

published before, is very much a by-product of the writing of *A Burnt-Out Case*, the role of the architect in the latter being played by a writer in this. There is the usual Greene fusillade on the conceptual presentation of religion and the perils of piety, but in fact the whole story turns on a distinction between 'faith' and 'belief' which exhibits as neat a piece of scholastic in-fighting as one could hope to witness. 'Your characters carry their ideas to extreme lengths', the observation made of M. Morin's literary art, has a relevance to the creation of M. Morin himself. 'Dream of a Strange Land' is a beautifully expert evocation of place and atmosphere, but it terminates in an irony too reminiscent of the slick finalities which punctuate so many of Mr Somerset Maugham's closing paragraphs.

By far the most successful story in the book is the last one, 'A Discovery in the Woods'. Here the irony, unlike the story which precedes it, really functions and forms an inseparable part of the meaning and emotional effect of the tale. Though it would spoil the story to relate its plot, it is not on surprise that it relies for its power. Rather it is on the quality of the imagination behind it, a quality which lifts this story at least, quite clear of the class of 'by-products', and establishes it, in its tact, insight, and effortless confidence with some of the best pieces of Mr Greene's work.

IAN GREGOR

THE DYER'S HAND AND OTHER ESSAYS, by W. H. Auden; Faber; 42s.

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, *Making, Knowing and Judging*, W. H. Auden declares, 'Because of his limited knowledge, a poet would generally be wise, when talking about poetry, to choose either some general subject upon which if his conclusions are true in a few cases, they must be true in most, or some detailed matter which only requires the intensive study of a few works. He may have something sensible to say about woods, even about leaves, but you should never trust him on trees.' It should be said at once that, in this fascinating book of essays and lectures, Mr Auden shows himself to be an expert on woods, leaves *and* trees. His approach to literary criticism seems to me to be the very best kind—wise without being esoteric, general without being superficial, and original without being eccentric. Mr Auden has an immense fund of out-of-the-way knowledge but he never shows off with this information or uses it to stun the reader into respect and submission. He is, one feels, always on one's own level and yet, at the same time, he has the ability to see more clearly and to express himself more pungently than one could oneself.

*The Dyer's Hand* deals with many subjects, from Italian opera to the animal poems of D. H. Lawrence, from Mr Auden's own experiences as a young poet to the fine humanist poems of Robert Frost; even the most fragmentary pieces here contain important insights and illuminations. Above all else, perhaps, Mr Auden is a generous-minded critic, quick to see and respond to the especial gifts

of other writers. He is also, in the best sense, a moralist, though such a subtle one that, until one has read a number of these essays, one does not realize how intimately, for Mr Auden, poetry and life are connected with one another.

Mr Auden sees the making of a poem as primarily a religious activity, and says, 'The impulse to create a work of art is felt when, in certain persons, the passive awe provoked by sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship or homage, and to be fit homage, this rite must be beautiful . . .'. Of so-called Christian art, Mr Auden has some fine and surprising things to say: 'The Incarnation, the coming of Christ in the form of a servant who cannot be recognized by the eye of flesh and blood, but only by the eye of faith, puts an end to all claims of the imagination to be the faculty which decides what is truly sacred and what is profane.' This observation is made in a short essay entitled *Postscript: Christianity and Art*. However, in *Making, Knowing and Judging*, Mr Auden goes more deeply into the relationship between man's aesthetic and religious sense. Adapting Coleridge's theory of the Primary and Secondary Imagination, he declares that the Primary Imagination is passive and concerned with Sacred and Profane Objects, while the Secondary is active and concerned with the Beautiful and Ugly. Poetry, then, for this poet can never be art for art's sake; it is something central to man's experience, a mode of apprehending which springs from the depths of his nature.

In all that he writes, Mr Auden shows himself to be a philosopher at heart. Though he makes absorbing remarks about the growth of a young poet or the particular merits of Marianne Moore and P. G. Wodehouse, he is chiefly concerned with the nature of man and his moral attitudes; this means that his conclusions on any given work of art are extraordinarily lucid and profound. One of the most important pieces in this book is undoubtedly *Balaam and His Ass*, in which Mr Auden discusses the significance of the master-servant relationship in literature, music and life. He is concerned here chiefly with discovering and demonstrating men's best and most human forms of relations with one another, relations in which neither side is a slave or a god, and in which neither wishes to use the other merely as an object of desire. These views lead Mr Auden to some startling, but surely true, conclusions. He presents the Tristan and Isolde passion in Wagner as primarily unreal because it was always looking forward to an eternal state of romance which no human being could sustain. Again, he sees the Fool in *Lear* as 'Lear's sense of reality which he rejects . . . Not . . . his conscience.' And in P. G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, Mr Auden discovers a perfect master-servant relationship since Wooster 'has . . . that rarest of virtues, humility, and so he is blessed: it is he and no other who has for his servant the godlike Jeeves.'

*The Dyer's Hand* is full of memorable comments and passages. I could cite many but perhaps one particular one about poetry will give some flavour and indication of Mr Auden's knowledge and wisdom. In his essay on Robert Frost, he makes an important distinction between what he calls Ariel and Prospero types of poetry; he says, 'Art arises out of our desire for both beauty and truth

and our knowledge that they are not identical. One might say that every poem shows some sign of a rivalry between Ariel and Prospero; in every good poem their relationship is more or less happy, but it is never without its tensions. The Grecian Urn states Ariel's position; Prospero's has been equally succinctly stated by Dr Johnson: *The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it.*

Alongside Mr Auden's warmth, enthusiasm, intellectual curiosity, originality, wit and scholarship, goes his passionate belief in the importance, power and value of poetry. The whole of *The Dyer's Hand* is alive with this belief, and it is wonderfully infectious. This is a book which will not only enliven the depressed moods of poets today, but also instruct readers of poetry in the intimate, though not always clearly evident, relationship between art and life.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

THE FREE SPIRIT, by C. B. Cox; Oxford University Press; 25s.

This book is, in the words of its sub-title, 'A Study of liberal humanism in the novels of George Eliot, Henry James, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and Angus Wilson'. Mr Cox is a critic of great intelligence and perception, but, though his book is well worth reading for the questions it raises, and for its incidental *aperçus*, it is unsatisfactory as a whole. At the risk of appearing unappreciative of the book's merits, I wish to devote most of the space at my disposal to explaining why I found it unsatisfactory, as it seems to illustrate very interestingly the kind of temptations to which the Christian literary critic is perhaps especially vulnerable.

All 'thematic' criticism of fiction is open to attack because it is concerned with artefacts, but selects, arranges and evaluates them within a non-aesthetic scheme—in this case the values and attitudes of liberal humanism. Of course, this objection is itself crudely oversimplified. Fiction is not 'pure form'; it has manifold and intricate relations with life, and the critic cannot ultimately dissociate his response to a novel from his own 'philosophy of life'. But it seems to me that the critic has a duty to discipline his own preconceptions as far as possible, and that he is less likely to err by submitting himself to the formal effects of a work of literature than by abstracting from it certain patterns of behaviour and evaluating them in the same way that he evaluates actual human behaviour.

Novels certainly contain 'ideas', and have a place in the history of ideas. But novels—at least those Mr Cox discusses—are not primarily vehicles of ideas, but of a total response to life, life as perceived by the novelist. Thus an ideological reading of James, Forster and the rest makes them all seem very similar, but a literary reading of them impresses one with the uniqueness of each.

Perhaps I can best illustrate my uneasiness about Mr Cox's approach by quoting from his last chapter: