

DEFENDING ANCIENT SPRINGS, by Kathleen Raine. *Oxford University Press*, 1967. 30s.

A leading poet's reflexions on other poets must always be interesting. Kathleen Raine's essays, entitled from a quotation out of Vernon Watkins, are fascinating and provocative. As Byron outlined his poetic *credo* in *Don Juan*,

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge,
Southey;

Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,

The second drunk, the third so quaint and
mouthy. . .

so in these articles and papers Kathleen Raine boldly asserts the values by which she lives and works. The influences over her development in art and thought are set out for all to see. The first essay covering Edwin Muir shows the pervasive effects of this distinguished Scot's poetry upon one who was a close friend and in some ways a disciple. 'Vernon Watkins and the Bardic Tradition' takes up another aspect of the Celtic cultural tradition and offers warm tribute to a poet whose career has since been tragically cut short. (For very possibly Watkins' best work lay ahead.) She has a high regard for David Gascoyne: a living poet who has long been silent. Her many labours on Blake, Coleridge and Yeats are reflected in the central papers. And there follows a most interesting defence of Shelley's poetry. In 'The Use of the Beautiful' Kathleen Raine examines the kind of beauty which appeals to ordinary people. It is usually of a very rarefied order.

. . . 'of what use is Genet's *The Maids* or Wesker's *The Kitchen* to working girls? With the instinct of their sanity the Cinderellas prefer *Swan Lake*.'

(Still, might not the often bone-headed parents of these girls benefit from exposure to Wesker's *Roots*?) A study of the French poet St John Perse ends the collection; though an existentialist, he may also be described as a symbolist, since he 'affirms and uses as the instruments of his art the law of harmony which subsists in and unifies the cosmos'.

The sentiments and values reflected in these papers are in defiance of many modern fashions and so issue a challenge which needs to be taken up. The author has a natural re-action against the Positivist philosophy which has dominated Cambridge for decades. What she does not take into account is that Wittgenstein's later teaching has resulted in his disciples' thought taking a mystical turn. Rush Rhees, who has lately retired from the Department of Philosophy at Swansea Univer-

sity College in order to concentrate on editing Wittgenstein's writings, is passionately concerned with the Mass as the central redemptive action taking place within the world and absorbed in the Church's tradition of mystical theology. And this is a not unexpected outcome of the Positivist movement. For there are many worse things than materialism. Pushed far enough, a study of matter makes for spirituality. The real enemy remains spiritual pride, as it has done since the Fall of Lucifer. Matter is in itself innocent. All evil is spiritual in origin. It is not 'generation' which is the real degradation. At least Christ did not seem to think so. It is self-worship. And the Neo-Platonists, like their fellows the Gnostics, have always been prone to this particular vice. (Not for nothing did Giordano Bruno and Sir Walter Raleigh, those famous members of the School of Night, have a somewhat Faustian reputation among their contemporaries. And the same is true even of Paracelsus himself.)

Everyone has the defects of his qualities. It is disturbing to watch the prejudices of great poets against their contemporaries working out, and their prejudices against such of their predecessors as they feel out of sympathy with. Byron entirely travestied the greatness of Wordsworth and Coleridge. And, while Wordsworth may have been quite right in remarking to Crabb Robinson that Blake's poems had 'the elements of poetry a thousand times more than either Byron or Scott', he disastrously under-estimated Pope, whose *Dunciad* ends in one of the great apocalyptic visions of English Literature. Signs of such limitations appear scattered about this collection of essays. One catches a note of disparagement, or at any rate dislike, in certain remarks on Auden and Philip Larkin, for instance. Yet the realism of these poets is in the grand line of Skelton, of Burns, and of James Thomson in his *City of Dreadful Night*. Then, while Kathleen Raine defends Yeats quite reasonably against attacks from critics who do not pay him the compliment of taking his ideas seriously, she still does not give enough weight to the sense of shock that must overcome any student of the Kabbalah, of Paracelsus, Boehme or William Law when the use of these impressive systems of thought among the members of the Order of the Golden Dawn is considered. The version of this tradition which reached Yeats was a very debased one; a degradation which had already set in to some

extent with Swedenborgianism in the eighteenth century.

