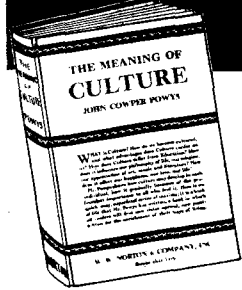


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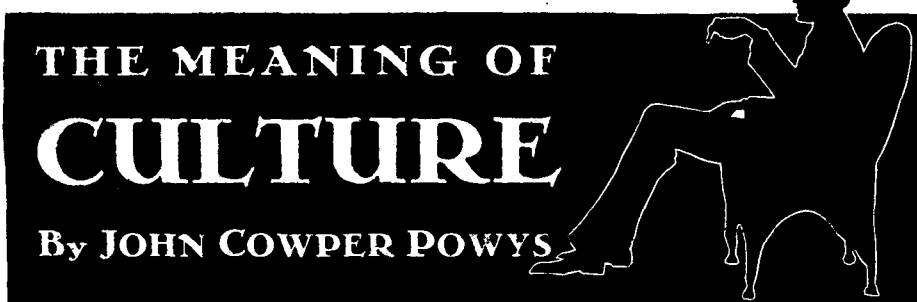
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Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE symposium on the "Revolution of the Word" in V. F. Calverton's and S. D. Schmalhausen's *The Modern Quarterly* has recently interested us. Are the revolution-in-the-wordists moving in the right or the wrong direction? James Joyce in his "Work in Progress" has been doing all sorts of things with words. At first glance it would seem that he has simply been trying to write a whole book in Jabberwockyese. Then it appears that his words are portmanteaus—not such simple and outdated portmanteaus, for instance, as the word "Hobohemia," once coined by Sinclair Lewis, but packed with extreme erudition, linguistic accomplishment, and cryptogrammatic affluence. A line from Francis Thompson pops into our memory at this juncture: "Brimmed with nimbler meanings up than hasty Gideons from their hands may sup." The texture of Joyce's present writing is "stiff with riches" of such kind. And to us, when it is not utterly incomprehensible, it is so laborious that it bores us. Why not be frank about it? It bores us; just as Gertrude Stein bores us. And we do not feel ourself to be altogether too hasty a Gideon.

There is a delight in coined words, there lurks a great delight in "lingo." We have all heard children evolve words, through an inexact comprehension of the words spoken around them, which were so good in their portmanteau meanings that it seemed as though they should most certainly be added to the English language. But such words are inspirations, conscious or unconscious. When one goes at the matter with the well-nigh Teutonic thoroughness Joyce has applied to it, the eventual palimpsest presents so great a problem to the average mind that literature's true function is all but destroyed. The pleasure derived from his writing reduces itself to a highly esoteric pleasure. The study of such writing becomes like the study of the higher mathematics. And, unfortunately, the general run of mankind is at present so constituted that it cannot grasp the rarified esthetic and intellectual enjoyment to be derived from application to this new language. Why should there not be such a new language? Why indeed! But for a very long time it will, necessarily, be for the few. And it seems to us a pity that one of the great literary geniuses of our time, as we believe Joyce to be, should assiduously and determinedly follow a road that leads him farther and farther away from intelligibility to the average reader, in a day when, we verily believe, writing has never had so intelligent or quickly perceptive a general audience.

Perhaps, if the word-revolution gains ground and advances its standards within the next century, readers of 2030 A.D. will find Joyce as simple and direct as most of us now find Browning, though Browning was satisfied with the English language, more or less, as he found it. Mr. Calverton has admitted to his symposium, with great fairness, a variety of spokesmen, for and against the word-revolution. He himself contributes a very interesting paper. And if you ask us why we are discussing here, in a column devoted to the discussion of poetry, the matter before us, it should be obvious that it is in poetry that single words have always become most intensely effective. The revolution-in-wordists will create a new poetry, whether it be written (as most certainly it will not be) in the present verse forms or no. When Mr. Jolas says, in his contribution to the symposium, that "the isolated vocable should develop a new sense of conjuration," we most heartily agree, except that with the words of the present English language—even the simplest, of the most common usage—that has always proved possible when genius or even great talent wielded them. He also says, however, (in part) that

The study of the state of mind which the discoveries of Freud, Stekel, etc., have clarified for us, after a long struggle begun by the Greeks and continued by the romantics, is the primary task of the modern poet.

He quotes Poe to the effect that "there are certain states of mind for which language has not yet found an adequate manifestation." Of this every poet is aware. And the conclusion is that the new poetry, if it does indeed take up "the primary task of the modern poet," "needs instrumentalities that past epochs did not know." The complete expression of the "dream state" in its relationship to the "conscious state" seems to him to demand a new language.

Mr. Calverton agrees that whole new areas have been opened to the poet for interpretation, but it seems to us that his unanswerable answer is this:

Any revolution in the word, therefore, if it is to mark an advance, has but one function to

perform, and that is to make the word a finer because a more precise and clarifying form of social communication.

That was what we ourselves meant when we said above that in the Joycean experiment we felt that "literature's true function is all but destroyed." Mr. Calverton's contention is not that there is no necessity for a revolution in expression, but "the revolt that is necessary, we maintain, is not in the word, but in the use of the word." "There can be no intelligent argument," he says, "against neologisms that aid language to be more communicative; argument can only be directed against neologisms that do not aid that function. Here is the crux of the controversy!" He goes on to disagree with one of the revolution-in-the-wordists who announced that "the writer expresses; he does not communicate." He points out that such an attitude is "hostile to all sense and reason."

If an artist writes merely to express and is unconcerned with the element of communication, to be consistent with himself he should never print what he writes—if he must write—but keep it to himself in his own private possession. But that is not the nature of artists or the so-called art-impulse.

This is entirely sound. And equally as sound is this paragraph:

Because we are done with an old culture does not mean we are done with old words. Words survive cultures—for they are the substance of all culture, be it revolutionary or reactionary. Words take on new meanings, acquire new power, demand new emphasis, but they are spelt approximately the same, and hold within themselves the residuum of culture. In English and American words there now inheres the congealed thought of centuries. That we must add to these words, drive new life into their old bones, set them against the new spirit of our age, no one should dispute. But that we should destroy their meaning by distortion; that we should allow an individual to make havoc with their substance in order to express his fancy—that is a violation of the entire social purpose and meaning of words.

So the situation stands. And after being so forcibly reminded of Joyce's vocabulary and of Gertrude Stein's rhythms there still seems a good deal to be done with the language as it stands and with variations of the rhythms we know. Mr. Joyce and Miss Stein are extraordinary phenomena of our time. The former has prodigious gifts, the latter seems to us to labor under a prodigious hallucination concerning the effectiveness of words. And all this logomachy has its interest. But its end seems to be in sterility. It does not impress us with new life. It is of the study. Both writers have become the most extraordinary examples of detachment from the age in which they live that we know of to-day.

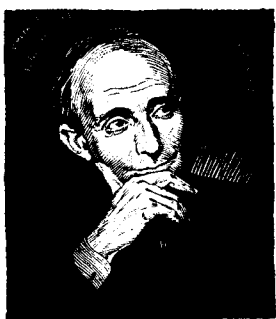
After such considerations it is interesting to turn to a slim book of poems written by probably the best of the younger critics of our time. It was published in the fall of last year. It is "Poets, Farewell!" by Edmund Wilson (Scribners). The opening poem is one of the best. It is in regular metre and rhyme (as are, in fact, most of Mr. Wilson's inclusions in this volume) and is impressively nostalgic. In fact, one verse of it has been running in our head for a long time:

*Yet never now to travel toward Vittel!—
South now to seek her, say!—
South, south, to that soft-graying Esterel
That fades on rose and gray—*

"Infection," on the seventh page, is likewise remarkable. So are "Boboli Gardens" and "Provincetown." And the peculiar thing about them all is that the last three are in exactly the same metre, that all four are most classical and traditional as to form, that in none is there the slightest attempt at verbal or metrical experimentation. Yet Wilson is undeniably a poet, with an exact ear and the gift of precise expression; and he has given us probably the best critical analyses of Proust, Joyce, and others that we have had in our time. Also in his section "Nonsense" his poem concerning "Quintilian," in regular stanzas, is to us one of the most amusing pieces of fooling we have read for a long time. In fact, we have had it in a scrapbook of ours for a number of years, ever since it originally appeared in *The Double Dealer*.

We ponder upon the revolution in the word, and we ponder upon this book. We find ourself allied to those who elect an ancient discipline. Perhaps it is a sign of age. But the less words the better, seeing that a simple direct statement can still be packed with human experience and with a reference to beauty that by its very reticence still deeply stirs the heart and ennobles the mind.

"Gentlemen, A NOVEL!"



JEAN-RICHARD BLOCH

ALMOST any book can get some favorable reviews. Even the superlatives are frequently too easily available. There are always a few friendly or lenient or obscure critics who can accommodate the blurb-writer or the headline virtuoso.

But acclaim—authentic acclaim from responsible and famous men of letters—is made of different stuff, and it is international acclaim of such magnitude which greets the American publication of this novel by JEAN-RICHARD BLOCH, "*—And Company*".

