

less, London's book is a much-needed corrective to the doomsaying which has become so fashionable in recent years.

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## Mother of Her Country

Pauline Glen Winslow: *I, Martha Adams*; St. Martins; New York.

Something strange is brewing in the popular arts these days. *Red Dawn* reminded its very large audiences of the possible menace of a Soviet invasion, and every week producer Stephen J. Cannell entertains millions of American viewers with the exploits of heroic Vietnam veterans on the *A Team* (the most reactionary show ever on television) and *Riptide*. Even novelists are turning to pro-American themes. Last year, Martyn Burke's very funny *Commissar's Report* provided, between the laughs, a frightening glimpse into Soviet life. Now comes *I, Martha Adams*, a thriller by the author of *The Brandenburg Hotel* and *The Counsellor Heart*.

The Russians have occupied the U.S. Predictably, most government officials accommodate themselves to the new order. All the usual arguments about sensitivity and compassion are trotted out to support nonresistance, and the radical chic crowd actually applauds the invasion as a step toward world peace. Only Martha Adams, the wife of a dead scientist, knows the secret of an American Doomsday Machine which could bring the Soviets to their knees. This fast-paced and very readable adventure novel chronicles Martha Adam's almost single-handed efforts to save her country. It is, as they say, a good read and the perfect gift for patriots addicted to thrillers. ☐

## Troubled Sleep

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus*; University of California; Berkeley.

In the more than 165 years since Mary Shelley wrote her Gothic tale, Victor Frankenstein and his monster have become an enduring symbol of the modern mind. She was only a girl of 18 when her adolescent nightmares curdled into the murky tale of an earnest

young man trying vainly to escape the consequences of his experiment in creating life. *Frankenstein's* merits do not lie in style or construction: it is as clumsy and, in its own way, as overwritten as any neo-Gothic novel cobbled together by Joyce Carol Oates. Characters are inserted as an afterthought with only the flimsiest of apologies, and the personages are contrived to move from event to event like so many chessmen manipulated by an amateur.

And yet, there is an after-image of the Modern Prometheus that has continued to haunt the conscience of succeeding generations as much as it troubled Mary's sleep. This daughter of the first feminist (Mary Wollstonecraft) and an ardent social revolutionary (William Godwin), a girl who defied convention and ran off with the very model of poetic rebellion—she of all people touched the panel on the wall, by accident, and found the secret passage-way to the 20th century: our fear of death, our relentless faith in the white-coated scientists who will save us from extinction, our even greater—and older—fear of what this power means. In the words of the serpent:

Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

That was the first temptation to which the human race succumbed. But it is not so much the creator of life, Victor Frankenstein, that we remember but his creation: the larger-than-life monster, who craves the love and understanding he can never receive at human hands, who demands a soul mate that his



creator will not complete, who—finally—in his resentment and despair sets out to poison his maker's life by murdering everyone dear to him—his brother, his friend, his wife. When we hold up this tale as a mirror, we see as our reflection not the face of Victor Frankenstein but of his monster; of modern man, the creature of the Modern Prometheus.

The University of California Press should be congratulated on bringing out this splendid Pennyroyal edition at a relatively affordable price (\$29.50). The oversized format combined with Barry Moser's evocative illustrations make it the only edition of this 1818 classic worth acquiring. ☐

## Last Rites

Mary Douglas: *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*; Ark/Routledge & Kegan Paul; London.

The history of most religions can be written as a struggle between High and Low Church. There is always a tension between those who adhere to ritual and tradition and those who seek salvation only from things of the spirit. As an ecumenical institution, Christianity practically begins with Paul's insistence on the faith that saves as opposed to the law that condemns. In religious studies as well, ritualists are lined up against those who would strip off layer after layer of magic, superstition, and taboo before reaching the pure center of faith and ethics. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas followed in the footsteps of Robertson Smith, Émile Durkheim, and her distinguished mentor, Evans-Pritchard, all of whom took seriously the forms, as well as the spiritual content, of religious life. Her subject is the notion of "pollution" or what we now call dirt. To take a familiar case, why does Leviticus prohibit the eating of pigs and fish without fins? Surely, not for reasons of health: trichinosis was not discovered until the 19th century. Such taboos have more to do with order than physical well-being. Anomalous or ambiguous phenomena and events upset the order of things—an order which is imposed by our systems of classifying everything: male/female, light/dark, water/land, air/earth, kin/foreign, right/left . . . and so on. Inevitably, there are cracks in any system: four-legged creatures with wings, swine that divide the hoof but do not chew the cud, squirrels that fly through the air but also walk on the ground, men that sleep with their mothers. "Any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. . . . That is why . . . we find in any culture worthy of the name various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events." In our own secular culture, dirt—what William James called matter out of place—takes the place of pollution. Our obsession with cleanliness may have more to do with our sense of order than from anything we know about microbes.

