

Nonfiction

JOSEPH MCCARTHY:

Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator

Arthur Herman. Free Press, \$26 (416p)
ISBN 0-684-83625-4

Given recent revelations from Soviet-era archives and new thinking about the Cold War, this biography was probably inevitable. Readers can therefore be thankful that Herman, a historian at George Mason University, has given us an occasionally strained but generally fair study of McCarthy rather than a one-sided defense or assault on him. The book will surely be controversial and subject to attack from all sides, for its author insists that we must hold McCarthy's enemies and victims to the same standards to which we hold him. McCarthy himself was as much a phenomenon as McCarthyism. He rocketed from local Wisconsin office directly into the Senate, where he was quickly marginalized by the defenders of that institution's decorum, which he then scorned and attacked. Depicted by Herman as a reckless, uninformed, publicity-seeking, hard-drinking, mocking man, McCarthy doesn't easily evoke sympathy. But Herman successfully situates the anticommunist zealot in his place and time and among his opponents and supporters better than anyone before him and (by conjecturing cautiously, for example, that he suffered from hypomania) helps us understand, if not honor, his methods and their consequences. In arguing that McCarthy was "always a more important figure to American liberals than to conservatives," Herman opens new avenues for understanding American liberalism, as well as McCarthy's own Republican Party, in the 20th century. Unfortunately, he fails to provide a full picture of the man—husband (of Jean Kerr, critically important to McCarthy's career), father, sometime bon vivant. Nevertheless, Herman's book is an important contribution. (Dec.)

THE SCOTTISH NATION:

1700-2000

T.M. Devine. Viking, \$35.95 (672p)
ISBN 0-670-88811-7

Nearly 300 years after the Scottish parliament voted itself out of existence in 1707 as the ruling classes in Edinburgh and London forged a marriage of convenience, history has come full circle: in July 2000, the first Scottish parliament in nearly 300 years will convene amid a growing movement for partial autonomy or even independence from England. Devine (*The Great Highland Famine*), director of research at the Insti-

tute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, charts Scots' ambivalent relationship to Britain, from 1700 through the Victorian era, when Scottish pride rested on identification with union and empire, to disillusionment with England during the Thatcher years and the new service-based economy of the 1990s. Since the mid-19th century, Scotland has been one of the world's most urbanized societies, with the vast majority of its people living in the industrialized Lowlands, not in the Highlands romanticized by Robert Burns and others. To Devine, a central paradox is why Scotland, one of the most prosperous industrial and agricultural success stories after 1860, lost millions of people through emigration. The answer, he believes, is to be found in gross inequality of income and the overcrowding, squalor and epidemics to which the unlucky many were exposed. His survey explores how Scottish national identity has continually refashioned itself, from the 18th-century Enlightenment, which spawned Adam Smith and David Hume, to the adaptive creativity exemplified by poet Hugh MacDiarmid, architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and even rock bands like the Proclaimers. The pace sometimes bogs down under the weight of statistics, but for its size and ambition, this is a graceful synthesis of economic, social and political history that gives readers a wonderfully rich portrait of Scotland. (Nov.)

A TIME REMEMBERED:

American Women in the Vietnam War

Olga Gruzhit-Hoyt. Presidio, \$27.95
(288p) ISBN 0-89141-669-2

The experiences endured by young American men during the Vietnam War have reached mass audiences. But the 10,000 young women who served alongside them have, for the most part, been ignored. In digest form, Gruzhit-Hoyt presents snapshots of women who served, in one capacity or another, during the war. Like many college students of the era, Linda Sullivan Schulte opposed U.S. participation in the war and was active in campus protests. But when challenged by a visiting military officer to go there and see the truth for herself, she joined the Red Cross. Air Force Corps nurse Eileen G. Gebhart's skills were vital, but didn't insulate her and her colleagues from repeated sexual harassment, the uncertainty of life in a war zone and other indignities and dangers. Karen Offut's ex-husband blamed her for their children's medical problems, citing her probable exposure to chemicals during her tour of duty with the Women's Army Corps. Two subsequent marriages also ended in divorce for Offut, who went

on to suffer from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. Others, like Schulte, who became a successful businesswoman and local politician, emerged relatively unscathed and arguably strengthened. The profiles are similar in format, detailing each woman's reasons for going to Vietnam and what happened once she arrived. Although the book is informative and some of the individual stories moving, Gruzhit-Hoyt's prose is dry, keeping readers at arm's length from the events and feelings the women experienced. But nearly every one of these individual profiles will shed new light on readers' understanding of the daily life of the war. (Nov.)

