

tion, to censure the orientation. This is where Raffalovich's book is so instructive: in classical form, it tries to justify the personality while, at the same time, it decries the expression, and thus shows up the tensions implicit in the would-be liberal, would-be charitable stance of orthodox Christianity. The defective logic of his argument, as evinced in his choice of analogies, is significant; it belies, of course, the assurance of his position, it reveals a mind which has looked back.

Questioning Critics: Hardy and Williams

Bernard Sharratt

Literary criticism seems to be in an odd cul-de-sac at present. Two recent works by widely-esteemed critics can serve as pointers to a persistent paradox. In reviewing together the latest offerings of Barbara Hardy and Raymond Williams I don't intend to do 'justice' to each volume individually, but to suggest, by their juxtaposition, a curious state of affairs: the simultaneous importance and irrelevance of 'literature'—its importance within an educational apparatus and as the focus of a political project, and yet a concomitant sense that neither critic, or approach, has much to say about why anyone might actually continue reading poems and novels anyway. As a link, or diversion, I also glance at an aspect of Walter Benjamin's work still largely unappreciated—his criticism of Brecht's poems.¹

Barbara Hardy entitles her book *The Advantage of Lyric: Essays on Feeling in Poetry*. Almost every word here invites comment, but the most provocative is "advantage". The 'advantage of lyric in itself is its concentrated and patterned expression of feeling. This advantage is negatively definable: the lyric does not provide an explanation, judgment or narrative; what it does provide is feeling, alone and without histories or characters.' (p.1). The absence of history and explanation is frequently noted, and approved; an interesting example is the quoting (p.5) of Quiller-Couch's cut-down version of Emily Bronte's long poem *Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle*: in Q's version 'virtually all we are left with is the

¹ I refer to B. Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric*, The Athlone Press, 1977, pp. 142, £5.50. R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 218 £3.50. W. Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, New Left Books, 1973, which includes 'From the Brecht Commentary' and 'Commentaries on Poems by Brecht'. The general argument of this article might be taken further and modified by considering also Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology*, NLB, 1976, and Gabriel Josipovici's *The Lessons of Modernism*, Macmillan, 1977.

intense lyrical evocation of Hope' and this turns a narrative of tyranny and physical imprisonment into a lyric of 'spirit tormented by flesh' (p.6). Specific response becomes transmuted into metaphysical universality. An alternative title for the poem is *The Prisoner. A Fragment*. As a fragment, it tempts us tantalisingly, like tourists contemplating a name scratched on an ancient dungeon wall: we respond to the imagined personal agony and forget the complex historical determinants of any specific imprisonment. As in the lyrics of the trench-poets, a whole war may be received, inadequately, in the form of private suffering. But Hardy apparently sees only the advantage not the disadvantages of this reducing perspective.

The structure of her book enacts a similar reduction. Each chapter focuses on a particular poet, ranging from Donne to Plath, and though occasionally a gesture is made towards biography or history, these poets are presented throughout as collections of poems, words on pages, largely without 'histories or characters'. The focus is on the poems 'themselves' ('lyric in itself') but it is then an unstable and oscillating focus. Some individual poems receive detailed explication, others are glanced at, others merely pointed at in passing. This raises problems for the reader: one never knows quite whether the phrase 'in another poem' presages a two-line précis, a casual comparison of a specific aspect, a page-length exegesis, or a Pevsnerian *bon mot*; so reading Hardy becomes a jittery business, one's finger constantly poised over the index to the relevant Collected Poems. But to what purpose? Each chapter does have a kind of thesis—that Auden's poetry is reticently revealing, that Plath's offers us 'enlargement' rather than 'derangement'—but then what is it we are learning? A particular poem may enact a reticent emotion, and a number of poems written by Auden may do so; but other poems written by other poets may also do so, and each does so in its own way. In writing a chapter on 'The Reticence of W.H. Auden' or on 'Clough's Self-Consciousness', is Hardy offering us covert character-psychology, after all; but wouldn't that invite consideration of other factors than the words on the page (e.g. the English upper-class code of emotional reticence? inter-war reticence about specifically homosexual affection? etc.)? This grouping of poems under the aegis of single authors and the uneven distribution of precision, the shifting proportion of commentary to text, point beyond Hardy's own book to more general problems.

