

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.

angels out there!”

Priest gives up on pigs and goes straight to sheep, buying her first flock of hardy Scottish blackfaces from a transplanted English sheep breeder who once worked for James Herriot. She gets a Border collie to help control her herd, and learns the immensely sophisticated, demanding, and rewarding pleasures offered by one of the world’s great dog breeds.

Priest also learns that you don’t just drop sheep on an island and leave them. Shearing, vaccinating, breeding, and culling all require trips in small craft and uncertain weather to deal with stubborn and uncooperative creatures. The tasks also require help from the community: the fishermen, carpenters, contractors, and others who own the boats, block and tackle, trucks, telephones, and everything else she finds that she needs. Despite some initial doubts, most everyone lends a hand.

In the years that follow, Priest buys another sheep farm in upstate New York, where she and the lambs spend winters. She increases her flock and watches it prosper—a favorite sheep, Mischa, races about the pasture, making beautiful balletic leaps. She buys a guard donkey to protect the sheep in New York from dogs, puts goats on the island in Nova Scotia, branches out into another sheep breed, and attends a sheep-herders’ peace mission in Israel.

A foreign correspondent before becoming an actress, Priest has a voice that’s energetic and opinionated, funny and beguiling. “Despite my being an oddity, I had the silent support of the men at the wharf,” she writes at one point. “They were always ready to help whenever I needed a hand, . . . but no one ever made me feel that I didn’t belong there. I also know that I gave considerable pleasure all around when I fell into the water, which I did about once a year.” She is firmly connected to the natural world and takes a great deal of joy in inhabiting it. And she makes us wonder why we’re eccentrically here, instead of running sheep on an island—which is clearly so much fun.

—Roxana Robinson

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

Morocco’s Moderation

MIDDLE EAST ANALYSTS often cite Morocco as a country with at least reasonable potential to become a democracy. A nation with a history of relatively moderate politics, Morocco has 33 million

people, nearly all of them Muslim, who value education and independence in equal measure. Though Morocco remains a monarchy, its citizens now elect local officials as well as representatives to a parliament, and its recent kings, whatever their failings, haven’t been tyrants.

A *New York Times* and BBC correspondent since the 1950s, Marvine Howe observed firsthand the end of the French protectorate in 1956 and the evolution of Moroccan independence in the decades thereafter. She offers a broad-stroke summary of Morocco’s past, coupled with the captivating and clearheaded reportorial detail necessary for assessing its future. And she has spoken firsthand to many of the figures who have shaped the past and will have a hand in the future: Mehdi Ben Barka, the opposition leader who was murdered in 1965, seemingly for political reasons; the young prince Moulay Hassan, who went on to reign from 1962 to 1999 as Hassan II; and leading human rights activists.

Howe characterizes the rule of Hassan II as a “prolonged despotic regime,” which seems an overstatement. To be sure, Hassan was a master of playing parties against one another, and he jailed political opponents, though rarely for long. After his death, his son and successor, Mohammad VI, appointed a truth and reconciliation commission, which has granted amnesty to thousands of former prisoners, though without any direct criticism of the monarchy. Yet despite his occasional severity, Hassan generally allowed quite open political discussion at the local level, a tradition that

MOROCCO:
The Islamist
Awakening and
Other Challenges.

By Marvine Howe.
Oxford Univ. Press.
448 pp. \$29.95