LET ME TAKE YOU DOWN IN A CYN SANDWICH:

The Profoundly Paradoxical Mind of John Lennon

Brian Murphy

Whenever a noble soul comes, the audience awaits.
And he is not judged by his performance,
but by the spirit of his performance.
—Emerson
[*Journals*, Dover, p.206]

An essay-review of the following books:
Cynthia Lennon, *A Twist of Lennon* (New York: Avon Books, 1978).
Frederic Seaman, *The Last Days of John Lennon: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991).
Robert Rosen, *Nowhere Man: The Final Days of John Lennon* (Soft Skull Press, 2001).
***Memories of John Lennon*, ed., with an introduction by, Yoko Ono (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).**
Elizabeth Partridge, *John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth, A Photographic Biography* (New York: Viking, 2005)
Marion Winik, *Above Us Only Sky* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005).
Cynthia Lennon, *John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005).

I: Introduction

On December 8, 1980, John Lennon was assassinated. So stated, this event was surely something new under the sun, a genuine first: a popular entertainer, a singer-song-writer, a mere celebrity was not only murdered but "assassinated"—a word whose associations evoke kings, archdukes, historical personages, heads of states, presidents, historical demarcations, Lincoln, King, Kennedy.

It had been foreseen: in *Hair,* that astonishingly evocative mirror of The Sixties, the line comes with a shock, out of nowhere, "Mick! They shot Mick." The tribe felt that the dark forces that killed the Kennedys and King would spill over, almost inevitably, to the brightness of the counter-culture. They picked the wrong singer, but the fear was not misplaced.

Twelve years after *Hair,* sitting in prison, the brilliant writer, then-Soviet-dissident, later-Czech-President, Vaclav Havel heard the news of John Lennon's death and regarded it as an event of *political* consequence; he ruminated (in his journal) on this historical shift, this bridging of the pop and the political: what could this mean about the nature of democracy? Ten more years passed, and we all saw the fall of the infamous Wall in Berlin and heard the echoes of that fall in Prague and Budapest and the other great, shadowed cities of Eastern Europe: the nearly literal echo took the form of loudspeakers playing, and local singers with guitars chanting, "Imagine" and "Give Peace a Chance." Kids suddenly appeared in blue jeans; and so, it turned out, Lennonist manifestations of dissidence, of a counter-culture, had been there, all along, waiting and working for this liberation.

John Lennon and The Beatles, more than any other single group, person, or abstraction, had both reflected and created The Sixties, which is to say, therefore, most of the culture in which we presently live—if only by its opposite: what else is neoconservatism but a hatred of everything The Sixties were

all about? In a song to John on *Double Fantasy*, Yoko sang, "Your mind has changed the world." It is an extraordinary statement . . . and yet it seems true enough.

It was long ago. And it is the present.

In a superb title essay ("Above Us Only Sky") in a book of superb essays (*Above Us Only Sky*), Marion Winik writes of her and her friends' reaction to Lennon's assassination. Her book's general theme is a post- 9/11 meditation on living without religion; she invokes John's words—words that are often omitted, especially when "Imagine" is sung in churches!

> Imagine there's no heaven;
> it's easy if you try;
> no Hell below us,
> *above us only sky.*

In 1980, she was living a quasi-hippie existence in Austin, at the edge of the University of Texas:

> Lennon's death was a tragedy felt world-wide, and the inhabitants of Austin, Texas, the freethinking potheads, latter-day flower children, slacker musicians, long-haired grant-writers, and guitar-playing lawyers, were on the frontlines of the bereaved. Coming as it did just a month after the election of Ronald Reagan, Lennon's passing seemed to many the end of an era of any shred of idealism and now it was just every man for himself and his bank account. Nuclear plants were exploding, South Africa and Central America were vicious pits of oppression, and there was a paint-haired puppet of the right sitting atop it all. Imagine. [p. 143]

She goes on to describe the memorial services and parties held in Austin and argues that with Lennon's assassination something dark had entered the world. John Lennon's death represented to the people she knew—and to millions around the world—death, the death of something Lennon represented.

What was that? How had we got there? And what was the

relationship between the actual John Lennon and the hopes he had stirred (like that other assassinated John)?