At one point Hardy remarks (p. 63): 'I need not labour the local dramatisations of feeling' in some lines of Hopkins. Too true. For most of the readers she can expect will have already learned to practise the kind of practical criticism and close reading she provides; we are all inheritors of the Richard-Eliot-Empson-Leavis approach. And, despite some fine demonstrations of Hardy's skill

in this familiar mode, there is a constant sense of either over-elaboration or under-analysis: if one line of quotation generates ten lines of exploration and unpacking, we can feel bombarded with the unnecessary; but if a ten-line poem is pinned down in a critical phrase, we feel free to dissent from the too-swift judgment. The problem lies not so much in an individual imbalance of apportionment but in a general inheritance and transmutation. To establish an approach, or way of reading, is an achievement, a paradigm shift that necessitates a full account of the crucial experiment (one thinks of Leavis's 'Notes in the Analysis of Poetry'), but then the 'ordinary' practitioner can seem a mere repetition of the master, a marginal and even superfluous voice. Moreover, if the origins of 'close reading' lie in the face-to-face teaching-situation ("this is so, isn't it?") its transmutation into the monologue of print is radically disabling: at the point of dissent or query, further persuasion is unforthcoming, the critic is silent where we seek to test him, garrulous where we already agree. And since performance (of the tone, the rhythm, the crucial emphasis) is a part of critical persuasion, the printed text is a clumsy medium for the gesture of conversion: either we read the poem like *that* already or we remain unsure that we have heard the critic's variant reading as it's intended.

This problem looms largest in basic disagreements. If the (second) advantage of the lyric is that 'it creates and discovers feeling under the guise of affirming it, and does not have to discuss, analyse, explain or imitate it' (p.2), the critic in discussing, analysing and explaining that feeling cannot convince us of its 'value' unless he can also create that feeling in our reading of the poem. But that way eloquence lies. And in disagreeing with critical colleagues Hardy is sometimes reduced to an indignant eloquence: 'I would like to disagree with this in the strongest possible terms and insist that Clough's poetry is strongly sensuous both in music and in visual imagery'—thus begins an eight-page attempted demolition of Walter Houghton's contrary opinion. But the insistence is mainly assertion: 'Clough never writes coldly, dryly or cynically' (p.45). Never? But what if I read him dryly or cynically; isn't coldness a matter, in part, of spoken tone? One can analyse verbal complexity or demonstrate technical virtuosity, but can the printed word enforce a particular performance of 'feeling'? If it could, the poet would not require his commentator,

But why does he require that commentator anyway? More to the point, why do we require either poet or commentator? Hardy's disagreement with Houghton is instructive. It is a tactic of professionalism, or twitch of scholarship, like some of the footnotes: 'She is also Grania, as her Adonis is Dermid. Yeats may even be echoing or remembering Samuel Ferguson's poem 'The Death of Dermid', *Lays of the Western Gael*, 1865 ...' (p.79 n).

The essay on Clough was first published in (*The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, the chapter on Yeats in *Modernist Studies*, volume 1, No 2, 1974. The 'Acknowledgements' shows that the whole book has been previously published, each chapter as a contribution to a periodical or symposium. Presumably the book itself will find a niche somewhere in the same libraries that house those periodicals and symposia, and hundreds like them, and thousands of books like this one. Hardy herself quotes what she calls 'an affectionate conceit' from Auden's *Homage to Clio*:

I dare not ask if you bless the poets
For you do not look as if you ever read them
Nor can I see a reason why you should.

