

THE ORPHIC VOICE, by Elizabeth Sewell; Routledge and Kegan Paul; 56s.

That poetry could be the most authoritative and exacting mode of exploring and evaluating our condition is not a view that cuts much ice in these days. Not to speak of those for whom poetry can at best be only a mental holiday, because language itself has come to seem too crude to serve as an adequate medium of thought, there are also those who, while caring deeply for the poetry of the past, believe that the creative initiative in literature has now passed for good to the novel. Fiction seems so much ampler and more flexible an instrument for registering and encompassing the complex particularity of raw behaviour. This book, however, is an impressive vindication of poetry as primarily an intellectual activity, more far-reaching, more inclusive, more telling, in its research into the morphology of human existence than any other discipline whatever. Poetry is the mind unfolding and shaping itself, articulately and critically. It is the language in which we lay hold of, and qualify, our natural history. Miss Sewell clinches her argument with responsible and illuminating analyses of *The Prelude* and Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*, works which certainly bear out high claims for the service of poetry in our unending search to understand ourselves.

F.K.

THE RUINED TOWER, by Raymond Chapman; Geoffrey Bles; 13s. 6d.

Mr Chapman is worried by the isolation of the imaginative writer in modern society, an isolation which can lead to a withdrawal into a private world ('The Ivory Tower may soon become the Ruined Tower'). For the Christian writer such a withdrawal is a denial of the responsibility to his neighbour which his faith implies; yet for the Christian the difficulties of communication are aggravated by the weakening of the traditional symbolism of the Church, through ignorance of Christian dogma and through the transformation of a rural into an industrial society. This not very controversial thesis is set out clearly enough in the first hundred pages. Occasionally there is room for disagreement: 'The accepted (religious) symbol does not depend for its power on the quality of its individual reproduction'. Bad art, then, is as powerful as good art: Whatever we mean by 'power', it seems odd to put a Madonna by Duccio or Henry Moore, a Crucifixion by El Greco or Rouault, on a footing with the most grossly sentimental treatment of the same theme.

In the main, however, Mr Chapman's account of the position of the Christian writer in a secular world is unexceptionable, if familiar. In the remaining forty or fifty pages he considers certain themes in the work of Eliot, Christopher Fry and Charles Williams. As criticism these pages are disturbingly superficial; the assumption that a play like *The Dark is Light Enough* can be taken seriously as literature is itself surprising. The desultory analysis of Eliot's poetry and plays, which could have been studied closely in this context, suggests that these latter