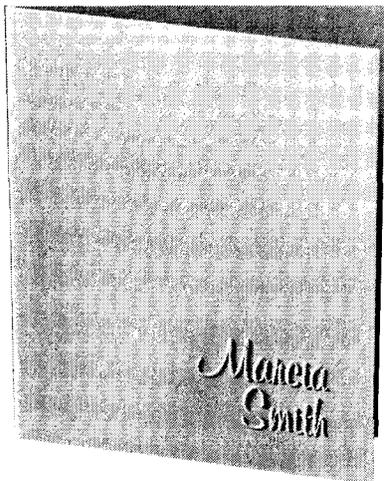


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Winter Count

by Barry Holstun Lopez
Charles Scribner's Sons, 128 pp., \$9.95

BARRY HOLSTUN LOPEZ is an East-erner who has migrated westward, ever further westward in a series of beautifully constructed, slender volumes that move back and forth between fiction and nonfiction, all of which grow out of his radical alignment with the truths that dwell in nature. *Winter Count* is his fifth book. It may be the one that will win him recognition as a writer who like, say, Peter Matthiessen or Edward Hoagland, goes to the wilderness in order to clarify a great deal about civilization.

The 10 fiction sketches in *Winter Count* portray sensitive observers, a number of them scientists and naturalists, coming to terms with various kinds of life both wild and tame in places as dissimilar as the American southwest, Park Avenue, Los Angeles, and Sanibel Island. Encounters with desert winds "of wild refinement," rivers that disappear, buffalo as spry as mountain goats, shells upon which the world's fate seems to rest, men who make pebbles fly, help Lopez's protagonists achieve their immediate desire to, as one of them puts it, "let go of a fundamental anguish."

Weaving "literalisms and metaphors and forms of proof" into a style

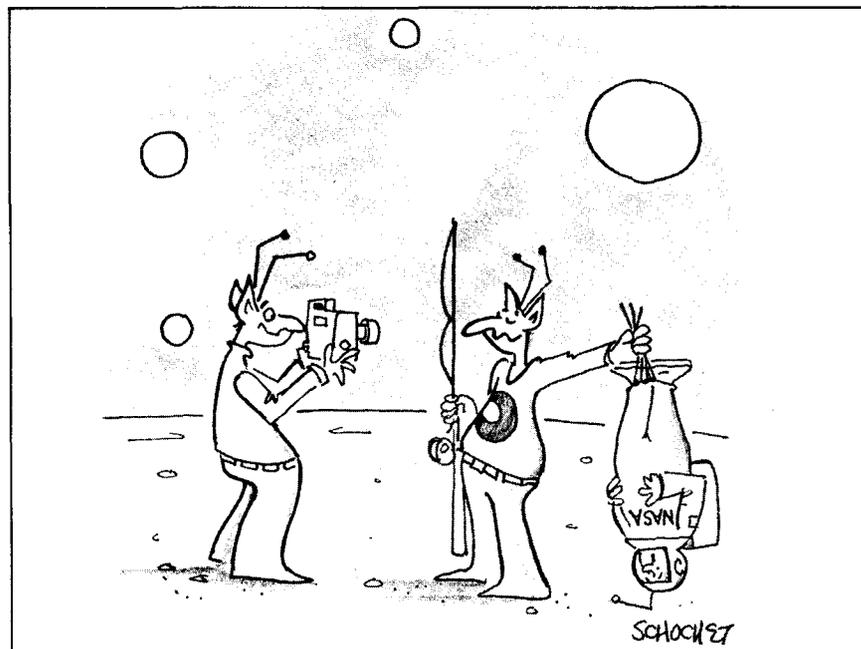
reminiscent of some important con-temporary Latin American magical realists, Lopez turns the sentiments of a decade's worth of ecology lovers into a deeply felt and unnervingly powerful picture of reality. —ALAN CHEUSE

November

by Rolf Schneider
Alfred A. Knopf, 240 pp., \$11.95

VOMITING ALCOHOL every morning and ready to switch to low-tar ciga-rettes, privileged, "infallible" Natasha Roth, East Berlin's widely read writer-intellectual, is feeling her age. Her latest book, an in-depth story of a social worker, dissatisfies her because it ends before the real-life worker's arrest for attempted flight to the West with her three children. How can she face writing her new book about Rimbaud in the Paris Commune when she's already bored with her notes? Or face her son Stefan, now coming home after a long hospitalization following a bicycle-car collision? Should she write the tragic tale of the East German singer Rebecca and her poet-husband Bo-dakov (he can be published only in West Germany and so is abused by Red newspapers)? All these questions are considered finely against the intel-lectual climate of Red Berlin along with the Roths' eerie daily minutia.

After Stefan slowly recovers from



partial paralysis and returns to school, he sees his art-historian father Rudolph with his arm around a strange blonde—is he having an affair? Natasha finds an incriminating phone number in Rudolph's pocket, and is quickly, knowingly, locked into the clichés of jealousy. When Bodakov publishes a slim volume that gets him exiled to West Germany and his Communist citizenship revoked, Natasha and other Eastern writers flock to Rebecca, who's left behind, and sign a protest letter. But as days pass and Soviet pressure builds, two of the signers repudiate the letter. The undermining of Natasha continues until she too chooses to abandon her citizenship, while Rudolph asks for a divorce.

Through Stefan's and Natasha's sensibilities, East Germany is a perpetual November. As brilliantly translated by Michael Bullock, *November* has superb moments of frosty objectivity and strangling moodiness, and an iron grip on characters in a rats' maze. In all, a bitter picture of the writer's life.

—DONALD NEWLOVE

Nonfiction Briefs

Basin and Range
by John McPhee
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
224 pp., \$10.95

"I WANT TO...suggest the general history of the continent by describing events and landscapes that geologists see written in rocks," John McPhee says in *Basin and Range*. And he proves to be surprisingly modest. Like the geologists he venerates, McPhee knows how to "look at mud and see mountains" and how to dramatize the slow history of the earth. A dream vision of a house of carpets on fire illuminates the underworld, with its "pile after pile of shags and broadlooms, hooks and throws, para-Persians and polyesters" melting, mixing, and finally hardening on the stairs. An image of continental barges "on a collision course" animates the theory of plate tectonics, an attempt to

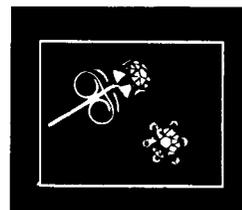
explain how mountains are built and why the Nevada Basin may someday again be undersea.

Unfortunately, McPhee does not stop with the drama of geology; he tries to establish its epic stature. Granted, this perspective inculcates enormous respect for the earth's 4.5 billion-year history. (Compare this to the paltry 2 million years our species is expected to

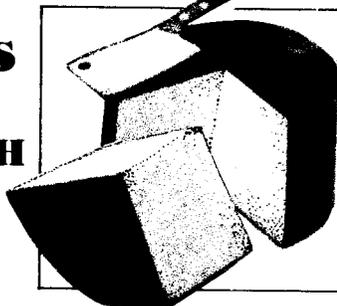
last.) But it also undermines the book. Almost every chapter harks back to our continent's development or forward to the underwater future of the West. And every field trip yields momentous reflection, every rock a cosmic clue. So an almost extraordinary collage of geological history and personal adventure is ultimately subverted by cloying awe.

—ROBIN BROMLEY

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