



# ATATÜRK'S DAUGHTERS

*Though founded upon Western secularist principles, Turkey has not been immune to the Islamic fundamentalist upsurge of recent years.*

*Nowhere is Atatürk's legacy more pointedly challenged, the author shows, than in heated public struggles over matters affecting women and their status as full and equal citizens.*

BY AMY SCHWARTZ

**O**n a fine April evening in 1994, a conference at the Women's Library in Istanbul is drawing to a close. In the courtyard of the converted Byzantine basilica, 20 or so women, mainly academics and other professionals, prepare to leave after a day of discussions marking the fourth anniversary of the institution's founding. A sliver of moon rises over the Golden Horn, whose waters twist their way through this old, lower-class neighborhood.

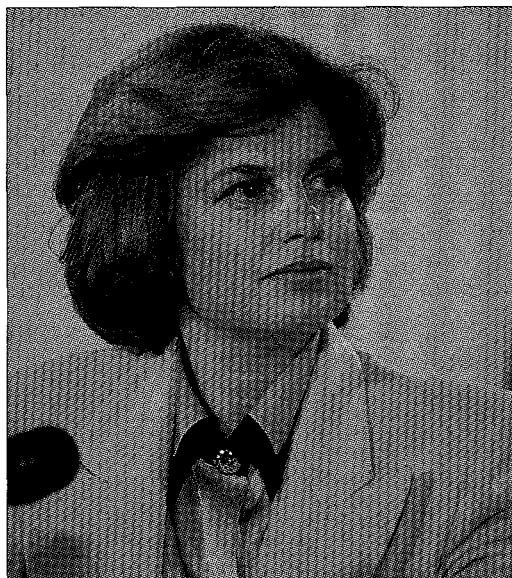
One woman in the group nudges another and points at the moon: "Pretty, no?"

"No," exclaims the other in mock dismay, "I won't say anything nice about it!"

Nervous laughter runs through the courtyard as everyone catches the reference to the Islamic crescent. The joke is bitter. Just a week before, Turkey's main Islamic fundamentalist party swept the municipal elections of Istanbul and the nation's capital, Ankara. It wasn't a national takeover by any measure; the winning Islamist party, Welfare, took only 19 percent of the votes nationwide in fragmented local elections. This, however, translated into victory in 28 cities, includ-

ing Istanbul, the most secular. Nobody at this point can say exactly what powers over daily life the mayors of cities have; to make drastic changes to the secular state and its laws, the party would need to do as well or better in national parliamentary elections in 1996.

But when Islamist parties start gaining ground, women and their institutions tend to be the first to notice. The Women's



Tansu Çiller: Turkey's first female prime minister

---

Library, itself supported by the city government, is just the kind of organization that could feel the pinch. Set down in the midst of a traditional neighborhood, designed to appeal not only to Western-style feminists but to any woman with an interest in women's history, it nonetheless stands firmly identified with Turkey's secular and egalitarian culture—and so could easily draw the ire of an Islamist mayor.

The ostensible topic of the anniversary conference is "Women in the Islamic World," but the participants have spent most of the day arguing over what will come next, what to do about it, and whether to panic. During the breaks, they wonder whether the wine they are sipping is illegal—the new mayor having proclaimed, on his third day in office, that alcohol would no longer be served at City Hall functions.

Everyone at the conference knows how the fundamentalists have moved in on women in Iran and other nations, shooting or beating those who refuse to veil their faces and segregating public workplaces. But Turkey's situation, they also know, is more complicated.

More than a year later, it remains so. In addition to a political system with an 80-year commitment to secularism, Turkey has had until recently a female prime minister, Tansu Çiller (who may yet be able to form a new government). It also has an avowedly "moderate" Islamist party cagey about what changes it actually seeks. Such cunning is necessary. A broad-based popular emotional investment in women's emancipation remains a badge of Turkey's modernity, proudly worn by many Turkish citizens.

After the group dispersed that evening two springs ago, I fell into conversation with a young woman named Deniz, who had returned to Istanbul the



*Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, father of modern Turkey*

previous fall after spending a decade in America training to be an art historian. Hired to teach the introductory art course at the Istanbul Fine Arts Faculty, she had been surprised to discover that a substantial minority of the female students in her class wore the Islamic head scarf. In her own college years, a decade before, such a style of dress would have been illegal, head scarves being explicitly religious and the university firmly secular.

Deniz had tried to take the headscarved students in stride, but two weeks into the term she was summoned by the dean, who told her the university had two serious complaints about her behavior. The first was that she was being too pleasant and tolerant toward the fundamentalist girls in her classes. Though the university had been forced to admit such students, the dean explained, it had an obligation, as a secular institution, to make them uncomfortable. The other complaint was that her skirts were too short.

I laughed at this, and Deniz looked astonished. "You find it funny because you're American," she said. "Not one

---

single Turkish person I've told that to, not one, has understood why I thought it was funny."

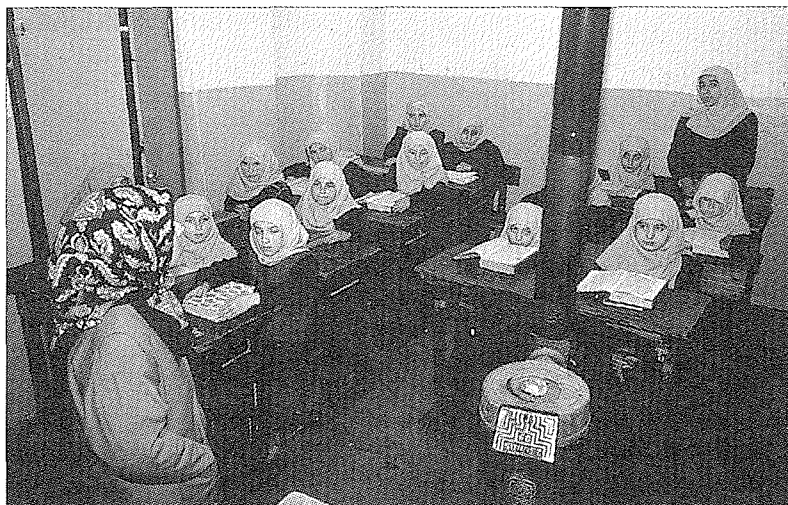
**I**t's easy for an outsider to laugh, harder to thread the maze of Turkey's contradictions and to appreciate the struggles that wove it. The "secularism" to which the Turkish state pledged itself in 1923 has much in common with the type subscribed to by Western governments—enough to set it off sharply from virtually all its neighbors in the region. But there are divergences from Western-style secularism as well. The most notable is the absence of any real connection in people's minds—in this nation 99 percent Muslim—between the concept of a secular government and that of true religious tolerance, for believers as well as unbelievers.

Embracing government "secularism" in the West—*or at least the American*—mode would entail allowing girls to wear head scarves if they so desired and to forgo them if they wished. An American

might also wonder how a state-run institution that set itself so implacably against the swathing of women's heads, railing endlessly against a religion that dictates how women should dress, could then turn around and impose its own form of dress code.

Suspended between East and West, Asia and Europe, secular present and Ot-

toman past, Turkey is undergoing a reluctant reappraisal not only of its secularism but of other ideals that shape the modern republic. Countries with even more aggressive Islamic movements face similar reckonings, but only in Turkey do the details of the Islamic-secular tug of war play out so publicly in the arena of electoral politics. And of all the markers laid down in this culturally Muslim country by the state's commitment to its vision of secularism—a civil law code, minority religious rights, interest-bearing accounts in the banking industry—by far the most visible and contested is the status of women. In the public struggle to determine that



*Schoolgirls in head scarves: an increasingly familiar sight*

status, the most powerful symbols remain, as always, matters of dress. Rulings on such matters as skirt lengths and head coverings are the moves played out on the chessboard of the female anatomy, in terms everybody can understand.

General Islamic doctrine offers a simple rule for *hejab* or covering: all the female "charms," except the face and hands,

---

*Amy Schwartz writes for the Washington Post. A frequent visitor to Turkey, she lived in Istanbul in 1986 and 1987. Copyright © 1995 by Amy Schwartz.*

---

must be covered. An amazingly wide range of acceptable dress styles appears throughout various Muslim regimes, from the all-encompassing black *abaya*, or chador, popular in the early days of the Iranian Revolution, to the raincoat-and-scarf combination more common there now to the loose-fitting *shalwar-kameez*, or tunic and trousers, favored throughout South Asia. In Turkey itself, setting aside the majority of the upper class that doesn't cover at all, there are three prevailing types of *hejab*, determined not by doctrine but by age, profession, and social class.

One style is favored by the "traditionals," older women who cover their hair not so much for religious as for cultural reasons. These include Balkan Turks who cover their heads with a babushka-style handkerchief and village women who wear a scarf once they are married but rarely bother to tuck in every last hair. Then there are the young women students or professionals from the middle class who have adopted the large head scarf that folds around the edges of the face and, in a characteristic pattern, down over the shoulders of what is typically a loose-fitting coat. The wearing of such "turbans," as they are confusingly called in Turkish, is a statement of identity and rebellion.

An even stronger statement is made by women who go about dressed in a manner that secular types call *çarsafli*—literally, wrapped in bed linen. Such women are poor and uneducated, usually belonging to the rapidly growing class of the "recently rural"—the economic migrants who are flooding from their villages to the city, faster with every passing year. The *çarsaf* is a version of the black chador, draping to the floor in all directions and leaving a slit for the eyes. If you go far enough east in Anatolia, even the eye slit disappears, though the owner of the sheet can apparently see through the thin weave of the cloth.

A young Turkish professional, a merchant of soap and perfumes, once showed me a vintage 1930s picture of Istanbul's Galata Bridge, the 800-year-old footbridge over the Golden Horn. "See those wonderful women on the bridge, in those wonderful Paris fashions?" he asked despairingly. "How is it we have sunk to this, with women going over that same bridge wrapped in the black cloth like Saudi Arabians?"

That was in 1987, and a fair proportion of the sheeted bridge crossers might well have been Saudi Arabians, who swarm Istanbul in the summer to avoid the desert heat at home. But there is also no question that from year to year the concentration of covered women grows and that Istanbul, long the most cosmopolitan of the Turkish cities, changes visually with the years. Nor is there any denying that if at any point the government could have stopped this from happening, it would have done so.



Secularism is a cornerstone of the philosophy of Kemalism, by which modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), wrenched the newborn Turkish Republic out of the moribund Ottoman Empire in 1923 and set its face westward toward modernization. Distancing his regime from a religion that had justified the veil and *purdah*, Atatürk made a high-profile commitment to women's full equality a central part of his "march from East to West."

To some extent, the resulting Turkish secularism—the almost visceral recoil from symbols of overt or state-supported religion—has left intellectuals and government bureaucrats vulnerable to the charge of "secular fundamentalism," a charge that carried a particular sting in the 1980s, when cultural and political Islam became a force to reckon with. Unable

---

to extend to the faithful the kind of tolerance that might have defused the drive for Islamic political action, a regional fact of life by 1987, the guardians of secularism found themselves stuck. The logical outcome was the turban crisis.

**D**eniz, who was caught off guard by the head-scarved girls in her class, had missed the turban crisis. I caught some of it on visits to Istanbul in 1987 and '88. As political spectacles go, it was a striking event, or, rather, series of events, starting in the fall of 1986 when growing groups of newly devout Muslim girls marched and demonstrated for the right to cover their hair with turbans in school. For the then still marginal Islamist parties (polls that year showed that only seven percent of the population favored the adoption of Islamic law, or *sharia*), it was a brilliant public relations success. So effective was it, in fact, that people assumed—and the papers reported as fact—that the girls were being funded with money from Iran and Saudi Arabia. (A fair amount of evidence has since turned up to support that allegation.)

