

mines the kind of features they must have. A craftsman could not design a new kind of table unless he understood what tables are, for without this understanding he would not be able to judge how far he could deviate from previous designs without producing a non-table. And we do not decide whether some unfamiliar object is to be classified as a table by comparing it with other objects already accepted as tables, but rather by appealing to the formal element in our notion of a table as determining the range of permissible variations in design.

This is not how we decide whether to say that an object is yellow: in this case we just look for the recognizable colour quality. But there is no recognizable quality of 'tabularity'. And in this respect the majority of our concepts are unlike colour concepts. Especially is this true (as Moore failed to see) of 'good' and 'bad', which are the most general of our moral concepts.

Many of our concepts are organized in hierarchies. For example, the notions (already organized into formal and material elements) of tables, chairs and beds belong to the material element in the higher concept of 'furniture'. Similarly the high order moral concept of vice includes in its material element the various ways in which people can act viciously (murder, lying, adultery, etc.), and these notions are themselves organized into formal and material elements, that of murder, for example, comprising in its material element various ways in which murder can be committed.

The author shows that the difference between moral and non-moral notions is not that the latter are descriptive while the former are evaluative or prescriptive. The difference is in the formal element of the respective notions, and can only be understood in the light of the reasons why we form moral notions. We form scientific notions in order to make predictions or to be able to control events. The point of view from which we form moral notions is that of interpersonal relations, and the need to promote or avoid certain kinds of conduct. It is for this reason, and because language is public, that our moral notions are public and apply to *anybody*.

In forming the notion of murder we are

guided by the need to discriminate between killings that are right and killings that are wrong. If we later decide that certain kinds of killing which have been lumped together under the concept of murder are in fact justifiable, we do not call them 'justifiable murders'; we form a new notion (e.g. 'execution') formally different from that of murder. This is because we need 'Murder is wrong' as a moral principle that applies to anybody in any circumstances. For our moral life cannot be based, as some situationists would maintain, on particular decisions taken without reference to moral principles. The 'cannot' is logical: for as the author says, when we have to decide whether we should tell a lie in order to save someone's life we should not be confronted with the need for a decision (we should not be 'in a situation') unless we knew that lying was wrong and that we have to save people's lives. If it were often necessary to tell lies in order to save lives we might need to preserve the notion of lying as wrong by bringing such cases under a formally different notion. We might perhaps form the new notion of 'saving deceit'. And now our moral principles would include 'Lying is wrong' and 'Savingdeceit is right'. (Just as we now have the formally different notions of a 'promise' as an undertaking that ought to be kept, and a 'threat' as an undertaking that ought not to be kept.) It is not a question the end justifying the means, or of one and the same action being right in some circumstances and wrong in others, but of *two formally different actions*.

Mr Kovesi's central thesis is that moral notions do not evaluate the world of description; they describe the world of evaluation. He is not primarily concerned to explore this 'world of evaluation' or to define precisely the moral point of view, but rather to clarify the logic of the kind of notions we call moral. As a study of the logical basis of ethical thinking this book is indispensable, but it is so closely argued that it is not always easy to see the wood for the trees, and the demands on the reader's thinking and attention are considerable. The book is excellent value for 20s in spite of a few misprints.

JOSEPH COOMBE-TENNANT, O.S.B.

DANTE'S LYRIC POETRY, Volume I: The Poems, Text and Translation; Volume II: Commentary, by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde. Clarendon Press, 1967. 6 gns.

With this book Dante's *Rime* are for the first time made truly accessible to the English-speaking world. Where in the past English

readers of Dante have had to make do with translations in a precious and stilted language that all too often blurred the line of thought,

the present editors have printed alongside their text a plain prose translation which (a few periphrastic passages excepted) is extraordinary helpful. The introduction to the first volume, on Dante's poetic practice and critical consciousness, discussing the craftsmanship of the *Rime* in relation to the theories of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, and outlining his principles of versification, provides an admirable synthesis of essential information. In their text the editors follow Michele Barbi with only minor exceptions; it is in the Commentary volume that they make substantial original contributions. They have assimilated the work of modern Italian scholars without being submerged by it, and have produced a commentary which, while not on the scale of Barbi-Maggini for the songs of Dante's youth, is more comprehensive than that in Gontini's celebrated edition of the complete *Rime*, and which, particularly in some of the most difficult of the major poems, brings notable advances in understanding.

Such a commentary is a labour of love; it can be consulted with profit by the non-specialist who wants further information on occasional points, as well as combed by the scholar for whom every nuance of Dante's poetic diction is of importance. It is so rich in technical detail, its cross-references and arguments often so intricate, that the reviewer feels he will have to live with it for several years before a just appreciation is possible. I should like, however, to offer the following criticisms provisionally, after sampling the commentary in a limited number of the poems. It goes without saying that such criticisms should not obscure how much there is to be grateful for in this edition.

The editors, in their devoted concern with Dante's manner of saying, have not I think always kept a sense of proportion about what he says. Thus I would agree that the canzone on avarice, *Doglia mi reca*, like that on justice, *Tre donne*, shows technical mastery of an exceptional kind; yet I cannot see how one can speak of these in the same breath as 'the two greatest poems of Dante's first years in exile' (p. xxii): in the first, Dante sets his prodigious rhetorical powers in the service of arid fulminations and grandiose platitudes, in the second they carry an authentic insight, won through his own sufferings and expressed with the acumen of a seer. Again, can one continue to group together without qualification the *pargoletta* poems (64–66), or the *rime petrose* (77–80), when the differences of content within

each group are overwhelming? The first group couples two pallid and derivative sonnets of love-lament with a ballata that triumphantly shows a woman as epiphany of a heavenly, cosmic power. It is unique in that the woman herself speaks it: she reveals herself almost in the manner of the Biblical Sapientia, and only the closing lines tell of the mortal effect of this revelation.

