Reviews

Retrieving democracy?

C. B. MacPherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval,* Oxford University Press, hardback £2.75, ISBN 1982 71875, paperback £1.25, ISBN 1982 71891

Political philosophy has not suffered exactly the same fate in English-speaking higher education as philosophy in general. The concerns of political philosophy have made it difficult to exclude the idea of a glimpse of reality. This book is the present culmination of the work of one of the most suggestive academics in political philosophy.

In an essay in Laslett and Runciman's *Politics, Philosophy and Society,* MacPherson argued some years ago that a crisis was developing in western liberal democratic theory. He claimed that it could no longer justify the society it sustains either in terms of absolute superiority of consumer production or in terms of individual power. This latter is diminished by the transfer of power from non-owners to owners which is implicit in the private ownership of the means of production. With the origins of this society man came to be regarded as essentially a consumer (thus economic scarcity was permanently insinuated into the system) so that the rewards of unlimited appropriation could act as a motor for the massive expansion of productive capacity that ensued. However, the level of productivity is now such that it is again possible and necessary to revert to the older idea of man's essential nature as a creative agent which the transfer of power in capitalist society offends. This notion was used by Mill and Green, but subsequently set aside by thinkers who made no attempt at justification; hence MacPherson's 'Essays in retrieval'.

The outline of MacPherson's argument has not changed since then. But it is developed in two further directions in this book. First, the alternative notions of power and of property which MacPherson argues that we are going to need are developed in more detail. And secondly specific attacks are mounted against other current theories of democracy and freedom; particularly those of Berlin, Dahl, Chapman, Friedman and Rawls.

MacPherson presents two concepts of power corresponding to the two concepts of man's essential nature. 'Extractive power' is what a man has insofar as he is a consumer; it can be passed from one to another as labour and is subject to indefinite appropriation. So long as the levels of extractive power were fixed by the market there was no problem about the deployment of extractive power. But the corresponding levels of satisfaction cannot so easily be measured (or fixed by the market). A new ontology of human essence which treated man as an agent, would substitute 'developmental power' for 'extractive power'. Developmental power can be measured by the removal of the objective restraints which contain the requirements of *both* the new demands on the left and the more traditional successes of liberal society (individual human rights). This argument, which fills out MacPherson's theme insofar as it attempts to show that the maximisation of developmental power would have practical criteria, is surely unconvincing. The problem is that the development of 'essentially human capacities' calls for subjective criteria of what constitute these capacities.

The problem is not solved by insisting that restraints are objective and can be measured. For the restraints are still restraints of given capacities. This relates to MacPherson's persistent problem - the ethical character of his thesis. He is concerned to show that his position is not merely subjective; whereas it would surely be a better tactic at this point to insist that the contrary theory (in which each man's satisfaction is quantified, falsely, in the market) is equally distortingly subjective. The prejudice that the subjective (and accordingly the ethical) is politically impractical is an illegitimate extrapolation from the relations between men as consumers of commodities; and it is this that MacPherson should attack.

MacPherson's theory of property is similarly divided between an analysis of the concept which arose with market society and that which is possible in some alternative. MacPherson describes the history of the concepts of property held in common, property as revenue and duties, and property as something defined by society (perhaps in relation to God); and finally of property as something acquired by the direct appropriation of some materials from nature by the labour of the individual. The latter provided a temporary justification for the distribution of property, but the justification became inadequate as soon as the available means of production in land had all been taken up. No justification subsequent to it has been forthcoming though the concept of property that went with it has survived in our theory and our usage. Property is now essentially private in that it excludes others from its use and can be alienated freely; it is possession of a thing rather than its revenues and its responsibilities; it is, in short, property that can move in a market. The conditions now obtain where usage and democratic pressures are tending to a reversion to property as a right to revenue or even as a right to participate in the collective distribution of revenue.

