I believe that one of the greatest functions art can serve for a community or an individual’s life is the expression of Truth. For me the search for Truth has always been best revealed through an expressive style. I avoid “the thing” or the object, and attempt to reveal the life experience by showing the energy around or even inside “the thing.” No matter the medium or subject (figurative or landscape), my goal is always the same, to find the sensual experience or an essence of life rather than the direct facts of a tactile world.

—Mary Dondero

Above, Bluff
24” x 30”

Below, Shore
30” x 42”
ON THE COVER
This silver and turquoise necklace, typical of John Heller’s jewelry, reflects his love of the natural beauty of gemstones set within organic metal forms.

INSIDE FRONT AND BACK COVERS
Sumi Ink Paintings
Mary Dondero

2 Editor’s Notebook
Barbara Apstein

Alphabetic Imperialism? A Cross-Cultural Glimpse into the Evolution of Writing
Curtiss Hoffman

9 Faculty Profile
Salil Sachdev

Hatshepsut: A Female King of Egypt and her Architecture
Roger Dunn

15 Ceramics and Jewelry of John Heller

19 Music and Poetry: Confessions of a Rhyming Musicologist
Jean Kreiling

A History of Washburn Island
Donald L. Keay

26 News from CART (Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching)
Garland Kimmer

28 Cultural Commentary: Held by Many Threads
William Levin

30 McMorals (Book Reviews):
Fast Food Nation; Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America
Charles F. Angel

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Our Medieval Adversaries

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, a flurry of articles and commentaries attempted to explain the terrorists’ thinking to a bewildered American public. Why, everyone asked, do these people hate us? The answers were usually presented in terms of contrasts and dichotomies. We were told that there are two kinds of religion: those that are hardline and dogmatic (theirs) and those that are progressive and tolerant (ours), as well as two kinds of societies: those that hold a single world view (theirs) and those that are pluralistic (ours). New York Times columnist Thomas J. Friedman explained the difference in terms of outlook: “The real clash today is…not between civilizations but within them—between those Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews with a modern and progressive outlook and those with a medieval one.” In a similar vein, Times columnist Maureen Dowd affirmed that “America’s new foes in Afghanistan are clinging to a medieval mindset.” These writers thus invoked history as a way of framing the contrast between “us” and “them”: a modern, enlightened, progressive outlook or mindset versus one that is medieval, superstitious and barbaric.

In fact, “medieval” seems to pop up whenever a shorthand term is needed for “backward,” “bigoted,” or “feudal”—the opposite of civilized. Yet this definition is very much at odds with the picture of the Middle Ages presented by Geoffrey Chaucer, the medieval writer most familiar to the English-speaking world. Although there are plenty of scoundrels among the 29 pilgrims on the road to Canterbury Cathedral, no religious fanatics or potential suicide bombers are to be found among them. Chaucer’s Knight has participated in crusades, yet he never mentions “holy war” or glories in the destruction of infidels. Meek in his bearing, noble and gentlemanly, he is described as a man who values chivalry, truth and honor. His tale, far from glorifying the shedding of heathen blood, explores the issues of fate and fortune. Chaucer himself comes across as skeptical, tolerant, and amused by the human comedy he observes.

Of course, it might be argued that Chaucer was not “typically medieval.” He was, after all, well-educated and well-read, a cosmopolitan member of the merchant class and a courtier. But during the 1,000 years (5th – 15th centuries) which we refer to as the Middle Ages, there must have been many men and women who shared his temperament and view of life. I suspect that people in the Middle Ages were no more uniform in their “outlook” or their “mindset” than people are today. Judging from such diverse Chaucerian creations as the lustful Wife of Bath, the earthy Miller and the hardworking Plowman, medieval people probably held a wide range of attitudes and beliefs.

Dividing history into clearly defined periods, each with its own identifying characteristics, simplifies the task of understanding the past. Many of us learned that the Middle Ages were “dark,” while the Renaissance was a period of “rebirth.” The Victorians were prudish, smug and obsessed with respectability. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to question this tidy division into cultural periods, each with its supposed underlying identity. The more we investigate, it seems, the less coherent and neatly differentiated these historical periods are.

But perhaps historically-based characterizations are too useful to be abandoned. In our struggle to understand the minds of the terrorists, distant precedents may be more reassuring than recent ones. Although the “outlooks” and “mindsets” of the Islamic fundamentalists are in some respects much closer to those of Hitler and Stalin than to anything the Middle Ages produced, labeling them as “medieval” places them at a comfortable distance. We are more advanced, more civilized. Thus, as medieval scholar Lee Patterson observed, the Middle Ages fulfills its role as a symbol of “premodernity,” of “the other that must be rejected” so that Americans of the twenty-first century may reaffirm our sense of who we are.

— Barbara Apstein is Professor of English and Editor of the Review.
Alphabetic Imperialism?
A Cross-Cultural Glimpse into the Evolution of Writing
by Curtiss Hoffman

A brief visit to Japan during June of 2000 brought me into contact with the complex writing systems of that island nation, and caused me to reflect upon some of the basic assumptions I was taught about the development of written language, both in the East and in the West. In college and graduate school, I was trained in the ancient languages and scripts of the Middle East, and I had always accepted the received wisdom that writing in that region had evolved through four stages, from

A) a system of 3-dimensional clay tokens pictographically representing items of commerce; into
B) the logographic, 2-dimensional form of writing we call Sumerian, in which most signs still represent objects or actions, but some have been converted into grammatical particles by the use of homophones; into
C) a syllabary, in which all sounds in the language are represented by a more limited number of signs derived from the earlier logographs; into
D) an alphabet, in which the number of signs is reduced to between 20 and 30, each representing (more or less) a phoneme in the spoken language.

The received wisdom, again based on the Middle Eastern example, is that each of these four stages was superior to the one which preceded it in precision and intelligibility. The alphabetic stage is supposed to represent a major, perhaps even an inevitable, advance in terms of making the written word more accessible to a larger audience, thus promoting the institution of democracy.

It is this last conclusion that I wish to challenge. As an anthropologist, I tend to be suspicious of any explanation of cultural change which implies that the way in which Western civilization achieved a certain set of cultural characteristics was inevitable for all cultures, or, more perniciously, the assumption that cultures which failed to follow the historical stages we followed are somehow inferior. This kind of explanation strikes me as rather self-congratulatory. Instead, we need to consider each set of developments on a case-by-case basis, and to examine the contingencies which applied in each case. When we do this, we very often discover some surprising results which can broaden our perspective of what is possible, and effective, in the broad span of human cultural diversity.

To do this, I will take the reader through a brief comparison of the writing systems of Sumer and Japan, noting points of commonality. I do not intend by this comparison to imply that there is, or ever was, any direct connection between these two cultures, distant from one another as they are by over 3,000 years and 5,000 miles. Instead, I wish to show that their scripts evolved under somewhat similar circumstances and sometimes in strikingly similar ways.

The origins of Sumerian script lay in the ubiquitous clay "tokens" found at late Neolithic and early Chalcolithic sites (ca 7,000 – 4,000 B.C.) throughout the Middle East. It is now well established that these tokens were used to keep records of commercial transactions: if you sell me 10 sheep, I give you 10 little quarter-sized disk-shaped tokens in the shape of a distinguishing part of a sheep (in this case, the hindquarters, represented by a circle with an x inside it); or, if I put 50 measures of barley into the temple storehouse for safekeeping, I get 50 little conical tokens in the shape of bowls of grain with the fill level marked to indicate my property, in case I need to claim it
back later. This system worked well when the amounts exchanged were relatively small, but as Sumerian farmers prospered, the amount of loose change in the form of tokens they had to keep in their possession must have become a nuisance. So they hit upon the idea of enclosing the tokens for each transaction inside a clay envelope, on the moist surface of which the parties to the transaction would stamp or roll their personal seals. Since clay is opaque, they soon discovered that it was now impossible to see how many tokens they had inside the envelope without breaking the seal. So they began to inscribe two-dimensional representations of the three-dimensional tokens on the outside of the envelope. Soon after, they realized that they no longer needed the tokens inside, and the envelopes became inscribed clay tablets. Signs for numbers quickly followed, so that now all I had to do to record the above transactions was to write the sign for 10 followed by the sign for sheep; or the sign for 50 (5 signs for 10) followed by the sign for a measure of barley. This certainly made commerce much easier, though the clay tablets were still rather bulky. It was common practice to discard them after three generations. Even so, commercial texts make up about 80% of all clay tablets found in Mesopotamia.

By the time cities were well established in southern Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C., the priests and city rulers realized that this pictorial representation of the spoken language could be carried a step farther: they could record not only the sales of goods, but also texts of praise for their gods and kings, myths, epics, and eventually diplomatic and personal correspondence. The script in which these were written was streamlined into a system of signs written with a wedge-shaped reed stylus in the moist clay of the tablet (hence the term cuneiform, wedge-shaped), each sign standing for an object or an action, plus signs derived from the above which represented grammatical particles on the basis of homophony. Each sign stood for a Sumerian word of one or two syllables, and because it derived from a picture it might be read in any of a number of ways, depending upon the context. For example, the sign which originally depicted a foot (Sumerian du) might denote the verb “to walk” (gina in the present 3rd person indicative, but with many permutations depending on tense, mood, etc.); or it might denote the verb “to stand” (guba in the indicative). To avoid confusion between the three, a glossing sign was added after the sign for foot: e.g., GIN + NA to form “he walks,” or GUB + BA to form “he stands.” Some of the basic signs were modified by adding marks (gunu) to indicate a particular part of the object to which the scribe wished to draw attention; for example, the sign for head (sag) with marks over or next to the mouth would indicate “mouth” (ka) or “word, speech, language” (emegir), respectively. In addition, certain types of nouns were glossed with what are called “determinatives,” which are not intended to be read but simply inform the reader of what sort of noun is involved: the name of a person, of a god, of a star, a fish, a bird, or of an object made of wood, metal, leather, etc.

