

cannot object to that; still, a book of this kind requires a slightly stronger position than the author has taken. He is further crippled because he includes no sustained discussion of particular poets and does not much care about literary quality. A volume planned around a group of carefully selected poets would have achieved more valuable results. M. Ginistier's idea is a fresh one in some respects; let us hope that he will soon give us another study more worthy of it.

Reviewed by RALPH J. MILLS, JR.

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### *Modern Letters Con and Pro*

***Truth is More Sacred: a Critical Exchange on Modern Literature***, by Edward Dahlberg and Sir Herbert Read. *New York: Horizon Press, 1961.*

*Truth is More Sacred* is a fascinating duel between heart and head over the basic value of modern literature. Edward Dahlberg, author of *Bottom Dogs* and *Can These Bones Live*, leads with the case for the negative, and the indictment is severe indeed. Introducing himself as "rough and feral," he presents sweeping condemnations of the major writers of our time. And whatever one may think of his opinions, one must concede Mr. Dahlberg to be a

master of literary invective. "I regard James Joyce, André Gide, Cocteau, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Eliot, Pound, as the bawds in the beauty parlor on Mount Ida." Of the novel which has been most revered by the *avant garde* he has this to say: "The *Ulysses* of James Joyce is the story of the scatological sybarites of the business world; it is a twenty-four hours' journey through ordure; a street urchin's odyssey of a doddering phallus." With reference to D.H. Lawrence: "It seems to me that the modern novel about love is all dross and no Helen." "Lawrence only cared to do nude figures; he put clothes on the men and women in order to remove them." Of Henry James, who is a special trial to Mr. Dahlberg's patience: "Henry James was as debilitated in his books as Pope was in his life. . . . the former, perspiring over his syntax, sends those he tortures to Egyptian ideographic writing in which a pair of legs going denotes a transitive verb." James was "the sovereign of the enervated phrase." ". . . he cared more for propriety than he did for the universe. Everything he did was governed by taste, and it was impossible for him to be clear because he wanted to be sure and tactful." "James was the canniest peeping male that ever observed feminine habits." On T. S. Eliot: "I blame Eliot for nothing except the books he has written." "Why leave the United States to be rid of its vulgarities in order to be a bad St. Louis poet abroad?" "A thief may go to Paradise with Christ, but not a traitor to his own native speech. Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis are matricides who have slain their native tongue." These are the judgments of a writer who would see our literature recover the vein of Homer, Hesiod, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Swift.

Sir Herbert's response to this may seem somewhat patronizing because of a differ-

ence in style. But it is realistic, for it is based on a true theory of the relation of the artist to his world. The artist does not make his world; he depicts it, in the root sense of that term, which is to say, he paints it. Wholeness and simple affirmation are not aspects of our world. If much of modern literature is brilliant but fragmented and even tortured, that condition is not wholly the result of the perverse wills of artists. Art is both universal and relative, and the relative dimension is always the spirit of its particular milieu. With us, "the mirror is broken," and there is no prospect of having a whole and symmetrical image again, short of a recovery that would include much more than art. Accordingly Sir Herbert can reply in the exchange over Eliot and Pound: "The charges that you bring against Eliot and Pound could with the same doubtful cogency be brought against Joyce and Faulkner, Picasso and Klee, Stravinsky and Bartok—indeed against every representative artist of the past fifty years.

"I do not defend the age. I am a fatalist and believe that what has happened in the art of our time had to happen, as a logical reflection of what was at the same time happening in society at large." One may rail against *The Waste Land* and the *Cantos* as "symbols of our spiritual impotence," yet they are authentic just because they could not have been produced by any other age than ours.

