

THE EMPTY MIRROR, by Janwillem van de Wetering. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*, London, 1971. 145 pp. £2.

THE WAY OF ALL THE EARTH, by John S. Dunne. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1973. 240 pp. £2.50.

One immediate disadvantage of trying to say the unsayable is that the result is likely to be pretty unreadable. So far as I understand them, the message of these two books is similar: that, even if you succeed in 'climbing the mountain', all you end up with is insight into failure, an insight which, peculiarly enough, humanises one; but one of the books is content to point, while the other tries also to state.

Janwillem van de Wetering describes his experience of going to a Zen monastery in Japan, equipped with little more than a vague but dogged determination. After a longer stay than he originally reckoned on, one day he suddenly left, and came home. He shows, rather than tells, us how he learned (without perhaps even being aware that he had learned) that there is, anyway, nothing really to learn. The monks, most of them, were not 'good monks', and he himself settled down frankly to the task of surviving, giving up any attempt to learn how to 'meditate'. Nowhere is the Gita referred to, but the story of the book could well be summed up in the phrase 'action with complete detachment from the fruits of action'. The author did not, perhaps, learn anything very obviously 'spiritual', and he has enough humour to let us share the joke about his attempts to 'become a Buddhist'; but yet, he *has* learned something about being himself. In Professor Dunne's language, having 'passed over into a strange religion, culture and language, and several very diverse lives (from the rather wild novice to the grave and alarming Master), he discovers that it all leads him

back, not even to his own culture, but simply to his own life. In a thoroughly elusive way it is a beautiful book.

Dunne tries to theologise, or at least generalise, where van de Wetering just tells a story, and the result is inevitably much heavier. Some people, no doubt, have a taste for this kind of thing, and it is a bold attempt at a kind of theologising that we have not really learned how to do yet. The fact that one can 'pass over' to somebody else's religion and thereby enriched and strengthened in one's own faith is undoubtedly of profound theological significance, and it is to Dunne's credit that he has attempted to unpack this at all. And he has certainly managed to steer well clear of the usual sell-out to syncretism. But nevertheless there is something odd about writing a book about 'turning poetry into life' such a book could only be a book written to men's hearts. Maybe the best way to demonstrate that we can learn from each other's religions how to talk our own religious in the theological language better is by actually talking it better.

One of the hardest tasks for us is to learn how to abstain from asking (let alone trying to get answers to) the questions that cannot be asked. And this is an existential, not an academic, problem; one needs ladders to climb up, before one can throw them away, and Dunne's book may provide such a ladder for some people. But I suspect that van de Wetering remains much more approachable for most people.

SIMON TUGWELL, O.P.

THE OCCULT REVOLUTION. A Christian Meditation by Richard Woods. *Herder and Herder*, New York, 1971. 240 pp. \$6.50.

THE DEVIL, by Richard Woods. *The Thomas More Press*, Chicago, 1973. 172 pp. \$5.95.

Now that William Friedkin's film version of *The Exorcist* has come to Britain and is drawing many to the cinema to this this orgy of Satanic horror, it is perhaps the moment to mention briefly some books by the young American Dominican, Richard Woods.

Most British critics, much too sophisticated to be impressed by Satanism, have greeted the film with total rejection as a disgusting and calculated attempt to make millions out of millions of impressionable people. But the 'success' of the film remains an ineradicable fact that in some way or another has to be accommodated in the contemporary confused religious scene in the West, where, in the wake of Christianity's decline, all sorts of obscure

cults have mushroomed. Woods deals with this question and takes his cue from *The Exorcist*—more exactly, *The Exorcist* in book form—comparatively harmless between its black corners. We are then taken on a journey through a flood of literature to show that the Occult Revolution has really caught on in America. Woods himself is, of course, an orthodox Christian who has not fallen victim to the craze, but he has met enough of the phenomenon to insist on the reality of the devil. The reality of evil is not, however, so mighty and incontestable that even God is unable to stand in its way. That was certainly the conviction of the medieval church, and inasmuch as this is not recognised by the writers (

modern popular satanic literature, Woods refers them to the more solid studies in that subject.

