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 **The Key Reporter**

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An Election-Year Retrospective
FDR AS A BIOGRAPHER'S PROBLEM

by *Kenneth S. Davis*

When, more years ago than I like to count, a publisher approached me with the proposal that I do a book about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, only the accompanying offer of what was for those days a quite large advance against royalties was tempting to me. It was a temptation I resisted. The flood of Rooseveltiana already in print, including several established classics, was overwhelming; I saw no need to add to it. The risks and difficulties of the proposed project were formidable. There was the danger, for instance, of becoming bogged down in interminable research (it crushed my spirit to learn that there were 45 tons of documents in the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park). Finally, conclusively, as I thought at the time, FDR, though I'd read with much interest a great many books about him and his administration, was devoid of interest to me as a writing subject of my own. Indeed, as a biographical subject, and quite apart from the bristling difficulties he presented in that aspect, he repelled me.

How and why was this so?

For one thing—despite all I'd read of his warm heart and concern for the welfare of common folk, and despite the impression he conveyed of these things when he talked on the radio or appeared in newsreels—I could never quite have for him a genuinely *human* feeling. He was to me more a symbolic movement than a person, and in all respects remote. His background as a member of the Hudson River aristocracy, his Groton-Harvard schooling, his crippling polio, his subsequent and consequent environmental experience—these were all so alien to anything I myself had experienced that I might never be able to depict them accurately, much less comprehend and accurately describe their influence on him. As for his basic motives, his ultimate aims, his actual feelings about himself and the world, his sense of reality—these things, I was sure, lay forever beyond my ken.

Moreover, suppose, after the arduous search that would evidently be required, I did find the *real* Roosevelt. Would he



FDR at a CCC camp in Virginia, August 1933.

Courtesy of FDR Library.

prove to be a man in whose company I could live comfortably through the years required for a serious biography of him? I doubted it. I happen to be an idealist in philosophy: I'm convinced that ideas are determinants of history and that long-term consistency, not immediate practical efficacy, is the test of the truth of ideas. With pragmatism and pragmatists, therefore, I have little imaginative sympathy—and FDR in action seemed almost wholly, purely pragmatic. His concern for consistency, if any, appeared minimal, which meant from my point of view that his concern for truth, for truthfulness, must also be nonexistent or minimal. And such a conclusion seemed justified by a good deal of evidence. From what I had observed and read about him there emanated, along with a wonderfully animating life-affirming radiance, a faint (sometimes not so faint) odor of

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**THE KEY REPORTER
MARKS ITS GOLDEN
ANNIVERSARY**

With this issue, *The Key Reporter* begins volume 50. The United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa began publishing a quarterly newsletter in 1910, but it was dropped in 1931 when the decision was made to begin quarterly publication of *The American Scholar*, designed to publish scholarly articles and to promote liberal education and culture by the exchange of ideas among scholars.

Despite the success of *The Scholar*, the need for another publication—to stimulate interest in the society and to constitute a permanent record—became evident. After some experimentation with an annual report, the United Chapters adopted the new quarterly newsletter format and *The Key Reporter* appeared in the winter of 1935-36. In 1955 the volume year was pushed back to begin in autumn. The first issue carried an editorial stating that *The Key Reporter* aimed “to maintain concern for ΦBK ideals of excellence and freedom in scholarship, and of cultural breadth of interest.”

It seems fitting to mark the beginning of this anniversary year by reprinting an article that first appeared in *The American Scholar* about a member of Phi Beta Kappa who was president of the United States when *The Key Reporter* was started.

In addition, we reprint this story from volume 1, issue 2, of *The Key Reporter*, titled “President Roosevelt’s Story Re Honorary Membership,” told “with the consent of President Roosevelt himself” by John J. McSwain, a member of the 74th Congress and an alumnus member of the University of South Carolina chapter of Phi Beta Kappa:

“During an interview with the President about an important phase of legislation, I incidentally referred to the fact that he and Representative Lister Hill, of Alabama, and I were all wearing Phi Beta Kappa keys, which is accepted the world over as a mark of scholarship. The President said that he had an interesting story about the Phi Beta Kappa key, as follows:

“He said that at a certain conference of governors, while he was Governor of New

(continued on back cover)

FDR (continued from page 1)

the sly, the slippery, the excessively clever.

Consider the published testimony: “Franklin Roosevelt was not a simple man,” writes Frances Perkins. “That quality of simplicity which we delight to think [which I myself *do* think] marks the great and noble was not his. He was the most complicated human being I ever knew.” Walter Lippmann, disgusted by the “intricate game” that FDR as New York governor and presidential candidate “elected . . . to play . . . with Tammany,” suggested on several occasions that the “complicatedness” described by Perkins was not unrelated to the arts and morality of an opportunistic confidence man. “The trouble with Franklin D. Roosevelt is that his mind is not very clear, his purposes are not simple, and his methods are not direct,” concluded a famous Lippmann column. “A—clear-headed, simple and direct man would not have landed himself in the confusion [Lippmann elsewhere calls it a “squalid mess”] which now prevails between Albany and City Hall.”

Much of the poignancy of Eleanor Roosevelt’s memoirs derives from her expressed yearning to reach out and touch the essential self of the man she had married. Her second volume aches with the frustration of her effort to reach him—a frustration leading to the bleak conclusion, after he had died, that she had been merely one of those whom he found “useful.”

Obviously any historian who accepted as literally true, without further checking, anything FDR said about his own experience ran grave risks.

Roosevelt “loved secrecy,” writes Sam Rosenman, yet he “was often the one guilty of letting facts get out about which he had sworn others to secrecy.” And Rosenman, Ray Moley, Rex Tugwell, and Jim Farley record instances of Rooseveltian mendacity, often employed merely to embellish a good story but sometimes with regard to major issues, and of his preference for the devious over the frankly straightforward, even on occasions (notably at the outset of his 1937 Supreme Court battle) when plain speaking and dealing would have far better served his ends.