Turkish universities had run into trouble with such symbols before, but their attempt to uphold the ban against head scarves was their most dramatic miscalculation. For a time, the administrators held out firmly. Several girls were expelled and became folk heroes in the Islamic right-wing media. Six student organizers were arrested, and government spokesmen, supported by the normally left-leaning secularist press, declared that they had found a compelling reason not to give in: one of the organizers was Iranian. With the Islamists calling for freedom of religion, the supposedly liberal press insisted that the turban controversy was an issue of religion versus the legitimacy of the state. The president, an ex-general named Kenan Evren, made ominous noises about "cultural backsliding," and

Evren was understood to speak for the firmly secularist and Kemalist army.

Finally, the Supreme University Council, tired of creating teen-age female martyrs, lifted the prohibition at the end of 1987. By then, though, it was widely agreed, the controversy had produced one more significant and probably irreversible effect: the religious youth organizations had become sophisticated political organizations, primed for further activism.



Kemalist-style secularism was ill equipped to deal with the upsurge of the back-to-Islamic-roots feeling that made the Welfare Party attractive in 1994. Kemalism in fact rests on an array of early prohibitions against symbolic religious expression of various kinds, though most of those prohibitions have eased with the years. In the early decades of the Turkish republic, before the first of four coups that introduced multiparty democracy in the 1940s, the mosques were forbidden to issue calls to prayer in Arabic; only Western classical music could be played on state-owned radio; non-Western dress, including the veil, was strongly discouraged, while the fez, designed for ease in touching the forehead to the ground in prayer, was officially banned.

In opposing aspects of Islam that prescribed a traditional role for women, in particular those that barred them from education, Atatürk was indefatigable. He campaigned for an end to traditional practices such as child marriage, arranged marriage, bride-price, and veiling. At the same time, he instituted free and compulsory primary education for both sexes and created "village institutes" that offered compulsory adult literacy classes for men and women. The replacement of the *sharia* personal code with the Swiss Civil Code in 1926 outlawed polygamy and the Islamic practice of divorce by repudiation.

---

Granting women the right to vote, to run for elective office, and to serve in the army, the code lifted Turkish women above women in many European countries.

While strongly supported by much of the urban elite, Atatürk's reforms met with fierce resistance in the rural areas where, in the 1920s, the majority of Turkey's tiny population lived. In *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1986), historian Bernard Lewis quotes Atatürk's dry evaluation of the role of military rule in his project of persuasion: "We did it . . . while the Law for the Maintenance of Order was still in force. Had it not been, we would have done it all the same, but it certainly is true that the existence of the Law made it much easier for us."

To be sure, many countries with Muslim populations and officially secular governments have extended voting rights to women. In few, however, was the emancipation of women so bound up in the national project of modernization and Westernization. To Atatürk, women's equality was a psychological centerpiece not only of the nation's modernity but also of family life. Characterizing the "Turkish mother" as "fundamental to the nation on a thousand and one points," he managed to knit the idea of women having careers to the goal of "15 million Turks in 15 years," a drive to repopulate after the disastrous War of Independence (1919–23) and the empire's messy end.

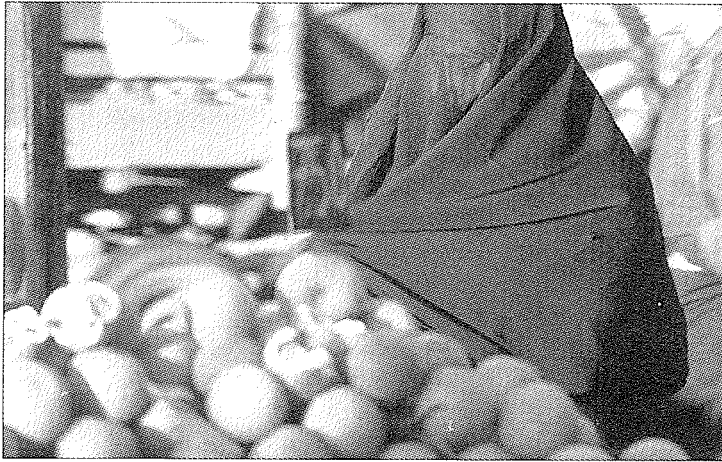
More to the point, Atatürk managed to capture the popular imagination on the question of women and make the cause central rather than peripheral to political reform. The ground had been prepared by the socially engaged literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including reformer Namik Kemal's novel *The Poor Infant* (1874), which explores the tragedy of arranged marriage for intelligent and sensitive women, and his still-popular play *Fatherland, or Silistre* (1873), whose

female protagonist disguises herself as a man to go to war.

Atatürk's own personal life dramatized his desire to put women's issues high on the agenda. He shocked his cabinet ministers by dancing with his wife, Latife, at parties, and even insisted—much against prevailing custom—that she be present at their wedding. One long-term effect of his actions, evident even now, is the degree to which modern Turkish democrats see the success of women's emancipation as central to their own self-identity as Western.

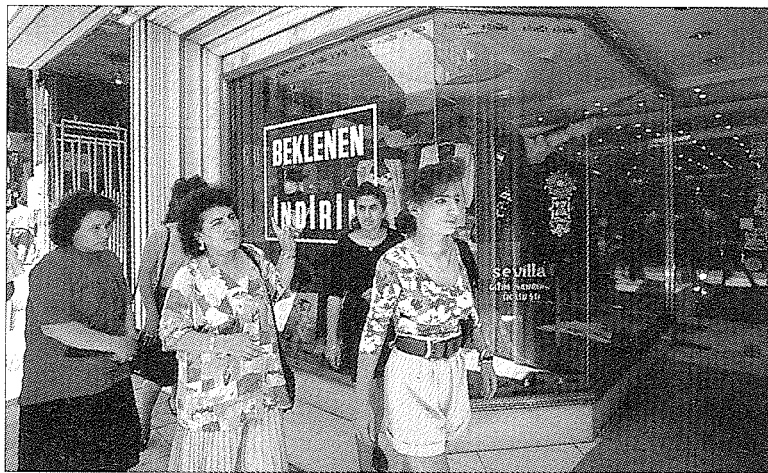
Nowhere was this more visible than in the initial pride and enthusiasm expressed to foreigners on the accession of Tansu Çiller as prime minister in 1993—expressed not just by members of the educated elite but by a wide range of more modestly educated Turkish men on the street and in the bazaar, frequently with the addendum, "See, we're not so backward." The need to prove Turkey's modernity and Westernness gained urgency from an external political reality that Çiller herself has not been above exploiting—the strong impression that the European Union, long hesitant to grant Turkey membership, was turning its back in rejection. The EU's more encouraging response to the membership hopes of Hungary, Poland, and other Eastern European countries only stoked the insecurity that underlies a great deal of Turkish public and political feeling toward the West.

Çiller's sudden arrival on the political scene was typical neither of Turkish politics nor of the paths to power taken by female political leaders in other parts of the Islamic world (paths usually blazed by the deaths of husbands or other relatives). Çiller, by contrast, was an American-educated professor of economics who became minister of economics for then-prime minister Suleyman Demirel in 1991. Elected to



*Shoppers from two worlds: a veiled woman examines produce in the marketplace while three of her countrywomen stroll through Istanbul's Fatih district.*

the parliament as a fresh face, she became Demirel's protégée in True Path, one of a cluster of center-right parties with nearly identical policies. Demirel ascended to the presidency on the death of Turgut Özal, a popular leader and successful economic reformer who had been in power (first as prime minister, then as president) since the after-



math of the 1980 military coup. Özal died suddenly of a heart attack in 1993 after an exhausting trip through the Central Asian Turkic capitals. Demirel, seeking to build a coalition that would keep True Path in power, backed Çiller; she became prime minister at age 47.

At first Çiller played her advantages to the hilt. Shortly after she took office, she and Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto made a wildly photogenic trip together to embattled Sarajevo. Europeans and Americans responded enthusiastically to the attractive, tough-talking leader; Çiller's background in economics fueled hopes that she would do something

about the financial mess that had become noticeable under Demirel. But the glow wore off quickly. Early reviews of her economic performance were disappointing, and colleagues complained that she refused to listen to advice or work with a team.

If such complaints were gender tinged, they were the closest her opponents in the Welfare Party came to challenging her on the basis of sex—at least at first. As unhappiness with her performance intensified, barbs about the “blonde beauty” tended to increase. For her part, Çiller has assiduously avoided giving offense to the Islamic establish-

---

ment, sometimes to the point of making other secular women uncomfortable, ostentatiously wearing a scarf on her head when she visits mosques or speaks with religious leaders. ("I'll bet she's never been in a mosque before this in her life," said a disgusted female professor at Ankara's Hacettepe University.) Just as important, she has drawn more and more support from, and given more and more rein to, an increasingly confident military establishment.

**A**ny more deeply seated lack of confidence in Çiller's power could be inferred only from the persistence of rumors—starting with the Welfare wins and repeated every few weeks since—that she was about to be removed. If anything, the challenges to her gender came from her closer, more nominally secular rivals in the parliament, a group of whom, rallying for her opponent Mesut Yilmaz, chanted, "*Mesut koltuga, Tansu mutfaga*"—"Mesut to the chair, Tansu to the kitchen."

In person, Çiller can be steely. Asked in an interview about the role of groundbreaker, she softened slightly: "I have to succeed for Turkey, and also for Turkish women." The success of the fundamentalists drew no acknowledgment: a protest vote, she shrugged, against political fragmentation and the corruption of her predecessors; all the more need for the constitutional amendments at the national level that, in fact, she has since been tirelessly pushing to enact.

Asked for her views of fundamentalist Islam generally, she answered obliquely that Turkey's role is "to help both sides avoid becoming politically fundamentalist." Both sides? "Yes. If the Europeans decide not to help the Bosnians, or not to admit us to the European Union, because they want only Christians, that is fundamentalist thinking."

A little of that steel may be reason

enough for the clerics to steer clear. In general, though, Welfare has been extraordinarily careful on the question of women, preferring to send its messages in stereo and to demur when questioned directly. "You never hear the answer to the question," complained Sirin Tekel, one of the Women's Library directors. "It's pretty clear what they would like to do [with women], but at that stage the whole population would rise up—they know that, so they're being very careful."

Though Welfare has never mentioned what it wants to do with, to, or about women, this very caution strikes many as a tip-off. One of its television campaign ads featured a blonde woman, a dentist, who appeared with her head uncovered. Party functionaries I interviewed in Istanbul were indignant at the suggestion that anybody's rights could be in danger.

"This isn't blocking anybody," said a spokesman for Tayyip Erdogan, the Istanbul mayor. "We've expanded opportunity. Before this, a woman in a head scarf could not work in City Hall. Now she can."

As for the true Islamic radicals, the ones Welfare disavows because they discard tact and openly urge the adoption of *sharia*, they too can be cautious. Drinking tea in the center of Istanbul's fundamentalist neighborhood of Fatih, I asked a bearded and capped magazine editor about Çiller's legitimacy. He jumped up and rummaged through bookshelves that offered, along with ordinary religious materials, a variety of gruesome anti-Semitic tracts, coming back with a volume of his own commentary. "In here," he said, presenting it to me, "I write that a woman can even be caliph."

**T**he most widely accepted explanation for Welfare's mayoral wins was, as Çiller said, not Islam but corruption: the other parties had failed so resoundingly to solve economic and administrative problems,



---

even pragmatic secular Stamboullis wondered if the straight-and-narrow fundamentalists might not be able to get the trash picked up on time.

**A**nd yet Islamist parties, too, have their flanks to protect. The first news stories after the election were not about trash or taxes but about an incident in which a group of teen-age boys had responded to news of their party's electoral victory by going up to women whose skirts they considered too short and spitting in their faces. Reading the news accounts of this incident while flying to Turkey in the spring of 1994, I felt in a small way what I later learned many women in the secular elite experienced powerfully: a sinking, whirling sense of inevitability, the sort of feeling that comes when you hear that someone you know has a deadly disease.

