NON OBSTANTE
Next day I [British sculptor Henry Moore] was somewhere in the museum [of Modern Art in New York in 1946] with Dorothy Miller discussing some details of the exhibition when she received a phone call from René d’Harnoncourt who said “I know that Henry wants to see the [Alfred] Barnes Collection. Barnes is just about to come to my room now. I’ve had a message that he’s coming to see me right away. Why don’t you ask Henry to come into my office in a few minutes so that I can introduce them to each other.” So Dorothy and I went down there a few minutes later, and sure enough, there was René and Dr. Barnes with two of his bodyguards who looked like Chicago gangsters. D’Harnoncourt said “Dr. Barnes, may I introduce Henry Moore.” And I said “I’m so pleased to meet you, Dr. Barnes, because I was about to write to you since I would love to come, if I may, and see your fabulous collection.” And for about a minute there was dead silence. Then he said “such exaggerated flattery makes me sick.” I was taken aback and didn’t say a word in reply. Even his bodyguards looked aghast. So did everyone else in the room except Barnes, of course, who let another minute go by—it seemed like five minutes to us—and then he said, “well, when would you like to come?”

ANON
I've got a room in Chicago and she's got a flat behind.

ANON
—Hey, Pop, vot is a vacuum?
—A vacuum is a void.
—I know it's a void, but vot does dat void mean?

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS
Nature abhors a vacuum.

STUART DAVIS
One day I set up an eggbeater in my studio and got so interested in it that I nailed it on the table and kept it there to paint.

JEREMY BENTHAM
Prose is when all the lines except the last go to the end. Poetry is when some of them fall short of it.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
A vacuum is a hell of a lot better than some of the stuff that nature replaces it with.

GROUCHO MARX
Quotes, unquotes and quotes. That's three quotes. And another quote'll make it a gallon.
IN LATE 1960, as a high school freshman, I was paging through an anniversary issue of *Life* magazine, made up of pictures and snippets of text from earlier features.

I stopped when I came to a photograph of a strange-looking young man, strange because he looked like Christ in those ubiquitous portrayals by Warner Sallman (e.g., Sallman’s *Head of Christ*, Sallman’s *Praying Hands* [with apologies to Dürer]) which, in those days, hung in every home in the Midwest. Well, Christ-like or not, the person in this photograph was at least bearded and slender, and his hair was shoulder-length. He was not wearing a Biblical robe, but a sweat shirt with the sleeves pushed up, turned inside out, and he was holding a couple of pigeons.

Now why was I stopped by this photo? Well, I was living at the time in a small Midwestern town in an era in which it was “extraordinary” [a stronger word is needed here] for an adult male to have shoulder-length hair (this was before there were hippies), unless he was some kind of showman like Buffalo Bill, and only in town very briefly. Beards were also “discouraged” back then because they implied concealment or deceit. So, only a couple years earlier had I seen a full beard for the first time (not counting St. Nick and the Amish), when a fellow from a nearby town had grown one in connection with a Centennial Celebration (which was the Midwest’s equivalent then of the New Orleans Mardi Gras or, in Georgia, of the Rattlesnake Round-up). But even that fellow did not have shoulder-

A young teacher said to me, "Since I am just beginning, how will I know when it is time to stop teaching?" After a moment of thought I replied, "When you hear yourself talking, it will be time for you to retire."

The absence of flaw in beauty is itself a flaw.
shattered into five pieces (which I put back together with blue plastic tape, although, needless to say, it was still not playable). The handwritten score (which I still have) is personally addressed to me, as is the back of the album.

In the meantime, I had discovered that Ahbez was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 15, 1908, at which time his legal identity was Alexander Aberle. Jewish, he had grown up listening to Yiddish songs, a fact that would take on significance when, after *Nature Boy* had become a hit, he was accused by a music publisher of (whether consciously or not) too closely basing the melody on a copyrighted Yiddish song (about a rental car!) titled *Schwieg Mein Hertz*. The dispute was settled out of court.