The tone of course is crucial. But why should *we*? What is the 'advantage of lyric' and over what? That "should" rather uneasily takes on a familiar echo: "You should read Barbara Hardy's analysis of Auden's reticence; you'll find it in *The Review* 11/12, 1964." It's the tone of the don to the conscientious student of literature, writing his essay on Auden's middle period. That, perhaps, is the major transmutation of our literary inheritance—and a set of essays on individual poets ("Next week we're doing Z"), published with a title that suggests a genre ("I'm taking the Lyric course this term"), under the imprint of the University of London Athlone Press at £5.50 for 140 pages, slots neatly into it. To read a poem with one's index finger pinioned elsewhere in the volume, ready to flick to another poem, to compare and contrast, is a curious but characteristic activity of the critic. But even if we focus on the individual poem, we may well respond to its 'concentrated and patterned expression of feeling'—only to find ourselves expressing our feeling for its concentrated pattern: which is not the same thing at all. The subtlest traps and temptations lurk here. For in taking the lyric as the quintessential literary form (apparent in the endeavour to read novels and plays as dramatic poems), the post-Eliot critics may have helped to create the conditions for the apparent irrelevance of poetry for most of us today. We learned to read literary works as 'objective correlatives' of feelings, but those feelings were present to us only in the work, a 'new *art* emotion' (Eliot's phrase in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*); the work thereby became an objective correlative—of itself. From the position that 'It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting', it was dangerously easy to move to the notion that reading a poem (still more, the 'reading' of a poem) need not be 'provoked by particular events' in our own lives or have any specific relation to them; the feelings we were invited to discover 'in poetry' (cf. 'Essays on Feeling in Poetry') were to be divorced from our *own* 'histories or characters'—but that meant that reading poetry could be only a (higher?) form of leisure amusement or an academic ex-

ercise. We could then invite and *expect* students to read love-poems, war-poems or nature-poems not for what they might (want to) discover about love, war, or nature, nor for what they might (want to) discover about Donne, Owen, Edward Thomas or even themselves as lovers or fighters, but for what they might (be obliged to) say about 'Thinking and Feeling in the Songs and Sonnets of John Donne' (cf. chap. 2) or 'Passion and Contemplation in Yeats's Love Poetry' (cf. chap 5). But then, of course, they might be better advised to read the critics who had written about such curious topics (if they—or the library—could afford the relevant books). And if the poems themselves happened to provoke a desire to make love, make war, or go for a walk, that had nothing to do with responding appropriately to the 'art emotion' *in* the poem—which was their proper concern. And it could always be intimated to anyone else (a historian, an engineer, a housewife, a computer programmer) who ventured to respond to a poem that, really, 'poems' weren't *their* proper concern either. A curious circle had closed, with only the critic on the inside. Barbara Hardy's book is very much the work of an insider; in its intermittent struggles to escape its own origins it mainly demonstrates the tenacity of their hold. .

The deadening grip can be broken, at some cost. In his *Commentaries on Poems by Brecht*, Walter Benjamin wrote:

It is a known fact that a commentary is something different from a carefully weighed appreciation apportioning light and shade. The commentary proceeds from the classic nature of its text and hence, as it were, from a prejudgement.... The difficulty to be surmounted here consists in reading lyric poetry today at all ... corresponding exactly to ... the difficulty of writing lyric poetry today.... It is the commentary's purpose to pinpoint the political contents of passages chosen precisely because they are purely lyrical.

And in speaking of Brecht's poems as 'attempts to make gestures quotable', those gestures evincing 'not what a man is convinced of ... but what his convictions make of him', Benjamin notes:

These words, like gestures, must be practised, which is to say first noticed and later understood. They have their pedagogical effect first, their political effect second and their poetic effect last of all. The purpose of the commentary ... is to advance the pedagogical effect as much as possible and to retard the poetic one.

What 'pedagogical' means here might be indicated by one sentence: 'The *Handbook for City Dwellers* provides object lessons in underground activity and emigration.' And Benjamin rightly pinpoints the precise historical-biographical moment for these lessons: 'For the intelligent Communist, the final five years of his political work in the Weimar Republic signified a crypto-emigra-

tion. Brecht experienced these years as such. This may have provided the immediate occasion for the writing of this cycle of poems. Crypto-emigration was a preliminary form of actual emigration; it was also a preliminary form of underground political activity.'

