

ment that goes back to 1945 and has occupied some of this country's best minds, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to affect the momentum of debate on the large questions, and this book does not do so. Indeed the very title, incorporating the words "apocalypse" and "catastrophe," suggests that the author's aim is not so much to shed light as to add heat. Fortunately, while there is heat aplenty, there is a good deal of light as well. Three aspects of Beres's treatment of the superpower scenario tend to redeem it: his facility with detail, a serious discussion of particular contemporary threats to nuclear stability between the superpowers, and a thorough consideration of how to reduce or eliminate the risk of catastrophe.

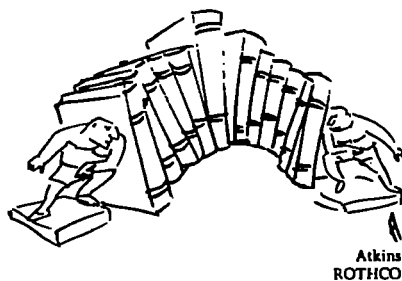
Detail is always helpful. The discussion enlivens an otherwise old debate by reminding readers of the scope of destruction a present-day nuclear exchange could bring and the enormous difficulties of limiting such destruction. The consideration of how to reduce risk is important in two ways. First, by highlighting the possibilities of an accidental first detonation of a nuclear weapon leading to nuclear war, Beres underscores the necessity for effective military, political, and technical controls over such weapons. Second, by considering changes in strategic and tactical military planning vis-à-vis nuclear weapons, he points to threats to stability and the particular patterns of escalation that are most worrisome today. Beres's own position is clear throughout. The superpowers are currently playing with fire. This dangerous game must end, and the way to stop it is (1) by ending the arms race, (2) by getting rid of nuclear weapons arsenals, and (3) by transforming "the characteristic behavior of the superpowers in world politics." A tall order. Beres's chapter on preventing superpower nuclear war is a lucid and cogent statement of the case for arms control, disarmament, and international reconstruction, but much longer on *why* these ends should be achieved than on *how* to achieve them.

Both proliferation and terrorism are relatively recent phenomena and only now is a literature on them being generated. Beres's book is a useful contribution to a new debate.

In this context "proliferation" refers to the numerous "mini-arms races" between such hostile neighbors as India

and Pakistan, Israel and the Arab states, South Africa and the black African states surrounding it. Though the megatonnage involved is far smaller than that possessed by the superpowers, it is not insignificant; and the consequences of even a local nuclear war between such powers, Beres shows, could be serious for the world at large. These consequences would be magnified enormously if such a local nuclear war triggered a superpower nuclear exchange.

Nuclear terrorism, like proliferation, has been made possible by the widespread availability of fissionable material under conditions of poor security in civilian nuclear power plants. Here too the danger posed by one nuclear device is amplified by the possibility of its acting as a trigger for a larger war.



Proliferation can be controlled, Beres argues, only as part of a larger effort involving restructuring the strategic relation between the superpowers, aiming at a return to strategies of "minimum deterrence." The keystone of the effort to control proliferation, he believes, must be the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970; yet it must be strengthened by certain realistic measures. Incentives for renouncing nuclear weapons must be strengthened through "preferential treatment in terms of security assistance, materials, equipment, services, and technical aid." Inspection must be strengthened to minimize cheating; security must be tightened on nuclear fuel; and some parts of the world "must be declared nuclear-free zones." These are reasonable and realistic measures, though politically difficult.

This is the sort of book that will be overtaken by events in a relatively few years. In the meantime its scope and detail, and the readiness of the author to propose solutions to problems that often appear insoluble, make it worth attention by those who are interested in attempting to overcome the dilemmas of the age of nuclear weapons. **WV**

VISITANTS

by Randolph Stow

(Taplinger, 189 pp., \$9.95)

John Tessitore

Some years ago a few of us made a habit of gathering in the office of a certain English professor—his awesome intellect rivalled only by his indefatigable liver—shamelessly helping ourselves to the beers he kept stored in an old rhinoceros of a refrigerator and ruminating about the "good old days" when Faulkner lived on Jack Daniels by the week and Scotty and Zelda rounded out the evening with a dip in the fountain at the Hotel Plaza. Inevitably, as the beers ran low and the lies stretched thin, someone would say to the Learned Man: "But J—, what about today? Who's writing good fiction now?" And each time the Learned Man would lower his head sadly and reply in low, broken tones: "There's no more good news."

The fact is, more than a few fiction enthusiasts have been forced to conclude that the recent novels of our "major" British and American authors only confirm the verdict. "All the good stuff is coming out of Latin America," said a friend in the mid-1970s, and of course since then the excellence of such authors as Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes has popularized this observation. But *Visitants*, Randolph Stow's seventh novel, is good news, forcing us to reconsider the state of English-language fiction and, with it, our own nationalist prejudices.

An Australian, Stow is one of several voices emanating from that enigmatic land that have lately made an impact on the Northern Hemisphere. In film and fiction, the variety and quality of Australian artists tempts a comparison with America's Southern Renaissance—that burst of talent in the '20s and '30s that included Erskine Caldwell, Katherine Anne Porter, John Crowe Ransom, and, of course, William Faulkner.

Stow himself is principally in the Anglo-Saxon tradition; and he is most specifically indebted to the most extraordinary and puzzling member of that tradition, Joseph Conrad. Set in Papua, New Guinea, in the late 1950s, at the very end of Australian rule, *Visitants* invokes in character and tone the Malayan stories of Conrad. Like *Lord Jim*, the novel presents two cultures in

conflict: one black and tribal, the other white and colonial. The dichotomy is by no means a simple one; for conflict, we are shown, exists not only *between* cultures but *within* them, as exemplified by the struggle for chieftain hierarchy. And as with Conrad, Stow focuses on the fate of men forced to draw upon their inner resources, men who, left to function in the hidden places of the earth, are denied the comfort and support of what in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad calls "kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you."

MacDonnell, Dalwood, and Cawdor are three such men ("dimdins," as the natives call them). The first, an old trader and planter, has existed in his now decaying village—appropriately called Rotting Wood—for fifty years; and it is clear that we must respect this cranky old man of seventy-two, for in his own way he has successfully come to terms with the burdens of love, personal worth, and death.

Dalwood—young, brash, and strong—is the embodiment of the *élan vital*, a combination superman and Boy Scout. While in less skillful hands Dalwood might well have emerged a mere functional character used to propel action, through the very successful technique of multiple narrative voices Stow lets us witness Dalwood's growing awareness and sympathize with his own sensitivity.

Finally there is Cawdor, the taciturn hero of this Manichaeic tragedy. Old beyond his twenty-six years, weakened by assaults from within and without, he embodies the defeat of Hawthorne's Dimmesdale with the surrender of Conrad's Jim. Unfortunately, we do not come to know Cawdor as we do Jim, largely because we do not have the advantage of Conrad's wonderful narrative voice, Marlow. But if we cannot really know Cawdor, we most surely like and respect him; and when his tale is concluded, we can say confidently—as Marlow does of Jim—"He was one of us." This, I think, comes very close to love.

And that is what makes this novel so satisfying. There are no "Big Ideas" here, no philosophic dialogue in the Dostoevski/Thomas Mann tradition. But there are some awfully big ideas nonetheless: of friendship and faithfulness; honor and dignity; culture and value. Stow recognizes that it is here—on the mundane level of daily interaction—that men experience their lives;

and it is on this level that they ultimately manifest their worth. Certainly we have been told this before, by other artists in other times. But ours is a forgetful nature, and it is good to hear that voice once again. [WV]

CONTRIBUTORS

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Briefly Noted

WEALTH AND POVERTY

by **George Gilder**

(Basic Books; 306 pp.; \$16.95)

This is the most thorough and lucid argument to date setting forth the economic theories espoused by the New Right and largely embraced by the Reagan administration. With engaging, although sometimes verbose, energy, Gilder explains "supply side economics" in a way that tries to come to grips with the moral, as well as the pragmatic, strengths of capitalism. His liberal interlocutors are always in his mind, frequently disputed by name and some-

times put down with sardonic glee. His critique of conventional approaches to welfare is devastating, solidly based as it is upon first-hand experience, especially with the black urban poor, as well as a stunning range of academic studies. The thesis is that capitalism is good for the rich and for the poor, that the best hope for breaking out of the current depression and dependency of the black underclass is to reduce taxes, thus enticing wealth into productive job-producing investment. This book sets forth the rationale behind the Kemp-Roth Bill for tax cuts and makes no bones about its departures from conventional conservatism's obsession with inflation and deficits. It is an ambitious book, ranging from the usual subjects of academic economics to male-female relations and the role of religious faith in economic behavior. Praised by people such as Nathan Glazer, David Stockman, and Congressman Jack Kemp, there is no better introduction to a radically different understanding of economics that, at least for a time, will have a prominent place in the political sun. Quite apart from its political timeliness, its moral analysis of received liberalism cannot be ignored by serious students of ethics and public policy.

