

white guy Ms. Walker does approve of. Remember, he sent the "greedy and anti-sharing" packing, and he has been building "a just society" ever since. Ms. Walker reports in a 1977 essay on Cuba that, thanks to Uncle Fidel, today there is "work for everyone in Cuba. Everyone has enough to eat. . . . Illiteracy has virtually disappeared." And thanks to him, even male chauvinism is on the wane. For as Walker approvingly notes, there is in Cuba something called a "Family Code" which "contains the laws that regulate family life." Among other things, the code—which Walker quotes in full—stipulates that women have an equal right to practice a "profession or skill" and demands that "spouses must live together, be loyal, considerate, respectful and mutually loyal to each other." In other words, it says to males: Be nice to your women—or else.

Of course, Fidel Castro is himself no Phil Donahue. He originally bought grenades and bazookas for his guerrillas by extorting money from Cuban businessmen, farmers, and mill owners. Once in power, he silenced his more articulate opponents by pushing them into prison—or eternity. Eventually, he muzzled the press, broke the trade unions, shut down the churches, and set up a network of internal spies. Today he functions as a Soviet stooge in an effort to ensure that the boys in the Kremlin will do what it takes to keep Cuba's moribund economy afloat. But over such matters Ms. Walker would rather not quibble. She concedes that some hardship and persecution still exist in Cuba (the "government-sanctioned dislike of homosexuals" bothers her most), but she points out that revolution is—as Fidel so uniquely put it—"a process." It takes "years and years and generations" to complete, she explains. Besides, "Standing in line for hours to receive one's daily bread cannot be so outrageous," she suggests, "if it means that every person *will receive bread*, and no one will go to bed hungry at night."

In an afterword to one of the stories contained in *You Can't Keep a Good*

*Woman Down*, Ms. Walker admits "I am sometimes naive and sentimental." On this point at least, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* does much to prove her right. Naiveté and sentimentality are not the stuff of serious writers, unless such writers know how to convert them into credible components of a literary probing into fundamental notions: truth, emotion, moral value. Naiveté and sentimentality (especially when they are undergirded by the kind of rabidity of

mind and heart which seem to be a staple of Ms. Walker's output) may serve as the stuffing of the romance novels perennially produced by hacks and trendists—using Ms. Walker's own knack for forming neologisms. As such they become a sign of cheapness and paltriness—which makes them an easy merchandise to be pushed by Manhattan and Hollywood operators of shoddy "ideological" commodities in arts, literature, and academia. □

## Accidents & Ignorance

A. J. P. Taylor: *A Personal History*; Atheneum; New York.

by Samuel T. Francis

With the exception of Edward Gibbon, there have been few great historians who have written their autobiographies. The reason for this should be fairly clear. While some historians, such as Macaulay or Mommsen, led interesting lives, and some, such as Lewis Namier, are interesting men, most serious historians do nothing that is of any historical significance in itself. After a lifetime of interpreting the failures and achievements of more important figures, they acquire the humility or the good sense not to delude themselves on their own importance and therefore do not intrude the trivia of their personal histories upon their readers.

A. J. P. Taylor, one of the most prolific writers of history in the English-speaking world, is also an exception, although this is all he shares with Gibbon. Taylor is not a great historian or even a very significant one. Most of his works have been either textbooks (*The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* or *English History, 1914-1945*) or popularized accounts of 19th and 20th-century history. Only *The Origins of the Second*

*World War* broke new ground, and it was based on printed sources, not archival materials. Unlike R. H. Tawney and Lewis Namier, Taylor devised no new methodologies of research or inquiry. Unlike Marc Bloch or the *Annales* school, he applied no new social science disciplines or ideologies to history. (It is just as well that he did not, since such applications have usually contributed more distortions and omissions than they have corrected.) Insofar as Taylor enjoys a professional reputation, it is that of an honest researcher and narrator who knows his sources and who honestly reports and analyzes them. He has, then, simply the reputation of a competent historian.

