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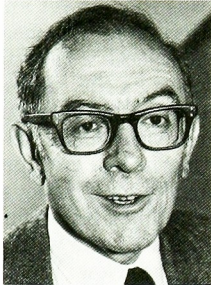
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Loosening the First American Canon

By Robert E. Streeter

IN MORE SERENE TIMES, when readers noted a reference to the canon, they were likely to think of an Anglican functionary strolling through the cathedral close of Barchester, or perhaps of Heloise's uncle, Canon Fulbert, whom Mark Twain persisted in confusing with a howitzer. Nowadays, of course, with lively controversy over the kinds of books that qualify as required reading, and even over the propriety of asserting a preference, the status of the literary canon has become a highly charged issue. The committee room where reading lists are shaped used to be a fine and private place, but now it is swept by winds of contention from government officials and critical quarterlies alike.



Robert E. Streeter

The literary canon, of course, derives both its name and much of its authority from the biblical canon. This connection was explicitly present in a funeral sermon preached in 1892 by John Howard Harris, the president of Bucknell University, for my great-granduncle, who had gone to California as a Forty-Niner. "When he went to California he carried a great library of literature, for study during his sojourn there," President Harris recalled. "For he took with him the Bible, Shakespeare, and Homer."

As the quality of this young miner's reading list suggests, the canon undertakes to confine itself to the preeminent and the essential. It assumes that there are real differences of value among works of art and thought, and that, in view of the finite human life span, these differences establish a solid practical case for the existence of the canon. As Thoreau put it, read the best books first or you may not have a chance to read them at all.

All canons, however, run the risk of succumbing to time, too, and becoming eroded, or ossified, or at least somewhat puzzling. Thus, on the south wall of the Art Institute of Chicago are carved the names of great figures constituting an artistic canon: Rembrandt, Murillo,

Gainsborough, Turner, Kanaoka. Even a well-informed art lover inspecting the list while waiting for the doors of the museum to open may wonder about the last name on the roster. It takes a fair amount of encyclopedia thumbing to discover that Kanaoka was a ninth-century Japanese court painter. He was vastly celebrated in his time, but none of his works appear to have survived. High reputation in the absence of evidence may be an attractive way to achieve canonization.

A more striking example of canonical shift can be seen in a series of bas-relief images surmounting the doorway of the Oriental Institute in Chicago. These images figure forth the transit of civilization from East to West: the emblematic artifacts are the Pyramids and the Sphinx, the Parthenon, a Gothic cathedral, and the Board of Trade building in Chicago, the last-named doubtless owing its pride of place to the fact that it was a recently erected center of Western commercial civilization.

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ΦBK Associations' Activities Reported in 1988-89 Newsletter

Since 1877, alumni members of Phi Beta Kappa have formed associations in communities throughout the United States and from time to time in foreign countries. These groups provide intellectual and social opportunities for their members and communities, and bring to the attention of their communities the goals and ideals of Phi Beta Kappa.

Each autumn, the Phi Beta Kappa Society publishes a newsletter about the activities during the previous academic year as reported to Washington, D.C., by the ΦBK associations. This year more than three-quarters of the existing, active associations filed reports. The names and addresses for the secretaries of these associations are printed on page 7. If you wish to receive a copy of the newsletter of the ΦBK associations, or if there is no association near you and you are interested in organizing members in your area, write to the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q St., N.W., Washington, DC 20009.

Foard Named to Succeed Greene as ΦBK Secretary

Douglas W. Foard, of Arlington, Va., has been selected to succeed Kenneth M. Greene as secretary of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, Otis A. Singletary, the Society's president, announced in October. The new secretary was employed in the Division of State Programs at the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C., until he assumed his post at Phi Beta Kappa on November 1. Kenneth Greene, who served more than 14 years as secretary, announced his retirement as of October 1, but he has agreed to help with the transition through the end of the year.



Douglas W. Foard

Foard, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Randolph-Macon College in 1961, holds advanced degrees in history from the University of Virginia (M.A., 1965) and Washington University, St. Louis (Ph.D., 1971). Before joining the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1985, he held a variety of teaching and administrative positions at Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va. For the past two years he has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in modern European history as an adjunct instructor at George Mason University, Fairfax, Va. His most recent publication is *The Revolt of the Aesthetes: Ernesto Giménez Caballero and the Origins of Spanish Fascism*, scheduled for publication in 1989 by Peter Lang, Inc.

Ramsey Wins Nobel Physics Prize

Norman F. Ramsey, Higgins Professor of Physics at Harvard University and the immediate past president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, has been awarded the 1989 Nobel Prize in physics for his work leading to the invention of the highly accurate atomic clock. He will share the prize with two other physicists who also contributed to new precision in timekeeping: Hans G. Dehmelt of the University of Washington in Seattle, and Wolfgang Paul of the University of Bonn.



The American Canon

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Despite their famous restlessness and mobility, Americans did manage to create one notably durable literary canon, largely supplied by New England worthies who gloried in double-barreled Christian names—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, John Lothrop Motley, and the like. With literary people, sensitive to signs of identity, this attention to nomenclature is no trivial matter. In the literary textbooks still in use during my schooldays, these sonorous 19th-century names, coupled with equally formidable portraits, created a panoply of respectability, stability, and cultural continuity. Worth remarking is the fact that writers who were admitted belatedly, or grudgingly, to the American pantheon tended to get along with less impressive names—Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson.