AFFLUENCE, ALTRUISM, AND ATROPHY: THE DECLINE OF WELFARE STATES

by **Morris Silver**

(New York University Press; 248 pp.; \$17.00)

The title pretty well suggests Silver's thesis: Historically the affluent have tended to a delusive altruism that asks the state to fund their consciences with respect to the needs of the not so affluent. It doesn't work, says Silver, professor of economics at City College, New York; and the welfare states of the West, like ancient Rome and Sung China, are just beginning to find that out. Although he wants to write for a general audience, nonspecialists will likely be discouraged by flow charts and jargon. Silver is aware of and sympathetic to "supply side" economic theories, but better statements of that approach are available.

—Richard John Neuhaus

**FREEDOM IN THE WORLD:
POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL
LIBERTIES 1980**

by Raymond D. Gastil

(Freedom House, x + 331 pp., \$24.95)

For some years Freedom House in New York has monitored freedoms around the world, publishing surveys that rank countries in terms of freedom and indicate gains or losses during the year. More recently, Raymond D. Gastil has served as editor and principal author of a yearbook that includes this information and much more.

The present volume is a valuable contribution to this series. It includes two long essays on countries that have undergone revolutionary changes in the last year—Iran and Zimbabwe. Both focus on the continuing struggle for democratic freedoms and are not only informed but contain strong judgments—judgments that merit and I'm sure will receive critical attention.

Leonard Sussman has contributed an examination of "problems in restructuring the flow of international news," a phrase that refers to the call by some Third World countries for a "balanced" rather than a free press, the balance to be determined by governments. The

history of the present debate is well presented, as are the underlying issues in the debate. There is, in addition, a section devoted to basic moral values in human rights policies. It is brief and well done.

The present volume will not escape the inevitable charges of bias. Acutely aware of such charges, Gastil and his co-workers have provided a rationale for their work, for their goals, and their methods.

This is highly recommended as a reference work and as a stimulating discussion of freedom and its enemies. The discussion of human rights in the world today will take a different turn with the new U.S. administration, but it will still be on the agenda. This book should make it easier to grasp different standards with which people approach the subject.

—James Finn

THE PUBLIC CHURCH

by Martin E. Marty

(Crossroad; 170 pp., \$10.95)

America's most practiced surveyor of the religious situation proposes a new institutional model for relating public

life to transcendent, religiously based values. The "public church" differs from the civil religion espoused by Rousseau and Jefferson, coming closer to Benjamin Franklin's idea of a public religion that incorporates rather than displaces "the sects." Marty's public church is a coalition of the Protestant mainline, Catholicism, and the more culturally accessible forms of Evangelicalism. The coalition does not imply that these groups merge into one another but that they redefine their relationship as a "community of communities" within which discourse and judgment relevant to the *res publica* can be nurtured. The alternatives to the public church, in Marty's argument, are the militant tribalism of the Religious New Right (Moral Majority and all that) and the militant secularism that views religion as, at best, a private indulgence that must be rigorously excluded from public space. Marty acknowledges that his proposal to combine commitment and civility may seem improbable, but he makes a convincing case that the alternatives are rather frightening. *The Public Church* is an informed and thoughtful overview of some possible futures for American religion and culture.

—Richard John Neuhaus

COMING

HENRY STEELE COMMAGER on U.S. foreign policy...JULIAN HOLLOCK on the French elections...SY SYNA on what's happened to religious drama...ROBERT JOHANSEN on global politics...SUDHIR SEN on helping ourselves...MARVIN ZONIS on Islam...ROBERT COX on the press in Argentina...LEWIS NKOSI on Nadine Gordimer...