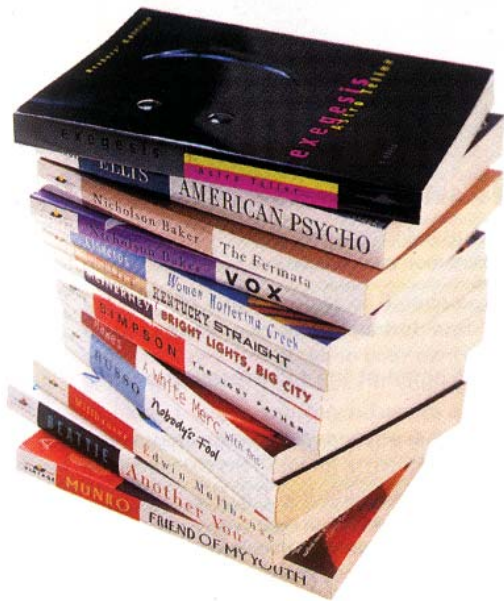


The Shelf



Should you ever be lucky enough to be invited into my apartment, you'd find that I own a quite magnificent mahogany bookcase. It's crammed with books (I certainly am *not* one of those dames who clutter their shelves with dust-ridden knickknacks), books that have been battered, torn, pored over, wept to. Most of my favorites are cheap paperbacks published by Vintage Contemporaries: the novels of my own personal twin gods, Nabokov and Amis; books by Faulkner; poor, emasculated Robert Graves (Laura Riding was *quite* the ball-breaker); Julian Barnes; Carver; Cheever. Glowing luridly and shamefully on the bottom shelf is a certain *bad* book of Vintage's, though. The author is Jay McInerney, and the book is mean (as in *nasty*), and little (as in *scrawny*—intellectually, emotionally), and, somehow—despite the fact that “A Womb with a View” is one of its chapter titles—it became very, very *big*. *Bright Lights, Big City* was published by Vintage in 1984. Vintage's *original* fiction was never particularly accomplished, unfortunately, and the company stopped publishing it eight years ago. (Mr. McInerney, however, did not go away.)

This month, Vintage is reintroducing its line of original paperback fiction, with the first novel by Astro (yes, *Astro*) Teller. Vintage has such grand hopes for young Teller's *Exegesis* that it's printing a hundred thousand copies. Twenty-six, a Ph.D. candidate in artificial intelligence at Carnegie Mellon, with a terrifically brainy pedigree (he is of the atomic Tellers), the author's got *cybercelebrity* written all over him. And at only eleven dollars a pop (and at only 224 easy-to-read pages), *Exegesis*—in which an excitable woman grad student's computer project takes on a life of its own—might, indeed, turn out to be a Big Book. Unless it's little, in which case I can still thank Vintage for its reprinted classics. —ADRIENNE MILLER

ILISA KATZ