
FAMILIAR TERRITORY:
**Observations on
American Life**
by Joseph Epstein
Oxford, 1979
204 pp. \$11.95

Like the 19th-century French traveler Tocqueville, Epstein is intrigued by what kind of people Americans are. Writing informal essays in the tradition of Addison and Steele and Montaigne, Epstein, who is editor of the *American Scholar*, is more inclined to be inquisitive about educational fads, television, and publishing than about foreign affairs or the economy. He rebels at Americans' fascination with psychology: "We have become connoisseurs of grievance—one nation problematical with anxiety and aggravation for all." He warily notes the popularity of the King Tut exhibit, the success of book clubs, and the celebrity status indiscriminately granted to almost anyone who writes, paints, or performs. Americans' "appetite for culture is palpably there," he remarks; "at issue is the quality of the diet it is being fed." Readers of this slim volume need not fret about the quality of the fare.

**ACCOUNTING FOR
SLOWER ECONOMIC
GROWTH: The United
States in the 1970s**
by Edward F. Denison
Brookings, 1979
212 pp. \$16.95 cloth,
\$7.95 paper

Since 1973, the U.S. economy has been plagued by "stagflation"—slow growth, chronic inflation, and a sharp decrease in productivity. (Ten of the nation's 11 leading industries have experienced sluggish growth, communications being the sole exception.) In this sober, densely written study, Denison, a Commerce Department economist, echoes neither those critics who blame lethargy within business nor those who blame burdensome demands on business by government and labor. Increased federal outlays (and higher taxes), he writes, have not had a noticeable adverse effect on growth and productivity. Federal and industry research-and-development expenditures have held constant, even taking inflation into account, since the mid-1960s. Total employment has risen; it is output per worker that is down. Government safety and health regulations, the high costs of needed environmental protection, and rising crime rates (with more money and manpower now funneled into security) contributed to the down-turn in productivity. Inflation and high energy prices have also had an impact. But inflation's ef-

fect, notably in discouraging long-term, risky investment, is not yet fully understood; and higher energy prices in 1973-76 accounted for less than 5 percent of the drop in the growth rate. Any single factor, Denison suggests, can explain only a small part of the slowdown: "It is possible, perhaps even probable, that everything went wrong at once."

Arts & Letters

**THE MADWOMAN IN
THE ATTIC: The Woman
Writer and the Nineteenth-
Century Literary
Imagination**
by Sandra M. Gilbert and
Susan Gubar
Yale, 1979
719 pp. \$25

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was thwarted in her love for the brooding Mr. Rochester by his mentally deranged wife, a prisoner in Thornfield Hall's attic. To Gilbert and Gubar, both professors of English, Bertha Mason Rochester is *Eyre's* (and Brontë's) second self, an alter ego trapped in claustrophobic anger and struggling to be free. In this credible re-evaluation of the Brontës, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mary Shelley, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Emily Dickinson, the authors are largely successful in their search for a uniquely female creative imagination. These eight Victorian novelists and poets invented characters and voices to act out both private guilt—over having abandoned traditional woman's roles for writing careers—and their gnawing resentment of the male-dominated literary establishment. "Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers," Gilbert and Gubar contend, "obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors' submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable." On their surfaces, Jane Austen's refined novels of manners revolve around young heroines who willingly submit to male authority. On another, deeper level, the authors argue, Austen's inner conflict over this paternalistic view of women is evident in her portrayals of shrewd older women (e.g., Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*) who tamper with the docile heroines' lives. The study ends