Let's back up. At the end of the Sixties, in the phrase everyone knows, The Beatles Broke Up.

So extraordinary was their fame, the four of them could not help going on to living lives of allegory. Ringo, playing a part in various magical railroads, has, apparently happily, stayed in the Octopus's Garden that they all created; Paul, in the more purely musical parts of the garden; and George, of course, in its mystical groves.

And then there's John. It was The Beatles, a cross between a disciplined band and an improvised commune, not Johnny and the Moon Dogs, but it was also—we were supposed to just know this—John's band. "Contradictory" hardly begins to describe him. One thinks of Oscar Wilde's penetrating comment that in the world of art a thing can be true, and its opposite can be true. John was an almost insanely egotistical individualist—who needed a partner, a collaborator, a lover, a competitor. Mick Jagger once said that John's ambition was simple: to become the most famous person on the planet, an accomplishment he pretty well achieved.

He achieved that goal chiefly through the production of The Beatles' thirteen albums that changed the perception and place of pop music as well as the nature of popular art in general—at least as much as Andy Warhol's work did. These albums are still part of the very fabric of our culture. Then, in the first half of the Seventies, on his own and with Yoko Ono, (in six extraordinary albums) he developed further, and intensely personal, kinds of popular music. In 1975 he stopped recording, and, as he *was* stopped for whatever reasons, he turned around, so to speak, to *observe* the process and the price of his kind of fame.

II: Inside

One of the most fascinating insights in Robert Rosen's book is that John knew that he, in the last half of the Seventies, exercised his greatest power to the extent that he wasn't seen; he was beyond success; he had achieved such fame that his five-year silence hummed more loudly than, say, any of Paul McCartney's appearances in *People* Magazine.

After intensely personal work in *Plastic Ono Band,* John zoomed to the politically radical ("The Luck of the Irish" being the least known but most wonderfully mordant of his songs of this period), imagined various kinds of mind games, again retreated to his own childhood, and then a Goodbye-to-All-That with his *Rock'n'Roll* album; he retired from Public Life and became a father and househusband (though that *was* a rather political statement to us post-Sixties guys who came to think of ourselves as feminists).

For five years he allowed himself the unspeakable luxury of following Emerson's advice: over your door, post the word "Whim." He had 150 million dollars and Yoko and a great apartment in The Dakota, a fortress in the middle of New York, at the center of the American Empire: he could live in and simultaneously observe the new Rome at its very pinnacle.

Five years: and then, a cross between a showbiz comeback and the next chapter in the Gospel According to John: *Double Fantasy* is the great story of their life: all you need *is* love; it's by, about, and for the two of them: they sing love songs to each other, songs which record ups and downs and angers and reconciliations and fears and delights—all the stuff of everybody's love-life, even people without 150 million dollars—in original work which suggested a new direction.

Then: no new direction. Shot. Assassinated. The dream is, without a doubt this time, definitely over.

So, naturally, we want to know: what was the sunset of this extraordinary life *really* like in The Dakota in the last half of the Seventies?

In 1991, one answer to that question appeared in Frederic Seaman's "personal memoir" ***The Last Days of John Lennon.*** Seaman was John's personal assistant, gofer, bought and paid for friend, "sycophant slave," Yoko-watchdog over John, and note-taking observer of the whole strange scene in the final two years. The book begins with a bizarre narrative in which Seaman is abducted, beaten, and eventually arrested, by two New York City cops who also worked for Yoko: they were after "the journal," which he insisted he did not have.

At the end of his book we get the story: after John's death, Seaman admits to smuggling John's journals (covering the Dakota years) out of the apartment and giving them to a friend to be copied. He says that the friend refused to give them back and Seaman concocted a ruse involving a financial backer which resulted in his getting the journals back, with one missing, and giving them to Yoko. He ended matters by pleading guilty to grand larceny (getting five years probation) and by writing his book.