*A Personal History* is without any illumination of the great questions that attend the study of history or the nature of the historical process; indeed, there is little reason to suppose that Taylor has ever seriously grappled with these questions. His own view of history, for which he has been for some years notorious, is "that most things in history happen by accident" and "I merely find the writing and reading of history entertaining. I have never discovered any message in the writing of history other than . . . 'Always verify your references.'" The view of history as a chapter of accidents or, in Aldous Huxley's phrase, "one damn thing after another," is not uncommon among 20th-century British histo-

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rians—H.A.L. Fisher and Alan Bullock also espoused it. Its logical implication is that there is no meaning in history and no purpose in studying it. There is neither progress nor decline, neither a pattern of lessons nor a tradition of conduct, and human thought and action have no significant consequences. "Entertainment" is the only intelligible justification for studying history so conceived, although most normal people would probably prefer watching television to wading through monographs based on this concept, and why anyone would find history as the story of accidents more entertaining than monkeys in a cage is beyond my comprehension. Certainly there is no reason to coerce taxpayers to support Dr. Taylor and his colleagues in their solipsistic notion of fun. If entertainment is the criterion of good history, why shouldn't

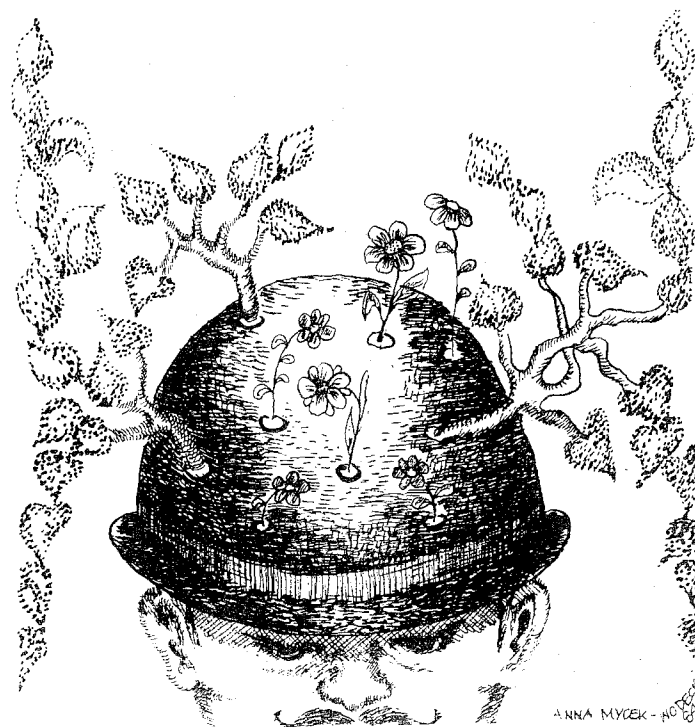
he also says nothing about why he became an historian. Born in 1906 into a well-off middle-class Lancashire family of Dissenting businessmen, Taylor absorbed their liberal and socialist opinions without reflection. As a boy, he claims, he one day heard a voice saying, "There is no God," and he has been an atheist ever since. So much for philosophical inquiry. He chose to read history at Oxford because his school usually prepared boys to read science at Cambridge, and Taylor wanted to be different. He continued the study of history after taking his degree because he had nothing else to do and it afforded him the opportunity to live in Vienna for a while. By his own admission, most of the books he has written were offered to him by accident, and there were few that he undertook because he believed the subject was important. After a few years

tual establishment. It is easy to confuse a fixture with the real thing.

In his youth Taylor was a member of the Communist Party, but he gave it up because he could not muster belief in its discipline, ideology, and program. He came to dislike most British communists, but he continued to defend the Soviet Union. He also gave up his youthful socialism except as "a vague emotion" and, later, because he was disappointed that the Attlee government was too conservative. Probably Taylor is incapable of accepting any disciplined body of thought, whether theological or political, and he became an affable nihilist. He often mentions his commitment to the notion of sexual equality and goes on ad nauseam about his love affairs. Perhaps his belief in the equality of the sexes has something to do with the fact that he has been married three times, that his first wife publicly and shamelessly cheated on him, and that his second wife forbade him to mention her name in his book. Or perhaps it is just an accident, like everything else.

Despite his apparent nihilism, Taylor continued his activism for leftist causes, mainly the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). The most officious parts of *A Personal History* are those in which Taylor inflicts his political opinions upon the reader. If he were an aging Labour Party guru, these would be tolerable, because no one expects historical sophistication from political figures. But because Taylor is an eminent academic and historian of the 19th and 20th centuries, he has no excuse for his banalities. Listen, then, to the accumulated wisdom of 75 years of historical erudition:

*On Soviet Russia:* "Soviet Russia had made a great impression on me which lasted a long time. All the people we met—school teachers, hospital workers, men and women in factories—still seemed full of revolutionary enthusiasm. The measure of enlightenment and emancipation that people talked about in the west were here being put into



historians simply fake references or fabricate the narrative altogether? That would be even more amusing.

