

The Groovy Revolution

by HENRY S. RESNIK

According to a biographical sketch in *Woodstock Nation*, Abbie Hoffman, who describes himself as a "revolutionist," was thrown out of high school for hitting his English teacher. It seems that Abbie has always had a brilliant sense of theatrical irony—the class was probably discussing *Silas Marner* at the time. Abbie's grammar still isn't very good, but that hasn't stopped him from writing books of his own. *Woodstock Nation* is his third.

Abbie Hoffman has been in an excellent position, in fact, to document, through books and articles, the "youth" movement so vividly represented by the Woodstock Music and Art Fair of August 1969, for he has been consistently at the center of the action during the last several years. He was involved in the "exorcism" of the Pentagon in October 1967, for example—an attempt to levitate the dread polyhedron three feet in the air by surrounding it with a magic number of chanting people, and thus rid it of its evil spirits. (The Pentagon stayed put.) Abbie lent his own special élan to the "Festival of Life" in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic Convention, which culminated in a police riot. And now he is one of the Chicago Eight, whose trial on charges of conspiracy he calls "the World Series of Injustice." Wherever Abbie goes these days, there is magic—and theater and media and, if possible, dancing and sex and laughter. As Abbie

HENRY S. RESNIK, frequently reviews books about the counter-culture.

WOODSTOCK NATION: A Talk-Rock Album

by Abbie Hoffman

Vintage, paperback, 154 pp., \$2.95

THE FREE PEOPLE

Photographs by Anders Holmquist,
introduction by Peter Marin

Outerbridge & Dienstfrey/Dutton,
\$6.95, paperback \$2.95

THE MAKING OF A COUNTER CULTURE

by Theodore Roszak

Doubleday, 303 pp., \$7.95, paperback
\$1.95

himself often says, it's a groovy revolution. He lives it all the time, even, as the following will show, during taped interviews.

H.R.: Who do you want to buy your book, anyway?

A.H.: I don't want anybody to buy it—I want them to steal it.

H.R.: Okay, who do you want to steal your book?

A.H.: Seven-year-old kids, cause that's who I write for. They're the vanguard of the revolution.

H.R.: But why write books at all?

A.H.: I don't write books. *Woodstock Nation* is a talk-rock album—it's a record album. They're all songs and cuts . . . I paint books . . . and sing them . . .

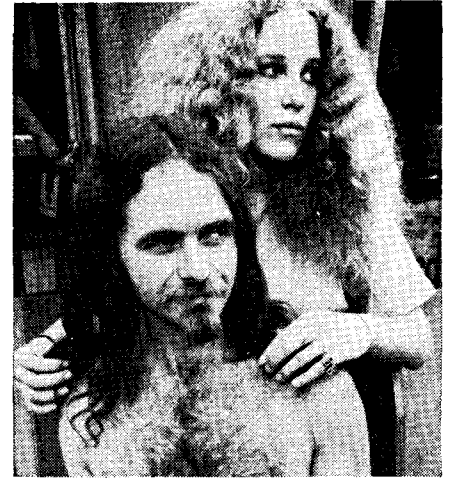
H.R.: Are seven-year-olds reading books? Are fifty-year-olds reading books?

A.H.: No, but they're listening to albums, and since this is an album they'll listen to it.

H.R.: Is this thing meant to be on a record?

A.H.: It's meant to be swum in, it's meant to be sung, it's meant to be looked at. In *Woodstock Nation* there's nobody who's gonna read it from front to back unless you're over seventy. You read it from blue to green to red and then you look at the written part and you look at the pictures and then you read the end to see how it ends and then you go and look at the list of song titles and then you look at the back—that's how you do it; that's how I wrote it.

Abbie wrote *Woodstock Nation*, the jacket copy proudly announces, "in longhand while lying upside down, stoned, on the floor of an unused office of the publisher." Don't underestimate Abbie; he *could* lie upside down. But don't expect *Woodstock Nation* to herald a cultural revolution, either. The book is more of the "revolutionary" same: a slick, pseudo-media mix, with several different colored papers and myriad type faces and text-over-picture pages, and an apocryphal "last letter" in longhand from Che Guevara, and a film scenario in "sprocketed" frames. You will find every turned-on trick in the book in this volume (derived, no doubt, from the work of Quentin Fiore, Marshall McLuhan's designer-collaborator), and by now you ought to be catching on to the fact that books like *Woodstock Nation* only



—From "The Free People."

