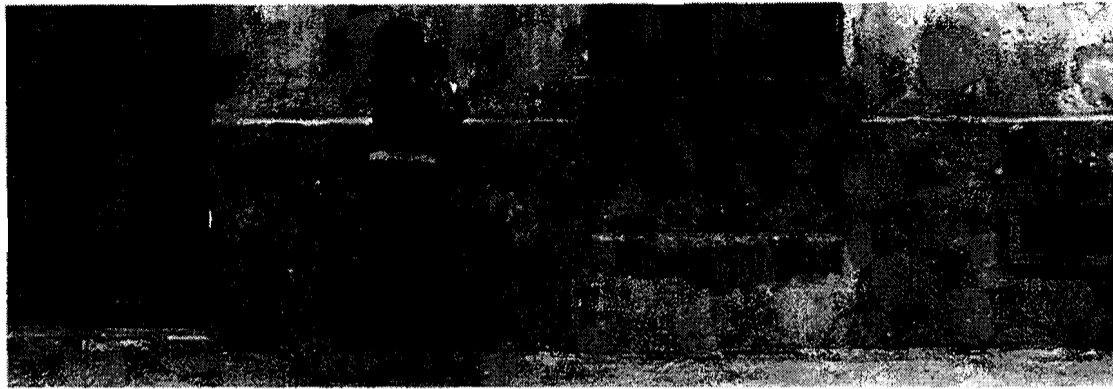


# HARPER'S



ACROSS THE BORDERS OF HISTORY  
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*By Richard Rodriguez*

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and Linda Mizejewski on romance in Romania*

this beneficent god offers.

We say money doesn't buy happiness, but we don't really believe that. So we find ourselves in the ironic position of growing rich materially while becoming impoverished spiritually.

What will lift us from this rut? I don't think capitalism or any "ism" will lead us to greatness. The flaws in our society are flaws not of capitalism but of human nature. Can human nature be perfected? This would seem a worthy goal for people who need not worry about their next meal.

*Jim Bass*  
Miami, Fla.

#### Professor and Mrs. Barth

I'm sorry I read the memoir "Teacher" by John Barth [*Harper's Magazine*, November 1986]. It left a bad taste in my mouth. As a college teacher of English, I thought it might be enlightening. Instead, I found its twin

themes of brilliant student as sex object and brilliant woman playing second fiddle to brilliant man disgusting. He writes novels, she teaches them to high school students. The few comments on Shelly Barth as teacher were submerged by these dominant themes.

The motifs were likewise distasteful: woman drops out of graduate school in emotional crisis; wife and mother of three is superseded by newer and younger model; woman seeks male approval; woman follows socially conditioned, limited career goals despite superior talents; woman proudly takes man's name.

I would much rather read Shelly Rosenberg Barth's account of teaching in the secondary schools and her commitment to it.

*Anne Eggebroten*  
Costa Mesa, Calif.

What splendid memories were evoked by John Barth's memoir. My

roommate and I had Barth at Penn State in 1959: Hum I, of course. A couple of business majors, we suddenly found a whole new world of the mind opening to us. We couldn't wait to settle down each evening to discuss what had come up in class. Barth gave us the tools we needed to discover the essence of ideas. More important, what he taught was permanent. For twenty-seven years I have examined every new idea through the prism he gave to me in Hum I.

Such teachers are rare, indeed. I'm glad there are at least two of them out there, and grateful that I had Barth.

*David J. Pepper*  
Dallas, Tex.

#### True Stories

I enjoyed "Truer Than Strange" [*Harper's Magazine*, December 1986], and Barbara La Fontaine is a fine writer, but her idea that fiction is in com-