

American economic system can be made to work. For every nasty, provincial bigot convinced that America has lost its nerve, there is a dreamer who has not given up, or a pragmatic leader who discovers that democracy is most successful when practiced on a small scale. There are delightful ironies that, on close inspection, are not as incongruous as at first they seem: the heartlanders who despise "strangers" from a neighboring county, but who—somehow still in touch with their own immigrant heritage—will open their doors to a foreigner.

And there is the river itself, bringing disaster to some, fortune to others. The Mississippi is brutish and gentle, murderous and sustaining, still casting the clearest reflection of a diverse land and its heroic people. ■

Fiction Briefs

Sixty Stories

by Donald Barthelme

G.P. Putnam's Sons, 464 pp., \$15.95

SEVENTEEN YEARS? Barthelme's been at it for more than 17 years? Amazing! Depressing!

Yes, it's been that long. This collection of Barthelme's short stories begins with five from *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964) and continues through nine recent, uncollected pieces. It's a good time for this collection, for the time of this collection—from Kennedy through Carter, to put convenient correlatives upon it—is a discrete period, begun and ended, a period whose social, moral, and emotional landscape has been represented by Barthelme better than by most.

If the period is of a piece, so too are these stories. Not much has changed over the years: There are the philosophical excursions, the blurred dialogues, the cinematic descriptions, the nasty/chic relationships. And there is the language, still transforming the banal into the surreal and vice versa, still constructing syllogisms that challenge us to accept the shifting internal logic of a story as no less valid than the shifting logic of our lives.

What has changed, perhaps, is orientation. The journey from "Views of My Father Weeping" (1970) to "A Manual for Sons" (1975) to "Aria" (1981) is a journey from childhood to parenthood. And in "Bishop," the best of the recent stories, a relationship gone sour speaks not of the unfulfilled opportunities delineated in Barthelme's earlier works, but of

lost opportunities, of reflection, and of dream-wishes of childhood.

It is a time for reflection, the beginning of this new period. It will be interesting to see what Barthelme, an important chronicler of our lives, eventually makes of it all.

—CAREY HORWITZ

Cujo

by Stephen King

The Viking Press, 299 pp., \$13.95

SLICK, SKILLFUL, SAVAGE. Stephen King's *Cujo* is a sure bet for the best-seller lists. It's as grisly as *Carrie*, as ominous as *The Shining*, as eerie and absorbing as *The Dead Zone*. Carefully plotted, the novel throbs with the malignant evil that permeates all of King's fiction. In it, the civilized world is a scrim that barely conceals a rolling current of catastrophe.

The territory will be familiar to readers addicted to King, for *Cujo* concerns a born-again boogiemaniac who was killed off (if not laid to rest) in *The Dead Zone*. Once again, the town of Castle Rock, Maine, is visited by an agent of hell. And, once again, an innocent seer falls prey to an inexorable malefactor. (This time, it is a hydrophobic St. Bernard who is the Beast incarnate—a notion that becomes more believable as the tale progresses.)

Cujo isn't as haunting as the author's vintage works. It's equipped with all of the familiar chilly conventions—and much bloody, morbid imagery—but its night stalkers aren't as menacing as they might be. And King breaks the spell at times with a clumsy metaphor or an awkward bit of phrasing. Nevertheless, this thriller offers tingles and shudders apace; it's replete with little shocks that dim the memory of the author's missteps.

—MICHELLE GREEN

Take This Man

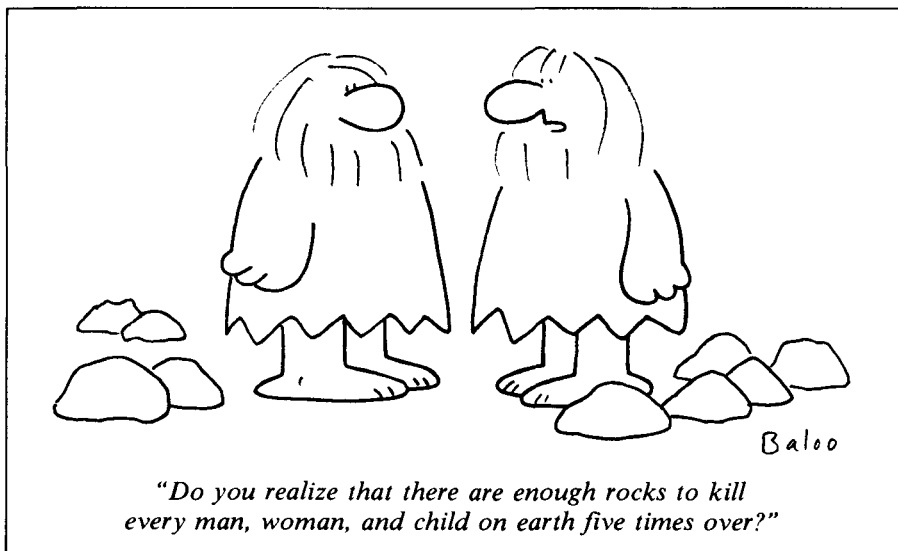
by Frederick Busch

Farrar, Straus & Giroux 264 pp., \$12

A TOUR DE FORCE of comedy and pathos, Frederick Busch's *Take This Man* will have readers—and writers—admiring its exactness. Every thing on the page seems to have been eyeballed, touched, and weighed, and the characters are shaped and given life in an encircling, stylized manner.

