

the real realists—the debunkers who blink with astonishment at the failures of faith or the prophets who give us energizing visions?

Still, Berger is worth reading. His attacks on the specific ills and woes of contemporary capitalism and socialism in the Third World make an abundance of sense, although he often lets capitalism off too easily. He rightly stresses the importance of national self-determination in the effort to modernize, and the further importance of listening to the people, understanding their resistance to change, and winning their active participation in defining what needs to be done. He strikes a convincing balance, too, between the ideals of a value-free and a value-impregnated social science. It is all very reasonable. *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, the author reports, offers “some first steps toward a *hard-nosed utopianism*.”

I note the hard-nosedness, but I doubt the utopianism. The danger of such books—let me repeat—is the excuse they give us for doing nothing. We need the oxygen of hope as well as the sense of limits. What passes, in one light, for a pyramid of sacrifice may also be visible, in another, as a spire of aspiration. □

New Books

Monsieur

by Lawrence Durrell
 Viking, 305 pp., \$8.95

Like his *Alexandria Quartet*, Lawrence Durrell's *Monsieur* is a difficult book to approach critically. One is almost immediately swept up in the sheer gorgeousness of its language: Durrell's powers of evocative description are remarkable. And, despite, or perhaps because of, the exotic and extravagant nature of both its plot and settings, one very quickly and willingly suspends disbelief, giving oneself over for the book's duration to the often fantastical quality of the tales told by its several narrators. Mood, if it is not everything in *Monsieur*, is still most important, and the air that hangs over the places in which the novel is set—Verfeuille, a deteriorating chateau near Avignon; the oasis of Macabru near Alexandria; and the rotting and romantic city of Venice—is delicate, dream-like, lush, ominous, and oppressive all at the same time.

Once it is said, however, that *Monsieur* is an intricate and lovely book, it

must also be noted that even its deepest effects are somehow ephemeral. Although it is, among other things, a “novel of ideas,” these ideas do not especially strike or stick in the mind. Too, there are some serious problems with the central human relationship in the novel—a repellent *ménage à trois* combining adultery, incest, and homosexuality, which is regarded by the narrator as if it were, before anything else, a romantically mysterious and pretty, if somewhat extraordinary, love idyll. Perhaps because of the emphasis on surface and tone over substance, the “happy trinity of lovers” does not seem, finally, something credible, solid, or compelling. Altogether, reading *Monsieur* is rather like watching a visually enchanting movie; there is no gain-saying the delight of the experience, but, by the same token, one might very easily be left, once the lights go up, wondering about the substantiality of what has gone before.

JANE LARKIN CRAIN

The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft

by Claire Tomalin
 Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
 320 pp., \$8.95

Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, was published in 1792 and won immediate celebrity for its author. Previously, Miss Wollstonecraft had

pursued a number of different occupations—lady's companion, governess, schoolmistress; she had also already done a good deal of professional writing. Political radical, feminist, a complex and difficult woman of broad acquaintance and experience, twice an attempted suicide, Miss Wollstonecraft married William Godwin, the philosopher, in 1797; some six months later, at the age of 38, she died from an infection contracted during the birth of their daughter—another Mary, who was later to marry Shelley. Shortly after his wife's death, Godwin published his *Memoirs* of her; by the standards of the times, Miss Wollstonecraft's life had been a scandalous one, and Godwin's book—rich in the “shocking” details of his wife's private life—succeeded in nothing so much as it did in outraging and disgusting the public. The furor inspired by Godwin's revelations eventually subsided, and Mary Wollstonecraft was, for at least the 100 years following her death, virtually forgotten.

With the current resurgence of feminism, interest in Mary Wollstonecraft once again runs high. Her name has been invoked any number of times in the literature of the women's-liberation movement—in which *A Vindication* has been quoted and referred to in a manner befitting some sacred text. Happily, however, beatification is not the intention of Claire Tomalin's fair, albeit enthusi-



“That’s not fair, Dad. Lenny’s father lets us watch him work at the gas station.”

astic, biography. She is, not surprisingly, predisposed to the political and social leanings of her subject; while this sympathy leads to a largely unquestioning acceptance of the integrity of Miss Wollstonecraft's ideas, rather than to a scrupulous evaluation of them, it does not, on the other hand, overly prejudice the close and balanced scrutiny given Mary Wollstonecraft's life as a whole. Tomalin's study, soundly researched and gracefully executed, is at once a judicious appraisal of Mary Wollstonecraft the woman and a rounded re-creation of the tumultuous era in which she participated so fully. J.L.C.