At the very time I was considering the publisher’s offer, Rosenman and James MacGregor Burns suffered acute public embarrassment for having accepted at face value FDR’s claim (found in a memorandum in the Roosevelt Library) to have composed the first draft of his first

inaugural address between the hours of 9:00 P.M. and 1:30 A.M., at Hyde Park, on the night of February 27, 1933. Moley’s just-published *First New Deal* scornfully decried Rosenman’s failure to check with him the account, in Rosenman’s *Working with Roosevelt*, of the inaugural’s making, since Rosenman well knew that Moley was at that time involved in the preparation of every Roosevelt speech. And Moley proved with incontrovertible documentary evidence that he himself had written the first draft, which meant that not a word was true of Burns’s vividly circumstantial story of this drafting, in *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*—a book I continue to admire greatly. Moreover, reading *The First New Deal*, I could only conclude that FDR’s copying in his own hand of Moley’s typed draft, in Moley’s presence, on the night of February 27, was probably done with deliberate intent to deceive posterity.

Obviously any historian who accepted as literally true, without further checking, anything FDR said about his own experience ran grave risks. The primary source of information, in the case of FDR, was by that very token the most suspect.

The Central Theme

In the face of all this, I’m reasonably sure I would never have signed that publishing contract had the idea not occurred to me, one day, of giving the proposed project the working title of “Franklin D. Roosevelt: A History” rather than “Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Biography” and then assigning to “history” the same weight I gave “Roosevelt” in my overall conception.

Every biographical work is of necessity, to greater or lesser degree, a “life and times.” In most biographies, however, even those written about major political figures whose lives are absorbed in public affairs, the “times” are presented as a background or temporal setting for the “life.” But must the proposed work, if I agreed to do it, be done in this usual way? Instead of dealing with history as mere occasion or necessary condition for a story of Roosevelt’s life, why not make it the very substance of the book—make it the story, having FDR as the central character or hero? I might be enabled, if I chose, to shape a kind of “nonfiction

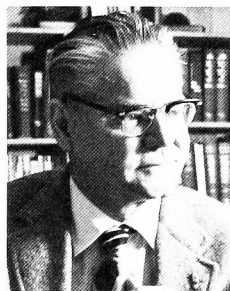
novel” (Capote’s phrase was not then overused) which, though scrupulously accurate in every biographical-historical detail, made use of a novelist’s sense of drama, a novelist’s feeling for character and place, a novelist’s narrative and descriptive techniques.

My aim could be to achieve an actual fusion of history and person in a single flowing process—a process, moreover, having a clear central theme.

And what would be the unifying theme? I found it already derived in my mind as part of a long-perceived theme of Western history. For obviously the basic causal force operating in Western, and thence world, history, from the early 17th century until today, has been the accelerating advance of science and technology and its increasingly strong impact on social, cultural, economic, and political institutions and on the lives of individual men and women.

Every major decisive historical event of the past two centuries has had at its heart the dynamic relationship (that of challenge and response) between our personal and institutional life on the one hand and the growing power of our technology on the other. But since the latter has increasingly become the prime mover of the whole process, the question arises as to whether the technology is truly ours in the sense of ownership and control. Do we possess and control it—or does it possess and control us?

The question was no by means wholly fanciful when Mary Shelley published her *Frankenstein*. It had become wholly realistic by the time Henry Adams published his *Education*. And it was one of Adams’s striking metaphors that set me thinking about all this, that day, in terms of FDR. Adams tells how, in November 1904, sailing up New York harbor at the end of a crossing from Cherbourg, he saw the “outline of the city” as “frantic.” It was as if “power . . . [had] outgrown its servitude” and “asserted its freedom.” It was as if “the cylinder had exploded, and thrown great masses of stone and steam against the sky.” And when Adams had debarked and was again upon the streets of New York, the city seemed to him to have “the air and movement of hysteria”; its citizens “were crying, with every accent of anger and alarm, that the new forces must at any cost be brought under control.”



Novelist, historian, and biographer, Kenneth S. Davis was awarded the Francis Parkman Prize by the Society of American Historians for the first volume of his “history” of FDR titled *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882–1928*. The second volume, *FDR: The Years of Destiny, 1928–1936*, will be published by Random House in April 1985. This article originally appeared in a somewhat longer version in the Winter 1983–84 issue of *The American Scholar*.

But they were not brought under control. Instead, they continued to grow out of control, distorted into monstrous shapes by the political and economic arrangements of a preindustrial age. They imposed intolerable strains on social walls and vastly overflowed economic channels that had never been designed to contain them. They created global interdependencies that were increasingly frustrated by the prevailing system (or anarchy) of national sovereignties. Blind responses to them increasingly submerged individual lives and liberties in vast collectives, essentially mindless in their direction—giant organizations of which the nominal administrator was more puppet than master and in which human lives and purposes were more and more subordinate to the machine's laws of operation, the machine's convenience.

In sum, a gap was opened and widened between power and intelligence (out of it came World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the atom bomb) as power advanced by leaps and bounds while intelligence, whose firm grasp alone could make technology the servant of humane ends, limped further and further behind.

Here, then, was my unifying theme. The struggle to close the power-intelligence gap—which was a struggle for emergence of a new kind of American community out of individualistic chaos, and of at least minimal world government out of international anarchy—was for me the essential dramatic conflict, the plot of the story having FDR as central character. By this perceived story line I would be provided with a selective principle (one was absolutely necessary) for choice and emphasis among the myriad items and possibilities anyone who writes of Roosevelt and his years must consider.

