

place, the permanent staff regard them with undisguised hostility, as interlopers who will be replaced after the next Democratic victory.

These people, administrators and staff, are the ones who keep sending me missives by Federal Express. At first I thought it was outrageous that this grotesquely expensive form of communication was used to transmit the trivial stuff that I was getting, but I have come to realize that *spending*

*money is the point.* The political appointees at the top are happy to see the agency's money spent on mailing unimportant messages around the country: At least it does no harm. The permanent staff people are content to hunker down and wait out the Reaganites, but, in classic bureaucratic fashion, they want to spend everything allotted to them so that no one will propose to cut their budget for next year.

Does anyone have a better explanation? It's a hypothesis anyway, and if I'm right, there's a nice play in Federal Express stock for anyone who can predict the outcome of the 1988 election. Remember: you read it here first.

*John Shelton Reed recently threw away the form from Who's Who in Finance and Industry.*

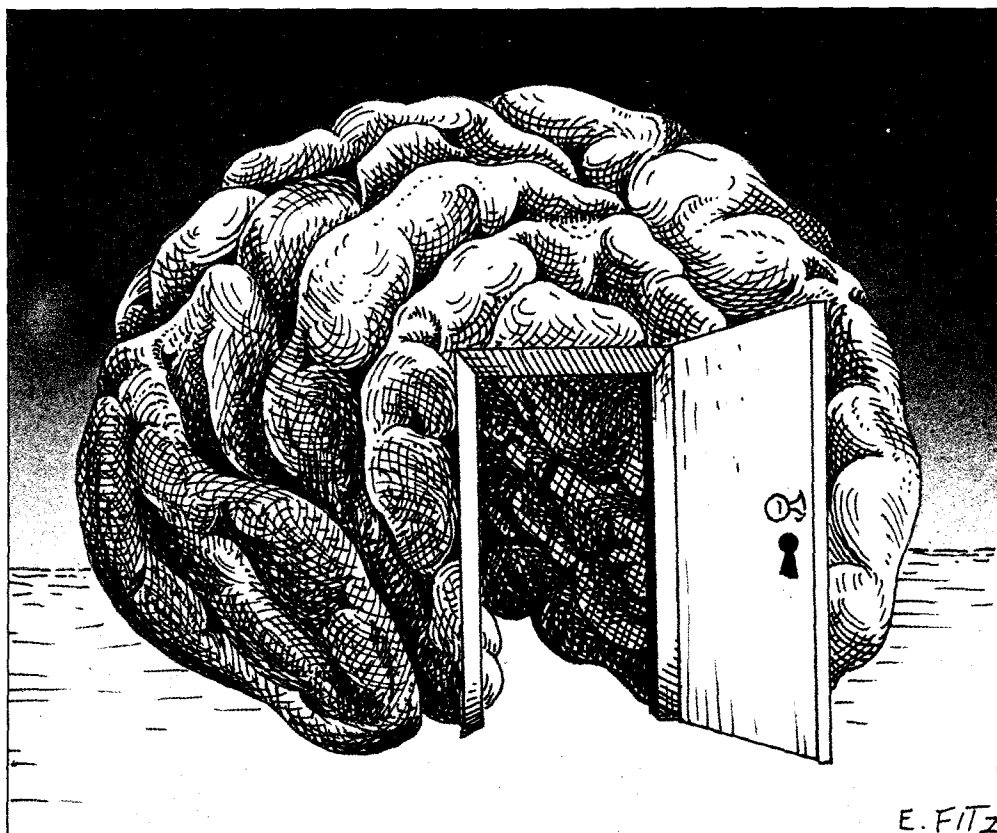
## TYPEFACES



### Temporizing on the Thames

by Andrei Navrozov

It is one of the chief distinguishing features of the philistine that he thinks himself, above all things, "open-minded." While the converse of this proposition is untrue, modern culture having witnessed an explosion in the doctrinaire varieties of philistinism, it is nevertheless a fact that the true-blue, classic philistine, of the kind described by the Russian word *obyvatel'*, who has passed, without mutation, from the world of Chekhov's short stories into real life on the front pages of the *New York Times*, has "an open mind." It is his open-mindedness that allows the philistine to mention, with a disarming sincerity, that his club is open to "anyone" ("except, you know, those pushy types"). He cannot be confused with the bigot, whose mind is closed, because the philistine never hears himself; put another way, the bigot is an intellectually superior being, harmless in the overall scheme of cultural existence, because, unlike the philistine, he has the capacity for self-examination. The bigot may be



seen as an introspective loner, whose gloomy, rude, or cynical outlook sets him apart from his philistine contem-

poraries. By contrast, the agenda for the philistine's friendly, chatty open-mindedness is set by the fellow mem-

## CONCERT IN THE PARK

by Andrei Navrozov

Like most, that sound was infused  
With darkness as with tea leaves,  
Absorbed, like some amazing news,  
By the still night's Darjeeling.