There were well over 600 signs in common use, and certainly this made the task of learning Sumerian script a daunting one, even for speakers of the language. We have texts about the schooling of scribes, and practice texts on which the teacher would inscribe an example on one side of the tablet and the student would have to copy it on the other. The profession of scribe was highly honored and paid well, and scribal academies were well-supported, both by tuition from private wealthy patrons who sent their sons to be taught there and by the state, which employed scribes for various tasks: preparing inscriptions for public monuments, writing correspondence between city rulers, keeping track of surplus grain, etc. While most scribes were male in this heavily patriarchal society, we do have evidence of female scribes, and also of a separation into male and female dialects of the language (eme.gir, “reed speech,” and emesal, “skinny speech,” respectively).

The written word assumed great importance in Mesopotamian culture, in both law and religion. Law codes were inscribed on large monuments placed in public squares so that a person brought before the law, either as plaintiff or defendant, could be shown the written case law that applied to the particular case. And the king of the gods, Enlil, was thought to have control of the Tablets of Destiny upon which were written the fates of men and gods.

By around 2400 B.C., new peoples were entering the region from the desert. The Akkadians and the Amorites spoke Semitic languages unrelated to Sumerian. At first the Sumerians tried to assimilate them by giving them marginal lands to graze their herds, but eventually the assimilation developed into an outright takeover of the old Sumerian culture. The Semites adopted Sumerian social structure, dress, urbanism, economics, and religion, with a few modifications. The new peoples also took over the cuneiform script and adapted it to represent the sounds in their languages. They clearly had problems with both the writing and grammar of Sumerian, for they created long bilingual lists of terms for reference—luckily for us, for otherwise we might not be able to read Sumerian at all! They also simplified the logographic script into a syllabary of about 100 signs, each representing a vowel (V), a vowel plus a consonant (VC), or a consonant plus a vowel (CV). They retained about 200 of the more complex CVC signs as a kind of
shorthand, or, sometimes in scribal academies, just to show off—but for comprehension, they often glossed these with Akkadian equivalents, in the same way that the Sumerians themselves used glosses for pronunciation aids. Like Latin in Medieval times, Sumerian was retained as a literary language, used primarily in the temples for the preservation of religious and astronomical texts.

With this step, the signs were almost entirely divorced from their original logographic meaning and became sound units to express the spoken language. The syllabic system was much easier to learn and to use, and as a result Akkadian script became the standard for international commerce and diplomacy throughout the region for well over a millennium and a half. Even in Egypt, where parallel developments had independently resulted in the hieroglyphic script, Akkadian was the language in which letters were written to the Pharaoh by petty princes in Palestine during the reign of Akhnaton (ca 1350 B.C.).

Starting in the early 2nd millennium B.C., some Semitic-speaking groups along the Mediterranean coast—in Sinai and at Ugarit in Syria—began to experiment with a further modification: an alphabetic script which reduced the number of signs yet further, each now representing a consonantal phoneme in the language. This may have derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs, which are a combination of logographs, syllables, and consonantal signs. Like the early Sumerian and Egyptian signs, each letter was originally the pictograph of an object (aleph = ox, beth = house, etc.), but unlike hieroglyphic script they were never used logographically. One of the reasons this system may have become popular among these seafaring tradespeople is that the number of characters in the Ugaritic and Phoenician alphabets is equivalent to the number of days in a lunar month, thereby making it possible to use the set of alphabet letters as a kind of calendar.

The advantage of this kind of writing system was that the student had far fewer characters to memorize. The disadvantage was that the vowel sounds were mostly left out and had to be inferred from a knowledge of the spoken language—like modern alphabetic shorthand. Only where the vowel was preceded by a glottal stop was a, i, or u indicated. This remains the case with the two chief modern descendants of these scripts in the region: Arabic and Hebrew. While both languages developed a system for denoting vowels during the first millennium A.D., in practice today (both religious and secular) the markings are often omitted. Students first
learning the language are supplied with the vowel pointings, but once they become fluent with these they learn to read texts without them. Yiddish, the language of the Jews of Eastern Europe, is written with Hebrew script without vowel pointings, but since it is about 80% German some of the glottal consonants are forced into service as vowels instead.

The Greeks, who were heavily involved in trade with the eastern Mediterranean coast, adopted this system fairly early, as inscriptions in Linear A and B show. By the mid-first millennium B.C. they had converted it into a true alphabet, in which vowels as well as consonants are represented. The advantage of this is that one does not have to be fluent in the language, only in the sounds assigned to each letter, to understand what it sounds like. The disadvantage is that one has to use far more characters to represent a word than with the earlier logographic, syllabic, or consonantal sign sets. For example, the preceding sentence required 125 alphabetic characters. If I had used only the consonants and initial vowels it would have taken about 75 characters; if I had used a syllabary, 42 characters; if I had used logographs (excluding definite articles and verb tense and noun case markers), only 15. This may not seem important in this day of word-processors, but it would make a big difference if one had to engrave a long text on a stone monument!

Alphabetic scripts began to eclipse the Akkadian syllabary during the latter half of the first millennium B.C., and by the time of Alexander’s conquest they had completely won the day. The last cuneiform texts were written around 200 B.C., in temples. After that, it was a lost language, forgotten and unreadable until the early 19th century adventurer Henry Rawlinson copied, at great personal risk, the trilingual inscription at Behistun in Iran and Robert Koldewey deciphered its Akkadian text from the better known Old Persian.

All of the alphabets in wide use today—Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Hindi—derive from the early alphabets developed on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean around 1700—1400 B.C. Each culture which received it adapted it to its own sound system, some more successfully than others. English, the most widely circulated written language in the world today, is not one of the more successful adaptations! Compared to Italian, for example, we have far too many silent letters, extra vowels, etc.

Now for the Japanese side of the story. Writing was introduced to Japan around the 5th century B.C. from China, which had had a well-developed logographic script for thousands of years (and still does, though streamlined by Mao into the pinyin system). The Japanese made some changes according to their preferences and to suit their language, which is unrelated to Chinese. But they have kept the system of logograms, called kanji, to the present day. As with Sumerian, each kanji character stands for a word or idea, sometimes of one syllable, sometimes of several, and is derived from a pictograph. Japanese is well suited to a logographic system, because it is a highly agglutinative language (so is Sumerian!)—compound words are formed by combining existing characters. A well-schooled reader of Japanese today is expected to know a minimum of 1500 kanji characters.

Like Sumerian cuneiform, kanji was taught in academies and in the households of high-status men, but only to boys. Traditional Japanese society was just as sexist as Sumerian; girls in these households were not expected to be literate. But by the 12th century A.D., with increasing prosperity under the Tokugawa shoguns, many young women desired an education. They were easily able to overhear the lessons their brothers were receiving through the rice-paper walls, but they were barred from the lessons themselves. So they devised their own form of writing, a syllabary called hiragana. Like Akkadian cuneiform, the individual signs, while possibly derived from kanji, do not carry meaning, only sound value. Also like Akkadian, hiragana affords a radical reduction in the number of characters to be learned, to only 109. Hiragana allows only two types of characters, V and CV; Japanese does not permit VC or CVC clusters, with the exception of final m or n, for which there is a separate hiragana character. In addition to the main vowels (a, e, i, o, and u) there is also a series of “y-glides” for most consonants. These are derived from the “e” version of the corresponding CV signs, with a mark (like the Sumerian gunu) added. The unvoiced consonants (g, z, d, b, and p) were similarly derived from their voiced equivalents (k, s, t, and h) by the addition of marks.

Hiragana proved extremely popular among women, and the first novel written in Japan, The Tale of Genji, was by a female author in this script. It is used today by both men and women for literature, for descriptive works, and also as a gloss on kanji characters to show grammatical particles—much like the glosses used by Sumerian and Akkadian scribes on Sumerian logograms. Hiragana characters tend to be cursive and flowing.

Not to be outdone, the all-male academies responded with a syllabic script of their own, katakana, modeled exactly on the 109 hiragana characters. However, these characters are more angular in shape. They are used
today in business, commerce, advertising, and any situations in which Japanese interact with foreigners (gaijin). Moreover, the syllabic systems of hiragana and katakana began to assume symbolic importance: statues guarding the entrances of Buddhist temple complexes are depicted as fierce warriors, the one on the left with his mouth open voicing the first character in the syllabary, “a,” the one on the right with his mouth closed voicing the last regular character, “n/m.” This is similar to the Greek concept of the alpha and omega, representing the totality. It is also a variant on the Hindu/Buddhist sacred word AUM or OM.

Once Japan was opened to the West during the Meiji Restoration of the mid-19th century, the Japanese began to use the Roman alphabet, and Arabic numerals, in addition to their own scripts. This is referred to as Romanji, but it is almost exclusively used for foreign words, sometimes glossed by katakana characters. Signs on public accommodations such as train stations are written in kanji and romanji (the latter for the benefit of gaijin; as tourists we found this to be most useful!). Japanese children are taught hiragana and katakana first, and are then gradually introduced to the kanji. Walter Carroll of the Sociology Department has informed me that American G.I.s billeted in occupied Japan after World War II who wished to learn the local language could only find female tutors, and thus learned hiragana and the women’s dialect. When they attempted to use this in the company of Japanese men it was, shall we say, a source of innocent merriment!

Most young Japanese are also now learning English as a second language for economic reasons, but they have not shown any signs of abandoning the syllabaries, or the logographic kanji which lie behind them. While in Japan, we were interviewed by several middle-school age children, who had been given the assignment to find some gaijin and ask them questions in English. We noticed that while the questions were all written in romanji, they recorded our answers in a mix of romanji, hiragana, and kanji (not katakana, as one might expect for an interaction with gaijin—but our interviewers were girls). We also saw an I-Book computer with hiragana characters as well as romanji on the keys—and we were told that the computer translates these into kanji when it displays them on the screen or in printout.

Public billboards and advertisements in subway cars are often a bewildering (to us!) mix of all four scripts.

While the four stages I have described for Near Eastern scripts certainly do reflect the historical progression over a period of some 2500 years in that region, my experience in Japan has caused me to question its causality, as well as its inevitability. The Japanese have never quite adopted an alphabetic script, though literacy in Japan is as high as in any other modern industrialized country today.