For those securely on the inside, for those Americans more or less at home with their situation in this land, this collection of familiar writers constituted a fairly homogeneous tradition. It became fashionable to talk of the American mind, a usable past, even the American way of life, and, in the immediate future, the American century. The long and painful quest for a distinctive national identity might indeed be drawing to a close.

To the outsider, however, to the person who for whatever reason—ethnic origin, sex, class, religion—stands apart from the national consensus, the canon of American writings looks narrow, parochial, exclusive. More than that, the sheer force and omnipresence of this culture threaten the vitality and even the existence of groups that are not white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. For these groups Plymouth Rock is not a base on which to build a culture, but a looming, intimidating slab rather like the portentous forehead that the white whale displays to his foes.

In this fresh perspective, at a time of unprecedented attention to writers and writings previously neglected, it is tempting to describe the standard version of the American past as a kind of instrumental myth, designed for the aggrandizement of a dominant group. In the fiction written out of the life of minorities in this country, examples abound of resentment engendered by the cultural pretensions of old-line Americans. If I may allow one example to stand for a multitude, in J. F. Powers's fine novel *Morte D'Urban*, the central figure, Father Urban, who grew up in a southern Illinois town where the "best people" were Protestants, remembered that a Catholic

boy "felt it was their country, handed down to them by the Pilgrims, George Washington, and others, and that they were taking a risk in letting you live in it."

The View from Plymouth Rock

What are the sources of the suspicion that white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, a dominant majority during most of our history, have been inclined to pass off their own books and writers as constituting the canonic American literature? Not for a moment would I suggest that this suspicion arises only from the fervid imagination of newly emerging groups—blacks, Chicanos, Roman Catholic ethnics—seeking their place in the sun. After all, most groups of people feeling their oats as they move into positions of influence are likely to confuse their special angle of vision with the perspective from which all of us see things.

During the formative years of American culture, this easy glide from the particular to the universal was fatally attractive to writers and thinkers in New England. For many of them, the history of New England was the fountainhead of authentically American ideas. Social and

Every version of culture earns its own counterculture, so it should not startle anyone that the energy with which New Englanders placed themselves at the center of the American universe produced reactions of skepticism and derision in other quarters of the nation.

political life in New England offered criteria of civic virtue and individual responsibility. In literature and education New England volunteered to improve the taste and sharpen the intelligence of the nation. Insofar as Plymouth Rock became a symbol for what was most durable and most significant in our national life, New Englanders themselves, old hands at working with symbols, certainly helped the process along.

From the outset, the settlers of New England thought of their local enterprise as having universal consequences. John Winthrop spoke of Boston as a "city upon a hill," an eminent beacon-light of religious truth, the correct ecclesiastical polity, and social order. When our first great literary historian, Moses Coit Tyler, undertook, in the 1870s, to assess the achievement of his Puritan ancestors, he found it natural to begin by dividing all 17th-century Englishmen into two classes of people—the disciples of things as they are and the disciples of things as they ought to be. From this second group,

Tyler asserted, were drawn most of the settlers of New England, and it was they—with their intelligence, energy, and willingness to innovate—who set their stamp on the American national character.

In his account Tyler was following a seductive New England version of history that had achieved quite complete form by the 19th century. This history narrated a succession of ever more stringent winnowings of the wheat from the chaff, culminating in the pure grain of 19th-century New England.

History began, for these interpreters, with a view of late-medieval Roman Catholic Europe—corrupt, superstitious, tyrannical. The first winnowing occurred with the secession of the Protestant reformers from the decaying body of Catholicism. Next came the triumph of Protestantism in England, quickly followed by the withdrawal of the Puritan fathers from the Church of England and from their native land. Political separation from England in the 18th century was seen as yet another step in purification from European corruption. In this perspective the emergence of Unitarianism as the rational religion of the 19th century represented a sloughing-off of irrelevant doctrines—the Trinity, natural depravity, and predestination. And finally, for Unitarians of Transcendental leanings, Emersonianism could stand for the ultimate winnowing.

The New Englanders' winsome certainty that theirs was the quintessential American experience crops up frequently in their writings. Thus, James Russell Lowell assessed the meaning of Plymouth Rock in the first paragraph of his 1865 essay "New England Two Centuries Ago":

The history of New England is written imperishably on the face of a continent, and in characters as beneficent as they are enduring. . . . Next to the fugitives whom Moses led out of Egypt, the little shiplod of outcasts who landed at Plymouth two centuries and a half ago are destined to influence the history of the world.

Even when they wrote of other peoples and other times, as David Levin has reminded us, the New Englanders customarily inspected these alien beings under the cold dry light of Unitarian history. When W. H. Prescott narrated the romantic history of the conquest of Mexico, he faced the necessity of accommodating this striking event to the course of history as understood in Boston. After all, Cortez the conquistador was a Spaniard and a Roman Catholic. How could his achievement in subduing the Aztecs be anything but retrograde, counter to the progressive version of history favored in New England?

Prescott solved the problem by converting his Cortez into a kind of proto-Unitar-

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ian and Yankee—rational, long-headed, sometimes at odds with the more ardent Roman Catholic priests in his entourage. Cortez was also presented as something of a self-made American type, not a Spanish *hidalgo*, but a man who made his own way from relatively humble origins.

The Puzzle of Washington

When J. L. Motley turned to writing his history of the rise of the Dutch Republic, his rhetorical task was easier. The long and bloody conflict between Catholic Spaniards and Dutch Protestants in the Low Countries was a familiar story. The central theme of opposition between centralizing tyranny and popular freedom was ready-made.

