

ago. The second is *A Political Bestiary* (McGraw-Hill), written by James J. Kilpatrick and myself with illustrations by the noted cartoonist, Jeff MacNelly.

RICHARD PIPES

Professor of history, Harvard University; author of Russia Under the Old Regime.

I spend most of my working life reading, mainly sources, primary and secondary, for the histories I write. I do not consciously distinguish this kind of reading ("research") from reading for pleasure, inasmuch as trying to cope with life's problems is for me the highest form of pleasure. I read belletristic works to gain depth and improve my style. The connection between a great novel or essay and a historical source is very intimate because, ultimately, both kinds of literature help to illuminate life's mysteries. Montaigne probably has done more to shape my historical and political views than any historical monograph that I have ever read. Chekhov, Rilke, and William James, to mention but a few, have profoundly influenced the way I perceive the world and, therefore, write history.

I have recently developed a passion for Max Beerbohm. He is not generally regarded to be a major writer, nor did he think of himself as one. But as Beerbohm has cautioned in another connection, "mental ability is not safely gauged by height or depth of topic. The value of the thing said depends not on the value of the thing it is said about...good sense about trivialities is better than nonsense about things that matter."

Beerbohm was an aesthete, which means that he preferred to ignore everything sordid and evil, and to seek refuge in fantasy and humor. His world is bewitching; his style, sheer perfection. Anyone who grapples with English syntax day in and day out cannot but be overwhelmed by his uncanny choice of words, by the elegant yet never artificial rhythm of his prose, by his sense of composition. Isaac Babel once said that a properly placed exclamation point is like a knife driven into the reader's heart: In Beerbohm's prose, nearly everything is of that order of artistic magnitude.

His best essays have no superior in the English language: Among them I would include almost all the essays from *And Even Now* (e.g., "Quia Imperfectum"), and such masterpieces as "Enoch Soames" and the parodies in *The Christmas Garland*. (Incidentally, Beerbohm's style seems to me possibly to have served as a model for Vladimir Nabokov, although I know nothing positive of the influence of the one writer on the other.)

Beerbohm had the misfortune to outlive his generation. In the midst of World War II he jotted down in his notebook the following observations:

Those whom the gods loved died in July, 1914.

Those whom the gods liked died very soon after Armistice Day, in November, 1918.

Those whom the gods hated lived to see the War's effects.

Those whom the gods loathed will live to see the effects of this War.

Hardly any of Beerbohm's writings are in print today, which forced me to undertake (against Beerbohm's advice) a collection of his first editions. I do not know why he is not read. The other day I learned, however, that one-half of Americans never read a book, and of the others, the book readers, a good proportion use reading as a soporific. Perhaps that is part of the explanation: Beerbohm's minor masterpieces are invidiously exciting.

WILLIAM A. RUSHER

Publisher of National Review; author of The Making of the New Majority Party.

Some things that are old, then some that are new. Whittaker Chambers' magnificent *Witness* (1952) is just out in a paperback edition by Gateway. It is at once a searing autobiography, an introduction to Communism, a fascinating (and true) spy story, and an indispensable account of the case of the century—all in the luminous prose of one of America's finest writers.

Further back, find and read *A Roving Commission* by Winston Churchill (published in England under the title *My Early Life*): fond and lively memories of the great man's first 26 years, written in his forties solely to entertain.

Recent and fascinating is Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper—The Final Solution* (McKay). Did you think we'd never know the identity and motive of the fiendish Ripper? Well, Mr. Knight, a London reporter, convinced me that he does. Was it Victoria's grandson, the Duke of Clarence? No, but you're warm.

In *Chinese Shadows* by Simon Leys (Viking), an essentially apolitical connoisseur of Chinese culture reports on his visits to the mainland—and turns in an indictment of Communist China so withering it will make Hua Kuo-feng lose his won-tons.

Finally, invest forty dollars in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, a magnificent, superbly scholarly, endlessly fascinating analysis of the Bible—often almost line by line. Published in 1976 by Prentice-Hall, it bears the imprimatur of a Roman Catholic bishop, but it has been hailed by scholars of many faiths and none.

PAUL SEABURY

Professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley.

My Christmas list has two parts: Part I, books which I keep around for reference or inspiration; Part II, books which I have enjoyed reading this year.

