

SENTIMENTAL IMPERIALISTS
by James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter
W. Stanley, and John Curtis Perry
(Harper & Row; xv+323 pp.; \$17.50)

Kalman Goldstein

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, 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 misreadings 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 Sino-American and 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 Bonifacio Salamanca.

A final criticism, sure to be made by many: the absence of bibliography or footnotes. Knowledgeable readers will with delight recognize the contributions of Foster R. Dulles, Tang Tsou, Akira Iriye, and others; but a missionary work for the general reader, having whetted the appetite, should include a list of readings.

None of these suggestions detracts from the enjoyment and utility of *Sentimental Imperialists*, unless the reader insists on happy endings.

Since Vietnam our perceptions and policies have become less moralistic, and we don't expect Chinese gratitude, Japanese submissiveness, or cultural mimicry. Yet we still make culture-bound distinctions between authoritarianism and totalitarianism and have just begun again to view the globe in Manichean, confrontational terms. The authors leave us unsure of whether we now have decided to see the world as geopoliticians or as proselytizers, but certainly they illustrate the pitfalls of self-delusion. [WV]

**POWER AND ORDER:
HENRY ADAMS AND THE
NATURALIST TRADITION
IN AMERICAN FICTION**

by Harold Kaplan

(University of Chicago Press; xi+146 pp.; \$15.00)

Stephen J. Whitfield

This brief, densely written study in cultural criticism is more diffuse in scope than its subtitle suggests. Only two of its six chapters examine Henry Adams, that beguiling and exasperating thinker whom the author takes to be a representative man of letters of his times. It was Adams, Professor Kaplan claims, who articulated the cosmology of power that sustains such novels as *Sister Carrie*, *The Octopus*, and *The Red Badge of Courage*.

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, "twentieth-

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 virtually entitled 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 thus 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 *Machtpolitik* 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 excruciating 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 be rationally 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 viol-

ence 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 isn't obvious where the bullets came from. [WV]

THE LISLE LETTERS edited by Muriel St. Clare Byrne

(University of Chicago Press; 6 volumes; \$250 to 12/31/81, \$300 thereafter)

Richard Marius

The times were turbulent. Arthur Plantagenet Lord Lisle was sent across the Narrow Seas to be the captain of Calais, the last English possession on the continent of Europe — a marshy, unhealthy location and a walled city that Thomas More described as an ugly and boring place. Lord Lisle, a bastard son of King Edward IV, was about sixty, but apparently healthy and vigorous and undoubtedly ambitious and hopeful about the future. He stayed at his post for seven years before he was summoned home and imprisoned in the Tower in the confusing events surrounding the fall of Thomas Cromwell. There he died in March, 1542, having just received the king's pardon.

The Lisle Letters make up the largest body of private correspondence left to us from the reign of Henry VIII. Now they have been gloriously edited and stunningly produced in six volumes. The first thing that must be said about this incomparable edition is that it is readable. The book lover can take it up without the depressing sense that primary sources from the daily life of nearly five hundred years ago are like medicine — good for one's general condition but bitter in the mouth and acceptable only by an act of will. *The Lisle Letters* as Ms. Byrne presents them and as the University of Chicago Press has printed them are a delight to peruse.

Ms. Byrne has departed from the standard practice of scholarly editions in several ways. She has modernized the spelling — a marvelous