This original essay on the concept of property shows up well the strengthes and weaknesses of MacPherson's method. On the one hand he gives us a perceptive commentary on the history of thought, neatly demonstrating how our own ideas and arguments are blinkered by the society that has adapted them (and us) to its workings. The area is original; the approach is illuminating. Yet the analysis requires more to justify it than this sense of freedom over our ways of thinking about our own society. It needs to show not only how ideas *had* to develop in a certain way with the market society, but also to show that they *do not have to* remain that way. Yet MacPherson can offer us only trendy straws in the wind - the democratic ideas of participation, the separation of executive power from those who have the right to revenue.

MacPherson's work is threatened by the paradox of relativism. This is usually stated as a claim that the historian of knowledge cannot exclude the mere relativity of his own assertions. But I am worried at the vacillation between a clear explanation of how concepts come to be as they are, because of the context in which they develop, on the one hand, and on the other the assumption that we have a free choice about changing them. MacPherson's reasons for commending new ideas are weak compared with what he shows to be the origins of misconceptions.

Here are some more examples of the same problem. MacPherson describes in Essays I and II the development of the ontology of man

as essentially a consumer in terms of the 'making of two value judgements' (p17), (concerning freedom of choice in work and productivity) and later he describes it in terms of the invention of 'assumptions' to 'justify' new institutions. He attacks several theories of power and freedom which are opposed to his own. Thus he criticises Dahl for employing the narrow concept of man; but he does not disprove the practical usefulness of Dahl's conception as an instrument of political science. In order to do this, MacPherson would have to show that political power can be scientifically based upon social context; while in offering us moral choices, he implicitly allows the separation of power from its social base.

MacPherson is much more successful in his attack on Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. He shows that Berlin's inheritance of a crude notion of restraint from classical liberals, forces upon him a specious distinction between freedom and conditions of freedom. For the welfare-state programme that is Berlin's own objective, MacPherson's own notion of developmental liberty is far more suitable. But this is a case where MacPherson and his adversary already agree upon a moral programme - a plan of what one ought to do with society made as it were from outside it. Criticism remains moral; historical analysis scientific.

Finally there is the case of power. What we have there is a juxtaposition: the concept of extractive power makes power transferable and liable to appropriation and is conceivable in a society where the main activity is appropriation of something else - labour power; developmental power is the extension of the capacity for individual self-conscious activity and is conceivable in a society that is truly democratic, with equality and common ownership and control of the means of production against a background of high productivity. Two societies; two concepts; a matter of mere choice.

This is particularly distressing because MacPherson's overall theoretical position is the best in political philosophy in English. At the same time its weaknesses account precisely for its suitability to the English context. In the introduction to his classic on Hobbes and Locke (*The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*) MacPherson showed how the understanding of political philosophers of the past requires understanding of the society they sought to describe. He further argued that what people called the naturalistic fallacy in Hobbes was really Hobbes's own recognition of the implications of the social structures he saw developing. The implication is surely that we too can communicate only in the light of the social context of our expression.

Two essays in this volume (X and XI) attack the scientific inadequacy of what is also morally inadequate. The model of political life borrowed from the economists builds in an assumption of equilibrium that could never stretch to political crisis. It does not go beyond the phenomena of political demands to the factors which bring people into the political arena. By contrast the classical tradition did exactly that:

> *A political theory may be called scientific insofar as it seeks to deduce the desirable or right kind of political obligation from the nature of man, and insofar as its view of the nature of man is based on enquiry as scientific as is possible within the prevailing limits of knowledge and vision.* [p198]

It is the lack of any suitable material for this kind of deduction that makes MacPherson's straws in the wind so thin.

I alleged earlier that the paradox of relativism appears in various forms in MacPherson's difficulties. But the paradox when explained may seem to have turned out to be largely the separation of facts and values. MacPherson's difficulty is that he sees relativism and voluntarist moralism as the only alternatives. His strength is that he is working upon a tradition which is widely disseminated. His weakness is that the institutions which preserve the tradition, and which set themselves up to speak for the whole of society, cannot be professionally involved in the explication of what becomes possible through the victory of one part of society over its oppressors. Hence the force of MacPherson's argument that equilibrium theories of power will not cover cases of crisis. Given the universalism of intellectual life within our society (see Sohn-Rethel's article in *RP6*) any recommendation must turn out to be the voice of its dissociated unity, its ideal. MacPherson himself makes this point perceptively about Green and Barker. It rather seems that MacPherson's approach is a brilliant *critical* success in an activity that can go no further. No doubt some of MacPherson's restraint has to do with the Canadian context (though it fits ours well enough too). It knocks against the limits of where we are. Yet the institutions exist tangibly and we should not abandon them to the other side.