But the story proved to have a surprise ending. The spitters were attacked by passersby, who sailed in with their fists; two days later, Welfare announced that it did not support the street harassment of women. This was modest, to be sure, but more explicit than any Islamist party, in Turkey or elsewhere, had ever been on the subject of street harassment. Though harassment on the basis of dress has been heard of in the year since, and one woman in the provinces was recently reported shot by a relative for failing to veil, the party's official position remains unique among Islamist parties holding office. Then again, no other religious party in the Islamic world is currently in the position of having to hold onto votes and woo an electorate.

■

Which is the real Turkey? That question, which hangs over the country's increasingly contested politics, is of long standing.

The taboos against Islamic practice, so strongly pushed by Atatürk, began to break down shortly after his death in 1938. For most rural women, it's agreed, they never really took hold at all. Along with the East-West and Islamic-secular divides, the other great split in Turkish consciousness lies between city and country. Like the others, this one is borne out most powerfully and visibly in the lives of women. Overall, the literacy and professional-employment rates for Turkish women are higher than anywhere else in the Middle East: women make up one in six judges, one in four doctors, and over 40 percent of the enrollment in schools of medicine and law. There are three or more generations' worth of firmly feminist, Kemalist women in politics and the professions.

But outside the cities in this country of 60 million, there are eight million illiterate females, a dramatically lower average age of marriage, and burdensomely high fertility rates. Most annoying to the authorities is the persistence in the villages of the practice of contractual religious marriages (sometimes arranged for very young children). Birth control and abortion, while legal and widely available in the large cities, play little role for rural women who continue to plow the fields and to function as Anatolian family farmers have for millennia. Women remain the principal harvesters of the Black Sea tea and nut crops, while the men, following a pattern seen throughout the Middle East, frequently spend their days in the village coffee houses. Few women in the cities have contact with this other side of the moon, where folk Islam, as opposed to the rigorous new kind, continues much as it always has.

The great exception to the secular-religious dichotomy was Semra Özal, the late president's colorful, liberal, and cigar-smoking first lady. After his death, Turgut Özal was greatly credited in the outside world for his economic reforms and privatizations, as well

---

as the light touch with which he brought the fractious country back together after the 1980 military coup. But during his term as president, the Turkish intelligentsia attacked him bitterly for having accommodated the fundamentalists after military rule was lifted in 1983. A devout man, Özal made a point of going on hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage, with Saudi Arabian friends—the first secular Turkish leader ever to make the trip. But the main reason he gave a hand to the



An Anatolian peasant in "traditional" garb

fundamentalists was to counter the threat of communism. Building mosques and separate religious schools, inviting fundamentalists into the army, Özal incurred the wrath of people who thought he had opened the door to Islamist influence in politics.

On women's issues, though, Özal drew no complaints. "Semra Hanim," or Madam Semra, was a continuing demonstration that such a man could be religious and yet have a wife who traveled freely and pursued her own public-service agenda in the villages. She took a special interest in family planning, traveling often to remote areas, holding public health clinics, distributing birth control devices, and periodically presiding over mass registrations of illegal religious marriages with the civil courts.

**D**espite 80 years of modernity, you can still feel the pull of the 600-year Ottoman past, whose legends speak of contradictions no less twisted than today's. Ottoman culture gave the world the harem,

that powerful image of female mystique combined with female imprisonment, but the reality of the harem—in literal meaning, the private dwelling quarters of the head of household—is endlessly debated among historians and sociologists, some of whom even see the centuries of gender segregation as laying the ground for women's institutions and women's political structures more powerful than those that exist in the West. And though mainstream Ottoman society was deeply marked by the two sets of restrictions that shaped the lives of women throughout the Islamic world—*sharia*, which imposed the unequal personal-status laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and *pardah*, the practice of restricting women to their homes—it seems also to have had a version of today's split between upper-class female freedom and lower-class female ignorance and confinement. The sultans' mothers and sisters had great power; people who know nothing at all about Turkey are likely to have heard a vague echo of the stories told of "Roxelana," the



*Young girls in a central Anatolian village*

favorite wife of Suleiman the Magnificent (1490?–1566), who altered the succession in favor of her son and was one of several royal women to engage in large-scale architectural patronage.

The original nomadic existence of the first Ottoman Turks, and their more distant Central Asiatic cultural forebears, made for relatively free lives for women even after the adoption of Islam, a freedom that was curtailed only with settlement and urbanization. Sociologists find a parallel in contemporary Turkey, where women who undergo the sharpest decrease in personal freedom are the ever more numerous “recently rural,” transplanted from a life of hard agricultural toil to modest or squalid city surroundings

where they cannot work or, in some cases, even go outside because of the proximity of strangers. Such scholarship suggests that it is not Islam itself that circumscribes women’s lives but Islam in conjunction with pressures brought about by massive social change.

Moreover, many Islamist intellectuals go a step further and defend Islamic conceptions of womanhood in the same language their feminist critics use. Arguing that Western feminism arose specifically in response to female inequality under Christianity, they suggest that women are oppressed and objectified not by Islam but by consumerism and materialism, and that Islam has always offered a more “empowering” model for full female self-actualization, albeit in the private sphere.

At the very least, ardent secularists have been forced to examine their own prejudices. “We made a mistake with the turbans,” sighs Turkan Akyol, minister for health and women’s affairs, the second-highest-ranking woman in Çiller’s government, a second-generation Kemalist, and a former university president. Akyol is filled with regret and trepidation by the successes of the Welfare Party, and with confusion. “We were too careful,” she says. “My generation used to refuse all such things, even those of us who came from religious families, even if we believed in God. We always felt we had to be very careful of the slightest step in that direction, the slightest religious symbol. Probably it was too much, but it helped us, too, in the beginning—be-

---

cause when you make such a big change, you need taboos to avoid going back."

**I**n Washington recently, in a conference room at the National Endowment for Democracy, a male journalist visiting from Algeria declared passionately that "it is women, and only women, who stand between us and Islamist takeover. All over the Middle East, women will save us from Islamism." Turkey is no Algeria. It is a nation of complexity and pragmatism, and whatever happens there is likely to happen slowly. Tolerance, it's said, is the option turned to when exhaustion and permanent warfare make all other paths impossible; it could also be the option into which parties are forced by electoral spinning and trimming, even if the opposite poles of the argument lie on opposite sides of the mental and philosophical world.

A splinter politician, traveling around the Turkish countryside to launch a party called New Democracy, takes pains to say he is reaching out to the people "who are

not afraid of democracy, who are not afraid of religion." He tells a campaign anecdote that sounds like a Grimms's fairy tale: "I was at a picnic, campaigning, and I met a man with three daughters. The first daughter said, 'Oh! You're so handsome! Can I kiss you?' And she kissed me on the cheek. The second one shook my hand. The third one wouldn't shake my hand; she was too religious. But she wished me well." The candidate, whose name is Cem Boynar, is an industrialist who might do well in 1996 or disappear without an electoral trace. His candidacy hardly suggests the old Atatürkian metaphor of a straight march from East to West. Instead it conjures up a more complicated image, suggested by the turbulent waters one sees from the Istanbul bridge connecting Europe with Asia. The waves there move neither east nor west but roil endlessly above the colliding currents of the Black Sea, the Golden Horn, and the Bosphorus, an apt image of a nation that will never be in anything as simple as transition.

---

## CURRENT BOOKS

### Speak of the Devil

**THE ORIGIN OF SATAN.** By Elaine Pagels. Random House. 256 pp. \$23

**THE DEATH OF SATAN: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil.** By Andrew Delbanco. Farrar, Straus. 320 pp. \$23

Satan did not step suddenly from the shadows, absolute evil all at once, co-star in the cosmic drama. He found his way into the part, matured to the role. It took centuries for the Christian devil to arrogate to himself the various characteristics of the devils who make scattered appearances in the Bible. Satan is present in only a few places in the Old Testament, most prominently in the Book of Job, where he seems to be a member of God's court who, with God's permission, is allowed to test Job. The snake is perhaps the best-known symbol associated with Satan, but Genesis does not identify him with the cunning creature who persuaded Eve to try something new.

Just how closely the Old Testament Satan is to be associated with evil is a matter on which scholars differ. To his successor in the New Testament and beyond, however, the scent of evil clings like a signature cologne. The creature conjured up today in the popular imagination by the word *Satan* is a mix of malevolent beast and fallen Miltonic presence, hooved and horned and burnt red by the circumstances of his overheated home. (Is the use of the male pronoun contested, by the way, or are those who have made God "She" disinclined to give Satan a makeover too? Is he still "All yours, guys"?)

The titles of these two new books, by Elaine Pagels, a professor of religion at Princeton University, and Andrew Delbanco, a professor of English at Columbia University, make them sound like proper bookends to the life and career of the Lord of Evil. (All that's missing is an appropriate bridge volume, something like *Satan: The Working Years*.) In fact, however, the two books are strikingly

dissimilar, in purpose and approach.

Pagels, the award-winning author of *The Gnostic Gospels*, here continues her study of early Christianity. Specifically, she wants to show how events related in the Gospels about Jesus and those who supported or opposed him "correlate with the supernatural drama the writers use to interpret that story—the struggle between God's spirit and Satan." She explores the "specifically *social* implications of the figure of Satan: how he is invoked to express human conflict and to characterize human enemies within our own religious traditions." Her intention is to expose "certain fault lines in Christian tradition that have allowed for the demonizing of others throughout Christian history."

Pagels argues that Christians reading the Gospels for almost 2,000 years have always identified themselves with the disciples and, as a consequence, have necessarily identified the disciples' opponents, "whether Jews, pagans, or heretics, with forces of evil, and so with Satan." This Satan was born, she believes, sometime in the second half of the first century A.D., when adherents of the Jewish sect that became Christianity began to associate those who resisted their teaching with diabolical forces.

The Jewish proto-Christians found evil in their differences with other Jews, and the polarization was progressive. The first stage of demonization saw them turn against those closest to them ("intimate enemies"), the rabbinical leaders of Jewish society at the time of the war with the Romans (A.D. 66–70). For Pagels, the war and its aftermath drove a wedge between Jews who embraced Jesus' teaching and were trying to convert other Jews to their beliefs and Jews who held to their traditional faith. These resistant Jews were seen as allies of Satan's cause, the cause of darkness and evil. In this early demonization, so integral to establishing the new faith, Pagels

---

finds the seeds of the violence that Christians would work on Jews during the course of the next two millennia.

But the demonization did not stop with Jews. As Christianity spread around the Mediterranean, Christians discovered enemies at every point along the sweeping radius of their influence: non-Jews whose minds were closed to conversion also took on the mantle of Satan. Eventually, the serpent bit its tail: Christians found unorthodox thinkers in their own midst—and they too underwent demonization.

Pagels's argument depends on reading the Gospels in the following chronological order, so that the Passion narratives assign increasing blame to the Jews for Jesus' death: Mark first, written near the end of the war with Rome, and reflective of divisions in the Jewish community that the war made worse; then Matthew and Luke, from the decade A.D. 80–90; and finally John, from the mid '90s. She makes much of the first chapter of Mark, in which the Spirit descends on Jesus as he is baptized and then sends him out into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. In the last chapter of Mark, the risen Jesus sends the disciples out into the world to baptize believers and gives them the power to cast out devils. Thus, a cosmic struggle frames the narrative. Pagels wants its representation in Mark to mirror the conflict between Jews-turned-Christians (the forces of good) and the Jewish majority in first-century Palestine (Satan's team).

Pagels refers the reader to other scholarly work (including her own) for elaboration. But the evidence, no matter how ingeniously manipulated, remains incomplete and ambiguous. It cannot convince because, as she herself is at pains to remind the reader, the historical circumstances surrounding the composition of the Gospels remain, and perhaps will always remain, controversial. From the evidence we tease theory, not fact, and from the same evidence others will tease another theory. A book to be published in 1996 will offer new evidence that Matthew's Gospel

should be dated no later than A.D. 50. So early a date for Matthew would play havoc with Pagels's speculation about the chronology and purpose of the Gospels.

