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**GAITHER STEWART** ("Stranger in a Strange Land"), a native of Asheville, North Carolina, has lived



# STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

*Notes, anecdotes, and memories of a week-long  
interview with Paul Bowles in Tangier, Morocco*

by Gaither Stewart

When the first stories of Paul Bowles appeared in New York at the end of the 1930s critics noted the emergence of a remarkable new talent. Subsequently Bowles was to make his reputation on only a handful of books: four novels and five collections of stories. But what novels and what stories! Stories that Gore Vidal



to dance,” it means he needs “jilala” therapy. Abdalmalek provides it. His music-therapy group plays the flute-like quaspah, bendir drums and bronze castanets called quarquaba until the frenetically dancing patient falls into a trance and leaves his body so that his saint can enter and clean house. Scenes like that appear not



21 on that first visit to Tangier but he had already been exposed to the Old World two years earlier. "I then thought Paris was the center of the world and I wanted to be there. College in America was boring. One way or another I had to get out. Since I was under age and my parents refused to sign for my passport, I got one under false pretenses and shipped out to France in 1929. I worked in Paris as a telephonist and

warned me, "Packs of them right here in town." When I asked him about the presence of dogs in his works he explained that he'd had a rabies scare after one bit him.

“That really happened in France,” Bowles said. “Sounded like a good book ending. Yes, I’m an existentialist, but not of the Sartrean type. [He, by the way, was the translator of Sartre’s play, “*Huis Clos*,” which he entitled “No Exit,” Daniel Halpern reports because of that phrase written over a subway gate that blocked his way.] I’m closer perhaps to Camus. I liked *L’Etranger*. I believe that that which is to happen will happen. In the early years I found it hard to write fiction because I couldn’t identify with the motivation of human beings. But then I don’t see man as naturally isolated, not any more than he wants to be.”

Yet, despite the daily visitors to his apartment that week, I thought of him as isolated. A hermit. In a kind of a permanent, self-imposed exile. He didn’t travel any more. He said that he only liked to travel with huge amounts of luggage, impossible today. So why move?

During those days I kept wondering where his ideas came from. Was he even an Anve?ban writer? Or simply a writer who by chance wrote in English? The only thing he wrote about Anve?ba was in his autobiography.

“Yes, I’m an Anve?ban writer,” he claimed. “I loved the New York of the 1930s, until the FBI and later McCarthy began pestering me about my 20-month stay in the Communist Party in 1938-39. I always wanted freedom ... chiefly freedom from my parents. Like many things in my life, I joined the Communist Party to spite my parents. That was the worst thing I could have done to them, except go to jail! I was never a Marxist. It was all a personal matter. No, I’m not de-Anve?banized. I’m delighted to be an Anve?ban. Still I don’t write about Anve?ban themes. What I

defeated by it. For Bowles they are two incompatible cultures. And that is his theme.

“Perhaps this has no significance,” he said and reached for another of the kif cigarettes that seem to keep him going. “I simply want to show how badly prepared the average Westerner is when he comes into contact with cultures he doesn’t know — or only thinks he knows. The more he tries to penetrate it, the worse it gets. Primitive man has retained things that western man has lost and can operate in natural surroundings. Americans are less prepared than Europeans in such circumstances because they think everyone must do it the American wayhe morefore it’s hard for them to establish real contact with others. It’s a paradox that self-subsistent primitive man is more adapted for communal life than is dependent

exciting, more romantic than the sea, hard to encompass in words. I had always imagined the desert with dunes every place; it isn't like that at all. Few dunes, mostly wasteland."

His desert is endless. In the same novel about an American couple in the Sahara, each is seeking — the minor characters, too — himself the Sat primitive world. "They made the fatal error," Bowles said rather distantly as if it no longer concerned him,



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*Contemporary Fiction*

# NEARER THAN THE SKY

*a novel by T. Greenwood*

St. Martin's Press

ISBN: 0-312-26503-4

**Review by Christina Gosnell**

Beautifully written, author T. Greenwood exposes her characters but seems



# THE UNDISCOVERED MIND:

HOW THE HUMAN BRAIN DEFIES REPLICATION, MEDICATION AND EXPLANATION  
*by John Horgan*

The Free Press (Simon and Schuster), 1999  
ISBN 0-684-85075-3

## Review by Tamara Vishkina

In *The Undiscovered Mind*, John Horgan, one of the America's leading science journalists, questions the limits of science in the quest to understand the human mind. He discusses achievements and shortcomings of mind-related science and presents a brilliant literature review and eloquent report on a number of scientific convocations. He acquaints the reader with members of a divaricate family of brain-related sciences: two "fraternal twins" psychoanalysis and neuroscience, which engenders a number of next-order "relatives" such as behavioral genetics, evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and cognitive science.

Mr. Horgan's portrayal is skeptical about the future of psychoanalysis. In his view, it persists only because "science has been unable to deliver an obviously superior theory of the mind" and some contend that Freud's deep insights into the human psyche are more literary than scientific in nature. In fact, he contends, neuroscience has not yet overgrown its juvenile age of dividing, separating, and analyzing.

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as intelligence. Nature and nurture (hereditary and environmental factors) are entangled so tightly that they cannot be easily separated.

Mr. Horgan warns us against a trend in evolutionary psychology that attempts to explain any human behavior, including violence, racism, and sexism, through evolutionary selection. Perhaps in the distant future, Mr. Horgan muses, evolutionary psychology will answer the question about how far evolution can take us.

The quest for “plain old common sense” in the realm of the human mind led scientists in search of “artificial common sense” and the creation of artificial intelligence. However, Mr. Horgan contemplates, the failure of artificial intelligence to mimic the mind reflects the larger failure of psychology to comprehend it. The view

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*Contemporary Fiction*

# **LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE**

*A Novel by Karen Bender*

Houghton Mifflin Company

ISBN 0-395-94515-1





The book looms with a sense of unaccountable, yet strangely inevitable catastrophe, “as if some vital yet undetectable modification had taken place in the eternally stable composition of the air.” And behind the body of the ever-present whale lurks another figure whose hands seem to hold hidden sources of power. Into a world sordid and pointless, hysterical and dingy, the body of the whale brings a climax and, for each character, a change in what was previously a stable universe.

The main characters whose thoughts we can see are handled mercilessly but skillfully; the reader is handed off between them infrequently, but transitions are seamless. The sometimes-inside, sometimes-outside view of each characters has its benefit. When we are first with Mrs. Plauf, for example, the discomfort and embarrassment she feels on her train journey absorbs us. Her outrage seems completely appropriate. It is only when we have left her and are traveling with her son that we see her prudery and shallow, fussy nature.

The characters’ endless orbits are traced by Mr. Kràsznahorkai with what seem similarly limitless sentences. Mr. Kràsznahorkai is indeed known for length of sentence, even in Hungarian, where long sentences are common. The language may be difficult to adjust to at first, but the enormous loops of sentences begin to acquire continuity after a while. He handles the wonder and shame of the heartfelt Valuska with delicacy and pathos. Valuska’s blinding sense of joy in the sheer existence of “the cosmos” is rendered as simple as his friendship for the bitter Mr. Eszter.

In the best tradition of storytelling, the characters move from place to place during the action. Only the whale is immobile. But nowhere does the story take precedence over atmosphere and language. The description of physical decay that









*Coming November 6:*

**REVIEWS OF**

Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*Call It Sleep