The Good Blonde and the Genuine World
Doris Day’s American Century

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Our fall 2008 issue was the least popular of all we have done. On its cover was a picture of Republican presidential nominee John McCain and his running mate, Alaska governor Sarah Palin, looking happy because they had not yet heard the election results and did not even suspect them. (Politicians before Election Day are much like baseball fans during spring training: overflowing with hope and convinced that fortune will smile upon them, as, after all, it must arbitrarily smile upon someone.) I imagine that photo may have had something to do with the issue’s unpopularity. Our previous issue, spring 2008, had a picture of Barak Obama on the cover and it was, far and away, the most popular we have ever done. (I realized then that all the people I was around felt about Obama in a way that was quite similar to how a young boxer named Cassius Clay felt about middleweight champion Sugar Ray Robinson: blinded by awe, such light that obscures as much as it reveals.) I come away from this thinking either never to put Republicans on the cover of Belles Lettres—unless they are, for the sake of the political persuasion of the vast majority of our readership, decidedly unhappy or giving all the appearance of being thrashed unmercifully for whatever their collective sins happen to be—or I must always find a reason to put Obama on the cover. I almost succeeded when I found a photo of Obama reading a story to a group of schoolchildren. I thought this might vaguely connect to WU lecturer Amy Pawl’s insightful and delightfully written review of Gregory Maguire’s What-the-Dickens: The Story of a RougeTooth Fairy. Alas, it was not to be, as our associate director, Jian Leng, was against any more Obama covers until he runs for reelection. In fact, she was against politics of any sort. In surrender to her wishes, I opted to indulge another whim and put Doris Day on the cover. That seemed fairly apolitical. She’s eighty-six years old, lives with a bunch of dogs, and hasn’t made a movie or an album in at least forty years. But then I discovered that I had to connect her photo to something that was actually in our magazine. So, I have dutifully reviewed the latest Doris Day biography.

There are some other gems in this issue as well (not my piece, which I wrote simply to indulge my fancy for the Doris Day cover), such as Ellen Harris writing about Paula Giddings’s new biography of the remarkably feisty and unruly Ida B. Wells; Joe Pollack weighing in on St. Louis’s favorite son, Yogi Berra; and WU English professor David Lawton telling us about a new edition of Canterbury Tales in an exposition that is as erudite as it is, at times, truly witty. We are always glad to have Jan Castro writing something for us and welcome her back in our pages. Finally, we are pleased to have a fine review of violinist Eugene Drucker’s novel The Savior by WU Music Ph.D. student Erin Brooks. It is especially good to display new talent in our pages.

So, there you have it. Another issue of Belles Lettres, purified of any taint of conservatism, that we hope will make our readers forget all about our Republican cover, which made them so unhappy. Jian has decided to banish Republicans entirely from the next presidential election so that we will not have to mention them at all. Then, we can run several Obama covers without having to worry about being “fair and balanced.” I will miss those moments when I channeled Bill Buckley and Russell Kirk, the Agrarians and Thomas Sowell, with little spasms of Booker T. Washington thrown in for good measure. Well, I can only hope Jian may fail in her mission. Republicans may turn out to be just like cops—the people, as Raymond Chandler wrote, that no way has yet been invented to say goodbye to.
Her name was never mentioned in my high school or college American history courses. She was a footnote in one journalism textbook and rates only a paragraph in a new edition. Students at Washington University who studied Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois in high school say they have never heard of Ida B. Wells.

Paula J. Giddings, the Elizabeth A. Woodson 1922 Professor in Afro-American Studies at Smith College, has rectified a long injustice with her new book, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*. She places Wells where she belongs: in the pantheon of heroic Americans. A crusading journalist, Wells was the first to speak out against lynching and continued to do so in a loud voice. Lynching in America has taken more lives than did 9/11. Between 1882, the first year of reliable statistics, and 1968, 4,743 men, women, and children were lynched, of which 3,446 were African American, according to the Tuskegee Institute.1

With its exhaustively researched historical background, this biography is a must read for serious students of American history.

Born July 16, 1862, to slave parents in Holly Springs, Mississippi, Wells was raised in a politically active family. Her father, Jim Wells, the son of his master, was a master mason and a community leader. After voting in one election, he found his carpentry shop locked by his white supremacist landlord. Unfazed, he bought more tools and rented another building.

His eldest child, Ida Bell Wells, never gave up the struggle for equality. She rebelled against an industrial education that would have relegated her to work as a domestic. Orphaned after her parents died in a yellow fever epidemic that swept the Mississippi Valley, Wells, only sixteen, fought her father’s friends who planned to divide up the children. To support her family, she dropped out of Shaw University (later renamed Rust College) and became a schoolteacher. Knowing her dying father had entrusted his money with a white physician, Wells met the man in the town square where he handed her the cash. The townspeople watched and cast Wells as “a soiled dove.” For years afterward she burned with shame. An aunt’s invitation to move to Memphis two years later gave her the chance to do “something heroic and wonderful that won’t be forgotten after I’m dead,” she wrote.

She achieved that dream by the age of twenty-one. Long before Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus, Wells literally fought a conductor on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway. As he yanked her from her seat in the white-only car, she clawed and bit him so severely that he bled. Long before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Wells proposed a boycott of Memphis’s segregated trolleys. Some editors of the black press, which included some two hundred weeklies, lauded her and invited her to write for them. Still teaching, she became editor and one-third owner of the *Memphis Free Speech*.

The year she turned thirty, Wells found her life’s work when her good friend Tommie Moss, the president of a black-owned grocery co-op, was lynched by a Memphis mob. The cause was economic; the black-owned grocery was taking business away from a nearby white-owned one. “If it were possible I would gather my race in my arms and fly away,” Wells wrote in despair. “There is only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial,” she argued, and three weeks after the lynching, thousands of black Exodusters struck out for the Oklahoma Territory. That year, 1892, saw the largest number of recorded lynchings in the U.S., 230, of which 161 were black and 69 were white.2

Wells began doing investigative journalism, visiting the lynching sites and interviewing eyewitnesses and the victims’ families. The truth was rarely reported: in one case the white press

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claimed that “a big burly brute” had outraged the seven-year-old daughter of the sheriff of Tunica, Mississippi, who then led a lynching mob. Wells found instead that the girl was seventeen and had gone to the man’s cabin willingly. The sheriff was practicing image control, she deduced.

While she was visiting New York, Free Speech ran her fire-bomb editorial in which she claimed: “If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.” Furious at her audacity, the white Memphis dailies called for Wells to be lynched. Within days, the Free Speech’s office was destroyed, her good name was maligned, and her life was threatened. The Memphis Commercial called her “a black harlot,” a variation on the age-old labeling of outspoken women as “sluts or nuts.” The paper also claimed Wells aimed to “marry a white husband,” which raised the fear of race-mixing.

Undaunted, Wells published Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892), her landmark pamphlet attacking the premise that lynching was a response to black men who sexually assaulted white women. She wrote that “cries of rape often followed the discovery of consensual relationships between black men and white women.” She named names of white women of standing who consorted with African American men. She proved how hypocritical these white knights were who protected their own women, but dishonored and violated black women and ignored their responsibility to their biracial children. “If it is illegal for white men to marry colored women, it should also be illegal for them to form alliances with them,” she wrote. She cited the Chicago Tribune’s statistics that less than a third of the lynched black men had been accused of rape. Rape was an “excuse,” not the cause. How else to explain the bodies of children and women dangling from trees and bridges?

Wells pointed out that lynching was mob rule that undermines the rule of law: it is unconstitutional, denying the accused the right of due process. (St. Louis editor Elijah P. Lovejoy, who is hailed as the first martyr to the First Amendment, made the right of due process. (St. Louis editor Elijah P. Lovejoy, who)

By 1894, two years after Tommie Moss was lynched, Wells announced that she had “the ear of the world.” The St. Paul Appeal wrote, “Ida B. Wells has licked the Solid South worse than the Union ever did.” Even the Memphis dailies and the governor of Tennessee spoke out when six black men were massacred on August 31, 1894, in Kerrville, Tennessee. But that was not good enough for Wells. She wrote that white supremacists merely hated the bad press they were receiving. Blacks were content with all talk and no action. A jury had yet to convict any lyncher. “We must organize and agitate,” she demanded.
Her militant philosophy was directly opposed to that of Booker T. Washington, who favored accommodation. Touted as “the New Negro” after the death of Douglass, Washington told white audiences that training at his Tuskegee Institute would uplift the “ignorant” and “childish race.” He claimed, “The men that are lynched are invariably vagrants, without property or standing.” Wells was adamant that no African American should have to prove anything to be able to go to good schools, ride first class on public transportation, feel safe in his own home, and vote without paying a poll tax. Civil rights should be a birthright as guaranteed by the Constitution, she said.

Wells was so busy on her lecture tours that she put off her nine-hundred-guest wedding to Chicago attorney and activist Ferdinand Barnett until June 17, 1895. She foremost was married to the cause. “I decided to continue to work as a journalist, for this was my first, and might be said, my only love,” she later wrote. The births of four children never slowed her down. “I honestly believe that I am the only woman in the United States who ever traveled throughout the country with a nursing baby to make political speeches,” she said. Ahead of her time, she kept her name and added Ferdinand’s with a hyphen.

She took off to investigate the Wilmington Massacre, in North Carolina, where on November 10, 1898, 2,000 whites went on a rampage, killing up to 100 African Americans. Some 1,400 blacks fled and 400 more hid in the woods. The cause was economic. The population of African Americans was larger and more prosperous than that of whites. In a blistering speech, Wells said, “We have at last come to the point in our race history where we must do something for ourselves and do it now.” Within months, she took up her pen to write a third pamphlet on lynching, *Lynch Law in Georgia* (1899).

The Springfield, Illinois, riot on August 14, 1908, not far from the tomb of the Great Emancipator, triggered the birth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and owner of the *Nation* and the *New York Post*, issued “The Call” for new race relations. The NAACP Founding Forty was the first national mix of blacks and whites, men and women, Wells included. But as Giddings points out, her “temperament and the NAACP’s elitism, her militant ideology and confrontational style were what the civil rights organization could, literally, not afford.” Indeed, government investigators described Wells as “a far more dangerous agitator than Marcus Garvey.” Du Bois became the editor of the influential *Crisis* magazine and saw to it that Wells was sidelined.

Lynchings continued to increase in number, scope and brutality. The worst case was the 1917 East St. Louis Riot, which left at least 150 dead, according to Wells (but 39 according to officials). Little black children were tossed into burning buildings and into the nearby Cahokia Creek. Wells raced to the scene two days after the riot, staying in St. Louis with her friend Annie Turbo Malone, the Poro cosmetics manufacturer. After interviewing about 50 survivors Wells wrote the pamphlet *The East St. Louis Massacre: The Greatest Outrage of the Century* (1917). “If we only had men with the backbone of Mrs. Barnett, lynching would soon come to a halt,” the *Chicago Defender* applauded. She “towers high above all her male contemporaries. Mrs. Barnett never shrinks,” praised the *Springfield Forum*.