Pagels concedes that many Christians through the ages—Francis of Assisi and Martin Luther King are named—have resisted demonizing their opponents, but these, she claims, are the exceptions: "For the most part, however, Christians have taught—and acted upon—the belief that their enemies are evil and beyond redemption." The assertion is dramatic, but is it true without an awful lot of qualification? Of course, many readers of the Gospels have called those who will not accept their faith devils. Yes, there were Crusades and an Inquisition and a St. Bartholomew's Day.

But those are the extreme cases. What about the ordinary? The Roman Catholic tradition in which I was raised in mid-20th-century America taught us to pray for the conversion of "nonbelievers" but never once to identify them with Satan. On the contrary, each was a soul to save—a potential Catholic. The only individual I remember being denounced as "evil" and "a devil," maybe even *the* Devil, was Stalin—and about him the nuns were more savvy than the apologists.

In truth, though, there was no need to identify "the other" with the Devil. The Devil was all too real himself. Our devil was the devil of 1 Peter 5.8, the one who went about like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat. What mere nonbeliever could measure up to that? Who had time for "the other" (that creature of recent academic making)? You had all you could do to worry about yourself. The cosmic struggle was less significant than the daily personal struggle to lead a good and moral life. It's because you were so often tempted from the clear path of resolve into the delicious woods on either side that you were prepared to believe it was the Devil doing the deflecting.

This daily devil is absent from Pagels's account, though I suspect he has been a whole

---

lot more present to individual Christians and important to their lives for 2,000 years than her cosmic warrior. She writes, "The figure of Satan becomes, among other things, a way of characterizing one's actual enemies as the embodiment of transcendent forces." Yes—but in that "among other things" may hide the clever beast's most abiding and significant self.

**W**e are light-years from ancient Palestine and cosmic struggle between good and evil in the contemporary world of Andrew Delbanco. "We no longer inhabit a world of transcendence," he writes, and the change, which some would see as a sign of maturity, is for him a mixed blessing at best. Indeed, there are moments, he admits, when the loss of a sense of transcendence is "unbearable." Delbanco's book, an eloquent, morally charged work of cultural, social, and intellectual history, uses American literature to explore how the country came untethered from its traditional religious moorings and how our language was "evacuated of religious metaphor"—metaphors such as "Satan." It is "the story of the advance of secular rationality in the United States, which has been relentless in the face of all resistance."

The concept of evil does not accord comfortably with our modern world view, for which the dominant mode is irony. Yet metaphysical need is not so easy to pull as a tooth. "Despite the monstrous uses to which Satan has been put," writes Delbanco, "I believe that our culture is now in crisis because evil remains an inescapable experience for all of us, while we no longer have a symbolic language for describing it." We want Satan back, and need to find new ways to conceive his reality, for "if evil escapes the reach of our imagination, it will have established, through its elusiveness, dominion over us all."

Delbanco's provocative sweep through American history leaves few religious ideals upright—and moves at so swift a pace that the reader's doubts about much of the grim, dra-

matic, academically astute generalization simply eat dust. Puritanism devolves from "a religion of self-effacement before an angry God" to "a religion of individuals striving under the gaze of a parentally proud God," and sin becomes "a synonym for the disreputable." By 1700, Satan begins to lose his moral content and his credibility. He goes from being an attribute of the self to a visible being outside the self, subject to dismissal in every one of his forms. By the mid-19th century, when the marketplace rules supreme and liberal individualism is increasingly the norm, he has been disavowed in literature, folklore, theology, and psychology. The color is gone, and not merely from his cheeks.

The Civil War is a crippling blow to faith and belief; in the land it bloodies grows a culture of doubt. America becomes modern, and, for Delbanco, "the emergence of chance and luck as the chief explanations and desiderata of life is perhaps the central story of modern American history." Evil is just bad luck. Soon, America enters its great age of scapegoating, when evil becomes synonymous with a foreign face. Belief bumps finally against our contemporary postmodern sense, or non-sense, of the self and our reflex disavowal of personal responsibility for any action, no matter how awful. How can we accept the irreducibility of evil in the self when there is no self? "As a society," Delbanco writes, "we seem to have virtually no beliefs left." But we had better learn to believe again, he urges, and soon.

The difficulty with both these books is that their catchy titles promise much more than their sober texts deliver. Reality is messier than any theorizing about it. You just can't coax every bee into the hive. Pagels's essay makes you doubt by the end the possibility of neatly defining at this late date "an" origin for Satan. Delbanco does an autopsy on the Devil's corpse, but the thing keeps twitching during the procedure.

To say "Americans" have lost the sense of evil, or a sense of transcendence and its complications, is to say only that "some" Americans have lost them. Millions have not,

---

and hold to their reality with a conviction that is properly religious. There are others for whom the impulse to believe may exist without formal religious motivation. Why do so many people put themselves through a hell far less hospitable than Dante's by reading the unreadable novels of Stephen King—reading them willingly, that is, by lamplight rather than at gunpoint—or the fevered oeuvre of Anne Rice, which is not merely unreadable but unspeakable? The need to encounter good and evil plainly marked, in their local, regional, and cosmic varieties, numbs all aesthetic sense in these folks. Why have angels become such a hot commodity in recent years, after languishing for so long on stained glass windows and greeting cards? What's going through people's heads when they dial "psychic hot lines"?

All this is trivial evidence, perhaps. But the figures on how many Americans still believe in God are not trivial. Nor is the strong,

and growing, fundamentalist presence in the country. There are people who know evil all too well when they see it, and they see it all too often. Americans—*some* Americans—have not entirely given up on the possibility of transcendence, even if they're looking for light (and darkness) in all the wrong places. Delbanco insists that the old language of evil has become a collection of dead metaphors and that you can't get back a sense of evil in ways that have been superseded by history. I wonder. Rationality might argue so, but will its low and even voice carry over the noise of stubborn conviction and irrational faith? To those who want to set tombstones atop the graves of transcendence and the Devil, the prudent advice may be "Hold off carving the dates."

—James Morris is the director of the Wilson Center's Division of Historical, Cultural, and Literary Studies.

## The Stately Homes of Russia

**LIFE ON THE RUSSIAN COUNTRY ESTATE:** A Social and Cultural History. By Priscilla Roosevelt. Yale. 384 pp. \$45

Russian literature from Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (1833) and Gogol's *Overcoat* (1842) to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) seems preoccupied with the agitations of urban life, especially those of Peter I's capital, St. Petersburg. But the literature has a rural side as well, concerned with the gentry's country residences and the worlds of nature and the peasantry in which those estates were immersed. For the century and a half before 1917, this second locus of Russian literature was the more important of the two, as Priscilla Roosevelt makes clear in her excellent book. By turns literary history, sociology, econom-

ics, art history, and architectural history, *Life on the Russian Country Estate* has something for everybody. Indeed, in its sheer inclusiveness lies one of the book's greater appeals.

The world into which Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy were born, and whose passing Anton Chekhov later mourned, was, like so much in Russian culture, created "from above" by the will of the tsars. Russia's rulers cut a simple deal with the gentry. In effect, they commanded, "Serve the crown, and in return the crown will reward you with land and control over your farm labor." Thus was Russian serfdom born at the beginning of the 17th century. By the late 18th century, the grandees were no longer required to serve in the government, though serfdom continued and the gentry still exercised many state functions locally.



---

For a few hundred of Russia's elite, the deal with the crown brought immense wealth, allowing both the architectural extravagance of the great rural estates and the establishment of notable amenities—domestic theater companies and orchestras, for example. The wealth bought lesser luxuries too, such as foreign tutors and foreign travel. The travel stimulated Russians' imaginations and challenged and intensified their sense of self. These disparate multicultural contacts—on the one hand with the culture of Western Europe, and on the other with the rough-talking peasants in the village just beyond the copse—were the fertile soil in which a great literature grew.

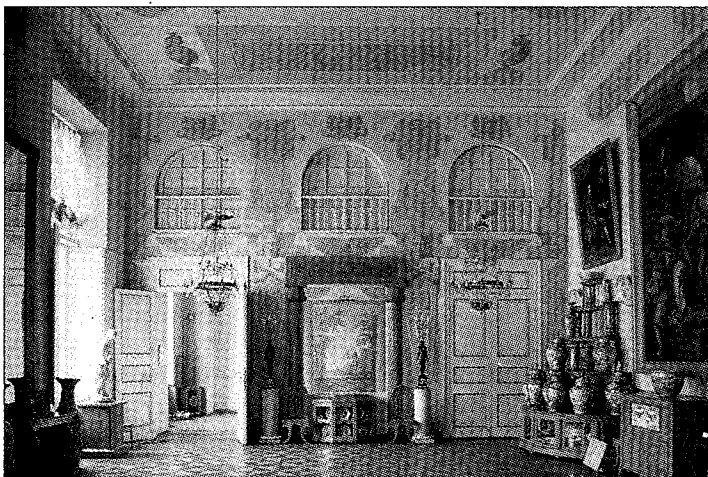
Roosevelt, a fellow of the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University, frequently contrasts her portrait of this world with the more rooted English country life of the same period. More telling still would be a comparison with the life of the great Elizabethans, who were the direct beneficiaries of royal benevolence and built their palaces so as to receive the British queen on her periodic peregrinations around the country.

In several absorbing chapters, Roosevelt summarizes recent scholarship on the system of serfdom that underlay Russia's estates.

Though the Russian system differed significantly from slavery in the antebellum South, it gave to Turgenev's novels a social mood reminiscent of a plantation in Virginia's Tidewater. But comparisons geographically closer to Russia are readily at hand. A similar form of serfdom continued in Germany until the Napoleonic wars in the early 19th century, and much later in the Austrian Empire and Russian-ruled Poland.

To a far greater extent than the country houses of England or France, the great landed estates of Central Europe provided the immediate model for Russian grandees as they created their bucolic nests. When Count Razumovsky tried to hire Franz Joseph Haydn for his Ukrainian estate, he was consciously imitating the composer's Hungarian patron Prince Esterhazy, at whose great estate Haydn had spent many years. The many early-19th-century literary-philosophical circles that sprang up at the country houses of Russian aristocrats have their immediate antecedents in the world of the Brothers Grimm in Westphalia, and in country seats in Bohemia and locations farther east. The sprawling Baltic estates in what are now Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were also well known to Russian aristocrats. Thanks to this rich array of models based on serf labor, a fashion such as the natural and informal "English Garden" could be passed from Western Europe to Russia through several national and cultural stages.

The number of Russians who owned or resided on landed estates was minuscule. Most Russian "aristocrats" lived no more grandly than many farmers in 19th-century Indiana. Moreover, the age of the theatricalized superestate, with its army of liveried servants, was fading even before Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812. During the last years of serfdom before its abolition by



---

Alexander II in 1861, Russian estate owners fell even deeper into debt, tried to cobble together rural factories staffed with serf workers to recoup their losses, and simply sank into a genteel lifestyle amid Russian-made furniture patterned after Biedermeier originals from Central Europe.

However few Russians participated in this world, the insistent reality of country life left a profound imprint on the larger culture in art, literature, and music. When the tsars of Soviet culture lauded Russians' passionate love of the Russian land, they were in fact echoing the lyric effusions of 19th-century Russian gentry writers such as Turgenev. The anarchic strain that coexists with Russians' supposed subservience to authority also traces in part to these same gentry, who were accustomed to thumbing their noses at the

bureaucrats in St. Petersburg. Indeed, Mikhail Bakunin, the founder of European anarchism, was just such a rural aristocrat. Finally, the sense of a lost golden age that permeates Russian culture from Chekhov to our own day is a direct legacy of the long, slow death of the Russian estate in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Despite their passion for modernity, Russians still fear the sound of the ax in the patrimonial cherry orchard.

It is no criticism to say that Roosevelt's richly illustrated book is not the last word on these subjects. Rather, it is the *first* word for a very long time, and, as such, should be heartily welcomed.

—S. Frederick Starr, president of the Aspen Institute, is the author of *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*.

