

in a few lines what Salinger in *Franny and Zooey* evokes less well in as many pages. Here there is a dryness and acuteness of observation as stimulating as a fine Hock. The setting is depressingly dreary and the characters, even the children, thoroughly unsympathetic and the central character's problem somehow fails to involve the reader. Yet, such is the author's skill that he achieves that essential 'one remove' to another plane that transmutes the whole thing into a work of art. It would be both fascinating, and, one feels, rewarding to see what Mr Sheed would make of a book in which his characters demanded his passionate involvement and some form of vigorous affirmation, always a harder task than the negative, satirical approach and perhaps less acceptable today.

LEIGH LESTER

THE GENESIS OF RELIGION, by Margaret Murray; Routledge; 12s. 6d.

Dr Margaret Murray's own religious belief seems to be pantheistic, 'that unseen overruling Power which Science calls Nature and Religion calls God.' Her thesis is that this belief, which provides all religions with their myth-surrounded core, originates at the point in biological and cultural evolution where man replaced pre-man. The origin of religion was a specifically feminine discovery resulting from woman's consciousness of pregnancy, which she ascribed to the activity of an unseen Power. Woman was then the dominant partner in human progress. The first fixed settlements were composed of women and children (the men being away hunting) and in this matriarchal society the cult of a female deity would emerge long before any idea of a male deity. This latter concept arose probably when the men abandoned hunting for farming and joined the women in the fixed settlements.

This book does not explain old myths; it manufactures new ones instead. The knowledge we have of the social structure and religious beliefs of modern food-gathering and hunting peoples (such as the Australian aborigines) entirely contradicts Dr Murray's reconstruction. The author of *Genesis* had a truer understanding of the essential complementarity of the sexes in the determination of human destiny than can be found in this projection backwards of feminism.

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