

ers of the Communist Labor Party — and thus drew him back to Russia, to the 2nd Congress of the Communist International and the typhus that killed him. But that came later. It was years before political commitment occupied the center of Reed's personal stage. The work, for example, that made him the most sought-after journalist of his day was his account of two months with Pancho Villa in Mexico. And what fascinated him about Villa was less the Mexican's politics than the larger-than-life quality of the man, the heroic in him.

Perhaps Reed never stopped trying to be a Villa. Here he is in Petrograd: "Seizing one of Lenin's dramatic phrases — 'History will not forgive us if we do not assume power now' — he enjoyed rolling it off his tongue as he roamed about the city, notebook in hand." Did he ever really pass from adolescent fantasy to adult reality? It is the theme of the biography, the reason for its title "romantic revolutionary," the question Rosenstone never fully resolves. One reviewer has already remarked that Rosenstone is very close to his subject, so close it is often hard to tell which of the two is speaking and in whose prose. A fair comment; if Rosenstone does not swallow Reed whole — he allows, for example, that *Ten Days* is "streaked with bias" — he nevertheless identifies with him, embraces him, speaks through him. But perhaps that is the key to the biography's success. Rosenstone literally relives Reed's life. And though I am even now not fully convinced of the depth of Reed's political radicalism, though he is so little my kind of person that I am not certain I even *like* him very much, there is no question that I am a great deal closer to an understanding of him and his age than I was before I read this thorough, continuously interesting, and sometimes quite strangely moving book.

*Robert Rosenstone and Peter Fay are both professors of history at Caltech.*

## Letters

### Guaranteed a Fegger

Potomac, Maryland

This afternoon I received my copy of *Engineering and Science* for October-November, and it could not have arrived at a better time. I had just finished teaching my Advanced Physical Science class and was contemplating the complexities of Markov Chains, a topic which my students are presenting for me, and thinking about how we would ease into an elementary example of a stochastic process, when a particularly tenacious student, once again started to question me about "Caltech." These scenarios generally start out with questions like, ". . . just what kind of a place is Caltech?" Today, I had some concrete evidence about your school.

I first pointed to the "FEG" formula. The student then asked, "Is that *the* Gray of that old battered chem text you have us read for the Advanced Placement Exam in Chemistry?" "The same," I said. The student then added ". . . and don't we have some books by Feynman in the school?" Again I concurred. We then talked about the "FEG" formula. Before the conversation ended, I turned to the back page of *Engineering and Science* and asked, "Are you so dedicated to science that you could ignore a 250-pound lion, in favor of a science lecture?" The student pondered this a moment and then said, "Caltech sounds like a fun place; I'm going to consider that school!"

Now, I don't know if this student will apply to Caltech or not, but I can guarantee that he will be a "fegger" — you can spot 'em while they're young — they're different. Whether or not you get this student, I want you to know that we enjoyed your publication. I might also add that science is alive and well in the secondary hinterland of this great nation.

CHARLES C. PHILIPP,  
Chairman,  
Science Department  
Winston Churchill High School

### Poetic Justice

Ricketts House, Caltech

Dr. Fowler's passage, "Resonance," (*E&S* October-November) is competently written, as prose. It is not poetry. A comparison of:

The realization  
That the red giant stage  
Of stellar evolution  
Involved helium burning  
Which transforms helium  
Into carbon and oxygen  
Was just as far-reaching  
As the discovery  
That the main sequence stage  
Involves the conversion  
Of hydrogen into helium.

with this passage by e. e. cummings:

What if a much of a which of a wind  
gives the truth to summer's lie:  
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun  
and yanks immortal stars away?

will make that fact clear.

Turning good prose into bad poetry  
does Dr. Fowler a disservice.

NICK OKASINSKI, '78

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