

Book Reviews

BIOGRAPHY

The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh. Edited by MICHAEL DAVIE. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1976. Pp viii+814. Price £7.95.

Who or what, was Evelyn Waugh? His diaries cover thirty-seven of the forty-five years of his life from 1911 to 1956. They show him starting from a normal boyhood, developing into a monster of egoism hardly credible as a human being. He meticulously records the objective features of his life, the details of book production and business affairs, his social engagements, the dishes set before him, the wines and cigars, the drinking bouts, the hangovers, the illness, the religious observances. But of his inner life he tells us nearly nothing. Once he had achieved success as a writer he moved in the circles of the rich, titled and leisured. The index to his diaries is stiff with the names of public figures; but names they remain, and are hardly even people. Most disappointing for the reader is an almost total lack of the wit, fun and farce which made his novels so readable. The excitements of war and world travel bring no spice to the pages, so empty of insights as to be tedious.

The factual record is itself incomplete. There are great gaps (perhaps because diaries were destroyed) wherever his ego might show itself in vulnerable nakedness: the years at Oxford made turbulent by homosexual passions, the break-up of his first marriage, his religious conversion. There must have been powerful emotions passed through, though for us they are unrecorded, seemingly burnt out, and in later life leaving no trace. His loving second wife, Laura, remains a stranger to us, pinned down here and there with an icy phrase: 'Laura fell into a melancholy during the subsequent week', 'Laura's melancholy abated'. Of his children he writes with disgust: 'My children weary me. I only see them as defective adults; feckless, destructive, frivolous, sensual, humourless', 'The presence of my children affects me with deep weariness and disgust'.

At times, particularly on a birthday, he tries to assess what he has made of his life, but never what he has made of himself: 1942 'My 39th birthday. A good year. I have begotten a fine daughter, published a successful book, drunk 300 bottles of wine and smoked 300 or more Havana cigars.' 1947 'My 44th birthday. I am a very much older man than this time

last year, physically infirm and lethargic. Mentally I have reached a stage of non-attachment which if combined with a high state of prayer—as it is not—would be edifying.'

We catch glimpses of something a little nobler, of a man of courage as well as bellicosity, of a hard worker with high standards and a great sense of style. But to see more of the man we have to go to the Sykes biography, to another's witness where his own evidence is suppressed or fails. All he reveals is a hollow man. Over the boozing, guzzling belly presides a black box with a camera eye, loveless, pitiless, avid for sensation to fill the void within.

To answer the question with which I began, I find it difficult to convince myself that he ever existed at all. I see him rather as a grotesque character in a story, the creation, say, of Ivy Compton Burnett.

ELIOT SLATER

SPECIALIST NURSES

Nursing in Behavioural Psychotherapy: An Advanced Clinical Role for Nurses. By ISAAC MARKS, R. S. HALLAM, J. CONNOLLY and R. PHILPOTT. Royal College of Nursing Research Series. 1977. Pp 149. Price £2.

This important monograph shows how the work of a highly responsible professional, whose training has been prolonged and expensive, can be equally well carried out by less skilled and more easily available labour.

With the advent of the airshuttle between London and Glasgow it became necessary to train more airline pilots, and researchers began to question whether traditional methods of pilot selection and training were really necessary. An advertisement for interested lorry drivers to apply elicited 80 replies, and the investigators selected the best 5 applicants for an intensive period of training lasting two years. It should surprise no one that the lorry drivers learned to take off and land as well as the other pilots, since in many respects their training was superior to that available at most conventional pilot training schools. There was some brief exposure to aerostatics and aeronautics at the beginning of the course, but very little teaching was given concerning aerodynamics. Although the lorry drivers initially rated a conventional pilot's knowledge of aerodynamics as 'quite useful', towards the end of their training they came to