

Busby Berkeley in front of one of his sets, 1938, from Los Angeles. Bottom, Audrey Hepburn adorns the Swedish periodical *Damernas Värld*, 1956.



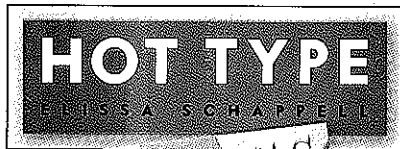
iddle English rusty? Think the Wife of Bath is a sex worker? Tired of pretending to get Chaucer's bawdy in-jokes? **Peter Ackroyd's** conversion of *The Canterbury Tales* (Viking), the classic, salaciously witty pilgrims-on-the-road poem, into Anglo-sexy prose is a romp for the ages.

UNLOCKING THE TRUTH

Why seven seas, seven deadly sins, seven ingredients in a Big Mac? **Jacqueline Leo**, plus one **Edward Burger**, unfolds the mysteries behind the power of *Seven* (Twelve). **Janine R. Wedel** throws light on how power brokering by *The Shadow Elite* (Basic Books) undermines our government and democracy itself. **Nicholas Haslam** possesses many *Redeeming Features* (Knopf). **Seith Rogovoy** testifies that Jewish texts and prophetic tradition—not born-again Christianity—influenced *Bob Dylan* (Scribner). Pioneering cartoonist-reporter **Joe Sacco's** *Footnotes in Gaza* (Metropolitan) exhumes the past, turning up new truths in this irremediable war.

Construct "Bookhenge"? Substitute them

for sandbags? **Bruce McCall** proffers *50 Things to Do with a Book* (It Books). **Hannah Pakula** acquaints us with the remarkable Madame Chiang Kai-shek, *The Last Empress* (Simon & Schuster), who helped haul China into the modern age. Romanians rise from the grave of Communism in **Sheilah Kast** and **Jim Rosapepe's** *Dracula Is Dead* (Bancroft). **Caroline Fraser** beholds the conservation movement's revolutionary crusade to avert the global crisis of extinction by *Rewilding the World* (Metropolitan). **Kevin Starr** and **David L. Ulin** ogle *Los Angeles, Portrait of a City* (Taschen). Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole, Richard Harris, and Oliver Reed are anointed Hollywood's original *Hellraisers* (Thomas Dunne) by **Robert Sellers**. Gifted with Brobdingnagian talent—and hammered on power—these gods of excess got away with it all, including O'Toole's pummeling a cop and Reed's liquoring up the cast of *Oliver!* In Burton's words, "God put me on this earth to raise hell."

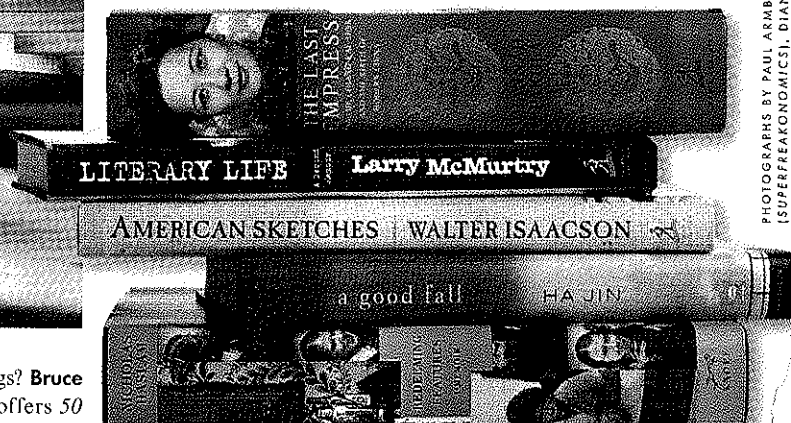


SHORTLY, BUT FONDLY

Larry McMurtry has more to say about his literary life (Simon & Schuster). Kamala D. Harris gets *Smart on Crime* (Chronicle). Joann Davis prays in *The Book of the Shepherd* (HarpeStudio). Robert Kahn and Mark Strand edit *City Secrets: Books* (Fang & Duff/Kahn). Walter Isaacson composes *American Sketches* (Simon & Schuster). Paul Goldberger points out *Why Architecture Matters* (Yale). Ha Jin's stories take *A Good Fall* (Pantheon). Gretchen Rubin devotes herself to *The Happiness Project* (Harper). Anne C. Heller respects Ayn Rand (Nan A. Talese). Scott Brizel translates *Audrey Hepburn* (Chronicle). Bridie Clark presents *The Overnight Socialite* (Weinstein). V.F. contributing editor Richard Rushfield jokes *Don't Follow Me, I'm Lost* (Gotham).

Freak Chic

Some will buy economist **Steven D. Levitt** and journalist **Stephen J. Dubner's** sequel, *Superfreakonomics* (Morrow), because of the real-world incentive in learning how a simple sex change can launch a woman into a higher tax bracket. Or for humanists: How deep do the roots of altruism and apathy truly go? Others may assume it's a money-management primer by the late Rick James. See, there's a little freak in all of us. —E.S.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL ARMBRUSTER (SUPERFREAKONOMICS), DIANE FIELDS (BOOK STACK), JOHN MANNO (INDIVIDUAL BOOKS)

Five Better-than-Sweater Gift Suggestions

- Josh Neufeld's** account of Katrina, A.D.: *New Orleans After the Deluge* (Pantheon), rises to greatness in the new genre of comics with a conscience.
- Colum McCann's** epic *Let the Great World Spin* (Random House) evokes the summer of 1974, when a Frenchman on a tightrope united New Yorkers.
- Lorrie Moore's** post-9/11 bildungsroman, *A Gate at the Stairs* (Knopf), is a richly imagined, wit-snapping tour de force.
- Ever political, and scarily prescient, **Margaret Atwood** envisions dystopian civilizations forged in the wake of an environmental apocalypse in *The Year of the Flood* (Nan A. Talese).
- Tracy Kidder's** inspirational *Strength in What Remains* (Random House) chronicles the true-life struggles of a young Burundian man who flees civil war for uncertainty in America. —E.S.