

# IMAGINING NEW YORK FROM

...Continued from page 1

I knew right away that writing about Woodlawn was the way for me to write about New York.

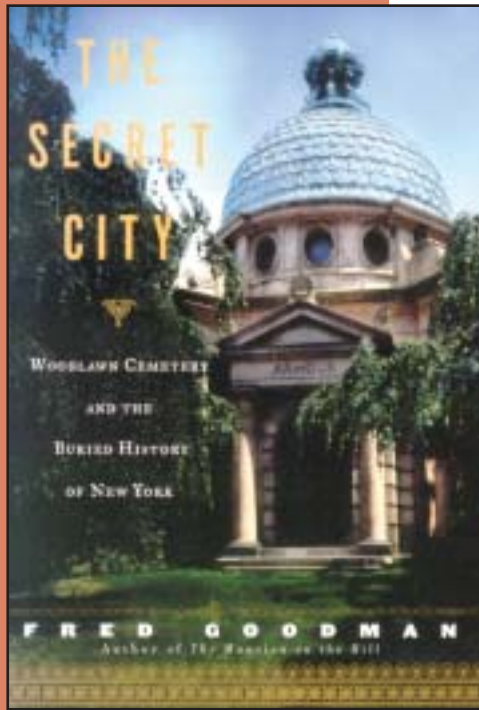
I'd long wanted to write about the city, but couldn't see how to deal with the obvious problem: New York is so vast, so diverse, as to be beyond portraiture. There have, after all, been many great books about New York, but no book – be it fiction or history – that could rightly be termed THE book about New York; so far it's simply proven too big and daunting a subject.

My own taste in City writing runs toward the writers I think of as New York miniaturists: the journalists-turned-essayists like Joseph Mitchell and A.J. Leibling who illuminated the common but somehow overlooked corners of Gotham. And so, in Woodlawn, I saw a neatly circumscribed subject that offered me a chance to pick any of the 300,000 lives interred there – and thus write about virtually any facet of city life.

Of course, Woodlawn is a place of striking beauty and surprising grandeur. It's natural to be awed by the pharaonic tombs of the Goulds and Belmonts and Armours and Woolworths and Baches, but the more I wandered through Woodlawn, the more I found myself thinking not of the most recognizable names, but of the ones that didn't ring a bell. I knew that Herman Melville, perhaps the greatest writer this country ever produced, went to his

Woodlawn grave a forgotten man. When he died in 1892, many greeted the news with surprise: they thought he'd been dead for years. Yet today, he is appropriately famous. Indeed, it occurred to me that with the exception of Melville, everyone else interred in Woodlawn has become less and less known to us as the years roll by. Why? I began reading and looking into the lives of some of the less-well-known among Woodlawn's long-term residents, trying to see if there wasn't something of resonance for us in their quickly fading strivings and achievements, something that speaks to the things we are going through today as New Yorkers.

Out of these questions and research, I used Woodlawn to spin my own personal history of New York, telling



## About the Author

Fred Goodman is the author of The Mansion on the Hill: Dylan, Young, Geffen, Springsteen and the Head on Collision of Rock and Commerce, which received the Ralph J. Gleason Award for Best Music Book of 1997. He is a former editor of *Rolling Stone*, and is still a regular contributor to that publication and a variety of others. He lives with his wife and sons in White Plains, New York.

