

spondence and his *Crisis Papers* than you would from a dozen popular textbooks I could name; and if you are of that frame of mind, it may relieve you to know that so many of the concepts you hold are not foreign importations.

## In One Dimension

JOHN DRYDEN: A Study of His Poetry, by Mark Van Doren. Holt. \$3.

NO READER familiar with the critical attitudes of the twenties will have to turn back to the preface to learn that this book, now reissued, is a product of that decade. In his preface Mr. Van Doren notes that his revisions for this new edition have left the original substantially unaltered. That could have been surmised from his more recent books, which continue in their conviction of the twenties that culture is an autonomy within the social structure. Even his book *Liberal Education* proved to be a somewhat tormented effort to reconcile special cultural values with democratic social values.

The criticism of the twenties, certainly in the dominant trends, sought to abstract art from the social context. To restrict criticism to technical analysis and pure esthetic evaluations was its ideal, an ideal to which Mr. Van Doren stuck closer than most. In his *John Dryden* he observes, quite literally, the limitations set in the subtitle, "A Study of His Poetry." The book is exactly and solely that.

We are given a study of Dryden's poetry in the various fields in which he worked, in poetic drama, epic narrative and tales, translation, verse for occasions and polemical satire. The direct textual study proceeds from an examination of the literary influences on which Dryden formed his style and ends in a consideration of Dryden's place and influence in English and world literature, done in the form of an extended critical bibliography.

The presentation is made with conscientious and precise scholarship. The judgments derived from the study are sensitive and balanced. And one should add that the writing, in a restrained and inconspicuous way, is very fine. Yet the whole effect is flat and thin.

Biographical and historical references are reduced to the indispensable minimum necessary to make allusions intelligible. Physical portraiture and social backgrounds are avoided as if they could only be intrusions or, at best, an excess. The neat, restrained, textual analysis goes on; the supporting examples rise in their places; but the last effective

word has been said long, unendurably long, before the actual last word.

A book like this, certainly one of the best to issue from its school, has a special demonstration value to the social critic. If he still has doubts or qualms about his new method, such a book makes clear, by the contrast, not only the new method's usefulness but the nature of its contribution. We realize then that social insight is no less than a new critical dimension. The linear course on a flat surface of Mr. Van Doren's textual criticism serves to emphasize the volume and depth that social criticism gains.

At a certain point I turned to the biographical sketch of Dryden in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, and to the sections on the Restoration in Green's *History of the English People*. These conventional sources were enough to refresh my sense of the man the poet was and the times he lived in. They provided at once the perspective, background and movement lacking in Mr. Van Doren's study. The *how* to which Mr. Van Doren reserved his examination were slowly amplified by the *when* and the *where* and the *why*. The poetry itself, in the very citations given by Mr. Van Doren, began to leap from metrical exercises into an expression of life.

And not only the poetry as a whole but even the richness of the texture and the supple turns of the style brightened and became more distinct through the non-literary data. That Dryden's social origin was the landed gentry and that his somewhat questionable marriage fastened these social ties explains much that the most diligent of merely textual poring could not uncover; as does the fact that Dryden was rather opportunist in his politics and that much of his writing was for money in the special ways money could then be earned, through patronage registered in dedications, party propaganda and catering to a theater audience with a restricted range of taste. All of this had analyzable conditioning effects upon the poetry. As for Dryden's conversion to Catholicism, the progress toward which is reflected in the poetry, it was a chartable destination of his political and social course. Since "order"—or "quiet," as he called it—was for Dryden the greatest good, we can understand the attractions for him of the reactionary "science" of Hobbes, for whom "order" was a "common good" for the sake of which the masses ought contentedly to submit to eternal exploitation.

It is in these data that we have the clues to the backward-looking, classic-fixated content of Dryden's

**"A HIT!"**

—WALTER WINCHELL

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poetry and for its need for the indirect, the symbolic and the allusive. Accepting such aids, textual study itself would emerge magnified.

If this is true of Dryden's virtuoso poetry, which lends itself particularly well to textual analysis, it is much truer of other poets whose work yields less to such study. And the deficiencies of the method become particularly clear when applied to the work of poets concerned with directly expressing rather than parabling the life of their times.

Thus Mr. Van Doren is himself obliged to confess the deficiencies when dealing with Walt Whitman. In the preface to his selections for the edition of Whitman, recently issued in the Viking Press Portable Library, he writes, "Whitman's art as a poet is a matter of some mystery," and adds in the same puzzled paragraph, "Such a way with words is never to be understood. It is miraculous and must be let alone."

But Whitman was a conscious student of language and versification. He did not merely happen upon his effects. He used them, of course, because they could carry the content he had chosen. But so, in the long run, had Dryden, whose effectiveness derives, also, from forms suited to the content. If the limitations of textual criticism make it powerless to penetrate the art of a poet like Whitman, the social critic need not throw up his hands.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

## **A Creature and His Times**

THE<sup>2</sup> CIANO DIARIES, 1939-1943, by Count Ciano. Doubleday. \$3.50.

READ correctly and with care, this "inside story" of world politics and diplomacy by Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Fascist son-in-law of Mussolini, provides a useful illumination of the men and events of our times. But a word of caution is necessary—it must not be studied uncritically.

A first warning signal: the editor of this work is Hugh Gibson, one-time American diplomat and close collaborator of Herbert Hoover, and both notorious appeasers of international fascism. Gibson's comment that the diary is unabridged leaves unanswered a more fundamental question. Was not Ciano "playing both ends against the middle"? Did he not tailor his cloth with an eye to the future, hoping that in the event of an Allied victory against the Axis he might be called upon to play the part which later in fact fell to the lot of Marshal Badoglio?

Indeed, many American reviewers