

Physical and political tragedies hover over the trilogy and its many characters largely unrelieved by what could conventionally be called "hope"—but moderated somewhat by a recurring manifestation of *will*, of refusal to play history's game. *Valedictory's* central character, squadron leader Ludwik Toporski, muses in darkening days on his fellow Poles, "their notion of themselves as replaceable components of their country's history. . . . Whether or not they failed in their tasks, their rejection of the *penalty* of failure would nullify every victory of their enemies." Poles, indeed, have made bad victims.

But all in all, one will understand little from these books of the reasons to be optimistic about Poland. Kuniczak's endings, Michener's patternless ups and downs, leave one with a poor grip on some decisive Polish assets.

Poles have not obtained the state they wanted—that, by and large, they collectively deserve. But they have not lost everything and it is quite unlikely that they will. Poland's balance between regime and society, fakery and authenticity, has been, since at least the mid-1950s, as far from Soviet desiderata as a satellite has come. By will and defiance, Poles have secured a vital church, a private agriculture (socially important if economically troubled), a cultural style profoundly Western and openly contemptuous of their "partner" to the East. Toughness and romanticism have served Poles better, in this sense, than have pacifism and compromise their no-less-Western Czech and Slovak brothers. Speech was freer in Warsaw before, during, and after martial law than in today's Prague, or in Moscow under Khrushchev at his most liberal.

Poles live within a set of concessions, true—but they are the best sort of concessions. Long before the dissident Adam Michnik defined the "new evolutionism"—expect nothing from party "reform," but organize real social forces to press the party to yield space—Church, farmers, workers, and intellectuals were doing this in their own ways. They have extracted the concessions. This is the best guarantee that Poland will remain exceptional, even in its long ~~crawl~~ *travail*, and that the struggle to expand the scope of its authentic life will continue. In the future as the present, travelers Paris-Warsaw-Moscow may, arriving in Warsaw, think they're already in Moscow. Those who reverse this route, reaching Warsaw, can be excused for thinking they're already in Paris. Proud Varsovians may not all appreciate the implied patronization, but they will understand the travelers' confusion. And Parisians, perhaps, should feel honored. □

THE MUSLIM DISCOVERY OF EUROPE

Bernard Lewis/W.W. Norton/\$19.95

Rustam

At some point, all thoughtful observers of Muslim societies confront a common question: Why do Muslim societies in the Middle East exhibit such a contradictory mixture of disdain and veneration toward the West? A nagging fear has persisted, especially in the last decade of the oil bonanza, that the social/economic developments of these Muslim nations remain only skin deep. Though the same question may be posed about other regions, the Muslim states of the Middle East, for a variety of reasons, are particularly prone to such attention.

There is, first of all, the reality that not one of these states has successfully transformed into an industrialized society. Some financially are very wealthy. A few possess sizable manufacturing industries. But none has reached a stage in economic development where a significant portion of the work force is either employed in modern industries or is capable of producing and exporting a significant share of manufactured goods and services. Egypt, with the longest introduction to industrialization, is among the poorest states of the group. Even those nations with an oil bounty have not managed to become anything more than welfare states based upon a pain-free tax revenue base.

A second reason is the religious convictions of Muslims. Rightly or wrongly, a common perception outside the Middle East is that Islam is reactionary and hence a hindrance to innovation and modernization. It is a perception that seemed to be confirmed by the Iranian Revolution. The ruling Shiite clergy has time and again demonstrated overt hostility to the basic tenets of modern Western societies.

The behavior, remarks, and actions of particular Islamic leaders have bolstered this perception. Hardly a week goes by without some Middle East leader denouncing the influences of the West. But at the same time, Western goods of virtually all categories are being imported by these countries at an unprecedented rate. When the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran after 14 years of exile

to wage his campaign against the Great Satan—the United States—it was in an American-made jumbo jet.

