

perversity and brutality closer to Belsen and Auschwitz than to Bedlam have been exaggerated on stage. In both cases, contemporary performances have shunned the critics' preoccupation with Webster's moral purpose.

Although scholars will still have to consult Boklund and Dent on Webster's sources, this book serves its purpose well: for both student and teacher it is a provocative introduction to Webster's major plays.

Ronald B. Bond

John Wain, ed., *Johnson as Critic*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (The Routledge Critics Series) 1973. pp. 472. \$23.25.

John Wain, *Samuel Johnson*. New York: Viking Press. 1975. pp. 388. \$10.

John Wain's interest in, and affection for, Samuel Johnson is well documented. Those who heard, as I did, his professorial lecture at the University of Edinburgh were already aware of Wain's sense of identity with Lichfield's greatest son and his strong affection for him. This love of his subject persuaded even an Edinburgh audience, loath to forgive Johnson his anti-Scottish humours, and unwilling to admit that any further biographic work was necessary after Boswell's *Life*, that John Wain was an unusually suitable person to write a new biography. As Wain put it in the introduction to his biography:

I was born in the same district as Johnson — some thirty miles away — and in much the same social milieu. I went to the same university, and since then have lived the same life of Grub Street, chance employment, and the unremitting struggle to write enduring books against the background of an unstable existence. The literary and social situation that Johnson knew in its early days, I knew in its twilight; and perhaps even this will give my book, whatever its shortcomings, some documentary interest.

This quality of strong love for the subject is, at one and the same time, the strength and weakness of Wain's biographical work. To use a Johnsonian word, it is an "encomiastic" biography, and not an analytic one. Inevitably, some of the more disturbing sides of Johnson's personality, such as his "vile melancholy" or extreme neuroticism, and the fact that Johnson, in his attitude towards national groups like the Scots, the Americans and the French, tended towards the stereotype of the "prejudiced" as opposed to the "tolerant" man, are consistently played down. Wain is at his best in extolling the finer sides of Johnson's moral thinking: his basic humanity, his opposition to exploitation, his hatred of the slave trade, and his desire for a more merciful penal system. Wain clearly believes that one of the major merits of his biographical work is the new emphasis he gives to aspects of Johnson's personality which we know best through James Boswell's eyes. He reveals many weaknesses in Boswell's perspectives and flaws

in Boswell's own personality. Such is the power of familiarity, however, or it may even be a question of superior literary talent, that when I compared parallel biographical passages in Boswell and Wain, I consistently felt that Boswell was more dramatic and immediate. Boswell's famous sketch of Johnson's religious, moral, political and literary character at the beginning of the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, which Boswell himself describes as an "imperfect sketch of the combination and the form of that wonderful man, whom I venerated and loved while in this world" seems to me to obtain a kind of "loving truth" that Wain, for all his affection for Johnson, never equals.

Wain's biography has one feature which distinguishes it from all other biographies known to me, with the possible exception of that of Joseph Wood Krutch. As one would expect from a distinguished writer and critic, what Wain has to say about Johnson as writer, and particularly about the *Journey to the Western Isles*, and about Johnson's poetry, is perceptive and absorbing. It is, however, not surprising that one gets a *déjà vu* feeling in reading some of it, for Wain had earlier written extensively on Johnson as writer, starting, I believe, with his essay on Johnson's poetry in *Encounter*. Wain's introduction to the selection of Johnson's critical writings, published in 1973, inevitably anticipates many of the things that Wain has to say in the biography about Johnson as a critic of Shakespeare, Johnson on other poets, and Johnson as lexicographer. Wain's criticism of Johnson as writer has many of the qualities of Johnson's own criticism; it concentrates on essentials, it quotes and summarises successfully, and is lucid and pleasant to read. If it occasionally gives the impression of being "old-fashioned" and thus unaware of some of the more recent excesses of critical writing on eighteenth-century literature, it is, to my mind, none the worse for that.

One pleasing feature of both books is the genuine modesty of the hidden scholarship. Wain makes no claim to original scholarship, but he handles the very considerable body of modern critical writing on Johnson that he has read with tact and sensibility. In the *Johnson as Critic* volume, one is occasionally surprised at his choice of text for the forty-seven selections which he makes. A Fellow of Brasenose presumably had access to more significant texts of the *Lives of the Poets* than that in the World's Classics series, and the reasons for not using the Yale text for Johnson on Shakespeare are not clear. Generally speaking, however, texts are handled carefully and sympathetically. The note on sources in the biography denies originality: "There is no research in this book. Every fact it contains was previously known to scholars and to any reader who kept abreast of scholarship." Wain's sure touch with his primary and secondary material would put many an "academic" researcher to shame. Wain further says: "every-one who knows his way about Johnsoniana will recognise my debt to certain modern studies in fields where my ignorance was too great to allow of my consulting original sources." In view of the fact that the weakest part of Boswell is that dealing with Johnson's earlier life, the name of J. L. Clifford,

author of *Young Sam Johnson*, might have been added to the names of the other great Johnsonians, Birkbeck-Hill, Powell, Greene, and the Hydes, whose work Wain gratefully acknowledges.

R. H. Carnie.

M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*. New York and London: Cambridge University Press. 1975. pp. 289. \$23.50.

Dr. Badawi is a prolific writer whose main strength lies in his deep awareness of eastern and western cultures. After his recent study, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (1973), he has written the first critical survey in English of modern Arabic poetry. The book, based on his lectures at the University of Oxford, covers the era from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Presumably, this ambitious study is designed for Arabists as well as average cultivated readers. All the selected verse, newly translated into English by the author, is closely examined in the light of the literary climate, with a minimum of technical jargon. The material is well-ordered, lucidly and gracefully expressed, systematically reasoned, and amply but never excessively or pedantically supported by references.

As a literary historian, Dr. Badawi adopts a chronological pattern which consists of four main stages: "the neoclassical," the "pre-romantic," the "romantic," and the "contemporary." This design, more or less, parallels the development of English literature from the Augustan age to the modern era. But the author gives a word of warning about the danger of applying European critical terminology to Arabic poetry (p. 26). He carefully draws clear distinctions in order to avoid distortion, over-simplification and misleading comparisons. The terms of classification are defined with clarity and precision to indicate the common characteristics of each group of poets, without disregarding individual disparities.

After a brief historical introduction, the second chapter deals with neoclassical poets such as al-Barudi and Shauqi who turn to the Arabic tradition for their inspiration, creatively imitating the profuse elaboration and decorative style of medieval writers, especially those of the Abbasid period. In general terms, they are earnest moralists usually writing didactic poetry to glorify the ideals of honour, chivalry, valour, munificence or hospitality. With their emphasis on the decorum of form, these neoclassicists display great interest in magniloquence, elegant and archaic expressions, verbal acrobatics and stylistic ingenuities.

As a literary and social phenomenon, this mode of expression fades away in the early decades of this century, with the cultural movement towards change and modernization. The "pre-romantics" gradually reject the limitations imposed by the conventions of the classical heritage, and attempt to revolutionize themes, diction and imagery in Arabic poetry. It is significant that Khalil Mutran, a highly conscious artist and a