

KIRKUS REVIEWS

Mailer, Norman
PORTRAIT OF PICASSO
AS A YOUNG MAN
Atlantic Monthly (448 pp.)
\$35.00
Oct. 1995
ISBN: 0-87113-608-2

A puzzling and unconventional excursion into art history by an unexpected author. In an unusual change of pace after *Oswald's Tale* (p. 363), Mailer sets out to make the legendary Picasso "real." In an admittedly personal interpretation of his life, psyche, and art, Mailer focuses on the artist's early years. Presumably, he feels that Picasso's greatest achievements as a painter came out of the period from the turn of the century to the end of WW I. It is also one of the most seductive periods in French cultural history and the era of his involvement with Fernande Olivier, who emerges as the heroine of Mailer's tale. We witness the events of Picasso's early career primarily through the eyes of this jilted lover whose two memoirs are quoted from extensively. Mailer lavishes an unseemly amount of attention on Olivier, subjecting us to the lurid details of her coming of age, brutal marriage, and sexual awakening. She functions, too, as a masturbatory diversion (of which there are many here) for the author: "With Fernande, he [Picasso] had entered the essential ambiguity of deep sex, where one's masculinity or femininity is forever turning into its opposite, so that a phallus, once implanted in a vagina, can become more aware of the vagina than its own phallitude. . . ." While Mailer admits—correctly—that he makes no contributions to the already vast Picasso scholarship, the author does offer a number of peculiar and unconvincing explanations for shifts in the aesthetic direction of Picasso's work. What "altered the ground of cubism altogether," for example, and led Picasso to "never feel respect for himself again" was an incident in which he and Guillaume Apollinaire were wrongly implicated in a plot to steal the Mona Lisa from the Louvre.

Mailer's biography, following in the footsteps of Arianna Huffington's notorious *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer*, a work Mailer unabashedly admires, emphasizes gossip and sex and leaves you wondering, "So what?" (First printing of 100,000; \$100,000 ad/promo; author tour)

rocco, the Himalayas and his home country, compiling some well-told if disconnected anecdotes. In Malaysia, he fights an epic battle of "face" with a hotel proprietor; hitchhiking through the Mojave desert, he's picked up by a madly proud Marine; lounging in a Costa Brava village, he's embroiled in a world of expat Brits. Occasionally, Pfister's travels lead to insights, as when he observes of a cafe tableau that "If Greece is anything it is theater" or belatedly recognizes, after negotiating a stream of hustlers in Morocco, that his final guide was a genuine friend. But Pfister tells us too little about himself (Who is he?) and the cumulative meaning of his journeys to elevate this book to a memorable traveler's tale. (Nov.)

THE NEW AMERICAN CIRCUS

Ernst Albrecht. Univ. of Florida, \$29.95 (280p) ISBN 0-8130-1364-X
In a plodding academic study, Albrecht, who teaches English at Middlesex County College in New Jersey, tells the story of four modern circuses that evolved after the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus abandoned the big top in 1956. They are the Pickle Family Circus in San Francisco, the Big Apple Circus in New York City, Cirque du Soleil in Montreal and Circus Flora in St. Louis. Each offers one-ring productions in the European style, and each operates from a different home base. Albrecht maintains that, combining elements of the counterculture of the 1960s like street performances with those of legitimate theater and dance, these four represent a new brand of circus. Describing their histories, he summarizes the trials brought by economic crises, battles with animal-rights activists and the founding of circus schools, no longer a rarity in the U.S. While Albrecht distinguishes the "alternative circus" from its ancestors, the presence of trapeze artists, jugglers and clowns suggests that it's the same old material wrapped in new diction. Photos. (Nov.)

☆ PORTRAIT OF PICASSO AS A YOUNG MAN

Norman Mailer. Grove/Atlantic, \$35 (448p) ISBN 0-87113-608-2
Although Mailer relies heavily on previous Picasso biographies and memoirs, from which he quotes extensively, this inspired, lavishly illustrated biography offers an uncanny psychological portrait of Picasso's inner development as man and artist. Commenting on 250 black-and-white and 55 color reproductions woven throughout the text, the prolific

author presents Picasso as a painter who was wholly derivative until his Blue Period, and who then harnessed his inner terror, his dread of mental and physical destruction, as a stimulus to his work. Mailer considers Cubism, and Picasso's related discoveries between 1907 and 1917, as his creative peak from which he would beat a retreat by the late 1920s. This elegantly written portrait, which makes Picasso's erotic drawings and paintings an integral part of the story, mines shrewd insights, wild psychosexual speculations, anecdotes and telling incidents. The narrative, which closes on the eve of WW I, pays special attention to Picasso's relationships with his mistress, Fernande Olivier (whose untranslated memoirs, written in her 70s, Mailer excerpts in chunks); and with Gertrude Stein, Guillaume Apollinaire and Picasso's sexually impotent friend, aesthete Carou Cassagnes, who committed suicide in 1901, deflected over unrequited love for a model. (Oct.)

