

tence compares favorably with the ill-conceived rebellion of the Generals in 1961 and the terrorism of the O.A.S. that succeeded it.

Given the failure of the French in Algeria, and the parallels with other crises of imperial rule in Vietnam, Rhodesia, and elsewhere since 1960, one is brought to wonder whether the West is capable of ruling an empire at all. Empires are not a pleasant business. They are won and kept by force and fraud, and their control requires unity of purpose, a willingness to inflict and endure suffering, and a conviction that the conquerors are in the right. The West does not now have a set of beliefs that justifies these realities of empire and it is not likely to develop one. It appears increasingly unwilling to accept or impose any form of physical force. Finally, it can be argued that what defeated the French in Algeria and what undermined America in Vietnam is the modern democratic nation-state itself: with its institutionalized factionalism and its international competition, it does not seem able to support the unity of purpose or the continuity of policy that imperial rule requires. The internal factions must be satisfied before external obligations can be met; the external obligations to and against other nations require men and measures different from those required for undeveloped colonies and satellites; and the kind of leader that is produced is not the kind suitable for the problems of empire. In the end, writes Horne of de Gaulle's peace negotiations with the F.L.N.,

he suffered from the lesson not learned by Kissinger in Vietnam, or perhaps by the Israelis *vis-à-vis* the Arab world; namely, that peoples who have been waiting for their independence for a century, fighting for it for a generation, can afford to sit out a presidential term, or a year or two in the life of an old man in a hurry; that he who lasts the longest wins; that, sadly, with the impatience of democracies and their volatile voters committed to electoral contortions every four or five years, the extremist always triumphs over the moderate.

Reviewed by SAMUEL T. FRANCIS

## *Reflective Reminiscing*

**New York Jew**, by Alfred Kazin, *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978. 307 pp. \$10.95.*

ALFRED KAZIN'S *New York Jew* includes far more than its somewhat defiant title would seem to indicate. The third volume of his intellectual and spiritual autobiography—the other two being *A Walker in the City* (1951) and *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965)—Mr. Kazin's latest book begins in 1942 and continues its reflective reminiscing through World War II and the three decades which followed.

It was in 1942 that Kazin's *On Native Grounds: A Study of American Prose from 1890 to the Present* first appeared. He tells us that he spent almost five years doing research for the book "in the great open reading room, 315, of the New York Public Library, often in great all-day bouts of reading that began when the place opened at nine in the morning and that ended only at ten at night." The effort was well worth it. It impressed the reigning literati with its loving and meticulous scholarship and style. Unfortunately, its impact was so great and its level of achievement so high that it has tended to dwarf all of Kazin's subsequent efforts; the latter have consisted of collections of random book reviews, essays, introductions to classics such as *Moby Dick*, editorship or co-editorship of works by writers like William Blake and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the autobiographic volumes previously mentioned. What with the responsibilities of teaching and lecturing at several prestigious colleges and universities in this country and elsewhere, little wonder that Kazin's unquestionable literary scholarship and insights have produced only sparks rather than the creative fire which illuminated his *On Native Grounds*. Nevertheless, *New York Jew* is worth reading.

The book proceeds chronologically, but its chronological narrative combines four parallel sets of reminiscences: impressions of people met; descriptions of places, cities, and countries visited; comments about the major events of the times; and revelations of personal intimacies.

Like Walt Whitman, one of his most admired literary heroes, Kazin is all-embracing in the people he meets, sees, and writes about. It can include the famous ones (President Kennedy, Robert Frost, Saul Bellow, Edmund Wilson, T. S. Eliot, and dozens of others—chiefly writers, critics, artists, and photographers), those related to famous people (like Gertrude Stein's brother, Leo), and the complete unknowns (like the anonymous couple in a London public park, whose sexual gropings Kazin deems appropriate to describe). It is an impressive collection of portraits. Kazin has a penetrating perception which pierces beneath the public posturing and reveals the human being in all his quivering vulnerabilities. Thus, he can write that "[Robert] Frost wanted his tomb in the form of the biggest and most adulatory biography, and I knew why. He could not bear the life he had lived." Or, with Ozymandias-like conciseness, he deflates the accomplishments of Bernard Berenson. Berenson was a famous authenticator of art who had been born a Jew in Lithuania and who subsequently "had grown up in the Boston slums, had turned Episcopalian at Harvard and Catholic in Italy. . . . As a work of art, Berenson himself was incomparable, but there was hardly anyone left to authenticate *him*. He said more than once that he felt a failure. In his own eyes he was. Perhaps, like so many immigrants, he tried too hard."

