

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.