

Thank Heaven: A Memoir

Leslie Caron. Viking, \$25.95 (272p) ISBN 978-0-670-02134-5

Caron went from Parisian ballerina to Hollywood movie star at 17, when Gene Kelly tapped her for a co-starring role in the 1951 hit *An American in Paris*. She became a star in the studio system of that era, and via her MGM contract shared billing with Fred Astaire and Cary Grant by day and socialized with Judy Garland and Lena Horne by night. It's been a glamorous life, but, as Caron reveals, not without struggles. She grew up in occupied Paris, her father a French chemist, her American mother a former dancer. Caron never felt good enough for her parents: "The path to excellent was clearly indicated, and my insecurity became chronic." Despite her success, she points to insecurity as the root of her decision to date or marry and divorce several controlling men, including meat-packing heir George Hormel II and actor Warren Beatty, with whom she had an affair in the 1960s. Caron provides countless dishy details about her exploits, which are sure to entertain film buffs, Caron fans and aspiring actors. Today, the 78-year-old two-time Academy Award nominee acts in the U.S. and Paris; in 2007, a role on *Law and Order: SVU* garnered a prime-time Emmy. Caron also runs an auberge, or inn, in France and, she writes, intends to avoid fading into the background. (Dec.)

★ **Chief Culture Officer: How to Create a Living, Breathing Corporation**

Grant McCracken. Basic, \$26.95 (288p) ISBN 978-0-465-01832-1

McCracken (*Flock and Flow*), a research affiliate at Convergence Culture Consortium at MIT, argues that every company needs a chief cultural officer to anticipate cultural trends rather than passively waiting and reacting. CCOs should have the ability to process massive amounts of data and spot crucial developments among an array of possibilities; they will be able to see the future coming, no matter which industry they serve, and create value for shareholders, move product, create profit and increase the bottom line. McCracken provides an impressive list of individuals deeply connected and in tune with the zeitgeist including Steve Jobs, A.G. Laf-

ley, Mary Minnick, Joss Whedon and Johnny Depp—who fought Disney in order to create a campy male lead in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie—as well as such corporations as Starbucks and Nike that have “refashioned culture.” McCracken’s case is persuasive, and his book, peppered with pop culture references and enlivened by his restlessly inquisitive nature (and ability to strike up conversation with just about anyone), makes for enlightening and entertaining reading. (Dec.)

Journey to the End of Islam

Michael Muhammad Knight. Soft Skull, \$16.95 paper (384p) ISBN 978-1-59376-246-9

Born Irish Catholic in upstate New York, Knight converted to Islam as a teenager and wrote an influential underground novel, *The Taqwacores*, about young Muslim-Americans struggling to integrate their religious beliefs with an affinity for beer and the Sex Pistols. His latest, a stream of consciousness chronicle of his pilgrimage to holy sites in Pakistan, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, resembles nothing so much as the archetypal American road novel complete with a harrowing episode of cannabis-induced psychosis, a breezy tone (“I spent two months in Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, doing the madrasa thing and considering jihad in Chechnya”) and indifference to whether the reader can follow his references (if you aren’t acquainted with Muslim history and terminology, you would be well-advised to stay within close reach of Wikipedia). He probes and prods the boundaries of his faith with unabashed emotion and honesty, even questioning, near the end of his journey, whether he really understands anything about Islam. But the book is most engaging when he turns his gaze outward to make pithy observations on the intersection of religion and global capitalist culture (he describes Saudi Arabia as the “Wal-Mart of Islam”). (Dec.)

Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates

John Gerassi. Yale Univ., \$20 (336p) ISBN 978-0-300-15901-1

With a decidedly political focus, these lively and candid conversations from the early 1970s between the famed French philosopher and his godson are a fascinating glimpse into Sartre’s efforts to recon-

cile existentialism with Maoism and his own increasingly revolutionary leanings. That Gerassi (*Jean-Paul Sartre*) is clearly on close personal terms with his subject is always apparent, and this allows for wonderfully frank accounts of Sartre’s childhood, various affairs and women, as well as asides about his drug use and bizarre, recurring hallucinations of crabs. The author incessantly returns to political questions, examining Sartre’s various left-wing commitments, his views on Soviet Russia, Cuba, the Israel-Palestine conflict, in addition to the broader questions of how social conscience relates to art and whether a doctrine of absolute individual freedom can be made compatible with Sartre’s emphasis on collective action. This can make for repetition and occasional tedium that could easily have been remedied by more disciplined editing and a less ideologically strident framework. Still, as a document of both the thinker and the man, the volume paints a revealing picture of a restless mind in profound engagement with the philosophical and political crises of its time. (Dec.)

The Fat Studies Reader

Edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, foreword by Marilyn Wann. New York Univ., \$27 (448p) ISBN 978-0-8147-7631-5

With 40 essays that span an impressive array of academic and popular approaches, this book is the first to collect the essential texts of the blossoming discipline known as fat studies, which explores why the oppression of fat people remains acceptable in American culture. As contributor Bianca D.M. Wilson notes in her piece, fat studies is an arena where the personal, political and scientific converge, and with this book, readers can mount an informed challenge to the medical construction of obesity and size, the diet industry, insurance companies, public policy and popular culture. Arranged thematically, the essays survey the “social and historical construction of fatness,” “fatness as social inequality” and even “size-ism in popular culture and literature.” While one essay points out the North American biases of the current state of fat studies, new cross-cultural work would do well to attend to this volume first. It may be too soon for the movement to offer utopian alternatives, but these essays offer a rich supply of tools