saw it, the world’s problems would be solved if “the sixty kikes who started this war [were] sent to St. Helena as a measure of world prophylaxis” (Doob 1978, 115).

Pound in fact had many Jewish friends. One was Allen Ginsberg, who visited him in the mental hospital to which he had been committed. Ginsberg was sufficiently impressed by Pound to name him secretary of economics in a poetically envisaged ideal state (Tytell 1987, 312). In 1967 Pound told Ginsberg that his worst mistake had been “that stupid suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism” (Tytell 1987, 337).

An interesting aside. Careful examination of the broadcasts reveals that Pound had some knowledge of Yiddish. In his June 1, 1943, broadcast, he said: “Don’t go for the poor Jews. Don’t pick on the amhaareez. Look into the system” (Doob 1978, 330). Clearly, this is a slightly mispronounced rendition of *am ha-aretz*, roughly connot-
ing an uneducated country bumpkin. Few would have expected Pound to be familiar with a word far removed from the yiddishkeit expressions that have made their way into the lingua franca. In the same broadcast Pound added that the “lone Jew” (one not connected with organized Jewish groups) was a “good fellow” (Doob 1978, 330).

On July 26, 1943, Pound was indicted for treason. Along with seven other Americans, all broadcasting from Berlin, he was charged with a violation of the Treason statute. To underscore the gravity of Pound’s offense, Attorney General Francis Biddle called a press conference and declared that the indictments were based on the broadcasters’ “free choice in wartime to devote their services to the enemies of the United States” (Tytell 1987, 269).

When Pound learned of the indictment (via the BBC), he made a panicky blunder that almost destroyed him. Abandoning the Ol’ Ez pose, he wrote a letter to Biddle on August 4th that he took the trouble to have posted from Switzerland. The letter, a justification of his position, was remarkable for its calm, reasoned, and temperate tone. In a story that abounds with ironies, this lucid defense did Pound damage that was nearly irreparable. After the war, when Pound was in captivity, the letter was brought forth as evidence that he was sane and merely faking lunacy to avoid the death penalty (Tytell 1987, 289). The tone of the letter can be grasped from these excerpts:

I understand that I am under indictment for treason. I have done my best to get an authentic report of your statement to this effect. And I wish to place the following facts before you.

I do not believe that the simple fact of speaking over the radio ... can in itself constitute treason. I think that must depend on what is said, and on the motive for speaking.

I obtained the concession to speak over Rome Radio with the following proviso. Namely that nothing should be asked of me contrary to my conscience or ... my duties as an American citizen.

... This declaration was made several times in the announcement of my speeches. ... These conditions have been adhered to.

(Tytell 1987, 270)

Pound’s well-crafted but ill-advised letter to Biddle would have been fatal without the efforts of influential supporters from the fields of letters and psychiatry. When Pound was brought back to America, in November 1945, one of his staunchest allies was James Laughlin, the steel heir turned publisher. To handle Pound’s defense, Laughlin enlisted the service of a noted civil rights attorney named Julien Cornell. When Cornell suggested an insanity plea for his client,
Pound told him that this was what he had been planning all along (Tytell 1987, 285).

Some of the literati who endorsed Pound’s insanity defense were less than complimentary in their references to him. Ernest Hemingway pronounced the broadcasts “vile, absolutely idiotic drivel” and said that Pound was “obviously crazy.” But he opposed making Pound a martyr, suggesting that he deserved disgrace and ridicule rather than death. Characterizing Pound as a “crazy but harmless traitor,” Hemingway recommended his consignment to a “loony bin” (Tytell 1987, 225).

Laughlin was more sympathetic. In a letter to T.S. Eliot, he wrote: “I think you and I both realize that Ezra is ‘sane’ and the world is ‘insane’ but since it is the world which habitually hangs or torments men of genius or vision this solution (the insanity defense) seems the most practical” (Tytell 1987, 285).

A more equivocal position was taken by William Carlos Williams, one of the few people who suffered personal inconvenience because of the broadcasts. In the O’Ez mode, Pound had made three references to his fellow poet, once jovially addressing him as “ole doc Williams” (Doob 1978, 16, 361, 382). These tactless allusions brought down on Williams the unwelcome attentions of the FBI (Stock 1982, 396). Why, demanded J. Edgar Hoover’s literal-minded gumshoes, was he being mentioned in such a pally manner by this traitor? In a frenzy of disassociation, Williams denounced Pound as “Lord Ga-Ga,” indicating disbelief in Pound’s sanity (Tytell 1987, 268). But he reversed himself after the war. In the spring of 1946 he wrote Pound that he did not “for a moment” consider him crazy. Later that year Williams wrote Pound’s wife that Ezra should stand up like a man and accept a trial (Tytell 1987, 296).

An even harsher critic was Pound’s old friend Nancy Cunard. In a letter to the poet she called him a scoundrel and expressed the opinion that he was “in perfect possession of (his) faculties” (Tytell 1987, 295).

Echoing Cunard’s negative sentiments were the writers Arthur Miller, Norman Rosten, and Albert Maltz. Miller said that Pound’s diatribes were worse than Hitler’s, Rosten described Pound as a Fascist hireling, and Maltz pointed out that there would have been no debate about a trial if the defendant had been a businessman, factory worker, or physician. All three deplored the idea of letting Pound make a lunacy plea (Tytell 1987, 289).

If Pound had planned an insanity defense from the beginning, why had he let the sober and erudite observations of Dr. Pound intrude on the maniacal babbling of O’Ez? An explanation can be ventured in terms of Pound’s colossal vanity. He wanted to seem
loony enough to fool the psychiatrists but not so loony as to forfeit the respect of those whose esteem he truly valued—people like Williams, Laughlin, T.S. Eliot, and e.e. cummings. Unlike the psychiatrists, these literati knew that the clown-cornball pose went back a long way with Pound. His letters of the twenties and thirties to cummings, Eliot, and others are full of Ol' Ez locutions.

