fessor of English, is concerned with modern poets' "naturalness." "To anyone brought up on Shakespeare, Keats, and Tennyson," she writes, "the accommodation to the modern . . . must be sometimes painful pleasure." Eschewing esoteric theories of aesthetics, she searches for—and values most highly—the true voice that describes life's ordinary experiences in the works of poets as disparate as W. H. Auden and Marianne Moore, Allen Ginsberg and Elizabeth Bishop. Vendler can be wholehearted in her praise (A. R. Ammons' "conversations with mountains are the friendliest and most colloquial conversations with the inanimate since Herbert talked to his shooting stars") and wittily scathing in her condemnations. Her least charitable remarks are reserved for E. E. Cummings, for his "great and aborted talent" and "devaluation of intellect," and W. S. Merwin: "one has a relentless social-worker urge to ask him to eat something, anything, to cure him of his anemia."

ADULTERY IN THE NOVEL: Contract and Transgression
by Tony Tanner
Johns Hopkins, 1980
383 pp. $18.50

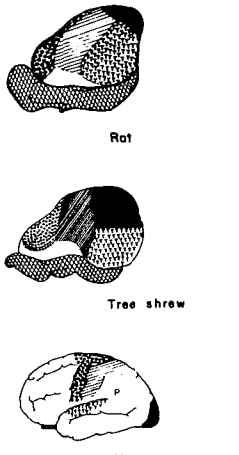
Woman Taken into Adultery *by William Blake. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

Marriage occupies center stage in most 18th- and 19th-century European novels about the middle class. But adultery, suggests Tanner, a British literary scholar, gets the limelight. Concentrating on Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Eloise,* Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* and Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*—but ranging widely over Western literature to the present, Tanner considers this obsession with infidelity. Marriage reconciles the designs of love with those of economics, he muses; as such, it is the "all-subsuming, all-organizing contract . . . the structure that maintains the Structure" in modern middle-class society. In the novel, adultery became a device to test the limitations of decorum and of institutions such as marriage, the family, and the state. And, as authors came to view life as mired in arbitrary "contracts" that could be "transgressed," they began to ask whether society could be based on something other than marriage and novels constructed from something

other than 19th-century narrative conventions. Portrayals of the breakdown of marriage portended the collapse of fictional realism, observes Tanner, and led to works of extreme "physicality" (D. H. Lawrence), excessive word play (Joyce), and "mere solipsism" (Proust).

Science & Technology

THE PURPOSIVE BRAIN
by Ragnar Granit
MIT, 1980
244 pp. $12.50



From The Purposive Brain.

"Why" the human brain works as it does is as relevant a question as "how," to Granit, a 1967 Nobel laureate in physiology. Granit combines philosophy of science with an up-to-date technical explanation of eyesight and human motor control, and of the mastery of the two by the brain. Along the way, he reviews the debate over such issues as the purpose of a reflex and how and why the brain's right and left halves differ. (Most scientists agree that the brain's left hemisphere controls language communication; the right perceives and comprehends but cannot express itself verbally. Yet, one researcher found that an isolated right hemisphere retains the ability to compose music.) Granit carefully underlines the limitations of all scientific theories that claim to identify Nature's ends. "There is no explanation," he notes, for "the talent that made possible the creation of [Beethoven's] Ninth Symphony." Moreover, some subjectivity is inevitable, even in the laboratory. The wall of ignorance that so often blocks scientific advance, Granit emphasizes, is erected, in large part, by "the head that beats against it."

THE COLDER THE BETTER
by David Wilson
Atheneum, 1980
272 pp. $9.95

Rocket fuel, the superconductive magnets that are used in atomic particle accelerators, and even some instant coffees (of the freeze-dried variety) would not exist but for cold. Wilson, a British science writer, details the erratic history of low-temperature technology. Cryobiology—the study of low temperatures' effects on biological systems—was the