A justificatory theory of the kind that MacPherson would approve could best be developed through the notion of power. MacPherson's hints about changing attitudes do not admit to any specific origin within the social structure. If they did, they might possibly be shown to be realistic as well as moralistic possibilities. For power has an unusual status among the phenomena of society. It is a possibility of producing an effect, rather than the effect itself, and the signs of it are as much in the perception of the power-holder and of him over whom he holds power as in the rest of the situation (their views are part of the real situation). Thus to claim power for a certain class of society is not only to make an observation regarding power; it is to make an intervention. It is to a degree self-validating (Peter Binns was attempting to say a similar thing in *RP4*). Given MacPherson's argument that the concentration of power is based in the society beyond the political sphere, and that one must go there to discover its scientific origin, the need for a move like this would follow from his argument.

Another peculiar feature of power is its connection with the fact that what is possible for human agents is mediated through the form of society, so that the forms of society (which again include the agents' perception of them) can be modifications of the *same* agents' power. This point could bring together the two divorced types of power that MacPherson asks us to choose between. The concentration in private hands of the means of production imposes a limitation on people's freedom. The repossession of these means is the lifting of this limitation, and hence an extension of the power of those who expend their energies through these means of production. In both cases we are talking about the channeling of the energies of real people. Extractive and developmental power are the power of the *same* people; in one case limited, in the other extended. They are not alternatives between which one simply chooses.

Noel Parker

The hazards of work

Patrick Kinnersley, *The Hazards of Work; How to Fight Them*, Workers Handbook No.1, Pluto Press, 90p.

One day at work in a Frigidaire factory in North London, David Adair was asked to clean foam from the floor beneath a leaking insulation plant and so was exposed to a chemical called toluene diisocyanate (TDI) which caused permanent damage to his lungs (a specialist described him as 30% disabled), giving rise to severe asthma, and reducing him to taking work as a lavatory attendant because he could no longer do anything more strenuous than light sweeping. Of the parties concerned, only David Adair seems to have regarded the incident as a tragedy; Frigidaire were inclined to dispute the occurrence of any accident, and the High Court awarded Adair a mere £4,000 compensation.

Industrial workers are put at daily risk from the machines, processes, and ever-increasing number of chemicals with which they work. Patrick Kinnersley reckons the annual toll as around 2,000 killed at work or dying from injuries, 1,000 killed by recognised industrial diseases, 1,000,000 injured or off work for at least three days with industrial diseases, and 10,000,000 injured needing first aid. Official figures give around 600 dead and 300,000 injured annually. There is a difference between these two sets of figures partly because official estimates leave out any diseases which are not 'prescribed'. A prescribed disease is a disease which the Department of Health and Social Security recognises as being an occupational disease, so that sufferers qualify for disablement benefit. Reluctance to recognise the extent of occupational diseases is therefore partly linked to a fear that people who have contracted their diseases privately may pass themselves off as industrially disabled and 'illicitly' claim benefit. Asthma, for example, is not a prescribed industrial disease - although David Adair could qualify for benefit as industrially disabled, because his asthma resulted from an accident. Workers who contracted asthma more gradually - as a result of regular exposure to substances which damaged them less rapidly than TDI - might discover that what had occurred had not been an 'accident' but a 'process', so that they would not quality for benefit.