MICROSOFT SECRETS: How the World's Most Powerful Software Company Creates Technology, Shapes Markets, and Manages People

Michael A. Cusumano and Richard W. Selby. Free Press, \$28 (416p) ISBN 0-02-874048-3
The authors of this surprisingly candid report interviewed 38 Microsoft employees, including chairman and CEO Bill Gates, other top executives, middle managers and software developers, and they were also given access to internal documents and project data. They provide a detailed look at how the software giant develops new products, competes and strives to improve its operations. Seven key strategies central to Microsoft's approach are identified, among them: continually improve products incrementally, with direct input from customers during the development process; organize small teams of overlapping specialists who formally share tasks; aggressively target emerging mass markets. Microsoft has retained much of its loosely structured, small-team culture, and this study helps to explain how the company is able to do so while designing and manufacturing tremendously complicated products. Although some chapters are targeted to people familiar with personal computer software, this pragmatic handbook provides instructive lessons for firms and managers in many industries. Cusumano teaches management of technology at MIT; Selby teaches information and computer science at UC-Irvine. Author tour. (Oct.)

BARRY GOLDWATER

Robert Alan Goldberg. Yale Univ., \$27.50 ISBN 0-300-06261-3
Former Arizona Republican senator Barry Goldwater, a leader of the extreme conservative movement in the 1960s and '70s, has recently attacked the religious right while championing abortion rights and advocating federal legislation to protect homosexuals against job bias. Many liberals have welcomed Goldwater into their fold, but the author, himself a liberal and a history professor at the University of Utah, points out that Goldwater's bedrock conservative principles emphasizing personal freedom underlie his latest stances. A longtime advocate of limited government and individual responsibility, Goldwater still urges a federal withdrawal from social programs, opposes gun control and believes that women should leave the workplace and return home to raise their children. This balanced, solid biography, written with Goldwater's cooperation (but unauthorized), traces his rugged individualism to his Western frontier roots, to his formative experiences in the Depression and as a gutsy cargo pilot in WW II and to his Jewish immigrant grandfather, Michel Goldwasser, self-made entrepreneur and refugee from Russian Poland. The author details Goldwater's behind-the-scenes role in supporting President Reagan's anti-communist crusade in Nicaragua and his overhaul of the U.S. military chain of command through major legislation in 1986. Photos. (Oct.)
FVI: For a different take on the Arizona senator's support of certain liberal causes, see Barry Goldwater, by Les Edwards, reviewed in *Forecast*, June 5.

☆ ROBERT GRAVES:

Life on the Edge
Miranda Seymour Holt, \$35 (384p) ISBN 0-8050-3055-7
Robert Graves (1895-1985), egocentric, obstreperous novelist, poet, critic and scholar of classical myth (*The White Goddess*), mythologized his own life, according to this intimate biography. Shell-shocked in WW I, Graves, enmeshed in homosexual circles, abruptly married strong-minded feminist Nancy Nicholson but abandoned her and their four children for charismatic American poet Laura Riding, leaving England and settling with her in Mallorca in 1930. Graves endorsed Riding's megalomaniacal belief in her supernatural powers, idealizing her as a savior and prophet of world peace, and as his muse, embodiment of the all-powerful ancient Goddess worshipped in matriarchal societies. But when Riding

is the theme of "How Mr. Dewey Decimal Saved My Life," which is based on her address at the ALA Annual Convention in New Orleans in 1993. Kingsolver also writes with great verve, honesty, and humor about motherhood, housework, fashion, sports, and travel to Africa, Hawaii, and the Canary Islands. —Donna Seaman

Kunhardt, Philip B. and others. P. T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman. Sept. 1995. 368p. index. illus. Knopf, \$45 (0-679-43574-3). DDC: 338.7. YA

