

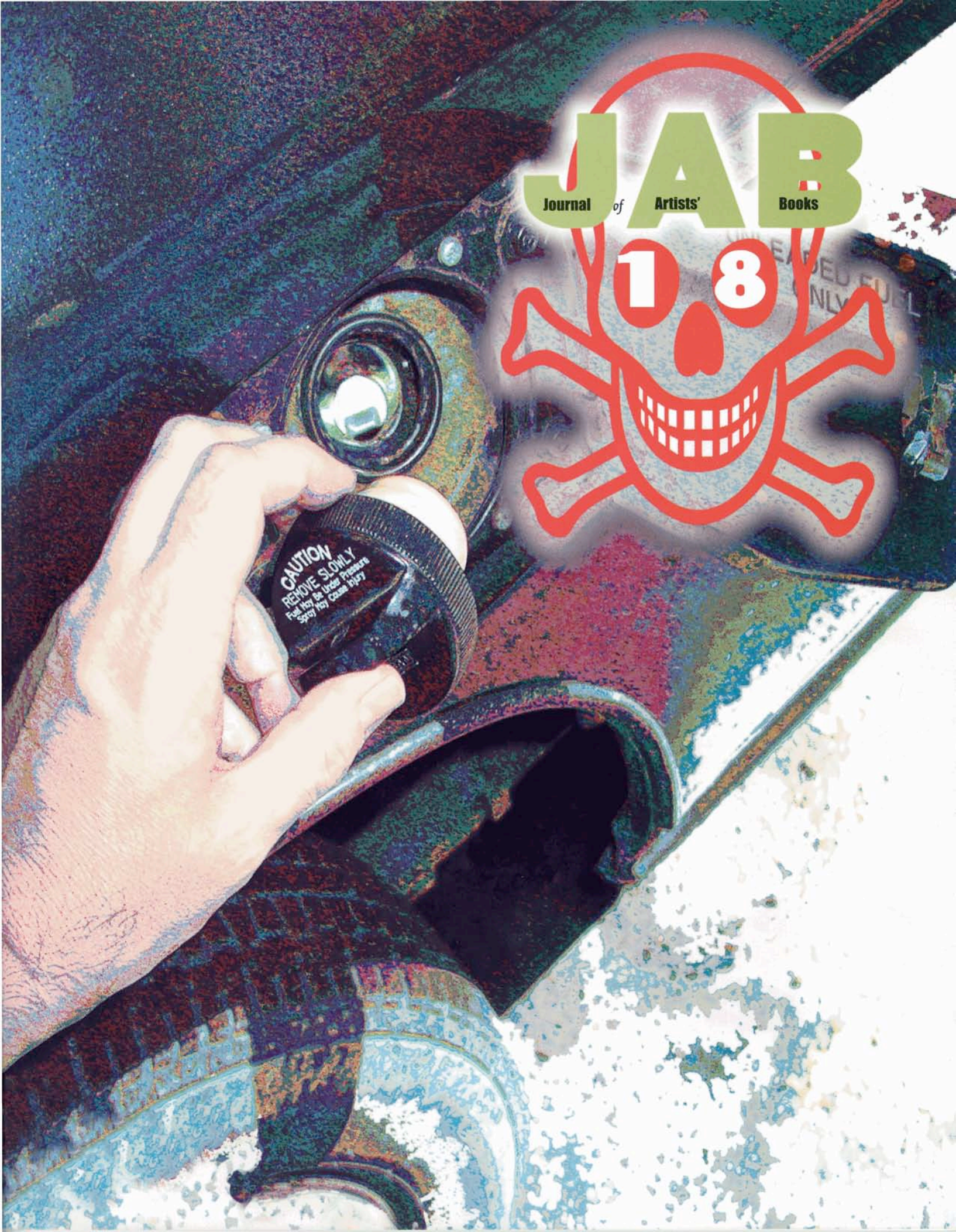
# JAB

Journal of Artists' Books

18



CAUTION  
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*Every gas tank will be sacred!*

MONUMENT TO THE UNKNOWN REFINED CORPSE



JAB, LIKE EVERYTHING, evolves over time while retaining some characteristic elements. JAB18 marks the third time we've had a guest editor. Clifton Meador, a book artist familiar to our readers, edited and designed this issue. He also designed and letterpress printed the JAB4 cover and was interviewed in JAB7. New to these pages is book artist, educator and curator Tom Trusky with his astute and well-researched article about the extraordinary art of the autistic Idahoan James Castle. In JAB8 Thomas Günter wrote about the situation of artists from the former East Germany facing reunification with West Germany ("Essential Aspects of Subculture Periodicals in the GDR and Their Place in Cultural History"). Günter returns now with an article arguing for the legitimacy of unique, one-of-a-kind books in a era of easy access to reproduction technologies. Poet and letterpress printer Joe Elliott has written a review of a new Granary Books publication in this issue—his imaginative article "Reviewing the Subway as a Book" was featured in JAB1. The film for this issue was imaged on the SelectSet Avanta 25S donated by the Agfa Corporation at the Institute for Electronic Art at Alfred University. JAB18 was printed at Nexus Press, a programming division of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center.

— Brad Freeman, publisher

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MANY PEOPLE have trouble with the term "artists' books." There can be no question that the genre of artists' books is a legitimate artistic endeavor, one sanctioned by a long and rich history. But the marginalization of a wonderful, inventive practice by a name that makes an odd distinction is a kind of dismissal that slights the genre. We don't normally talk about artists' paintings or artists' sculpture, so why must we use such a confining (and faintly ridiculous) term for this kind of work? Books always have authors, designers, printers, illustrators, and editors. So-called artists' books are frequently just books that have been written, illustrated, edited, designed, published, and printed by one person. Why not call them what they are: *books by artists*?

This kind of discussion has been going around and around for thirty years or more. Obviously, it is useful to have an identifying term for purposes of discourse, but naming has some power as an act, and it is not useful to name something in a way that marginalizes it. Books are a huge category, encompassing every thing from telephone directories to hand-painted papyrus manuscripts. Every single category of book represents some kind of creative endeavor on the part of some person or persons, and the potential delight, illumination, enter-

tainment, or pure aesthetic sensation\* that I get from a book is not enhanced or improved by its being called an artist's book. While I agree that the intention of the maker is part of the way the reading of the work is created (by placing the work within a certain set of codes, and so on), limiting which books can be considered as whole works (which is what calling something an artists' book does: it forces the viewer to consider the book as an integrated whole, rather than as a transparent container for content) seems to close off consideration of an enormous range of work. Let us consider all books as book art: some are awful, and most are boring; but widening the field makes the discussion of what constitutes an effective book much more interesting.

— Clifton Meador

\*a suspect idea, of course.

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FIG 1: Taylor bookhead. Opening illustration of the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind "chapters" in Castle's autobiographical edition recovered from the Castle family icehouse circa 1970. Shown is W. E. Taylor, Director of the school. Pictured inside his head: presumably his wife, a teacher at the school (she holds a blackboard pointer) and their children or other staff. Circa 1913.

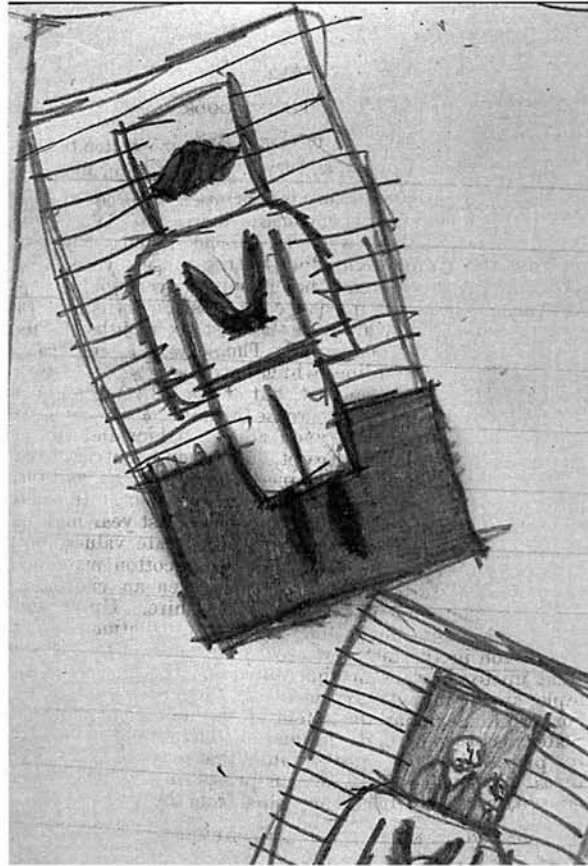


FIG 2: Liphead bookhead. One of a series of portraits of Gooding school classmates. Like those on "Mona Lisa," the lips that Castle draws are open to interpretation. Was this young man to be remembered for his ability to speak, read lips, or for his ability to buss? Or did he just have well-endowed lips? (Castle invariably draws male and female student neckerchiefs upside down.) Circa 1913.



FIGS 3-4: Photograph and drawing of James Castle. Photograph by Nellie Castle of James Castle (1911) and Castle's re-drawing of his sister's photo (date unknown).

# Autism, Physiognomy & Letter Forms:



## The Faces of James Castle Tom Trusky

OF INTRIGUING SUBJECTS in illustrations by self-taught artist James Charles Castle (1899-1977), one of the most paradoxical is the Idahoan's depiction of the human face. Many of his human figures appear to be wearing cereal boxes for heads. They have thin square or rectangular craniums with circles for eyes, little ski lifts a la Bob Hope or V's or U's at various slants for noses, while simple O's, dots or dashes suffice for mouths. Tongues are never seen.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes these heads have ears; sometimes they do not.<sup>2</sup> Other Castle people periodically shoulder what have been termed "Bookheads" [FIG 1]. These biblio characters have heads that are illustrated pages, often captioned with squiggly lines representing writing above or beneath them. Cereal Boxheads and Bookheads frequently contain portions of anatomy (a drawing of a hand, for example) or small collages (bits of illustrations or text from magazines and catalogues) or drawn scenes or tableaux where facial features should appear.<sup>3</sup> [FIG 2] Both types of portrait styles are in stark contrast to the artist's detailed, realistic renditions of the interiors and exteriors of houses, barns, and outbuildings. It is as though the architecture of the human face was either beyond the artist or not of interest—as if the Mona Lisa should have consisted of a simple, Cheshire cat smile centered on an otherwise blank canvas.<sup>4</sup>

There are, however, exceptions to Castle's surrealist approach to portraiture and these are often self-portraits. A number of these portraits have been based on photographs snapped by the artist's sister, Ellenor ("Nellie"). At least four

times, Castle re-drew Nellie's photograph of the artist, reportedly taken the fall day in 1911 when Nellie and James left their birthplace, Garden Valley, for the Idaho State School for the Deaf and Blind in Gooding [FIG 3-4]. Copying a photographic portrait, compared to rendering a sitting subject, face-to-face (or himself, in a mirror), was apparently easy for the artist.<sup>5</sup>

Castle's apparent aversion to, disinterest in or inability to render faces of live human subjects is paralleled by his treatment of live animals. Although Castle lived in the country most of his life, we seldom see wildlife (deer, elk, frogs, hawks, bears, raccoons, badgers) and only infrequently see domesticated animals (sheep, horses, cows, cats or dogs) in the artist's drawings or illustrations. Castle does re-draw animals, notably the black and white Scotties in Dewar's Scotch Whisky advertisements, a Thanksgiving turkey, or American political party symbols, in cartoons showing donkeys or elephants. Yet, Castle's drawings of the family homestead in Garden Valley rarely includes family livestock, except for fowl, such as their flock of geese that always descended upon and terrified Castle's young cousin, Eleanor Scanlon, when she came down the valley to visit.

It may be that the problem with drawing live animals (or people) was simply that they would not sit still. While sister Nellie could take a snapshot with her Kodak "Brownie" in a second, the best James could do with his soot and saliva ink and stick ink pens was to produce "simple" caricature-like sketches in perhaps minutes. Or could it be that Castle found live creatures dangerous, unpredictable, unknowable or unbearable in their motility?<sup>6</sup> Castle was often free to roam Garden Valley and surely he had contact with wild creatures on his expeditions. We can understand how one could be momentarily startled by a deer or terrified by a mother bear guarding her cubs. But how intimidating or unfamiliar were domesticated animals, grazing or chewing their cud? Castle's mother tended flocks of sheep and reportedly husbanded the family cattle while her husband managed their general store and post office. Many Garden Valley

<sup>1</sup> Daniel McNeill notes that "this odd and agile organ [the tongue] rarely emerges onto [depictions of] the face, and its appearance is often aggressive" (McNeill 1998, 41). Of the thousands of Castle books I have reviewed, I recall only one instance where a Castle tongue appears. Although it is not "aggressive," it is a memorable tongue. The front and back covers of the small volume in question have been appropriately colored red (with ink), except for centered rectangles on the covers. In the front cover rectangle, in red, Castle has written "KOTEX," while in the back cover rectangle he has inked an egg-shaped self-portrait with his tongue extended out and downward in dismay or distaste. It is not clear, if covers or text pages of the Kotex Book come from discarded Kotex boxes Castle recycled.

<sup>2</sup> Because Castle was deaf or autistic and unable to process sounds, the earlessness of his portraits, if intentional, is understandable. For discussion of autistics misdiagnosed as being deaf or of hearing autistics not paying attention to spoken language, see Park (1967, 71) and Grandin (1996, 67-71). In a personal letter to the author, Grandin has written, "People with milder forms of autism like myself have problems hearing hard consonants like 'b' or 'd'. I mix up words like fog or bog. Autistics who remain non-verbal seem to only be able to hear vowel sounds. Even though their hearing test is normal the brain does not process the complex sounds of language. They are deaf to words but they can hear tones very well." For information about the deaf, see Note 25.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill tells of anthropologist Edmund Carpenter's giving New Guinea tribesmen Polaroid portraits. "They were confronting their visual images for the first time and the shock was deep. But later some wore the Polaroids on their brows, as a proclamation of self" (McNeill 1998, 109). Bookheads may be seen as imaginary Polaroid portrait-wearers created by Castle.

<sup>4</sup> Castle does a quirky re-drawing of DaVinci's portrait, likely at the urging of art professors and dealers who surrounded him in the late 1950's and early 1960's. This drawing—now reportedly lost—is reproduced in Trusky (1998, *Raw Vision*, 38-44). Castle's own Mona Lisa is the "Liphead Bookhead," a circa 1913 Icehouse book portrait of a Gooding school classmate—male—whose square head is featureless but for a set of large lips. See FIG 2.

<sup>5</sup> Also easy was recopying cartoon figures (Henry, Dennis the Menace), political caricatures (Stalin, FDR and Truman), photographs of Idaho politicians—males (from newspapers and campaign literature) and a multitude of advertising figures (from Sir Walter Raleigh on cigarette packs to the Gerber baby in baby food ads).

<sup>6</sup> Animals (cows, geese, turkeys) are subjects of Castle's constructions; however, perhaps the artist only felt secure creating animals when he could physically control or manipulate them in his hands. Yet Castle's "friends," the term the artist's family gave to his doll-to-pygmy size constructions of humans, are most often the standard issue, cereal box or book-headed individuals found in Castle drawings. One notable exception to the standard "friend" appearance is Castle's cardboard rendition of himself. Not surprisingly, this more-realistic-than-usual construction is based on a photograph of the artist taken by his sister Nellie in Garden Valley in 1908.

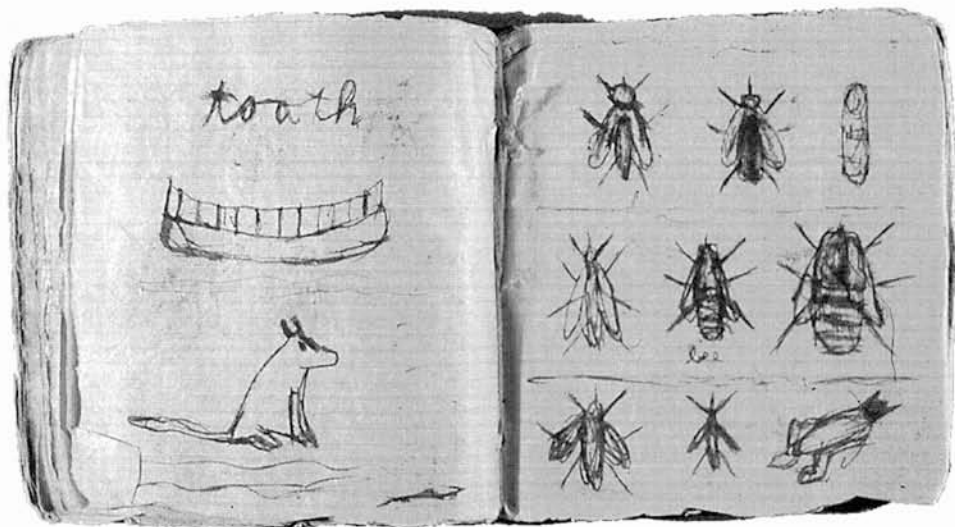


FIG 5: Tooth & bee spread.. Castle combines visual language with written words to depict two dangerous animals. Note the canine is in right profile, relatively rare in Castle, and is gazing across the gutter at its kin-in-danger.

families had herds of cattle and cattle drives to a railhead were an annual event.<sup>7</sup>

One clue about Castle's knowledge of animals and the dangers they may have posed may be found in the artist's *Large Primer*.<sup>8</sup> The *Primer* has a faint, pencilled (?) image of an egg-headed boy grinning delightedly or demonically as he speeds across the cover in a little wheeled wagon, to the right. The boy appears to be James and we know he is whizzing by because the artist has drawn cartoon "motion lines" trailing the vehicle. Though found in Boise Valley, the *Primer's* binding, papers, illustration style and condition suggest it was begun while the Castle family was living in Garden Valley. (The Castles moved from Garden to Treasure Valley in 1924.) Book contents have

determined the arbitrary title given the 180-page volume with over 300 illustrations that seemingly catalogue all the items in the artist's world.<sup>9</sup> The book is reminiscent of the Sears & Roebuck catalogues the artist collected and cherished for text and illustrations to be copied or used in his collages.<sup>10</sup> The concluding two-thirds of the *Primer* contains drawings of a plethora of inanimate objects: clothing, foodstuffs, glasses, jars, chairs, silverware (as large as chairs), tubs, washing machines and farm implements. Castle does include rudimentary outlines of a few human figures that may be presumed to be his nightgowned sisters, and some simple outlines

of a cow, a horse, and a sheep. However, on pages 116-117, animals receive quite different treatment.

