

Saturday Review



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Books and Transplants

Medical scientists today are developing techniques through which virtually every vital part of the human body can be replaced. They are also devising tests for determining potential weaknesses of vital organs so that new organs can be installed before trouble develops. There is even talk that the brain, or portions thereof, may be replaceable.

Phenomenal though these advances may be, they still fall short of an already existing non-medical technique for increasing longevity. A simple system now makes possible an incredible enlargement of human life. This system goes by the name of a book. Through it, one can live hundreds of lifetimes in one. What is more, he may enjoy fabulous options. He can live in any age of his choosing. He can take possession of any experience. He can live inside the mind of any man who has recorded an interesting thought, any man who has opened up new sluices of knowledge, any man who has engaged in depths of feeling or awareness beyond the scope of most mortals. This is what good books are all about.

A personal digression. I once knew a man who had lived at least 6,000 years. His name was M. E. Tracy and he was blind. The fact of his blindness had something to do with his ability to make the lives of others as much a part of his own experience as anything that happened to him in the act of living. He had mastered the art of reading to a degree I have seldom encountered before or since. His inability to see not only did not impair or interfere with his access to books but actually en-

hanced his intellectual vision, for he was able to perceive fully the reality of the things he read about.

For many people, what happens in their own lifetime has the bite of reality. What happened prior to their lifetime is someone else's reality. The present engages their passions; the past may engage nothing more than their curiosity. The difference between the two is the despair of anyone who writes history.

M. E. Tracy's mind was unencumbered by distinctions based on direct observation or chronology. Past and present came to him through the same fingertips. Whether he read the day's newspapers or Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, he had the same full flush of living recognition. He could become as excited about the struggles that animated or rent the lives in Plutarch as he could in reading a contemporary study of Franklin D. Roosevelt or Mahatma Gandhi. He was blind but had no blind spots. Perception transcended vision.

It is not within everyone's capacity to develop such heightened awareness; Tracy's gift and his affliction were inseparable. But anyone who can read can learn how to read deeply and thus live more fully. The way a book is read—which is to say, the qualities a reader brings to a book—can have as much to do with its worth as anything the author puts into it. A writer may spend two days working on a single paragraph so that the words will turn just right, enabling the reader not just to get the drift of a narrative but to become immersed in it.

I have the strongest feelings against

capital punishment, but I am tempted to make an exception in the case of those who have been pushing speed reading to preposterous lengths. There are times when it is more important to read slowly than quickly. Yes, yes, I know: the speedsters claim that they are as much concerned with sense and comprehension as they are with facility. This misses the point. The purpose of reading is not to gobble up the words—even though the reader can afterward itemize his intake from memory—but to experience a mood, to meander through thoughts touched off by an idea, to provide food for the imagination. What makes the present emphasis on rapid reading all the more baleful is that it occurs in the context of an age that worships speed. The consciousness needs the kind of breather the book can provide. It is absurd to say that the speed-readers, if tested, will be able to give everything back. This is not reading; it is regurgitation. What speed-readers too often can't give back is the beauty of a line or the melody of a thought. Water turns to steam with but one degree of additional heat. Many speed-readers constantly fall short of that one degree that turns fact into meaning or a narrative into a living experience.

I do not argue against the development of a man's reading skills in order to manage more information in less time. I do, however, argue against the tendency to scan rather than savor when savoring is the most vital ingredient in the transmission of meaning. Certainly the ability to dwell inside the mind of another man or to have a total transference of emotion or experience is minimized and cheapened by the race against the clock.

Any life, however long, is too short if the mind is bereft of splendor, the passions underworked, the memories sparse, and the imagination unlit by radiant musings. Longevity by itself is indistinguishable from vegetation. A man can acquire a new pancreas, kidney, liver, heart, bone marrow, and lung, but he will succumb to boredom if his mind is without a horizon.

The book is no substitute for experience. But neither is experience a substitute for the book. The growth of the human mind is still high adventure, in many ways the highest adventure on earth. And nothing is more characteristic of that growth than the transmission of vital thought and experience from one person to another and from one generation to another.