---

## OTHER TITLES

### *History*

**REPORTING WORLD WAR II:** American Journalism 1938–1946 (2 vols.). *Library of America*. Vol. I: 912 pp.; Vol. II: 970 pp. \$35 each

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the *Library of America* has made a rare break with its normal practice of publishing the work of a single author and issued two volumes of reports and reflections on the war written by American journalists between 1938 and 1946. It's an inspired memorial, likely to be valued even when the war's anniversaries are no longer routinely tallied.

The "reporting" in these volumes generally consists of feature stories and essays rather than "breaking news" about events. For the most part, the authors try to recreate the experience of being there—on battlefields and bombing runs, in villages, cities, and concentration camps

during the war and as the fighting finally came to an end. And, for the most part, they succeed.

The 150 or so pieces are the work of gifted and important writers—among them William L. Shirer, A. J. Liebling, Edward R. Murrow, Margaret Bourke-White, Walter Bernstein, E. B. White, John Hersey, James Agee, Ernie Pyle, and Vincent Tubbs. (Brief but helpful biographies of all the contributors are included.) Cartoonist Bill Mauldin's book *Up Front* appears in full and may be the best thing in the collection. By contrast, Gertrude Stein's account of life in a rural village in France is notable mainly for its silly punctuation. Reports from the home front are also included, but they are mere counterpoints to the principal action, which is elsewhere. Battle stories, life-on-the-line stories, and refugee stories crowd these pages.

The volumes follow standard *Library of America* editorial procedures. In other words, the texts are accompanied by less explanatory



"You'll get over it, Joe. Oncet I wuz gonna write a book exposin' the army after th' war myself."

information than some readers will wish. There is no introduction to explain why the editors chose what they did, and no discussion of the overall strategy of the war, though maps and a chronology in the appendix suggest its course. It's churlish to complain about what's *not* in 2,000 pages, but one does miss stories of the military behind the lines (the sort of thing about which *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Catch-22* have subsequently made us curious), stories of the navy as a navy rather than a mere support for air or infantry forces, and reports about pacifism on the home front (perhaps something by Dorothy Day of the *Catholic Worker*, who was nothing if not a journalist).

*Reporting World War II* concludes with the full text of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, which first appeared in the *New Yorker* in August 1946. Hersey addresses, but does not resolve, the moral ambiguity of using nuclear weapons, and his doubt contrasts with the certainty most of these journalists felt about the rightness of their cause. In this valuable collection, at least, the war ends not with a period but a question mark.

**THE BLACK DIASPORA:** Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa. By Ronald Segal. Farrar, Straus. 477 pp. \$27.50

The numbers are still contested and perhaps fall short of the reality, but they are sufficiently awful without increase or precision: from the 16th century through 1870, some 12 million individuals were taken by ship from Africa against their will and transported in chains across the Atlantic in squalid, airless confinement. Between 10 and 20 percent of the kidnapped Africans are thought to have died at sea. Some 400,000 of those who survived were cargo for North America; the vast majority were brought to South America, in particular to Brazil, and to the islands of the Caribbean.

Segal, who spent more than 30 years in voluntary exile from his native South Africa, where he was the first white member of the African National Congress, and who is the author of 11 other books, has set himself the monumental task of writing an account of the 500 years of this vast displacement and its consequences—"the story of a people with an identity, vitality, and creativity all their own." (He does not write about slavery within Africa itself, or within the Islamic world.) And he tries to find in these people's experience "some underlying meaning, some redeeming force, a very principle of identity that may be called the soul." This soul he identifies with freedom.

The first third of his book is the most riveting. Its catalogue of horrors about the Atlantic slave trade fascinates and overwhelms. But Segal's schematic approach robs the book of cumulative power. He does not tell the story of events in any one country straight through. Rather, individual chapters recounting the introduction and spread of slavery in a group of countries (Brazil, Haiti, Guyana, Cuba, the United States, etc.) are followed by chapters that recount the resistance to slavery and the struggle for emancipation in each of those same countries—and then by chapters on subsequent political, economic, social, and cultural development. The locales change, but too often the reader has the feeling of going over the same ground.

At the same time, Segal's narrative ambition allows scant space for nuance. One often wants

---

pages when Segal has time to supply only a paragraph, or a provocative sentence. Thus, of America in the 1930s he writes: "The arrival of the Great Depression led to a Democratic federal government whose New Deal was freighted with old discrimination." The sentence needs sustaining by more than the subsequent dozen lines of documentation. (His chapter on contemporary America is entitled, predictably, "The Wasteland of the American Promise.")

Such criticisms do not diminish the achievement. It is instructive to have the full sweep of the tragedy, and to be reminded anew of how many nations were complicit in it—not just the United States, but the British, the French, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Spanish. Slavery planted a canker at the core of civic life in much of North and South America and the Caribbean, and its destructive power is never more evident than when Segal tells of the struggle of black against black, or lighter black against darker black, for status and economic advancement. The infection can cause blindness: "In 1988, a congress was held at the University of São Paulo to mark the centenary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil. At the formal opening, there was not a single black to be seen on the platform."

In the end, Segal wants the black diaspora not just for subject but for audience, and his message to it is moral and hortatory. To free itself, he argues, the diaspora must do something it has not yet done—"accept its past, as a source not of degradation, but of dignity." Above the din of five centuries, Segal lifts his voice bravely, improbably.

**THE AGE OF HIROHITO:** In Search of Modern Japan. By Daikichi Irokawa (trans. by Mikiso Hane and John K. Urdá). Free Press. 179 pp. \$25

Pivotal historical figures who survive being the pivot usually tell their stories, in Tokyo no less than in Washington. That the Emperor Hirohito never reflected publicly on his tumultuous reign (1926–1989), the longest of any Japanese emperor, is a measure of how much he remained, even decades after World War II, the focus of intense debate over the nature of the state. In this brief

but closely argued book, Irokawa, a historian at Tokyo University of Economics, provides background to that debate and seeks to illuminate the shadowy figure at its center.

Though his main purpose is to describe the emperor's personal role in World War II and the effort to hide that role after Japan's catastrophic defeat, Irokawa does not confine his criticism to Hirohito. He apports it throughout Japanese society and across seven decades. For the war, he blames military leaders and the ambitious, greedy industrialists who encouraged them; leftist intellectuals, who were blinded to events by their devotion to Soviet ideology; and even the Japanese people, who were all too easily distracted from political issues.

The favorite means of exculpating Hirohito has been to claim that he was a figurehead, with little influence on policy. He himself said that because he was a constitutional monarch his authority was narrowly circumscribed. But by examining the emperor's policy decisions and claims to authority before and during the war, Irokawa refutes the latter-day efforts at justification. "Despite the emperor's general inaction," he writes, "on numerous occasions he did exercise the authority of the supreme command." He did not merely reign; he ruled—and he could have stopped the war. A strong stand by Hirohito against leaders of the military and their expansionist plans would have compelled their assent. He was, after all, their highest recourse, their god.

Japan surrendered, but the fight to protect the emperor continued, and, ironically, Hirohito acquired a surprising new ally—the Americans. Calculating that Japan would be more tractable if the emperor remained in place, the prosecution at the Tokyo war crimes trials refused to accept testimony against him. He was allowed at last to assume his full stature as figurehead.

### Arts & Letters

**WALKER EVANS:** A Biography. By Belinda Rathbone. Houghton Mifflin. 308 pp. \$27.50

Before tattered signposts, desolate streets, and desperate, unposed people became fashion-



able subjects for photographers, Walker Evans (1903–74) discovered them through the lens of his Leica. Best known for the hauntingly plain images of southern sharecroppers in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941, with text by James Agee), Evans took to serious photography after he dropped out of Williams College in 1923 and made unsuccessful forays into business and writing. The prominent schools of photography at the time—impressionistic pictorialists and slick, surreal modernists (who loved to shoot eggs and angled skyscrapers)—had little use for the realism that Evans favored. They deliberately distanced photographic art from ordinary life, and, as Rathbone, a historian of photography, argues that Evans was, with his painfully honest eye, the first great photographer of the ordinary.

Evans turned to the camera even though he professed to find photography disreputable and “ludicrous.” Drawn to the streets, warehouses, and back alleys of Brooklyn and Manhattan, he thrived on the tense images he found there. But when he showed his early work

to Alfred Stieglitz, the self-established god of the growing photography industry, Stieglitz was not impressed. “Technically uneven” is Rathbone’s own measured judgment of the work.

Evans did not turn professional until 1930, when his friend, the struggling poet Hart Crane, insisted that Evans’s bleak photos of the Brooklyn Bridge illustrate the text of his new poem *The Bridge*. Evans repeatedly sought his subject in urban landscapes. “The right things,” he wrote to a friend, “can be found in Pittsburgh, Toledo, Detroit (a lot in Detroit, I want to get in some dirty crack, Detroit’s full of chances).” He craved the unposed and took to the New York subway to photograph weary, oblivious subjects with a concealed miniature camera.

James Agee drew Evans out of the city in 1936 to the back hills of Alabama, where he produced some of his bravest work. The photos he took of a family of white sharecroppers were stunningly intimate. They captured the dignity as well as the poverty of each family member, and they refrained from judgment. Evans rejected the conjurer’s tricks of light and angle and forced posing used by contemporary photographers such as Margaret Bourke-White. He shot straight on and created intensely personal portraits that kept the photographer at a distance.

Like her subject, Rathbone keeps her own graceful distance in this, her first book, and the first biography of Evans. She portrays in detail Evans’s taste for married women (his two marriages began as adulterous affairs), the intense friendship with Agee, the explosive, devastating passions, including a youthful homosexual experimentation with 21-year-old writer John Cheever, the increasingly frequent bouts of alcoholism, and the sharp peak and steady decline of his professional career. Keeping supposition to a minimum, she allows the contradictions in Evans to stand. And so he remains—the artist of the ordinary who fastidiously pursued the socially elite; the sensual collector of junk (“For him, trash was the contemporary equivalent of the ruin”); the surly, unfaithful husband; the driven, unpredictable genius.

---

**EMBLEMS OF MIND: The Inner Life of Music and Mathematics.** By Edward Rothstein. *Times/Random*. 263 pp. \$25

The composer Igor Stravinsky once remarked that in mathematics a musician should find a study "as useful to him as the learning of another language is to a poet." What Rothstein, chief music critic of the *New York Times*, attempts to explain is why. Few dispute the strong connections between music and mathematics. Even at its most improvisational, music follows structural rules of meter and tempo. Similarly, even the most abstract mathematical equations are built from known axioms in an elegant pattern not unlike the movements of a sonata. But Rothstein wants to delve deeper into the two disciplines, to discover whether their inner workings yield insights into the act of creation itself.

The journey he undertakes—through the higher reaches of philosophy, musical composition, and mathematical theory—is so satisfying that the elusiveness of its destination finally becomes irrelevant. Along the way, the lay reader learns to appreciate how mathematicians derive such principles as Fermat numbers, the Fibonacci Series, and Gödel's incompleteness theorem. One of Rothstein's more intriguing observations is that the process driving mathematics is "no more dominated by compulsion or mechanism than musical composition is by the 'need' to follow one type of chord with another." Rather, mathematicians extrapolate proofs through surprisingly playful experimentation with the relations between numbers. The numbers represent an unmapped universe; if the mathematicians' work is successful, they uncover an internal relationship between the elements.

Rothstein suggests that listeners arrive at a sense of a composer's work in a similar way: "Mappings are made within music—from one phrase to another, from one section to another... [and] to our varied experience as listeners." Depending on that experience, the connections may become more refined. It may be possible, for example, for a given listener to recognize the style of the music—baroque or classical or romantic—or

to identify a piece as a fugue or a waltz, but even the uninitiated will recognize that there is order behind the notes.

Rothstein deftly reveals the beauty and elegance of certain mathematical principles, but his argument tends to reduce music to a consideration of form and function—at least until the visionary final pages of the book, where he describes the poet William Wordsworth's encounter with a spectacular view emerging from morning mist. "The mist, the moon, the sky, and the ocean are each distinct objects," writes Rothstein, "each seemingly subject to its own law, possessing its own character. But they are also tied together, exercising powers and influences on one another." As the poet seeks to apprehend the influences and make sense of the whole scene, so composers struggle to make music out of silence and mathematicians to show connections where none appear to exist.