Philip II and the Duke of Alva had already been established in the Protestant imagination as figures representing religious superstition, unscrupulous intrigue, and conscienceless brutality. Against them, in Motley's history, stands the lonely, patient figure of William of Orange—matching their wiles with right-minded intrigues of his own, losing battles, retreating to fight again, and finally consolidating Dutch resistance to Spanish power.

Chief interest to us lies in the adroitness with which Motley associates the work of William of Orange with the achievement of George Washington. Like Washington, William never has enough men and arms really to do the job; he is a master of the makeshift and expedient, he bides his time, and he is a man of perfect integrity.

[George] Washington was always an awkward problem for New Englanders.

This equation of William of Orange and George Washington illustrates the New Englanders' facility in naturalizing within their own tradition those admirable figures who had chanced to be born south of Long Island Sound or west of the Hudson River. Washington was always an awkward problem for New Englanders. He was indisputably the greatest of Americans, but he was also a Virginian and a slaveholder, and he was not a church-going Congregationalist. How to account for him?

In the *Education*, Henry Adams tells how as a boy he was taken to Mount Vernon to visit the home and the tomb of the first president, and how the experience puzzled him. En route to Mount Vernon he saw bad roads, slaves, squalid houses—all of them signs, to a properly educated New England boy, of social and political immorality. How, then, could he explain the overpowering presence, in

the midst of these improbable conditions, of George Washington, the enduring symbol of political probity? Adams decided it was best to regard George Washington as one of a kind, a moral freak, proof that in a few rare instances it was possible to find salvation outside the church—in this case, the church of New England habits.

In North America, the third of the great New England historians, Francis Parkman, located the arena for still another demonstration of the same thematic conflict—Catholicism versus Protestantism, political centralization versus democratic freedom. This large design is woven into the texture of Parkman's multivolume account of the struggle between France and England for mastery of North America, from the first explorations to the climactic battle between Montcalm and Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, near Quebec, in 1759.

Throughout the century and a half of struggle that the history chronicles, the French are shown as being thwarted by excessive meddling from the court and the bureaucrats in Paris, by concentration of power with attendant in-fighting and corruption in New France itself, and by ironclad uniformity of thought imposed by the Church of Rome. On the other side, the characteristic political institution of British America is the New England town meeting, a school for individual enterprise and responsibility. Once again the New England and American virtues—free will, energy, and rationality—win out over routine, tradition, and sterile status.

America's Schoolmasters

These historians were "thinking New Englandly," then, even as they wrote about Mexico, or Holland, or French Canada. They thought of themselves as cultural schoolmasters disseminating a version of modern history that would make clear to Americans that they stood at the center of their times, and that they owed this strategic position to the inheritance of ideas and conduct from the Reformation through the Puritans.

The role of schoolmaster came easily to most New Englanders. As farmlands wore out in the East and the population moved westward, the New England schoolmaster followed along. The Congregational colleges as regional centers of light and learning were outposts of the New England Way. And always, of course, the transplanted New Englander was prone to view the local scene by the standards in force along the shores of the Charles or the Connecticut.

When the University of Chicago was established in 1892, the English department was naturally recruited from the New England universities. In the books

and papers of men like William Vaughn Moody, Robert Herrick, and Robert Morss Lovett, one can see the displaced literary man trying to make sense of the raw indecorum and vitality of Chicago.

One of the most amusing examples of the stretch of the New England umbilical cord appears in a letter that a Harvard professor wrote in the 1890s to a former student who had accepted a teaching position at the University of Nebraska. Apparently the young man had written back to Cambridge complaining of the cultural deprivation of living in Lincoln. Think of yourself as Tacitus among the barbarian Germans, his mentor responded consolingly: you have an unparalleled opportunity to observe the ways of a primitive people on the verge of civilization.

Every version of culture earns its own counterculture, so it should not startle anyone that the energy with which New Englanders placed themselves at the center of the American universe produced reactions of skepticism and derision in other quarters of the nation. In all fairness, we should grant that some of the best jokes about Bostonian arrogance and self-absorption came from Bostonians themselves. We all know, for example, about the Boston woman who, asked about her itinerary to the West Coast, replied, "I went by way of Dedham." William Tudor, the first editor of the *North American Review*, told in 1820 of another Boston woman who was much impressed with the eloquence in prayer of her pastor: "It was the best prayer," she pronounced, "ever addressed to a Boston audience."

Knickerbocker History

Writers outside the New England states were quick to seize on the Yankee character as an amalgam of religious hypocrisy, moral shiftiness, and vaulting ambition. The New England schoolmaster, with his drive to make the most of his chances, was a particular target. Ichabod Crane, in Washington Irving's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, is a typical Knickerbocker version of the Yankee—greedy, pushing, credulous, out to make a fortune, in this case, the wealth to be won by marrying the Dutch farmer's daughter. In *Rip Van Winkle*, after his long sleep Rip finds the social climate sadly changed by the intrusion of New Englanders into his Catskill village. Yankees are glib, contentious, full of newfangled notions: the somnolence of the old Dutch village has been replaced by a democratic pandemonium.

