

codes—all of western writing—that have been written under its shadow. He also explains how certain features of the Bible distinguish it from most other works of literature: The Bible's structure, for example, depends on its typological pattern—the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament events (e.g., Jonah's release from the belly of the whale prefigures Christ's resurrection)—not, as with most narratives, on a pattern of cause and effect.

In tracing the seven major "phases" of revelation in the Bible (creation, exodus, prophecy, wisdom, law, gospel, and apocalypse), Frye sketches a complex web of allusions, echoes, and images which illuminates not only the sacred text but also Dante, Milton, Blake, Dickens, and even such moderns as Wallace Stevens. Typically acute is his discussion of Kafka's *The Trial* as a revision and commentary on the Book of Job.

To be sure, this is not a work of original Biblical scholarship. Nor does it fit comfortably into any of the categories of contemporary literary theory. It is, rather, an articulate, witty, and moving meditation on the crucial text of Western culture.

—Frank McConnell (78)

CHINABOUND

A Fifty-Year Memoir
by John King Fairbank
Harper, 1982
480 pp. \$20

At a time when the fashion in analyzing China has once again swung from one extreme to another—this time from the breathless apologetics of the 1970s to the more recent accounts inspired by Chinese dissidents—Fairbank's memoir of his 50 years as America's foremost China specialist provides an unusually dispassionate perspective.

What motivates someone to devote his life to studying China? Describing his education (Exeter, Wisconsin, Harvard, Oxford) and his personal ambitions, Fairbank, the son of a South Dakota lawyer, tells us, "I was headed for the Establishment." Unlike some other Americans discussed in the book (such as anarchist writer Agnes Smedley) who were attracted to China because of a sense of commitment or personal mission, Fairbank says he decided to study China as a means to a successful career. "The state of China itself, about which I knew nothing, had little to do with my decision," he writes, with astonishing candor. "I was much more concerned about my own performance than about the state of the world." This may partly explain why this memoir reveals far less about China (where he lived in the '30s and '40s and to which he returned on many occasions) than about the man and his career.

The career was successful beyond imagination. During his 40 years as professor of history at Harvard, he built the library collections, wrote bibliographies, and trained graduate students who became leaders in the field of Asian studies. He served on all key organizing committees at the national level (e.g., the National Academy of Science-sponsored Joint

Committee on Contemporary China) and took his turn as president of the major academic associations. Amidst it all, he authored or co-authored over 20 major works on China, including textbooks which came to be accepted as standard.

Fairbank's greatest contribution to Chinese studies was organizational rather than intellectual. More than any other person, he helped to found and shape a structure of institutional support (such as the Association for Asian Studies) for the study of modern China in the United States. For Fairbank, the structure had to be of a particular kind—one that would "get beyond the McCarthy-era split in the China field" and the extreme "emotional involvement" of China specialists on both sides of that schism. Fairbank saw himself as an "area specialist" dedicated to training other area specialists—whom he saw as onlookers, "privileged to watch how the human drama unfolds without being caught in it." Those who studied under Fairbank confirm that he practiced what he preached.

Yet Fairbank paid a price for his success within the Establishment, for his detachment, and for his preoccupation with the middle-of-the-road, consensus view of China. For a memoir encompassing such volatile times, exotic places, and important people, his book is surprisingly dry. How risk-free was the life he chose in such dangerous times—while other Americans such as Edgar Snow crossed the battle lines in North China to interview Mao Zedong, and John Service put his Foreign Service career on the line to report the facts about the Communist movement in Yen-an. By the end of his story, one wonders who helped us to understand China better: Professor Fairbank pursuing his career, or those contemporaries who took chances to gain new insights into Chinese society—people for whom China was a life, not merely a career.

—Peter Van Ness ('74)

**NIGHT THOUGHTS OF A
CLASSICAL PHYSICIST**
By Russell McCormmach
Harvard, 1982
217 pp. \$15

Through techniques of institutional history and collective biography, historians of science have frequently attempted to describe the "ethos" of a scientific generation or of a scientific culture. The greatest difficulty in this enterprise has always been to interpret intellectual developments in their personal and cultural contexts.

McCormmach, a historian of science at Johns Hopkins, addresses the problem through a remarkably effective narrative—part history, part novel—set in Germany in 1918. Through the eyes of Dr. Victor Jakob, an invented but wholly believable witness, McCormmach conveys the anguish of a diligent but unapplauded German scientist, frustrated by lack of advancement at his provincial university. On the eve of his 70th birthday, Jakob reflects not only on his personal unhappiness but also on the collapse of his world.