

assemble and interpret material, much of it already published, which may help towards a better understanding of the man who was Britain's youngest, and perhaps greatest, Prime Minister."

In fact, Reilly's is an excellent narrative of Pitt's private and public worlds, both of which are perhaps less mysterious than is usually assumed.

Pitt's weird youth is often not emphasized sufficiently as a factor in both his emotional reserve and his politics. With five close relations who were to varying degrees deranged, it is not surprising that he developed obsessive self-control supplemented by "relief" in politics and alcohol. The elder Pitt set him out for public life early, and while still a teenager port was prescribed for his fleshly ills. For all the warmth of Pitt's private relations, he could not become deeply involved with others. But Reilly's speculation that he was homosexual is pointless. The traditional explanation is the likeliest: Pitt was undersexed.

One consequence, as the author demonstrates, was that Pitt was too loyal a friend. He declared himself "the shyest man alive," and it might have been better if he had known when to tell people to get off. This was irksome enough as a personal problem, but at times the nation also suffered. For instance, after resigning in 1801, he rashly promised George III that he would support the incoming Addington administration and not mention again Catholic emancipation, in which cause he had given up office. He made that promise because he feared for the king's sanity and because the new (and incompetent) prime minister was his childhood friend, the son of the very doctor who had addicted him to the port that helped kill him.

Still, for England there was not a better choice in those years than Pitt. Fox, the other major figure from 1783 to 1806, was self-centered, opportunistic, and Francophile, albeit that "most unscrupulous of politicians...possessed an innate probity that burst unbridled from the shackles of his ambition." Reilly skillfully shows the importance of Pitt's peacetime reforms in administration, trade, and finance, as well as his sincerity regarding the abolition of the slave trade and electoral reform (though Pitt yielded too much to pressure in deferring further work on these as he was caught up in the struggle with France). While he was a mediocre war leader,

lacking his father's strategic vision, "It is, nevertheless, easier to criticize Pitt's policy than to find one which, in the circumstances facing him, would have produced a more favorable result."

Reilly comes, quite properly, to Whiggish conclusions about Pitt's career. He lists his accomplishments and failures, and then pays tribute to Pitt's most important legacy, his rectitude:

"Pitt was truly a man of principle, of one single principle that transcended all others and on which no compromise was possible. The welfare of his country, with which he associated the preservation of the Constitution and loyalty to the Crown, was the mainspring of his life, and for it he was ready to sacrifice cherished causes, personal advantage, and even his own reputation for integrity. This dedication was absolute....To his successors he left an example of leadership, fortitude and self-denial. To his country he bequeathed the priceless legacy of hope."

That is no little contribution, in any political season. [WV]

## The View in Winter by Ronald Blythe

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; xiii + 270 pp.; \$12.95)

### Berel Lang

Readers have often been asked to pay the price of boredom for the findings of social science, and Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village* provided a sharp reminder that the people and lives that subsidize the generalizations of sociology and psychology are at least as interesting as the theories themselves. Blythe's achievement in *Akenfield* was his ability to recapture the voices of the inhabitants of the fictionally named but real village of Akenfield; they spoke about themselves as they spoke for themselves. Blythe's narrative, leading the reader from one village to another, completed an unusual portrait of English rural life, at once dramatic and reflective. In his new book, *The View in Winter*, Blythe turns the same practice to the phenomenon of old age—the *problem* of old age, as he argues—but with less success: The dif-

ficulty of getting people to address directly the question of what it is to be old is itself part of the problem.

The premises of *The View in Winter* are both concise and indisputable. Because of increasing life expectancies, old age is more and more a factor in our society. Although society has conceded to the old their status as a social or political "problem," nobody is willing to listen to the old people themselves: not the young, because the old are alien; not the middle-aged, because of the fear of aging in a youth-centered culture; not even the old themselves, because they have no reason to think that either what they say or anything else they are able to give is desired by anyone in the society. This last point is part of a harsher and more general reality to which Blythe calls attention: The old in our society are addressed out of a sense of duty. They themselves make no claims on love—no advances to emotion, no indications of sexual desire, no expectations of future return.

This is undoubtedly a great theme, long known, as Blythe notes, to authors as various as Sophocles, Montaigne, and Shakespeare; it is new only in the number of people against whom the prejudice now works. One might well argue that, in the United States no less than in England, aging has taken the place of sex as a vice to be practiced only in private (extending even to the obscene language attached to those discreet institutions of the aged like "adult" villages or "convalescent" homes). But the question remains of how the aged themselves feel and speak about this when the pressures for silence are great, and here even Blythe's powers of evocation are not enough.

