

BLACKFRIARS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GABRIEL MARCEL, by Kenneth T. Gallagher; Fordham University Press; \$5.

The significance of Kant's 'Copernican revolution' lies in the question that gave rise to it: is man capable of metaphysics? Since then there has been an increasing awareness that for metaphysical statements to be meaningful, they must be rooted in some kind of philosophical anthropology. This is a concrete approach to metaphysics, consisting of an explication of the ultimate implications of experience. The experience in question may be man's symbol-life; in this sense for example, Cassirer investigates myth, Heidegger examines poetic language. Or it might be a question of man's intersubjective experience, and in this sense Sartre examines the 'alter ego', Marcel investigates fidelity, hope and love as forms of ontological communion with other persons and ultimately with the Absolute Thou. We then get metaphysical drama and journals.

Marcel's plays are not the *théâtre à thèse* kind. He does not use drama for the purpose of conveying philosophical theories. Most themes appear in his plays before being philosophically thematized. The most basic of all Marcellean themes, that of communion among subjectivities, lends itself to this form of treatment. Marcel dramatizes various checks to authentic communion, various degrees of the master-slave dialectic, we might say. He is trying to indicate that the purely private self is an abstraction. The real ego, the true self that is given in experience is a being-by-participation. More precisely, there is no self except in so far as there is communion with other selves; and there can be no experience of Being except by an authentic self. Love and longing, then are prerequisite modes of existing for a metaphysician. Man affirms Being by the creative testimony of his true self.

It is difficult to synopsise Marcel's philosophy because, like Kierkegaard, he has a horror of systematic thought. It is more a collection of disconnected insights expressed in somewhat mystical language. The work under review is the first full length study of Marcel's thought in English. It shows a clear and sympathetic understanding of an enigmatic philosophy. To anyone already familiar with existentialist thought and language it will prove an invaluable key to the mind of Gabriel Marcel.

NICHOLAS FOLAN, O.P.

THE BARBARIAN WITHIN, by Walter J. Ong, S.J.; Macmillan, New York; 37s.

There are few truly encyclopaedic minds to be found in our intensely specialized world; but Fr Ong's is undoubtedly one of them. This collection of his essays is the most intellectually stimulating book I have read for many months, but its extraordinary diversity of subjects makes it hard to classify and virtually impossible to summarize. Fr Ong's field might be described in that forbidding,

blanket-term 'Communications'; indeed, no other concept would be large enough to cover the interest that these essays reveal in modern literary criticism; medieval and Renaissance grammar, rhetoric and logic; the history of vernacular education; the impact of electronic communications; and the nature of myth; to give only an incomplete list of Fr Ong's subjects. Nevertheless, the effect is very far from that of an over-stocked mind dissipating its energy in a dozen different directions. There are a number of strands linking the separate studies. In particular, Fr Ong is concerned with the uniqueness of the human personality, an uniqueness which is expressed by the human voice, but suppressed by the impersonality of the printed page. He sees the era of electronic communications as a period in which *personal* communication is once more possible, after several centuries of typographical culture, with its stress on the objective and the diagrammatic. To some extent, Fr Ong's arguments overlap those recently advanced by Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; but I find his approach more acceptable, and easier to follow, than Professor McLuhan's. The personalist flavour of Fr Ong's thought is apparent in another context, in 'The Jinnee in the Well Wrought Urn', where he discusses the tension between the radically personal note in all imaginative literature and the 'impersonality' demanded by modern critical theories.

Fr Ong, for all his fantastic learning, emerges from this book as tough-minded but likeable, and decidedly optimistic. For all his sense of history, he refuses to adopt the facile role of the *laudator temporis acti*: if there is much that is dangerous in the technological revolution of our time, there is more that is encouraging and hopeful. And here, in his buoyancy and calmness, Fr Ong offers an interesting contrast to some other Christian historians of culture, notably Professor C. S. Lewis. I can best give the quality of Fr Ong's thought, highly documented yet exhilaratingly synoptic, by quoting a paragraph from his title essay, 'The Barbarian Within' (he is writing about the modern cult of the outsider, the beatnik or hipster): 'Interest in social outcasts is of course not new and not restricted to the United States. It reaches back through Richard Hovey's and Bliss Carmen's shabby-genteel *Vagabondia* literature of the 1890's on past Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* (social ostracism romantically transmuted into geographical isolation), through Renaissance rogue literature, the medieval François Villon and his goliard brethren, on through Apuleius and even Homer, for whose Odysseus the prototype seems to have been a more ancient character of the clever-rogue-and-outcast type. And the story of paradise lost itself ends in exile, long a preoccupation of Hebrew and Christian thought, literature and prayer. *To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.*'

Fr Ong's book contains a great deal of knowledge, and countless valuable insights; but more than these, one finds in it something rarer and more illuminating – wisdom. It is a pity that its transatlantic origin means that its circulation in this country will be limited: I would like to see an English paperback edition.

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