The New Englanders sketched by another New York writer, James Fenimore Cooper, are, if anything, even less appealing. In *The Pioneers*, the first of the

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Leatherstocking tales to be written, the Yankees who drift into Templeton (based on Cooperstown, New York, the village founded by Fenimore Cooper's father) are uniformly vulgar, grasping, hypocritical, and outrageously confident of their own powers. Restless and argumentative, they are indeed disciples of things as they ought to be; they move onto a property, fix it up a bit, sell it for "the improvements," and move on. They look down on the good Episcopal pastor because he reads his prayers and his sermons. They love to litigate, to calumniate their neighbors, to bad-mouth their betters. Cooper's New Englander is democratic man run amok.

No wonder these Yankee dogmatists want to move on from Templeton, because Cooper is re-creating his New York village out of a vision of American life somewhat more generous and less doctrinaire than the one reviewed earlier. Many strands are brought together to produce the possibility of community in Templeton. The squire of the town, Judge Temple, is a lapsed Quaker from Philadelphia. His cousin and majordomo is an Episcopalian. A frequent houseguest is a German ex-soldier from the Mohawk Valley. The town storekeeper is a French emigré. On the outskirts of the town live two aged survivors from wilderness times, Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook. The cast is rounded out by a cultivated young Englishman who marries the judge's daughter. All these, plus the pesky Yankees.

Because the action of *The Pioneers* revolves around the question of establishing social order in the early days of settlement, a mere recital of the range of characters may suggest the amplitude with which Cooper conceives his community. Its problems have to be solved by judgment and prudence, not by reference to a single ideological standard.

The Middle States Mix

It is not entirely regional chauvinism, I hope, to associate this view of the emerging American society with the Middle Atlantic states and the West. Certainly, when perceptive early observers discerned the appearance of a new kind of community in America—one characterized by variety of religious beliefs and ethnic origins, tolerance of others, and concentration on the practical problems of living together—they pointed to the Middle Colonies, and especially Pennsylvania, as an example. It was in the middling portion of the Middle Colonies, halfway between the seacoast and the frontier, that the 18th-century French visitor, Crèvecoeur, found that a new breed of man was appearing. In the same vein, when Thomas Jefferson in the *Notes on Virginia* argued against religious es-

tablishments, he looked northward to Pennsylvania and New York for supporting evidence.

Our understanding of this second constellation of attitudes toward the American experience may be sharpened by examining how two celebrated natives of New England saw these matters. No one was ever more deeply dyed in the New England tradition than Henry Adams. He was the great-grandson and the grandson of the first two New England presidents. Nevertheless, emerging from what Adams called a "nest of associations so colonial—so troglodytic," when he tried to make sense of the American experience, his point of view became un-failingly broad, comprehensive, national.

He begins his history of the early national period by noting that in 1800, when Jefferson was elected, the United States was three separate sections—New England, the Middle States, and the South—each with distinctive intellectual habits. His great story is how, under the pressures of economic problems to be solved, the second war with England to be fought, and the machinations of European great-power politics to be fended off, a single nation is forged, almost against the intentions of some of the American leaders.

Once again the Middle States play a significant role. The Pennsylvania Democrats, as Adams describes them, are not particularly bright, or well educated, or elegant. They lack the intellect of the New Englanders and the rhetorical powers of the Southerners. But they have, for Adams, one great virtue: by a kind of blind instinct they always vote and act in the national interest. They build the new nation, and they point the way to the future.

By the time he wrote the history, Adams had moved from Boston and Beverly Farms to Washington. A second transplanted New Englander of even greater representative power was, of course, Benjamin Franklin, who at age 17 left Boston and its nest of troglodytic associations for the bustling Middle Colonies metropolis, Philadelphia. Franklin—multifarious in his activities, an apostle of good works, and an advocate of what Tocqueville later called "self-interest rightly understood"—became both architect and spokesman of Middle Colonies attitudes. He and Philadelphia were made for each other.

When one reads the first section of Franklin's *Autobiography*, written in 1771 when he was 65, one senses that even Franklin, down-to-earth and not given to flights of fancy, feels some wonder as he recalls this early migration, this hejira, from Boston to Philadelphia. He goes into unusual detail as he remembers the hardships and uncertainties of crossing first the Hudson, then the Delaware, en route to Philadelphia.

After he crosses the Delaware, he lands in Philadelphia early in the morning, ready to buy a biscuit and start a new day and a new world. Even the skeptical Franklin might smile indulgently if we enwrap this youthful Puritan traveler, however briefly, in a garment of myth, and see his passage of the Delaware as a kind of reverse crossing of the Jordan, off to Philadelphia in the morning, entering the Promised Land of a larger America.

Conclusion

This account of the fortunes of the New England worthies whose writings constituted the first American canon may reassure us that controversy and changing taste about the books we read and admire are both inevitable and salutary. Two American writers who remain firmly canonical, Melville and Emerson, endorse this view of the matter. In the novel *Redburn*, Melville tells a story about a young man who sailed before the mast to Liverpool—the same journey his father had taken a generation before him. On the voyage eastward, the young sailor's most cherished possession was a tattered guidebook that had belonged to his father. Arriving in Liverpool, the sailor set out to see the sights—with the aid of the guidebook. To his shock and disappointment he discovered that the guidebook was useless; the famous hotels, public buildings, and notable monuments were no longer where they had been thirty years before. And so the young sailor mused, "Guide-books . . . are the least reliable books in all literature; and nearly all literature, in one sense, is made up of guide-books."

In the most famous of Phi Beta Kappa addresses, in 1837, Emerson was worried about the tendency of his contemporaries to lean too heavily on books and authors certified as authoritative. "Meek young men grow up in libraries," he said, "believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books." Thus we are in good company when, recognizing that we turn to books for the satisfaction of a variety of human needs—for pleasure and instruction, for consolation and inspiration—we both cherish the canon and undertake to change it.

