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a sort of guilty pride that he would be remembered principally as the author of "the stuff that raised the famous Blush . . . on the soft round object, sacred to British claptrap—the cheek of a young person." The self-tribute is fitting. In blushes—and in shivers—the body registers the mind's shame, disturbance, or arousal. Perhaps Collins's greatest genius was to determine how to produce such reactions in his readers while avoiding them in his own life.

## History

**THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY: An Intellectual History.** By *Forrest McDonald*. Univ. of Kansas. 516 pp. \$29.95

Having experienced the tyranny of the British king, the Founding Fathers—like most Americans—were ambivalent toward, even fearful of, executive power. But after enduring the absence of a strong executive during the Articles of Confederation, they recognized the need for it. That left them with a problem McDonald calls the "central dilemma of constitutional government." The safety and well-being of the nation, writes McDonald, require a quasi-monarchical figure who can "operate outside or above the law." In his 15th book, McDonald, a professor of intellectual history at the University of Alabama and a leading authority on the Constitution, describes how the Framers avoided their worst fears and still managed to build an office that "has been responsible for less harm and more good, in the nation and in the world, than perhaps any other secular institution in history."

McDonald explains that he undertook this study partially because of the "striking reversal of ideological positions concerning the presidency that has taken place in recent decades." Until the 1960s, liberals generally supported increasing the authority of the executive at the expense of Congress and the Supreme Court, while conservatives stood for congressional sovereignty and local government. During the Vietnam War, the pattern began to reverse itself, with conservatives coming to champion greater power for the executive branch. The result has been a presidency with authority far exceeding the conception set forth by the authors of the Constitution. McDonald sets out to explore "whether the enormous growth of the responsibili-

ties vested in the American Presidency has been necessary, practical or desirable."

McDonald begins his study with a lengthy look at the presidency's theoretical underpinnings in English constitutional law, the writings of various philosophers popular in the 18th century, and the colonial experience itself. He then moves into a discussion of the Constitutional Convention, at which the Founders had trouble coming up with a name for the office. For a time, delegates referred merely to "the Executive." They flirted with John Adams's suggestion of "governor of the united People and States of America," but abandoned it because it smacked of colonial proprietorship. "President," however, was different. The word had been used by informal associations throughout the 13 colonies, and its Latin root gave it the reassuring connotation of "passivity."

No matter what the name, every American knew that George Washington would fill the office. "It is no exaggeration to say that Americans were willing to venture the experiment with a single, national republican chief executive only because of their unreserved trust" in him, says McDonald. Washington at first shied away from the role—he had promised never again to hold public office after resigning command of the Continental Army—but an aggressive letter-writing campaign led by Alexander Hamilton eventually swayed him. The authority of the office rapidly expanded with the election of successive presidents, most notably (and ironically) that of Thomas Jefferson in 1800. But not until the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 did presidential contenders campaign actively and solicit votes openly—marking the beginning of the modern presidency.

McDonald concludes by examining the president's relationship to such areas as legislation, foreign affairs, and image making. Here he becomes less the scholar and more the polemicist. We learn that he dislikes Franklin Roosevelt, believes Richard Nixon will come to be reckoned among the "great" or "near-great" presidents, and admires Ronald Reagan without reservation, crediting him for having won the Cold War almost single-handedly.

All in all, though, this remains a balanced inspection of America's most closely scrutinized political institution. "Though the powers of the office have sometimes been grossly abused,"

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McDonald observes, "though the presidency has become almost impossible to manage, and though the caliber of the people who serve as chief executive has declined erratically but persistently from the day George Washington left office," the presidency continues "unparalleled in its stability" as a "model of order and sanity." Americans have elevated 41 different people to the White House, and in the process let control of the executive office go from one party to another 21 times, but only once, in 1861, has the nation come apart. Peaceful transfers are the norm, and the office remains, remarkably, "fundamentally true to the original design."

**THE SOVIET TRAGEDY: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991.** By Martin Malia. Free Press. 575 pp. \$24.95

**IMPERIUM.** By Ryszard Kapuscinski. Knopf. 331 pp. \$24

The collapse of the Soviet Union has drawn Sovietologists into one of history's great whodunits: Did the Soviet Union kill communism, or did communism kill the Soviet Union? To Malia, a former professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, communism is clearly the culprit. His argument here expands and updates his widely discussed 1990 article, "To the Stalin Mausoleum," published in *Daedalus* under the pseudonym "Z." He charges that those who believe that Stalin's crimes were an aberration of Leninist thought, or that Soviet communism could be successfully reformed, get things exactly wrong.

In Malia's view, Western Sovietologists failed to foresee communism's inevitable demise because they ignored the study of ideology for the more neutral and "scientific" study of social and economic forces. They refused to recognize that the Bolsheviks imposed Marxism on Russia in a utopian "revolution from above" that necessitated thorough and relentless destruction of the existing social and economic order. Every time Lenin, Khrushchev, and, finally, Gorbachev were forced by economic exigencies to adopt market-based "reforms," they amplified the contradictions between communist theory and reality. "If in the end communism collapsed like a house of cards," writes Malia, "it was because it had always been a house of cards."

Malia's complaint about the myopia of most Sovietologists is shared by Kapuscinski, the peripatetic Polish journalist whose previous books include quirky reports on politics in Ethiopia during the last years of Emperor Haile Selassie and in Iran under Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Kapuscinski would also agree with Malia that communism killed the Soviet Union. But Kapuscinski sees a far greater connection between the fear and fatalism of "Homo Sovieticus" and that of his Russian forebears. Comparing the eras of Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev with those of Peter I, Catherine II, and Alexander III, Kapuscinski asks: "In what other country does the person of the ruler, his character traits, his manias and phobias, leave such a profound stamp on the national history, its course, its ascents and downfalls?"

Kapuscinski, however, is more intent on offering an impressionistic tour of the Soviet "imperium" than on arguing about its theoretical origins. This he does through vividly evoked encounters with intellectuals in Moscow, coal miners above the Arctic Circle, and ex-fishermen near the shrinking Aral Sea. Some readers may find his meditations on the making of cognac in Tbilisi irrelevant. But more often than not his offbeat observations cast new light on the curious dystopia that was the Soviet Union. Commenting on the miles of barbed wire he saw in his travels, Kapuscinski notes: "If one were to multiply all this by the number of years the Soviet government had been in existence, it would be easy to see why, in the shops of Smolensk or Omsk, one can buy neither a hoe nor a hammer, to say nothing of a knife or a spoon."

At journey's end, Kapuscinski describes the impact of new freedoms on the former Soviet Union but concludes that "the so-called Soviet man is first and foremost an utterly exhausted man. . . . We shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't have the strength to rejoice in his newly won freedom." Malia agrees. After "70 years on the road to nowhere," he writes, a Russia rendered prostrate by the total collapse of its "total system" must simultaneously create a liberal economic order, a democratic polity, and a viable nation-state.

One may take issue with Malia's tidy intellectualism, which gives short shrift to the role of individual error, pettiness, vainglory, and other human traits in the rise and fall of communism. But by demonstrating the animating power of