The Problem of FDR Himself

There remained the problem of FDR himself—that multifaceted, mercurial, enigmatic man. How was I ever to penetrate his thick, and evidently swiftly changing, disguises to reach any understanding of his essential being—of his basic attitudes and motives? I'd have to do that if I were to present him as other than a symbolic person or cardboard figure, all brilliant smiling surface. And I remember that, on the day of my final decision to sign the publishing contract, I made a list of published facts and surmises about him from which I might draw clues to a solution of this problem, clues possibly pointing the way toward a valid theory of personality.

FDR was the only child of highly privileged parents, and his formidable mother, in a strange little book titled *My Boy Franklin*, reports that he as a child, playing with other children, was always the one who gave orders. When she re-

monstrated with him one day, saying he should let others run things sometimes, he replied, "Mummie, if I didn't give the orders, nothing would happen!" And, surprisingly, significantly, his playmates seemed not often to resent his bossiness: they generally obeyed with alacrity.

He was from early boyhood an inveterate collector of birds, stamps (this became his major lifelong hobby), naval prints, historical documents, and rare books (he specialized in Americana). He lived amid a clutter of ship models, figurines, and mementos of all kinds.

He was mildly but genuinely superstitious. He was superstitious about the number thirteen and would go to considerable trouble to avoid eating at a table of thirteen or beginning a journey on the thirteenth day of a month. "Occasionally this meant pulling a train out at 11:50 p.m. on the twelfth or 12:10 a.m. on the fourteenth," writes Grace Tully, who also reports that "one of the few occasions I know of when the President actually reprimanded someone brusquely in public involved the superstition of lighting three cigarettes on a match." He became addicted to certain articles of clothing as lucky—an old felt hat, an old sweater—and averse to others as unlucky.

The fact that Franklin Roosevelt was a man of great and evidently remarkably simple religious faith . . . seems to me the most potent of clues to the innermost workings of his psyche.

He was notably ear-minded rather than eye-minded; he learned by listening, not by reading. Ed Flynn, who was as intimate an associate of his between 1928 and 1945 as any man, with the exception of Louis Howe and Harry Hopkins, writes that he "never saw him read a book" or even "read a magazine unless a particular portion was called to his attention." Moley, Tugwell, and many others who were for periods close to him testify that he seldom, if ever, read a serious book all the way through during the time they were associated with him.

At Harvard, where his academic record was undistinguished, all his classes were in history, political science (only thoroughly orthodox economic theory was taught to him), and English, save for single courses in geology, general paleontology, Latin literature, and French literature. He had no exposure to mathematics, physics, chemistry, or philosophy (the philosophy faculty at Harvard, with James and Santayana as members, was exceptionally brilliant during his undergraduate years). He did enroll in a

general introduction to philosophy, taught by Josiah Royce, but dropped it after three weeks.

At the close of his last college year he complained to his roommate that his Harvard studies had been "like an electric light that hasn't any wire. You need the lamp for light but it's useless if you can't switch it on."

He was fond of gambling, but for small stakes. He played poker with more enthusiasm than skill, losing more than he won. He bet impulsively, was overinclined to bluff, and, when dealer, was likely to raise howls of protest around the table by calling a game in which so many cards were wild that no one could estimate the odds.

His business speculations during the 1920s were of the same "wild card" variety. He was attracted to the novel, the daring, and though he seldom invested much in any one such venture, he lost most or all of what he did put in when, as almost always happened, the venture quickly failed.

Yet in elective politics, though he often seemed daring to the point of recklessness, he was, in reality and in general, shrewd and cautious. His first campaign (for the New York legislature in 1910), his immediately following legislative battle over "Blue-eyed Billy" Sheehan, and his 1914 primary bid for the United States Senate were all extremely hazardous ventures. The last was actually foolish: he suffered a predictable defeat of humiliating proportions. But thereafter he planned his political moves with care (and with Louis Howe), estimated the risks as precisely as possible, did what he could to minimize them, and paid close attention to relations between his immediate tactical objectives and his long-term strategic goal. Sometimes he miscalculated badly—he did so repeatedly in 1937, a year of disaster for him and the New Deal—but almost never did he proceed with no calculation at all.

The Histrionic Element

He was constantly described, in public print, as a "consummate actor"—and the published letters of his boyhood and youth do reveal a strong element of the histrionic in him. (This is often characteristic of unusually shy, sensitive people who learn to hide or overcome their insecurities through role playing; and his mother insists, as photographs of him suggest, that he was as a young boy very shy.)

No letters he wrote home from Groton were more heavily underlined, more studded with exclamation points, than those he wrote in the spring of his sixth-form year (he was then 18) about the part assigned him in W. S. Gilbert's *The Wedding March*, which was that year's school

play; and from all accounts he was a hit in the part.

A shared love for things theatrical was one of the bonds between him and Howe. He loved to mimic (he could take off Cal Coolidge hilariously), loved to act parts (*presiding* parts) in the costume skits that Howe composed for the Cuff-links Club dinners held annually on FDR's birthday.

The histrionic in him greatly aided his delivery of speeches, which he made with maximum effectiveness. His physical presence at the lectern—leonine head tossed back or from side to side, strong jaw outthrust, an extraordinarily mobile countenance registering a great range and subtlety of emotion—was itself powerfully communicative to his immediate audience. And he had a superb speaking voice, a vibrant tenor that could at his will become hard or soft in tone, cold or warm, harsh with scornful anger or gentle with affectionate intimacy. Often he rendered eloquent to the radio-listening ear, and sometimes soaringly so, lines that to the normal reading eye lay flat and dull upon the page.

He proclaimed himself a "snap-judgment man." Interviewed by Marquis Childs in early April 1944, he asserted that the "burden of responsibility" about which Childs questioned him was not really a burden for him because he made decisions so easily. ("You mean, sir, it is . . . not ever difficult?" asked a somewhat incredulous Childs. Replied FDR, "No, I should say, no.") Yet the evidence is abundant that he had a profound aversion to irrevocable decisions and went to great lengths to avoid them, in his private as in his public life.