Workers are also expected to believe that, on the whole, they themselves are mostly to blame for the bad safety record in industry. Safety manuals and safety posters love to dwell on the 'carelessness' of employees. The official story goes that there is no conflict of class interest with regard to health and safety at work. Indeed the Robens Report (1972) goes so far as to claim that there is 'a natural identity of interest' between the two sides of industry in matters of health and safety. The Robens Committee analysed the problem in terms of 'apathy' and appealed to industry to 'pull together' to improve safety conditions. The message seems to be that if management would take a more 'positive attitude' there'd be less slacking on the shop floor. But apart from exhorting management to exhort the workers to be a little more careful, Robens thought industry could carry on as before, i.e. industry should regulate itself in matters of health and safety; there was already, the Report wearily claimed, too much law:

> *Our present system encourages rather too much reliance on state regulation, and rather too little on personal responsibility and voluntary, self-generating effort.*
> (*Robens Report* section 28)

If even the present law were enforced it could touch industry economically:

> *Mr E Peel, for the company (W and C French) said that if the regulations regarding shoring up of trenches were rigidly enforced there would be a thousand such prosecutions a day. There would have been no prosecution now had there not been an accident.*
>
> *He added that contractors would find many jobs economically impractical if they shored earth works as thoroughly as the regulations demanded.*
> (quoted in *Hazards of Work*, p18)

The Robens Report provides tables showing the 'cost to the nation' of industrial accidents, and computes the cost to the employer of an accident, even working out the costs on time lost for workers who stop and stare. But the Committee does not seem to have supposed that questions of the cost of safety were within their brief.

The Hazards of Work recognises increase of profits, official terminology, management apathy and the Robens Report as among the dangers facing industrial workers. Patrick Kinnersley has arranged the book so that he is able to fight on several fronts at once. He gives basic information about dangerous chemicals, and about how phenomena such as noise and vibration can be dangerous. He gives great priority to the hazards of stress - traditionally thought more a white collar risk - which can make you both ill and 'accident-prone'. He also gives basic information about relevant laws, how to use the law courts in order to gain some compensation, what sort of supplementary benefits are available for whom. He discusses how best workers and unions can organise - and have organised to fight particular dangers, giving forewarning of various arguments that management like to produce. And at the same time the book provides an analysis - directed especially against the Robens Report, but also against common assumptions underlying remarks by management and professional safety specialists - of why it is so dangerous to be an industrial worker (or of working class family) and of who or what is responsible for placing workers at such risk.

Janet Vaux

Rediscovering women's struggles

Alexandra Kollontai: *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle - Love and the new Morality* translated and introduced by Alix Holt, The Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5EP, 15p (+5p post)

The radicalisation associated with the year 1968 has set going a process of rediscovery. There is a rediscovery of revolutionary history - so long buried under the dead tomes of bourgeois hacks and Stalinist falsifiers. There is the rediscovery by the women's movement of previous struggles. Alexandra Kollontai (the only woman on Lenin's Central Committee) takes her place in both these perspectives.

After the revolution she was associated with the 'Workers' Opposition' in the party; but she was also active in the sphere of women's rights and sexual relations generally. Later she made her peace with Stalin and served him in various diplomatic posts. In fact, of the thirty-one members and alternates of the October Central Committee only two were alive in 1946 - Stalin and Kollontai. It may or may not be significant of Stalin that near enough the only other member of Lenin's Central Committee to die a natural death was a woman!

The pamphlet before us is a translation of two of the three essays originally published in Russia in 1919 in one book, under the title of *The New Morality and the Working Class*. (The third essay, *The New Woman*, has already been published in English as part of the volume *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*.) One of the essays is a review of

a book by Grete Meisel-Hess. There is also a competent introduction situating the texts against the background in Russia at the time, and stressing the importance of Kollontai's struggle to raise issues too many socialists dismissed as secondary.

In these essays Kollontai does not adopt the partial standpoint that treats the matter as a 'woman's problem', but talks of a generalized 'sexual crisis'. Only one of the basic issues she discusses relates to the question of sexual inequality:

The three basic circumstances distorting the modern psyche - extreme egoism, the idea that married partners possess each other, and the acceptance of the inequality of the sexes in terms of physical and emotional experience - must be faced if the sexual problem is to be settled.

While the treatment of inequality and the relation of this problem to the class struggle is of historical interest, it does not seem to say anything not already familiar in present debates.

What does seem more thought-provoking is her discussion of the pair-bond in bourgeois society - whether in a conventional marriage or a so-called 'free union'.

