

bour in the Minds of thriving Men: All of which neglects of Sublunary Things are vulgarly imputed Folly'. Sir John Falstaff, 'the last of the great fools of the sixteenth century', triumphs (in a sense) over Hotspur's fevered idealism, and over law and order as represented by Justice Shallow. Now, all this is interesting enough, and a kind of connection is more or less established. But what, ultimately, is it meant to be in aid of? The support of an extreme anti-rational or romantic position, at one point stated quite bluntly by the author: '... the irrationality of the heart is always mightier than the rationality of the head'.

However, even if the book's main contentions seem over-laboured or even pointless, it can still be read with interest and profit simply as a commentary on Rabelais' *Tiers Livre* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. Mr Kaiser's erudition certainly gives off sparks, and the reader soon finds himself in the bemused and slightly incredulous state of one who witnesses a virtuoso performance. *What* does 'theopneustic' mean? And 'Lucianic adoxography'? And in what exactly does St Paul resemble Euripides? Ah yes, of course, they were both praisers of folly. (Mr Kaiser is presumably thinking of the *Bacchae*; not, surely, a typical work). Falstaff's connection with the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a bit too subtle to be fully explained here. But Erasmus and Wallace Stevens? A famous university provides the link, and the author quotes a delightful poem of Stevens which begins:

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.

We shall return at twilight from the lecture,

Pleased that the irrational is rational . . .

Hardly daring to challenge Mr Kaiser on his own scholarly ground, I was surprised to find him making a point (admittedly a minor one) based on the assumption that Falstaff babbled of green fields on his death-bed. I thought it was now known for certain that this is a textual corruption, sharing with 'Brightness falls from the air' the distinction of being the most striking phrase in English literature ever created by accident.

KEITH MITCHELL

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GOD, by J. Hillis Miller; Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press; 45s.

Professor Miller has given us a lucid and generous book. His method is to choose five nineteenth-century writers, viewing the work of each of them as a single unit, and then to evoke the informing principles that underlie their art. The thesis that appears is that all the writers, while believing in God, testify in their work to a God who is far and transcendent rather than near and immanent. 'Almost all the romantic poets begin,' Professor Miller writes, 'with the sense that there is a hidden spiritual force in nature.' The writers discussed here—De Quincey, Arnold, Emily Brontë, Browning, Hopkins—lack that sense, and so their 'literary strategy . . . must consequently be more extreme, more extravagant, as the gap between man and the divine power seems greater.' For these writers, we are told,

'theological experience is most important and determines everything else.' Everything? At first glance the statement implies the kind of generality that makes the dictum that 'all questions are at bottom theological' potent as a principle, but, in a heuristic context, crippling.

Professor Miller is not short of generalities in his Introduction. Perhaps, in his survey of the background, he might have given more attention to Deism (the word does not appear in the book) than is suggested by his phrase about the 'watchmaker God'; and he might valuably have turned his mind on to the fideism whose impulse can be sensed as far back as Montaigne, or farther; and to the ancillary mistrust of reason that is so well documented in, for example, Bredvold's *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*.

When we come to Professor Miller's treatment of his five authors we face in every instance a very orderly argument—each of the essays has a fine bold structure—and an exuberance of quotation. The order is most manifest, I think, in the essays on De Quincey and Hopkins. We cannot grumble if at times among the quotations the riffling of the card-index is heard, as it is in the opening pages of the piece on Arnold. Even there, however, the passages provided throw a shaft of light on to the Arnoldian ambition to see steadily and complete. Oddly, though, Arnold's essays—certainly no fainter a source for his ideas than the poems—are thinly represented.

Professor Miller rarely names the work from which he is quoting, and it is therefore hard for the reader to find the context or to verify the reading unless he happens to own the edition that Miller's page numbers refer to. A little research through one chapter suggests that we should walk warily with the author when he is in a quoting mood: in the essay on Hopkins he quotes 'The earth and heaven, so little known' as evidence of Hopkins' 'subjectivism'. The poem does little more than elaborate (finely) the truism that it is we, not others, who see what we see. Then: Pater's *The Renaissance* is cited for comparison with 'A Vision of the Mermaids'; Professor Miller might have referred more pointedly to Keats. On the next page he tells us that Hopkins 'wants to pass beyond the situation of being always the center of the world. He would far rather circle around God.' In support of this we are offered the poem 'Let me be to Thee as the circling bird.' The bird in this poem is not circling round—or anywhere near—God: it is the bird's music, not its motion, that concerns the poet.

If Professor Miller's handling of evidence is wild—sometimes illuminating, sometimes darkening his topics—the most dubious aspect of this book for the reviewer is the collision between the significance that Miller places on certain passages—examining them at length or hammering them home at key points in his edifice—and the literary value that most readers would assign to them. The element of sheer disorder in De Quincey, for instance, gains important emphasis; but a sentence which Professor Miller quotes on pp. 56–7 as typifying a style that is 'a collection of words which . . . circle forever without getting anywhere, and ultimately evaporate in their own fume' strikes one as being conspicuously orderly: a mob of particulars subdued by a supervening awareness of English syntax

into a disciplined and expressive unit. Again, one wonders how Professor Miller can assert that the 'prosodic slackness' of Arnold's *Stagirius* verses, 'and the sing-song of their feminine rhymes match the terrible spiritual slackness and despondency which is their meaning.' Can we believe that any mimetic theory of literature is hospitable to *that* sort of comment? By the same token, when Professor Miller offers a full—and ingenious—explication of Hopkins' *Pied Beauty*, because its philosophical bearings run true to his exposition of Hopkins' thought, we may ask whether there is any sense in which an even better poem would have contributed less to an authentic understanding of the poetry as a whole.

The central power of this book—its clear march of ideas—is not amenable to exemplification in a brief review. But the reader will not miss the acute criticism of Browning's dramatic monologues, or the fine observations on the 'impenetrable obscurity into which space fades' in Arnold's verse; and above all he will not miss the potent and economical discussion of *Wuthering Heights*. Here, we see the justification of Professor Miller's method by which he takes a writer's complete *oeuvre*, and weaves a network of quotations in order to catch the form of the mind that generated the fiction. The author moves here within a limited area, and brings in to great effect the Gondal poems and the 'Butterfly' essay for enrichment of his theme. If he inclines to overstress the theological tendency of *Wuthering Heights*, he nevertheless writes with perception both on the detail of the book and on the structure—particularly in his demonstration of the two ways in which the stories of the elder and the younger Catherine are involved with each other.

It seems to me that *The Disappearance of God*, if it is a success, is a success of a precarious kind. The thrust and pulse of the argument does not, I think, always echo the felt pressure of the works from which it is supposed to have emerged. Professor Miller has both sense and sympathy; but he is too eager to assert his own pattern. Students of Victorian literature should consult this book—with the appropriate caution—and will be able to determine whether their sense of disappointment is due to its inherent frailty or to the fact that Professor Miller has produced something that is not quite literary criticism, not quite a history of ideas, not quite a set of spiritual biographies, but a piece in a *genre* of its own. I think the method is viable; we need not demand that Professor Miller should all at once create the taste by which his practice of the method is to be appreciated.

JOHN P. WHITE

A CENTURY OF SOCIAL CATHOLICISM, 1820-1920, by Alec R. Vidler; S.P.C.K.; 25s.

Dr Vidler's new book is an expansion of his 1960 Scott-Holland lectures and provides an admirable synoptic view of the main trends of nineteenth century social Catholicism, the main attention being necessarily focused on France, with supplementary chapters on Germany, Belgium and Italy. Writing with charac-