Yet something about the two arts of music and math—so similar in their "inner and outer life," in their reliance on "metaphors and analogies, proportions and mappings"—hovers always just out of reach. They remain mysteries, "too close to Truth to be merely human, too close to invention to be divine."

**WRITING AND BEING.** By Nadine Gordimer. *Harvard*. 176 pp. \$18.95

**WRITING WAS EVERYTHING: Life as a Critic, 1934–1994.** By Alfred Kazin. *Harvard*. 152 pp. \$17.95

What makes writers tick? In these two books, each a blend of memoir, criticism, and history, a famous novelist and a famous literary critic reflect on their shared craft. What surprises is how very direct the American critic's reflections are, and how very theoretical the South African novelist's.

When a life is made particularly vivid in fiction, a reader can't help but wonder how much of it is true. Gordimer, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, plays this "prurient guessing game" as writer, reader, and critic, all "fumbling to find out where fiction [comes]

---

from," and explores the shadowy theoretical territory that lies between fact and fiction. Arguing that fiction informed by real-life experience is often more true than self-declared history or biography, she cites the novels and poetry of South African revolutionaries as "testimony" to their search for a physical and artistic homeland. She allies herself with writers who have followed Proust's directive, "Do not be afraid to go too far, for the truth lies beyond." These include Naguib Mafouz in Egypt, Chinua Achebe in Nigeria, and Amos Oz in Israel, whose fiction was banned in their respective countries, as hers was in South Africa, for revealing unpleasant political and social realities. This slender book is most involving when Gordimer speaks of trying to "write her way out" of her adopted country's physical and cultural boundaries. One wishes that the personal and critical honesty had to contend with less theory, which nearly obscures her considerable wisdom. Gordimer manipulates her Barthes, Said, and Lukacs well, but they seem beside the point when she tells us plainly in her own words how "fiction is an enactment of life."

Alfred Kazin, now 80 years old and a professor emeritus of English at Hunter College, provides a clear-eyed analysis of 20th-century literary history as it parallels his own career. He regrets the "tides of ideology" that have swamped the reader "mercilessly" since the 1960s, and, unlike Gordimer, he has little patience for the "guidance" that too dogmatic—or abstract—a theory can impose on the impressionable reader. "Only in an age so fragmented," he growls, "can presumably literate persons speak of Dante, Beethoven, or Tolstoy as 'dead white European males.'"

Kazin interweaves personal with literary anecdotes to show that living, writing, and reading are necessarily intimate. Indeed, all his personal stories are literary, and one gets the impression that, from the moment he was "shaken and seized" by *Oliver Twist* at the age of 12, books rather than events have marked the significant moments in his life.

Kazin might flinch at Gordimer's theorizing, but when he bears witness to the intermingling of writers' lives with their art, his testimony is not unlike hers. In particular, he recalls how the writings of Hannah Arendt and Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz made clear to him, an American Jew, "the European agony we did not experience." At such moments, he and Gordimer share the same sensibility: writing does not merely record human "experience"; it shows that life *is* narrative, and it lets the two converge.

### *Contemporary Affairs*

**THE NIGHTINGALE'S SONG.** By Robert Timberg. Simon & Schuster. 540 pp. \$27.50

In January 1961, John F. Kennedy told the world that the United States was willing to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship" to advance the cause of world freedom. He struck a chord in the hearts of Americans of his generation who believed in America's special mission abroad and thought military service a duty and an honor. How dramatically things had changed by April 1975, when the Ford administration ordered the emergency evacuation of the United States embassy in Saigon. America had suffered through an unpopular and devastating war that spawned enormous social upheaval and, as Timberg puts it, opened a "generational fault line" between those who served (as Timberg himself did) and those who did not.

His book is about this fault line and how it endured to contribute to the election of Ronald Reagan and to his administration's involvement in the Iran-contra affair. Timberg, deputy chief of the *Baltimore Sun's* Washington bureau, pursues his theme through fascinating portraits of five prominent Vietnam veterans who were also, like him, graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy—John S. McCain III, Robert C. "Bud" McFarlane, Oliver L. North, Jr., John M. Poindexter, and James H. Webb III. These five men, so different in character and personality, shared an "unassailable belief in America" which led them to distinguish them-

---

selves in action in Vietnam. McCain's ordeal was the most notorious: as a prisoner subjected to humiliation and brutality in the Hanoi Hilton, he held to the military's highest standards of honor and courage. (McCain is now a U.S. senator from Arizona.)

The physical and emotional trauma of the war was only a portion of its legacy for the five men (and for hundreds of thousands of other veterans). They returned home to "hostility, contempt, ridicule, at best indifference." Little wonder, then, that the fault line in the society grew so wide: the spat-upon veterans came to view the pious activists who surreptitiously (or illegally) evaded service with an equal measure of moral contempt.

For the most part, Timberg's subjects managed to get on with their lives after the war and make successful careers. But for McFarlane, North, and Poindexter, he argues, something was missing. They had been "stunned into silence" by the hostility and ridicule of their fellow Americans. Timberg likens them to nightingales, who find their voice only when they hear another nightingale sing. Ronald Reagan's full-throated patriotism and generous praise for Vietnam veterans restored their voices, even as it provided "resonance" for the message in Webb's novels and "mood music" for the emerging politician McCain, who had remained "silent by choice."

In 1984, the Congress—full of individuals who had not served in Vietnam and could not appreciate "what it meant to be bloody, hungry and out of ammunition"—voted to cut off all aid to the contras in Nicaragua. Determined that the United States not betray another ally, as it had South Vietnam, and seduced by patriotism's song, North, McFarlane, and Poindexter became involved in a covert plan to support the contras with proceeds from Iranian arms sales. They acted for what they thought good and noble reasons, and they suffered eventual rebuke on both sides of the fault line.

For all but the seasoned ornithologist, Timberg's governing metaphor is strained. The considerable strength of his book lies rather in the wealth of stories through which he gives individuality to each of his five prin-

cipal characters and makes of their collective histories a vivid account of America's social and political climate from the morass of Vietnam to the quicksand of Iran-contra.

#### THE TYRANNY OF NUMBERS:

*Mismeasurement and Misrule. By Nicholas Eberstadt. AEI Press. 310 pp. \$24.95*

We Americans are allowing statistics to rule us and drive public policy, argues Eberstadt, a visiting fellow of the Harvard University Center for Population and Development Studies and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. But how do statistics gain ascendancy, and what happens when we cede control to them? Eberstadt takes aim not at any specific political ideology but at the faith we now place in the official figures collected by governments. He believes that, despite current doubts about the future of the nation-state and its centralized methods of governance, the rise of public sectors in free societies has yet to reach its peak: "The modern voter and his agents have demonstrated already that they are quite capable of inveighing against the heavy burden of an excessive government even as they militate for additional state subventions." Because more will be at stake in the political redistribution of resources, the need for reliable data—from governments and other sources—will grow, and the data will continue to inform politics.

Eberstadt analyzes contentious public claims about social problems by examining how numbers are constructed for the purposes of argument. On the controversial issue of poverty in America, for example, he insists that "the poverty rate" itself is "an arbitrary and, in some ways, a seriously misleading statistical indicator" because it focuses on income rather than consumption. That focus resulted, Eberstadt explains, from a federal agency's unwillingness 30 years ago to collect information about expenditures because data about income were already available. Having a different (and less alarming) measure for material deprivation, Eberstadt argues, would create a different public debate about poverty.



---

On a second controversial issue, Eberstadt suggests that ineffective governmental and medical systems may not be responsible, as many believe, for high rates of infant mortality in America, and that we need to know more about the attitudes and behavior of pregnant mothers. But research into this aspect of the problem meets strong resistance—for political reasons. It “blames the victims,” something avoided at all costs these days, even that of failing to understand—and end—the true causes of high infant mortality.

Eberstadt’s approach is clearly provocative, and his passionate commitment to getting the figures and the correlations right lends his work a genuine moral dimension. That’s too rare a quality in contemporary social science to be ignored.

**VIRTUALLY NORMAL:** An Argument about Homosexuality. By Andrew Sullivan. Knopf. 205 pp. \$22

Andrew Sullivan, the editor of the *New Republic*, is a romantic at heart, or maybe just below the skin. He still believes in happy endings; at least, he refuses to disbelieve in them. Sullivan’s book is “about how we as a society deal with that small minority of us which is homosexual.” Unimpeded by statistics and footnotes, it has the pressing, insistent tone of serious conversation. It is inevitably a book about politics—specifically, the conflicted politics of homosexuality in America today. What Sullivan wants for homosexual citizens is nothing more than public equality with heterosexual citizens, that is, equal treatment by the state. That is all, he believes, one can or should expect of the state, and it would be enough. The state cannot legislate an end to private scorn and hatred of homosexuals.

Sullivan argues from observation and lived experience, true to his epigraph from Ludwig Wittgenstein: “One can only *describe* here and say: this is what human life is like.” On the basis of his own life and the testimony of many others, he contends that “for a small minority of people, from a young age, homo-

sexuality is an essentially involuntary condition that can neither be denied nor permanently repressed.” For such individuals, homosexuality is, quite simply, natural, and to deny it is to go against their nature.

Sullivan assigns—somewhat artificially, as he admits—the most prominent arguments currently being made about homosexuality to four groups: prohibitionists (for whom homosexuality is an abomination and an illness, and who feel that homosexual acts call for punishment and deterrence by the society); liberationists (for whom homosexuality is not a defining condition or inherent natural state but an arbitrary social construction); conservatives (a variety of liberals, actually, for whom homosexuality is a condition to be tolerated in private because individuals’ privacy must be respected, but disapproved in public lest it fray the social fabric); and liberals (for whom homosexuality is an individual’s right, to be protected by law in the society, along with the myriad other “rights” liberals have discovered in the process of educating a skeptical and reluctant public about what’s good for it).

Alert to the need for nuance and qualification, Sullivan gives each of these positions its due before arguing its insufficiency. He would replace all of them with his own politics of homosexuality, “one that does not deny homosexuals their existence, integrity, dignity, or distinctness.” What he proposes is less a parting shot than an opening volley: an end to all public (as distinct from private) discrimination against “those who grow up and find themselves emotionally different.” “And that is all,” writes Sullivan, as if the proposal were as simple as it is reasonable: accord homosexual citizens every right and responsibility that heterosexuals enjoy as public citizens.

The consequences? Well, for one, equal opportunity and inclusion in the military. For another, and even more provocatively, legalized homosexual marriage and divorce. For many in the society this would be the last straw; for Sullivan it is the best hope. He may be prescient, and he may be right; for the historical moment in American politics, he is merely quixotic—romantic even. But his book honors and advances the debate.

---

**BALKAN TRAGEDY: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War.** By Susan L. Woodward. *Brookings*. 536 pp. \$42.95

When the European Community declared the former Yugoslavia dead at a 1991 peace conference in the Hague, the six republics that lived within its bounds became locked in a bitter struggle over the decedent's estate. Long after borders are redrawn in blood and the spoils of war divided, debate over the causes of what happened will rage among journalists, scholars, and policy makers.

Woodward, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, has written the most thoughtful, detailed, and lucid work on the disintegration of Yugoslavia to appear thus far. It confronts head-on what will be the crux of the controversy—the alleged inevitability of the collapse of Yugoslavia into nationalist regimes and civil war.

According to the new Western dogma, Yugoslavia was doomed from the start. It was an artificial country that never should have lasted its 73 years; a hellish place, moreover, where the end of the Cold War lifted the lid from “a cauldron of long-simmering hatreds.” The “revival of ethnic hatreds in a return to the precommunist past” has become, says Woodward, the ideological explanation of choice in the West for the disaster: the breakup was unavoidable, and only its brutality was negotiable.

