

pendent judiciary, and individual political awareness—that it would certainly threaten the present constellation of administrators who mistake their survival for the survival of Japan. To convert Japanese subjects into genuine citizens, Van Wolferen concludes “would require realignments of power akin to those of a genuine revolution.”

Although *The Enigma of Japanese Power* has caused an uproar in Japan, Van Wolferen is not condemning a society which has almost no street crime, no homeless, 100 percent literacy, and—to be sure—huge trade surpluses. But, as Fallows observed, “Japanese-American relationships have a fragile, walking-on-eggs quality, which makes people think it’s dangerous to talk frankly in public.”

BARBARIAN SENTIMENTS: How the American Century Ends. By William Pfaff. Hill and Wang. 198 pp. \$19.95

Beyond the daily drone of Washington’s debates over defense and foreign policy, there are a few hopeful signs that the crippling post-Vietnam schism within the nation’s foreign policy establishment may slowly be healing itself. *Barbarian Sentiments* is one of them. In the lucid prose one would expect of a regular contributor to the *New Yorker*, Pfaff takes his readers on a tour of the globe, at every stop pointing out how badly Americans have misunderstood the forces at work (especially nationalism) in the nations where they have become involved since 1945.

Pfaff’s assessments are bold and refreshing. The strength of West Germany’s peace movement, for example, he ascribes to Germany’s age-old failure to achieve a satisfactory political and cultural identity for itself. As a result, he observes, “Germany has consistently looked for justification in causes larger than mere national aggrandizement.” But he is also capable of gross misjudgments (dismissing communist ideology as a cause of the Khmer Rouge’s genocide in Cambodia in 1975–79).

The world, Pfaff argues, is a much more complicated place than most Americans have appreciated, the problems of nations more intractable. He decries the naive American optimism that has given birth to “an activist foreign

policy which presumes that nations and international society can be changed into something more acceptable to Americans.” Curiously, however, he seems to think that only conservatives have been guilty of this naiveté; liberals prone to it are exonerated simply by omission. And Pfaff seems convinced that the impersonal forces of nationalism and history run so deep that neither men nor ideas can greatly alter the fate of nations. At times, Pfaff seems to collapse into a kind of “neoisolationism” or to embrace the politics of resignation.

What is most encouraging about the emergence of thinkers like Pfaff is the assumptions they share (without acknowledging it) with others across the political spectrum. If liberals follow Pfaff’s lead, they soon will find themselves competing with conservatives over who has the more “realistic” view of the world and of American interests rather than the most morally unimpeachable one. Such realism would be a very good thing for the United States—and possibly for the world.

THE POLITICS OF EARTHQUAKE PREDICTION. By Richard Stuart Olson with Bruno Podesta and Joanne M. Nigg. Princeton. 187 pp. \$19.95

By June 28, 1981, all outbound flights from Lima, Peru, were booked; Peru’s first census in many years was postponed; property values had dropped drastically; those who could afford it had left town. An unknown U.S. government physicist, Dr. Brian Brady of the U.S. Bureau of Mines, had driven the entire population of Lima to panic by predicting, almost to the day, a disastrous earthquake that would level that country’s capital.

Olson, an Arizona State University political scientist, poses a vexing question: When scientists make a prediction, what are the politicians to do? The question was, in this case, further complicated by the fact that Brady had invented a method of prediction that contradicted all the accepted ones. Traditionally, earthquake predictions are, at best, carefully hedged approximations, based on past earthquake patterns in a particular area. But Brady claimed that, given enough seismic, geophysical, and microphysical data, he had a math-

ematical formula to predict any earthquake to the exact place and date of its occurrence. Brady was cautious enough to bury his specific Lima prediction (made five years before the expected quake) in a scientific journal that had but a few hundred readers. Only when the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), a U.S. State Department agency, discovered the article and began championing Brady did the fireworks go off.

The OFDA had always operated *after* a disaster happened. But if Brady were right, the agency would become a headline-grabbing hero that had averted, or at least mitigated, a catastrophe. But the more the OFDA championed Brady's prediction, the more the U.S. Geological Survey—the traditional home of earth scientists—denounced it. The stakes were high. If Brady's prediction proved correct, most established earth scientists would become semi-obsolete creatures, and, indeed, the Survey might well lose its funding for earthquake studies. Despite the Survey's opposition, however, the OFDA was awarded nine million dollars for seismic and precautionary studies in Peru. The U.S. government did not want to risk the charge of being careless about the lives of five and a half million people in a country with a history of natural catastrophes.

June 28, 1981: When the long-dreaded day arrived, the earthquake did *not* happen. But the issues the prediction raised are far from dead; similar situations will certainly recur elsewhere. The moral that the seismological community took from this controversy, however, is not encouraging. According to Olson, earth scientists no longer publish their predictions and are reluctant to talk with anybody from the media: "By its very existence, the controversy has . . . [convinced] scientists to stay quiet and announce predictions only after the fact."

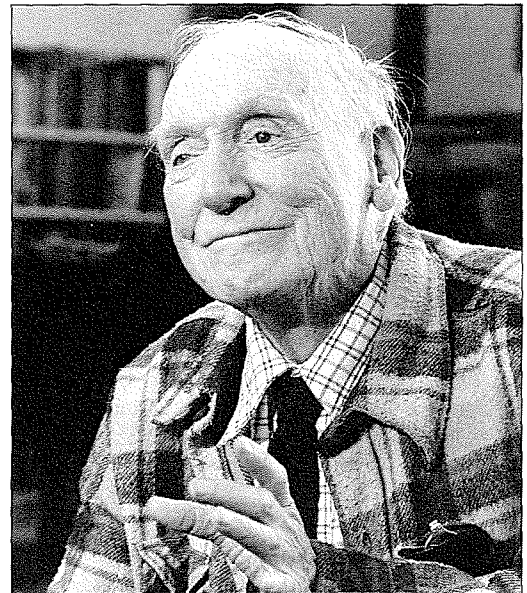
Arts & Letters

NEW AND SELECTED ESSAYS. *By Robert Penn Warren.* Random House. 424 pp. \$24.95

Until his death this past September, Robert Penn Warren was not only the grand old man of American letters; he was the chief exhibit that a "man of letters" was still possible. During

his lifetime (1905–89), he wrote admired poems, novels, short stories, criticism, and essays—more than 50 books in all. In addition to being the only person to receive a Pulitzer Prize for both fiction (in 1947 for *All the King's Men*) and poetry (twice, in 1958 and 1979), he became in 1986 America's first Poet Laureate.

During the 1940s, Warren was a founding practitioner of the "New Criticism," of which these essays are excellent examples. Before New Criticism, the work of critics was often a casual affair, based on subjective impressions or inferences about the author's intention drawn from biographical clues. For the New Critics, as Warren demonstrated, the "evidence



is [in] the poem itself" while "the criterion is that of internal consistency."

These 13 essays deal with familiar figures—Coleridge, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Conrad, Hemingway, Faulkner—but Warren seldom confined himself to well-worn paths. Melville's poetry catches his eye, not *Moby Dick*. In a surprising essay about John Greenleaf Whittier, Warren asks, "What does the past mean to an American?" This question reverberates throughout Warren's poetry and fiction as well as his essays. (It may also explain why Warren's novels have fallen out of favor: Rooted in history and community, they do not suit a largely individualistic, present-minded reading public.)