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE COMMAND LINE

Neal Stephenson. Avon, \$10 paper
(160p) ISBN 0-380-81593-1

After reading this galvanizing essay, first intended as a feature for *Wired* magazine but never published there, readers are unlikely to look at their laptops in quite the same mutely complacent way. Stephenson, author of the novel *Cryptonomicon*, delivers a spirited commentary on the aesthetics and cultural import of computer operating systems. It's less an archeology of early machines than a critique of what Stephenson feels is the inherent fuzziness of graphical user interfaces—the readily intuited “windows,” “desktops” and “browsers” that we use to talk to our computers. Like Disney's distortion of complicated historical events, our operating systems, he argues, lull us into a reductive sense of reality. Instead of the visual metaphors handed to us by Apple and Microsoft, Stephenson advocates the purity of the command line interface, somewhat akin to the DOS prompt from which most people flee in a technophobic panic. Stephenson is an advocate of Linux, the hacker-friendly operating system distributed for free on the Internet, and of BeOS, a less-hyped paradigm for the bits-and-bytes future. Unlike a string of source code, this essay is user-friendly—occasionally to a fault. Stephenson's own set of extended metaphors can get a little hokey: Windows is a station wagon, while Macs are sleek Euro-sedans. And Unix is the Gilgamesh epic of the hacker subculture. Nonetheless, by pointing out how computers define who we are, Stephenson makes a strong case for elegance and intellectual freedom in computing. (Nov.)

PASSPORT TO THE COSMOS:

Human Transformation and Alien Encounters

John E. Mack. Crown, \$24 (320p)
ISBN 0-517-70568-0

Here is a fascinating foray into an exotic world. From Harvard psychiatry professor

and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Mack comes a second book (after *Abduction*) based on accounts by people who claim to have been abducted by aliens. While he fudges the question of whether the aliens are "real in a strictly material sense," he insists that the experience is "real" for the abductees, in the way that shamans' spiritual journeys are real to them; indeed, a couple of his interviewees are shamans. He focuses on the newly emerging spiritual importance of the alleged abductees' message. Their reports, Mack believes, reveal much about human culture and the future of the human race. In extensive interviews with Mack, those who claim to have been abducted, report that the aliens are especially motivated by questions of ecological destruction, and that they may even be survivors of a destroyed civilization seeking to breed hybrid children with humans to ensure the survival of both the human race and their own. Overwhelmingly, the abductees state that the aliens visit Earth to warn us that our cavalier tree-cutting, water-polluting, trash-dumping habits will have dire consequences if we do not change our ways. Abductees are left with not only a profound caring for the environment, but with a sense that they have encountered creatures sent by whatever power rules the universe. They particularly find that their experiences resonate with Native American religions. This discussion leads into what is possibly the most intriguing section of the book, the examination of sex between humans and aliens—great sex, by numerous accounts. But as a serious investigation into a mystifying experience, Mack's account poses questions begging for answers. (Nov.)

THE UFO ENIGMA

Peter A. Sturrock. Warner Aspect, \$23.95 (416p) ISBN 0-446-52565-0
 If the truth is out there, why haven't we found it? A 1997 conference at the Pocantico center in Tarrytown, N.Y., assembled UFO researchers and distinguished air and space scientists to review theories and evidence concerning inexplicable lights, big disks and other odd, exciting stuff in the sky. If they produced no new conclusions, their work certainly makes informative reading. A professor emeritus of Space Science and Astrophysics at Stanford, Sturrock synthesizes the conference reports and deliberations into 120 carefully considered pages. One presentation (in Sturrock's summary) shows why some UFOs can be explained as weather-related phenomena. Another shows why UFO investigators and SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) radio astronomers don't get along. Sturrock calls for more, and more widely

