

**ABROAD**  
by Paul Fussell

(Oxford University Press, 246 pp., \$14.95)

Mark Caldwell

Paul Fussell wants travel writing out of the backwaters and in the mainstream of literature. Examining the spate of good travel narratives that appeared in England between the First and Second World Wars, he tries to erect around them a vocabulary of serious literary criticism by which they can be discussed not as ephemeral entertainments but, rather, as works of art with their own proper aesthetic canons.

And in fact the penultimate chapter, "Travel Books as Literary Phenomena," does offer provocative if hasty notes for a future poetics of travel literature. Travel books are sustained, Fussell contends, neither by narrative nor by the character of the narrator, but by their commitment to liberty and anomaly, to experiences and hence to literary structures that dispel "the shades of the modern prison house,...the passports and queues and guided tours and social security numbers and customs regulations and currency controls." Thus freed from the constraints of storytelling and character-painting, travel books indulge a form lately fallen into desuetude, the personal essay. The sites and sights often serve as cues for detailed and reasoned discourses that readers wouldn't tolerate in a less beguiling context. And finally, unsurprisingly, in what now seems at least the hundredth boring year of the reign of Northrop Frye over literary criticism, travel books represent an avatar of literary romance. A hero sets out, suffers rites of initiation, encounters adventure, finally returns to rejoin the culture from which he first set out. Thus, Fussell asserts, the travel narrative relives a deep-rooted myth and, in so doing, touches us at the same visceral level as does a good novel or poem.

But real, if debatable, ideas like these huddle together miserably in one thirteen-page chapter. The rest of the book is boring, embarrassing, and out of control. There are mundane accounts—summaries, really—of a number of English travel books from the '20s and '30s, by D.H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, Robert Byron, and others. These punctuate *Abroad's* dominant and most annoying feature, a series of

obtrusive, condescending, and graceless personal asides. Travel, Fussell snorts, is a thing of the past. The "transatlantic lovelies" (ocean liners to you and me) are gone, and with them the likes of lumpishly whimsical fantasy.

"I saw myself lolling at the rail unshaven in a dirty white linen suit as the crummy little ship approached Bora Bora or Fiji in a damp heat which made one wonder whether death by yaws or dengue fever might be an attractive alternative."

Shipboard sex, Fussell archly leers, might be helped on by "the proximity of all the passengers to the piston-and-cylinder principle, which, when you get to thinking about it..." What everybody's old grandmother knows ("No surprise,...the tendency to admit that for all his faults Mussolini at least 'made the trains run on time'") is spouted as if it were the product of a sophisticate's knowledge or a scholar's research. There are stillborn epigrams ("It's a rare American who, asked 'Where you from, Sir?' will venture 'Screw you' instead of 'Boise.'") and rotten jokes ("A very popular easy read in the early '30s was Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel*, which, if written today, would have to be reconceived as *Grand Motel*.").

The source of all these lapses is not, I think, ignoble. They are signs of stress. For *Abroad* opens with an evocation of Fussell's splendid *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which brilliantly rediscovered the terrors, brutalities, and paradoxical felicities of the First World War through the ephemera to which it gave rise. The guns of France could sometimes be heard in London; every city department store had a "Trench Requisites" section; an officer could drink tea with his mother in the morning and be back in the mire and blood of the front by evening. These and a carefully researched tissue of other details poignantly recreated the war and its literature by reacquainting us with its forgotten things, and in the end we saw an old story told completely anew.

Fussell aims at reproducing this method in *Abroad*. The first chapter, "Frozen Oranges," half-seriously proposes the praise of oranges in postwar travel books as an image of the postwar disgust with cold, rationing, deprivation. The trouble with this, as the infirmity of the book soon reveals, is that the '20s and '30s simply lacked the apoc-

alyptic definition of the war years. The war was such a horrifying, devouring, consuming fact, so pervasive and rapacious, that it transformed even the most fugitive details of daily life into small images of itself. But the '20s and '30s merely drifted. Virginia Woolf caught their spirit in the title of the novel she wrote about them: *Between the Acts*. They were an intermission, a pause in the action, never coming together around a central fact or a defining event. So their trivia remain trivia, either meaningless or only weakly significant. The Depression might have measured up to the method, but in the moiety of effort that Fussell devotes to the attempt to make oranges, sun-worship, passports, and peripatetic sex mean something, *Abroad* falls apart.

**MAO: A BIOGRAPHY**  
by Ross Terrill

(Harper & Row, xi + 481 pp., \$17.50)

Howard Goldblatt

Few individuals have influenced the course of modern history as profoundly as Mao Zedong. Like so many major international figures, much of Mao's life is shrouded in mystery; his role in China's epochal metamorphosis from a backward, semi-feudal, virtually toothless dragon to a world power well on the road toward modernization is veiled in myth and misunderstanding. Ross Terrill has done an admirable job of demythifying Mao in what is probably the most readable and comprehensive biography of China's Great Helmsman available in English. Terrill's task has been simplified by China's ongoing reevaluation of Mao following the fall of the Gang of Four and by the officially proclaimed bankruptcy of the Cultural Revolution. The final word on Mao's legacy is assuredly some distance away, but Terrill's contribution takes us substantially closer to understanding than most of what has preceded it. That is not to deny the invaluable contributions of Terrill's predecessors, for in many cases their work is the acknowledged foundation of his. Terrill has made the life of Mao more accessible to the nonspecialist by recapturing the human dimension of a man who has been generally pictured as superhuman by some of his Chinese biographers,

subhuman by others. The humanizing process is partly accomplished by Terrill's physical descriptions of his subject, beginning with a revealing look at Mao's physiognomy.

