

the time is so opportune, entering the field of research. Such too, the attitude of which, with all respect and yet with the assurance I draw from fifty years spent living in the heart of the problem, I should like to remark to those it properly concerns that it is psychologically unviable and, what is more, directly opposed to the greater glory of God.'

Towards the end of this inspiring communication, he says simply, 'We need a new theology, then, and a new approach to perfection, which must gradually be worked out in our houses of study and retreat houses, in order to meet the new needs and aspirations of the "workers" we live among.' His own work

has laid some of the foundations for the new theology of the future.

Many of the ideas expressed in these books will of course be familiar to those who have already done some extensive reading in the field. But special essays, composed for special purposes or events, are where one looks for treatment in depth of particular topics. Perhaps what Teilhard needs most, just now, is to have his work subjected to a detailed, honest and thoroughly scholarly criticism. Each of these books contains a useful index. But picking snippets out of a text by means of an index is not fair treatment for an author as distinguished and as important as Teilhard. BERNARD TOWERS

POETRY AND THE SACRED, by Vincent Buckley. *Chatto and Windus*, 35s.

The title of Mr Buckley's impressive new book is slightly misleading: 'Poetry and the Sacred' suggests the sort of thematic study which is in fact disclaimed on the first page of the Introduction, where the author confesses that he has really no substantial *thesis* to offer. What follows are three connected essays on the ideas of the 'sacred' and 'religious', and then six closely detailed analyses of Wyatt, Donne, Blake, Melville, Yeats and Eliot, which seem only loosely related to the propositions of the first section.

This slight structural discontinuity follows fairly logically from Mr Buckley's particular kind of critical preoccupation: the individual studies are not controlled by an organizing thesis because that, for him, would be a damaging encapsulation of the 'specific life, quality and presence' of literary texts. One has seen too often, elsewhere, the limiting corollaries of this apparently positive and unexceptionable gesture not to be a little suspicious: the anti-thematic insistence on specificity in criticism has often enough relegated the analysis of wider literary issues—substance, ideas, social connexions—to the status of 'dogma', which can then be placed in favourable counterpoise with an esoterically abstracted 'sensibility'. There are faint traces of this limiting pragmatism in Mr Buckley's book: he is reluctant to be drawn into a more substantial, explicit and 'systematic' analysis of literary meanings (except in the case of Melville, where he advances, surprisingly, into more broadly interpretative terrain), and his fine attention to tone, poise, rhythm and texture can shift on occasions into a mode of sensibility so refined as to be hardly there. This comment on Yeats, for instance: 'I think that what holds us is the

delicate checks and balances which create a sense that Yeats is obeying a ceremony of the mind by attention to which the spirit and the bodily poise of the mind's object can be not only indicated but realized': what exactly does this sort of self-parodying 'Lit. Crit.' jargon, replete with abstractions enclosed within abstractions, actually get *said*? Mr Buckley's sensibility, unlike Henry James's, isn't quite so fine that no idea can violate it, but the hiatus between his three general chapters and six specific discussions is obvious enough for one to feel the undertow of a latent pressure in that direction.

Having said this, the fineness of the sensibility needs equally—indeed, much more firmly—to be emphasized. Mr Buckley's discussions of Donne, Blake, Yeats and Eliot are elegant and authoritative, revealing a superbly sensitive and genuinely personal critical intelligence. The best that can be said for his study is that it triumphantly justifies, in almost every line, that concern for the specific power and presence of literary works which he sets as the key-note; his ability to feel into a poem, to render the intricate significances of every modulation, is remarkable.

