

spirit”) isn’t up to the intellectual rigor of the rest of *Poetry Speaks*. Osgood’s cozy tone, meant to reassure the novice listener, instead disrupts the enthralling fabric the recordings weave.

“Not words, not music or rhyme I want,” wrote Whitman, “not customs or lecture,

not even the best, / Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvéd voice.”

>HONOR MOORE is the author of two collections of poems, *Memoir* (1988) and *Darling* (2001), as well as a biography, *The White Blackbird: A Life of the Painter Margaret Sargent* by Her Granddaughter (1996). She lives in New York City.

Bomb Thrower

MEMOIRS:

A Twentieth-Century Journey in Science and Politics.

By Edward Teller with Judith L. Shoolery.

Perseus. 628 pp. \$35

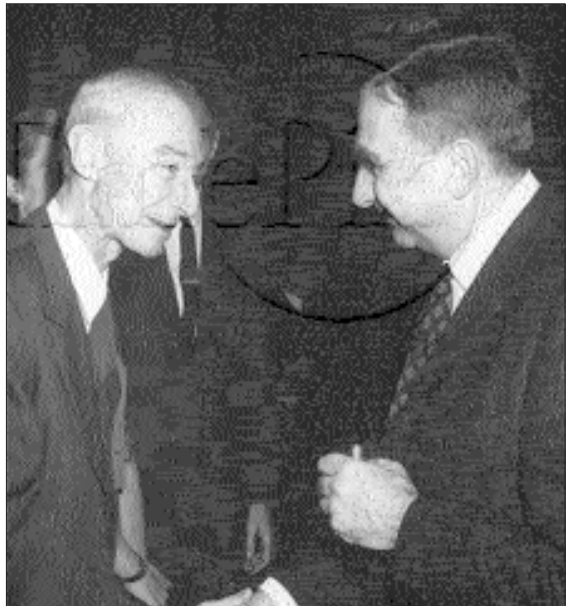
Reviewed by Kai Bird

“God protect us from the enemy without and the Hungarians within,” quipped J. Robert Oppenheimer to a friend at Los Alamos during World War II. A disproportionate number of the physicists working to produce the atomic bomb were Hungarian refugees, and every one of them possessed a difficult, demanding personality. But of these men, none was more difficult, more relentless, or more loquacious than Edward Teller.

Born in 1908, Teller is still with us and, to judge from his long-awaited memoirs, as feisty and opinionated today as he was during the Manhattan Project. In those pre-Hiroshima years, Teller annoyed Oppenheimer and other colleagues with his obsession with building a fusion “super” bomb at a time when the Los Alamos physicists were struggling to ready a simpler fission weapon. Temperamentally fixated on his obsessions, Teller persisted after the war and lobbied vigorously for bigger and more destructive bombs. No one worked harder than this physicist and self-appointed lobbyist to supplement America’s already quite destructive atomic arsenal with the apocalyptic thermonuclear weapons we all live with today.

To his friends in the nexus of Republican Party politics and right-wing think tanks centered around

California’s Hoover Institution, Teller is a genius and political hero: the man who persuaded President Ronald Reagan to spend billions on “Star Wars” missile-defense technologies. In the early 1960s and again in 2000, Teller played a key role in defeating a comprehensive test ban treaty. In short, he is a man who has embraced every nuclear weapons system and rejected every substantive arms control agreement ever proposed.



Edward Teller (right) congratulates Fermi Award winner J. Robert Oppenheimer in 1963.

Current Books

We already know much of this story from a vast literature on the bomb and the Cold War, as well as other books about Teller. Unfortunately, the new memoir has little to add. Much of it is a long-winded rehash of Teller's earlier memoir, *The Legacy of Hiroshima* (1962), and a friendly biography, *Energy and Conflict: The Life and Times of Edward Teller*, by Stanley A. Blumberg and Gwinn Owens (1976). (Blumberg put out another version of this hagiography in 1990 under the bloated title *Edward Teller: Giant of the Golden Age of Physics*.) In addition, the book owes a great deal to the memories of a 93-year-old man, unbuttressed by contemporaneous documentation. "That some of my remembrances are not the commonly accepted version of events should not be surprising," Teller confides. It should also not be surprising that historians will be wary of a memoir so heavy with remembered opinion and so light on quotes from letters, diaries, or other archival materials.

Though his life has been steeped in controversy, Teller desperately wants to be liked. Here, he seeks to win over critics by displaying the warm, human side of a man unfairly vilified. He would like the reader to think that this memoir is about the lasting friendships he forged with fellow physicists such as John von Neumann, Ernest Lawrence, George Gamow, Werner Heisenberg, Eugene Wigner, and many other like-minded scientists.

