

pollution from the interbreeding of escaped farmed fish and wild fish.

Like the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, this oceanic one “will probably have

some negative environmental effects,” says Mann. “But it will also feed countless millions—and possibly stop humankind from plundering the seas bare.”

## ARTS & LETTERS

# *Confessions of a Flower Picker*

“Remaking a Norton Anthology” by Jahan Ramazani in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 2004), 1 West Range, P.O. Box 400223, Charlottesville, Va. 22904-4223.

The intense demands of literary scholarship can often dull the pleasures many of us associate with literature. Such was the sad case for Ramazani, a professor at the University of Virginia, when he was offered the chance to edit a new edition of *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*—the book that delivers *the* poetic canon to tens of thousands of college English students each year. Ramazani was to write overarching introductions, copious footnotes, and the nearly 200 headnotes that outline each poet’s particular literary-historical context, distinctive formal attributes, and biography. Above all, he was to select “the best poems written in English in the last century from across the world.” Faced with this gargantuan task, he turned “pallid.”

He started by reading and rereading the previous edition, which had appeared in 1988. Were the poems still relevant? Imaginative? “Formally skillful? Historically and socially responsive?” Were they too American? Too British? Too postcolo-

nial? After months of deliberation, Ramazani had created a “grand anthological structure—its proportions carefully balanced and calibrated.”

Then he was told to cut \$40,000 worth of permissions costs from his \$500,000 budget. His artful structure gave way to a spreadsheet and a new question: “Should I dump one overpriced poem and buy 10 at a discount?” Even after these reckonings, questions persisted. Which “Nat”—King Cole, Adderley, or Turner—was Amiri Baraka referring to in his poem about Thelonious Monk? Only the poet could answer.

Two years later, in 2003, the anthology—195 poets, 1,596 poems—was ready. Ramazani had excised nearly half of the previous edition and added an entire second volume to make room for additional long poems and essays. He had even changed half the title to *Modern and Contemporary* to highlight the expanded selection of more recent poems. Ramazani had reconceptualized the canon. Though

### EXCERPT

## *Tips for Writers*

*I was recently asked what it takes to become a writer. Three things, I answered: First, one must cultivate incompetence at almost every other form of profitable work. This must be accompanied, second, by a haughty contempt for all the forms of work that one has established one cannot do. To these two must be joined, third, the nuttiness to believe that other people can be made to care about your opinions and views and be charmed by the way you state them. Incompetence, contempt, lunacy—once you have these in place, you are set to go.*

—Joseph Epstein, author of *Fabulous Small Jews* and other books, in *Commentary* (April 2004)

this was serious work, it had a lighter side. In Greek, as Ramazani learned, *anthos* means flower and *logia* means gathering. Though built on a foundation of research

and political and economic calculation, the anthology provided an opportunity for its editor—and its readers—to stop and smell the poesies.

## *The Birth of Theater*

“The Invention of Theater: Recontextualizing the Vexing Question” by Steven F. Walker, in *Comparative Literature* (Winter 2004), 1249 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oreg. 97403–1249.

Who invented theater? Tradition—supported by considerable archaeological evidence—has always awarded that honor to the ancient Greeks, but scholars have long debated whether their invention was unique. Certainly, theater has long existed in other parts of the world, notably India, China, and Japan, but did the Greek invention somehow migrate to these other cultures?

That theory was first suggested by Albrecht Weber in 1852, and endorsed by Ernst Windisch 30 years later; they believed that during Alexander the Great’s conquest of Bactria (in present-day Afghanistan) in 328 B.C., the invading troops brought with them examples of Greek New Comedy, such as Menander’s *Epitrepontes* (*The Arbitration*). In the German scholars’ view, these Hellenistic plays provided the inspiration for early Indian Sanskrit plays, particularly ones known collectively as *prakarana*, which include *Daridracarudatta* (*Carudatta in Poverty*), which was written by Bhasa in the second century A.D.

Walker, a professor of comparative literature at Rutgers University, supports the Weber-Windisch thesis, but admits some obvious difficulties. Almost 500 years elapse between Alexander’s incursion into India and the earliest surviving Sanskrit plays, and the connections seem tenuous at best. (However, many ancient plays did not survive to be found by archaeologists.) Many scholars attacking the Weber-Windisch thesis have also pointed out that, although *prakarana* share some thematic elements with Greek New Comedy—“the love affair between a man of good birth and a courtesan, with a depiction of their contrasting social worlds”—the textual overlap is almost nonexistent. Certainly, it is not as evident

as in the various Latin versions of Greek New Comedy written by Plautus and Terence. Walker suggests, however, that “the existence of a language barrier may account for the fact that Sanskrit theater, unlike Roman comedy, did not rely on the ‘blueprint copying’ of Greek New Comedy—that is, on translation and close adaptation.” He considers it plausible, even likely, that the Greek *idea* of theater—the form, if not the content—filtered into India, and eventually spread beyond, to China, where fully formed plays appeared around A.D. 960, and, by the 11th century, to Japan. There is a model for such transmission in the migration of a “Greek-derived Gandharan sculptural style from India to early Buddhist statuary in China and eventually to Japan.”

Given the lack of surviving ancient manuscripts, it may be impossible to prove conclusively whether theater followed the same path. In any case, there’s another intriguing question: “Why has theater apparently been such a late invention in the history of world literature?” Even among the Greeks, it flowered relatively late, emerging several centuries after Homer. Evolving, as most scholars now believe, out of the patterns of religious ritual, theater had two distinctive elements. It required “breaking the natural bond with one’s fellows and with one’s own social persona in order to become someone else,” as well as “fellow human beings who agreed to look on without intervening.” Walker believes that while “the originality of each dramatic tradition in the global context is hardly debatable,” theater itself “may have been a difficult invention—so difficult, in fact, that, like the wheel, it may have been invented only once.”