Almost nothing is known about Ahbez's first forty years, mostly because he refused to discuss his pre-enlightened past. In an article in *Life* on May 10, 1948 (titled "Nature Boy: Composer of top hit tune in U.S. is a bearded mystic from Brooklyn"), it was reported that he had grown up in an orphanage, and, by age 35, had walked or hitchhiked across the country eight times. Having settled in Los Angeles, one day he saw his future wife, Anna Jacobson, a mystic and a vegetarian, in a cafeteria. She was initially frightened because he followed her to a streetcar and gave her a note with his name and address. But she did contact him. They fell in love, and on the very day he proposed, he found $261.67 in a trash can, and, soon after, they were married. Thereafter, they slept outdoors in Griffith Park, while spending their days in a canyon (not the Grand Canyon), meditating and sunbathing. Eventually they had a son named Zelma.

The lives of the couple changed markedly in early 1948. Having written *Nature Boy*, Ahbez tried to show it to...
GEORGE ORWELL
Good prose is like a window pane.

RUDOLF ARNHEIM (Parables of Sun Light) When on the front page of the paper I saw the headline *Jets Upset Dolphins*, I pictured airplanes swooping down to the ocean and disturbing the peaceful ecology of the sea animals.

ANON
—Some people think she's a bit hoity-toity.
—Well, she may be hoity but, believe me, she'll never see toity again!

the singer Nat "King" Cole, who was appearing at the time at Lincoln Theater in Los Angeles. When Cole was unable to see him, Ahbez thrust the manuscript at the doorman, urging him to pass it on, then vanished. It eventually reached Cole's manager, Mort Ruby, who encouraged the singer to give it a try. The audience loved it when he used it in his act, which persuaded Cole that he should record it. "There was a boy," the lyrics begin, "a very strange, enchanted boy, / They say he wandered very far...over land and sea..."

So Cole recorded the song, but still it couldn’t be released until they could locate its elusive author. Whether it’s true or not, one story says that Ahbez and Anna were found by Ruby living in their sleeping bag beneath the first "L" (not the second one) in the big white hillside HOLLYWOOD sign.

In 1948, when Capitol Records released the Nat "King" Cole rendition of the song as a backside alternative on a 33 rpm single, it was an immediate success, quickly becoming the country's top hit tune. All sorts of other singers, among them Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughn, and Dick Haymes, came out with their own variations. It was reported that Ahbez was destined to make about $20,000 in royalties. Nevertheless, he and Anna continued to travel by bicycle, to live on nuts and various fruits (which they processed with a juice squeezer), and to sleep outdoors in a double sleeping bag, residing in a friend's backyard for $3.75 a week. The central problem in life, said Ahbez, is "not so much what you want. It's keeping away from the things you don't want."

Moving ahead to 1962 in the Midwest, I pondered what I ought to do in response to the unexpected gifts from Ahbez. At the very least, I was determined to thank him—but how should I
do that? As an aspiring artist, I decid­
ed I would thank him by painting his
portrait—in oil paints on canvas
board—applying knowledge I had
 gained from Jon Gnagy's *Learn to Draw*
instructional kit and countless paint-
by-number sets! So that's exactly what
I did. I don’t have a photo of the
result, but I recall it was rendered
entirely in burnt umber, a brown that
I must have selected because (get
this!) I wanted Nature Boy to look
natural. It portrayed him sitting on a
rock, rather small, in the center of the
canvas board, beneath a tree, as if on
Eden's Island. (Looking back of course,
what a terribly amateur effort it was.)

It must have taken me awhile to
paint it, because I didn’t send it to him
until the fall of 1963, which means it
was almost coincident with the assas­
sination of John F. Kennedy. Ahbez
was 55 at the time, and living in La
Crescenta, California. Whatever the
circumstances, he had recently lost his
wife.

On February 24, 1964, he sent me a
typewritten letter in which he talked
about the significance of my painting in
relation to his wife’s death. My por­
trait of him, wrote Ahbez, “has a
beautiful conception and a warmth of
composition, earthy and ethereal and
monumental.” Not one to hold onto
possessions, he nevertheless regarded
my painting as “one of my few person­
al treasures,” along with a large pho­
tograph of Anna. “These two pic­
tures,” he continued, “I keep side by
side, [because] there is a beautiful
relation between them.”

