

works of fiction and nonfiction) brings the novelist's eye, the disciple's devotion, and the medievalist's hoary zest to a biography that may, he surmises, even be accurate: Records of the poet's life are few and scholars quarrel over what facts remain, although Chaucer's way of looking at things seems "clear as an English April day." A royalist in evil times and a free-thinking Christian who read Boethius and cultivated a taste for the bawdy, Chaucer emerges as a man who would take matters seriously if he must but humorously if he could, serenely fathering English verse in his spare time.

WALLACE STEVENS:
The Poems of Our Climate
by Harold Bloom
Cornell, 1977
413 pp. \$17.50
L of C 76-55482
ISBN: 0-8014-0840-7

Harold Bloom examines the work of one of the foremost American poets of the 20th century. He quarrels with the prevailing critical view that Stevens' poetic self is engaged in exploring possible confirmations of selfhood in the face of the loss of traditional certainties. Instead, Bloom argues, Stevens' return to the "First Idea," urged in his "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942) is the poet's central theme, conveying his will to repudiate the past, first by shedding inherited modes of perception, then by refashioning reality in a poem that affirms the authority and control of the poetic self. Central to this process is Stevens' struggle to escape the influence of such strong precursors as Whitman and Emerson. Not an easy book to read, but not one for students of poetry to overlook.

THE BOOK OF MERLYN:
The Unpublished Conclusion to *The Once and Future King*
by T. H. White
Univ. of Texas, 1977
137 pp. \$9.95
L of C 77-3454
ISBN 0-292-70718-5

For reasons that Sylvia Warner Townsend's introduction fails to make clear, this intended final chapter to Britisher T. S. White's retelling of the Arthurian legends was dropped at the time *The Once and Future King* was first published (London, 1958). *The Book of Merlyn* was written in 1941, while White was living in Ireland and wrestling with pacifist scruples over joining England's war for survival against the Nazis. Delivered to his editors just before he enlisted, the book is heavily didactic and, here and there, transparently autobiographical. But White's original grand design is interesting: to take Ar-