French Studies

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900–45

By Stuart Sykes, and Michael J. Worton, Lecturers
in French in the University of Liverpool

I. Essays, Studies

'Surréalisme et psychiatrie', L'Évolution psychiatrique (no. spécial), 264 pp., is a fascinating series of studies by psychiatrists: L. Bonnafé suggests that the surrealists used language as a means of 'dévoilement' but also exploited it as an oppressive tool which could restrict meaning; J. Broustra deals with two crucial periods of Breton's career (the period round the Premier Manifeste du surréalisme and that spanning the publication of Nadja and the Second Manifeste), analysing B.'s pre-occupation with suicide and mental decomposition and the 'solutions magiques' he used to transcend this 'hantise'; J.-L. Armand-Laroche argues that the surrealists misunderstood Artaud who used surrealist theories and images as therapy in a desire to communicate with humanity whereas the surrealists themselves undertook their tasks in hostile reaction to imposed social conditioning; J. Garrabé suggests that the true 'Father' of surrealism is the 'Soldat Inconnu' Breton met in 1916 and insists that every surrealist experience has a more solid scientific base than one imagines, finally asserting that the dialectic of the surrealists is nearer that of Heraclitus than the ontology of Descartes or Kant (as Alquié suggests); J. Masse-Rouquette examines the role played by women in surrealism, demonstrating the reluctance of male surrealists to accord to women more than the role of quasi-maternity or of inspirational Muse, but concludes that the surrealist expression is not marked by sexual identity although the thematic content may be sexually connotated; A.F. Zoila examines the identity between language and thought in 'récits de rêve', establishing links with psychopathology and argues that the surrealist approaches offer the starting-point for a study of 'la parole de la pensée'. D. Steel, 'Les débuts de la psychanalyse dans les lettres françaises: 1914–1922. Apollinaire, Cendrars, “Le Mercure de France”, “La Revue d'Europe”, Morand, Bourget, Lenormand', RHLF, 79:62–89, proves that Breton and Gide were not the

In another encyclopaedic study, P. Astier, Écrivains français engagés. La génération de 1930, Nouvelles Éds Debresse, 1978, 192 pp., sees 1930 as both end and beginning, and rather loosely groups together writers who are no longer content to remain passive witnesses but wish actively to question the events and attitudes of the day. Largely biographical, his chapters on individual writers or groups remain relatively superficial. J. Blair, The Confidence Man and Modern Fiction, Vision Press, contains a chapter on Les Caves du Vatican. French Studies in Southern Africa, 6, 1977 (1979), is ‘Le rêve dans la litt. fr.’: incl. arts by J.-B. Barrère surveying use of dream for its enigmatic quality, its relevance to time, and discussing N. Delvaux’s ‘nouvelles de rêve’; and by L. Peeters on dream as metaphor of lit. creation in Bernanos.

2. Novel

R. Sussex, Home and the Homeland Novel: Studies in French Regional Literature, James Cook Univ. of North Queensland, 152 pp., uses Thibaudet’s definition of the roman de pays as starting-point for a discussion of such writers as Ramuz, Pourrat, Chamson, aiming to reveal ‘the potentialities of a species of human epic’ by the discussion of atmosphere, character and setting.

3. Theatre

This year has seen the timely publication of H. Béhar, Le théâtre dada et surréaliste (nouv. éd. revue et augmentée), Gallimard, 444 pp., in which Ribemont-Dessaignes, Malespine and