It crumbled like a sugar cube,  
Dissolving, sweetly tentative,  
In the warm summer that imbued  
The cupped yet rimless entity.

I mean the night. So keen its eye,  
Its ear such tones of azure,  
That both the sound and the sight  
Seemed one and numb with pleasure.

As midnight broke its own spell  
The dark went on infusing  
With stillness that unearthly shell,  
With melting pearl, that music.

bers of his club, that is to say, by his milieu.

As in all social and cultural matters, in the domain of literature (our present concern) the open-minded likes and dislikes of the philistine's milieu are forever in flux, undergoing perpetual revision and transformation in reaction to the changing habits of society as a whole and in response to those scattered individuals whose achievement, often belatedly or posthumously, invariably asserts itself as the one and only true criterion by which a creative epoch is measured. By the turn of the century, at least in Russia, no poem was thought to be truly elegant if the nightingale failed to put in an appearance somewhere in the third stanza; by the 1920's, it took the superhuman originality of divine Pasternak to restore the little creature to the poetic vocabulary (just about everyone else was writing about radium). In the United States today, the nightingale seems to have been replaced by phenomena which, for the sake of precision if not modesty, must be described as netheromphalic, and once again superhuman courage is needed to seek out the prose of an Anthony Powell or

the verse of a Philip Larkin.

The philistine rides high in the pages of *London Reviews*. In his "Introduction to the London Review of Books," the lead piece in this collection anthologizing the paper's achievements of the last three years, editor Karl Miller sets the stage for the orgy of open-mindedness that is to follow:

I remember a remark which came at this early point from Robert Silvers, editor of the *New York Review*, to the effect that he saw himself as giving people the chance to have their say.

This remark made a vivid impression on Mr. Miller, whose paper was set up with money from the *New York Review*, and he agreed with it. He, Karl Miller, would follow the example of his American friend Bob Silvers and give people the chance to have their say. There is, however, a danger in this sort of compassionate, liberal attitude: Not only will people take advantage of you, they will think you a Milquetoast besides. Mr. Miller senses that an intellectual, while being open-minded, must hold his own, and he hastens to qualify his position:

Now that people seemed to be having trouble in reaching agreement, there might be a merit in publishing their debates. I need hardly add that the commitment to hospitality and diversity was a long way from boundless. I am talking about a fairly small matter of degree.

Indeed he is, although he does not hear himself. But let us listen to the "debates" themselves.

The political debates of *London Reviews* reflect without exception the trivial politics of the American left, parochialized *ad absurdum* (at least from the American vantage point) to fit the creaky cradle of democracy. The anthology opens with Peter Pulzer's essay on "The Oxford Vote"; that is, "the vote on 29 January by Congregation of Oxford University, by 738 votes to 319, not to award an Honorary Doctorate of Civil Law to the Prime Minister." The politician is bad; she takes bread from orphans and gives the rich hydrogen bombs which they can

use against defenseless seals while factories are closing and Reagan plays Russian roulette with our children's future; Oxford University is good, because it voted, by a majority vote (unlike, one thinks, the British nation electing its Prime Minister), not to honor the bad politician. Oxford's courage is slight by American standards; here, Jeane Kirkpatrick is not even allowed to speak on campus, while the hecklers get to wear pretty armbands and spit on the university president's doorstep.

In the sphere of literary criticism,



Mr. Miller's debates are equally broad. Take deconstruction, for instance, a critical phenomenon to which his periodical seems rather devoted. Here is the opening sentence of "Derrida's Axioms," by E.D. Hirsch Jr., a review of Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction*: "Deconstruction . . . must be judged, simply by virtue of the commentary it has generated, an important cultural phenomenon." Had this sentence been antecedent to Mr. Hirsch's discussion of the Abominable Snowman, I daresay all would be well; but why should an intellectual judge something an important cultural phenomenon simply by the virtue of the commentary it has generated?

Deconstruction, from the very beginning but especially in its present "movement" form, is the great bold initiative on the part of American "Ivy League" literary academics to redistribute, and thereby expropriate and appropriate, the intellectual wealth of past generations by a kind of tweedy grave-robbing. Their motive is a thief's motive (property being, Proudhon's slogan notwithstanding, much less like theft than theft), and I have the distinct feeling Mr. Hirsch suspects this when he insists throughout his review that—Hello, Mr. Miller!—"intellectual culture thrives upon debate"; that is to say, that his detailed review of the thieves' rhetoric is undertaken by him purely in the interest of scholarship