But in moving from objective correlatives to object lessons, from vicarious feelings to quotable gestures, from the exclusion of historical explanations to the analysis of historical possibilities, the critic again faces traps and temptations—those of an easy equation between political commitment and literary quality or dogmatic demands for specific literary practices and options. Stemming from those dilemmas there has been a long debate about the politics of literary criticism and specifically about the relationship between 'marxism' and 'literary criticism'. In England, the work of Raymond Williams has been one local focus for that debate.

Raymond Williams's new book is boldly, simply and ambitiously entitled *Marxism and Literature*. The title already indicates a problem. Consider those echoed titles of Williams's earlier books, *Reading and Criticism*, *Culture and Society*, *The Country and the City*; the 'and' in these phrases suggests a tension but also an overlap, a completion by interpenetration or mutual supplementation, a gesture towards possible wholeness. The other strain in Williams's titles suggests a movement, a process, a probable incompleteness: (*Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, *The Long Revolution*. But the new title seems merely an inert juxtaposition, a rather wary bringing together of two terms that operate in different lexical worlds (not even a provocative gesture like *Modern Tragedy* or *Keywords*, more like the statement of a problem, as in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*). The book is actually one in a series of 'Marxism and —' titles, but—the thought arises—might it not equally be one in a series of '—ism and Literature' titles (Buddhism and Literature, Catholicism and Literature, Fascism and Literature, etc)? Characteristically, Williams anticipates the thought:

Even twenty years ago, and especially in the English-speaking countries, it would have been possible to assume, on the one hand, that Marxism is a settled body of theory or doctrine, and, on the other hand, that Literature is a settled body of work, or kinds of work, with known general qualities and properties. A book of this kind might then reasonably have explored problems of the relations between them or, assuming a certain relationship, passed quickly to specific applications.

The situation is now very different.

But then, equally characteristically, Williams offers himself as the third term, linking the other two; he traces his own 'relation to Marxism and to literature, which, between them, in practice as much as in theory, have preoccupied most of my working life.' The reading eye hesitates, and goes back. Williams's commitment

to 'Socialism' has been an open secret, but that is not the same as a preoccupation with Marxism (at least in England, over a long period). and Williams's own relations with Marxism as a body of theory have only fairly recently been a matter of public explicitness. One's hesitation persists as one reads: Williams speaks of his work over thirty-five years as 'in direct if often unrecorded contact, throughout, with Marxist ideas and arguments' and of his present position as 'a new and conscious relation with Marxism', his present theory as 'in my view, a Marxist theory'. Insofar as Williams's work over the years has represented, for many followers, a paradigm shift, supplanting Leavis, he is right to suggest, modestly, that his 'individual history may be of some significance in relation to the development of Marxism and of thinking about Marxism in Britain'; the question then raised by these more explicit declarations might be whether the new book signals an epistemological break in Williams's own thinking. But to speak of an 'epistemological break' may be to speak as the kind of 'Marxist' Williams now sees himself as having once been, in 1939-41: 'it can mean that a style of thought and certain defining propositions are picked up and applied, in good faith, as part of a political commitment, without necessarily having much independent substance.' (cf. pp.1 - 2)