What is most attractive of all, of course, about the kind of transplantation made possible by books is that it can be done without anesthesia, all assertions by literary critics to the contrary notwithstanding.

—N. C.

Letters to the Editor

Diminished Man's Right Hand

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH has given a masterly summary of the reasons for the student revolt in his article "The Revolt of the Diminished Man" [SR, June 7]. His concluding statement would be quite true, were the university engaged only in the quest for truth and knowledge. And here is where Mr. MacLeish has missed the crux of the revolt of the students.

It is not only the irrelevance of curriculums to life in the twentieth century, but the hypocrisy of universities attempting to show the way to an understanding and appreciation of life while secretly engaged in research designed to help the U. S. Government forge more efficient means of grinding underdeveloped peoples into the dust, e.g., chemical warfare, germ warfare, biological warfare, defoliants. All these multitudinous horrors were discovered by scientists in university laboratories under government grants that the university finds too profitable to resist. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

This continued preoccupation with money and power, no matter what the cost in humanity, has turned the young against their elders; they have discerned the hollowness of loudly proclaimed values and the shifting sands of integrity. Today's college students have returned to the ideals of our nation's earliest great citizens. These are the ideals which have been preached to them, but never practiced. To maintain his own self-respect, the idealistic youth can do no less than demand a change of direction in the university's conduct of its affairs; this the university must do if it is to maintain the respect of its students.

MRS. MAY O. MASTRONARDO,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Alternative to Safeguard

I READ JOEL LARUS's article "Nuclear Accidents and the ABM" [SR, May 31] with a great deal of interest. Recently I proposed before the Senate what I hope is a balanced and constructive alternative to the President's Safeguard system. The plan included:

- 1) No deployment of the weapons in the system now;
- 2) No future deployment without congressional review and agreement;
- 3) Continued research and development of the radar and computers at two sites so that we can test the integration of the system.

It is my belief that this proposal will not intensify the arms race; would help us secure an effective arms limitation agreement; seek to answer the hardest questions about the system's workability; and preserve our ability to meet in time any clear Soviet threat to the strategic balance in the 1970s.

My proposal would also help avoid the

possibility of accidental firings of the ABM system.

I am hoping that my plan may attract the support of many, many Americans, both those who oppose ABM and those who favor it.

THOMAS J. MCINTYRE,
United States Senator,
New Hampshire.

Federal Architecture

THE SELECTION by Wolf Von Eckardt in "The Sad State of Federal Architecture" [SR, June 7] of the Housing and Urban Development Building in Washington as an example of architecture to reflect dignity and enterprise of government certainly shows limited consideration of a building's merits. The architectural integrity of a building rests not only in its prizewinning drawing board design or in its curvilinear illusion interpreted by a distant camera's lens angle, but in how it looks to the naked eye at a distance and angle from which it is commonly seen, how it fits into its surroundings, and how it wears with its habitual users. The Housing and Urban Development Building, as seen from neighboring buildings, loses its gestalt effect as a giant impressionist painting might if viewed in a broom closet.

Nor has the building worn well with its users. An inadequate parking garage that was designed for European compact cars, a web of look-alike windows staring out from undifferentiated interior cells, and a ground floor entry of raw concrete that suggests the dignity and enterprise of the Stone Age, makes this building a candidate for urban redevelopment in the next decade.

Von Eckardt's argument that federal architecture is drab and ugly because the General Services Administration "fends off esthetes" and operates beyond the reach of public intervention is both popular and appealing, but does not begin to take into account the complexity of federal government decision-making or the present state of institutional architecture in general. The pluralistic pressures of Congress and the Administration, the simultaneous public outcry for more government economy and more government services, the disagreement among leading architects on "the finest contemporary architectural thought," all these suggest that not enough intervention has been fended off.

A review of the drab and ugly non-government buildings that are being mass-produced in our cities, and the inept planning of the cities in which buildings are to be placed would lead one to believe that federal architecture is no worse, but agreed no better, than the state of the art in general.

DONALD R. CALVERT,
Arlington, Va.



"All right you invented fire and the wheel but what have you done lately?"