

in her study of the sources of Ethiopian iconography. It was a misfortune that she had no time to study the Gondar area adequately or to visit the shrines on the islands of Lake Tana. Yet even if all this were admitted, Miss Playne has made a fresh and original and important contribution both to the history of painting and to the study of Christian iconography. It is to be hoped for the sake of both that she will be given the opportunity to complete her work in Ethiopia.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THOMAS HARDY: A critical biography. By Evelyn Hardy. (The Hogarth Press; 25s.)

An odd thing, possibly the oddest thing about nineteenth-century creative literature in Western Europe, is that from 1814, when Sir Walter Scott followed *The Lady of the Lake* with *Waverley*, to 1908, when the third part of *The Dynasts* was published, only two of the great English novelists have been poets as well.

The titan Goethe, looming in the background of the English mind, in 1809 followed *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, a novel which ploughed the furrows where the seeds of *The Waves* were sown, with the first part of *Faust*, and it is possible that this swing of the master from prose to verse may have influenced Scott in making a like change of medium. Victor Hugo, whose *Feuilles d'Automne* was published in the year of Goethe's death, must have been aware of this dichotomy in the works of the two greatest writers of his day, and it is not fantastic to suppose an impulse to foster a like ambidextrous gift stimulating the egoism of the precocious French boy. That George Meredith, who was at school in Germany about the time of Goethe's death, should have, earlier, begun to express himself in prose and verse is natural enough; but there is no such adventitious explanation of the two forms in which the genius of Thomas Hardy found its highly individual expression.

Hardy and Meredith have been called the demi-gods of the nineteenth-century novel: the twentieth century has been willing to give each of them an equal title as poet, naming them together because of this idiosyncrasy which separates them from Tennyson and Browning on one side and Dickens and Thackeray on the other in the gallery of literature.

The mystery of this likeness between two such markedly unlike writers has not been touched on by Miss Evelyn Hardy in her monograph. Meredith's name appears in her pages, sometimes as one among others at a London party and once as a rather condescending anonymous critic of the younger man's MS. novel. Later on, Miss Hardy, admitting that Hardy's country people do not come to life, adds

*in this he differs from Meredith who was far more successful with the gentry than he was with the humble people.*

The poet of *Modern Love* did not stimulate the author of *Jude the Obscure* to such fruitful recognition as was accorded to Swinburne, whose flaming rhetoric held torches in the darker chasms of Hardy's arraigned universe. Some of the most interesting pages of Miss Hardy's book trace this verbal harvest from *The Triumph of Time* and *Atalanta in Calydon*, presupposing her reader's familiarity with all the texts.

It is, indeed, page by page that Miss Hardy's book needs to be read and put by for future reference. As a life of the author the narrative too often looks back on itself in a tangential pursuit of detail and of other stories. Now and then a thread vanishes. We are not, for instance, told whether Swinburne ever answered the letter Hardy wrote to him in 1887 when sending him a copy of *The Woodlanders*, nor is it made clear if and why Macmillan finally turned down more than one of Hardy's early books. Other points baffle the reader's curiosity. Did Mr Charles Morgan actually visit Max Gate? Why is there no record of that memorable tea-party at which the young Hugh Walpole met 'the little nut-cracker faded man with his wistful smile'? These small irritations do not dim the increasing light cast on the Hardy texts by the careful and detailed accumulation of facts about his life, his antecedents and, above all, about the structure of the houses and the topography of the hamlets, towns and countryside wherein the novels and poems have grown. The book forms a detailed and descriptive guide to the end-papers, drawn for the Wessex edition of the complete works. It also contains a frank and analytic account of Hardy's first marriage annotated by excerpts from his poems in which the raptures of loss and the torment of estrangement are recorded, and from such passages in the works as no reader has ever mistaken for pure fiction.

Little by little as she compiles her cross-references from works to life the annotator comes to a belief that the poet Hardy was greater than the novelist, though, as she disconcertingly concludes, 'John Donne was the greater poet'.

A contrast—or comparison—between the works of Hardy and Meredith with the object of discovering whatever obscure likeness between them raised each of them to pre-eminence in both prose and verse has not entered into Miss Hardy's scheme. Some analytical critic might well find an investigation into the springs of genius so abundantly indicated in the varying works of these two writers a theme well worth a pursuit for which Miss Hardy's monograph might seem a starting post.

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