These apparently preliminary remarks go, in one sense, to the heart of the book. For its main target is the practice of taking terms of analysis for terms of substance. One formulation can stand for many: 'the analytical categories, as so often in idealist thought, have, almost unnoticed, become substantive descriptions, which then take habitual priority over the whole social process to which, as analytical categories, they are attempting to speak' (p. 80). It is presumably not an accident, but a tactic, that Williams shows very particularly, in chapter 2, how linguistics in its development from classical studies through nineteenth century comparative philology to Saussure and beyond, has adopted a notion of language as 'a fixed, objective, and in these senses "given" system, which had theoretical and practical priority over what were described as "utterances" (later as "performance")'. Thus the living speech of human beings in their specific social relationships in the world was theoretically reduced to instances and examples of a system which lay beyond them' (p. 27). Variations of this reversal are traced: within the study of language itself, the 'referential' and the 'emotive', the 'denotative'/'connotative', 'ordinary language'/'literary language' distinctions came to act not as categories of analysis but as names for demarcated *areas* of language; in marxist theory, 'base' and 'superstructure' came to indicate rigidly separated entities (whatever their dialectical relationships thereafter); in literary criticism, 'genre' assumed almost an independent existence, 'prior' to individual works. Williams's tactic against these hypostasised usages is to track their histories, recover their com-

plex pedigrees, and in these frequent analyses of word-traces we hear most clearly the echoes and accents of his earlier work—*Culture and Society*, and *Keywords*. Interwoven with this strand are other echoes and repetitions of other strands from earlier work: ‘dominant, residual and emergent’ and ‘structures of feeling’ are now titles of individual chapters, no longer phrases that play through other analyses but now the objects of analysis and quasi-definition themselves. Most of this new book therefore induces a distinct sense of *déjà vu* for anyone who has followed Williams’s previous work; what we seem to be offered is a shuffling of familiar pieces, an ordering of parts into a fairly predictable pattern. That pattern has its interests, of course; it becomes an intriguing question as to which theme or emphasis will link next, as ‘Base and Superstructure’ leads to ‘Determination’, then to ‘Productive Forces’, ‘Reflection and Mediation’, ‘Typification and Homology’, ‘Hegemony’ etc. And one notes, with the pleasure of recognition, where those remembered comments on Lukacs or Goldmann or Gramsci find their new place. In one sense, therefore, the new book offers a summary and summation of most of Williams’s already published work—and as such is both too complex to further summarise here and, probably, too familiar to require it.

But then the question arises as to how one receives, and judges this summation. One approach to an answer lies in the significance of the many excursions into the history of key-words and of debates. What purpose do they serve in the text itself? One might see them as variations on a Cartesian circle: Williams himself speaks of a ‘radical doubt’ ‘when the most basic concepts—the concepts, as it is said, from which we begin—are suddenly seen to be not concepts but problems, not analytical problems either but historical movements that are still unresolved’ (p. 11). But how can one begin to speak when the only terms available are themselves the problem? At times this can seem like a variant of an older idealist epistemology. Or one might see Williams as practising here his own form of Whiggery: he presents an interpretation of others’ positions so that they culminate, inescapably, in his own; thus, after labelling his own position ‘cultural materialism’, he can say of Marx’s achievement: ‘the stress on material history . . . was in one special way compromised. Instead of making cultural history material, which was the next radical move, it was made dependent, secondary, superstructural’ (p. 19); others’ positions become, similarly, ‘not material enough’ compared with Williams’s own ‘materialist’ stance. But in either of these cases, the mini-histories of terms and positions would be merely sleight-of-hand, a tactic or twitch of scholarship: Williams’s own eventual formulations and theories would in any case have to stand, finally, on their own merits, whatever the difficulty of a starting-point or their relation to other positions.

But a more positive way of understanding these backward glances is to turn this last comment on its head and in so doing to grasp the word-histories as exemplifying the central and, to some extent, new positive thesis of the book. Against the structuralist-linguistics emphasis, Williams offers Volosinov and Vygotsky. The basic notion here is that of the “multi-accentual” character of all language in practical use; since we always use language within a social, interactional situation, language is always a matter of differential emphasis, not merely in, say, pronunciation but, crucially, in meaning. The relation between ‘form’ and ‘meaning’ within the ‘sign’ is not fixed (as notions of system or code tend to make it) but flexible, within an active social relationship between living people. We each, if you like, bend the language we speak our own way. And this is precisely what we see Williams himself doing; his interlocutors are previous theorists; he takes their terms and bends them. The typography is the material index of this process: a particular term may appear as, say, ‘material’, *material* or, simply, material (without either inverted commas or italics); with the first it operates as someone else’s usage; italicised, it registers Williams’s modified emphasis, and it then takes its unremarked place as meaning something new. It’s an often successful device: we do find ourselves moving –as we read–across a range of meanings, beginning to read with Williams’s own accentuation.