This article is based on a Visiting Scholar lecture given during 1988–89 at Ripon College, University of Wyoming, Denison University, and Birmingham-Southern College. Before retiring at the end of 1986 from the University of Chicago faculty, the author taught, for four decades, the full range from freshman rhetoric to graduate seminars in American literature.

Recommended Reading

Book Committee

Humanities Frederick J. Crosson, Robert B. Heilman, Robert P. Sonkowsky, Lawrence Willson *Social sciences* Earl W. Count, Richard N. Current, Leonard W. Doob, Madeline R. Robinton, Victoria Schuck, Anna J. Schwartz *Natural sciences* Ronald Geballe, Russell B. Stevens

Robert B. Heilman

The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English. Ed. by Ian Ousby. Cambridge Univ., 1988. \$39.50.

A useful 1,100-page reference book, with entries on authors, individual works, and numerous literary and related topics, including recent theory, and more than 300 illustrations. Especially strong on British writers, but good coverage on writing in English around the world.

The Literary Guide to the Bible. Ed. by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. Harvard, 1987. \$29.95.

The editors and 24 other contributors of different nationalities and ecclesiastical backgrounds do 37 essays on individual books, or groups of books, from the Old and New Testaments, and on seven general subjects (such as English translations of the Bible). These studies of the Bible as literature are excellent criticism, and the style envisages a general audience.

Contemporary Literary Theory. Ed. by G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow. Univ. of Massachusetts, 1989. \$40; paper, \$12.95.

Thirteen contributors write explanatory accounts of various critical modes (semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, etc.). They aim, with intermittent success, at "a large, general audience." Each chapter is followed by an extensive annotated bibliography.

Six Memos for the Next Millennium. Italo Calvino. Harvard, 1988. \$12.95.

Calvino's texts for the Norton lectures (he died before giving them) outline five basic principles for writers and critics. Calvino presents these with admirable lightness of touch and even playfulness, and with a wonderful richness of allusion to Western literature—classical, Renaissance, and modern up to the present, both European and American.

The Collected Stories of Wolfgang Hildesheimer. Tr. by Joachim Neugroschel. Ecco Press, 1987. \$22.95.

Eighteen short narratives, mostly 10 or fewer pages in length, employ a flat, low-caliber, realistic style to present jesting, satirical, parodic materials that often rely on extravagant, fantastic, or surrealistic events. One 40-page story plays masterfully with scores of clichés, proverbial tags, popular idioms, and the language of ads, literary chat, etc.

An Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony. D. J. Enright. Oxford, 1987. \$19.95.

A genial, often witty series of comments on ironic situations in life and literature. Enright's mode is deft obiter dicta on how irony acts; he refrains from massive theorizing. He entertains as he enlightens.

Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings. Bartlett Jere Whiting. Harvard, 1989. \$39.95.

The master proverbialist, drawing on more than 6,000 English and American books pub-

lished between 1900 and the early 1980s, cites 5,567 proverbial sayings that the writers use. Under *cat* there are 61 entries and 378 citations; under *dog*, 58 entries and 350 citations. All the four-letter words are here. For reference or browsing.

The Neo-Pagans: Rupert Brooke and the Ordeal of Youth. Paul Delany. Free Press: Macmillan, 1987. \$24.95.

A detailed report on the personalities of Rupert Brooke, troubled by many conflicts, and his principal associates, male and female, and on other groups with whom they interacted—the Cambridge Apostles, Fabians, and Bloomsburyites.

Prophets of Past Time: Seven British Autobiographers, 1880–1914. Carl Dawson. Johns Hopkins, 1988. \$29.50.

Dawson analyzes the autobiographic writings of W. H. White, Father George Tyrrell, Samuel Butler, Edmund Gosse, George Moore, Ford Madox Ford, and W. B. Yeats, with emphasis on the various forms and functions of memory, and numerous references to other autobiographers, critics, and theorists.

Russell B. Stevens

Life in the Cold: An Introduction to Winter Ecology. Peter J. Marchand. Univ. Press of New England, 1987. \$20; paper, \$9.95.

Walking the Wetlands: A Hiker's Guide to Common Plants and Animals of Marshes, Bogs, and Swamps. Janet Lyons and Sandra Jordan. Wiley, 1989. \$10.95.

These books are alike only in that each highlights a relatively poorly known sector of the natural world. Marchand takes as his emphasis what he refers to as the special problems of plants and animals wintering in the North. In so doing he deals first with the options for survival—migration, hibernation, resistance—then turns to the nature of the snowpack and the adaptations of plants and animals to winter conditions, and finally comments on "humans in cold places."

Lyons and Jordan have prepared just what the subtitle suggests, a handbook to be taken on hikes to the wetlands, a community that until rather recently has been regarded as of little worth or interest. One need not be a trained field biologist to use this illustrated guide effectively.

World Deforestation in the Twentieth Century. Ed. by John F. Richards and Richard P. Tucker. Duke Univ., 1988. \$47.50.

Biodiversity. Ed. by E. O. Wilson. Frances M. Peter, assoc. ed. National Academy Press, 1988. \$32.50; paper, \$19.50; export, \$23.50.

