

under the pseudonym Jean Jacques Ferrat; yes, those few and no doubt others that will be sniffed out by fans and academicians prone to the picking of nits. But...

No doubt about it: this is the indispensable sf reference work. Exhaustive, accurate, scintillatingly written, and cross-indexed so clearly it will supersede all previous volumes of its kind. It is a terminological and historical wonder; but nothing less could be expected from Nicholls, the guiding intelligence behind England's *Foundation* magazine, and Clute, probably the finest sf critic alive today. An extravaganza of invaluable information. It is to stand in awe at its excellence. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

But then, you figured that out for yourself, right?

King of Bebop

What more apt title than *to Be or not... to Bop* (Doubleday, \$14.95) for the memoirs of John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie? Here is a man whose history is largely the history of bebop (he is credited with coining the onomatopoeic word suggestive of the staccato phrasing often found in the "new" music), whose cascading eighth notes and rhythmic inventions propelled jazz from the Armstrong era to the Coltrane era and whose work with Charlie Parker, Kenny Clarke, Thelonius Monk and others defined both a musical era and a cultural phenomenon.

The book moves swiftly through his pugnacious younger years to his involvement in the bands of Cab Calloway, Earl Hines, and Billy Eckstine and finally to Gillespie's own remarkable career as trumpeter, bandleader, and composer. Diz and coauthor Al Fraser display a rare talent for developing an intimate portrait — when we're not on the bandstand, we're no further than the first table away.

The first person narrative is interspersed with reflections on Gillespie's accomplishments by musicians and relatives (where never is heard a discouraging word). The names alone are dazzling, a pantheon of jazz legends: Miles, Thelonius Monk, Kenny Clarke, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Max Roach, et al. Only once does the parade of names pause long enough for the reader to see the fairytale-like atmosphere of those magic times blown away, the pathos become palpable: Charlie Parker — altoist, genius, and heroin addict near death imploring "Save me, save me" to a helpless Diz.

A ladies' man ("like a bee... not stopping anywhere but always buzzing") with a tendency to be in the wrong place at the wrong time that makes Leon Spinks look blessed by the Fates, Gillespie did little to belie his nickname. Random knifings, hoax paternity suits, close calls with drugs, and tricks like slipping Benzedrine into bandmembers' drinks managed to keep life interesting.

Cognizant of his own contributions to music ("If he's younger than me and playing trumpet, he's following in my footsteps"), cut by racism but never scarred, Gillespie remains at 62 a remarkable musician, teacher, and humanitarian. Some men grow old like coins, wearing away until only the outlines are visible, but Diz... "I hope to live to be about 160 so I can get some of that money back that I give these jive people for my social security." Berets off to this man and his book.

Terry Gloe

Baldwin: Bearing Witness

During the Fifties and early Sixties, James Baldwin stood among the nation's leading young writers, offering an articulate re-



LWATEL Lane

construction of black experience in America, and — as one critic put it — serving as "a kind of measuring rod for the nation's social conscience." With the rise of black nationalism throughout the mid-Sixties, Baldwin's preeminence as the voice of black American literature faltered considerably, giving way to younger, more outraged, and more conspicuously political spokespersons. In *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver gave his due to Baldwin's talent as a "personal" writer, but roundly criticized his fiction for a near-total lack of "political, economic, or even social reference." Of course, literary lights have shifted once again, and while Eldridge Cleaver has orchestrated one of the most public spiritual conversions in recent memory, James Baldwin has continued to write and speak, fulfilling his own designs to serve "not [as] a spokesman exactly, but as a public witness to the situation of black people."

The concept of "witnessing" is again key to Baldwin's latest novel, *Just Above My Head* (The Dial Press, \$12.95). This long work (nearly 600 pages) strives to follow the destinies and conditions of a half-dozen black men and women over a period of about thirty years. The story — an epic reminiscence in the first person — is propelled by the fate of one Arthur Montana, gospel singer, as he moves from the streets and churches of Harlem to Birmingham in the Sixties ("If there was one righteous man here he had to be in an asylum"), to cosmopolitan stardom and a bad end in the restroom of a London pub. In the terms of the novel's pervading gospel imagery, Arthur's journey is a long one and the road is not smooth: friends and family variously succumb to (or survive) the perils of incest, heroin, madness, murder, and a state of constant anger and pain that Baldwin submits as being the standard of Black life in America.

In some sense, Baldwin has come full-circle as a novelist. The black church, its music, homosexuality, and the crucial though often deadly relations between parent and child have all been themes central to his fiction since *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *Another Country* (1962). But whereas the earlier work revealed youthful characters who were about to embark upon the dangerous trek into a world beyond the ghetto, *Just Above My Head* is the chronicle of a man who has already made that journey and has returned with the judgement that things are even worse than he had suspected. The tenor of this entire novel might best be summed up by a description of the South as seen by the teenaged Arthur Montana and his quartet, the Trumpets of Zion. "Here" writes Baldwin, "they are confronted by the devastating reality of their youth. Here they begin to suspect, for the first time, that the world has no mercy and they have no weapons. They have only each other, and may, soon, no longer have that." Given such

discoveries, there is little wonder that the most heartfelt singing can produce no joyful noise.

