

our understanding of the *Red Chamber*. The study makes no concentrated analysis of the novel as a whole. Only about one third of the book concerns itself directly with the novel, and the discussions are mainly constructed on the conceptual level, based on the linguistic patterns and significance. No effort is made to analyze the actions of the novel and the interrelations of the characters through which a coherent meaning of the novel could be fully demonstrated. By confining the novel to the discussions of yin-yang dualism and of the logic of ceaseless alternation and recurrence of human affairs, one cannot help feeling that the author, in pursuit of his thesis, has reduced the complex structure of the novel to simple oppositions, and has ignored the major social concerns embedded in the rich texture of the work.

Plaks's book however is not without merit. One of its virtues lies in the illuminating discussion of the characteristics of Chinese mythology and of the differences in the allegorical modes in Chinese and Western literature. It is therefore of value to teachers and students of comparative literature. The translation is highly readable and imaginative, although there are occasional slips, as seen on pages 74, 171, 215. The original excerpts, set against the translative passages, provide an additional delight for those who can read the two languages and wish to compare.

Swan P. Chong

PAUL BAILEY

A Distant Likeness

London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.

Pp. 135.

In *The Secret Agent* (1907), an ironic meditation on the ambivalence of order and anarchy, Conrad writes: "The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket" (*Collected Edition*, p. 69). This theme has since been explored by not a few writers; and, of these, Paul Bailey has provided us with a complex examination, *A Distant Likeness*, a compressed, well-wrought portrait of a fanatical policeman's plunge into the past of a murderer and, by analogy, of himself. It is, as we are told, a tale of various kinds of "ghostly" kinship (e.g.: pp. 4, 27, 31, 87).

"There were enough wrecks littering the world" (p. 13), in the view of the pro-

tagonist, Inspector Frank White, the loveless fallen Catholic dedicated to the eradication of all evil. Obsessed with the fear of becoming "an unrecognizable mess, all feeling and no sense" (p. 83), that is, of joining the corrupt who people his life, he vows never to lose self-possession, for with such a loss of self-control come sin and crime. "You lose control and you pay the penalty" (p. 31), he argues without pity. But as White, a castaway deserted by his wife and the only child of an unfeeling mother and a criminal ("Esposito" or "Foundling" is his original family name, p. 94), probes into the history of Belsey, the pitiless murderer, he comes to perceive disconcerting parallels between his life and the murderer's. With this perception comes a growing suspicion of the palpable truth of metaphysical evil independent of moral choice: the self-contained murderer, eminently successful in refusing to express any feeling whatsoever, forces upon the policeman the dark speculation that ethical evil may not account for all crime. This speculation disarms the apostle of order, and leads to his accommodating a homosexual while in a drunken stupor. White thus descends into the hellish world of the human condition, a world of pervasive ambiguity ("I keep growing cold. Ridiculous in this heat," p. 117), where "Dominus vobiscum" (p. 29) comes to be rendered sardonically as "Dominus bloody vobiscum" (p. 129). The next morning, out of remorse for the night's depravity and in an effort to bring the ever-silent murderer to an expression of remorse, White gives Belsey a knife, assuming that the criminal will commit suicide in payment for the (apparent) loss of control manifested in the murder of wife and son—and thereby tacitly buttress the policeman's weakening belief in the merely ethical nature of evil. Belsey, however, disabuses White of this illusion; rather than committing suicide, he stabs a warder (fatally, perhaps). The defender of law and order now finds himself a criminal. The literalist who prefers *Treasure Island* to Shakespeare—the tale of "fiends" and "those brave Englishmen" (p. 64) mirrors a world of ethical distinctions between good and evil—comes to find himself the unwitting victim of the Mephistophelian laughter of a drunken pirate, himself: "Yo ho ho" (pp. 61, 114). As a would-be brave Englishman, he has joined the ranks of the fiends aboard the *HISPANIOLA*: the course of White's inner odyssey is plotted in words as brilliantly laconic as his creator's wit.

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