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percent of the "foreign aid" tube wells in South India and Bangladesh were inoperative in 1976. And acting alone rather than in consultation, donor nations have sometimes introduced new complications: To relieve a 1972 drought in Ethiopia, several Western nations separately sent water pumps that could not take the same spare parts.

The World Bank figures that universal access to safe water will cost \$300 billion (in 1978 dollars)—a gross underestimate, says Biswas, but still 10 times the actual investment during the 1970s. Such funding is possible only if developing countries make water a top priority.

Who Pays For Clean Air?

"The Clean Air That You're Breathing May Cost Hundreds of Billions of Dollars" by Lawrence Mosher, in *National Journal* (Oct. 10, 1981), 1730 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

How much does clean air cost? A Business Roundtable study estimates that compliance with the Clean Air Act of 1970 alone could cost the nation \$400 billion (in 1980 dollars), by 1987. For the past several years, industry has been calling for modified air quality standards and for the abolition of needlessly complex rules. On the other side, environmentalists have urged even stricter regulations to deal with an array of "newly perceived" environmental threats, including acid rain and fine particulates.

Resistance from both political parties has forced the Reagan administration to back away from its early attempt to subject air quality standards to cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, writes Mosher, a *National Journal* reporter, clean air has become "as risky a target for budget cuts as social security benefits." Action taken on the Clean Air Act (now up for review) should indicate whether the administration is interested in improving or in simply abolishing regulations.

Even if the administration is serious about reform, it will have difficulty sorting out the conflicting data. An EPA study covering 1970–86 put the total cost of the Clean Air Act at \$291.6 billion (in 1977 dollars)—an estimate far below the Business Roundtable's. Productivity growth has declined steadily since the act was passed (from three percent in 1965 to about one percent in 1978), and one University of Wisconsin economist attributes eight to 12 percent of the slowdown to environmental regulations. Edward Denison of the Bureau of Economic Analysis maintains, however, that the adverse economic effect of environmental controls on productivity growth was only 0.08 percent by 1978.

One clear beneficiary of clean air regulations is the air pollution control industry; its approximately 1,000 companies reaped some \$2.4 billion worth of sales in 1981. But Mosher agrees with John Schork, chairman of Research-Cottrell Corp., one such firm, that it has become "impossible for businessmen to predict what environmental standards they will be forced to live with, and so plans to build new plants have

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been delayed or scrapped." Without clarification and some relaxation of standards, Mosher concludes, the economy will suffer.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Novel as Victim

"The World in a Mirror: Problems of Distance in Recent American Fiction" by Morris Dickstein, in *Sewanee Review* (July-Sept. 1981), University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn. 37375.

Writer's block, book reviews, and negotiations with publishers—these matters have long concerned novelists. But, until recently, serious American authors, following the lead of Henry James and T. S. Eliot, kept them separate from their work. Now, however, writers like William Styron, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, and John Irving are relying on such details from their own lives for the meat of their novels. Dickstein, professor of English at Queens College (N.Y.), objects.

These novelists have a kinship with the "confessional" writers of the late 1950s and '60s—e.g., poets Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg and novelists Norman Mailer and Saul Bellow. The latter two sought to free the novel from formalism and give it more immediacy and intimacy. Unfortunately, says Dickstein, Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Roth's *The Ghost Writer*, Malamud's *Dubin's Lives* (all published in 1979), and Irving's *The World according to Garp* (1978) reduce such innovations to "lazy convention."

By closely modeling his protagonist on himself, an author limits his "perspective" to highly subjective retrospection; he loses the ability to make balanced judgments about his characters. Thus, his hero becomes a "confessional victim"—sinned against but rarely sinning. In *Ghost Writer*, an associate lamely characterizes Nathan Zuckerman (really, Roth), an aspiring Jewish novelist, as having "the most compelling voice I've encountered in years." Other characters are likely to lose definition, becoming mere satellites of the protagonist.

Styron, Roth, and Malamud have tried to counter their self-absorption by filling their stories with great events and historic personages (the Holocaust, Anne Frank, D. H. Lawrence, respectively). But because such subjects are mere settings or props for their personae, their efforts amount to a "kidnapping" of history, writes Dickstein.

James Joyce mined his own life as a writer to explore the nature of art and the creative process. All novelists are forced to work from a limited stock of personal feelings and experiences. But they must add keen observation of how others live, Dickstein argues. Styron & Co. never even tell us what it is like to hold down a job, or reveal very much about the broader society that their characters inhabit.