Finally, though one can see the force of the passage where Edwin Muir's use of the heraldic is praised, as representing 'some mastery of the natural and animal flux and chaos that is around and within man', would there not be grounds for seeing the recent remarkable experiment with the lioness, Elsa, in East Africa as an altogether higher assertion of this mastery, because one based on love and a reverent understanding of natural forces?

Yet the reader will take away many insights and much inspiration from this volume. Kathleen Raine's affirmation that Vernon Watkins is a Christian poet who has at the same

time absorbed 'the essence of the pagan cosmic sense', within his later poetry, into which, 'filled with blossom and bough, with sea-foam and rock and wings his earlier poetry has been distilled', helps to explain why it was received with such unbounded enthusiasm in America. And surely no undergraduate can dismiss Shelley's work as unworthy of attention after reading her defence of it? Facile underestimation of myth and symbol will likewise be discouraged by the essays on these subjects. The Imagination, which primarily deals in those forms, remains the characteristically human quality; the hallmark of this extraordinary animal, Man, who is only a little lower than the angels.

DESIREE HIRST.

POPE JOHN, by Meriol Trevor. *Macmillan*. 42s.

THE TEACHINGS OF POPE JOHN XXIII, by Meriol Trevor, edited by Michael Chinigo. *Harrap*. 35s.

In a notice of Miss Trevor's life of Philip Neri in this *Journal* (Vol. 48, p. 276) I suggested that a man demands of such a biography three things: new facts, an ordered and comprehensive view of the subject, and a distinctly modern understanding of hagiography. This time I think Miss Trevor has made a go of it. This life of Angelo Roncalli—and she has produced an account of the man's long career not unbalanced by too great a concentration on his years as John XXIII—is a good piece of craftsmanship, a job well done.

The biography is almost strictly chronological and moves sensibly from the Bergamo beginnings through support for the *Partito Popolare*, a lectureship (one term only) at the Lateran, long years in Bulgaria making efforts to encourage the Catholics and learning to talk easily with the Armenians and Orthodox in the days of conservative *Mortalium Animos*, and weathering the unfortunate affair of King Boris and *Casti Connubii*, further years at Istanbul, where he wore lay clothes and introduced vernacular prayers in the cathedral (on 6 May, 1936, he noted in his diary: 'When the Tanre Mubarek olsun, Blessed be God, was recited many people left the church displeased. . . I am happy'), to France, where the assignment was so difficult that none of the Vatican careerists would risk taking the job ('ubi deficiunt equi, trottant aselli'), and where he got into trouble from Pius XII for trotting about Paris, and so to Venice. If it be objected that not much of this information is new, it can certainly be replied that it is new to many readers: the story of the secret anti-modernist

conspiracy which flourished in Merry del Val's Secretariat appeared, some time after Miss Trevor had printed it, in several American newspapers and in the *Catholic Herald*, as a fresh discovery by their probing reporters.

Miss Trevor has employed her anecdotes to reveal character in a carefully directed manner. For example, by noting that in Venice Patriarch Sarto had forbidden priests to visit the Biennale, while Patriarch Roncalli held a reception for the distinguished visitors, Miss Trevor quietly demonstrates the difference of bishop and bishop. And this not just to cheapen personalities but to point a considered view of the Church in which Pope John worked. Miss Trevor has a view of modern Church history which, while sympathetic to the subjective aims of some popes, is able to account for their objective errors. She brings out the importance of Benedict XV, putting him into perspective as the man who in a short pontificate put his energies to matters of international peace, democratic socialism, missionary enterprise, Christian unity and openness within the Church with that sense of history and gospel which characterized John XXIII. For others there is some hard hitting. Pius X comes in for a fair share of blame for the Modernist muddle—a muddle so great that in 1958 the Vatican files were opened in order that on the Roncalli card the damning phrase 'suspected of Modernism' could be slashed through by the bravura 'I, John XXIII, pope, say that I was never a Modernist'. Never a Modernist but always a Christian. In the reign of Pius X, amid the ubiquitous atmosphere of suspicion