His book is a true *memoir*, it is his memory of his experiences with John Lennon. These experiences show a man who, pretty much, stayed stoned (he "Thai-ed one on" and chained-smoked joints) for at least the last two of his five years in seclusion and rarely left his bedroom, much less his apartment, and lay on his bed and watched TV and did nothing much but jealously guard (and then preserve on *Double Fantasy*) The Myth of JohnandYoko. Yoko, meanwhile, really *is* described as a Dragon Lady who snared John, got his millions, gave him a son—which seemed to John nothing less than a cosmic miracle—and then abandoned him to the Thai-stick and TV while she spent hours with astrologers, numerologists, and Tarot readers when she wasn't on the telephone turning John's millions into more millions.

The book culminates, one might say, in late 1980 during the *Double Fantasy* hoop-la, in the bizarre scene in which John and Yoko are filmed naked in bed, simulating love-making. It is a perfect final moment—because, after Sean was born, (Seaman says, though he does not say exactly how he, or anyone

else, could know this) they rarely had sex, or even were together very much, at all. They just wanted to make it *look* like they did—even to putting this non-existent erotic love *on film.*

Then, ten years after Seaman's book, came the aptly titled *Nowhere Man.* One learns from the Prelude of this "work of investigative journalism and imagination" (quite a combination!) that Robert Rosen is, in fact, the "friend" Seaman referred to in *his* book.

It's all pretty weird, and you really don't know whom to believe or even, much of the time, what to make of what anyone actually says. This, however, is as befits the surreal stories which float out from The Dakota. A hundred years from now, "sound, sullen scholars" (in Dr. Johnson's phrase) might be able to delineate some accuracy in all this. ("Just gimme some truth" is the refrain of one of John's angriest songs.) Meantime, those of us still living in the latter days of the tale will learn what we can from the accounts of participants.

Now, Robert Rosen was not exactly a participant. He never met John Lennon, but he was a close friend of Frederic Seaman: they both agree about that. They both agree that Seaman gave Rosen the journals and told him to "copy" them. They both agree that, after a period of time in which Rosen had the journals, the journals ended up back at the Dakota—where, one assumes, they repose today.

What Rosen did was not to copy (in the sense of photocopy) but to *transcribe* the journals, over a period of six intense weeks, in which he consciously tried to live as much as he could in John Lennon's mind. And John recorded everything—what he ate, what the weather was like, his dreams and sexual fantasies, his thoughts about his son Sean and about Yoko, and his endless, obsessive scores off Paul.

So Rosen says, "The result of this confluence of information, imagination and intuition is the story of what it was like to be John Lennon." Thus, the subject is exactly the same as Seaman's, but Rosen attempts to write it from the inside. Al-

though it is written in the third person, most of the time the book takes us inside John's mind.

Seaman and Rosen, therefore, often give a sort of *Rashomon* view of what lay behind The Myth of JohnandYoko, of the Double Fantasy. However, we begin with delightful factual discrepancies—in Seaman, John is 5′10; in Rosen, 5′8—and we're off.

Rosen's first page opens this way:

"'If I hadn't made money honestly, I'd have been a criminal. I was just born to be rich.'

"New York City, Wednesday, January 9 [1980], 12:06 PM.—The words astounded John Lennon as he stared at the caption beneath the old photograph of himself in *The National Enquirer*. He remembered thinking them but had no recollection of ever saying them out loud. Though he loved reading about himself in the tabloids, he hadn't spoken to a reporter in five years. He hated the motherfuckers. Since he'd gone into seclusion, virtually everything they wrote about him was libelous fantasy. But there was nothing he could do about it. He was fair game. It had been open season on Lennon for 18 years. Still, he had to admit, it was flattering that the press couldn't get along without him and Yoko."

There is, in fact, a tabloid quality to the whole of Robert Rosen's book. How could it be otherwise? We are following him, prying into the inmost privacy of someone else's life. That is precisely what tabloids do. However, as the opening paragraph makes clear, Lennon was amazed at how *accurate* the bastards were. Indeed, he thinks that the tabloids tend to be far more accurate than the mainstream press, which really does get everything wrong.

