

▶ bright colours affect a bare room or whether a window needs to open to a view or simply provide light. He created an unfolding sense of visual drama by having small doors open on to vast spaces, a cantilevered staircase that appears to hover in mid-air and a roof terrace with pink and violet walls to frame the sky in a surrealist embrace.

Barragán never forgot the vibrant forms and colours of the Mexican countryside where he grew up. Bougainvillea blossoms were his *madeleine*, and their magenta hue became so crucial to him that he kept a piece of pink paper by his bedside as he lay dying. He once said, "Don't look at what I do, see what I see." The artists exhibiting in Barragán's house have tried to see through his eyes and, in the process, have extended their own vision. It may be the truest way of keeping his spirit alive. ■

"The Air is Blue": Casa Luis Barragán, General Francisco Ramírez 14, Colonia Ampliación Daniel Garza, Mexico City, until February 28th. By appointment, tel: +52 (55) 55 15 49 08

"Luis Barragán—The Quiet Revolution": Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, until February 9th. Catalogue published by Skira, Milan; 319 pages; \$75

Ralph Nader

Fighting for his life

Nader: Crusader, Spoiler, Icon. By Justin Martin. *Perseus*; 336 pages; \$26

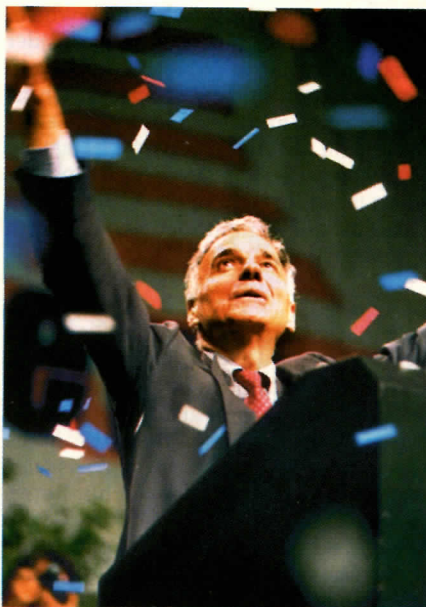
WHAT makes Ralph run? The question was asked in anguish by Ralph Nader's friends and former colleagues and in anger by Al Gore's followers during the last presidential campaign, when Mr Nader's bid to become America's first Green president split the Democratic vote. The harshest answer—ego—seems, on its own, to be an unlikely explanation. "If you want to be effective in Washington, put your own ego aside," the veteran consumer activist once told a colleague.

Few people—elected or unelected—have been more effective in Washington than Mr Nader, or had more impact on the lives of ordinary Americans. By the age of 33, this loner, living austerely in a one-room flat and working on the sparest of budgets, had helped persuade Congress to pass laws that improved the safety of everything from chicken to natural-gas pipelines, atomic energy, x-rays, and air travel. His biggest crusade, for car safety, is said to have saved perhaps 1m lives since his book, "Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile", was published in 1965. The story of how General Motors sent detectives to dig up dirt on Mr Nader, and then denied

doing so, has been told before—they failed to find any dirt and their denials were exposed as lies during congressional hearings—but Justin Martin tells it again with verve, and it is a timely reminder that Mr Nader was preaching about crime in the boardroom long before the shenanigans at Enron were even a twinkle in Kenneth Lay's eye.

Mr Nader, who will be 69 next month, has often been likened to an Old Testament prophet, but, as one ally and friend said, "Prophets don't make good presidents...[to] call people to account for not living up to moral codes, that's the role Ralph performs best." The author argues that Mr Nader is not well suited to public life, being both prickly and notoriously private. Why then, did he run for president? The reason, Mr Martin suggests, was that he was no longer newsworthy and, above all, that he had been shut out by Bill Clinton and Mr Gore. After 12 years of Ronald Reagan and George Bush senior, Mr Nader's natural ideological opponents, it seemed axiomatic that the activist, and his causes, finally had friends in high places. But they would not return his calls—apparently for fear of offending corporate America.

This admiring portrait can occasionally slide into a flat recitation of Mr Nader's accomplishments, but it vividly reveals the difference that one committed idealist can make. Mr Nader is described as an eccentric genius, who was driven by a finely calibrated sense of outrage and who chose to do things his own way. Or, as one of his closest allies over the years, Joan Claybrook, once put it, "He is one of the most stubborn people in the United States." Such traits are not necessarily endearing, but they go a long way to explaining why Ralph ran—and who he is. ■



Trouble at any age

Jewish history

Give sorrow words

The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933. By Amos Elon. *Metropolitan Books*; 446 pages; \$30. *Penguin/Allen Lane*; £25

THIS book begins in 1743, when the 14-year-old Moses Mendelssohn arrived in Berlin to seek an education. He would become celebrated as the German Socrates and the Jewish Luther. It ends nearly two centuries later when another luminary, Hannah Arendt, left Berlin after the Nazis came to power. These two vignettes frame Amos Elon's elegiac book. They also suggest the aspects of modern German-Jewish history that really engage him. Mr Elon wants to trace "the fates and ideas of a number of interesting, mostly secular, and often very appealing people". They were, he adds, not "representative" but "emblematic", a distinction that some may find elusive.

Having begun with Mendelssohn in Enlightened Germany, Mr Elon moves on via the *salonnières*, Henriette Herz and Rachel Levin, to the politically engaged writers of Young Germany, Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne. An exceptionally thoughtful chapter then looks at Jews for whom the 1848 revolution provided a political stage. The collective biography thickens as Mr Elon turns to the extraordinary talent that flowered in newly unified Germany in the fields of literature, art, music, journalism, philosophy and science. This is the story of Weimar culture in waiting. The author writes the poignant end of that story in his final chapter, but not before a more-in-sorrow-than-anger reminder that Jewish intellectuals fully shared the German war fever of 1914.

Mr Elon makes familiar material absorbing with his deftly interwoven life histories (helped by the fact that so many of his principal characters were in fact related to each other) and his generous use of direct quotation from letters and diaries. Although sometimes shaky on the larger political history, he gives a good sense of the institutional settings that made a difference. The reason why so many educated Jews turned to journalism, criticism and bookselling, for example, was because they were barred from holding civil service or university posts.

But this collective portrait, undeniably attractive, remains very partial, devoted to the minority of the minority that stood for cultural, political and entrepreneurial modernity. One of the ideas that recur in the book is education as a form of secular belief, but there is little on religion itself. Mr ▶▶