Worth a Thousand Words
A printmaker plays with the hidden patterns of language and art.
by SAMANTHA MALDONADO

Despite its muted color palettes and simple shapes and lines, the art of Sarah Hulsey ’01 has a lot to say. Nearly every piece—each screen print, relief print, etching, or artist’s book—features letterpress text of some kind. It’s not prose, nor is it poetry, and its presence can be confusing. Though the visuals may be mystifying at first, patterns start to emerge, reminiscent of familiar objects: road maps, line graphs, or the periodic table of elements. Hulsey’s graphic images are characterized by a sense of careful handicraft: boxes may not be perfect squares, but they are aligned. Recent sources of inspiration include audio recordings of ocean floor maps and Copernicus’s drawings of heliocentric solar systems: diagrams, charts, and objects she describes as “really gorgeous, graphical things, apart from what...
In committing The Poetry of John Milton (Harvard, $39.95), an enormous new book of criticism, professor of English Gordon Teskey begins with a bracing definition of his discipline. He has honed it previously in such capacities as editing the Norton Critical Edition of Paradise Lost. From the preface:

The present book is an exercise in the art of literary criticism, which I take to be the appreciation of quality, of excellence, in art made with words. Literary criticism is not science: it does not prove and discover; it persuades and reveals. But the chances of a work of literary criticism being worth reading outside expert scholarly circles are much increased if it first meets their standards, which often do involve proof and discovery. Philology, in the broad sense of the word, is where criticism starts from, but not where it ends.

That is because criticism has a higher aim, which may be described as moral and humanizing. Literary criticism is the appreciation of verbal art as a power that elevates our ordinary experience in almost every way. Literature cultivates wisdom, courage, generosity, breadth of outlook, intellectual and moral judgment, a reflective passion for justice, and, not the least of these things, pleasure, civilized pleasure as opposed to brutal or trivial pleasures. But literature also enhances our capacity for sympathizing with others, or at least for understanding them, by allowing us to travel into different moral worlds, such as that of Homer, or the authors of Genesis, or the author of Paradise Lost. Literary criticism strives to show why certain works of literature are good, why they have enduring quality, and, however different their values are from our own, why they are not only civilized but civilizing. I should add that I use the word civilizing and civil, civilis “of the city,” with the intention of including politics, concern with the polis, the city. For it seems to me—I say this as someone who cares for all the arts—that literature comes first among them because it is made with our political instrument, language. Certainly John Milton put literature—which for him meant poetry—first among the civilizing arts, and I have written this book in agreement with his judgment on the matter.

Hulsey’s pieces marry the elaborate structure that speakers are, for all intents and purposes, totally unaware of—and her work explores the subtle intricacies that make speech make sense.

When she first pursued printmaking, Hulsey considered it a side interest, completely separate from her academic studies. A linguistics concentrator at Harvard, she attended workshops and courses on letterpress printing, papermaking, and bookbinding. While earning her Ph.D. in linguistics at MIT, she kept a studio in nearby Somerville to pursue her hobby. Ten years and one M.F.A. from the University of the Arts (in Philadelphia) later, she has left the world of academic linguistics
The Lion’s Share
Benjamin Scheuer takes his life story out on the road.

by LAURA LEVIS

The only props in The Lion, the critically acclaimed musical by Benjamin Scheuer ’04, are the chair he sits on and six gorgeous guitars. Among them, there’s a gentle 1929 Martin, an electric Gibson that growls, and a stylin’ Froggy Bottom H-12, which Scheuer got as a thirtieth birthday present.

But the two most important instruments Scheuer has ever played are not on stage with him. The first is a toy banjo that his lawyer father made for him out of the lid of a cookie tin, some rubber bands, and an old necktie for the strap. Scheuer played it alongside his father on the front porch, mimicking his finger strokes. The second instrument is the guitar his father played, which the teenage Scheuer inherited after a sudden brain aneurysm killed his father and sent his world into chaos.

Told mostly through whimsical and poignant songs, The Lion traces Scheuer’s quest