This suggests that the move to alphabetic scripts was not necessarily an inevitable evolution, or even something which would have necessary social consequences such as the rise of democracy. In the Middle Eastern case, it is possible to argue that the successive conquests of the region by the Greeks and the Romans, and the subsequent domination of learning by the Christian
Church, resulting in the elimination of all competitors. By contrast, Japan, an island nation, was literally insulated from unwanted foreign influences for a long time. After the initial conquest by the ethnic Japanese in the mid-second millennium B.C., it was not again successfully invaded until 1945. In the West, the alphabet was a standardized form which could be (and was, and still is) used as an instrument of tyranny and imperialism as readily as it is used as a tool to promote democracy.

Think of the wide dissemination of Mein Kampf in pre-World War II Germany, for example. While democracies certainly do depend upon the dissemination of information through a free press, Japan has no difficulty maintaining its active democracy by means of its syllabic and logographic writing systems. Millions of Japanese inform themselves of current events every day by reading newspapers printed in a mix of all four scripts.

No is this the only example of a non-Western people adopting and maintaining a syllabic script in the face of outside domination. In the state of Kerala in southern India, which I visited during the summer of 2001, the conventional script of north India, devanagari, has made little headway against the local Malayalam syllabic script of about 900 characters. This is said by some to have derived from north Indian models, and by others from Aramaic (a script very similar to Hebrew) introduced early in the first millennium A.D., but neither of these scripts is syllabic. In recent times, the number of characters has been reduced to about 90 to accommodate computer keyboards. The Keralans have absorbed many of the customs, religion, and mythology of the northern Indo-Aryans, yet they gently but firmly maintain their cultural identity through state-wide annual ceremonies, language, and the use of the Malayalam script. We saw far more transcriptions of this cursive script into English than into Hindi in Kerala. Far from being a barrier to literacy, Malayalam is read by over 95% of the approximately 30 million residents of Kerala—the highest literacy rate of any state in India.

I have also learned of a syllabic script in use among the Vai people of northern Liberia. This was evidently devised during the first decades of the 19th century by a local religious mystic on the basis of a dream. It contains 175 V and CV characters and was first noted by missionaries accompanying freed African slaves from America to that portion of the African coast. It is still in use today, despite the dominance of English in the cities. I am told that it is a way of maintaining Vai cultural identity, as well as being a much better fit to their language than the Roman alphabet.

I want to close by mentioning two other more recently innovated syllabic scripts in use on the North American continent today. The first is Cherokee, or Tsalagi, an 85-character syllabary which was supposedly innovated by their chief Sequoia in the first decades of the 19th century. Some Native Cherokee informants maintain that Sequoia only modified a much more ancient system of writing, though there is little archaeological evidence of this (Not none: a lead Sumerian cuneiform tablet was found at the Hearn site in west Georgia in 1945. I have examined this site and found it to be of an age roughly equivalent to the date of ca 2050 B.C. on the tablet. Before the U.S. Army forced them to take the Trail of Tears away from their homelands, the Cherokee had established printing presses in southern Appalachia and were publishing books and newspapers in this script. It continues in use today among their communities, both in Oklahoma and in North Carolina. I have to wonder whether Tsalagi might have been the inspiration for the Vai script, since the prosperous Cherokee did keep (and sometimes manumitted) African slaves.

The second example is Inuktitut, a syllabic script introduced to the Inuit in northeastern Canada and Greenland by a late-19th century missionary. It has 59 characters, a mix of syllables and consonants, and is roughly based on Pitman shorthand. It is catching on in the newly autonomous Canadian region of Nunavut. Just as the Quebequois insist on French-English bilingualism in lower Canada, the Inuit are now publishing books in bilingual facing-page English and Inuktitut. Both Tsalagi and Inuktitut are used as a means of maintaining cultural identity, and learning them is a matter of pride for their young people. It may be one means by which these cultures achieve sustainability in the fast-paced 21st century.

In conclusion, syllabaries are alive and well, and some of them have successfully resisted the repeated attempts of alphabetic systems to colonize them. It may even be the case that the requirements for learning them sharpen the mind—I can certainly attest to that from my own learning curve for cuneiform! We should not hasten to declare them inferior to alphabetic systems, but instead we should try to understand them as effective alternatives to alphabetic imperialism.

—Curtiss Hoffman is Professor of Anthropology.
Faculty Profile

Salil Sachdev

Expanding the curriculum to include the study of African, Latin American and Asian cultures has been one of the College’s highest priorities in recent years. The number and variety of courses in non-western civilizations grew steadily during the 1990s. New faculty members, among them Professor Salil Sachdev, who joined the Music Department in 1999, have added increased depth to our multicultural offerings.

Born and educated in India, Professor Sachdev is familiar with both Indian classical music and the folk, ceremonial and religious music of his native land. He received a thorough grounding in western classical music, beginning his studies in India and continuing in graduate school in the U.S. More recently, Professor Sachdev’s interests have broadened to include West African folk music and drumming, Irish Frame Drumming and Solkattu, the rhythmic solfege language of South India. He plays the Djembe (West African drum), the Bodhran (Irish frame drum) and the Udu (Nigerian clay pot drum), as well as experimenting with unconventional percussion “instruments” like metal bowls and electronic hand percussion.

Bridgewater students enrolled in Professor Sachdev’s courses in “Music of the World” and “Music of Africa” benefit from this extensive and varied background. In addition, Professor Sachdev has organized an African drumming ensemble on campus called “Khakatay,” which means “laughing out loud” in the Wolof language of Senegal, West Africa. Beginning with seven students meeting on a voluntary basis, the ensemble has grown to nearly twenty, with students now able to receive academic credit for participating. While the group’s repertoire consists primarily of traditional music from the West African nations of Guinea, Senegal, Mali and the Ivory Coast, Professor Sachdev also experiments with musical instruments and stylistic elements from other parts of the world. The performers are not all music majors, but come from a variety of different disciplines, which pleases Professor Sachdev, who believes that the ensemble provides an opportunity for students who are not majoring in music to participate in an enjoyable and disciplined musical activity.

When he is not teaching or directing “Khakatay,” Professor Sachdev devotes himself to composing. His approach to composition is highly eclectic, his musical language drawn from a variety of areas including western classical, jazz, rock, and non-western music. He deeply appreciates classical masters like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Stravinsky, as well as the Beatles, Frank Zappa, Art Tatum and Bill Evans. Professor Sachdev has composed works for piano, voice and orchestra as well as for less conventional instruments. “Burn” (1994) is scored for a solo mallet player accompanied by the tape of one of his electronic compositions; “Magic” (1999) was composed for a metal bowl, which proves to be capable of producing a vast palette of sonic textures, from delicate nuances to thundering loud sounds.

Professor Sachdev’s interest in music goes back to his boyhood, and he remembers composing popular songs and playing hand percussion while growing up in India. After completing high school, he studied western classical theory and composition for four years with Harold Joseph, a well-known composer and conductor in India. He then pursued a Masters in Music Composition at Ohio University and completed a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Miami.

Professor Sachdev has travelled extensively, both to study and to perform. His interest in West African drumming led him to study with a drumming master in Guinea, West Africa, and he has studied the South Indian rhythmic musical system, as well as Frame drumming and the Bodhran (Irish frame drum). Assisted by a CART grant, he, along with Dr. Jabbar Al-Obaidi from the Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts, recently travelled to India to conduct field research and make a series of films and audio recordings of Indian folk music. Last summer, Professor Sachdev’s interest in Irish music led him to participate in the International Summer School for Traditional Irish Music and Dance hosted by the Irish World Music Centre at the University of Limerick.

Through his course offerings, the performances of “Khakatay” and his work as Co-director of the Second Annual Multicultural Music Festival held at the College last October, Professor Sachdev has introduced the Bridgewater community to a wide range of musical experiences.
During my years of teaching the art and architectural survey courses that cover ancient Egypt, and later in developing the course Women in the Visual Arts, which I co-teach with Mercedes Nuñez, I became more and more fascinated by the pharaoh named Hatshepsut, a woman who came to the throne under the titles of a king and appeared in public as one. She is the first recorded female ruler in history and the first recorded female patron of large-scale art and architectural projects. She left behind a number of artifacts testifying to the importance of her reign, which lasted from about 1504-1483 BCE. I had viewed on several occasions the two sculptures of her at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, one showing her in the traditional guise of pharaoh, with chin beard, kilt and linen headdress. This regal attire would have left her chest bare. The other sculpture depicts her as a sphinx. She made sure not to be mistaken for anything but a legitimate pharaoh. This is expressed as well in Hatshepsut’s funerary temple, her greatest visible legacy. It would have earned its patron a special role in Egyptian and architectural history whether built by a female or male. There is nothing quite like it in architecture in its design, siting and effect. Egyptian kings in the New Kingdom period sought an enduring monument of temple architecture to communicate to posterity their importance and power. In contrast, royal tombs were now hidden away in the cliffs on the west side of the Nile from the capital city of Thebes, seeking a security for the mummy and treasures which the prominent early pyramids had failed to insure. Located some distance away from the tomb, the funerary temple provided a place for the ongoing rituals to the divine king and favored deities, even long after the king’s death. And its permanence and impressiveness would preserve the continued memory of the king, assuring his eternity in the afterlife.

Fulfilling a goal I had for myself (while helping to assure Hatshepsut’s eternal existence by thus honoring her), I visited her funerary temple during a research and documentary tour of Egypt in January 2001, made possible by a CART grant. For an art historian, works of art and architecture are the primary documents of research. To be able to view first-hand the works one teaches about is very important because no reproduction and text description replace the experience of the work itself. This is especially true of architecture. Such direct study can then be communicated to students with greater knowledge and enthusiasm for the works than before.

The temple did not disappoint. The experience of ascending the ramps towards the cliffs is one of moving from the vast flat desert to soaring grandeur. Whatever losses there are in terms of original decorative effect, the scale and sequence of spaces remain and have their impact. To see the much-reproduced painted reliefs of the royal couple of the land of Punt bringing offerings to the king and Hatshepsut greeting Hathor was more meaningful when viewed in their context. Details, such as the paintings of heaped up sacrifices of bulls, grain and other produce, were remarkably colorful and easy to “read” and understand. There were discoveries, such as the lion-head “gargoyles” that serve as rain spouts and predate the famous Gothic ones by two and a half millennia. A sequence of columns in Hathor’s chapel are each beautifully carved with the cow goddess’ head, but I never have seen them effectively depicted in photographs of the temple. But how could Hatshepsut have placed herself on the male throne of king of Egypt, putting herself in position to create such works in her honor?

