Book Reviews

Sister Thekla, *George Herbert: Idea and Image.* Newport Pagnell, England: The Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, 1974. pp. 307. £2.85.

Since the publication of Rosemond Tuve's authoritative study, *A Reading of George Herbert* (1952), many scholars have focused their attention on the poet's affinities with Christian theology, typology, liturgy, iconography, cosmology and the like. In a grand display of erudition, they have unwittingly done their best, not to "praise" Herbert, but to "bury" him in the barren pages of learned journals. Their intellectual gymnastics have often led them to lose sight of the fact that he is "a man speaking to men." According to the poet himself, *The Temple* is designed for the purpose of delightful instruction to help "any dejected poor Soul." In his code of thought, the communication of Christian experience, however personal it may be, inevitably functions didactically.

In her *Idea and Image,* Sister Thekla seems to be keenly aware of this function when she explores man's spiritual pilgrimage from the doom of life to salvation in the light of Herbert's poems. Her inquiry into the theological content of *The Temple* is marked by charming simplicity as well as freedom from pedantry and neo-scholasticism. This, however, does not imply that she is a simple-minded didact or a cheap religious propagandist attempting to indoctrinate readers with platitudes which would not stand the test of severe thought. Without striving to be original or ingenious, Sister Thekla reveals depth of thought and clarity of vision in her endeavour to analyse the spiritual significance of the poems.

The organization of the book is based mainly on topical arrangement of central themes: the work of Faith, the world of Grace, the world of Nature, the work of Love, the participation in Christ, the offering of Praise, the mystery of Presence, the mystery of Renewal, the mystery of Eternity. This classification is strongly reminiscent of the "Alphabeticall Table" included in the 1656 edition of *The Temple* and all subsequent ones to 1709. In this subject index, there is a similar attempt to categorize systematically the fundamental conceptions and motifs of the poet. Sister Thekla's approach is indeed close to the spirit of many seventeenth-century readers of Herbert who regarded his poetry as an introduction to the devout life.

But she treads on slippery ground by suggesting, without textual evidence, that Herbert may be seen as "a mystical thinker" (p. 13). The same notion is echoed by Mother Maria in her essay on some aspects of his theology at the end of the book. It is true that Herbert has felt the joy of God's presence and the agony of His absence in a manner peculiar to the mystics.

Nevertheless, his religious experience does not seem to reflect the mystical ascent from awakening of the self and purgation, through illumination and the dark night of the soul, to the ultimate union with the Divine Being. It should be noted, however, that Sister Thekla and Mother Maria, in their loose generalizations about mysticism, resist the temptation to use biographical material in order to force a mystical pattern on *The Temple*. This has been the major defect in Itrat-Husain's book, *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century*, where he adopts G. H. Palmer's so-called "chronological" order of the poems to make a hypothetical thesis of mystical development in Herbert's "Odyssey."

Generally speaking, the author of *Image and Meaning* avoids the esoteric language of Christian theology and mysticism. From her classification of ideas and citations, the reader gets the impression that her main concern is to indicate the universal significance of *The Temple* as an objective record of religious thought and feeling. Occasionally, however, her readings of certain poems betray literary naïveté, manifest, for instance, in her attempt to explore the emblems of the "anchor," the "watch," the "prayer-book" and the "ring" in Herbert's "Hope" (p. 245f). But she has the intellectual humility and integrity to admit her failure to fully understand this obscure poem.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in the book can be seen in Part IV, "Synopsis of the Imagery," where she claims to make a scientific approach to the poems. Her list of key-words in *The Temple*, obviously derived from Cameron Mann's *Concordance* (1927), could be useful and illuminating for future research. But this is followed by complicated and confusing diagrams of word interrelationships, entitled "World of Grace," "Finite and Infinite," "World of Nature," "Properties of Nature," "Constitution of Man," "Man: Rank and Activity." This oddity, of which Sister Thekla seems to be very proud, verges on the absurd. The delightful simplicity of the book suffers from this naive attempt to display subtlety and sophistication.

There is hardly anything new in the writer's conclusion that *The Temple* covers "a treasury of common Christian ground wholly unrelated to doctrine . . ." (p. 277). Such a statement calls to mind Coleridge's suggestion that Herbert's poetry cannot be fully appreciated except by Anglicans who share his religious faith. But the poet has been admired by many non-Anglican, even non-Christian readers. His admirers include people of quite different sympathies such as Richard Baxter, Charles I, Henry Purcell, John Wesley, William Cowper, Hopkins, Aldous Huxley and Itrat-Husain, According to Eliot, "Herbert is not a poet whose work is significant only for Christian readers . . . *The Temple* is not to be taken as simply a devotional handbook of meditation for the faithful." As a record of conflict and resolution, of the struggle after inward peace, this volume of poetry should be a valuable document for all who strive to attain self-knowledge and come to terms with life.