By any reasonable criteria, concern for preserving the genetic diversity of species extends to an enormous array of plants, animals, and microorganisms. This view is born out by the impressive collection of contributions to a 1986 national forum sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences and the Smithsonian Institution, now made generally available in the

volume edited by Wilson and Peter. At the same time, a strong case could be made that it was the magnitude of global deforestation, and particularly the destruction of the tropical forests, that brought the issue from a concern of scientific specialists into the public media and the political arena. Regrettably, it is not yet at all clear that governments and societies will take, in time, the critical steps needed to stem the loss of diversity and of the ecosystems on which that diversity so largely depends.

Serendipity: Accidental Discoveries in Science. Royston M. Roberts. John Wiley, 1989. \$12.95.

This refreshing account of scores of notable discoveries in the sciences wherein sheer chance played at least an important, if partial, role is well worth the time invested in reading it. One cannot help being impressed with the wide variety of circumstances in which an unexpected event, a botched experiment, faulty equipment, or a failed test led to a key insight into the nature of things. But there was invariably a second factor in the equation—a keen mind able to comprehend the significance of what had happened. As Pasteur has been endlessly quoted, "Chance favors only the prepared mind."

Ice Time: Climate, Science, and Life on Earth. Thomas Levenson. Harper & Row, 1989. \$18.95.

The relatively small size of Levenson's book greatly belies its scope and impact, dealing as it does not only with climate in the limited sense most have of it, but with Earth history, geologic time, current research outlook, and possible fates of mankind's civilization. It is an impressive piece of work and well within the ken of the nonspecialist. It is, after all, only within the lifetime of many of us that the study of climate, as distinct from weather, began to evolve into a mature science with some real credibility in looking to the future. It could hardly be otherwise for, as the author says about midway in the text, "climate science lives and dies by the computer; it cannot exist without it." After all, one can hardly experiment, in the traditional sense, with climate.

For the Love of Enzymes: The Odyssey of a Biochemist. Arthur Kornberg. Harvard, 1989. \$29.95.

To a considerable degree, this is less an autobiography than a summary of a lifetime of research on the mechanisms of cell chemistry and, in particular, the laboratory synthesis of DNA—the essence of genetic information that so many have heard about and so few even remotely comprehend. As such, the discussion of enzymes and their behavior will be not a little daunting to many readers. But should some of the detailed explanations be beyond the nonspecialist, the general drift of the story is both illuminating and impressive. And there are enough personal commentaries and anecdotes to remind us, once again, that it is people who do science, people little different from those engaged in other pursuits—except perhaps in their special motivations. If nothing else, Kornberg's account dramatizes the awesome complexity of the machinery and processes of the living cell.

What Mad Pursuit: A Personal View of Scientific Discovery. Francis Crick. Basic Books, 1988. \$16.95.

This is one of the more recent in a series, under the sponsorship of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, whose central objective is to show

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Recommended Reading

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what the scientific enterprise—as distinct from the knowledge that derives from it—is all about. That enterprise is, in the words of the foundation president, “quintessentially human.” It is quite remarkable how widely the significance of Watson and Crick’s 1953 elucidation of the molecular structure of DNA and its subsequent identification as the key to the genetic code have become recognized in the decades since that time, even among those whose detailed knowledge of biology is but scant. To relive that accomplishment from the viewpoint of one of its key participants is an enjoyable and enlightening experience.

Lawrence Willson

Dreiser-Mencken Letters: The Correspondence of Theodore Dreiser & H. L. Mencken, 1907–1945. Ed. by Thomas P. Riggio. 2 vols. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1986. \$72.95.
The Editor, the Bluenose and the Prostitute: H. L. Mencken’s History of the “Hat-rack” Censorship Case. Ed. by Carl Bode. Roberts Rinehart, 1988. \$19.50.

The first four years of this correspondence between two German-Americans at odds with the traditional pieties of the nation show only perfunctory exchanges between the editor (of *The Delineator*) and the ambitious journalist ghost-writing for a medical series with such titles as “If My Baby Had Diphtheria.” Then, in 1911, the journalist, who called himself “one of those who hold ‘Sister Carrie’ in actual reverence, as one of the best novels this fair land has ever produced,” and thus made himself a target of suspicion by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, rose to defend a comparable novel, *Jennie Gerhardt*, against charges of indecency and found a career as a major opponent of censorship and wowsership, whose ideal, he wrote, “is a nation devoted to masturbation and the praise of God.” Thereafter the correspondence becomes a history of the attempts to censor Dreiser’s writings for the next 15 years until Mencken, more squeamishly puritanical than he was willing to admit, boggled at “The Hand of the Potter” (“a cheap piece of pornography”), not to mention Dreiser’s burgeoning reputation as a stud, and went so far as to characterize *The Genius* as “a literary behemoth” and “in large part . . . mere drivel.”

For eight years there were no letters, and from 1934 on their exchanges were mostly “amiable persiflage.” Yet no correspondence in which Mencken is one of the correspondents can be more than momentarily without merit, and always there is the chance of a glittering phrase or a ponderable opinion, to which even the lumbering Dreiser rises. As Mencken noted after looking over the correspondence not long before Dreiser died, “It is full of interesting stuff, and will no doubt edify posterity.” Surprisingly (or maybe not) Dreiser emerges finally as the more tolerant of the two, and therefore the “better” man. Once Mencken arrived at a prejudice, he clung to it with the tenacity of a pit bull.

