

Book World

FALL FORECAST

Sunshine Breaks Through

By Nina King

THERE ARE CLOUDS on the publishing horizon as we move into the fall season, traditionally the busiest of the year. Newspapers and trade journals sound the alarms: Employee layoffs and book cancellations. The burgeoning power of the superstore chains. The plight of the midlist author and that of the independent bookseller. The drop in sales. The competition of CD-Roms and the Web. The greed of corporate owners.

And yet... and yet. No one who has spent most of the past week as I have—going through stacks of publishers' catalogs and proof copies of forthcoming books—can fail to be perked up. Not only are there thousands of new titles coming out in the next few months, but many of them are very appealing. And a few are the occasion for rejoicing.

Here are some highlights, as well as a few trends and fancies. (Unless otherwise noted, all books are tentatively scheduled for September publication.) At the top of the heap:

- *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1964*, Volume II of Taylor Branch's trilogy about Martin Luther King and his times (Simon & Schuster, October). Vol. I, *Parting the Waters*, won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1989.

- *The Dark Side of Camelot* (Little Brown, November). Seymour M. Hersh takes on the Kennedy mystique.

- *Big Trouble*, by J. Anthony Lukas (Simon & Schuster, October). The late author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Common Ground* and other notable books here probes the 1905 murder of an obscure Idaho ex-governor and its implications for class tensions in the United States.

- *The Royals*, by Kitty Kelley (Warner). The publisher is waging a first printing of 1 million copies that Kelly's revelations will shake the House of Windsor to its foundations—or, at least, make a headline or two.

The decade of the '60s continues to exercise a powerful hold on the American imagination. In addition to the books by Taylor Branch and Seymour Hersh mentioned above, the following are to be published in the next few months: *The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK*, by John Hellman (Columbia); *Decision for Disaster: Betrayal at the Bay of Pigs*, by Grayston L. Lynch (Brassey's); *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Harvard, October), edited by Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikov; *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Shaped a Decade*, by cartoonist Jeff Shesol (Norton, October); *Robert Kennedy, Brother Protector*, by James W. Hilty (Temple, October); *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964*, edited by Michael Beschloss (Simon & Schuster, October); *In God's Long Summer*, Charles Marsh's gath. —Continued on page 8

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INSIDE

JAMES SALTER'S "BURNING THE DAYS"	3
JUSTICE IN AMERICA	6
50 YEARS OF INDIAN WRITING	10
CHILDREN'S BOOKS	11



From top left: Kurt Vonnegut, John Updike, O.J. Simpson, Kirk Douglas, John F. Kennedy, and Richard Nixon

ESSAY

Weathering the Storms

By Mary Lee Settle

I AM, God help me, what is called a "good" writer. A "good" writer can be defined financially as one with a steady, slow growth of readership, mostly by word of mouth, sometimes conveniently for the publisher, by a jump in sales due to laudatory obituaries.

There was a time, in the early 1950s and '60s, when it seemed possible for serious writers to be lifted up into the happy land of bestsellerdom where they could earn, often at the cost of head-turning celebrity, huge profits from their work. Today that possibility is almost certainly cut off by too short a shelf life for books. With a few exceptions, the happy few are getting old.

I suggest that we serious writers are deeply responsible for some of this. The convenient split between the

good and the popular is the product of literary snobbery, academic laziness, and publication practice using the tax on the back-list as an excuse.

There are bad good books, as dull as the telephone book, as long, and as correct. There are fine popular books, in which I delight and hope are guides for me: Think of the tight plotting of classic detective stories. Both James Lee Burke and Patricia Cornwell retain that finer Dickensian indignation with the ways of the world that has been neglected by the small landscapes of much so-called serious writing.

The Father Brown stories of Chesterton inspired Borges, and the long-forgotten stories of the '20s writer Stacy O'Monier were models for Angus Wilson, who gave me one of the greatest pieces of advice I know. "Learn from good technicians," he said. "You can't learn from genius. You can only imitate."

