

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*

articles. The fascination of these pieces is to see Marx, who has delineated a highly schematic and optimistic theory of bourgeois revolution closely followed by proletarian revolution in the Manifesto, faced with the realities of the German bourgeoisie's conflict with absolutism. At no other time—even including the years of the First International—was he so involved in day-to-day political struggle, yet even here we can see that his decisions and actions are informed by a continuing theoretical analysis. He was, however, mistaken in one chief premiss of his analysis: that the bourgeoisie would resolutely attack absolutism in alliance with the workers. In fact they were so afraid of their 'allies' that they allowed themselves to drift back to a compromise with reaction, setting the stage for the Bismarck era.

David Fernbach's Introductions to the two volumes are extremely useful: even where I disagree with his analysis I would stress that these essays provide a valuable 'checklist' of the topics on which Marx's validity must be assessed, and of the crucial questions—class theory, nationalism, imperialism and so on—which make the analysis of Marx's writings of abiding importance. One point where I disagree with him is his argument that Marx opted for the alliance with the bourgeoisie because his thought became 'scientific' in 1845. He contrasts this post-1845 thinking with Marx's notion in the 1843-44 writings of the proletariat as the only class capable, because of its 'radical chains', of achieving a radical German revolution. The difficulty is that the 'new attitude' to which Marx was driven by the disappointments of 1848-9 is substantially that of the 1844 'Introduction' to his Critique of Hegel, where he tells us that the bourgeoisie is in conflict with all the upper reaches of society 'while the proletariat is already beginning its struggle with the bourgeoisie. The middle class hardly dares to conceive the idea of emancipation from its own point of view before the development of social conditions, and the progress of political theory, show that this point of view is already antiquated, or at least disputable'. (Bottomore, T: B., Ed. and Trans., *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, London, 1963, p. 57). Fernbach quotes this very passage (Volume I, p. 36) but seems to miss its implications for his own interpretation: either Marx's 'science' is a position (and an erroneous one at that) which he takes up in 1845 and drops in late 1848, returning to a 'prescientific'

approach, or else the more schematic 1843-4 argument, the *Communist Manifesto's* optimism, and the gloomier picture after late 1848 are *all* stages in the development of Marx's scientific social analysis. There is also an error of historical detail in the Introduction to Volume I: it was the Barrot ministry, not the Cavaignac one, which expelled Marx from France in August 1849 (see p. 48). Among its many virtues this Introduction includes an excellent account of Marx's and Engels's failure to come to grips with nationalism in the 1848 revolutions, and the 'great nation chauvinism' (p. 51) which inspired their (at times frankly racist) writings on this topic. Fernbach also traces the development of Marx's reaction to the failure of the revolution, from the dramatic and catastrophist vision of the March 1850 Address to the more sober picture in the May-October 1850 *Revue* which sees revolution as depending upon the next great economic crisis.

Volume II starts with Marx's two studies of the French revolution of 1848. The first of these, *The Class Struggles in France*, consists of three articles written in the *NRZ Revue* for, respectively, January, February and March 1850, plus a fourth 'chapter' added by Engels when he published *CSF* as a separate work in 1895 (twelve years after Marx's death). This fourth chapter was made by joining together two sections, dealing with France, from the May-Oct. edition's general 'review' of continental politics. This is quite significant. Chapter 3 of *CSF* ends with optimistic predictions of an imminent renewal of the revolutionary struggle, based on the March 1850 elections where the social-democrats made huge gains. This was written at about the same time as the March 1850 Address (see Volume I) which spoke of 'permanent revolution' and an imminent struggle. 'Chapter 4' of *CSF* on the other hand takes a much more sober view, predicting stalemate between Bonaparte (then President under the 1848 Constitution) and the big bourgeoisie, the party of Order. This less optimistic chapter was written at the same time as, or rather was a part of, the May-October 1850 'review' in which the optimism of March is toned down. This explains an otherwise inexplicable gulf between the perspectives of the penultimate and final chapters of what people too often take as one homogeneous work.