His capacity to bear physical pain, hiding it from others behind a calm, cheerful demeanor, was almost incredible.

His wife and his mother were essentially antipathetic personalities. Eleanor was primarily animated by generous instincts, Sara by selfish ones, and between the two was a constant tension that broke, now and then, into open quarrel. When this happened, FDR seems seldom if ever to have taken sides. Generally he pretended unawareness that anything had gone wrong. And certainly he never made any sharp distinction between the loyalties he owed his mother and those he owed his wife, much less any clear-cut decision as to which set of loyalties had priority.

In the case of his love affair with Lucy Mercer, he was forced by Eleanor to make a flat choice between divorce and a total

renunciation of Lucy. He chose the latter (a divorce would end his political career; his outraged mother threatened to disown him), but he evidently did so with secret reservations, for he kept close track of Lucy, may even have been in touch with her through the following years, and certainly renewed relations with her in the closing years of his life.

When the issue facing him was whether to fire an unfit subordinate, he almost always postponed the decision unconsciously or avoided it altogether through false-compromise arrangements—a procedure which was doubtless dictated by his wish to avoid giving pain but which had the frequent effect of prolonging and increasing it.

When the issue was between antagonistic public policy proposals, his initial effort was generally to try to weave them together, as in the famous case of the two speech drafts on tariff policy during the 1932 campaign. He was a Whitmanesque yea-sayer who could speak a firm no with only the greatest difficulty. Hence his natural tendency toward omnibus statutes and administrative agencies wherein sharp differences between ideas and men would (he hoped) be dissolved by a common bureaucratic label and goal statement, the latter so broad as to be practically meaningless.

FDR's Courage and Faith

One would expect such avoidance of sharp definition, such preference of "both/and" over "either/or" (as Kierkegaard put it), to be a manifestation of cowardice—and indeed the accusation of moral cowardice, of mental timidity, was leveled against him on occasion. But consider the indisputable evidence, the numerous crucial instances, of this man's magnificent courage!

His capacity to bear physical pain, hiding it from others behind a calm, cheerful demeanor, was almost incredible. He did so as a boy when an accident broke off one of his teeth, leaving the nerve nakedly exposed: only the sight of his pale, drawn face, joined with his inability to speak in other than monosyllables, revealed to his mother that an accident had occurred and he was in agony.

He also bore pain as a man over and over again, during his polio ordeal and the subsequent long, arduous struggle to walk again. Rare is the man who demonstrates such fortitude, such tenacious hold on long-term purpose through thick and thin, as he did during the 1920s. Even more rare is the crippled man who in his dealings with the world manages, as he did, to give no impression of lameness, physical or psychological, but radiates instead the zestful good cheer of a supremely healthy man.

Nor was stoic courage the only kind he

possessed. He was utterly fearless in the face of sudden, unexpected mortal danger. When a madman fired five revolver shots at him from barely 20 feet away, in Miami on the night of February 15, 1933, he, who perfectly realized that his enforced physical immobility made him an unusually easy target, seemed scarcely to have flinched. Certainly he remained calmly, precisely observant, almost as if he were witnessing the whole episode from a safe distance—an episode which he found intensely interesting but from which he was personally detached—as the remarkably clear, detailed, chronological account he gave reporters a few hours later reveals. He gave no sign of letdown after the immediate excitement had passed, either. Writes Moley, "I never in my life saw anything more magnificent."

Possessed of an intellect that was broad but shallow, he collected facts and ideas as he did stamps and naval prints, letting them lie flat, distinct, separate in his mind, never attempting to combine them into any holistic truth.

In his talk about crises and their resolutions, he almost always referred to God, or God's beneficence. When he sent a telegram of thanks to the woman who had saved his life by grabbing the gunman's shooting arm, he spoke of the "Divine Providence" whereby (as it then appeared) "the lives of all the victims . . . will be spared." To Frances Perkins he once said that, in the ultimate crisis-hours of his polio attack, he felt that God had abandoned him—which suggests that, when he recovered, he felt that God had spared him after testing him for some divine purpose.

On the night of March 2, 1933, when he rode a B&O train down from New York to Washington for his first inaugural, he summoned Jim Farley to his stateroom and there talked to Farley, a devout Catholic, not of the multitudinous problems whose solutions would be his responsibility in two days' time, but of faith in God. More important than any planned operation for the solution of the present crisis was a great people's religious faith, he said; ultimately the salvation of America depended upon the American people's active belief in divine providence, their seeking and acceptance of divine guidance. He himself proposed, and had made the arrangements, to launch the New Deal with a prayer: his first public act on inauguration day

would be his attendance at a worship service at Saint John's Episcopal Church.

It was the last of my listed items—the fact that Franklin Roosevelt was a man of great and evidently remarkably simple religious faith—that seemed and still seems to me the most potent of clues to the innermost workings of his psyche. His superstitiousness, his decision making (a feel for the relative weights of opposing external pressures), his gambling, his optimistic courage under extreme pressures, his otherwise incredible manifestations on crucial occasions of a personal irresponsibility—all these were explicable in terms of what appeared to be his kind of simple, matter-of-fact Christianity. “He felt that human beings were given tasks to perform and with these tasks the ability and strength to put them through,” Eleanor Roosevelt has written. “He could pray for help and guidance and have faith in his own judgment [thereby informed by divine will] as a result.”

The Biographer's Summation

My own summation, on that day of my own decision making, was somewhat as follows: Born an only child into a highly privileged position, bearer of a name made immensely famous by a distant relative, Franklin Roosevelt had early inculcated within himself a sense of his own importance in the total scheme of things. Innately abnormally sensitive to other people (therefore originally shy of strangers), eager to please, anxious to serve, yet with an instinct for power, he was early encouraged into role playing, for which he had a natural talent, by his need for defense against the demands of a strong-willed, thoroughly selfish, domineering mother whom he loved.