Many of the books that —Continued on page 15

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Fall Forecast

Continued from page 1

ering of "stories of faith and civil rights from Mississippi Freedom Summer" (Princeton, October).

In fiction, a handful of novels stands out: *Cities of the Plain* by Cormac McCarthy (Knopf, January) is the concluding volume of his *Border Trilogy*, of which the first volume, *All the Pretty Horses*, won the National Book Award in 1992.

Charming Billy, by Alice McDermott (Farrar Straus Giroux, December). From one of America's best young writers, a novel about the 47 Irish Americans gathered to drink and remember on the occasion of Billy Lynch's death.

John Updike's *Toward the End of Time* (Knopf, October). Set in the year 2020 after a U.S.-Chinese war has brought destruction and social disruption, this novel is the story of a retired investment counselor contemplating past and future, the nature of time and "the many-universes theory."

Underworld by Don DeLillo (Scribners, October). From a brilliant literary innovator, a novel that is both family saga and history of the Atomic Age.

PROMISING first novels include *The Flower Net* by Lisa See (HarperCollins, October), a thriller set in Beijing, where a Chinese police detective and a U.S. district attorney team up to solve two murders with international implications. Also set in the Far East is Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Knopf, October). Advance word has it that Golden, an American scholar of Japanese history, pulls off a tour de force by writing convincingly in the voice of an aging geisha in 1930s Kyoto. In Laura Zigman's satiric *Animal Husbandry*, (Dial, January) a TV producer named Jane Goodall turns to the study of animal behavior in an effort to understand why she has been so suddenly and inexplicably dumped by the man she loves.

Established novelists with new books due include George V. Higgins, whose *A Change in Gravity* (Holt) is a story of old-style Massachusetts politics caught in a new-style ethics investigation. Set in contemporary Vietnam, *The Deep Green Sea* (Holt, January) is the love story of an American veteran and a Vietnamese woman by Robert Olen Butler, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning

A Good Scent From a Strange Mountain. Alan Gurganus's *Plays Well With Others* (Knopf, November) tells the story of one Manhattan circle of artists and the impact on it of the AIDS epidemic. In *Timequake*, by Kurt Vonnegut, a "millennial spasm" forces everyone to relive the '90s (Putnam). *Larry's Party* (Viking) is the new novel from Carol Shields, author of *The Stone Diaries*. *Celebration* by Harry Crews (Knopf, January) is about senior citizens living in a Florida trailer park.

From Mexico comes *The Crystal Frontier* by Carlos Fuentes (Farrar Straus Giroux, October). This is "a novel in nine stories," all connected in some way with the border that both separates and links the United States and Mexico. From Israel, look for David Grossman's *The Zigzag Kid* (Farrar Straus Giroux), a picaresque tale of a young boy and his engaging kidnapper. *The House Gun* by South Africa's Nadine Gordimer (Farrar Straus Giroux) is the story of an upper-middle class couple who must deal with the fact that their son is a murderer.

Noteworthy commercial fiction: Just in time for the millennium comes Ira Levin's *Son of Rosemary* (Dutton), a sequel to *Rosemary's Baby*. The new novel begins when Rosemary wakes from a 27-year coma to find that her Satan-sired son is about to take over the world. *Violin*, by Anne Rice (Knopf, October): A ghost plays a violin in this guilt-and-grief-driven novel, which contains many autobiographical details, according to Publishers Weekly. In *The Wonder Worker* (Knopf, November), Susan Howatch follows her series of "Starbridge Cathedral" novels with a story about a clergyman who heads a ministry of healing in a small London church. *Wizard and Glass* (Plume paperback, November) is the fourth book in Stephen King's "Dark Tower" fantasy series about Roland the Gunslinger. Carl Hiaasen's *Unlucky You* is another antic tale from the Florida master. This one is about a woman who wins a multimillion dollar lottery jackpot, only to be pursued by villains from the "White Claron Aryans" (Knopf, November). In *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* (Norton, November), Walter Mosley introduces a new protagonist, Socrates Forlow, a tough ex-con with a philosophical bent.