The worst that can be said for the book is that its thesis, in so far as it has one (and the title, surely, must be given *some* weight) makes little headway. The general chapters are thin in comparison with what follows, held together at points only by the self-conscious, slightly rhetorical pitch of the author's tone. I've suggested that this limitation is in any case inherent in Mr Buckley's approach: these fragmentary generalizations are not what he can do best. But he also works with a notion of the 'religious'—as an opening to transcendent

forces inherent in the cosmos which demand submission, communion and worship—which is really too nebulous to have much cutting-edge. (His definition of the religious seems to me to be of only marginal concern to Christianity, but this is perhaps an incidental point.) There seems to be a structural relation, within the sort of contemporary liberalism which Mr Buckley exemplifies, between an intensely focused empiricism and a sense of the transcendent as that which is 'to be responded to in terms other than those we use for our everyday relationships'. Empiricism, and this mode of

transcendence, are related as polarities in their common opposition to the historical. But Mr Buckley would probably be right in seeing that as an 'ideological' point, irrelevant to his own concerns, and while it perhaps serves to illuminate something of the deeper and more significant causes of his study's structural imbalance—in particular, the way in which generalities stubbornly refuse to enter into any creatively dialectical relation with the local and specific—it does less than justice to the fine power of his critical analysis.

TERRY EAGLETON

CONTINUITIES, by Frank Kermode. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*, London. 35s.

It is becoming clear that Frank Kermode is extending the grammar of modern literary criticism. And he is doing this not so much by a series of particular judgments on particular authors as by a stance towards literature in general. Central to that stance is his attempt to make us more sharply aware of literature as a whole. In his two most influential books *Romantic Image* and *The Sense of an Ending* he tried—in the first with poetry and in the second with fiction—to make us see more clearly the nature of the artist's invented world. Put in these terms we might be inclined to think of Kermode as someone more interested in aesthetics than in literary criticism, but it is one of the paradoxes of his position that though he habitually employs the long perspective, he enjoys working largely in terms of the particularities imposed by regular periodical reviewing. Accompanying his first book, *Romantic Image*, published just over ten years ago, went a collection of journalistic essays, *Puzzles and Epiphanies*, and now we have *Continuities* which bears a similar relation to *The Sense of an Ending*. The juxtaposition of the general work, ambitious in scope, allusive in manner, with the brevity and particularity demanded by regular journalism, gives his work an interestingly paradoxical element.

There is, to begin with, Kermode's predilection for the panoramic view—the predilection that led to his concern with the image in his earlier work, and ideas of 'crisis' and 'apocalypse' in the later. Rarely do we find him engaged in that area which so preoccupied a previous generation of English critics—'the words on the page'. For those critics, Kermode is a critical astronaut whose reports are sent in from outer space; only from such an altitude, they would argue, can novels as different as *Middlemarch* and *Women in Love* be brought

together as novels of apocalyptic crisis. Where do we find in his work, they would ask, the experience of what it feels like to read *this* poem or *this* novel?

While such a view is understandable, it is I think, misjudged. Kermode is well aware of these arguments and indeed employs them himself in a brief and lethal essay on Northrop Frye in the present collection. He argues that Frye 'stands back' so far from literature that he is led into dismissing as irrelevant anything that constitutes the personal presence of a work of art, 'its existential complexities, all that makes it mean something *now* to a waking audience'. This note is heard in other essays, so that if Frye is reproached for turning literature into ritual and magic, Conor Cruise O'Brien is found neglecting the distinction between the symbol in religion and the symbol in art, and critics of Wallace Stevens are taken to task for obscuring the particularity of his poems. 'It is better to grasp', Kermode writes, "'The Idea of Order at Key West'" as a single unique occurrence, an invitation to one's own imagination, than to see it as part of a para-philosophical structure.' While it is true that we have to look hard for anything resembling detailed criticism of texture in Kermode's work, this is not because he is unmindful of the point it makes, but because he feels the particularity of art can be argued for in other ways.

Indeed it seems to me that the weakness of Kermode's stance lies not in its generalizing impulse, but rather in a too exclusive view of particularity. In his concern to see that literature is not confused with philosophy, theology or ethics, he slackens dangerously the tension between art and life and runs the risk of an immensely sophisticated reorchestration of the doctrine of significant form.

Kermode's criticism is at its best when his