The protagonist is Anthony Prioleau, a clumsy wartime researcher stationed at Patoka Plains, Illinois, in 1944. He's studying the possible application of TV technology on fighters and bombers when his life is disrupted briefly by Ellen LaRue Spencer. En route to see her fiancé before his Seabee company leaves San Diego for the invasion of Japan, she is put up by Prioleau while her car is being repaired. Their ensuing love affair is played out against a backdrop peopled with eccentric small-town folk: a druggist who goes batty when his daughter is seduced; the daughter herself who writes unsalable soap-opera scripts; an alcoholic who fires buckshot at "Communists floating through the air." Busch's humor has the driven oddity of Faulkner's *Pylon*, *The Wild Palms*, and *Sans-tuaries* without the doom and outrage; it climaxes in a superb burlesque of a grade-school play about Jews and Nazis and in a description of the first hectic display of TV in the Midwest. Prioleau and Ellen have a son and the author shows us their lives in 1956, 1963, and 1980. Busch's eighth and best work of fiction demands concentration; he refuses to write a commonplace word.

—DONALD NEWLOVE



**The New
Communications
and Freedom**

**JOHN WICKLEIN
ELECTRONIC
NIGHTMARE**

"Anyone wanting to understand our electronic world should read John Wicklein's book—anyone wanting to preserve individual freedom in this brave new world **MUST** read it." —BEN BAGDIKIAN
\$14.95

Who owns your body?

**THE BODY AS
PROPERTY
RUSSELL SCOTT**

A chilling exploration of the social, moral, and legal issues arising from our ever-increasing reliance on human organ and tissue transplants. **"Informed and sophisticated."**

\$14.95

—Kirkus Reviews

**From alpha to x-ray,
a lexicon for the
science watcher.**

**COMING
TO TERMS**

by Wayne Biddle
Illustrations by David Suter

"Never again will I confuse a quasar with a quark. In the name of every ignoramus about scientific terms—and our number is legion—I thank you for this glossary, Mr. Biddle."

—WILLARD R. ESPY

\$8.95

THE VIKING PRESS



BOOKS

Reinhart's Women

by Thomas Berger

Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence
296 pp., \$12.95

WITH THE PUBLICATION of his 11th novel, the prodigiously talented Thomas Berger turns his mordantly comic Reinhart trilogy—*Crazy in Berlin* (1958), *Reinhart in Love* (1962), and *Vital Parts* (1970)—into a world-class series. The eponymous Carlo Reinhart, an Ohio-born hulk of a German-American, first saw service as a teenager during the Allied occupation of Berlin. After surviving the postwar college scene, Reinhart entered into a series of disastrous business ventures and a destructive marriage to Genevieve Raven, who bore him son Blaine (who grew up to become a Sixties' radical) and whale-like Winona. All of this proved to our hero that Virgil was right when he said there are tears in things.

The new novel presents Reinhart at 54, serenely sailing into late middle-age. Having divorced Gen a decade before, he now keeps house for dutiful Winona, who has dieted her way to become a svelte and highly paid fashion model and her father's sole support. (Meanwhile, Blaine has become a miserly stockbroker with a skitterish wife and two rude children.) That Winona's sexual proclivities run to women is only the first surprise that turns grandfather Reinhart's new life into a comedy of the commonplace.

The mood here is less biting than in the earlier books as Reinhart achieves a "hearty Elizabethan" happiness moving back and forth in a daily round full of devoted daughters, lovers, friends, and neighbors. Berger devotees will notice the evolution, too, of the Reinhart style from a heavily complicated syntax that relied as much upon wit as drama to a plainer, more demonstrative prose.

—ALAN CHEUSE

Sauce for the Goose

by Peter De Vries

Little, Brown, 240 pp., \$11.95

WHAT'S SAUCE for the goose, it turns out, isn't sauce for the gander. A woman wants someone who says "You waltz divinely." A man wants someone to keep his clothes clean. Of course, a woman may divorce a man because he actually does say "You waltz divinely." Such are the vagaries of romance.

This story could be summed up Cinderella-style: Girl comes from the Midwest to the big city; she starts as a typist and winds up owning a magazine, having married the boss. But Cinderella is less to the point than the heroine's nickname, Daisy May. Daisy may be adopted; then again, she may not. Daisy may marry Dutch dynamo Dirk Dolfin; then again, she may not. It doesn't much matter, so long as her caustic mind and gameness can carry her into situations of deepening ironic absurdity—like writing an article on sexual harassment during the course of which the only harassment she encounters comes from the woman editor who assigned the piece.

It must be a curse to be both extremely silly and helplessly intellectual. De Vries is so comfortable with his cynicism that he doesn't even try to be wise or even really satirical. He takes us on a quick two-step that makes for bright light reading. You may wish to tell him, "You waltz divinely." Then again, you may ask for a divorce.

—ANNA SHAPIRO

On the Stroll

by Alix Kates Shulman

Alfred A. Knopf, 320 pp., \$12.95

ALIX KATES SHULMAN, author of the best-selling *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, sets out to show us New York's Hell's Kitchen (and life) from the divergent points of view of three pilgrims in the

