
PAPERBOUNDS

THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE. By William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. Macmillan, 3rd ed., 1979. 85 pp. \$1.95 (cloth, \$4.95)

In a more perfect world, people who write would, like drivers, have to be licensed. If such were the case, this book would be their Operator's Manual. In 1959, the *New Yorker's* E. B. White published a revised version of the privately printed "little book" written by his English professor at Cornell, William Strunk, Jr. White published a second edition in 1972. This new, third edition, he writes, underwent a general overhaul "to correct errors, delete bewhiskered entries, and enliven the argument." The advice is always simple and direct, and it makes sense: "Never tack *-ize* onto a noun to create a verb. Usually you will discover that a useful verb already exists. Why say 'moisturize' when there is the simple, unpretentious word *moisten*?" White comes down hard on other jargon, e.g., "offputting" and "ongoing": "As a simple test, transform the participles to verbs. It is possible to *upset* something. But to *offput*? To *ongo*?"

THE PRICE OF GLORY: Verdun 1916. By Alistair Horne. Penguin reprint, 1979. 364 pp. \$2.95

The battle of Verdun lasted for ten months. It was the longest in history (by comparison, the World War II battle of Stalingrad lasted five months). Three-quarters of the French Army's divisions served at one time or another on the 15-mile front; and although other World War I battles exacted higher casualties, Verdun resulted in "the highest density of dead per square yard that has probably ever been known." French and German losses amounted to 420,000 dead and 800,000 gassed or wounded; after the war, another 150,000 unidentified and un-

buried corpses (or fragments of corpses) were discovered. British historian Horne describes the tactics of both sides (the Germans introduced flame-throwers and phosgene gas) and examines the personalities of the opposing military leaders: France's Joseph Joffre, who "thought from his belly rather than with his head"; Germany's ruthless Erich von Falkenhayn; England's Douglas Haig, whose visits to casualty clearing stations made him physically ill. Verdun's influence on later French strategists was enervating. The heavy toll of World War I, especially at Verdun, led the French, as World War II began, to embrace *defense* as the safest policy and the fortified Maginot Line along its eastern border as a security blanket. Horne sees Verdun as World War I in microcosm, "an intensification of all its horrors and glories," an "indecisive battle in an indecisive war."

—AND I WORKED AT THE WRITER'S TRADE: Chapters of Literary History, 1918–1978. By Malcolm Cowley. Penguin reprint, 1979. 287 pp. \$3.95

Malcolm Cowley succeeded Edmund Wilson as literary editor of the *New Republic* from 1929 until 1944. In this overview of 20th-century American letters, he examines many of the concerns and trends (the re-examination of America's past by writers of the 1930s, the decline of storytelling in fiction especially during the 1960s) of modern writing. Recent critics have dismissed Hemingway too easily, Cowley says—a case of the sons killing off the father. Cowley also champions writers he feels have been too often ignored or underrated—S. Foster Damon (reading his poems makes Cowley think of "New Hampshire fields that are strewn with boulders"), Robert M. Coates (who gave everything he wrote "a consistent