We are people living in a world of property relationships, a world of sharp class contradictions and of an individualistic morality. We still live and think under the heavy hand of an unavoidable loneliness of spirit. Man experiences this 'loneliness' even in towns full of shouting, noise and people, even in a crowd of close friends and work-mates. Because of their loneliness men are apt to cling in a predatory and unhealthy way to illusions about finding a 'soul mate' from among the members of the opposite sex.

This compensatory activity, she argues, takes on a highly possessive character - not only in familiar demands for physical fidelity but even more so in the 'no secrets' ideal. This she sees as a modern phenomenon:

Bourgeois morality, with its introverted individualistic family based entirely on private property, has carefully cultivated the idea that one partner should completely 'possess' the other. It has been very successful. The idea of 'possession' is more pervasive now than under the patrimonial system of marriage relationships. During the long historical period that developed under the aegis of the 'tribe', the idea of a man possessing his wife (there has never been any thought of a wife having undisputed possession of her husband) did not go further than a purely physical possession. The wife was obliged to be faithful physically - her soul was her own. Even the knights recognized the right of their wives to have <u>chichesbi</u> (platonic friends and admirers) and to receive the 'devotion' of other knights and minnesingers. It is the bourgeoisie who have carefully tended and fostered the ideal of absolute possession of the 'contracted partner's' emotional as well as physical 'I'...

To be rid of the eternally-present threat of loneliness, we 'launch an attack' on the emotions of the person we love with a cruelty and lack of delicacy that will not be understood by future generations. We demand the right to know every secret of this person's being. The modern lover would forgive physical unfaithfulness sooner than 'spiritual' unfaithfulness. He sees any emotion experienced outside the boundaries of the 'free' relationship as the loss of his own personal treasure...

Two people who yesterday were unknown to each other, and who come together in a single moment of mutual erotic feeling, rush to get at the heart of the other person's being. They want to feel that this strange and incomprehensible psyche, with its past experience that can never be suppressed, is an extension of their own self.

No doubt defenders of the ideal would say that all they wish for is 'sharing'. Kollontai's point, however, is that, under present conditions, such a hope takes on a neurotic character in that, instead of being a natural development of increasing intimacy, it is demanded as a 'right' from the beginning - otherwise the relationship is seen as fatally flawed. It is interesting that Kollontai had already spotted the correlation between the neurotic intensity of 'nuclear' family-life, and social atomisation, that is even more familiar to us today. It is this defense mechanism that makes more open relationships - such as 'group marriage' schemes - so difficult. All of us suffer from basic emotional insecurity - compounded in the case of many women by an economic necessity to 'get her man' and keep him.

Whatever the defects that might be found in her presentation, Kollontai was undoubtedly right to raise these issues. They are certainly too pressing today for socialists to postpone to the future.

Chris Arthur

Most successful students said they were more than satisfied with the content of their courses, yet among those with poor degree results only the highly religious students expressed satisfaction.
Times Higher Education Supplement, 28 December 1973

Reporting Vietnam

THE BRITISH PRESS AND VIETNAM
published by the Indochina Solidarity Conference, 101 Gower Street, London WC1
20p, 31pp.

We publish in this issue an essay by John Krige which is a case study in the analysis of ideology and its mechanisms as manifested in certain texts concerning Chile under Allende. For anyone contemplating doing this kind of work a very useful starting point could be the pamphlet *The British Press and Vietnam* which contains a mass of raw material for this kind of analysis.

We ask a simple question: do the media provide a balanced view of the events in Indochina and of the policies of all those involved - has the basic principle of 'giving both sides of the picture' been adhered to? We conclude that there has been, and continues to be, an overwhelming bias in favour of the official American line.