AS MANY critics have remarked, this is an age of the personal memoir. For some, it's a Golden Age; for others it's



Carol Shields

LARRY AMAZED

"THE WORD *labyrinth* has only recently come into the vocabulary of Larry Weller, aged thirty-two, a heterosexual male (married, one child) living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He doesn't bother himself with the etymology of the word *labyrinth*; in fact, at this time in his life he has zero interest in word derivations, but he can tell

you plain and simple what a labyrinth is. A labyrinth is a complex path. That's it. It's not necessarily something complicated or classical, as you might think. The overpass out on Highway 2 is a kind of labyrinth, as Larry will be happy to tell you. So is the fox-and-geese tracery he stamped into the backyard snow as a child in Winnipeg's West End. He sees that now. So's a modern golf course. Take St. George's Country Club out in the St. James area of the city, for instance, the way it nudges you along gently from hole to hole, each step plotted in a forward direction so that you wouldn't dream of attacking the whole thing backwards or bucking in any way the ongoing, numerically predetermined scheme...

"A maze, though, is different from a labyrinth, at least in the opinion of some. A maze is more likely to baffle and mislead those who tread its paths. A maze is a puzzle. A maze is designed to deceive the travelers who seek a promised goal. It's possible that a labyrinth can be a maze, and that a maze can be a labyrinth, but strictly speaking the two words call up different ideas..."

"If he had not married Dorrie Shaw, if he had never visited Hampton Court, his life would have swerved on an alternate course, and the word *labyrinth* would have floated by him like one of those specks in the fluid of his eye."

From Carol Shields's *Larry's Party*

a cultural nightmare in which everybody seems intent on sharing his nastiest little secrets with the indifferent critic. As usual, the truth lies somewhere in between: There are too many mediocre memoirs but also a good many wonderful ones. Here's a sampling of this season's many variations on a theme of remembrance.

In *Wait Till Next Year: Summer Afternoons with My Father and Baseball* (Simon & Schuster), historian Doris Kearns Goodwin writes of growing up a Dodgers fan in Rockville Centre, Long Island, in the '50s: "From something as simple as the small red scorebook in which I inscribed the narrative of a ball game, I saw the inception of what has become my life's work as a historian." In *My Life and My Country* (Regnery, October), Gen. Alexander Lebed, a possible successor to Yeltsin as president of Russia, tells his rowdy, combative life story. In *Climbing the Mountain: My Search for Meaning* (Simon & Schuster), actor Kirk Douglas turns to Judaism after he is first seriously injured in a plane crash and then partially paralyzed by a stroke.

Rita Will: Memoir of a Literary Rabbit-Rouser (Bantam) is novelist Rita Mae Brown's story of her life as a writer and as an unabashed lesbian. Nat Hentoff's second memoir, *Speaking Freely* (Knopf), chronicles his 40 years in journalism—from jazz critic to defender of civil liberties. *Footnotes by Tommy Tune* (Simon and Schuster, November) is a lively chronicle of a life on stage. Paul Auster writes about his struggle to survive as a writer in *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* (Holt). *Straight, No Chaser* is Jill Nelson's story of "How I Became a Grown-Up Black Woman" (Putnam). And Anita Hill finally tells her story in *Speaking Truth to Power* (Doubleday, October).

Travel memoirs include Norman Lewis's *The World, the World: Memoirs of a Legendary Traveler* (Holt)—50 years of remote adventures in a classic British mode. Gregory Jaynes's *Come Hell or High Water: A Really Sullen Memoir* is a new-style travel chronicle that could have been called "Around the World in a Bad Mood," if someone else had not already used that title. Undergoing a

midlife crisis, journalist Jaynes booked passage on a freighter headed around the world that was his first mistake. In *All the Way to Heaven*, novelist Stephen Alter, son and grandson of Presbyterian missionaries, describes his happy childhood in the Indian hill station of Mussoorie high in the Himalayas (Holt, January).