But, oddly, we can then see how this tactic unites the ploys of both idealist epistemology and Whiggish historiography. The first parallel is with Aristotle. In surveying the theories of his predecessors concerning a topic, Aristotle characteristically offers himself as the synthesis and does so by proposing a terminology; necessarily, that terminology is drawn either from those predecessors or, by metaphor, from other usages. Thus, he can ‘solve’ the problem of the One and the Many and Parmenides’s paradox of becoming and being, by speaking of ‘potency’ and ‘act’; but do these terms solve or merely dissolve the problem? Since, however, they are the ‘concepts from which we begin’ we cannot now think (metaphysically) beyond or without them. But Aristotle’s initiating privilege cannot be repeated. Hegel perhaps tried, in his own Whiggish idealist blend of historiographical epistemology, to begin anew. But whereas Aristotle’s syntheses remained inescapable common sense until Heidegger, Hegel’s system seemed radically ambiguous even to his immediate disciples. The split into Left and Right Young Hegelians was crucially a matter of political interpretation of a densely ambivalent style of writing.

Consider now the case of Williams. He writes, for example: ‘A Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless’ (p. 83). He then surveys both Marx’s various German terms and a range of English uses—as ‘determination’ of a calculation, a course of study, a lease, as setting bounds or limits, as ex-

ternal determinism, as determined laws. The section concludes: 'This is where the full concept of determination is crucial. For in practice determination is never only the setting of limits; it is also the exertion of pressures. As it happens, this is also a sense of "determine" in English: to determine or be determined to do something is an act of will or purpose' (p. 87). This allows him then to achieve the required synthesis: 'Determination of this whole kind—a complex and interrelated process of limits and pressures—is in the whole social process itself and nowhere else: not in an abstracted "mode of production" nor in an abstracted "psychology".' But then this 'full concept' leaves *all* the political options open, in practice—the term 'determination' can receive equally the accentuation of a Stalin, a Sorel or a Situationist.

That, Williams might say, is precisely what he intends. It is a constant emphasis of the book that 'situations, relationships and responses' are always 'varying and *in principle* variable' (p. 198, his emphasis). Allied to this formulation is another, again italicised by Williams: 'no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention' (p. 125, whole passage emphatic). But if we then ask what *is* 'in reality' excluded in a particular case, the theoretical response can only be 'It is an open question—that is to say, a set of specific historical questions' (p. 131). This emphasis, against others, may be salutary—but then all historical (and philosophical?) questions become 'open questions' as all political options become 'open options'. When Williams says, of his discussions of 'commitment', that 'these qualifications are not meant to weaken the original claim, but simply to clarify it', we can sense the unease; but when he goes on to say that 'Alignment in this sense is no more than a recognition of specific men in specific (and in Marxist terms class) relations to specific situations and experiences' (p. 199), the parenthesis is hardly a clarification of a formulation which has weakened a polemical proposition into a toothless tautology. And it is then noticeable that "class" is the one term that Williams nowhere in this book seeks to examine or define afresh—or dissolve. A Marxism without a specifiable historical method and without a specifiable political practice, but which still speaks in a 'class' accent, may not cease to be entitled 'Marxist', but it may then be only a matter of terminology, a category of analysis not a matter of substance, whether we call that position "Marxist" or not.

