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CHARLES DICKENS

Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, are all very good words for the lips; especially prunes and prism.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

If once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination.

LES COLEMAN (Unthunk)

A trip down
Amnesia Lane.

JOHN G. MUIR

(Classroom
Clangers)

Very slowly I
began to make
rapid recovery.

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Behrens, editor, publisher, and art director.
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Ballast is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to *Blast*, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. *Ballast* is mainly a pastiche of astonishing passages from books, magazines, diaries and other writings. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought provoking.

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With this issue, *Ballast* has begun a collaborative affiliation with *Leonardo: Journal of the International Society of Arts, Sciences, and Technology* (MIT Press). As a result, some of the book reviews in *Ballast* will be reprinted on the *Leonardo* web site at <<http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/leonardo/home.html>>.

HILAIRE BELLOC

I shoot the Hippopotamus
With bullets made of platinum,
Because if I use leaden ones
His hide is sure to flatten 'em.

I have always been horrified with the prospect that I'd discover what it was I could do well and then I'd be doomed to repeat it for the rest of my life. I've always considered that a kind of slow professional death.

MILTON GLASER in Joan Evelyn Ames, *Mastery: Interviews with 30 Remarkable People* (Portland OR: Rudra Press, 1997), p. 78.



JULES RENARD
A fly alighting on the sheet of white paper was excuse enough for him to give himself the right to idle. He did not write, for fear of disturbing the fly.

LEFT Type face made of letter parts by **MICHAEL NEUMANN** (1997).

I was thought to be retarded as a child, and all the evidence indicates that I was. I have no memory of the first grade, to which I was not admitted until I was seven, except that of peeing my pants and having to be sent home whenever I was spoken to by our hapless teacher. I have even forgotten her appearance and her name, and I call her hapless because there was a classmate, now a psychiatrist, who fainted when he was called on, and another who stiffened into petit mal. I managed to control my bladder by the third grade, but the fainter and the sufferer from fits, both classmates of mine through the ninth grade, when I quit school, kept teachers edgy until graduation.

GUY DAVENPORT (who recently received a "genius award" from the MacArthur Foundation) "On Reading" in *The Hunter Gracchus* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1997), p. 20.

LEWIS CARROLL We called him Tortoise because he taught us.



ABOVE

Type face made of
letter parts by
TAMMY
BOOTH
(1997).

ANON

He's the sort of
person that
Reverend
Spooner would
have referred
to as a shining
wit.

MRS

HENRY

ADAMS

[about Henry
James] It's not
that he bites
off more than
he can chew,
but he chaws
more than he
bites off.

AUSTIN DOBSON [in a conversation with Henry James, who said that he'd become lost in the maze at Hampton Court]: I am surprised at that. I should have thought you would have felt that you were in the middle of one of your sentences.

DOROTHY
PARKER

*House
Beautiful* is a
play lousy.

RECOMMENDED Robin Lenman, *Artists and Society in Germany 1850-1914* (Manchester University Press / Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 1997). ISBN 0-7190-3636-4. On the dust jacket of this book is a painting by the foremost history-painter of Imperial Germany, Anton von Werner, of German army officers listening to a comrade sing Robert Schumann's *Das Meer Erglänzte Weit Hinaus* in the living room of a captured French chateau. It is September 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, and the Germans have begun a 135-day siege of Paris, in which food shortages became so severe that Parisians had to eat cats and dogs, even elephants in the zoo. The cover is appropriate because the book's subjects are the cultural rivalry between Germany and France (which would resurface in World War I), the rapid acceleration of German nationalism, and the growth of opposing traditions of art, academic and experimental, in the "big four" artistic centers of Dresden, Dusseldorf, Munich, and Berlin. Scores of American artists flocked to German art schools during this period, among them Frank Duvenek, who became head of the Art Academy of Cincinnati; Carl Marr, who directed the Munich Academy (and whose huge unforgettable rendering of a flagellation street scene is housed in the art center in West Bend, Wisconsin); and William Merrit Chase. Illustrated by 25 black and white reproductions, this is a careful and balanced account of the times that set the stage for the eventual struggle between Fascism and Socialism, and the crackdown on so-called "degenerate art."