Two pages with drawings of human body parts preface the two animal pages. On page 114, Castle has drawn on the top left a group of three disembodied eyes to the right of which, as though copied from a medical text, is shown a fourth eye in side view. Beneath these four eyes is a wide-eyed, egg-shaped face, presumably a self-portrait. The word "eye" is written at the bottom of the page. Two ears, a nose and a mouth are found on page 115. The artist's awareness that words symbolize objects is clear, and his grouping of human sensory organs on the spread should also be noted. Too, if the portrait Castle has drawn is him-

self, he may also be telling us what his primary sensory organ is. In fact, is he perhaps boasting of his fine vision—six eyes?<sup>11</sup> Or is he highlighting his dependency on sight? If we can "see" these pages, we are prepared to "read" pages 116-117.

Atop page 116 is a written (and almost misspelled) word: "tooth" [FIG 5]. Below it, mid-page, is not a word but, instead, a drawing of a denture. Beneath this paean to Polident, in right profile is a dog, reminiscent of mongrels found in Booth *New Yorker* cartoons. Although the canine's jaws are shut and Castle has not drawn a dog tag with the name "Fang" on it, the sequence of illustrations suggests that Castle comprehended the meaning of the written word as well as that he was aware words have synonyms and various visual manifestations.

Facing "Fang," on page 117, is another word-and-illustrations tableau. The word on this page? "bee" (at center). The illustration? At least a half-dozen of the stinging insects, mounted in three rows.<sup>12</sup> Together, the pages in this spread illustrate that Castle, although he may have been unable to hear or comprehend their barks or buzzes, knew animate life could be dangerous. We may conclude that to draw these dangers and write their names—a rarity in Castle's primarily visual world—indicates their importance to him and, perhaps, the threat they could pose for valley visitors. The sense organs and the "tooth" and "bee" illustration sequences are easy to interpret and they reveal Castle's keen, witty and engaged mind and eye. The more challenging and intriguing illustrations, however, are Castle's portraits that open and dominate his *Primer*.

All but two of the first sixty-five pages of the *Primer* are devoted to portraits of men, from head shots to full figures [FIGS 6-12]. Most are usually shown wearing ties and a coat or jacket. One illustration, on page eight, contains the outline of what appears to be a horse [FIG 11]. Page sixty-two boasts what appears to be a dog-headed man [FIG 10]. The appearance of

<sup>7</sup> The artist, however, certainly noticed his family's branding iron, their brand on Castle livestock and brands of other valley residents. See discussion on page 18 of the artist's brand or copyright or printer's mark.

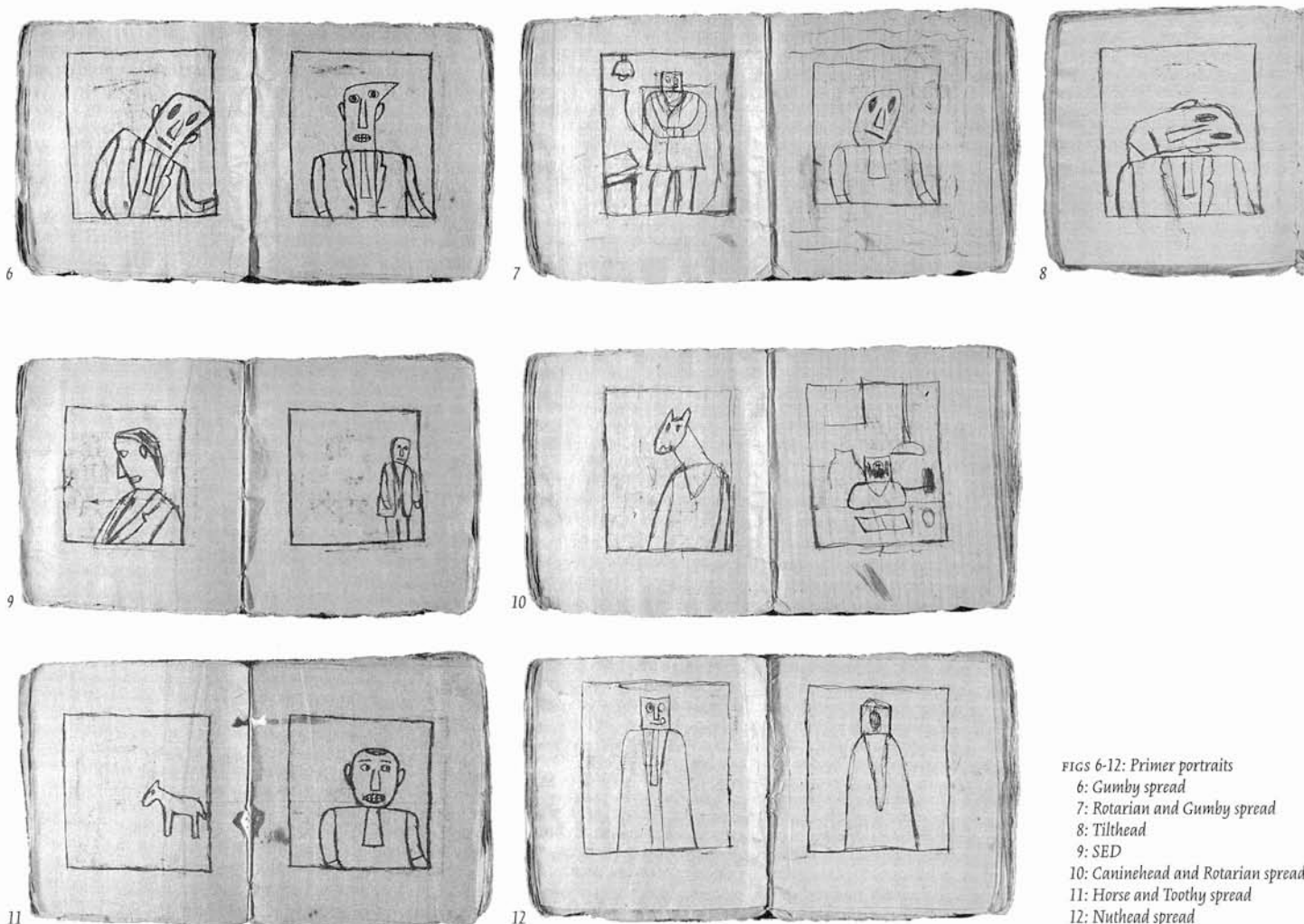
<sup>8</sup> At least two editions of the *Primer* exist: one "standard edition" or *Large Primer* (180 pages, about 4 1/2" square), and the *Little Primer*, a pocket or miniature version (2 1/2" x 3", with "Spoon & Napkin Inside lift here" printed sideways on the cover). I will be analyzing the *Large Primer* in this work.

<sup>9</sup> Castle books are untitled in the conventional sense. Castle, however, designed and/or illustrated many of his book covers. Generally, relying on cover or content of a book, readers have created titles. The artist's niece, Geraldine (Gerry) Garrow, titled these *Primer* books.

<sup>10</sup> Castle surely learned layout and design and catalogue organization from his Sears & Roebuck (and other) catalogues, as well as their entrepreneurial narrative logic. The artist would have noticed, for example, the chronological and spatial sequencing of information: clothing for infants, then children (girls and boys) then teenage girls and boys and so on, or from interior house accoutrements (furniture, home improvement items) to exterior materials, then further and literally afield, out into the garage and beyond, to the barn. Seeing plaids, tweeds and polka dots on men and women's clothes and highly patterned linoleum and roofing materials for houses may have inspired Castle to dress his drawings of houses that appear as tweedy-roofed-or-walled bungalows or herringboned cottages.

<sup>11</sup> It seems too much, to suggest this third eye grouping is a metaphysical image, an announcement of an "inner eye." Castle expropriated a variety of medical and mathematical textbooks and often re-drew their illustrations, sometimes drawing atop text and/or illustrations in the borrowed book.

<sup>12</sup> While there are a number of books that reveal Castle had a limited etymological bent, this is the sole instance I know of that illustrates Castle's interest in entomology.



FIGS 6-12: *Primer* portraits  
 6: Gumby spread  
 7: Rotarian and Gumby spread  
 8: Tilthead  
 9: SED  
 10: Caninehead and Rotarian spread  
 11: Horse and Toothy spread  
 12: Nutthead spread

this Canine erectus is so surprising we are likely to pause, seeing it, and wonder, Does this page anticipate the “Tooth” page? Is Castle characterizing someone as being dangerous? Is he being comical or satirical—just “goofing”? Or is he linking his uncle, John Scanlon, with Scanlon’s favorite dog, a dog Nellie Castle includes in a number of her photographs?

Frames contain all sixty-five drawings. The drawings themselves are simple line figures floating in a world with no horizon or perspective, yet they are executed in a sure hand. One figure sometimes is shown amidst half-sketched props or backdrops. Torsos tip or tilt (generally to their left, to our right). They gesture, their left hand extended out of the frame. Sometimes they appear to be just leaving or just arriving on the page. The horse, on verso page eight, for example, is emerging out of the gutter. Because Castle will sometimes position objects to indicate arrivals or departures, the position of this animal, and the placement of a new face, toothy and smiling, on recto page nine, may be the artist’s way of announcing the “tall, dark stranger” who rode into Garden Valley [FIG 11].<sup>13</sup> While the identity of the new face is not known, he may be the unidentified young man whose photograph was recovered with Castle

artifacts in the Castle family icehouse in 1970. Another candidate for the toothy, smiling figure may be Joseph Castle, the artist’s older brother. Joe was renowned for his genial spirits and sense of humor and Nellie’s photographs of him (grinning, hanging by his heels from a shed roof, or being a cowboy—riding a cow!) capture Joe’s personality just as this drawing may.

Most of the *Primer* faces are familiar Castle characters. Two figures predominate: a rubber-headed youth we might call Gumby (probably Castle) [FIG 6], and a suited gentleman who looks like a stereotypic, Sinclair Lewis Rotarian (probably Castle’s father, storekeeper and postmaster, Frank) [FIGS 7 AND 10]. These two exclusively populate Castle’s so-called *Gumby & Rotarian* books completed between 1918 and 1924.<sup>14</sup> In the *Primer*, there are at least fifteen pages devoted to the Rotarian and more than twice that number to Gumby. The Rotarian is the only figure shown in a setting. He appears to be at or beside a desk or counter on which rests a book or newspaper. A lamp hangs, above him [FIGS 7 AND 10]. A third familiar individual, often acronymed or named

<sup>13</sup> In Castle’s autobiographical *Icehouse Books*, the artist positions a buckboard to indicate his departure from and return to Garden Valley.  
<sup>14</sup> See my essay about these two books, found in the old Castle icehouse by Bill Pogue circa 1970: “Gumby & the Rotarian: James Castle & the Art of Reading” (Trusky 1999a, 43-60).

SED in other Castle books also appears once, without his moniker, in the *Primer*. Mr. SED is notable because in Castle books he is always shown in left profile; this is the only human profile in the *Primer* [FIG 9].

A few figures are highly stylized, with circles inset in knobs-for-heads. Others have square heads with inset circles and resemble “Nut-Sans-Bolt Heads.” The clothing on these stylized figures is simplified and resembles a cloak or cassock, whereas suits and ties are standard garb on the other figures [FIG 12]. Perhaps Castle is recording religious visitors? Mary Scanlon, Castle’s mother, was Catholic, and priests were sent up periodically from Boise to minister to valley residents. It is possible, however, that these stylized figures morph into (or out of?) the Rotarian. This interpretation has some logic for Frank Scanlon, according to eyewitnesses, apparently was the family disciplinarian. As such, his actions may not have been understandable to Castle, who frequently had to be reprimanded. How better to image incomprehensibility than by cloaking it or by not giving it a face? (How better to mock authority than by imaging it as a nut or someone with a hole in their head?) With the exception of Mr. SED, all figures are shown front view (full-faced), in contrast to figures in later, so-called “How-To Draw” or art instruction books like Castle’s *Manning’s Coffee* book.<sup>15</sup>

Castle opens the *Large Primer* with faces and devotes fully one-third of the entire book to them. He seems deter-

mined to create and/or capture an opera of motion and emotion, motive and mood in the *Primer* portraits. It is as though he has made a flip-book or invented a filmstrip made with soot and saliva.<sup>16</sup> As we turn pages, heads wobble, slide, tip, go sideways-pointy, stretch, bend then square on their shoulders. Never have craniums been more elastic, the envy of tribes given to headboards to shape their children’s visages. Hair can be curly on one page but turn flattop the next. If, as Pliny said, eyes are windows to the soul, we become spiritual Peeping Toms, gazing into Castle’s eyes. They seem to dart furtively, stare defiantly or resolutely or blankly straight ahead. Some would peek sidelong, sweet or sneaky glances. Others, are they vacant or blackened circles of hopelessness, blackened (bruised?) – or

are they little dotted or lined ovals, triangles, then coffins of cancelled eyes? Working with autistics and other patients, Simon Baron-Cohen and others have attempted to identify types and ranges of messages possibly conveyed by eyes. In his influential study, *Mindblindness*, Baron-Cohen quotes numerous literary sources invoking moonstruck gazes and evil eyes, provides a chart listing “mentalist interpretations” of the eyes, and reprints a number of photographs of different “looks.” Yet he only tentatively concludes, “In a real sense, there may be a language of the eyes” (Baron-Cohen 1995, 108). Likewise, while some of Castle’s eyes seem easily translatable, and though some rely on the conventions of cartooning (X’d pupils indicating unconsciousness, for example), “eye-speak,” Castle’s or anyone’s, is no Esperanto.

Many of Castle’s portraits stare directly at viewers and we cannot help but wonder why.<sup>17</sup> McNeill summarizes diverse findings of gaze researchers as showing stares may be rude, aggressive, inquisitive and inviting but, he concludes, “Staring precedes attack in humans as well [as monkeys], and retains the aura of threat” (McNeill 1998, 231). He further notes, “One critic has discussed Picasso’s portraits in terms of the Andalusian notion of *mirada fuerte*, or ‘strong gazing.’ *Mirada fuerte* is a way of dominating others, and Picasso, notorious for his need to control people, used the face forward pose almost solely in self-portraits. In portraits, his subjects gaze off to the side, as if unable to tolerate his powerful gaze” (231). While we do not know Castle’s motive for positioning his faces, if, being deaf and/or autistic, he found the world frightening or incomprehensible, a strong gaze might have been the teenager’s first and best defense—at least on paper, if not in life.

It is this ominous visual note that grips us, when we first see Castle’s portraits. However, stare after stare, suddenly it may strike us that there is less an aggressive, threatening or intimidating air to these portraits than an inquisitive blankness, or a plaintive, almost searching quality to their eyes. Less attention by Castle is paid to noses and none, as has been noted, to tongues. But mouths may be sessile or volatile, like sea anemones at ebb, then full tide. They are closed, open, and then become emblems of emotions and attitudes, perhaps reflectors of events. They grimace, twist, frown, sneer or smile, toothed then toothless.

The *Large Primer* is obviously not a Sears & Roebuck, let alone a Neiman Marcus or Sotheby’s catalogue. But what has Castle so painstakingly created and why?

Because Castle distorts significant and omits minor facial features, it is tempting to view the *Primer* portraits as caricatures. Such an interpretation is inviting because hundreds of Castle books contain instances of the artist re-drawing cartoons and comic strip panels from periodicals of the day, from *Punch* to the *Idaho Daily Statesman*.<sup>18</sup> McNeill provides a succinct definition of the genre, noting “A caricature is a

15 The *Manning’s* book, named after its coffee bag cover, was given to Portland, Oregon, artist and professor Michel Russo. It contains hundreds of postage-stamp and holy card size portraits, some a series of rotating male heads moving in and out of shadow and light and against a variety of backgrounds or held in diverse frames. The artist’s portraiture in his *Manning’s* book appears to have been executed for quite different purposes than that in his *Primer* books.

16 Before laws had been enacted to protect their work, some early filmmakers printed copies of their films on paper, then registered and deposited them in the Copyright Office in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In many cases, these are the only “prints” of the films that survive. Castle’s binding his work into codices (with his own copyright or brand) may have been his version of validating or establishing ownership.

17 We should not forget the influence Nellie Castle’s photographs had on her brother. With but a few exceptions (one notable instance comes to mind: sister Julia, looking shyly or downcast, emerging from a wall of ivy), all of the subjects in Nellie’s portraits say “Cheese!” for the camera.

18 Frank Castle was an emigrant from England and (with his Idaho wife) Postmaster of Garden Valley. His background and position help explain the incredible diversity of printed material to which Castle had access. The array of visual materials (including *National Geographic*—an understandable favorite of the artist’s, given its pictorial nature) call into question Castle’s being labeled an “Outsider” artist. The United States Postal Service provided the boy global visual information.

In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Oliver Sacks discusses the autistic artist José who had been confined in a cellar room and forgotten about until he became violent and had been taken to the hospital. “He was,” Sacks tells us, “not entirely without an inner life, in the cellar. He showed a passion for pictorial magazines, especially of natural history, of the *National Geographic* type, and when he was able, between seizures and scoldings, would find stumps of pencils and draw what he saw. These drawings were perhaps his only link with the outside world . . .” (Sacks 1985, 211).

Stacks of *National Geographic* on which James had written his name were found in the Castle icehouse in 1970. When we find drawings of Coolies pulling rickshaws, gondolas being poled down Venetian canals, cathedrals, or palm trees—relative rarities in Garden Valley—we may rightly suspect their origin.





FIG 8, detail

portrait in epigram. It exaggerates a few distinctive features, often for witty effect. . . . The facial parody arose with the ancient Egyptians, if not earlier. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle mentions one artist who improves faces, another who copies them, and a third who worsens them. They are the flatterer, the realist, and the caricaturist.”

