

preposterous from beginning to end. We are swept back slap into fantasy of the kind that the English do superbly but have done too often. It is arguable that Ronald Neame and Alec Guinness have done this deliberately, so as to project the whole story through the obsessed painter's eye of Gulley Jimson, but all I can say is that if this is so, Joyce Cary's novel contrived to be twice as earthy and quite as fantastic with no loss of force. There is too much caricature, too much slapstick, too much general *bonhomie* in this film and the end-result, I regret to say, is disappointment. It is too *thin*, in spite of all the intelligence and care behind it. Gulley is a great painter—we accept this—and in pursuit of his much nobler goal he is no less ruthless than Joe Lampton. The fact that he had lost the game years before we meet him should only make the film more serious, but in fact nothing of the kind emerges. The moral crisis of Joe Lampton, Jack Clayton makes us feel, is important to us all, but Ronald Neame evades the issue as neatly as Gulley sails down the Thames in his house-boat—and as frivolously, I cannot help feeling, for Joyce Cary left him on his deathbed.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

## REVIEWS

THE ARTS, ARTISTS AND THINKERS. A Symposium edited by John M. Todd. (Longmans; 35s.)

There are twenty-three contributors to this symposium, writing on a variety of matters to do with art; and it is not easy to see the wood for the trees. The papers vary a good deal, in the points of view that they represent and in quality; but together they are a valuable witness to what contemporary Catholics in England are thinking about an important and complicated subject. The range of the book is impressive, though the arts of painting and music are not adequately discussed; and although certain writers on art get less attention than they deserve or than one might have expected in view of their influence; Mrs S. K. Langer is incomprehensibly overlooked by almost every contributor, and also, less surprisingly, Eric Gill. Some of the papers would have little interest apart from the rest; but some are valuable studies in themselves. Of the latter, three should at least be mentioned here: Mr J. Rykwert's very intelligent sketch of the inter-relations of art and society in the West since the Renaissance, Mr. J. Coulson's reflections ('The Retreat from Meaning') on the Cartesian denial of the

importance of poetry, and Fr Vincent Turner's searching critique of the idealist aesthetic of Croce and Collingwood; though, as to this last paper, I wonder whether much of it is not a flogging of dead horses, and also whether Fr Turner's incidental gibes at Maritain are just—but of this more later.

The papers are arranged to display in turn four approaches to art: the historian's, the working artist's, the critical spectator's, and the philosopher's. The only professedly theological paper—a delicate Eckhartian meditation on 'consciousness' by Dom Sebastian Moore—is counted as philosophy. Across these compartments run the themes and problems: art and society in the past and present; art and the Church; art and morality; art and aesthetic theory. The artists themselves tend to one or other of two positions. Some stress the 'absolute' character of the work of art—so the poet Mr Saunders Lewis: 'the truth and integrity . . . are in the poem, the thing made, which, once completed, stands independent of the poet'; and some of these then underline the moral dilemma that this absoluteness or independence raises for the Christian artist. Miss Antonia White stresses this difficulty with particular urgency. Others, on the other hand, less troubled by the moral problem, exalt the religious possibilities of art as a manifestation of the divine in man and nature; thus Mr Peter Watts speaks of his own art of carving stone into 'a sign that God is and that I am and that the world is'—where the repeated verb to be shows what, for him, stone is the appropriate symbol of. One notes that it is the sculptor, the dancer and the singer who affirm the sacred relevance of art most confidently; it is the novelist who most hesitates and doubts.

The 'critics' are more concerned with the social functions and relations of art than with examining artefacts as such. And here too both confidence and anxiety appear. Mr Lance Wright, for example, speaks hopefully of modern architecture and town-planning; and Mrs R. P. Barton about art and psychotherapy. Mr Robert Waller, by contrast, is passionately convinced of the vulgarization and degradation of art today through misuse of the mass-media of radio and television. His contribution is a very remarkable one; it is the only critical paper here that is thoroughly and outspokenly Christian. It shows a genuine insight into the effects of original sin. Any competent critic can expose coarseness and sentimentality; the Christian critic can relate these evils accurately to their source. And this Mr Waller does: 'the souls of men deprived of religion', he says, 'are clamped down tight over their own egotism', and to the trash or dirt that such a public tends to demand Christianity will serve merely as a 'moral' flavouring to flatter complacency. Mr Waller's gloom may, as the editor hints, be excessive, but it is a salutary reminder that Christianity is the *salt* of the

earth; and he rubs the salt in hard enough to hurt.

The second half of the book is mostly philosophy; with Mr J. M. Cameron, Mr J. Coulson and Dom Illtyd Trethowan between them working towards the formulation of a positive theory of art, using poetry as their reference; and with Fr Turner's voice sounding a prolonged warning against abstraction. And in fact, *ni fallor*, Dom Illtyd's positive conclusion that the work of art *as such* is an 'organic unity' seems an implicit rejection of Fr Turner's scepticism—of the latter's insistence that 'aesthetics is the child of philosophical idealism' which itself is pernicious nonsense. But this disagreement, if such it was, is not explicitly adverted to. As for the positive theory which Dom Illtyd tersely formulates near the end of the book, I would only note here that the three writers with whom I have associated it, and in particular the two laymen, are evidently concerned, first of all, to rescue poetry from the sort of philosophy that has recently predominated in England; to show that there is a poet's use of language distinct from the logician's; and that the former, in Mr Coulson's terms, has 'significance' as distinct from 'meaning'. It is at this point, I feel, that Mrs Langer should have been heard. I regret also the tone of the two or three references to Maritain. If this philosopher was to be mentioned at all, it seems to me that he deserved to be seriously discussed, not brushed aside with a knowing smile. And if he had been properly considered, it would have emerged, I think, that his chief concern as an aesthetician from first to last has not been (as is hinted here) to define some transcendent 'essence' common to all the arts, to which would correspond on the artist's side some 'pure' intuition devoid of concrete and particular content; but to analyse, in terms of a subtly developed Thomist noetic, what goes on in the mind of the creative artist precisely as creative. Maritain has been chiefly concerned, in short, with the psychology (in the traditional sense) of the artist; and much less—only mediately—with the produced artefact. To say this is only to point to the field where he ought to be met, if at all.

This review has perforce been more descriptive than critical; but it will have appeared that questions and objections are deferred, not ignored. The contributors themselves have put their cards on the table; and may the game continue.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

CHARLES DICKENS: THE WORLD OF HIS NOVELS. By J. Hillis Miller. (Harvard University Press. London: Oxford University Press; 30s.)

During the last twenty years, criticism of Dickens as a novelist by such writers as Edmund Wilson, F. R. Leavis, Humphry House, John Butt and Edgar Johnson has made it evident that, as Lionel Trilling