Part I. Burke's *Works* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. Most *American Spectator* readers, I suppose, need no explanation for such a preference. But I like them both as

primers in political prudence. Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* is indispensable. I agree with Churchill, who said it is a good thing for an uneducated man to have a book of quotations. It is very helpful on occasions when I am stonewalled by a difficult problem of thinking. Another stand-by is Auden's *A Certain World*, a scrapbook anthology of writings organized by subject matter (e.g., Dogs, Humility, Purple Prose, Sin, etc.)—a very humane collection. Paul Valery's *History and Politics* is my favorite escape reading in my dour discipline, serving to reassure me that political science can be both civilized and stimulating. Then there are Aesop's *Fables*. These are required readings for all who try to understand world politics. Finally, the *Book of Common Prayer*—the Episcopalian's bible.

Part II. As far as current reading goes, I have a few odd favorites. For those backsliding into either religious or secular Manichaeism, I recommend Vilma Fritsch's *Left and Right in Science and Life*. It is also a must for left-handed people, who will gain comfort from it. I've also been reading Leon Feuchtwanger's *Success (Erfolg)*, about manners and morals in Munich around the time of Hitler's beer hall putsch; then, George Kennan's *From Prague to Munich*—diplomatic dispatches which in a fastidious way tell what goes on in a country which has just been abandoned by its allies. Then, William Buckley's *Saving The Queen*, which is a delight. Finally, Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden, Or, The British Agent*—the best spy book of all.

JOHN TOLAND

Historian; author of Adolf Hitler and The Rising Sun.

Are you hankering for the old-fashioned, true life, lengthy novel; one rich in story and carrying a full cargo of three dimensional characters, including heroes and heroines with whom you can empathize? Then take a look into the lesser-known works of Anthony Trollope. Like Dr. Chekhov, Trollope managed to carry on two successful careers. He was a conscientious postal official who was largely responsible for, among other reforms, the mail box. Besides the acclaimed *Barssetshire* and *Political (or Palliser) Novels*—six in each series—he wrote over fifty other books. Most of these are little read but of high quality and marvelously varied. All are not only highly enjoyable (my first criterion) but instructive (my next) and when I finish any one of them I feel pleased and rewarded, not as if I had eaten a dozen candy bars. Delightful is the word for *The Belton Estate* which possesses one of literature's most engaging heroes; *Ayala's Angel* is a piercing social comedy; *Orley Farm* a devastating study of morality; and *The Way We Live Now* nears the peak of Trollope's achievements in its relentless, fascinating attack upon all kinds of dis-

honesty. Finally, to appreciate fully the range and depth of this warm-hearted man who was, in my mind, the best historian of his times, read his autobiography, which about ruined his reputation because of its candor, especially its revelation that he was a professional who wrote for money.

R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon. The best presidential autobiography since Grant's. Abundant with information and revelations of error. Only an idiot or a lout would read it and fail to note its historical importance. John Kenneth Galbraith did so.

The U.S. and the Origins of the Cold War, by John Lewis Gaddis. The very best book on a historic question that became a question only because large numbers of profs believed that that which is obvious must be an illusion.

The Liberal Mind, by Kenneth Minogue. A useful explanation of the fevers of the so-called liberals.

Under Western Eyes, by Joseph Conrad. A work of art, and an insight into some of today's most brutal mischief-makers.

PETER VIERECK

Poet and historian; author of Unadjusted Man, Conservatism Revisited, Conservatism from John Adams to Churchill, and Shame & Glory of the Intellectuals, as well as a Pulitzer Prize-winning book of poetry, Terror & Decorum.

Historical Consciousness, by John Lukacs. Endlessly challenging because Lukacs tells it not like it is but (less modish) as it is. He is one of the world's profoundest psychologists of history (read also his *Last European War*), which is not the same as a psycho-historian (again: less modish).

Stained Glass, by William F. Buckley, Jr. I still can't see why economic Manchester liberalism (rootless, materialistic, atomizing) should ever be deemed "conservative" (which means a rooted, organic continuity) by Mr. Buckley, but it's his novel I'm here to praise; I find it intelligent, well written, and a "good read." Even better, it raises unanswerable moral questions of ends and means; so read it to ponder as well as enjoy. I can't help wondering whether his fictional hero Wintergrin is partly based on someone I admire in real life: Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn.