Naked Nomads: Unmarried Men in America

by George Gilder
Quadrangle, 180 pp., \$7.95

Mr. Gilder has collected an impressive amount of data for this work, whose theme is that unmarried men are the most desperate people in our society, the most likely to turn to criminality, to commit suicide, to be institutionalized. They make half the money, statistically, that married men make and far less than do single women. Where women are far more capable of sustaining themselves in a single state, and appear in some tests to be even better off than married people of either sex, the single male is a very different matter, a creature grown dangerous to himself and to society because his singleness defies an elementary law of nature. A man, Mr. Gilder sets about proving, is biologically dependent on women: The married state is far more crucial to him than to women. The unwed, unfamilied man declines rapidly with age. Some 60 percent of our criminals are single men, Mr. Gilder points out, adding that we should look to single-

ness rather than to poverty as the major factor in the commission of crime, and to singleness rather than to race as the significant factor in the incidence of black poverty. (Thirty-nine percent of the black men in America are single as compared with 27 percent of the whites.)

It is a straightforward, well-argued thesis, full of the sort of observations that used to be called home truths, perceptions that find an instant correspondence with what one feels to be reality. The objection one has to Mr. Gilder's otherwise appealing and admirable construction is its tendency to go off into small morality plays, sketches really, that show how foolish Tom or Dick or Harry had hoped to get away with the single life and how that life ended only in grief. Or violent suicide or an accursed wandering all over the earth. It is probably true, or at least the statistics seem to say it is, that the single state is a wretched condition for a man to be in. There is something callow in Mr. Gilder's punitive little fables about what happens to men outside the married state, something that smacks of the most unattractive aspects of the ideologue. It is a serious failing in a book of humanist intention. Still, that aside, it is a rich and penetrating work.

DOROTHY RABINOWITZ

King James VI and I

by Antonia Fraser
Knopf, 224 pp., \$12.95

In *King James VI and I*, as in *Cromwell* and *Mary Queen of Scots*, Antonia Fraser comes to the defense of a generally misunderstood and unpopular historical figure and through "humanizing" him seeks to improve his popular reputation. In the case of James, Mrs. Fraser has singled out a figure singularly deserv-

ing of compassion. James, although King of Scotland from 1566 to 1625 and of England from 1603 to 1625, is perhaps best remembered for commissioning the translation of the Bible that bears his name. Physically deformed, socially awkward, and of not more than average intelligence, James was not equipped to face the severe emotional and political crises that confronted him throughout his life.

Separated forever from his mother when he was less than a year old, James had a precarious and loveless childhood. His first two regents were killed by opposing political factions before he was seven years old, and when still a child, he was kidnapped by a group of dissenting nobles. The situation James found in England was less threatening, but no more friendly, than that in Scotland; the English nobles and populace alike regarded James as a foreigner and as such not to be trusted or liked. Given this background, it is understandable that James turned to those who were loyal to him alone and who gave unstintingly of their affection to him. The resulting succession of royal favorites, however, was ruinous to the kingdom's finances and James's own popularity.

The severe economic, religious, and political problems faced by England during James's reign, which were the legacy of the tremendous economic expansion of Elizabethan England, were aggravated by his inadequate measures, although he avoided provoking the civil war that later erupted during his son's reign. Although James was not responsible for the fact that he was ill equipped to deal with the situations he faced as king, he can, nevertheless, be brought to account for his political blunders.

The fault with Mrs. Fraser's biography lies not in its efforts to reach a sympathetic understanding of James's character and his difficulties, but in her attempt to convince the reader that inasmuch as James was aware of the problems facing his realm and tried to cope with them, their subsequent unsuccessful resolutions should not be laid at his door. In addition, *James VI and I*, although a beautifully illustrated book, lacks the thorough research and depth of Mrs. Fraser's first two books. Given the limited space and research, Mrs. Fraser would have done better to have written a thorough analysis of James's character, much as Erik Erikson did in *Young Man Luther*, and to have left aside the political complications. JANE MAJESKI



"Well, that ought to take our minds off inflation for a couple of days."