



of discounting the legitimacy of so many diverse peoples and cultures—fabricated a single African identity. From Europe, Appiah shows, the intellectual drama next shifted to the United States, where the fathers of pan-Africanism—Alexander Crummel (1819–98) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)—took the essentially de-meaning concept of “the Negro” or “the African” and embroidered it with positive connotations. Each race, Du Bois wrote in *The Conservation of Races* (1897), possesses its own special “mission” for civilization. Although Du Bois’s idea of an African civilization may satisfy a deep longing among Africans for some kind of unity, it flies in the face of everything that Appiah (a native of Ghana) personally knows: “Whatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary.” The contemporary “race industry”—thousands of politicians, professors, preachers, and poets who have a vested interest in race as a fundamental datum of human experience—will surely dislike Appiah’s insistence that there is nothing *essentially* black or African. Yet Appiah’s intention in casting out false racial or metaphorical identities is to help contemporary Africans more freely choose “what it will mean to be African in the coming years.”

But how is such an act of cultural self-definition to be accomplished? Here Appiah shifts to the personal, narrating the strange story of his father’s funeral. Appiah’s father, a modern Ashanti politician, left burial instructions that contradicted his clan’s matrilinear rules. In the ensuing dispute, spells were cast, sheep slaughtered, and poisonings attempted, as Appiah himself was pushed from neat abstractions like “tradition” and “modernity” into “an almost fairytale world of witchcraft and wicked aunts and wise old women and men.” He learned that Ashanti spirits—or, for that matter, the God of Christianity and Islam—have to be re-

spected as more than “symbolic truths.” *In My Father’s House* becomes the very desideratum it is proposing for Africa’s intellectual future: Appiah is writing not “African philosophy” (which he considers a meaningless term) but thoughts by an African in which oral wisdom and European concepts form a unified whole. “If you postulate an either-or choice between Africa and the West,” he concludes, “there is no place for you in the real world of African politics.”

History

A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science. By David F. Noble. Knopf. 330 pp. \$25

Western science has long been something close to a male-only club, a condition documented in such feminist studies as Evelyn Fox Keller’s *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1985) and Londa Schiebinger’s *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (1989). Such books analyze how exclusive male control of the scientific enterprise has shaped our understanding of the physical world as well as the strategies by which we go about “mastering” it.

Noble, a historian at York University in Toronto, proposes to tell how the club became virtually all-male. It didn’t have to be so, he says. Nor was it even the inevitable consequence of the misogyny of Aristotle and other classical shapers of Western science. The problem lies, says Noble, in the history of one of the West’s more influential cultures of learning: the Christian church. Drawing on the work of such specialists as Peter Brown (on late antiquity) and R. W. Southern (on the Middle Ages), Noble shows how women’s exclusion from the world of learning resulted from the long struggle over the character and role of the Christian clergy: Should it be homosocial, celibate, and male-dominated? And should the clergy have the final say in defining correct doctrine and practice?

The fact that these questions were not always answered in the affirmative is proof, in Noble’s telling, of how things might have been otherwise. For example, in the second and third cen-

turies there were, within the Mediterranean world, female priests and bishops—a phenomenon that Tertullian of Carthage branded “heresy.” Far more common, and almost as threatening to most Church Fathers, were the many wealthy female patrons of various Christian communities and churches. Monasteries housing both men and women, such as the one founded by St. Brigit in fifth-century Ireland, and spiritual marriages between male and female celibates were but two institutions that involved women in the culture of learning.

But with the increasing militarization of the church during the Carolingian period and the reforms of Pope Gregory VII in the late 11th century (which strengthened papal authority and weakened lay influence), women were effectively cut off from the intellectual life of Western Christendom. Their exclusion was nowhere more noticeable than in the new universities of Paris, Padua, and Oxford. From the 13th century on, observed historian Friedrich Heer, “there was no satisfaction for [women’s] spiritual and intellectual yearnings.”

Noble tells how the anti-female bias survived among the New Philosophers, those thinkers from Francis Bacon (1561–1626) to Roger Boyle (1627–91) who retained a religious outlook even as they laid the foundations of modern science. Universities and scientific societies in the early modern world were full of such men who shared Isaac Newton’s monkish horror of women’s potentially corrupting influence upon the life of the mind. Yet Noble does not ignore the heterodox tendencies within late Christendom that allowed women, particularly in America, slowly to infiltrate realms deemed properly masculine. How slowly hardly needs saying. England’s Mary Somerville (1780–1872), hailed as the “premier scientific lady” of her day, saw her book on astronomy adopted as a set text at Cambridge. Yet neither she nor her daughters were permitted to study within its hallowed, masculine halls.

WHEN TIME SHALL BE NO MORE:

Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture.
By Paul Boyer. Harvard. 468 pp. \$29.95

“Many Arguments . . . persuade us,” Cotton Mather told his Boston congregation in 1709,

“that our glorious LORD will have an Holy city in AMERICA . . .” The belief that ancient biblical prophecies would be fulfilled in America has inspired some of the best minds of this country, observes Boyer, a historian at the University of Wisconsin. As late as the 19th century, the narratives of America’s then-premier historian, George Bancroft, indirectly gained momentum from his belief that the hand of God was at work in the country’s affairs. But as American culture became increasingly secular, what had once been a fertile line of thinking degenerated into eccentricity and crankiness. A debased form of prophetic writing continued as if in a parallel universe. Expositors offered “scientific” readings of the Bible to explain everything from World War I to global warming. Boyer is not entirely dismissive of this thinking: The doomsday visions of environmentalists, he points out, are essentially secularized versions of the Apocalypse. Biblically inspired superstitions circulate even among America’s high and mighty. Ronald Wilson Reagan was so painfully aware that the Bible assigned the number 666 to the Antichrist—and that each of his names has six letters—that at one time he had the street number of his California home changed from 666 to 668.

Arts & Letters

THE ANALYST AND THE MYSTIC:

Psychoanalytic Reflections on Religion and Mysticism. By Sudhir Kakar. Univ. of Chicago. 83 pp. \$15.95

Psychoanalysis was born partly in hostile reaction to religion. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Sigmund Freud dismissed the religious inclination as a regressive, infantile wish to return to the mother’s breast or to the cozy womb. True to the positivistic climate in which he began writing, Freud was determined to make psychoanalysis a science. And just as the sciences treated surface phenomena as expressions of underlying laws, so psychoanalysis reduced human behavior, including religious behavior, to manifestations of biological drives.

Kakar, who practices psychoanalysis in New Delhi and teaches at the University of Chicago, offers an explanation for that early hostility: