

which we can perhaps decide for ourselves, partly by thinking, partly by reorganizing our minds in other ways; if we do not it may be decided for us, not in the way we should choose. While it lasts it puts a strain on each individual and upon society, a strain which is part of the explanation of many modern difficulties, the difficulties of the poet in particular.

It will be admitted—by those who distinguish between scientific statement, where truth is ultimately a matter of verification as this is understood in the laboratory, and emotive utterance, where “truth” is primarily acceptability by some attitude, and more remotely the acceptability of this attitude itself—that it is not the poet’s business to make true statements. Yet poetry has constantly the air of making statements, and important ones; which is one reason why some mathematicians cannot read it. They find the alleged statements to be false. It will be agreed that their approach to poetry and their expectations from it are mistaken and that these apparent statements which occur in poetry are not to be handled in the same way as the real statements of science. Let us call them, to mark the difference, pseudo-statements, or fictions, but not in Vaihinger’s sense.

Scientific statements, like the pseudo-statements of poetry, do of course constantly touch off attitudes and action. Our daily practical existence is largely guided by them, and on the whole true statements are of more service to us than false ones. None the less we do not and, at present, cannot order our emotions and attitudes by true statements alone. We cannot build our poetry out of science. Nor is there any probability that we shall ever contrive to do so. This is one of the great new dangers to which civilization is exposed. Countless pseudo-statements about the universe, about human nature, the relations of mind to mind, about the soul, its rank and destiny—pseudo-statements which are pivotal points in the organization of the mind, vital to its well-being, have suddenly become impossible for sincere, honest, and informed minds to believe. For centuries they have been believed; now they are gone, irrevocably; and the knowledge which has killed them is not of a kind upon which an equally fine organization of the mind can be based.



This is the contemporary situation. The remedy, since there is no prospect of our gaining adequate knowledge, and since indeed it is fairly clear that genuine knowledge cannot serve us here and can only increase our practical control of Nature, is to cut our pseudo-statements free from belief, and yet retain them, in this released state, as the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and to the world. Not so desperate a remedy as may appear, for poetry conclusively shows that even the most important among our attitudes can be aroused and maintained without any belief entering in at all. The attitudes of Tragedy, for example. We need no beliefs, and indeed we must have none, if we are to read “King Lear.” Pseudo-statements to which we attach no belief such as occur in poetry and statements proper such as science provides cannot conflict. It is only when we introduce illicit beliefs into poetry that danger arises. To do so is from this point of view a profanation of poetry.

Yet an important branch of criticism which has attracted the best talents from prehistoric times until today consists of the endeavor to persuade men that the functions of science and poetry are identical, or that the one is a “higher form” of the other, or that they conflict and we must choose between them.

The root of this persistent endeavor is clear. If we give to a pseudo-statement the kind of unqualified acceptance which belongs by right only to certified scientific statements, if we can contrive to do this, the impulses and attitudes with which we respond to it gain a notable stability and vigor. Briefly, if we can contrive to believe poetry, then the world *seems*, while we do so to be transfigured. It used to be comparatively easy to do this, and the habit has become well established. With the extension of science and the neutralization of nature it has become difficult as well as dangerous. Yet it is still alluring; it has many analogies with drug-taking. Hence the endeavors of the critics referred to. Various subterfuges have been devised along the lines of regarding Poetic Truth as figurative, symbolic; or as more immediate, as a truth of Intuition, not of reason, or as a higher form of the same truth as reason yields. Such attempts

to use poetry as a denial or as a corrective of science are very common. One point can be made against them all: they are never worked out in detail. There is no equivalent to Mill’s “Logic” expounding any such view. The language in which they are framed is usually a blend of obsolete psychology and emotive exclamations.

