

cludes with the barely ironic declaration: "Books are a load of crap." Larkin is often called the poet of the everyday, of the ordinary, because he took the unsatisfactory and the mundane—including that unsatisfactory mundane subject, himself—and then made some of the most quoted lines in recent poetry from them. "Sexual intercourse began/In 1963/ (Which was rather late for me)—/ Between the end of the *Chatterly* ban/ And the Beatles' first LP." ("Annus Mirabilis"). But Larkin's poems are not so much about much daily life itself as they are the creation of a stoic philosophy to deal with everyday sadness and loss. "Deprivation is for me," Larkin said, "what daffodils were for Wordsworth." Indeed, Larkin creates a rare oddity, poems with dreary themes which readers nonetheless turn to for comfort. Offering no religious consolations, his poetry illustrates how, once one's worst doubts about oneself are admitted, mental liveliness still makes life interesting. Reviewing some jazz records, Larkin claimed that art is useless unless it helps us to endure and to enjoy—by which criterion his *Collected Poems* is immensely useful.

Science & Technology

AMERICAN GENESIS: A Century of Technological Enthusiasm 1870-1970. By Thomas P. Hughes. Viking. 529 pp. \$24.95

A foreigner wishing to discover the true nature of America would learn less by visiting Independence Hall or Civil War battlefields than by touring the steel mills of Pittsburgh or the auto factories in Detroit—living remnants of America's technological revolution. Technology, argues Hughes, a University of Pennsylvania historian, is "mainstream American history, an exploration of the American nation involved in its most characteristic activity." The "century of technological enthusiasm" which he studies (1870-1970) introduced to America everything from the incandescent light to the automobile, from the telephone to the space shuttle. Hughes begins with the classic American heroes: inventors like Thomas Edison and Orville and Wilbur Wright. Those early inventors were removed from the demands of industry—a freedom which let them choose the problems

they wished to work on; in the absence of theory, they used a hunt-and-try method. Before the era of specialization, Edison could stay abreast of several fields at once: electricity, chemistry, and mechanical engineering. But by World War I, with the growth of industry and the American economy, there came a new generation of American inventors—"system builders" like Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor who organized manufacturing and labor. (The great car producer was also hailed by Lenin and Stalin, who saw "Fordism" as a way to industrialize a backward nation.) The unchecked optimism of Ford's era came to an end on August 6, 1945, with the detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima. The "bomb" demonstrated the other side of technology—its potential for destruction. "The effort to organize the world for problem solving," Hughes says, has passed from individual inventors to cumbersome, bureaucratic systems. And he worries whether the people and mechanisms for controlling technology have kept pace: "Like the dinosaurs, some technological systems have embedded in them characteristics suited for past environments but not the present." Einstein said it better: "Everything is now changed, except our way of thinking."

DOCTORS: The Biography of Medicine. By Sherwin B. Nuland. Knopf. 519 pp. \$24.95

"When I sit at the bedside of a patient, trying to reconstruct the sequence of pathological events within his body," writes Nuland of the Yale School of Medicine, "I am applying a method of reasoning that originated in Greece 2500 years ago." In *Doctors*, Nuland traces the history of that method, from Hippocrates's rejection of supernatural explanations of disease to a contemporary account of a human heart transplant. The history of medicine is no unbroken, linear progression. As Nuland shows, it has always been an oscillation, or tension, between medicine as an objective *science* and medicine as a subjective *art*. Nuland states flatly, "I am one of those who believe that the term 'Medical Science' [is] an oxymoron." The oxymoron was embodied fatefully in Galen (130-201 A.D.), Greek physician to the Emperor of Rome. Galen made the connection between

anatomy and disease and then betrayed his discovery by refusing to dissect the human body: His vainglorious claim to absolute scientific authority, without the necessary experimentation, retarded the development of medicine for 1500 years. The value of Nuland's biographical, narrative approach is that it shows that there is no history of medicine, only history of medicine *and* society. For example, the British surgeon Joseph Lister's discovery in the 1860s of anti-septic operating techniques—which made surgery a saver instead of a taker of lives—was initially opposed by the medical establishment. Doctors resisted it, Nuland says, because it impugned the way they were already practicing surgery. Today's controversies surrounding organ donations, euthanasia, rising insurance and health care costs, and malpractice suits show that the tensions between medicine and society, between medicine as an art and as a science, are very much alive.

APOLLO. *By Charles Murray and Catherine Bly Cox. Simon & Schuster. 512 pp. \$24.95*

On April 13, 1970, Apollo 13 was 205,000 miles from Earth when an explosion ruptured the craft's two main oxygen tanks, threatening the three-man crew with slow death. The emergency galvanized thousands of Earth-bound engineers in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), who frantically improvised a way during the next three days to bring the crew safely back to Earth. This, more than the first landing on the moon in 1969, say Manhattan Institute fellow Murray and science writer Cox, epitomized the bold spirit behind President John F. Kennedy's promise in 1961 to put a man on the moon. "It was a spectacularly American response to crisis—unorga-

nized (in a way), with people in a hundred different places across the country racing to do their part." Improbable as it may sound, *Apollo* is a gripping *organizational* history, beginning with NASA's first years as a neglected stepchild of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and focusing on the 11 manned Apollo flights (1968–72). If the astronauts of Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* recalled the mythical American cowboy, *Apollo's* flight directors and technicians seem more like Casey Stengel's storied Brooklyn Dodgers, an ill-matched assortment of quirky individuals who somehow pull together to accomplish the incredibly unlikely. There is nostalgia here, but a lesson, too. At a time when Americans wonder whether they are too individualistic to manage any kind of enterprise effectively, *Apollo* is a healthy reminder that we have done it before—in a big way.