To be sure, his ear is keen as always in its selection and reporting. So we hear Thomas, General Haig's batman in the "Great War," now, at eighty-five, regretting the medals he had then refused to collect; and Margaret, ninety-one, still devoted to her early training with Maria Montessori, scolding the school-girls who visit her for preferring to listen to her stories rather than speaking for themselves; the retired farmer, seventy-seven, who cherishes his new freedom—"I wander for days in my car now. I don't stay in, I get out. 'Off we go,' I say. Away, Away!" But neither from the old themselves nor from others whom Blythe introduces—the social workers speaking about aged clients, the

sixth-formers commenting on grandparents -- does the reader learn much about the questions Blythe himself initially sets out. There are many stories told about the past, and Blythe inventively views these as the need of the old "to see themselves as no one sees them anymore." But the effect of such stories is a portrayal of bygone English country life very much like that disclosed in *Akenfield*, not a representation of old age today.

Blythe tries to compensate for this preference of the old for talking about being young by speaking himself about the problems of the aged. But the result here does not have the same force, and too often draws on an unsatisfactory mixture of intuition and doubtful explanation. For example, it is questionable, and Blythe offers no evidence for the claim, that the contemporary rejection of the old has roots in or indeed any connection at all with the idea of the rejection of the body that Blythe traces to Plato's influence. The scenes presented in *The View in Winter*, then, are often frustrating and sometimes beside the point. But this is never true of the questions to which the book calls attention, which remain clear and sharp. The occasional moments when these are directly addressed by Blythe's characters have a lasting edge: "You take a simple thing such as whether somebody likes you or they don't," one of the aged speakers comments. "It doesn't cross your mind when you are very old. I don't expect to be liked or disliked. I don't expect anything." If the decisive question for political and moral thinking is whether the way things are is the way they need or ought to be, there can be little doubt about the answer to that question for the current social reality of old age. Blythe's book speaks acutely of one practice of human wastefulness, and for his readers it is only a question of when, not whether, they will face it.

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## Briefly Noted

### Dimensions of Human Sexuality

ed. by Dennis Doherty  
(Doubleday; xiv + 249 pp.; \$8.95)

In 1977 a committee of the Catholic Theological Society of America issued a book entitled *Human Sexuality*. It elicited cheers from the liberated and would-be liberated, fury from the Catholic Right, hostility bordering on condemnation from the bishops, reserve from the CTSA, which distanced itself from its committee's product, and yawns from those who did not know in adolescence the terrors of going to hell for having masturbated. Of course there were others who, upon reading press accounts about *Human Sexuality*, noted with condescending approval that the Catholics were finally coming around to the modern world. More serious people found the book to be explicable only as a product of a subculture in which some people felt themselves sexually oppressed and were now a bit giddy over the first tastes of freedom. While many conservatives decried the study's "permissiveness," others thought its conformity to the culturally conventional norms of what is "creative," "integrative," and "humanizing" to be simply confused in an uninteresting way.

*Dimensions of Human Sexuality* examines the fallout, and its purpose is to "advance the argument" in a series of essays by Gregory Baum, William May, Daniel Maguire, Joseph Bernadin, and others, with a longish postscript by Anthony Kosnik, editor of the 1977 book. Some of the questions joined, with varying degrees of sharpness, extend far beyond the field of sexuality. They are the same questions posed about the current state of Catholic moral theology in relation to war and peace, world hunger, economic justice, and a host of other issues. One set of questions has to do with religious authority: Who knows and teaches what is morally right, and how do they know? The issue of authority is addressed in a thoughtful way, particularly in Archbishop Bernadin's response to the questions raised in the current discussion. Another and related set of questions has to do with the possibility of maintaining the distinctive beliefs of a particularist community. Bernadin and others want to

insist upon moral theology as the business of setting forth what is objectively true and, therefore, the moral ideal; pastoral theology tells how to give loving care to the wounded who fall short of the ideal, that is, to all us mortals. Kosnik and the authors of *Human Sexuality* want to close the gap between norm and practice. Whether it is possible to do that, short of the Kingdom of God, without making the practice the norm is a problem that is not resolved or even very thoroughly examined in *Human Sexuality* and *Dimensions of Human Sexuality*.

### Foreign Policy by Congress

by Thomas M. Franck  
and Edward Weisband  
(Oxford University Press; ix + 357 pp.; \$15.95)

An extremely important argument on a subject that has received surprisingly little sustained attention: the relatively new powers of Congress, including the "legislative veto," to influence U.S. foreign policy. The authors acknowledge the promising potential of this development but are clearly more concerned about its perils. An excerpt appeared in the October issue of *Worldview*.

### After Reason

by Arianna Stassinopoulous  
(Stein and Day; 240 pp.; \$10.00)

Stassinopoulous is a Greek-born writer and social critic living in Britain, emphatically concerned about the future of the whole Western world. The high-voltage rhetoric of this polemic against the myths of modernity is sometimes wearing, but her championing of Solzhenitsyn's case for the urgency of spiritual renewal is for the most part persuasive. Unlike Solzhenitsyn, Stassinopoulous is religiously rather eclectic, affirming an evolutionary view of the human person that draws from several religious traditions, Eastern and Western. The author is a conservative in the libertarian tradition, and her erudition is reflected in numerous citations from diverse authorities that are perhaps as interesting as her own text. The title, *After Reason*, seems to have the double meaning of being "beyond rationalism" and "in search of true reason." A book well worth pondering.