The letter closed with these memo­
rable words: “I have so many things
on my mind and so many things to do
that it is hard for me to concentrate
on letter writing but what I have said
is real and true. When I was a small
boy I had a vision of myself sitting
under a great tree, filled with peace

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ANON
—My uncle has a
glass eye.
—Oh, really. Did
he tell you that?
—No, it just
came out in con­
versation.

STEPHEN
LEACOCK
(*Literary Lapses*)
Get your room
full of good air,
then shut up the
windows and
keep it. It will
keep for years.
Anyway, don’t
keep using your
lungs all the
time. Let them
rest.

SAMUEL
GOLDWYN
We're overpay­
ing him but he's
worth it.
and Divine Happiness. Your painting holds a special meaning for me. Your friend, eden ahbez.”

I never heard from Ahbez again, nor did I write to him. Nearly forty years have passed, and I only recently thought of him when Nature Boy resurfaced on the soundtrack of the film Moulin Rouge. Searching the internet, I discovered that he had recorded another album in the 1990s, titled Echoes from Nature Boy, and that, as recently as 1995, at the age of 87, he had died in California when struck by a car.

As a way of summing up his life, Ahbez remembered an incident in the 1930s or 40s, when he was challenged on the street by a cop, who suspected that Ahbez was totally nuts. “I look crazy,” the songwriter explained calmly, “but I’m not. And the funny thing is, that other people don’t look crazy, and they are.” The cop paused, thought it over and said, “You know, bud, you’re right. If anyone ever gives you any trouble, just let me know.”

POSTSCRIPT: It appears that I was not alone in “connecting the dots” between Nature Boy and Serutan. In August 1948, Los Angeles radio personality Jim Hawthorne released a Columbia LP titled Serutan Yob [Nature Boy spelled backwards]: A Song for Backward Boys and Girls Under 40, described as a hillbilly parody of Ahbez’s Nature Boy. For more on Hawthorne, see the website <http://members.tripod.com/~pagehogan.html>. For more on Ahbez (including photographs and music samples), see <http://www.shadowboxstudio.com/edenahbez.htm> and <http://www.spaceagepop.com/ahbez.htm>.

CHARLES BRAGG
Nature abhors a vacuum cleaner salesman.
MARK TWAIN
(Life on the Mississippi) When I was born, St. Paul had a population of three persons, Minneapolis had just a third as many. The then population of Minneapolis died two years ago; and when he died he had seen himself undergo an increase, in forty years, of fifty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine persons. He had a frog's fertility.

WILLIAM LAMB
MELBOURNE
While I cannot be regarded as a pillar, I must be regarded as a buttress of the church, because I support it from the outside.

PADDY CHAYEVSKY
Television is democracy at its ugliest.

RODNEY DANGERFIELD
If it weren’t for pickpockets I’d have no sex life at all.

MONIKA MARON
The artist as a citizen can be a democrat, just as well and as badly as everybody else. The artist as an artist may not be a democrat.
STEPHEN LEACOCK
(Literary Lapses)
The landlady of a boarding house is a parallelogram—that is, an oblong angular figure, which cannot be described, but which is equal to anything.

OSBERT LANCASTER
[A certain architectural device] belongs to the "Last-supper-carved-on-a-peach-stone" class of masterpiece.