Her directness was a blessing after the 1919 Elaine Massacre in Phillips County, Arkansas. There black sharecroppers had tried to stop the peonage system that cheated them of money when the riot broke out and white men were killed. Twelve black farmers were sentenced to the electric chair, and no one tried to save them. Then Wells stepped in, threatening to help thousands of tenant farmer families leave the state. She knew from her Memphis experience that such a gesture would make the white landowners take notice. Wells wrote a call to arms for the *Defender*: “Let me hear from individuals, churches, secret societies, businesses, men’s leagues and women’s clubs at once … furnish me with the sinews of war and I will fight your battles…. Will you do it?” That story alone propelled Arkansas black leaders to set up a legal defense fund for the farmers. Next she went into the prison to interview the men on death row. They sang for her the plaintive spirituals they had written, but she was having none of it. “I got up … walked close to the [prison] bars and said to them in a low tone, ‘I have been listening to you…. You have

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told and sung and prayed about dying, and forgiving your enemies…. Why don’t you pray to live and ask to be freed?” Wells wrote a fifty-eight-page tract, *The Arkansas Race Riot* (1920), using the farmers’ narratives of how they had been tortured with electric shocks and mock hangings. She added an analysis of the economics ofpeonage. The dozen men awaiting execution were owed $86,050 by the planters, she estimated. Years later, the last man freed (after the NAACP’s 1923 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Moore v. Dempsey*) showed up on the Barnett doorstep. He told about that day she visited the prisoners: “We never talked about dying any more, but did as she told us, and now every last one of us is out and enjoying his freedom.”

While difficult to work with, Wells accomplished many reforms. She, like author George Washington Cable, fought against the convict lease system in which African Americans were arrested for misdemeanors such as vagrancy, imprisoned, and then leased out as a cheap labor pool. (Scarlet O’Hara was rebuked in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With The Wind*, 1936, for using convict labor in her saw mill.)

Wells single-handedly changed the political landscape of Chicago, the second largest city in America at the time. Her platform was simple: “For Women, Of Women, and By Women.” Seeing how unsophisticated women were about politics, she organized the first black women’s suffrage club in Chicago, the nonpartisan Alpha Suffrage Club. The Alphas became powerful lobbyists who wrested power from the Republican machine so that blacks could represent themselves. They were to march with five thousand other women in the famous 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession in the nation’s capitol. Southern women balked at walking arm-in-arm with blacks, and Northern whites suggested that the African Americans form their own contingent. Wells refused. She strode out to the head of the white Illinois delegation and, with her head high, marched with them. Black women should stand as firm on their principles as Southern women did in their prejudices, she said.

She broke the back of a plan to segregate Chicago schools. The *Chicago Tribune* ran a series touting St. Louis’s separate-but-equal facilities. *(The reporters ignored how black St. Louis schoolchildren walked through streets lined with bars and broth-

*Ahead of her time, Wells understood, as Giddings puts it, that “the race could never rise [above] how the least of them was treated.”*

els to reach substandard classrooms.) When the editor of the *Tribune* ignored her reasoning, Wells brought in Jane Addams, who convinced him to drop the idea of separate schools for blacks and whites.

Wells proposed the then radical concept of an interracial center where people could meet regularly on common ground. Her Frederick Douglass Center offered a kindergarten, girls’ and boys’ clubs, and an array of adult programs. While she wanted to help poor blacks up from the South, her black contemporaries who were desperate for respectability wanted “a middle-class, race-relation salon” not “slum work.” Ahead of her time, Wells understood, as Giddings puts it, that “the race could never rise [above] how the least of them was treated.” Visiting penitentiaries and prisons to talk to the inmates, she learned that rural Southern blacks lacked the private social service agencies assisting Russian Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants. Within a year, she had opened the Negro Fellowship League with its free lodging, job placement, and reading room. Her League found jobs for ten thousand men and women, provided financial aid, and a place to go for socializing.

When A. Philip Randolph needed her help in Chicago with his nascent Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, Wells saw to it that her clubwomen supported the union. Within a year, the Brotherhood had one thousand members, and the Pullman Company announced its porters were no longer to be called “George,” a degrading term, after the first name of the company founder.

Nearing her sixty-ninth birthday, Wells was busy writing her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, and planning a black book fair. She died March 25, 1931, from uremic poisoning. At her funeral, a soloist sang the spiritual, “I’ve Done My Work.”


*1 http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html

When Carlo DeVito set out to write still another biography of Lawrence Peter (Yogi) Berra, the Hall-of-Fame Yankee catcher who grew up in the Hill neighborhood of St. Louis, he did a lot of research. In a 50-page list of what he calls “sources,” he credits hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, books, television programs, even the Internet.

But he apparently never spoke to his subject. Berra, short and stocky, homely and unsophisticated, was a lot better and smarter baseball man than fans, sports writers, and authors have decided. He was a fine hitter, a superior defensive catcher, and excellent handler of pitchers, including Don Larsen, who in 1956 threw the only perfect World Series game, 27 batters up and 27 batters down without a base runner. He also managed and coached for about 25 years. Most of the so-called “Berra-isms” or “Yogi-isms” came from his St. Louis boyhood chum, Joe Garagiola, and from a large number of witty writers who made Berra the voice for their quips.

Sportswriters (and I used to be one) traditionally have made a habit of quoting an unnamed “press box wag” for their own smart-aleck remarks that they cannot weave into a story any other way.

So DeVito provides many descriptions of Yogi Berra, many stories about games in which Yogi Berra played, a large number of Yogi Berra anecdotes and sayings, some of which may be true and some of which he might even have said. But we have no sense of Berra the man, though we get close in a section that covers 1963 and ‘64. DeVito is at his best, both in research and writing, as he describes Berra’s hiring as the Yankee manager, his team’s poor performance in the first year, its championship the second, his betrayal by his players and his boss, Ralph Houk, the Yankees’ general manager, and his firing after the St. Louis Cardinals defeated the Yanks in the 1964 World Series. It’s a sad story of poor treatment of a man who was more sinned against than sinner.

But DeVito, whose spelling and inaccuracies cause the reader to stumble and stagger through a repetition of tales of Berra’s early life, military service, minor leagues tour of duty, and seasons with the Yankees, relapses into a fumble-and-fall attitude within the final third of the book that is mainly a catalog of golf tournaments, dinners, honors, and reminiscences from other authors. There is good coverage of the famous “Harmonica War” between Berra and Phil Linz, and the brief battle may have sparked the Yankees to the 1964 pennant. But most of *Yogi* is a rehash of the writing of other people.

Despite being the subject of many biographies, Berra remains a very private man. He is a legend for being frugal, and perhaps an author’s unwillingness to pay for cooperation was a road block. DeVito, however, consistently throws impediments, misdirection, and minor errors at his reader, right from “I poured over more than 4,000 original sources,” but no interview with Berra apparently, on the very first page, through “Columbus Street” instead of “Columbia Avenue”; “Volpe” salami instead of “Volpi”; “Mama Foscano” instead of “Toscano”; to ignoring the fact that Ken Holtzman, the A’s pitcher who won two games against Berra’s Mets in the 1973 World Series, also was born and reared in St. Louis, just like Berra.

Robert Lipsyte of The New York Times probably offered the best insight into Berra in a 1967 article. As DeVito writes:

Per Lipsyte, “Berra was a splendid ballplayer in his youth, albeit foulmouthed, suspicious and sometimes nasty.” But the journalist intimated that Berra had become a hostage to his image. The media had “spun a cotton-candy legend about a dumb and loveable child-man. The legend grew and was sustained and had nothing to do with the Berra who grew older, more confident, who matured and mellowed.

“At 42, Berra is often pleasant, patient, and concerned with ways to make money for his family. He had enough pride, at the end of the 1964 season, to leave the Yankee organization rather than being demoted from manager,” wrote Lipsyte. But Berra didn’t have enough pride to leave in 1965 when the Mets passed him over [hiring Wes Westrum as manager to succeed Casey Stengel]. And he didn’t leave again this time [in 1967, when he was passed over a second time as the Mets hired Gil Hodges].

Berra is a lot more complex than writers and after-dinner speakers have made him out to be, but DeVito does little to explain what the man was like, leaving us with a book that only halfway follows its subtitle, *The Life and Times of an American Original*, and is a major disappointment.

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Gregory Maguire’s tooth fairy isn’t cute. Appealing, yes, in a scruffy sort of way, but there are no wands, glitter, or gauzy gowns involved. This will come as no surprise to readers of Maguire’s other transformations of classic tales and figures. “What-the-Dickens,” inadvertently named by a startled human, has big flat feet, some webbing, and untidy hair. He makes his first appearance in a story told during the dark and stormy night that opens the book, as Gage Tavenner, a twenty-something communication arts teacher, tries to distract his younger cousins, Zeke, Dinah, and baby Rebecca Ruth, from the alarming events unfolding around them. The book’s first paragraph offers us rising winds, packs of dogs, falling sirens, and abandoned cars, establishing a dark tone that dominates the rest of the story, including the inset tale about fairies. The nature of the disaster that has overtaken the cousins’ city is never specified. Ominous details are instead doled out at intervals: the reservoir has failed, mudslides threaten homes and roads, power has gone out across the region, and looters are on the prowl. Maguire is aware that he is employing the “dark and stormy night” cliché (Gage even quotes A Wrinkle in Time, published in 1962, another children’s book that begins with a nighttime storm), but on the whole the specificity of his descriptions allows him to overcome its potential limitations. Of the smoky atmosphere, he writes, “The air seemed both oily and dry. If you rubbed your fingers together, a miser imagining a coin, your fingers stuck slightly.” The muted tones of the cover illustration accurately signal the story’s mood, and the reader settles in with the details of their world include both the delightful and the disturbing. Once inside the colony, What-the-Dickens sleeps on a snug bed with a moss mattress and a dandelion-head pillow; the room’s glossy walls glow in the light of a firefly sconce. So far, charming enough. The logistics of the tooth-collecting process are also initially fascinating, and the reader experiences the pleasure of tracking a fully imagined and coherent invented system. But the colony’s leader, Dr. Ill, rides a muzzled mouse that he keeps caged in his office, and it quickly becomes clear that the severely hierarchical colony resembles a totalitarian dystopia. The skibbereen are sorted into different levels; those at the lower levels do not have individual names and are bred for their jobs. At a somewhat higher level are the punningly named Agents of Change, who carry coins with them on their daring tooth-collecting missions. (This rank includes What-the-Dickens’ only friend, Pepper, a female skibbereen whose spunky nature seems attested to by her otherwise unexplained bursts of nonstandard grammar.) The highest level consists of fully “differentiated” individuals, like Dr. Ill, who make decisions for the group. For an adult reader, Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World (1932) immediately comes to mind, with its Alphas, Betas, Deltas, Gammas, and Epsilons. Both societies also include formal bonding and pacifying rituals; Huxley’s Solidarity Service is paralleled by Maguire’s “Duty Pageant,” a story within a story (within a story) that enacts the origins of skibbereen society and encourages the easily manipulated viewers to accept unquestioningly their roles within their small world. By including this episode, Maguire is able both to exercise considerable ingenuity in coming up with a skibbereen origin myth (a woman mishears “true fritillary,” a type of butterfly, as “tooth fairy”) and to encourage young readers to think about the powers of propaganda. As in Brave New World, slogans are drilled into the populace from a young age: Huxley’s children learn that “history is bunk,” while the skibbereen are taught that “math is a myth.” Undertree Common offers What-the-Dickens the allurements of home and belonging if he will give up independent thought and submit to the control of the group.

