

important, is more serious as "art" than is the elementary duty of narrative; that to keep the lines of a plot clean and decisive is to show one's self no better than Walter Scott or Francis Marion Crawford; and that fulness of life is philosophically and esthetically to be preferred to a straight-line story.

There is good argument for this point of view. But are readers merely philistine in buying detective fiction? Is it not time to reconsider all the implications for structure of the stream-of-consciousness method and of those subjective unfoldings of personality which in fiction have developed with it on parallel lines? For the purpose of subjectivism is presumably to present and illuminate character; but it is by no means certain that subjectivism, with its irresponsibility, its commission to wander back and forth in time, its associativeness (so that everything suggests everything else), is that supple instrument it was supposed to be. By and large, narrative and plot in the old-fashioned sense of the terms produced impressive characters from Don Quixote down; and it seems, at any rate, that the contemporary subjective novelist is getting himself into a bog *because he mistakes personality for character*.

Miss Herbst's book illustrates the plight of the subjective novelist. By "subjective novelist" I mean, however clumsily, the novelist who is more concerned with inwardness in human beings than with event. There is no portion of the seven parts of "Somewhere the Tempest Fell" that cannot be justified as writing and as insight. But the total impact of "Somewhere the Tempest Fell" is one of confusion. The spotlight shifts so many times, the illumination falls so sharply upon so many personalities, things, problems, emotions, relations, that the eye dazzles and tires, the mind longs for sparer diet. The rich confusion of the pages becomes by and by a jungle through which the reader must hack his way or retire, giving up his journey. The book has every power except that of narrative. But is not the human instinct for narrative, which drives millions to the movies, to the radio, to popular fiction—is not this something deep-seated and primary, like the force of gravity in architecture? Is not the neglect to fulfil this elementary duty fatal? Are not novelists of first-class intelligence and power doing harm to that noblest of prose forms, the serious novel, by pretending it is not a novel at all but, as Emerson would say, a transparent eyeball? The difficulty of the transparent eyeball concept is that you can see with it, but not through it.

Belles-Lettres. *The essay is almost a lost art. In school, we waded through Bacon and Emerson, and delighted in Lamb, and we were stirred by Macaulay. But the essay is too reflective, too slow, too lacking in edge for these pointed, nervous times. Now and then a few quiet books of essays wander into the SRL office from England, where Victorian leisuredness still lingers in literature at least, but, generally, fine examples of the art are rare. We welcome therefore "Books and Biped," by Vincent Starrett, and some essays by a newcomer to the field called William Shakespeare. We are looking forward also to Arnold Toynbee's coming book, "Civilization on Trial," which is actually a collection of essays on history, and to the posthumous "The Moment and Other Essays," by that other great English writer, Virginia Woolf.*

Bard à la Bacon

ESSAYS OF SHAKESPEARE: An Arrangement. By George Coffin Taylor. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1947. 144 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LEGETTE BLYTHE

IF IT'S true that there's nothing new under the sun, it must equally be a fact that there's always possible a new approach to everything old.

Even Shakespeare. Yes, for though for 300 years the Bard of Avon has been studied, analyzed, criticized, and quarreled over by countless scholars and shallow-brains, and though his characters individually and collectively have been exhumed, autopsied over, dissected, weighed, measured, and psychoanalyzed, it remained for a University of North Carolina English professor just the other day to astound the Shakespeareans by introducing the famous poet and playwright as a highly proficient member of an entirely different writing profession.

Most of them, doubtless, had never suspected it of their hero. Though I'm no Shakespearean, I've studied and had to take elaborate notes on everything he wrote, and I've been in the low-ceilinged room in which he was born, sat on the back steps of Ann Hathaway's cottage where he is reputed to have done his courting, and stood above his grave in the little church at Stratford-on-Avon. But I had never thought of the great Elizabethan as an essayist.

Dr. Taylor, in his "Essays of Shakespeare," has interestingly developed a project he has long had in mind of grouping Shakespeare's ideas, as uttered by his many and varying characters or in his poems, into a series of essays that could easily have been written as such. It is amazing how these lines and verses, picked from the whole range of the bard's writings, line up one after the other to form

an essay of remarkable unity and clarity. It's a new kind of mosaic, but the small bits form into amusing, interesting, and meaningful patterns.

The subjects given the essays by Dr. Taylor read very much like Bacon's or others of his day, and one of the scholars who saw advance galleys of the book commented that "although Bacon could never have written Shakespeare, it is pleasant to know that Shakespeare might have written Bacon's essays."

