

to the inheritors, even though they have not heard the sound of mountain water, smelled the wolf willow tree, or wrestled with the bear.

One further observation. New Englanders, Southerners, and the commercially minded Americans of the Middle States, as I have argued before, brought a filter with them as they extended westward civilizations that they knew and loved. In blocking them off from direct transactions with the West, these overlays also inhibit their apprehension of the majesty of nature: that which is numinous and wholly other. Writers concerned with the mountain West are not often thus constrained. They understand what Wordsworth meant by "that beauty which hath terror in it," which brings to us both awe and exaltation. The West as ground for religious

experience, a land resilient in resisting intruders and not easily subjected to our will, is not to be underplayed, though it fosters religion of a very Protestant kind, with each man a church of his own as he contemplates what God hath wrought.

For reasons detailed in my account of how we go about imagining the West, I do not expect to see any great falling off in the volume, intensity, or artistic value of Western writing in the foreseeable future. For even though it is evident that Hollywood and the major television networks do not so much depend on Western materials as was once the case, it is also true that that shift has more to do with the intellectual and political bias of those who generate these entertainments than with the attitude of the nation

toward serious treatments of life as lived in the Western setting or under the terms prescribed for usage by the Western imagination. Moreover, the academic industry of interpreting the West as history or literature is on its way toward achieving some definitive shape. In the process, a distinctive culture is coming toward self-consciousness of a variety it had not previously known.

In examining the evidence supporting these remarks, I should acknowledge the contributions of the Western American Literature Association and of the Western and Southwestern Historical societies. Journals like *Western American Literature*, *South Dakota Review*, *Southwestern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Southwest American Literature* watch attentively the flow of publications that deal with westering and wilderness or the enterprise of knowing what these words mean. The University of Nebraska Press has accepted as its role keeping in print the classic texts of Western American literature. In this work they have been frequently supported by the presses of the University of Texas at El Paso, Texas Christian University, Southern Methodist University, Utah State, and the University of New Mexico. The new press at the University of North Texas has also made an ambitious beginning. With the history of the American West, the University of Oklahoma Press has, over a period of almost fifty years, assumed a special responsibility. And the Western Writers Series, with titles ranging from Richard Etulain's *Owen Wister* through Dorys Crow Grover's *John Graves*, will, when completed, be a basic introduction to the writers who constituted this field. What began in spontaneity has been translated into art. What had its origin in unplanned encounter has matured with reflection into an understanding of hidden connections, which together struggle toward making up the ground for a literary tradition. This process as it emerges should be an encouragement to those who do not believe that the United States and its cultural development are a finished business. For as concerns the operation of the imagination in dealing with the American West, the evidence is altogether to the contrary. ◊

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## The Watch

by Brad Omanson

Lodged in oak on a rugged bluff,  
a ruined farmhouse rises over  
lands that gully into the rough  
cleft of Spoon River—

lands that for generations fell  
from father unto eldest son  
with always hope of harvest till  
foreclosed upon.

The current owner lives so far  
away he's never seen the dark  
April fields lie furrowed or  
winter fields lie stark

and now Spoon River, ever more,  
runs muddy through eroded banks—  
the footbridge is in disrepair,  
minus many planks.

Upon the bluff, in cryptic shade,  
the house succumbs to slow decay—  
where once the porch and parlor stood,  
grazing cattle stray,

yet the old proprietor stands  
attentive at his window, still  
keeping watch: his icy hands  
grip the rotted sill.

# The Best of Our Time

by Geoffrey Wagner

Our Age: English Intellectuals Between the World Wars—A

Group Portrait

by Noel Annan

New York: Random House;

479 pp., \$30.00

Electing Provost of King's College, Cambridge, in his 30's and subsequently Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, Lord Annan is a delightful person who has given us a delightful book of scintillating erudition that ranges far beyond the confines of its subtitle. Indeed, there can hardly be a single English intellectual of significance in this century who is not mentioned in it.

As an etiology of upper-class England, it is inevitably grounded in that "unique British institution," the public school, which is to say the private school. Having been through one, I can attest to Cyril Connolly's opinion that the experience dominates your life. I have seen two elderly Englishmen introduced to each other and soon bringing up the ritual question, *Where were you at school?* (It is a fairly meaningless one in Italy or France and stands apart in intensity of definition from any university allegiance.) In my one brief meeting with T.S. Eliot, it was the only question he put to me.

Annan rightly sees this code of the public school man percolating through British life and letters, as well as politics (every member of Macmillan's postwar cabinet, including himself, had been to Eton). The *New York Times* reviewer objected to the elitist background of *Our Age*—only four percent of the British population experienced any form of higher education before the last war—but failed to see that the book is about Our Age rather than "our age." Annan capitalizes throughout.

The code taught civilized behavior—or manners if you will (Winches-

ter's motto being "Manners Makyth Man"); loyalty to institutions such as school, family, regiment; avoidance of conceit ("side") as of any emotional show; religion as a form of social control; and stoicism on playing or battlefield (one master sidelined tennis as a sport since it didn't hurt enough). I won't mention the food.

Philistinism was one of the results. When Roger Fry showed some early Matisse to art students they jeered back, "Drink or drugs?" An Oxford professor discredited Zola and Ibsen by comparing their photographs with those of "any decent midshipman." My own Oxford tutor, producing Shakespeare on the London stage, told me to avoid Ibsen as "barbaric," while his friend and colleague C.S. Lewis detested T.S. Eliot.

The code—which Kipling called *The Law*—has been covered in other books, but never so entertainingly. It bequeathed a remarkable self-confidence, epitomized by the story of the Duke of Wellington strolling down Bond Street in plain clothes (mufti) later in life and being accosted by a man saying, "Aren't you Mr. Jones?" To which the Iron Duke replied, "My dear chap, if you can believe that, you can believe anything." Women's schools aped the men's, as in the select Cheltenham Ladies College, where Indira Gandhi and Iris Murdoch were chums, and the code was exported to the colonies.

The rebellion against the code was intellectually rich. Churchill's nephew ran away from Wellington and Toynbee's son from Rugby. It was also perforce entirely upperclass; Annan's subjects for portraiture include Bertrand Russell ("a Whig holding advanced Victorian views"), Virginia Woolf ("the patron saint for the feminists of Our Age"), the insufferable Strachey, and Bloomsbury collectively. As for the university communists and Cambridge spies, *Our Age* parallels Verne W. Newton's recent book on the vermin, Annan well quoting Sir Harold Acton that "Every villain is followed by a sophist with a sponge"—truly a motto for our times.

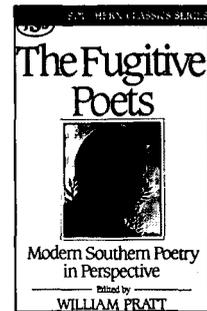
A major dissent against the Establishment took the form of the cult of homosexuality. But what Sir Maurice Bowra called the Homintern is hard to interpret to modern America where the subject has become so politicized and vulgarized and in a word disgusting. In England between the wars it was of course criminal conduct (Gielgud so fined) rather than the rallying point for some new demonstration. England had, in any case, a long and innocent bachelor tradition. One American professor put a sexual interpretation on the fact that as a boy A.E. Housman had his arm slung around another in a school photo. But in those days the cameraman carefully composed such groups and my father's study was tapestried with old rugger hearties so enlaced. Nor would the few lesbians of the British 20's have been anything but stunned by the feminist terror squads of modern America. Generally, the "queer" was not politically ambitious then. Keynes did not

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