The long-established and much-encouraged habit of giving to emotive utterances—whether pseudo-statements simple, or looser and larger wholes taken as saying something figuratively—the kind of assent which we give to established facts, has for most people debilitated a wide range of their responses. A few scientists, caught young and brought up in the laboratory, are free from it; but then, as a rule, they pay no serious attention to poetry. For most men the recognition of the neutrality of nature brings about—through this habit—a divorce from poetry. They are so used to having their responses propped up by beliefs, however vague, that when these shadowy supports are removed they are no longer able to respond. Their attitudes to so many things have been forced in the past, over-encouraged. And when the world-picture ceases to assist there is a collapse. Over whole tracts of natural emotional response we are today like a bed of dahlias whose sticks have been removed. And this effect of the neutralization of nature is only in its beginnings. Consider the probable effects upon love-poetry in the near future of the kind of inquiry into basic human constitution exemplified by psycho-analysis.



A sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavor, and a thirst for a life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed, are the signs in consciousness of this necessary reorganization of our lives. Our attitudes and impulses are being compelled to become self-supporting; they are being driven back upon their biological justification, made once again sufficient to themselves. To those familiar with Mr. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” my indebtedness to it at this point will be evident. He seems to me by this poem, to have performed two considerable services for this generation. He has given a perfect emotive description of a state of mind which is probably inevitable for a while to all meditative people. Secondly, by effecting a complete severance between his poetry and all beliefs, and this without any weakening of the poetry, he has realized what might otherwise have remained largely a speculative possibility, and has shown the way to the only solution of these difficulties. “In the destructive element immerse. That is the way.” A great deal of poetry can, of course, be written for which total independence of all beliefs is an easy matter. But it is never poetry of the more important kind, because the temptation to introduce beliefs is a sign and measure of the importance of the attitudes involved. At present it is not primarily religious beliefs, in the stricter sense of the word, which are most likely to be concerned. Emphases have altered surprisingly. University societies founded fifteen years ago, for example, to discuss religion, are usually found to be discussing sex today. And serious love poetry, which is independent of beliefs of one kind or another, traditional or eccentric, is rare.

Yet the necessity for independence is increasing. This is not to say that traditional poetry, into which beliefs readily enter, is becoming obsolete; it is merely becoming more and more difficult to approach without confusion; it demands a greater imaginative effort, a greater purity in the reader.

We must distinguish here, however. There are many feelings and attitudes which, though in the past supported by beliefs now untenable, can survive their removal because they have other, more natural, supports and spring directly from the necessities of existence. To the extent to which they have been undistorted by the beliefs which have gathered round them they will remain as before. But there are other attitudes which are very largely the product of belief and have no other support. These will lapse if the changes here alluded to continue. With their disappearance some forms of poetry—much minor devotional verse, for example—will become obsolete. And with the unravelling of the intellect *versus* emotion entanglement, there will be cases where even literature to which immense value has been assigned—the speculative portions of the work of Dostoevsky may be instanced—will lose much of its interest, except for the history of

the mind. It was because he belonged to our age that Dostoevsky had to wrestle so terribly in these toils.

A pioneer in modern research upon the origins of culture was asked recently whether his work had any bearing upon religion. He replied that it had, but that at present he was engaged merely in “getting the guns into position.” The same answer might be given with regard to the probable consequences of recent progress in psychology, not only for religion but for the whole fabric of our traditional beliefs about ourselves. In many quarters there is a tendency to suppose that the series of attacks upon received ideas which began, shall we say, with Galileo and rose to a climax with Darwinism, has overreached itself with Einstein and Eddington, and that the battle is now due to die down. This view seems to be too optimistic. The most dangerous of the sciences is only now beginning to come into action. I am thinking less of psychoanalysis or of behaviorism than of the whole subject which includes them. It is very probable that the Hindenburg Line to which the defense of our traditions retired as a result of the onslaughts of the last century will be blown up in the near future. If this should happen a mental chaos such as man has never experienced may be expected. We shall then be thrown back, as Matthew Arnold foresaw, upon poetry. It is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos. But whether man is capable of the reorientation required, whether he can loosen in time the entanglement with belief which now takes from poetry half its power and would then take all, is another question, and too large to be entered upon here.

