

earth; and he rubs the salt in hard enough to hurt.

The second half of the book is mostly philosophy; with Mr J. M. Cameron, Mr J. Coulson and Dom Illtyd Trethowan between them working towards the formulation of a positive theory of art, using poetry as their reference; and with Fr Turner's voice sounding a prolonged warning against abstraction. And in fact, *ni fallor*, Dom Illtyd's positive conclusion that the work of art *as such* is an 'organic unity' seems an implicit rejection of Fr Turner's scepticism—of the latter's insistence that 'aesthetics is the child of philosophical idealism' which itself is pernicious nonsense. But this disagreement, if such it was, is not explicitly adverted to. As for the positive theory which Dom Illtyd tersely formulates near the end of the book, I would only note here that the three writers with whom I have associated it, and in particular the two laymen, are evidently concerned, first of all, to rescue poetry from the sort of philosophy that has recently predominated in England; to show that there is a poet's use of language distinct from the logician's; and that the former, in Mr Coulson's terms, has 'significance' as distinct from 'meaning'. It is at this point, I feel, that Mrs Langer should have been heard. I regret also the tone of the two or three references to Maritain. If this philosopher was to be mentioned at all, it seems to me that he deserved to be seriously discussed, not brushed aside with a knowing smile. And if he had been properly considered, it would have emerged, I think, that his chief concern as an aesthetician from first to last has not been (as is hinted here) to define some transcendent 'essence' common to all the arts, to which would correspond on the artist's side some 'pure' intuition devoid of concrete and particular content; but to analyse, in terms of a subtly developed Thomist noetic, what goes on in the mind of the creative artist precisely as creative. Maritain has been chiefly concerned, in short, with the psychology (in the traditional sense) of the artist; and much less—only mediately—with the produced artefact. To say this is only to point to the field where he ought to be met, if at all.

This review has perforce been more descriptive than critical; but it will have appeared that questions and objections are deferred, not ignored. The contributors themselves have put their cards on the table; and may the game continue.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

CHARLES DICKENS: THE WORLD OF HIS NOVELS. By J. Hillis Miller. (Harvard University Press. London: Oxford University Press; 30s.)

During the last twenty years, criticism of Dickens as a novelist by such writers as Edmund Wilson, F. R. Leavis, Humphry House, John Butt and Edgar Johnson has made it evident that, as Lionel Trilling

wrote in 1952, 'No one . . . is any longer under any illusion about Dickens. It is now clear that he is one of the two greatest novelists of England, Jane Austen being the other.' In Mr Miller's book we may see the work of a critical intelligence which may assume that Dickens need no longer be defended.

The author has set himself to analyse the search of the Dickens hero for identity, his 'attempts to understand the world, to integrate himself in it, and by that integration to find his real self'. This is an important and neglected aspect of Dickens's work, and though Mr Miller has said many of the words on it, he has probably not said the last one; the theme has a peculiar appeal to us mid-century ciphers.

We are shown the progress of Dickens's technique in building his own world where the problems of identity may be studied under, as it were, laboratory conditions—from the claustrophobic labyrinths of *Oliver Twist*, through the experimental societies of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*, to the 'mutual responsibility for one another's lives of two fallible and fallen people' in *Great Expectations*, and the attitude in *Our Mutual Friend* which recognizes that 'value radiates not from any thing or power outside the human, but outward from the human spirit itself'. The chapters on *Oliver Twist* and *Little Dorrit* contain interesting and original studies of Dickens's imagery, though Mr Miller has not emphasized as one would expect the remarkably coherent image pattern in *Great Expectations*. His treatment throughout of the themes of Time, Evil and Destiny makes rewarding study, even if the high seriousness of his comments on *Pickwick* seem rather incongruous.

However, in limiting himself to the world of Dickens's novels, Mr Miller becomes insulated from the reality of which this world is an image, and is consequently shut away from the only standards by which the truth or validity of Dickens's writings can take their value. This is, of course, to question Mr Miller's premise: that Dickens's novels can be discussed as 'autonomous works of art'; but such a premise seems to invite question.

Mr Miller's style, moreover, detracts from the serious interest of what he has to say; it is frustrating, verbose, full of pretentious, pseudo-scientific jargon: 'the main axis of the nuclear structure of *Oliver Twist* . . .'; the elements of the world of *Martin Chuzzlewit* are 'like particles in a Brownian movement'; of *Bleak House* we read, 'one might plot the curve of this approach to maximum entropy by a series of crucial points'. Indeed, there is a kind of incantatory hysteria about the language in which he speaks of *Our Mutual Friend*: 'This world is both physical and spiritual, or, rather, it is the nonhuman world as collectively humanised by all of the people living within it'; 'The true mode of existence in *Our Mutual Friend* is intersubjectivity'; 'The

proper model for the universe of *Our Mutual Friend* is not that of a non-Euclidean space filled with incommensurate local monads entirely isolated from one another’.

There is too much that is good in this book for one not to regret that it is defaced by a proficiency, like that of Podsnap’s wife, in ‘the art of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on’.

JAMES REED

THE CATHEDRAL. By Clive Sansom. (Methuen; 16s.)

Mr Sansom’s last work was *The Witnesses* and in *The Cathedral* he uses a similar method. The work is called a verse sequence—some may prefer to think of it as in the nature of drama—and it evokes the spirit of a Christian Cathedral by allowing us to listen to the thoughts of the people and things associated with it throughout the ages, the architect, the bishop, the gargoyles, the devil, the wavering canon and so on. Obviously Salisbury Cathedral inspired much of the work, but it is sufficiently universal to reach beyond any particular. Inevitably it is more diffuse than *The Witnesses*, but the same poetic qualities are there to touch eye and ear. The handling of an immense variety of metres and verse forms can only be called masterly, whether it is alliterative verse for a medieval peasant’s daughter, blunt dimeters for a gravedigger, fussy dactyls for an eighteenth-century restorer, or Eliotesque blank verse (amusingly enough) for Ironside. It is evidence of the strength of the verse that all attempts to describe it are frustrating and we are compelled to read the stuff itself and quote. There we hear a thousand echoes—Donne, Browning, Fry—for Mr Sansom is a master of parody, and everything is immediate in detail and colour, and verse form always fits subject matter.

‘He’s a mean one, our bishop, though it’s not  
My place to be saying so, God help me.’

—obviously a fifteenth-century cellarer.

‘Splodge be my name—Splurge be mine  
Thus we squat, come foul, come fine.’

—obviously gargoyles.

The temptation to continue indefinitely is great. Above all this is a dramatic work, and one can see it being put to many ingenious uses in whole or part. For instance, it could be an admirable exercise in speech with film strips. However it is reproduced it needs no visual aids to bring out the author’s immense sympathy or increase the immediate impact on ear and eye. Though so very different from his own verse, Wordsworth would have recognized it as truly creative, because Mr Sansom’s inspiration completely dominates the metres and verse-forms he takes from others.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.