So the devil may be real, but he is not to be sought in a spectacular display of satanic possessions. These are rare and happen only under the most extraordinary circumstances. The reality of evil is to be located in the ordinary, in the absolute alienation of the individual and in the demonic nature of totalitarian institutions. Evil is not an entity by itself but lives in the hearts of men, where it is directly subjected to the irresistible goodness of God in Jesus Christ.

But has Woods' demythologisation of evil not obscured the distinction between evil and Satan as the power of evil? Although man is indeed the subject of evil, he is not altogether

its initiator, and the sin in him is also experienced as the work of a stranger. Is this not the paradox by which people are so baffled and which they try to challenge and explore in their obsession with Satanism? This enigma needs perhaps to find expression in the myth of the stranger who takes possession as if he were working from an outside realm. There is a cosmic dimension to the war between good and evil, and to recognise this is perhaps the most effective answer to the modern concern with the objectivity of evil. Christian preaching needs a frank presentation of the myth of the descent into hell where the victorious Christ confronts Satan in a realm which is indeed quite beyond the ordinary life in this world.

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CULTURAL STUDIES 4. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. *University of Birmingham*. 60p.

This latest collection of working papers from the Birmingham Cultural Studies Centre reveals an interaction between theoretical generality and tightly-focused particular surveys which now seems characteristic of the Centre's pioneering work. On the one hand, we have rigorously analytic 'readings' of specific cultural texts and events—Walter Greenwood's drama, the political structure of *All's Well That Ends Well*, an ethnomethodological treatment of reactions to the public announcement of a fatality; on the other hand, a range of penetrative theoretical studies in the literature/society field.

The theoretical centrepiece is a collectively produced project which 'maps the field' of the literature/Society debate, briefly reviewing the various 'positions' (Lukács, Goldmann, Adorno, Marcuse, Sartre, Brecht, Benjamin, Barthes and the structuralists) from which the naive empiricism of orthodox English literary criticism can be placed. Two emphases emerge here as crucial. First, a developing (though critical) engagement with structuralism and semiotics, as methods of cultural analysis which can add some 'scientific' backbone to what began as the Centre's rather nebulously conceived, idealist and phenomenological approach to cultural meanings as expressive 'objectifications' of intersubjectivity. Second, coupled with this, a relatively new encounter with that tradition, passed from Benjamin and Brecht to Sartre and the Althusserians, which by grasping art and literature as social *practice* and *production* subverts the bourgeois myth

of 'creativity' and qualifies the neo-Hegelian Marxist critical tradition (Lukács, Goldmann) which still grasp the literary text essentially as an object. (It is a pity here that the important work of the French Althusserian critic Pierr Macheray, who has 'theorised' this approach most succinctly in recent years, receives only a passing footnote reference).

The particular theoretical studies then radiate out from this nub: most of them (with the exception of Colin Spark's fairly unoriginal piece on Lukács) reflect a shift away from the neo-Hegelian heritage. Thus Adrian Mellor's contribution on Goldmann is properly critical of its subject, astutely demonstrating the theoretical shifts in the meaning of 'dialectics' hidden beneath the deterioration of his later work; and Alf Louvre's excellent 'Notes on a Theory of Genre' is grounded firmly in a materialist aesthetics indebted to Brecht, Benjamin and Enzensberger. Andrew Tolson's 'Reading Literature as Culture', while less easy to place, similarly opposes a highly systematised analysis of the various levels of the act of reading to the empiricism or intuitionism of conventional approaches. It is good, also, to see that the Centre is continuing its practice of including in each batch of working studies an important 'document'—this time, a translation of part of an article by Helen Gallas, of the German Marxist journal *Alternative*, concerning Lukács's part in the League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers in the 1930s.

TERRY EAGLETON