## The Case of Poe

EDGAR ALLAN POE: A Study in Genius. By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by NORMAN FOERSTER  
University of North Carolina

AS books go, this is an extremely interesting and able book. As biographies of Poe go, it is the most important contribution since George Edward Woodberry’s scholarly life. Although it by no means supplants Mr. Woodberry’s life, its value may be indicated by saying that it will have to be seriously reckoned with by all future biographers of Poe.

The book is not in the ordinary sense a biography at all, but, as the sub-title denotes, a study in genius. Mr. Krutch inclines to the view that all works of genius come into being essentially as Poe’s did, and that in him we have merely an especially clear example of the creative process. His was an exaggerated case of genius; he was a “psychopathic case;” he is “inexplicable by the laws of normal psychology.” This, it appears, is true of the man and his works alike: “It is just the persistent attempt to separate these two inseparable things which has stood more than anything else in the way of the complete understanding of either.”

So nearly identical (indeed) are the man and his writings that to wish any difference in either the character or experience in the first is to wish that the other had been different too; and since there is no reason to suppose that Poe would have written at all except as the result of a complete maladjustment to life, that would be also to wish that he had not, as a writer, existed at all.

The key, then, to both Poe and his work lies in the idea of self-expression. What was the nature of the self that he expressed so “wildly well”? Apparently his most important heritage from his father’s side was “an inclination toward alcohol” and from his mother’s side the dark taint which made his sister “a harmless imbecile.” As his heritage was sinister, so was his environment. His childhood was a tragic “conflict between a pride constantly nourished and yet continually wounded by a sense that as the son of an outcast and as a dependent not even sure of his patron he had no right to it.” He suffered from a sense of inferiority, and seemingly also, as he grew up, from a sexual impotence presumably connected with the “baneful fascination” exercised over his mind by the memory of his mother. Then, too, “the haughty and reckless spirit of the old Southern aristocracy” that he imbibed at the University of Virginia was “poison” in his case, causing his insecure pride to grow apace. “These University days were, indeed, the beginning of the first stage of Poe’s lifelong flight from himself.” He could not control the



actual world that he lived in, and more and more, as time went on, sought compensation by building an inward one "more real." The external result of this maladjustment and this compensation was—The Works of Edgar Allan Poe.

I have given a mere sketch of Mr. Krutch's argument, on the assumption that the reader will proceed to the book itself, a provocative little book, one of the best of many recent attempts to determine what light psychoanalysis throws on literature. Although on the whole commendably circumspect, the author has not succeeded in maintaining the scientific attitude at which he aims. The Edgar Allan Poe professor of English at the University of Virginia has already published corrections of some of the errors in fact into which Mr. Krutch wandered in consequence of his zeal for supporting his thesis. More important is his habit of wholesale assertion, as when he announces that "no more completely personal writer than Poe ever existed," and that "there is not, in the ordinary sense, one iota of observation or touch of reality in any story or poem which he produced. No native characters, no observed incidents, no contemporary problems appear; into himself he drew nothing, but he poured out, on the contrary, scenes, characters, and emotions which had no source but his own imagination." This is to propose a new Poe myth. Again, while the author occupies a strong position when he maintains that Poe and his works must be related to each other, he lapses into what appears to me a vague or nonsensical dictum when he holds that "to accept one is to accept the other"—does this mean that we must admire Poe the man if we admire Poe's writings? Mistaken zeal causes the author, once more, to subscribe literally to the assertion of Poe himself (a lamentable witness) that the terror in certain of his tales was "not of Germany but of the soul;" this, says Mr. Krutch, "is merely the simple and unescapable truth," since "the forces which wrecked his life were those which wrote his works." In saying this, the author invites a sweeping criticism of his study of literary genius.