Rarely is it given to a publisher to launch a novel with such impressive tributes, and under such distinguished auspices. The introduction is by ROMAIN ROLLAND, the translation from the French is by C. K. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF, noted for his rendition of PROUST, and the comments quoted in this announcement are but typical of a larger homage which ARNOLD BENNETT, VAN WYCK BROOKS, PAUL CLAUDEL, and ISRAEL ZANGWILL are proud to pay to a novelist in the noble tradition of classical French fiction. These, in fact, are their own words, not the publisher's.

"Gentlemen, a novel!"

THE word genius is not used lightly by men of the standing of ROMAIN ROLLAND. In the case of "*—And Company*", by JEAN-RICHARD BLOCH, he uses it with measured deliberation—and without qualifying phrases.

"The great majority of novelists," says ROMAIN ROLLAND, "write from a shallow ink-well. They but scratch the surface of reality. They seize upon nature from a single angle, perhaps by means of external description, or through the minds of the characters, or through the use of movement or emotion. I know scarcely a single writer who, throughout a work of any size, comes to grip with life like an athlete, hand to hand—who embraces the entire mass of reality, his chosen prey, in the net of his spiritual and intellectual perception.

"Yet that is the very achievement of '*—And Company*'. The tribe of the Simlers is modeled from human flesh. We can see them, touch them; we can even carry away the living clay in our hands.

"For me, that is the first and indelible impression produced by this great book—even beyond the overwhelming interest of the story itself: an exceptional power of integral creation, of body plus soul. The verb 'to create' here takes on its full complement of meanings. The author has not

only imagined or observed his characters. He has engendered them."

IN describing the "amplitude and the solid construction" of this novel ROMAIN ROLLAND speaks unqualifiedly of "the genius of JEAN-RICHARD BLOCH", and continues:

"The outstanding and preeminent element in this book is obviously the Simler family. And in painting their portraits the author is incomparable. His treatment, his style, by emphasizing certain qualities, by making them stand out in monumental relief, by the abundance of the clay and the vigorous joy of the modeler who shapes it, borders very close on caricature, yet is majestic to the point of being epic.

"He reminds me of Daumier. There is the same firm touch, the well-rounded flesh and muscles, the michaelangesque ardour in the bourgeois buffoonery, the *vis comica* (*tragica*?), the irresistible scenic movement, the genius not only of the individual portraiture (Hippolyte Simler is a world in himself), but of the *ensembles*.

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"'*—AND COMPANY*' is built on the scale of the masterpieces of French literature. It is worthy of the best work of BALZAC."—VAN WYCK BROOKS

"'*—AND COMPANY*' is a permanent achievement. It has some of the qualities of BALZAC, FLAUBERT, and ZOLA. It is written in the grand manner of the classical French fiction of the nineteenth century."—ARNOLD BENNETT



"A book like '*—AND COMPANY*' is not open to criticism. One yields to it as one would to a natural phenomenon. It flows along like a river and has the majesty of a forest."—ISRAEL ZANGWILL



into his spirit. It is this world which smoulders in a brain wherein a fever of creation and universal curiosity rages."

THE reader who confronts a novel entitled "*—And Company*" for the first time may wonder at its implications. There is drama in this story, there is passion, there is suspense, there is climax, there is imagery, and there is an astounding sense of character and continuity—but all these elements are steeped in a theme of timeless spiritual and ideological import—the struggle between man and his company—between individual and business—between personality and factory, between the hushed cry of Joseph Simler's love and the imperious summons of the daybreak siren over the looms and the smoke-stacks.

"... Most of all, the sword of his own eventual solitude pierced him to the heart . . .

"... The machines stand there in a row with the tranquillity of creditors, gluttonous and gorged . . .

"... Wagons bring fresh looms and machinery. The roar increases. The family home, which originally regulated everything else according to its own rhythm, is no more now than a plank tossed upon the waves. A mighty din overwhelms the universe . . ."

THIS, then, is "*—And Company*", the book hailed by ARNOLD BENNETT, VAN WYCK BROOKS, ROMAIN ROLLAND, ISRAEL ZANGWILL, and PAUL CLAUDEL. This is the author acclaimed by the most eminent critics of England, France and Germany. This is the work selected by *The Book League of America* for February, now published by Simon and Schuster and on sale at all bookstores for \$3.00.

The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Fiction

TIDE HOUSE. By MAUDE CALDWELL PERRY. Harcourt, Brace. 1929. \$2.50.