Saad El-Gabalawy

Terje Stigen, *An Interrupted Passage.* Translated from the Norwegian by Amanda Langemo. New York: Twayne Publishers and the American Scandinavian Foundation, 1974. pp. 261. $7.50.

This novel, which first appeared in Norway in 1956, is the latest in a series of Scandinavian works published jointly by Twayne Publishers and the American Scandinavian Foundation. To date, items in this Library of Scandinavian Literature Series include translations from the Old Norse and Old Icelandic, but the emphasis has been on contemporary fiction, poetry, and drama from the four Scandinavian nations and Finland. In effect, this series is performing a similar role to that established earlier this century by Alfred A. Knopf, publishers in translation of such significant writers as Knut Hamsun, Sigrid Undset, and Halldor Laxness, and the intelligent, sensitive translations in this present Series are a welcome contribution indeed to this tradition.

An Interrupted Passage on its most immediate level is a collection of four seemingly disparate tales told by a group of acquaintances whose cruise-ship has been temporarily disabled off the north coast of Norway. They continue their journey on a passing fishing smack and fortified by a rich wine whose redness is enhanced by the late northern sun, they tell stories which on the surface appear to be about other places, other times, but which in fact are subtly disguised chronicles of relationships in their own pasts. The tales are entertaining, digressive, and moral, though in an existential or pragmatic sense rather than in the medieval, Christian sense, but Stigen's debt to Chaucer, Boccaccio, and other practitioners of the frame-tale is evident here. Indeed, in launching into her story of Regine, Lady Sophie varies the words but attains the same ironic effect that Chaucer did in his *Prologue*: "If I use words other than hers and more of them," she asserts, "be assured it results from my love of truth."

As it turns out, there is no real agreement on what constitutes the truth of the past relationships between Lady Sophie and the three male members of the group, Governor Florelius, Pastor Celion, and Merchant Berg. Each teller is bent on maintaining a pose or a disguise, but in the act of telling all are unwittingly led into occasional revelations of their true feelings and natures, which at times cause an embarrassed and awkward silence, hurriedly overcome by the replenishing of their wine glasses. The passages of their lives, as it were, are interrupted as effectively as the passage of their ship, but Lady Sophie comforts them with the observation that by its very nature the truth cannot remain long to haunt one. "I believe it is with truth as with recollection," she proclaims, "it isn't a plant in the soil that you tend to make it grow tall and beautiful, rather it is like a butterfly that flits away each time you are about to catch hold of it."

Each story, therefore, is a distortion of whatever the original reality was, and in as much as Lady Sophie was the common element in the pasts of the three men, it is aesthetically appropriate that she is the manipulator of the present reality. It

is she who provides the wine and who proposes the story-telling, and it is she who tells the last tale, which makes a recognizable and acceptable order of the other three distortions. When the repaired cruise-ship overtakes them, their lives are again as complete as they ever can be, and like Sophie's character Regine, they "sailed south — into the world."

As the Norwegian critic, Ole Langseth, points out in his "Introduction" to this edition, it was *An Interrupted Passage* which earned Stigen the acclaim of critics and general readers alike in Norway. Now that it is available to non-Norwegian readers, it will undoubtedly create interest in his other dozen or so novels and collections of short stories, not only for his evocations of moods and landscapes of his native country, but also for his understanding of the essential nature of contemporary man and his problems.

Hallvard Dahlie

Patrick Cullen, *The Infernal Triad: The Flesh, the World, and the Devil in Spenser and Milton.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974. pp. xxxvi + 267. $13.50.

Once again a book from Princeton sets out to discover in medieval and Renaissance literature an underlying theological pattern. Cullen argues that both Spenser and Milton inherited from an early Christian tradition the concept of three chief vices — the flesh, the world, the devil — and used the *schema* extensively as the organizational backbone for much of their poetry: "the central contention of this book is that the infernal triad is *the* major structural motif for Spenser's Legend of Holiness and Cave of Mammon as well as Milton's *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, and that it also enters into the portrayal of Pandaemonium and the Fall in *Paradise Lost*" (p. xiii; italics mine).

