OBITER

GAUGUIN: Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture at the Tate Gallery. From the fine assembly of Gauguin's works, it was his apparent and constant struggle which emerged most clearly; not his ideological and personal difficulties which are implicit in his choice of imagery and his flight to a more primitive social ambience, but his perpetual struggle to reconcile his handling and his vision. In his later phases Gauguin revealed himself as a visual genius of a high order, but he was endowed with a comparatively modest technical skill.

His earliest pictures were influenced by the Barbizon painters, and especially Corot. Later there was his intimacy with the Impressionists. During this time his sense of colour and spatial design was dormant, and it is possible that the seductions of Impressionism hindered, rather than accelerated, the realization of his own artistic potentialities. Their lack of formal precision and the use of broken colours were in many ways the antithesis of his ultimate aims. The period of transition when the influence of Cézanne, Van Gogh and, obliquely, Seurat, allied to the exotic revelations of Martinique landscapes, of Le Pouldu, and Medieval stained glass, was superbly represented at the exhibition and brought his rapid stylistic oscillations into focus. His preferred colours —rose tones, lavender blues, indigo, greeny-greys and yellow—are decoratively and symbolically employed in the 'Christ Vert', where the primitive strength of the inert stone group is related to the rude vitality of the old peasant woman before it.

Significantly the titles become increasingly symbolic or quasi-philosophical in character; simultaneously the experiments with line, colour, and broad formal patterns are more pronounced and adventurous, while the brushwork is coarser but entirely subordinated to the demands of his decorative scheme. Through his imitative essays in primitive sculpture he gained insight into the art of modelling in low relief, which modified his approach to painted forms. The almost monumental gravity of the 'No Te Aha Oe Riri' of 1896 with its spatial and tactile emphasis was replaced by the decorative synthesis of the 'Three Tahitians' of 1899. Some of his later paintings have the schematic continuity of the great cycles of wall painting like the Ajanta frescoes. However (for instance in the pictures of sunflowers), he reverted occasionally to more conventional modes of presentation.

Ultimately it was his passionate adherence to his own aesthetic convictions, from which he never deviated, that enabled him to transcend his technical limitations and gave his work authority, so that it remains stimulating and valid for painters today.

MARIA SHIRLEY

WAITING FOR GODOT. The London theatre has not been without its controversies this year. First it was Sir John Gielgud's stimulating production of *King Lear* in the novel Japanese settings; of late it has been the play at the Criterion, *Waiting for Godot.*

The play in itself is a conversation piece. Two tramps, just as we might find in Hyde Park, somewhere near the Orators' Corner, sit and talk. They are waiting for someone called Godot who never arrives. The only people who do arrive are like caricatures of themselves, including the labels which they wear. The play drifts on. If only Godot —whoever he might be—would arrive. But, the final curtain falls and we look back on an evening of brilliantly presented boredom.

Boredom is not a particularly twentieth-century thing. It has always existed no doubt. But is it a legitimate theme for the theatre? In so far as it is a part of life, it is a potential theme for the artist. But the playwright must entertain. He can produce as many levels as he likes to his play so that we can go away and read it over and over again, ever discovering new and exciting meanings and implications. But one level he should never omit—that of entertaining his audience. I do not think Samuel Beckett has done that in *Waiting for Godot.* It may be the production. Perhaps the comic undertones, the sly incongruities and absurdities implicit in the conversation of two tramps on a park bench were not sufficiently made. The obvious influence of James Joyce on the author's language and style might perhaps lend that aura which is current in many places that something as 'serious' as this cannot really be comic too. But although our life might so often be taken up by this kind of trailing conversation and endless succession of almost unrelated, superficial, half-conceived remarks, yet that in itself can be highly amusing, if we have the eye with which to view it. We can suddenly see ourselves at our dull parties, committing all the same social and intellectual inanities as our neighbours—and how funny it can all seem! It is a sudden change of the perspective. We see our own weaknesses, our own limitations and so our own human-ness—and, in laughing, we grow a little in stature because we add to our sense of humility.

Maybe we are bored and boring. But if we are to see our life in the right light we must try to see it perhaps with the eyes of God. Possibly if Godot had arrived we would have got that new standard, that new dimension in which to measure things. But he did not arrive; as he so rarely arrives perhaps for many of us.

DAVID BALLARD-THOMAS