ROYAL WOMEN AND KINGSHIP

Hatshepsut’s rise to the rank of pharaoh, and her ability to hold this position for two decades, is testament to a remarkable woman who overcame the long-revered historical and religious traditions that restricted the rule of Egypt to one who was a son of the god Amun, hence a man. However, this belief that the pharaoh was sired by the great god gave enormous importance to the royal women as consorts of Amun, who sometimes bore the title “God’s Wife of Amun” or “Mother of the God (the Pharaoh).” Title and power were passed on from one king to another through connection to the line of royal
females. For a man born into the royal family, this legitimate rule usually came from his mother if she was a queen, though otherwise he might derive his authority—or further enhance it—through marriage to another royal woman, including his sister, half-sister, aunt, niece, or even his own daughter. Such incestuous unions are well documented in Egyptian history, though some scholars still dispute the concept of matrilineal succession. Even so, history records a number of instances in which a non-royal male attained kingship of Egypt by marrying a royal woman.

A good example of how royal women could legitimize a man’s right to be king is found about a century after Hatshepsut in Ankhesenamun (originally Ankhesenpaaten), one of seven daughters of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti, the pharaoh’s first cousin. When abandoned by his queen, who may have sided with the priesthood in overthrowing him, Akhenaten married his daughter, who was perhaps no more than eleven years old. During their marriage she bore her father a daughter. At his death, Ankhesenamun was married to Tutankhamen (King Tut), who may have been her uncle, nephew, or brother. He came to the throne at the age of nine and died nine or ten years later, so she was a few years older than he was. Within the famous contents of his tomb is a throne whose back support is adorned with a scene in hammered gold of Ankhesenamun anointing her husband. This is more than a tender image of the couple, as sometimes interpreted, for it depicts a ritual whose significance relates to the object it appears on and its symbolic location where it supports the king’s “upright” position on the throne. Other items within the tomb similarly depict scenes of her favor toward him and her support of his rule. Such images of a queen embracing or anointing her husband are not uncommon in dynastic Egyptian art.

When Tutankhamen died due to uncertain causes (murder is suspected), there was a power struggle in the court, and Ankhesenamun remained a pawn of the priesthood and powerful members of her family, particularly her grandmother Queen Tiy. A document survives in which Ankhesenamun, fearing for her situation, asks the king of the Hittites, the enemies of Egypt, to send a prince. In it she states she would marry him and he would become king of Egypt. This plan was foiled with the assassination of the prince enroute, and Ankhesenamun was married to her elderly grandfather Ay, who then became king. Upon his death not long afterwards, she was wed to the general Horemheb, a non-royal who became pharaoh simply through this marriage. Thus through marriage she had validated the kingship of four men, and had promised it to another who was not even Egyptian.

It is no surprise then that, even though women rarely ruled directly, they often exercised great authority within the court. Within this context Hatshepsut’s story is still exceptional. Her father was Thutmose I, a non-royal general who became king by marrying the previous pharaoh’s sister, Ahmose. Hatshepsut’s abilities as a leader and administrator were apparently so evident as a young woman (perhaps only aged 15), that she was named co-regent by her father toward the end of his reign. To assure the passage of power to one of the pharaoh’s own sons, she was married to her half-brother, the son of a minor wife, who thus succeeded their father to rule no more than three years as Thutmose II until his own death. This union begat the princess Neferure, but no male heir. Thus the chosen successor of Thutmose III was his three-year-old son born of a con-
cubine—obviously not a woman of royal blood. Though it seems likely that Hatshepsut legitimized this choice by marrying her daughter to Thutmose III, who was her nephew and stepson, she first served as his regent, then assumed the title and full authority of pharaoh herself, though nominally co-ruler with Thutmose III. This act reveals the level of power and support she already had achieved within the court and among the priesthood. In fact an important supporter was the Chief Steward of the god Amun, Senenmut, a man she elevated to high rank who became the most powerful member of her administration. Of the many titles and areas of authority heaped upon him, the most important was tutor to princess Neferure. Though the history of Neferure is uncertain, it is known that she did not outlive her mother’s reign.

A mythology was spun to reveal that, as with other pharaohs, Hatshepsut was conceived by her mother as a result of a visit from Amun, taking the guise of the queen’s husband—Amun’s usual modus operandi. This story and that of Hatshepsut being crowned as king by Thutmose I are told in the reliefs and hieroglyphics of her funerary temple. Hatshepsut took care to follow the traditional role and appearance of the pharaoh, as previously noted. In paintings her skin is red-brown, the traditional color for men, and she is depicted with male physique. As with other kings, she also was portrayed as sphinx and in the form of Osiris, God of the Dead. Inscriptions refer to her as male and use the titles of king.

Hatshepsut’s reign was one of relative peace, internal order and increased prosperity, in which her efforts were aimed at expanding trade, creating new markets for Egyptian goods while bringing in luxurious and exotic new goods from distant lands. In time Thutmose III became old enough and powerful enough to overthrow her, though nothing is known of exactly how her reign and life ended. We can suspect the worst, because her successor, perhaps resenting the many years when he was kept from coming to power, commanded much later in his reign that her name be removed from all sculpted images and monuments, including her own funerary temple. In this way he would destroy her very existence, both in earthly memory and in the afterlife. The command was only partially carried out.

PATRON OF ARCHITECTURE

To assure the continuation of their existence and greatness in this life and the next, the pharaohs built grandly, adorned their monuments richly, and inscribed their names, images, and lists of achievements throughout. In addition, pharaohs earned praise by restoring, adorning and adding to the temples built by their predecessors. Inscriptions that survive from Hatshepsut’s reign attest to the commitment and pride she felt in this role of architectural patron. Through these building projects, Hatshepsut assured divine favor and prosperity for herself and her people; she proved that she was a responsible ruler securing the best for Egypt.

Particularly important was the great temple complex at Karnak, the center of the cult of Amun, a sun god who had risen to primary importance within the Egyptian pantheon and who, of course, was the father of all pharaohs including Hatshepsut. Karnak had become the most important religious center in all of Egypt. Surviving from her contributions to this temple are a pylon (entrance facade) along the southern route leading to the Temple of Mut (Amun’s wife), and two obelisks (one still standing) placed within the small hypostyle hall built by her father, Thutmose I. Each obelisk was of a single stone 88-1/2 feet high and weighing 320 tons. They were originally gold-leafed on their...
pyramidal peaks, and gold would have also embellished the hieroglyphics on all four sides of each tapering shaft. As was typical, the hieroglyphs on these obelisks express Hatshepsut’s self-praise for her generous gift to the god, along with the expectation that the gift would assure the perpetuation of her memory into eternity. The inscription reads as follows:

[These obelisks] are of hard granite from the quarries of the South; their tops are of fine gold chosen from the best in all foreign lands. They can be seen from afar on the river; the splendor of their radiance fills the Two Lands, and when the solar disk appears between them it is truly as if her face rose up into the horizon of the sky.... You who after long years shall see these monuments, who shall speak of what I have done, you will say, “We do not know, we do not know how they can have made a whole mountain of gold.”...

To gild them I have given gold measured by the bushel, as though it were sacks of grain,...for I knew that Karnak is the celestial horizon of the earth (Translation from Will Durant, Our Oriental Heritage).

However, Hatshepsut is best known in architecture for her funerary temple, built on the west side of the Nile across the river from Amun’s temple and aligned with it on a west-east axis, establishing a close connection with the deity critical to the legitimacy of her reign. Her temple is next to the funerary temple of the earlier pharaoh Nebhepetra Mentuhotep, built more than five centuries before during the Middle Kingdom period. Once Thebes, today the location is known as Deir el Bahari. Both temples were built against the cliffs, with sanctuaries carved into the cliff rock. The site adds dramatically to the effect of the architecture. While they follow a thousand year old tradition of cliff tombs built by provincial governors and other nobles, Hatshepsut’s funerary temple is much grander and shows a particularly sensitive approach of the architectural design strongly related to the site. The vertical projections and crevices of the cliffs are echoed in the pattern of dark and lights created by the colonnades on the three terraces. The ascent of the ramps and terraces gives emphasis to the soaring cliffs. It is important to note that this was not the burial place of Hatshepsut, for that was hidden within the cliffs beyond. This temple was for the continued rituals that honored her as a deity, and assured her favored association with other powerful and personal gods.

The temple is typical in being designed around a long axis. From the Nile River valley, an avenue of sphinxes bearing the face of Hatshepsut once led to the terraces of the temple, each faced with double colonnades. (Though most descriptions refer to these as “colonnades,” in fact many of the supports here are square piers.) The piers of the outer colonnade of the upper terrace were fronted by painted limestone statues of Hatshepsut standing in mummiform pose with arms crossing her torso in the pose of Osiris, God of the Dead. Some of these still survive, though mostly fragmentary and without their original paint.

The approach from one terrace to another is by means of ramps that follow the processional route into the cliff face. At the end of the ramps a ceremonial gate gives entrance to a colonnaded courtyard, which is surrounded on three sides by sanctuaries usually attributed to the gods Amun, Ra, Anubis, Hathor, and of course Hatshepsut herself as well as a chapel to her father, Thutmose I. Some of these are within the cliff. As previously noted, her connection to the sun deity Amun is further established by the alignment of her temple with that of Amun at Karnak across the river. It was intended that yearly the small solid gold statue of Amun journey from his sanctuary at Karnak to cross the river and be placed in his chapel in Hatshepsut’s temple, a ceremony called the Festival of Wadi.

Under Thutmose III, the temple remained a cult center of Amun-Ra and Hathor, and the Festival was continued even though he abolished the cult of Hatshepsut.

