

and his activism led to another stay in prison, this time with his fourth wife, Edith, for a week in 1961. Retired to North Wales, he continued writing and arguing while trying without success to patch up the many rents in his life's fabric, including estrangements from his ex-wives, children, and grandchildren.

Monk is severely critical. His condemnation rests substantially on a judgment of Russell's journalism, which, he believes, exemplifies the philosopher's squandered promise. He seems incapable of seeing the value in polemic, or of accepting that humor and a brisk turn of phrase are assets in newspaper writing. Monk's philosophical hero is the logician who was the subject of his 1990 biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (the subtitle seems significant). Compared with the clay-footed Russell, Wittgenstein was indeed the genuine article, a solitary and eccentric man of transcendent mind.

The lack of charity Monk brings to Russell's more complicated, more human story weakens the book. He cannot justly portray the texture of this difficult yet brilliant man. He will not let us decide for ourselves. Luckily, we have the three volumes of Russell's own autobiography to even the balance. Sometimes special pleading in the first person is better, and more accurate, than narrow-minded, thin-lipped appraisals delivered in the third.

—MARK KINGWELL

MYTHS IN STONE:
*Religious Dimensions of
Washington, D.C.*

By Jeffrey F. Meyer. Univ. of California Press. 343 pp. \$35

If you follow the tourists around Washington, D.C., it's hard to miss the element of pilgrimage. Visitors come to see vistas that reaffirm the meaning of American history. The stone temples of the city's monumental core hold out visions of the nation's purpose; the Republic's founding documents rest under glass in the sacred space of the National Archives. The experience of viewing these sites, Meyer argues, is fundamentally religious. He quotes historian Daniel Boorstin: "Architecture can and does play the role of ritual."

Meyer, a professor of religion at the University of North Carolina, never quite explains what makes something a religious experience rather than a ritual or symbolic one, and the failure leaves conceptual gaps in this otherwise intriguing book. But his definition of religion is evidently capacious. He traces some of Washington's "religious" aspects back to Babylon and other ancient capitals: radiating avenues, orientation of the city's main axes to the four points of the compass, "central monumental architecture like temples, palaces, pyramids, ziggurats, and raised altars," and "processional boulevards connecting these places of power." Such architecture, Meyer says, symbolizes the larger cosmic order and proclaims a connection between the city and its heavenly sponsors.

That ancient religious impulse, in Meyer's view, emanates from the wordless, enigmatic Washington Monument and echoes the early settlers' belief that they were creating a new Jerusalem firmly under the protection of Providence. It resonates in the Framers' "missionary" certainty that their great experiment would bring a new birth of freedom to mankind, a conviction expressed through what Meyer calls the "axis of Enlightenment" running from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. Where the Jefferson edifice is light, open, and hopeful, the more somber Lincoln Memorial completes the task of "baptizing the Founders' terms into the religious discourse of American Christians, with Lincoln assuming the aura of a Christlike figure who saved the Union by taking its sufferings on himself."

The argument breaks down somewhat when Meyer turns to the Smithsonian Institution and the tree-lined National Mall. A quick tour of recent controversies, such as the fiasco over an Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian, is meant to show how these venues have become a locus for communal reevaluation of the American experience. But such squabbles hardly seem to fall under the rubric of religion, even American civic religion. Nor does Meyer's closing survey—fascinating though it is—of the allegorical artworks that decorate the Capitol itself, including now-objectionable depictions of the white man's conquest of the Native Americans.

The tussle over changing cultural mean-



The Lincoln Memorial

ings, religious or otherwise, is an important part of the capital's life. This book makes clear that ours is not the first generation to fight

pitched battles over the messages conveyed by statues, museums, and memorials.

—AMY SCHWARTZ

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

THE WOMAN I WAS NOT BORN TO BE: A Transsexual Journey.

By Aleshia Brevard. Temple Univ. Press.
260 pp. \$24.95

This is the story of a small-town kid, growing up in the narrow-minded but not deliberately unkind Tennessee of the 1940s and '50s, dreaming of Hollywood and fame. She achieves minor stardom (shows at Finocchio's, almost-dates with Jack Jones and Anthony Newley, "pretty girl" parts on the *Red Skelton Show* and in the Don Knotts movie *The Love God*) and marries a few bad but not terrible men (one lazy, one gay, one far too young).

In her forties, she becomes a feminist and realizes that she will never be truly happy, or truly safe, if she keeps seeking validation and a sense of self from men: "I'd squandered valuable years in an attempt to become someone worthy of love." What distinguishes Brevard's book from the slight, feminist coming-of-age stories of the 1970s are passages such as this: "We made love in front of the roaring fire and later . . . fell asleep melded like two cherubs in a sugar-spun dream. The next morning, Hank and I went to the doctor's. I had a rectal tear."

Aleshia Brevard was born Alfred Brevard Crenshaw in 1937. "From my earliest years I'd known that something was wrong with me. . . . I felt that people kept treating me improperly. They did. They insisted on treat-

ing me as though I were a boy." Alfred had a sex-reassignment operation in 1962, when there were no transsexuals on talk shows and damned little expert surgery, and emerged as Aleshia. Her book straightforwardly describes pre-op life as a female impersonator (Marilyn Monroe once came to watch), the perfunctory "psychiatric" treatment before surgery ("He asked me if I thought I was a woman. I did. That was pretty much that."), the brutal and painful procedure of creating and using a new vagina, and her feelings upon becoming a woman. "My life began at Westlake Clinic on that day in 1962," she writes. "Gone was my 'birth defect.'"

The Woman I Was not Born to Be is not the kind of book one really expects from an academic press: no statistics, no elaborate theoretical structure. Nor is it the story of people whom history has utterly ignored. Mocked, crucified, tortured, and jailed, yes; ignored, no. But I'm glad Temple University Press chose to publish it: in academia as in real life, a reasonably well-adjusted, kind-hearted woman who was born male is not so common. If you're intimidated by such brilliant and accomplished transsexuals as economist Deirdre McCloskey, scientist Joan Roughgarden, and classical pianist Sarah Buechner, you can relax with Brevard. She is as unassuming, unthreatening, and sweet natured as anyone could ask.

—AMY BLOOM