Possessed of an intellect that was broad but shallow, he collected facts and ideas as he did stamps and naval prints, letting them lie flat, distinct, separate in his mind, never attempting to combine them into any holistic truth. Indeed, he shied away from generalized thinking and abstract ideas. If never openly contemptuous of pure thought (certainly he was never assertively so), he had nothing to do with it personally, feeling it to be not merely irrelevant to his vital concerns but even hazardous to them insofar as it might distract his attention from small but important signs or cues presented him by and through his immediate environmental situation.

For at the core of his conception of self and world was the inward certainty that he was a chosen one of the Almighty, his career a role assigned him by the Author of the Universe, and that the part he must act or play to the best of his ability, feeling himself into it, even identifying with it (up to a point), was a very great one.

Believing absolutely in God the Father and Jesus Christ as the Son of God; believing that God, caring for each human being, was infinitely kind and good as well as all-wise and all-powerful; believing or feeling that history was a working out of divine purpose, that every truly fundamental historical force was a manifestation of divine will—believing all this, he must and did believe that history, though it had at any given extended period of time a tidal ebb and flow, had, in the long run, a surging flow in one direction. It was away from polar evil toward polar good. This was the essential progress, from worse to better, a progress that was inevitable because it was God's will.

As a chosen one, he himself was an instrument of progress, a special agent on earth of divine beneficence. But *only* an instrument. *Only* an agent. Moreover, what his heart accepted should not be questioned or even examined by his mind. “I never really thought much about it,” he said to his wife when she pressed him (too hard) to say whether he was really convinced, intellectually convinced, that Christian doctrine was true. “I think it is just as well not to think about things like that too much.”

Thus, Roosevelt's attitude toward power, his attraction to it and exercise of it, was characterized by a humility, a selflessness wholly foreign to a Napoleon, a Mussolini, a Hitler, or a Stalin. By his religious faith and his self-conception in terms of it (his sense of his role in history), he was required actively to seek great power—the greatest earthly power. But he never did so with the feeling that he himself would *become* the power he exercised, or even that it would become his personal property, to be used in service of his purely personal will. It was assigned, imposed from on high. It remained God's. And the ultimate responsibility for his use of it was therefore also God's. This conviction enabled him to act, often, as if he were possessed of what Spengler called a “dreamlike certainty” of decision.

Often he moved swiftly, boldly, with a seemingly fully informed decisiveness, as if he knew exactly what he was doing and what the results would be (although in reality he did not and could not know), when others in posts of decision—more cerebral than he, more weighed down by a sense of personal responsibility for large-scale consequences—were paralyzed by doubt and fear. His inward experience of such moments, however, was very different from a Napoleon's or a Mussolini's in that his act was not at all the exercise of an iron and conquering will. It was almost the opposite of it. Role and game playing fused; his experience became that of a pious gambler whose risk taking, teleologically motivated, is a form of prayer and an act of faith.

The American Scholar

If you enjoyed this article on Roosevelt as a biographer's problem . . .

perhaps you should be subscribing to *The American Scholar*, from which it was excerpted. Consider what else appeared in the same issue (Winter 1983–84):

- “The Discreet Pleasures of the Bourgeoisie,” by Peter Gay.
- “The Art of the Footnote,” by G. W. Bowersock.
- “The Ant and the Twig, or the Dark Side of God,” by J. C. Furnas.
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ROBERT P. SONKOWSKY

The Family in Classical Greece. W. K. Lacey. Cornell, 1984. \$10.95.

This paperback reprinting of the 1968 scholarly classic is timely now that so much popular attention is being given to the modern family. Although other studies have subsequently filled in some gaps in our understanding of such topics as the position of women in the city-state, Lacey provides a solid historical foundation. He treats the family—from Homeric times to democratic Athens—as a unit of the state; subtopics include adoption, adultery, blood feuds, children, marriage, old age, rape, wills, and Plato's ideal state. He also discusses city-states other than Athens, especially Sparta and Crete.

Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy. Arthur E. Gordon. California, 1983. \$42.50; paper, \$19.95.

Latin epigraphy is the study of the hundreds of thousands of Latin inscriptions that have been found and are still being found throughout the ancient Roman Empire on stone, metal, and other materials. The inscriptions are located in museums, private collections, and other places throughout the world. They are essential for understanding Roman history, including public, private, and religious life, and for understanding the history of handwriting, typography, coins, jewelry, pottery, language, and other related subjects. This clearly written book with 100 plates shows that this rich study need not be limited to experts.

The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism. Jeremy Cohen. Cornell, 1982. \$23.50; paper (1984), \$9.95.

Post-Holocaust scholarship on anti-Judaism among Christians has made it possible to discern more clearly a seedbed of Nazism and of other forms of anti-Judaism, group hatred, and violence. This important study focuses on 13th-century Christendom, especially on the work of the Dominicans and Franciscans, who helped to gradually shift the church's disposition toward Jews from the tolerant one of Augustine of Hippo to that of anti-Talmudic debate, with consequent persecution and ostracism of Jews throughout Europe. A well-written, balanced study revealing the whole intellectual and spiritual climate, including purely intra-Christian suppression of doctrinal diversity, in which medieval anti-Judaism advanced.

Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater. William C. Scott. New England, 1984. \$20.