Felicity Ashbee, Janet Ashbee: Love, Marriage, and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8156-0731-8. The British designer Charles Robert Ashbee (usually known as C.R. Ashbee or, among his contemporaries, as CRA) (1863-1942) was an inheritor of the Arts and Crafts tradition of William Morris. He was a literal inheritor in the sense that, after Morris' death, it was Ashbee and his newly-formed Essex House Press that purchased the equipment from Kelmscott Press. In 1888, inspired by Morris, he had founded the Guild of Handicraft and School of Handicraft (woodwork, metalwork, and decorative painting) at London's Toynbee Hall, a colony admired by Chicago social worker Jane Addams, who returned from a visit to Europe to start Hull House. Lecturing in the U.S. in 1900, Ashbee was a guest at Hull House, where he met and befriended by Frank Lloyd Wright (for whom he wrote the foreword in 1911 for an important German portfolio of Wright's architecture). As this book explains, traveling with him on that trip were the two Mrs. Ashbees: His youngish, bitchy mother (called "Little Mother"), to whom he was abnormally tied; and his "comrade-wife," as he called her (14 years younger), Janet (nee Forbes) Ashbee, whom he had wed in 1898 but with whom he had yet to consummate the marriage. As this book explains, at times in honest, bleak detail, Ashbee was a prominent homosexual, as everyone seems to have known but his bride. In fact, it was only nine years later, a dozen years after their wedding, having returned from their second visit to the U.S., that they began sleeping together, which eventually led to four daughters. All this is news-sort of. It's been there for all to find, since, throughout their marriage, CRA and Janet kept a collaborative journal, in which each wrote entries in the same daily diary; they exchanged letters between themselves and with a number of close friends; Janet kept a private diary, the ninth and last volume of which records the events that eventually led to her breakdown and recovery; and, last but most revealing, Janet wrote a thinly disguised autobiographical novel (in which only the names are fictional), portions of which are printed here for the first time. Researched and skillfully written by the second of the Ashbees' four daughters (now 88 years old), this is a candid, backstage look at the challenges faced and surmounted by her heroic Victorian mother, as she grew to accept the reality of a jolly Art "practical" marriage.

COGITO ERGO DIM SUM: Therefore I think these are pork buns.

The mother isn't born that could outgrabe me.
JOHN GUNTER
(Inside Asia) [A New Yorker who was visiting Vermont] said, “There are so many rocks here. Where did they come from? Do you grow rocks in Vermont?” The Vermont farmer replied, “The rocks were brought here by the great glacier.” The New Yorker said, “What became of the glacier?” The Vermonter said, “It went back to get more rocks.”

JAMES THURBER
(The Thurber Album) [In Ohio] the words “Mary” and “marry” are pronounced the same as “merry,” and there too, Gudda is spoken (“Where’s he gudda go? What’s he gudda do?”), which results from a partial immobility of the lips in speaking.

HENRY MOORE
(Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations) [Before getting married] I had argued with all my friends that really artists shouldn’t get married, they should be married to their art. After all Michelangelo wasn’t married, Beethoven wasn’t married and so on, all the examples of really good artists who weren’t married; but after meeting Irina [his future wife], I began to say Rembrandt was married, Bach had twenty children and so on. All this attitude changed, and within six months we were married.

RUDOLF ARNHEIM
(Parables of Sun Light) Older people talking to each other would not have to say everything twice if our language had an opening signal like the British “I say,” or the Japanese “Anone” to alert the partner that something is about to be said. The oldsters often fail to understand something the first time it is said, not just because their hearing has gotten weaker but because they have become slower in tuning in on any appeal from the outside.
SAMUEL BUTLER (Notebooks)
The little Strangs say the "good words," as they call them, before
going to bed, aloud and at their
father’s knee, or rather in the pit of
his stomach. One of them was lately
heard to say "Forgive us our Christ-
masses, as we forgive them that
Christmas against us."

ANITA BROOKER (Hotel du Lac)
In real life, of course, it is the hare
who wins. Every time. Look around
you. And in any case it is my con-
tention that Aesop was writing for
the tortoise market...Hares have no
time to read. They are too busy win-
ning the game.