The supporting posts of the colonnades vary from those square in section to those faceted with eight or sixteen sides. The latter bear a resemblance to the later Greek Doric columns, and may have been a type that influenced the columns used in such temples as the Parthenon almost a millennium later. The austerity of
the present condition of Hatshepsut’s temple belies the fact that its surfaces were once richly carved, colored and gilded, though some of the shallow relief carvings on the inner walls have paint that is remarkably preserved. For example, shown on one wall is the pharaoh’s birth, in which Amun, taking the form of Thutmose I, visits Queen Ahmose, Hatshepsut’s mother. Given prominence as well is a painted relief of Hatshepsut’s proudest achievement, the expedition to Punt (probably present-day Somalia), in a quest to promote trade between the two lands. Punt’s King and Queen, a corpulent woman who met the standards of beauty of her culture, are shown with their retinue bearing gifts for Hatshepsut. Among the acquisitions from this expedition were fragrant myrrh trees, the basis for gardens of flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs that adorned the terraces of this temple complex. The original splendor of this place within the desert against the cliffs can only be imagined now.

The probable architect of this masterpiece was Senenmut, whose many high-ranking titles included “Overseer of Overseers of All of the Works of the King.” Hence, he would have supervised the design and construction of this temple and is identified several times in its images and hieroglyphics. In fact, his name and image appear so frequently with Hatshepsut’s and those of her daughter that it has been assumed that he was the king’s most intimate consort. His achievement here makes him one of the greatest architects in Egypt’s phenomenal history of building, though surely its design was at least partly a vision conceived by his patron.

POST SCRIPT

For an ancient Egyptian, to have one’s name uttered by posterity was assurance enough of one’s eternity. A terrible irony occurred in October 1997, when the world resounded with the name of Hatshepsut because fundamentalist terrorists had opened fire on tourists gathered on the open terraces of her temple. While some were able to flee to safety behind the posts and columns and into the chapel of Hathor, a protective and powerful mother goddess, some thirty were killed, members of Japanese and Swiss tour groups. Being within the dramatic space of that recent tragedy added to my emotions in visiting Hatshepsut’s temple, feeling both the greatness and baseness of human endeavors, and the eternity and temporality that together define the passage of time.

—Roger Dunn is Professor of Art.
Ceramics and Jewelry of John Heller

John Heller, who was Professor of Art at the College for more than thirty years (1968–2001), died unexpectedly on February 17, 2001. His friends and colleagues will never forget John’s generosity, his intelligence, his wit and his unstinting service to the College. Fortunately, despite the many hours he devoted to his students, his colleagues and to the many committees on which he served, John still found time for his own creative work. The next four pages offer a sampling of the hundreds of original pieces, many now in private collections, which he created.
Right, Gold Ring with Opal
Below Left, Gold Ring with Cat’s Eye
Below Right, Gold Necklace with Moonstone
Bottom, Necklace with Freshwater Pearls and Lapis
The editors thank Professors Leslie Angell and Roger Dunn for their help in selecting these examples of John Heller’s creative work.
CERAMICS AND JEWELRY OF JOHN HELLER

Ceramic Jar with Faces
Music and Poetry
Confessions of a Rhyming Musicologist
by Jean Kreiling

When the composer Samuel Barber claimed that “a song can say what nothing else can,” he acknowledged the expressive powers of both music and poetry, and, more broadly, the crucial eloquence of art. A musicologist typically finds endless fascination in this eloquence and explores it by analyzing musical scores, studying historical documents, and pursuing fresh perspectives on both well-known and obscure music. The results of these efforts generally include scholarly essays and thoughtful classroom presentations—but nothing quite so compelling, or communicative, as a song. My own experiences in musicology have given me intellectual satisfaction, artistic insights, and cultural awareness—all of which have, I hope, informed my teaching and my performing.

But both in the classroom and at the piano, I frequently hear music “say” things that musicological methods cannot anticipate nor explicate—elusive, exquisite things that deserve a different kind of attention. And in response to the ensuing wonder and frustration, my professional life has intersected with my secret life as a poet. After years as a closet poet, I have recently seen my work published, in small journals including The Comstock Review, The Edge City Review, Ekphrasis, The Formalist, and The Lyric. While my poems address many different themes, several represent especially personal, non-scholarly approaches to music. Paradoxically, the metaphorical and suggestive qualities of poetry seem more precisely expressive than the exacting rigor of musicological scrutiny. That is, a poem, like a song, can say what nothing else can.

Like most of my poems, the ones below are sonnets—fourteen lines of rhyming iambic pentameter. The sonnet form, like many time-honored musical forms, neatly accommodates both contrast and unity, both order and flexibility, both logic and passion. Today’s poets exploit such traditional forms relatively rarely—just as today’s composers often choose newer and freer forms. But the words of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth still seem apt: he wrote (in a sonnet) that “Nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room” and he asserted that such a self-imposed “prison” is no prison at all—instead, it offers solace, for poet and reader, from “the weight of too much liberty.”

—Jean Kreiling is Professor of Music. Her poems appear on the following pages.
The Audition

How dare they sit in judgment, this cold row of suits and guarded smiles? She isn’t fooled by courtesy; she knows this court won’t show a candid countenance until they’ve ruled. She knows they see her trembling hand, a wing weak as a fledgling’s, and her shaking knees, unsteady as the feeble fluttering within her breast and throat— but no one sees that she can soar, can make the air her own. So now she masters it again: inhales, and breathes out beauty, hymns to heavens flown and sought. They nod, and ask her to sing scales— but their judicial poise can’t hide the sight of suits turned into feathers by her flight.

The Piano Lesson

—for Robert

The photograph portrays a patient pair: a loving mentor seated at the keys, a small boy, smiling, balanced on her knees, his fingers choosing black and white with care. Devoted to their shared pursuit of art, he’s held by learning’s focused fascination— and also by her arms, for cultivation of harmonies heard only in the heart. But she remembers when this shot was taken, and knows the child’s lesson did not last beyond the camera’s flash; the moment passed— and those inferring patience are mistaken. Intrigued by building blocks, he left her lap, soon begged for lunch, and finally took a nap.

I began writing “The Audition” during a Saturday morning spent in Room R026b of the Campus Center with other music faculty, listening to the auditions of prospective music majors. I felt enormous empathy for these nervous but promising young musicians.
“Intermezzo,” appeared last year in Ekphrasis, a journal devoted to poetry about other works of art— including paintings, sculptures, and music. Such a focus carries certain risks: art about art might ideally intensify or clarify a connection to the original aesthetic experience, but it could instead remove us further from it. Both “Intermezzo” and “Albumblatt” were attempts to hold onto the inevitably fleeting emotional and artistic satisfaction that these pieces give me when I play them at the piano.

“Intermezzo” hints at the wealth of possibility in Brahms’ music, while “Albumblatt” suggests the fruitfulness of a second encounter with a deceptively simple piece.

Intermezzo
— (Brahms’ op. 118, no. 2)

The subject might be love, or aging dreams, or only music— just a major key stalked by the minor, only pliancy of tempo, phrases arched by slurs and beams, immense arpeggios that slide away from ordinary chords, the weave of three beats into two, and supple melody that one hand lets the other lead astray.

Hear hints of wistful romance if you will, loss in the middle, anger briefly sprung, then resignation as first themes return— but plumb the depths that only notes can fill, upon which narratives need not be hung to know there’s more than just the notes to learn.

Albumblatt
— (Robert Schumann’s op. 99, no. 4, on which both Clara Wieck Schumann and Johannes Brahms composed Variations)

I noticed first that it was very brief. I played it and heard only momentary prettiness; thin as an “album leaf,” it whispered something gray and fragmentary.

The second time I played it, I heard more within the same vibrations; some unknown yet half-remembered history now bore a heartbeat on a breath of overtone.

Like photographs without a date or name, the music intimately reminisced in echoes undefined but dear— the same as those that neither wife nor friend had missed: as long-pressed flowers prompt new meditations, these slender sounds inspired their variations.
Washburn Island, located in Falmouth, Massachusetts, is one of the last undeveloped coastal properties on upper Cape Cod and a remarkable example of the Cape's shoreline ecology. The island, over 300 acres, consists of pine and oak forests, extensive systems of sand dunes, tidal flats, marshlands, and salt ponds. It is bounded on the east by Waquoit Bay, on the north and west by the Seapit River and Eel Pond, and on the south by Vineyard Sound. The importance of Washburn Island extends beyond its scenic beauty and physical resources. Its geographic location affects natural processes, making it an integral component of the Waquoit Bay estuarine system.

After my retirement from Bridgewater State College, my wife and I moved to Falmouth where I became a volunteer for the Waquoit Bay Reserve, a part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System established to create a network of protected coastal sites for monitoring and research. When the Director of the Reserve learned of my academic background, she requested that I research and write a history of Washburn Island. It was interesting to learn about the military training in amphibious warfare which had taken place in the Waquoit area during World War II. As a teenager, I had summered with my family in Wareham and, although aware of the existence of Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, I had never heard of Washburn Island and its unique role in the preparation of special units for overseas invasions. During my research, I became interested in increasing efforts on the part of governmental agencies and private organizations to preserve the dwindling natural resources of Cape Cod.

Although now protected in its natural state, Washburn Island has been utilized for a variety of purposes, some of which have brought permanent changes in its ecology. Archaeological surveys have failed to discover evidence of any long-term residential patterns prior to the nineteenth century. Remnants from stone tool makers have been found, but in the absence of more definitive information, it is believed that the artifacts were left by itinerant hunters and food gatherers. It has been speculated that Washburn Island was the site of Vinland, a colony founded by the Vikings around 1000 A.D., but there is no corroborating evidence.

European settlers arrived in the seventeenth century and purchased lands along the shores of Waquoit Bay. Specific sites are difficult to trace, but records show that Reverend Richard Bourne of Sandwich acquired ownership of several parcels which might have included Washburn Island, then known by the Indian name Menauhant. Over the years the island was partially cleared of trees and brush, providing grazing lands for cattle and sheep. In the mid-nineteenth century there were three working farms on Menauhant, two of which had disappeared by the end of the century.

From 1893 to 1895, Menauhant was acquired by Henry Bryant, a retired sea captain and businessman, through a series of negotiations with several members of the Bourne and Davis families. Bryant commissioned Ignatius Sargent to design and construct a residence overlooking Waquoit Bay and Vineyard Sound. The house was three stories, flanked by two ells. Built as a seasonal retreat, the house was lighted by kerosene lamps and heated by several fireplaces. To facilitate crossing to the mainland, Bryant obtained a permit to operate a hand ferry linking the island with a landing on the Seapit River.