So how can we—especially if we love John Lennon's music and marvel at his profound and still pervasive influence—*not* be fascinated by Rosen's promise? Of course we want to know what it's like to be in the mind of John Lennon. In a way, Lennon himself would, eventually, have understood. At the very end of his life he feared his fans (obviously, he was quite right to do that!) and hated the fact that they were always

"expecting us to do something," but that "following is not where it's at" and that the whole point of The Beatles and JohnandYoko is you should "realize your own dreams." All we can do, he said, is send out "messages and postcards": "here's what it's like for us; what's it like for you?" [John's remarks were from his final interviews, available on Elliot Mintz's radio series *The Lost Lennon Tapes* and on **the 1983 LP *Heart Play***.]

Well, what *was* it like for them?

Here are a few items:

We learn that 1980 began for John in a state of such acute depression that he could overhear the servants wondering if John & Yoko would both commit suicide: the year progressed from a possible double suicide to a *Double Fantasy*!

We learn that he was, or at least could be, a real bastard. He could be viciously cruel to his only couple-friends, the Peter Boyles. No wonder his final New Year's Eve was spent, in formal dress, with exactly one guest, the quasi-"sycophant slave" (the phrase was John's from the *Playboy* interview) Elliott Mintz. John was *euphoric* when Paul was arrested for marijuana-possession in Japan and spent ten days in jail. Poor Paul! Before leaving for his Japan tour, Paul had tried to smoke a dopers' peace pipe with John in New York as he had scored some "excellent weed" and thought the Lennons would be delighted to learn that he and Linda were touring Japan and even staying in the Lennons' favorite hotel. Wrong. So freaked were the Lennons—bad karma in *their* hotel, man—that, it is hinted, it was Yoko who tipped off the Japanese authorities about the marijuana. When Yoko sold a record-breaking cash cow, it was "another victory over the McCartneys."

His hatreds were legion—Bob Dylan, Paul Simon ("his first name alone gave him the creeps")—the list is more or less endless. He hated his fans for rejecting Yoko. And he hated them for recognizing him in the streets of New York . . . and for *not* recognizing him.

He was hopelessly addicted to coffee, cigarettes, and other drugs: he would snort heroin and then pray for the courage to resist its temptation. He prayed—sometimes; but

much of the time his idea was to *become* God. He meditated to achieve clairvoyance—and then thought, ah, clairvoyance would be the ultimate money-making skill; and he always wanted to be sure that he was richer than fucking McCartney.

For much of the five years, he simply slept; he took a morning siesta; he could sleep 16 hours a day. He did dream therapy—which seemed to consist chiefly of willed sexual fantasies. He stopped sleeping with May Pang for good old-fashioned reasons—guilt and fear of being caught by his wife. His 150 million dollars and world-wide fame weren't of much help in his sexual life: he would have an occasional "massage" (one in Cape Town, where he was alone but too afraid to sleep with anyone, was particularly memorable because the masseuse had big breasts); otherwise, he masturbated and wrote in his journal, "Call me fuckin' Portnoy!"

Portnoy! Exactly: there is something comically sad about all this.

And there is also something endlessly fascinating about all this: his consuming hatred of Paul did not prevent his using Paul's song "Coming Up" as the catalyst for breaking his creative silence and beginning to write again. The first song he wrote, as well as the second, was absolutely apt (both appeared not on *Double Fantasy* but on the posthumous *Milk and Honey*)—"I Don't Want to Face It," which ends with the spoken line, "I look in the mirror and can't see anybody there!" and—especially poignant—"Borrowed Time." These songs—especially if you listen to them after hearing Paul's "Coming Up"—have a wit, edge, and unmistakably Lennonist bite to them.

Rosen's book concludes with an engrossing portrait of Mark David Chapman. We are reminded that, on the afternoon of the day he shot him to death, Chapman got John's autograph *and* asked John for a job. Chapman had a Holden-Caufield-esque delusion about saving the children of the world from the phony John, but he also wanted to *be* John Lennon.

Rosen's book, like Seaman's, offers plenty of food for thought on the ever-useful themes of trusting the tale and not the teller, the song and not the singer. However, there is a mo-

ment described in the *Double Fantasy* studio sessions in which John and Yoko take a break by going off together and putting their arms around each other. There are plenty of scenes of John screaming at Yoko and Yoko screaming at everybody else, plenty of scenes debunking The Myth and showing a weird, sometimes even sad, reality. But John Lennon and Yoko Ono certainly had *something*. One danger of both the Seaman and Rosen books is that they invite a sort of tsk-tsk judgementalism—as if we readers were of course all water-drinkers with perfectly ordered love-lives.

