

BOOK REVIEWS

D. EDEN: *Gilbert and Sullivan; The Creative Conflict*. Associated University Presses, London and New Jersey (1986). 224 Pages.

Much of this book is devoted to an analysis of the personality of W. S. Gilbert, which David Eden, argues, was quite abnormal. He was "highly authoritarian, extremely sensitive to supposed insults, relentlessly determined to avenge those same insults, oblivious to the feelings of others, conceited enough to regard himself as greater than Shakespeare, jealous of other people's success, boastful of his victories (which included making women cry), repetitious, hysterical in anger, abrupt, boorish, and when facing exposure, cringing". All of this is persuasively documented, as well as his obsessions with murder, executions and torture, and with large, ageing, dominant and libidinous women (those appearing both in his life and literary works). Eden goes on to develop a Freudian interpretation of Gilbert's preoccupations, including fixation at the emotional level of a five-year-old child, infantile sadomasochism, and probable adult impotence. Despite my general scepticism regarding psychoanalytical theories, I found this analysis, and the book as a whole, totally fascinating and for the most part, convincing, and I recommend it to anyone interested in Gilbert and Sullivan themselves or in the psychoanalysis of literary figures.

GLENN WILSON

J. SHEPHER: *Incest. A Biosocial View*. Academic Press, London (1983). 213 Pages. £16.20.

In this volume Joseph Shepher competently outlines the theoretical and historical context for a sociobiological theory of incest avoidance in human societies. A characteristically enthusiastic foreword by Edward O. Wilson introduces a wide-ranging text that draws on ideas and evidence from areas as diverse as the genetics of inbreeding to psychoanalytic theories of sexuality. The evolutionary arguments are briefly summarised before Shepher embarks on the specification of an appropriate research program, the full extent of which is unlikely ever to be realised. A persuasive case is made out for a sociobiological approach to the problem of incest that emphasises the role of ecological and biological constraints, which impose differing pressures on the alternative types of incestuous relationships. This approach is supported by what little reliable evidence is available. Subsequent chapters focus interest on the major psychoanalytic and anthropological models of incest and the author accurately documents the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. A short glossary of evolutionary and anthropological terms is included, although the definition of assortative mating adopted is imprecise. Both author and subject indices are thorough and the excellent bibliography will prove invaluable in a subject that transcends so many disciplinary boundaries. In short, Shepher has provided a very readable introduction to a difficult area that will be useful to teachers and students of human social biology and appeal to anybody interested in a stimulating and novel approach to the subject.

R. A. BLIZARD

S. OYAMA: *The Ontogeny of Information: Developmental Systems and Evolution*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1985). Pages IX + 206. £8.95 (paperback).

The manner in which information from genetic and environmental sources combines to assemble phenotypes remains a central challenge in diverse fields including human personality. Oyama's book explores several facets of the nature-nurture complex, focusing on development as the pivot around which resolution of issues will occur, and the role of cognitive-intentional metaphors in conceptualizing biological causation. Oyama, a psychologist, draws from anthropology, philosophy, politics and theology to explore the shortcomings of the idea of genetic programming in its multitudinous guises, including human sociobiology. She spearheads her attack with entries of the type: "The gene is an animalistic metaphor, a kind of ghost in the biological machine; the trouble with this metaphor is...", and "Given the ubiquity of the argument for design, has the gene become 'First Cause' now that God is dead?"

The book is critically flawed by the complete absence of data. This is grievous since findings from behaviour genetics and development psychology are crucial. While small fluctuations in one or two molecules might affect ontogeny, studies show that siblings raised apart for many years in complex environments, grow to be significantly similar to each other on a variety of traits. Moreover, their degree of similarity is predicted by the number of genes they share. Another discovery is that the environmental factors influencing development are unique to each sibling rather than common, even for traits such as altruism and aggression which parents are expected to socialize heavily. Such observations imply the presence of genetically based stabilizing systems which channel development so that people create environments maximally compatible with their genotypes (Rushton, Littlefield and Lumsden, 1986). It is this kind of analysis, however which Oyama argues is misguided. Unfortunately, her own account offers no theoretical alternative. Indeed, she provides what is to me a nullifying form of 'wholistic' 'interdependent' 'interactionism' which eschews hard lines of demarcation and differential prediction. It is unlikely that the book will appeal to the scientifically minded who want the latest report on how development occurs.

J. PHILIPPE RUSHTON

Reference

Rushton J. P., Littlefield C. H. and Lumsden C. J. (1986) Gene-culture coevolution of complex social behavior: human altruism and mate choice. *Proc. natn. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* **84**.