maintained at five percent of the total population, all of which could help revitalize small towns and local industries. "No area of national policy," he argues, "has the same kind of power for good or ill as does farm policy."

THE USES OF ADVERSITY: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe. *By Timothy Garton Ash. Random House. 335 pp. $19.95*

It would seem foolhardy to publish a book about Central Europe at a time when daily newspaper articles about the region often prove outdated by the time they hit the streets. These 16 essays by the London *Spectator*'s foreign editor originally appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *Granta*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the author's own publication; they date from the winter of 1983 to the summer of 1989. Yet there is little that is stale about them. They are saved, in almost every case, by Garton Ash's historical intelligence, his acute readings of cultural politics, and his deft portraits of key political players, many of whom (particularly those on the Polish scene) he knows first hand. The *New York Review* essays even entered directly into the political dialogue that helped shape the new Poland and the new Hungary: Hastily translated, they enabled reformers there to see events in their own country within the larger context of a collapsing Soviet Empire. The tempo of "refolution"—Garton Ash's neologism for the revolutionary reforms we are witnessing in Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and East Berlin—has accelerated dramatically since last summer. But this collection will endure because it depicts so exactly, and often presciently, the region on the brink of its most dramatic political transformation since the early years of the Cold War. While clearly enthusiastic about the prospect of a reinvigorated, democratized Central Europe, Garton Ash remains soberly realistic about the dangers that lie ahead for an area with so troubled a past: "Can Central Europe be put together again . . . at the very point where it has most often, most horribly, and (from the point of view of neighboring empires) most successfully been divided—at the point where different nations, races, cultures, religions try (or fail) to coexist?"

Arts & Letters

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Speeches and Writings. *Edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher. Two volumes. Library of America. 898 pp.; 787 pp. $35 each*

Abraham Lincoln is only the second American president—after Thomas Jefferson—to be "canonized" by inclusion in the Library of America's collection of "America's greatest writers." Does this mean that Lincoln, in addition to being a great president, should be reckoned among our great literary stylists?

Here are close to 1,700 pages of speeches, letters, messages, and even a few poems by which to arrive at a judgement. Certainly Lincoln's status as a stylist and writer was harder earned than Jefferson's. In his 1860 campaign autobiography, Lincoln reports that he never entered a college or "accademy" [sic] until he became a lawyer. "What he has in the way of education," Lincoln (a genius of understatement) writes of himself, "he has picked up." Yet, for all his homespun, unassuming airs, he made himself into a person of genuine culture: He attended the theater and the opera regularly, and he read widely. "Some of Shakespeare's plays," he said, "I have gone over perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader"—a literary training that few politicians, or non-politicians, can better.

At his best, Lincoln enters the company of Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson; like them, he is a biblical prophet who has learned to use the American vernacular. The Civil War made Lincoln a stylist, because his biblical cadences were inspired by what was to him a *holy* war: "He [God] gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence [slavery] came." Lincoln's most remembered passages—"Four score and seven years ago" (from the Gettysburg Address) and "With malice toward none, with charity for all" (from the Second Inaugural)—are religious, not political, rhetoric.

Yet in sheer quantity the great speeches are outweighed by pedestrian addresses to interest groups like the Wisconsin Agricultural Society. What the reader finds in most of these two volumes is not art but the conditions for art—not always great speeches but the process of revision that makes great speeches possible. As though in some enormous rough draft, Lincoln kept reworking the same ideas over and over, first in casual formulations, until at last—as in the "House Divided" speech—they issued forth in concise, unforgettable expression.

ELLEN FOSTER and **A VIRTUOUS WOMAN.** *By Kaye Gibbons. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 146 pp.; 158 pp. $13.95 each*

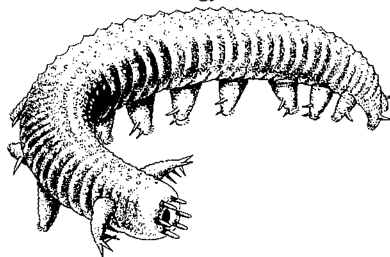
To add the name of a new author to the company of William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Tennessee Williams, and Thomas Wolfe is no small matter. Yet Kaye Gibbons, a housewife from Raleigh, North Carolina, not yet 30, has added a voice, original and recognizable, to southern literature.

Eleven-year-old Ellen Foster, the heroine-narrator of Gibbons' first novel, calmly describes her mother's illness: "You see when she was my size she had romantic fever I think it is called and since then she has not had a good heart." Ellen suffers, after her mother's death, some of the worst relatives found outside a Dickens novel. But Ellen represents the triumph of the decent and the practical over the tragic: "I fed myself OK," she says when her drunk father fails to appear for meals. "I tried to make what we had at school but I found the best deal was the plate froze with food already on it."

Gibbons' new novel, *A Virtuous Woman*, set in a contemporary but unnamed southern state, is filled with the family love so painfully lacking in Ellen's story. In alternating chapters, Jack Ernest Stokes ("stokes the fire, stokes the stove, stokes the fiery furnace of hell!") and his wife Ruby narrate their separate hardships, their unlikely meeting, and 25 years of living together. Before Jack, Ruby had a disastrous first marriage: "I just hated that the first big decision I ever made was the kind that can kill you if you make a mistake." Before Ruby, Jack had "never come close to marrying. Until I met Ruby I suppose the sweetest thing I'd ever asked a woman to do for me was to hold a mule still while I hitched him." Despite Jack's being a poor tenant farmer and 20 years older than Ruby, they build a good marriage. Yet it is hardly a match for life's sorrows—childlessness and Ruby's cancer. During the terminal stages of the disease, she fills the freezer with enough meals to last Jack through the winter. "Then maybe he'll feel up to planting a garden, carrying the whole thing through by himself."

Obviously, Gibbons can border on sentimentality, but she is saved by her vision of hard vicissitudes and necessary graces. More remarkable are Gibbons' spare sentences and paragraphs in which not a word can be changed without serious loss. From Madison Smartt Bell to Bobbie Ann Mason, contemporary southern writers describe a South shedding its distinctive features—as though Faulkner's mellifluous tragedies had washed up somewhere between tract home and shopping mall; these younger writers' language rarely sounds distinctively southern. But Gibbons' idiom—dry and practical as a farmer's skin, studded with clichés that somehow seem fresh, semi-illiterate yet never so intrusive as dialect—is recognizably southern and recognizably hers. And it is this, the creation of a voice, that makes her cousin to the "old masters," Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, and even Faulkner himself.

Science & Technology



WONDERFUL LIFE: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History. *By Stephen J. Gould. Norton. 347 pp. $19.95*

In 1909 the prominent geologist and longtime-head of the Smithsonian Institution, Charles Doolittle Walcott, was digging in a quarry in the Canadian Rockies when he uncovered a