

DREAMER BY DAY, by Michael S. Parer. *Angus and Robertson*, 1972. xii + 144 pp. £2.

One reason why this book has been written 'is to speed the inevitable change of the compulsory law of celibacy'. I can think of nothing more likely to slow it down.

The author is possessed of a maddening sense of his own importance. He is determined to correct the ways of bishops and theologians who don't pipe to his ill-prepared tune. His long explanations of his struggle with his sexual impulses, his verbatim accounts of his talks with the Almighty, and his odd behaviour when he really comes close to a girl, all betray an immaturity which at times is almost incredible. He was born in 1933, studied for the priesthood in Werribee, Australia, was ordained in 1959 and laicized in 1969. Although he was already eighteen when he entered the seminary, he doesn't seem to have known as much about girls as the average teenager knew even then; and, by his account, the seminary training from 1952 must have been much worse than my own at Ushaw nearly thirty years earlier. They let him through and he even obtained a few special jobs in the diocese and the Church at large. Photographs show him beaming on one bishop and two archbishops, looking solemn as he awaits ordination in 1959, beaming again after his wedding ten years and fifteen pages later, blissfully unaware of the fact that any wedding photographs are at best a bore, often merely silly, to all except the parties and their close friends.

His self-importance comes out when he calls at Westminster Cathedral one afternoon. Perhaps justifiably annoyed at not being able to see a priest, he becomes really 'peevish' when he learns that not even Cardinal Heenan would see him without appointment. He had button-holed the Cardinal in Rome during the Council sessions, to tell him that a lecture by Francis Clarke, S.J., on the Eucharist, was out of date and indeed 'almost dishonest'. The Cardinal expressed surprise: evidence obviously

of his extreme patience and tolerance and not, as Mr Parer thinks, of a determination to uphold a lost cause. In fact the author's memory of eucharistic theology in the seminary seems rather dim: he thinks he was taught that Christ was 'circumspectively multi-located' in the eucharist.

He has indeed quite a lot to say about abuses in the Church, untruthfulness in high places, barriers between clergy and laity, and these things need saying. But they have been said before, by more competent and less excited critics. Much of what he says is robbed of its force by the way it is linked with his account of his sexual progress.

At one stage he is self-confident enough to wonder 'whether only a priest or a nun could fully appreciate the deepest mysteries of marriage'. Always willing to learn, he asks about a girl at the bar in a restaurant in Istanbul and is told that the price of champagne for her at 10 dollars also included taking her to bed. He resisted this unusual bargain and spent a restless night.

The setting for his first real breakaway bears a close resemblance to that of an Aldwych farce. In a hotel in Florence, Marie, an ex-nun, had to pass through his bedroom on her way to their shared bathroom: returning in her nightie, she flicked the dripping water from her hand as she waved him good-night. Tension mounted when they were allotted a twin-bedded room in Venice. On page 91 she sits in her nightie at his bedside while he tells her of his 'personal battle for sexual integrity'; on page 92 'she lay beside me with only our pyjamas separating us'; eight lines later she has apparently effected another quick change, since he lifts up her nightie and proceeds to settle his immediate problem. They rise at 5.30 and go to confession, but on reflection he decides: 'In this total act of love, God had answered a prayer of my long years of struggle.' EDWARD QUINN

MOTHER IS GOLD: A STUDY IN WEST AFRICAN LITERATURE, by Adrian Roscoe. *Cambridge University Press*, London, 1971. 273 pp. £3.40.

The title translates a Yoruba proverb, and states a principal theme of the author's: the importance for the artist of indigenous sources. In this critical account of West African writing in English, Mr Roscoe makes a personal, often provocative response to modern African writers from Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. He insists on the need to submit their

verse, prose and drama to as exacting canons of judgment as are used for British and American authors; and thus dismisses as worthless many of the bandwagon autobiographical novels produced since 1960.

This book is to be welcomed because it contributes vigorously, contentiously, to a literary debate often marred by hypocrisy and

cultural paternalism. The work lacks the comprehensive vision and steady penetration of great criticism; but it is well informed, rich in insights and puts its views boldly. Poetry, the author holds, promises well in West Africa, and drama is strong, but prose is flat and often bad. Amongst the poets, Okara is sensitively studied, but John Pepper Clark is condescendingly patted on the shoulder. Abioseh Nicol is ranked higher as a master of prose than Achebe, whose pre-eminence as a novelist is, however, conceded. The greatest accolade of all is reserved for the dramatist Soyinka.

These sharply personal assessments are supported amply by quotations (which could have been better marked out for the reader by deeper indentation and some spacing above and below, instead of appearing to be merely part of a badly laid-out paragraph). Sometimes the extract makes the author's point and is not helped by his sudden descents into banality and cliché such as (p. 86):

'There are qualities here which place Nicol in the very forefront of African short story writers. It all looks so simple, so utterly natural; as though Nicol is casually taking a slice of real life and offering it to us in all

its workaday detail, all its blending of the tragic and the absurd. Yet the style that allows this effect must possess the translucence of crystal; and the sensibility behind the style must be one of marvellous richness and iron control.'

There are other passages, which read like transcripts from a taped lecture. Did the author have African university students in mind as his readers? The argument at times becomes wordy, yet we are carried along by the author's excitement and enthusiasm, to be rewarded by flashes of perception, especially in his handling of authors he likes.

The immediacy of this response to literature seems to preclude the development of any treatment of theme, other than tangentially. There is an interesting critical work yet to be written on the 'quest' theme in African writing. But Mr Roscoe's aim was to set out in some detail a personal assessment of modern West African writing in English, and to show that in drama and verse, at any rate, it has largely succeeded in becoming independent of western models, and is drawing increasingly on its own heritage of thought and experience. In this he has succeeded.

ROLAND HINDMARSH

THE LIFE OF ST PHILIP HOWARD, edited by Francis Steer. *Phillimore*, London and Chichester, 1971. 83 pp. £2.50.

St Philip Howard is the only one of the recently canonized martyrs who was not executed. He was condemned to death in 1589 and left to languish in the Tower till his death in 1595. For this reason alone he has a special importance in establishing that condemnation rather than actual execution is the essence of martyrdom. There are several others who died in prison under sentence of death and have never been declared even 'venerable'.

On his reconciliation to the Church in 1585 St Philip tried to flee the country but was betrayed and captured at sea. He was convicted in the Star Chamber and sentenced to a huge fine and imprisonment at the Queen's pleasure. At the approach of the Armada in 1588 he organized a 24-hour prayer. This was very easily interpreted as a prayer for the success of the Spaniards and he was condemned for treason.

This account was written by a Jesuit who

knew him. The MS. is at Arundel and was privately printed in 1857. It is now lavishly reproduced, with portraits from the Arundel collection of the saint and his parents. Most contemporary accounts of martyrs are little more than panegyrics but this one is an exception. It really gives all the important facts and does not whitewash a very human person. Not only the indiscretions of his youth are recorded but his correspondence with Dr Allen at Douai, intimating that it would be a good thing for the Catholics if the Earl of Leicester could be 'taken away by some lawful means'. Also no attempt is made to minimize the want of prudence in organizing special prayers at the time of the Armada. But it is easy to be wise after the event and these are small points in a drama that contains all the ingredients of Tudor intrigue, including an apostate priest and a terrorized Marian priest who provide the 'evidence'.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.