
pointedly suggests, a lot to learn from the Victorians, and we are only in second grade.

In elegant prose, the professor emeritus of history at the City University of New York shows how thoroughly we have misunderstood the Victorians—their family life and sexuality, their feminists and reformers, and much else. It was, she emphasizes, a society united, despite class fissures and other flaws, in its belief in “hard work, self-help, obedience, cleanliness, orderliness,” and in its pursuit of that all-important social glue, “respectability.” The Victorians, in other words, agreed on the virtues.

Thus even those who pushed against Victorian orthodoxy—and they were numerous—accepted and honored the larger values of Victorian society. The novelist George Eliot insisted on all the proprieties of married life—including the title “Mrs. Lewes”—even though Mr. Lewes, with whom she lived for 24 years, could not marry her. (He was unable to obtain a divorce from his wife.) “If there was one common denominator among” feminists of the period, Himmelfarb writes, “it was the belief that liberation—whether by means of the suffrage, or work, or education, or property and divorce reforms, or birth control—should not be purchased at the expense of ‘womanliness’ and the ‘domestic virtues.’”

The Victorians presided over a century of social progress, including not just a rising standard of living but even declining levels of crime and illegitimacy. Again, Himmelfarb argues, it was the Victorians’ extraordinary moral consensus that allowed this to happen. Under the New Poor Law of 1834, for example, they carefully distinguished between the independent but impecunious poor and the completely dependent pauper. The poor man could still claim a measure of respectability; the pauper was stigmatized, and was entitled to relief only at the workhouses (which were not quite as bad as those depicted in Dickens’s harrowing portrait, Himmelfarb says).

Himmelfarb says that it is our “reluctance to speak the language of morality, far more than any specific values, that separates us from the Victorians.” She traces this “de-

moralization” to what Friedrich Nietzsche in the late 1880s called the death of God. Nietzsche, she says, foresaw that this “would mean the death of morality and the death of truth—above all the truth of any morality.” Henceforth there would be no virtues, only “values”—one pretty much as good as any other.

In reality, the Victorians were already beginning to live off dwindling religious and moral capital when their queen took the throne in 1837. G. K. Chesterton observed that the Victorians were the first generation that “asked its children to worship the hearth without the altar.” Which leads to a question: to achieve the *re*-moralization of society urged by Himmelfarb, would it be enough to learn from the Victorians and, as she suggests, to apply their lessons to public policy, requiring welfare recipients, for example, to work? Or does the restoration of a moral society require a renaissance of religious conviction? That important question is never really engaged in this otherwise wise critique of our de-moralized society.

THE NIXON MEMO. By Marvin Kalb. Univ. of Chicago. 248 pp. \$19.95

THE HALDEMAN DIARIES. By H. R. Haldeman. Putnam. 698 pp. \$27.50

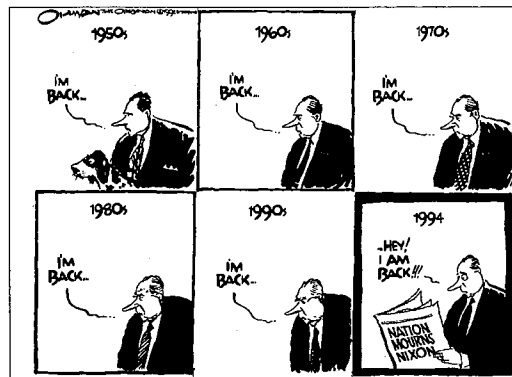
“There are no second acts in American lives,” F. Scott Fitzgerald once observed. Obviously he never met Richard Milhous Nixon. The only president ever forced to resign, Nixon (1913-94) by the time of his death was eulogized by the news media as “the most important figure of the postwar era.” How Nixon managed his apparent metamorphosis from dishonored ex-pol to elder statesman is chronicled with righteous gusto by Kalb, a former diplomatic correspondent who was once placed on Nixon’s “enemies lists.”

Fittingly for a politician who rose to prominence as a redbaiter, Nixon’s post-Watergate road to rehabilitation led through Moscow. Using the same genius for self-promotion and disregard for ideological consistency that had allowed him to begin normal-

izing U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972, Nixon in 1992 reversed his opposition to aid packages for Boris Yeltsin's Russia (which he had previously denounced as "counterproductive Western painkillers"). Essential to Nixon's strategy was his uncanny ability to manipulate the media. Kalb unravels the symbiotic relationships that Nixon cultivated with news outlets such as *Time* (where current Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott called himself Nixon's "case officer"), the *New York Times* op-ed page (which swallowed Nixon submissions as if they were bon-bons), and the TV networks (where Ted Koppel said "interviewing Nixon is one of the most fascinating political experiences").

The "Nixon memo" of Kalb's title refers to Nixon's carefully orchestrated dispatch on March 10, 1992, to 50 opinion makers blasting the Bush administration's Russia policy as "pathetically inadequate." Given Nixon's growing stature and his proven access to the media, neither President Bush then nor President Clinton later dared to alienate an elder statesman capable of asking the politically damaging question, Who lost Russia? While history may discredit Nixon's acuity as a Russia analyst (in 1991 Nixon was observing, "I doubt that Yeltsin wants Gorbachev's job"), his stage-management of the Russian question put Nixon, Kalb writes, "finally back in the big leagues."

Kalb's analysis would likely not have displeased Nixon, who once told his chief of staff H. R. Haldeman that "mystique is more important than content." There is an odd irony here. Kalb, for all his animosity toward Nixon, has not only explained but contributed to the former president's rehabilitation. Haldeman, who professed to admire Nixon and whom Nixon in turn said he "loved," may have all but ensured that the 37th president's rehabilitation will be temporary. Each evening Haldeman repeated into a tape recorder what Nixon had said and done that day, and there never has been a portrait of a president such as those tapes reveal. (These 700 pages are, in fact, but a fraction of the "diaries" available on CD-ROM.) Nixon's well-known dislike of



blacks and Jews, both individually and in general, is recorded here in detail; more surprising is his sheer lack of knowledge of both domestic and foreign policy. Almost every major domestic innovation for which the Nixon administration is credited—from education to welfare, from environment to consumer protection—was passed, Haldeman reveals, despite Nixon's secret opposition. The mystique of Nixon's second act, as Kalb shows, might have been new and improved; under the rhetoric, Haldeman reveals, the substance had not changed.

Arts & Letters

WALTER PATER: Lover of Strange Souls.
By Denis Donoghue. Knopf. 347 pp. \$30

Hearing of Walter Pater's death, Oscar Wilde reportedly said, "Was he ever alive?" Donoghue might answer, "Why, he lives still." In this eloquent and wonderfully nuanced book, Donoghue makes large claims for Pater, the languid 19th-century Oxford don who smuggled subversive Continental notions of art for art's sake into traditional Britain and, in so doing, helped conjure into existence artistic modernism.

Donoghue, who holds the Henry James Chair of Letters at New York University, writes against the current fashion in biography, in which the accreting volumes can double as doorstops. His book is not only of relatively modest size; it gets the proportions