Henry Bryant died in 1904, leaving the estate to his widow Alida. In 1912, she sold the property to a corporate group of investors and bankers including Albert Henry Washburn. To recoup their investments, the partners planned to sell parcels of land for private development. The only sale to materialize was an area of approximately 4.5 acres along the southern beach to Fred and Fannie Collins, who built a summer home, a guest house, and a garage in front of a glacial outwash still known as Collins' Hill.

The corporate members changed their plans and Henry and Florence Washburn purchased the rest of the island for their own use. They moved into the Bryant house, which they did not change except to bring in electric and telephone lines. To improve access, a narrow-bridged causeway was constructed across the sand spit separating Eel Pond from Vineyard Sound. The Washburn family...
enjoyed the peace and tranquility of the island where they spent extended summer vacations. During this time the property became known as Washburn’s Island.

On October 26, 1926, the residence was destroyed by a spectacular fire which lit up the skies of Falmouth. Shortly before midnight a maid discovered smoke and flames and alerted other members of the household. As the fire enveloped the upper floors, alarms sounded at the Menauhant Village fire department. Firefighters responded and rushed to the scene, but their trucks bogged down in soft sand as they crossed the causeway. Upon arrival, the firefighters found no adequate water supply and had to pump from a nearby pond. The wing housing the servant quarters was the only section which could be saved. The cause of the fire was traced to a defective chimney in the den.

Henry Washburn died of food poisoning in Vienna in 1930. During the succeeding years in which Florence Washburn owned the Island, she never posted her property or restricted recreational use by visitors. Washburn Island became increasingly popular as a picnicking, camping, and swimming site. As more people took advantage of her generosity, vandalism became a serious problem. Thieves stole anything of value and wantonly destroyed what was left. Beer and bonfire parties increased the danger of fire and left the grounds littered with rubbish and garbage.

In September 1938, a severe hurricane hit Cape Cod. A tidal surge washed out the sandspit and causeway, opening up a channel 125 feet wide and seven feet deep between Vineyard Sound and Eel Pond. Washburn Island was now truly an island, to the delight of yacht owners. Boats could navigate through the breach into the Sound without having to travel the two or three miles formerly required to circumnavigate through Waquoit Bay.

The entry of the United States into World War II brought many temporary displacements on Cape Cod, but nowhere were they greater than in the Waquoit Bay region. It was obvious to military strategists that winning the war would require specially trained amphibious forces. The shores of continental Europe were held by the Axis troops and vital islands in the Pacific occupied by Japanese forces. Successful invasions would require transportation across stretches of rough water to land troops on enemy territory and secure beachheads for larger follow-up units.

The U.S. Navy announced that it could transport troops to invasion sites but lacked the manpower to carry out landing operations. The army took over responsibility for preparing special units for amphibious warfare. Soldiers would be trained as boat operators working in teams to establish techniques and skills required for storming enemy shores.

Navy personnel designed and supervised the construction of various types of shallow draft, ramp-loading landing craft for transporting troops, supplies, and heavy equipment. Camp Edwards on Cape Cod was chosen to be the headquarters for the unit primarily because it had suitable billeting and support facilities. A few miles away were the bays, beaches, and islands of Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds, which provided ideal conditions for development and training.

The federal government leased several tracts of land around Waquoit Bay, including Washburn Island, for the duration of the war. To gain access to the island, the Army Corps of Engineers filled the breach in the sandspit and constructed an asphalt road across the sand. A pontoon bridge that spanned the Seapit River from Waquoit was later replaced by a permanent drawbridge linking the island to Ovington Point.
Construction proceeded rapidly. A network of paved roads criss-crossed the island. Cement slabs were laid as platforms for necessary buildings. There were also parade grounds, drill fields, and an obstacle course. Five 12-foot wide finger piers stretched almost 900 feet into Waquoit Bay, augmented by smaller service docks along the shores. When the base was ready for operation, training continued day and night for almost two years. Boot handlers were taught navigation skills, the use of signalling devices, and methods of avoiding anti-landing armaments.

The Waquoit training area was one of the most closely guarded installations on Cape Cod. Despite efforts to maintain secrecy, residents and visitors could easily observe training activities from the surrounding shores. They became accustomed to the sight of landing barges making their way up and down the beaches and soldiers swimming or wading with full packs, rifles held overhead.

The units demonstrated their readiness by launching a full-scale training exercise on Martha's Vineyard. Successive waves of landing craft plowed through the rough seas, landed at designated sites, unloaded troops and equipment, and established beachheads. The mock invasion was a great success, on target and schedule. Although it was a relatively small maneuver, and no one was shooting at the "invaders," the lessons laid the groundwork for techniques later used in battle. Soldiers trained on Cape Cod spearheaded campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, and many islands in the Pacific. Local residents proudly referred to Washburn Island as the "Cradle of Invasions" and the troops as "Cape Cod Commandos."

Over the winter, weather became a serious impediment. The War Department decided to transfer the program to Carrabelle, Florida. Washburn Island was nearly deserted by March, 1943. The military maintained a presence but, for the most part, tents were gone and buildings barred and locked. The federal government announced plans to restore leased properties to the owners after all military construction had been demolished. Bids were accepted for the razing of the buildings, the piers, and the drawbridge.

In September 1944, another hurricane roared into the region, washing out the causeway, again opening the channel between Ed Pond and Vineyard Sound. It was agreed that the breach would not be refilled and that nature should be allowed to take its course.

The army then announced a change in plans. At the request of the commanding officer of the hospital at Camp Edwards, the leases were extended, demolition halted, and plans developed to create a recreation and recovery center for convalescing patients. A large cement block bathhouse was constructed. During the summer of 1945, as many as 800 soldiers a day were transported to the island, where they could swim, fish, go boating, or just relax. They had the use of exercise equipment, barbeque pits, and basketball and volleyball courts.

With the end of the war, the army again announced that Washburn Island would be returned to its owner upon completion of demolition. Special consideration was given to the only remaining crossing to the island, the bridge at Ovington Point. The army had planned to demolish it before the leases were cancelled, but with easy access from Route 28, it would provide means by which visitors could cross to a potential park and/or residential area. It was argued that the drawbridge did not seriously interfere with river traffic. Town officials attempted to persuade the State Waterways Commission not only to allow the bridge to remain, but to maintain it. The request was rejected and the bridge was quickly torn down.

When Washburn Island was restored to Florence Washburn, it had changed considerably. Most of the forests had been cleared to make room for military facilities or had been destroyed during the hurricanes. Cement pads dotted the landscape. Four structures remained: an old farmhouse, a barn, an icehouse, and the bathhouse, all of which were later abandoned. With no maintenance, they deteriorated badly over the years and were eventually razed.

There was a move among the selectmen of Falmouth to purchase Washburn Island and restore it as a park commemorating the soldiers who had trained there. Mrs. Washburn asserted that she would never sell the estate. Over the years she received offers from potential buyers, but consistently rejected them.

Although not able to utilize the estate herself, Mrs. Washburn gave permission for visitors and campers to continue using her property. Day trippers, arriving in small boats, had free access for hiking, swimming, camping, berry picking, shellfishing, and other leisure activities. The Falmouth Rod and Gun Club, the Falmouth Beagle Club, and scout units were among those who
benefited from her generosity. The island remained in an undeveloped state. There were no facilities, so visitors had to bring their own supplies, including water. At times there were problems. Out of towners (according to residents) held noisy parties and often left the area covered with litter and debris.

Florence Washburn died on January 27, 1953, leaving the estate to her son, Dr. Lincoln Washburn. The future of the island was again a source of speculation. Among the townspeople there were lingering hopes that Falmouth might be able to purchase the property, but the new owner said that the island was still not for sale. He stated that he intended to continue his mother’s policy of maintaining it as a natural, recreational preserve open to everyone.

In 1976, town property reassessments resulted in a huge increase in taxes, causing Dr. Washburn to offer to sell his estate to the town of Falmouth, but proposals failed to materialize when funds were not made available. Two development companies negotiated agreements to purchase the property for the construction of luxury homes and recreational and support facilities, subject to government approval. In the meantime, state and local agencies had issued stringent regulations for land use which made it next to impossible to build in areas deemed environmentally sensitive. Washburn Island had been designated as a crucial barrier beach and a fragile buffer which helped protect inland areas from storm damage and flooding. The federal government declared that such designated regions are not suitable for development because of erosion and shifting sand patterns and should be preserved for both ecological and aesthetic reasons.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts had issued directives which did not prohibit construction but granted wide discretionary power to local conservation and planning authorities. Despite carefully prepared plans by the development companies, local opposition from municipal boards and private organizations prevailed and permits were not granted.

The Commonwealth then appropriated sufficient funds to seize Washburn Island by eminent domain at the appraised evaluation. Nearby South Cape Beach had been recently purchased and the two properties were combined into a new state park. Washburn Island was to be maintained in its natural state to be used for passive recreational purposes with provisions for limited camping, swimming, hiking, and nature studies. Access is difficult since the island can only be reached by small, private boats, part of a deliberate policy to discourage visitors from venturing into sensitive areas, a policy geared to protect the ecology rather than to accommodate large numbers of visitors.

The Falmouth Enterprise editorialized in 1951 that Washburn Island had been so badly violated that it could not be rehabilitated without huge expenditures of time, energy, and resources. This gloomy outlook proved to be unduly pessimistic. The island has regenerated into a beautiful and peaceful refuge, providing evidence that whatever damage human beings or natural disasters might inflict on the landscape, the dynamic forces of nature will ultimately prevail, not necessarily by restoring previous conditions, but by creating new ones which can prove to be equally productive and beneficial.

— Donald L. Keay is a retired member of the History Department. He lives in East Falmouth.
The Center for Advancement of Research and Teaching (CART) facilitates interactions between teaching and research for Bridgewater State faculty members. CART provides a number of different types of grants to fund both small and large-scale projects. These projects include travel to professional conferences in order to present papers and research travel, such as a trip to Africa undertaken last summer by Martina Arndt of the Physics Department to collect data about a solar eclipse. One of the most appealing programs for faculty members has been the CART Summer Grants. These grants offer faculty members up to $3,000 for use on projects geared toward either teaching or research.

Two of last year’s Summer Grant recipients and their projects are profiled below.

