

## COMMENDABLES

### The Orient Egress

**Richard Grenier: *The Marra-kesh One-Two***; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

Pope John Paul II and the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini have little more in common than species. This was made most evident when the Pope was on his visit to Poland last June. While he was speaking out against the oppression of the Polish people, Tehran radio reported that Khomeini was speaking out against the Pope. It was the same old story: "Great Satan" America. Khomeini reportedly said that the Pope, "instead of condemning America for its crimes against humanity and arousing his followers to confront the oppressors, supports America and suggests to the other oppressed people that they cooperate with it." Imagine that. Meanwhile, members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (sic) were attacking their head, Yassir Arafat, who, in turn, lashed out at Libyan leader Moamar Khadafy, whom Arafat said was behind the PLO revolt. At the same time, people in Lebanon were shooting at Syrians. The war continued between Iran and Iraq. Etc., etc., etc. How can Westerners in general and Americans in particular deal with people like Khomeini, Arafat, Khadafy, and countries and organizations that simultaneously pretend to a common front and shoot at each other? That question is essayed by Richard Grenier in a delightful romp through the countries of the Middle East. His answer isn't the one commonly voiced on television and pub-

lished in newspapers and magazines. Grenier, regular film critic for *Commentary*, sets up the quixotic adventure by using another land that's equally foreign to most: Hollywood. A film company, attempting to make Islam's explanation to the West, *Mohammed Superstar*, is summarily kicked from country to country as it goes in search of sand, camels, and, most importantly, money.

There are those—critic Edward W. Said, most notably (vide *Orientalism*)—who claim that

### Yesterday Today

***Twentieth-Century American Historians, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 17***; Edited by Clyde N. Wilson; Gale Research Co.; Detroit.

Fidelity to truth is an impossibility for the historian, if a historian's task is seen as making a complete record of past events. That is, as Laurence Sterne showed with his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, it is virtually impossible for an individual to record merely the events of his own life since while he is making that record, other events are occurring; even if one were to catch up, one's "history" couldn't be written unless the postmortem were counted, and it, of course, wouldn't be by the hand of the historian. The power of selection in history is an imperious one. Thus it behooves any student of history to find out about the history of the historians

the West co-opted and distorted the Middle East during the 19th century as Oriental studies were established: such programs incorrectly codified the countries under study, and therefore Westerners have it all wrong. Perhaps Sir Richard Francis Burton, British explorer and Orientalist, and his like set people in the West on the wrong track, but Grenier follows no one: no more evidence than his first-person narrator—a young, long-haired American screenwriter who unapologetically assists the CIA—is needed to prove that. As Grenier deftly shows, the Islamic Weltanschauung is different than the Judeo-Christian one of the West, in both physical (e.g., the slicing off of portions of a person's anatomy for purposes of punishment) and philosophical (take your pick) ways. The species is the same. But Kipling was correct. □

so that an understanding of what criteria were used by the historian can be developed. A fine work for this purpose, one that covers 59 American historians who concentrate(d) on American



history, has been edited by Dr. Wilson. The essays presented are thorough and well illustrated. Although this is a reference book undoubtedly designed with libraries in mind, it is a collection suited for the serious student of history. □

### The Light Touch

**Georges Simenon: *Aunt Jeanne***; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

**Georges Simenon: *Maigret Afraid***; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

Almost by definition or convention, detective and mystery stories are characterized by violence and excitement: not only is a crime perpetrated, typically murder(s), but the characters are put through frantic or otherwise unusual paces. Even the dapper Sir Peter Wimsey works up some perspiration on occasion. Raymond Chandler once said that when he got into a bind with Marlowe and didn't know what to write next, he had someone throw a punch. Thus, the use of action can be an out for the writer, an accessible path. Similarly, it is a guideway for the reader. That is, unless the story is one by someone like Robbe-Grillet, the odds are that there will be a solution to the case. The author must make it worth one's while to move from point A, the discovery of the mystery, to point Z, the denouement, without skipping the 24 points in between. Some might argue that the masterful writer of detective stories relies on the readers to be captivated by the ratiocinative abilities of the sleuth and nothing else (assuming, of course, that said operative isn't from Mike Hammer's mold). While there is something to that, its complete validity can be laid to rest with two words: "Quick, Watson!"

There are, by nature, exceptions, and in the genre under discussion the exception takes the form of the invariably slim volumes produced by Georges Simenon. Simenon is most widely known for his semiquiescent Maigret. However, the number of books he has produced is ex-

pressed in three digits; not all of his works deal with the police inspector. One, for example, is *Aunt Jeanne*, which first probes then delineates the feelings of a deteriorating family that resides in a French village. It is the stuff of mainstream literature (i.e., incorrectly assuming that the detective story is an illegitimate line, an assumption shown to be fallacious by a certain Detective Oedipus). Simenon's forte is description. He selects details—physical and psychological—that are apt: no more, no less. He is masterful at that. While he is clearly expressing himself with prose in the novels, that prose has the evocative power of poetic language.