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Guy Davenport, *The Hunter Gracchus: And Other Papers on Literature and Art* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1997). ISBN 1-887178-55-4. Davenport, a MacArthur Fellow and an award-winning translator, poet, critic, short fiction writer, and visual artist, is also one of the finest essayists of our time. This is his third collection (the first two, *Geography of the Imagination* and *Every Force Evolves a Form*, were both nominated for the National Book Award). His delightful essays, like his more difficult short stories, are literary montages; they begin by combining unlikely events, people, and ideas, then show us a sensible, elegant way by which they all flow together. Among the 40 essays in this book are commentaries on Thomas Merton, Franz Kafka, revolution, the Shakers, Gertrude Stein, John Ruskin, Grant Wood, the Bible, Paul Cadmus, and snake handling. Davenport grew up in rural South Carolina, in the Old South, and his most exhilarating passages are often colorful childhood memories, as when, for example, in a brilliant essay titled "On Reading," he remembers the people who encouraged him to read: Aunt Mae, for example, who was married to Uncle Buzzie and never drove over 30 miles an hour, and Cora Shiflett, a neighbor who lent him his first volume of *Tarzan*, in which the Lord of the Jungle survives in the Sahara Desert by dispatching a vulture and drinking its blood.

DOROTHY PARKER

[on being told that Clare Boothe Luce was always kind to her inferiors] Oh, really. And where does she find them?

JULES REYNARD

The swollen veins of his temples. Moles are digging around and ravaging him under the skin.

JAMES A. M.

WHISTLER [in reply to the question: Is genius hereditary?]: I can't tell you; heaven has granted me no offspring.



ABOVE

Type face made of letter parts by AMY VANDERBEEK (1997).

GEORGE DAY

[who insists that he witnessed the following ad on late night television] Jesus is coming, perhaps as soon as tomorrow! For a video on how to prepare for the Second Coming, send \$10 plus \$3 for shipping and handling. Please allow six weeks for delivery.

Les Coleman moved to Clapham Junction in 1967. During the summer of that year, *The Summer of Love*, he lost his wallet on Dartmoor containing two pound notes. A doctor found the wallet and handed it over to the police. It took until the autumn to trace Coleman to his new address. He collected the wallet from Lavendar Hill Police Station to discover the money was still inside. In the autumn of 1996 he painted the walls of his front room *Sunbeam* with *Moonshine* on the woodwork. In keeping with this color scheme the room has a blue fitted carpet (80% wool) and yellow venetian blinds (made to measure). Among his possessions Coleman owns a small African sculpture which stands on his mantelpiece despite having one leg shorter than the other.

LES COLEMAN [his biographical note in] *Meet the Art Students* (England: Arc Publications, 1997).

LES
COLEMAN
Our footprints
follow us
home.

RUDOLF ARNHEIM
(*Parables of Sun Light*) What is
the point of hooting in the dark?
Perhaps the owl, devoid of activi-
ty and company, uses its voice as
its cogito. "I hoot, therefore I
am."

RECOMMENDED Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, *Seeing Jazz: Artists and Writers on Jazz* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997). ISBN 0-8118-1732-6. Some people are capable of "synaesthesia," which results in a kind of connection among the various senses. The Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, for example, often heard specific sounds when looking at colors, or saw colors when listening to sounds. The intent of this book is not dissimilar, in the sense that it tries to establish a link between the musical experience of jazz and the sensory experiences of other art forms, including painting, sculpture, photography, and the written word. The result is a kaleidoscopic assortment of more than 160 visual artworks, anecdotes, poems, lyrics, and jazz-related writings, including, for example, four Romare Bearden collages; Piet Mondrian's famous *Broadway Boogie Woogie*; Lee Friedlander's photograph of Sweet Emma Barnett; and poignant excerpts from Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and Jack Kerouac's *The Beginning of Bop*. Divided into three sections (Rhythm, Improvisation, and Call and Response), each introduced by a brief essay by jazz scholar Robert O'Meally, this is the catalog for a traveling exhibition that began at the Smithsonian in October 1997 and will travel around the country until July 1999.



