

repercussions and the ways in which it has been used and abused. He provides not only a detailed history of the military and diplomatic prelude to the defeat, but also a series of reflections on the validity of the excuses, myths and search for scapegoats that have characterized attempts to explain it. The first section of this book consists of four chapters on the events of May–June 1940 from the perspectives of the military, politicians and diplomats, as well as those who fought or fled. In each case, his grasp of detail and concise and accessible presentation of information are impressive, and would constitute reason enough to recommend this book to students. Where these four chapters excel, however, is in their willingness to confront head on a number of received ideas about the fall of France. Thus, Jackson suggests that French rearmament in the 1930s was not the hopelessly belated and inadequate affair that has often been depicted, and does much to restore the reputation of the much-maligned soldiers of 1940, demonstrating that while command and strategy were indeed often incompetent, the myth of a cowardly and demoralized army fleeing at the first sight of battle is in many ways just that: a myth generated by defeatists under Vichy and maintained since. Thus, he reclaims for objective historical analysis some of the territory too easily abandoned to the post-1940 onslaught of recrimination. Compared to traditional histories of the fall of France, the chief innovation of Jackson's work is its second section, in which he ponders the 'causes, consequences and counterfactuals' of the defeat. This is a thought-provoking look at many aspects of the topic, including an excellent survey of historical writing on the defeat and a discussion of interpretations of 1940 covering Gaullism and the Resistance; Vichy propaganda; post-war reconstruction; and the repercussions of the defeat on France's post-war colonial problems. All of these themes suggest welcome new directions for new reflection about 1940 and contribute to a much-needed revival of the debate about why France collapsed and what the collapse meant.

STEPHEN TYRE

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

*Simone Weil's 'The "Iliad"; or, The Poem of Force': A Critical Edition.* Edited and translated by JAMES P. HOLOKA. New York, Peter Lang, 2003. x + 130 pp. Pb £19.95.

This is one of Simone Weil's most important essays, written at a time of great personal and national crises, in the early stages of the Second World War. Obsessed by the situation of open conflict in which France now found herself, obliged in the end to abandon her long-held pacifist principles, Simone Weil uses the Greek poem as part of her meditation on the nature of force, seeing in it the great leveller to which those who wield it and those who are subject to it are equally bound. The essay thus explores a familiar theme in her thought, namely delusion and the human condition, so that men on the whole do not recognize the ubiquitous nature of force, the strong imagining themselves to be outside its grip and in control. Homer's genius, according to Simone Weil, was to recognize the true nature of force and what it does to all human beings, while its bitter tone demonstrates the poet's compassion for victor and vanquished alike. The enemy is not despised for his weakness but embraced in a common humanity, warfare is not glorified but recognized for its destructive inevitability. In his Introduction, Holoka acknowledges that Simone

Weil's 'ethical criticism' goes against much of the twentieth century's approach to literature; it is, however, fundamental to her perception of the purpose of literature. As a teacher of philosophy, she used literature — especially the 'great classics' — as a means to reflect on moral issues, believing that true philosophy was a guide to action rather than thought abstracted from life. It is thus that she enlists Homer and his great poem in her analysis of one of the most urgent issues of the times. Holoka recognizes the idiosyncratic nature of some of Simone Weil's interpretations, but maintains that the value of her essay 'lies in her distinctive outlook on the human condition, quite apart from the accuracy of its representation of Homer's actual worldview'. This new translation, presented bilingually, is the first scholarly edition in English of Simone Weil's essay, and also the first to benefit from the definitive French text in the *Œuvres complètes*. As a classical scholar, Holoka is particularly well equipped to set Simone Weil's approach in the context of Homeric studies, and his useful paragraph-by-paragraph commentary reflects this. He also gives in the Appendix the original Greek of passages translated into French by Simone Weil. His sensitivity, not only to her approach to the poem but also to her direct and unelaborate style, is reflected in his translation, which is strong and simple, conveying the tragic weight of the original. The Bibliography gives helpful pointers both for Simone Weil's works in translation and related critical material, as well as substantial reference to relevant classical studies, although for clarity of presentation it might have been advisable to subdivide this under various headings. Altogether this translation is a welcome addition to Simone Weil studies, and one which brings out the relevance of the philosopher to today's war-torn world.

J. P. LITTLE

ST PATRICK'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

*'Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs' ou la symphonie carcérale.* By PIERRE LAFORGUE. Toulouse, Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2002. 100 pp. Pb €12.20.

As the first part of the title announces, this book offers an exclusive focus on the first of Jean Genet's novels. It deals with *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* in isolation not only from Genet's other texts (except in the final 'Envoi' where the poem 'Le Condamné à mort' receives a brief consideration), but in isolation also from criticism on Genet: other than two references to Edmund White's biography and a reference to Didier Eribon's *Réflexions sur la question gay*, there is no mention made of any secondary literature available on Genet. It is thus perhaps all the more remarkable that Pierre Laforgue should make two points that, to my knowledge, are original in Genet studies. The more convincing is that the system of metaphors in Genet's text 'constitue une anamorphose de la réalité dans la fiction' (p. 40), although how this anamorphosis might differ from the distortion of reality that other critics have shown to be at work in Genet's non-referentiality is not discussed. The other is that Genet's writing is 'hystérique' (p. 24). Laforgue defines hysteria as a 'une théâtralisation de la parole par l'écriture' (p. 26), as a 'distance théâtrale que le sujet de l'intérieur de lui-même établit entre lui et son autre; l'hystérie, autrement dit, comme conscience de soi' (p. 36). But the problem with broadening the concept of hysteria thus — Laforgue goes to the extent of denying it any 'nature pathologique' (p. 36) — is that its usefulness as a tool to elucidate what is distinctive about Genet's writing