available, research into UFOs; he notes that physical scientists, while not trained to evaluate witness reports, can analyze material evidence. Most of the rest of the book is comprised of essays ("Post-Pocantico Reflections") and "Case Material" (about specific UFO reports) by a variety of hands. Richard Haines considers a Frisbee-shaped aerial object in a vacationer's photo; Jennie Zeidman reports on "A Helicopter-UFO Encounter Over Ohio." The ongoing French study called GEPAN or SEPRa emerges as a leader in recent studies of UFOs, decidedly on the back burner in the United States. All the contributors write in the impersonal, precise, deliberately colorless language proper to scientific journal articles. If the results are less than thrilling, they represent a hoard of raw information, and some admirably cautious reasoning, from which any reader who already cares about UFOs might be glad to learn. Photos, charts and diagrams not seen by PW. (Nov.)

VIRUS: The Co-Discoverer of HIV Tracks Its Rampage and Charts the Future

Luc Montagnier. Norton, \$24.95 (256p) ISBN 0-393-03923-4
 Reminiscent of Paul De Kruif's 1926 classic *Microbe Hunters*, this highly engaging scientific adventure story by the noted French virologist who was a codiscoverer of HIV begins with a short sketch of Montagnier's youth and early career as a researcher before launching into the more exciting narrative of his pursuit of the causes of AIDS after the epidemic emerged in 1981. The most compelling aspect of the story is Montagnier's account of the very public competition between his laboratory and that of his American rival, Dr. Robert Gallo. This version is far more generous to Gallo than other published accounts, particularly Randy Shilts's in *And the Band Played On*. Montagnier's ability to present highly complicated scientific material in accessible language is especially useful in the second half of his memoir, when he explains the impact of the AIDS pandemic around the world. His informative narrative covers such issues as epidemiological transmission patterns ("heterosexual transmission... represents 90% of cases" worldwide); needle exchanges, which he contends "are not an incitement to drug use as some detractors claim"; and how multiple risk factors increase the possibility of HIV transmission. Montagnier ends the book with a cautiously optimistic view of the future, reckoning that more research, sensible risk reduction and humane social and medical policies may make the AIDS epidemic manageable, if not bring it completely under control. (Nov.)

THE GENDERED ATOM: Reflections on the Sexual Psychology of Science

Theodore Roszak. Conari, \$21.95 (192p) ISBN 1-57324-171-4
 Readers of Roszak's recent novel, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, will be unsurprised to find that he borrows another page from Mary Shelley in this return to the personal essay. In Victor Frankenstein's discovery of his young bride, dead at the hands of the monster he created, Roszak finds an apparently inexhaustible metaphor for the rape of nature. A professor of history at California State University-Hayward, he ranges from an account of his journey to the sites of Mary and Percy Shelley's literary inspiration in Switzerland to an impassioned if loosely organized psychological analysis of the impact of gender on science. His main target is "the curious scientific fascination with smashing atoms, and what that project has done to our understanding of the universe." Viewing the atom as a fictional conceit, which he attributes to the neurotic male need for a separate untouchable core of consciousness, Roszak extends his skepticism toward other atomist visions of "macho science," including Richard Dawkins's famous "selfish gene," which he characterizes as a "tiny, tough-guy particle fighting to prove his superiority and augment his inheritance." As a corrective, Roszak hails the quantum vision of "entanglement"; its biological counterpart, the new science of "complexity"; and the growing appreciation of the "relatedness of things." Quotations from the Romantic poets, Paracelsus and Abraham Maslow are the freshest part of this galloping synthesis of contemporary feminist thought about science, which is bolstered by a rousing introduction from Jane Goodall. (Nov.)

☆ AN AMERICAN OBSESSION: Science, Medicine and the Place of Homosexuality in Modern Society

Jennifer Terry. Univ. of Chicago, \$20 paper (528p) ISBN 0-226-79367-2
 In this persuasively argued social history, Terry, an associate professor of comparative studies at Ohio State University, contends that homosexuality "has acquired a symbolic centrality in American culture" as a dominant marker between the "normal" and the "abnormal" across a diverse range of disciplines and milieus. Drawing upon a wide range of materials—from personal memoirs to legal cases, yellow journalism, pulp fiction, religious writings, psychology texts and "scientific" studies (which prove to be not all that scientific)—Terry demonstrates how, over the past 100 years, theories about the causes, nature and possible "cure" for homosexuality have focused far more on no-