The question of progress and Islam is thus complicated and not easily answerable. But with the appearance of *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, there is a new angle. In this scholarly and lucid study, Bernard Lewis traces the first encounters between Muslims and Europeans, beginning in the eighth century. His is a fascinating kaleidoscope of two great civilizations groping at each other, a first-rate study impressively steeped in the region's history and based on original material.

Lewis argues that the first intercourse between the two civilizations occurred when Islam was expanding and receptive, but when Western Europe still had nothing to offer. Given the Muslim belief in successive revelations, which culminated in the mission of Mohammed, Christianity was regarded as an unworthy predecessor. Hence, not only did the Muslims find little to learn from Europeans, but what did exist was "imperfect." From this was born the disdainful attitude of Muslims towards Europe, so much so that a famous letter sent by the Caliph Harun al-Rashid to the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros begins thus, "From Harun, Commander of the Faithful, to Nikephoros, dog of the Romans, greeting."

Satisfied with their own superiority, Muslim societies turned inward, and remained insulated in the following centuries thanks to the might of the Ottoman Empire. This attitude continued unabated even when the Renaissance and Reformation came to change Europe radically.

When the French Revolution marked the dawn of Europe's political evolution, Muslims shook their heads at the travails of the infidels. The Ottoman Sultan's private secretary noted in his diary: "May God cause the upheaval in France to spread like syphilis to the other enemies of the empire, hurl them into prolonged conflict with one another, and thus accomplish results beneficial to the Empire. Amen." And the faithful were told in proclamations: "The French nation (may God devastate their dwellings

and abase their banners, for they are tyrannical infidels and dissident evildoers) do not believe in the oneness of the Lord . . . and have enticed into their iniquity the common people who have become as raving madmen."

At this stage, Bernard Lewis ends his volume, but it does not take much to proceed with the inherent argument. Smugness and comfort of tradition were not a long term solution, for the economic and military power European societies possessed by the eighteenth century was overwhelming. Call them infidels, if you like, but it hardly affected their armies or production. Having ignored European culture, history, and languages, Muslim societies suddenly began to send students to Europe, adopt their manners, and employ foreign military advisers. The pendulum had decisively swung.

Yet for all that, the Islamic mind-set remained unaltered, as a central contradiction remained in the Muslim understanding of the modern era. If inferior Christians were now suddenly stronger than Muslims, went one argument, then Muslims must have deviated from the righteous path, and so it was necessary to return to the good old ways. Another point of view considered European strength to consist only in the possession of certain materials, weapons, or, at best, techniques. Muslim nations had only to adopt the most visible aspects of European civilization—their military practices, industries, and know-how.

Unfortunately for Islam, Europe's rise was the result not of a lucky invention or discovery, but of scientific progress, expansion of education, growth of more representative government, trade, and, above all, social traits that allowed for the assimilation of innovations and new ideas. Return to the past could, perhaps, make one feel better, but it would hardly bring forth the necessary social dynamism to compete with European power. Nor would imitation or purchase of goods and services prove more than a temporary expedient, vulnerable to progress and development. Nevertheless, these reactions go a long way to explain the current oscillation by Muslims between disdain and veneration when it comes to Western civilization. During the last century, as the gap between Europe and Islam increased, the initial responses remained intact, and, if anything, became further polarized. Although some Muslims today argue for an even more rapid adoption of the Western ethos, a significant number hold to the idea that what is needed is even greater purity of culture and devotion to tradition. In short, coming to terms with the change in fortune which the modern era has ushered in

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remains an elusive problem for Muslim states.

