

Skilfully Ordered Words

LITERARY CRITICISMS BY FRANCIS THOMPSON. *Discovered and collected by the Rev. Terence Connolly.* New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1948. 617 pp. \$12.50.

ESSAYS IN RETROSPECT. *By Chauncey Brewster Tinker.* New Haven: Yale University Press. 1948. 161 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

FATHER CONNOLLY, who put us in his debt a few years ago with a well-annotated edition of Francis Thompson's poetry, has now increased our obligation to him with this interesting volume of Thompson's previously uncollected literary criticisms. The essays which Wilfrid Meynell chose to include in his well-known edition of Thompson's poetry and prose were comparatively few, and would seem to have been selected largely for their eloquence, even their poetical power; for the most part they show the writer with his singing robes upon him. But here, for the first time, we meet him as a practising critic, expressing himself through the medium of reviews in *The Academy* and other periodicals; doing supremely well work that is only hack-work when it is done ill. For the first time we are enabled to appreciate the range of the man's literary knowledge, the sureness of his taste, the accuracy of his judgment. We have long been familiar with the Thompson who was a master of verbal magic, even of juggler's tricks; who could thrill and surprise and delight every reader susceptible to the power of skilfully ordered words. But here, in this extensive collection, we bear company with a writer who can weigh literary values justly, and dispassionately analyze literary performances. Of course he is eloquent in this activity, for without eloquence he would

not be Francis Thompson, but he limits his flights with wise economy; his eloquence is always controlled with strict regard to the business at hand. And if he is witty, too—delightfully and pervasively witty—his wit, like his eloquence, is always functional.

His scope is wide, in time and space. English, Irish, French, American, and Italian writers pass under his scrutiny; but on the Germans he is silent, at least in this volume, and Father Connolly's bibliography indicates that they did not much interest him. In poetry he ranges from Dante to Henry, in prose from St. Augustine's "Confessions" to Paul Elmer More's "Shelburne Essays." His competence is, of course, not always the same in all instances; no critic's is. But he does not pretend to a competence which he does not possess, and, if he is sometimes content to skim a surface, he is never guilty of pseudo-profundity. Religion and morality enter into his criticism, but without warping his measures or blinding him to excellence in work that is, in its nature, antipathetic to him. He may, for example, despise the kind of thing that d'Annunzio does, but he must praise the way he does it.

Brief quotations cannot do justice to Thompson's perceptions, judgments, and arguments, but a few may serve to illustrate his ability to speak his mind with pitch and point. "Don Juan," he declares, "is table-talk: the finest in the language." It is "a misnomer," he asserts, to call such poets as Racine and Arnold "faultless," when "in line after line there is the blot of absent inspiration, when there is not the only possible word in the only possible place." Of Coleridge he writes: "It is the saddest and costliest wreck in literary annals, an argosy of priceless freight gone down with all its treasures, save a little flotsam which is more treasurable than most vessels' whole lading." And of Montaigne: "There was no pole-star in Montaigne's astronomy; his planets were interesting complexities, which in their curious evolutions had no ascertainable sun—and the sun, to his mind, did not really matter."

He speaks of "the riotous obviousness" of Dumas; declares that "Chateaubriand would have been unhappy in a serpentless Eden, where apples were licensed"; and, when he insists that both intellect and emotion are necessary to the appreciation of poetry, he puts his finger on Leslie Stephen's prime deficiency. He points to the cause which makes Wordsworth "either unapproachable or unendur-

able; and very often both in the compass of twenty lines." Paul Elmer More, he finds, writes "always with the same lofty reasonableness, yet with a monotonous severity and respectability that have in the end the same effect as a nasal unctuousness in the voice—that is, laughter. If the whitened statue of Cobden, which looks seriously upon the Hampstead trams, were to speak, even thus would he comment upon books and life, after so many days and nights of elevated and solitary immobility." Finally, when he searches for what makes the "Paradiso" an astonishing poem, he comes back to us with the declaration: "It is a certain marvelous austerity of enticement, the asceticism of loveliness, the white light of intellectuality; an exquisitely choice apparel through which one feels the hair-shirt. It is a macerated beauty."

A certain marvelous austerity of enticement. . . . This is itself said marvelously. Of course, those who believe that criticism can and should be a science, a laboratory process, will deny that Thompson's "impressionism" is criticism at all. They might be pitied, if their complacency did not make pity superfluous.

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CHAUNCEY TINKER'S slender volume consists, in its author's own words, of "those essays and addresses which I could not bring myself wholly to destroy. They represent some of the chief interests which I have had for many years, poetry, painting, teaching, and, above all, that strange position in which man finds himself in a universe that eludes all comprehension."

For the most part literary, these papers are intelligent without profundity, instructive without pedantry. Uncommon commonsense, based on learning that is lightly carried, informs them all, and their writer controls a style that is distinguished not only by colloquial ease, but also by what may be called colloquial elegance. His wit is keen, his temper urbane; it is obvious that he suffers fools with only the required minimum of Christian charity, and he has as much use for pretentiousness, and artistic or intellectual faking, as he has for the more noxious poisons. He is no fellow of those critics of the new school who "cast the violet into the crucible, and look for chemical results." With a critical technique based on the tested humanities, rather than on pseudo-scientific jargon, he is content to examine his violets with wise eyes, sniff them with discriminating nostrils, perhaps even touch them with experienced fingers,—though not

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Sohrab, in "Sohrab and Rustum," by Matthew Arnold. 2. Priam Farll, in "Buried Alive," by Arnold Bennett. 3. Danny, in "The Butterfly," by James Cain. 4. John Douglas, in "The Valley of Fear," by Conan Doyle. 5. Milady de Winter, in "The Three Musketeers," by Alexandre Dumas. 6. Georgiana, in "The Birthmark," by Nathaniel Hawthorne. 7. Arthur Dimmesdale, in "The Scarlet Letter," by Nathaniel Hawthorne. 8. The Llano Kid, in "A Double-Dyed Deceiver," by O. Henry. 9. Queequag, in "Moby Dick," by Herman Melville. 10. The Duke and the Dauphin, in "Huckleberry Finn," by Mark Twain.

so clumsily as to subject them to a withering pressure.

