

**THE FEMINIZATION OF
AMERICAN CULTURE**

by Ann Douglas
Knopf, 1977, 403 pp. \$15
L of C 76-47923
ISBN 0-394-40532-3

The core of sentimentality nestling within much American popular culture is persuasively traced to ladies and parsons in this thoughtful argument by Columbia Professor Ann Douglas. Concentrating on the early and mid-19th century, she shows how the writing of high-minded novels, stories, and poetry became the preserve of two disestablished groups: women lately turned from being proud, productive partners in the Revolution and on the frontier into dependent consumers, and Protestant clergymen relegated to the company of womenfolk by the rising male business class. The alliance of these two elements and their use of literary outpourings as weapons in a struggle to dignify their enforced passivity is examined through the works of Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Huntley Sigourney, and many others. Douglas argues that the dichotomy between "culture" and "serious pursuits" established in this period led straight to today's TV soap operas and to the "plots" implicit in modern advertising. Two essays serve to contrast the era's sentimentalists with its most phenomenal literary deviants, Romantics Margaret Fuller and Herman Melville.

**ALEXANDRIA STILL:
Forster, Durrell,
and Cavafy**

by Jane Lagoudis Pinchin
Princeton, 1977, 245 pp. \$13.50
L of C 76-3014
ISBN 0-691-06283-8

Many Americans remain unaware of the riches of modern Greek literature. The work of Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933), an obscure employee of the irrigation service in Alexandria (Egypt) and poet second only (some would say equal) to Greece's Nobel Prize-winning George Seferis (1900-71), is not well known in the United States. Even readers of Lawrence Durrell's four novels, *The Alexandria Quartet*, in which Cavafy figures as the "old poet of the city," may be unaware of his achievements. Colgate English Professor Jane Pinchin's book of essays, on the "old poet," on Durrell, and on E. M. Forster (who did much to make Cavafy's work known in England) comes on the heels of Robert Liddell's full, old-fashioned life, *Cavafy: A Biography*, and the fine textual analysis, *Cavafy's Alexandria: Study of a Myth in Progress*, by the poet's

translator Edmund Keeley, both published in 1976. Pinchin explores the real and imagined affinities of three men strongly linked to the home city of "*We the Alexandrians . . . / with our far-flung supremacy, our flexible policy of judicious integration, / and our Common Greek Language / which we carried as far as Bactria, / as far as the Indians.*" ("Come, O King of the Lacedaimonians," 1929, Cavafy, *Collected Poems 1924-1955*.)

Science & Technology

THE FIRST THREE MINUTES: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe

by Steven Weinberg
Basic Books, 1977
188 pp. \$8.95
L of C 76-7682
ISBN 0-465-02435-1

There is a tradition of good writing about astrophysics and cosmology by men who have themselves been in the forefront of these fields. This brief, lucid book by Harvard Professor Steven Weinberg, a leading theoretician in the field of elementary particle physics, is perhaps the most important and readable such exposition since Fred Hoyle's *The Nature of the Universe* (1951) and George Gamow's *The Creation of the Universe* (1952). But Weinberg's discussion begins where the speculations of earlier generations of cosmologists left off; he leads us into the study of elementary particles, from which stems much of the concrete understanding of the universe's course after those first three minutes to today. He describes the "big bang" theory ("In the beginning there was an explosion") as the now generally accepted "standard model"—displacing previous formulations based on the assumption that the universe has always been just about the same as it is now. He reviews the many linking discoveries in astrophysics that have quietly revolutionized the scientific view of the nature of the universe during the last decade. Among these are microwave radiation measurements that show a relatively uniform temperature in space of about 3.5 degrees above absolute zero; this "blackbody" radiation is apparently left over from a time when the universe was approximately 1,000 times smaller and hotter than at present. Weinberg's presentation of the new theories is non-mathematical