Throughout the novel are threaded the two major themes of language and imagination. Cousin Gage is a language arts teacher, the skibbereen learn languages from a single word spoken aloud to them at birth, and Maguire’s text itself is a web of lin-
guistic references to other texts. The skibbereen name themselves after words in advertising circulars, altering a letter or so to make the name theirs. (Dr. Ill’s name is an amputated form of “Pill.”) Throughout the text, imagination is revealed to be both dangerous and powerful. Discussing the mudslide that has enveloped the county cemetery, Dinah asks her older cousin (rhetorically, we assume at first), “Can you imagine the coffins all popping up, their lids splintering from the pressure—?” When Gage interrupts in an attempt to discourage her, she answers her own question earnestly, “I can…I can imagine it just fine.” In the midst of real terrors, Dinah frightens herself with her imagination. But imagination is also liberating. Faced with the apparent certainty of Pepper’s approaching death, What-the-Dickens remarks that because he has missed out on the colony’s “early training,” he can’t help it if he can “imagine that maybe she doesn’t need to die.” Imagination, he learns, allows people to consider that things “could improve…Could be different.” In the end, he and Pepper leave the colony, a happy ending (or a happy beginning) made possible by his imagination and the generous impulses of the young Gage Tavenner, who as a 10-year-old himself encountered the creatures whose story he is now recounting. Imagination and language together, this book tells us, form stories, and stories open up powerful possibilities. The young Gage is “in love with stories and words and all that kind of thing,” and by the end of Maguire’s book, Dinah—and the reader—are too. So when Gage leaves what he calls “a story for a long night” unfinished, Dinah jumps right in, imagining possible further adventures for What-the-Dickens and Pepper, seizing the role of storyteller that Gage has inhabited so appealingly. Similarly, Maguire leaves the cousins’ story unfinished; the night ends, dawn breaks, the winds drop, and Rebecca Ruth gets a (scavenged) birthday cake. But we are not told anything more. We must, like What-the-Dickens, imagine for ourselves what happens “next upon a time.”

One other expression of Maguire’s interest in language constitutes the book’s most puzzling feature: Maguire consistently embeds unmarked, unattributed phrases from other books and media sources into the body of his text. These words may be spoken by any character, and it is unclear what they are supposed to contribute. To the adult reader, many of these phrases will stand out; for the child reader, most of them will pass by invisibly. A few examples will illustrate the range of sources: “It’s the economy, stupid,” remarks Old Flossie the stump mistress, conversationally; in an early adventure, What-the-Dickens is swept down a gutter through “caverns measureless to man”; and Pepper offers directions to the Undertree stump: “Second star to the right, and straight on till morning coffee.” While Pepper’s reference to J. M. Barrie does in fact carry resonance (the slightly altered directions to Neverland are both ironic and appropriate), this instance is an exception. Does a slogan from the 1992 Clinton campaign enhance the scene with Flossie? How is Shelley’s “Kubla Kahn” relevant? And what about the reader who misses the references? It may be, of course, that Maguire imagines that adults will read this book aloud to children and that he has scattered these references, like Hansel and Gretel’s bread crumbs, to mark out a previously travelled path. All stories, after all, are made up of bits of stories that have come before.

But would an adult choose to read this book aloud to a child too young to read it independently? Along with the questions regarding the fates of its various characters, the conclusion of What-the-Dickens leaves me pondering one final question: for whom is this book intended? The messages it sends are mixed. With its apocalyptic frame and dystopian center, the story seems too frightening for younger children. Dinah worries that looters may cut their throats, and adult authority figures are missing or useless. At the same time, if older children are the intended audience, it may be difficult to convince them to read a story about tooth fairies. Famously successful in writing for adults and for elementary school children (the Hamlet Chronicles, a countdown series that began with Seven Spiders Spinning in 1994 and concluded with One Final Firecracker in 2005), Maguire here blurs the line, producing a work that, while it will please some middle school readers, will put off others. With all its contending elements, however, this story offers the young reader who can appreciate it immersion in a rich linguistic universe (Maguire never dumbs down his vocabulary), as well as the pleasure of seeing Maguire exercise his trademark inventiveness on the sneaky little nocturnal intruder we call the tooth fairy.

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Chaucer in English?


Chaucer is a great poet, but changes to the language make his work relatively hard for general readers to read in its original form. The fact is tacitly acknowledged in the uniformly unhelpful format of most scholarly editions (though both Norton and Penguin have recently produced decent original-language versions seemingly aimed beyond a student market). General readers need translations and are likely to meet Chaucer for the first time in one—most likely that of Oxford professor Nevill Coghill, who died a rich man on the strength of his often indifferent version of The Canterbury Tales. How can such readers grasp the literary quality of the original?

The problem is not unique to Chaucer. I was amazed, on reading Proust for the first time in French, to understand what no English translation had taught me—that his writing is witty, that the long sentences that sometimes seem in Scott Moncrieff’s translation labored or ponderous are in fact sinuous and protean, and that the structure of French syntax, in a way that English syntax simply can’t, allows them routinely to lead up to a funny or climactic final phrase. More recent English renderings can go for the humor or the syntax, but rarely, and certainly never routinely, manage both at once, so that a constant intellectual, even sensuous, pleasure of Proust’s writing is all but lost in translation: Proust’s haute cuisine is translated all too often into English stodge. Life is short, and the translations are necessary; yet we lose more than we know. Proust just happens to be a writer in whose work the stylistic craft is of paramount importance. Chaucer, unfortunately, is another.

Chaucer’s craft is conspicuous. This is not “art to conceal art”; its artfulness is manifest, even showy. Its hallmark is the way in which Chaucer combines a highly artificial meter (the iambic pentameter, which he imports from Italy) and more or less complex rhyme patterns, in couplets or in stanzas, with the ease of idiomatic, at times colloquial, conversation. It’s a kind of structural oxymoron, enabling rapid-fire transitions in his poetry from natural language quite separated itself from the French (Anglo-Norman) of the English court.

The Germanic vestige is a useful neutral vowel that Chaucer is able to utilize, not at will but in certain linguistic circumstances to the endings of certain parts of speech. It is a sort of shadow syllable (called in histories of the language final -e and further glossed as a “decayed inflexional ending” because it marks the remnant of Germanic inflexions suffixed, not prefixed, to words); it is extraordinarily useful in assisting the poetry to scan without too much of an air of effort or formality but only works if you know it is there. And the French heritage is in the sound of the poetry, allowing a large range of polysyllabic words with their French stress pattern (often stressed on their antepenultimate syllable) and a generous use of feminine rhyme, which is what makes rhyming generally less of an imposed labor in romance languages than it often sounds in English. Take a simple example. When in the “Franklin’s Tale,” Dorigen refuses to have sex with the squire Aurelius, she tempers her refusal with a playful promise to do so if he were able to remove all the rocks from their rocky coast of Brittany (an afterthought that emphasizes her loyalty to her husband, who is away across the sea fighting the dastardly English). Though Aurelius will later seek to hold her to her word, he is in no doubt at the time that he has just heard an invitation to make pigs fly. In Chaucer’s original, which I have slightly modernized: “Madame,” quod he, “that were an impossible. Then moost I die of sudden death horrible.” The stress on the rhyme words falls early, on “im-” and on “hor-”, and they are spoken in the French style; indeed, Aurelius needs to sound like Inspector Clouseau, as he is a parody (like Lancelot) of a French courtly lover. The rhyme word of the first line, “(an) impossible,” is a noun and has not yet made a secure home for itself in English—it is in fact a technical, academic, philosophical term, which means that it is somewhat ludicrously and bathetically paired with the flailing, florid, and self-pitying “horrible.” The couplet works like a sentence in Proust, leading up to a controlled explosion that unlocks both psychological insight and comedy. Now what of this comes over in translation, where one sees the words but cannot hear the sound? Burton Raffel’s is as good as any: “Madame,” he said, “you seek an impossibility! So I must die a sudden death, and horribly.” (Except that Dorigen does not “seek” this at all; her offer is a carelessly amplified refusal.) At least Raffel sees that “impossible” is a noun, which is more than most do. His rhymes convey something of Aurelius’s comically injured dignity, but nothing either of the Francophone or the virtuoso in Chaucer’s original rhymes. To do this one would have to go to Ogden Nash, something like “Then must I die a death of horribility.” I’m glad Raffel doesn’t.

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Apart from “seek,” I can’t fault his translation. But it is a dull postcard compared to the original’s vivid impasto.

For all his genius, Chaucer could only write as he did because of the linguistic possibilities of English at the time he lived; and it is these very possibilities that have worked against an appreciation of his poetry almost ever since, for the conditions proved to be thoroughly impermanent. By the third quarter of the fifteenth century (Chaucer died in 1400), scribes, and after them printers, were having difficulty with that final shadow syllable; once you fail to understand it (and either omit it when it should be there or add it when you should not), you completely destroy the music of the line. And, since it occurs in so many lines, you effectively destroy the music of Chaucer’s poetry, as English stress patterns ever more decisively and progressively diverge from French. In the sixteenth century, even avid readers of Chaucer were convinced that he was a rough and unmetrical writer, an Esau not a Jacob among poets; that remained the standard view until nineteenth-century scholars, founders of the original Chaucer Society, rediscovered the rules for final -e and restored Chaucer’s text.

Yet the view of Chaucer as an unruly and untutored genius produced some of the greatest translations, those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, notably by Pope and Dryden. This is largely because it freed translators of the period from any commitment to fidelity at the verbal level (and it was a period that in any case tended to colonize its classics). Dryden made the distinction between metaphrase, which is line-by-line and word-for-word translation, and something altogether freer, a creative attempt to capture the spirit of the original by a more resourceful process of interpretation and rewriting, which he called paraphrase. It’s paraphrase he employs for Chaucer, as do his successors. At this remove, their efforts often seem enchanting, especially compared with subsequent pedestrian metaphrase: Chaucer drinking coffee in a wig. But nineteenth-century scholars approached their textual scholarship as if with the desire to free Chaucer’s work from a form of slavery, and we should hear that impulse before succumbing to the powdered pantomime of Augustan translation—in contemplation of which, as they might have said, ’tis distance adds enchantment to the view.

Then there was Wordsworth, as ever dominant in his cultural influence and as ever an incendiary mixture of insight and stupendous misconception. The Renaissance mistake worked in Chaucer’s favor, perhaps for the first time: he’s an unruly genius, and therefore, hey, an honorary Romantic. Perversely and yet logically, that meant one had to use less art in translating him. Wordsworth plumps decisively for Dryden’s nonpreferred metaphrase, boring through his Chaucer translations word by word and line by line and somehow in the process turning Chaucer into a proto-Milton, full of defiant archaisms like “whilom” that Wordsworth—at once the greatest and the deafest of modern poets—simply transliterated. And transliterated in ignorance of the fact that their meaning had changed between Chaucer’s time and his own.

The effect, which is far from benign, is still with us. Chaucer’s vocabulary is often retained even when the meaning of the words has changed. The classic example, of the Knight (again lightly modernized), is: “He was a very, perfect, gentle knight.” The only words modern readers can trust are the first three, “He was a.” “Very” means “truthful,” “perfect” and “gentle” retain a vestige of their Chaucerian sense, not accidentally, only in the phrase “perfect gentleman,” meaning respectively “consummate” and “well-born”; while “knight(hood)” is a profession, not a tap on the shoulder to some ageing rock star or captain of law or industry by a grateful Queen Elizabeth II. (Raffel’s translation, “He was a knight indeed, a worthy man,” gestures at the semantic difference and sounds passable until you realize that it betrays uncertainty about “very” and is vague about “worth” where Chaucer, focusing on breeding and accomplishment, is satirically precise.) What sort of “translation” fails to take account of semantic change? One by or following Wordsworth, in short, for whom—following the Renaissance misconception—Chaucer is both a fountain of archaism and of the folk. The effect on Wordsworth’s own style is extraordinary. Much in his work that is said to be Miltonic is faux-Chaucerian, inkhorn populism.