Realising at this point that he needed greatly to deepen his theory of economics and particularly of economic

crisis, Marx in late 1850 resolved on the 'retreat to the study' which was to last until the mid-1860s, during which he produced the *Grundrisse* of 1857-8 and which culminated in *Capital*. He was not involved in politics during this period, but, as Fernbach rightly says, we may learn much from his vast journalistic output over these years, as, for example, the articles written in December 1851 and January 1852 which Weydemeyer published as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*—Marx's second, and classic, study of the failure of the 1848 revolution. Despite the interest of the journalism of the period (many examples of which are published in Volume II), Fernbach is justified in his shrewd observation that: 'Revolutionary political theory can only develop in response to the new problems and tasks raised by mass struggle, and this was completely lacking in Marx's England' (Vol. II, p. 19). Fernbach goes on to discuss the development of Marx's political thought between 1851 and 1864: while allowing that the thought did develop, and that it widened beyond its previous 'Europocentrism', yet he argues that Marx 'made several errors of judgment. He did not understand the peculiarities of the British social and political system. He did not understand the general character of European development after the defeat of the 1848 revolution. He exaggerated the negative role of tsarist Russia, and the positive role of federal America. More seriously, he did not develop a theory of imperialism' (p. 33).

The translations in both volumes (by different translators; see Vol. I, p. 4 and Vol II, p. 4) are extremely readable and almost always accurate. There are however some errors and omissions. Perhaps the most interesting omissions are two made by Samuel Moore who did the 1888 translation of the Communist manifesto which anthologies ever since, including Vol. I of the present collection, have faithfully reproduced. On p. 72, line 31 of that volume Moore's translation omits the sentence 'Sie hemmten die Produktion, 2statt sie zu

fördern' (*Marx Engels Werke*, Vol. IV, p. 467) which says of bourgeois production relations that at a certain stage 'They restricted production, rather than encouraged it', a not unimportant explicitation of Marx's theory of revolution. On p. 79, line 8, Moore's version omits the phrase 'die Anhäufung des Reichthums in den Händen von Privaten' (*MEW* IV, p. 473), which specifies as a condition for bourgeois dominance 'the amassing of wealth in the hands of private persons'. I have checked other reproductions of the Moore translation; the fault seems to be Moore's (and Engels's), but *somebody* should have thrown an eye over the 'canonical' translation in the intervening eighty-five years! Moreover, Moore's version, which tells us that man's consciousness 'changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence' (p. 85) is an excessively mechanistic rendering of 'mit den Lebensverhältnissen der Menschen . . . auch ihr Bewusstsein sich ändert' (*MEW*, IV, p. 480). Other omissions in the two volumes are relatively minor, except that page 128 of Volume II tells us that the economic upswing has been at work in France since 1850, whereas *MEW*, VII, p. 95 tells us that it has been at work since 1849 and especially since the start of 1850; in view of Marx's concern in these chapters with the effect of economic on political events, this is not a trivial omission. And finally, one howler: Cavaignac's attitude of resignation is described as 'antirepublican' (Volume II, p. 68), whereas the original in *MEW*, VII, has 'antik-republikanischer' (p. 40; my emphasis), which means 'old (i.e., ancient or classical) republican'. Even Marx's love of paradox could not have stretched to calling the Cavaignac of 1848 'antirepublican', so that the misreading should have been ruled out by an understanding of the argument. These criticisms, I repeat, are of the relatively few faults in two well-translated and readable volumes. They are well worth buying, and essential to the student of Marx's political thought.

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THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM, by David Coates. *Cambridge University Press*, 1975. 257 pp. £5 hardback, £2 paper.

This book must be unique amongst works on politics, since its author changed his opinion in the course of writing it. 'This study'—Mr Coates

writes in his introduction—'was begun in an attempt to assess, and hopefully to find, the Labour Party's road to socialism. In the event, and with great