American Lives: Homesteading: A Montana Family Album by Percy L. Wollastor (Lyons & Burford, October) is a previously unpublished account of farming near Ismay Mont., in the 1920s—an account brought to light by Jonathan Raban in his book *Bar Land: From the Mississippi Delta: A Memoir* is the story of poet-playwright-essayist Ende sha Ida Mae Holland (Simon & Schuster, October). *Daggett: Life in a Mojave Frontier Town*, by Dix Van Dyke, edited by Pete Wild (Johns Hopkins, October), offers a vivid eyewitness account of a little California boomtown around the turn of the century.

DYSFUNCTIONAL families are still in spiraling painful—sometimes poignant—stories. NPR foreign correspondent Jacki Lyden is the daughter in *Daughter of the Queen of Sheba* (Houghton Mifflin, October); her book chronicles life with a severely delusional mother. In *My Brother: A Memoir* Jamaica Kincaid tells the grim story of her talented youngest brother, caught up in the drug culture and dead of AIDS in their native Antigua at the age of 33 (Farrar Straus Giroux, October). In *Crabcakes* (Simon and Schuster, November), Pulitzer Prize-winning short story writer James Alan McPherson describes the "series of devastating personal setbacks that kept him from writing" and the inspiration he finds in Maryland crabcakes.

The extent to which the memoir has become fodder for the wilder daytime talk shows is suggested by the following titles: *The Last Time I Wore a Dress: I Was Sad* (Simon & Schuster, October); *Gorilla Suit—My Adventures in Bodybuilding*, and *Tales of a Rat-Hunting Man*.

Conventional biographies of unconventional people include: *East to the Dawn: The Life of Amelia* —Continued on page 8

THE SNOWS OF YESTERYEAR

"FIRST SNOW came this year late in November. Gloria and I awoke to see a fragile white inch on the oak branches outside the bathroom windows, and on the curving driveway below, and on the circle of lawn the driveway encloses—the leaves still unaked, the grass still green. I looked into myself for a trace of childhood exhilaration at the sight—my sixty-sixth season of snow beginning—and found none, just a quickened awareness of being behind in my chores and an unfocused dread of time itself, time that churns the seasons and that had brought me this new offering, this heavy new radiant day like a fresh meal brightly served in a hospital to a patient with a dwindling appetite."

From John Updike's *Toward the End of Time*



BY DOB WELLS BRAUN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST
John Updike

Fall Forecast

Continued from page 8

Earnhart, by Susan Butler (Addison-Wesley, October), which marks the 100th anniversary of the aviator's birth; *Albert Camus: A Life*, by Oliver Todd (Knopf, December), a bestseller in Europe; *Keats* (Farrar Straus Giroux, January) by Andrew Motion, who won praise for his biography of Philip Larkin; *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (Knopf, October) by Arnold Rampersad, acclaimed biographer of poet Langston Hughes; *Man on the Flying Trapeze: The Life and Times of W.C. Fields* by Simon Louvish (Norton); *Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child*, the woman who taught America French cooking, by Noel Riley Fitch (Doubleday); and *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*, by James H. Jones (Norton, November), the story of our national sex educator.

TWO forthcoming books will fan the flames of "Che mania," the revived fascination with the leader of the Cuban revolution who died trying to export it to Bolivia. They are *Companion: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*, by Jorge G. Castaneda (Knopf, November) and *Guevara, Also Known as Che*, by Paco Ignacio Taibo II (St. Martin's, October). More political than biographical in intent is *The Secret Life of Bill Clinton* by British journalist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard (Regnery), which seeks to prove that the Clinton presidency is the most corrupt in history.