But Wordsworth can scarcely be blamed for his major effect, which is to privilege a certain repertoire in all subsequent poetic translation in English. Worse still, this program has been carried out mainly by scholars, not by poets. Their commitment to Chaucer’s text is sometimes undone by their loyalty to Wordsworthian principles, and they lack the poetic facility and grace that characterized almost all seventeenth- and eighteenth-century translators. This sounds like, and often is, the worst of both worlds. It would be easy to produce here a portable chamber of horrors, but it has been done elsewhere—and is, in any case, somewhat unfair. The problem is often not so much the execution as the protocols on which it is based. Paramount among this is the commitment to following Chaucer in the use of pentameter and rhyme. It is already disfigured by the absence of Chaucer’s final -e and then again by the often bad ear of those doing the makeover, so that much rhymed translation of his work would

continued on p. 12
have struck a Chaucer redivivus as, in his own phrase, “rhyme doggerel.” This applies in my judgment as much to Coghill as to many others, though the Anglo-Irish Coghill had a beautiful speaking voice and could make anything sound good, as he did his translation on BBC radio. The basic question, of course, is, Why on earth use rhyme, especially rhyming couplet, given that the linguistic circumstances of Chaucer’s prosody have irrevocably passed—it can literally only be recovered in the original—and that slavish following of Chaucer’s own rhyme words is incompatible with responsible translation? Small wonder that some of the best Chaucer translations of recent times, especially Barry Windeatt’s of *Troilus and Criseyde*, have been into prose.

Enter Burton Raffel, an experienced, one might say, professional academic-translator, who confesses to being a poet whose poetry does not rival Chaucer’s. Raffel’s translations have been well-received. His dust jacket boasts of selling more than 1 million copies of his *Beowulf* translation. It is a good one, though it is to be hoped his readers also caught Seamus Heaney’s.4

At first sight, I was excited: this looked to be a verse translation that eschewed rhyme. But this is not the case. He is simply content with half-rhymes and mid-rhymes5 and other modern innovations post-Muldoon. This is fine, though inadequately ostentatious to be Chaucerian, but (seemingly in consequence of his rhyming procedures) he takes the opportunity to introduce a policy of obtrusive enjambment6 that is completely contrary to Chaucer’s practice. It is therefore very difficult to know how to interpret his claim in his introduction: “I have tried to give as much of the effect of Chaucer’s poetry as I could.” Obviously *effect* in italics means something different from usual. He continues: “I have often borrowed Chaucer’s words and even his rhymes. Indeed, I have borrowed them whenever it was linguistically possible to do so.” This sounds, and is, Wordsworthian—and very odd it is to speak of borrowing an author’s words in the course of translation of that author’s work. Raffel may borrow, but he does not always understand. A word such as “reverence,” “borrowed” for the Prioress, needs an essay to explain: the modern usage does not correspond. And there are some elementary mistakes. Chaucer’s dry notation of the Knight, “his hors were good,” is translated “Though his horse was good”; but as the verb clearly shows, “hors” here is plural, and the knight has more than one of them, or his claim to be a knight would fall. In his case, Raffel has apparently devised a fourteenth-century credit crunch.

I could multiply examples, but again, over the long canon of Chaucerian disfigurement, it would be unfair. Raffel’s work is a modern variant of the long chain of Wordsworthian metaphrase. Reading his rather wild version of the opening of the *General Prologue* raised my hopes that it might deviate into Drydenian paraphrase, but after several lines of ostentatiously rewriting Chaucer, Raffel settles down into translating him. The problem thereafter is largely with rhyme, with Raffel’s sense that it is appropriate, and the lazy privileging of an approximation of form over exact meaning. In these respects he simply continues a chain, more competently than many. Indeed, and largely by default, I would prefer “the general reader” to own this translation rather than most others.

But to hell with rhyme. And it is time for routine parallel text, as in France’s exemplary and accessible Livres de Poche,7 so that the poor translator’s best efforts, albeit—as a mere shadow of the facing original—no longer eligible for Pulitzers, may instantly be compared with Chaucer’s, may perform the considerable service to all readers of making his text more intelligible, and may even meet the standards of accuracy, historicity, and literary consciousness normally required of a translation.

David Lauton is professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis.

1 Nevill Coghill (1899–1980), scholar known for his translation of Chaucer, as well as theatrical producer and director who co-wrote a musical version of *The Canterbury Tales*
2 Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff (1889–1930), Scottish translator of Marcel Proust’s multi-volume *Remembrance of Things Past*, published serially between 1922 and 1930
3 feminine rhyme is a rhyme on two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed (mother/another)
4 Seamus Heaney, Irish poet and translator, winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature
5 Half rhymes, used frequently by Emily Dickinson, are imperfect rhymes in which the final consonants of stressed syllables agree but the vowel sounds do not (cape/deep). Mid-rhymes are interior rhymes that occur every so many feet within a line.
6 Enjambment is a run-on line, where the complete phrase or clause is carried over to the next verse line. It is the opposite of an end-stopped line.
7 Medieval French Literature in Translation series

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**Pop Quiz #2:** How many tales were told in the *Canterbury Tales*?
Music, Murder, and Redemption

Review of

Early in The Savior, a Nazi officer tells the protagonist, “You’re a performer: you need an audience as much as I need experimental subjects.” Set during the waning months of World War II and consumed by the moral quandaries of the Holocaust, Eugene Drucker’s debut novel also explores the mysterious rapport between a solo musician and a live audience. Drucker, who has played violin for more than thirty years in the world-renowned Emerson String Quartet, lends an experienced voice to this discussion. Whether a performer or composer is legitimized by a sympathetic audience is a debate which has permeated twentieth-century classical music discourse, ranging from Milton Babbitt’s controversial 1958 article, “Who Cares if You Listen?” to contemporary anxieties about arts funding to symphony orchestra programs that seek to offend none and attract all.

Delving into his own musical experiences, Drucker accurately portrays the disconnect that can sometimes occur between performer expectation and audience reaction. I can certainly remember similar experiences from my own career as a violinist. I’ve received a standing ovation for a performance I considered miserably poor and a near-silent reception for something I thought beautiful. Years ago I sat in the audience myself and wondered at the woman near me who was sobbing through a Chopin sonata—was she hearing something I missed or was it experience alone which made all the difference? None of the audience’s reactions—or my own—was wrong, of course, but Drucker’s novel does elicit the provocative question of how music can lead us on such different journeys. The Savior ultimately upholds a visceral emotional connection between audience and performer as the ideal goal. The tragic denouement of The Savior, however, largely denies music performance as redemptive, at least in the special circumstances of the Holocaust.

The Savior’s protagonist is Gottfried Keller, a classical violinist with a diploma from Cologne’s prestigious Hochschule für Musik. We first encounter Keller as an employee of the Wehrmacht, a cultural ambassador of sorts. He plays the violin for wounded soldiers as therapy, even though they rarely respond with anything but scorn for Keller’s classical repertoire. Although most of the novel is set in Germany near the end of World War II, we at times drift back to Keller’s student years in the 1930s. Keller makes his two most formative relationships at the Hochschule: he befriends the gifted Jewish violinist Ernst Schneider and becomes engaged to a Romanian Jewish pianist named Marietta. Schneider’s character is based in large part on the author’s father and provides the novel’s moral compass by refusing to capitulate to the Nazis.

Later in the war, Keller is summoned to a camp outside his city, where he is ordered by a Nazi officer to participate in an experiment. The Kommandant is interested in studying survival instincts amongst a small group of Jewish camp inmates. The inmates are emotionally non-responsive after the horrors of the camp, but the Kommandant believes music may restore the inmates to life. He asks Keller to give a series of four concerts over four days at the camp. The majority of The Savior focuses on this four-day journey of music-making and soul-searching, as Keller becomes progressively closer to his audience, more affected by their fate, and more aware of the horrors inflicted on European Jews. Through a series of interwoven flashbacks, we also learn that Keller betrayed both Ernst and Marietta, leaving him with a complex set of emotions towards his Jewish audience—love, guilt, disgust, pity, fear, and even indifference.

As one might expect, Drucker’s musical descriptions are in part practical and pedagogical, in part evocative and lyrical. The music of J.S. Bach is an overpowering presence throughout, particularly the Chaconne from his Partita no. 2 in D Minor for solo violin. Keller’s performance of the Chaconne on the fourth day is the narrative’s watershed moment. Drucker describes the piece as “full of the joys and sorrows of this life, and a yearning for something beyond.” In The Savior, Bach’s piece is the monument, the masterwork most suited to this ameliorative project of resurrecting the Jewish prisoners. Keller’s life has existential meaning because of music, most specifically because of Bach’s music. In a flashback sequence, a younger Keller tells his disapproving parents, “What I experience alone when I play the Chaconne by Bach means more to me than sermons and ritual.” In Drucker’s 2007 interview with Diane Rehm several callers echoed this sentiment and considered the Chaconne to have an almost ur-power, something beyond religion.

Turning to both Bach and popular music, Drucker in the book also picks at the tangled threads of art and cultural supremacy. Keller is disgusted when the Kommandant praises the

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and his complete contempt for the Nazis, the Kommandant points out his complicity and allows him to escape the camp.

_The Savior_ closes with another conversation between the music-loving Nazi guard Rudi and Keller. After saving Keller’s life, Rudi confesses how moved he was by the Chaconne. Keller is disturbed by his adulation: how can someone weep for music, but not after committing murder? Rudi tells him:

I was mourning the music itself, our music, the music that can never be the same again. Not after the ovens. Not after the burial pit. Not after we’ve distorted music by blasting it through our loudspeakers while we count them and herd them like cattle. I used to think it didn’t matter what they did to waltzes and tangos, that our great music would survive all this, that it would remain pure. How stupid I was! They’ve ruined everything, they’ve pulled it down to their level, dragged the summits of our culture through their cesspool…. Maybe it will have to be different music from now on. I can understand … some memories take a long time to shake off. (201-202)

Rudi’s rhetoric references not only Adorno’s idea that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric but also real developments in music after World War II, when new styles of music did attempt to replace a decayed belief in artistic and cultural progress.

Much of _The Savior_ concerns the idea of choice and the moral imperative of the Holocaust. Keller is not a heroic figure; after his desertion of his Jewish friend and fiancée, his identification with Judas is indicated by both his body language and a long discussion about the musical characterization of Judas in the _St. Matthew Passion_. Yet Drucker intends him to be, if not a wholly sympathetic character, at least an understandable one. I doubt, however, whether we as readers can share in Keller’s dangerous oblivion. Intent on self-preservation, Keller asks the Kommandant few questions about the nature of the concentration camp, though he grows more and more agitated as he discovers its secrets. When Keller briefly wonders why the smokestacks of the camp emit horrid smells and sees a huge series of ditches stretching around the periphery, we cannot dismiss these observations from our minds as he does. We flinch as readers because we know the source of these particulars, and it chills us.

Drucker hopes that, by identifying with his protagonist in some way, we will share in his complicity. He is not subtle in linking Keller with larger themes of Holocaust remembrance. After acknowledging his role as an accomplice, Keller declares he owes it to the inmates to bear witness. Like Elie Wiesel and others, Drucker hammers home the dangers of forgetfulness and the importance of remembrance. He exactly echoes Wiesel’s conclusion that humans do as much harm through indifference and inaction as through active evil. Although written in an aggressively simple style with often-predictable dialogue and plot, Eugene Drucker’s _The Savior_ still manages to interweave narratives about music’s complexity with those of history’s most complex legacies.