The Discovery Channel will air a TV documentary on Barnum in October, perhaps causing a boomlet in demand for the book, which, however, is readable enough and—with 525 illustrations, largely of the freaks and wonders Barnum famously exhibited—certainly visual enough to grab plenty of perusers all by itself. It tells the story of the greatest American figure in the history of show business (a term he may have coined). He started as a hoaxer, palming off an aged black woman as the 160-year-old former nurse of Infant George Washington. The reputation for falsehood he acquired when this ruse was exposed stuck to him for the rest of his life but didn't slow him down at all. Indeed, perhaps the most impressive thing about Barnum was his boundless personal optimism, his faith that he could turn any setback into a means to greater success. The Kunhardts portray him proceeding from success to success, losing fortunes and houses occasionally, and ending up running his most famous venture, the circus-cum-freak-show he called and that is still known as the Greatest Show on Earth. They reveal, too, that although he pandered to the prejudices of his time, he was no callous huckster, but rather something of a velvet-gloved exploiter. —Ray Olson

Mailer, Norman. Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man. Oct. 1995. 448p. index. illus. Atlantic Monthly; dist. by Publisher's Group West, \$35 (0-87113-608-2). DDC: 759.4.

Following hard on the heels of *Oswald's Tale* [BKJ Ap 1 95], this "personal interpretation" of the first third of Picasso's life finds Mailer in fine fettle, pleased as can be to complete a project he began but put aside some 30 years ago. It makes perfect sense that Mailer would identify so strongly and intuitively with Picasso: they share many traits, in terms of talent and personality. In fact, Mailer feels so connected to Picasso, he offers all kinds of daring theories about the sources of his revolutionary aesthetic and high-handed life. Freely admitting that he conducted no "original scholarship," Mailer makes liberal use of the work of his many predecessors, even, in the case of John Richardson, who's working on a magisterial multivolume biography of the artist, offering strong criticism of their analysis. His favorite source is not a scholar, but rather Fernande Olivier, with whom Picasso had his first serious relationship. Fernande's memoirs haven't yet been published in English, but Mailer quotes her at length, and these passages make for revelatory and intriguing reading. As his fascination with Fernande suggests, Mailer's main avenue of interpretation of Picasso's genius is a sexual one, and he has some striking things to say about Picasso's obsession with carnality and the awesome power of women. —Donna Seaman

NICHOLAS PILEGGI

with former best friend Tony "the Art" Spilotro, who supplied the muscle brains. With nonfiction page-turners like the kind Pileggi writes, what fiction? Expect heavy demand with the simultaneous release of *Casino* the movie, again directed by Scorsese and starring Robert DeNiro, J. Sharon Stone. —Mary Frances Wilkens

Massie, Robert K. The Romanovs: The Final Chapter. 352p. index. illus. Random, \$25 (0-394-58048-6). DDC: 94.4.

When Robert Massie wrote *Nicholas and Alexandra* he never had dreamt that, in his lifetime, there would be the many questions surrounding the deaths of the tsar and the fall of the Soviet government and the help of modern technology, such as DNA matching, that finally made it possible to be written. Unfortunately, as with so many other of the unresolved questions holds more fascinations than the definitive answers. Not that there isn't news here. Massie answers several big questions: how the Romanovs died and how their bodies were eventually found; whether the woman known as Anna Anderson was in fact the duchess Anastasia, youngest daughter of the czar; a series of pretenders, would inherit the throne if the tsar decided to restore the monarchy. The discussion of particularly arcane, full of the knotted strings of 1917 only the most dedicated royalist or an editor at large would want to untangle. More interesting is the trail of the earthed at Ekaterinburg and how, using blood samples from Philip of England (a cousin of the Romanovs) and DNA tests were finally made. Similar DNA tests were made that Anna Anderson was not Anastasia but was in fact a peasant. How she managed to pull off such a success for so many years is one mystery that remains unsolved. The book's regrettable dryness, the inquiring mind will ensure demand. —Ilene Cooper

The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life's Journey. Ed. Bennett. Oct. 1995. 608p. Simon & Schuster, \$30 (0-670-808-8).

Two years back, conservative gadfly William J. Bennett took over the publishing business when *The Book of Virtues* became the biggest best-seller of the 1990s. It was an anthology of stuff that parents supposedly quit reading to their children a half-century ago, stories and verses that had moral lessons, ironic, satiric, distanced, or otherwise modern. The book's success suggested that old virtues long reviled as hypocritical were back in style. It contained a second helping—this book. The contents have seven sections that loosely trace life's progress from "Hearth" on "Into the World" and learning when and where to be ("Standing Fast") and be generous and kind ("Past"), then becoming "Mothers and Fathers, Husbands and Wives," and finally "The End of the Journey."