In any case, there is the music: and if John and Yoko needed The Myth of John and Yoko—and also really needed to put their arms around each other—to create those last, lovely love songs (and some very great songs before that), well, let's note the reality and then grant them, and maybe even admire, The Myth. John's idea for the cover of the next album, after *Double Fantasy,* was to show JohnandYoko in garb reminiscent of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Evidently, the (painfully incomplete) song based directly on Browning, "Grow Old along with Me," was to be the theme for the album. John wanted them clearly enrolled in the (lamentably brief) list of The World's Great Couples. Aside from the Brownings? It's hard to think of many Great *Couples.* (Great Lovers are a totally different matter: there are many more of them, but the thing is, they always die—or at least one of them does.) Maybe *we* need JohnandYoko. Perhaps it *was* a myth, a mask. But, as Oscar Wilde said, "Give a man a mask, and he'll tell you the truth."

III: Outside

John and Yoko were people whose fantastic freedom became—where extremes meet—a fantastic prison. They were also people whose masks were pretty interesting in themselves and which also told invaluable truths. John mused, in what proved to be his final days, about the fact that when "a person comes

along with a good piece of truth," people choose to focus on the person and not the truth. It's the reverse of the old custom of shooting the messenger: "now, they *worship* the messenger and don't listen to the message." (**Heart Play**) This astute point applies equally well either to worshipping the messenger or to deploring the messenger. This particular messenger, with all his wild contradictions, is certainly interesting. But he was one who came along with "a good piece of truth," and his *music* (especially when it animates his great theme of peaceandlove) is the truth and the real treasure.

Memories of John Lennon **is edited by Yoko** and, therefore, it comes as no surprise that this is the complementary opposite of the Seaman and Rosen books. Yet it is, in its opposite way, as fascinating as the "tell-all" insider books.

The most obvious opposing view is from the longest of these memories (there are nearly 75 of them; many are very brief) by Elliott Mintz. He says that when people ask him what John Lennon was *really* like his reply is: "You already know, because he never kept anything secret. He was real. He was exactly what was advertised, revered, and sometimes scorned. He just put it out there. Nothing was censored or altered for mass consumption. . . . He was an emotional provocateur. That was his charm." [p. 151] Actually, Elliott Mintz's portrait is not totally at odds with the sketch given by Messers. Seaman and Rosen: they showed a depressed recluse who stayed stoned and/or in bed; however, they were talking about the last two years of Lennon's life. After a sort of retirement, which followed the release of his quasi-farewell *Rock 'n' Roll* album, he did practically nothing. OK. So he slept 16 hours a day (after the first glow of fatherhood and househusbandry had worn off). He had worked nonstop from the age of 17 or so. Why the blame? In any case, Elliott Mintz reports that in 1980 he definitely "came back," and he was energetic and happy. He was optimistic about the future—about his and about the world's future: he really believed that his generation had a new world to offer.

That was his mood (pretty obviously a euphoric rebound

from a prolonged depression) when he recorded *Double Fantasy*. Drummer Andy Newark remembers how John's nickname for Yoko was "Mother." Far from finding this too painfully Freudian, he began using the same nickname with his own wife. He also recalls John's only advice to him as they worked together on the new songs. "Don't get too fancy; just play it like Ringo."

The brevity-is-the-soul-of-wit award is tied between Dennis Hopper ("All my memories are in the music") and Norman Mailer ("We have lost a genius of the spirit"). Or they are trumped by Annie Liebovitz's truly strange photographs (a naked John climbing over a clothed, impassive Yoko).

