but had not yet found a role.

It is the great strength of Alistair Horne's avowedly Boswellian approach that we see Macmillan plain at last. Full of sympathetic revelations, particularly of his profound loneliness, this compelling biography interprets Macmillan essentially as a tragic figure rather than as a heroic one.

FRAGMENTS FOR A HISTORY OF THE HUMAN BODY. *Edited by Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. Three volumes. Zone. 480 pp.; 552 pp.; 578 pp. $39.95 (cloth); $16 (paper) each*

History is made up of personalities, its actions performed by characters. The fact that these characters once had bodies has been considered largely irrelevant: Anatomy may interest a biologist, but not a historian. *Fragments* challenges that assumption. These 48 essays, written by scholars from five countries, attempt to establish the "historicity of the human body," to show how the body has influenced—and been influenced by—historical events.

To get at this elusive subject, *Fragments* assembles the most unlikely cast of characters: medieval woman, African Wodaabe nomads, marionettes, Japanese ghosts, 16th-century automata, Holbein's Christ, the embryo in the *Upanishads*, Pascal on the incarnation, Dickens on bio-economics, gods, and animals. What can hold together such a menagerie? Dominated by leading French intellectuals—the linguist Julia Kristeva, the classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant, the historian Jacques Le Goff—these volumes, not surprisingly, are pervaded by the most fashionable, or faddish, idea in academia today: social construction. "The history of the body," the editors write, "is not so much the history of its representations as of its modes of construction." In other words, forget anatomy. The way a culture understands the human body—and these ways vary amazingly—can, the editors point out, "naturalize a political institution, a social hierarchy, or a moral principle."

Consider, for example, "head" and "heart". If the head is the ruling organ, as Thomas Hobbes asserted, then the state's requirement of a head can legitimize monarchy or authority; if the "heart" is the ruling organ, as the Romantics held, then society should tolerate more individual expression. If the female body is reckoned a lesser version of the male's—as Caroline Walker Bynum shows it was for the late Middle Ages, when the female genitalia were considered the male's pulled inward—then male primogeniture and kingship descent are rational. Centuries later, Freud's "locating" the female orgasm in the vagina instead of the clitoris—despite his knowing, Thomas Laquer argues, that the former had far fewer neural connections—endorsed a particular kind of "socially responsible" sexuality and sexual relationships. Even whether a rotten tooth, symbol of vice, was pulled in public (in the 17th century) or in private (in the 19th century) helped define, according to David Kunzle, the emotional life of members of society.

Fragments is like a banquet made up of many hors d'oeuvres but lacking a main course. History was once considered the stage where statesmen and generals played their part; today, the discipline considers material not only from the social sciences but even from the physical sciences. How is the historian to integrate it all? No clue here. Like the thin man struggling vainly to get out of the fat man's body, a synthesis fails to emerge from these weighty volumes.

HONORABLE JUSTICE: The Life of Oliver Wendell Holmes. *By Sheldon M. Novick. Little, Brown. 522 pp. $24.95*

When appointed to the Supreme Court in 1902, Oliver Wendell Holmes was already 61, but he sat on the bench long enough—from Roosevelt (Theodore) to Roosevelt (Franklin)—to write more opinions than any other judge in its history. And Holmes wrote them so eloquently that Edmund Wilson named him among America's outstanding literary figures. Even today his dissents on behalf of individual freedoms are quoted nearly as reverentially as the Constitution itself.