50 minutes. Available from First Run / Icarus Films, 32 Court Street, 21st
Floor, Brooklyn NY 11201. Website: <http://www.ifri.com>. Among the
most admired (and imitated) of American filmmakers is John Cassavettes,
who was born in New York City in 1929, and died in 1989, at age 59, of cir-
rhosis of the liver. His equally admired wife, the actress Gena Rowlands,
who often appeared in his movies, once said of him: “As an artist I love him.
As a husband I hate him.” This documentary, which was produced for a
French television series titled Cinema of Our Time, consists of two clusters of
footage, the first filmed in Hollywood in 1965, the second three years
later in Paris. As the film begins, Cassavettes is 36 years old and has recently
received the Critics Award at the Venice Film Festival for Shadows (1961),
his film about a love affair between a white boy and a black girl. Partly script-
ed, partly improvised, it was filmed in 16mm for a total cost of $40,000.
That success enabled him to make two Hollywood-funded films, both disas-
ters. In the first half of this interesting video, he talks a lot—at a pace that
appears to be manic—about artistic improvisation, the Incompatibility of
integrity and money-making, and the pros and cons of independent filmmak-
ing. Three years later, he is interviewed in Paris, with Rowlands sitting on
the side (watch her expressions), on his way to the Venice premiere of Faces
(1968), a film about marital breakdown. This time Cassavettes is somber,
perhaps depressed, and far more introspective. In his remaining years, he
would direct seven other films, of which the finest two may be Husbands
(1970) and A Woman Under the Influence (1974). He was also a Hollywood
actor, appearing in The Killers, The Dirty Dozen, Rosemary’s Baby, and others.
This documentary has a certain rawness to it and, like Cassavettes’ own
films, is not always pleasant nor easy to watch. In the end it comes off as a
very brief view of a determinedly gifted but unstable man for whom all or
most of life was blurred, abrupt, and ill-defined.

OGDEN NASH
If you get a call
from a panther,
Don’t anther.

ANON
German for
"Do you have
gloves?:" Gott
mit uns?

A farmer once called his cow Zephyr,
She seemed such an amiable hephyr.
But when he drew near
She bit off his ear,
Which made him considerably
derphyr.

The American painter and printmaker Nathan Oliviera was born in 1928 of Portuguese ancestry in Oakland, California, the Bay Area city in which Gertrude Stein grew up, and of which she once remarked, "When you get there, there isn't any there there." This is a full-color, 240-page catalog for a retrospective of his work, which opened in February 2002 at the San Jose Museum of Art, and will travel throughout 2003 to other museums in New York, California, and Washington. Inadvertently, it is also an off-hand reminder of the legacy of ceramic artist Peter Voulkos, who was a classmate of Oliviera at the California College of Arts and Crafts, and who died only recently. Influenced by Abstract Expressionism, it was Voulkos who brought expressionist gesture (or Action Painting) into ceramics; while Oliviera, along with other painters like Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff, and Paul Wonner, carried it into figure painting. Among the most interesting parts in this book is Oliviera's memory of the summer of 1950, which he spent at Mills College as a student of German painter Max Beckmann. The larger portion of the text is devoted to Oliviera's paintings, the smaller to lithographs, monotypes, and sculptures; while other sections include a chronology, exhibition list, and bibliography. Seeing so much of his work at once, it is apparent why people may argue that his finest pieces were made in late 50s and early 60s, the years in which his work premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Guggenheim Museum. Equally breathtaking, however, are the watercolor, charcoal, and wash drawing nudes produced in 1989, and again at the end of the 90s, when he was 70 years old. When Oliviera is genuinely spontaneous, the resulting ambiguous images have, as Rainer Maria Rilke said of Rodin's figure drawings, the "immediacy, force and warmth" of life, with "an almost animal quality."

HENRY MOORE [While studying painting at the Royal College of Art in 1921-24, among his teachers was a Professor of Architecture named Beresford Pite, who one day] arrived in front of my painting and for several minutes spotlighted his violent dislike of it. "This student," he said, "has been feeding on garbage." That Friday afternoon I could not work, but wandered around Hyde Park to work off my hurt feelings. I almost decided I would leave the college and study on my own.

HARRIET MARTINEAU (Society in America) A Sunday school teacher asked a child, "In what state were mankind left after the fall?" [And the child answered] "In the state of Vermont."
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GYPSY ROSE LEE
God is love—but get it in writing.

ALAN BLINDER
If you try to give an on-the-one-hand-or-the-other-hand answer, only one of the hands tends to get quoted.

ELAINE DUNDY
(The Dud Avocado)
I mean, the question actors most often get asked is how they can bear saying the same things over and over again night after night, but God knows the answer to that is, don't we all anyway; might as well get paid for it.

ANON
—Sorry about my dancing. I'm a little stiff from badminton.
—I don't care where you're from. You'll never dance with me again!