Not only does Taylor maintain that nothing can be learned from history, but

of living the academic life, acquiring contacts with serious scholars like Namier and G. N. Clark, and contributing to newspapers and the BBC, Taylor became a fixture in the British intellec-

practice. I am afraid I never thought about economic policy which no one discussed. If there was dictatorship and a secret police, no one noticed them."

**On Appeasement and Rearmament:** "How could we advocate armaments that were likely to be used against Soviet Russia? I answered by propounding a Soviet alliance as the test of anti-Nazi sincerity. . . . I had a further motive which I think few others shared. Knowing eastern Europe . . . I believed that Communist victories there would be an improvement on the existing regimes as in my opinion they have proved to be."

**On America as an Ally:** "The predominant feeling among English people was that the Americans should have entered the war long before. There was little of the gratitude towards America that Churchill and others told us we ought to feel. What had we to be grateful for? It was the Americans who should have been grateful to us."

**On the Satellites and the Cold War:** "Soviet ascendancy of eastern Europe had no perils for me. Certainly I hoped that the East European states would gradually acquire greater independence, as had happened with Yugoslavia to my great joy and might well have happened elsewhere if it had not been for the Cold War. . . . If the United States could claim a say in the Far East, why could Russia not claim a say in, for example, Africa?"

**On the Hungarian Revolution:** "Better a Communist regime supported by Soviet Russia, I thought, than an anti-Communist regime led by Cardinal Mindszenty. Hence my conscience was not troubled by the Soviet intervention. Everything I have seen in Hungary since then confirms my belief that I was right." (In the 1920's, when Taylor was studying Austro-Italian diplomacy in the 19th century, he refused to visit the Italian archives while Mussolini was in power. His scruples did not forbid him to visit Yugoslavia and Hungary in the 1950's.)

**On Proposed British Intervention at Suez:** "Michael Foot and I believed that

the British government was committing a crime comparable to Hitler's invasion of Poland."

**On Disarmament:** "Our programme [in the CND] was simple and we never wavered from it: unilateral disarmament first for our own country and then for everyone else."

This is only a sample of the fatuous opinions to which Taylor was and remains dedicated. It does little to inspire his readers with the notion that they learn anything from history, but it does corroborate the adage that the only thing worse than a young fool is an old one. Nevertheless, A. J. P. Taylor is an interesting specimen of a certain breed that, to our woe, is by no means extinct. His is the leftism, not of the flaming rebel, but of the parlor pinks of the academic establishment: narrow-minded, highly opinionated, blissfully unaware of alternative bodies of thought and opinion,

ignorant of and uncommitted to the assumptions and implications of his beliefs, sentimental, sanctimonious, and patronizing toward those who do not share his tastes and superstitions—in short, a liberal bigot. It is a type whose cultural power in universities and the mass media has been a principal cause of Anglo-American self-destruction.

Taylor is blessedly silent on the virtues of socialism, I suspect because its costs have become so obvious even to him that he cannot bring himself to defend it. He does state near the end of his book, for once correctly, that "Civilization can survive wars and slumps. Inflation destroys the foundations of society." Could there possibly be any connection between inflation and the socialism Taylor has supported as "a vague emotion" all his life? Probably not. Probably this, like everything else, is just an accident. □

## Finer Feet of Clay

**Bernard Malamud: *The Stories of Bernard Malamud*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

**Isaac Bashevis Singer: *The Penitent*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

by Will Morrissey

Morality is religion's province. Contemporary secularists do not see this, averting their eyes from the religious sources of their own moralities. Such aversion makes a kind of sense; deprived of any metaphysical foundation, secular morality can only rest on a physical one, and modern physics, chemistry, and biology are morally unpromising. Looked at hard, modern secular moralities dissolve into more or less appealing immoralisms, though many people prefer not to notice. Even ancient philoso-

phers, celebrated or condemned for their teleology, never quite offered rigorous proofs that nature issues directly in morality. Custom and opinion, compacted largely of accident and artifice, seem to contribute more.

Moral commandments animate Judaism. Hebrew has no word for "nature." Judaism rejects accident for Providence and abhors the art that produces graven images. Today's Jews confront men animated by modern science, the art of using nature to conquer nature, a human providence. The non-Jews Jews confront are therefore more profoundly unJewish than any other non-Jews in history. Bernard Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer write very differently, but each responds to the confrontation of Jews with modern non-Jews by upholding the Jewish tradition of moral seriousness.

Malamud has collected 25 of his short stories, all but two of which appeared in previous books. In his preface Malamud

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