

few days later, Flannery was dead.

Courage is Flannery O'Connor's cardinal virtue, both in her life and in her work. Her fiction compels us because of its daring: It has to do with the people and the events we, most of us, are afraid to consider. The irony and formality of her language make the situations bearable. Her life, too, was full of courage and a sense of irony and formality. There is no hint of self-pity or anguish: Her acceptance of her fate was complete. But it was not merely a serene acceptance; she was aware of the irony of her destiny, of how the enforced limitations of her life may have been responsible for the perfection of her work. Flannery O'Connor first went north at 22; perhaps she would have stayed there had she not become ill. What would she have written in Iowa or in Connecticut, living a freer life? As it was, she knew her work and settled down to it, realizing that she would not live long, would not live free of pain.

These letters are a treasure, or as Flannery would have said, a grace. Funny, relentless, deeply touching, they reveal the mind of one of our least personal writers. Sally Fitzgerald's introduction is a model of loving understanding: It illuminates what the letters obscure or distort; it acknowledges the less attractive aspects of O'Connor's character, accepts them, and tries to put them in context. Flannery O'Connor's personal voice is a deep pleasure, if sometimes a harsh one. It is, as Catholics used to say, an edification.

Mary Gordon is the author of *Final Payments* (Random House).

Changing Old Man Time's Act

Timewarps

by John Gribbin

Delacorte/Eleanor Friede

194 pp., \$8.95

Reviewed by Alan Harrington

ONE WEEKEND MORNING a number of years ago, my friend Jack and his wife were awakened by a rapping on the bedroom door. Their small son drowsily announced: "I've just had this dream. Willie Mays is going to hit four home runs tomorrow." Reproved and sent back to bed, the boy wandered off. But the next day, to his father's consternation ("Think of the bet I could have got down!"), Willie Mays *did* just that, performing a feat equaled only a half-dozen times in

"Jazz music's one true poet."

—FM Guide

"Whitney Balliett," wrote *The New York Times Book Review*, "can pay tribute without being maudlin or fawning. In his profiles, he humanizes musicians." In the 14 profiles collected in this book, *The New Yorker's* jazz critic focuses his acclaimed talents on singers like Ray Charles, Tony Bennett, Mabel Mercer, Bobby Short, and Alberta Hunter—the artists who have made the "non-classical" song a modern classic. \$10.00

Whitney Balliett

american singers



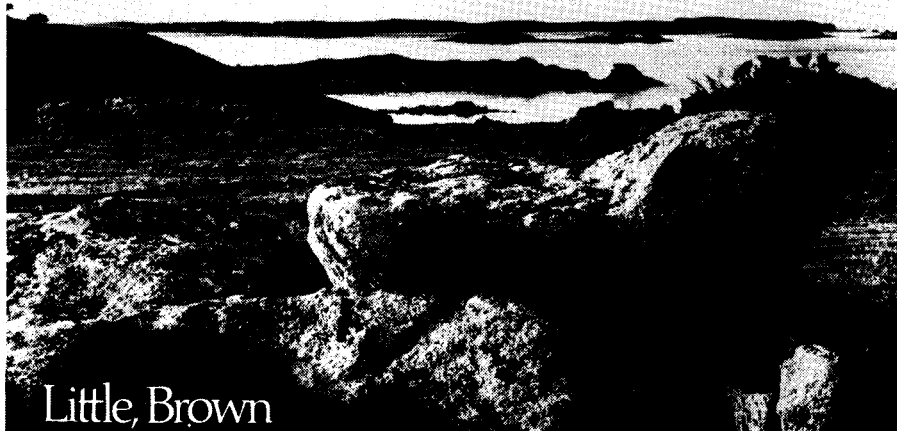
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016

Journey with one of the world's great novelists into a realm as haunting as his fiction.

"The first novel in world literature is woven of islands and the sea," John Fowles writes of *The Odyssey*. The connection between islands and the human imagination is the subject of this rich and reflective work, which sweeps from Homer to *The Tempest* to the author's own experiences in the Scilly Isles. Complementing Fowles's text are a series of island photographs of almost unearthly beauty by Fay Godwin. "Fowles is in top form here;

siren-like, he draws the reader into his imaginative excursion. Godwin's sensitive, brooding photos expertly render sea and land, light and shadow."—*Publishers Weekly* \$10.95

ISLANDS
JOHN FOWLES
Photographs by Fay Godwin



Little Brown

baseball history.

Many of us have had or heard about such precognitive flashes, instances of seeming clairvoyance or telepathic communication, dreams of somebody's arrival, good or ill fortune, accident, death—and then the event's actually taking place. Sensibly, we tend to dismiss these episodes as coincidences. The rational person prefers not to think about them. Stories of this kind, eagerly devoured by mush-heads of the world who adore unsolved mysteries, insult common sense. Yet documented accounts of hard-to-explain insights across space and time persist, and are by no means rare.