So too the *rime petrose* couple three engaging virtuoso pieces with a song, *Così nel mio parlar*, that (despite the superficial link implied in 'questa bella pietra') is not in the least like these, and even less 'resembles Dante's earlier love poems' as the editors claim (II 273). *Così nel mio parlar* is one of the most vehement and anguished expressions of love as pain in European poetry, and in its fantasy of the lover's revenge expresses something for the tone of which I know no parallel. One should perhaps, to bring this out, compare certain other apparently similar motifs in medieval lyric—in Walther von der Vogelweide's *sumerlaten* song (73, 17ff.), or *Carmina Burana* 121. Their lightheartedly malicious sense of play is obvious. Dante by contrast wants to give an impression of jocoseness ('like a bear sporting'), yet this makes the fierceness lying behind the mask (seizing the woman by her hair, the thousand lashes) all the more frightening. If the editors wish to retain the conventional groupings, a sense of differentiation should emerge in the commentary. The problems of style cannot be divorced from those of tone and meaning.

A similar problem, concerning the human substance of the poetry, arises out of the long expert discussion of the conflict in Dante's mind and writing between Beatrice and the Donna Gentile. When the editors say of the Donna Gentile (II 357):

Clearly, at the time of writing [the prose *Vita Nuova*] she was either a symbol of philosophy or she was not. If she was not, for Dante at that time, a symbol of philosophy then we have no reason to take her as a symbol of anything; she was a real woman whose interest in Dante tempted him to forget Beatrice.

or again, in the case of the *pargoletta* (II 186), speak of

a decision as to whether the *pargoletta* was a flesh-and-blood Florentine maiden or a symbol of philosophy

they have not I think realized how deeply figures of speech can be grounded in figures of thought. I believe that for Dante such dichoto-

mies are inappropriate; the reason that his poetry can be simultaneously so moving and so enigmatic is at least partly that his symbols were almost never without an existential base, his allegories almost never purely conceptual

fabrications. It is from a *sensory* reality of exceptional intensity (even if we cannot specify it with any certainty in biographical terms) that the symbols and allegories draw their power.

PETER DRONKE

#### THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY IN THE MIDDLE AGES, by Walter Ullmann. *Methuen*, 1967. 30s.

Professor Ullmann's latest book consists of three lectures, general in character, delivered at Johns Hopkins University, which may explain why in general the savagery of its author's comments on such English scholars as fall in his way is only equalled by the fulsome-ness of its praise for the Americans: unless he thinks they need it more than we do. At times this verges on the absurd. He has a learned footnote explaining that the drafters of *Magna Carta* 'plainly distinguished between the meanings of *vel* and *aut*'. The note adds nothing to Powicke's famous article which is not cited, although the collection in which it appeared is referred to in the same note. Again Dr Ullmann tells us: 'It is not altogether properly appreciated that the handling of legal business in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England was very largely in the hands of the unpaid amateur, of the non-professional'. I should have thought one of the books every history undergraduate might be expected to know was A. L. Poole's *Obligations of Society*. Moreover Dr Ullmann has equally overlooked *Self-government at the King's Command* by the American historian, White. In view of this it is both vulgar and distasteful when he tells us how ignorant of the influence of the Bible on the Middle Ages most medievalists are, and appends for our information a selection of his own articles with no reference to Dr Smalley's great book on the *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Perhaps he is not acquainted with it. In spite of the want of taste and the charm-less style the book is none the less decidedly a good one.

Dr Ullmann has devoted his first lecture to what he calls the descending thesis of medieval political thought. That is the notion expressed in 'official' sources, the protocol of state documents and so on, of government descending from God on to a King and downwards to his subjects. Then, deserting the level of high theory for a rare visit to the world of fact, the second lecture deals with the feudal realities in which Dr Ullmann brings out well the ways in which the nature of medieval society meant in practice a large measure of agreement, contract,

and co-operation to make life go on. The last essay is concerned with showing how this sort of theological political ideology and this sort of practical co-operative politics combined to create the liberal conception of citizenship, at least in *esse*. Although he must be summary in order to deal with such a theme in three essays of moderate length, Dr Ullman is not superficial. A great deal of very relevant knowledge is packed into a short compass. Very few could honestly say they had read this book without learning a very great deal about something important from it.

There are weaknesses. Dr Ullmann is not very often at home to the practical politics of the feudal world and he is not always clear at what level of society, the village or the honour, he is talking. But the points he makes tell well enough as far as I can see. Those acquainted with his other books will find much to ponder in the first chapter, that devoted to the 'descending thesis'. The point he wants to make is the absolutist character of official medieval ideology. The thesis is almost identical with that he identifies in his other books as medieval papalism. Once again its logical rigour is singled out as a leading characteristic. The new book, however, illustrates the logical weakness of Dr Ullmann's notion of papalism. Here only kings and a few great men are competent in matters of government because, the lower orders are *idiota* and therefore by definition incompetent. The authority for this is no more than Pauline and patristic texts to the effect that the world is divided into governors and governed, so that, as a consequence 'the *fidelis christianus* not only had no rights but also no autonomous standing within the Church itself or within society'. Everything depends on how the distinction between competent and incompetent is drawn and how justified. As Dr Ullmann has often pointed out the extreme canonists took up the position that in the end no-one was competent but the pope: a king is as much and as little of an idiot as the lowest of his subjects. Since few popes and fewer Catholics wanted a monopoly of governing power in the hands of the vicar of Christ,