He is old-fashioned enough—or shall we now say, revolutionary enough?—to insist that it is the business of poets and painters to give something that is capable of being received:

It is no defense of the poets to say that our present Babel has been caused by the modern doubt of all ultimate truths, for it is just the office of poets to discover and to teach these very ultimates. If poets are ready to surrender this office to the scientists, then they and their readers are indeed in miserable plight.

"The whole tradition of literature," he declares, "is in startling contrast to the modern contempt for the public." And he asserts further: "The time will never come when the artist will find no satisfaction in the impression he makes upon the public mind." Mr. Tinker's admiration for the painters of the Dutch School is based upon the fact that "they have so obviously learned their job." These are fighting words in a day when so many artists are proud of not having learned their jobs, when so many refuse to admit the existence of the craft which underlies every art.

They are fighting words, but they are also sound words. And it is because Chauncey Tinker has learned his own job, through many years, by steady practice of his craft, assiduous extension of his knowledge, and persistent cultivation of his critical talents, that what he has to say is worth reading, whether it concern the poetry of Shelley, Morris, Housman, Meredith, and the Brontës, the novels of Trollope, the Pre-Raphaelites, the legend of Dr. Johnson's literary dictatorship, Samuel Pepys, Joel Barlow's mighty epic, sitting for one's portrait, an artist's duty, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, or the mysteries of evolution. As he talks to us on all these topics, this long famous and almost legendary teacher proves himself eloquent and charming.

Pope, James, Hopkins & Kafka

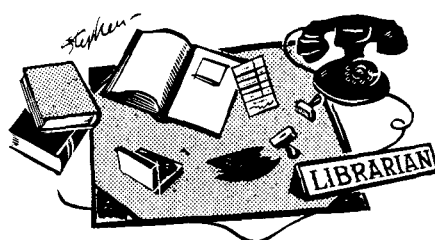
RAGE FOR ORDER. By Austin Warren. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1948. 165 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY POPKIN

AUSTIN WARREN'S criticism discovers an organic principle, a synthesis, in each author considered. Mr. Warren examines the interaction of idea and image, the ideological and formal elements of literature. He interprets the "rage for order" that induces the poet to mold the chaos of his experience into some harmonious pattern:

The poet's passionate desire to see order for himself (not to accept it as a stereotype, "given," handed down) makes his final creation a kind of world or cosmos.

This versatile critic is probably at his best in the essays on Pope, James,



Hopkins, and Kafka. Pope's organic fusion joins classicism and rationalism. Classicism stresses tragedy, the epic, and the grand manner; it is in direct conflict with the narrow boundaries that Hobbes and Locke assigned to the imagination. The products of this disparity are some uninspired and imitative serious poems and a few magnificent burlesques, including the works Mr. Warren considers Pope's masterpieces, "The Rape of the Lock" and "The Dunciad." For Henry James the tension is between the mythic and the dialectic. The mythic is personal, intuitive, subjective, typified by James's use of symbols. The dialectic is cerebral, analytic, social, typified

by endless conversations probing the most recondite shades of meaning.

Hopkins embodies his "inscapes," his visual patterns, in words characterized by their particularity. Mr. Warren traces this preference for the particular to certain poetic and philosophical influences and to the poet's deep interest in Celtic and Teutonic aspects of the language. The essay on Kafka is an excellent antidote to the confusions and contradictions of much current criticism. Kafka exhibits "the irruption of the irrational" in the concrete terms of apparently realistic fiction. The particular merit of Mr. Warren's treatment of Kafka lies in his refutation of the extremists who see Kafka as either a mystic or a revolutionary:

It is absurd to speculate about the nature of the highest, for of course we cannot know; we cannot even know how near we come to knowing.

In each of these essays, Mr. Warren offers a new and valid portrait of the artist; no essay runs any danger of being a final or complete comment on the man and his work, but each should stimulate a fresh interpretation of its respective subject.

The other studies are equally enlightening. Writing on Forster some years before the revival, Mr. Warren expounded that writer's tension as a balancing of conflicting human values. Forster strives to save as many ideas as possible in a fusion that emphasizes universality and moderation. Hawthorne is represented as employing the literary tradition of romance to dramatize the internal mysteries of the human soul, isolation, guilt, and spiritual sin. Two metaphysical poets, George Herbert and Edward Taylor, demonstrate their rage for order in their attempts to convey spiritual meanings in homely conceits. The comments on Yeats are less central to the poet's major work, since they chiefly concern his ventures into occultism, but even this essay reflects Mr. Warren's theory by describing Yeats's efforts to justify the irrational against the rational and orthodox orderings of the universe.

Mr. Warren displays a remarkable versatility both in subject matter and in critical technique. He utilizes the traditional scholarly equipment of history of ideas and biography, but he reveals also a devoted interest in the close reading of texts. More important, Mr. Warren's conception of the rage for order provides a justification for literary criticism that is absent from most recent critical writing.

He Walked in the Cool

By Katharine Day Little

THIS is the time of day
the uncolored city slumbers in the dawn;
a mist-hung-river—
under each flying arch
of her slim floating bridges—
lies lovelier than any daisied lawn.
Pale ripples flicker; as the light flowers out
new shadows darken; under island walls
the walking shadows there are still enoused;
Across the freshening river
an unseen man's bold whistle sudden falls
into the summer morning.