

that in Renaissance II government rather than business became increasingly the initiator and planner of urban development, a conclusion which does not fit easily with those models of urban political history which see a flow of power and authority away from city governments across the twentieth century. The extent to which the private city had become a public one remains an open question.

The major contribution of this volume is to the historiography of Pittsburgh. It does not make a significant contribution to the development of a systematic comparative urban history. The one lesson which British policy makers might draw from the Pittsburgh experience — that civic leadership has a crucial role to play in urban renewal — would be anathema to a national government determined to turn local government into local administration. Overall, however, I fear that this book would not convince the sceptical British civil servant that either historians or the historical perspective could offer significant guidance on the ways in which the revitalisation of declining industrial cities might be achieved. Rather it is more likely to confirm Mrs. Thatcher of the truth of her view that the pursuit of history is a luxury whose cost outweighs any tangible benefit. ■

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*An American Childhood*      By Annie Dillard  
(New York: Harper & Row, 1987. Pp. 255. \$17.95)

In an essay in her collection, *The Eye of the Story*, Eudora Welty, clearly writing out of her knowledge of the experience itself, asserts that there is a confidence, a sense of authority, that comes to the writer who recognizes that he or she has succeeded in creating a feeling of place. What often comes with it, Welty adds, is the sense of a particular time. By this standard Annie Dillard attains admirable achievement in *An American Childhood*, her complex memoir of childhood, adolescence and growing to maturity in the Pittsburgh of the 1950s and early 1960s. The significance of place as a major part of our sense of ourselves, as a fundamental strand of our identity, is established in a way that transcends that immediate sense of recognition which will come to Pittsburghers them-

selves; this Ms. Dillard achieves not by psychologizing, not by formal argument, but by the persuasive, artful use of detail. Whether she writes of the urban environment or of the natural world, hers is the born writer's eye that seizes upon those details that count.

Any memoir, any autobiographical retrospective, must necessarily be shaped by two points of view, written on two levels of time, and *An American Childhood* reflects this condition. It is the woman writing now who selects from and gives special shape to her material, working in such a way that she finally creates a particular vision — unique, her own — of the figures and events of the past. Authors of such works of course handle perspective in various ways, some by overtly asserting it and even, indeed, making it a large part of their subject, others with great flexibility and subtlety. In the present volume, perspective *per se* is never made a major issue, but we nevertheless become aware of the maturity, of the fully emerged creative intelligence, of the writer herself. Moreover, and this is why I call her work complex, Ms. Dillard has set herself more than one goal in *An American Childhood*, which also provides a record, we recognize as we read on, of her education and her formation as a naturalist and then as a writer.

*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* remains Annie Dillard's best-known book, the one by which we most securely identify her as a writer: it is to the tradition of Thoreau that she most often appears to belong. And Thoreau awakens in us all a sense of wonder; by his own profound response to the created world he stands amidst, he evokes in us an anguished sense of what, in our perpetual dullness, we have missed, as, frequently with the suddenness and force of revelation, his wonder becomes our own. Wonder, too, is Annie Dillard's great gift to her reader. "What does it feel like to be alive?" we are not surprised to find one chapter opening. Another begins, perhaps more dubiously, "Young children have no sense of wonder." It is this concern which leads to what some readers might consider a defect in this book, an overwritten quality that emerges frequently: we sometimes have the sense that Annie Dillard is feeling, interpreting, saying more than the occasion warrants. These sections are particularly intrusive because she can be so briskly narrative when she wants to be, but it needs to be argued that, even if often appearing inappropriate, they do essentially reflect what, in another context, is perhaps her greatest strength. Here, we have a volume written on two different levels of style.

*An American Childhood*, however, is first and foremost a recording and a celebration. In a day when family memoirs are often notable chiefly for a desperate paying off of scores, for rancor and even outright hatred, this

one is robustly healthy, full of affection. Most significantly, this affection persuades the reader, who is not left wondering whether the record has been distorted or even merely simplified. Equally notable, I think, is the way in which the writer's method combines the account of her own interior development with her portraits of family, friends, fellow-students and many others. (Annie Dilliard grew up in the Point Breeze section of Pittsburgh: her background and family were distinctly upper-middle class. She attended Ellis School.)

Finally, this is a book about that special kind of growth which arises from an addiction to reading. Annie Dillard seems never to have been separated from the life of books, from some particular volume to which she found herself creatively responsive. And we conclude her present work with the sense of an identity fully achieved, of the young girl *then* so completely embodied in the woman *now*. ■

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*Don't Call Me Boss: David L. Lawrence, Pittsburgh's  
Renaissance Mayor* By Michael P. Weber

(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988. Pp. xxii, 440.

Preface, biographical sketches, illustrations, epilogue, appendix,  
notes, index. \$32.95 hard, \$16.95 paper.)

Michael P. Weber might have entitled his biography, *David L. Lawrence: A Study in Paradox*. Lawrence came out of a provincial, Irish-Catholic working class neighborhood in Pittsburgh's Point, but collaborated with its business and social elite in promoting the post-World War II Renaissance. Reared in a family which expected the children to "lead hard-working, moral, blue-collar lives," he could neither fully accept nor escape this imperative; he retained a life-long commitment to better the lot of the working class, but sought to transcend that status himself. (Few encountered Lawrence without a jacket and tie, even at home.) A workaholic, disdainful of frivolity, he devoted much of his scarce free time to card-playing and spectator sports. Lawrence subscribed to the ideals of familism dictated by his religion, class and ethnic heritage, but allowed most of his time to be consumed by political activity. Not the least paradoxical was the clash between Lawrence's political role and his