In April 1926 Mencken, pursuing at full tilt his campaign against censorship, submitted to being arrested on Boston Common for offending public morals by publishing in *The American Mercury* (the magazine of “the civilized minority”) the story, wholly innocuous by present standards (which would be unutterably offensive to Mencken, for whom freedom of

speech had definable limits), of a prostitute of considerable delicacy and discrimination in a small town, Farmington, in Missouri. The incident brought about a great public brouhaha: a viciously hostile press, especially in the South (where in the previous year Mencken had attended and had had much to say about the Scopes trial) and the Middle West, attacked him; editorial positions were assumed against him, letters to the newspapers vilified him, and sermons gave warning to the righteous in peril. The trial ended in a judgment for Mencken, and little was heard thereafter of the New England Watch and Ward Society, which had brought the suit.

The Letters of Margaret Fuller. Ed. by Robert N. Hudspeth. Vol. IV, 1845–47. Vol. V, 1848–49. Cornell, 1987, 1988. \$32.50.

Since we have known the sad end of her story for 139 years, it would seem impossible that Fuller’s letters could build on suspense; yet they do, no doubt because of the pathetic and ominous undercurrent (an apt word for it) of fear regarding the voyage from Italy to America and the very real possibility of drowning. Sure that Destiny will not allow her even three years of life (as it did not), she wrote, late in 1847, her phrasing also apt, “I hope she will not leave me long in the world, for I am tired of keeping myself up in the water without corks, and without strength to swim.” “You would say to those I leave behind that I am willing to die. I have suffered in life far more than I enjoyed, and I think quite out of proportion with the use my living here is of to others.” Yet, despite the lugubrious tone of her letters (in which she describes her unhappy love affairs—made unhappy by her inability to remove her heart from her sleeve, her lifelong suffering from headaches, and her constant worry about money), they were written in the years in which she achieved distinction as a journalist, an author, and finally as a superpatriot operating on behalf of the Risorgimento in the land that “fulfills my hopes; it could do no more, it has been the dream of my life.” Of course there were occasions of happiness, too, somewhat muted, to be sure, in her marriage to the young Marquis d’Ossoli (“my gentle friend, ignorant of great ideas, ignorant of books, enlightened as to his duties by pure sentiment and an unspoiled nature”) but triumphant in the birth of their son, Angelino (“In him I find satisfaction for the first time, to the deep wants of my heart”), whose life stands also in jeopardy, “for Heaven has thus far always reclaimed the children I most loved.” At the end of volume V, Fuller, facing the imminent voyage westward, contemplates her brief future with the prophecy: “It has long seemed that in the year 1850, I should stand on some important plateau in the ascent of life.” She was right.

Anna J. Schwartz

What Determines Savings? Laurence J. Kotlikoff. MIT Press, 1989. \$37.50.

Theories of savings behavior emphasize different motives: life-cycle saving for retirement, saving for bequests and other intergenerational transfers, precautionary saving because of life-span uncertainty, and precautionary saving because of uncertain future health expenditures. This collection of studies of saving illuminates the theories and shows that they have advanced beyond the empirical research.

Because saving is the economic link between past, present, and future, the studies deal with

many related issues affecting intertemporal economic choices. Analysis of savings involves consideration of demographics, the rationality of consumer decisions, the effect of liquidity constraints, the role of altruistic in contrast to nonaltruistic motives for intergenerational transfers, imperfections in annuity insurance arrangements, and fiscal policy effects. The book provides a splendid review of the issues.

The Insider-Outsider Theory of Employment and Unemployment. Assar Lindbeck and Dennis J. Snower. MIT Press, 1988. \$27.50.

The insider-outsider theory is a recent explanation of phenomena in market economies such as the existence and persistence of involuntary unemployment and the failure to underbid prevailing wages. According to the theory, insiders are incumbent employees in the primary sector, where turnover labor costs are high, wage contracts are generally covered by job security legislation, and incumbent employees have significant market power. Because they don’t care about outsiders, insiders have strong incentives to discriminate against them. Outsiders are either unemployed or employed in the secondary sector, where positions are not protected by turnover costs. Given insiders’ high labor turnover costs and strong bargaining power, the theory predicts that outsiders, among whom youth, females, and minorities are included, will have a comparatively high unemployment rate.

One twofold policy the authors discuss to reduce insiders’ power is to dismantle job security legislation and to limit union power. That policy, the authors recognize, would tend to raise outsiders’ employment chances at the cost of reducing insiders’ real wages and job security. An alternative policy is to enfranchise outsiders through profit-sharing schemes that reduce the marginal cost of hiring new entrants; through apprenticeship systems, vocational training programs, and job-sharing programs; and through reducing barriers to entry of new firms. While acknowledging the need for further work on the theory, the authors also suggest measures such as expansionary demand management policies and wage controls to stimulate employment.

The Coming Soviet Crash: Gorbachev’s Desperate Pursuit of Credit in Western Financial Markets. Judy Shelton. Free Press, 1989. \$22.50.

Skepticism about Gorbachev’s intentions animates this study of the economic strains in the Soviet Union. Soviet requests for most-favored-nation treatment and membership in the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT are all suspect, in the author’s view, because transfusions of capital from the United States and other Western nations to prop up the Soviet economy may serve to establish a stronger foundation for a new military build-up there.

