

obfuscation, the fanaticism of the lunatic fringe and the humourless distractions of the pseudo-Poundian energumen—Dr Kenner goes for the ‘gists and piths’, illuminates the structure, and lures the reader on to do the rest of the thinking for himself: *ecco miracolo!* how lucid, how easy everything becomes!

Apophthegm: ‘If Mussolini was not altogether the seamless factive intelligence Pound imagined him to be, it was necessary, we may say, for Pound to invent him’. Epithet: ‘that random missile from the Idaho wilderness’. Cartesian angelism, the objective correlative, hylography, reification, and ‘depressurised lyrics of hyperaesthetic stasis’ are made equally enthralling.

A well-produced book; highly commended to the beginner, the baffled and the expert.

ALAN NEAME

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS. By Christopher Fry. (Oxford University Press; 6s.)

There is a popular conception about that Christopher Fry has two moods as a dramatist—a secular and religious mood. To accept this dichotomy is to misunderstand the nature of his art. For Fry, growth of vision means progress, reality. Yet although *Venus Observed* was written for the commercial stage and *A Sleep of Prisoners* for the Society of Religious Drama for presentation in churches, there is no fundamental difference between the plays: what difference there is lies in the plot, not the intention. For in both—as in all the Fry canon—the intention is through the wonder of words to reveal the wonder of the Word. Wake up in bed; reach for the lamp; turn on the light. Then look at your hand: for a moment view it objectively—as one can at such moments. In it you will see the wonder of the Word incarnate, a work of art far greater than *Hamlet*.

In *A Sleep of Prisoners* Fry attempts another variation on this theme. His soldiers—prisoners-of-war—talk endlessly: when they are awake they speak for themselves; when they are asleep in their dreams they speak as at heart they are, not as they believe themselves to be. By this means, Fry is able to relate the past to the present; to re-tell by such devices as sleep-walking-and-talking, the stories of Cain and Abel, David and Absalom, Abraham and Isaac. Murder is seen as both a Biblical and modern problem—the answer to which can only be found if men will grow in vision.

It will be seen that the play is not an easy one of which to provide a synopsis. In church the same problem faces the audience. It is simple to form a main impression and to understand how the biblical and modern time-sequences interlock, but again it is not always easy to follow the underlying and interlocking arguments. There is a break-down of

explicitness, since it may well be that in bringing drama back to the church Fry feared lest his work might be dogmatic and hence avoided anything which might savour of over-simplification. 'The Church knows all the answers' is an attitude which a dramatist (if he is to remain an artist) cannot adopt: the answers must be the corollaries of statements which are dramatic, not dogmatic. So it is that *A Sleep of Prisoners* is essentially an experiment in drama, an interim work: it is not so much a change of direction as a development, and like all Fry's plays, after the performance is over or the script has been closed, lines echo in the memory.

*Show me the ending great enough
To hold the passion of this beginning
And raise me to it*

are some such lines.

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

YORK. By John Rodgers. (Batsford; 8s. 6d.)

This is essentially a book for the visitor to York, whether he comes from south of the Trent, west of the Severn or from across the Atlantic; and a very delightful book it is. For York is not only a great English city: it is European. It is a provincial capital, but it has missed provincialism. It is also the one really fine specimen of a walled city in England, and in spite of its wealth of good architecture and its historic past, it has never consciously posed itself as a tourist centre. In fact, as Mr Rodgers points out, the danger, too often, in the past has been that its citizens might fail to realise in time how magnificent their city was. The nineteenth century saw a great deal of unintelligent demolition. The author writes with commendable gusto, as indeed he should, for he was educated at St Peter's famous school. There are times when, perhaps, his delight in York out-distances his sense of proportion. Micklegate is a very fine street, but it is hard to think of it as one of the most beautiful in Europe; and it is a pity that a number of small errors were not removed from the text before publication. These will, very properly, not bother the visitor, but they may make the native less appreciative than he might have been of Mr Rodger's vigorous book.

As might be expected, the photographs are excellent, and there is a useful map. Furthermore, and a not unimportant point, the book is of a size which is convenient for the tourist's pocket, in both senses. With some of Mr Rodger's opinions it is possible to argue, but there can be nothing but agreement with his condemnation of the tower of St Wilfrid's which affronts the eye and spoils so many views of the Minster. There is a lot to be said for St Wilfrid's Church, but nothing for its tower. Is it, one wonders, too late to celebrate the centenary of the restoration of the hierarchy by removing it?

T. CHARLES EDWARDS