

development of early Christology seems clear enough. The recent work of exegetes like Norman Perrin bears that out. For all the thought that the notion of symbol has given rise to in the work (say) of Paul Ricoeur, however, the fact remains that we have very little theory of fiction from which a theologian might take bearings. It is not very encouraging to find Tracy citing the "new journalism" of Tom Wolfe (author of *the Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*), Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*), and so on, as instances of the conflation of fact and fiction which might illuminate the exegete or the theologian. Biblical criticism, from the found-

ing fathers onwards, has worked with an unexamined distinction between fact and fiction which badly required to be exposed and assessed. Questions about the nature of narrative - of myth and of story - demand an answer. That these questions are raised perhaps shows how far David Tracy has moved away from Lonergan. In that area, as in others, there is work going on in Europe which he should not ignore. Roland Barthes is worth as much of a theologian's attention now as Karl Barth is, and perhaps in the end we shall have to get back to Kant and to Heidegger's study of Kant on imagination.

FERGUS KERR OP

**SAMUEL BECKETT, by John Pilling. *Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. 1976.*
246 pp. £5.75**

Mr Pilling's reason for writing yet another full-length book on Beckett is that he is able to give an account 'based on Beckett's own aesthetic thinking, and on the intellectual, historical and literary tradition and milieu that have sustained it'. I applaud the aim, and admit the value of such an enterprise. It is clear from the results that the author possesses, amply, the knowledge of Beckett's sources, influences and background for such a task. But I cannot honestly report that what emerges is as illuminating as I had hoped it would be.

My personal feeling is that the learning and the intellectual curiosity that flood every page of this book is insufficiently digested and too lacking in focus to throw much light on Beckett's work as a whole. The chapters on the intellectual background and the literary background read more like catalogues of quotations, often as recondite as Beckett's own, than accounts of what really matters for the understanding of Beckett's writing. Beckett is notoriously well read, a voracious user of his own 'mine of useless knowledge', a master of numerous languages and cultures. What I had hoped to find in Mr Pilling's work was a guide-book through this jungle. But what I found was a collection of bits of

information which, as a whole, left me in as much confusion as before. To judge from some of the remarks he makes at the end of his chapters, I suspect that Mr Pilling himself may feel the same. I feel duly humbled by the amount of work, and the depth of learning that are evident in these pages: but I am not much clearer as to how I should read Beckett, nor how I should evaluate him.

For my money, some of the most interesting parts of the book were those where biographical facts, to me unknown, were brought into play - for example those connected with Beckett's role in the Resistance during the war. There is also a useful chapter on the poetry which provides a commentary on the least discussed aspect of Beckett's oeuvre, though it left me with the same impression that it left upon the author: 'There is no point in pretending that Beckett is a great poet' (p. 180). The bibliography is also helpful, as being more up to date than most others easily accessible. The book is also interesting in that it shows the way personal interviews with Beckett, and familiarity with the Beckett archives at Reading University, can add to our appreciation of his work.

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