

Würbel thinks that actual changes in the physiology of the animals are manifested in these behaviors.

Stolen looks at the mice's secret nightlife aren't the only indicator that impoverished lab conditions may have a profound effect. One study found that lead-contaminated drinking water damages the brains of mice in barren environments, but not those in enriched ones. Another found that small amounts of light in the lab at night significantly accelerate tumor growth.

Genetic research is also affected. In 1999, a Princeton University team removed a gene associated with the N-methyl-D-aspartate receptor in the hippocampus, a component of the brain that is a critical tool in transforming short-term memories into long-term ones. But when they placed some of these memory-deficient mice in cages enriched "with running wheels, playhouses, and an ever-changing assortment of toys" for two months, the animals were magically able to

remember again. As early as the 1950s, Mark Rosenzweig of the University of California, Berkeley showed that lab rats supplied with mazes, ladders, and sponges had increased enzyme levels, synaptic bridges, and cerebral weight.

Würbel stresses that he's more interested in the good of science than rodent liberation. He says that science would be the better for developing a more complete concept of the animals used in testing, including their evolutionary background and natural function. "I have a vision that there will be a time when we will have natural-like, although heavily managed, populations of rats or mice, maybe in big enclosures, representing whole populations."

Others reel at this suggestion. John Crabbe, a behavioral neuroscientist from Oregon, suggests that providing mice food, water, and clean bedding is plenty. Given that generations of mice have been raised in barren cages, perhaps that should now be considered their natural environment.

ARTS & LETTERS

Hip-Hop Bards

"Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture" by Dana Gioia, in *The Hudson Review* (Spring 2003) 684 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Stepping out of the cloisters of English departments and literary journals for the first time in more than half a century, poetry is everywhere, according to Gioia, a poet and the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. And whom do we have to thank for this renaissance: a recipient of the Yale Younger Poets prize? An august literary critic? Guess again. A DJ named Cool Herc? Well, maybe.

Whether or not Cool Herc was the originator of hip-hop is a murky topic. It's clear, however, that the Bronx's gift to the world popularized rhyme and meter, making syllabic counts and verbal acrobatics a force in popular culture. Moreover, hip-hop, along with its close cousin, the poetry slam, and its rural neighbor, cowboy poetry, has created an appetite for oral poetry reminiscent of that in antiquity.

By the 1970s, the decade that witnessed

the birth of hip-hop, many dues-paying members of the literati saw rhyme and narrative verse as old hat, while free verse and "concrete poetry," in which the form of the words on the printed page is all-important, were à la mode. Rooted in the traditions of print culture, literary poetry still relied on variations of a 15th-century technology, movable type, for its preservation and dissemination. By contrast, the new popular poetry uses modern-day media such as radio, CDs, video, and the Internet, along with stratagems borrowed from the entertainment industry, to attract a general audience that is less and less inclined to devote time to reading.

Cowboy poetry, which originated in the oral verses of frontier folk, was revived after a 1985 convocation of poets by the folklorist Hal Cannon in Elko, Nevada. Born around the same time, poetry slams—whose cre-

ation some attribute to Marc Smith, a poet who hosted events at a Chicago bar called the Green Mill—are now featured at bars and cafés around the country. And last year, Russell Simons, founder of Def Jam Records, brought the phenomenon to Broadway. Poetry slams are competitive events, usually judged by a panel or audience. As in hip-hop freestyle competitions, the performer's charisma is an important factor along with the compositions, which are sometimes improvised. In a break from traditional, literary poetry readings, which tend to celebrate a poet's past written accomplishments, "much of the new oral poetry is never written down."



Poetry slammer "Wammo" performs before an avid crowd in Austin, Texas, in 1998.

"Today," writes Gioia, "for the first time in the history of American literature, it would be difficult for a new poet to build and sustain a significant reputation on print alone." With so many books flooding the market, poets and writers of all stripes are banking on their media savvy to attract readers. For Gioia, the demands of the audio-visual culture aren't necessarily a bad thing. While much of the new popular poetry may be found wanting in intellectual and aesthetic heft when compared with the canonical texts of literary poetry, it may well turn out to be as important a source of inspiration as cinema, another form that was often maligned in its early years.

EXCERPT

Alas, Emerson

Most people who are not specialists probably associate [Ralph Waldo] Emerson (1803–82) with a series of aphorisms that often seem tautological, sometimes mystifying, and eventually annoying: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact." "A man is a god in ruins." "Coal is a portable climate." "The sky is the daily bread of the eyes." After a few pages of this sort of thing, the mind begins to reel. He went on turning it out in bulk for 40 years of lectures and essays.

"I hate quotations," he announced in 1849. "Tell me what you know." In 1876, however, he declared, "Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it." Not surprisingly, Emerson coined the two classic excuses for confusion of oneself and others: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," and, "To be great is to be misunderstood."

Yet just as André Gide, when asked who the greatest French poet was, is supposed to have said, "Alas, Victor Hugo," so Americans must concede, happily or not, that Emerson is by far their most influential prose writer. Perhaps he was even a public intellectual in some usefully ambiguous sense. It's precisely the sort of phrase he might have devised.

—Christopher Clausen, a professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, in *The New Leader* (July/Aug., 2003)