But he can't restrain himself from grousing about a long list of men and women who opposed his science policy recommendations during the Cold War. The godfather of quantum mechanics, Niels Bohr, made him feel "foolish" in a seminar 70 years ago; Stan Ulam, widely credited with the theoretical breakthrough that led to a practical design for the hydrogen bomb, was "difficult company"; and Teller was "not happy" about working under Nobelist Hans Bethe. Without any evidence, he labels the British Nobelist Patrick M. S. Blackett a communist—and fails to mention that Blackett was an early critic of nuclear weapons.

These complaints stand as petty grievances compared with the animus Teller holds for the *bête noire* of this memoir, J. Robert Oppenheimer. Teller understands

that whatever his accomplishments, his life will forever be defined by the story of a betrayal.

In 1954, he testified before the Atomic Energy Commission's security review board, summoned to determine whether Oppenheimer posed a security risk to the nation. Teller testified, "I would like to see the vital interests of this country in hands which I understand better, and therefore trust more. . . . If it is a question of wisdom and judgment, as demonstrated by actions since 1945, then I would say one would be wiser not to grant [Oppenheimer] clearance."

When Oppenheimer's security clearance was revoked, many of their mutual friends blamed Teller. That summer, Teller visited Los Alamos and spotted an old friend, Bob Christy, with whom he had shared a house for a year. "I hurried over," Teller writes, "reaching out to greet him. He looked me coldly in the eye, refused my hand, and turned away. I was so stunned that for a moment I couldn't react. Then I realized that my life as I had known it was over."

In two chapters and an appendix, Teller goes to great lengths to explain his action in the Oppenheimer hearing. He was misunderstood, he says. His doubts about Oppenheimer had nothing to do with the physicist's opposition to the hydrogen bomb. Instead, Teller claims, he testified as he did only because the Atomic Energy Commission's lawyer, Roger Robb, had shown him a transcript in which Oppenheimer admitted inventing a "cock-and-bull story" that implicated a friend in a Soviet spy network seeking information on the atomic bomb project. Teller was so "amazed and confused" by what he read, he says, that a few minutes later he testified that he had doubts about Oppenheimer's judgment.

There are two problems with this story. First, in a 1961 letter to Lewis Strauss, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Teller said he had met with Robb the previous evening, rather than a few minutes before testifying. In this book, Teller acknowledges this handwritten letter but claims that his memory in 2001 of that 1954 conversation is more reliable than his note to a friend written seven years after the event.

Second, the archives demonstrate that Teller himself was the source for many of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's allegations against Oppenheimer. In 1949 and again in 1952, Teller went to the FBI with suspicions about Oppenheimer's motives for opposing the development of the "super." According to Harold P. Green, the lawyer who drafted the charges against Oppenheimer for the 1954 hearing, "a very substantial portion of the charges, certainly most of them related to the H-bomb, were drawn from FBI interviews with Teller."

Teller portrays himself as a friend of Oppenheimer's. But from his own account, he clashed with "Oppie" early and often. The turning point in their fateful relationship came in the autumn of 1942, when the two physicists shared a first-class train compartment to Washington, D.C., for meetings with General Leslie R. Groves, who had just been appointed to run the Manhattan Project out of the Pentagon.

According to Teller, Oppenheimer complained about having to work with Groves, and added: "We have a real job ahead. No matter what Groves demands now, we have to cooperate. But the time is coming when we will have to do things differently and resist the military." A "shocked" Teller replied, "I

don't think I would want to do that." Oppenheimer quickly changed the subject, and Teller believes "the relationship between us changed at that instant." Oppenheimer might well have said such a thing. Some might even say he was admirably prescient. But in Teller's rendering of this story, the ugly implication is clear: Oppenheimer was not to be trusted with the nation's security.

Henry Kissinger, William F. Buckley, Jr., Tom Clancy, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, and Milton Friedman write the expected glowing endorsements for Teller's book jacket. "Now we know Ed Teller," gushes Buckley, "and rejoice in his company." You can't tell from these blurbs, but some eminent men who have known and worked with Ed Teller consider him a blowhard, even a madman. "He's a danger to all that's important," said the late physicist Isidor I. Rabi. "I do really believe it would have been a better world without Teller."

>KAI BIRD, a Wilson Center fellow, is writing (with Martin Sherwin) a biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer. His previous books include *The Chairman: John J. McCloy and the Making of the American Establishment* (1992), *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (1998), and *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy* (1998).

The Puzzling Persistence of Nationalism

WHO WE ARE:

A History of Popular Nationalism.

By Robert H. Wiebe. Princeton Univ. Press.

282 pp. \$24.95

Reviewed by Jim Sleeper

When death-embracing fundamentalists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America's most telling response came from New York City firefighters who likewise proved willing to face death—but in order to rescue others, not to slaughter them. Their sacrifice

found emblematic voice in Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, was amplified by Good Samaritan citizens, and prompted reverential, often unanticipated stirrings of patriotism in many of the rest of us. The sudden blossoming of flags received a good deal of comment, but there was scant