

though mentioned, does not receive full attention. But any path struck through a forest this big is bound to miss some areas. Hughes's book comes across as modest in its ambitions, and it is the better for it.

—Amy Schwartz

THE HOME PLACE.

By Wright Morris. Introduction by John Hollander. Univ. of Nebraska Press. 200 pp. \$12

Little fanfare marked the death of novelist and photographer Wright Morris in 1998. The man whom literary critic Wayne Booth hailed in 1980 as “one of America’s three most important living novelists,” and whose photography was given a retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1992, died largely forgotten, in his 88th year. “His books are his memorial,” his widow said at the time. Now, at the urging of Morris’s friend Saul Bellow and others, the University of Nebraska Press has reissued one of his most significant books: his 1948 “photo-text,” *The Home Place*. Though not his most polished volume—*The Works of Love* (1951) and *Plains Song: For Female Voices* (1980) vie for that honor—*The Home Place* may be Morris’s most adventurous, pairing photographs and fiction to create a new genre.

In *The Home Place*, Nebraska-born writer Clyde Muncy returns to his Uncle Harry and Aunt Clara’s dilapidated farm, where he had spent summers as a boy. The story is plainly autobiographical: in 1942, Morris visited his Uncle Harry and Aunt Clara’s farm (he returned in 1947 to photograph it), where he had spent two childhood summers. The book’s drama comes from the crystallization of memory, as a physical place is transformed into a remembered place. Documentary photographs face each page of text, demonstrating the reality of what the novelist imagines, and leaving the reader/viewer in a limbo between fact and fiction that is Morris’s comment on the problems of memory—and a rebuke to the propagandistic New Deal photography that turned its Dust Bowl subjects into sentimental heroes.

For Morris, as for many authors, home and family were bottomless subjects. The Nebraska relatives in *The Home Place* repeatedly tell Muncy that they are all connected by behavior and blood, even “small-town expatriates” like him. Not long before Morris returned to the farm in 1942, his father died (his mother had

died in childbirth), attenuating his connection to the home place. Morris’s redolent photographs of the place would be his home thereafter, to which he returned in subsequent books of fiction, photo-text, and memoir.

The Home Place has been a difficult project to get right. Nebraska last reprinted it in 1968, with cropped pages and photos in some printings that, Morris complained, were “as pale as phantoms.” The pages have been restored to their proper size in this edition, and the photographs reshot from the best available reproductions, but these improvements are undercut by the use of a flat, matte-surface paper that makes the photographs look like photocopies. The Proust of the plains does not yet have a proper memorial, but perhaps it is fitting that his meditation on memory should resemble a faded artifact.

—Stephen Longmire

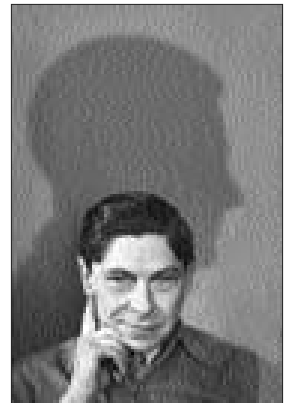
ARTHUR KOESTLER:

The Homeless Mind.

By David Cesarani. Free Press. 646 pp. \$30

The story of the postwar New York intellectuals has been told in a number of histories and autobiographies and even a film, but the saga of their European counterparts, who were on the frontlines of the intellectual battle against communism, has not received as much attention. Perhaps the most intriguing member of this cohort was the journalist and novelist Arthur Koestler (1905–83). A brilliantly talented Hungarian Jew and lapsed communist, he is most famous for *Darkness at Noon* (1940), the novel that helped explain communism’s powerful hold on intellectuals.

Koestler was born in Budapest to a middle-class Jewish family. After dropping out of the University of Vienna, he linked up with the leader of revisionist Zionism, the charismatic Vladimir Jabotinsky, whom he later called “the first political shaman in my life.” He



went on to work in Berlin as a journalist for the famous Jewish Ullstein publishing house, until Nazi influence grew and he was forced out. Along the way, he traded his Zionism for communism.

Touring Russia in 1932, Koestler was shaken by what he saw, but he did not summon the courage to break with the party until 1938, when the third and final show trial was conducted in Moscow. The trial of Nikolai Bukharin, a leading Bolshevik, would serve as the basis for episodes in Koestler's contribution to the anthology *The God That Failed* (1950). Koestler went on to play a leading role in the battle against communism in the late 1940s, when the Soviet Union enjoyed high moral

standing among many Western intellectuals. Measured against that act of courage, the late-life obsession with the paranormal that dismayed so many of Koestler's admirers seems a mere foible.

Cesarani, director of the Institute of Contemporary History and Weiner Library in London, has a weakness for glib psychological theories (Koestler's restlessness stemmed from his Jewish ancestry; "guilt was inscribed on his personality"; he was "forever in search of his father"). But the biographer has certainly done the necessary spadework, including extensive digging through archives. There is much to learn here about Koestler's event-filled life.

—Jacob Heilbrunn

Religion & Philosophy

FOR COMMON THINGS: *Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today.*

By Jedediah Purdy. Knopf. 226 pp. \$20

It is with trepidation that someone approaching 50 opens a book on politics by a 24-year-old. Trepidation and a little guilt, knowing the responsibility my self-indulgent generation bears for debasing our culture and politics over the past quarter-century. But *For Common Things* proves reassuring rather than dismaying, a demonstration of the human capacity for moral self-renewal.

Purdy protests eloquently against the ugliness and cynicism of public life. He takes his stand against the manipulative language and symbols in politics; against the neglect of our common public space; against the pervasive inauthenticity of our media-driven existence; against the overwhelming posture of "irony" that, he shrewdly argues, has come to dominate contemporary social life (nicely exemplified in the sitcom *Seinfeld*). Echoing the communitarian and civil society movements, though in terms quite striking and often original, he argues for a rededication to civic life based on a bold, even openly naive reaffirmation of political hope. "If we care for certain things," he writes, "we must in honesty hazard some hope in their defense."

Are we hearing, at last, the stirrings of a new cohort, a successor to the famously shallow

Generation X? It is tempting to think so, but Purdy may not typify his age group. He was raised and home-schooled in rural West Virginia by parents who, in his father's words, sought "to pick out a small corner of the world and make it as sane as possible." Although Christian fundamentalists dominate today's home-schooling movement, Purdy's parents seem to be secular, liberal, and utopian minded enough to carve out an "intentional" lifestyle in the Appalachians. From home-schooling, Purdy went on to three of the country's most elite educational institutions: Philips Exeter Academy, Harvard, and Yale (where he now studies). In between, there were breaks for environmental activism in West Virginia and a trip to newly democratic Central Europe, both discussed here.

Not even the finest education could explain the grace of this young writer's prose, whose quiet rhythms echo the arcadian music of his childhood and hark back to the way language was used before the information age. "What has so exhausted the world for us?" he writes. "For one, we are all exquisitely self-aware. Around us, commercials mock the very idea of commercials, situation comedies make *being* a sitcom their running joke, and image consultants detail the techniques of designing and marketing a personality as a product. We can have no intimate moment, no private words of affection, empathy, or rebuke that we have not seen pro-