There are involved here two ways of "explaining" the writings of a man like Poe, or, less obviously, the writings of any genius. One is the historical way, which emphasizes the literary and intellectual influences that shape a writer's work. This is the favorite method of the academic mind in our time, which enjoys the task of showing how thoroughly the work of a writer like Poe fits into the history of the Romantic Movement. The other way is the psychoanalytical, which centers attention upon the quality of the writer's subconscious psychic activity, in the belief that in that activity is to be found the true "source" of his works. Mr. Krutch has only scorn for the historical approach, and only admiration for the psychoanalytic. In taking this attitude he is doubly unscientific, although to be scientific is his dearest desire. For, in the first place, the literary influences upon a writer, the things that he selects or that gravitate toward him, show why the creative force in him expressed itself in the way that it did express itself. Poe's way was that of his time. If he had lived at another time, and had had the same kind of personal heritage and experience, there is every reason to suppose that he would have written otherwise, or not have written at all. The forces which wrecked his life may have awakened the impulse to write, but in the shaping of his intuitions he was guided primarily by the traditions of romanticism. We can see that definitely; the historical "explanation" of a writer's work is, so far as it goes, valid. Secondly, we cannot see definitely, on the contrary, what goes on in the psychic realm. The application of our present psychoanalysis to literature is essentially unscientific, for the reason that this new development of psychology is still on trial—is still interesting and promising speculation rather than knowledge.

To pass beyond the study of the gravitation of influences to the cause of the gravitation is to

... take upon's the mystery of things.  
As if we were God's spies.

It may well be questioned whether we shall ever enjoy so exalted a commission; and assuredly it is plain that we do not enjoy it now, and that Mr. Krutch is, accordingly, somewhat premature in his attempt to circumvallate Poe and his works in a neat system. Yet, it ought at least to be said that he has employed plausibly the supposed knowledge that underlies his book, and that the picture that he draws makes us feel closer to the tortured spirit of Poe than we feel in reading the encomiums or the denunciations by most of his biographers.

## "L'Homme d'Amour"

FRANZ LISZT. By GUY DE POURTALÈS. Henry Holt & Co. New York. 1926.

Reviewed by EDWARD BURLINGAME HILL  
Harvard University

"EXPRESSIONISM" is gradually stealing into all the arts. One by one, it has invaded painting, music, sculpture, poetry, and the drama. It is now the fashion to write biography in the "expressionist" manner. In place of the exhaustive two or three volume treatment of the human subject, with an elaborate analysis of his professional career, amply provided with notes and cross references, we have a far briefer exposition of humanistic traits, a coloristic background of persons and places into which the life work of the individual makes scarcely more than an apologetic entrance. Witness "Glorious Apollo" and "Ariel" both which are atmosphere and personality incarnate, but which do not attempt the conventional sphere of biography. This method has much to commend it. Its first place it enables the author to concentrate upon the human qualities of his subject without demanding the intense critical insight which is essential to the real biography. There is a further advantage that in outlining the career of an artist, the precise nature of his innovations and indeed the accurate estimate of his historical import may be



DIANA: "SPORT'S THE THING"

From "Ixion in Heaven," by Benjamin Disraeli, decorated by John Austen (Holt)

safely ignored. The general reading public expects from biography first of all an illumination of personality, an intensification of character, not an accession to its knowledge of professional prowess.

With the preponderance of argument on his side, from the popular point of view, M. de Pourtalès has written a life of Liszt which belongs to the "expressionist" category of biography. He has, at the outset, defined Liszt's dual personality, that baffling union of the sensualist and the mystic. He has followed his subtitle "L'Homme d'Amour" and given refined, yet glowing narratives of Liszt's principal love affairs, and deftly indicated their reaction upon the composer's career. Marie d'Agoult and the Princess von Sayn-Wittgenstein naturally occupy the lion's share of these tender episodes. In the former case, M. de Pourtalès errs on the side of chivalry, overlooking the fact that the Countess d'Agoult's brother once declared that Liszt had throughout acted "like a man of honor." On the other hand, the refusal to grant the Princess von Sayn-Wittgenstein a divorce in order that she might marry Liszt is so skilfully related as to arouse the reader's sympathies for a noble-hearted woman.

