

in the work of African writers who are part of a literary independence movement paralleling political change comes as less of a surprise. Introducing the work of contemporary authors in East, Central, and Southern Africa, Adrian Roscoe describes vernacular writing ("the outgrowth of an oral literature which has begun to die before the world knows much about it"). He discusses the change in the literature syllabus—from British to African—at the University of Nairobi in 1961, since followed in Malawi and Uganda. "As the voices of Wordsworth and Tennyson grow dim," he reports, "the voices of Okigbo and Soyinka grow loud." So do those of Kenya's Grace Ogot, with her strong tales based on Luo tribal stories, South Africa's Ezekiel Mphahlele, Uganda's Taban Lo Liyong, and dozens of other artists, established or emerging, whose work Roscoe perceptively analyzes.

**THE FACE OF BATTLE.** By John Keegan. Vintage, 1977. 360 pp. \$2.95

John Keegan lectures at Sandhurst, England's West Point. He has never seen a battle. Neither had Stephen Crane, whose *The Red Badge of Courage* is probably America's best war novel. Keegan's book, newly available in paper covers, is not as compelling as Crane's classic, but it does distill, from historical records, what war is like to the men who bear the battle: English bowmen and pikemen at Agincourt (1415); gunners, cavalry, and massed infantry in the confusion of Waterloo (1815); participants in the unbelievable slaughter of the Somme (1916)—where the 1st Battalion, Newfoundland Regiment, in one afternoon lost 705 dead, wounded, or missing. (Newfoundland!) Looking at "the inhuman face of wars" in these three battles fought within a hundred-mile radius,

Keegan writes that "impersonality, coercion, deliberate cruelty, all deployed on a rising scale, make the fitness of man to sustain the stress of battle increasingly doubtful." One wonders.

**HOUSES AND TRAVELLERS.** By W. S. Merwin. Atheneum, 1977. 214 pp. \$6.95 (cloth, \$10)

Better known as a poet and translator of poets than as a writer of prose, W. S. Merwin in the last few years has won new followers with his short short stories, fables, and parables, in the *New Yorker*. Thirty of the odd, haunting narratives collected here appeared first in that magazine, others in a variety of literary journals. Merwin writes (ostensibly) about people, many of them old and lost, about paths, cabins, grain elevators, lakes, nesting pigeons, about "The Devil's Pig," and even (in 69 words) about language we have lost but cannot forget—words we "shine the lantern of our sleep on . . . and there they are, trembling for the day of witness. They will be buried with us, and rise with the rest."

**THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY: What it is, with all the kinds, causes, symptomes, prognostickes and severall cures of it.** By Robert Burton. Vintage, 1977. 1,440 pp. \$7.95

Robert Burton's years on earth (1577–1640) were greatly afflicted by the "black choler." (*I'll change my state with any wretch/Thou canst from gaol or dunghill fetch! . . . Now desperate I hate my life./Lend me a halter or a knife.*) But he made a good thing out of melancholy. His learned, witty compendium on the subject, first published in London in 1621, went through five editions before his death at age 63 of natural causes. Not until now has it appeared in paper (at a cheering price).