

imaginative suggestiveness, though often rather bewildering for poor moderns. Even while one must often feel that precision was dangerously lacking, there is a certain human warmth, an appeal to the imagination and to the artist in us, which surely has much to offer to us.

Apart from anything else, Fr Murray's book introduces us to some very fine literature, helping us to grasp its meaning, without presuming to interpret it all away. Ancient poets are left to speak for themselves, with com-

ments which elucidate, but do not exhaust. The author hopes that his book, like the well-known writings of Hugo Rahner and Jean Daniélou, will help the modern church to rediscover the value of symbols, of poetry, in the expression of our faith.

It is altogether a very fine book, only very slightly marred by a few trivial misprints. And it is well equipped with bibliographical information, indices and tables, so that it should serve as a valuable reference work for students and scholars.

SIMON TUGWELL OP

**STRUCTURALIST POETICS**, by Jonathan Culler. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London 1975. 301 pp. £5.50.

This book should extend the study of literary meaning in some important ways. It does not alter our habits of reading so decisively as (say) *The Country and the City* or *La révolution du langage poétique*, to mention two major landmarks in contemporary literary analysis, in which Raymond Williams and Julia Kristeva respectively ousted previously dominant interpretations of whole swathes of literature. In his case English literature since 1600 and in hers French poetry since 1870. But Jonathan Culler unlocks for us the often formidable-looking world of current French literary theory, and in the process he provides a better guide to the field than any so far published in French or in any other language. The only comparable books are Fredric Jameson's *The Prison-house of Language*, an altogether weightier account, written from a Marxist standpoint, and covering Russian formalism as well as French structuralism, and Stephen Heath's much more specialised study, *The Nouveau Roman* (in the same series as Dr Culler's book on Flaubert). Precisely because of his much less definable intellectual moorings, Dr Culler's book is more likely to help to disseminate French theories over here. He is blessedly free of the patronising and insular posturing which so often marks, and mars, English discussion of foreigners' notions about philosophy and the arts, though he is never slavish in his exposition or modish in his judgments. The sympathy with which he presents his material makes his strictures, when they come, all the more serious.

It is language that speaks', Dr Culler quotes Heidegger as saying: 'we speak

only in so far as we learn the knack of complying with language'. What we say is made possible only by our observing a set of conventions over which we have no control. The creation of new sentences depends upon rules which normally escape the speaker. The characteristic of structural analysis of literary texts is that it refuses to make the thinking subject—the author—the only begetter of the meaning. The meaning of a text lies less in the consciousness of the writer than in the system of codes that enables the text to be woven.

After a preliminary canter through exemplificatory works by Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Dr Culler goes in some detail into the theories of Roman Jakobson and A. J. Greimas. The first part of the book then closes with a highly selective sketch of the kind of analysis practised by Barthes, Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, among others.

In the rest of the book Dr Culler sets about assembling some of the elements for a future theory of how a literary text functions. Formulating any such theory is, of course, something different from practising literary criticism, and it is this which Dr Culler labels 'poetics' (as Northrop Frye has already done). The task is to understand how we make sense of a text; it is a theory of the practice of reading. To read is to participate in the interplay of codes which creates the text. The desire to isolate and identify codes is perhaps the strongest impulse in structuralism. It is only when we are faced with texts that we are tempted to dismiss as 'unreadable' that we begin to understand how much the accessibility of a text depends

on our being accustomed to the operative conventions. We have to learn to think of literature as an institution composed of a variety of interpretative operations which are not always so easy to perform, let alone to identify.

To focus on literature as an institution and on reading as practising a set of conventions is offensive to many literary critics because they take it as an attack on the creative originality of the author and on the personal response of the reader. But the notion of author and reader as autonomous selves transcending the materiality of meaning is precisely what critics such as Roland Barthes are out to dislodge. Emphasis on 'genius', 'inspiration', etc., in the author, and on 'appreciation', 'authenticity', etc., on the part of the reader, interlocks with a whole ideology that continues to exalt a mythical and therefore mystifying liberty of the individual, deliberately concealing the authority over us of our meaning-systems. Structuralist poetics, if that means the work on texts performed (sav) by Barthes and Kristeva, contributes, in the wake of Marx and Freud, to the destruction of neo-capitalist ways of thinking and feeling. That is why it often meets with violent resistance in French literary and academic circles, with predictable clamour about 'jargon', 'unintelligibility', etc.

By the end of the book we find Dr Culler writing of 'the structuralist or semiological project' (my italics), which means that he is trenching on questions about the nature of *signs*. He raises these questions briefly, in a handful of pages devoted to work by Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida (exponents of 'semio-analysis' and 'grammatology' respectively); but by this stage in the argument it is too late to go into the matter very deeply. It remains unclear, then, whether he would follow them in tracing, in the concept of sign, the crypto-theological idealism that continues to bewitch western thought even, and perhaps especially, where it prides itself on being empirical and scientific.

But it is unfair to wish that Dr Culler had done more than he has, and greater stress on the political implications of structuralist poetics might only have reduced the usefulness of his book as an introduction, given the readers for whom it has no doubt mainly been written. He has given us as competent an exposition as we could ever have expected of the most interesting aspects of contemporary French literary theory, transcribing them skilfully for those who dwell (as Mallarmé wrote, remembering London) among 'the cherished fogs that muffle our brains', *les chers brouillards qui emmitoufflent nos cervelles*.

FERGUS KERR OP

KARL MARX: Political Writings. Vol. I: The Revolutions of 1848. 368 pp. 1973. 80p. Vol. II: Surveys from Exile. 376 pp. 1973. 80p. Each volume edited and introduced by David Fernbach. *The Penguin Marx Library, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.*

There is no complete English edition of Marx and Engels. The rectification of this omission has started with Volume I of the *Collected Works* (to be reviewed shortly in this journal), but it will not be completed for a good number of years. Meanwhile there appears the Penguin Marx Library, which has already published the *Grundrisse* (reviewed in *New Blackfriars*, April 1974, pp. 188-9). When completed, this edition will also contain the three volumes of *Capital*, a volume of early works, and three volumes of political writings, of which the volumes in question here are the first two (Volume III will be reviewed shortly). These political volumes are very useful indeed.

Volume I starts with the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, and is largely

occupied with 25 articles from Marx's and Engels's enormous output in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* which Marx edited in Cologne in the revolution years of 1848 and 1849. These are followed by some 'Reviews' of the general European situation written in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung: Revue* which he produced in London in the period of defiant disappointment after the reaction's triumphs in 1849. This volume closes with two famous Addresses of 1850 to the Communist League (said to be Lenin's favourite Marxian texts) in which the idea of permanent revolution is discussed, and with the minutes of the meeting at which the decisive split in the League, between Marx and the more insurrectionist Schapper/Willich faction, occurred in September 1850.

The core of the selection is the *NRZ*