My Doppelgänger

In *Antaeus* (Spring 1994), John Updike considers the "other" John Updike, the one who writes all those novels, essays, and poems.

I created Updike out of the sticks and mud of my Pennsylvania boyhood, so I can scarcely resent it when people, mistaking me for him, stop me on the street and ask me for his autograph. I am always surprised that I resemble him so closely that we can be confused. Meeting strangers, I must cope with an extra brightness in their faces, an expectancy that I will say something worthy of him; they do not realize that he works only in the medium of the written word, where other principles apply, and hours of time can be devoted to a moment's effect. Thrust into "real" time, he can scarcely function, and his awkward pleasantries and anxious stutter emerge through my lips. Myself, I am rather suave. I think fast, on my feet, and have no use for the qualificatory complexities and lame double entendres *and pained exactations of language in which he is customarily mired. I move swiftly and rather blindly through life, spending the money he earns. . . .*

I brush my teeth, I dress and descend to the kitchen, where I eat and read the newspaper. . . . Postponing the moment, savoring every small news item and vitamin pill and sip of unconcentrated orange juice, I at last return to the upstairs and face the rooms that Updike has filled with his books, his papers, his trophies, his projects. The abundant clutter stifles me, yet I am helpless to clear away much of it. It would be a blasphemy. He has become a sacred reality to me. I gaze at his worn wooden desk, his boxes of dull pencils, his blank-faced word processor, with a religious fear.

Suppose, some day, he fails to show up? I would attempt to do his work, but no one would be fooled.

seau, a church wedding, and a honeymoon."

"The idea that only in marriage can Dorothea find her personal happiness as well as her moral mission seems peculiarly Victorian. And so it is," Himmelfarb says. "For the Victorians, even for Victorian feminists, marriage and family were the primary human relationships. . . .Victorian families, recent scholarship has shown, were not nearly as oppressive or patriarchal as was once thought. But the idea of the family was very nearly sacrosanct, and that idea implied that men and women had distinctive natures and virtues which bound them together in a complex relationship of rights, duties, and, if they were fortunate, love."

Dorothea marries Ladislaw, by her own account, because of their mutual love. But *Middlemarch*, Himmelfarb says, is also what Henry James called a "moralized fable." Precisely because Ladislaw is morally imperfect, he provides Dorothea with "her mission: to redeem him." Her love and faith in him can make him "a better human being . . . worthy both of her and of society." For Dorothea to marry the noble Lydgate, on the other hand, would have been lacking in moral drama. He sought to do "great work for the world," and did not need a wife to help him. The ending of *Middlemarch*, Himmelfarb concludes, is not tragic, but rather, "as Eliot meant it to be, eminently moral, even heroic."

When Opera Had Sex Appeal

"Finding a 'Real Self': American Women and the Wagner Cult of the Late Nineteenth Century" by Joseph Horowitz, in *The Musical Quarterly* (Summer 1994), Oxford Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 2001 Evans Road, Cary, N.C. 27513.

In the late 19th century, the operas of Germany's Richard Wagner (1813–83) dominated musical high culture in America. This did not, as in Eu-

rope, herald an iconoclastic modernism in the arts, writes Horowitz, executive director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra. But it did create a remarkable Wagner cult among respectable, middle-class women.

When Anton Seidl, Wagner's protégé and American emissary, conducted his operas at New York's Metropolitan Opera House during 1885–91, one journal reported, "middle-aged women in their enthusiasm stood up in the chairs and screamed their delight for what seemed hours." Those who listened to Wagner, maintained the influential bohemian Mabel Dodge Luhan, "were only listening to their own impatient souls, weary at last of the restraint that had held them."

More than half of Seidl's performances at the Met were Wagnerian operas, including the American premiers of *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* (which, along with *Die Walküre*, comprise the tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Tristan und Isolde*. He also conducted during the summers at Coney Island's Brighton Beach, and on Wagner nights—sponsored by the Seidl Society of Brooklyn, an organization of women who diligently read Wagnerian literature and attended lectures explicating the meaning of the *Ring* and the Christian content of *Parsifal*—the 3,000-seat music pavilion was filled to capacity.

"The *Tannhäuser* Overture, by far the most popular Wagner extract [a century] ago, embodied Wagner's role as a timely inspirational bulwark, buttressing faith, banishing looming 20th-century doubt," Horowitz writes. However, the later Wagner, exemplified by *Tristan und Isolde*, "occupied libidinal realms more menacing." Yet the middle-class, urban women of the Gilded Age also responded enthusiastically to it.

At Brighton Beach or at the Met, the devoted Wagnerians "were transfixed and transformed," Horowitz says. "No less than the roller coasters and revival meetings that serviced the lower classes, Wagner was a necessary source of violent excitation."

The women's excitement was due to more than just "Seidl's charisma and Wagner's sensuality," Horowitz contends. Among the devoted Wagnerians were "women of passionate sensibility for whom Wagner represented a consuming alternative to a world of marriage and men." The German composer gave musical expression to repressed sexual drives, Horowitz says, and the profound impact that *Tristan*, the *Ring*, and *Parsifal* had on middle-class women of America's Gilded Age was a measure of "the emotional repression they suffered."

The Mystery Of Jean Stafford

"Green Visors and Ivory Towers: Jean Stafford and the New Journalism" by Maureen Ryan, in *The Kenyon Review* (Fall 1994), Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio 43022.

Why did Jean Stafford (1916–1979), the acclaimed novelist and short story writer, suddenly switch from fiction to journalism in the mid-1950s? All three of her recent biographers agree that her need for cash was paramount. And they tend to dismiss her writing after the shift as a tragic diversion from art, as "hackwork written, begrudgingly, for money," observes Ryan, dean of the Honors College at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Ryan thinks that dismissal is a mistake. Stafford's nonfiction writing, she contends, must be seen as part of the New Journalism. During the 1960s and '70s, writers on both sides of the fiction-nonfiction divide, from Norman Mailer to Tom Wolfe, concluded that the techniques of journalism and fiction were straitjackets. To create a literary form adequate to the new reality they saw being born, the New Journalists melded the two techniques. Stafford's journalism emerged from similar challenges, Ryan believes. She was never able to complete her fourth novel, *The Parliament of Women*, in part because it was as much autobiography as fiction. Stafford was well aware that fashion had passed—for the moment—her fictional methods by. When her *Collected Stories* won the 1970 Pulitzer Prize, she expressed surprise that "a writer as traditional as I can be recognized." Finally, Stafford's relationship, beginning in the mid-