



ple's inner lives.

His own inner life was capacious. Biographer Edel devoted roughly two decades and five volumes to describing its peculiarities, including James's thoroughly repressed homoerotic tendencies. Edel's definitive study, here scaled down to a single volume by editor Catharine Carver, also paints the broad panorama, from James's birth in New York City in 1843 to his death in Sussex in 1916. In between came a comfortable childhood shared with two brilliant siblings, William and Alice, an informal education, extensive travels abroad, resettlement in England, an ever-expanding network of notable friends and acquaintances, literary triumphs and failures.

To this volume, Edel has added a franker discussion of James's sexual ambivalence and more details about the difficult relationship with his brother, William, the famed Harvard psychologist. One learns, for instance, that William was often cruel to his adoring brother, finding fault not only with his novels but also with his "whole way of taking life." Of all the criticisms he suffered, those may have hurt Henry most.

**THE ART OF
BIBLICAL POETRY**

by Robert Alter
Basic, 1985
228 pp. \$17.95

Much of the Hebrew Bible is poetry, among the best verses written by man. Yet precisely because of the Bible's status as sacred text, its literary dimensions have been largely neglected.

An 18th-century Anglican bishop, Robert Lowth, was one of the first analysts of the Bible's poetic form. He found that parallelism between two, sometimes among three, elements of a line ("Ada and Zilla, hear my voice. Wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech") constituted the main structural principle of ancient Hebrew verse. Using Lowth's insight as his starting point, Alter, a literature professor at the University of California, Berkeley, delves into the many ways the parallel parts work—how one image begets another and, in the process, creates the unique "movement" of the poems.

Alter's reading of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and other poetic books is closely attentive to the word play, punning, and verbal ambiguity of

the ancient Hebrew. (This may be as close as nonreaders of Hebrew will get to the richness of the original Old Testament—a reward in itself.) Alter's underlying argument clearly emerges: Poetry is no mere ornamental aspect of the Bible; it is by poetry, and poetry alone, that the Bible's authors were able to "realize" their mysterious, ever-compelling meanings.

Science & Technology

**THE MAN WHO
MISTOOK HIS WIFE
FOR A HAT and Other
Clinical Tales**
by Oliver Sacks
Summit, 1985
233 pp. \$15.95

An elderly, respected musician, Dr. P, comes to neurologist Sacks because, though his vision is fine, he cannot recognize familiar objects or people. Tests reveal that he can identify the components of a thing but is unable to combine the parts into a sense of the whole. (He describes a rose as a "convoluted red form with a linear green attachment.") On the way out of the office, reminded to pick up his hat, the genial musician reaches for his wife's head. An extremely odd case, Dr. P's: It was as though he "construed the world as a computer construes it, by means of features and schematic relationships," concludes Sacks.

Not all of the cases assembled here are so unusual, but in most of them, Sacks, a professor at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, explores the (often heroic) ways people deal with the "organized chaos" of disease. He tells how a woman laboriously relearned to control her physical movements after losing her body (or "proprioceptive") sense; how twin idiots savants with IQs of 60 performed marvelous numerical feats until they were, for "therapeutic" reasons, separated; how a Tourette syndrome sufferer came to depend so much on his hyperenergetic state that he abandoned his medication on weekends so that he could be his "old self."

Sacks's first book, *Awakenings* (1973), about the arduous recoveries of 20 victims of sleeping sickness, found a small but devoted following. These essays enter the mysterious world of illness with equal imagination and sympathy.