The kind of deflation found in Kazin's treatment of Frost and Berenson is similarly extended to many of the other famous people he writes of. Lionel Trilling, for example, loses some of his luster when he is shown trying, not too subtly, to conceal his Jewish roots and in the process thereby diluting the authenticity of his accomplishments. But it is not that Kazin wishes to elevate himself by knocking others down. It is rather that he is scrupulously honest in seeing all people—the famous, infamous, and un-famous—with all their warts as well as their splendors, and he is equally impartial in delineating the weaknesses of those whom he clearly admires—like Edmund Wilson, for example, for whom he has the greatest affection and who inspires the most extensive portrait in the book. When Kazin becomes acerbic and

more Swiftian than Horatian in style, he will depersonalize his attack under the shield of making his targets anonymous. He can assail callousness and ignorance by ironically observing, "At a painter's smart dinner party in the East Nineties, two visiting Indian diplomats explained, with a little smile, that the Holocaust had never occurred. It was all propaganda." Or note the following: "A Keats specialist at the university who had me to tea looked vaguely horrified and lifted a disdainful finger as he explained that talk of concentration camps was 'vulgar.' "

When it comes to giving us his impressions of places he visited and lived in during these portentous decades, Kazin is not quite so brilliant as he is drawing vignettes of people. It is quite obvious that it is New York which he knows and loves best; it is, after all, where he was born, raised, and educated; and where he lived and established his literary reputation. Whether it be in describing the physical decay of Brownsville, the section in Brooklyn he grew up in, or the excitements of the places in Manhattan, where he got to know the famous editors and writers of the 1940's, or Greenwich Village, whose Bohemian spirit he seems to endorse but mildly, it is New York which nourishes his emotional yearnings and stimulates his artistic imagination.

He is not equally successful in describing other American cities of other countries. We have merely attempts to recapture his subjective impressions, reminiscences sometimes reinforced by sympathetic or antipathetic predilections. Thus, we don't quite know whether his enthusiasm for Italy was due to his appreciation of the cultural wealth and history found there or whether it was at least partially intertwined with the joy he experienced on his second honeymoon. Again, his vision of Germany can't be separated from his revulsion at recalling the horrors recently perpetrated there; nor can he look upon Russia without the intruding consciousness of the evil embodied in Stalinism and its inheritors. Similarly, the glow which radiates in his recollections of his trip to Israel is stirred by his constant awareness of the persecution and alienation which the Jews have suffered for two

thousand years and by the joy he feels in recalling that at last they have returned to their original soil.

These decades that Kazin chronicles in his book were ones of great events—not only World War II (it is clearly the Holocaust which has left the most searing impression on Kazin's consciousness), but the Cold War and McCarthyism; the Vietnamese War and all the dislocation it caused, especially on the college campuses; the establishment of the state of Israel; the growing decay of urban societies; the increasing vulgarization of culture, and so forth. Kazin again sacrifices the scholar's analysis for the individual observer's impressions. Instead of weighty dissection, we have thoughtful reactions. And yet, Kazin's observations are pungent and sometimes more valuable than the pedant's inconclusive divagations. I have read few accounts of the divisiveness which split our college campuses in the 1960's that are marked by the admirable fusion of sense and sensibility that characterizes Kazin's recollections of that now seemingly distant era. His own son, Tim, was one of the student rebels—and yet Kazin gives us a picture of the issues and people involved which recognizes that the student rebels had a cause but were hardly above reproach, and those who denounced the student rebels had sufficient reason to do so, but they too were not always the guardians of unblemished virtue.

It is when Kazin leaves the scenes of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* and tries to reveal personal intimacies that the book sustains some embarrassing moments. Certainly, his portraits of his immigrant parents remain among the most touching and effective parts of the entire book. It is when he attempts to sort out the difficulties of his love life and his three unsuccessful marriages that Kazin stumbles. His lengthy descriptions of his erotic liaison with somebody called Mary Ellen are neither illuminating nor titillating—just embarrassing. He tries—rather desperately—to apotheosize both the sex acts and his sex partner, whose facile promiscuity and intellectual pretensions seem to be her chief claim for inclusion here. We wonder whether he is being Whitmanesque or Voltairian when he writes,

“And a priestess she was, the priestess who brought so many of us to the mystery of the bed. She made the delights of sex seem the well-practiced gestures of a temple ceremony.” To me it all seems like a feeble attempt to disguise a liberated lechery.

But the marital and extra-marital exposures should not be allowed to obscure the total effect of the book. It still remains a fine contribution to the intellectual, moral, and artistic history of our times.

Reviewed by MILTON BIRNBAUM

## *Reforming Conservatism*

**The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative**, by Craig Schiller, *New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1978. 174 pp. \$8.95.*

OF LATE, various spokesmen of the traditionalist and libertarian schools of right-wing American thought have espoused the view that the majority of the people of the United States are actually “conservative” in their sympathies. Kevin Phillips immediately comes to mind as one of the most prominent exponents of this thesis. Generally, what these people have apparently done is to combine the anti-New Deal segment of American society with the more moderate element among those who supported the New Deal, by which they include those who still believe in religious and moral standards while retaining a feeling of loyalty to their country. By downplaying the more controversial doctrines associated with American right-wing thought and by drawing their nets broadly enough to take in people generally classified as moderately liberal in their sympathies, the exponents of the New Majority have come up with some very hopeful prognostications for the future.

If they are right, one cannot help wondering why candidates for public office who have gen-