

In one sense, however, this is a defect resulting from those qualities which make Dr Baldick's book what it is: the very wealth of one's material can, on occasions, prove a liability owing to the difficulty of getting it into perspective and of depicting the fundamental unity underlying the intricate lines of the character-pattern which emerges.

It is, therefore, clear that such criticism as can be voiced is subordinate to one fact: Dr Baldick, by his presentation of hitherto unavailable material and by the conscientiousness with which he sketches the different facets of Huysmans' complex personality, has put every student of the subject in his debt—and that is, after all, the ultimate test of excellence for a book of this type.

KATHLEEN O'FLAHERTY

UP THE GREEN RIVER. By Thomas Gilby. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 15s.)

NO TRUE LIFE. By Miriam Blanco-Fombona. (Lincolns-Praeger; 12s. 6d.)

MASTER'S HOUSE. By Barbara Collard. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 12s. 6d.)

For his first novel, Father Thomas Gilby has chosen to write an 'honest-to-goodness' adventure story. That does not mean that it lacks that 'human' or psychological interest which seems so vitally necessary to contemporary themes in fiction. In fact, this book has the fullest possible combination of events with the insight into human character which is not merely expository or explanatory but understanding. Richard French, a priestly young dreamer, leads a group of people in the mid-nineteenth century from his industrial parish in the Midlands to a land of promise in South America. This is the history of their fortunes, caught between the schemings of two rival States, charmed and yet bewildered by their new-found situation, human, political and geographical. Battles at sea, attacks by night, intrigues in high circles—how expertly Father Gilby seems to move from the one to the other! It is an *expertise* which is only rivalled by the way in which in clear bold lines he draws the character of Richard French, bewitched by the intriguing Maria Aguilar; the lovable practical Peregrine Tempest, whose spirituality will not be clogged by an alien piety; the suave, subtle, yet sincere court chaplain; the evangelical sea captain; the one-eyed belligerent lay brother. But it is pointless to go on, unless to suggest the enjoyment that lies in store for those who are not discouraged from reading by the length of the book or by the feeling that the reviewer has hinted at something *demodé*. This is not a great novel. I do not think the author ever dreamt of it as such. But for several hours of thoroughly enjoyable reading, slightly remote from reality and yet sufficiently informed by it, this is first-rate.

The problem of the immigrant (or the emigrant—depending on which way you look at it) has also been a chief concern of Miriam Blanco-Fombona. But this is more pressing. The author is concerned with the problems and the difficulties that face a young Irish girl coming to England, divorced from her native atmosphere of good Catholic practice and faith, face to face for the first time with her own personal troubles, doubts and temptations. Kathy Donnelly turns to her childhood friend and counsellor Father Peter Hughes, who is a priest engaged on the 'Scottish Mission'. As the blurb coyly—but somewhat misleadingly—informs us, 'the inevitable happens'. So far as the theme is a pressing one, dealing with a real problem, this is a welcome book. But the problem seems to be too big for the author. The problem is everything. The characters are no more than types, speaking a phoney language, producing stock reactions and remarks. And the ending—which gives a peculiarly literal meaning to the familiar *deus ex machina*—appears to be an all-too-obvious method of getting out of a situation which has grown too unwieldy to be handled. Much as the sincerity and the preoccupation of the author are unquestionable, the inadequacy of the treatment is only to be equalled by the general shoddiness of the book's production.

*Gaster's House* is Barbara Collard's third novel. This is a truly remarkable book. The theme is not even remotely Catholic (though Miss Collard is a convert from Communism). But, so far as one could ever approach to a 'Catholic novel', this is one. No one would be more ready than the present reviewer to agree that that is the most dubious of compliments. But this is a novel written with the insight, the sensitivity, the delicacy and the style of an author who might, some day, produce a really great work. It is the story of a woman who returns to her old home to nurse her neurotic alcoholic brother. His sole hope appears to be a strange, mystic young man whom he has befriended. She falls in love with this friend. How easy it would have been for Miss Collard to create an *affaire*, to indulge in endless introspective analysing, to waver towards the most delicate and subtle kind of pornography. Instead she has dealt with human beings, impressively sparing with her words, revealingly human with her characters. I noticed that one reviewer seemed disappointed at what he obviously thought her *bourgeois* ending. But therein, indeed, lies the final tribute to the author's sensitive grasp of that truth and that reality that underlies the life which it is the novelist's duty to portray. Barbara Collard's work has come along in a rare progression of excellence. We await her next book with eagerness.

DAVID BALLARD-THOMAS