In the Old Testament pollution was a subject of some importance. It was seen primarily as a violation of Holiness, which "requires that different classes of things shall not be confused." Holiness is, therefore, right order and wholeness

or perfection. It is pollution if a priest has only one eye or if a man confounds the order of things by mating with his sister. Morality is more a question of rights. It protects a husband against adultery, but Holiness separates what should be kept separate. Incest, adultery, and homosexuality are abominations not so much because they infringe upon anyone's rights but because they are confusions. It is easy to read a Freudian message into all the taboos on sexual behavior and bodily emissions. Obviously, we are all more or less interested in our own bodies and tend to see the universe as a projection of our physical shapes. We devise tools to extend the use of our hands (hammers and axes), our feet (the wheel and the Mercedes), and even our eyes (the telescope and microscope). We classify inanimate objects as masculine or feminine, and our old system of weights and measures was based, by and large, on the proportions of the human body. In fact, we still measure horses by hands and whiskey by fingers. It is only *natural* for us to be concerned with apparently borderline cases. Saliva, excreta, and nail-clippings have magical properties, precisely because they were but are not part of us. Disputed boundaries are always dangerous.

The most important boundaries on our lives are the basic facts of "birth, copulation, and death," in Eliot's phrase. They are all periods of transition and times when the social order is threatened by disruption. We hedge them about with laws and taboos in an attempt to defuse the danger and reassert society's right to control even our grief, our joy, and our intimacy. The rituals which surround a marriage or a burying help to "create a reality which

would be nothing without them. It is not too much to say that ritual is more to society than words are to thought. For it is very possible to know something and then find words for it. But it is impossible to have social relations without symbolic acts."

Modern men have done their best to do without symbolic acts. In the name of enlightenment and humanity, the ritual forms which gave meaning—and even existence—to our inchoate passions and aspirations have all, by and large, been swept away as so much insincerity. The points raised by Douglas in 1966 (reissued by the wisdom of the publishers) now seem more than ever like warnings. "If a ritual is suppressed in one form," she observed, "it crops up in others, more strongly the more intense the social interaction." No society can survive without ritual and taboo, but it is equally true that rituals are not generalized abstractions: they are an inextricable part of the social order which they help to reinforce. Change the ritual and you change the society. The strong new social rites offered by the likes of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and Sun Myung Moon may have their merits as religions, but they are not the fruits of a centuries-long adjustment to Western social life. They go straight to the raw nerves of existence and serve to reinforce a sort of culture that we in the West have not experienced since we learned to make tools out of bronze. As the symbols of our common life become extinct, they are being replaced by sectarian fetishes which serve to divide, not unite us. A people that loses its national rituals is no longer a nation. It is an uneasy federation of tribes. (TJF) cc

## IN FOCUS

### Say a Little Prayer by Steven Hayward

George Goldberg: *Reconstructing America*; Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

Many years ago Leo Strauss remarked that the Supreme Court is more likely to defer to the contentions of social science than to the Ten Commandments as the words of the living God. Strauss was, of course, basing his observation on the use of social science in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, but he did not live to see the other shoe drop; in 1980 the high court ruled that a Kentucky statute requiring the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schoolrooms violated the "establishment" clause of the First Amendment.

The Kentucky case illustrates the current state of judicial wisdom on the subject of "separation of church and state." The relevant clause of the First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Well, *Congress* made no law; the Kentucky legislature did. But the modern Supreme Court, in a fit of judicial irredentism, has applied the "establishment" clause to state actions as well by way of the 14th Amendment's "equal protection" clause. Goldberg, a Jewish lawyer, outlines the history of the Court's debauchery of the First Amendment's intention; from the first church-state cases at the beginning of this century right through the 1984 Pawtucket crèche case.

Goldberg cannot contain outbursts of just indignation at the Court's tendentious reasoning on religion cases. It has come to this: a public school teacher would probably lose his job for leading a prayer in the classroom, while a teacher who showed a pornographic movie would be successfully defended by the ACLU (Anti-Christian Litigation Unit?) on First Amendment "free expression" grounds.

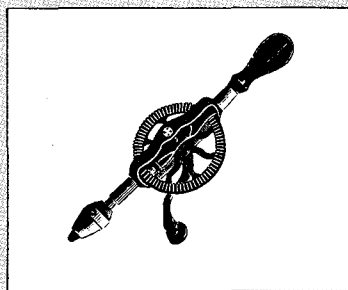
And what about the "free exercise" clause of the Amendment's religion clause? In the current judicial interpretation, the "establishment" clause eats up the "free exercise" clause, such that even a "moment of silence" in public schools is proscribed, as well as *voluntary* religious meetings on school grounds during off hours. Surely this flies in the face of the intention of the Framers of the First Amendment, who, recognizing the salutary effects of reli-

## LIBERAL ARTS

### Soul of Moderation

Brian De Palma, a master of contemporary American cinema, explained his personal code of decorum to the *Chicago Tribune*. It isn't easy to murder people creatively, he argued:

But I know what I'm doing. I know when I have a guy pick up a drill there's gonna be a lot of people be offended by it. But it seemed to me to be the right instrument for that time in the movie. He could have strangled her or hit her over the head with a club. But I thought this way was best. . . . Don't make it sound like



I went crazy with that scene. When he finally drills her, I didn't show the drill going into her body. I could have done that, but I didn't. cc