In *Timewarps* John Gribbin offers a trip through the wonders of space-time, during which flukes of cognition are seen as not at all mysterious. Rather he presents such events as "slippages" of information from a future that has already occurred, in a cosmos made up of parallel universes, coexisting in multiple time frames, some behind ours, others ahead, and still others "sideways" in time from the one to which we must for now—from our limited point of view—be confined. Gribbin, who has a doctorate in astrophysics from Cambridge University (England), begins:

Sober scientists with impeccable academic credentials...calmly inform us that ... time isn't something that flows inexorably forward at the steady pace indicated by clocks and calendars, but that it can be warped and distorted in nature, with the end product being different depending on just where you are measuring it from.

Starting from this Einsteinian frame, Gribbin takes off across a wild frontier of time-travel possibilities. A good many of his ideas will be familiar to science-fiction readers. He pays tribute to the works of outriding Sci Fi novelists, as frequently "more intelligible than ... mathematical physics," his aim being to put "factual flesh on the bones of their fantasies."

Gribbin projects fascinating "time dilation effects" in four-dimensional space-time. As a backdrop he cites the view of eminent astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, who is also a Sci Fi novelist, that "everything [already] exists; everything that was and everything that will be are in existence at all times..." Interestingly we have from T.S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*:

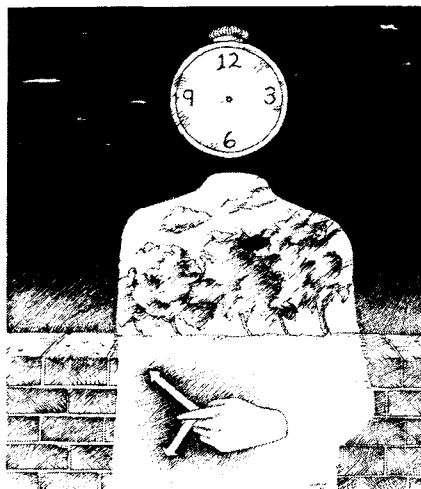
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.

Gribbin goes on: That "... our con-

sciousness...gives us a feeling of history and of time passing ... is just an illusion." Therefore, "every consciousness state can be triggered and retriggered indefinitely and in any order. We may ... relive our youth and age repeatedly ... and never know it!"

Further: "We may simply be single facets of one all-embracing cosmic consciousness...one super-mind whose attention flickers across an array of pigeonholes representing our lives or events in our lives."

Granted such a cosmic condition, our experience of here and now has no exclusive validity. The "flickering attention" allows for the alternate reality of whatever *could* be. Time splits into multiple scenarios in other frames taking form elsewhere or "elsewhen." In one time frame you are going down



(went down, will go down) the path to Eliot's rose garden; in another, you are not, did not, will not... and, depending on where you happen to be coming from at which time, all these outcomes are equally so.

Gribbin undertakes to show how some day we will be able to cross over to next-door universes in two ways. First, by maneuvering a rocket probe (he goes into detail here, making the passage credible) through a rotating black hole in space, where matter is crushed to absolute density, with all time stopped, and finding on the other side "the bizarre possibility of a backwards universe running alongside our own" that would allow an explorer entry into events *back* as well as forward in time. Secondly, theoretical physics has postulated the existence of *tachyons*, faster-than-light (FTL) particles. If they exist, "and the balance of evidence now is in their favor," we may be able to capture and utilize an FTL particle stream "to communicate with universes that *always* traveled faster than light relative to us."

Communication from other time frames, Gribbin suggests, may account for accurate flights of prophecy, idiot savants, subjects in trances, say, suddenly speaking in Arabic that they never learned, visions of a past life, *déjà vu*, and all such baffling phenomena.

"Free will and a fixed future pattern of events may be quite compatible," he concludes. "If an infinite variety of...future worlds exists, across a fan sideways in time... we have the option of choosing by our actions which path across this fixed future landscape we will take."

Oddly, in his depth analysis of space-time Gribbin hardly touches on the impact of modern computers, which in many areas have practically annihilated time, and in terms of problem-solving made its traditional values obsolete. Even more surprisingly, while assuming the validity of Jung's collective unconscious, he fails altogether to mention our now commonplace means of entering that state. Substances like LSD 25, mescaline, and peyote, which alter our minds, distort time drastically, and perhaps open up glimpses of the worlds that, in the view put forth in this book, may exist alongside ours.

A passing phrase of Gribbin's may be revealing. He refers to the "Holy Grail of time travel." What's this? May we detect a longing? Possibly this brilliant astrophysicist, having written a startling and provocative book, remains for all that one more artful dodger of our mortality. The time-manipulator himself still ages. The dreamer, though he may jump from one universe to the next, dies no matter what the dream. Until medical science changes his act, Old Man Time, just as Jimmy Durante sang about him, counts down all our days, and Dr. John Gribbin's too.

Among Alan Harrington's recent books are *The Immortalist*, *Psychopaths*, and the novel *Paradise I*.

Books in Brief

Margaret Sanger: A Biography of the Champion of Birth Control

by Madeline Gray

Richard Marek, 496 pp., \$15

MARGARET SANGER was not, it seems, a nice person. Preoccupied by the demands of scheduling her transatlantic, and sometimes simultaneous, love affairs with Havelock Ellis, H.G. Wells, Hugh de Selincourt, and others, she was often too busy to answer the letters of her children—let alone those of her two husbands, each of whom, in his turn, remained loyal to a fault. Worse