seems an inadequate response, not fully under Miss Stafford's control and, ultimately, not very interesting.

Mrs Oswald has fed and prospered on the proceeds of the world's fascination with the details surrounding Kennedy's death, as Miss Stafford (gainfully employed?) suggests. No doubt it is difficult to feel much compassion in the circumstances, and the novelist is honest enough about her reactions – on one occasion only can she confess to 'a fleeting pity'. And when towards the end of one of her self-absorbed tirades Mrs Oswald says 'I have suffered very much,' it makes Miss Stafford's blood 'run cold with embarrassment'. But embarrassment doesn't seem enough in front of a woman, however humanly 'impossible', who has seen her son die as Oswald did.

The noisy, mercenary creature offered for our inspection is clearly not as abject and defenceless as the two men on Death Row whom Truman Capote worked over so persistently and skilfully, but surely she is pitiable as well as horrible. Some people have apparently found Miss Stafford's reportage amusing. It's hard to understand. Mrs Oswald at one point speaks of herself like this: 'They say "This woman is out of her mind. Let's put her in a mental institution." Isn't it funny?' It's like laughing in Bedlam.

BERNARD MCCABE

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## LE MEME PIEGE, by Charlotte Crozet. *Gallimard*, 1965.

This novel has a certain piquancy for English readers, since it is set in London, where Mlle Crozet has lived for the past eleven years, married to an official of the B.B.C. She has an accurate feel for the mental landscape of the English, though not everyone will be at home in her hyper-articulate, sophisticated and neurotic world of quivering sensibilities, the fringe of sub-Bohemia. Dominique, her heroine, is called by her father 'my little Cartesian' and there can be no apter description for this girl who endlessly ratiocinates about her desires and relationships and has the ill-luck to fall in with Christopher, whom J. G. Weightman, reviewing the book in *The Observer*, characterised as a 'particularly revolting type of Englishman'. Christopher is a tease, certainly, but it is possible to understand that although he feels the upsurge of desire for Dominique, he cannot share her rather *simpliste*, if over-psychologized, view of what the completion of love is. Love and England both somehow escape her, not because she is too intelligent, but because she is intelligent in a particular analytical way.

Her outward surface of independence and aggressive energy has already, as the novel begins, been broken by submission to an appalling and ambitious young Swede, and in the next liaison Dominique seeks to be the one who makes the rules; but she cannot free herself of her intolerable desire to be loved. This is 'the same trap' of the title, but it has another meaning, too. Christopher is not simply unwilling to be subjugated by Dominique, to leave the control of their relationship in her hands; he has odd, vague homosexual velleities, and her crude Yes or No attitude to physical love makes him feel that he is in a trap – the classical bachelor-at-bay situation rendered slightly more sophisticated by the complexities of Christopher's character.

This is where Mlle Crozet definitely scores. Her semi-intellectual, vaguely arty London milieu is intensely real, as also is the reaction of the hesitant and romantic Christopher, needing Dominique and yet defending himself against her. So also is the mutual opacity of the two of them, involved in a curious situation in which the attraction between them is physical, but the psychology of one of them prevents its consummation and makes them mutual enemies who – until the rather unconvincing final break – perpetually require the other's presence.

The confrontation in this book is a complex and interesting one of two types of sentimental life, each reachable by conversation, and yet in the last analysis separated by a wall of understanding. In spite of the complexity of Christopher's character, the chasm between him and Dominique is not one of mystery but of clarity, a case where *tout comprendre* is definitely not *tout pardonner*.

LOUIS ALLEN

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## EMILE ZOLA, by F. W. J. Hemmings. *Oxford University Press*, 55*s*.

Professor Hemmings' book is, after revision, essentially what it was, a standard critical-biographical study of the French novelist, Emile Zola. It has a first-rate bibliography, some interesting biographical discussion, but is still very unsatisfactory as an attempt to assess Zola's achievement. For Zola's life and work raises certain crucial questions about the relationship between art and politics with which Professor Hemmings' critical perspective is not

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adequate to deal. In fact, the critic's discussion assumes a familiar separation of politics and art, the social and the Human, the specific and the Universal, into mutually exclusive categories, of which the latter is preferred in each case.

The distortion breaks the back of one of the finest chapters, 'The Last Act', in which Professor Hemmings discusses Zola's role in the Dreyfus affair. While Zola was being gradually drawn into the Affair, he was planning, among other things, the novel, *Fécondité*. This novel was to have as its central concern the contemporary French practice of severely limiting the size of the family, a policy Zola abhorred. Hemmings' comment on the two activities is perhaps too simple: 'Zola's participation in the Affair did not interfere noticeably with the pace of his literary production'. It is perhaps equally inadequate to assign the central concern of *Fécondité* to 'a strictly personal origin' in Jeanne's pregnancy. This is not doing justice to Zola's intense concern with French society. For him, to become involved in the Affair was quite natural for a novelist concerned with social justice and reform. The two activities easily associated.

One can, however, detect a separation between politics and art in Zola's life and work. That it is there is made the more interesting when one considers that he was so intensely concerned to make literature politically relevant. Yet his greatest work is profoundly non-political – not, however, because (as the critical orthodoxy maintains) it transcends such a mundane and limiting order of experience as the 'political', and achieves an authentic 'universality'. The deciding factor is the specific social situation in which Zola found himself. He was a thoroughly middle-class writer with a purpose to observe whole areas of experience, marked off as 'social problem' or 'good material for the next novel', and with an intense interest in social reform. His sympathies were created in the life of one class, and the attempt to achieve an imaginative understanding of the life of other classes proved too great for him. The issue was further complicated for him by the fact that the misery which he found among the industrial poor, the miners and the peasants demanded from a man keen on social reform more than imaginative sympathy.

*Germinal*, for instance, creates in the reader a tremendous indignation at the vicious situation in which the miners are involved. This driving emotion of the novel is powerful enough as generated by the opening chapters of the novel, but later chapters dissipate it in violent and melodramatic action, as Zola avoids what he is trying to experience vicariously through the personae of Etienne and Souvarine. That is to say, he never allows the boiling indignation to constitute the energy of a political commitment to radical change in the existing situation (the relationship between Zola's life and work is this close). For such a commitment would threaten his own position within the middle-classes, the people with the most to lose in any radical change in the existing economic set-up.

Zola wrote of *La Terre*: 'J'y veux poser la question sociale de la propriété'. In this same letter, he lists all the items which will constitute the novel's survey of peasant life in La Beauce. Professor Hemmings' comment is that while none of the items in the list were forgotten, all were subordinated to the dominant aesthetic concerns, and the universal themes of love and the earth. In a way, this is the critic's compensation for Zola's failure to create the life of La Beauce in complex depth – it is excused as success in creating the universal and the essential. As in *Germinal*, the withdrawal from political commitment demanded by a specific situation, accompanies a failure to master the full reality of the material. One might well talk, as Georg Lukacz does, of a profound community of spirit between Zola's political attitudes and his fictional conventions. Lukacz is in the bibliography but not in the text, and yet his work, which is an example of the remarkable insight into Zola which a critical vision substantiated by a firm political commitment can achieve, is the growing point for a revision of the bad 'literary' traditions which accompany Zola's work (and indeed the whole of nineteenth-century French fiction).

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

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