

As a student at Bennington College, I witnessed the critic's power one afternoon in 1975. Greenberg was visiting Ken Noland in nearby Shaftsbury, Vermont (dating one of Noland's friends gave me guest credentials). The entourages of painter and critic waited in suspenseful silence as Greenberg entered Noland's studio and began examining the target paintings. "What if you turned these around?" Greenberg finally demanded, meaning, what if the squares were turned into diamonds? A studio assistant hopped to; Greenberg nodded. A few months later, a show of diamond-shaped Noland's appeared on 57th Street.

Marquis, author of *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (1991) and *Marcel Duchamp: The Bachelor Stripped Bare* (2002), writes engagingly, making a reasonable case for Greenberg's enduring importance, a dozen years after his death. He didn't "rise and fall" so much as rise and fade away, obscured and eventually buried under Pop Art (which he despised), Keith Haring and Julian Schnabel, the vile careerism of the 1980s, and whatever's come next. Now that we've begun to look back on the 1950s and '60s as a time of high seriousness—it's all relative—Greenberg's star will likely rise again.

—Ann Loftin

Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here

FEW MAGAZINE EDITORS cast a longer shadow than Willie Morris (1934–99), who took over the top slot at *Harper's* in 1967. The 32-year-old Morris rapidly turned America's second-oldest continuously published magazine (the oldest is *Scientific American*) from a stuffy old men's club into a cutting-edge cabaret that, along with *Esquire* and *New York*,

showcased that path-breaking mix of fictional techniques and shoe-leather reporting known as the New Journalism.

He hired David Halberstam, who wrote long articles that formed the core of *The Best and the Brightest* (1972), about the hubristic architects of America's Vietnam policy, and *The Powers That Be* (1979), about the intersection of mass media and politics. Morris rejuvenated Norman Mailer's flagging career by turning over virtually entire issues of the magazine to the novelist's first-person reportage on war protests outside the Pentagon, the 1968 Republican and Democratic national conventions, and the feminist movement, which became the books *The Armies of the Night* (1968), *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), and *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971). Morris was in steady demand on TV and op-ed pages, and he was a fixture at Elaine's, the Manhattan restaurant that's a den of power brokers and literati. How hot was he? "There were eight million telephone numbers in the Manhattan directory, and every one of them would have returned my calls," he boasted in his memoir *New York Days* (1993), exaggerating only a bit.

Yet in 1971 Morris resigned from *Harper's* after battling its then-owners, the Minnesota-based Cowles family, over the magazine's spiraling costs and, more important, its left-leaning politics. Though only in his mid-thirties, Morris never regained his luster. Bitter and despondent, he decamped from Manhattan to the Hamptons for a decade and then to his beloved home state of Mississippi, where he became Ole Miss's first writer-in-residence. Over the years he published a string of novels, reminiscences, and nonfiction works, none of which achieved the literary acclaim of his precocious memoir *North Toward Home* (1967). Though his children's books proved popular, especially *My Dog Skip* (1995), the basis of a successful 2000 film, his post-*Harper's* years and output are rightly seen as a coda to what he called his brief attempt "to remake literary America."

IN SEARCH OF WILLIE MORRIS:

The Mercurial Life of a Legendary Writer and Editor.

By Larry L. King. *Public Affairs*. 353 pp. \$26.95

The central mysteries of Larry L. King's engaging, personal, and often moving biography are why Willie Morris threw in the towel at *Harper's* and why he didn't get the second act he deserved. As one of Morris's first hires at *Harper's* and a lifelong friend and boon companion, King—best known for coauthoring the musical *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*—seems amply qualified to unravel these mysteries, but, as he acknowledges, he doesn't altogether succeed. "Why didn't Willie Morris fight back? . . . Why did he exile himself?" asks King. "I have no single conclusion that will please everybody—or even myself." Morris was "wounded," "bereft," and "angry," King notes, before suggesting that clinical depression, intensified by boozing and pill popping, helps explain the long literary denouement.

The psychological explanation is doubtless important, but there are social factors to consider as well. Morris's belletristic vision of "literary America" was wedded to liberal conceptions of good politics and good taste. In *New York Days*, Morris confessed that he didn't run a "watershed" essay on Sino-American relations by a pre-presidential Richard Nixon simply because he "did not want Richard Nixon in *Harper's*." But by the end of the '60s, the tradition to which Morris was loyal was already being eclipsed by fresh understandings of cultural meaning and power. America splintered not just politically but aesthetically too, with new values infusing everything from pop music to partisan politics. It's no accident that the magazines that defined the '70s (*Rolling Stone*), the '80s (*Spy*), and the '90s (*Wired*) were very different from Morris's *Harper's* in tone and focus. King notes that *New York Days*, Morris's last truly serious book, "lacked meaningful candor and tough-minded self-examination." Whatever personal demons were hounding him, Willie Morris must have felt increasingly out of touch with a world in which he was just one more aging wunderkind.

—Nick Gillespie

Herd on an Island

I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU that Anne Barclay Priest is an eccentric. All I have to tell you is that for many years she managed a flock of sheep on an island off Nova Scotia while acting in plays in New York City.

In 1971, she buys a Nova Scotia waterfront lot overlooking the hauntingly lovely Blue Island. For shelter, she brings an old house from Massachusetts (paying \$800 to buy it and \$6,000 to move it). When she hears that developers are nosing around the 138-acre Blue Island, she buys it to protect her view. (Modest inheritances, she says, pay for all this.) And once she owns the island, she decides to put sheep on it. This isn't uncommon; many local islands support livestock. I once saw bison grazing quietly on an island in Blue Hill Bay, Maine, beyond the seals and porpoises.

Priest loves the region, the people, and the adventure. She becomes close friends with some of her neighbors, but not all. When she puts range cattle on the island, to clear brush before bringing in the sheep, a fisherman plants himself on her mainland property one afternoon and informs her, "Sheep are okay. Lots of people keep sheep on islands. But not critters."

Priest pays no attention. Later, she asks another neighbor, "Do you think people would criticize me if I put pigs out on Blue Island?"

"Anne. People would criticize you if you put

TRAFFICKING IN SHEEP:

A Memoir—From Off-Broadway, New York, to Blue Island, Nova Scotia.

By Anne Barclay Priest.
Countryman.
253 pp. \$19.95



A few of Anne Barclay Priest's sheep graze on Blue Island.