

sophy, providing us with 'grasp' in a way we could not otherwise achieve. 'A series of unsatisfactory ways of putting it may succeed in conveying what none of them would convey by itself and what could not be conveyed by any *one* way of putting it'. His volume provides a valuable lesson in the ways in which

such 'dialectical' approaches may be genuinely illuminating, but that such methods may reveal truths not otherwise graspable still remains 'not proven'; perhaps the publication of Wisdom's Virginia Lectures will carry the argument further.

MARTIN WARNER

BECKETT THE SHAPE CHANGER, edited by Katherine Worth. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*. London and Boston, 1975. 227 pp. £4.95.

The impact of Beckett on the person who knows him only as a name, whether as a novelist, playwright or prose poet, is liable to be extremely intense when it does occur. Of all contemporary writers, he is perhaps the one who is best introduced to a new audience by the methods which T. S. Eliot adopted when giving 'extension lectures' during his early days as a bank clerk and aspiring poet: 'I have found only two ways of leading any pupils to like anything with the right kind of liking: to present them with a selection of the simpler kinds of facts about a work—its conditions, its setting, its genesis—or else to spring the work on them in such a way that they were not prepared to be prejudiced against it'. As a professional extension lecturer, I have always found this advice to be very sound, and never more so than when introducing Beckett (the only living writer, I think, who approaches Eliot himself in producing a precise sort of understanding, on the part of the uninitiated reader, long before any exact study of the text has occurred). It is therefore with some trepidation that I come to this symposium, itself the product of a series of Extramural lectures in London organised by the editor.

The emphasis in the book is on the fiction, though there are several discussions of the plays. Now this means, among other things, an emphasis on that aspect of Beckett which most invites the sort of scholarly academic commentary which was also invited, for example, by *The Waste Land*: I mean the commentary which involves the less simple kinds of fact about a work (e.g., the tracing of literary cousinships, the explaining of learned jokes, the writing of footnotes on obscure allusions or textual peculiarities) and which is likely to prepare a person to be prejudiced against the work itself. On the whole, this symposium avoids the worst faults of this critical style, though some of the essays seem

to me to be rather laborious explanations of the obvious—and I mean obvious to the literary specialist: and this kind of explanation is, of course, **neither obvious nor necessary** to the novice in the Beckettian house of fiction. The best pieces, therefore, are those which point out features of the Beckettian architecture which we might otherwise not have noticed, rather than those which tell us (in a way mostly foreign to Beckett's own practice) what it all means or how we should respond. Barbara Hardy, for example, shows that we are mistaken to suppose there are no consolations to be had in Beckett's treatment of such themes as art, love or nature: beneath the bleaknesses, there are still consolations to be had, if only of a 'dubious' sort. And the editor herself illuminates (almost literally) the plays by discussing one of the most obvious but least discussed facts about them; namely the implications of the stage directions, especially those concerning lighting and the spatial disposition of the various elements (and the sound effects in the radio plays). On the other hand, John Chalker's reading of *Watt* in the light of Swift and Sterne as satirists, or the discussion of the novels as a whole as exercises in the search for the self which Charles Peake provides, are—for my money—less useful and exciting. Martin Dodsworth mounts a vigorous attack on *Film* (a subject on which I'm not competent to comment) and *Eh Joe*, saying that both are failures, and he ends by actually preferring some bits of Beckett to others: a piece of critical boldness scarcely matched by any of the other contributors, who all stand equally in awe of the great man himself. Harry Cockerham's discussion of the differences between French and English versions of the plays is helpful and unpretentious, and I learned several things in the course of it—especially about Lucky's big speech in *Waiting for Godot*. But it seems odd that, in a book mainly

concerned with the fiction, most of the good things are to be found in the pieces given to the plays (Barbara Hardy's essay excepted). Perhaps this

has more to do with the very concreteness and directness of the theatrical works themselves than with the deficiencies of the critics?

BRIAN WICKER

EVELYN WAUGH: a Biography, by Christopher Sykes. Collins, London, 1975, 455 pp. £5.50.

Evelyn Waugh has been very fortunate in his biographer. Ever since his *Four Studies in Loyalty* Christopher Sykes has been known for his gift of concise vivid portrayal; not only Evelyn Waugh but his whole small world are brought alive. Among the miniature portraits some are very felicitous, like those of Robert Byron and Professor Whittemore; only one seems to me unjust, that of Brian Howard.

Evelyn Waugh's first marriage collapsed in September 1929. A year later he became a Catholic after a month's instruction. Christopher Sykes first met him in 1930. From then on he writes convincingly from a close personal knowledge. All the later Waugh is here with his Faith, his bitterness and his disillusion. These are not qualities that would have been there before 1930. It is difficult to believe that *Decline and Fall* and *Handful of Dust* are by the same author. Nancy Mitford has described the 'He Evelyn' and the 'She Evelyn' of the first marriage being happy together 'like two small boys'.

It is tenable that the collapse of the first marriage was a central cataclysm in Evelyn Waugh's life. Later generations can learn what he was really like since 1930 from reading Christopher Sykes. No one will ever know what he was like when he was writing *Decline and Fall* or producing his film *The Scarlet Woman*. His own autobiography never comes alive and his diaries are obviously unreliable except as a guide to his fantasies.

This admirably illustrated volume is more than a biography; it is also a sensitive and perceptive study in literary criticism. It is a convincing assessment, though I regret the author states that Mr Samgrass in *Brideshead* was drawn from Maurice Bowra; it is true that this was asserted by Evelyn himself but that was only one of his 'Maurice teases'. There was no point of resemblance. If Mr Samgrass had an original it was Professor Woodward. But this is a trivial criticism with which to end a tribute to a remarkable achievement.

GERVASE MATHEW OP

TEACH US TO PRAY, by André Louf. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1974, 112 pp. £1.25.

André Louf, Abbot of the Trappist monastery of Katsberg in France, offers us a book on prayer that has the immediate attraction of being prayerful, springing from the silence of the author's own personal appropriation of the contemplative tradition. But this is a wonderfully fresh book, not an esoteric work geared to a purely monastic readership.

Louf has explicitly in mind all those who feel a longing to pray, but are aware of their inability to do so, those who have got nowhere with conventional books of oral prayers but nevertheless are searching for some 'way in' to contemplation. He presupposes that all the time the Spirit is praying within such people; his book attempts to lead them to a gradual break-through

to this 'deeper level of (each man's) interior being', and to conscious awareness of themselves as praying in union with Christ. He does not pretend the way will be easy; there are down-to-earth pages on distractions, temptations and spiritual aridity (e.g., pp. 74-7). He proposes no 'method' or specific techniques. One must learn simply to open the whole self to God and wait in silence on Him, to 'hang extravagantly about the Lord without being distracted'. Affective prayer is not helped by incessant verbalising and conceptualising but it still needs to be fed: the rich assortment of Scriptural and Traditional citations in this book, with Louf's comments upon them, may well help to fulfil this need.

I was particularly struck by the