

that this unfinished book (the author died before completing it) never attains.

For example, in 1960 a second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* appeared, doubling the number of photographs from the 1941 first edition of that seminal collaboration between Evans and writer James Agee. In 1966, a major project from the 1930s and 1940s featuring hidden-camera portraits Evans had taken on the New York City subway got an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and was published as the book *Many Are Called*. In 1971, John Szarkowski curated a major retrospective of Evans's work at the Museum of Modern Art. During these final years, Evans had close friendships with younger photographers such as Szarkowski, Lee Friedlander, Robert Frank, and William Christenberry. The reader longs to hear them talk about their friend.

Mellow is best known for his books *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (1974) and *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (1980), which won a National Book Award. It may be a little unfair to say that this book seems perfunctory compared to those, given its unfinished state—but perhaps no more unfair than publishing it at all.

I wonder, though, whether Mellow's imagination would ever have caught fire with Evans, a man who was essentially private, solitary, and somewhat dour. Even his best-known photographs, of those Alabama sharecropper families in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which seem so politically charged at this distance, came much more from a personal aesthetic than any encompassing vision of what the world should be. Evans had first wanted to be a writer; his aesthetic as a photographer was in the plain style of Lincoln or Twain. It was a style that perfectly matched his times, with its urgent program to ennoble the common man. But Evans embodied the style and not the program, which is why he could just as easily ennoble buildings, cars, and graveyards as

those who built and would rest in them.

—Robert Wilson

SURVIVING LITERARY SUICIDE.

By Jeffrey Berman. Univ. of Massachusetts Press. 290 pp. \$60 hardcover, \$18.95 paper

Surviving Literary Suicide is an important book about suicide and the psychological impact of its literary portrayals. A professor of English at the State University of New York at Albany, Berman assigned his graduate students writings about suicide by six authors (Kate Chopin, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, William Styron, and Virginia Woolf), and had the students keep diaries recording their responses to the works.

Not one to celebrate self-inflicted death, Berman nonetheless captures well, and in detail, the profound despair experienced by the authors. Most powerful for me, though, were the strength, insight, and humanity of the students' responses to what they read. Here, for instance, is one student's outrage at how the cerebral dissections of Plath's life and work overlook her suffering: "I picture them fighting over the souvenirs of her demise . . . and forgetting the person who went through the infernal pain. Readers may reify Plath, and the 'cost' to them is that they forget to be human, forget that their subject of study was also a person whose life hurt so much that she was forced to end it."

Works that glorify suicide may pose risks to readers, but Berman reminds us of the affirmation of life that can come from great literature. One student wrote of how Styron's wonderful, and wonderfully influential, *Darkness Visible* (1990) reached through her own depression: "William Styron, the one who made it through, the one who did not succumb. While I still identify more with Anne Sexton, it is you toward whom I gravitate because you are breathing." Berman has written an excellent book.

—Kay Redfield Jamison

Science & Technology

BRAIN POLICY:

How the New Neuroscience Will Change Our Lives and Our Politics.

By Robert H. Blank. Georgetown Univ. Press. 208 pp. \$60 hardcover, \$21.95 paper

The human brain, the source of political ideas, is increasingly becoming the object of policy, too. According to Blank, a professor of political science at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, the implications

are virtually limitless—the developing “arsenal of techniques for physical, chemical, and potentially genetic control” is destined to “shake the foundations of social thought.”

So far, the debate over brain policy has focused largely on violence and addiction. If some brain defects predispose people to violence or drug addiction, how can we blame them for doing what, in effect, comes naturally? Blank believes that acknowledging the influence of genes and biochemistry does not “force us to abandon the notion of a free will, although it does require a refinement of it.” With few exceptions, individuals still must bear responsibility for their actions, because “brain damage or abnormality remains subjective and links to any specific behavior are tenuous at best.”

Conceivably, though, future discoveries may strengthen the chain of causality between brain defects and aberrant behavior. Neurochemical determinism could collide with much more than just our criminal code. “Biological models of behavior . . . will always be controversial in Western societies,” Blank points out, for they “challenge the foundational concepts of democracy: equality, individual freedom, and free will.”

As if understanding misbehavior weren't contentious enough, scientists are seeking refined methods for altering it. Some of these techniques already are with us: children on Ritalin, adults on antidepressants and mood stabilizers, the elderly on drugs aimed at enhancing mental performance, the anxious of all ages on tranquilizers. In the near future, increasing numbers of us will be taking drugs to enhance memory, sociability, and virility (Viagra is just the first).

Blank favors greater regulation to cope with the emerging psychotechnologies. He envisions legislation requiring “health-outcomes impact statements” for new brain-related technologies, and giving “health-outcomes boards” the authority to decide whether social benefits exceed the costs. He acknowledges, though, that this sort of central planning clashes with our emphasis on individual rights over collective interests. Still, such boards are perfectly consistent with recent shifts of power and responsibility in the field from scientists and medical practitioners to entrepreneurs and bureaucrats.

Americans, Blank argues convincingly, don't yet appreciate the enormous potential of neuroscience—or its likely social and political impacts. That can be explained in part by the news media's fascination with the new genetic technologies and a few other scientific fields. Neuroscience hasn't yet come up with a Dolly. But, as the author makes clear, brain modification—even more than genetic engineering—will profoundly influence our lives in the decades to come.

—Richard Restak

FOR THE TIME BEING.

By Annie Dillard. Knopf. 205 pp. \$22

Author of the Pulitzer-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), Dillard muses on those expanses of space and time that, in John Updike's words, “conspire to crush the humans.” Drawing on Eastern and Western thought, the intricacies of the natural world, and the beliefs of 18th-century rabbi Baal Shem Tov and French paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, she contemplates the insignificance of an individual life when weighed against the age of the universe and “the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity.”

Dillard probes our perceptions, misperceptions, and blind spots. Why, she wonders, does she find it easy to fire up moral urgency over a girl lost in a Connecticut forest, but difficult even to comprehend the death of 138,000 Bengalis in a flood (her daughter suggests “lots and lots of dots, in blue water”)? “Individuals blur,” Dillard writes. “Journalists use the term ‘compassion fatigue.’ What Ernst Becker called the denial of death is a kind of reality fatigue.”

“Excavating the Combe Grenal cave in France, paleontologists found 60 different levels of human occupation.” Disquieting as it may be to contemplate a faraway future in which we will be just one more layer, Dillard takes some reassurance from the faraway past. Today's gloomsayers, pronouncing civilization's imminent decline, have a great many forebears. “Already in the first century thinkers thought the world was shot to hell.” And Augustine, looking back on the apostles, lamented, “Those were last days then; how much more so now!”

—Paul Feigenbaum