The book is filled with wonderful little bits. In 1973 or 1974, Jerry Lee Lewis was playing the Roxy Theatre in Los Angeles; he noticed his sax player trying to get a whiff of whatever was being smoked in the balcony. Next thing he knew, there was someone on his knees, kissing Lewis's cowboy boots. Known as "The Killer" and not exactly as a modest man, Lewis put his hand on the shoulder of the man who proved to be John Lennon and said to him, "Now, now, Son, that ain't necessary at all." [161; also 137] Amid the notes and recollections of such pop luminaries as Iggy Pop, Bonnie Raitt, Carlos Santana, Carly Simon, and Pete Townshend (whose thoughts about the artistry of The Who and of John and Yoko are particularly interesting), is a long account of a fascinating meeting with legendary Canadian premier Pierre Trudeau. Recalled was a meeting of Trudeau with Marlon Brando, who said that Canada and the US had a common native heritage. Trudeau responded, "Ah, there are differences in the way we treated our native people. You hunted them down and murdered them. We starved them to death." [296] Winner of the nice-try award went to Leonard Bernstein who used his own celebrity as well as neighborliness (he too lived in the Dakota) to get the Beatles back together to perform at the UN; even the Maestro could not pull that one off. [257]

Another of the many books about Lennon currently on the shelves is one enjoyably readable and concise account of John's life and personality, and one which really does work all

the many personal contradictions into a coherent picture. ***John Lennon: All I Want Is the Truth—A Photographic Biography*** **by Elizabeth Partridge** is a coffee-table book in size and layout: the photos and drawings are very revealing and interesting; they remind us that John and The Beatles knew how important self-presentation was. Most of their contemporaries *saw* them—in the famous image on the US debut album *Meet the Beatles*—even before hearing them. (This book is also commendably researched—with the documentation and references given clearly but not at all obtrusively.) We see John from multiple points of view, including his own. His thoughts on not seeing his first son Julian? He said that "out of sight, out of mind" was his "motto." Most of us think the phrase an unfortunate effect of circumstance, not a guide for living.

It is said that John opened his ex-wife Cynthia's book about him (*A Twist of Lennon*) with dread but quickly found himself charmed by its rather sweet tone and affectionate recollection of their early years. If so, he must have been able to ignore the rather shocking information that John was what we would now call an abusive husband: she was, she says, "afraid" of him about 75% of the time. (Or perhaps he did not need to ignore it, having comes to terms with his inner macho violence. Part of John's story is how Yoko showed him a new definition of a "real" man and how indebted he was to women and, yes, how abusive he had been.) But it is quite fascinating to hear the familiar tales of the Beatles told from her perspective—from finding the "new" drummer Pete Best and the entrance of Brian Epstein into their lives through Brian's shocking death in 1967. Most interesting of all is her account of the famous trip, in 1968, to India to study transcendental meditation with the Maharishi. Everyone knows that The Beatles (it was John and George who were the passionate enthusiasts and serious students; Paul and Ringo went along for the ride—and not even very much of that) became disillusioned with the Maharishi because he is alleged to have demonstrated a sexual interest in some young women in their party; John wrote about him in "Sexy Sadie" as the man "who made a fool of everyone."

But Cynthia feels there was something suspicious about it: the friend who introduced them to the Maharishi made one unfounded and unchecked allegation against this man who brought them all peace and happiness *without drugs*. Although Cynthia was able to see the extraordinary effect LSD had on John as a man and as an artist [155], she never liked the drugs. Marijuana just made her sleepy. And she especially disliked LSD, which meant so much to John. But she tried: "During my trip John was marvelous. But whatever happiness and awareness John had gained through his own experiences, I did not. I hated every moment. It was hell on earth. Losing control of my mind was the most horrifying feeling I have ever experienced." [156]. In India she felt George and John over-reacted to the charge against the Maharishi and left in a suspiciously mad rush. Back in England, she felt that she and John were no longer on the same wave length. She felt that she knew that Yoko was John's soul-mate even before he did. She was shocked and hurt but not surprised when they got together at which point, in fact, her book ends. Her story is told in an artlessly affecting way. The last lines give a nice sense of the book's flavor and value: "I still feel very proud of the Beatles and their accomplishments. My life during that period was an education, an education I wouldn't have missed. It has left me feeling enriched, not embittered, enlightened, not blinded. All I can think of to conclude my story is to say, 'Thanks for the memories, and in the words of the I CHING, no blame.'" [189]

