

for God. And in Carmel, where she lived a life of prayer and austerity for the remaining twenty years of her life, she found the spiritual peace her restless soul had sought for so long.

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MARCEL PROUST AND DELIVERANCE FROM TIME. By Germaine Brée, with an introduction by Angus Wilson. (Chatto and Windus; 21s.)
BYRON and GOETHE. By E. M. Butler. (Bowes and Bowes; 30s.)

In his introduction to Mlle Brée's new book on Proust Angus Wilson suggests that there are too many guide books to the passing beauties of the Proustian world but that this one is different. There are and it is. It is also interesting and raises one or two possible questions about the uses of criticism. Particularly illuminating are her discussions of the time structure of *A la recherche du temps perdu* and she helps to elucidate with some skill that curiously vague and Eliotian sphere where the three times are held in a loose synthesis in which we pass to and fro in the manner of those in J. W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time* and where Proust's narrator projects himself into an anticipation of the future, relives his life in meditations retrospectively and focuses upon the present, finding a timeless world the spatial dimensions of which are constantly changing. This examination leads Mlle Brée to adumbrate and emphasize—very properly it seems—the recognition of the existence of identity which, as far as Marcel is concerned, is the important revelation which ensures the imposition of order upon previous chaos.

Mlle Brée also examines the relation of Proust to the narrator—Marcel. She asserts that many critics have tended to identify them 'reading from Proust's life into the novel and back again'. This, of course, is a perilous and sometimes foolish method, a product of that school of criticism which attempts to arrange Shakespeare's sonnets in a biographical sequence and which seeks to establish whether or not Keats had a 'hang-over' on the day he was supposed to have started to write the Ode to a Nightingale. Clearly, in Proust's novel, to be misled by the use of the first person is to create an insuperable number of obstacles to vitiate the art which prepares the reader for Marcel's revelation which leads to the outcome of a seemingly hopeless excursion. As Mlle Brée puts it:

'The point at which the narrator arrives at the end of the novel cannot possibly be superimposed upon the point of his departure, for this would bring the aesthetic validity of the novel's composition into question. The title of the book indicates a quest in which the narrator is engaged. How could he tell of his hopeless "search" if he already knew its successful outcome? The revelation at the end

would then be faked; the climax of the novel would lose all its value.'

But despite her denial of the 'identification' and biographical method Mlle Brée falls into the same seeming error. For instance, she says: '... sometimes Proust speaks through the narrator but sometimes the narrator speaks for himself.' Such a statement supposes, to use an oxymoron, that Mlle Brée is retrospectively clairvoyant. In any case, surely it does not matter when Proust is being the narrator and when he is not? It is the narrator who is telling the story and we know that Proust created the narrator. It would not really matter very much if it were discovered that Proust had not written it at all. Similarly it does not really matter, except to academic hacks with spare time and card indices, and benefactors of the tourist trade, who wrote Shakespeare's plays. The plays exist; surely that is sufficient? Thus Proust's novels, like anything else, should, I submit, at the risk of committing a minor heresy, be examined only in the light of themselves. Mlle Brée is at her best at doing this in her discussion of Proust's characters in terms of the comic. Much of the rest of the book might have been shorter with profit, since she tends to dwell too long upon points which are already clear.

Professor Butler's book is detection of a different kind. She is concerned to analyse the remarkable effect of Byron—his mind, personality, attitude and works—upon the mind and heart of Goethe. She calls it an 'analysis of passion' and it is learned, comprehensive, well documented by extensive but judicious quotation and, on the whole, a little dull.

The first part of the book is devoted to an examination of the various sporadic and ineffectual attempts—these helped and impeded by a number of intermediaries—on the part of both men to communicate. The second part, which deals with events after Byron's death, is concerned with the continued influence of the Englishman upon the German for, when Byron died, 'his spirit was burning as fiercely as ever in his writings . . . his effect upon Goethe increased prodigiously . . . inspiring a great elegaic rhapsody and expanding into cosmology. . . . They were to meet in the spirit again and again, often round unexpected corners. It might be thought that Goethe had by now run through the whole gamut of emotions Byron could inspire; but he was still to be disconcerted and dismayed, delighted and exasperated, overcome with gladness, heart-stricken, downcast and uplifted.' If Byron's spirit had been burning as fiercely as ever in hell Professor Butler could hardly have been more eloquent.

It is perhaps a measure of the author's learning and exuberance that we are able to read the latter half of her study without much more effort than that entailed by the first and to follow the seismography of

a seemingly tumultuous and passionate intellectual love affair; and it comes as something of a relief to recall that the two men never actually met. If they had it would have been rather like Gabriel apprehending Satan in the Garden of Eden when, had they fought:

'. . . dreadful deeds
Might have ensued, not onely Paradise
In this commotion, but the Starrie Cope
Of Heav'n perhaps, or all the Elements
At least had gon to rack . . .'

But even Professor Butler might have found it difficult to distinguish the combatants accurately in these terms.

Romantic appetites will be whetted by the prologue of her book and will not be disappointed by much of the ensuing chapters. She shows a remarkable knowledge of what Byron and Goethe thought and felt from day to day and how their thoughts and emotions conflicted and agreed. In a manner more melodramatic than usual she refers to the two men 'hailing each other from afar across the gulf of forty years between them; intermittently but urgently; hopefully but bootlessly'. She speaks of the legend of Byron:

'. . . which, like a river in full flood, swirls through wrathful deeps and sparkling shallows, hurtling onwards to re-enact the awe-inspiring fall, when the world reverberated with the shock, and Europe mourned the uncrowned king of Greece. But it also passed through the noisome swamps of controversy, sittring up malodorous mud on its way.'

She declaims upon the manifestation of the Faustian spirit which 'striving, questioning, doubting and despairing; ruthless, reckless and distraught; impatient of limitations and piteously limited, swept through Europe like a forest fire with romanticism in its wake'. She also mentions phenomena like the 'annihilating power of Byron's laughter', his 'apocalyptic writings', his 'flaming spirit', and refers frequently to people and things as 'star-crossed'. It seems that Romeo and Juliet were well off in conjunctions by comparison with Goethe and Byron.

It would probably be vain as well as imprudent to cavil at the many interesting conclusions to which Professor Butler comes, especially in her final and best chapter, but perhaps it is not unreasonable to complain of a style so redolent of the posters of yet another M.G.M. 'screen-shattering epic'.

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