

CAM, the university's alumni magazine.

Newton's solitary nature was at least partly a result of his personal history. His father, a yeoman farmer, died before Newton was born. When the boy was three, his mother married a wealthy clergyman, leaving her son in the care of his grandmother. Newton endured "eight years of apparently loveless isolation," Richards notes, until his hated stepfather died and he went off to Grantham Free School.

Remembered later as "a sober, silent, thinking lad," Newton at Grantham was forever experimenting, Richards says, building wooden clocks driven by weights and other devices. Returning home at 17, Newton kept on experimenting, to his mother's dismay. "He was so surly that after nine months his mother finally gave up. Newton was packed off to Cambridge," with even the servants saying he was fit for nothing else.

Because his wealthy but barely literate mother refused to pay, Newton entered Cambridge in 1661 as a poor "subsizar," who earned his way by waiting on the Fellows and better-off students, until 1664, when he was elected to a scholarship.

Two years after entering Cambridge, Newton came upon René Descartes's *Geometry* (1637). "Thereafter," Richards says, "he immersed himself, learning 'of his

owne inclination, and by his owne industry without a teacher.' " He received his bachelor's degree in January 1665 and threw himself into research. By the end of the next year, he had invented calculus, discovered that light was "a confused aggregate of Rays" which exhibit different colors, and, after noticing an apple fall to the ground at the family farm, begun to conceptualize his theory of universal gravitation.

Yet Newton's astounding discoveries remained known only to him for some years to come. Indeed, although he stayed on at Trinity as a mathematics professor, it was more than two decades before Cambridge and the world came to appreciate how great a genius was in their midst. That occurred with the publication of *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), in which he detailed his theory of universal gravitation and his laws of motion.

Suddenly, the reclusive bachelor, now in his mid-forties, was the toast of Cambridge and London, and he seemed to enjoy it. He left the university for a government sinecure in London in 1696, and became the first scientist ever knighted. At his funeral in Westminster Abbey in 1727, Voltaire recalled Newton's reply when asked how he discovered the law of universal gravitation: "By thinking on it continually."

ARTS & LETTERS

The Two Faces of Literary Stardom

"The Author as a Brand Name: American Literary Figures and the *Time* Cover Story"
by Joe Moran, in *Journal of American Studies* (Dec. 1995), Cambridge Univ. Press,
Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011-4211.

In *Time* magazine's heyday, to appear on its cover seemed the height of American fame, especially for such obscure folk as novelists, poets, and playwrights. For five decades after its debut issue appeared in 1923, *Time* made "serious" writers from Sinclair Lewis to John Updike seem as important, in their way, as all the politicians, business executives, and popular entertainers who usually graced the cover. All well and good, perhaps, but the authors themselves, maintains Moran, a doctoral student at the University of Sussex, were often not so happy about it. The sedate painted portraits or sketches on the cover were flattering, as

were the stories inside. *Time*, in those days, was seldom "intrusive" toward its cover subjects. But inclusion in publisher Henry Luce's steadily expanding gallery of culture heroes had other drawbacks.

The authors often feared—rightly—that the stories would reduce them to stereotypes, Moran says. *Time* turned Ernest Hemingway into "the man's man," William Faulkner into "the farmer," John Cheever into "the country gentleman," and J. D. Salinger into "the hermit." Readers unfamiliar with the work of the authors could thus have the illusion of knowing them. But for an author "trying to unpack his heart through the devices

of fiction,” John Updike explained, it is distressing to learn that “what really counts is the aggrandizement of himself as a figure, a celebrity, a name brand.”

In keeping with Luce’s notion of America’s special place in the world, American authors who appeared on *Time*’s cover “tended to be defined as quintessentially [American] in their personality or subject matter,” Moran says. *Time* lauded Thornton Wilder, for example, for his ability to reproduce “authentic Americana,” and approvingly noted that John Dos Passos “attempts to organize [America’s] chaotic, high-pressure life into an understandable artistic pattern.” In addition, Moran says, the cover stories showed “an almost obsessive interest in the details of the writer’s popular commercial success,” with nary a hint that artistic excellence might sometimes go com-

mercially unrewarded.

Authors sometimes did say no. In 1954, Faulkner’s publisher urged him to agree to a new cover story in order to boost sales of *The Fable*. Faulkner, who had been “honored” in this way by *Time* once before, responded by asking for an estimate of “what a refusal would cost Random House,” saying he would gladly write his publisher a check to avoid the “distinction.”

Time had the “initially admirable” belief that culture was as much “news” as political and social events were, Moran says. But its cover stories “helped to create a kind of literary ‘star system,’ ” a forerunner of today’s blockbuster-oriented publishing scene in which a few “celebrity authors” receive vast amounts of money and publicity, while many “serious” authors find it hard even to get their books commercially published.

Rembrandt or Not?

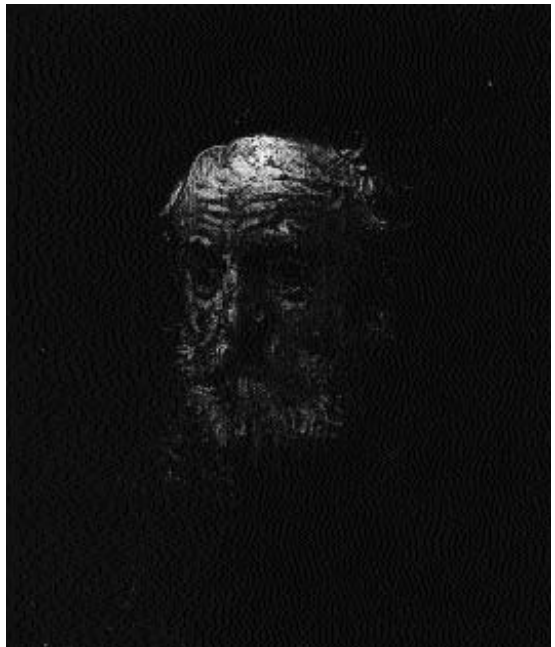
“Truth in Labeling” by Gary Schwartz, in *Art in America* (Dec. 1995),
575 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.

To call a painting a Rembrandt is to count it among the most prized creations of humankind. Until the mid-1960s, about 620 paintings possessed that distinction, with scholars, collectors, and museum curators agreeing that Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) had created them. Then a great purge began. Today, only about 300 paintings are considered indisputably genuine “Rembrandts.” Some 50 more are still in dispute.

The “Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt” exhibition last fall at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art highlighted the unsettling situation. It showcased 42 works once attributed to Rembrandt, of which only 18 are still unquestionably genuine. The Met’s curator of northern European paintings and its chief conservator disagreed so deeply about the other 24 that the museum took the unusual step of publishing two catalogues for the same exhibition.

The purge of ersatz Rembrandts began during the 1960s, explains Schwartz, a visiting professor of art history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the author of *Rembrandt: His Life,*

His Paintings (1985). New analytical techniques, such as X-radiography, which can reveal previously painted areas beneath the surface layer, and pigment analysis, in which



Study Head of an Old Man was “definitely” an 18th- or 19th-century imitation—until tests showed the wooden panel was from c. 1630. It may be a genuine Rembrandt.