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Trouble is the operative word in this fast-paced autobiography of Marcia Tucker. This workaholic used laughter to disarm opponents as she challenged old ways of looking at art and became the first woman curator at The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, then founded the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and kept it growing for twenty-two years. What makes her story special is Tucker’s sass and veritas—whether she was dealing with adversity or building circles of friends and supporters, she never lost her sense of humor.

Tucker’s amazing life tales unfold chronologically, in self-deprecating incidents: “I … came into my classic middle-aged Jewish lady looks early on.” After moving from Brooklyn to Upper Montclair, New Jersey, at age twelve:

- Kids at school called me “Turtle,” “Four-Eyes,” and “Swamp.” I may not have been beautiful, but I was popular in my own way. I formed the Ugly Club with my closest misfit friends.

- Tucker made Ugly Club membership cards and wrote its Mickey Mouse-like theme song.

- At seventeen in 1956, Tucker was thrilled when her father, a criminal lawyer, hired Bob Burns, an African American, as his junior partner. Her father’s decision-making based on merit initially displeased bigoted clients. Yet Marcia felt grown-up bantering with a professional close to her age, especially when Bob invited her to accompany him to a jazz club in Harlem. This and other teen experiences helped Marcia develop her lifelong ways of bucking the system and championing all kinds of diversity.

Although her father continually expressed his hope that she, too, would become a lawyer, Marcia wanted to become an artist.

After two boring years at the “suitable” Connecticut College for Women instead of the free, more prestigious Cooper Union School of Art, Marcia devised a reverse psychology strategy to trick her parents. First she told them she had to transfer to a co-ed school. After they became sufficiently agitated by this news, she switched gears and told them she’d been accepted for a Paris study program but didn’t want to go. This worked: she landed in Paris, met her first boyfriend, Henry, perfected her French, and passed a rigorous oral test on an obscure painting and artist.

Tucker’s inclusion of her worst, as well as her best, life experiences extends to discussing unprovoked anti-Semitic attacks she experienced in Paris and in Germany, the latter a beating that required a week’s recovery.

During Marcia’s youth, the Tucker household became increasingly dysfunctional with her mother ill, her brother mentally unstable, and her father working nonstop. Her mother’s deathbed parting words to her daughter were, “Remember when I die that you did it…. Go back to your friends, to whatever you were doing that’s so important.” Soon after this, her brother, Warren, tried to commit suicide at age fifteen but survived. As a mature adult, Tucker speculated that perhaps her mother, too, had used reverse psychology to keep her impending death from devastating her daughter.

Upon graduating from Connecticut College in June 1961, Tucker was hired as a $65/week secretary for William Lieberman, head of the Museum of Modern Art’s Department of Drawings and Prints. Tucker stretched her salary as far as it could go, living in a tiny room with boyfriend Michael, whose existence she kept from her dad. One day her temperamental boss blew his stack.
one time too many, leading to a now-famous story. Lieberman bellowed: “Why aren’t my pencils sharpened?” Tucker retorted: “You’re not doing it the right way. You stick them up your ass and turn hard, that’s what does it.” She was fired on the spot.

Instead of pounding the pavement for a new job, Marcia decided to buy her friend’s motorcycle, sublet her room, and take off with Michael—once they learned how to ride the hog—for California. After a year of cheap bliss, the two married.

Tucker by now had given up wanting to be an artist herself; she was a grad student at NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts and also working for artist René Bouché. Her father’s death around Memorial Day, 1963, made harder by sour feelings her relatives expressed toward her, was followed, head-on, by a car/motorcycle collision crushing Marcia’s leg in five places.

Tucker somehow bounced back from these tragedies, landing top jobs with influential art collectors and casually meeting art world stars like Marcel Duchamp. At twenty-five, she ended her five-year marriage in a Tijuana divorce. As she was working for Margaret Scolari Barr, the wife of Alfred H. Barr, Jr., she was invited to apply for a curatorial position at the Whitney Museum. Doing this job was her next undertaking. Her office was in the basement. Tucker’s approach to curating was daring, starting with the exhibition Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials (1969), which she developed with another newcomer, Jim Monte. For the show, artists used bushels of leaves, blocks of ice, hay, air, and other “non-art” materials, along with unusual processes. When Hilton Kramer panned the show, Tucker rebutted:

He was deep in conversation with Kant, whereas we were out dancing with Merleau-Ponty. There were two ways to curate exhibitions. One was didactic, the other investigative…. The investigative model was rarely used because it meant organizing a show in order to learn something, moving full tilt ahead without really knowing what the result might be.

Using the investigative approach, Tucker “discovered” and championed a number of artists who are well known today, including Bruce Nauman, Richard Tuttle, Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, Robert Morris, and Nancy Graves, whose lifesized camels, created in her New York loft “were pushing the boundaries of the avant-garde by using realism to subvert itself.” Tucker’s adventures as a Whitney curator culminated in her firing in December 1976 due to creative differences with the new director.

Nevertheless, Tucker’s friendships with influential collectors and arts patrons continued and grew as she began the dream that became the New Museum. Her first new art space was at 105 Hudson, in a building that lacked heat, air-conditioning, and adequate bathrooms. The New Museum became a nonprofit corporation in 1977, and Tucker was next given space at The New School. This lasted until 1983, when the New Museum acquired its own building at 583 Broadway. In addition to doing everything it took to run the museum, Tucker was busy raising money on the lecture circuit. Her love life, along with eventually meeting the love of her life, is yet another part of this first-person narrative.

At age fifty-nine, after battling breast cancer and learning she had other serious health issues, Tucker retired from being Director at the New Museum. For her sixtieth birthday, her husband Dean enrolled her in a stand-up comedy class; this led to her next career as a stand-up comic, Miss Mannerist. Tucker also began to write this autobiography, but had trouble finding a publisher. She began working with artist Liza Lou, who finished editing this book about a year after Tucker died in October 2006. Lou probably deserves credit for the book’s fast pace and final content. A Short Life of Trouble includes enough photos to wish there were more. This book is concise, dense, funny, and sad—a model story about thinking and achieving outside the box.

Tucker is among a handful of curators who have broadened and deepened the ways “art” is defined and seen. Tucker championed artists whose varied processes and media have become part of the aesthetic toolbox. And today, all kinds of museums—history, science, children’s museums, and so on—regularly use interactive mixed media to engage viewers. Tucker blazed a trail that has become a superhighway.

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1 Interactive art, in general, encourages viewers to experience art in new ways, to become engaged in exploring “art” in its many contexts, and sometimes to participate in various ways.

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**Pop Quiz #3:**

*What a cappella singing group did Marcia Tucker found?*
Tales of a Working Girl
Or Why Doris Day is More Important Than You Think

Review of
David Kaufman, Doris Day: The Untold Story of the Girl Next Door
(New York: Virgin Books, 2008), 626 pages with index, notes, bibliography, and photos

Part 1: Don’t Touch the White Woman!

The only very real talent Miss Day possesses is that of being absolutely sanitary: her personality untouched by human emotions, her brow unclouded by human thought, her form unsmudged by the slightest evidence of femininity.
—Movie critic John Simon, 1963

Nothing seems to daunt the persistent image of me as the unsullied sunshine girl…. So there must be something about me, about whatever it is that I give off, that accounts for this disparity between who I am and who I appear to be.
—Doris Day, 1976

I dig Doris Day.
—Jazz singer Sarah Vaughn

“Doris Day became nothing short of a mass-media symbol of twentieth-century America,” writes Tom Santopietro in his Considering Doris Day (2007), “the flesh-and-blood personification of what came to be known as ‘the American Century.’” According to biographer David Kaufman in Doris Day: The Untold Story of the Girl Next Door, in 1961, just when Universal Studios announced the filming of That Touch of Mink, starring Day and Cary Grant, Day went to the Moscow Film Festival and was the face and spirit of America insofar as Hollywood and the State Department were concerned: “Indeed, what Edith Piaf was to France, Day had become to America. More than just a singer or even a superstar, she was now a national emblem.” If these recent books and the spate of DVD-box sets of her movies currently being released are any indication, there seems to be something of a Doris Day revival occurring. It goes back to 1997 when movie critic Molly Haskell wrote a fierce defense of Day that appeared in Holding My Own in No Man’s Land. A few years ago, James Wolcott of Vanity Fair wrote a glowing piece about the on-screen partnership of Rock Hudson and Doris Day (they co-starred in three hugely successful films in the early 1960s): “Rock Hudson and Doris Day were shucking the Eisenhower blahs and ushering in the New Frontier. They were the First Couple of American Pop.” Jazz critic and Bing Crosby biographer Gary Giddens acknowledged Day’s greatness as a singer in his Natural Selection (2006).Novelist John Updike had long been a fan, praising Day generously in a New Yorker review when her autobiography, written by A. E. Hotchner, appeared in 1976 and publicly after that whenever he had a chance. In 1980, the British Film Institute did a retrospective of Day’s career, proclaiming her a feminist heroine, an assertion in the end that may have been beside the point.

As a boy, I remember the young college students—most of whom attended historically black colleges—who were part of the civil rights movement and who seemed always to be drifting in and out of my mother’s South Philadelphia home (my sisters were very active in the civil rights movement) dismissing Doris Day as a figure of white oppression, a white sexual fantasy, a Barbie doll, the all-American bourgeois mother. Her films were considered white bread, white suburban nonsense. They derisively tossed off Day as they did Gidget, Tammy, Bing Crosby, Jayne Mansfield, American Bandstand, Troy Donahue, Rock Hudson, Steve Reeves, Charlton Heston, and Elvis Presley. These young black critics were partly and justifiably motivated by race, and a

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new consciousness about how to read the world and its objects but they were also feeling some anxiety about lowbrow taste, expressing a yearning to be middlebrow or highbrow, sophisticated, in a way that made political sense for them. They were going around carrying copies of Albert Camus’s *The Rebel*, Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, LeRoi Jones’s *Dutchman* and *The System of Dante’s Hell*, Ralph Ellison’s *Shadow and Act*, and listening to Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Thelonious Monk and going to classical music concerts: sure signs that you were a bona fide aspirant to the black intellectuals’ club. Lots of tasteless, lowbrow white folk liked Doris Day’s mass-marketed films, which was a good reason for a budding, black Marxist to hate them.

I didn’t dismiss Day because of the whiteness of her films. In those days, nearly all films were supremely white, and as a minority viewer you adjusted your imagination accordingly, either by pretending that the people you were watching were secretly black or that you, the viewer, were secretly white or that all people, viewer and actors included, were actually raceless. If the film was good, you admired the whites who were in it, and if it was bad, you made fun of them. I think this is how pop culture assimilated minorities in those days, by making you self-consciously neurotic. I had little interest in Day in my childhood mostly because she appeared in either musicals or romantic comedies, two film genres I utterly detested. (I preferred adventure, spy, detective, and gangster films, plus sword-and-sandal epics and, of course, westerns.) If I had had a choice between paying $3.00—an exorbitant admission for a neighborhood movie house in the early 1960s—to see *The Guns of Navarone* and seeing any Day film for free, I would have paid the three bucks to see *Navarone*.

