

appeal of Thomas Jefferson and the Bible, an unbeatable formula.

But of course it wasn't. The Democratic Party nominated Bryan for president twice more, in 1900 and in 1908, and twice more he lost. In 1912, Bryan saw in Woodrow Wilson a man of high religious purpose and gave Wilson his support at the Democratic convention. Wilson acknowledged Bryan's crucial help by naming him secretary of state, but Bryan resigned in 1915 over what he considered Wilson's overly aggressive handling of the sinking of the *Lusitania* by German torpedoes. Kazin says Bryan was quite happy to exchange the only powerful office he had ever held for a return to the lecture halls. He could add to his resumé that he was the man who had resigned from high office rather than compromise his principles.

Bryan contributed to many accomplishments now seen as progressive: He helped bring about the election of senators by popular vote and the establishment of a graduated income tax; he spoke for women's rights and labor's right to organize. Then he made the mistake of getting involved in the Scopes trial. He accepted an invitation to be called as a witness for the prosecution and to opine that every word of the Bible was factual. Clarence Darrow cross-examined him, and H. L. Mencken made fun of him, and he died shortly after the trial concluded.

Popular history, says Kazin, has unfairly embalmed Bryan in that trial. Kazin's effort to revive him and his reputation is only partly successful, but it tells a rollicking story and brings back the resonant echoes of a glorious political voice.

—Jacob A. Stein

Italy's Fascist Mirage

SOMEWHERE AMONG THE family memorabilia there should be a 1939 photograph of me on a visit to Italy with my parents. I'm posing with members of the Italian Fascist youth movement outside Rome's Termini Station, watching a parade to welcome an

MUSSOLINI'S ITALY:
Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915–1945.
By R. J. B. Bosworth.
Penguin Press.
692 pp. \$35

arriving foreign dignitary (it could have been Hitler). Behind the group is a row of tanks, but even in the picture it's obvious that they are wooden replicas, no more menacing than carnival floats. From the distant station entrance, however, they would have looked impressively like the real thing.

As R. J. B. Bosworth makes plain in his massively researched study, this was Italian Fascism, a regime that slips and slides. Like the elusive image of a distant hill town shimmering in the heat of the Italian sun, it presents itself as a blend of characteristics—rhetoric, make-believe, feverish bursts of action, and violence. The challenge for the historian is to identify the fault lines between reality and the version that party ideologues said was reality, labeling it “the Italian truth,” which had to be accepted by every good citizen.

Bosworth, who has also written a prize-winning biography of Benito Mussolini, has produced what amounts to a collective biography of the Italians, spanning the 30-odd years of Fascist power. His finely detailed account (there are 88 pages of chapter notes) interweaves the experiences of ordinary Italians, foreigners living in Italy, Fascist party bosses, Mussolini's son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, and, of course, Il Duce himself.

Ultimately, the book is about national self-delusion, culminating in the biggest delusion of all, one that led Italy disastrously into a world war for which it was neither militarily nor mentally prepared. (To illustrate its unprepared state, Bosworth points out that to go to war, Italy needed 150,000 tons of copper, but the nation produced only 1,000 annually.) In civil war-weary Spain, Francisco Franco, a much less charismatic and arguably nastier brand of Fascist, had a good excuse to resist German pressure to join the Axis, and he used it, ending up the darling of the United States. Mussolini's legacy, on the other hand, was a devastated country facing a long, painful road to recovery.

Fascist Italy was an empire of words. Yet one of its failures, as Bosworth points out, is that its rhetoric was

Italian Fascism blended rhetoric, make-believe, feverish bursts of action, and violence.

ambivalent, and the regime never succeeded in clearly defining itself. Other failures were legion: “The [work] absences, the cynicism, the corruption, and the incompetence outweighed the rest in building a legacy for those Italians who survived into the new Republic in 1946. Every one of the great slogans of Fascism turned out to be false.”

And yet in contemporary Italy, the neo-Fascist group now known as the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), supposedly reconstructed along democratic lines, was politically respectable enough to occupy the right flank of Silvio Berlusconi’s right-of-center coalition. It attained this respectability without ever having explicitly rejected Mussolini’s misdeeds. Il Duce’s granddaughter is a parliamentarian. Is all forgiven? No—just swept under the carpet. Hence, Bosworth. The nation that turns its back on its past has its history written by foreigners.

—Roland Flamini

ARTS & LETTERS

An African Adulthood

WOLE SOYINKA, WHO IN 1986 became Africa’s first recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, has long been one of the continent’s most imaginative writers. He also embodies the effort by its native cultures to reclaim their identities after colonialism by a return to the rhythms of native ritual. It’s a complicated task, as Soyinka illustrates repeatedly in this third installment of his memoirs.

The tale of his first professional homecoming is typical. After early studies at the elite Government College in Ibadan, in western Nigeria, near his birthplace, Soyinka had gone to England to earn a degree in drama from the University of Leeds. He then worked a few years at London’s Royal Court Theatre before returning to Nigeria with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. He had also won a competition to produce a play as part of the new nation’s independence day celebrations on October 1, 1960. *A Dance of the Forests* presented Africa’s

YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN: A Memoir.

By Wole Soyinka.
Random House.
528 pp. \$26.95



Nigerian author and playwright Wole Soyinka continues to lend his support to causes, such as this Lagos protest against fuel prices last year.

“recurrent cycle of stupidities” through a complex use of Yoruba traditions combined with European modernism. Nigeria’s new rulers, recognizing themselves in the drama’s depiction of corruption and abuse of power, branded it subversive on the basis of rehearsals and canceled the performance. Pan-Africanists meanwhile attacked the play’s embrace of Western dramaturgical devices.

Despite this initial setback, Soyinka persevered in his pursuit of an Africa where traditional cultures freely assimilate those elements of modernity consistent with their own proud identities. This vision draws on the writer’s own fruitful encounters between a rich African heritage and the “greats” of the Western literary and modernist canon. Soyinka’s first memoir, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), told how these two influences mingled from the beginning. Born in 1934, Soyinka grew up at the Anglican mission of Aké, where his father was headmaster of the primary school and his mother, nicknamed “Wild Christian,” was a social worker. Though raised in an English-speaking and Christian environment, Soyinka regularly visited his father’s ancestral home in Ìsarà and nourished an affinity for the mythic, ritual, and cultural world of the Yoruba, where sorcerers, spirits, and gods were living realities.

A second memoir followed, in 1994, describing his early pro-democracy activities (*Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years—A Memoir, 1946–1965*) and the difficulties they caused him. Soyinka’s appeal for peace during the 1967 Biafran conflict led to his arrest and two years’ imprisonment, most of it spent in solitary