Books of special Washington interest include *The Freshmen: Inside the House Class of 1994* (Westview, October). Another fabled DC institution, *The Party* (as in cocktail or dinner, not political), is the subject of a nonfiction book by Sally Quinn (Simon & Schuster, October).

Race relations, a persistent issue for Americans within and without the Beltway, is explored by sociologist Orlando Patterson in *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Regret in America's Racial Crisis* (Counterpoint, November). Journalist David K. Shipler has written *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (Knopf, October). *The Black O: Racism and Redemption in an American Corporate Empire*, by Steve Watkins (Georgia, October), is the case history of the legal battle against discrimination at Shoney's restaurant chain.

The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood, by David Simon and Edward Burns, focuses on a drug-ridden Baltimore neighborhood (Broadway Books). In *Official Negligence*, Post special correspondent Lou Cannon explores "How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the L.A.P.D." (Times Books, November). Meanwhile, the library of books devoted to the O.J. Simpson case continues to grow. From ReganBooks in October comes *Nicole's Story*, as told by the victim's sister, Denise Brown. See also O.J.'s niece's story, *I'm Not Dancing Anymore*, by Teri Baker (Kensington, October). Dominick Dunne's *Another City, Not My Own* (Crown, November), described as "a novel in the form of a memoir," draws on Dunne's reporting of the Simpson case for Vanity Fair. Gerry Spence offers *O.J.: The Last Word* (St. Martin's, November). Promises, promises.

History—In sheer numbers of books published, the Civil War and related issues dominate the field of American history this year. A few standouts: *The Confederate War*, by Gary Gallagher (Harvard); *Days of Defiance: Sumter, Secession and the Coming of the Civil War*, by Maury Klein (Knopf); *Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball is a reporter's investigation into his family's slave-holding past (Farrar Straus Giroux, January). British historian Hugh Thomas has written a fat history of *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (Simon & Schuster, October). *The Civil War in Depth: History in 3-D* by Bob Zeller (Chronicle) offers unique contemporary photographic images of the Civil War. (The book is packaged with a stereoscopic viewer.)

Other Times, Other Wars: *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* by former Post reporter Don Oberdorfer (Addison-Wesley, October); *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady: Richard Nixon vs. Helen Gahagan Douglas: Sexual Politics and the Red Scare, 1950*, by Greg Mitchell (Random House, January); *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy*, by Arnold R. Isaacs (Hopi, October); *King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen: Victorians Britain Through African Eyes*, by Neil Parsons (Chicago, January) is the story of three African chiefs who journeyed to England in 1895 in an effort to keep their lands out of the hands of Cecil Rhodes.

The subgenres of social and cultural history offer some provocative titles this season. *The Gay Metropolis, 1940-1996* by Charles Kaiser (Houghton Mifflin, November) chronicles homosexual life in New York City. *Mama's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens and Machos* (Chicago, January) is Annick Prieur's study of a house in a poor Mexican barrio that is a refuge and meeting place for gays of many backgrounds and predilections. Peter Gay's *Pleasure Wars* (Norton, January) is the fifth and last volume of his "The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud." From Johns Hopkins comes *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery*, by Elizabeth Haikenn (November).

Public policy issues: *New American Blues: The Private Life of the Poor*, by Earl Shorris (Norton, October); *Illusions of Opportunity: The American Dream in Question*, by John E. Schwarz (Norton). In *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostategic Imperatives* (Basic, October), Zbigniew Brzezinski looks at how the United States can preserve and expand its global pre-eminence.

How the Mind Works, by Steven Pinker (Norton, October); *Next of Kin: What Chimpanzees Have Taught Me About Who We Are* by Roger Fouts (Morrow, October), a pioneer in the use of American Sign Language to communicate with chimps.