**JULES
REYNARD**
He walked
noiselessly, like
a fish.

LEFT
Pencil drawing by
**JOSEPH
PODLESNIK**
(1995).

RECOMMENDED Richard Nelson Current and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loie Fuller: Goddess of Light* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997). ISBN 1-55553-309-4. Nearly anyone acquainted with design history will recognize the name of La Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), the American-born stage performer whose "serpentine dances" became an overnight sensation at the Folies-Bergère in Paris in 1892. Her tantalizing performances, which combined innovative stage lighting with costumes of swirling diaphanous veils, were immortalized in Art Nouveau posters and sculptures by Jules Cheret, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Auguste Rodin, Will Bradley, and Koloman Moser. Born in Chicago, Fuller was christened Marie Louise, which was shortened to Louie, then nicknamed Loïe by the French. In this interesting, detailed account of the life of an extraordinary Victorian woman, we learn about her brief association with Buffalo Bill; her court battles with a bigamist who may have poisoned her father and then (not unlike our own day) threatened to release "nude-appearing" photographs of her, for which she had posed in flesh-colored tights; her inventive use of electric stage lights in daring adaptations of skirt dances; her fame and the short-lived financial success that she found when she moved to Paris in the 1890s; and her subsequent friendships with celebrated Parisians, among them Sarah Bernhardt, Isadora Duncan, Pierre and Marie Curie, Alexandre Dumas fils, and Anatole France.

**LOUIS
ARM-
STRONG**
All music is
folk music. I
ain't never
heard no horse
sing a song.

**JULES
RENARD**
A scrupulous
inexactness.



ABOVE
Type face made of
letter parts by
ALEX
MULLAN
(1997).

I remember Rudi [a friend and teacher] saying once that all life is about transcendence. If you're ugly you have to transcend your ugliness, if you're beautiful you have to transcend your beauty, if you're poor you have to transcend your poverty, if you're rich you have to transcend your wealth... There is nothing worse than being born extraordinarily beautiful, nothing more potentially damaging to the self. You could say the same for being born inordinately rich. You suddenly realize how wise the idea is that you get nothing at birth except things to transcend. That's all you get.

MILTON GLASER interviewed in Joan Evelyn Ames, *Mastery: Interviews with 30 Remarkable People* (Portland OR: Rudra Press, 1997), pp. 84-85.

A N O N Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly go clear to the bone.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Steven Heller and Karen Pomeroy, *Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design* (New York: Allworth Press, 1997). ISBN 1-880559-76-5. In the past several decades, various authors have objected to approaches to graphic design history that focus on individual masters, movements, and styles; that analyze the structural attributes of a work (derided in this book as "eye candy"); or that feature highbrow examples while leaving out simpler, more popular works. This volume, which is one of the more inventive and thought-provoking books on design history in recent years, offers a plausible alternative: It consists of 93 "object lessons" in the form of engaging short essays about a wide variety of graphic icons, from the late 19th century to the present, ranging from the ubiquitous (shooting targets, the swastika, Joe Camel) to the esoteric (*Emigre* magazine, the Cranbrook posters, or April Greiman's self-portrait). Organized somewhat chronologically but in eight thematic categories (Persuasion, Media, Language, Identity, Information, Iconography, Style, and Commerce), the essays form readable "stories" about the objects, the designers' thought processes, and the social and political circumstances from which they emerged.

