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*Arts & Letters*
**MARCEL DUCHAMP:  
Appearance Stripped Bare**

by Octavio Paz  
 Viking, 1978  
 218 pp. \$10.95  
 L of C 78-17560  
 ISBN 0-670-45502-4

Mexico's Octavio Paz—poet, philosopher, teacher, and essayist—believes that the greatest influences on 20th-century art are Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp. Picasso did it with his astonishing productivity and the metamorphoses his paintings went through; Duchamp with his “no less astonishing” and “no less fruitful” inactivity. The famous *Nude Descending a Staircase* shook the New York art world when it appeared in the Armory Show in 1913; by then, Duchamp, born in Normandy in 1887, was already beginning to substitute what he called “painting-idea” for “painting-painting.” He worked thereafter on studies of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (also known as *Large Glass*), which he left “finally unfinished” in 1923, did a few “Readymades” of commonplace objects, and became a self-styled “chess maniac” who spent much of his time competing in international tournaments. Manhattan became his permanent home in 1942. Not until after his death in 1968 on a trip to France was his last major work, *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas, 1946–66*, uncovered in his secret East 11th Street studio. It is hard to believe that any critic could penetrate the vision of an artist—especially this artist—as well as Paz has done in the essays that comprise his book. But vision “is not only what we see,” the poet reminds us. “It is a stance taken, an idea, a geometry—a *point of view* in both senses of the phrase.”

**AMERICAN INDIAN  
FICTION**

by Charles R. Larson  
 Univ. of New Mexico, 1978  
 208 pp. \$9.50  
 L of C 78-55698  
 ISBN 0-8263-0477-X

In 1899, Potawatomi Chief Simon Pokagon became the first American Indian to publish a novel. His *Queen of the Woods* was followed by three novels from Cherokee John M. Oskison, published in the 1920s and '30s, and Osage John J. Mathews' *Sundown* (1934). All were “conventional in form, traditional in subject, . . . indistinguishable from hundreds of other fictional works of the time.” Each of the authors was well-educated (Mathews a

geologist with a second B.A. in the natural sciences from Oxford). "If we did not know," writes American University's Charles R. Larson, "we might conclude from their novels that they were white." Not so with later Indian authors. Thirty years separate *The Surrounded*, by D'Arcy McNickle, a Flathead born in western Montana, and F. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer-prizewinning *House Made of Dawn* (1968). But a strong sense of lost identity unites the two. McNickle's book sometimes echoes white writer-about-Indian-life Oliver LaFarge's *Laughing Boy* (1929). Momaday's work is less derivative and more ambiguous, Larson finds. It blends Navajo traditions with the author's maternal Cherokee and paternal Kiowa inheritance. A Stanford English professor, Momaday sees his "New Indians" as unable to cope with the white man's world. Their own "is dead-ended." Larson's groundbreaking critique of "native American" fiction is not his only contribution to publishing's current list: his own first novel, *The Insect Colony* (Holt), holds up for inspection a group of Peace Corps volunteers in West Africa in the 1960s.

**FAIRY TALES AND  
AFTER: From Snow White  
to E. B. White**

by Roger Sale  
Harvard, 1978  
280 pp. \$11  
L of C 78-18788  
ISBN 0-674-29157-3

In 10 relaxed essays, critic Roger Sale, who teaches English at the University of Washington, explores the literary merits of children's books. Treating authors whose work "contributed to defining . . . what I seem to find most important in life," Sale examines how it is that successful children's literature works on its readers, adults or children. He moves deftly through analysis of such favorites as Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* ("permeated with need and power that readers can feel without inquiring into its source") and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* ("a sweet interlude of a book"). Where biographical material can cast light on a story's construction (as in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*), it is gracefully provided. Sale carries out the delicate task of exploring how something magical works in literature without exposing that magic as trickery or losing a sense of wonder.