"A way of living and surviving . . ."

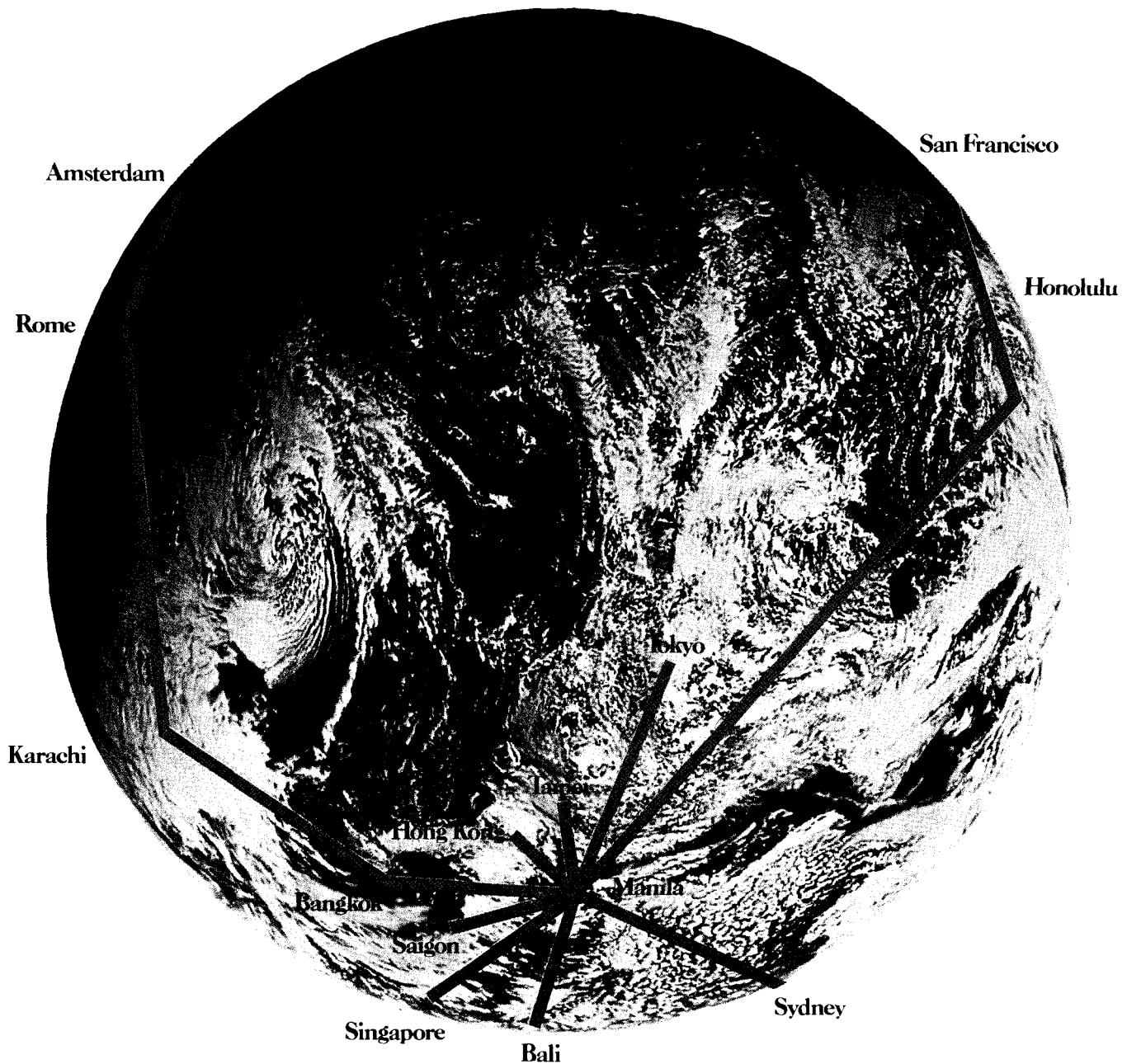
aspire to being outasight—Quentin Fiore's remarkable vision loses all its power when it becomes just another gimmick.