There are more than fifty of the essays, with an introduction and a key in the back of the book showing from which play or poem each mosaic bit was taken. The reader who delights in Shakespeare and fancies himself an expert in spotting quotations from the bard can quickly check his knowledge with the aid of this key. And he'll get much amusement doing it. The essays are on such subjects as truth, time, love, lust, marriage and single life, sleep, fortune, ambition, drinking, virtue of laughter, mental pain, life, death, suicide, riches, beauty, honor, music, mobs, politics and politicians, peace, war, nature, a perfect man, a perfect woman, virginity, a horse, England—and many others.

And it's remarkable how modern his essays are, too, as modern as are his plays. They have the same virtue of timelessness. For instance, think of Mr. Vishinsky's ravings before the council of the United Nations and then read "A Big Talker." Or even better, have a look at the short, fat sister wearing one of those too-awful-length new skirts and then turn to page 86 and read "On the Force of Custom": "New customs, though they be never so ridiculous . . . yet are followed . . . for use almost can change the stamp of nature . . ."

Who says the bard of Avon wasn't a poet, dramatist—and essayist, yes, and profound philosopher!

Comment and Curiosa

BOOKS AND BIPEDS. By Vincent Starrett. New York: Argus Books, Inc. 1947. 268 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JOHN T. WINTERICH

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS entitled a collection of his essays "Literature and Life" because, he said, substantially he couldn't see any difference between them. Mr. Starrett obviously calls the present collection "Books and Bipedes" for much the same reason. The collection, in his own words, is "a desultory miscellany, a volume of comment and curiosa rather than criticism, with only one purpose—to make books alive and interesting. I have written about the things that interest me in the hope that they would interest others." Most of the units appeared in Mr. Starrett's column in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. Column material rarely merits preservation in more substantial form. These salty, urbane, informative, shrewd, pungent, witty, thoroughly readable paragraphs do.

Some of them are just that, paragraphs—the shortest contains twenty-six words. The longest bits are sometimes made up of enough paragraphs to form essays of never more than a thousand words or so. To take odds

and ends of these dimensions and put them into a book is no trouble at all; to expect the book to interest and to entertain is another matter. But the feat is accomplished here. If you open "Books and Bipedes" anywhere, you will keep right on and then go back to the beginning—assuming, of course, you have any slightest interest in books, the people in them, the people who write them, or any people at all.

Mr. Starrett's own favorites among books and people naturally tend to filter out in this compilation based on four years (from 1942 to 1945) of Sunday columns. If you were lucky enough to be invited to an evening *chez* Starrett, you would find there Sherlock Holmes, Dashiell Hammett, Napoleon Bonaparte, W. M. Thackeray (height six feet four inches), Alexander Pope (height four feet six inches), Charles Dickens, Lizzie Borden, Alexander Woolcott, Baron Munchhausen, Emily Dickinson, Winston Churchill, Cinderella, G. B. Shaw, Long John Silver, J. P. Morgan, Frances Trollope, Abraham Lincoln, Christopher Morley, Samuel Pepys, Mary Shelley, and a couple of hundred others. One could go farther without faring better—or even wanting to.

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

PRIZE FIGHTERS IN FICTION

All of the characters in this week's quiz were professional fighters. Allow yourself five points for each story you can identify, five for its author, and a bonus of five if you can also name the fighter. A score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers are on page 34.

1. This battered-up boxer tutored a rich young gentleman three times a week in the peaceful art of self defense.
2. The \$25 that this worn-out pugilist was to receive for putting up a good fight was confiscated by the promoter when he was knocked out in the third round and died of a cerebral hemorrhage.
3. This fighter had \$50,000 bet on his opponent to win, so when he was fouled he had to take it rather than win the decision.
4. This man was a thorough heel but the papers wouldn't print anything adverse about him because he was a champion.
5. A talented violinist, this young man turned to the fight game in order to make money, broke both hands, killed his final opponent, and then killed himself in an auto accident.
6. Through a newspaperman's mistake, this mild and inoffensive milkman was launched on a career that made him middleweight champion.
7. This lightweight was bred for battle, his father having been a fighting Irishman and his mother having once licked four Newark cops.
8. After learning that all his previous victories had been prearranged by his manager, this Argentinian giant went berserk and killed his next opponent.
9. When a champion is shot during a fight, the spirit of this "dead" prize fighter is transposed into his body by a Mr. Jordan, an expert in such matters.
10. A most aristocratic young lady marries this middleweight champ in order to breed children that would have his physique and her brain power, but the results are surprising.

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