An entirely different dogma prevailed during the Cold War. Yugoslavia was once the darling of the West, and the Yugoslavs were America's pet Eastern Europeans. As Woodward explains, Yugoslavia was then an important element in the West's policy of containment of the Soviet Union, and the Yugoslav regime survived Tito's clash with Stalin thanks in large part to American military aid and economic assistance.

Balkan experts who were part of the earlier consensus, and proud of it, have since gone into hiding. But not Woodward. Her book runs counter to every tenet of the new orthodoxy on Yugoslavia. She begins her account a full decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when economic austerity and reforms in Yugoslavia triggered a breakdown of political and civil order and a slide toward governmental disintegration. This

was the real origin of the conflict.

Woodward is determined not to take sides in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, though she is fully aware that “all those who propose instead to analyze the conflict are accused of assigning moral equivalence between victims and aggressors—or worse, of justifying actions being explained.” She rejects the predictable argument that a longstanding Serb-Croat conflict exemplifies the historical character of contemporary Yugoslav politics, and she coolly discounts as “unlikely” the fashionable American theory that Yugoslavia unraveled because Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, devised a diabolical master plan for a “Greater Serbia.”

Woodward neither calls for bombings nor scrambles for the moral high ground. Her interest lies in understanding as clearly as possible why, over a prolonged period, government authority eroded. She sees the Yugoslav crisis as a “story of many small steps taken in separate scenes and locales,” and a drama to which Western governments and onlookers contributed significantly. Her exceptionally well-documented book will not buttress the dubious opinions one may acquire watching the evening news or reading the columns of the laptop bombardiers in the morning papers. But for those who care to know, it will explain why Yugoslavia perished, and why there has been so much death since its passing.

**POSTETHNIC AMERICA: Beyond Multiculturalism.** By David A. Hollinger. *Basic*. 210 pp. \$22

Does the debate over multiculturalism have to end at an impasse? Hollinger, a historian at the University of California, Berkeley, thinks not, and he proposes a novel way through the cultural and political tangles that obstruct any reasonable advance. His effort to tie a new civic nationalism to a vigorous endorsement of diversity will be especially welcome to readers who support cultural diversity but seek a common culture.

The problem with most defenders of pluralism, he argues, is that they don't go far enough. They erect artificial fences around each ethnic or

---

racial group to preserve its cultural identity or to protect its political and economic interests. Such defenders of pluralism often depict themselves as liberal or radical, but they are, in a sense, deeply conservative. They share with Euro-American traditionalists the prayer that ties of blood and family will withstand the centrifugal pressures of the modern world.

But some members of each group in the officially sanctioned American ethnic "pentagon" (whites, blacks, Indians, Latinos, and Asians) are rattling their protective fences from inside: Korean and Filipino-Americans challenge the category "Asian-American" because it connotes Chinese or Japanese ancestry; West Indian blacks distinguish themselves from African-Americans of southern U.S. origin; young people of all groups increasingly marry across ethnic and racial lines and thereby create a growing "mixed-race" population.

To those who value the free development of personality—a historic liberal commitment—over obedience to traditional prescriptions, such developments are good news. The irony of multiculturalism, Hollinger notes, is that its relentless insistence on pluralism has ended up undermining the stability of each ethnic or racial enclosure and "diversifying diversity." By so doing, multiculturalism has prepared the way for a critical cosmopolitanism that cherishes the freedom of each person to choose multiple identities. And one of those identities, Hollinger believes, should be civic, based on a decision to build up one's American self through participation in the culture and politics of the nation.

In Hollinger's view, it is time for liberals to stop belittling "patriotism," which they ceded to the Right in the wake of Vietnam. Like Marxists and other progressives, liberals have always had more difficulty than conservatives expressing their loyalty to the nation because the nation stood for something parochial. Hollinger sees the nation rather as an indispensable locus of loyalty and as the only cultural and political entity capable of advancing the historic liberal quest for equality.

Hollinger harbors no illusions that it will be easy to move beyond multiculturalism. He even concedes that, in the absence of a wide political consensus on eliminating poverty, multicultu-

ralism may be the only way to salvage a few crumbs for the poor. But his book makes a timely case for abandoning an increasingly rigid pluralism and setting out for a cosmopolitan America where cultural differences can proliferate and civic nationality deepen.

### *Philosophy & Religion*

**HANNAH ARENDT / MARTIN HEIDEGGER.** *By Elzbieta Ettinger.* Yale. 160 pp. \$16

Why should it matter, other than to the gossip-hungry, that Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Hannah Arendt (1906–75) once had an affair? The year was 1924. He was 35, married with two children, a professor of philosophy at the University of Marburg, and—most important—heir apparent to the throne of German philosophy then occupied by Edmund Husserl at the University of Freiburg. She was 18 when she first heard him lecture, a bright young German Jew with a first-class mind and an almost religious reverence for the misty labyrinths of Teutonic thought. Within a year they were launched upon an affair that would last, thanks to much discrete plotting, until 1928, when Heidegger succeeded to Husserl's chair (and found another mistress).

Ettinger, a professor of humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, mines the newly released correspondence between Heidegger and Arendt in her attempt to illuminate the relationship between a man whom some consider the greatest philosopher of the 20th century and a woman who became one of the more influential political thinkers of her time. Heidegger is important for his radical rethinking of the Western metaphysical tradition, his probing if often obscure explorations of the "existence" question (*Being and Time*, 1927), and his critique of technology and instrumental thinking. He is controversial to an almost equal extent for his involvement with the National Socialist Party. Despite his artful postwar disavowals, a spate of recent studies shows that Heidegger was a party member not merely while rector of Freiburg (1933–34) but well into 1945. And perhaps worse than his philosophical

sympathy with parts of the Nazi ideology was his deplorable treatment of Jewish scholars who were once friends, colleagues, and mentors (including Husserl himself).

Arendt's postwar response to this shameful record was almost as troubling. Although she left Germany in 1933 and eventually settled in the United States, she knew that Heidegger had been anything but blameless during the Hitler years. Writing in *Partisan Review* in 1946, she noted that he had banned Husserl from the Freiburg faculty "because he was a Jew." Yet within a few years, after resuming her correspondence with Heidegger, she accepted almost all of his self-justifications and evasions. Indeed, she became one of his more ardent apologists in the United States. For this gullibility Ettinger adduces a single reason: Arendt never overcame her youthful infatuation; nor did she cease, in Ettinger's words, "to believe that she was the woman in Heidegger's life."

That may well have been Arendt's belief, but as an explanation for her action it falls woefully short of adequate. Much more to the point is her complicated intellectual debt to the substance and style of Heidegger's thought, apparent in all of Arendt's work, including her masterpiece, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). This influence she found impossible to shed. Even a book as short as Ettinger's might have hinted at how Arendt's defense of Heidegger was at least partially a defense of her own intellectual position. Alas, no such hint appears. Because Ettinger so assiduously avoids the entanglement of two minds, her study ends up being little more than high gossip, a sad record of treasons large and small, as slight in significance as it is in size.

## Science & Technology

**CHARLES DARWIN: Voyaging.** (A Biography, Vol. I.) By Janet Browne. Knopf. 543 pp. \$35

The man who persuaded us that our forefathers swung from trees did not wish to scandalize. So he tucked his observations away in secret notebooks and suffered mysterious stomach ailments. In this latest of recent studies, Charles Darwin (1809–82) is once again the "tormented



evolutionist" of Adrian Desmond and James Moore's rather break-neck 1991 biography, which placed Darwin at the center of the social and political uproar of mid-19th-century England. Browne, a zoologist, historian, and editor of *Darwin's Correspondence*,

views Darwin "as his wife or friends" might have seen him—hiding from the public, puttering in his garden, studying worms. Although scholars may wish for more hard science, lay readers will find much to admire in her leisurely stroll through the great man's life.

Browne's book also adds weight to Gertrude Himmelfarb's argument in *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (1959) that Darwin was a "conservative revolutionary." His theory of evolution did not grow from radical social or political persuasions, Browne shows, but from a uniquely stubborn mind. Emotionally, he could not have been more conservative. As a child, he cared only for bugs, dogs, horses, and relatives. Two weeks before his 30th birthday, with no greater ambition than to be comfortably settled, he abruptly married a younger first cousin. Affectionate natures made for a happy marriage, though Emma Darwin's Anglicanism operated as a brake on her husband's evolutionary ideas. Intellectually, Darwin proved more adventurous. His father, a doctor, sent him to Edinburgh to study medicine. But Darwin recoiled from the surgical techniques of his era and preferred to roam the countryside with other fanciers of bugs and rocks. He even tried the ministry but could not abandon his naturalist hobbies.

A Cambridge University mentor secured for Darwin the opportunity that launched his career: a five-year voyage aboard a naval surveying ship, the *Beagle*. At the tip of South America, he was exposed to a dazzling variety of geological formations and plant and animal species; contact with native "savages" impressed upon him the variations possible within our own species. Finally, the trip gave Darwin license to draw conclusions about change in the natural world; he was simply too far from home to

---

doubt his own powers of observation.

Darwin approached the natural sciences with a strong philosophical bent. Though never moved by notoriety to mount a soapbox, he could not help thinking more publicly about the origins of life as he grew older. When Browne's first volume ends, in 1856, Darwin has passed the midpoint of his life; he is redrafting his secret notebooks and reading such social critics as Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) to gain support for his theory of natural selection. He stands ready at last to show his fellow Victorians his dark and godless truth. In Browne's words, "The pleasant face of nature was . . . only an outward face. Underneath was perpetual struggle, species against species, individual against individual."

Following the publication of his evolutionary theories, Darwin had two decades to live. Much of that time he spent sick and depressed. After *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), he reverted to some humbler studies of flowers and worms. It will be interesting to see how Browne handles these distinctly unglamorous years, when Darwin's greatest voyage was long behind him.

**SCIENCE AND THE QUIET ART: The Role of Medical Research in Health Care.** By David Weatherall. Norton. 320 pp. \$25

"It was his part to learn the powers of medicines and the practice of healing," wrote the Roman poet Virgil in the first century B.C., "and, careless of fame, to exercise the quiet art." In Virgil's day, so little was known about the body's mechanics that medicine was indeed an art. But not today, maintains Weatherall, the Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford. For all the mounting distrust of medicine and interest in "alternative" remedies, medicine remains a science, and the miracles it performs are products of scientific research. As Weatherall demonstrates in this informative excursion through the history of medical research, to effect cures requires a deep understanding of biology.

For centuries Western doctors, armed with the elaborate belief systems of the ancient

Greeks, confidently bled and blistered their patients to restore the body's "humors" to balance. Few in this prescientific age thought to test whether such remedies did any good. A gulf opened between those who accepted blindly what they were taught and more skeptical healers who chose rather to acquire their knowledge and skills at the bedside. Thomas Sydenham, 17th-century England's most famous pragmatic clinician, was one of medicine's first scientists. He recommended only remedies whose worth he could see and stressed the importance of healthy habits, the body's ability to cure itself, and the doctor-patient relationship. Medicine has taken a long time to reach the same level of common sense by subjecting to rigorous clinical trials the new therapies research makes available.

Costly as modern medicine is, it has made colossal gains against disease and death. Yet medicine today is at an impasse. The spectacular success of antibiotics is now a half-century old, and the major modern scourges—heart and vascular disease, Alzheimer's, cancer, and stroke—are far too complex to be knocked out by a "magic bullet" or kept at bay with a vaccine. By living longer, we have become subject to the long-term interaction of our genes, habits, and living conditions, and to the myriad unexplained failings of old age. When the basic mechanisms of disease are not understood, doctors are reduced to managing symptoms.

If medical science fails, a public yearning for simple answers seeks them elsewhere. Statistics implicate diet, pollution, lack of exercise, and high cholesterol. But Weatherall's review of the latest findings shows that smoking is the only environmental agent conclusively shown to murder on a grand scale. Simple solutions are no solution at all. What is needed is more knowledge. Yet Weatherall has no faith in the directed-research blitz. It is basic research that must have broad support. He believes that if researchers studying the molecular, chemical, and genetic bases of disease are given sufficient time and support, they will eventually break the current impasse. And as general principles come to be better understood, the need for specialization will diminish and doctors will be able to view, and treat, patients as whole human beings.