GEORGE SANTAYANA

Perceptions fall into the brain rather as seeds into a furrowed field or even as sparks into a keg of powder.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Jane Livingston, *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn* (New York and Berkeley: Whitney Museum of American Art and University of California Press, 1997). ISBN 0-520-21258-4. In the last half of this century, few artists have been as influential or respected as the abstract painter Richard Diebenkorn (1922-1993), whose work was in part the result of the light he experienced in California, where he lived most of his life. This is the richly illustrated catalog of the first retrospective of his work since his death, an exhibition that opened on October 9 at the Whitney, and will travel next year to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Understandably, Diebenkorn is usually regarded as an Abstract Expressionist, but his path was surprisingly wider than that. As documented here, he was influenced by sources as diverse as Erle Loran (author of *Cézanne's Composition*), Piet Mondrian, Henri Matisse, Edward Hopper, jazz, and the poems of William Butler Yeats, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, and others. His drawings are invariably as powerful as his paintings. While few drawings are in this volume, 192 paintings are shown in color. The price of the paper-bound edition (\$39.95) is extremely reasonable, and anyone who admires this Modern master should find it a valuable volume to own.

ANON
A friend of
mine worked
in the circus.
He was
engaged to a
lady contor-
tionist but she
broke it off.

**LES
COLEMAN**
The crematori-
um was
reduced to
ashes.

**JULES
RENARD**
He wept cats
and dogs.

Wendell Berry, that thoughtful man, once remarked that teachers are like a farmer dropping an acorn into the ground. Some years will pass before the oak comes to maturity. We gives grades, lecture, and do the best we can. But we cannot see what we have done for many years to come.

**GUY
DAVENPORT**
"On Reading" in
The Hunter
Gracchus
(Washington DC:
Counterpoint,
1997), p. 27.

ANON
My great-
grandfather
was a mission-
ary who was
eaten by canni-
bals. At least
he died in the
knowledge
that he had
given them
their first taste
of Christianity.

JULES REYNARD

(*Journal*)

Toulouse-Lautrec was lying on his bed, dying, when his father, an old eccentric, came to see him and began catching flies. Lautrec said: "Old fool!" and died.

RECOMMENDED Anne Coffin Hanson, *Severini Futurista: 1912-1917* (New Haven CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 1997 / Distributed by Washington University Press). ISBN 0-89467-071-9. Cubism was founded in 1907, Futurism in 1909. The former simulated the motion of an observer, by juxtaposing multiple points of view, whereas Futurism represented a moving object, as anticipated in the 19th century by the photographic experiments of Muybridge and Marey. While also exhibiting with the Parisian Cubists, Gino Severini (1883-1966) was one of five artists (with Marinetti, Balla, Boccioni, Carra, and Russolo) who signed the Futurist painting manifestoes in 1910. A review of his paintings appears to confirm that, however close his affiliation with his Italian compatriots, he remained sympathetic to French Cubism. This elegant volume, which is enhanced by 86 annotated illustrations (including 41 color reproductions), an illuminating narrative, and his 53 letters and postcards to Filippo Marinetti, is the catalog for an exhibition, held in 1995-96 at Yale and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, of 37 works he created during the halcyon years of Futurism.

[The physicist Albert Einstein had a] perverse delight in doing the unexpected. "Once when out sailing with him," writes Watters, "and while we were engaged in an interesting conversation, I suddenly cried out 'Achtung' for we were almost upon another boat. He veered away with excellent control and when I remarked what a close call we had had, he started to laugh and sailed directly toward one boat after another, much to my horror, but he always veered off in time, and then laughed like a naughty boy."

Ronald Clark, *Einstein: His Life and Times* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1971).

JANE
AUSTEN
You have
delighted us
long enough.

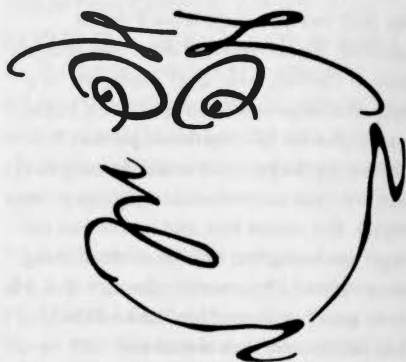
WALLACE
STEVENS
The poet
makes silk
dresses out of
worms.

