

academic career. He was, Rubin writes, "a man in full emotional recoil from democracy, the middle class, religious latitudinarianism, and the cramp of the flesh. His adopted English identity became a badge of virtue to signify his emancipation from vulgarity." And his poetry was a way for him to assert "an intensely personal appetite for suffering, an agonizing fear of sexual appetite, and a shrinking from carnality, along with a desperate need for religious certainty and for civic and social coherence."

What gives "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) its power, Rubin says, is "the communicated sense of frustration, the struggle between decorum and libido, the contempt

for mannered response juxtaposed with the dread of vulgarity." And "The Waste-Land" (1922), Rubin adds, "is no diagnosis of contemporary society from outside and above," but rather "the articulated and agonized depiction of a participant sharing in the chaos."

Eliot asserted in another famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." His poetry, however, tells a very different story. "His poetry is *not* an escape from passion; it is not *about* the passion," Rubin notes. "It is the passion."

Late-Blooming Architect

"What Louis Kahn Built" by Michael J. Lewis, in *Commentary* (Mar. 1992), 165 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022; "What Does the Building Want to Be?" by Brooks Adams, in *Art in America* (July 1992), 575 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.

Architect Louis I. Kahn (1901-74), "the last great modernist" in critic Brooks Adams' phrase, did not get a prestigious commission (the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven) until he was 50 years old. When the Richards Medical Laboratory, his first project to be internationally celebrated, was built at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he was nearly 60. Yet during the next 15 years, writes Michael J. Lewis, a historiographer at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, Kahn "produced a solid body of work that met with almost uniform critical acclaim, something true of none of his contemporaries."

Kahn's best known buildings include the Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, with its compounds (as Lewis notes) "gathered around a single monumental axis, a mighty crescendo that culminates in a triumphant vista of the Pacific," and the library at the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, with (in Adams' description) "its amazing well of space punctuated by huge cast concrete bull's-eyes which reveal the stacks behind." But the architect's "grandest spatial conceits," Adams says, are located in India and Bangladesh. "In the official complex, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar . . . in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, the national legislature and mosque are wrapped in glare walls punctured by gigantic triangles and circles." Kahn sought "very archaic-looking buildings," and his huge concrete structures in Dhaka were influenced by the great 18th-century astronomical gardens at Jaipur. In Ahmedabad, India is Kahn's campus for the Indian Institute of Man-

agement, a business school. It has been called a 20th-century successor to Thomas Jefferson's campus ideal at the University of Virginia. Kahn became, Adams says, "a world architect who endowed new capitals and emerging cultures with his most convincing brand of cosmic symbolism."

The architect's spectacular late successes, Lewis points out, overshadowed his failures. Architectural philosophers applauded his "insistence on the collective and the universal, his ideal of an architecture so spacious that it could encompass everyone," but Kahn's clients often did not. In reaching for the universal, many of them thought, he lost the particular. Jewish institutions, for example, entrusted him with a half-dozen major projects in his final decades, but "all that came of them was a small synagogue in Chappaqua, New York, and the Jewish Community Center Bathhouse in Trenton, New Jersey, itself a small sliver of a much larger project from which he was dismissed."

Kahn's experience during the 1930s, when he was extensively involved in public housing schemes, left a permanent imprint on his career, Lewis says. He "learned to make the rounds of government corridors, instead of wooing clients in corporate boardrooms or on golf courses." The architect, according to the catalogue for a retrospective exhibition ("Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture") that began a three-year world tour last fall, "rescued modernism from the banality induced by its commercial success."

Kahn's career indeed was based not on com-

The Capitulation of James Baldwin

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., chairman of Harvard's Afro-American Studies Department, recalls in the *New Republic* (June 1, 1992) how writer James Baldwin (1924–87), having been pushed aside as a spokesman for black America in the 1960s, courted "a new vanguard, one that esteemed rage, not compassion, as our noblest emotion."

In an impossible gambit, the author of No Name in the Street [1972] sought to reclaim his lost authority by signaling his willingness to be instructed by those who had inherited it. Contradicting his own greatest achievements, he feebly borrowed the populist slogans of the day, and returned them with the beautiful Baldwinian polish. "The powerless, by definition, can never be 'racists,'" he writes, "for they can never make the world pay for what they feel or fear except by the suicidal endeavor that makes them fanatics or revolutionaries, or both; whereas those in power can be urbane and charming and invite you to those houses which they know you will never own." This view—that blacks cannot be racist—is today a familiar one, a platitude of much of the contemporary debate. The key phrase, of course, is "by definition." For this is not only, or even largely, an empirical claim. It is a rhetorical and psychological

move, an unfortunate but unsurprising attempt by the victim to forever exempt himself from guilt.

The term 'racist' is here redefined by Baldwin, as it has been redefined by certain prominent Afro-American artists and intellectuals today, to refer to a reified system of power relations, to a social order in which one race is essentially and forever subordinated to another To be sure, it does express, in an abstract and extreme manner, a widely accepted truth: that the asymmetries of power mean that not all racial insult is equal Still, it represents a grave political error.

For black America needs allies more than it needs absolution. And the slogan—a definition masquerading as an idea—would all too quickly serve as a blanket amnesty for our own dankest suspicions and bigotries. It is a slogan that Baldwin once would have debunked with his devastating mock-detachment. He would have repudiated it not for the sake of white America—for white America, he would have argued, the display of black prejudice could only provide a reassuring confirmation of its own—but for the sake of black America. The Baldwin who knew that the fates of black and white America were one also knew that if racism was to be deplored, it was to be deplored tout court, without exemption clauses for the oppressed.

mercial skyscrapers (for which his plans were invariably rejected) or on stores or office buildings, but rather on public buildings—libraries, schools, churches, and synagogues. The "inspirational if rather generic monumentality" of

Kahn's architecture, Lewis concludes, reflects more than his own pursuit of broad abstractions such as "Silence and Light;" it reflects also "our own uncertainty about our institutions and their ultimate validity."

OTHER NATIONS

The End of the Italian Republic?

"Italy after Communism" by Giuseppe Sacco, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1992), Ctr. for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; "A Second Italian Republic?" by Angelo Codevilla, in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1992), 58 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

In Italy, which has had 51 governments since the end of World War II, talk of a governmental "crisis" is usually taken with a large grain of salt. But today, University of Rome political sci-

entist Giuseppe Sacco and Hoover Institution Senior Research Fellow Angelo Codevilla agree, the collapse of communism has ushered in a genuine crisis.