# Give an entire year of ideas, insight, and information.

*What holiday gift could be more generous  
— or more thoughtful?*

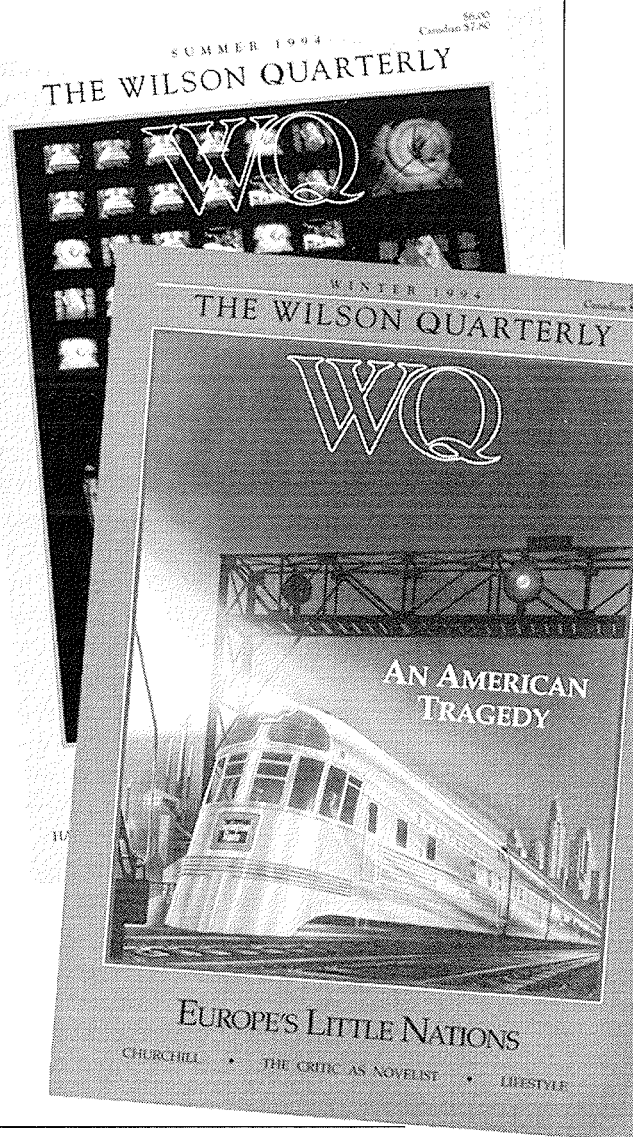
*In a very real way, a holiday gift subscription to THE WILSON QUARTERLY is the ultimate gift. Forget silly neckties and awkward gift certificates — this year, make your holiday remembrance one of substance and style.*

*THE WILSON QUARTERLY. From finance to feminism, the military to the media, it delivers the best writing and thinking of our day — in a format as varied as the subjects it covers.*

*For the intellectually curious on your holiday list, THE WILSON QUARTERLY is more than just a must-read...it's absolutely the perfect gift. And remember, included in your gift is membership in The Wilson Center Associates, and all the benefits and discounts that go with it.*

## WQ

THE WILSON QUARTERLY, Membership Dept.  
P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235



---

# POETRY

## CÉSAR VALLEJO

*Selected and introduced by Edward Hirsch*

César Vallejo's poems are intensely imaginative. They have an anguished power, a rebellious lexical energy, and a wild, free-wheeling emotionalism. Sympathy for the suffering of others is a deeply political current which runs through all his work. His lyrics are suffused with what Federico García Lorca termed *duende*, a demonic inspiration that lifts the imagination to another plane in the presence of death. At times, one feels as if Vallejo has descended into the welter of the unconscious and returned bearing messages from this other world. Yet his own voice comes through as that of the most vulnerable, agonized, and compassionate of speakers—a witness urgently testifying to the experience of human pain.

Vallejo was born on March 16, 1892, in Santiago de Chuco, a small Andean mining town in northern Peru. He had Indian and Spanish blood on both sides. His poetry shows tremendous feeling for his large, affectionate family—for his mother, the emotional center of his religious childhood world, for his father, a notary who wanted him to become a Catholic priest, and for his 10 older brothers and sisters. Vallejo's life was marked by poverty at nearly every point. In 1908, he completed his secondary schooling in the city of Huamachuco, and then attended college off and on for five years, withdrawing several times for lack of money. During this time he worked as a tutor to the children of a wealthy mineowner, as a bookkeeper's assistant on a sugar plantation, and as a science teacher at a boys' school. He finally graduated from the University of Trujillo in 1915, with a thesis on romanticism in Spanish poetry.

Vallejo supported himself for several years by teaching in primary schools in Trujillo and Lima. He read widely, worked furiously at his poems, and belonged to the vanguard *Colonida* group. He also suffered several traumatic love affairs, after one of which he attempted suicide. In 1919, the year after his mother's death, he published his first collection of poems, *Los heraldos negros* (*The Black Riders*). "There are blows in life so violent . . . I can't answer!" the speaker cries out in the title poem, and, indeed, these dark heralds come with messages of destruction that leave him reeling and desolate. In these poems of alienated romanticism, Vallejo grapples with the anachronism of his past as well as the tragic incompatibilities of his divided heritage. Faced with these contradictions, he speaks of his own harsh solitude and inexplicable longings. One of his recurring subjects is the void left in the soul when the Logos has become uncertain and Christianity has lost its stable meaning. Suddenly bereft of a common spiritual vocabulary, the poet seeks to create an authentic language of his own in a fallen modern world.

In 1920, Vallejo returned home for a visit and got inadvertently mixed

---

up in a political feud. Though innocent, he went into hiding for three months and then was incarcerated for 105 days, one of the gravest experiences of his life. During this period he wrote many of the poems for his second book, *Trilce* (1922). Published in the same year as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, *Trilce* is a groundbreaking work of international modernism. Its 77 poems, which bear numbers for titles, are exceptionally hermetic; the syntax disregards the rules of conventional grammar and logical narrative. Language itself is put under intense pressure; surreal images float loose from their context and poetic forms are radically broken down and reconstituted. Neologisms abound. There is a cabalistic obsession with numbers in a world where reality is fragmented and death omnipresent. Vallejo's dire poverty, his bitter sense of orphanhood and brooding exile from his childhood, his rage over social inequities—all make their way into an astonishing and difficult work that fell, as the author declared, into a total void. He published no more collections of poetry in his lifetime.

**I**n 1923, Vallejo left Peru for good and settled in Paris, where he eventually met his future wife, Georgette Phillipart, a woman of strong socialist convictions, and eked out the barest subsistence by writing journalistic pieces for Peruvian newspapers. Several times he nearly starved to death. In the late 1920s, he underwent a crisis of conscience. Consumed by Marxist causes and the quest for a better social order, he visited the Soviet Union three times to see communism in practice. In 1931, he published two books in Spain: *El tungsteno* (*Tungsten*), a socialist-realist novel, and *Rusia en 1931* (*Russia in 1931*), a travel book. His political activism peaked with his involvement in the doomed Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. He wrote descriptive accounts of the conflict as well as a play, *La piedra cansada* (*The Tired Stone*), and the 15 magnificent poems that became *España, aparta de mi este cáliz* (*Spain, Take This Cup from Me*). In the spring of 1938, he developed a fever that doctors could neither diagnose nor treat, and he died on April 15th of that year.

Between 1923 and 1938, Vallejo wrote the 110 posthumously published poems that are his most enduring literary achievement. The year after his death his widow published *Poemas humanos* (*Human Poems*), which brought together his undated lyric and prose poems written between 1923 and 1936, as well as dated poems from 1936 to 1938. Recent scholarship suggests that Vallejo intended three separate collections: *Nómina de huesos* (*Payroll of Bones*), *Sermón de la barbarie* (*Sermon on Barbarism*), and the Spanish Civil War verses. Human feeling is the compulsive subject of these apocalyptic books. The poems speak to the difficulty of maintaining a human face in an alienated industrial world where people wander among objects like strangers and, again, language no longer seems to represent reality. All are shot through with a terrible sadness as, disaffected and dislocated, Vallejo struggles to speak as clearly and accessibly as possible. The poems are haunted by premonitions of the poet's own death, by his sense of the torment of others, by his grief over the impending fate of Spain and the destiny of Europe. Finally, Vallejo emerges as a prophet pleading for social justice, as a grief-stricken Whitmanian singer moving through a brutal universe.



---

## The Black Riders

There are blows in life so violent—I can't answer!  
Blows as if from the hatred of God; as if before them,  
the deep waters of everything lived through  
were backed up in the soul . . . I can't answer!

Not many; but they exist . . . They open dark ravines  
in the most ferocious face and in the most bull-like back.  
Perhaps they are the horses of that heathen Attila,  
or the black riders sent to us by Death.

They are the slips backward made by the Christs of the  
soul,  
away from some holy faith that is sneered at by Events.  
These blows that are bloody are the crackling sounds  
from some bread that burns at the oven door.

And man . . . poor man! . . . poor man! He swings  
his eyes, as  
when a man behind us calls us by clapping his hands;  
swings his crazy eyes, and everything alive  
is backed up, like a pool of guilt, in that glance.

There are blows in life so violent . . . I can't answer!

*Translated by Robert Bly*

## The Anger That Breaks the Man

The anger that breaks the man into children,  
that breaks the child into equal birds,  
and the bird, afterward, into little eggs;  
the anger of the poor  
has one oil against two vinegars.

The anger that breaks the tree into leaves,  
the leaf into unequal buds  
and the bud, into telescopic grooves;  
the anger of the poor  
has two rivers against many seas.

The anger that breaks the good into doubts,  
the doubt, into three similar arcs  
and the arc, later on, into unforeseeable tombs;  
the anger of the poor  
has one steel against two daggers.

The anger that breaks the soul into bodies;  
the body into dissimilar organs  
and the organ, into octave thoughts;  
the anger of the poor  
has one central fire against two craters.

*Translated by Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia*

---

## XV

In that corner, where we slept together  
so many nights, I've now sat down  
to wander. The deceased newlyweds' bed  
was taken out, or maybe what will've  
happened.

You've come early on other matters,  
and now you're not around. It is the corner  
where at your side, I read one night,  
between your tender points,  
a story by Daudet. It is the corner  
we loved. Don't mistake it.

I've started to remember the days  
of summer gone, your entering and leaving,  
scant and burdened and pale through the  
rooms.

On this rainy night,  
now far from both, I suddenly start. . .  
Two doors are opening closing,  
two doors that come and go in the wind  
shadow to shadow.

*Translated by Clayton Eshleman*

## Black Stone Lying on a White Stone

I will die in Paris, on a rainy day,  
on some day I can already remember.  
I will die in Paris—and I don't step aside—  
perhaps on a Thursday, as today is Thursday, in au-  
tumn

It will be a Thursday, because today, Thursday, set-  
ting down  
these lines, I have put my upper arm bones on  
wrong, and never so much as today have I found myself  
with all the road ahead of me, alone.

César Vallejo is dead. Everyone beat him,  
although he never does anything to them;  
they beat him hard with a stick and hard also

with a rope. These are the witnesses:  
the Thursdays, and the bones of my arms,  
the solitude, and the rain, and the roads. . .

*Translated by Robert Bly and John Knoepfle*

"The Black Riders" and "Black Stone Lying on a White Stone" are reprinted from *Neruda and Vallejo* by Robert Bly. Copyright © 1971, 1993 by Robert Bly. Reprinted by permission of Beacon Press. "The Anger That Breaks the Man" is from *Complete Posthumous Poetry* by César Vallejo, edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia. Copyright © 1979 by The Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission of the University of California Press. "XV" is from *Trilce* by César Vallejo, translated by Clayton Eshleman, and published by Marsilio Publishers. Reprinted by permission of the translator.