

Dr Robinson's publications, including articles and book reviews, which Fr McBrien has manifestly studied with much care.

The Bishop of Woolwich is quite rightly regarded as a grave divine, not as an *enfant terrible*. Although he is not, and would not claim to be, a dogmatic or systematic theologian, he is a serious and significant writer on ecclesiology. An original feature of the book is that it brings out, as has not hitherto been done, the connexion between Dr Robinson's earlier essays in biblical and liturgical theology and his more recent and widely read monographs, viz. *Honest to God* and *The New Reformation?* In a foreword, the Bishop expresses his appreciation of Fr McBrien's fairness and accuracy. He is indeed fortunate to have had such an interpreter.

Fr McBrien considers Dr Robinson's teaching about the Church to be representative of

promising trends in current theology, and he relates it to that of some prominent Catholic and Protestant authors and, in particular, to that of Vatican II. Many readers will be surprised at the affinity he discovers with the latter. Although naturally he notes some basic differences, he is content to remark that there are 'certain weaknesses – or, perhaps better, certain *underdeveloped* areas – in the argumentation of Bishop Robinson' (p. 128). Could the case be more charitably stated? Fr McBrien's charitableness is in fact evident throughout. While such an amiable disposition is to be warmly welcomed, it is to be hoped that, as ecumenicity matures, charity will be found to be consistent with a keen astringency. As it is, this book is stronger in exposition than in criticism.

ALEC VIDLER

A MOTHER IN HISTORY by Jean Stafford: *Chatto & Windus*. 12s. 6d.

'Lee Harvey a failure? I am smiling. I think it took courage for a young boy to go to Russia at twenty, for whatever reason he went. I find this a very intelligent boy, and I think he's coming out in history as a very fine person.'

'President Kennedy was a dying man. So I say it is possible that my son was chosen to shoot him in a mercy killing for the security of the country. And if this is true it was a fine thing to do and my son is a hero.'

'I'm gonna say that . . . at age sixteen Lee Harvey Oswald was being trained as a government agent.'

'When I find out who framed my son, then we can find out who killed President Kennedy.'

And so on, and on, a jumbled mass of ugly nonsense. Oswald's mother talked a great deal to the Warren Commission, and to the newspapers; presumably its all down in the archives for posterity. So why this book? Because, says the novelist Jean Stafford who went to Texas to interview the lady for the illustrated magazine *McCalls*, Mrs Oswald is 'inherent to the evolution of the reasons' for the Dallas killings; 'we need to know the influences and antipathies and idiosyncrasies that were the ingredients making up the final compound.'

That sounds impressive (sort of), but do we in fact 'need to know' all this? It's at least doubtful whether the deluded ramblings here presented teach us anything really new about Oswald's dreary and admittedly puzzling life.

And anyhow emphases are disturbingly

misplaced. Mrs Oswald, whose voice dominates the book, is seen convincingly as a brightly-dressed, 'tubular, well-corseted' matron in full control of her surroundings. What does not get firmly enough emphasized is that not only is she stupid and ignorant, but also deeply vulnerable. Particularly to Miss Stafford's sophisticated pen. To score off this depressing figure seems tasteless, but Miss Stafford, also very much present in the book, does not hesitate to do so. For example: one of Mrs Oswald's delusions is that her Russian daughter-in-law Marina is somehow secretly French. Miss Stafford comments: 'I recalled that when I had seen the first photographs of Marina . . . no face had looked to me more Chekhovian or Dostoevskian or Pushkinesque – she could have been Lisa in *Pique Dame*, destined to hurl herself into the Neva as the sad snow fell around her, or Masha, of all the three sisters the one most given to tears. Mrs Oswald, however, stated unequivocally, "She looks French," and that was that.' All this literary 'fine writing' only emphasises the snobbish bear-baiting that is going on.

The book is offered as a 'memorable encounter'. But clearly no real encounter takes place between them at all. Mrs Oswald addresses a permanent public meeting, and, as Miss Stafford rather frequently and testily interjects, she shows no interest in her interlocutress. Perhaps Miss Stafford was overwhelmed by Mrs Oswald's grotesque presence – certainly the brittle, even fun-poking hostility that results

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

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

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

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