

partial paralysis and returns to school, he sees his art-historian father Rudolph with his arm around a strange blonde—is he having an affair? Natasha finds an incriminating phone number in Rudolph's pocket, and is quickly, knowingly, locked into the clichés of jealousy. When Bodakov publishes a slim volume that gets him exiled to West Germany and his Communist citizenship revoked, Natasha and other Eastern writers flock to Rebecca, who's left behind, and sign a protest letter. But as days pass and Soviet pressure builds, two of the signers repudiate the letter. The undermining of Natasha continues until she too chooses to abandon her citizenship, while Rudolph asks for a divorce.

Through Stefan's and Natasha's sensibilities, East Germany is a perpetual November. As brilliantly translated by Michael Bullock, *November* has superb moments of frosty objectivity and strangling moodiness, and an iron grip on characters in a rats' maze. In all, a bitter picture of the writer's life.

—DONALD NEWLOVE

Nonfiction Briefs

Basin and Range
by John McPhee
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
224 pp., \$10.95

"I WANT TO...suggest the general history of the continent by describing events and landscapes that geologists see written in rocks," John McPhee says in *Basin and Range*. And he proves to be surprisingly modest. Like the geologists he venerates, McPhee knows how to "look at mud and see mountains" and how to dramatize the slow history of the earth. A dream vision of a house of carpets on fire illuminates the underworld, with its "pile after pile of shags and broadlooms, hooks and throws, para-Persians and polyesters" melting, mixing, and finally hardening on the stairs. An image of continental barges "on a collision course" animates the theory of plate tectonics, an attempt to

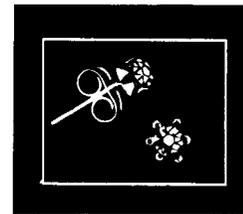
explain how mountains are built and why the Nevada Basin may someday again be undersea.

Unfortunately, McPhee does not stop with the drama of geology; he tries to establish its epic stature. Granted, this perspective inculcates enormous respect for the earth's 4.5 billion-year history. (Compare this to the paltry 2 million years our species is expected to

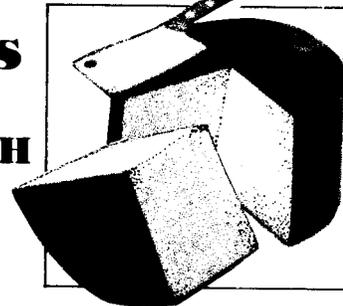
last.) But it also undermines the book. Almost every chapter harks back to our continent's development or forward to the underwater future of the West. And every field trip yields momentous reflection, every rock a cosmic clue. So an almost extraordinary collage of geological history and personal adventure is ultimately subverted by cloying awe.

—ROBIN BROMLEY

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BOOKS

Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*

by Stephen King

Everest House, 416 pp., \$13.95

STEPHEN KING is that rare phenomenon among authors of popular fiction: an entertainer who never stoops, but generally conquers. With a little help from the vampires, ghosts, and psychic deviants who inhabit the pages of such novels as *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, and *The Shining*, King has acquired a monstrous (so to speak) reading public while avoiding the explicit gore that has recently spilled out of the movie theaters and into horror fiction.

Stephen King's Danse Macabre is King's first book of nonfiction: an apologia for all the blood sucked and bodies devoured in the heroic effort to keep us happily scared witless. Unfortunately, what begins as an examination of horror novels and movies of the past three decades rapidly degenerates into an entertaining but essentially rudderless self-interview. While musing over such gems of the genre as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, King too often digresses into friendly, but more or less pointless, discussions of his own life, work, and views.

King comes across as intelligent and unpretentious, but even his most devoted fans should hesitate before paying the price of a book for nothing more than a magazine interview.

—ANDREW KLAVAN

Mary Chesnut's *Civil War*

edited by C. Vann Woodward

Yale University Press, 886 pp., \$29.95

OCCASIONALLY AN HISTORICAL document raises itself above the gray mass of source material to become an odd, elusive classic. Works like Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars* and Froissart's *Chronicles*, though artful, are not remembered for their art, and certainly not for their accuracy, but for their authors' ability to become Dantesque guides through visions of the world they knew. Mary Boykin Chesnut had that ability, and her journals of the Civil War are a painfully brilliant record of our old America at daggers drawn.

As the tough-minded but sickly wife

of a Confederate politician and plantation owner, Mrs. Chesnut was able to observe members from all strata of southern society, from president to slave. Her wit and shrewdness, her fierce abhorrence of slavery, her feminist ambitions, make those observations peculiarly modern. Today's reader is effortlessly drawn into her "gallant, gay, unfortunate" south, as its frenzied pre-war waltzes fade into the endless death march, and finally only into echoes in the ruins of a "world kissed to pieces."

C. Vann Woodward's editing of this latest, most complete edition of the Chesnut journals is exemplary: unobtrusive and instructive. He has reacquainted us with a remarkable woman; and she has reacquainted us with the living past.

—ANDREW KLAVAN

The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism

by Claire Sterling

Holt, Rinehart & Winston

334 pp., \$13.95

AT FIRST GLANCE, Claire Sterling's laconic, densely documented account of the terrorist phenomenon would seem an unbiased and straightforward piece of investigative journalism. Yet a careful reading reveals its central thesis—that the Soviet Union is the prime mover of global terrorism—to be a foregone conclusion shored up by a careful selection of facts.

The Terror Network reads like a complex thriller that spans continents and links together disparate characters and motivations. According to Sterling, since 1968 various "fronts" and "armies" have attempted to "destabilize" Western and pro-Western democracies. Under the avuncular tutelage of the Soviet KGB, a bewildering mix of nationalities has streamed through the guerrilla training camps in Cuba, Palestine, and elsewhere. To ply their trade, terrorist groups have crossed frontiers with astonishing ease, often carrying ill-concealed caches of guns and explosives—and an occasional Soviet-made guided missile.

Although Sterling makes a fair case