Because of Donald Howard's detailed research into the exegetical background in *The Three Temptations* (1966), Cullen provides only a brief sketch of the typological affiliation between the account in Genesis 3:1-6 of Satan's beguiling Eve with intemperance (the flesh), avarice (the world) and vainglory (the devil) and the corresponding accounts in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 of Christ's temptations in the wilderness. He is similarly reticent about alternative versions of the scheme, versions which he nonetheless adduces often later in the book when the intractable poems of Spenser and Milton refuse to take the shape required by his original apparatus. Infernal appeals to submit to the Flesh, for instance, are sometimes replaced in Protestant variations on the scheme by appeals to despair, distrust in God, or necessity; temptations to the World sometimes involve not lust for gold, but lust for knowledge; usually, in fact, submitting to the World means submitting to "all sin" and hence to the Seven Deadly Sins which themselves, according to Cullen, split up into three groups of fleshly, worldly and demonic vices. That sin has many lovely aspects we all know, but Cullen is not rigorous enough in explaining the various guises assumed by this triad.

The lack of theological specificity in a book that demands it allows Cullen to isolate two triads in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, since he calls the Flesh, the World and the Devil prototypes for both the Duessa-Lucifera-Orgoglio sequence and the Despair-House of Holiness-Dragon sequence. In his confrontation with the first three, the Red Cross Knight imitates Adam; he "resists or is educated in terms of" the second three in an *imitatio Christi* (p. 4). Cullen's insistence on impressing his thesis upon a malleable poem is evident in this identification of the House of Holiness as a temptation to the World. The Red Cross Knight does not have to resist the House of Holiness, but rather the urge to stay there, the enticement not to return to the world. (Cullen nowhere mentions the echo of Plato's Allegory of the Cave.) Such manipulation of the poems appears again and again as the scheme assimilates Belial, Mammon and Moloch in *Paradise Lost* and Manoa, Dalila and Harapha in *Samson Agonistes*, in spite of Cullen's acknowledging that "any poetic structure is infinitely more fluid, more flexible, than the expository outline a critic may give it" (p. 172). Unfortunately even the devil can quote scripture.

One of the book's principal aims is to define a great English allegorical tradition which derives from medieval poems of pilgrimage, passes through Spenser to Giles and Phineas Fletcher, and issues in Milton. But such a stream of influence is muddied by the imprecision of Cullen's interpretations. On Stephen Hawes' relation to Spenser, he says: "Indeed, if we were to combine the *Example of Virtue's* triumph over the infernal triad through a true love with the *Pastime of Pleasure's* succumbing to the infernal triad through a false love, we would be very close to the general outline of Book I of the *Faerie Queene*" (p. 13). Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory on Earth* Cullen rightly calls a link between Spenser and Milton's *Paradise Regained*, but his logic falters as soon as he focuses on details. Fletcher includes a temptation to the Flesh which hinges on the suggestion that Christ turn stones into bread and on a subsequent journey to a Cave of Despair. The problem with viewing this episode as mediating between Spenser and Milton, however, is that Spenser has nothing to say about Christ's temptation and Milton, nothing about a cave of despair. One further example of negligent reading: Cullen claims early (p. 14) that Spenser organizes the pageant of the sins on the plan of the Flesh (idleness, gluttony, lechery), the World (avarice) and the Devil (envy, wrath, pride), although there is no internal evidence for such a pattern, the text being ambiguous about whether the sins move singly or in pairs as they precede the chariot driven by pride, who is, incidentally, outside the main group, a partner of neither envy nor wrath; later on (p. 178), however, Cullen asserts that the order of temptation in Fletcher is identical to the order in Spenser and Milton, thus making of his earlier distortion a symmetry crucial to his argument. Obviously we cannot expect writers to imitate sources exactly, but we can expect critics to distinguish between identity and resemblance.

If Cullen's argument is often opaque, so too is his articulation of it, which is cluttered with unnecessary Latin phrases and ob-

solete latinisms such as "tendance" and "debel," both of which words appear several times in his text. The result of a phenomenological approach to the poetry and of espousing the provocative theories of Stanley Fish on the reader's psychological engagement with the hero's trials, Cullen's critical vocabulary is fashionable, specializing as it does in monsters within us, halls of mirrors, "good" temptations, and interior landscapes. We learn, then, that "the Archimagoan semblances have an operative value in the world" (p. 37) and that both Adam and Samson "experience a regeneration involving an externalization of their flaws, a confrontation with the Adamic mirror, a homeopathic purgation of like by like" (p. 192). To disagree, of course, is yourself to succumb to Circe.

The book has some successful moments when Cullen, building on the foundation supplied by Elizabeth Pope and Barbara Lewalski, discusses the structure of *Paradise Regained,* where the temptations are overt. Spenser and Milton have generally resisted, however, the allure Cullen finds in the scheme of the infernal triad.

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