Beyond this the author appears to approach his subject with two different attitudes. With respect to Mao's revolutionary thought, his military strategy, and his understanding of Chinese history and society, Terrill is virtually unsparing in his praise. With respect to Mao's personal life, however, his attitudes toward and adventures with the opposite sex, his sometimes Machiavelian dealings with comrades, friends, and family, or his frequent manifestations of unparalleled self-esteem, Terrill is much harsher.

The early chapters, dealing with Mao's family, youth, education, and the formation of his political philosophy, make an engrossing story, sympathetically written. The author's and the reader's sympathies begin to undergo a change as Mao becomes more Draconian and callous in his dealings with contemporaries—friend and foe alike—and ultimately become negative. Mao's longevity (he died at eighty-three) did not serve him well. Used by those around him and faced with the mortality not only of his body but of his ideology as well, he must bear a significant measure of responsibility for the Cultural Revolution that so devastated China. As Terrill writes:

"He taught three generations to laugh in the face of taboos and authorities held in awe by Chinese people for two millennia. Yet he ended up, maybe to his own despair, as a mirror-image Son of Heaven whose every syllable was truth and law—terrible proof that the Old World lives on to haunt the New."

As befits the biography of a man of such monumental influence, the supporting characters are described primarily in their relationships with Mao; yet their stories too are often of compelling interest. Terrill generally tells these stories well, structuring his narrative so that the past and the future are alluded to at crucial points. To be sure, Terrill's interpretations will be debated, but he is to be credited both for his superbly readable style and his tireless search for and use of all available materials.

All in all, Terrill's *Mao* lives up to its publicity and should be required reading for anyone involved or interested in the study of contemporary China.

### **SHRINKING HISTORY: ON FREUD AND THE FAILURE OF PSYCHOHISTORY** by David E. Stannard

(Oxford University Press; 182 pp.; \$12.95)

John O'Sullivan

William L. Langer, in his presidential address to the 1957 convention of the American Historical Association, described to his colleagues what he viewed as "the next assignment" of the discipline. The profession, Langer insisted, "urgently needed deepening of our historical understanding through exploitation of the concepts and findings of modern psychology." The framework for this new research lay specifically in "psychoanalysis and its later developments and variations as included in the terms 'dynamic' or 'depth psychology.'"

Langer's call for "psychohistorical" studies found a quick response. Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* appeared the following year, and a body of work by historians using psychoanalytic theory was published over the next decade. By the early 1970s psychohistory had attracted a sizable number of practitioners in the historical profession and was well along in the process of institutionalization: courses and degree programs, panels at professional meetings, and a number of journals.

Psychohistory's gains came in the face of resistance by many historians. Opposition ranged from denying the applicability of psychoanalytic concepts to adverse judgments on specific psychohistorical studies. Jacques Barzun, in *Clio and the Doctors* (1974), challenged the claims of psychohistory in the course of his traditionalist critique of the new historical methodologies. David Stannard in *Shrinking History*, however, has escalated the assault on psychohistory, providing a much more substantive rebuttal to its claims.

Stannard's work is a relatively brief, powerfully argued attack on the fundamental premises of psychohistorical methodology. He begins with a critique of Freud's *Leonardo DaVinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, using that work as a case study of the difficulties he finds inherent in psychohistory: problems of fact, logic, theory, and culture. Stannard then engages in a more general exploration of these four problem areas, providing evidence and anal-

## **WAR OR PEACE?** The Search for New Answers



Thomas A. Shannon, editor  
*War or peace?*—the question for every age, but enlarged to global proportions in our own, is raised with new urgency in this book by a succession of distinguished Christians who have given their lives to a search for answers. Gordon Zahn, Paul Deats, Eileen Egan, Paul Hanly Fursey, Bryan Hehir, James Finn, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, Walter Muelder, David O'Brien and Tom Cornell.

paper \$9.95

## **FAITH: CONVERSATIONS WITH CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANs**

by Teofilo Cabestrero

Conversations with Ladislaus Boros, Georges Casalis, Jose Comblin, Enrique D. Dussel, Segundo Galilea, Giulio Girardi, Jose Maria Gonzalez Ruiz, Gustavo Gutierrez, Hans Kung, Jurgen Moltmann, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, Edward Schillebeeckx, Juan Luis Segundo, Jean Marie Tillard.

paper \$7.95



At bookstores, or from:  
**ORBIS BOOKS**  
Maryknoll, NY 10545  
Write for complete catalog