

in that it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm trees for company." In the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, the Essenes come to life, although it is a life that no one could have imagined for them. They staged sacred meals with eschatological significance, complete with the blessing of bread and wine, and they performed baptisms by immersion. Moreover, both the early Christians and the Essenes expected the Messiah to appear imminently. One scroll, "The Messiah of Heaven and Earth," clearly alludes to the idea of bodily resurrection.

So much from the scrolls seems clear, but a number of questions they raise have no ready answers: Was John the Baptist a member of the community that wrote the scrolls? Was Jesus, in fact, an Essene? Is the "Temple Scroll" the lost sixth book of the Torah? Taken together, however, these essays establish that early Christianity is grounded more completely in Jewish thought than any authority before 1947 had proposed.

If the scholarly team controlling the scrolls was worried about their falling into the wrong hands, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* illustrates what happens when they do. There is no direct mention of Jesus in the scrolls, but such a small detail hardly deters Australian biblical scholar Barbara Thiering. She uses them to argue that Jesus was born to an unwed (hence, officially "virgin") woman, that he married twice and fathered three children, and that he did not die on the cross but was drugged and later revived in a cave. What Thiering has done, in fact, is substitute for the texts of the scrolls—which are fragmentary, sometimes contradictory, and in archaic script—the idea of a *subtext*, a hidden code, which she then "decodes" into a narrative that is fluent, coherent, and, of course, unverifiable.

There will likely be no such bold and final "solving" of the Dead Sea Scrolls. But a wide range of scholars, such as those represented in the BAR reader, are now providing reliable information and possible interpretations of these manuscripts that, as Shanks notes, "ignited the imagination of nonscholar and scholar alike."

**THE ULTIMATE ART:** Essays Around and About Opera. By David Littlejohn. Univ. of Calif. 303 pp. \$25

Samuel Johnson characterized opera as "an exotick

and irrational entertainment"; two centuries later, the French composer Pierre Boulez proposed blowing up the world's opera houses on the grounds that they were devoted to an absurdly costly and indefensible art form. If opera is a bastard art—the "illegitimate" offspring of music, libretto, dance, historical costume, and theatrical production—then novelist-critic Littlejohn (like Edmund in *King Lear*) argues that bastard is best. For all its hybrid qualities, he insists, opera produces effects, such as "the human voice at its most powerful and expressive," found nowhere else. Littlejohn pursues his argument in essays ranging from "Why We Put Up with Dumb Opera Plots" to the changing public tastes of "The Janáček Boom." Everywhere, Littlejohn opposes popular excesses, such as Peter Sellars's stagings of Mozart, in which the "directorial conceit [is] alien to the score," as well as academic excesses, such as Cornell University's "new opera studies," which treat librettos as autonomous works and subject them to advanced literary theory. Littlejohn may fail to convert the skeptic or to interest the academic specialist: Eschewing theory and what Shaw called the "Mesopotamian words" of technical musical analysis, he writes not to preach to the converts but to delight them.

## Science & Technology

**THE CREATIVE MOMENT:** How Science Made Itself Alien to Modern Culture. By Joseph Schwartz. HarperCollins. 252 pp. \$25

Joseph Schwartz has an unusual complaint: "Our poets do not tell of the intricacies of microminiature electronic circuitry." For that matter, he continues, "the mere mention of relativity makes every intellectual in Europe and the United States start to stammer." To believe the former physics professor, little has changed during the 35 years since C. P. Snow identified the gulf between sciences and the humanities as perhaps *the* problem for modern society.

Schwartz, moreover, maintains that this division is unnecessary, indeed little more than a historical accident. To locate the origins of the accident, he returns to Renaissance Italy, when Galileo's study of the heavenly bodies landed him in trouble with the pope. Galileo's solution was to convert his arguments into the rarefied language of mathematics, which mollified the church by being inaccessible.