For the sake of those septuagenarians who are likely to read *Woodstock Nation* as if it were a book, at any rate, some explanation is in order. First of all, and most important, it gives relatively little attention to the Woodstock Music and Art Fair. Most of it is about Abbie Hoffman's adventures as a revolutionary culture hero and enemy of the state—the United States of America, which he calls "Pig Nation." And the record is impressive: Abbie was busted on one charge or another ten times in 1968 alone, and in the past five years or so he has been beaten and jailed so often that he could be a leading candidate for martyrdom if he didn't make people laugh so much. On the surface, Abbie's life is one fabulous put-on; at another level, there is a certain dreary routine to having a lawyer as a traveling companion. Abbie and his friends really *do* get hassled.

A.H.: All the money from the book goes to the trial—what else is there? Except a little for dope. I ain't paid taxes in eight years; I don't keep the money. I got ten grand advance, I got rid of that in less than five hours. That money went to, like, the John Sinclair defense fund, to try and get him out of prison—he got ten years for having two joints of marijuana, and it's an important case. The rest went for the conspiracy trial in Chicago.

The main idea of the book, in short, is that *Woodstock Nation* was not just a music festival, but that it continues to be a way of living and surviving within the confines of Pig Nation. The citizens of *Woodstock Nation* are those who either think of themselves as cultural revolutionaries or have dropped out of the predominant culture—they are the mind-blown "hippies" and the

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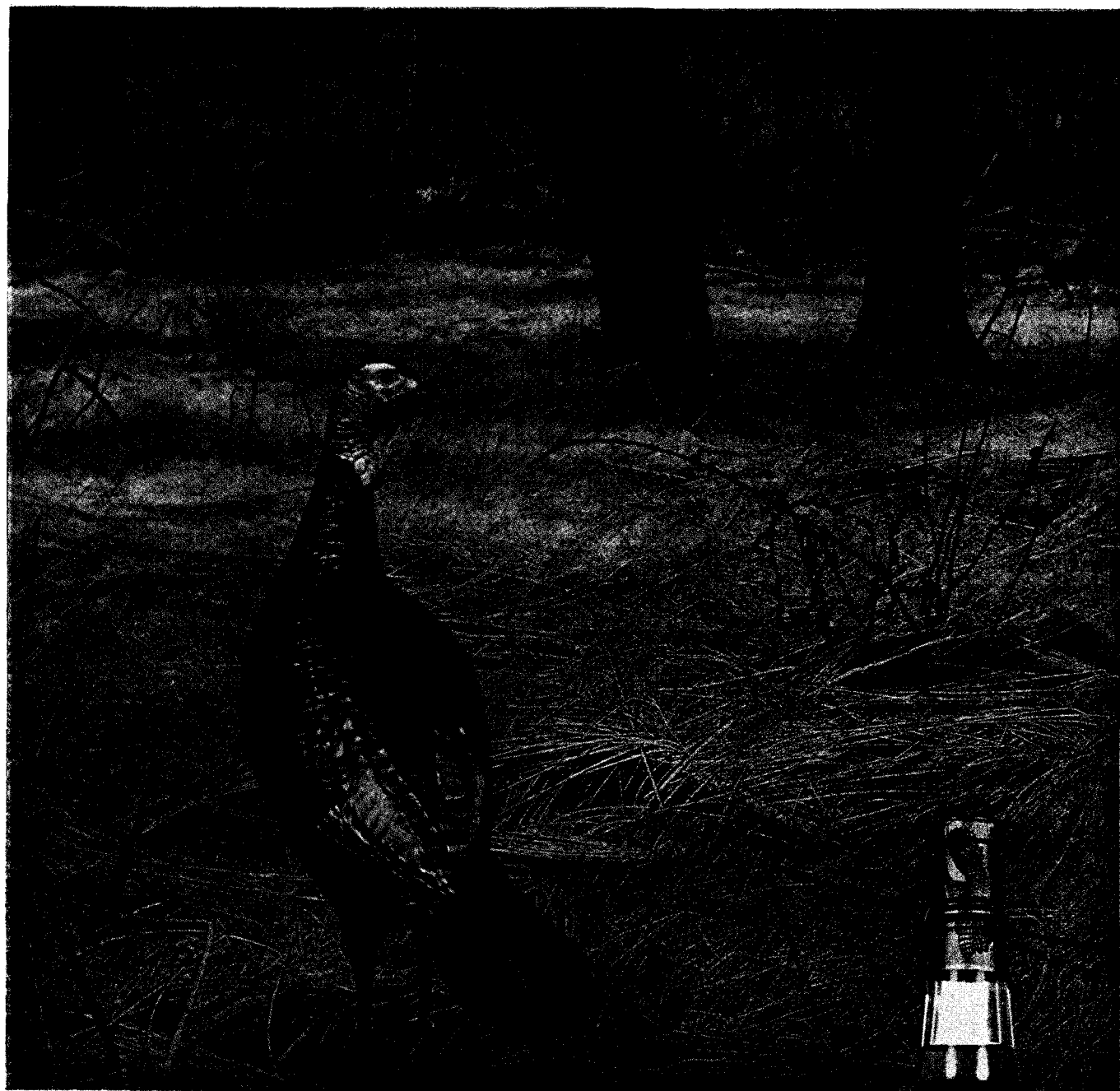
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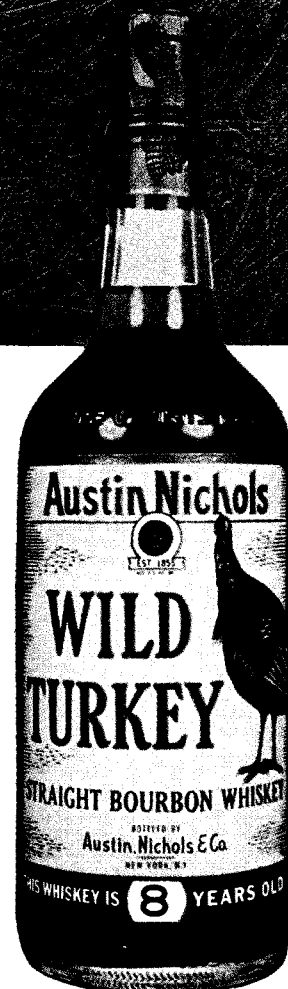
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radical activists; their numbers constantly grow.

Woodstock Nation did not really begin to dawn on Abbie as a political fact until "the rains came" on Saturday of that mad August weekend—then, suddenly, the 600 acres in White Lake, New York, were no longer the setting of a festival but a palpable enemy and threat. "Those that stayed," Abbie writes, "are better for it all, including me. When you learn to survive in a hostile environment, be it the tear gas parks of Chicago or the mud slopes of Woodstock Nation, you learn a little more of the universal puzzle, you learn a little more about yourself . . ."

And it is here, when Abbie gets into a description of his experience at the festival (including a bad acid trip), that the monumental egotism of his writing glares, that his prejudices and his staged reality come sharply into focus. "Everything was so beautiful," Abbie says earlier in the book, describing a visit to ultra-liberal Antioch College, "I was completely bored after three hours. The school lacked the energy that comes from struggle." For the Abbie Hoffmans of America the absurd overkill of modern communications and the domination of technology has made only one kind of struggle really interesting: guerrilla theater, play-revolution, and ultimately the mock wars of the SDS Weathermen. All other struggles are a bore; action is the key, violence the reward. There are no writers in Woodstock Nation, Abbie tells us—only "poet-warriors."

Abbie may be fine as a media clown, and his courage and idealism are admirable, but he cannot qualify as a poet in anyone's nation. His strings of wordy sentences, spun out in a number of styles so blatantly conflicting that the over-all effect can only be called schizophrenic, amount to one huge, leaden rap. *Woodstock Nation* is, in fact, little more than clumsy propaganda for a "revolution" that Abbie takes with what seems to be great seriousness—the overthrow of the United States government. If such a revolution ever occurs, however, it will need better propaganda than *Woodstock Nation*.

There is some kind of awful yet unfathomable tragedy here, and Abbie may yet emerge a unique kind of hero that Orwell and Huxley never dreamed of. The purpose of the propaganda, after all, is to raise money for the Trial. And the Trial is one absurdity that Abbie Hoffman didn't invent—he has been completely upstaged, in fact, by the United States Department of Justice. Nor, for that matter, is Vice President Agnew the mere fantasy of

some diabolical cartoonist. Abbie's book is ridiculous, but he and his comrades are the leading figures in a crisis that can only widen the schism dividing our country. We may have to defend him soon whether we take him seriously or not.

