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they spend their time doing. . . tells us almost all we need to know about them. But funny as these sketches are, Maupin doesn't allow the character profile to end there. From time to time, a human being is exposed to view. Even Connie, the gauche, mindless stewardess has such a moment.

(Are you still with me?)

Whether or not he gave it a great deal of thought, Maupin's story begins in the classic form of a story of city life, before spinning off in a hundred new directions. The 'greenhorn,' Raban writes, is the central character in the mythology of the initiation of the city. And few characters have ever been so green as Mary Ann, fresh from Ohio.

"In novels and autobiographies, the first positive move that the immigrant makes towards assimilation is to buy himself a suit of city clothes," Raban comments. But here Maupin's story differs, because these times are different. Since there is no longer a single uniform that would single assimilation (and there hasn't been for twenty years or more), Mary Ann must find other means of identification.

Luckily, Mary Ann stumbles onto an unusual house, full of people very much like herself (but more practiced in their role-playing), and ruled over by "The Mother of Us All." Only Anna Madrigal seems to really know who and what she is. Describing her remarkable self, she says: "This is exactly what a fifty-six year old woman is supposed to be." And she means it.

During the course of a day in the city, Raban writes, "one passes from identity to identity. . . in every contact with every stranger, the self is projected or exhibited or, at least, a version of the self, a convenient mask which can be looked at and listened to, quickly comprehended, easily forgotten."

(Does anybody besides me find this interesting?)

In *Tales of the City*, we see this process as it happens. . . the swift passage from one identity to the next, the disposable self-images. In the city, who you are depends on what you own and where you go, and Maupin has an exceptionally keen eye for the most revealing possessions and pastimes. His most appealing characters, of course, are those who see through their pretensions, even while they act them out.

And, Raban continues, there lie "stretches of unbeing, minutes out of time, out of character, periods in which it seems as if you are simply waiting for the next script to be delivered, the next performance to begin."

Maupin captures these times, as well. Mary Ann's first weekend alone in her new apartment, for example, trying to fill the hours until Monday. Or Brian Hawkins, trying to gear up for another night of cruising.

"A good working definition of

metropolitan life," Raban concludes, "would center on its intrinsic illegibility: most people are hidden most of the time, their appearances brief and controlled, their movements secret, the outlines of their lives obscure."

This "intrinsic illegibility" (there's got to be a better way to phrase that!) is the chief attraction of city life. It is also one of its principal dangers. Maupin effectively manages to capture both sides of the coin.

But more than that: *Tales of the City* allows us to do the impossible, to see the outlines of the lives of these people. As we watch their lives take shape, we cannot help but enjoy a feeling of wry detachment and a strong sense of irony. This is the sensibility of the book and the sensibility of the most appealing characters.

Anna Madrigal, Mona Ramsey, Michael Tolliver, and eventually even Mary Ann, have a wonderful sense of their own silliness, and a sense of humor rooted in self-mockery. Although in a much lighter vein, it is the same sort of sensibility that made *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* so rewarding.

What's more, in *Tales of the City*, this sense of irony is tempered by a restrained but effective feeling of sentiment, of warmth in the recognition of these characters as ourselves.

Armistead Maupin has commented, concerning *Tales of the City*, "I had no grand scheme in mind except to capture as clearly as possible the mammoth practical joke of urban life in the 70's." All I'm trying to say here is that this he does, and very well, too.

So enough already. If you've read this far (brave soul!), please don't let my rambling affect your judgement or take the fun out of this book for you. *Tales of the City* will keep you in stitches, you'll love every minute of it, so go out and buy a copy of it right now!

JB

Women's Conference

The Southeastern Women's Studies Association has scheduled its 4th annual conference for March 21-23 on the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

Over 28 workshops and caucuses are planned. Participants also will hear music and poetry and meet and exchange ideas with other feminist educators from across the South.

For additional information contact Betsy Brinson, ACLU Southern Women's Rights Project, 1001 E. Main St., Suite 710, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Buy
Gay



IGNA

"Your being gay doesn't shock me, but I can't see how I can break the news to your Aunt Doris and her roommate."

GOTHAM Interview

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In an interview with the D.C. *Blade* in January, Herb told Kim Shepard: "We told the producers, 'Make us a hit album,' and they said we had to fit into a specific slot in order to confuse the record companies. So we decided to do an all-disco album even though we are not known for singing disco in our act."

The purpose of the album, Herb concluded, was "to prove that GOTHAM can be a legitimate, successful recording act."

Keep your fingers crossed.

I hope the album does just that, and soon. . . hopefully, before a tentatively scheduled recording session for a new album this spring. Material for the album hasn't been selected yet according to Herb, but the material would be more of the sort of thing that GOTHAM has been doing successfully for so long: pop music, rhythm and blues, rock and roll. If quality is what makes a viable recording act, then GOTHAM should be one, because they are good.

It's amazing, if you sit and sift through the clippings that come with their press kit, how many of the reviews focus on their comedy, at the expense of their singing. The outrageous humor is an integral part of their act, and, frankly, it was the humor that first got them good press. Still does.

"This part of the show we love more than life itself," Herb deadpans. Pace goes on to explain that this will be a series of one-liners, the advantage of which being "that you who told the stupid thing can get off fast."

And you can't fault them as comedians. Their timing is breathtakingly fast, and impeccable. Because of that excellent timing and delivery, they manage to bring down the house time after time with a series of wheezy, sleazy jokes that otherwise wouldn't amuse anyone who graduated from junior high school.

But the way they sing! That's what made seeing their show three times in one week worthwhile.

(I asked Gary about one song in particular, a slow ballad called "Only a Matter of Time," which displayed



The Front Page

GOTHAM's fine trio singing to excellent advantage. The woman who wrote it is Marsha Malamet (she's worked with Peter Allen and Carol Bayer Sager, he offered, by way of identification), and I want to keep an eye out for her name on album jackets. If "Only a Matter of Time" is any example, I want to hear her other songs as well.)

For my money, with their considerable skill and the ability to harmonize in almost any style imagined in the last fifty years, GOTHAM could skip the jokes. But, of course, my money won't pay their rent. And the jokes, to be sure, do a lot to loosen up the audience, as well as garner them press coverage. But it's the songs they sing that make the evening memorable.

Mention should be made here of GOTHAM's Music Director and the band that accompanied them. Rob Preston (who's no slouch in the looks department, either) handled the keyboards and the musical direction for a group that included Jeff Crespy on bass, Bill Krither on drums, Ruth Grey as percussionist, and Wiley Porter on guitar. They handled the multitude of styles involved in the music with apparent ease.

At the end of the interview, Gary Herb had a final comment. "You can thank the people of Raleigh for us," he said, "for being supportive of us for all these years." Then, noting that I hadn't written this last down, he added: "I'm serious about that."

And he is, too. And I'm just as serious when I wish them every possible success, and - along with the rest of their N.C. fans - hope that they'll come back again next year.



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