I was about ten or twelve years old when I watched the 1958 Day film, *Teacher’s Pet*, on late-night television with my mother and sisters. I watched only because Day’s co-star was Clark Gable, an actor I liked after seeing him with Burt Lancaster (a big personal favorite) in *Run Silent, Run Deep* (1958). I liked *Teacher’s Pet* very much, much more than I expected, and Day was appealing in her role as a journalism teacher. My family liked it too. I remember my mother saying after the film ended, “Doris Day has a nice figure but she sure has a big behind for a white woman.” My sisters and I giggled at that. I remembered how she swayed her hips in front of Gable as she parodied Mamie Van Doren, who also appeared in the film, singing “I’m the girl who invented rock and roll.” I almost thought of her as a sexy black woman when she did that because she moved with the grace of a dancer. (I didn’t know at the time she had been a dancer.) What I learned from *Teacher’s Pet* was that Day made films before she hooked up with Rock Hudson. I had no idea that was so since she came into my consciousness as a filmgoer right at the time she and Hudson were making their films. When I was about seventeen, I saw *Storm Warning* (1951), a film about the Ku Klux Klan in which Day played a terrified housewife of a brutal Klan member. It was not much of a film about the Klan (the only people the Klan killed in the movie were whites and not for any discernable political reason) but I thought Day was effective in the tragic role, in this instance, of a young mother and obedient wife. Her character was the kid sister of Ginger Rogers’s character—the only time the two women appeared in a film together. I was shocked, moved, when her admittedly vacuous character was killed. It is the only film in which she plays a character who dies. I now learned that Day had ability as a dramatic actress. It was *Storm Warning* that led Alfred Hitchcock to cast Day five years later in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Preparing for an NBC Radio broadcast circa 1949. Day strongly disliked the live performances. Photofest

I think it was around this time that rumors began appearing in the black press that Day, then married, was stepping out with black Los Angeles Dodger shortstop Maury Wills. Day denied any romance with Wills in her autobiography, *Doris Day: Her Own Story*. Wills claimed to have had an affair with her in his autobiography, *On the Run: The Never Dull and Often Shocking Life of Maury Wills*, published in 1992. There is enough ambiguity about the whole business to make either of them credible. She might have been lying—especially in the 1960s and 1970s—in order not to lose her standing with her legions of fans. He might have been lying to help sell his book, taking advantage of the fact that Day was a big Dodger fan who attended many games and sometimes hung out with the players.
Sammy Davis, Jr., and Chubby Checker had both married interracially around this time, and this made the entire subject popular at the local barbershop I patronized. “You know Maury had better watch out messin’ with Doris Day,” one wag shouted out one Saturday afternoon as I waited to get my hair cut. “That brother ought to know that you don’t touch the white woman, especially that white woman. Doris Day done made her whole career on being the white woman who don’t get touched.” I giggled at this and wondered if the whitest white woman in America was going with a black guy. Day’s father had married a black woman in 1961, another item that was made much of in the black press. “It must run in the family,” the wag continued. Day, who never had much of a relationship with her father, did not send a note of congratulations or a gift. She was later rumored to have had an affair with Sly Stone of Sly and the Family Stone, when she announced in 1973 that she —through the machinations of her son, Terry Melcher, a noted record producer of the period—was going to do an album with the black rock star. Stone did go on to record an odd version of “Que Sera, Sera,” Day’s most famous song. Day denied she was going with Stone. Maybe she did go with Stone. She was fifty-one at the time—Stone was twenty-nine—and, as she had issues with aging—getting breast enhancement surgery and a face-lift around this time—perhaps it was a sort of midlife crisis. She had endured three bad marriages to white guys, all of whom were nothing to write home about, so maybe cutting loose with a stoned-out, over-theatrical black guy who made music with occasional lefty or universalist overtones—she became something of a universalist, attracted to what she called “metaphysics”—was a way for her to keep her sanity.

After having seen most of Day’s films, I must agree with her supporters that she is an underrated and underappreciated talent. She was one of the best pop singers of the twentieth century, ranking with or just a shade below Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Nat Cole, and Ella Fitzgerald. She was a fine actress with great range and energy. She could cover a greater variety of roles than many of her contemporaries like Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly, and Kim Novack. She was a first-rate comedienne, better by far than most of her glamour girl peers. Films like *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Camarine Jane*, *It Happened to Jane*, *Love Me or Leave Me* (her excellent portrayal of singer Ruth Etting), *The Pajama Game*, and *Lover Come Back* are all really first-rate and would be enough by themselves to assure any actress consid-erable stature in the history of American cinema. They stand up well to any six films made by any of Day’s female competitors.

But Day is known for being the perpetual virgin, the girl next door, the eternal ingénue, the good anxious mother of the Cold War, and for this reason the intelligentsia condemns her as low-brow, antifeminist, and the like. Such critics see the United States as repressive and hypocritical, which is certainly true of aspects of it, but this view simplifies something far deeper and more complex, aside from the fact that holders of this view seem to think that the United States is the only country and culture that is repressive and hypocritical. (Everyone else would be liberal, liberated, and wholly sincere if the United States would stop being such a hegemon!) But making Day a stealth feminist is not the answer to this complaint about her. I feel it is a simplistic reaction to rescue every “objectionable” pop culture icon from an “oppressed” demographic by arguing that he or she was or is secretly a rebel.

Sometimes, a cigar is just and only a cigar and needs to be understood as such because making a cigar, a good cigar, is a demanding art. Day represented something else important about America for most Americans: a sense of energy, commitment to family, a desire to succeed, sexiness combined with self-respect and virtue. What’s wrong with a woman who doesn’t want to be taken advantage of sexually by men? Day frequently played working women who stood up for themselves and who desired the companionship of a man. What’s wrong with that? In her off-screen life, Day always wanted to be married. Clearly, the large number of fans she had, especially among women, meant that many women identified with this idealized balance between independence and dependence. Day’s characters seemed to give her fans not only a coping fantasy but a sense of inspiration. One of the problems with the intelligentsia is that it will not respect or take seriously any fantasy that is not built on some idea of resistance to hegemony, which Day’s fantasy clearly was not. But fantasies that inspire and are compelling for many people are not about resistance at all but rather about accommodation and adjustment that validate not conformity but rather the individual’s need to express herself and find fulfillment in the world. Most people, even the oppressed, like the world as it is, and like people who succeed by accepting the

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Part 2: Big Band Girl and Movie Star

I've never been taught how to act. I don't know what my method is. I can't explain it. But when I am called on to do something, I have to do it. And I know I can. I have complete confidence.
—Doris Day, 1960

I had a great time in Cincinnati, but why is there no shrine to Doris Day?
—John Updike, 2001

If a biography is judged definitive based on its length, then David Kaufman’s *Doris Day* is the definitive biography of its subject. Some readers are likely to think it is too long and a bit repetitive. Many who know Day well think that the book overstates its claims in the subtitle: there is not much here, as I have discovered in preparing this review, that has been “untold.” Day has large, active, and highly committed fan clubs around the world that have printed in newsletters a great deal about the actress/singer’s life and career. Day herself engages her fan clubs far more than most stars and has frequently hired members to work for her. Since 2001, for instance, she has spoken to members at length on her birthday. She writes members frequently and has even invited some to come visit her. She has interacted with her fans quite a bit since her earliest days as a successful performer. Kaufman never interviewed Day for his book. I assume she refused to cooperate with him. This is not a fatal blow to the book, by any means, but it does seriously compromise it, especially among her fans, many of whom have spoken to Day personally.

Doris Kappelhoff was born in 1922 (Santopietro in his book puts her birthdate as 1924; Day has issued many different ages for herself over the years) in Cincinnati, Ohio, the third and last child of the Kappelhoffs. Both of her parents were musical, and so young Doris was introduced to performing at a young age as she studied both piano and dance. Her father, an aloof and rather stern man, developed Doris’s ear and thought she had real ability to become a professional instrumentalist.

Her mother, Alma, a typical stagedoor parent who lived through Doris, thought she had the ability to be a professional dancer, the next Ginger Rogers, whom Doris resembled a little. Because she liked her mother better, she preferred dance. Young Doris always sang around the house but never took her singing seriously. Doris’s father had an affair with her mother’s best friend. The couple divorced in 1935 when Doris was twelve. She would not see her father again until she was a famous movie actress. Doris seemed well on her way to a dancing career when she was involved in a terrible car accident on October 12, 1937. She had a double-compound fracture of the right leg, which required a steel pin to set. She re-broke the same leg when dancing around on her crutches. She spent eight months in a cast. Both mother and daughter thought she would never have a career as a dancer. But she did like to sing. Her mother arranged to get her voice lessons. Doris never finished high school. She became a working girl with a voice.

“I hated it,” Doris recalled when a Cincinnati bandleader with whom she broke in gave her the name of Day, “I thought it sounded really cheap.” Day began singing while still a teenager. Despite her casual attitude she has always assumed about her success, she was driven and determined. Her music teacher noted that she had never had a student who worked so hard and made such strides. She sang briefly in 1940 with Bob Crosby’s Bobcats (Bing’s brother) but her big break came when she joined Les Brown’s band, then a new group out of Duke University. It was with Brown’s band that she had her first hit, “Sentimental Journey,” recorded in 1945. By that time, Day had become a noted band singer, admired for her ability to put a song’s lyrics across, to enunciate clearly, to always sing in tune, something not all band singers did (thanks to her good ear training). Her youth, good looks, sincerity, innocence, enthusiasm, and optimistic stage persona made her click with audiences; she was the epitome of the band canary, the girl with the gown and the voice that every guy wanted to have as a girlfriend. Privately, traveling with a swing band, she was often the opposite of this: insecure, frequently depressed and unhappy, lonely, hungry for sex and love (but not wanting to be available to all the guys in the band), and yearning for a stable home life. The problem that Day was to have her entire career was that although she yearned for a home life, she hardly knew what to do with herself when she was home. She found her purpose in life through her work and worked relentlessly for many years. When she finally retired, she simply filled her house up with dogs and stray animals. She has complained all her life about being lonely and her animal activism is doubtless a compensation for that.

In 1941 she married a dashing musician, trombonist Al Jorden, and gave up her promising career. Her mother was against it. Day herself realized the marriage was a mistake when Jorden began beating her. He was a very jealous man and

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thought Day was, to use today’s parlance, a skank, a reputation against which band girls had to fight. Day gave birth to her only child, son Terry, in 1942. She was divorced in 1943 and was back singing with Brown. She married another dashing, though less assertive, musician, saxophonist George Weidler, in 1946. He was three years younger than she was. They separated in 1947 and divorced in 1948. So, by the time Day was twenty-six or twenty-four, she had been divorced twice, had a child, and admitted to having at least one extramarital affair, which may have explained, but not excused, Jorden’s jealousy. She was a single working parent. This hardly sounds like the girl next door, and Day did nothing to conceal any of this. She seemed an artistically gifted, lusty, maybe a bit randy, and insecure young woman. How did she become the merry virgin? I suppose she just looked the part.

Hollywood had had its eye on Day for a couple of years. By 1948, she was under contract to Warner Brothers, making her first film with Michael Curtiz, Romance on the High Seas, a musical. (Once Day started making movies, she rarely sang before a live audience again. She never liked singing in front of live audiences. She would have made baskets of money if she had. Las Vegas lusted for her.) Curtiz would direct Day in three of her first four films. He was known for such films as The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938), Casablanca (1942), and Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942). Day had signed with Columbia Records, one of the three major record companies, a year earlier. She was now on the verge of true stardom. Her second film, also directed by Curtiz, My Dream is Yours, another musical, seemed based partly on Day’s own life, about a young (widowed rather than divorced) singer with a child. This was Hollywood’s first attempt at spinning or recasting Day’s life into the Day fantasy of wholesomeness and bourgeois respectability. Day played a widow with children again in It Happened to Jane (1959), co-starring with Jack Lemmon, one of her strongest films. She did her first drama for Curtiz in 1950 when she co-starred with Kirk Douglas and Lauren Becall in Young Man with a Horn, based on Dorothy Baker’s novel of the life of trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke. She did her first musical in which she danced—Tea for Two (1950)—her second film with director David Butler. Curtiz, with whom Day had a personal contract that entitled him to fifty percent of her earnings outside of her film work (standard piracy of the old studio days), did not want to expose Day as a dancer immediately in her first film. If all her bag of tricks were given out at once, the public might lose interest.