This lesson was, and even today largely is, misunderstood in Middle Eastern societies. Will oil turn out to have been a mere reprieve from the predicaments of development? Do the

traditions of Islam need to be modified? Are there political leaders brave enough to face the undoubted challenge of self-appraisal? These questions continue to haunt the region's inhabitants, as they have for centuries. □

STRANGER AND BROTHER:
A PORTRAIT OF C.P. SNOW
Philip Snow/Scribner's/\$14.95

Thomas Mallon

C.P. Snow has been dead for over three years now. Even people who never read a word he wrote can recall a couple of things about him, like the photographs of his bald and bespectacled head—something less and less anthropomorphic as the years went on—and the fact that he made the phrase “The Two Cultures” a popular label for the troubling (if obvious) estrangement of the arts and sciences. He knew that his own varied experiences would make him an intriguing speaker on such an idea, and while he no doubt cared about the notion itself, it probably also appealed to him as a good career move: cornering a bit of the intellectual market, one might say. When he became Baron Snow in 1964 he put a telescope crossed with a pen on his coat of arms, as if registering his trademark.

This account of Snow's varied career by his younger brother Philip does not purport to be definitive, and in fact dithers rather charmingly between the realms of memoir and biography. Nonetheless, in spite of its slightness—and its reverence—a useful picture of Snow's life becomes discernible in it. Charles Percy Snow was born in Leicester in 1905. His father was a shy man, a clerk who in the evenings taught music, his mother a proud woman of conservative leanings. Philip Snow concedes that the family was “always in danger of crashing through the slim frontier into the lowest economic level of the working class,” but he also admits that in later years his brother indulged in a bit of Mr. Bounderby about the family origins: “Because his early struggles were hard, Charles wanted no one to overlook them and, perhaps because of this, he placed the family background just a shade lower in the social scale than it actually was.”

There is no doubt he worked hard. In fact, he worked himself sick before

he got to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1928. But once there he was certain of success—one way or another. He started out in Physical Chemistry, but even as he did his own research he was absorbed by the spectacle of scientific and academic politics in a literary way. It didn't take him long to decide that writing was to be his main business. Science would provide the basis for his first serious novel (*The Search*, 1934), and university intrigue the material for his most famous (*The Masters*, 1951). He “enjoyed everything” about Cambridge, according to Philip, who became an undergraduate at the college where his brother was a Fellow. C.P. Snow remained there through the early part of the Second World War, until he went to work for the government recruiting scientists to work on the development of radar. As his career as a novelist gained momentum he also did a stint in British industry (part time at English Electric). He would eventually, in the mid-sixties, become Parliamentary Secretary in the new Ministry of Technology set up in the first Wilson government. (Britain is still decrepitly awaiting, twenty years later, the promised high-tech transformation of her economy.) Snow, because of the “Two Cultures” and his public activities, gradually became recognized as a kind of cultural seer, occasionally laughed at by highbrows, but often attended to by middlebrows—among whom, in any case, the action lies.

Despite his belief in the critical importance of luck, Snow knew that his varied successes had been much the result of shrewd deliberateness, the methodical ambition his brother quite clearly admires. Snow almost never missed a trick that lay between himself and the main chance. In 1939 he was putting a bit of money aside in the U.S., in case the going got too tough in a defeated Britain. When a few years before he advised Philip not to join the Communist Party it was less on ideo-

logical grounds than professional ones: “If I joined it would be very difficult to find a job on leaving Cambridge—or at least one's choice would be highly circumscribed.” (Philip provides, in fact, an amusing illustration of how Communism brushed the most unlikely temperaments at Cambridge during the 1930s: He would find his real work when he joined the Colonial Service and was posted to the South Seas. While there he wrote a book about cricket in Fiji. When he got home he became, for a quarter century, the Bursar at Rugby.)

Snow liked making money and was uncontrollably eager to know people's salaries as soon as he met them. He

sent his son to Eton during his time in the Labour government, and he clearly relished all the honorary degrees and testimonials that came to him in his last two decades. Philip is driven to a rapt inclusiveness when it comes to naming them: “The highest Bulgarian cultural honour had been awarded to him—the International Dimitrov Prize. . . .” (The Nobel eluded him.) He protested that he was not so captivated by winning as people made out: “I'm often accused of being entirely interested in success. Anyone who reads my books will realise that what I'm most closely in sympathy with is tragic failure.” This strikes one as being true if one considers how many sad

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