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**ARTS & LETTERS**

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*Caveat Emptor*

"The Print's Progress: Problems in a Changing Medium" by Judith Goldman, in *Art News* (Summer 1976), 121 Garden St., Marion, Ohio 43302.

The 1960s saw a revival and proliferation of print-making and selling, which is now big business. Lavish ads in the mass media lure buyers into paying large sums for "original" prints which may be reproductions of little value. Sets of six "authentic lithographs" by Renior were recently advertised and sold by mail for \$2,250 per set. In fact, they were reproductions of Renior paintings which hang in a Paris museum.

"The print is ready-made for deception," writes *Art News* contributing editor Goldman, because the technology of modern printing "can create reproductions barely discernible from originals." Even prestigious art-auction houses (Christie's, Parke-Bernet) have been deceived by unauthorized reproductions passed off as original prints. Goldman defines an original print as an image *meant* to be a print, and a reproduction as an *exact* duplication of a work that already exists in another form. Terms signifying originality—signing, numbering, editioning, restrikes—are intended to guarantee authenticity, but they can also be manipulated to defraud buyers.

The College Art Association of America is currently drafting standards for the marketing of fine prints, and the Illinois and California legislatures have passed print laws to protect consumers. But these laws are ineffective, says Goldman. Existing civil statutes may be better (e.g., the publisher of the Renior prints was charged with mail fraud in New York and ordered to offer all purchasers a full refund).

How can the buyer avoid deception? Many specialists believe that the only real protection is knowledge and the avoidance of all but reputable print galleries.

*Peter Pan in America*

"Adulthood in American Literature" by Kenneth S. Lynn, in *Daedalus* (Fall 1976), 7 Linden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02130.

Psychic immaturity—a refusal to acknowledge and assume adult responsibilities—lies at the core of the American literary tradition, writes Kenneth Lynn, a historian at Johns Hopkins. The fact that most of the prominent writers of 19th-century America grew up in families where the father was either "dead, missing, physically crippled, or financially inept suggests the possibility that fears about growing up affected their literary imaginations," but this is not the main source of their immaturity. "The childish qualities of nineteenth-century

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American literature had their origins in the historical circumstances that fostered childishness in an entire civilization," Lynn argues.

Natty Bumppo's wanderings in James Fenimore Cooper's *Prairie* (1827) reflect the inclinations of an entire nation to rely upon isolation, rootlessness, and economic opportunism to provide painless solutions to social problems. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850) offers an exception to this obsession with escapism. But the literary landscape is studded with childish themes, childish characters, and childish points of view depicted in books like Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

Publication of *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser in 1900 reflected the disillusioning events of the preceding decade—the disappearance of the frontier, the rise of the trusts, the outbreak of bloody industrial strikes—and represented the skeptical perspective of a novelist who saw modern society as "a trap from which no one, male or female, could possibly escape."

Still, the immaturity of American literature did not end there. Child heroes gave way to "the sad-faced adolescents of *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*." Historical events influenced the shifts between immaturity and adulthood. As depression gripped the nation in the 1930s, William Faulkner and John Steinbeck turned soberly to history and family life. Kurt Vonnegut became a cult figure in an age of unprecedented prosperity. Today, Norman Mailer and Jerry Rubin personify the adolescent urge; they are creatures of a society still reluctant to come of age.

### *Laughter In America*

"Nineteenth Century American Humor: Easygoing Males, Anxious Ladies, and Penelope Lapham" by Alfred Habegger, in *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (Oct. 1976), 62 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

Cultural historians have long viewed American humor as developing out of a struggle between differing visions of what American life should be—one earthy, ribald, vernacular, the other genteel and refined.

Habegger, a professor of English at the University of Kansas, proposes an additional dialectic: between male and female. "The social basis of American humor may have been the staggering difference in our ideal gender roles." There is a long-standing tradition in the United States that women have no sense of humor, Habegger notes. There are no women humorists to speak of, and during the classic period of American humor, the 1860s, humor, like politics, was a club for men only—a masculine world of saloons, smoking cars, and barbershops.

The prevalent 19th-century jokes were crude anecdotes of domestic strife recounted in the vernacular by wise fools like Artemus Ward (1834-67), a favorite of Abraham Lincoln. The personae of these tales