Moreover, Pound was not known for consistency. His bigotry, for example, never conformed to the standard Aryans-über-alles pattern. He was anti-Semitic, patronizing toward Native Americans and “darkies,” but had a strong admiration for Chinese and Japanese. Rightly he denounced the “fetid imbecility” of a BBC commentator who described the Japanese as jackals. “The Japanese classical plays,” he said in his first wartime broadcast, “would convince any man with more sense than a peahen of the degree of Japanese civilization” (Doob 1978, 26). Yet, for some obscure reason, he had a mindless and vehement prejudice against Australians, whose country he never visited. “The Australians deserve a Nippo-Chinese invasion. Criminals were their granddads, and their contribution to civilization is not such as to merit even a Jewish medal. Why the heck the Chinese and Japs don’t combine and drive that dirt out of Australia . . . is for me part of the mystery of the Orient” (Doob 1978, 21). In another broadcast he advocated selling Australia to the Jews for their national homeland (Doob 1978, 255). Given this level of inconsistency, it is hardly surprising that Dr. Pound and Ol' Ez were able to coexist in the broadcasts.

As we know, his strategy was successful. At a hearing on February 12, 1946, Pound was ruled mentally unfit to stand trial. This decision, handed down by Judge Bolitha J. Laws, followed an examination by four psychiatrists. Heading the group was Dr. Winfred Overholser, superintendent of St. Elizabeths Hospital. Others were Dr. Marion King, medical director of the Bureau of Prisons, Joseph Gilbert, chief of psychiatry at Gallinger Hospital, and Wendell Municie, a psychology professor at Johns Hopkins University who had been selected by Pound’s counsel.

An outspoken dissenter against the ruling was Dr. Fuller Torrey, psychiatrist and author of The Roots of Treason. In his book Torrey contends that Overholser was part of an “old-boy” network organized to protect Pound. Torrey identifies the network’s leader as Merrill Moore, a poet-psychiatrist who was friendly with Laughlin and Archibald MacLeish. Despite his anti-Fascist views and position in the Roosevelt administration, MacLeish opposed a treason trial for Pound. Torrey also asserted that Pound was quite capable of faking
symptoms and discerned a pattern of “selective memory loss” which he characterized as lying (Tytell 1987, 291).

Pound’s confinement to St. Elizabeths can be divided into two segments. Between December 1945 and January 1947 he was placed in Howard Hall, the “hell-hole,” a grim building without windows that stank of sweat and urine. Eliot visited Pound there and came away with the impression of a medieval prison, a place where rapists and killers screamed day and night, foamed at the mouth, tried to choke one another, or wallowed in their own filth (Tytell 1987, 294).

Pound’s liberation from Howard Hall came after testimony by Overholser at a January 1947 meeting. Overholser said the poet’s rehabilitation would be speeded by transfer to a more comfortable section of the hospital. Pound’s new quarters were in Chestnut Ward of the Center Building, where he had a room with a window overlooking the Capitol and Library of Congress.

Though Chestnut Ward was not the last word in luxury, Pound’s life was immeasurably brightened by liberal visiting hours and permission to go outdoors. He played tennis, one of his favorite pastimes, and received visitors ranging from established literary figures to youthful admirers. Among those who made the pilgrimage to Chestnut Ward were Eliot, Ginsberg, Thornton Wilder, Allen Tate, Conrad Aiken, Stephen Spender, Katherine Anne Porter, Langston Hughes, Robert Lowell, and Marianne Moore.

Pound was attended by his wife (who took an apartment near the hospital) and visited by his mistress Olga Rudge. He was also reputed to have had sexual liaisons with two young women who might be described today as “groupies.” Sherri Martinelli was a neurotic ex-model and sometime painter, while her successor, Marcella Spann, had been a schoolteacher in rural Texas.

Pound’s position as guru of Chestnut Ward also enabled him to make an ill-advised return to politics. As friend and protegé he embraced John Kasper, the White Power demagogue who was later imprisoned for inciting riot. Their first meeting, during which Kasper expounded his neo-Nazi views, ended with Pound shouting “Bravo for Kasp!” (Tytell 1987, 306).

Pound’s unrepentant Fascism greatly annoyed such liberal friends as MacLeish. In a scolding letter to the poet, MacLeish warned him that efforts to secure his release would be delayed till “the Kasper stink had blown over” (Tytell 1987, 324).

That release was effected on May 7, 1958, when Pound was discharged from St. Elizabeths. The “nut strategy” had worked. Robert Best and Douglas Chandler, Pound’s confrères in atio-treason, were serving life sentences at Leavenworth. But Pound was en route to Italy, where he would spend the last fourteen years of his
Pound gives Fascist salute on his return to Italy (Wide World Photos).
life in comfortable exile. Accompanying him was Dorothy, his tolerant and long-suffering wife, and Marcella Spann, traveling as his "secretary" (Tytell 1987, 34).

For those who perceive Pound as more knave than loon, the most paradigmatic visual symbol is a news photo taken on July 9, 1958. It shows Pound on the upper deck of the Italian liner Cristoforo Colombo, as the vessel is docking in Naples. He is wearing a white, open-neck shirt and white slacks, his left hand is perched saucily on his hip, and on his face is an unmistakable leer. Under the right arm is a huge, dark, spreading sweat stain. The stain is visible because Pound's arm is raised in the Fascist salute.

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