Cynthia wrote a second book (*John*) in 2005. The sweet tone has decidedly soured: she says her earlier book was "superficial and lightweight," and her feelings about Yoko are more human-sized, more those of Wife #1: she recounts the ways that Yoko pursued John (by letters, poems, and sudden personal appearances) and when she gets the word, brutally delivered by "Magic Alex," the friend who introduced them to the Marharishi and then engineered their sudden departure from India, that John was going to divorce her so he could marry Yoko, her feelings are that "Her persistence had paid off . . . Yoko had got her man. My man." [294] One of the few

times after that she spoke directly to John, it was about money, and he said that 75 thousand pounds was his "last offer," because she "wasn't worth more than that." [306]

Obviously, the memories of an ex-wife are unlikely to be without a strong personal bias. However, Cynthia, "Cyn," makes the bias perfectly clear, especially on behalf of their son Julian, and the portrait that emerges is quite consistent with the moody and erratic John in the Rosen and the Seaman books. Fred Seaman even appears in Cyn's book, and there is *another* fascinating version of the story of the Lennon journals. In this account, Seaman says John had intended the journals to go to Julian, which of course could have gone a long way to make up for the nearly life-long neglect Julian had experienced. But the journals are still locked away in the Dakota. [369]

In *A Twist of Lennon,* Cyn said she was "afraid" of John 75 % of the time. In the later book [48–51] she recounts the awful time that he actually hit her. It was only once, and it led to a three-month breakup; but it still makes for awful reading. Worse, she portrays John as someone who, although easily provoked to jealous furies, rarely fought with men. One exception was the fight with a man who made a remark about John's and Brian Epstein's trip together to Spain. The slightest insinuation of homosexuality was enough to cause a physical attack. Usually, she says, John avoided the fights or confrontations and got others to do the dirty work. For example, although Pete Best and John were fairly close friends, John insisted that manager Brian Epstein give Pete the bad news that he was being replaced by Ringo: "It was John at his most cowardly." [115]

The most damning part of the book's portrait is in John's treatment of his son Julian. Cyn notes that Julian was 5 when his father left them for Yoko—exactly the same age John was when *he* was abandoned by his father. (And Sean was five when John was murdered.) For a time, there were uneasy weekend visits. But when John—who had become, as Cyn notes, JohnandYoko—moved to New York, he essentially ignored his son for three years. (Someone in his London office sent Julian a Christmas gift each year; there was no card.) Even more

oddly, these three years concurred with the period when JohnandYoko were doing nothing but trying to regain custody of Yoko's daughter Kyoko, who was about the same age as Julian. Cyn wonders if John had made some weird vow: I won't see my kid until you see your kid?

Julian's point of view includes the rather strange experience of seeing his father, at a time they were not seeing each other in the flesh, on television—for example, at the time of the "bed-in" for peace at the Amsterdam Hilton. Young Julian utters a real crusher, when he said to Cyn, "Dad's always telling people to love each other, but how come he doesn't love me?" [330] Julian's recollections are in agreement with Seaman's: both remember a John who was erratic and who could suddenly lash out with breathtaking cruelty—even to a nervous, teenaged boy who was trying to get closer to his father. The worst instance is when Julian "giggled," and John screamed at him, "I can't stand the way you fucking laugh. Never let me hear your fucking horrible laugh again." [356] Cyn reports that this (understandably) deeply scarred Julian, who even as an adult has never laughed very much.

Cynthia's own analysis of JohnandYoko—"what *was* her power over him?"—is simple: what other woman is John's life was a steel-willed older woman? Answer: Aunt Mimi. Cyn notes that Yoko has occasionally referred to herself as a sort of Aunt Mimi. "She'd got it dead right," Cyn says. [341-2] This explains but without at all explaining anything away.

Really, no one could argue with this: John *called* Yoko "Mother," after all, and he wrote constantly about the loss of his mother, and Aunt Mimi was his mother-substitute. In a song written directly to his mother, "Julia," he fuses her name with "Ocean Child," which, apparently, is what "Yoko" means. He was pretty clear about the identification. Yoko fulfilled profound needs in him, and she inspired him, and that is why they were great lovers. Was it a myth? Was it the truth? Are we so sure that we can always tell the difference?