

Book Reviews

JOHN REIDY (editor), *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of alchemy*, London, Oxford University Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. lxxv, 125, illus., £3.00.

The famous book by Thomas Norton (?1433–1513 or 1514) on alchemy exists in thirty-one manuscript copies and Mr. Reidy bases his text on two of them, with variant readings from five others. There is an excellent introduction, which discusses these texts, their linguistic aspects, all the facts known about the author, and a discussion of the *Ordinal*. In order to alleviate some of the obscurity concerning the process of making an elixir or philosopher's stone, as described by Norton, the editor provides a lucid account of this part of alchemy. The base manuscript is in typical London English of the late fifteenth century, and consequently much of the text here is easily read. There is, however, a glossary (pp. 97–121) and an index of names and words (pp. 122–125).

Norton began his treatise in 1477 and it eventually took its place as one of the two most important Middle English alchemical works. It is in part a defence of alchemy, which is considered to be arcane and sacred, but it does contain a few practical details. There was a Latin translation of it in 1618, and Ashmole in 1652 printed the original English version for the first time.

In keeping with the numerous other publications of The Early English Text Society, this is a praiseworthy work of high scholarly merit. It is an important contribution to the history of alchemy, and in addition the production is excellent and the price modest.

PATRICK ROBERTS, *The psychology of tragic drama*, London and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, 8vo, pp. [ix], 234, £5.95.

The author is attempting here to apply Kleinian psychoanalysis to literature by interpreting the themes of selected examples of both ancient and modern tragic drama in the light of it. Euripides, Strindberg, Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco, Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and others are chosen. Mrs. Melanie Klein's fundamental belief is that the first few months of an infant's life are of the most vital importance for his subsequent development. Thus, the author, who is lecturer in English at University College London, claims, for example, that *The Bacchae* of Euripides confirms her ideas of infantile fantasy. And so forth and so forth.

It is obvious that those of literary bent should be attracted to and are willing to accept psychoanalysis, whereas the scientist would be more hesitant and would wish to have more adequate proof of its tenets. On the whole, however, it seems that psychiatry at the moment is moving away from the theoretical analytical era to a more concrete post-Freudian one of neurochemistry and neuropharmacology. It would seem reasonable to await scientific verification of the various schools of psychoanalysis, if one is ever forthcoming. Only when this is available will it be permissible to apply analysis to literature, which, after all, is remarkably susceptible to all kinds of speculative approaches, which can be grouped under the appropriate term "romancing". Mr. Roberts presents some remarkable interpretations, some of which are breath-taking in their flights of psychoanalytical fancy. Even if they are proved to be correct, and this seems highly unlikely, do they help us to appreciate the dramatists better?