
PAPERBOUNDS

THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE. By William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. Macmillan, 3rd ed., 1979. 85 pp. \$1.95 (cloth, \$4.95)

In a more perfect world, people who write would, like drivers, have to be licensed. If such were the case, this book would be their Operator's Manual. In 1959, the *New Yorker's* E. B. White published a revised version of the privately printed "little book" written by his English professor at Cornell, William Strunk, Jr. White published a second edition in 1972. This new, third edition, he writes, underwent a general overhaul "to correct errors, delete bewhiskered entries, and enliven the argument." The advice is always simple and direct, and it makes sense: "Never tack *-ize* onto a noun to create a verb. Usually you will discover that a useful verb already exists. Why say 'moisturize' when there is the simple, unpretentious word *moisten*?" White comes down hard on other jargon, e.g., "offputting" and "ongoing": "As a simple test, transform the participles to verbs. It is possible to *upset* something. But to *offput*? To *ongo*?"

THE PRICE OF GLORY: Verdun 1916. By Alistair Horne. Penguin reprint, 1979. 364 pp. \$2.95

The battle of Verdun lasted for ten months. It was the longest in history (by comparison, the World War II battle of Stalingrad lasted five months). Three-quarters of the French Army's divisions served at one time or another on the 15-mile front; and although other World War I battles exacted higher casualties, Verdun resulted in "the highest density of dead per square yard that has probably ever been known." French and German losses amounted to 420,000 dead and 800,000 gassed or wounded; after the war, another 150,000 unidentified and un-

buried corpses (or fragments of corpses) were discovered. British historian Horne describes the tactics of both sides (the Germans introduced flame-throwers and phosgene gas) and examines the personalities of the opposing military leaders: France's Joseph Joffre, who "thought from his belly rather than with his head"; Germany's ruthless Erich von Falkenhayn; England's Douglas Haig, whose visits to casualty clearing stations made him physically ill. Verdun's influence on later French strategists was enervating. The heavy toll of World War I, especially at Verdun, led the French, as World War II began, to embrace *defense* as the safest policy and the fortified Maginot Line along its eastern border as a security blanket. Horne sees Verdun as World War I in microcosm, "an intensification of all its horrors and glories," an "indecisive battle in an indecisive war."

—AND I WORKED AT THE WRITER'S TRADE: Chapters of Literary History, 1918–1978. By Malcolm Cowley. Penguin reprint, 1979. 287 pp. \$3.95

Malcolm Cowley succeeded Edmund Wilson as literary editor of the *New Republic* from 1929 until 1944. In this overview of 20th-century American letters, he examines many of the concerns and trends (the re-examination of America's past by writers of the 1930s, the decline of storytelling in fiction especially during the 1960s) of modern writing. Recent critics have dismissed Hemingway too easily, Cowley says—a case of the sons killing off the father. Cowley also champions writers he feels have been too often ignored or underrated—S. Foster Damon (reading his poems makes Cowley think of "New Hampshire fields that are strewn with boulders"), Robert M. Coates (who gave everything he wrote "a consistent

finish as if he were polishing steel"), Conrad Aiken (whose candor "evolved into a system of aesthetics and literary ethics that unified his work"). John Dos Passos' fictional trilogy *U.S.A.* (1930-36) was both a somber history of America during the first 30 years of this century and, by means of such impressionistic devices as the "Camera Eye" passages, a reflection of the author's own feelings. Despite the passing from fashion of young Dos Passos' radical views, *U.S.A.* "holds together," writes Cowley, "like a great ship freighted with the dead and dying."

HISTORY OF ISRAEL: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time. By Howard M. Sachar. Knopf, rev. ed., 1979. 954 pp. \$9.95

The idea of a Jewish homeland had its roots in early 19th-century European Jewish nationalism. In Serbia, Rabbi Judah Alkalai was one of the first to translate biblical prophecy into a more contemporary framework. In an introduction to an 1839 textbook, the rabbi alluded to the need for establishing Jewish colonies in the Holy Land as a prelude to religious redemption. The grandson of one of the rabbi's disciples was Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Hungarian Jewish journalist. In 1903, Herzl secured from Britain's Prime Minister Balfour an offer of territory for a Jewish state in East Africa; the proposal severely divided Zionists, and it was eventually withdrawn by London. In 1917, Balfour, then secretary of state for foreign affairs, tried again. He issued his famed declaration supporting a national home for Jews in British-occupied Palestine, with the proviso that the civil and religious rights of Moslem and Christian communities in that area would not be prejudiced. Sachar, a history professor at George Washington University, provides balanced accounts of the sequels—the 1936 Palestine Arab re-

volt; the 1947 UN partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, the ensuing civil war, and the creation of Israel in 1948; the 1956 Suez Crisis; the 1967 Six-Day War; the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Sachar has added a brief epilogue carrying Israel's story from 1976 (when his book was first published) to 1978. Here his treatment of Israeli domestic politics is less detached. He interprets Prime Minister Menachem Begin's May 1977 election as a repudiation of the Labor government's "flaccidity and corruption" after almost 30 years in power and blames the old Labor government's regulatory zeal for Israel's declining economic growth.

THE SHOUT AND OTHER STORIES. By Robert Graves. Penguin reprint, 1979. 300 pp. \$2.95

Robert Graves, 84, perhaps best known as a British traditionalist poet, is also an essayist, literary critic and theorist, classical scholar, novelist, and short story writer. All of his talents and interests come to bear in these 30 stories, written between 1924 and 1962. The earliest, "The Shout," is an eerie, subtly erotic tale of a lunatic who has learned to utter (or thinks he has) a demonic shout that can drive people mad and even kill them. In "Epics Are Out of Fashion," Graves demonstrates his taste for the fanciful when he resuscitates an aspiring poet of Roman times who thinks his epic will stay in fashion because "I make my warriors use modern weapons; I rule out an absurd personal intervention of the gods; and I enliven the narrative with gruesome anecdotes, breath-taking metaphors, and every rhetorical trope in the bag." Graves has lived on Majorca since 1929, and the 11 stories set on that Mediterranean island are colorful—tales of bicycle thieves, young lovers, low-level bureaucrats, superstition.

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