

the work of Toni Negri and Mario Tronti on the 'social worker' and the 'social factory' (*Red Notes* have published some of this work in England). As it is, the final essay in the volume, by Biagio de Giovanni on 'Lenin and Gramsci', has been translated into such awkward English that I refused to persevere with it. Since the editor's own contributions are acknowledged as having themselves been translated into English, the blame for approving this piece

of garble may lie with the publishers rather than with the editor herself. But since the debate about Gramsci and, much more importantly, the attempt to clarify those problems of 'Western' strategy that pre-occupied Gramsci is far from concluded it's appropriate that one should close this commendable collection without quite finishing it.

BERNARD SHARRATT

**THE IDEA OF THE SYMBOL: SOME NINETEENTH CENTURY COMPARISONS WITH COLERIDGE** by M. Jadwiga Swiatecka O. P. *C.U.P.* pp viii + 213. £11.50.

This is an essay in philosophical definition, an attempt to disengage with rigour the concept of the symbol, and the role of this concept, in the thought of Coleridge, followed by comparisons with the concept of the symbol *chez* Carlyle, Newman and others. To a student of English literature such as the present reviewer the mode and even the point of such an exercise seems at first not at all obvious, for the Introduction confesses both that the word 'symbol' is not used consistently by modern writers and that it does not in fact play the sovereign part in nineteenth century philosophies of religion which modern commentators would have us suppose. So negative an introduction suggests a Ph.D. thesis failed for its candour. Indeed it turns out that while, for example, M. Arnold and F D Maurice hardly use the word 'symbol', even Coleridge, Carlyle and Newman do not use it very often. The book is punctuated by complaints that no later writers fully understood Coleridge's use of the concept, that they used it differently and (each of them) inconsistently. The common practice of academic philosophers in critically examining the role of a single word or concept without full regard to the context and assumptions of the literary genre in which the quarry lurks can seem arbitrary, dry and, where the authors studied are themselves not philosophers, of questionable value. Is the idea of the symbol, then, a quarry worth chasing?

The chapter on Coleridge sufficiently provides a reassuring answer. It also makes

clear to the non-specialist that Coleridge's understanding of this term, applied to natural objects, works of art, the Bible and even to Christ, has a real potential usefulness for the epistemology and language of modern theology. The book is not merely an act of mental hygiene and a distinguished contribution to the history of ideas, it rediscovers something of real value. Coleridge wrote in *The Statesman's Manual* that the narratives of Scripture are 'living educts of the imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-encircling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of which they are the conductors.' From these last words it appears that the puzzling wide introductory survey of the very various senses in which authors now use 'symbol' had a purpose eventually, not unconnected with our understanding of such dogmas as the Real Presence.

Students of literature are accustomed to having their thinking done for them by philosophers. The discomfort aroused by the Socratic naivete of the opening pages and their horror at the Babylonian confusion of uses of 'symbol' gave way, in this reviewer, to gratitude for the economical sketch of the essentials of Coleridge's philosophy of mind. For the daunting scope and refrigerated style of the book, its clarity and penetration are ample reward. Economy is won by the determined application of the single criterion of the

concept of symbol: with this laser beam the author neatly sections the thought of Coleridge. In the process the importance of the concept is demonstrated, together with Coleridge's powerfully enforced understanding of a symbol as participative of the reality for which it stands. A symbol for him embodied its significance: it was not a shadow but could confer real experience. Thus (sacred) history and symbol were entirely compatible. Most interesting is Coleridge's treatment of the Fall in Genesis (a treatment very similar to Milton's, incidentally, and traditional except in its analytic explicitness and subtlety). The unColeridgean single-mindedness and system of the book do not, I think, misrepresent his thought, although they intensify by contrast the richness of his language whenever this is quoted. Coleridge quoted seems luminous rather than cloudy, and he is quoted to good effect, except in the only quotation from his verse. I missed 'Frost at Midnight'.

A certain lack of outer confidence may account for a rather painfully high and dry tone, as in the opening of a strong final paragraph on STC: 'Nevertheless, unsatisfactory or incomplete as it may be, Coleridge's concept of 'symbol' is, I would suggest, interesting, perhaps capable of development, and certainly unexpectedly consistent.' The inner confidence with which Coleridge is presented (at odds with an excessive citation of secondary authorities) is maintained throughout the subsequent flank march examining the symbol *chez* Hazlitt, De Quincy, Carlyle, Newman, Inge, Tyrrell and George MacDonald.

It is easily shown how little any before Newman grasped the true Coleridgean doctrine, and how even he, like the others looked at, tended to fall back sometimes into seeing symbols, literary or natural, as Platonic or Calvinistic shadows, or numerical cyphers, rather than as incarnating the substance of what they also represent. The author confesses to being a little puzzled by Newman, and finds inconsistency in the use of the term 'symbol' in all those

she examines, especially Tyrrell, for whom nevertheless she has a soft spot. In general, all these developments from Coleridge are seen as false or partial, and one can certainly join in her hope that his 'seminating' Idea may still bear fruit.

M. Jadwiga Swiatecka is at home with Coleridge, and is most convincing with him because she begins with an outline of what she calls his *Weltanschauung*, and with some fullness. Only against such a firmly grasped background does the single test of consistency in the (novel) use of an instrumental term like 'symbol' seem both safe and useful. Although instrumental it is demonstrably central enough to Coleridge, but its centrality to Newman doesn't seem so evident; nor (partly for reasons of space) is his thought in general so firmly sketched in. Perhaps it is too much to expect that the word 'symbol' should itself be both mathematically univalent and also consistently an embodiment of what it represents, since even Coleridge applies it to so many different kinds of things. On the whole the handling of related terms such as 'history', 'analogy' and 'sacrament' is clear and tactful.

There are one or two minor blemishes on what is a strenuous and distinguished book – a misquotation from E M Forster; an incidental misrepresentation of Aristotle's idea of *mimesis*; 'impassable' for 'impassible'. There are also two unclear major points: it is not obvious from the evidence presented why Tyrrell is seen as potentially the true inheritor of the symbolic mantle of STC; and there is a mysterious and also uncharacteristically petulant passage of comment on John Coulson's fruitful *Newman and the Common Tradition*, a pioneering survey of this part of the forest. It may be that the strain of centring this impressive synthesis on the shibboleth of the one true use of 'symbol' has here narrowed for a moment the width and variety of that tradition.

MICHAEL ALEXANDER