Miss Perry's "Tide House" is confused, harsh, and irritating; in more skilful hands it could have been made persuasive. It does fairly well with its scene, but the rest—plot and people—is disappointing. The protagonist, Matthew Gulick, is a dim and

unsympathetic figure; we do not know him well, and we do not wish to. He is a simple-minded, stupidly ambitious boor, and whatever significance Miss Perry intended him to possess is certainly not communicated to us. The women characters, though equally unattractive, seem much more plausible. As for the plot—the less said the better; it is complicated, luridly melodramatic, and tiresome.

Local color is the only real merit of the novel. Argyll, the small town where the entire action takes place, is on the Pacific coast, evidently in the state of Washington. During the years from 1890 to 1917 we see this "mud-flat" town grow and change. The sea, with its storms; the dunes, with their encroaching sands; the vast lumber tracts, with their threat of forest fires—these, somehow, seem to keep the townspeople dispirited and uncivilized. Every aspect of life in Argyll makes for discouragement and meanness. This background, however, in spite of its energetic picturesqueness, does not make up for the serious defects of the novel.

THE MERCHANT PRINCE. By H. C. BAILEY. Dutton. 1929. \$2.50.

Mr. H. C. Bailey writes his historical novel with a blithe and agreeable pen. Those who imagine novels looking to the past for their subject are dull and lacking in the kick which follows from the proper use of modern ideas and language will find Mr. Bailey makes as good reading as they could wish. In "The Merchant Prince," the author traces out the growth of a new type of man and mentality in the Middle Ages. Then war and the pursuit of war was not only the business of the aristocracy, but also the big business of the era. The risks were great and the gains were corresponding to those who happened to be lucky enough to keep whole skins and on the right side.

Hugh Camoys, though given the opportunity to enter this business under good patronage, declined. He found himself able to make as good a livelihood in trade, with fewer chances of getting his head broken as a penalty for lack of foresight. In addition to this, he saw that trade went on merrily, while factions inside the country equally merrily broke heads and got heads broken in their attempt to keep on top. Amidst all this, Hugh's trade keeps on prospering and his power and influence grow, and he finishes up happily by marrying a noble maid from the aristocracy which once so despised him.

This tale might be considered to carry a moral as well as a plot which rattles along at a good pace. If so, then the moral must be that peace and prosperity and trade are better than all the glories of war and cold steel in the gullet. It doesn't sound very adventurous, but the author makes it so. Mr. Bailey is his usual engaging and competent self, and "The Merchant Prince" is another added to the long list of his novels which one takes up to put down only when finished.

EARLY REAPING. By CALE YOUNG RICE.

Century. 1929. \$2.50.

This is an uneven novel with some excellent psychological delineation and a story—it can hardly be called a plot—that is well integrated and interesting in its unfolding. The hero is an offspring of mis-mating, son of a dissolute father of comparatively aristocratic family and of a mother who was a common-law child and socially outside the local pale of Louisville, Kentucky, scene of the story. The effect upon a sensitive boy of his restricted mother-dominated life with only occasional visits from an unscrupulous and brutal father is traced with sympathy and insight. The resultant split personality of the boy leads to a marriage as disastrous as that of his parents but also to a love that in the end promises to solve all.

That is why the novel is uneven. Mr. Rice unflinchingly presents the tragic elements necessary to his story, but then he too often relents and loosens the tension with some idealization of life or love, an idealization which is not forceful or convincing enough to resolve the bitter compound he has made. When Mr. Young is the observer and analyst, and sometimes when he is the interpreter, he might take his place beside the better realists of today. But when he philosophizes, or permits his philosophy to sift through the action and characters, he blurs his effects and slips most contradictorily into rather an "uplift" attitude. There is a lack of ruthlessness in Cale Young Rice the novelist that must be due in part to Cale Young Rice the poet and idealist.

IN PRINCETON TOWN. By DALE EDWARDS. Scribners. 1929. \$2.

These stories of college life have all the defects and the one virtue of cheap magazine fiction. To enumerate the defects would be tedious. Chief among them are a machine-made plot, usually with a trick ending, a cheaply romantic style, and standardized characters. The solitary virtue of magazines stories, and of these collegiate fables, is that they are easy to read. No effort of any sort, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual, is required in order to follow Mr. Edwards as he goes through his little bag of literary tricks. One knows that Crane will not cheat on the examination, sorely tempted though he is. One knows that the despised East, working his way through college, will get a bid from the best club in Princeton and that his snobbish roommate will not. And one knows that orchestras will blare, that colors will flame, that glances will dart and cheeks grow hot with humiliation. All these commonplaces one expects to find in a book of this sort, and Mr. Edgar does not disappoint one. However, his stories are readable enough, and often quite entertaining and colorful in spite of their banality.

(Continued on page 682)

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