Not a surprising conclusion of course, but the documentation supporting it is fascinating. The pamphlet starts with an examination of terminology, of the semantics of bias. There is a useful section on the treatment of the 1973 ceasefire and its violations in the press and on TV. And an examination of the role of some of our academic, therefore 'objective', experts in the creation and perpetuation of myths about Vietnam. Of particular value is the investigation of the way in which the press has elevated to the status of indubitable facts two mythical communist massacres of thousands of non-combatant civilians. The first case was that of the slaughter that was alleged to have taken place in North Vietnam in 1956, which formed the basis of the predictions of a bloodbath that would occur in South Vietnam should the communists ever succeed in taking over. The story, subsequently revealed by the Director of South Vietnam's Psychological War Service to have been a complete fabrication, was given the seal of scholarly approval by, among others, the expert of experts Patrick Honey of SOAS. The second case, that of the alleged Hué massacres during the Tet offensive in 1968, also turns out to be a fabrication. The standard *Guardian* challenge to those who are narrow minded enough to have made up their minds on which side of the fence they stand on Vietnam - 'But what about the communist atrocities?' - relies on these myths, and they will no doubt survive for a long time in people's minds as 'facts'. The British press has a lot to answer for.

John Mepham

Eng.Lit.

Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (Eds.) *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English*, Wildwood House, £1.00
ISBN 394 71820 8

It is one of the delights and terrors of living today that not one of an individual's acts can be insignificant, either for himself or for those towards whom his actions are directed. Life may still appear meaningless or absurd in a metaphysical frame of reference, but we tend to think within that social matrix which shows off every speech, gesture and role as heavy with significance. There is nothing which I may say or do which does not tend to reproduce, change or destroy at least one among a multitude of social institutions.

The resort to, sometimes the imposition of, this way of thinkint must be attributed largely to political developments. The rise of the Women's Liberation movement, for instance, obviously explains male awareness of the significance of previously taken-for-granted and naturalized actions. Global revolt, along with the dissemination of totalised theories and justifications of that revolt, has limited or abolished the possibilities of privatising a whole range of practices, whether the individual Bad Faith of "I'm only doing my job" or such institutionalised forms as Professional Ethics. The teacher and writer has been as much affected as the soldier and psychiatrist.

For teachers of Arts subjects, the crucial questions which have posed themselves can be summarised in these terms: What is the *significance* of what we teach? If significance is taken to mean *effects*, and the reference point is the social system, the answer increasingly takes the form: The effect of teaching in the Arts is to reproduce the values and social relations which sustain an imperialist, capitalist, racist and sexist structure. It is from this question and answer applied to their own field that most of the contributors to *The Politics of Literature* make their departure. Kampf and Lauter write in their Introduction that 'Literature and literary practice, in spite of the intentions of the practitioners of aestheticism are weapons in maintaining and transforming the received order of social relations.' (p41) As socialists, they are opposed to that received order, and hence to a literature and literary practice (teaching; criticism) which sustains it.

Much of *The Politics of Literature* is devoted to the articulation of the functional links between literature, literary practice and the received order, though not without disagreements: whilst for Bruce Franklin 'New Criticism began as a conscious counter-attack on rising proletarian culture'. (p113) For Richard Ohmann the New Critics 'were sensitive and well-intentioned men, whose main effect on the academy was for the better' (p142) and who cannot be blamed for the 'viciousness' (p143) of American culture at large.

Two essays are devoted to the critique of theories of linguistic deprivation and the practices, such as Operation Headstart, that they found. The editors have imaginatively reprinted an essay, 'The Logic of Non-Standard English' by someone outside their working group, William Labov, and followed it up with a short paper by Wayne O'Neil which drives home the political lessons. Labov claims (a) that black ghetto English is a dialect, not an ungrammatical language without proper transformation rules; (b) that black ghetto youths are verbally fluent, when they are not placed in hostile and potentially dangerous interview situations; (c) that their dialect is capable of, and their discourse contains, the full range of grammatical and logical operations; (d) that the superiority of educated English - what Basil Bernstein would call the use of an *elaborated code* - is often illusory, hiding confusion and vacuity behind verbosity; (e) that, in consequence of (a)-(c), practices like Operation Headstart are bound to fail, and inevitably (f) lead their proponents into acceptance of genetic inferiority. Jensen has already trodden this path.

Even though (b)-(d) are supported only with examples and not systematic evidence or logical argument, Labov's lucid and witty article deserves the closest attention. It reminds me of Chomsky's critique of Skinner. I wonder whether Labov will go unanswered as long as Chomsky.