A.H.: I don't think I have much to say. I think I have a lot to do and I think I'm pretty clever and I know how to do a lot of things, but I don't think I have much to say. I don't think there's anything more to say. I think the ideas are already in.

H.R.: Do you have much to give?

A.H.: Yes, I have my life to give.

While *Woodstock Nation* does not satisfy either as poetry or as propaganda, the authors of *The Free People* have struck just the right note in presenting a genuinely poetic view of the counter-culture that Abbie Hoffman symbolizes. A collection of 154 black-and-white photographs of young rebels in their many natural habitats—Berkeley, the Lower East Side, Chicago, beaches, roads, woods, and music festivals (including Woodstock)—*The Free People* has a tender, loving quality that manages to avoid the usual slick simplemindedness of most journalism sympathetic to the subject. Even Peter Marin's introduction, unabashedly lyrical in tone, has a solid earthiness quite foreign to the usual media treatment. Perhaps this is the book that Abbie Hoffman would have made if he didn't find words such useless things while insisting on using them anyway. For if the old adage has any validity, *The Free People* is worth approximately 154,000 words. This

book is probably more relevant, in fact, than any treatise on the counter-culture to date; its pages are filled with vitality, beauty, and joy.

Though conventional in form and scarcely revolutionary, Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* is the most comprehensive and sophisticated analysis of what is happening among the young people of the Western world yet to emerge from the ever-increasing flood of speculation. A frequent contributor to *The Nation*, a teacher of history at California State College, and a leader among the self-proclaimed radicals who maintain their ties to the academy, Roszak has an aggressive, clear-headed way of summing up phenomena that the media have made blurred or shapeless, or merely unreal, and putting the whole counter-culture in perspective. Roszak's premise is that "the rivalry between young and adult in Western society during the current decade is uniquely critical" and that we should consider, first of all, why this situation exists and, secondly, where it is likely to lead.

Roszak has strong leanings towards the counter-culture himself; admirably, he lays his prejudices on the table: "... to make my own point of view quite clear from the outset, I believe that, despite their follies, these young centaurs deserve to win their encounter with the defending Apollos of our society. For the orthodox culture they confront is fatally and contagiously diseased." What Roszak and the counter-culture oppose is the absolute domination in the Western world, particularly in America, of science and technology—a "technocracy" that is subtly totali-



Abbie Hoffman—a new kind of hero?

—Wide World.

tarian, yet beyond conventional politics.

This predominating super-rationality and dependence on the authority of science is contrasted with the personal, mystical, anti-intellectual culture of the rock-drug-beat-“hippie”-Zen generation and the search for true liberation, humanity, and community. But the counter-culture is more than new art forms and philosophies, in Roszak's view; it is also a political phenomenon, an “insistence on revolutionary change that must at last embrace psyche and society.” It is a movement that includes much of the New Left and the hippies as well, communes and free universities, music festivals and anti-war demonstrations. And, Roszak insists, the counter-culture is not so mindless as some technocrats might fear: evidence for this is “the strong influence upon the young of Eastern religion, with its heritage of gentle, tranquil, and thoroughly civilized contemplativeness.” Thus, the essence of the crucial early chapters, in which Roszak picks through the garbage-heap of information that the media have piled up in the last decade, and, more often than not, sets matters unequivocally straight.

A.H.: The reality is that no politician in this country, in Pig Nation, is going to endorse what happened [in Woodstock Nation] . . . The people that make up the military-industrial complex in this country, they're shit-tin about the Woodstock Festival. They're uptight about it. They got three enemies—Nixon laid em out—they got the Vietcong, they got niggers, and they got drugs. Drugs don't mean penicillin, it means *us*.