While Castle’s portraits distort or emphasize a facial feature, the majority do not seem witty in the sense of being lightheartedly or savagely humorous or clever. If there were one or two or three portraits only, perhaps. But after a dozen wide-eyed Gumby stares, it is difficult to conclude we should be slapping our thigh or splitting our sides with laughter. The joke, if ever there was one, has grown old, at least for non-autistic viewers. Instead, Castle’s portraits seem to possess an intensity and seriousness. At the least, they portend. Even the “Nut Heads” provoke fear or evoke mystery to “Outsiders,” like us: are they or are they not related to Darth Vader? The portraits seem to capture the essence of a moment or the split-second reaction of an individual to an event. Their purpose seems not to be, paradoxically, portraiture in the sense of recreating a complete, complex and wholly accurate likeness of an individual. Rather, it is as if a *Primer* portrait is a vessel carrying a single message. They are not designed to create biography. Castle’s “Tilthead” [FIG 8, detail] does not seem to be an attempt to evoke a life as does, for instance, Francis Bacon’s 1966 *Study for Portrait*, even though the skulls of both gentlemen share a similar angle of repose. Nor does Aristotle’s definition of caricature apply to most of Castle’s *Primer* portraits. Castle does not seem to consciously “worsen” a face in his *Primer*—other than, perhaps, the cloaked “Nut Head” figure [FIG 12]. His distortions or emphases seem to highlight a feature not to lower our estimation of the individual, but to pinpoint or underscore an emotion or the

memory of a stimulus that precipitated the visual manifestation of an emotion.<sup>19</sup>

There are a number of readings possible of the *Large Primer* portrait series, of course. One theory is that the first third of the *Primer* may be an attempt to record one or more day’s routine in the artist’s family’s general store and post office. Another interpretation would have Castle producing an encyclopedia or diary of facial rhetoric, a Sears & Roebuck catalogue of emotional apparel or furniture. That all the faces shown are men also may indicate this is not only about men but also that this portion of the *Primer* is only relevant for men. Or for one man only: its author.

Because approximately two-thirds of the portraits in the *Primer* are of the artist, it would appear the artist is recording, validating or learning facial expressions (and gestures and postures) that may have been produced by specific emotions or events he experienced, or by individuals with whom he interacted. How the portraits, self or otherwise, were drawn is unclear. Perhaps the artist studied his face in a mirror. Perhaps his drawings were elicited by memories of an event or emotion. In either case, his drawings may memorialize an event or manifestation of an emotion connected to the event. Regarded in this light, the drawings seem similar to modern, posed photographs taken by researchers for their analyses of the human face and emotions.<sup>20</sup>

The caricature-like style of Castle’s drawings may have been perfect for the artist’s purposes. McNeill cites studies analyzing the memorability of caricatures:

. . . Findings have led some psychologists to call caricatures “superportraits.” They suggest we recognize faces by using shorthand of special features which the caricature highlights and the true picture does not. The caricature feeds the vital variables straight into the formula, while the full line drawing adds clutter and gives all features equal weight. (McNeill 1998, 144)

Others go further. Psychologists Robert Mauro and Michael Kubovy have produced evidence that the brain stores faces as caricatures. Rather than a shorthand for recognition, the caricature lives intact in compressed memory (McNeill 1998, 44).

But why catalogue, compressed or not, what, for most of us, comes so naturally? Anger, curiosity, bafflement, sadness, a stranger enters our lives—these are not rare species evolved only on some Garden Valley Galapagos. In fact, most of the items depicted in the *Primer* are commonplace; however, it is also

<sup>19</sup> Castle’s drawings are caricature-like but are not, strictly speaking, caricatures. However, sometimes Castle does indulge in a “worsening” caricature. Consider his non-*Primer* book portraits of a nephew, for example, which may be instances of distortion of the visage of an individual who tormented the artist.

<sup>20</sup> Castle’s portraits are interesting to compare with photographic studies of facial expressions in Eckman, Friesen and Ellsworth 1972 or Eckman and Friesen 1975. However, methodologies and conclusions in these works (and works by others utilizing similar approaches) have been questioned. See Friedland 1994. Consequently, I have limited linking interpretations of emotions in Castle portraits—or identifications of the subjects of those portraits—to events or individuals that might be verified or strongly suggested by biographical information.

likely that all of the items Castle included in his book were familiar and important, perhaps even reassuring, to him. We may have clues to what Castle was up to and why, for the artist's situation may well have been similar to that described by the self-diagnosed autistic author, Donna Williams.

Williams recalls that in her twenties—the same age, presumably, Castle was when he created his *Large Primer*—she first realized the nature of her body. She did so by connecting the sensation of touching her own leg, then arm, then “my hands went up to my face. My face was there from the inside. My body was more than just a series of textures that my hands knew, an image my eyes saw . . .” (Williams 1994, 229-230; quoted in Cole 1999, 89). Castle's hands drew his face, but the effect on him may well have been the same as when Williams touched her face: awareness of self. And clearly Castle grants the face primacy: it is the first and major object, organism, tool or implement in the *Primer*.

The Idaho artist's awareness may have involved a cognizance of kinship or community, too. Castle's including male figures other than himself suggests the artist recognized not only cause-and-effect relationships (a horse arrived—so did its rider) but also that gender linked him to the expressions, reactions, and emotions shown by the other men he had drawn.<sup>21</sup> Williams, also, is aware of a bond between herself and others. In answering a question put to her by Jonathan Cole, Williams asserts she believes there is truth in Merleau-Ponty's saying that we exist in another's facial expressions. Others validate or confirm our existence by their reactions to us. Castle's portraits may be visual confirmations of this belief.

While none of the *Primer* portraits are signed by the artist, in a sense each is.<sup>22</sup> As McNeill observes, “The face is a signature in flesh and bone and it remains our frontline against imposture. Faces adorn drivers' licenses, passports, credit cards, corporate ID cards—any document that might require proof of its link to us. Our singularity is our security, and our restraint” (McNeill 1998, 78). Again and again, Castle seems to be saying in his self-portraits, “This is me and this is me and this is me . . .,” as if the artist might otherwise lose himself or be overlooked.

Of course, one could charge that Castle's self-portraits are obsessively narcissistic in-

dulgences. Certainly, Castle's fascination with himself is obsessive. Although the artist could and did copy images other than himself from a variety of eclectic sources, much of Castle's imagery springs from what he knew best, apparently what he was attempting to record and comprehend. Narcissism, however, seems an unfair charge, especially when we interpolate comments made by Donna Williams about her fascination with her face and consider Castle's drawings. Williams reports the only person she could tolerate looking at directly as a young woman was herself. She would “spend hours in front of the mirror, staring into my own eyes and whispering my name . . . frightened at losing my ability to feel myself.” This fearfulness of faces other than her own manifested itself in Williams' artwork. “In my paintings and drawings,” she says, “most are done with the subject facing away from the viewer” (Cole 1999, 90).

Williams's (and other autistics') avoidance of others' faces, however, may be more apparent than real. Professor Uta Frith of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience in London summarizes research done on autistic children that asked:

Did children with autism really avoid looking at people? Did they in fact show complete indifference to social interactions? Contrary to popular belief, the answers turned out to be negative. They did not avoid people; rather, they could not make sense of people. There were stark impairments in many cognitive skills. Yet there were islets of ability. . . . Again and again, results indicate that autistic children cannot make sense of things in the ordinary way. They truly look at the world differently. (Houston and Frith 2000, 118)

Facial orientation in Williams' art is in complete contrast with Castle's *Primer* images. With the exception of SED, Castle's people directly face us.<sup>23</sup> Does this evidence, then, invalidate a diagnosis of autism in the Idahoan? Hardly. We should keep in mind Oliver Sacks' admonition. “No two people with autism,” the medical authority states, “are the same; its precise form or expression is different in every case. Moreover, there may be a most intricate (and potentially creative) interaction between the autistic traits and other qualities of the individual. So, while a single glance may suffice for clinical diagnosis, if we hope to understand the autistic individual, nothing less than a total biography will do” (Sacks 1995a, 250).

Castle was born one or two months premature and the family reports he was a “head-banger,” a “rocker” who had to be held or rocked to calm and soothe the infant.<sup>24</sup> Because he did not respond to sounds or language, he was assumed to be deaf. While Castle may have been profoundly deaf (deaf at birth), we know today that many autistics are misdiagnosed as being deaf because they do not respond like “Hearies” to sound.<sup>25</sup> However, relatives and acquaintances from his boy-

<sup>21</sup> It may also suggest the Idahoan believed learning “girl” faces would be of little use to a young man. Sexuality (or a lack thereof) in Castle's work is a research topic worthy of exploration.

<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s, at the prompting of art dealers who advised the Castle family that signed works would not only authenticate Castle's work but also assure higher prices, the artist begins to sign his drawings. Castle appears to have willingly signed his name in some instances; however, templates with his name (printed and in script) survive. Instances where the artist was “encouraged” to sign his name often have the signature in odd or inappropriate positions and are inordinately large. Other reports have family members signing Castle's signature for him. See note 41.

<sup>23</sup> Castle's persistent presentation of Mr. SED in profile might be interpreted as the artist's method of identifying a kinship—someone like the artist who also cannot gaze directly at people. If we look to Castle's immediate family or relations for a Mr. SED, the artist's mother's side of the family provides a possible candidate.

Unsubstantiated reports would have the Garden Valley Scanlon family (Castle's mother was a Scanlon) inbred and affected, mentally, “wet-wired” (short-circuited), according to one valley-born informant. (See Larry Mills interview conducted in December 20, 1979 by Sandy Harthorn at the Boise Gallery of Art—now the Boise Art Museum.)

The Scanlon reputation may be based on the reputation of John Scanlon, Castle's uncle, on his mother's side. John Scanlon was diagnosed early in the Twentieth century as “crazy” and committed to the Idaho State asylum at Blackfoot. Later, however, Scanlon was discovered to be epileptic, a condition often associated with autism.

<sup>24</sup> Later in life, Castle has been described as rocking back and forth on his feet at gallery openings. Rocking and “head-banging” are typical of many autistic children. See Digby Tantan, “Asperger Syndrome in Adulthood” in Frith 1991, 165.

<sup>25</sup> For information about the deaf (relating to Castle's treatment at the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind), see Lane 1984 and Sacks 1989-1990, and see note 2.

hood do not report Castle as being anti-social, exclusively reclusive, or lost-in-other worlds, as is often the case with autistic children. There were times, however, when Castle would vanish into the family's icehouse to draw or when he would vanish into what is now named the Boise National Forest or roam Garden Valley. His brother and sisters had another term for these activities. They called it "avoiding chores," and it did not please them. Castle's niece, Eleanor Scanlon, recalls how her father tried to teach James to farm, but the boy would just disappear, go to sleep in the haystacks. As if to preserve her brother's reputation, Nellie snaps a photograph of James in Garden Valley reclining in a haystack, arms behind his head, broad smile on his face.

Yet we should keep in mind the possibility that characterizations of Castle being lazy, irresponsible and indolent—or resolutely dedicated to art (for art's sake)—may be neither fair nor accurate. Consider the problems of David, a young man with Asperger syndrome (the so-called "high-functioning" type of autism), interviewed by Jonathan Cole. David explains how life is extraordinarily difficult for him, how he has to concentrate on the simplest task, otherwise he forgets what he is doing or is supposed to be doing (Cole 1999, 83). Constantly reminded, badgered or exhorted to slop the pigs, drive cattle to the upper pasture, help haul the hay rack out of the barn, work the cream separator—such commands may have been demands with which Castle could not cope. Yet, alone in his icehouse or traipsing by himself out in the valley, we know Castle was able to focus with relentless diligence on his drawings, books and constructions.

At times, Castle seemingly could socialize. Everyone who knew the artist as a boy or young man recalls him as being puppy-dog friendly. When relatives or friends approached the Castle family ranch, post office, general store, the young boy would run out, smiling, and thrust his latest drawing upon the visitor. By the time Castle was a teenager, he was cadging cigarettes from visitors. (Castle was an inveterate smoker whose fingers were stained from his famed soot and saliva ink and, later, from nicotine as well. Hundreds of his small books boast cigarette pack covers.) Castle's manner of greeting relatives, friends and strangers continued throughout his life.

Though young Castle was seemingly sociable, he could be friendly to the point of being a pest, perhaps another manifestation of an autistic's mind-blindness and/or self-centeredness. Some valley girls found him irritating. And so did valley boys. Sometimes Frank Castle would have to take his son aside and direct him into a side room. Sometimes, when the boy became uncontrollable, Frank would have to grip him, slap him once to calm him down, then lead him up a long, single flight of outside wooden steps that led to a large attic. We have many drawings of that attic interior, an attic that became James' detention studio, gallery, and archive.

There are other, more disturbing stories about Castle's demeanor. Boys who grew up with the artist report sometimes the boy and young man would explode, have fits or rages. (Castle's Garden Valley nicknames were "CJ" or "Crazy Jimmy" or "Dummy.") These outbursts are reminiscent of fits by the autistic artistic idiot savant Nadia, a young English girl of Ukrainian heritage.<sup>26</sup> Nadia was sent to a special school where her "headmistress recalls . . . she was sometimes destructive and frequently had uncontrollable attacks of screaming. . . . She had regular temper tantrums when she would scream and shout uncontrollably for two or three hours at a time" (Selfe 1967, 4). Even at home, Selfe tells us, Nadia "had moods and bad temper tantrums when she was destructive and she occasionally smashed milk bottles and broke the fretwork on the piano" (5).<sup>27</sup> While it is quite possible Castle could have been venting his frustrations at being unable to communicate or participate in socializing in the post office or on the playground in such outbursts, it may also be that he, like Nadia and other autistic children, was easily over-stimulated.<sup>28</sup> Oliver Sacks, in his *Mind Traveler* segment "Rage for Order," has captured on videotape a frightening instance of autistic over-stimulation. Sacks is shown interviewing with a well-known autistic young woman, Jessy Park.<sup>29</sup> At one point, Sacks apparently has been too insistent in his questioning and Jessy explodes in anger. Similarly, Donna Williams also speaks frequently of being frightened of "losing it," when over-stimulated.<sup>30</sup>

There are a number of eyewitness reports regarding Castle's fits or rages, but the artist does not seem to have recorded these outbursts overtly in his art. They may, however, be hinted at in some of the distorted cranial activity depicted in *Primer* or *Gumby & Rotarian* portraits, in other book illustrations, and in some seemingly fractured Garden Valley interiors. One striking Castle book seems to reflect some type of instability or trauma. The *Post Toasties* book begins as a seemingly conventional multi-genre Castle work (Album, Calendar and Letter Book pages in one volume) until we come upon an intermittent series of spreads that appear as if a whirlwind had

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<sup>26</sup> See Selfe 1967. Castle, however, cannot be thought of as a savant, idiot or otherwise. Sacks, who notes that Dr. J. Langdon Down coined the term "idiot savant" in 1887, reports that savants "do not seem to develop as normal talents do. They are fully fledged from the start" (1995a, 225). Clara Claiborne Park (2001), notes contemporary writers prefer the term "savant skills."

Castle, in contrast to Nadia or to Steven Wiltshire, as Sacks describes him, had to teach himself to draw. Analysis of his books (and one drawing) salvaged from the Castle family icehouse in 1970 proves the beginning artist has not yet mastered, for example, perspective.

Work by Castle and Wiltshire is a particularly intriguing case of contrasts. Castle's copied work reveals him to be a master of chiaroscuro, while his architectural drawings from the studio of his memory or from the field reveal him to be a master draftsman. Both are sources of works that resonate but, as many critics have noted, seem encapsulated in silence. The few pen and ink drawings by Wiltshire that I have seen seem organic, alive, almost electric and executed in a never-ending, sinuous line. It is Wiltshire's line that envelops us, not his hush.

<sup>27</sup> Nigel Dennis has criticized treatment of Nadia, a gifted artist early in her life, in his review of Lorna Selfe's study. See his "Portrait of the Artist," (1978). After treatment, or "mainstreaming," Nadia's artistic abilities disappeared.

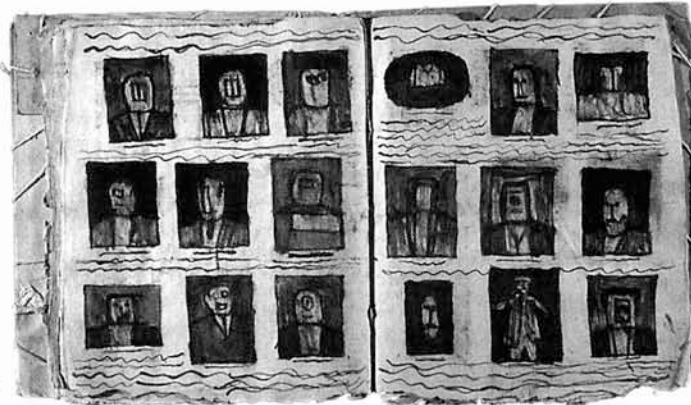
<sup>28</sup> Castle was not allowed to attend public school in Garden Valley. However, he frequently slipped away from home and visited the school grounds, reportedly peering in the school windows until recess, when he would attempt to participate in games like mumblety-peg. In other instances, he would become the (willing) target for boy's spears made from beargrass, according to Larry Mills (Boise Art Gallery interview—see Note 26), and from personal interviews with Ira Rodemack in Boise.

<sup>29</sup> Called Elly in *The Siege*, Jessy Park is the subject of this early and compelling record of autism written by her mother and English professor, Clara Claiborne Park (1976). Jessy is also featured in the Oliver Sacks PBS series, *The Mind Traveler*, in the episode titled "Rage for Order." Interestingly, Jessy Park has gone on to become an artist and exhibited in March 2001 at Bodell Gallery in New York City. Her career and adult development may be followed in *Exiting Nirvana*.

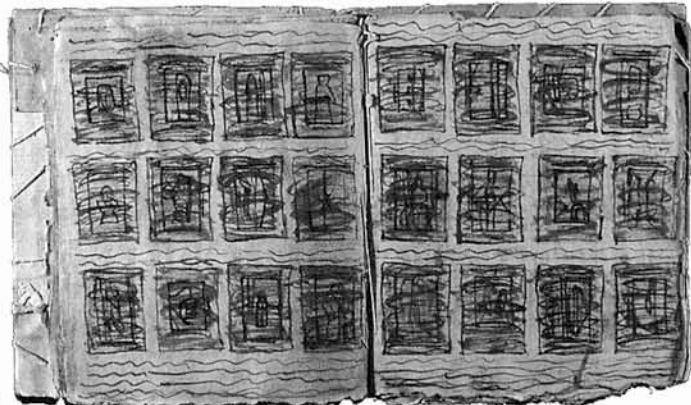
<sup>30</sup> Sacks also notes seizures striking the autistic artist José (Sacks 1985), and Grandin talks about her "tantrums . . . like epileptic seizures" (Grandin 1996, 87-88), all of which may be instances of autistic over-stimulation.