The criticism of theories of literature and language and their functioning is one of the aspects of this book, sociological if you wish, though I imagine that collaboration with some professional sociologists could have strengthened some of the links in the conceptual chain. The other aspect of the book formulates alternatives to present theory and practice. This is its revolutionary side. The editors define at least four areas of activity: reconstruction of the canon of what is studied and taught; change in the questions we ask about literature and a particular writer's work; production of an alternative radical scholarship; lastly, they write that 'while teachers can indeed become more competent, can use livelier, more relevant material ... our problem is, finally, to *change those* (teaching) roles rather than merely the ways in which we play them.' (p7) Let us take these four areas in turn.

Reconstruction of the Canon

Here the recognition of working-class, black and women's literature is obviously most important. Martha Vicinus' essay on 19th century British working class poetry stands in this collection as an example of such recognition and the radical scholarship to which it can give rise. But it seems to me that the activity of reconstruction is hampered by the classroom-bound context of the discussion and the general, if implicit, acceptance of the given categories of Literature and genre. More radically, I wonder whether what is really needed is a *de*construction of the very idea of a canon into which historically specific works are assimilated. Consider, for example, Ellen Cantarow's discussion of the effect on her of a CNT pamphlet, *Collectivisations*, describing anarchist experience in the Spanish Civil War. She quotes a passage from the pamphlet and comments that when she first read it 'I wept. I tried to think of a poem, a story, that might parallel it' (p79); contrasting it with bourgeois-individualist literature, she concludes 'one teaches literature that represents collective effort because one has been moved, through one's own experience, by the dignity, the humaneness, and the power of such efforts.' (p80) I am led to ask: Isn't the reference to literature and literary forms either redundant or foreign in this context? Might not the message be betrayed just as much as when the undergraduate student of literature writes 'Speaker. Tone (define)' beside the lines 'Nothing so true as what you once let fall,/ "Most women have no Characters at all"' (p59)? Of course, if one pursued these questions one would end up challenging the category of teacher of literature, and the frame of reference of this book precludes that.

> *Prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them*
> (Mao Tse Tung - quoted by Kampf and Lauter, p48)

The Politics of Literature addresses itself to teachers (why not students?) and is written by teachers, some of them long standing. Paradoxically, the book is billed as an antitextbook - to give it its full Newspeak title it is a "Pantheon antitextbook".

Whilst the inclusion of Labov's essay belies the implicit equation of the title between Literature and English, this equation and the scope of address has served to exclude any discussion of plays, films, music, oral tradition and mass media - though the last are mentioned in passing by Sheila Delany (pp316-17).

This exclusion is, I think, unfortunate, and would not have been possible had the authors worked with a general communicational theory, of which literary theory might form a specific part. On first reading, I did think it a merit of this book to have been structured around political theory rather than in the familiar theoretical terms (genesis versus structure; Lukács versus Leavis etc). On second reading, I came to feel that the search for a politically relevant teaching of literature would have proved more fruitful if there had also been a theoretical acquaintance with, for instance, some of the work which impassions some readers of *Radical Philosophy*. A book like Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* could have formed the basis of an essay on the possibility of the teacher of language or literature organising critical work in the classroom around the everyday, and not specifically literary, coded transformations and iconic representations of reality.

Change the questions we ask

The recognition of the sociological dimensions of literary production and response means that the critic has to engage in what is being said and not only with how it is being said. Hitherto, classloads of girls have been able to read and study Pope, and do well on Pope, by commenting 'Speaker. Tone (define)' against 'Most women have no Characters at all'. A radical teacher would expect a 'bullshit' at least. The new questions bring us back, in a sense, to the functions of an older criticism which 'tried to relate the experience of literature more intimately to the rest of the readers' lives'. (p20)

Changing roles

Since much of the book assumes the teacher-class situation, there is plenty of discussion of teaching style and teacher-student relations, though less than is needed on the effects of examinations: perhaps discretion proved the better part of valour here, Paul Lauter having been fired from the University of Maryland for 'subversion of the grading system'. (p415) There are two points I'd like to discuss, one idiosyncratic, the other major.

