



tically inventing the discipline of children's oral history, Coles set a standard in his *Children of Crisis* series that psychologists, sociologists, and historians have all attempted to equal.

The hundreds of children from age eight to 13 whom Coles interviews here allow for some interesting, if tentative generalizations. The Muslim children tend to accept Allah and their religion without question. Jewish children are taught to question, but mainly as a learning device within the context of their religious studies. Christian children, struggling with the strange paradox of an omnipotent God somehow connected to the child Jesus, freely ask the most questions of all.

Coles's respect for the children's beliefs shows how far he has travelled since he was a young psychiatrist and accepted the dictates of his profession's god, Sigmund Freud. Freud put religion on a par with "childhood neurosis," but Coles refuses to reduce his young subjects' spiritual concerns to neuroses or complexes. Children, he says, ask the same "questions our philosophers and theologians and novelists have asked over the centuries and ordinary human beings have posed to themselves."

Some critics have objected that Coles has focused almost exclusively on the brighter, more elevated aspects of religion, and that he ignores those religious feelings of guilt and inadequacy that, for example, torment Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. Coles, however, believes it a mistake to emphasize demeaning, helpless, or passive images of the person, which is what he feels psychiatry and the "healing professions" do. In recent years, his interest has turned to literature, and, in *The Call of Stories* (1989), he suggests that stories of active, struggling human beings have a power to heal. What Coles has elicited in *Spiritual Life* are really stories by and about children—stories that are often as affecting as any in religious literature.

**ETHNIC IDENTITY:** The Transformation of White America. By Richard D. Alba. Yale. 374 pp. \$35

**ETHNIC OPTIONS:** Choosing Identities in America. By Mary C. Waters. Univ. of Calif. 197 pp. \$32.50

What does it mean, in 1991, to say you are Irish-American, Italian-American, or Jewish-American? Two sociologists, Richard Alba and Mary Waters, use different methods to reach the same conclusion: In most matters today, ethnicity counts for very little.

Alba at the State University of New York and Waters at Harvard are the latest to join in a debate that has continued since the turn of the century. Mass immigrations created fears that the new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe would overwhelm "true" American culture. Reassurance came from the new "science" of sociology, notably from Robert Park and Ernest Burgess of the "Chicago School," who argued that residence here would eventually lead to complete assimilation.

This "melting pot" theory has been challenged often over the years, never more powerfully than in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963). Glazer and Moynihan contended that complete assimilation had not and would not take place because each group establishes a new ethnic identity within America: Italian-American culture, for example, is not Italian culture in America but a new creation that has become part of a pluralist American society.

For two decades, this "pluralist" interpretation dominated sociological thinking. But during the 1980s, Herbert J. Gans revived the old assimilationist theory, arguing that Glazer and Moynihan were discussing "symbolic ethnicity," an "ethnicity of last resort" in which individuals identified with superficial practices that could be retained or dropped at their pleasure.

Alba and Waters test this argument with sophisticated fieldwork and quantitative analysis. Alba interviewed hundreds of people of European descent living around Albany; Waters studied 60 people from the suburbs of San Jose and Philadelphia. Only two percent of the people Alba interviewed had received help in business from their "ethnic network"; only four percent had suffered discrimination because of

ethnicity; only one percent ate ethnic food on a daily basis. Young Catholics more often than not marry Protestants, and almost one out of three Jews marries a non-Jew. For most whites, moreover, the old urban "ethnic neighborhoods" no longer exist. Ethnicity, Alba concludes, represents only "a small portion of the identity 'masks' individuals present to others."

But both sociologists find that there is a Brand-X or generic European-American identity emerging in America. This vague new "white ethnicity" began as a reaction to the civil-rights movement and has increased as the new waves of immigration come to America from Third World countries. (Paradoxically, at the very moment that white European "ethnics" are sloughing off their historical ancestries, African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans—who, judging by length of time spent here, should be the most assimilated of all—are loudly recalling their racial roots.)

In this latest round of the old debate, Waters and Alba offer no new model of assimilation. The melting pot is out; adaptation (to a largely Anglo-American prototype) is out. These two studies show that new immigrants are greeted more tolerantly now than were those of the late 19th century. Yet this tolerance may have been purchased at the price of national self-definition. New immigrants often seem somewhat puzzled—as Waters and Alba are—about what it now means to become an American.

### *Science & Technology*

#### **A LITERARY COMPANION TO SCIENCE.**

*Ed. by Walter Gratzer. Norton. 517 pp. \$24.95*

Thirty years ago C. P. Snow launched a public debate by claiming that science and the humanities are two cultures, separate and irreconcilable. An entertaining example of the two mind-sets appears in this anthology: When the mathematician Charles Babbage read Tennyson's famous line, "Every minute dies a man,/Every minute one is born," and noted that it failed to account for increasing population, he wrote Tennyson, suggesting an improvement: "'Every moment dies a man,/And one and a sixteenth is born.' I may add that the exact figures are 1.167 but something must, of

course, be conceded to the law of meter."

Gratzer, a cell biologist at King's College, London, has gathered 216 pieces, ranging from fiction to biography to journalism, to show what happens when the two cultures do meet. At certain moments, as when Primo Levi is writing, they appear to be kin: Both science and literature, Levi argues, rely upon observation to construct hypothetical models of behavior; both set problems and solve them.

Yet most contributors to this anthology lack Levi's intimate knowledge of science. The picture that they collectively paint of scientists at work is a stereotype—actually two stereotypes. The more familiar one portrays the scientist as a pure, disinterested observer who collects facts and formulates theories to fit them: a scientist who is free, Gratzer says, "from the crises of purpose and identity that have afflicted Western music, literature, architecture, and painting." The classical scholar Maurice Bowra evokes this image when he says that scientists make dangerous allies on university committees because "they are apt to change their minds in response to arguments."

But contemporary scientists have another reputation, this one more blemished. Gratzer admits that "emulation and jealousy among scientists have become sanctified as the motives that drive scientists forward." Gary Taubes, the author of *Nobel Dreams*, shows the Harvard physicist Carlo Rubbia politicking unabashedly for the Nobel prize and skewing the work of a large team of researchers to further his own effort. And when politics gets coupled to science—as happened, to take an extreme example, under Stalin's regime in Russia—the manipulative scientist becomes the stereotype, and results get further skewed.

Gratzer's anthology succeeds in making scientists and their work interesting to the layman, yet it oddly perpetuates the very cultural division it would close. Gratzer includes no scientific papers, which, at their best, can condense years of work into a few pages of unrivaled utilitarian lucidity. And as for literature, Gratzer makes no distinction between first-rate writing and third-rate science fiction. In his principle of selection, Gratzer seems to suggest that science is science and literature is literature, with a simple boundary running between them. C. P. Snow would have agreed.