

subjected to exhaustive analyses this poem, its sources, its philosophy, and its art. Even so, Dorothy Everett was able to make some contributions, characteristically her own, to our comprehension and enjoyment of *Troilus*, particularly in her consideration of the much-discussed epilogue, where, contradicting various recently-advanced views, she maintained that we shall see the epilogue as the logical and indispensable culmination of the whole work if we will understand the real theme of the poem as 'the failure of human love in its most ideal form'. The epilogue is not 'in any narrow sense the moral of the story. It is the end to which the whole story inevitably moves.' This epilogue, it will be recalled, tells how Troilus, ascending to the seventh sphere after the death in battle which he has sought as the only cure for his wounded heart, sits there looking down upon 'this little spot of earth . . . this wretched world', and laughing to himself at the sorrow of those who bewailed him: and then Chaucer goes on to adjure all young lovers not to put their trust in any of this world's felicities, but only in the Passion and Death of their Redeemer. In the preceding essay, *Chaucer's Love Visions*, the author pointed out that in *The Parlement of Foules* Chaucer shows us Scipio looking down upon a world which is described in terms almost identical with those of the *Troilus* epilogue, and that the poet proceeds to imply in the *Parlement* the same Christian doctrine. This is a part of a long examination of what she regarded as the best of Chaucer's love-visions, in which she declared that she intended 'to carry out . . . what I believe to be the critic's task when he is faced with medieval poetry'. If at times her approach to this task seems pedestrian, that is largely because we are only too well used to the spectacle of her contemporaries cavorting on their hobby-horses, for each of which she had a kindly but dismissive word. To the very end of her career, her attention never wavered from the target which she had chosen, the humane interpretation of medieval English literature. Her celebrity as a scholar, delayed in her lifetime because of an academic catastrophe so appalling that it would have broken anyone of less fortitude, is bound to increase in the coming years; and this admirable volume, produced through the piety of her nearest friends, will do much to ensure this growth.

ERIC COLLEDGE

DIALOGUE D'OMBRES. By Georges Bernanos. (Plon; 360 fr.)

Of the short stories conveniently grouped in this volume three belong to the 1920s and are already known to those interested in Bernanos, while the remaining four, prefaced with a few explanatory pages by M. Béguin, have been reproduced from newspapers of 1913 and 1914. Only one of these latter approaches the level that Bernanos

was to attain, *La Tombe refermée*, which portrays a writer spiritually dead, having fabricated a false life of his own, a type recurring in the novelist's mature work. Two of the other early stories, *La Muette* and *La Mort avantageuse du chevalier de Lorges*, present us with professional soldiers dying rather in the manner of Vigny's wolf, while the earliest of them all, *Virginie*, which M. Béguin considers to have been written when Bernanos was about twenty-one, opposes with the naïve pomposity of youth a man and wife pursuing independent and hostile chimeras. What these early stories do reveal is the author's preoccupation from the start with truth and illusion, with the life which is a contrived falsehood, and with the manner of dying.

Death and falsehood are themes of two of the later stories, *Madame Dargent* and *Une Nuit*. In the former the dying wife of one of those dealers in illusions that Bernanos represented the novelist as being, reveals her real affinity with his created heroines beneath the humdrum submissiveness with which she has deceived him and everyone else. She leaves him in no doubt that she has murdered his mistress and poisoned the child he has had by this woman, though even this revelation of reality, which he avenges by strangling his dying wife, does not deter the successful novelist: '*Que craindrait-il, en effet? Un auteur ne se trouve pas deux fois dans sa vie face à face avec une créature de chair et de sang, qui ressemble comme une soeur à ces rêves dont s'amuse, avec le lecteur complice, une élégante perversité. . . . Qui sait, pourtant? Plus d'une image meurtrière, dont l'écrivain se délivre, dix siècles après remue encore dans un livre. . . .*'

In *Une Nuit* the tangle of events is difficult to unravel, as if to emphasize that the factual truth is of little consequence beside the spiritual reality. This South American melodrama, in which two of the three characters die unnatural deaths, while the fourth is a corpse already, and in which lies abound, culminates in a mood of tender compassion, a compassion which vanquishes disgust in the heart of the French survivor. While the latter's compassion is reserved for Alahowigh, a rogue and probably a murderer, desiring to die a Christian death without knowing how it can be achieved, the reader feels compassion also for the girl the Frenchman has unintentionally killed, Bisbillitta, hardly out of childhood, whose aggressiveness and mendacity one senses to be weapons of self-defence. She dies without lament, as abandoned as the Mouchette of *Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette*.

The most thought-provoking of these later stories, all three of which reveal the mature Bernanos, is *Dialogue d'Ombres*, possibly because the dialogue remains unclarified. Beginning with the lovers' evocation of human love in remarkably Claudelian terms, it becomes a process of probing in which we are left uncertain as to how much of their authentic selves they disclose. The man is a writer of stories, that is to

say, a creator of illusions, and he is confronted in the woman with what seems to be the reality of human feeling, though it would appear that there has taken place in her a falsification of the self, at the root of which lies pride. However, the ultimate truth is no easier to discern than it is in life, for in the vision of Bernanos, though there is distortion and at times even caricature, neat simplifications have no part; if appearances are pierced, the mystery of personality is but deepened as a consequence.

For those who value the work of this powerful writer and seek to fathom its import, this book will be welcome.

ERNEST BEAUMONT

THE RETRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC. By Régine Pernoud. (Methuen; 16s.)

Saint Joan, according to Mme Pernoud, 'has the effect on us today of a person who can never be entirely known, of one who can always be seen afresh and who is always capable of arousing the most heated controversy'. That may be true of France. It is scarcely true of England where the national attitude to the Maid has changed from Shakespeare's day when Joan la Pucelle was named a 'devil or devil's dam', 'a high-minded strumpet'. Only a few weeks ago an important French journal commented on the well-known English infatuation for La Pucelle. It was very different five hundred years ago when, as Mme Pernoud shows, the English were the villains of the piece, the French judges their unworthy hirelings. The personality of Joan, her mystery, has conquered the hearts of the Goddams of these days as once her military mission conquered their ancestors.

The giddy Dauphin of Shaw's *Saint Joan* became the anointed king of France, Charles VII. It was nearly twenty years before he took action to have the stigma of 'relapsed heretic' removed from the name of the girl from Lorraine who had brought him to his throne. This he did when Rouen, the scene of Joan's martyrdom, was freed from English occupation at the end of 1449. He gave orders that diligent inquiry should be made concerning the trial of Joan the Maid by the English who 'iniquitously, cruelly and in defiance of all justice put her to death'.

Mme Pernoud's book is a digest of the royal inquiry. Here we can read what people who actually knew Joan thought of her, Dunois, la Hire and the rest. It is, inevitably, repetitive at times but these contemporary statements bring Joan vividly to life. The rehabilitation process means less to us than it did to her contemporaries for we accept Joan as a saint and France's greatest heroine. It meant a great deal at the time for it vindicated the claims of Joan the Maid and prepared the way for her greater glory in this century.

KIERAN MULVEY, O.P.