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Sentimental Imperialists is a cautionary tale with an unresolved ending. It is about "virtually invincible ignorance" between peoples, and about the way continued disjunction between national myth and historical reality affects perceptions and national policy. Focusing upon their areas of specialty (China, Japan, the Philippines), the authors sum up clearly and succinctly two centuries of chauvinistic misunderstandings and clashing versions of "destiny." Two tragic sentimental convictions loom: that the superiority of our society or institutions justifies cultural reality affects perceptions and national policy. Focusing upon their areas of specialty (China, Japan, the Philippines), the authors sum up clearly and succinctly two centuries of chauvinistic misunderstandings and clashing versions of "destiny." Two tragic sentimental convictions loom: that the superiority of our society or institutions justifies cultural, economic, or political tutelage and that after two centuries of interaction we could still honor a "domino theory" that presupposed a uniform "Asian" mind.

This book is itself a missionary work—a plea for greater self-knowledge through better appreciation of other societies. Therefore it is intended for the general reader, providing a survey of how (with the best of intentions) Americans have assumed they know what other people want or need. Whether as Christian missionaries, exemplars of the Western standard of living, or paternalistic reformers, we have been reluctant to recognize that other societies may have their own, irreconcilable dreams of grandeur. It is a strength of the authors that they can see the correspondence of "Manifest Destiny" and the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." It is another strength that, while evocatively charting our voyages of discovery in each culture, they can see the line between understanding another's customs and knowing another's mind. Orient and Occident remain "inscrutable" throughout the narrative.

I found the early chapters truly remarkable in their sweeping summations of East Asian societies and the mutual misunderstandings that occurred as they were "opened." Equally noteworthy is the authors' ability to combine apt generalization with selective and attractive detail on unfamiliar points. Their treatment of Filipino history under the Commonwealth, the subtleties of the Open Door, the dissimilarities in Sinophone and American-Japanese-American relations during the nineteenth century stand out in this regard. The authors generally maintain a sense of what will hold the reader's attention and an appropriate balance in treating the three areas studied, though China gets the dragon's share of space. There are twenty-one chapters, each with its own integrity as well as a clear relationship to the others—no mean feat in a multi-authored work. The material is too rich for summary.

A work of such scope will exhibit some problems for the general reader, however. Some topics deserve greater coverage than they were given: More discussion of the guerrilla warfare in the Philippines might have presented a prefiguration of Vietnam. Some sweeping statements merit expansion or explanation: On page 95 the authors write that post-Civil War America was "hardened to mass violence and alienated from the revolutionary tradition," identifying itself increasingly with the great monarchical empires.

A multi-authored book may also exhibit some unevenness of tone. Thomson and Perry write more in sorrow than in anger, but Stanley's portrayal of the Philippines excoriates both Americans and the co-opted Filipino elite for ignoring socioeconomic reforms. For him, both nations have paid a price: Ferdinand Marcos. He may be right; I still remember my sadness at the death of Magsaysay. But as the book treats perceptions as well as policy, more attention or credence might have been given to Quezon and Osmeña and to the writings of Benigno Aquino and the Red Road to Rebirth. The first third of this volume traces the acknowledgement throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the sovereignty of nature, the validity of the scientific method, the heroism of art, and the impact of force. But so many figures are so cursorily treated—from Marx and Carlyle and Nietzsche to Lawrence and Russell and Picasso—that Kaplan's argument cannot be discerned with clarity and confidence. He has nevertheless attempted to identify a "myth of naturalism" and its cognate "gospel of power," a myth so compelling in its day that it forced both assenters and dissenters to accept its definition of life as a struggle punctuated by violence and threatened with cataclysm.

If, as Kaplan writes, "twenty-th
century history has laid down a terrible record of the existence of a culture of power and struggle," then the prophetic role that Henry Adams assigned to himself takes on special poignance. For he understood that nothing mattered more to the conduct of human affairs than the calculus of power, and those who wielded it with executive flair won his admiration. Yet Adams felt estranged from the polity that had spurned his claim to leadership, to which he had felt virtuouso entitiled from birth. He was fearful and contemptuous of the financiers and technicians whom he suspected of being the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. He registered both an awe and a dread of power, and this exemplified the tensions of naturalist thought. Friends like John Hay and Theodore Roosevelt, exercising the statecraft Adams had felt destined to display, were asserting their country's influence in a manner that would transform American diplomacy. Yet Adams himself, nursing those fantasies of power that afflict the powerless, could locate no direction, no purpose, no moral restraint in this realignment of international affairs. He recoiled in horror, haunted by the specter of apocalypse.

Conceiving the universe as a closed system vulnerable to entropy, Adams stressed the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which supposedly called into question the optimistic theory of evolution. Concluding that scientific laws cancelled each other out, bemused by the unwillingness of scientists to pursue the implications of their own discoveries and hypotheses, Adams withdrew into a private world of whimsy and intimations of impending doom. He became the man in the ironic mask.

It makes little sense to credit so unscientific a temperament with adherence to naturalism. Kaplan can do so only by minimizing the sadness Adams felt for the triumph of the Dynamo over the Virgin. Yet it is hard for the reader of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres to be immune to the charm of the medieval synthesis, which Adams romanticized and which suggested to him an antidote to cynicism and brutality. On the one hand Adams remained deaf to the upper registers of faith; on the other he never managed to formulate a way of speaking truth to power. He never found the principles of order to challenge the Machtspolitik that, harnessed to the genius of technology, seemed so aimless and so reckless. In a world that tabulates the pope's divisions with a smirk, Adams's dilemma is exorcising because it is our own.

Yet Power and Order lacks the elegance of a seamless argument; Adams's conundrum is not linked to the novels of Dreiser, Norris, and Crane. An intellectual historian might have tried to show that the novelists had read Adams — and would have failed, since Mont-Saint-Michel and the Education were privately printed in limited editions. A literary critic might have drawn parallels. But Kaplan, who teaches English at Northwestern, contents himself with short and rather familiar proofs of the ferocity of social warfare in the classic texts of American naturalism: Despite its allusions to second- and even third-generation "naturalists" like Dos Passos and Mailer, Power and Order fails to construct a persuasive case for the vestigial strength of the naturalist tradition in American culture.

Kaplan's pithy analysis of Crane nevertheless deserves praise. He effectively demolishes the interpretation that Crane himself projected onto his fiction: that "environment is a tremendous thing." Yet his Maggie: A Girl of the Streets remains affecting because of its criticism of the social code and of the sexual hypocrisy that drives its protagonist to suicide. Kaplan nevertheless fails to consider how Crane's strategy calls the naturalist enterprise itself into question. For if the impact of social codes is conceded and if, as history shows, they can berationally and sympathetically revised, then naturalism — with its commitment to the supremacy of physical pressures — is undermined. No matter. A doctrine that is alleged to incorporate both vitalism and mechanism, both religious belief and atheism, both moralism and indifference to ethical value, both apolitical art and reformist fervor, is so elastic that its semantic and intellectual integrity is suspect. Kaplan rightly emphasizes the distinctive predilection for violence in naturalism (although Adams himself, oddly for Kaplan's thesis, exempted himself from the bare-knuckle bellicosity of the fin de siècle). Yet naturalism is so eclectic in its explanation for the sources of violence that, though plenty of corpses are visible, it is obvious where the bullets came from.