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FIGS 13-15: *Post Toasties* book sequence

13: cover

14: standard Album Book spread

15: "defaced" Album Book spread

31 Castle was also fascinated by kaleidoscopes. At least one was found in his Dreamhouse belongings and a number of his books have kaleidoscope imagery. One such volume, owned by the Boise Art Museum, has what appears to be a visual narrative based on the fragmented, repetitive imagery created by the device. For information about the history and construction of kaleidoscopes, see Boswell 1992.

Grandin's comments, although about low-functioning autistics, may provide another interpretation for Castle's kaleidoscope interest. "The world of the non-verbal person with autism is chaotic and confusing. A low-functioning adult [which James was not] who is still not toilet trained may be living in a completely disordered sensory world. It is likely that he has no idea of his body boundaries and sights and sounds, and touches are all mixed together. It must be like seeing the world through a kaleidoscope" (58-9).

struck, touched down, lifted, then touched down, again and again [FIGS 13-15]. It is a remarkably accurate twister, possessing pinpoint accuracy: each portrait has its own cyclone — a whirling funnel cloud of sorts that is confined within the picture frame [FIG 15]. It is as though the artist

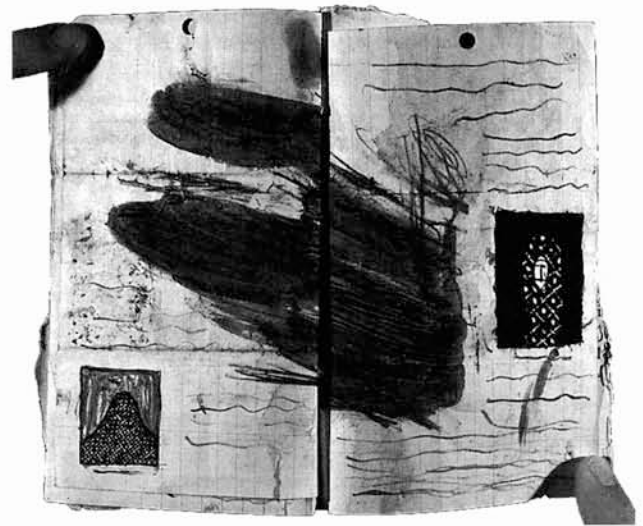


FIG 16: A calculated discordant visual effect or an accident in Castle's *Piano* book?

is recording an attack or a fit of depression. Perhaps these pages record Castle's feelings of terror, of being uprooted and moved from Garden to Treasure Valley in 1924. Many of the *Post Toasties* images are familiar, appearing in hundreds of Castle's so-called Album Books, and many of them are portraits of family members. Whatever the maelstrom is, it is effacing (or merely moving, in the manner of a Kansas tornado, Oz-bound?) the artist's family, as well as religious and other familiar images. Defacing or relocating in the *Post Toasties* book is methodically done, in marked contrast to Castle's *Piano* book where a spread has a large, inexplicable black splotch splayed across the gutter [FIG 16]. *Piano* almost appears to be an accidental ink spill, whereas the visual violence in *Post Toasties* is clearly calculated, premeditated and carefully executed.

Wh should also recall that Castle could become "lost" in simple objects. One nephew, notorious for teasing and taunting the middle-aged Castle, even breaking up the sticks Castle fashioned into pens, recalls how the artist would sit for hours, looking into bits of glass or dipping them into water and peering through them. Other relatives corroborate Castle's activity and point to trays filled with chips and bits of glass, crystal and translucent plastic found in the artist's belongings after his death. Family members ascribe Castle's activity as proof of his endless search for new and artistic ways to perceive the world. They may be correct.<sup>31</sup> As well, these bits of glass and plastic may have served as Irlen lenses for the artist. Irlen colored lenses are reputed to reduce visual over-stimulation, thus enhance visual processing in autistics. Donna Williams claims that before she began using the lenses, "I did not recognize people by their faces . . ." (Cole 1999, 99). Descriptions of Castle spending hours looking through bits of colored glass and plastic also recall Temple Grandin's hours-long fascination with grains of sand and numerous other reports of autistic children,

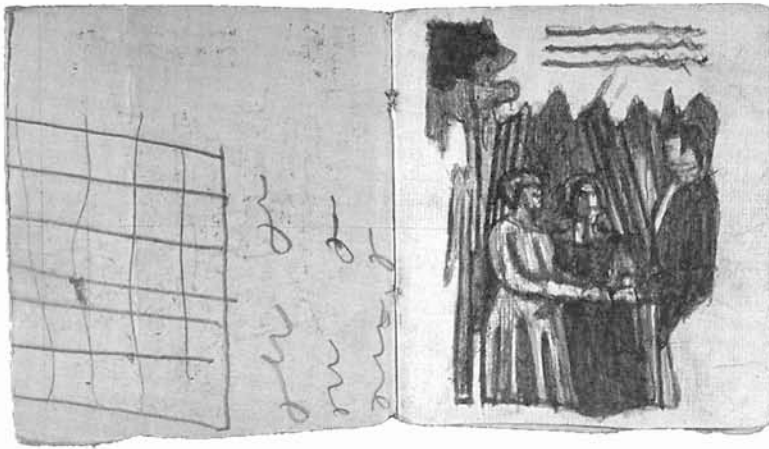


FIG 17: Jigsaw Puzzle book. A cover crossword puzzle-like grid wraps around to the inside cover of this book which contains three pages of jigsaw puzzle illustrations. Shown puzzle piece is probably part of an advertisement or magazine illustration.

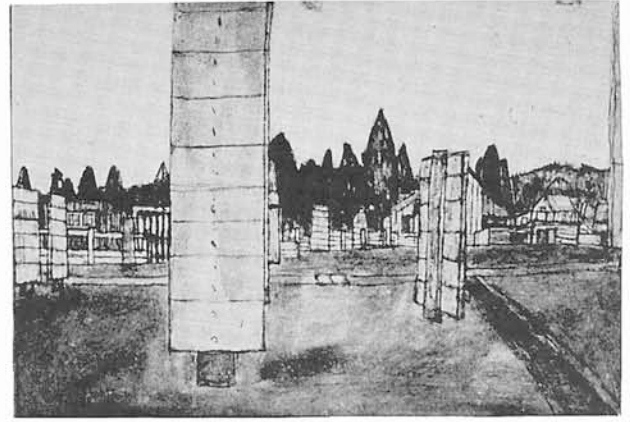


FIG 18: Castle "totems" or autistic associational images recording construction in Garden Valley.

hyper-absorbed in seemingly trivial (yet comforting) objects and activities.<sup>32</sup>

Questions remain about Castle's *Primer*, however. Why are *Primer* portraits full-faced, in contrast to portraits by Donna Williams, and why did Castle apparently chose to bring his *Large Primer* book instead of other Icehouse books left behind when the Castle family departed Garden Valley in 1924.<sup>33</sup> Understanding some of the pathologies of autism may permit us to hazard answers.<sup>34</sup>

Autistics and their reactions to or perceptions of the human face have fascinated researchers since autism was first named and described in medical literature in the early 1940s. Castle's *Primer*, completed perhaps a quarter of a century before that first medical description of autism, not only contains a multitude of objects that made up his life but also, we may hypothesize, it contains full-faced portraits of the artist and others who, collectively, helped create, shape and/or maintain the artist's emotional or psychological identity. As Cole says of Williams, "Part of the way in which she had begun to know our world seemed to include observation of the face and facial expressions. A repeated theme was that face represented personhood and feelings" (Cole 1999, 93). One might say the *Large Primer* was Castle's survival kit. It permitted the artist to face himself and the world, a world that is collected in *Primer* drawings subsequent to the portrait series.

Like many visually gifted autistics, Castle was fascinated by jigsaw puzzles and a number were found after his death in what his family called his Dreamhouse (the small trailer which served as his living quarters, refuge, studio and archive, circa 1962-1975). Drawings of what appear to be advertisement illustrations in the shape of jigsaw pieces are found in a number of Castle books. In these books, the artist illustrates one page with one or two large puzzle pieces. The next page contains another piece or two, and so on [FIG 17]. Why only a portion of the puzzle

appears on a page, and why successive pages do not mesh to "solve" or complete the puzzle (or even appear to be from the same puzzle) is unclear. Temple Grandin provides an insight into autistic visual memory, however, which may help solve this puzzle. She notes that gifted visual autistics often create referential portions of images in their drawings. From these portions, the autistic can mentally envision the complete image. If Castle possessed this ability, his jigsaw pages (full illustrations for him) are only clues for those of us without a corner piece to even commence completion of the puzzle.<sup>35</sup>

A permutation of the jigsaw puzzle approach to page illustration is employed in other Castle drawings. In a number of drawings of the Castle homestead in Garden Valley, Castle draws a swatch of plaid or, in other instances, what appear to be frets of a guitar (or a telephone or electrical pole?) hovering in the sky.<sup>36</sup> In a number of haunting exteriors, erect rectangles of wood—strips of partitions or walls—appear isolated or at angles to one another in an open field [FIG 18]. (Critics have termed these structures

<sup>32</sup> See Grandin, 44. One of Castle's nieces has told of taking James for an automobile ride in the countryside outside of Boise later in his life, thinking he might relish a change of scenery. To her surprise, Castle was not at all interested in the scenery and spent the entire trip, scrutinizing a few objects he discovered in the glove box.

<sup>33</sup> One may speculate how many other works by Castle, tucked and stuffed away for safekeeping in various outbuildings, also remained in Garden Valley. Not all his hideaways were secure as the icehouse. We know, for instance, that the Yourens, the family who traded their Boise Valley property for the Castle's Garden property, burned Castle's attic work in fire-barrels behind the old Castle house. In later years, Mrs. Youren ruefully regretted the destruction of thousands of dollars of artwork they had viewed as trash.

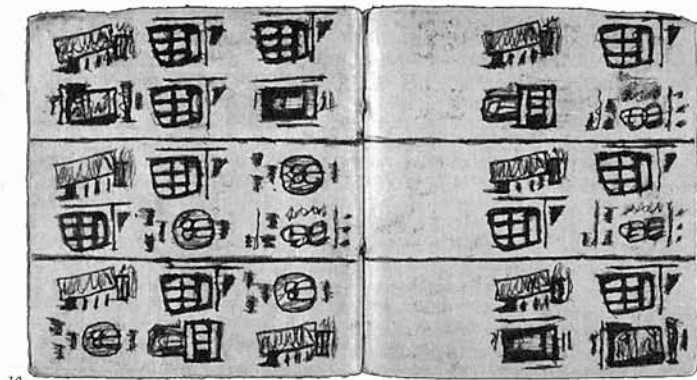
<sup>34</sup> Evidences of autism in Castle's work and lifestyle are compelling. In addition to works related to autism already (and subsequently) cited, my analyses and conclusions have drawn heavily on a case history reported on and analyzed by Houston and Frith (2000). Frith, a leading expert on autism and dyslexia, provides a model for diagnosing the condition based on eyewitness and printed and written documentation.

The constellation of conditions associated with autism in the Castle family's medical biography provides additional evidence in concluding the Idaho artist was autistic. Known Castle family maladies, syndromes or conditions include: epilepsy (Castle's uncle, John Scanlon), dyslexia (a Castle niece and grand-nephew), lupus (Castle's sister Emma is suspected of suffering from lupus and two of his nieces have the condition), and an unspecified mental instability and impairment (a niece, a grand-nephew). A Castle great grand-nephew suffers from Tourette syndrome, associated with Asperger Syndrome, a form of autism, according to Tantom (Frith 1991, 165).

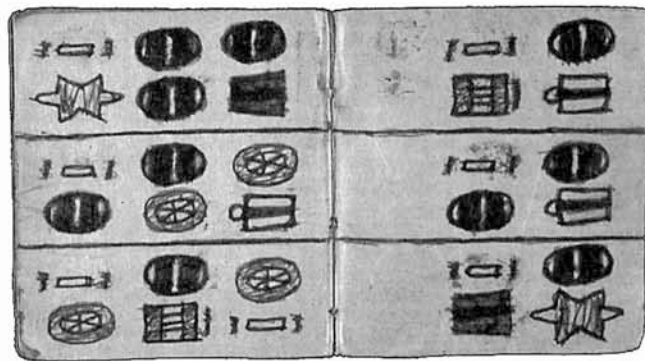
Castle's autism appears to have ameliorated over time, which is not atypical. Certainly, his rages and seemingly inexplicable outbursts of anger seem to have lessened as he matured. Still, relatives tell of Castle's "acting-out" when taken to the doctor, in his final decades. The artist would make inappropriate noises and "cause trouble" in the doctor's office waiting room. When this would happen, the receptionist would immediately take the trouble-making patient into an examination room. Castle's relatives believed this was Castle's clever way of making certain he would not have to wait for an appointment. While this may be the case, it may also be true that the artist was over-stimulated.

<sup>35</sup> Baron-Cohen cites his article about a youthful autistic jigsaw Grand Master (1993, 62), Sacks reports of similarly talented autistics, "J. D." and Steven Wiltshire (1995a, 211), and Grandin discusses autistics and jigsaw puzzles (1996, 26, 32).

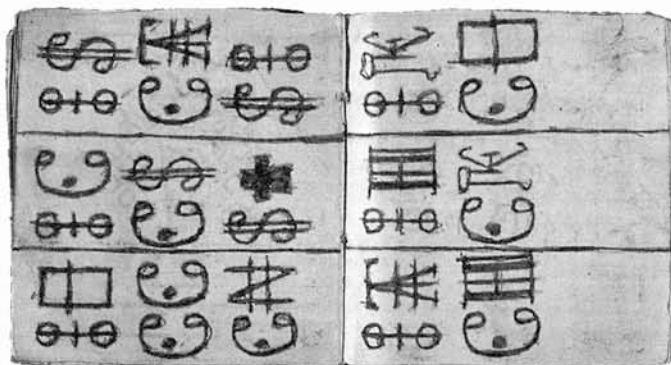
<sup>36</sup> There is also the possibility that Castle created these and other drawings like them after seeing bad photographs (double exposures) taken by his sister Nellie.



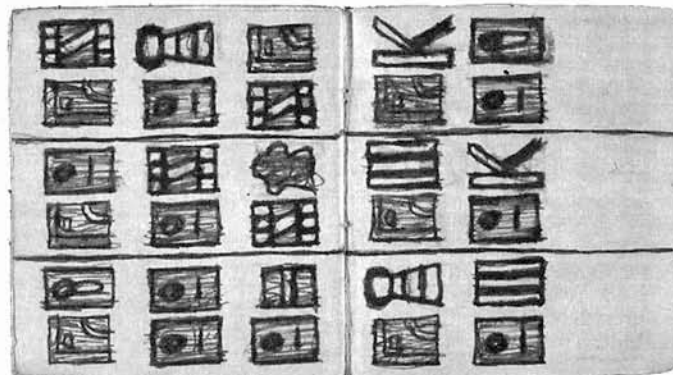
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FIGS 19-22: Code Books. Castle has devised more than a dozen codes all bearing the same—if any—message. Despite diverse letters, numbers, characters and “glyphs,” code patterns are identical in all books, although approximately half are mirror sequences (the reversed pattern) of the other.

37 Castle’s Calendar Books and Code Books may be viewed as grids of associational images, numbers and symbols. In cinematic terms, perhaps they are storyboards used to outline Castle’s narrative—the film or memory he is depicting. The content or message of these books may illustrate the extreme subjectivity Grandin cites. Although of seeming endless variety (in terms of imagery, symbols [and, in the case of Calendar Books, the number of days/month], both biblio genres repeat basic patterns.

Sacks (1995a, 284), refers to the Mnemonist who reduced everything to numbers or letters. A terrifying and yet oddly pleasing speculation: what if Castle Code Books = his Album = Calendar books? One aesthetic homily would have every artist and author having but one story to tell. In this view, all of Castle is one story—in an edition of over 20,000 pleasing and variant works.

The best known Outsider or Self-Taught artist is Adolf Wölfli. For a well-documented study of the Austrian artist and his imagery and subjective symbol systems, see Morganthaler 1992. Numerous works on the American artist Henry Darger are appearing, such as (see) Darger 2000. For an overview of artists outside of the mainstream art world, see MacGregor 1989.

38 Indeed, there are hundreds of so-called Code Books, yet another product line in what seems like a virtual Dreamhouse factory.

39 In their encyclopedic anthology of written systems, Rasula and McCaffrey 1998, include samples of Elise-Catherine Müller’s Martian script. Swiss-born Müller, better known as Hélène Smith, in the latter nineteenth century produced four different versions of Martian (later described as “an infantile travesty of French” and written in a charmingly alien scribble) all in a trance-like state.

In addition to examples and explanations of divine and alien alphabets and other instances of the arcane and esoteric systems of writing from ancient to contemporary times, Rasula and McCaffrey include works which may have influenced Castle or which illustrate his concerns and approaches to writing and letter forms. See, for example, entries on Alexander Melville Bell’s “Visible Language” (to which Castle was almost certainly exposed to the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind) or the layout and design of Max Ernst’s *Maximiliana*, or, especially, John Riddell’s philosophic musings and illustrations in *H*, about which more will be said in this article. Language concepts of Isidore of Seville, George Dalgarno, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), and Michel Leiris also shed light on

“totems.”) One way of discussing these drawings is to consider their “visual scraps” as autistic footnotes or memory chips. The plaid is that worn by Castle’s sister Nellie in numerous drawings and illustrations; the frets of the guitar may remind Castle of his father Frank, a musician. Or Castle may be commemorating the arrival of the telephone or electricity to the valley (although the Castles never enjoyed either convenience). The totems may well be portions of buildings demolished or being constructed. Castle had been fascinated as a boy by carpenters adding on to the Garden Valley homestead and had made a continual nuisance of himself during the remodeling, according to contemporary reports. (Inasmuch as conventional

totem poles may record or commemorate important clan or family events, the use of “totem” as a term for these structures in Castle drawings may be most appropriate.) These bits and pieces carefully situated in Castle’s drawings likely are what Temple Grandin terms associational images. Autistic artists frequently employ such imagery although, Grandin notes, sometimes the images are highly subjective and only their author understands their significance.<sup>37</sup>

Intriguing as Castle’s portraits are his works featuring another type of “face”: alphabets, numbers or special letter forms. The latter, especially, have drawn attention primarily because of their bizarre design, frequently expressed in miniature jigsaw puzzle letter forms or in glyph-like formations sometimes termed “codes”<sup>38</sup> [FIGS 19-22]. Seeing Castle’s codes, firsttime viewers are often stricken by what appear to be invented symbols or languages, as though the Idaho artist had surpassed Blake in originality. While the English artist created illustrations and text for his Prophetic Books, Castle seemingly has not only created illustrations and text but also has devised new letter forms and languages for that text. Others are convinced Castle has employed alphabets from Mars or variants of Greel or Cyrillic alphabets.<sup>39</sup> The truth is only somewhat less fanciful and is a logical continuation or extension of the artist’s efforts.