A useful discussion of the relationship of metrical patterns to the overall meaning and form of the plays of Aeschylus in production. Because we lack the evidence, Scott cannot actually describe the music and dance in ancient productions of particular plays, but he draws reasonable inferences about them from Aeschylus's repeated use of the same meters with similar themes within a play. This works

best with the *Oresteia* because it is a complete trilogy, but Scott's discussions of the other plays are also helpful. All Greek is translated. Only such metrical technicalities as are necessary for interpreting general theatrical intent are treated, and the whole is clearly written for use by anyone interested in the theatricality of Aeschylus's plays.

Roman Foreign Policy in the East: 168 B.C. to A.D. 1. A. N. Sherwin-White. Oklahoma, 1984. \$27.50.

An important study of Roman policy and expansion in Asia Minor from around the time of the defeat of Perseus at Pydna to the activities of Gaius Caesar in carrying out the policies of his adoptive father Augustus in Armenia and Parthia. The wars, the fate of the warring peoples, and the military strategies and political power plays of the generals, such as Pompey and Mithridates, are carefully inspected and documented.

Greek and Roman Technology. K. D. White. Cornell, 1984. \$39.50.

Liberal education persons should be aware not only of the arts, humanities, and sciences but also of technology, including the history of road building, farming, milling, mining, and the like—as well as the methodology for study of such techniques. This volume puts Greek and Roman technology into historical, social, economic, and environmental contexts with photographs, drawings, maps—even tables of tools, materials, and inventions.

RUSSELL B. STEVENS

The Gene Doctors: Medical Genetics at the Frontier. Yvonne Baskin. William Morrow, 1984. \$13.95.

Genetic Engineering of Plants: Agricultural Research Opportunities and Policy Concerns. National Academy of Sciences, 1984. \$9.50.

So much nonsense has appeared in the public press concerning what has come to be called genetic engineering that the informed citizen dearly needs some thoughtful material on the subject. These two volumes are very different, but both deal with the real world in a sober and useful way. Baskin's lucid study takes up the issue of genetic manipulation in relation to a number of human maladies that stem from inherited abnormalities. Baskin also explains clearly many basic phenomena as exploited in the modern biological laboratory.

The second title, a summary of a conference of geneticists and agricultural scientists, reminds us that plants also are subject to manipulation by molecular biologists. Indeed, it may well prove more immediately useful to push in the direction of crop improvement than livestock alteration or human disease therapy. Fortunately, no one can know for certain, so research in many directions is the better pathway.

Bioshelters, Ocean Arks, City Farming: Ecology as the Basis of Design. Nancy Jack Todd and John Todd. Sierra Club, 1984. \$25; paper, \$10.95.

Only time will tell, of course, but I strongly suspect that most if not all this material will in the long run turn out to be foolishness. Certainly this book is largely speculative in its views as to what the human race must and will do in the future with respect to shelter, food, and lifestyle. As do most such exhortations, this one is unvaryingly critical of the way of life in industrialized societies; perforce it takes on an annoyingly self-satisfied tone. All that said, the book deserves to be read, if only to remind ourselves that there are hazards in the way we have come to do things and that there are enthusiasts willing to spend their time and energy in developing alternative actions. In an aside, one may wonder why, as early as page 2, the authors refer to "scientists, ecologists and environmentalists"; do they thus imply that ecologists are not scientists?

The Blue Planet: A Celebration of the Earth. Louise B. Young. Little, Brown & Co., 1983. \$18.95.

Probably the most telling single effect of America's much heralded space program was that, for the first time, millions could see planet Earth as a whole—unique, isolated in space, and fragile. Indeed it is difficult to imagine how the environmental movement could have gathered the momentum it has without this initial, awe-inspiring perception. But inspiration is hardly enough; there must then be information. To this end, Young has provided an overview of the earth sciences that can be comfortably and profitably read by anyone who has felt the urge to know more about how the Earth came to be, what it is like right now, and what lies in store.

The Apocalypics: Cancer and the Big Lie. Edith Efron. Simon and Schuster, 1984. \$19.95.

To some, the case against the "environmental cancer" alarmists will seem overstated in this detailed analysis of the scientific and political scene of the past few decades. But if one observed much of that episode from a rather close vantage point as it was unfolding, as this reviewer did, Efron's rebuttal comes none too soon. To speak bluntly, if only half of what she says is true—and the detailed documentation argues that much more than that is accurate—her presentation is essential to setting aright the misperceptions foisted on the general public by what she calls "regulatory science." For example, Efron asserts that the term *environmentalism* "may, in fact, be the most meaningless term in common use in America today." She chooses, persuasively, to speak of apocalypics and an apocalyptic movement.

Diving and Marine Biology: The Ecology of the Sublittoral. George F. Warner. Cambridge, 1983. \$39.50.

For readers who are not easily deterred by a rather technical examination of marine ecology or who wish to enhance their appreciation of the special vistas open to the scuba diver, this book will prove rewarding. As Warner points out, a highly complex community of organisms is typical of the waters between low tide and some 50 to 60 meters below that level—a community uniquely available to the diver with modern equipment. This book provides a detailed exposition of what goes on in that particular zone of the marine environment.

FREDERICK J. CROSSON

The Imperative of Responsibility. Hans Jonas. Chicago, 1984. \$23.

A thoughtful—indeed, wise—book about the ways in which technology forces a recasting of the contour of ethical reflection. Moving at a deeper and more comprehensive level than most authors who write on this topic (e.g., Schell, Ophuls, Dubos), Jonas makes clear both the change in the nature of human action and the new frame in which it must be assayed.

Ethics Without Philosophy. James C. Edwards. South Florida, 1982. \$20.

Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language. Saul A. Kripke. Harvard, 1982. \$12.50.

Two essays on what Wittgenstein was trying to do in philosophy, both of them accessible and recommended to the general reader. Edwards describes a Wittgenstein whose basic vision was moral, whose method was to lead us to see differently, whose goal was to exorcise the illusions of philosophy. Kripke's topic is more limited—the skeptical problem about other minds—but his discussion involves a general interpretation about locating the justification for assertions in attitudes and behavior rather than in observed evidence.