Whether we call a particular piece of writing "literature" or not may also be an open question; it has certainly had a historically variable answer, as Williams shows (Chap. 3). The emphasis of his final chapter, 'Creative Practice', is—refreshingly—on the creative character of *all* writing, as 'always in some sense self-composi-

tion and social composition' (p. 211). But if we ask why we might *read* what is now more narrowly known as 'literature', Williams again appears synthetically evasive. He writes: 'Works of art, by their substantial and general character, are often especially important as sources of this complex evidence'—for a 'cultural analysis' of the 'hegemonic in its active and formative but also its transformational processes' (pp. 113-114). On the same page he also writes: 'The finite but significant openness of many works of art, as signifying forms making possible but also requiring persistent and variable signifying responses, is then especially relevant'. The second formulation *might* lead to an articulation of why reading literature might be not only a matter of 'evidence'—as, say, listening to the Archduke Trio is not only a matter of hearing evidence about the declining role of Archdukes in the Hapsburg Empire. But Williams has little to say in this direction. He is right to protest that 'it is still difficult . . . to prevent any attempt at literary theory from being turned almost *a priori*, into critical theory, as if the only major questions about literary production were variations on the question "how do we judge?"' (p. 146), and right to remark that 'genre-classification . . . can indeed be left to academic and formalist studies' (p. 185). But to leave literature as either 'evidence', in however complex a form, or as an object for genre-classification, is perhaps still to leave open the most difficult question of all in this area: why we 'should' read, let alone bless, the poets in the first place.

In *Marxism and Literature* Williams has perhaps tried to achieve a magisterial position and tone, a bending of a massively complex debate towards a resolution that transcends polemical standpoints. For his own 'struggle at the roots of the mind', here as elsewhere, he deserves and earns much more than respect. But the resolution he offers may be only a matter of sustained resolve, his solutions only verging on the brink of dissolution, his synthesis only a matter, finally, of proposing 'terms of analysis as terms of substance' (p. 129). But, to adapt another formulation, 'this specific solution is never mere flux. It is a structured formation which, because it is at the very edge of semantic availability, has many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations—new semantic figures—are discovered in material practice.' (p. 134).

Whereas Barbara Hardy's work seems representative, then, of a critical practice which has become increasingly marooned in a self-feeding academic enclave, Williams's seems yet another variation on the appropriation of literary works as part of a complex political project, which neither elucidates the attractions of literature nor resolves political problems. It seems doubly curious that, in both these cases, 'literature' should be the focus of so much investment of intellectual, educational and political energy, and yet seem, in the process, to have strangely evaporated. Both these

books will, of course and rightly, find their readerships. But Auden's address to Clio seems, still, addressed to all critics and readers of 'literature':

I dare not ask if you bless the poets
For you do not look as if you ever read them
Nor can I see a reason why you should.

Against Natural Theology

Alistair Grimes

I want to take up the challenge made by Brian Davies in a recent article, in which he argues that natural theology remains unscathed at the hands of contemporary theological criticism.¹ I shall try and show that his optimism is largely unfounded, firstly, by showing the confusions in his own arguments, and then by indicating some grounds for a more widespread dissatisfaction with the whole enterprise of natural theology.

For both Davies and myself, the natural theologian is one who holds that the proposition 'God exists' is a respectable assertion that can be rationally sustained without recourse to a priori acceptance of God's existence, or any kind of special revelation.² As Davies notes, such an approach contrasts strongly with Liberal Protestantism, and in particular Barth and Tillich, who insist that there is no *justification* or *foundation* for Christianity in the sense understood by natural theology. Barth's own attitude is well expressed in his masterly summation of 'Church Dogmatics', "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the bible tells me so". Davies will have none (or very little) of this and spends some time attacking both Barth and Tillich. His first target is, however, Alasdair MacIntyre, or at least the Alasdair MacIntyre of 'The Logical Status of Religious Belief'.³ MacIntyre suggests that natural theology is incompatible (in the sense of trying to provide a proof) with the idea of freely accepting the love of God and that, paradoxically, the *success* of such arguments would be as destructive of religion as the

¹ 'Theology and Natural Theology', *New Blackfriars*, June 1977.

² *Ibid.* p. 256.

³ MacIntyre subsequently changed his mind (see 'Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?' in *Faith and the Philosophers* Ed. J. Hick).