Before analyzing Castle's Martian and Earthly letter forms, however, to fully appreciate the artist's achievements, we need to consider the tools he found or made, the materials on which he used them, and how he worked. Art educator Nicolette Gray is acutely aware of the limitations imposed on traditional Western artists by his or her tools:

Unlike the Chinese, our script is not built up out of brush, or even pen, strokes which can be learnt and practised as abstract linear movements. As we know, it is made up of formal letters. The modern attempt to revive the writing of these as an art, the italic hand revival, has been based upon the chisel-cut pen nib—now almost obsolete—and a classical theory of form. It has awakened interest but it does not provide the bridge between handwriting and lettering as a free and expressive art form. Different, more flexible, and experimental writing instruments may provide solutions. . . . (Gray 1971)

It is safe to say that Castle seldom had access to chisel-cut pen nibs, until the late 1950s and thereafter when art dealers, family members and gallery and museum staffs began to ply him with modern materials and supplies. Largely, Castle ignored such blandishments, either because he was stubborn and set in his ways, preferred his homemade variety, or because, as an autistic, he found new tools disconcerting. In many icehouse works (works begun or completed circa 1913-1924), we find Castle still using pencils and, in the *Primer* (believed to be of icehouse vintage), words that appear written with a brushy stick pen or lightly sketched with a pencil. Sometimes, Castle came upon or commandeered a fountain or ball point pen and, late in life, we find a few works done in felt-tip. However, the artist's writing implement of choice was a pen made from a sharpened stick (natural or Popsicle or tongue depressor or chopstick) or twig. With such pens, line effects were dependent on the hardness of the wood used, the diameter of the "nib" whittled, the pressure applied by the artist, the nature of the ink used, and the speed with which the artist executed his drawing or lettering—as well as the characteristics of the material being written on.<sup>40</sup>

In the documentary, *Dreamhouse: The Art and Life of James Castle* (Trusky 1999), Robert Beach, Castle's cousin and a commercial artist in his own right, explains and demonstrates his famous uncle's drawing technique. Beach was one of the few individuals Castle trusted to join him in his shed, the ex-chicken coop in which his sister Peggy let the artist work, prior to her purchasing him his Dreamhouse, the small trailer she acquired with monies from sales of Castle's work in the early 1960s. In the shed, his nephew photographed him at work in the 1950s. Castle, who was right-handed, is shown in Beach's photographs working at a small, battered, student's desk in the corner of the

shed.<sup>41</sup> The artist hunches over his drawing, close to the paper on which he is drawing. Castle's niece, "Gerry" Garrow, also recalls her uncle working very close to the paper surface on which he drew. The artist's posture or manner of positioning himself may also, however, reflect his diminishing eyesight. As Castle grew older, his eyesight worsened.

Beach tells us Castle worked incredibly fast, so fast, his drawing hand was a blur as it moved between Mason jar lid (which held his ink) to paper (blank, used, or printed on paper or cardboard). Castle's papers were found, scrounged, "borrowed" or, later in his life, were gifts of expensive artist's papers. As he had other supplies and tools purchased for him, Castle usually ignored these presents.<sup>42</sup> Beach describes and re-enacts how Castle made his drawings, with quick, short strokes—not long, sweeping, extended lines. It is important to note, though, that Beach seems to be speaking specifically of Castle's illustrations and his photographs show the artist at one such drawing; Castle's procedures for lettering may have differed from what Beach describes.

Approximately sixty years prior to Gray's advice to students of lettering, Castle employed "different" writing implements. As to their flexibility, judging from the artifacts that have survived, it appears Castle shaped individual sticks of wood to suit his needs. With these sticks, he could make hair-thin lines to broad, almost brush-like strokes [FIG 23]. While Gray proposes the possibility of developing new ("experimental") tools, Castle's sticks seem atavistic, reminiscent of sailing ship tattoo artist's



FIG 23: Castle "ink pens," fountain pen cap filled with stove soot, and other artifacts.



FIG 24: Front page of a typical issue of *The Young Catholic Messenger* (circa 1918).

Castle's work. For more detailed information about Bell and Dalgarno, see Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

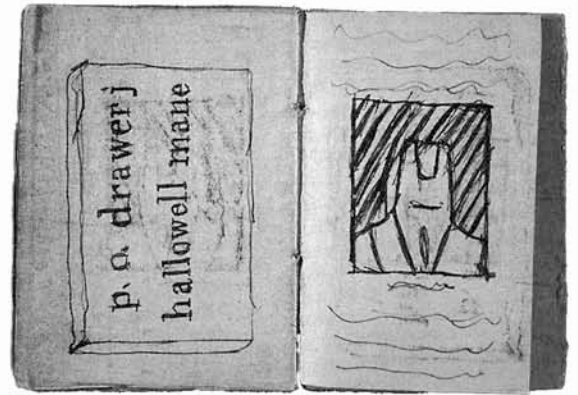
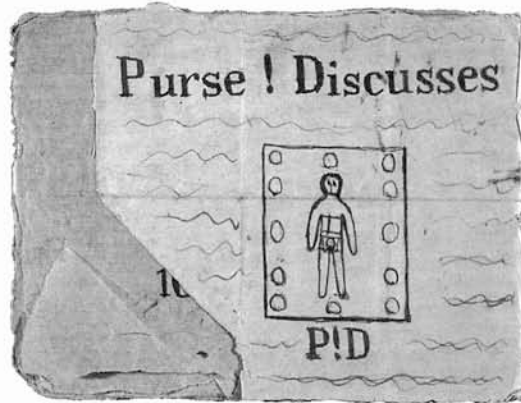
<sup>40</sup> Castle's materials are described in Trusky (1999:2000, 38-47).

<sup>41</sup> Trusky (1999). Because he was right-handed, Castle, in contrast to left-handed Leonardo Da Vinci, indulges only infrequently in right-to-left (and mirror) writing. Writing right to left with the right hand poses the same problem writing left to right with the left hand poses: the high probability of smearing text. Some have speculated Da Vinci adopted this manner of writing to keep his heretical views from the Catholic hierarchy, as if Cardinals did not possess mirrors and could not read right-to-left. Current opinion has the left-handed Italian artist writing as he did simply for ease, convenience and speed. We do not know if Castle had information to keep from priests from Boise, whichever direction he wrote.

<sup>42</sup> Motives expressed by gift givers include: a sense of pity or concern for the poor, deprived artist; an interest in providing the artist with tools and supplies worthy of his talent; a desire to help the artist "improve" or develop his technique and/or execution; a desire to have the artist use tools and materials that would justify higher selling prices (works done on Arches or Rives papers would command a higher price than those done on newsprint or cardboard, according to this logic); and to insure the survival of the artist's work (work done on better papers would be less likely to discolor, turn brittle or disintegrate than those done on acidic newsprint and cardboard).



FIG 25: Fine example of Castle letter form calligraphy, from his *Post Toasties*



FIGS 26-27: "P!D" and a Maine mailing address appear repeatedly in Castle's work. The address may have been for the headquarters of publishers of an early almanac Castle saw.



FIG 28: The *BLAW* book, an example of letter form serving as design elements and



FIG 29: *Liberty Loan* book, an early example of Castle's letter form experiments.

needles or styli Romans used to inscribe their wax-coated pugillares, or wedged-shaped sticks favored by writers of cuneiform.

Castle's lifelong interest in letter forms may be seen in hundreds of books and illustrations that consist largely or entirely of conventional alphabets and numbers. The earliest known example of Castle's interest is *The Young Catholic Messenger* [FIG 24].

Castle has reproduced the front page of the periodical and has either devoted his efforts primarily to the masthead, or the work is in-progress, for the mast-

head is the most complete feature of the oversize page. On the reverse side of this sheet is what appears to be mimeographed text regarding a 1918 Fuller Brush sales campaign. Letter forms in what appears to be a more conventional font (Times Roman?) fill one spread in the *Post Toasties* book. [FIG 25] Some times books and illustrations contain displays of seemingly nonsense phrases and random letters or addresses, both types repeated so frequently in Castle's work they seem calligraphic mantras<sup>43</sup> [FIGS 26-27]. In other instances, Castle seems to be treating letter forms, groupings and words as design elements or as text. [FIG 28] Often these carefully constructed Times Roman letters, let-

<sup>43</sup> Grandin comments, "Autistic children with echolalia help themselves understand what has been said by repeating it" (1996, 71). Perhaps Castle's repeated drawings, letter forms and, often with interesting variation, scenes or situations is visual echolalia for the same purpose.



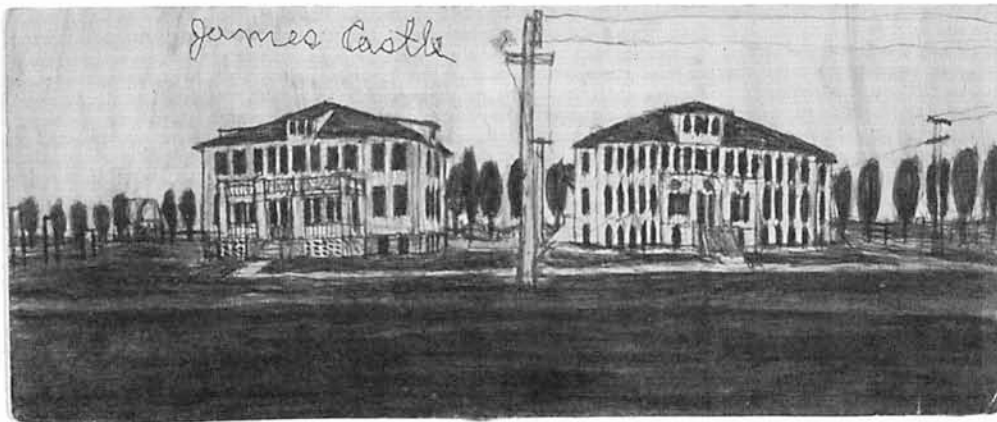
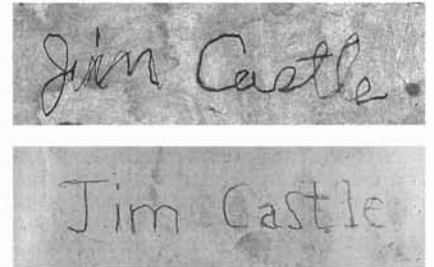


FIG 31: Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind illustration. The size and placement Castle's signature gives every indication of having been added as an afterthought or at the urging of others.



FIGS 31-32: Cursive and printed Castle signature templates found in the artist's effects.

ter groups and words will appear in upper and lower case, as though Castle were completing a calligraphy workbook task. Indeed, many of Castle's Letter and Number Books appear to be exercises the young artist has assigned himself. Sometimes alphabets and numbers will be written backwards, sometimes reversed or upside down [FIG 29]. Whether the artist consciously executed his works thusly, of course, is not known. It is known that dyslexia appears in successive Castle generations.<sup>44</sup> Given Castle's delight in or penchant for reversing or scrambling letters and words, or reversing images, patterns or entire illustrations—or his inability to do otherwise, one wonders if this condition was manifested in the artist. Frith, writing of an autistic patient named Ted Hart, described by Charles Hart, his father, comments on the younger Hart's similar ability. Although Hart "was able to learn to speak and read and write fluently," and Castle seemingly could not, Frith notes Hart "could read anything upside down and mirror reversed as rapidly as in an upright orientation" (Frith 1991, 113). The autistic artist Jessy Park, also possesses this ability. Yet, Castle's seeming delight in variation, sense of humor, and pride in his work suggest these were not primarily dyslexic or mirror-writing manifestations; seemingly, they were productions over which Castle consciously deliberated, apparently aware of what he was fashioning.

Different font and point size exercises are completed in Castle's numerous renditions of periodical advertisements. Less frequently Castle will write in script, usually in a brushy or sketchy, pencilled cursive, as is illustrated in his *Primer* "tooth" and "bee." Printed and script versions of Castle's signature usually appear to have been produced post-1950. Interpreting these signatures is however, more difficult than deducing emotions on faces. Despite Gray's assertion that "We all know how we feel that a person's handwriting gives an immediate impression of something of their character" (Gray 1971, 72), looks may deceive. This is especially true in the case of Castle's hand, where graphology, a questionable science from the outset, is rendered as useless as phrenology. These Castle signatures are

usually executed in a sloppy cursive or mechanical hand, as though the artist had lost interest or ability in such efforts—or was as lazy (or disinterested) an autographer as a farm hand. In fact, Castle was being directed to sign his work by individuals who believed signed works would increase sale prices of his art works<sup>45</sup> [FIG 30]. For ease, out of necessity, or because he was being forced to, when executing his name (printed or signed), the artist used templates [FIGS 31-32]. Yet, decades before art dealers and family members became in Castle's name, the artist had experimented with ways to identify his work.

What spurred Castle to claim authorship, we do not know. If mimicry is the mother of plagiarism, Castle may have noted author's names and copyright notices in publications he scrutinized. Castle was familiar, for instance, with Elbert Hubbard's Roycrofters printers device. We know this because one of Hubbard's 1904 publications was found with Castle's books in the family icehouse in 1970 [FIG 33]. As well, Castle could not have avoided noting branded cattle in Garden Valley.<sup>46</sup>

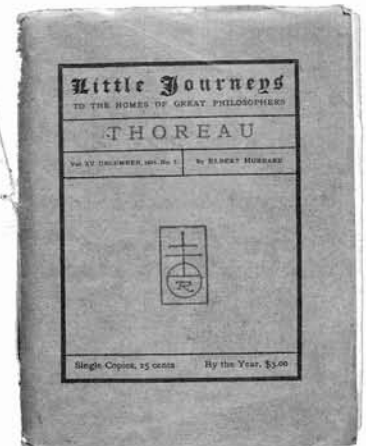


FIG 33: Elbert Hubbard publication with Roycrofters printers device or mark on cover. Found with Castle's books in the Castle family icehouse circa 1970.

<sup>44</sup> A Castle niece and a great-grandnephew are known to be dyslexic. Hans Asperger describes an autistic patient who was dyslexic. See Frith (*Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 63).

<sup>45</sup> I am reminded of Uta Frith's summary of the film *Rain Man*: "The adult with autism [played by Dustin Hoffman] was shown as awkward and gauche, with easily recognizable neurological signs. For instance, he had a peculiar stiff gait and a wooden expression, altogether a rigid and obsessive demeanor. Despite the lack of what we might call lost child appeal, he was an engaging character. That is, he was essentially innocent of the ways of the world. He was supremely egocentric (and hence autistic, in the original sense of the word), yet he was uncorrupted by the base motives which seem to govern so many transactions between ordinary people trying to get advantages for themselves" (Frith 1991, 107).

Some drawings and books have cursive signatures or notations regarding authorship or prices or have numbers written on them. The first three instances were written by Castle's sister Agnes Wade or his niece Geraldine (Gerry) Wade Garrow. Numbers were used to identify works in exhibitions of Castle's work organized by Portland, Oregon Image Gallery personnel in the 1960s. These different hands are readily distinguished from the artist's.

<sup>46</sup> In *The Alphanumeric Labyrinth*, Drucker chronicles a variety of Western myths that attempt to explain the invention of the alphabet. The Greek myth of Cadmus, Drucker explains, tell us Cadmus gave the alphabet to the nymph Io. "Io was also pursued by Zeus, turned into a heifer to conceal her from the jealous Hera, and as she wandered the footprints of her hooves marked out the tracks of the two letters which form her name" (Drucker 1995, 57). Though western, Garden Valley need not be confused with Greece. However, there is a bovine parallel for the probable source of Castle's discovery of and interest in the alphabet. No two-lettered hooves were inscribing Garden Valley dust, but there were herds of hides with numbers, letters, and manipulated or altered letter forms burned in them.

<sup>47</sup> Castle's early to mid-career drawings are seldom if ever signed. If they are, they appear to have been "encouraged" or template signatures, or added by another hand.

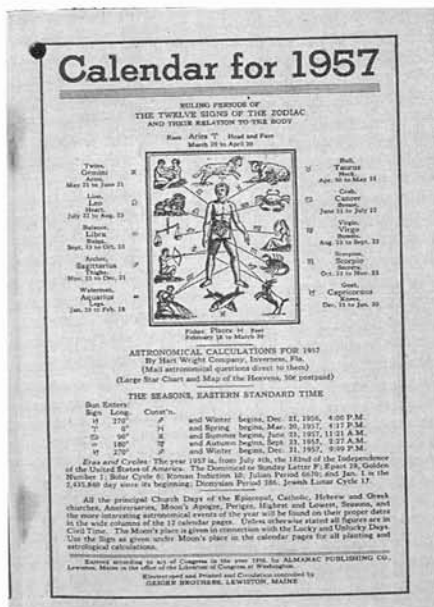


FIG 34: Zodiac figure from an almanac found in Castle's belongings. Castle incorporates this traditional almanac figure into his printers mark or device.

FIG 37: Spread from Mr. Fixit book. Is Castle portraying his acoustic space—the world he hears, in such cut-out and pasted-down letter form layouts?



FIG 35: Photograph of the Castle family branding iron, one of a number of "copyright" devices that influenced Castle.

