rhymed, which can expand to fit whatever he notices:

> On the dewy Savannah, gently revolved
> by their grooms,
> snorting, delicate-ankled racehorses
> exercise,
> as delicate-ankled as brown smoke from
> the bakeries.

"Midsummer" sets the pattern that Walcott continued to follow in most of his later work. "The Bounty," "The Prodigal," and "White Egrets," in particular, are long sequences, written in virtuosically roughened pentameter lines, which follow the poet as he travels the world and returns home:

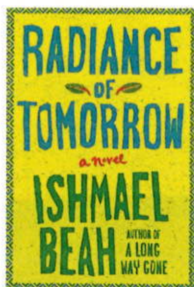
> On the warm stones of Florence
> I subtly alter to a Florentine
> till the sun passes, in London
> I am pierced by fog, and shaken from
> reflection
> in Venice, a printed page in the sun
> on which a cabbage-white unfolds, a
> bookmark.

This is the transparency not just of the chameleon but of the painter, who sees without being seen. And in his late poems Walcott often seems like Monet, painting the same haystack again and again, finding new surprises every time. Europe and the Caribbean, the Old World and the New, and the relationship between them—these are no longer tormenting questions for the aging poet but accustomed themes that allow for endless improvisations. Thus we find Walcott abroad, observing that "Geneva was the color of a statesman's hair," or in a dream city where "two green bronze horses / guard a locked square like bookends." Back home, he notices "how spray will burst / like a cat scrambling up the side of a wall, / gripping, sliding, surrendering."

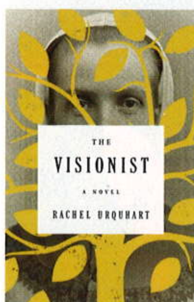
The final pages of "The Poetry of Derek Walcott" are full of intimations of death; like Prospero, Walcott could say, "Every third thought shall be my grave." But he remains a poet of astonishing inventiveness—"The perpetual ideal is astonishment," he writes. Perhaps the greatest proof of his achievement is that, after a lifetime of remaking the world in language, Walcott can force even death to submit to the power of his metaphors:

> Accept it all with level sentences
> with sculpted settlement that sets
> each stanza,
> learn how the bright lawn puts up
> no defenses
> against the egret's stabbing questions
> and the night's answer. ♦

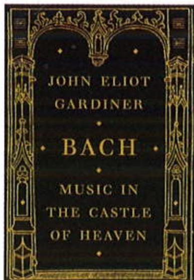
BRIEFLY NOTED



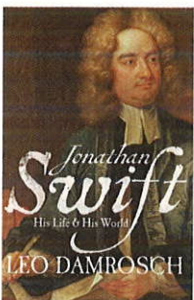
RADIANCE OF TOMORROW, *by Ishmael Beah (Sarah Crichton Books).* This first novel by a celebrated memoirist and former child soldier from Sierra Leone is an unsparing study of displacement and rehabilitation. When residents of a war-ravaged African town return to their land after a seven-year absence, they find houses burned to the ground and human bones strewn in pathways. Beah's protagonist is a young father who tries to make a living as a teacher in a place rife with corruption and despair. Just as his community begins "shedding its image of war," a mining company threatens to disrupt the newfound peace. "Beauty causes the wretchedness of this place," the novel tells us, but though its message is powerful, it feels overly didactic.



THE VISIONIST, *by Rachel Urquhart (Little, Brown).* In this début novel, set in New England in the eighteen-forties, a young woman, Polly Kimball, helps her family escape an abusive father by setting fire to their farm. Fearing repercussions, her mother sends Polly and her brother to a Shaker settlement. There the girl is mistaken for a visionist—someone capable of mystical visions—and she becomes the object of both admiration and suspicion. The story unfolds in shifting points of view, moving from Polly to a Shaker friend and the fire inspector who is investigating the blaze at the farm. Although the narrative wanders, it contains many exciting twists.



BACH, *by John Eliot Gardiner (Knopf).* Was Bach "the goody-two-shoes of legend" or a "reformed teenage thug"? Gardiner, a conductor famous for extensive recordings of Bach's choral works, suggests the latter, citing evidence of general bad behavior among the youth of Eisenach, Bach's home town. This book attempts to humanize the composer, too often seen as austere and a little dull, "a bewigged, jowly old German Capellmeister." The biographical discussion is fascinating, if at times speculative. More persuasive is Gardiner's attempt to know the man through his music, though a largely choral focus scants important parts of Bach's output, such as the keyboard works. Still, Gardiner writes with an infectious passion, and he succeeds in proving that, "emphatically, Bach the man was not a bore."



JONATHAN SWIFT, *by Leo Damrosch (Yale).* Swift "liked to be mysterious toward everyone," Damrosch writes, in a biography that aims at sweeping away misconceptions, many of which were encouraged by the man himself. The result might have made for tedious reading, but Damrosch writes with wit and constructs a compelling portrait of the Irish clergyman, whose satires delighted and scandalized eighteenth-century Britain. Swift, we learn, loved fruit, abhorred strong odors, and had a high, grating speaking voice. Contradiction defined his character: he detested Ireland but did much to forge its national identity. Swift's politics were staunchly Anglican and "more Tory than Whig," but he was able to see beyond them. As he once wrote, "I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is towards individuals."