



lected in this volume. Both Cronon, an historian at the University of Wisconsin, and his contributors assert that our ideas about nature are “culturally constructed.”

Several essays are illuminating forays into what might be called “construction sites”—the Amazon rain forest, Sea World, Central Park—where popular ideas about nature are formed. Cronon, Candace Slater, and other contributors point out that the notion of an Edenic natural world, unsullied by human presence, is a myth that fosters unrealistic environmental policies.

Yet these strong points are undermined by the tendency of many contributors to treat *nature* as a mere linguistic bauble whose meaning can be constructed—and deconstructed—at will. More useful than some of these essays would have been a serious discussion of the new, and presumably more accurate, “constructions” of nature now being developed by science.

—Steven Lagerfeld

AN UNQUIET MIND:

A Memoir of Moods and Madness.

By Kay Redfield Jamison.

Knopf. 224 pp. \$22

Memoir is deceptive. On the surface, it appears to be the easiest of genres. No research, no footnotes, no argument. Just write down what happened. But in the depths, where the motley ingredients of a life bubble together, memoir becomes a witch's brew difficult to stir.

In this memoir, Jamison, a distinguished psychiatrist specializing in manic-depressive illness, peers into the cauldron of her own prolonged struggle with the disease. “It has been a fascinating, albeit deadly, enemy and companion,” she writes. “I have found it to be seductively complicated, a distillation both of what is finest in our natures, and of what is most dangerous.”

Jamison confesses to the difficulty of speaking as both patient and doctor. Unfortunately, this does not prevent her from interrupting the flow of her narrative to engage in professional shoptalk or (worse) to share the details of her curriculum vitae. Nevertheless, this is a brave book. At its best, it makes vivid not only the pain of manic-depressive illness but also—most strikingly—its pleasure:

“How could one, should one, recapture . . . the gliding through starfields and dancing along the rings of Saturn, the zany manic enthusiasms? How can one ever bring back the long summer days of passion, the remembrance of lilacs, ecstasy, and gin fizzes that spilled down over a garden wall, and the peals of riotous laughter that lasted until the sun came up or the police arrived?”

—Martha Bayles

AGING AND OLD AGE.

By Richard A. Posner. Univ. of Chicago Press. 363 pp. \$29.95

Francis Bacon once wrote: “Age is best in four things—old wood best to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, and old authors to read.” What about our understanding of age itself? Should we rely on old ideas—or new? Posner, a federal judge, legal scholar, and economist, evaluates the contentious issues surrounding age through the (relatively) new discipline of rational-choice theory. Though his wide-ranging study draws upon such diverse fields as medicine, psychology, and philosophy, Posner admits that “economics wields the baton of my multidisciplinary orchestra.”

As an overture, Posner asserts that aging is real—not, as some activists propose, a social construct that gathers otherwise unrelated mental and physical illnesses under an unnecessarily demeaning rubric. He also speculates, in an armchair evolutionary argument, on why human beings are built to break down: eventually our resource consumption becomes a drag on the reproductive capacities of the young.

Yet while aging is real, people often behave as though it were not. Among the many topics addressed by this book is social security. Posner admits that most mandatory retirement savings systems are justified by the fact that young people tend not to save for retirement, even though they have every reasonable expectation of living long past