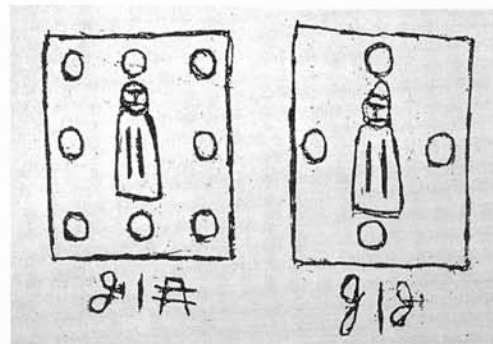
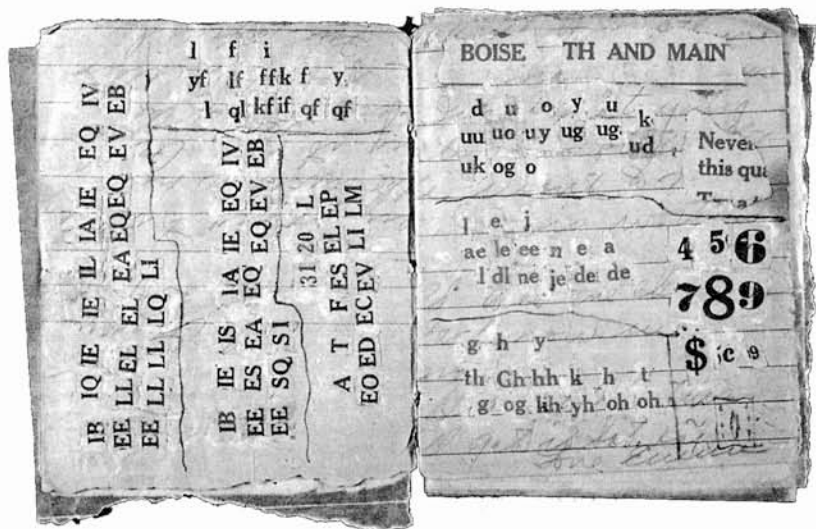


FIG 36: Castle's own "brands," found at the beginning and end of books and in drawings. The two lines through the "C" in the first brand indicate "two C's."



Castle fuses these two systems of ownership signification, printers marks and cattle brands, with a third—a familiar and proven system: the self-portrait.

Typically, in book produced mid-career (1930-1950), Castle employs all three methods to claim authorship and, perhaps, to indicate to whom the book belonged. Such insistence in establishing identity is reminiscent of Castle's *Primer* portraits. Now, however, in addition to portraiture, letter forms are employed by Castle to validate existence.<sup>47</sup> Castle begins by sketching a portrait of a zodiac figure reprinted annually in issues of *The Farmer's Almanac*. The appeal of this full-framed figure, legs set apart, arms upraised, is unclear, but clearly it is important to Castle [FIG 34]. (Perhaps Castle intended his books to be his personal almanac, complete with its own zodiac figure?) Sometimes, instead of or in addition to this zodiac figure,

a full-faced self-portrait will appear on the inside cover, the "title," or the "copyright page."<sup>48</sup>

Castle grants primacy to visual notarizing; however, to further reassure himself or to insure readers are aware of who

wrote this book or to whom the book belongs, Castle places his invented brand, monogram, printer's mark or device below his portrait. This monogram is based on his family's C-bar-C brand. (Its two C's may represent Frank and Mary Castle [FIG 35].)<sup>49</sup> For himself (James Charles Castle), the artist has devised a J-bar-2C brand. Near the end of these books (the last pages, including the inside back cover) we frequently find another self-portrait and/or the author's brand. There is a subtle difference, however, in this second brand. The letter forms are cursive and fused and we must decipher the two "C's" hidden in the second "J." If this second brand appears at the end of a book, it frequently, but not always, is accompanied by the zodiac man. This second figure almost always has fewer astrological signs surrounding him, as though the author is fatigued, or is relying on visual shorthand, or (as a bibliophile would have it) the book has set him free of whatever fates the initial zodiac man had prognosticated [FIG 36].

In the examples cited so far, Castle is both echoing visual patterns and quite probably comprehending the relationships between letters and words and objects or concepts. A "bee" is a sting and a Castle Guernsey is known by her brand. However, it is not clear if Castle comprehended what indi-

<sup>48</sup> At first glance, "portrait copyrights" might seem to be useful in dating Castle's works for, with the exception of icehouse works, items in Castle's oeuvre are extremely difficult to date. Would not a portrait of a boyish, teenaged, young or mature man provide an approximate date of creation for such works? Unfortunately for art archeologists, Castle often reproduces his work or recopies portions of it, much as aging authors who have flattering photographs taken during salad days reproduced as dust jacket photos for volumes published long after wilt has set in. Soot and saliva portraits are not carbon dating systems.

vidual letters in English represent. “Most basically,” Richard Firmage observes, “an alphabet is a set of symbols representing sounds. It is composed of letters—each one a visual sign representing a sound” (Firmage 1993, 5). To this definition, Gray adds, “A letter is a sign; over and above its phonetic significance as part of a word it also has visual connotations” (Gray 1971, 80). The question is, was Castle aware sound elements related to letter forms?<sup>50</sup>

Studying Castle’s Letter and Number Books and selected drawings, we cannot help but entertain the possibility that Castle’s efforts are self-diagnostic or, even, appeals to us, his deaf and blind audience. To portray his acoustic space, has Castle created an environment filled with an incomprehensible barrage of free-floating letters, words, and word fragments? Is Castle saying-by-showing, “This is how the world sounds to me. It is a universe of complete—albeit shaped and ordered—cacophony!”? [FIG 37].

We do know Castle knew people spoke—and in different voices—for he shows us. In the *Perfect Fresh* book (circa 1950), Castle has cut out an illustration showing a woman and man facing each other. Folding the illustration to create two facing pages, Castle has the two profile faces talk to one another across the gutter. To accomplish this, the artist has carefully cut out all capital letters for the woman and all lower case for the man, then pasted them down, arranging them so they emanate from the two speakers.<sup>51</sup> [FIG 38] At least as remarkable is the *Unee* book, as modest a looking work as *Perfect Fresh*. *Unee* contains a portrait of a male, either the artist (or his father or uncle—Guy Wade) on the inside cardboard cover. This man is shown facing us and, like the *Perfect Fresh* book’s Upper and Lower Case Couple, he may be speaking, despite the pipe Castle has him smoking. At a distance from his mouth, hovering neck-level, floats not a cloud of Prince Albert tobacco smoke, however, but a line of hovering squares made from little cut-out and pasted-down letters. Or is his visual gobbledygook, the words or sentences Castle hears, when others speak? The first page of this crudely bound little volume is made of newspaper. Astonishingly or accidentally, Castle has torn the 1930s paper with news of Hitler so its headline, facing the inside cover, reads “SENTENCIN” [FIG 39].

Six years before Castle’s death in 1977, Nicolette Gray lamented in *Lettering as Drawing*, that in many art schools, teaching of calligraphy and lettering had ceased. Instead, students were being trained in typography where “Greater formal variety is sought by looking at letters from a distorting viewpoint, or in reverse, or by tearing them in pieces. . . .”<sup>52</sup> Gray continues, suggesting how this situation might be rectified, noting that “training in creative letter-drawing could take over by starting with the free drawing of individual capital letters. This approach has the great advantage that it means starting with single, simple forms which can immediately be thought of as



FIG 38: Speech or letter case identifies gender in the *Perfect Fresh* book. The female speaks in cut-out and pasted down majuscule characters, while the male is granted miniscule characters.

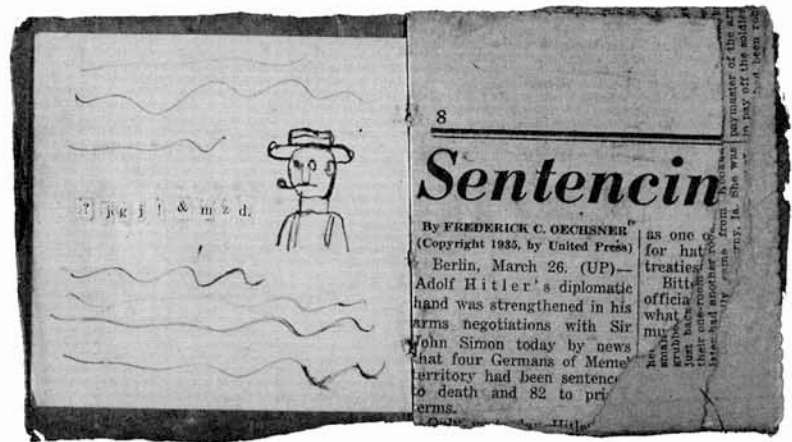


FIG 39: Possible visual representation of how Castle hears speakers—or how his sentences sound. From the *Unee* book.

abstract shapes. The relation of these shapes to the idea of letters can then be analysed, and the student can start thinking about lettering in his own terms” (Gray 1971, 79).

Gray’s complaint about, and her suggestion for the improvement of lettering student education, are both embodied in Castle’s work. Perhaps “seeking greater formal variety,” as Gray phrases it, Castle has doggedly dissected Roman letters, mentally reducing them to angular and incomprehensible puzzle pieces, much as the Letterists would do, mid-twentieth century. Johanna Drucker notes,

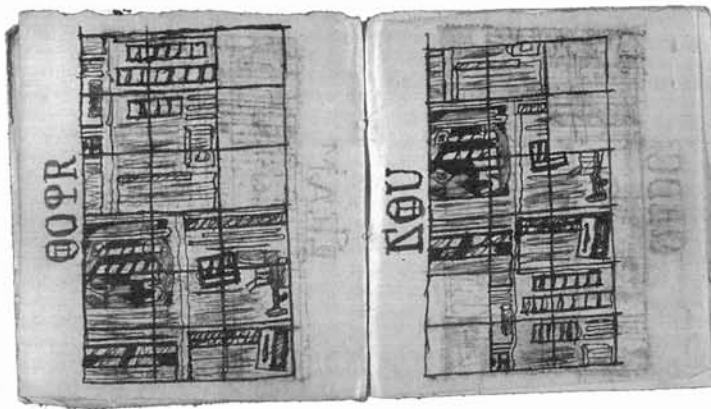
The Greek word for the alphabet, *stoicheia*, also carries the meaning elements with all the cosmological associations of that term. For the Greeks the letters had an atomistic and elemental character. The letters were indecomposable:

49 Other ranchers had their own brands and some of these appear in Castle’s Code Books. These brands are reproduced in Trusky 1999, 15.

50 Analogous to, but the reverse of Castle’s plight of being able to see what he may not have been able to hear or process, is the situation contemporary linguists face studying Etruscan. “This language,” Firmage notes, “was almost certainly non-Indo-European and presents scholars today with the curious case that they are able to ‘read it’—knowing the sounds the letter symbolize—but not understand it” (Firmage 1993, 17).

51 A notable contemporary artists’ book which allocates characters their own fonts to visually distinguish them is *French Fries* (Lehrer and Bernstein 1984).

52 Gray (1971, 79) identifies some of these artists who deconstruct letter forms: “Young artists like Kriwet, Franz Mon, Josua Reichert, are taking typographic letters, often wood letters, and building them into shapes or sequences, or cutting and tearing them up to make a new message.”



FIGS 40-41: Examples of Castle's hyper "jumbled" letter forms—Calendar Book month names: December; October/November spread.



FIGS 42-43: Deconstructed "LEARN" (front and back). One example from a bag-full of letters and words Castle cut out and then pasted and re-formed.

there were no smaller, more significant, or more basic elements of the cosmic order. It was from these units that the material form of the material world, and the natural world, was constructed. In addition, the essence of the letters was equivalent to their value as numbers, for numbers were considered the purest form of energy or matter. (Drucker 1995, 56)

One might speculate if Castle saw letter forms as being composed of "sub-atomic particles." Did he see letters as being a composite of leptons, mesons, and baryons—smaller visual entities eligible for fission and fusion? These are the Martian, Cyrillic or Greek scripts viewers have found so bizarre. Most frequently, these atomized letters which have been joined to create seemingly invented words will be found as month names in hundreds of Castle's Calendar Books. [FIGS 40-41] It is as though Castle has invented a hyper-cattle brand or a more complex version of the "Word Jumble" game. (In this game, players are given a jumbled set of letters and must unscramble the letters, re-forming them to the word they were, before Babel.) In Castle's version, not only

have individual letter forms been de- and reconstructed but also the letters in the word have been scrambled, then varied in point size. Sometimes parts of letters adhere to other letters. Sometimes it appears as if the puzzler has deliberately deleted a leg or a serif. Child's play, perhaps, for an autistic practiced in creating and reading associational images.

Other instances of Castle's mania for letters and words were found in the artist's belongings after his death: paper sacks stuffed with strips of newsprint, magazine and (previously blank) paper. Castle had cut out individual letters, words, phrases, or headlines from printed material, had surgically dissected each letter into minute, jigsaw puzzle-like pieces, and then had pasted them back together on the original paper or on strips of blank, white paper, reform-

ing the letter or text.<sup>53</sup> [FIGS 42-43] These Castle artifacts resemble those created by other autistic children. In his review of Lorna Selfe's book, Nigel Dennis writes that Nadia "likes tearing paper into thin strips; when she uses scissors, she can get each strip about one-tenth of an inch wide with remarkable accuracy" (Dennis 1978, 8). Likewise, Oliver Sacks tells of "An attractive six-year-old boy [who] had been given a pair of scissors and was cutting minute 'H's, a fraction of an inch high, each perfect, from a piece of paper" (Sacks 1995a, 251).<sup>54</sup>

As one would expect from an autistic adult, Castle's manipulation of letter forms is a more complex matter than those reported on by Selfe or Sacks, in their studies of autistic children. And Castle's creations may cause us to consider the nature of creativity and free will. Are Castle works primarily manifestations of autism or of Castle's artistic impulses?<sup>55</sup> Consider Castle's LABOR DAY and PLAY. [FIG 44-45] Castle has drawn two large words, cut them out, then pasted and re-formed them. The drawing and deconstruction of words may define the two works as art pieces for some. For the dubious, however, it may be of interest to know that these two pieces were discovered packed together, which may indicate the artist was intentionally posing an ironic or humorous question by juxtaposing them. How may one play on a day of labor?

<sup>53</sup> We can imagine Castle responding to irritated family members, "Who has time for chores, facing these tasks!"

<sup>54</sup> For more on "H," see Ridell 1977.

<sup>55</sup> Another way of considering autistic artistic works is to attempt to evaluate them as conscious or unconscious productions. Lay and professional medical experts have long documented the therapeutic effects repetitious tasks or activities have on autistics. Such tasks or activities may be viewed as evidence of what Sacks (quoting from Wallace Stevens's poem, "Sunday Morning") so aptly terms, a "rage for order."

Answer: only when it is a holiday. Or the pairing may be a verbal portrayal of cause and effect: on the Labor Day holiday we do not have to work, we may play. Is Castle's coloring, cutting out, and re-pasting letters play for him? Do we view such activity as labor? In either instance, are they art? And is art play, labor or both? What seems apparent, however, is that in these instances, Castle's work leads us to ponder when or if autistic becomes artistic activity

Assemblage, dis-assemblage, and/or re-assemblage of letter forms-into-phrases may have empowered speechless Castle, as well as delighted and occupied him. But these activities were not the only manner by which the artist could exert dominion over the world of letters. Familiarity with Castle's biography and his art reveals the artist possessed an ability similar to what Grandin describes (and possesses), that of being able to store and recall images, verbatim. Grandin compares her ability to videotaping, while a more contemporary metaphor might be that of videostreaming. Although Castle, noted for his different "takes" or perspectives of a single scene or object, may have physically positioned himself in place to obtain this or that bird's eye view, there is ample evidence the artist did not have to vantage himself in place to draw it.<sup>56</sup> He may have had only to recall it—even decades later. Castle was able to mentally levitate himself around and about, as Grandin describes herself capable of doing. Thus Castle could situate himself wherever, whenever, recalling and recreating the scene completely.

We know Castle possessed these levitating abilities because twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years after having attended the Idaho School for the Deaf & Blind (in Gooding, Idaho in 1911), the artist will draw an interior school scene showing a second floor landing, the corner of a first floor classroom, a third floor hallway, or an exterior, from a field, behind the boys dormitory. While a few of Castle's Gooding school scenes are based on photographs, hundreds are not. The artist possessed a photographic memory or, if videographic, he was capable of freeze-framing his fluid memories of static school architecture. Castle's deconstruction and reconstruction of letters and words may also illustrate his ability to levitate mentally around them, as if they were three-dimensional objects, free standing sculptures in a pasture, much as Canadian cartoonist John Riddell depicts himself in *H*, his visual (and prose) journey into a world filled with totemic alphabet letters (Riddell 1977).

Although Castle has torn apart letters, as Gray somewhat disparagingly describes modern artists as doing, he has also anticipated her advice and rendered letters as free-form drawings, as abstract shapes. One lure of letters for the Idaho artist had to do with their immobility. The second letter of our alphabet could neither fly nor sting. This delight in stasis is also apparent in Donna Williams' case. Jonathan Cole asked Williams "if a static face was easier [to look at] than a moving



FIGS 44-45: Castle has drawn large words, cut them in pieces, then pasted and reformed them. (Note the peeling piece in the "Y" in "PLAY.") The two words were found, side by side, in the artist's artifacts after his death in 1977.

one, since less information was being expressed." Williams replied,

In terms of visual processing a static face is easier. . . . Both the static face and the moving face generally impose a sense of the other at the expense of connection to sense of self. The static one is easier to handle, though, because it won't blah at you or grab you and try to force eye contact. The static face of a picture is controllable and able to be abandoned without consequence. That's why I chose to spend time with statues. (Cole 1999, 103)

This explanation can be related to Castle's delight in emulating photographic, stamp, advertising and holy card imagery and it also may explain why stones, pillars, obelisks and cemetery statuary—and, of course, letter forms—are also favorite subjects for the Idaho artist. Williams's answer also sheds light on why Castle favors interior and exterior architecture and furniture in his Garden Valley and Gooding school drawings and illustrations.

Motion was, at the least, visual chaos for Castle. Although extreme, his disorientation is neither idiosyncratic nor unique to autistics. McNeill writes, "Several factors blur [facial] recognition. . . . A shifted pose or expression can also challenge memory, at least of still photos. One study found accuracy rates of 90 percent with a different pose, 76 percent with a different expression, and 60.5 with both" (McNeill 1998, 80). Castle's choice of the codex to house his portraits is a neat solution to his distrust of motion. Flipping pages in his *Primer* creates a crude flip book. Motion and emotions are created and recreated—yet all are firmly in hand, controlled by the reader.

