

"conjunction of pleasure and social purpose." But Glassie's Ballymenone is on the brink of change. Endless civil strife, television, and automobiles are threatening social ties. Private enterprise and a drive for material prosperity are supplanting the spirit of cooperation. New houses are built with vestibules between kitchens and an increasingly inhospitable outside world. The days of storytelling and conviviality will soon be gone.

**CONSEQUENCES OF PRAGMATISM**

(Essays: 1972-1980)  
by Richard Rorty  
Univ. of Minn., 1982  
237 pp. \$29.50 cloth,  
\$11.95 paper

Rorty's controversial assessment of the history of his field, presented here and in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1981), is that attempts to find absolute and indisputable "truths" have led philosophy to become arcane, professionalized, and mired in unresolvable arguments. Drawing from Continental philosophy since G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), Rorty, professor of humanities at the University of Virginia, subscribes to the view that "truths" held by one age are replaced by others in the next. Standards of knowledge, he believes, should be based upon the needs of a particular society at a particular time. Thus Rorty sees the philosopher's task as a modest one, along the lines of John Dewey's pragmatism: to criticize the thought of current and past generations for the purpose of living better today.

*Arts & Letters*

**THE ARGOT MERCHANT  
DISASTER: Poems**

**New and Selected**  
by George Starbuck  
Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1982  
119 pp. \$8.95

The unusual title comes from a line in one of Starbuck's poems, an ode to Americana: "O / it isn't the cuisinart it's the cuisine argot / and I don't care if it's the argot as in the argot merchant disaster / or the argot as in What kinda colada makings the bar got here . . ." ("Sunday Brunch in the Boston Restoration"). Here, as elsewhere, Starbuck evokes mercantile America, its plenty and its strangeness. His poetry mingles the opulent and the underworldly, decorative language and slang, jazz rhythms and traditional

forms. He writes about food, the Bomb ("It's going to kill us, sure as gonif/and gizmo gravitate and groove"), sex and love, the "spell of spelling" ("Why do they always say heighth, but never weighth?"), American places (especially Boston), and American people. Starbuck's linguistic virtuosity, his witticisms, and his puns sometimes conceal his strongly moral vision. But in certain poems, he speaks with forceful directness: "Nations convulsing, their great thought gone static, / try your mere voices; try small work of hands."

**MOZART**

by Wolfgang Hildesheimer  
trans. by Marion Faber  
Farrar, 1982  
408 pp. \$22.50



The work of Wolfgang Mozart (1756–91) at-tests, in Hildesheimer's words, to "perhaps the greatest genius in recorded history." Yet, insists the biographer, a German-born writer and artist, the music reveals almost nothing about the man; indeed, it camouflages an erratic, infantile, and obsessively scatological personality. Friends, relatives, and earlier biographers have further obscured the picture by bowdlerizing Mozart's lyrics and his letters. Hildesheimer's book, a labor of 20 years, dismantles many of the popular myths. Romantics of the 19th century portrayed Mozart as an otherworldly spirit, a creature of exquisite feeling. Hildesheimer exposes the cold, commercial motives behind such sublime works as *The Magic Flute*. Mozart was, in fact, surprisingly boorish and insensitive (he even used borrowed phrases in letters to his dying father). Some biographers have regarded Mozart as a revolutionary because of the irreverent depiction of the upper classes in *Figaro*. Hildesheimer explains that Mozart was merely working within the tradition of received texts. Content was always less important to him than theatrical potential. Without his intending it, *Figaro* did upset Vienna's nobility and thus hastened the composer's financial decline. But Mozart (contrary to legend) had never truly liked Vienna, and Vienna had appreciated him less as a composer than as a performer. As other, more well-mannered musicians rose in public fa-