During the course of her thirty-nine-film career, she played against some of the major actors of the day including Rock Hudson (Pillow Talk, 1959, for which she earned an Oscar nomination, Lover Come Back, 1961, and Send Me No Flowers, 1964); James Garner (The Thrill of It All, 1963, and Move Over, Darling, 1963); Rex Harrison (Midnight Lace, 1960, where she had a nervou breakdown on the set playing a wife whose husband is trying to drive her mad); James Stewart (The Man Who Knew Too Much, 1956); Frank Sinatra (Young at Heart, 1954); Gordon MacRae (Tea for Two, 1950, On Moonlight Bay, 1951, and By the Light of the Silvery Moon, 1953); David Niven (Please Don’t Eat the Daisies, 1960); and James Cagney (The West Point Story, 1950, and Love Me or Leave Me, 1955, for which many felt she should have earned an Academy Award nomination).

Let us consider Day’s magnitude as a box office attraction: For ten years, Day was one of the top ten box office attractions in the country. For four years, she was the number one box office attraction, beating out both male and female peers. No actress has matched this: not Barbra Streisand, not Julia Roberts, not Angelina Jolie. She was also the number one female recording star from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. At times, she was actually outselling Sinatra.

Day married her third husband, Marty Melcher in April 1951. He had worked for Day’s agent, but now he became her manager. Most of Kaufman’s informants, from ex-personal secretaries to former co-stars, have little good to say about him. He was a hustler, an operator, an obnoxious guy. His background was Orthodox Jewish, but he became a Christian Scientist, as Day had by the time they married. As they did go to the hospital and see doctors, I suppose they were backsliding Christian Scientists or perhaps afflicted with doubt. Melcher adopted Day’s son, Terry. The marriage fell apart in 1962 when the couple separated. Melcher had been abusive to Terry and Doris. The couple’s sex life had deteriorated. But Day did not divorce him when Melcher explained that their finances were so entangled that it was wiser to stay together at least in name and appearance, which they did, until Melcher died suddenly in 1968. Indeed, after his death, Day discovered that Melcher had mismanaged her affairs, working with a lawyer named Jerome Rosenthal, who was actually in charge of Day’s money. She was
Day was a creation of swing bands and the Hollywood musical, both of which had largely disappeared by the late 1960s.

Kaufman’s biography is a good and useful work, although it is far from definitive. It is likely that certain things will not be revealed about Day until after she dies: access to certain information may open up, and some informants may talk less guardedly or less vengefully. This book relies a great deal on people who used to work for Day and many factors, both good and bad, motivate this sort of testimony.

Kaufman’s theory that Melcher ruined Day’s career by having her play the eternal virgin or the girl next door-type in a series of very bad comedies (Caprice, Where Were You When the Lights Went Out, The Ballad of Josie, With Six You Get Eggroll) well into the 1960s, when American cinema changed dramatically, rather makes their relationship out to be not unlike that of Elvis Presley and the Colonel. (In some sense, Day was lazy about her recording career just as Presley was, singing material that was beneath her, generated by her movies. Her preference was the Great American Songbook, although she did yearn for the relevance of rock in the 1970s but this may have been the influence of her son.) Day reportedly turned down the role of Mrs. Robinson in The Graduate. But there is more to this story than an inept manager with bad taste. Day herself was reluctant to play a role in which her fans would not accept her, such as seducing a college boy. She also was middle-aged by the late 1960s and not very inclined to play middle-aged parts, the few that were available to women. (Day was under an enormous disadvantage no matter what she wanted to do because she was a woman. Men—from Gary Cooper to Sean Connery—can continue to play leads in exactly the manner they always have until they are quite old. An old Clark Gable could play against her in Teacher’s Pet but the situation could not have been reversed.) Day was a creation of swing bands and the Hollywood musical, both of which had largely disappeared by the late 1960s. Her epoch had ended. She did not have the gravitas to be welcomed into another era, like, say, Miles Davis or Marlon Brando (a gravitas, I might add, she should have had based on her body of work), and she did not wish to work hard to reinvent herself. She was not unique in this regard: in the late 1960s, Columbia Records wanted jazz pianist Thelonious Monk to make a recording of Beatles tunes. He refused, deciding not to record at all rather than try to be trendy. In the end, the mistake Melcher may have made was half-heartedly trying to have her fit into the age of Aquarius, a time which seems more hideously dated now than the great bulk of Day’s films. Melcher would have done Day a great deal of good if he had taken Monk’s example and simply refused to have her do anything but the sort of thing she had done well in the past without in any way trying to update it. If there was no call for her talents at the moment, she should have done nothing until the world came back to her, as it will, if it ever truly values your art in the first place. But then again, Melcher needed Day to work, especially because he needed her money to finance his mistresses and Rosenthal’s grand investment schemes that never amounted to anything. Duke Ellington kept his band and his sound until the end. In this life, the old saying is true: you have to dance with the person who brought you and in the way that you know. Or, don’t try to be young when you’re not. Which Miles Davis looks and sounds more desperately trapped by his time: the hot, amplified Davis of the wah-wah trumpet wearing high-heels, leather pants, and gold chains in the 1970s or the cool, muted Davis of Italian suits and modal jazz and the Great American Songbook?

Part 3: Did Doris Day Fail or Did Her Pictures Just Get Small?

But she is complex and has uncertainties about herself. That’s what makes her such a great performer. Simple girls can’t act. If she were as uncomplicated as her publicity would lead you to believe, she wouldn’t be the tremendous box-office draw that she is.

—Producer Joe Pasternak

If only Day’s husband had resisted his inclinations to follow the old and tired formulas and had been willing to surf the changing tide, his wife’s film career may have thrived instead of sputtering out in relative disgrace in the eyes of cultural commentators.

—David Kaufman

Kaufman’s biography is a good and useful work, although it is far from definitive. It is likely that certain things will not be revealed about Day until after she dies: access to certain information may open up, and some informants may talk less guardedly or less vengefully. This book relies a great deal on people who used to work for Day and many factors, both good and bad, motivate this sort of testimony.

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There are some mistakes in the book: Kaufman gives the publication date for Dorothy Baker’s *Young Man with a Horn* as 1945 when it was actually 1938. He credits lyricist Gus Kahn with writing “I’m Just Wild About Harry,” when it was actually written by the African American songwriting team of Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake. He quotes one former employee discussing Day’s Christian Science that “she would flip a *Watchtower* on my desk with circles around certain articles.” But *Watchtower* is the official house organ of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, not the Christian Scientists. This has to be incorrect, unless Day dabbled in the doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses too, which no source has ever mentioned, nor has she ever mentioned it herself.

Kaufman also writes that *Gigi* set a new record for Academy Awards when it won nine in 1958. *But Gone With the Wind* had won ten in 1939. Like many books published today, it could have been edited a little more carefully. But it is certainly worth reading not only for those interested in Day or women in Hollywood films or American popular music, but also those who want to understand the 1950s and 1960s better, when the American Century truly became the American Century.

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**Pop Quiz #4:**

In what two films did Doris Day co-star with former president Ronald Reagan?

1. *From Stage to Screen* (1952)
2. *Storm Warning* (1951) and *The Winning Team* (1952)
3. *The Art Mob*
4. *Home from Home*

For more information, go to [http://academic.evergreen.edu/p/pfeifferm/PopQuizzes.html](http://academic.evergreen.edu/p/pfeifferm/PopQuizzes.html)

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1. Approximately 80 persons—both black and white—have been lynched in Missouri from 1867 to 1981.
2. 24
3. *The Art Mob*
4. *Home from Home*
5. *From Stage to Screen* (1952)

Answers to Pop Quizzes:
On March 25, the day African American historian John Hope Franklin died, Darryl Scott, a history professor at Howard University, was visiting my university to give a lecture on Carter G. Woodson. His talk dealt with how Woodson was similar and yet importantly different from black historians of the Progressive Era and how Woodson, a central figure of the New Negro Movement, would eventually, in the publication of his most popular work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), repudiate the New Negro. It seemed fitting in a way that Scott was giving this lecture on the day Franklin died. Woodson—the founder of the National Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1916 and of the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*, creator of Negro History Week, and author of *The Negro in Our History*, published in 1922, the major black history text of the Harlem Renaissance era—was, without question, the father of Negro History. Franklin himself referred to Woodson as “launching the era of ‘The New Negro History.’” But he was not referring to the historical and cultural phenomenon called the New Negro but rather to Woodson having put into place a new, more legitimate history of blacks, “exploding the myths of Negro history and...putting the Negro in his rightful place in the history of this country.” For Franklin, Woodson’s Negro History project, as was Franklin’s own, was the paradoxical invention of a consensus pluralism. Franklin called Woodson’s effort “the most far-reaching and ambitious effort to rewrite history that has ever been attempted in this country.” Negro history, properly understood, was revisionist history: anti-white nationalist history and anti-southern nationalist history. Woodson was democratizing American history, the father, in effect, of a new American history, since writing Negro History Week, in effect, rewriting American history. And if anyone could be identified as the father of Negro history or black history since Woodson, it would clearly be Franklin, the most famous and revered black historian in the United States at the time of his death and for many years before. Perhaps it might be better expressed to say that if Woodson was the father of Negro history, Franklin ultimately became the father of a new American history, which centered on the Negro as a central actor in the shaping of the nation, a consensus pluralism.

Professor Scott was, of course, somewhat surprised, but as Franklin was 94, one cannot say that death was unexpected, and he was saddened when I told him that Franklin had died. But he also went on to say that when he was a younger scholar, Franklin was someone he felt he had to overcome, that he had had quarrels with Franklin. Franklin represented another generation, and among members of a minority group with a considerable history of persecution, to represent another generation is sometimes somewhat akin to being from another country, the old country, as it were, or what the young people today would call, the old school. Generational strife is no small matter, especially among those with histories of oppression where the young are apt to say to the old, “You got it wrong. You failed us. You have left me no usable legacy.” Doubtless, Professor Scott may have had his differences with Franklin about the nature and purpose of black historiography. As I am not a historian, I cannot speak to that. But I suspect from my conversation that there was a larger concern about Franklin as a black scholar and his relationship to black studies or, more properly, Negro studies, which was the field in which Franklin made his name. For all of us in black studies or Africana studies, we wonder about our relationship with Negro studies. We wonder about our relationship with our progenitors. The death of John Hope Franklin makes all of us in this line of intellectual endeavor reflect upon this matter again, some of us with a new perspective, some revisiting older perspectives about what it all means. Death always makes people think about the most basic of questions: what, in fact, do human beings do and what does it mean that they do it? In this instance, what does it mean when you, in essence, study yourself by studying your group and why do you do it?