The author demonstrates that the Soviet government’s published internal annual budget data since 1970 have concealed a growing gap in claimed budget revenues that has been filled by credit advances from the state bank, papering over revenue shortfalls. The bank has accommodated the least productive state enterprises that have offered wage inducements in a thus far unsuccessful effort to increase output and revenues. In this way the credit advances become excess purchasing power in the hands of the public. Because prices are fixed, excess purchasing power

(continued on back cover)

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Recommended Reading

(continued from page 6)

translates into pervasive shortages of goods and services. The official price index has, nevertheless, risen, as manufacturing enterprises justify higher prices by a trivial change in a product. Poorer Soviet citizens are finding it increasingly difficult to satisfy even basic physical needs.

The study also reviews the sources of external capital the Soviet Union seeks to tap—syndicated commercial bank loans, lower-cost Eurobond offerings, trade credits granted by Western governments, joint ventures. To participate in international financial markets, the author argues, the Soviet Union should be required to end the inconvertibility of its currency and to publish accurate internal budget statistics as well as a full account of its international indebtedness, now not known in detail. Only when the Soviet Union reorients its economy to producing goods for which it can acquire hard currency rather than building a war machine would the author relax the limitation of financial flows that she advocates.

Frederick J. Crosson

Contingency, Irony and Solidarity. Richard Rorty. Cambridge Univ., 1989. \$34.50; paper, \$10.95.

It is of more than usual interest to have an intellectual portrait of one's age limned by a knowledgeable observer, and to reflect on how far one can recognize oneself in it. Rorty's analysis of where we are is bold and comprehensive, pursued through interpretations of figures from Nietzsche and Proust to Derrida and Nabokov. His recommendation is that we should acknowledge that philosophy has become a private enterprise, and should let literature take over the job of motivating our liberal aspirations toward human solidarity. The proposal is many-faceted, but it is stated with clarity and intelligence. Recommended as stimulating (even if you're not persuaded) and readable.

The Unarmed Prophet: Savonarola in Florence. Rachel Erlanger. McGraw-Hill, 1988. \$19.95.

It has been almost four decades since Riddolf's biography of Savonarola, and although this volume cannot claim to displace that one in terms of scholarly advance, it is good to have

a contemporary and lively recounting of the career of an extraordinary figure of the Italian Renaissance. The story is dramatic, vivid, and well told, and if the puzzle (to modern eyes) of his motivation and influence retains an opacity, it may be because the author assimilates him too easily to figures like Khomeini and Pat Robertson. But the Florentine friar emerges from the pages and remains in one's memory and imagination after the book is closed.

The Spirit of Modern Republicanism. Thomas L. Pangle. Univ. of Chicago, 1988. \$22.50.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking and helpful book on the Founding of the American Republic that has appeared in many years. Pangle reviews and criticizes most of the recent writings on the Founding, from Hannah Arendt to Gary Wills, and insists that the Founding ought to be understood by placing the thought of its most capable thinkers, and their Lockean inspiration, in the context of the classical tradition they consciously sought to modify and transform. Only by grasping clearly the alternatives they saw and passed by can we comprehend the path that leads to our present situation. Pangle's discussion of Locke's teaching is original and illuminating.

The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity. Stanley Rosen. Yale, 1989. \$22.50.

A collection of essays, half of them newly printed, on the quarrel of *anciens et modernes*. The ancient reference point is predominantly Plato; the moderns range from Descartes to Nietzsche and Rorty, with Hegel as the center of gravity and key. Rosen successfully defends Plato from the superficial charge that the latter held a theory of knowledge in which the Forms are adequately grasped by noetic intuition, or (Rorty) are reflected in the mirror of the mind (though Rosen himself criticizes the thesis of the unity of the virtues on epistemic grounds). It is not the restoration of the ancient perspective he seeks, but such a revisioning of it that will once again open up the possibility of fruitful dialogue with it. The level of discussion is not easy, but that is because it moves at a deeper level than is customary.

Judaism: The Classical Statement. Jacob Neusner. Univ. of Chicago, 1986. \$33.

This is a remarkably fresh and extremely interesting redactional analysis of the Babylo-

Baylor University Establishes Annual Teaching Award

Baylor University has established an annual award to honor an outstanding professor to be selected from nominations by members of learned societies and institutions of higher learning. Funded by a Baylor alumnus, Robert Foster Cherry, the award will include a cash prize and a teaching opportunity at Baylor. The deadline for nominations for the 1989-90 award is December 1, 1989. For details on nominations, write Robert Foster Cherry Award, Baylor University, B.U. Box 7412, Waco, TX 76798-7412, or telephone 817-755-2923.

nian Talmud, a work that (completed around A.D. 600) became and remained the classical system of Judaism. The discussion uses profitably literary criticism and form-critical methods to ask how this work—in its historical context—relates as a whole to the Palestinian Talmud and their common source in the Mishnah. Neusner's concern is not merely descriptive and interpretive, but historical: how did it come about that a work at a given period could speak for all times? Parts of the book will be of interest only to scholars, but the intelligent reader will find the whole informative and absorbing.

Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700). Jaroslav Pelikan. Univ. of Chicago, 1989. \$29.95.

The fifth and concluding volume of the author's *History of the Development of Doctrine* brings that imposing and ambitious enterprise up to the Second Vatican Council. It must be said that its purpose has been magnificently fulfilled: to trace not the history of theology or of ecclesiastical groups and persons, but the history of what has been "believed, taught and confessed" down through the centuries by the Christian church. The delineation of the shifts in perspective, in formulation, and in the unfolding of understanding is especially revealing in the account of the 19th century, with the church struggling to come to terms with the challenge of the Enlightenment and its Romantic reactions. Of not many contemporary works can it be said, as it can of this, that they will be a legacy for future generations.

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