The Origins of Anti-Semitism. John Gager. Oxford, 1983. \$24.95.

Informative in its historical sources and bold in its scriptural exegesis, this study examines the attitudes toward Israel and the Jews in Hellenistic and Roman cultures and compares these attitudes with that which developed within early Christianity. In contrast to the received interpretation, Gager argues that for Saint Paul, the Torah remains the path of righteousness for Jews and that what Paul contends for is not the impotence of the Law but only its inapplicability to Gentile Christians.

The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Buber. Michael Theunissen. Trans. by C. Macann. M.I.T., 1984. \$40.

The dimension of *Mitsein* and of intersubjectivity has been a central concern for philosophies influenced by phenomenology's starting point in the consciousness of the ego. This critical examination of the foundation and character of "being-with," of how the Other is manifested in the field of awareness, place Buber's ontology in juxtaposition with—and gives it priority over—the others.

Leibniz and Locke. Nicholas Jolley. Oxford, 1984. \$34.95.

Leibniz's *New Essays* were intended as a comprehensive critique of Locke's philosophy, but they have often been regarded as a disparate series of attacks on various aspects of his thought. Jolley shows persuasively that the *Essays* are united by their implicit focus on the latent materialism of Locke's conception of the soul. The gamut of disputed points provides an excellent overview of the lively debate on issues still very much with us: the nature of scientific concepts (Newton's gravity), personal identity, essences and natural kinds, innate ideas. Well informed and informative.

The Christians as the Romans Saw Them. Robert Wilken. Yale, 1984. \$17.95.

Five critics provide depictions of the early moments of an "alien" religion, like snapshots

from our youth: Pliny, Galen, Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian. Some are uncomprehending as well as unsympathetic, but some are well versed in Christian ideas and incisively critical. Wilken's genial idea is not only to see how outsiders perceived Christianity, but also to assess the extent to which their attacks stimulated the form of developing doctrine. Very readable.

An Essay on Free Will. Peter Van Inwagen. Oxford, 1983. \$29.95.

The argument is that free will and determinism are incompatible (some readers may be surprised that the contrary argument—compatibilism—is the more common position today). The method is "analytic" at its best: close scrutiny of the premises and assumptions both pro and con, counterexamples, caution about what has been shown at every point. Although not technical in language, this book is not intended for the general reader.

ANDREW GYORGY

Fearful Warriors: A Psychological Profile of U.S.-Soviet Relations. Ralph K. White. Free Press, 1984. \$20.

This lively, controversial book presents a first-rate study of war and peace—in their dimensions for the 1980s. It is an eminently useful follow-up of White's earlier detailed study on *Nobody Wanted War: Misperceptions in Vietnam and Other Wars*. It clearly illuminates the psychological intricacies of the problems of nuclear and nonnuclear warfare, the twin scourges of our times and of current world politics. The book is so well written that it is warmly recommended both to interested specialists and to the general reading public.

Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography. Saul K. Padover. New American Library, 1978 (reprinted).

This well-known, valuable biography of the "Founding Father" of modern communism has been reissued in this attractive paperback, to the advantage of students and scholars alike. Using sources that were never before available, Padover portrays Marx in all his inner contradictions and complexities. The chapters dealing with Marx's early years ("The Family" and "Youth") as well as the "Final Years" are particularly interesting and useful. The scholarly appendixes also help clarify some of the murky aspects of Marx's complicated life. An excellent introductory study for general readers as well.

Society in Change: Studies in Honor of Béla K. Király. Steven B. and Agnes H. Vardy. Columbia, 1983. \$27.50.

This exceptionally well edited volume makes a substantial, serious contribution to our specialized knowledge of East-Central European and Balkan studies. The two introductory chapters dealing with Béla Király ("The Man and the Historian") and with Béla Király's detailed bibliography are particularly valuable to historians dealing with the hard-to-locate details of 20th-century East European history. The discussion of military theories and political alliances will supply first-rate background material to researchers in this field.

The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics. Ivo Barac. Cornell, 1984. \$35.

This monumental volume is probably the first Western study to provide an across-the-

board view of the turbulent racial "majorities" and minorities of the Balkans, always carefully centered on modern Yugoslavia. The book not only clearly outlines the diverse nationality groups, but also—properly—injects the ideological coefficient in terms of Communist groups and anti-Communist resistance. Certainly the most scholarly treatment of this complex subject since Hugh Seton-Watson's early works dealing with the historical background of southeastern Europe, this book is recommended primarily for experts.

Soviet Allies: The Warsaw Pact and the Issue of Reliability. Edited by Daniel N. Nelson. Westview, 1984. \$22.50.

Nelson has done a careful, scholarly job of editing a volume composed of many divergent and disparate chapters. The book has two types of equally useful treatments of the illusive subject: (1) a few functional chapters on across-the-board topics (such as Robin A. Remington's excellent contribution on the third decade of the Warsaw Pact with its systemic transformations), and (2) important chapters on individual Pact members. Despite the mediocre, difficult-to-follow printing job, this volume will be useful to specialists and students of Eastern Europe.

The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente. Harry Gelman. Cornell, 1984. \$8.50.

This book is an excellent analysis of recent Soviet goals and attitudes as mirrored in the Politburo under Brezhnev. Gelman stresses the inner struggles and domestic problems of the Soviet hierarchy, and ably summarizes the Soviet view of the elusive détente phenomenon. Other forces are also carefully discussed—the "Chinese factor," SALT, technology transfers, and the like. Lucid, persuasive, and well documented, this book should be particularly useful to students of Soviet politics.

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

Boris Pasternak: His Life and Art. Guy de Mallac. Oklahoma, 1981. \$24.95.