<sup>56</sup> Examples of Castle mania for a bird's-eye-view are seen in drawings of doorknobs, from one side of the door, from the edge of the door, and from the other side of the door, or in a 360-degree series focussing on the family's house in Boise Valley.

James Castle was able to portray what Frith, writing of autistic perceptions, describes as a “world-seen-differently.” World, however, seldom had time for the Idaho artist. From boyhood to adulthood, a recurring story about the Idaho artist is his greeting visitors with a new drawing in his outstretched hand. But these were drawings peopled with faces as oddly pictured and contorted as the faces of letter forms Castle also used to communicate, remember and record.<sup>57</sup> Only now is the world beginning to look at Castle’s work and attempting to appreciate and comprehend it. Although some of the messages Castle conveys are prosaic enough (a dog’s bite is worse than its bark), we may only half-grasp other messages—while still others are pure quicksilver. Yet, we should not exclude the possibility the Idaho artist had a limited or partial understanding of metaphysical matters. Castle’s conversion of ideas or emotions into images is reminiscent of Temple Grandin’s efforts. She has explained, “Growing up, I learned to convert abstract ideas into pictures as a way to understand them. . . . The Lord’s Prayer was incomprehensible until I broke it down into specific visual images. The power and the glory were represented by a semicircular rainbow and an electrical tower” (Grandin 1996, 33). Similar metaphysical imagery may be seen in Castle’s “Measles/Ascension” spread in his *Nellie’s Ledger Book* where the artist shows us the fate of children who contract (then-) deadly diseases. On the verso, Castle has pasted down a magazine illustration showing children quarantined for measles; on the recto, the artist has pasted down a scene of the Virgin Mary, accompanied by a retinue of angels, ascending into heaven.

Through the use of realistic details as well as public and private symbols and associational images, Castle recorded the world and attempted to communicate with it. Although we may never know for certain the identity or meanings of people who appear in his portraits, or the message his letter forms may be conveying, they may not be the point. As Walter Benjamin notes, “The portrait becomes after a few generations no more than a testimony to the art of the person who made it.” Such may be the case with Castle’s portraits and letter forms. In time, these creations may be seen as testimonies to the gift of autism, leading us to reflect, if there is a difference between art and order, if Castle’s works may be as much “Art for Art’s Sake” as “Art for Order’s Sake.”

57 McNeill chronicles a number of Twentieth century artists whose experiments in portraiture may be compared with Castle’s. Picasso is quoted as saying, “A head is a matter of eyes, nose, and mouth which can be distributed in any way you like; the head remains a head.” From about 1906 on, his [Picasso’s] faces grew more and more jumbled and quixotic until they finally became simple markers of his mood.” The same might be said for many of Castle’s portraits. McNeill also notes that “Francis Picabia’s dada ‘Portrait of Marie Laurencin’ (1917) tweaked the whole genre [of portraiture], showing a motley of mechanical parts with no link to Laurencin herself. As Tristan Tzara liberated language from meaning, he [Picabia] freed portraiture from the face” (McNeill 1998, 125). Castle, of course, was creating his portraits and letter forms at approximately the same time as the artists McNeill cites as exploring portraiture.

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# Singular and Unique

*A Publisher's Subjective Experience  
with the Untimely Art  
of the One-of-a-Kind Book*

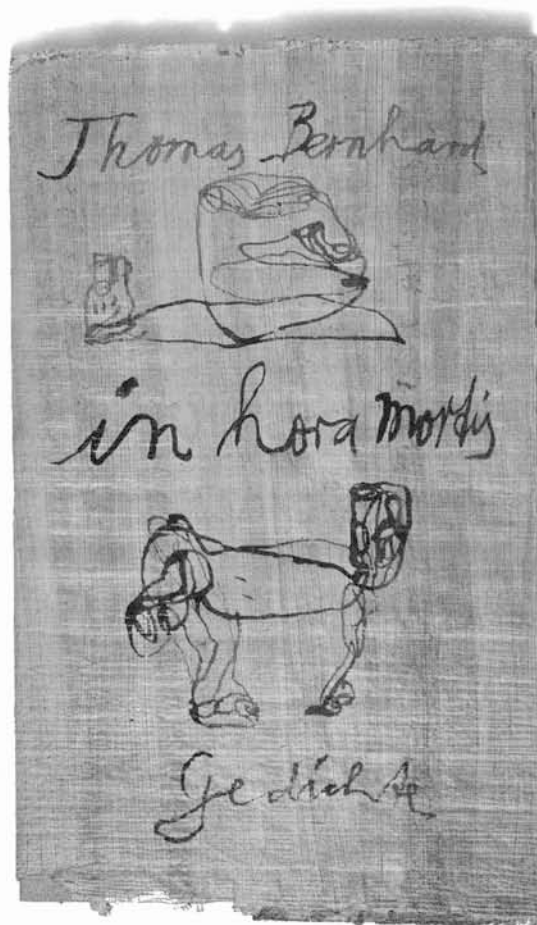
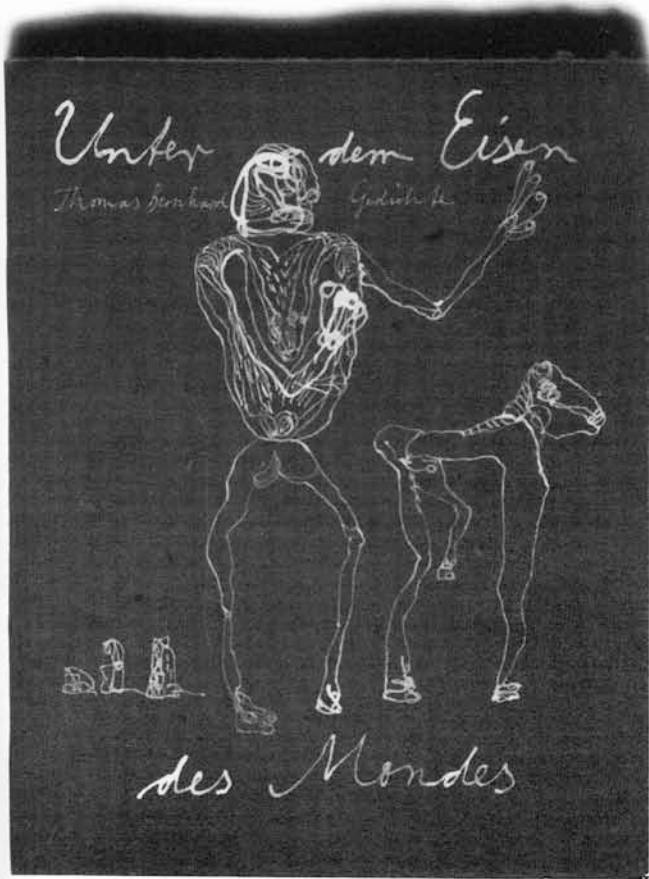
Thomas Günther

IN TIMES OF UNLIMITED EDITIONS, a book that exists only once in the world is something unique. One might think it is out of place, obsolete in this century, considering the technological possibilities for producing books. When speed did not yet play a role, monks, artists, court scribes, and magicians wrote books by hand. Even Nostradamus used a quill to

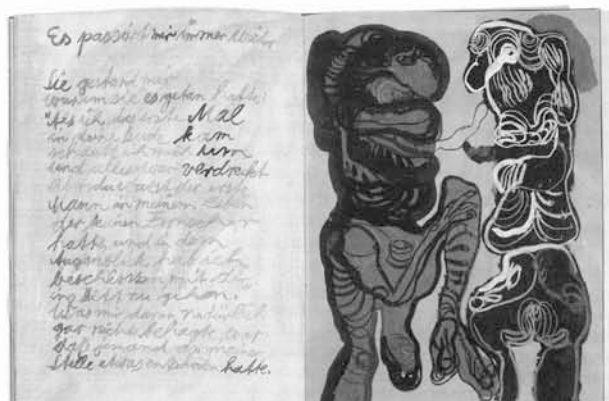
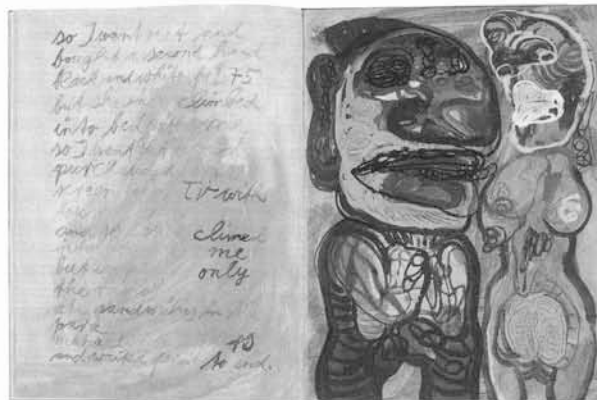
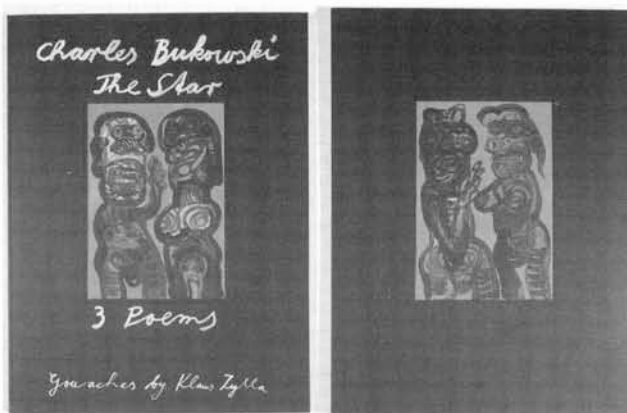
put down on paper his visions of the destruction of the world! Handwriting is what his work magical—today it is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and is of incalculable value. The unique object was commonplace, but it was grasped as a work of art. That was in the pre-Gutenberg era.

But what makes an artist want to take this untimely path today? If it were merely defiance and a revolt against the spirit of the times, then the one-of-a-kind book would still have the thrilling flair of revolt, but playing the Luddite against the printed and technically reproduced word seems infantile. Perhaps this way of making books would have died out if there wasn't a mercantile interest and a market for it. As long as a desire is present, the one-of-a-kind book cannot be "antiquated." It is rather timeless, like every direct form of human expression. Private collectors spend large sums because they want to possess something that no one else has. Whether on the bookshelf or on the wall, a drawing in a frame or in bound form—the value remains the same.

Some people collect one-of-a-kind books because they want to have an author or artist in completion. For example, I was contacted by an admirer of Thomas Bernhard who not only wanted to possess every first edition of the Austrian writer's books, but was also interested in



One-of-a-kind books by Klaus Zylla. Texts by Thomas Bernhard



Slipcase, cover and page spreads from *The Star: 3 Poems* by Charles Bukowski. One-of-a-kind book by Klaus Zylla

other artists approaches to Bernhard's work. How does a book reach its purchaser? The Bernhard collector learned about the offer from my publishing company's brochure, where the singular treasure found a targeted secondary distribution. The book was destined to find its master—and so it came to pass. At about the same time, the Berlin engraving cabinet purchased another one-of-a-kind book by the same artist, Klaus Zylla. This book was based on another text by Bernhard and differed from the first in form and material. One was on papyrus, the other on black engraving paper, resulting in completely different aesthetic accents. Public institutions collect this kind of book only sporadically. There must be a general interest in the artist, and the work must supplement the existing "stock," by which the curators usually mean painting and graphic arts. Only one museum in Germany has specialized in artists' books and handwriting from artists: the Klinspor Museum in Offenbach. This institution sees a visual artist's subjective, calligraphic interpretation of a text as decisive, since a great deal can be read from it: not only some of a personality and an individual psyche, but also the intimate, unimpeded process of creation, undisturbed by any technical preconditions or limits. The one-of-a-kind book realizes something absolute, and there is a utopian aspect to such radicality. A one-of-a-kind book is a kind of self-staging that need not bend to any compromise. At least this is the way I interpret the utopian power inherent in this kind of art.

One usually finds one-of-a-kind books in a niche in the biggest libraries, or to put a polemical point on it, they are secondary in the special collections. There they wait, like exotic plants, to be discovered. It is worthy of recognition that they are purchased at all. The Frankfurt am Main municipal and university library possesses some one-of-a-kind books by contemporary artists, and the Duke August Library in Wolfenbüttel acquires them in exceptional cases. One of Germany's richest libraries, the Bavarian State Library in Munich, refuses to even consider one-of-a-kind books. Such a noble area of collecting is equally out of the question for Prussia's impoverished libraries.

Book art has it better in America. The "Rare Books Departments" of the major libraries are even interested in contemporary German art, as long as there is some connection to the American cultural field. I thus had the good fortune to be able to sell two one-of-a-kind books by the painter Klaus Zylla with poems by Charles Bukowski, one each to the public libraries of Boston, Massachusetts and New York City. On opulently colored backgrounds, Zylla wrote the text by hand on the left and, on the right, created an accompanying graphic cycle in which human-animal figures, satyr-like hermaphrodites, collide violently and appear to be



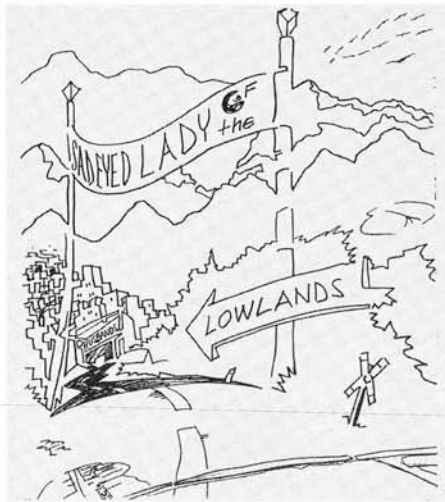
coporeally connected. That fits Bukowski's existential sex cosmos. The graphic idea and the subjective appropriation of the words are both convincing.

Zylla created his work completely independently. In this case, I was merely the persuaded and persuading mediator and bookseller. With other one-of-a-kind books, I have been more active, although the role of the publisher is more limited with such books than with limited but multiple editions of artist books. For the one-of-a-kind book, the publisher's function is more advisory and dramaturgical. The artist can live out whatever he wants, subjected to no limits in dimensions, length, or material. Whether he sews, glues, scratches the paper, or collages, the production costs are always ridiculously low, compared with those of a book produced by means of artistic reproduction techniques, like engraving, lithography, or silk screen. Thus, the exquisite book easily makes a profit—assuming it finds a purchaser.

A publisher friend of mine once offered an absolutely extraordinary book object by the painter Ottfried Zielke at the Leipzig Book Fair. Despite the disgusting subject (dog shit in Berlin), dimensions that would never fit any bookshelf (more than 1 meter), and a high price (almost DM10,000), the artwork constructed from cardboard and plywood was soon sold. It fittingly ended up in a satire collection!

But what moves a publisher to commission a one-of-a-kind book? Naturally, he believes in the quality of the commissioned artist's work. He thinks like a museum curator: the one-of-a-kind book will be an important segment in the artist's complete oeuvre. In my role as advisor and silent or active companion in the process of creation, I have experienced some surprises. No occasion was too odd. Thus, for the painter Mikos Meininger, I chose the lyrics of three Doors songs after hearing the band's songs many, many times at his nocturnal parties. In my eyes, Meininger's sensual painting fit the Dionysian mood of the music well, and so the real justification of the book took shape. The colorful splendor of his acrylic painting and the script, as if scratched with a pointed instrument into the still-wet paint, fascinated art students and Jim Morrison fans alike—though none of them could afford the book. Fortunately, the staff of the graphic division of the German Book and Script Museum in Leipzig were also pleased. They acquired the one-of-a-kind book as an example of young, daring, and vital book art.

I am meanwhile considering a series of painter books on rock music. Artists join me in choosing what fits their temperament and what they feel has influenced them. The whole thing is not a crazy whim, and yet it is an adventure with uncertain conclusion: one artists never delivers, another becomes self-tormenting. A painter from Cottbus who



Images from *Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands*. One-of-a-kind book by Michael Würzberger inspired by Bob Dylan and Hannah K.

wanted to create a tempestuous book to three Neil Young classics showed me his powerful, large-format preliminary study. I was enthusiastic, and we spoke intensely on the phone about it. The book took form over many months. I followed its progress from the distance, as if telepathically. But how did the story end? In a self-critical night, Hans Scheurecker burned the entire still-unbound material. He no longer liked it. In extreme form, he withdrew what was to be extraordinary! As publisher, I was rather embarrassed.

Most recently, I incited Michael Würzberger, an all-around talent from Berlin's Friedrichshain district who also writes and plays music himself, to create a Bob Dylan book. The painter grasps the text of *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* not merely as raw material for an illustration, but at the same time as a paraphrasing of the world of pop. In insinuations and scenes reminiscent of comic books, he lets thirty years of rock history pass review. Andy Warhol as a spiritistic Dracula appears along with Keith Richards's fall

from the ladder and a naked Edie Sedgewick, who inspired the love-intoxicated text, but who also looks confoundingly similar to Würzberger's girlfriend Hanna. That's fine and acceptable as artistic freedom. We'll see what happens with the book. The German Book and Script Museum was enthusiastic, but had to pass, for lack of money. America may come to the rescue again, with English and pop mysticism as bridges. Perhaps Mr. Zimmermann himself will be interested. I guarantee the book will grace a Dylan collection in twenty years. But neither the artist nor the publisher can wait that long. Occasionally I consider making a printed book out of the one-of-a-kind book, but the idea negates itself. Some things have to remain the way they were conceived. In reproduction, they would lose their charm and, in the worst case, their aura—the thing we call authenticity. The artist's intention is our uppermost principle.

And who says a one-of-a-kind book must define itself solely and necessarily through the art market and museum interest? Despite Gutenberg, photocopy shops, and computer printouts and beyond mechanically glued industrial commodities, everyone can create his own one-of-a-kind book. In word and image, it has its place on the shelf beside the reproduced product. To close with a thought by Joseph Beuys: if everyone is a creator of books, then here, too, everyone can be an artist.