If the inherent unselfishness of Liszt's character is scarcely revealed in its real dimensions by M. de Pourtalès, neither is the intrinsic significance of his innovations in the field of composition, and the universality of his influence more than suggested. On the other hand, Liszt's personality as a whole, the intellectual and emotional background of his life, his friendships with von Bülow, Schumann, and more especially Wagner, the gradual domination of the ecclesiastical over the worldly in his later years, are all admirably depicted, and give this biography

a graphic quality possessed by no other. For the untechnical music-lover, and the student of human nature, M. de Pourtalès has accomplished his task excellently. If this volume does not supersede the life by Huneker, it supplements it in an admirable fashion. For one who wishes specific information, Huneker is always available. For the student of temperaments who wishes to obtain a vivid glimpse of the man Liszt, M. de Pourtalès' picturesque and enlightening volume will provide an enthralling stimulus.

## When a Man Thobs

THOBBING. By HENSHAW WARD. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1926. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR W. COLTON

"WHEN a person thinks without curiosity, has an opinion because he likes it, and believes what is handy, then he thobs. I am weary," wrote Jack in Mr. Ward's parable, "of a universe of thobbing. I am coming home to study mining engineering." Thinking, opining, and believing are stages in the progress of thobistic conviction. Thobbing is what Professor Conklin calls "wishful thinking," and is the better term, first, because it is one word, and second, because it suggests thobbing, whereas *wishful* suggests wistful. It is not the thobbing that is wishful, but the thobbing that is thobbing, which is mainly the target, the elusive quintain, successfully speared by Mr. Ward's agile lance. What are the faiths, beliefs, convictions which we so emotionally champion? Either they are in the "mores," handed over to us in packages by inheritance, and never really poked into to see what they contain; or they are reached in a manner somewhat like this: as soon as we ask ourselves, What is the truth about this or that? straightway one of several attractive answers pop into our expectant minds; presently one of them has been taken into the heart of our affections, and we are its hundred per cent champions. The reasons we give for our choice are commonly not causes of choice, but weapons of defense.

A thobber seems to be much what Napoleon used to call an ideologist, a person whose conception of a thing is always getting in front of the thing. After all it is a relative matter. Everyone sees somewhat and fancies somewhat. No one sees anything without some personal slant. We are as little rational as primitive savages. We know more, but from his premises the savage argues as rationally and irrationally as we do. Our minds also are full of myths, and we, too, are outraged if anyone threatens them. No sooner is one dream castle and palace of theory thrown down than we build another, as convinced of its rock foundations as the architects before us.

Only in certain sciences, in which men constantly observe and only theorize intermittently, is there indisputable progress. The process is not wholly observation and induction, but nowhere else are hypotheses called hypotheses and recognized as classifications of apparent facts which the mind cannot otherwise handle. Elsewhere hypotheses are called laws, principles, convictions, doctrines, faiths, or other terms charged with possessive emotion. Herbert Spencer's idea of a tragedy, some one said, was a generalization destroyed by a fact. Only the Darwins are more pleased by a new fact than distressed by the wound it gives to a theory previously in good health. A mining engineer cannot thob on the job,—not very much,—for the job will rise up and smite him. But whenever the facts are not too thin-skinned, quick-tempered, and contentious, one may thob blissfully along, and bequeath his thobs to posterity who will rise up and call him blessed.

Mr. Ward has cast his argument in the form of letters to Clarence Day. Could anything be more ingratiating, more inductive of candor and wit? But with all his conversational manner, somewhat this side of sedate, there is nothing half-baked or incompetent in his handling of the monumental subjects into which he plunges. He has read widely and thought hard. He uncovers thobbing ruthlessly in the man in the street and in the deep thinker of long long thoughts: in morality, science, sociology, philosophy, and psychology; in the radical as in the conservative; in the educational doctrine of Professor Dewey, the economic man of Adam Smith; and the gargoyles of Upton Sinclair; in peace plans and principles of law. His inspiration or starting point, if it can be traced definitely, seems to be Sumner, and Sumner's Folkways.

Personally I am a thobber, probably more so than