Mallac describes fully, but never dully, Pasternak's background (both parents were artists), his long career as poet and translator (from three European languages), his philosophic ideas, his success with *Doctor Zhivago*, and his life as a target of Soviet oppression and as a literary and folk hero.

Deconstruction: Theory and Practice. Christopher Norris. Methuen, 1982. \$16.95; paper, \$8.95.

The Crisis in Criticism: Theory, Literature, and Reform in English Studies. William E. Cain. Johns Hopkins, 1984. \$24.50.

Like various books about theory, Norris's work often seems meant more for the experienced insider than for the seeking outsider. It is compact, it mainly uses the idiom of the theorists, and it defines key terms only at times. But the general reader should find it of some help.

Cain explicates several recent theorists as he evaluates major 20th-century critics with commendable liveliness and lucidity. As a pedagogical reformer Cain is less impressive. He calls for more interdisciplinary study, a latitudinarian literary sense, and the use of literature to better the world.

(continued on back cover)

READING (continued from page 7)

Benjamin Disraeli: Letters 1835-1837. Edited by J. A. W. Gunn, John Matthews, Donald M. Schurman, and M. G. Wiebe. Toronto, 1982. \$50.

Selected Letters of E. M. Forster. Vol. 1, 1879-1920. Edited by Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank. Harvard-Belknap, 1983. \$20.

These volumes, each a part of an edition in progress, reveal the contrasting personalities of a very public figure and a very private man. In 334 letters, superbly edited, Disraeli comments on political defeats, election to Parliament, and the publication of two novels and several political works. He juggles creditors, pleases friends and powers, analyzes characters and situations, and fires a bold theatrical rhetoric at opponents.

Forster's 207 letters, well annotated, take him to age 41, by which time he had written five of his six novels. We see less the writer than the devoted son, the Cambridge student, the amiable tutor in a German family, the generous observer of Indian and Egyptian life, the independent literary critic, and the growing skeptic of World War I.

A Guide to Twentieth-Century Literature in English. Edited by Harry Blamirez. Methuen, 1983. \$32; paper, \$15.95.

The Oxford-Duden Pictorial English Dictionary. Edited by J. A. Pheby. Oxford, 1984. Paper, \$12.95.

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama. 5 vols., 2nd rev. ed. Edited by Stanley Hochman. McGraw-Hill, 1984. \$295.

These three reference works are all well done. Blamirez includes almost 600 writers from all English-speaking countries except the United States. Entries ranging from 200 to 4,000 words aim less at supplying the usual chronological and bibliographical records than at conveying an impression of the author's subjects, manner, and major works.

Covering many fields (arts, entertainment, sports, sciences, trades, etc.), the Oxford-Duden dictionary relies on thousands of illustrations, each with numbered parts identified in neighboring ordered columns.

The drama encyclopedia, well illustrated, has unusually full discussions of, lists of plays by, and bibliographies for more than 900 playwrights of Occident and Orient. The rest of the

SOUTHWESTERN AT MEMPHIS CHANGES ITS NAME TO RHODES

Southwestern at Memphis, a 135-year-old private college of liberal arts and sciences, became Rhodes College in July, in honor of Peyton Nalle Rhodes, who joined the college as an associate professor of physics in 1926 and served as its president from 1949 until 1965. When he retired, Rhodes left a legacy of 10 new buildings, a freshly chartered chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and a greatly expanded curriculum, among other achievements. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Virginia in 1920.

GTE FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES LECTURESHIPS AVAILABLE

Grants of up to \$4,000 may be made to accredited colleges and universities to bring in outside lecturers to discuss the broad topic of "Science, Technology, and Human Values," Richard Schlatter, director of the GTE Foundation Lecture-ship Program, has announced. This program is the successor to the S&H Foundation program which, for a number of years, offered grants of up to \$2,500 for a similar purpose. Application forms may be obtained from Room 105, 185 College Ave., Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

1,300 entries deal with national theaters, genres, and so on. Vol. 5 includes a glossary of terms, a list of all plays mentioned, and an index.

The Origins of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots. Joseph T. Shipley. Johns Hopkins, 1984. \$39.95.

An amiable gathering of word families, quotations, and jests for reference or browsing by lay readers. The list of roots, each with its verbal descendants discussed for a dozen or several hundred lines, fills about 450 pages. These entries cite some 19,000 words, which are separately indexed.

KEY REPORTER ANNIVERSARY (continued from page 1)

York, he and two other governors were seated in a friendly chat, and one of them made mention of the fact that each of the three governors was wearing a Phi Beta Kappa key. The President said that he immediately remarked that his key was honorary and not awarded for academic attainments. Thereupon, each of the other governors confessed that his key was also honorary, and there was a laugh all around."

The Key Reporter added, "In the first issue of *The Key Reporter* it was stated that President Roosevelt is a member of ΦBK (alumnus member, Harvard, 1929; honorary member, Hobart, 1929) and, as Mr. McSwain remarks, the President does not wish 'to sail under any false colors.' This raises the question why honorary membership should be regarded as less an honor than membership attained as a student."

FIRST EDITOR OF AMERICAN SCHOLAR DIES

William Allison Shimer, who was instrumental in initiating *The American Scholar* and served as its first editor, died in Honolulu last December. As executive officer of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa from 1931 to 1943, he also helped develop the Committee on Qualifications to assess applications for new chapters. In addition, *The Key Reporter* and the Sibley Fellowship were established during his 12 years as executive secretary.

The Language of 1984: Orwell's English and Ours. W. F. Bolton. Tennessee, 1984. \$19.95.

A detailed but spirited survey of Orwell's opinions, mostly deemed erroneous, provides various entries into a linguist's discussion, for a general audience, of many aspects of language, including the functions of word processors. A final attack on "Simon purists" reveals a populist tinge and strong emotions.



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