In considering Professor Scott’s reaction to the death of Franklin, I was put in the mind of how I felt in 1994 when I learned that novelist and essayist Ralph Ellison had died. I was
only somewhat surprised because I knew he had been ill and that, after all, he was 81, an age when a person’s death is not considered untimely or premature. I admired Ellison, was greatly inspired by him in many respects, but yet I felt relieved when he died, for I had certain quarrels with him, for he represented for me the world of Negro studies or at least was something of the transitional nature of post–New Negro studies, or post–New Negro intellectual history, just as Franklin did. He was, like Franklin, a consensus pluralist. This was the aim of Negro studies, Negro literature, Negro intellectualism generally. But the generational strife between Ellison’s generation and my own, the 1960s and 1970s rebels, was remarkably fraught with pain and misunderstanding, hot with hostility of a strange kind about what it means to be a black American. It was all about the anxiety of influence.

Franklin and Ellison were contemporaries, were members of the same generation; Franklin was born in 1915, and Ellison was born in 1913. Both were born and reared in Oklahoma. Both attended famous black universities: Franklin graduated from Fisk, and Ellison attended Tuskegee as a music student for three years. Both hated the segregated military of World War II, Franklin having been blatantly humiliated by it in his attempts to join, while Ellison served in the merchant marine instead. They both wound up being honored by presidents. There were differences between the two men: Ellison was much more reluctant than Franklin about being connected to the civil rights movement, was aloof and skeptical about being overly politicized. Franklin was active in the movement. Ellison was touchy about disciples and did little to guide or teach other writers, whereas Franklin produced a multitude of students and influenced a generation of historians. Ellison was never as sanguine about social science as Franklin. In fact, like his friend Albert Murray, Ellison was deeply skeptical of it. Franklin was never vehemently rejected by the new generation of black studies as Ellison was. Yet there is something instructive in thinking about both men as post–New Negro integrationist intellectual figures who framed certain ideas and practices about their chosen fields, literature for Ellison (and to an equally important degree, cultural criticism) and history for Franklin. Briefly, I would like to consider them both in the context of a moment in the 1960s just before black studies emerged as an intellectual repudiation of the post–New Negro integrationist intellectual and the particular creed that both men, in some measure, shared.

I start with Franklin’s 1962 essay “The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar,” written specifically for Herbert Hill’s noteworthy anthology, Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940–1962, published in 1963, during the height of the civil disobedience phase of the civil rights movement—and just one year before Ellison’s collection of essays, Shadow and Act, truly established the novelist as a man of letters. In his essay, Franklin suggests that the scholar finds it difficult in the United States because of its anti-intellectual, practical, anti-theorizing inclinations. To the popular American mind, the scholar does not seem to have much to offer; yet the scholar, as Franklin argues, has had more than a little influence in shaping what the United States is, what it believes, and the courses of action it has followed as a matter of public policy and political and economic doctrine, although American scholarship has “always been pragmatic, always firmly based on need.” The scholar can be both innovator and apologist and is indeed greatly useful to the powerful in directing and justifying the uses of power. Franklin then goes on to consider the particular dilemma of the Negro scholar by first discussing how early black scholars like William H. Crogman, C. V. Roman, and Benjamin Brawley abandoned, in some instances permanently, the fields in which they were trained in order to write scholarly books in defense of the history and humanity of blacks. In the early days, then, Negro studies was a kind of amateur effort by men—scholarly men, to be sure—who had trained themselves to do racial studies.

Franklin then concentrated on W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain Locke, three Harvard PhDs who fairly much invented the field of Negro studies during the age of the New Negro and professionalized it. Following in their wake came “a large number of Negro scholars who devoted themselves almost exclusively to the study of some aspect of the Negro. Soon recognized fields emerged: the history of the Negro, the anthropology of the Negro, the sociology of the Negro, the poetry of the Negro, the Negro novel, the Negro short story, and so on.” Franklin then suggested that the black scholar had become the victim of segregation as had all other lesser-educated blacks; joining the black press, the black church, black business, and black education was now black scholarship. Black scholars had no choice if they were to do scholarship at all but to be confined to this field. Franklin makes clear that this was not the fault of these scholars, that they wound up segregated in this way but that their segregation defeated a central tenet of scholarship itself: “Namely, that given the materials and techniques of scholarship and given the mental capacity, any person could engage in the study of any particular field.”
In his introduction to Shadow and Act, Ellison makes clear that, like Franklin, he, as a black American writer, had “learned that nothing could go unchallenged; especially that feverish industry dedicated to telling Negroes who and what they are, and which can usually be counted upon to deprive both humanity and culture of their complexity.” The feverish industry Ellison is referring to is surely sociology. But his response to the professionalizing of the Negro world and the Negro writer led him to this harsh assessment: “It is quite possible that much potential fiction by Negro Americans fails precisely at this point: through the writers’ refusal (often through provincialism or lack of courage or opportunism) to achieve a vision of life and a resourcefulness of craft commensurate with the complexity of their actual situation. Too often they fear to leave the uneasy sanctuary of race to take their chances in the world of art.” Ellison senses an implicit white racism and black fear in the construction of Negro literature that Franklin sensed in the construction of Negro studies. Yet the separateness of black American life is difficult to dismiss, as it has its roots in the very act of the professionalization of black life, which dates back to the Progressive Era. For the New Negro could be defined as the dawning of the age of the black professional, the dawning of the cult of professionalism among blacks. Remember that professional Negro scholarship arose at the same time as Negro League baseball, another professionalizing endeavor. Franklin, too, wants blacks to have their proper place in American history, to be included in it, but he acknowledges the ironic importance of blacks having had to achieve inclusion by in fact institutionalizing their own separateness. Franklin says that this race professionalization is the trap of racist circumstances but the black scholar must ultimately break free of it in order to be fully able to partake of the privileges of the academy; Ellison suggests that it is the lack of a heroic vision on the part of the black intellectual that he can contest with whites in the world of ideas.

It is interesting to note that Nathan Hare and Ron Karenga, leaders of the black studies movement, in the late 1960s both condemned Negro studies and Negro colleges as being insufficiently revolutionary and insufficiently separatist, repudiating a scholar like Franklin as much as they repudiated a novelist like Ellison. (All the more ironic because Ellison loathed Tuskegee and Franklin had his criticisms of black colleges as well.) And so a generation rejected old racial separation for a new racial separation enacted as an attack against white hegemony, a claim for the transformational power of black studies as a political enterprise, an institutional assertion for the re-politicization of the black professional. It was a harsh rebuke of consensus pluralism. This is, of course, where things fell apart between Professor Scott’s and my generation and the generation of Franklin and Ellison.

Franklin goes on in his piece to discuss the difference between scholarship and advocacy. “There is always the temptation,” writes Franklin, “[for the Negro scholar] to pollute his scholarship with polemics, diatribes, arguments. This is especially true if the area of his interests touches on the great questions in which he is personally involved as a Negro. If he yields to this attractive temptation, he can by one act destroy his effectiveness and disqualify himself as a true and worthy scholar.” Franklin asserts that “[there] is also a place for advocacy, so long as the Negro scholar understands the difference [between it and scholarship].” Franklin writes for instance about providing a paper for the NAACP that was used in its school desegregation arguments: “I had deliberately transformed the objective data provided by historical research into an urgent plea for justice; and I hoped that my scholarship did not suffer.”

Franklin continued, “When such an opportunity [like doing a paper for the NAACP] does not present itself, there is still another way to keep one’s scholarly work from being polluted by passion—namely, by blowing off steam in literary efforts.”

What is important here is that Franklin, as Ellison was to make clear in Shadow and Act in the area of fiction writing and the black practitioner, was insisting that the profession of scholarship has rules and standards that he, as a black person especially, cannot violate if he wishes to be taken seriously at all as a scholar. Ellison was to make the same case for the black writer having to maintain the highest standards in his or her writing. Both men are in effect describing what can be called “the stern discipline,” to use Ellison’s term, of being a black professional. This is the social responsibility, the social action that defined the heroism of the black professional. In his essay, Franklin articulated this creed, this code as a form of action, better or at least more clearly, though less lyrically, than Ellison ever did. I found it striking but not surprising in the last conversation I had with Franklin about a year ago that he said that the worst thing to happen to black studies was the rise of the black public intellectual. “Writing magazine pieces is not scholarship,” he scowled. I suspect that the term “black intellectual” itself gave him the willies because it implied for him a lack of rigor. What the heck was an intellectual? A scholar, for Franklin, was not a mere member of the thinking class.
But there is a downside to this creed of both Franklin and Ellison, and this downside was probably one of the reasons why the militant nationalists ultimately rejected it. There was within this heroism of the black professional a form of repression disguised as self-control that seemed in its way brutally dehumanizing. Think about black athletes like Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, and Jackie Robinson in his first three years as a professional, all in some measure repressed men. Think about the on-screen persona of Sidney Poitier in the 1950s and 1960s. If anything, the men of Ellison and Franklin’s generation were hardly interested in expressing an uninhibited, primitive nonconformity or a nonconformity that could be mistaken for primitivism. There was also the problem that the creed seemed to accept a certain kind of universalism that legitimated certain forms of white hegemony as the proper standards by which one should perform one’s work. Good scholarship and good literature were universal, according to Ellison and Franklin. The militant nationalists wanted them unmasked as Eurocentric inventions. As good consensus pluralists, Ellison and Franklin felt there was a limit to what should be politicized; for militant nationalists and black Marxists, why should there be any limit on politicizing life and, if there were, who should impose it and for what end?

I have been thinking about Franklin and Ellison in this context for the last few weeks, since learning of Franklin’s death and appreciating more and more the magnitude of Franklin’s achievement as both a scholar and a man and the depth of the complexity of his historical moment. It is something that perhaps my generation is only beginning to understand. I do not think my generation fully understands the meaning of sacrifice. Franklin’s did. I knew John Hope Franklin, not well, was in his home on a couple of occasions, and found him to be a gracious and kind man. I learned two things from him: first, it is not good for black people to politicize all of life and its activities and, second, that there can be something courtly about being a scholar, that a black person could have a code of conduct. I had wanted to ask him about the four major humanistic changes—aside from the obvious rise in the diasporic perspective, which actually was always present in black studies and particularly emphasized during the Afrocentrism era of the early and mid 1990s—I have seen in black studies in the last fifteen to twenty years: the rise of biography writing (Franklin himself contributed to this with his magisterial biography George Washington Williams, published in 1985, one of the first major studies of a black scholar who shaped Negro studies); the rise of academic interest in blacks and the military; the rise of a layered black gender studies including constructions of masculinity and homosexuality; and the rise of interest in African American children’s literature and the construction of black childhood. Alas, I failed to inquire about any of this. As is the case with families, you never have the conversations with the elders that you should because you think they’ll be around forever.

Pop Quiz #5: What is the title of John Hope Franklin’s most famous book, his general history of blacks in America?
Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea
The End of the World as We Know It: An International Conference on War, Representation, and Memory

This conference, the second in a series of jointly sponsored humanities-oriented conferences organized by the Center for the Humanities at Washington University and one of the McDonnell International Academy University partners, will be held at Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea, from Monday, June 1 through Saturday, June 6. Co-sponsoring the conference with the WU Center for the Humanities are Yonsei University’s College of Liberal Arts, Department of English, and Center for Gender Studies. The themes of the conference are war, memory, and the political and cultural significance of representations about war. Faculty members from both Washington and Yonsei universities will be presenters.

We have reviews, essays, and notes available only on the Web. Please go to “Markings” on our Web site at http://cenhum.artsci.wustl.edu. Our latest online review is of Arthur C. Brooks’s Who Really Cares: America’s Charity Divide. New work is posted every few weeks.