

THE FROG WHO DARED TO CROAK

by Richard Sennett
Farrar, 1982
182 pp. \$11.95

A good number of scholarly tomes have dissected the self-deceptions of 20th-century intellectuals, particularly those of the Left. Sennett, director of the New York Institute for the Humanities, has dramatized their shortcomings through the fictionalized persona of Tibor Grau, a Hungarian Marxist, modeled, in many respects, after the philosopher Georg Lukács (1885–1971). A pastiche of documents—letters, police reports, journal entries, memorandums—tells how the bright son of a wealthy Jewish banker becomes a political radical. Searching for young men in Budapest's Municipal Park (homosexuality is his inadmissible secret), he sees the poverty of the uprooted peasants and workers forced to live there. Working for the revolution, he goes on to serve Hungary's various Communist regimes as a middle-rank official, producing cultural propaganda even as he writes serious philosophy for posterity at home. Grau's life is full of compromise and self-deception, disturbed by moments of troubling self-awareness: "Caution is a disease of the mind, and I am chronically ill." More often, though, Grau offers his standard excuse: "I am a realist. I believe in survival." Sennett's accomplishment is to have recreated the times and events—from the late Austro-Hungarian Empire, to the struggles against Fascism, to the horrors of Stalinism—that make the sins of Grau, and others like him, almost forgivable.

*Science & Technology***UR 'OF THE CHALDEES': A Revised and Updated Edition of Sir Leonard Woolley's Excavations at Ur**

by P.R.S. Moorey
Cornell, 1982
272 pp. \$24.95

Beneath the sands of modern-day Iraq, Sir Leonard Woolley (1870–1960) and a team of 400 Arab workmen unearthed dazzling evidence of a sophisticated urban center whose origin dates back almost 8,000 years. From 1922 to 1934, Woolley conducted systematic excavations of the ancient site of Ur below the once-fertile Tigris-Euphrates river valley. Remains of temples, schools, homes, and a vast array of artifacts allowed the English archaeologist to trace the fortunes of Ur from its



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days as an agricultural center in 6,000 B.C. through its cultural zenith in the second millennium B.C. to its last days as a religious cult site in the fourth century B.C. Situated on the shore of the Persian Gulf, Ur was for centuries the center of a far-flung empire. A succession of Sumerian, Babylonian, and other rulers traded agricultural products for precious metal and stone (used for magnificent crafts), encouraged widespread literacy, and employed women and slaves in a "cold-bloodedly businesslike" weaving industry. In this revision of Woolley's original *Excavations at Ur* (1954), Moorey, also an archaeologist, tempers Woolley's vivid imagination and strong Biblical bias, but preserves the flavor of his mentor's prose. "Our object," Woolley averred, "was to get history, not to fill museum cases." His historical account remains largely unchallenged to this day.

**GRAMMATICAL MAN:
Information, Entropy,
Language, and Life**
by Jeremy Campbell
Simon & Schuster, 1982
319 pp. \$15.95

Working in 1948 to solve a problem of sending radio and telephone messages, Bell Laboratory engineer Claude Shannon hit upon the central insight of information theory: Systems—including the physical universe, biology, human languages—are limited and defined by innate codes or "grammars." Furthermore, these codes (such as DNA in biology) account for progressive changes within their systems. With mathematical theorems, Shannon demonstrated that codes correct random change and lead to reliable information in an often unreliable world. Offering a full history and lucid explanation of this theory, Campbell, an English journalist, also shows how its principles have been supported and developed by work in several disciplines. Information theory conforms, for example, to Jung's proposition that dreams are messages from the archetypes of the unconscious to the conscious, ever-developing mind. Information is present throughout the universe; therefore, Campbell concludes, the universe must tend toward order and complexity, not, as the theory of entropy proposes, toward disorder or randomness.