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GOTHAM HOUSE

## Complex but Clear

MODERN POETRY AND THE TRADITION. By Cleanth Brooks. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1939. 253 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMAYER

THE sober and somewhat academic title of this book may attract only specialists and students in a restricted field. That will be a pity, for it is a book which any intelligent reader can read with profit and not without pleasure. It is sound without being sententious; it is suggestive yet precise; it avoids the temptation of sensationalism and the opposite extreme of stodginess. Mr. Brooks writes lucidly rather than brilliantly about the reach of the image (emphasized in his chapter "Metaphor and the Tradition") and goes to some length to explain the "difficulty" of modern poetry and the reader's resistance to it. Although the book is not planned as a particular rejoinder, it constitutes a rebuttal to the objections raised by Max Eastman, Leonard Bacon, *et al.* against the more intellectual experimenters.

Half of Mr. Brooks's chapters deal with the fluctuations of the metaphor, the expanded gamut of metaphysical poetry, the contradictions of propaganda art, the insecurity of the ivory tower, the reasons for "indefiniteness," and the shifting "rhetorical caprices" of style. The other half deals with particular poets, especially with Frost, MacLeish, Auden, Ransom, Eliot, Tate, and Yeats. Yeats may not be the "hero" of the work, but his poetry serves as something of a touchstone, and he is analyzed most effectively in the chapters entitled "Symbolist Poetry and the Ivory Tower" and "The Poet as Myth-Maker." If Mr. Brooks is a trifle too owlish in his solemn dissection of Eliot's "The Waste Land," he is not only plausible but penetrating in his interpretation of Yeats's delicate and extraordinarily intricate "Byzantium." The concluding "Notes for a Revised History of English Poetry" may well prove to be the most stimulating reappraisal to be encountered in any similar work; it presents the challenging thesis that English poetry and poetic theory "were deflected from their richest line of development by the scientific rationalism which came with Hobbes and has continued its restrictive influence to the present day, when such modern poets as Yeats and Eliot have begun the re-establishment of the earlier line of development."

All in all, this is the work of a scholar who is sensitive to every nuance of feeling and every change of pitch. Mr. Brooks is a probing analyst, but he is not a pedant. His work, reflecting his subject, is allusive rather than simple and straightforward, complex but clear.

Louis Untermeyer is the author of "Play in Poetry" and other books of poetry and criticism.

"The first biography of one of the most remarkable Americans of our time" . . .

Edward Wagenknecht,  
*Seattle Post Intelligencer*

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GOTHAM HOUSE



## WHO SMASHED

Evelyn Lister's skull with a rock, and left this in her hand? . . .

I was only fifteen  
when it happened  
but I knew too much

## WHO STABBED

Art Dawson twelve times with a paper knife, and explained it this way? . . .

I knew too much

## WHO BURNED UP

Jenny Midge in her own house, but left this note behind? . . .

I knew  
I never told  
I should have

## WHO HUNG

Terry Whitcomb to his own yardarm, and pinned these words to his chest?

Counting myself  
I have killed everyone  
who knew about it

**WHO** but Abelard Voss, criminologist, could find out? The police of Waldham, Long Island, were no match for the killer who wove a shrewd pattern of crime around the bare grave of a man seven years murdered. \$2.00

# Grave WITHOUT Grass

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## Shakespeare and His American Critics

*AMERICAN SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM, 1607-1865. By Alfred V. R. Westfall. New York: H. W. Wilson Co. 1939. 305 pp., with index. \$2.75.*

Reviewed by ESTHER CLOUDMAN DUNN

IN twenty-nine short chapters, each followed by a useful bibliography, Alfred Westfall presents the outlines of American Shakespearean criticism from the founding of the colonies in 1607 to 1865, the year "when White was producing his edition and the Cambridge editors were standardizing the text."

Mr. Westfall has been painstaking in his research. The resulting book is a valuable source of information on such topics as the history of the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, the first American publications of Shakespeare, the first complete American edition. The author has made good use of the special knowledge of Henry N. Paul, Esq. of Philadelphia, whose collection of American editions of Shakespeare together with his unpublished bibliography of American editions is now in the Folger Library. Westfall has supplemented this study with some interesting discoveries of his own.

The chronological list of American editions between 1787 and 1865 is an important bibliographical item. In the field of drama, the list of "performances of Shakespeare in America before the closing of the theaters," numbering "at least one hundred sixty-six" between 1730 and 1774, presents for the first time in tabulated form the statistics which reveal the taste and emphasis of Shakespearean production in a crucial period of colonial history.

The fault of this book springs, I think, from a difficulty in Mr. Westfall's interpretation of his title. He tries to make it cover both the history of Shakespearean criticism, which he does well, and the interpretation of that history, which fits awkwardly into a discussion mainly bibliographical and historical. His handling of what he calls "real" criticism, by which he means formal criticism in the shape of essays, introductions to editions, etc., is good. He unearths hitherto unknown facts and works with completeness and accuracy. But for the hinterland of informal and indirect criticism, Mr. Westfall's method is not so successful. A work mainly bibliographical and historical suffers embarrassment when it crosses over into the field of interpretation of these facts against the slowly emerging cultural background of America. There is not time to do both things. The cultural interpretation is, therefore, likely to be truncated and the argument somewhat disconnected. The array of statistics on "our Presidents as Shakespearean critics" is admirable. The attempt, however, to divide the history of critical comment on Shakespeare

into separate chapters emphasizing respectively esthetic, moral, and poetical aspects is external and categorical.

Perhaps to say this is to cavil. The book as a whole is of significance for librarians, scholars, collectors, and bibliographers. It is honest and thorough, and Mr. Westfall is to be congratulated on having carried through an arduous and important task.

*Esther Cloudman Dunn, professor of English at Smith College, is the author of "Shakespeare in America."*

## Industrial Democrat

*SIDNEY HILLMAN, LABOR STATESMAN. By George Soule. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. 237 pp., with index. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM O. SCROGGS

MR. SOULE'S book is not, in the strict sense, a biography; it is much more. While sketching the life story of Sidney Hillman, the author also outlines in bold, clear strokes the evolution of labor relations and the growth of industrial democracy in the United States since the turn of the century. Much of the volume is devoted to the problems of unionism in a single branch of the clothing industry, because it was there that Hillman first exhibited his capacity for leadership and rose to prominence. But the book is not a narrow dissertation on technical developments in a special field. With his intimate knowledge of industrial problems, Mr. Soule is able to give the details of his narrative their proper proportion and always to show them in their relation to the whole labor movement.

With the passing of the years Hillman's influence has become increasingly effective, both extensively and intensively. A realist as well as a champion of the underprivileged, and with no axe to grind, he has won the respect of employers and employees alike. His skill as a mediator has often been severely tested in bitter and intricate controversies—not a few being among the workers themselves—and his success is attributed by Mr. Soule to the fact that he combines in his person the good points of both the idealist and the practical man. He is "suspicious of empty formulas and rigid dogmas," and yet "imaginative and daring," completely devoted to the welfare of labor while insisting that it must not ask too much of its friends lest this bring an unfavorable reaction.

The story of industrial strife rarely makes interesting reading for those who are not in some way involved in the struggle, but by linking such a story with the personality of Sidney Hillman, Mr. Soule has produced a work that everyone interested in the working of the democratic processes in America may read with both interest and profit.