

PATRIOTIC GORE: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War. By Edmund Wilson. Farrar reprint, 1977. 816 pp. \$7.95

*Avenge the patriotic gore
That flecked the streets of Baltimore*
—Confederate song

Hailed when it appeared in 1962 as one of the most original, informative books to come out of the Civil War Centennial, *Patriotic Gore* was at the same time heartily condemned for its introduction. In it, Wilson equated Lincoln with Bismarck and Lenin and argued that the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery. The introduction still makes astringent reading, but it has little to do with the 800 pages on 30 writers that follow. Here are Mary Chestnut's superb diary, the war's romantic fictional after-glow in George W. Cable, a single reference to *Gone With the Wind* that dismisses it as a "curious counterbalance" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Wilson spent 15 years poring over the literature. Readers with 15 hours to spend will relish this long overdue reprint.

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE. By H. L. Mencken. (Abridged edition with annotations and new material.) Knopf, 1977. 777 pp. \$7.95

First published in 1918, *The American Language* preceded Mencken's reputation and now largely upholds it. Twice revised, and later enriched with two supplements, its evolution mirrors diverging U.S. and British fortunes. Where once Mencken believed that America's English and the King's were following separate paths, he later held that English was rapidly becoming a dialect of American. Not a scholar, Mencken saw himself as a bird dog leading experts to the prey—

even if many of the objects of their pursuit had "now gone to word heaven." Starting with the first widely deplored "Americanism" (*bluff*, as in riverbank, but also in poker), he sifts through curious loan words (*hoozegow*, from the Spanish *juzgado*) and murky matters of grammar, spelling, and syntax. Like Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), *The American Language* is enlivened by the author's acerbic asides ("It has become a platitude that one may go almost anywhere with no other linguistic equipment [than English] and get along almost as well as in large areas of New York City").

TREASURES OF ASIA: Chinese Painting. By James Cahill. 212 pp. **Persian Painting.** By Basil Gray. 190 pp. **Arab Painting.** By Richard Ettinghausen. 209 pp. Rizzoli, 1977. \$12.50 each (cloth, \$22.50)

Each of these three beautiful books, available in paper for the first time since they were originally published by Skira (Geneva) in the early 1960s, stands on its own as an expert presentation of its subject. The excellent color plates (100 Chinese, 84 Persian, 81 Arab) reveal many similarities among the paintings of the three civilizations. All, at separate times, came under the influence of the Mongols. It shows—especially in the rendering of horses. The Chinese use of line is far more restrained, however, as are the soft earth colors that characterize even the earliest Chinese paintings on silk and paper. Lapis lazuli, turquoise, red, and gold tones shine from the pages illustrating the exuberant religious art of early Islam and the Persian manuscript and miniature paintings of battle, court life, and courtship.