*Translated by Mitch Cohen*

#### NOTE

Thomas Günther (born in 1952 in Schneeberg, Erz Mountains, Germany) is a freelance author and publisher of the EDITION GALERIE AUF ZEIT in Berlin. He wrote this text in August 1999. Michael Würzberger's one-of-a-kind book has meanwhile gone to the artist's book collection of the Boston Public Library.

REVIEW

# Debtor's Prison

Lewis Warsh and Julie Harrison

Granary Books, 2001

\$24.95

ISBN: 1-887123-58-X

*Perficio: to bring to an end, to accomplish, to finish.*

*Debtor's Prison* (Granary Books, 2001), a collaboration between poet/novelist Lewis Warsh and video/visual artist Julie Harrison is in many ways a perfect book and, like all perfect books, its narrative eventually evolves to deal with its own restrictions and artifice.

Physically, the book is a model of consistency. It's square, a shape that underscores the contained sentences and cropped images it houses. The book as box or cell or coffin rather than door or highway or horn of plenty. The spirit of sameness informs the layout as well. Each image is the same size and uniformly located in the same place on the right-hand page. All of the photographs have the same sepia tone and almost all are close-ups or tightly cropped partial images with varied quality of reproduction and often slightly blurred. It's as if the rawness of the images, their spontaneous in-your-faceness, has been cooked and served in identical prison portions. Or better yet, the book looks like one of those page-a-day desk calendars, only inside "the house" each day is the same.

The presentation of the text is also highly formalized. Centered on each left hand page (excepting the chapter dividers) is a single sentence, usually declarative, of about the same length and always broken into two lines; the first one longer, the second shorter. Below and slightly right of each of these sentences, and in italics, is a word or phrase separated from another word or phrase by a slash. This verbal grouping serves as a kind of caption for the preceding sentence (bringing to mind Clark Coolidge's and Ron Padgett's *Supernatural Overtones*), and creating a way around the flat polarity of sentence/image. This visual triangulation creates space for the mind to wander around in and remain undecided. These italicized asides are ways the book thinks outside the box and, thereby, comments on itself.

In the dark I couldn't tell whether it was her body or his  
*suspicious unwarranted/endless embrace*

[Fig 1]

The box here is the habitual ambiguity and suggestiveness almost all short poetries trade on. You leave stuff out and the thing begins to float. The trouble here is that after a few

pages of repetition, cropping words or images loses its suggestive powers. Thus, as a solution, like an act of legerdemain—a third item, sometimes related, sometimes from left field—is introduced to keep the attention away from the magic, and the image and sentence keep their strange freshness.

Although the reader is convinced, the writer always knows he's performing tricks. His way out is his prison. It's circular. Thus:

You can read the sentence backwards & it still means  
the same thing

*surgical intervention/mental picture*

[Fig 2]

and

There's only one way this void can be filled  
and that's by putting words on paper

*footsteps on the ceiling/swollen gland*

[Fig 3]

and

In control of nothing but writing & even writing  
I'm out of control

*protective custody/screams in the night*

[Fig 4]

The sentence is a machine the author has been sentenced to write and the writing of which prolongs his sentence. The control gained and beauty visited in creating this haiku-like NOW is a pyhic pleasure. Although no declarative sentence is more declarative than a declarative sentence by itself and although no image is more focused than the close-up, both tend to tire of the limelight and recede into the undifferentiated sea of context from which they were singled-out.

The images too seem to be pushing against their containers and seeking each other. Clearly, the young woman, the artist herself, is the connection between the old woman and the child. In contrast with the sterile hospital tubes (the image of the IV carousel is particularly disturbing and brilliant) that await the old woman, the artist/Houdini figure has her own life-giving tubes/umbilical cords she's using in an underwater performance or stunt. Yet, as the book progresses, and the old woman becomes more identified with close-ups of the floral pattern on her dress, the artist becomes more entangled in her own tubing. Her tools of cropping and focusing and framing are too confining and begin to strangle her. As the book turns into the sepia picture album that on some level it was meant to be, it turns the old woman into an iconic flower, something non-personal (in contrast to the lined and expressive profile earlier in the sequence), something able to be memorialized and put into a book or box, something susceptible to nostalgia. In short, as the book succeeds and the artistry works, a price is exacted from the artist. This is her debtor's prison.

—Joe Elliott

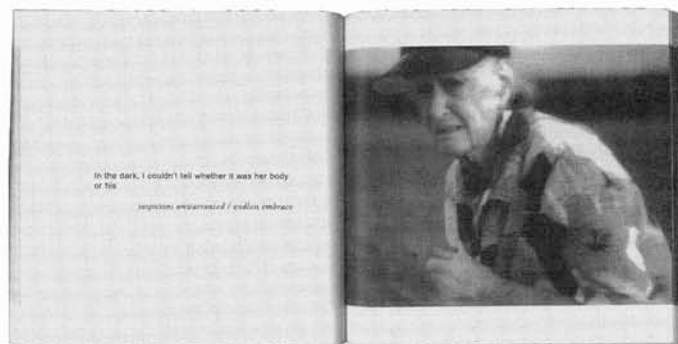


Figure 1

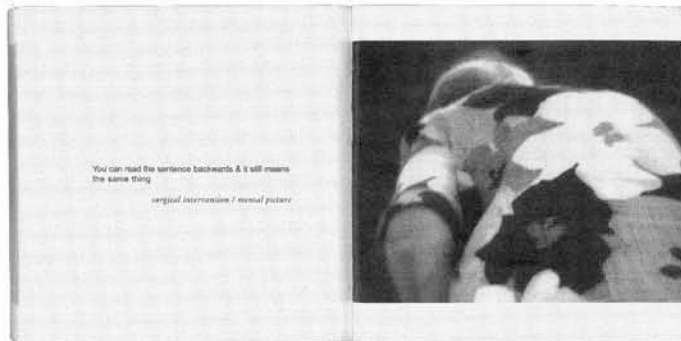


Figure 2

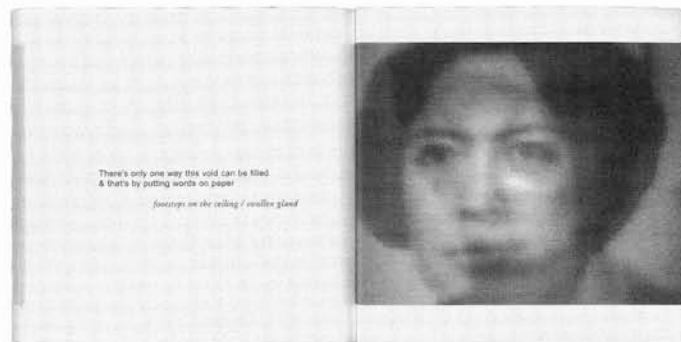


Figure 3

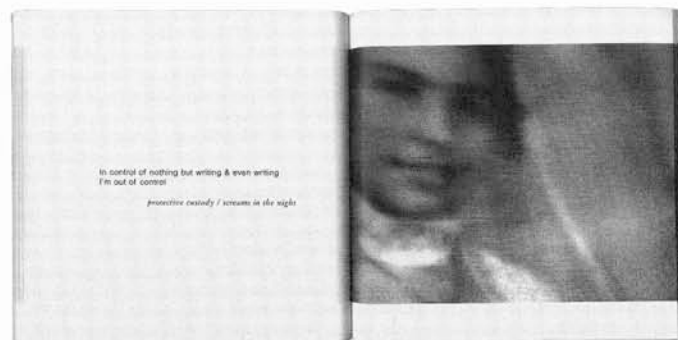


Figure 4

# Pocketbooks

## Overview of a Scottish publishing program.

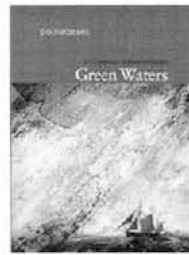
POCKETBOOKS WAS AN INNOVATIVE publishing program dedicated to publishing high quality artworks in a uniform format and available at very reasonable prices (typically around \$15.00 for each book). This very interesting series was largely the idea and the work of Alec Finlay, who still runs Morning Star Publications, an artists book publishing venture located in Edinburgh. Pocketbooks, co-published by Morning Star, offered a contemporary vision of Scottish culture, including visual artists, poets, and intermedia artists. It was funded by the Scottish Arts Council National Lottery New Directions Programme and also received assistance from Highlands and Islands Arts Ltd.

From the beginning, Pocketbooks was intended to publish fifteen titles (I think I have identified seventeen, including the pilot book) and then go out of business, but it still seems sad to see a publishing program with such a distinctive vision cease operations. Pocketbooks concentrated on Scottish artists, or artists working in Scotland and, based on these books, a case could be made for a Scottish sensibility in contemporary art (though of course, what is most apparent is the vision of the editor). Many of these works are succinct distillations of quiet observation. A thread of concrete poetry also runs through some of the titles (*Football Haiku*, for example, is a book of photographs of t-shirts imprinted with football-related slogans which are incidentally readable as haiku. These slogans were drawn from a call for submissions).

The books themselves are all designed and produced to read as part of a series, with standardized cover treatments, fixed trim size (17 by 13 cm, or approximately 6¾ by 5½ inches) and consistent commercial printing. Several of the books are packaged with small audio cds, which contain audioworks related to the theme of the book.

Many of these books are still available. Printed Matter (<http://www.printedmatter.org>) in New York city carries some of these, as does Columbia University Press (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/catalog>). Or you could try Pocketbooks at <http://www.pbks.co.uk>.

—Clifton Meador



PILOT EDITION  
*Green Waters*  
edited by Alec Finlay  
ISBN 0 9527 6692 2



PBO 2  
*Atoms of Delight*  
edited by Alec Finlay  
ISBN 0 7486 6275 8  
January, 2001  
Paper, 208 pages



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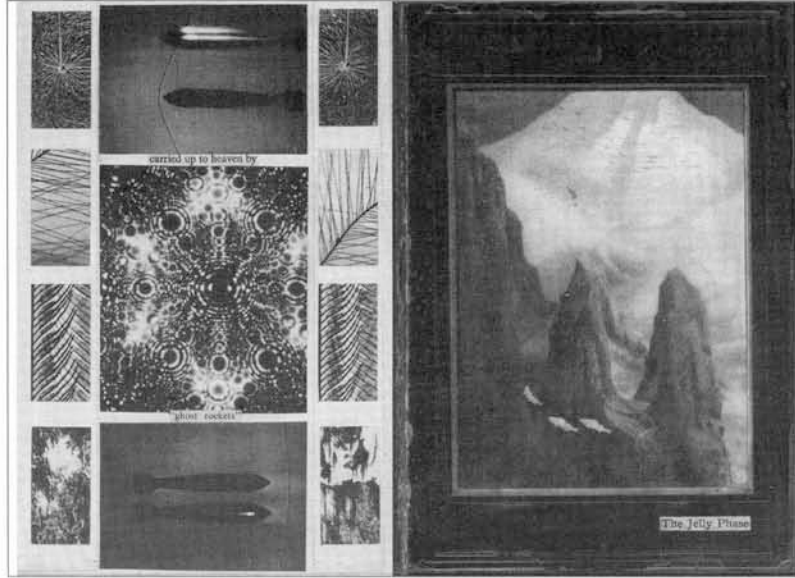
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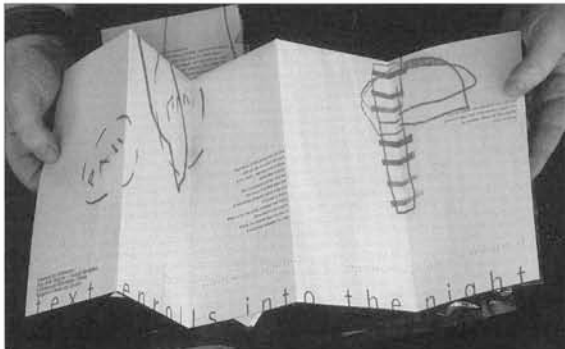
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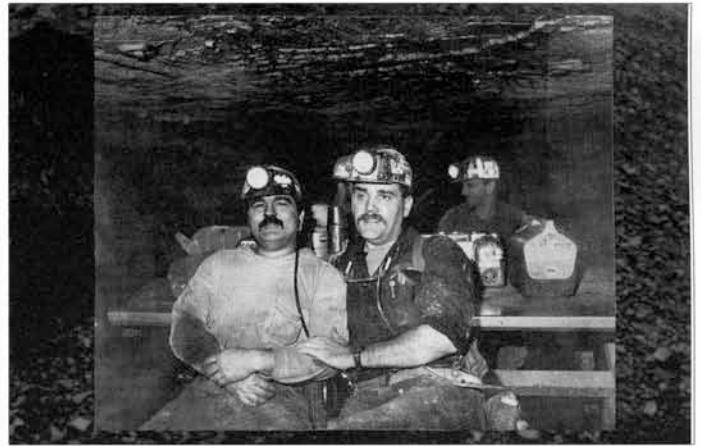


KEEP COMING BACK by Julia Clinker

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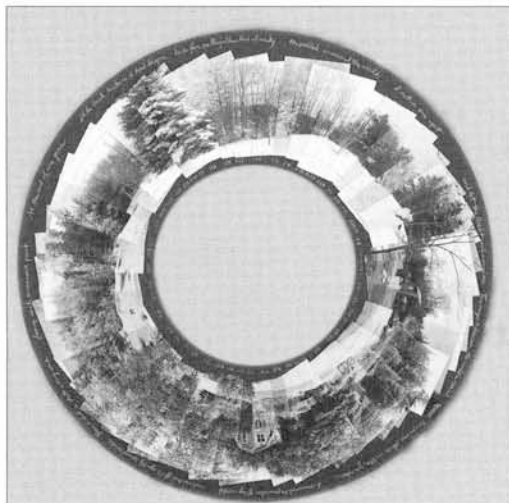
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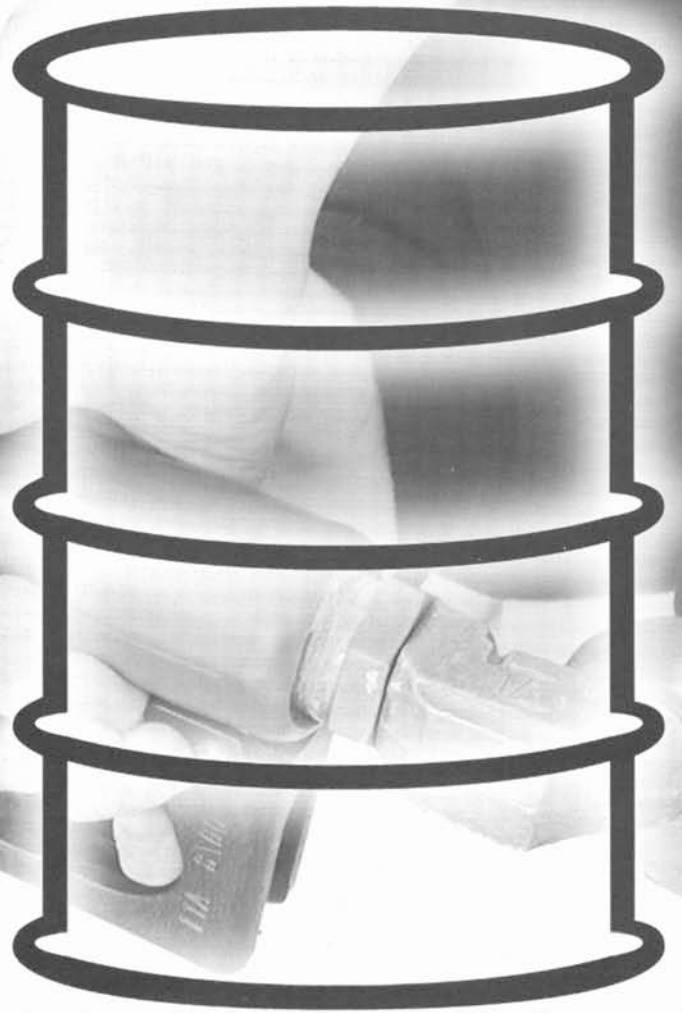
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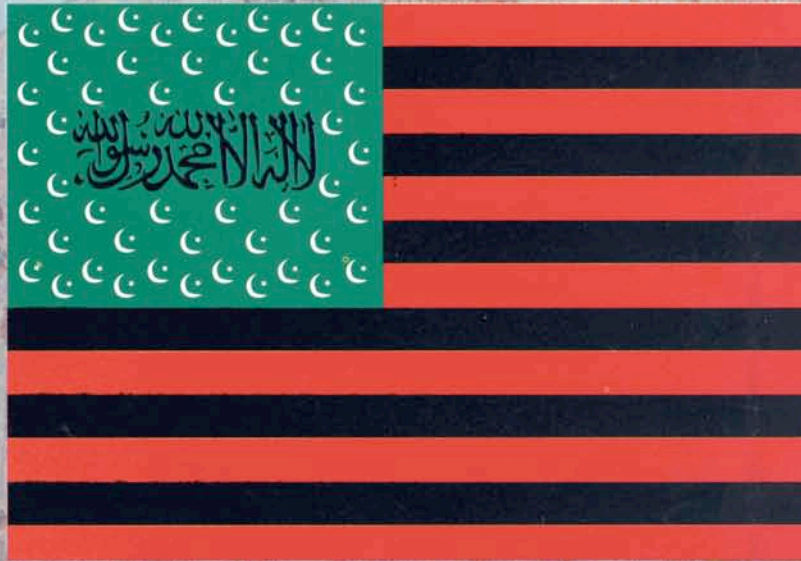
*self-righteous, smug, and  
pathologically afraid of not  
getting our junk, and,  
of course, our national  
junk is oil.*

SINCE WE ARE RUNNING our habit on death already, pumping the bodies of dead dinosaurs and old vegetation into our tanks, why not skip all those time-consuming difficult intermediate steps we seem to be preparing to take, and just start using the bodies of dead people, liquefied into a thick viscous glop, as a crude oil replacement?

The last time we invaded Iraq we killed enough people to keep a fleet of 8 mpg SUVs running for years. We would have to carefully refined the corpses into a lead-free version of gasoline so we don't pollute too much, but think of all the advantages: limitless supply, ease of extraction, low cost of supply, oh the list of benefits is long.

Of course, we will have to kill a lot more of them than will be killed in the next little war (so scarcity doesn't drive up the prices too much), but we have plenty of client countries that could supply their excess population to feed our little habit.





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