JULES
REYNARD

The critic is a
botanist; I am
a gardener.

DOROTHY
PARKER

Guido Natso is
natso guido.



LEFT
Type face
made of letter
parts by
LISA
BEIER-
SCHMITT
(1997).

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Joan Evelyn Ames, *Mastery: Interviews with 30 Remarkable People* (Portland OR: Rudra Press, 1997). ISBN 0-915801-70-1. It is challenge enough to be interviewed. It's even more difficult to do the interviewing; especially, as in this case, to conduct more or less the same interview with more than one person. Too often, the questions drag on, become predictable, and the interviews sound artificial. For the most part, that is not the case in this volume of short conversations about remarkable achievement with 30 contemporary "geniuses," many of them MacArthur Fellows, in part because, as the author explains, "The more I learned to keep my mouth shut and simply listen, the better the interviews became." It is interesting that the author is related to Adelbert Ames II, the well-known inventive psychologist who devised distorted room experiments in the 1940s and 50s; and to George Plimpton, the American editor and writer, who is among those interviewed. This isn't just another book about creativity in the arts: While most of the people interviewed are visual artists, writers, dancers, and musicians, also represented are such diverse disciplines as meditation, homeopathy, astronomy, religion, winegrowing, marketing, cooking, genetics, and juggling.

I remember when we were in training to be night fliers in the Navy, I learned, very strangely, that the rods of the eye perceive things at night in the corner of the eye that we can't see straight ahead. That's not a bad metaphor for the vision of art. You don't stare at the mystery, but you *can* see things out of the corner of your eye that you weren't supposed to see.

WILLIAM MEREDITH quoted in George Plimpton, ed., *The Writer's Chapbook* (New York: Viking, 1989), p. 41.



ABOVE
Type face made of
letter parts by
KELLY
WILHELM
(1997).

JOHN G.
MUIR
(*Classroom*
Clangers) A
cemetery is
where dead
people live.

BILL
BRYSON
(*The Lost*
Continent)
When you tell
an Iowan an
joke, you can
see a kind of
race going on
between his
brain and his
expression.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Deborah Soloman, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). ISBN 0-374-18012-1. Art theorist Susan Sontag became famous in 1964 when her essay "Notes on Camp" appeared. Among her fan mail was a package from a secret admirer, the 62-year-old American sculptor Joseph Cornell, who, after seeing her in a television interview, had apparently begun to imagine her as a romantic partner. He visited the 31-year-old writer (who was honored but uncomfortable with his attentions), she visited him, and he created collages confusing her with Henriette Sontag, an unrelated 19th-century German diva. He even gave her two of his "found object" box sculptures, then demanded their return when his interest faded. This is only one of many curious episodes in this candid but sympathetic biography of an artist who is often described as a poet, whose artwork has been called "star maps of a private universe," and who, despite his shyness, had significant encounters, even friendships, with such prominent contemporaries as Pavel Tchelitchew (pronounced Chelly-cheff), Marcel Duchamp, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Stan Brakhage, Matta, Saul Steinberg, and Andy Warhol. A legendary recluse, Cornell lived with his mother and invalid brother in a cluttered white frame house on Utopia Parkway in Queens, New York.

Appropriately, the book's title is a found object and a use of the well-known Surrealist device of "radical juxtaposition." It is also a pun, because Cornell's artworks, like his eccentricity, were attempts to address the division between two incompatible planes of existence, the celestial and the trivial—the stars and the prison of daily routine.

W. H. AUDEN (*The Dyer's Hand*) A man has his distinctive personal scent which his wife, his children and his dog can recognize. A crowd has a generalized stink. The public is odorless.

No teacher I've ever had put greater stress on tonal texture, on the notion that in all literary forms "it is by their syllables that words juxtapose in beauty." He [the poet Charles Olson at Black Mountain College] forced us to realize that prose is only as good as it approximates the condition of poetry—that state in which not a particle of sound can be changed without upsetting the entire page.

