

reading material on magazine racks; perhaps some adults will take a cue and make some furtive glances in the juvenile section of book shops. □

From Berlin to Beirut

Amos Oz: *In the Land of Israel*; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

According to numerous speculative historians and novelists, Hitler did not die in a Berlin bunker almost 40 years ago. He escaped, they theorize, to Brazil—or Argentina, or Paraguay, or New Mexico, or the South



Pacific. Explaining away the remains medically identified as Hitler's so as to give plausibility to these fantasies is a task best left to the experts at the *National Enquirer*, but identifying and evaluating the corpses of the ideas and cultural formulations that went up in flames with the führer's defeat is a task for anyone who would understand the late 20th century. For only such philosophical autopsies can clarify the ideas and cultural developments that Hitler inadvertently helped make both possible and necessary.

Mingled with the smoke from Hitler's cremation were not only the ashes of six million Jews as individuals but also of the Diaspora as a cultural and historical phenomenon. Out of those ashes

arose the phoenix of a new nation, Israel, created and unified by the newly empowered political vision of Zionism. But the future of that state is now dubious in part because the concept of an ideologically unified and militarily powerful nation was badly scorched on the fascist bier—at least in the West. In the Soviet Union, where totalitarianism was far more firmly entrenched than in the Third Reich and where anti-Semitism continues to be a state doctrine, this concept of the armed state united by doctrine was carefully preserved in the fireproof safe behind the iron curtain. On this side of the curtain, however, where free men had willingly united to defend the humane ideals defined by Judeo-Christian ethics and parliamentary tradition, noxious smoke from Fortress Europe still gets in the eyes of many. Indeed, now anyone who does not categorically champion value-free pluralism over normative conformity nor headlong disarmament over vigilant might will probably be smeared with polemical suet (drawn in swastikas) by those who do. Accordingly, with the unbounded support of the Politbureau, Arab terrorists have somehow persuaded some Westerners that because Israel has demonstrated unity of purpose and disciplined power, it must therefore be "nazi." (Never mind that the PLO is preparing to complete the Holocaust.)

But unlike its implacable foes, Israel is a democracy, with no führer (nor ayatollah) to lead it in battle and no Gestapo to enforce internal discipline. So far, racial and cultural ties and the common threat of Arab aggression have provided a consensus wide enough to make democracy workable, yet narrow enough to inculcate fighting rigor. Judging by Amos Oz's *In the Land of Israel*, that consensus is unraveling. A talented

novelist and essayist who has fought in two of Israel's wars, Mr. Oz lays bare the growing tensions in Israel between European and Asian Jews, religious and secular, right and left, intellectuals and laborers, hawks and doves. Ballots have ceased to be simply expressions of preference and have become weapons in an internecine war: the epithet "nazi" flies too frequently be-



tween Israelis. Though Mr. Oz indicts messianic religionists and the militant right for failing to cultivate "pluralism as a desirable condition," Israel's real problem, as he himself sees, is not the lack of diversity but the disappearance of national agreement. The pre-Six Day War unanimity on crucial issues, he shows, has not survived and desperately needs to be renewed. Since Mr. Oz's own gospel of secular and pacifist humanism is too contentless and sterile to effect such a renewal, the reader can only hope that someone else in Israel can still find a balm in Gilead for healing breaches. If not, a noble but bitterly divided people may soon join both Hitler and their ancestors among the cinders. (BC) □

Onwords & Backwords

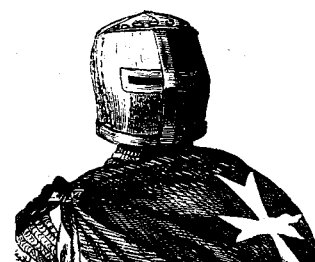
Samuel Beckett: *Worstword Ho*; Grove Press; New York.

Raymond Federman: *The Twofold Vibration*; Indiana University Press; Bloomington.

Beckett continues. While there has been a sense of ending from the beginning, the pauses, as he nears 80, seem . . . felt, not studied. Genuine. The words emerge, repeat, proliferate, press onward, enjamb, stall, renew, yet . . . are arthritic. But come. The man who has forever been seen as a harbinger of darkness and vacuum here becomes transparently clear about the grin: *Worstword Ho*. No exclamation mark. Still moving toward, around, or through a joke. Not Perelman exactly. But not unlike him, either. Beckett has loosened thousands of words into the void. Is it less a void when the words pile up (and are buttressed by hundreds of scholarly books and papers . . . and essays), or a greater one? What becomes of

impedimenta? Can the writer stop, cease, desist, or do the reverberations from a trembling hand continue on to the unimaginable, through the unknowable? Can something be unsaid? Beckett continues. There will be no stop. Until the end.

