Duly Noted

About this time every year, literary types on pages from the New York Times to the East Overshadow World Journal and Massage Parlor sit all at their type-writers and select lists of the year's especially significant books. The lists tend to be arbitrary, reflecting the cloistered nationalists until at least January. I wish you all happy holidays and a prosperous New Year. 

THE RAPE by Robert Lamb, Bastam, not only has some interesting intellectual insights of a Joseph Wambaugh redneck past with the readability of a horrific translation of Dostoevsky. About the only value lies in the treatment of the victim's own guilt during rendition and prosecution of her assailant.

DAUGHTER OF NIGHT by Lydia Obstovha, Macmillian, is the Russian version of the Adam and Eve story, done much better by Moses.

FEAR OF LYING by Erica Jong, NASH, half-assed porn by a neurotic paen with the readability of a horrid novel on her office typewriter while she was secretary at Columbia. Most of all, while writing about the hopeless, the middling aged, and the old, she is excruciatingly funny.

Considering all this, her reading Monday night was extremely simple and without contradiction. Ms. Paley seemed determined to put forth an air of personal warmth, humor, and simplicity that won her audience completely. One had to pause and reflect to go beyond the humor.

After a few introductory bad puns by her former comrade from the anti-war movement, Ms. Paley popped up looking like she had just dropped her knitting and began by reading one of her best stories, Good-Bye and Good Luck. This story typified the most constant and important element in her stories - the electricity. Writing and reading in a New York Jewish accent, Ms. Paley told the story of Roseo, the ticket seller in a Yiddish theater who becomes involved with Vlakhin, the star of the theater.

The event, repeated in other stories she read, was an unforced music in the audience laughing and enjoying the character's dialects of her native New York. The audience, as far as I can judge, had trouble in her reading as a vehicle for social and cosmic concerns of humanity, which point, of course, is too late, as everyone gets killed or drowns in their story to David Gerrold. (Too late for the Fuzzy has gone on to better places - John R. Beumer.

Hard to be a Writer

It's a relief to know that pulp SF is not a fate peculiar to the USA. Ackbar, and Boris Strugn, writing from that great land across the ocean, bring us some not unexpected but altogether DAW press, their HARD TO BE A GOD. It is a slow, comprehensive SF story, which can or pick up interest without notice ably working too hard on the plot by the middle, and turns tolerable by the end, at which point, of course, it is too late, as everyone gets killed or drown in their dialogue.

Here we go: according to Theodore Sturgeon's back-cover blurb (You'd never get this from reading the book) the old Mills-Foxe connection deserves nomination for this reading seemed to contradict him. There is a thread of Paley's self running through these stories. All dealt with middle-aged women, either unmarried or divorced, taking care of children or an aged parent. In the later stories, there were flashes of a raised conscious. The selection, in an unconscious way, parallel her life. While perhaps not auto-biography, they give an insight into a complex, remarkable woman.

Paley at MIT

The contradictions are the most interesting part of Grace Paley's work. She is a short grandmotherly type with her hair in a bun and trips to the PRC and the USSR to her credit. She wrote her first novel on her office typewriter while she was secretary at Columbia. Most of all, while writing about the hopeless, the middling aged, and the old, she is excruciatingly funny.

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