Roszak believes that the counter-cultural revolution is nearly inevitable, but he admits early in his discourse a number of serious obstacles. One of these is perhaps best illustrated by Abbie Hoffman himself: it is the idea, widely popularized in this country by Herbert Marcuse (whom Roszak contrasts in the book's most thoughtful chapter with Norman O. Brown), that the liberal technocracy is infinitely capable of absorbing dissent—through the attention of the media and commerce, through the overwhelming idolization of youth, even through the modification of existing laws (the legalization of marijuana, for example, which is much more likely now than it seemed a decade ago). The Nixon-Agnew maneuvers are an exception, of course, but they could well be a merely unfortunate episode, a spasm in the unfolding of technocracy's destiny. Nixon and Agnew lack vision, after all; they may have to jail and batter thousands of youthful dissenters before

(Continued on page 42)

The Questing Mind

THE UNEXPECTED UNIVERSE

by Loren Eiseley

Harcourt, Brace & World, 239 pp., \$5.75

FOLLOWING UPON THE SUCCESSES of his widely read *Darwin's Century*, *The Firmament of Time*, and perhaps especially *The Immense Journey*, Dr. Loren Eiseley continues to reward his faithful readers with still another account of our cosmos as viewed and contemplated through the eyes of a poet disguised as an anthropologist. Or might one more aptly describe this nearly unique genre as poetic anthropology? The question is academic, because, even in this far from tranquil era, sensitive humanists will find in this charming collection of new writings combined with modified earlier lectures and essays the always difficult to present “delicate mystery” in which all of us find ourselves immersed. Since, for such readers, pregnant myth is fortified by the authority of Dr. Eiseley's unquestioned scientific training, they will recognize immediately of what he is writing.

At the same time, those who are more inclined toward direct scientific analyses will find themselves enriched if they realize that these essays are indeed science in a humanistic language. Lest these potential readers be apprehensive, permit me to state unequivocally that Loren Eiseley has researched his material well and that it is wisdom to understand that the very finest scientific findings need not be reported solely in formulae and jargon.

But I sense a possible stylistic problem for some. This is not to state a thesis apropos writing styles, yet to those who are unacquainted with Dr. Eiseley's genuinely captivating style—I personally could not pause in the middle of any of the ten chapters—it should be said that they may experience an initial (and quite false) im-

pression that they have been “had.” That is, they may feel that what the author has reported as a naturalist is probably new in detail, but that a common thread running throughout, reflecting man's utter isolation if not desolation, is scarcely new. The difference, of course, is that Dr. Eiseley is basically optimistic. In addition, he has wisely not labeled this work as either a scientific report in the customary sense or as a medieval philosophical *questiones*. This is a book that elucidates precisely what its title implies: the *unexpected*—not necessarily the unexplored, or even the yet to be understood—universe.

Perhaps the heart of the stylistic matter to which I allude—and this is mentioned only in the hope of explaining it, and not to condemn it—is the author's repeated usage of extended metaphors. Let me cite as an example the brief yet telling description of the universe of the orb spider as related in a chapter called “The Hidden Teacher.” After happening upon a spider and its web in some Western Gulch while fossil hunting, Dr. Eiseley paused to consider this creature who turned out to be a hidden teacher. Almost as anyone else might do out of sheer curiosity (though I dare say with far more expertise), he gently prodded the web:

A pencil point was an intrusion into this universe for which no precedent existed. Spider was circumscribed by spider ideas; its universe was spider universe. All outside was irrational, extraneous, at best, raw material for spider. . . . I realized that in the world of spider I did not exist.

At this moment the reader is sure to realize what is to come. Not the unexpected psychology of the orb spider, not the tensile strength of its web, but the inevitable lesson: “The spider was a symbol of man in miniature.” But further, this most elastic metaphor enables the author deftly to arrow home the ramifications of this thought. Are man's thoughts while contemplating war and peace, or stars, or uncontrolled populations, or viruses *really* unbridgeably different from the concerns of the spider (substitute phagocytes, or DNA coils, or . . .)?

Similar metaphors focus our thoughts in chapters entitled “The Ghost Continent,” “The Unexpected Universe,” “The Star Thrower,” “The Angry Winter,” “The Golden Alphabet,” “The Invisible Island,” “The Inner Galaxy,” “The Innocent Fox,” and “The Last Neanderthal.”

One must presume that positivistically oriented readers may tend toward impatience with Dr. Eiseley's lack of “answers,” or even theories to explain his thoughtful observations. Perhaps