Epigones, alas, try to carry on that which need not be toted. Federman attempts the lading. He knows them: Mercier, Malone, Murphy. The breathing of *How It Is* is studied. The



flourishes of *Proust* delineated. He thinks what can be. But it isn't. The words come, then disappear. They're not vaporized. They linger and reverberate,

knocking images about as if they are subatomic quarks. (Joyce to the world, the word remains.) Alas. Counterfeit echoes, unheard, of a silent man who sits in a room and writes. □

Perceptibles

James Atkinson: *Martin Luther: Prophet to the Church Catholic*; Paternoster/William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

During the past year, Catholic scholars and writers have spoken with unwonted warmth and approbation of the German monk who initiated the Reformation and thus split the Church over four centuries ago. In part, this new Catholic appreciation for Luther brings to fruition the scholarly work of a number of researchers, who have demonstrated that the doctrinal gap between Catholicism and Protestantism is much narrower than is commonly supposed. Such understanding, here delineated by James Atkinson in a book published jointly by a Catholic and a Protestant press, is welcome and salutary. However, because our age is singularly indifferent to creeds and doctrine, it appears that much of the adulation of Luther is not the thoughtful recognition of a courageous theologian, but rather the irrational mythologizing of a prototypical defier of authority and thus the ahistorical creation of a new countercultural hero. As a leading Catholic scholar recently suggested, "I get the feeling that many Catholic leaders adore Luther primarily because they see him as a late-medieval Hans Küng." Since the absence of authority has proved Protestantism's most vexing and insoluble problem in trying to create cohesive communities of believers, such knee-jerk antiauthoritarianism does not bode



well for the future of Catholicism—or society. For when the posting of defiant theses, regardless of content, becomes the focus of worship, then no congregation can share any values more substantial than a preference for bulletin boards shaped like cathedral doors. □

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J. D. Ogilvy and Donald C. Baker: *Reading Beowulf*; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, OK.

People in pagan cultures knew they needed heroes: Who else could keep the dragons and other monsters at bay? After the coming of Christianity, the need for heroes was still obvious, though the new faith required its champions to show more devotion and less vainglory and vengeance than their heathen predecessors. Written not long after England became Christian, *Beowulf* permits a glimpse into this transition in heroic types. Those unfamiliar with Old English literature can turn to translators for an understanding of the words of this masterpiece and to scholars like J. D. Ogilvy and Donald C. Baker for an explication of its themes, prosody, and backgrounds. It requires no special scholarly skills now, however, to see that Christianity is fast disappearing into a morass of amoral egalitarianism and that the notion of heroism is consequently undergoing another and more disturbing metamor-

phosis: heroes defending all of society against its common foes are being replaced by "role models" who legitimate its aberrant fringes. Indeed, those pursuing Grendel's murderous offspring today usually do so not to

protect humane order by engaging the monsters in mortal combat but rather to further reduce our hopes for survival by gaining an interview or publication rights for another bestial life story. □

WASTE OF MONEY

Of Communists and Convicts

Nathan Heard: *House of Slammers*; Macmillan; New York.

"It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good." So wrote Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in "The Soul and Barbed Wire" about his experience in the Soviet Gulag. Like most inmates in the communist penal system, he was guilty of no crime, yet he came to thank God for the humiliation of an imprisonment that helped him become a believer. Indeed, despite all of their incredibly brutal and dehumanizing efforts to make the Gulag a tool for enforcing their atheistic doctrines, the Soviet prison authorities unwittingly provided Solzhenitsyn

valid because they attack "only those carriers of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well)"; consequently, "they then take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more."

Nathan Heard has also spent a number of years in prison, and has likewise taken his experience as a basis for his writing. But he was justly convicted and sentenced by a judicial system that presumed his innocence, was never deprived of adequate rest or nourishment while incarcerated, nor was he denied visits from family and friends nor time for reading, writing, and recreation. Regrettably, he apparently learned from this experience only how to write noxious novels glamorizing communism as an alternative to the "racist capitalism" which allegedly forces men to crime when outside of prison and to bestial depravity when inside. His transparent protagonist in *House of Slammers*, an articulate armed robber who has educated himself while in prison and who is finally killed by murderous prison authorities for leading a demonstration for prisoner's "rights," spouts endless leftist drivel. Declaring an equal love for Jesus and Karl Marx, for Arthur Koestler and



with a classroom where he learned "the truth of all the religions of the world" and "the falsehood of all the revolutions in history." Religion is valid, he concluded, because it combats the "evil inside a human being." In contrast, revolutions are in-