texts, the same, by implication, might well be true of the skills of the philosopher in the consideration of literary texts. Lang does not make this reverse argument, but he does read literature philosophically. His criticism rewards the effort it takes to follow him through. The improbability of Lear's opening chanson is the obvious enough point of departure for Lang's essay on that play. Lear, says Lang, wishes, as a man might, to demonstrate his control over his own death. He sees through Goneril and Regan well enough; he is stage-managing their protestations of love with the same arrogance with which he expects to retain power and prestige after giving it up. He sees himself enacting a role, performing in another play that he has contrived. Cordelia's refusal to play her role is the beginning of the process of his enlightenment: Mortality is not, as is virtually everything else in his kingdom, subject to his pleasure. He must eventually find himself located within the fact of mortality rather than outside it. In the end his dying role becomes a subjective and first-person consciousness of death's full impotence; the inability to retrieve life from it or maintain anything of life in it is unmistakable.

Lang also has excellent chapters on Borges and on 1984. It is a valuable and interesting book. Most important, Lang is continuing the necessary process of opening up the disciplines to one another—a process that has resulted in rich and exciting insights into the traditions we live by, the progress we hope for, and the conundrums that continue to bedevil us. [WV]

HISTORICAL CAPITALISM by Immanuel Wallerstein
(Verso Editions [distributed by Schocken Books]; 110 pp.; $6.50)

Brian Thomas

Here, in refreshingly few pages, is a succinct how-it-works of the modern world economy. Well, almost. Wallerstein's book is a condensed version of his multivolume The Modern World System, and though it is impressionistic, owing to its slenderness, it surpasses many longer works. His account of the genesis of today's woes has at first a familiar leftist ring. He utters bons mots about "individualizing the profit and socializing the risk" in mercantile ventures over the past two centuries; he discusses the contradictions that have emerged as elites have devoted themselves more strenuously to amassing money; and he inquires into the musing of objections to the system. Readers are not spared the usual disdainful remarks about the "commodification of everything" and the absurdity of capital accumulation as an end in itself. (Although cover art rarely has much bearing on a book, the reproduction here of a sixteenth-century woodcut depicting big fish eating little fish, and men devouring all, deftly captures the tone of this portion of the essay.)

In spite of these familiar echoes, Wallerstein differs from most leftists in his suspicion of progress. He considers it a dangerous shibboleth. Brand X—capitalism—draws most of his scorn; it deserves no praise as a spur to development because material gains have been deceptive. Progress and equalization have taken place only among the top 15 percent of the population; Pan-glossian talk of the sweetening lot of mankind ignores the abject misery of the remainder. The appeal of the march of money with its formidable force of that hoary and embarrassing question, Who's getting it?

Marxism, of course, is also tainted by the evolutionary bug, and the confidence that many leftists have in an ever-increasing bounty alarms Wallerstein more than would a similar confidence among the members of the Chamber of Commerce. He points out that the future could be worse than the present, that we could end up writhing under yokes more obnoxious than those that bear down on us today. The future may hold a refined barbarism, or a more efficient brand of exploitation. Here, as elsewhere, other critics of modern life—some radical, some nostalgic for simpler times—have spelled out Wallerstein's sketchy arguments in more detail.

Not until Wallerstein begins exploring the connections between knowledge and power does interest quicken. He scrutinizes the links between racism and the practiced universalism of the Enlightenment, the way meritocracy has cloaked oppression, the toll exacted by cultural domination. He suggests, for instance, that what racists have wanted is not to expel oppressed groups but to keep them inside the system, where they can serve as a source of inexpensive labor. Far from being an evil easy to eradicate, racism, he insists, is embedded in the growth of capital as a whole, both justifying inequality and bullying the downtrodden into accepting their serfdom.

The most controversial part of Historical Capitalism concerns "truth" as an ideology and the pose of science as a neutral culture. The great emphasis on the rationality of scientific activity, Wallerstein says, has masked an endless delirium of acquisitiveness. To paraphrase: The shift away from the narrow cultural base that religion once furnished, onto a scientific base that supposedly allows one to escape the biases of individual cultures, has merely justified a pernicious kind of cultural imperialism—domination in the name of skepticism and intellectual liberation.

Controversy will inevitably arise because of Wallerstein's habit of conflating critical inquiry—the proper pursuit of truth—with the mere pretension of objectivity. He takes a demonological view of so-called rationality's part in the suffering of the majority, chiding Marxists for clinging to the positivistic dogmas of the nineteenth century. This is true as far as it goes. Yet Wallerstein never clarifies whether he thinks the culprit is "reason" or reason, a moral failure or a failure inherent in the very exercise of thinking about the human condition.

In a field where no one seems to write except to produce dull prose by the furlong, brevity stands out. Unfortunately, Wallerstein himself suffers from a mealymouthed style; his most vigorous points are blunted by qualifiers and second thoughts. The result is at once wooden and garrulous—a danger common to transcripts of lectures, as these essays are. One wishes an editor had persuaded Wallerstein to speak plainly and face the consequences of his novelty. And no care has been taken to document assertions or supply a bibliography. [WV]

GANDHI'S CHILDREN by Trevor Fishlock
(University Books [New York]; 189 pp.; $16.50/$8.95)

W. Howard Wriggins

Trevor Fishlock has sharp eyes, sensitive ears, a lively, humane wit, and a skillful pen. Like many other serious journalists posted to India, he copes with the contra-dictory, aspiring, and disheartening realities of India by providing numinous vignettes and pithy comments on what seems to him important. Fishlock brings us religious ceremonies millennia old, the teeming excitement of major cities, the monotonous and harshness of rural village life, the argumentative, remarkably vigorous criticism of India by Indians and their touchy sensitivity when non-Indians go half as far. He contrasts the tidy, productive, well-ordered Punjab with the anarchic, corroded, corrupting life in Orissa or Bihar. In short, he gives his readers as rich and compact a tapestry as this reviewer has seen. Americans should become more knowledgeable