Sheila Delany, one of the most successful essayists, mentions that 'the radical teacher, like anyone else, may be a performer, a group therapist, or a bore' (pp316-17) but doesn't expand on this. Nor does anyone mention what is for me one of the most important categories of teacher, and a category which has, I think, specific links with radicalism, namely that of the *maverick*, the teacher who is not the *porte-parole* of an Authority, and who (like Brecht?) forces his audience to *judge* what he is saying as he says it, who makes passivity impossible.

As for more substantial transformations of role, or abolition of roles, it seems from this book that the development of theory must await the development of practice. Some of the contributors are in the difficult position of being ahead of their students and the white community (for example, Cantarow) and they cannot therefore be expected to produce either a radical scholarship which is more than new wine in old bottles or detailed plans for general 'participation in the composition, distribution and performance of literature' (p46). Florence Howe's account of teaching poetry to young mechanics reads primly against one's wild hopes for the development of a hegemonic proletarian culture, involving multiple linked practices, from street theatre, street poetry (and its theory; Mayakovsky - *How Are Verses Made?*) and community papers through to intense theoretical debates involving audience and authors as well as (in place of?) radical professionals.

Trevor Pateman

Philosopher queen?

William Warren Bartley III, *Wittgenstein*, Quartet Books, Midway, £1.50
ISBN 0 70433042 3

The heart of this book is some new information about Wittgenstein's life between 1920 and 1926 when, having published the *Tractatus*, he was teaching elementary school in Austria. Bartley retails some gossip from the now aged peasants who were Wittgenstein's pupils, about the professional jealousies and local conflicts and classroom discipline problems which dogged Wittgenstein's teaching career. He also sketches some of the theoretical background to what was then the most progressive school system in Europe.
In addition, the book tries to be an elementary, popular introduction to Wittgenstein's work as a whole. Bartley gives a conventional picture of Wittgenstein's progress from a supposedly rigid 'atomism' to a free and easy pluralism, and claims that Wittgenstein's school teaching bridges the gap. (Amazingly, he does not mention any of Wittgenstein's middle period writings). Like nearly all summaries of Wittgenstein's work, it presents almost nothing that would justify taking him seriously, so it is not surprising to find Bartley announcing portentously 'I reject the main tenets of his early and later work'. (Good for him!)

The main selling point of this book is that it says (without presenting evidence) that Wittgenstain was gay. The dust jacket carries a garishly touched up photo of Wittgenstein, looking as though grotesquely tarted up with lipstick and eyeliner, and the reader is soon told that ...
this pure and intense genius ... was also a homosexual given to bouts of extravagent and almost uncontrollable promiscuity.
Bartley clearly expects readers to be thunderstruck by the revelation; and there cannot be any doubt about who he really wanted to shock - Wittgenstein's literary executors, jealous guardians of the Wittgenstein archives. The conflict is completely unedifying and is going to be of no benefit to people who want to get to grips with Wittgenstein's work.

Jonathan Rée

A R Manser's inaugural lecture as professor of philosophy at Southampton University, *The End of Philosophy: Marx and Wittgenstein*, University of Southampton, 20p) is an unambitious piece of work, but quite a lot of people may find it helpful. It compares a few passages in Wittgenstein and Marx and tentatively suggests that *'what is now needed is someone to play the role of Marx to Wittgenstein's Feuerbachian one'*. Every page communicates the surprised pleasure which English philosophers often feel when they chance to read some Marx (at least some young Marx) and find that he was rather good at philosophy.

J.R.

'KILL LEFTIE LECTURERS!' - PROFESSOR PLEADS

I have deliberately made nothing of the tiny body of academic staff - between 1 and 2 per cent in most universities - who give support to these outrages. They do this because they cannot help it: they act from instinct rather than from mind, and are no more to be blamed than dogs who chase chats. When they really cause impossible situations, they must be put down, with the agony one experiences in parting with domestic pets.

(Professor Guy Chilver, ex-Dean of Humanities, Kent University *Times Higher Education Supplement* 3 March 1974)