Countdown to 2001: Updike and Vonnegut are among those playing with millennial ideas this season. But Stephen Jay Gould takes a dim view of such games in *Questioning the Millennium: A Rationalist's Guide to a Precisely Arbitrary Countdown* (Crown, October). Look also for the wisdom of *The 2000-Year-Old Man in the Year 2000*, a revival of the classic comedy routine by Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner (HarperCollins).



PALEOLITHIC OG LOOKS UP

"I THINK that I love humanity all the more—the scholar's hangup, I suppose—when our urge to know transcends mere practical advantage. Societies that both fish and farm need to

reconcile the incommensurate cycles of years and lunations. Since nature permits no clean and crisp correlation, people had to devise the cumbersome, baroque Metonic Cycle. And this achievement by several independent societies can only be called heroic.

I recognize this functional need to know, and I surely honor it as a driving force in human history. But when Paleolithic Og looked out of his cave and up at the heavens—and asked why the moon had phases, and because he could use the information to boost his success in gathering shellfish at the nearby shore, but because he just wanted to resolve a mystery, and because he sensed, however dimly, that something we might call recurrent order, and regard as beautiful for this reason alone, must be behind the overt pattern—well, then calendrical questions became sublime, and so did humanity as well.

From Stephen Jay Gould's *Questioning the Millennium*

GREENWOOD'S LOST PARADISE

IN MY hometown of Greenwood, in Leflore County, Mississippi, whites had sworn since before Reconstruction that we blacks would not only know our place but stay in it forever. They celebrated as a holiday the Leflore County Massacre of 1889, in which three thousand blacks seeking political rights had been slaughtered by white posses. Here,

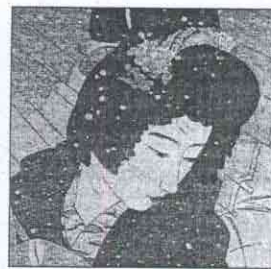
in this paradise lost, black people could take nothing for granted—not life, not liberty, not "the pursuit of happiness."

Into this magnolia jungle, on August 29, 1944, I was dragged, kicking and screaming, from Mama's womb.

From Endesha Holland's *The Mississippi Delta: A Memoir*

BEST AND WORST

"SUPPOSE that you and I were sitting in a quiet room overlooking a garden, chatting and sipping at our cups of green tea while we talked about something that had happened a long while ago, and I said to you, 'That afternoon when I met so-and-so... was the very best afternoon of my life, and also the very worst afternoon.' I expect you might put down your teacup and say, 'Well, now, which was it? Was it the best, or the worst? Because it can't possibly have been both!' Ordinarily I'd have to laugh at myself and agree with you. But the truth is that the afternoon when I met Mr. Tanaka Ichiro really was the best and the worst of my life. He seemed so fascinating to me, even the fish smell on his hands was a kind of perfume. If I had



FROM A WOODCUT BY SHUNBEI ITO

never known him, I'm sure I would not have become a geisha."

From Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*

A NEW YEAR ON THE CORNER

"ALL ACROSS the west side, the distinct reports of individual shots now blend into cacophony. Down Fayette Street toward the harbor, and up Fulton toward the expressway, the bright orange-yellow of muzzle flashes speckles from front steps, windows, and rooftops. They look like fireflies amid the crescendo, beautiful in their way. A window is shattered on Monroe Street. Another on Lexington. And a block north on Penrose, some fool without sense enough to come in from the rain suddenly winces, grabs his forearm, and races for the nearest doorway to ex-

amine the wound.

The hour approaches, and the great, layered dissonance grows even louder, the flashes of light racing up and down the streets as visible proof of this explosive percussion. It is a sound both strange and familiar: the signature sound of our time, the prideful, swelling canonade of this failed century. Shanghai. Warsaw. Saigon. Beirut. Sarajevo. And now, in this peculiar moment of celebration, West Baltimore."

From Edward Burns and David Simon's *The Corner*