

eration forged painfully personal ones. Berryman was a confessional poet, and Jarrell wrote searingly about his experiences during the Second World War.

Because they were their own subjects, says Pritchard, a professor of English at Amherst, "we care more about the life when we begin to care about the writing." These two sympathetic biographies—Jarrell's by Pritchard and Berryman's by Mariani—reveal the haunting similarities between the two poets' lives. Both men belonged to the first generation of poets as academics: Their home was neither the occult world of Yeats nor the rural life of Frost but the classroom, the critical journal, and the poetry seminar.

Of Berryman, Mariani observes that "except for the intense industry, the lifelong obsession . . . of getting words down on the page and getting them absolutely right, there is nothing out of the ordinary about what Berryman did." Successful as a poet, Berryman seemed inept at anything else: He could barely cook a meal or make sense of his bank statement. Berryman's suicide may have an air of inevitability about it, considering his alcoholism and depression. But what about Jarrell? Neither an alcoholic nor a manic-depressive, he also apparently took his own life. Both were typical of the middle-generation poets—one thinks of Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Delmore Schwartz—who came to sad ends.

Yet, in his poetry, Berryman's life could become witty and even comic. Take his "Dream Song # 14," which begins, "Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so," and concludes with a conceit worthy of a midwestern John Donne:

and somehow a dog
has taken itself & its tail considerably
away
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving
behind: me, wag.

Berryman's *Collected Poems* omits his masterpiece, *The Dream Songs* (too bulky to include). But the *Collected Poems* effectively traces Berryman's growth, from his early (unsuccessful) imitation of Yeats and W. H. Auden through the finding of his own style in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*.

That it's not his *Collected* but only his *Selected Poems* (a mere 50 in all) being reissued



Randall Jarrell

indicates Jarrell's fallen reputation as a poet. Although a few poems—"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," "The Woman at the Washington Zoo"—continue to be anthologized, Jarrell is now known as the critic who helped shape his generation's taste in poetry. Jarrell

wrote to Elizabeth Bishop that "one expects most of a good poet's work to be quite bad." Jarrell's critical method was, with an unflinching eye, to delineate what was good—the best poems and best lines. In this way, he revived Whitman's reputation and solidified Frost's, Stevens's, and Marianne Moore's.

Why, upon this middle generation, did the practice of poetry take such a toll? These two biographies suggest an answer: Unlike their predecessors, Jarrell and Berryman did away with larger myths and had only themselves to fall back upon in their poetry; at various universities, they were free to be full-time poets. But such freedom may have been a burden in disguise. Berryman and Jarrell, having erased the modernist boundary between the poet and his work, saw no gap between "art" and "life" where they might have found respite from the ravages of each.

ÌSARÀ: A Voyage Around "Essay." By Wole Soyinka. Random. 262 pp. \$18.95

HOPES AND IMPEDIMENTS. By Chinua Achebe. Doubleday. 186 pp. \$17.95

Ìsarà is a "prequel" to Noble Prize winner Wole Soyinka's childhood memoir, *Aké* (1982). It is as if the Nigerian playwright, having examined the opposing forces of tradition and modernity that shaped his own experience, came to realize that the only way to fully understand himself was to know his father's world.

Ìsarà, an inland Nigerian village, is the birthplace of Soyinka's father, Essay, a place to which Essay keeps returning despite his repeated attempts to leave it for good. What emerges from this chronicle are portraits from a not-too-distant past—the years before the Sec-

ond World War when Nigerians yearned for more contact with the West but were constrained by the "benign colonialism" of their British masters. The cautious, studious Essay and his friends called themselves "The Circle." One friend, a wily schemer named Sipe, views every calamity in the outside world as an occasion for making a "killing" in some business scheme. But Sipe, the would-be modern entrepreneur, still consults ancestral spirits before closing a deal. The tug between past and present, between knowledge of the larger world and an antiquated provincialism, circumscribes "The Circle" in all their dealings and speculations. They follow Edward VIII's abdication in 1936 with avid interest, yet worry that it will cause civil war in England, indeed a revival of the War of the Roses.

The detachment of Essay's generation from the larger outside world is oddly mirrored in the author's own detachment from Essay's world. One seldom feels in *Ìsarà* the personal connection that characterized *Aké*. And though by the end of the book Essay has come to realize that his roots tie him inextricably to *Ìsarà*, Soyinka seems to have far less certainty about his own life.

Fellow Nigerian Chinua Achebe is also concerned about his place in the modern world. In a series of essays, he examines the way African writers are viewed in the West. "The latter-day colonialist critic," says Achebe, "sees the African writer as a somewhat unfinished European who with patient guidance will grow up one day and write like every other European." Achebe objects to the requirement that African novels be "universal," since, he claims, Western works are not held to the same standard. Critics never try "changing names of characters and places in an American novel, say, a Philip Roth or an Updike . . . It would never occur to them to doubt the universality of their own literature." (Achebe ignores the fact that Roth's writings have been criticized, particularly in Europe, for being too Jewish-American provincial.) Throughout these essays, aesthetic questions have a way of



turning into moral predicaments: Achebe recognizes that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, set in the Congo, is great literature, but he is pained that its author is a white European, partially blinded by "racism" and "xenophobia."

Achebe's essays, for all their lucidity, appear trapped in a conundrum: He objects when Western literary standards are applied to the African novel, but he has no alternate "African aesthetic" to propose. Achebe, like Soyinka, seems burdened by the weight of his success in the West. Both writers' works have received praise and awards from Western audiences. They understand the West far better than their fathers did. They write in its language. And having played so skillfully with the major forms of Western literature, they may have left themselves no choice but to be judged by the standards of that tradition.

Science & Technology

THE FORMATION OF SCIENCE IN

JAPAN: Building a Research Tradition. *By James R. Bartholomew. Yale. 369 pp. \$30*

Why has Japan never produced scientific accomplishments on a par with the West's? Stereotypes about the militant conformism of the Japanese provide the popular explanation. Another answer comes from sociologists who, from Max Weber to Talcott Parsons, have insisted that only in societies without vestiges of feudalism can science truly develop.

Bartholomew, an historian at Ohio State University, sets out to challenge such views. Japan's Confucian tradition, Bartholomew points out, tolerated new ideas: Scientific theories that had provoked storms in the West—heliocentrism or the origins of species—were accepted by Japanese intellectuals matter-of-factly. Nor was Japanese culture ever dominated by a revealed religion with an elaborate theological interpretation of nature. Consequently, the physicist Yuasa Mitsutomo wrote, "It was as though Japanese science had had the teeth of . . . [adverse] criticism removed." So the critics of Japanese science were wrong?

Not according to the impressive documentation that Bartholomew has collected. After the Meiji Restoration (1868), the Japanese govern-