WRITING, READING, AND FRED NEWTON SCOTT

Lee Torda of the English Department focused her summer research on the pioneering work of Fred Newton Scott. Newton Scott was a Compositionist at the University of Michigan early in the century, and his work and philosophy have made a profound impact on the field of Composition and Rhetoric. Though originally hired to teach Technical Writing, Torda’s focus also includes composing processes, theories of rhetoric, and the history of Composition and Rhetoric as a discipline.

While herself a graduate student working as an administrator in the writing program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Torda undertook the difficult task of training graduate students to teach writing. Through this process, she became interested in the intricate and integral relationship between the histories of literary studies and writing programs at American colleges and universities. Her dissertation worked with one model for early writing programs, that developed at Harvard University. This model contained a very particular paradigm that Torda attributes to two divergent impulses: the drive toward professionalization that emphasized reading literary texts and a need to demonstrate the discipline’s practical worth to society through writing courses. In many instances, the work of teaching students how to write was not valued as highly as studying literature, so the new faculty were assigned to teach these courses.

Torda’s CART Summer Grant focused on one of the figures who suggested a markedly different approach to teaching writing. So far, only a few large-scale analyses of Newton Scott’s work and writing have been published, and nothing has been written about his attitudes toward the role of reading in the writing classroom. Working at a large state university in the midwest, Newton Scott was in a very different environment than his contemporaries on the east coast. He began a department of Rhetoric and Composition at Michigan that was separate from the English department. This was the first graduate program in the field and centered around the development of an entire writing curriculum that emphasized both reading and writing to develop literacy skills.

Torda’s research led her to the Bentley Historical and Hatcher Graduate Libraries at the University of Michigan, where she spent several weeks working directly with the original texts that Newton Scott produced as he implemented both an undergraduate curriculum and the graduate program. In addition to compiling and analyzing the results of these texts, Torda found that the experience “focused my project and helped me decide what I want to look at.” At the suggestion of the Bentley
Library, she will be applying for a travel grant from the library to continue research on Newton Scott as part of her larger work.

Torda's work also offers unique insight into the history and development of the Writing Program at Bridgewater. She notes that "Bridgewater State College is caught between these two models. We're not Harvard, Yale or Princeton. In terms of our history and students, we're more like a Midwestern state school, yet perhaps because of where we are we labor under the burden of the Ivy League paradigm." In other words, the English Department must continue to re-think the balance between its two missions: the study of literature and the teaching of writing and general literacy skills. Understanding this balance will be especially important as the campus reviews its General Education requirements over the next few years.

BANGING OUT A NEW ANTIGONE

Suzanne Ramczyk, of the Department of Communication Studies and and Theatre Arts, spent her summer doing something that most of us would never even attempt: re-writing one of the world's masterpieces of drama. The genesis of her current work began over a year before, when she heard the College's African drumming ensemble under the direction of Salil Sachdev. Since she possesses a degree in music, Ramczyk was excited about meeting Sachdev and hearing the ensemble when it was still getting off the ground. After hearing the group, she knew that there had to be some way to work the ensemble into one of her productions. Through several discussions with Sachdev, Ramczyk tried to iron out the best genre for such a production. Finally, they decided on Greek Tragedy and chose Sophocles' Antigone.

Part of the appeal of Antigone is that the Theatre Arts students already feel a strong connection to the play, since every sophomore major studies it in the Play Analysis for Production class. Another appealing aspect of the play, however, was the age of its title character. Unlike many Greek tragedies, Antigone features a lead who is college-age. The primary reasons for needing a new adaptation of the play were to better fit the presence of the drumming ensemble and to recreate the theatricality of the original event.

One of the more appealing and intriguing aspects of this impending production has been the addition of several scenes that were not in the original play. Ramczyk has always loved the comic relief provided by the sentry in Antigone. She feels that "It's an aspect of the play that can be easily overlooked." She sees him as a common man, an Everyman figure. Even though there is a chorus of elder citizens in the play, the sentry is the only spokesman for the majority of residents who do not qualify as citizens. Ramczyk describes him as "a good hook into the play because he is distinct from Antigone, who's almost a zealot, and from Creon, who is a politician."

Accordingly, she inserted a scene in which the corpse of Antigone's brother is being guarded into the play.

Ramczyk's summer is still continuing, at least in terms of this project. She recently had a reading of the play at the Trinity Repertory Theatre in Providence, where she was given "a lot of rewrites." She goes on to add, however, that Craig Watson and Amanda Dehnart of the Trinity Rep have provided high-quality responses that pose real and positive challenges. She is currently rewriting and plans to have another reading featuring Bridgewater State students before the winter break. This, of course, means that her holidays will be white, though not in the traditional sense. One other highlight of the upcoming performance of Antigone has been Professor Lee Dunne's agreement to return to Bridgewater State to play Tiresias. Ramczyk is excited about their collaboration and looks forward to Dunne's feedback on the play and the production.

—Garland Kimmer is Assistant Professor of English.
Cultural Commentary: Held by Many Threads

by William Levin

Occasionally, without warning or apparent context, I am visited by vivid replays of sights, sounds and even smells from my past. Recently, I was thinking of not much at all when I suddenly daydreamed a view of my college roommate's bedroom. It took a few days for me to figure out why the memory had come back to me, but in order to explain the why of this, let me first describe the actual flashback.

The year was 1967 and Carl and I were sharing an apartment in Kenmore Square during our senior years at Boston University. It was one of those converted brownstones with tall ceilings and ornate plaster moldings. One night the upstairs neighbors had a raucous party and managed to dislodge a large chunk of the molding with their aggressive dancing. Given that the thing must have weighed twenty pounds, it’s a good thing that it fell on Carl’s bed on one of the rare occasions when Carl was not in it.

After weeks of trying to get the landlord to fix it back in place, Carl gave up and tied it to a big hook in the ceiling with the cord from his bathrobe. It was suspended about four feet below the ceiling, and Carl could just walk under it without braining himself. He grew fond of the thing, arguing that the craggy back end of it looked something like Lyndon Johnson or Barbara Streisand, depending on the light. Carl continued to work on what he called his ‘installation,’ mostly by tying thin strings of cheap packing twine around the blob and running them to various spots along the wall and ceiling, where he attached them with thumbtacks. In a few months the web of filaments was impressive. There must have been nearly a hundred, and the chunk of plaster at their center seemed like the core of some important structure.

One night, while admiring the new lighting that Carl had arranged to show off the complexity of his whatever-it-was, we noticed that its original support, the bathrobe tie, had gone slack. It wasn’t doing anything to hold up Barbara’s head. So he delicately reached into the mess and snipped the tie, top and bottom, with a scissors. It remained that way until we moved out after graduation that year, a marvel of engineering, solid and stable in its web-of-a-hundred-threads. Reasoning that failure to remove the thing might diminish the likelihood of getting our apartment deposit back, we cut it down on our last night in the apartment. Working our way around the room and cutting one string at a time, we had to cut nearly 80% of the threads before the chunk fell.

When images like this pop to the conscious level of my life, I like to figure out why. After all, we can’t have our brains randomly interrupting our lives for their own amusement. Often, the explanation is fairly simple, like the time I could distinctly smell the cafeteria string beans from my elementary school days. In this case it turned out that I was remembering that particular smell because at that moment I was visiting an elementary school. They must still have been using the same sort of industrial food supplies forty years later. Context discovered. But in the case of Carl’s bedroom, I had no such obvious link. I think I now know why this memory came back to me. I think it was the way people have been behaving since September 11th, and here’s my reasoning.

Since the attacks in New York City and Washington D.C. and the crash in Pennsylvania, Americans have behaved in some very unusual ways. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the crashes, millions of people apparently got in touch with loved ones to ‘make sure everyone was O.K.’

This was completely understandable for those with loved ones in the disaster areas, but the great majority of these calls were in areas where there was no reasonable expectation that people were in danger. Students told me that they had called parents, friends, spouses, girlfriends and boyfriends at work in the Boston area and in other parts of the country ‘just to check in.’

One man who was interviewed by a reporter in Boston said he called his wife at home in Newton three times during the first day to ‘stay in touch.’

I found many more examples of this sort of behavior. People have been speaking to strangers in ways they normally do not. I found out about the crashes when
a woman I did not know stopped me in the college parking lot and asked me “Have you heard about the towers?”

Of course, I had no idea what she was talking about and asked her what she meant. At the time she had little information, and left me with more questions than answers. So, I stopped in the entryway of my office building to watch a television and to talk with people who were also watching. A full month later strangers are still talking to one another at an unprecedented rate. For example, at Logan airport I recently waited in a snake of a line for almost two hours to check my baggage, during which time conversation between strangers was the rule.

Americans have been expressing their patriotism with flags on their homes, cars and in public places such as highway overpasses. They are writing letters-to-the-editor at a record rate. They are donating huge amounts of money for relief funds and blood for victims of the attacks. They are volunteering for public service (especially the military), and children are suddenly asserting that they want to be firefighters and police officers when they grow up. The rates of marriage are up, and of divorce are down.

So, what does all of this have to do with Carl’s room sculpture? As a sociologist, my thirty-year career has had an underlying theme that is common to anyone in the field. It is the desire to understand social connection. One of our founding thinkers, the French intellectual Emile Durkheim, set the goal for sociology in 1893 when he coined the term ‘social fact.’

He recognized that the connections between the members of a society are as real as the forces that hold the physical world together. We seem to have no problem believing in the reality of physical forces. Perhaps it is because we have daily evidence of their existence. For example, though we never see gravity itself, we know all too well that it affects every object as we watch a waterfall, or see a great skyscraper fall into itself. However, under normal circumstances, such as those that exist in our unremarkable, everyday existence, we are unaware of social bonds. However, the social facts that form the connections of all Americans were brought into sharp relief after September 11. We don’t use Durkheim’s term “social fact” in our normal talk. However, people do use the term “social fabric” to describe the way we are connected. When Americans called one another to “check in to see if you are O.K.”; when they spoke to strangers and displayed American flags as symbols of citizenship; when they gave money, blood and worry and even when they indulged in a desire to broadly distinguish between “we” and “they,” Americans were reaffirming that the fabric was intact.

