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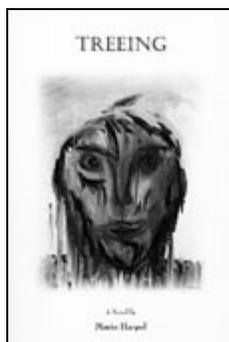
What Books Can Do

By Claudia Ebeling

New and veteran members of the English faculty lead a list of authors whose recent works tap into the American psyche. Both Robert Rosenberg, assistant professor, and John Wheatcroft, professor emeritus and former director of the Stadler Center for Poetry, explore the impact of global experience on the individual and, conversely, the significance of the individual in the global scheme.

The protagonist of Rosenberg's acclaimed debut novel, *This Is Not Civilization* (Houghton Mifflin), is attracted to purposeful social service after college. He abruptly leaves his first post at an Apache reservation, feeling ineffectual, and accepts a Peace Corps assignment in Kyrgyzstan just after it has been set adrift by the collapse of the Soviet Union. He is likewise challenged to identify his effect there, but his legacy catches up with him a few years later in Istanbul, where characters out of his past converge on his new life.

From the hilariously unforgettable first line through the dramatic climax, *This Is Not Civilization* rips along, moving seamlessly between comic and harsh realities. Cultural identity, clashing mores, and ambivalent relationships with family and homelands are recurring themes. Rosenberg, whose own volunteering career put him in the places he describes so vividly, has created fully realized characters and settings that pull a reader in.



The persistence of the past in the present and the ramifications of war are deeply felt in Wheatcroft's short but eloquent new book, *Answering Fire* (Lunar Offensive Press), an amalgam of the titular story and a reprise of an earlier work, "Kamikaze." In the former, a man who has led a quiet academic life for several decades, takes off for the comfort of an English village as America plunges into war in Iraq. The idyll is interrupted by the presence of a Japanese traveler who unknowingly unleashes haunting memories of the American's service in World War II and the need to resolve them.

"Kamikaze" is the perfect companion piece, portraying war-time sailors aboard a ship in the South Pacific. The isolation and threat of attack set the stage for petty transgressions to erupt into morally irreversible acts.

An alumnus has also delivered a novel this month: Mario Harpel '88 is the author of *Treeing* (Trafford), which traces the rough and tumble life passages of two boyhood friends. Harpel created the cover art as well.

Justice and Jail

In 2004, the House of Representatives passed the Kirk Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program, part of the Innocence Protection Act, bringing to closure a personal tragedy and ensuring that it will not be repeated in the future. Tim Junkin, father of Isabel '08, investigates what became two crimes: the horrific 1984 murder of a little girl in Baltimore and the conviction of an innocent man in *Bloodsworth* (Algonquin Books).

Recounting the original crime, trials, and eleventh-hour intervention of what not that long ago was the nascent science of DNA fingerprinting, Junkin builds a taut thriller. In Kirk Bloodsworth, he has a character hard to match in fiction, a man who survives several years in one of America's most brutal prisons. A man of inauspicious beginnings, he reveals extraordinary heart, emerging on the other side of a death sentence to campaign for the eponymous landmark law and become an international advocate for prison reform.

Say "prison" in Lewisburg, and eyes automatically shift westward toward the tower marking the Federal Penitentiary that seems to have been around forever, at least long enough to become part of the local lore. With the publication of *The History of the Penitentiary at Lewisburg* (Union County Historical Society), edited by M. Lois Huffines, associate dean of Academic Affairs and professor of linguistics and German, the history is set right. The volume opens up a place that few have seen and examines its roots in the evolution of the Bureau of Prisons and prison philosophy.

This American Life

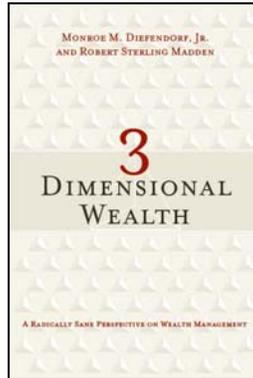
The suburb of Bellport, Long Island, is home and host to an eclectic parade of famous and not-so-famous people with interesting tales to tell. Resident Chuck Anderson '56, who spent 10 years interviewing them for the local newspaper, collects 45 of his most fascinating encounters in *American Conversations* (PublishAmerica).

Anderson, who among other things teaches English at Hofstra University, has a gift for drawing his subjects as everyday folks who happen to have risen above the ordinary. Among them, the late Peter Jennings, a disabled veteran known locally as "The Hubcap King," Art Garfunkel, a bounty hunter . . . the variety underscores Anderson's epigram, Thornton Wilder's line, "In our town, we like to know the facts about everybody."

The posthumously published *Joshua Humphreys, His Life and Times* (Vantage), by Richard Eddy M'49, dovetails with the resurgence of interest in the Revolutionary War. A naval history buff, Eddy

spent 10 years researching the Philadelphian who was the major force calling for the newly formed Navy to use frigates. Humphreys had to fight to convince colonial leaders of his vision, but in the end he prevailed and was instrumental in establishing an American maritime presence.

3 Dimensional Wealth: A Radically Sane Perspective on Wealth Management



For better and for worse, financial wealth is part and parcel of the American dream. **Monroe Diefendorf Jr.** '74, an investment analyst, proposes a new way to look at success in *3-Dimensional Wealth* (Greenleaf Book Group), co-authored with Robert Sterling Madden. Informed by faith and family values, Diefendorf believes monetary rewards are just one of three components of wealth, with the most important being personal and social wealth.

The authors offer advice for adjusting priorities in the transition to balanced life accounting. "Spend, save, then give" is the old paradigm, they say. "Give, save, then spend" is the new order.

End Notes

Here's a first for "Books": a coloring book. Jacinta Bunnell '93 is co-creator of *Girls Will Be Boys Will Be Girls Will Be . . .* (Soft Skull Press), designed to help children break through gender expectations that can stifle personal expression.

Lastly, the soon-to-be-published *Hatteras Blues: A Story from the Edge of America* (University of North Carolina Press) by Tom Carlson '66 probes the allure of the Outer Banks of North Carolina through a look at its watermen.

Claudia Ebeling regularly reviews books for Bucknell World.