Fred Setterberg

Slow Train Going

Paul Theroux has his own approach to travel writing. Getting there isn't just half the fun; it's all of it. *The Old Patagonian Express*, subtitled *By Train Through the Americas* (Houghton Mifflin, \$11.95), is the follow-up to *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), his first and best book about long, exotic train trips. By coincidence, I read *Bazaar* and loved it enough to buy several copies for friends. Alas, this will not be the case with *Old Patagonian*.

The premise was the same in both books — that he boarded his local commuter train and just kept going, but it's less wonderful the second time around. Theroux boards the train in Boston, his childhood home, in the teeth of the most vicious winter, and heads south — way south: Patagonia by way of all the Americas. The America he leaves is icy and bleak. The Americas he encounters are largely hot, stark and poor. There are few exceptions. The journey is nasty, brutish and long. It is possible that the listlessness of his surroundings made Theroux more introspective and querulous. The exuberance in *Bazaar* was real. Here, on the few occasions when it surfaces, it feels forced. Considering it was his idea to make the trip in the first place, he is palpably homesick a good deal of the time. The further he gorges into the single-tracked wastes, the more domestic his imagery — hills "like failed souffles" and deserts "like kitty-litter."

The book's 22 chapters take their names from the trains he rode — the Aztec Eagle, the Balboa Bullet and such. The train was often the poor people's transport, busses and planes being preferred by those with a choice. Scenery is dutifully described, although he sleeps through some of the best, he says. The characters aren't special, which is bad luck as much as anything else. This is less a book of scenery and characters than one of sheer observation, rumination and philosophy about Theroux's two chief interests — travel and writing. We hear all about the books he's taken with him, so Twain, Conrad and Boswell are strewn amongst the cactus, played off against the responsibly gathered snippets of historic, socio-political and economic data about the places passed through. He's done his homework. There is emphasis on the Catholic church. Theroux was raised Catholic and finds much to say about the architecture and practice in the solidly Catholic territories he traverses.

There is a solitude/loneliness on this expedition that seemed not to plague the Theroux who wrote *Bazaar*. Although the worst that befalls him is rats in his room, altitude quease and a gashed hand, he admits to the fear of death so far from home. And that rings true. Theroux does succeed in making us feel what he feels and see what he sees. He is strong on physical detail. What disappoints is the way this good writer is, here, too self-consciously a writer. The stuff is workmanlike, fastidious, but not flowing.

He coyly makes the point, too early and then far too often, that this weird trip started out on the Boston commuter train. He even uses it as his closing sentence, by which time it is blanching of all irony; there's no punch left in the line. Read *The Great Railway Bazaar* instead. It's terrific.

Shelley Turner

The Beats Go On

It's hard to know what Jack Kerouac would have thought of this party held in his honor on October 21st. There we were at the Old Spaghetti Factory in San Francisco's North Beach, a hangout of the "beatific generation" Kerouac rendered so brilliantly twenty years before. Only now there were streamers in the doorways, and video crews, and a three-piece combo playing "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "Our Love Is Here to Stay." In fact, it looked like one of those scenes Kerouac assiduously avoided.

The date was the tenth anniversary of Kerouac's death, but the real purpose of the gathering was to publicize *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* by Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee which has just been published in paperback, joining several other biographies and some half-dozen critical studies and a soon-to-be-released film which have emerged about this most elusive of authors. Those who knew him well were there — longtime friend Victor Wong, poet/critic Kenneth Rexroth, and Carolyn Cassady, whose book *HeartBeat* records the tempestuous ménage she lived with both Kerouac and her husband, Neal Cassady. Carolyn Cassady told me how *HeartBeat*'s first draft of 863 pages was eventually whittled down by the editors to 92 pages and she feared even more would be cut from the upcoming film version "because they think it's been done before. That's the tragedy," she said, "they think they have the whole story; they only have a part, and they don't even know what that part means."

Still, authors Gifford and Lee were on hand to sign books, and they showed the Robert Frank film *Pull My Daisy* which Kerouac narrated, and everyone had a good time. Kerouac's daughter, Jan, came closest to summing up everyone's feelings when she told how she learned of her father's death: "I was up in Little River, and one day this friend of mine came running down to the cabin, she'd heard about it on the radio. She said to me 'Your father's dead' and then she looked at me with this really expectant expression, like she was waiting to see what I'd do. Finally, I said 'Oh, wow — gee — that's too bad' because I'd only met him twice in my life, you know? But I like to think I know him — in spirit, at least — through his books. I think we all feel like that."

Mark Bacich