In the various Maigret tales

the police officer does very little of a physical nature, certainly nothing frantic or unusual. The title *Maigret Afraid*, for example, might indicate to an uninitiated reader that the character is put into a life-threatening situation: held by a ruthless band of Parisian thugs, perhaps. However, the fear is actually a *slight* feeling of anxiety brought on by the Chief Inspector's realization that he is growing old, that his eclectic methods will be overtaken by scientific uniformity. One of the most astonishing things in the novel is Maigret's acceptance of a cigar. Still, Georges Simenon has held—and will continue to hold—readers enthralled for years with his deft subtlety which does not date. □

## IN FOCUS

### Media Menace

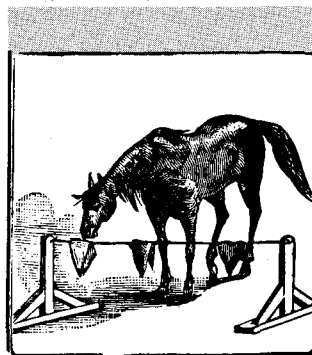
**John G. Adams: *Without Precedent: The Story of the Death of McCarthyism*; W. W. Norton; New York.**

Apolitical thugs in New York City typically subdue their prey with a club, switchblade, or cheap handgun. Liberal journalists in the Big Apple and elsewhere prefer a more lethal weapon: they beat their victims senseless with the name of Joe McCarthy. Naturally, those who are sufficiently tolerant of leftist subversion, terrorism, and espionage need not fear such assault, but just let anyone hint that the threat of communism must be opposed not only militarily but also intellectually, culturally, and politically and he will immediately be bludgeoned by a mob of commentators, columnists, and pun-

ditions all screaming with melded outrage and glee: "McCarthyism! McCarthyism!"

Only national amnesia permits contemporary journalists to brandish McCarthy's name so menacingly, however, since it was the media themselves who made him a potent force in American politics in the first place. As John Adams observes in *Without Precedent*, McCarthy's power was underwritten by editors who trumpeted his unsubstantiated charges in headlines and reporters who were "too lazy to check the facts." Only the force of "a strange media machine . . . fueled by hot air and printer's ink" could transform an uncouth Wisconsin senator with no real political convictions into a national power. McCarthy's "anticommunism" was never anything but successful grandstanding: he conducted his red-

baiting "hearings" not because they uncovered spies (he never caught one) but because they captured front pages. In an open society, such tactics must eventually be exposed. In McCarthy's case the turning point was the Army-McCarthy confrontation of



1953-54 in which Mr. Adams was a key participant as Army counselor under Robert T. Stevens. For this he deserves the nation's sincere thanks. He deserves somewhat less for his book about his efforts. Little more than a detailed record of his own involvement in the much-publicized imbroglio, punctuated with confident judgments on the characters of the other principals involved and narrated with self-congratulation tinged with self-pity, Adams's book fails to analyze the larger cultural and political ramifications of the McCarthy debacle.

It is particularly ironic that in a study which repeatedly quotes from Michael Straight (a recently confessed Soviet spy during the Truman Administration), Adams nowhere discusses the need for an acceptable and efficacious anti-communism. Certainly we do not need more Joe McCarthys trampling the Constitution underfoot as they stage ersatz searches for subversion; if not hamstrung, the intelligence and law-enforcement communities can ferret out undercover agents quietly and legally. What America does need are principled, articulate, and popular spokesmen who can

combat the omnipresent naiveté concerning communist intentions and tactics. In this regard, Adams's complacent relief that TV coverage of the Army-McCarthy hearings finally "exposed McCarthy in the flesh, without the distorting filter of headlines and self-serving press conferences and phony 'news events,'" must be reevaluated. In a time when photogenic and suave telejournalists slyly manipulate misleading 30-second snippets and contrived news-event interviews as they romanticize Central American and Palestinian terrorists, malign conservative politicians, and promote no-nuke neurosis, the danger posed by the media is without precedent. (BC) □

### From Diadem to Democracy

**Michael Packe: *King Edward III*; Routledge & Kegan Paul; London.**

**Denis Judd: *King George VI*; Franklin Watts; New York.**

At the close of the War of Independence, a group of officers proposed that George Washington become the first American king. Fortunately, Washington repudiated the very notion that anyone, himself included, should ever reign over the new United States as monarch. Nonetheless, the new republic that Washington actually did help create represented an extension of, rather than a radical break from, the British political tradition shaped during centuries of diminishing royal sovereignty. Indeed, by 1776 the Crown had already surrendered to Parliament most of its power over Britain as well as America. This surrender began, of course, when King John was forced by his vassals to put his seal to the Magna Charta in 1215. When Edward III ascended the