In my professional life I knew how to use the language of my field to describe this to my students. I spoke about Durkheim’s ideas and about how the social fabric was being brought to light and tested by Americans because it was comforting in such dangerous times to do so.

But my subconscious mind was drawn back to the sculpture in Carl’s bedroom, and to the unlikely ability of hundreds of thin threads to support such a heavy load. The web of connections in our lives gains strength in numbers, and when we need to support a heavy weight, it is good to touch as many of the threads as possible so we can believe it to be as real as gravity.

—William Levin is Professor of Sociology and Associate Editor of the Review.
McMorals: Book Reviews

Fast Food Nation
Eric Schlosser, (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

Nickel and Dimed:
On (Not) Getting By in America
Barbara Ehrenreich, (Metropolitan Books, 2001)

by Charles F. Angell

Fast Food Nation and Nickel and Dimed both undertake to examine contemporary American culture, the first through the lens of the fast food industry, the second from the perspective of the low-wage worker, many of whom the fast food industry employs. Schlosser’s study presents the history of fast food franchising, the impact of this post WW II phenomenon on American (and increasingly world) agriculture and animal husbandry, and its effects on America’s dietary and eating habits. Nickel and Dimed considers the plight of low-wage workers, the “almost 30% of the workforce [that] toils for $8 an hour or less.” Both studies should give the thoughtful reader pause over what conditions we as a society are willing to tolerate in the pursuit of efficiency, convenience, and low prices.

I challenge anyone who argues that books can’t change behavior to read Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation and not wonder whether consuming a Big Mac or a Whopper, ground beef in any form for that matter, is worth the immediate health risk or the less immediate support of industrial exploitation that permits the industry to prosper.

Schlosser proposes to explore the “values [fast food] embodies, and the world it has made... During a relatively brief period of time,” he writes, “the fast food industry has helped to transform not only the American diet, but also our landscape, economy, workforce, and popular culture.” Whether a frequent, infrequent or non-consumer of the industry’s offerings, Schlosser maintains that the fast food industry has altered every American’s behavior.

In his chapter, “The Founding Fathers,” Schlosser provides a history, some of it familiar, of how such entrepreneurs as Ray Kroc (McDonalds), Harlan Sanders (KFC), Dave Thomas (Wendys), Matthew Burns (Burger King), and William Rosenberg (Dunkin Donuts) brought the food franchises into national, even international, prominence. All intuited in the decade following WW II how the United States’ commitment to the automobile, especially in the West, would alter the country’s living patterns and social needs. Strongly iconoclastic themselves, they understood their customers’ desire for uniformity and consistency. A burger bought at McDonalds in Peoria should not differ from one consumed in Los Angeles. In Ray Kroc’s words: “We have found out... that we cannot trust some people who are non-conformists. We will make conformists out of them in a hurry... The organization cannot trust the individual; the individual must trust the organization.”

Visionary as they undoubtedly were, none would have succeeded without the benefit of enormous government subsidies, most particularly the construction of the interstate highway system. “Had the big auto companies,” Schlosser observes, “been required to pay for the roads—in the same way trolley companies had to lay and maintain track—the landscape of the American West would look quite different today.” Where the roads went, the golden arches followed.

Interesting though Schlosser’s chapters on the fast food industry’s growth are, his chapters on the impact and effects of the industry on America’s agriculture, eating habits, and health are compelling, perhaps even horrifying. Anyone who’s ever wondered where all the French fries come from, needs to read how J. R. Simplot mechanized the potato industry. Simplot, who does come across as a resourceful and responsible entrepreneur, runs several potato processing plants, one of which is in Aberdeen, Idaho, “a small facility, by industry standards” which “processes about a million pounds of potatoes a day.” Schlosser tours a much larger plant where—I find this process mindboggling—the Lamb Water Gun Knife...
“uses a high-pressure hose to shoot potatoes at a speed of 117 feet per second through a grid of sharpened steel blades, thereby creating perfectly sliced French fries.”

Though the “dozen or so” multi-national agribusinesses have amassed fortunes, the potato growers, forced to specialize in a single crop and to maximize production by adopting increasingly expensive technologies, have become “beholden to the companies that supply the inputs and the processors that buy the outputs.” Too many farmers frequently suffer the loss of their land owing to high costs; those who manage to remain find their status reduced nearly to sharecroppers.

Much the same holds true for the cattlemen where the feedlot owners and meatpacking firms have forced the farmers to standardize their cattle raising. For those with the fortitude to read through Schlosser’s descriptions of slaughterhouse working conditions and the potential for contaminating enormous quantities of meat, his gripping chapters, “The Most Dangerous Job” and “What’s in the Meat,” provide an indictment of such giant meatpacking firms as Con Agra, IBP (Iowa Beef Packers), and Excel to name only a few. Through mechanization of the meatpacking process, reliance on a mostly unskilled workforce, virulent anti-unionism, and help from friendly politicians, these meatpacking giants eventually drove small, independent processors, located primarily in Chicago, out of business.

Located mostly in rural communities where their presence has often overwhelmed local populations, these slaughterhouses operate virtually around the clock, killing thousands of animals every day. The blood, feces, and offal collect in pools, endangering the environment. The slaughterhouse workers must incise carcasses at a rate that guarantees serious injury—usually knife punctures—and all too frequently death. Imagine, if you can, a job which requires standing for eight and one half hours shooting an animal with a bolt stunner to render it unconscious, one animal after another. Even Schlosser has to admit “I’ve seen enough.”

Schlosser makes clear that these conditions exist as a direct result of a hands-off government attitude. Beginning with the Reagan administration, meatpacking executives have participated in and sometimes led with considerable success, a movement to reduce or eliminate the USDA and OSHA’s regulatory and inspection powers. IBP, for instance, routinely maintained double logs of worker injury reports, one for company use, another for government inspectors. Deregulation in the 1980s resulted in a 20% reduction of OSHA inspectors. Large campaign contributions to friendly politicians meant sympathetic congressional representatives who passed industry favored legislation or defeated legislation that might have served wider interests. By these means and others he documents, Schlosser believes the industry has avoided a long overdue scrutiny of its practices.

Just this past August IBP recalled from mid-western restaurants and supermarket shelves nearly 500,000 pounds of contaminated meat, mostly hamburger. The potential for such extensive contamination resides squarely in slaughterhouse production schedules that require unskilled, near minimum wage, and often immigrant employees, to submit to pressures that bring feces, urine, dirt, and other impurities in contact with the meat. The most frequent pathogen contaminating meat is Escherichia coli 0157:H7, itself potentially lethal. Where in the past hamburger ground in the local supermarket, if somehow contaminated, might only sicken a few people, today the huge mechanized slaughterhouses producing millions of pounds of hamburger a week, should the meat become contaminated, pose a public health problem of almost unimaginable scope. Schlosser points out, if I may quote him at some length, that

While medical researchers have gained important insights into the links between modern food processing and the spread of dangerous diseases, the nation’s leading agribusiness firms have resolutely opposed any further regulation of their food safety practices. For years the large meatpacking companies have managed to avoid the sort of liability routinely imposed on the manufacturers of most consumer products. Today the U.S. government can demand the nationwide recall of defective softball bats, sneakers, stuffed animals, and foam-rubber toy cows. But it cannot order a meatpacking company to remove contaminated, potentially lethal ground beef from fast food kitchens and supermarket shelves. The unusual power of the large meatpacking firms has been sustained by their close ties and sizable donations to Republican members of Congress. But, to be fair, Congress does reflect occasionally the will of the people. Our desire to have everything fast, convenient, and cheap may have blinded us to the true costs of our happiness. Fast Food Nation is an eye-opener.
So, in its way, is Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. Ehrenreich resolves first-hand to experience what living on poverty level wages is like and whether one can survive on an annual income of considerably less than $20,000 a year.

“Maybe,” she writes, “when I got into the project, I would discover some hidden economies in the world of the low-wage worker. After all, if almost 30 percent of the workforce toils for $8 an hour or less, as the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute reported in 1998, they may have found some tricks as yet unknown to me.” Working first as a Florida waitress, next for a Maine house cleaning service, and last as a Minnesota Wal-Mart sales associate, Ehrenreich learns that low-wage earners have no tricks to stretch the few dollars they earn.

Finding affordable housing reasonably close to the workplace, as might be expected, poses an almost insurmountable problem. Fortunate workers may reside with a family member or relative; the less fortunate dwell in run-down motels and rooming houses, trailers, cars; the unfortunate are homeless. Desperation and resignation overcome workers compelled to accept such circumstances if they have any hope of making ends meet. These employees work hard, yet are bullied by supervisors, taken advantage of by their employers, subjected to various forms of harassment, and often denied in their workplaces any effective remedies to regain their rights. Ehrenreich realizes that working conditions at Wal-Mart, a company that advertises itself as all-American, cry out for unionization. Dare to mention collective bargaining, however, and the employee is quickly shown the door. In recounting her experiences cleaning houses in the more affluent suburbs of Portland, Maine, Ehrenreich points out that she and her co-workers were pretty much invisible to the homeowners and, when they were visible, the homeowners treated them as ignorant and untrustworthy. She began, she tells us, to resent and acutely dislike her middle-class employers, people she realized were not so different from herself in her other, professional life.

Ehrenreich experiences what it means to be among the “working poor.” I will quote, again at length, her conclusion:

When someone works for less pay than she can live on—when, for example, she goes hungry so that you can eat more cheaply and conveniently—then she has made a great sacrifice for you, she has made you a gift of some part of her abilities, her health, and her life. The ‘working poor,’ as they are approvingly termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor to everyone else.

Ehrenreich’s words struck home for me when I read in the paper a few days after the World Trade Center tragedy that many of those who perished were immigrant workers, some perhaps illegal, who would very likely never be identified. They cleaned the offices, cooked in the restaurants, provided the security for the professionals who worked alongside them in the towers. The WTC towers can be rebuilt, but Schlosser and Ehrenreich both tell us that if conditions don’t improve for many of those called upon to do the building, those proud towers may not be the last to swift destruction doomed.

—Charles F. Angell is Professor of English.
SUMI INK PAINTINGS
MARY DONDERO

Above,
Carp
24" x 30"

Right,
Heralds of Spring
32" x 40"