FRANCINE DU PLESSIX

GRAY "Charles Olson and an American Place" in Kai Erikson, *Encounters* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 62.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Wayne Booth, *The Art of Growing Older: Writers on Living and Aging* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). ISBN 0-226-06549-9. The author, who wrote earlier *The Vocation of a Teacher*, is a well-known distinguished professor who taught at the University of Chicago for many years. He now faces old age, and this is his splendid selection of poems, epigrams, diary excerpts, letters, and meditations on that intimidating prospect by dozens of familiar authors, among them Czeslaw Milosz ("Old Women"), Gerard Manley Hopkins ("God's Grandeur"), Simone de Beauvoir (*Coming of Age*), and Ogden Nash ("Crossing the Border"). There is, for example, a wonderful list by Malcolm Cowley of 16 signs of old age, in which he concludes that, as a man ages, "time passes quickly, as if he were gathering speed while coasting downhill. The year 79 to 80 is like a week when he was a boy." Supplemented by 16 photographs and paintings, the literary selections were chosen as much for their tonal texture as their content. As a result, nearly all are exquisitely phrased, and, as Booth advises, would profit from being read slowly and aloud.

So it went with my education. God knows what I learned from classes; very little. I read Santayana instead of my philosophy text (the style of which sucked), I read *Finnegans Wake* instead of doing botany (in which I made an F, and sweet Professor Anderson, that great name in photosynthesis, wrote on the postcard that conveyed the F, "You have neat and attractive handwriting"). Instead of paying attention to psychology I made a wide study of Klee and Goya.

GUY

DAVENPORT

"On Reading" in *The Hunter Gracchus* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1997), p. 27.

WINSTON CHURCHILL
[when told of the Greek statesman Plasteras]
Well, I hope he doesn't have feet of clay also.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU
Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.

A boy named Eddie Shell came one afternoon to play with Frank and me, and at the hour of going home did not know how to do so. This is a malady that afflicts all children, but my mother was not sure how she should handle it in Eddie's case. She consulted us secretly as to whether he should be asked to stay for supper; we thought not, so she hinted to him that his mother might be expecting him. He was so slow in acting upon the hint that we were all in despair and began to feel guilty because we had not pressed him to stay. What I remember now is Eddie standing at last on the other side of the screen door and trying to say good-by as if he meant it. My mother said warmly: "Well, Eddie, come and see us again." Whereupon he opened the door and walked in.

MARK VAN DOREN *The Autobiography of Mark Van Doren* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 24.

"What was your first sexual experience, Simon?" He thinks for a moment. "I was about ten. This teacher asked us all to make little churches for display, kind of a model of a church. I made one out of cardboard, worked very hard on it, and took it in to her on a Friday morning, and she was pleased with it. It had a red roof, colored with red crayon. Then another guy, Billy something-or-other, brought in one that was made of wood. His was better than mine. So she tossed mine out and used his."

"That was your first sexual experience?"

"How far back do you want to go?"

DONALD BARTHELME *Paradise* (New York: Putnam, 1986).

DAVID STEINBERG
I believe that eating pork makes people stupid.

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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For more than 12 years, it has operated at a financial loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the paycheck of the Subscription Boy. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

Every time we came home from the store with a new jar of peanut butter, my dad, when we would go out of the room, would write the initials of the one he thought had been the best that week. And then the next morning, or whenever we'd go to open the peanut butter to put on our toast or something, he'd say, "Oh look what's here!" And he would tell us that it was the little fairy who lived in the light downstairs, whose named was Matilda and that she had done it. That used to make you be good so you could get your name in the peanut butter.

EMILY SARDONIA quoted in Steven J. Zeitlin, et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 173.

CHARLES
DUDLEY
WARNER

There is no
dignity in the
bean. Corn,
with no affec-
tation of supe-
riority, is, how-
ever, the child
of song. It
waves in all lit-
erature. But
mix it with
beans, and its
high tone is
gone.
Succotash is
vulgar.

COVER
Typographic
composition by
AMY BAACK
(1997).

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