

tection led to a new vigor in devotion to the saints (and to newly popular saints—in Florence, parents began to name their sons Sebastian, Bartholomew, and Christopher), which sharpened the already growing controversy over their role in Christianity. In some respects, then, mass mortality and depopulation may be healthy for technology, learning, faith, and other living forces: a cheerful reflection for the new millennium.

—Edward Tenner

#### *DIVIDED MEMORY:*

##### *The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys.*

By Jeffrey Herf. Harvard Univ. Press.

560 pp. \$29.95

Herf, a historian at Ohio University, reveals how the leaders of both post-World War II Germanys manipulated memory of the Holocaust for political ends. Rather than following the path of *Vergangenheitsbewng* (coming to terms with the past) paved in the early postwar years by, for example, the West German Social Democrat Kurt Schumacher and the East German Communist Paul Merker, the two nations construed history through the distorting lens of ideology.

During the 1950s, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer allowed millions of Nazi-era civil servants and judges to reassume their former positions. Adenauer believed that integrating the former Nazi supporters could help stabilize and nurture the new democracy. The nation paid a heavy price for his decision: a series of scandals about the Nazi records of these officials, which in turn fueled widespread political disaffection, especially among young people. With time, political freedom and open debate led to criticism of the Adenauer years, criticism that included efforts to comprehend the Nazi past.

In the East, Communist Party leader Walter Ulbricht shamelessly followed Stalin's anti-Semitic policies, purging "Cosmopolitanism" in 1952-53 to establish communist martyrdom at the core of anti-fascist memory. To justify the communist dictatorship, Ulbricht interpreted the murder of millions of Jews as nothing more than confirmation of Nazi brutality. Herf, who gained access to the archives of the Central Committee of the SED (East Germany's communist party) and those of the Ministry of State Security (the Stasi),

is particularly incisive here. Although anti-Nazism became part of the East German collective memory, the "Jewish question" remained largely un confronted for years. Still, the seeds were planted. In one of its first declarations in 1990, East Germany's democratically elected parliament—which governed for the six months prior to reunification—expressed remorse for the crimes of the Nazi past *and* for the policies of the communist regime toward Jewish people.

—Burkhard Koch

#### *HOMESTEADING.*

By Percy Wollaston. Lyons & Burford.

131 pp. \$20

Jonathan Raban's lyrical 1996 book *Bad Land* recounts the settlement of eastern Montana early in this century. A heretofore unpublished memoir by a settler, *Homesteading* was one of Raban's primary sources. Wollaston was six years old in 1910 when his family left a rented farm in South Dakota to take title to a 320-acre homestead near Ismay, Montana. They built a house, planted crops, and survived the winter—"I don't think there is anything that can make cold seem more penetrating or dismal than that creak of wagon tires in cold snow." After a few years, though, Ismay fell into a slump. The livery barn closed, the lumber yard burned, and a tornado leveled the town hall, "leaving the piano sitting forlornly in its place with the sheet music still on the rack." Wollaston moved west in 1924, planning on college but ending up a firefighter; his parents abandoned the farm two years later.

*Bad Land* portrays the homesteaders as tragic figures—bamboozled by railroad tycoons who needed more residents in order to make new rail lines profitable, gulled by a balmy theory that rainfall increases as population grows, exploited by shiftless bankers and too-easy credit. *Homesteading*, by contrast, depicts plucky survivors. "The next meal might be potatoes and water gray but you didn't hear anything about hardship unless somebody burned out or broke a leg," Wollaston writes. He tells of a drifter who came across a Norwegian farmer's homestead. The farmer was away, so, as was customary, the visitor fixed himself a meal. After dinner he sat down, had a smoke, then took the shotgun down from the farmer's wall and blew his head off. Raban, in his foreword to *Homesteading*,

intones that this “horribly memorable suicide” overhangs the entire memoir. But to Wollaston, it’s a blithe yarn building to a punchline. Once the body is removed, the farmer frantically scrubs down the cabin, then prepares to retire for the night—and, in the farmer’s words, “there was one of his dommed eyes, right in the very middle of my bed.”

Where Raban sees villainy and victimization, Wollaston sees self-reliance and good-heartedness. Whatever the explanation for the two authors’ divergent viewpoints—the rosy glow of Wollaston’s childhood memories, the generational outlook of someone who came of age in the 1920s (as opposed to Raban’s 1960s)—the chipper, anecdotal

*Homesteading* is a worthy complement and counterpoint to *Bad Land*. “We are all of us pioneers in our time,” Wollaston writes, “wearing the clothes that are most suitable or available, making the best of the present situation and learning to cope with new conditions.”

Along with Wollaston’s recollections, *Homesteading* offers a handful of family photographs. More numerous and evocative photos can be found in the biography of another prominent figure in *Bad Land*, Donna M. Lucey’s *Photographing Montana, 1894–1928: The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron*, back in print from Knopf.

—Stephen Bates

## Science & Technology

### *THE PLATYPUS AND THE MERMAID AND OTHER FIGMENTS OF THE CLASSIFYING IMAGINATION.*

By Harriet Ritvo. Harvard Univ. Press. 304 pages. \$29.95

In 1735, when Carl von Linné (a.k.a. Linnaeus) published his *Systema Naturae*—in which he coined the term *Homo sapiens*—he described some 300 animal species. A century and a half later, with naval expeditions routinely carting new zoological specimens back from overseas, British taxonomists struggled to identify more than a thousand new genera each year, a number that a contemporary commentator deemed “simply appalling.” Classifying these legions of creatures became a principal occupation of Great Britain’s naturalists.

Not every new discovery slid easily into existing categories. In 1770 the crew of Captain James Cook’s *Endeavour* reported coming across an Australian animal “as large as a grey hound, of a mouse colour and very swift,” which “jumped like a Hare” on two legs, “making vast bounds.” And what to make of the amphibious, egg-laying mammal with webbed feet that seemed to have “the beak of a Duck engrafted on the head of

a quadruped”? The British met the challenges: by 1804, the kangaroo (the name was borrowed from an Aboriginal language) had been declared “a most elegant animal,” fit to be included in the royal menagerie; and by 1851, stuffed platypuses were appearing alongside rabbits and squirrels in British museum displays.

In *The Platypus and the Mermaid*, Ritvo, a historian at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is less interested in kangaroos and platypuses than in the principles undergirding Victorian taxonomy. She contends that “the classification of animals, like that of any group of significant objects, is apt to tell as much about the classifiers as about the classified.” The fact that British naturalists earnestly placed *Homo Europaeus Britannici* at the pinnacle of their taxonomic system speaks volumes, of course.

But, as Ritvo demonstrates at length, naturalists were not alone in their solemn categorizing. Farmers, hunters, butchers, and breeders all developed distinct systems of their own for organizing the natural world. Hunters, for example, “classified game according to the kind and degree of amusement it offered.” This anthropocentrism and general penchant for classification help