As much as we may deplore the course of the time, we can still find aesthetic satisfaction in those artists whose loyalty is to truthful expression, regardless of whether that leads us into the vernal woods or a brothel. Therefore Sir Herbert can take pleasure in Joyce because "his words are doing good work, communicating his impressionistic vision of the world of reality." Lawrence was the greatest writer of his generation because he "held strongly to

one half of the truth about beauty and about love." As for Henry James, it is easy to allow the preciosity of the man to obscure the great achievement of the writer. James had the most uncompromising ideal of all authors of fiction: "to create a fictional form as intense and as moving as the form of the classical drama," and as subject to rigid laws. "He worked relentlessly beneath these laws, and there is no fiction anywhere else in the world that comes near to the formal perfection of his." He defends Eliot as the true voice of our inner experience. "Eliot was the prophetic poet of his time, projecting the images of our guilt and remorse, accusing our consciousness of corruption, and recalling us to 'the Peace which passeth understanding.'"

It is difficult not to sympathize with Mr. Dahlberg, for his heart is in the right place, and his stance is heroic. He forces us to think of times when there were giants in the earth. But Sir Herbert has the juster view of the role of the artist. He confirms the prophecy of Jacob Burckhardt that "the utmost effort and self-denial will be necessary. . . if art and science are to remain *creatively* independent in view of the relation in which they stand to the daily press, to cosmopolitan traffic, to world exhibitions. All of these menaces have since Burckhardt's time increased a thousand-fold, and to them we have added deterrents of which he could have no conception—air traffic, radio, and television." This is why we must save what we can from the "demotic jargon" of the mob, from "consolidated ignorance," and from the ideal of comfort which is supplanting that of glory, without expecting our artists alone to effect the miracle of renewal.

Reviewed by RICHARD M. WEAVER

*The Kingdom of God  
in Marigold, Mississippi*

*The Morning and the Evening*, by Joan Williams. New York: Atheneum, 1961.

AS EPIGRAPHS for this, her first novel, Miss Williams might well have chosen two familiar Biblical quotations: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" and "It is impossible but that offenses will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." For what Miss Williams has done in *The Morning and the Evening* is memorably to dramatize the relationship—half love, half fear—which exists between the small Mississippi community of Marigold and a forty-year-old idiot, Jake Darby. From this brief statement of the novel's setting and "situation," one might easily assume that he had heard all this before: in the stark (and sometimes ridiculous) naturalism of Erskine Caldwell or the terrifying and profound Gothic of William Faulkner—or perhaps in their various disciples. But here he would be mistaken; for Miss Williams is

not concerned with piling up the horrors—for either sociological or artistic purposes. Rather, she is using her focal character, Jake, and Marigold's shifting reactions toward him to represent dramatically one of the oldest themes in the world's memory, a paradox lying at the deep silent core of human experience: the different faces of love.

After the death of his father and the departure for the bright lights of Memphis of his older brother, Jud, who despises him, Jake has lived alone with his mother on a small farm in the Marigold community—an object of condescending pity and yet real affection to the rest of the inhabitants—from "Miss Loma," who runs the general store, to Ruth Edna May, a neurotic, frustrated spinster who seeks lady-like comfort for a lifetime of being put upon by "Mamma," "Poppa," and "Brother Cotter" in the chaste oblivion of paregoric. And when Jake's mother dies, the community displays almost a proprietary interest in his welfare. (The Negro community is represented by the wash-woman, Jurldeane, who comes to Jake after the white citizens have returned home from their visits of condolence.) And to everyone's surprise, Jake, who does not "know the morning from the evening," more or less "manages" after Mrs. Darby's death—with the good ladies sending him tempting dishes and doing his mending and Jurldeane seeing to the washing. (He does the farm chores himself.)

Trouble comes, though, when Ruth Edna, full of paregoric and lonely "emptiness," in measuring Jake for a new shirt impulsively but quite innocently kisses him, frightening him ("He had the look of an animal chased and caught.") into a series of fits which convinces some of the good citizens that Jake needs to be shut away. And so Jake is "betrayed" into a state hospital for the insane through being misrepresented as an idiot who cannot talk.

But though the hospital is one of the