And now three older books having this in common: They miraculously make their fantasies more convincingly real than reality. *The Man Who Was Thursday,* by G.K. Chesterton. Beautiful, wise, and without preaching, it shows how *les extrêmes* (far left, far right) *se touchent.* *The Third Policeman,* by Flann O'Brien. A colleague says Hugh Kenner has already once listed this as a Christmas book; if so, I am

honored to have my O'Brien cult confirmed by an authority whom I so much respect. O'Brien's section on bicycles seems the funniest as well as the most fantastic spoof ever written. *The Man in the High Castle,* by Philip K. Dick. The most imaginative of all science-fiction writers, Dick is quoted as such in my forthcoming new poetry book, *Applewood,* and specializes in alternative universes.

EDWARD O. WILSON

Professor of zoology and curator of entomology at Harvard University; author of The Insect Societies, Sociobiology: The New Synthesis, and On Human Nature.

Science since Babylon, enlarged edition, by Derek de Solla Price. In this brief and stimulating exposition of the scientific study of science, the author explains why knowledge has expanded too fast for the scientific academy to keep up with it. Population growth must fall behind the growth of knowledge, with consequences still only dimly foreseen. As a bonus, de



Solla Price presents his own research on the history of celestial clocks with a liveliness that gives this arcane topic momentary parity with molecular biology and astrophysics.

Beyond Economic Man, by Harvey Leibenstein. Economics is just a gigantic accounting scheme, the predictive power of which depends on the comprehensiveness of its mathematical models. Leibenstein reminds us that nonrational human behavior is a major neglected element; he suggests how human nature might be incorporated into the main body of the theory. I suspect that if Leibenstein and his colleagues succeed, economics will become a far more precise—and interesting—subject.

The First Three Minutes, by Steven Weinberg. Not easy going but worth the effort, because Weinberg, one of our foremost physicists, is here talking about the beginning of the universe according to the Big Bang theory, and therefore in a sense about everything. And given his own creativeness and the magnitude of his subject, he cannot help capturing a special quality of the scientific spirit: "The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy."

The Killer Angels, by Michael Shaara. I

include this novelization of the Battle of Gettysburg as simply the piece of fiction that has given me the greatest pleasure during the past ten years. I am not sure I could explain why if I tried.

TOM WOLFE

Journalist; author of Radical Chic, The Painted Word, Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine, and The Right Stuff (forthcoming).

Nothing that I have read this year has given me more pleasure than three novels by Zola: *La Bête Humaine*, *Nana*, and *L'Assommoir*. I don't remember reading a line of Zola until last year, when I read *Therese Raquin* (and promptly advertised the fact in these pages in December). In my school years I had somehow formed the impression that Zola was the earnest hard-slogging naturalist of the lower depths, "the French Dreiser," and I had had about enough of the American one. Zola helped create such simple-minded notions among the bystanders, incidentally, by continually theorizing about his own work. (I can tell you: It doesn't help a bit.) Now, after reading four of his novels, I regard him as one of the great virtuosi of the medium.

L'Assommoir. A novel of the lower depths, all right, but extremely funny and written throughout in the rhetoric of prole slang. This was fifty years before Celine. *L'Assommoir* was denounced by the French intellectual left for presenting the Paris working class not merely as poor but honest victims of the industrial economy but also as fools and slovens happily demolishing or corrupting their own best opportunities.

Nana. Here Zola pulls off what I regard as an absolutely dazzling technical feat. He presents both a detailed portrait of a woman and a tableau of *le beau monde* of the Second Empire in fourteen consecutive crowd scenes. It's great stuff.

La Bête Humaine. Written in 1890, this will strike most readers as a very modern novel, I think, in its use of suspense, which dangles murder and lust from the outset, and in the author's portrayal of terrible faults in even his most sympathetic characters. It is hard for me to believe that James M. Cain did not read *La Bête Humaine* (and *Therese Raquin*) before writing *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*, even though Cain's biographer, Roy Hoopes, tells me he has found no evidence of it in Cain's notes and letters. *La Bête Humaine* must also be one of the first novels, if not *the* first, to use moving trains as the locus of the major action. It's riveting!—a point not lost on the moviemakers: there's never been a bad train movie.

I have listed the three books in the order I wish I had read them. *Nana's* childhood is depicted in *L'Assommoir*, as is the family taint of madness—Zola believed in *the taint*—that shows up in *Nana's* brother Jacques in *La Bête Humaine*. □