

Nixon of Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley."

The truth is that just as in his explanation that in an untrammelled nature there was nothing in which to believe, so he could not believe in money either. He only found it necessary, which is quite another matter. If there was a personal paradox, it was in the fact that editorship as he practised it helped to set the form of common literary judgment which stifled the publication and the immediate rewards of a novel like "Sister Carrie." Of that important episode in American literary history, Mr. Elias has given us the fullest and the most valuable account.

If Dreiser developed as a "naturalist," as so many critics have labeled him, it was so in the particular sense of a naturalism always in conflict with the aspirations which he and his characters habitually felt. One may in fact question whether truly naturalistic writing is possible in America, where the dream of progress of one sort or another is so firmly imbedded in our subconscious. It was the pull towards idealism, its irresistible and magnetic force, which led Dreiser more and more avowedly to criticize the remediable American scene.

Dreiser's career in the Thirties was, although he expressed it as though somewhat in caricature, typical of the plight of contemporary literary figures. Impelled towards some kind of directive, the alternatives seemed either political or religious. Their innate difference was not marked. The greater appeal of the former was chiefly in its more definitely articulate rationale and its more immediately substantive demonstration of results. Dreiser was tossed and buffeted, but, although frequently confused, moved always with integrity. The pay-off was substantively disastrous, and, what was worse, left him in unsplendid isolation. The first move had been a failure in its totality. His second move veered towards religion. A vague but satisfying sense of divine energy, in combination with societal reform, gave him the beginnings of a new attitude towards nature and life. It was at a point somewhere between the inner white gleam of the Quakers and the outer red starlight of the Soviet. But it was illumination, and in the account of Dreiser's long pilgrimage towards it Mr. Elias has admirably given us more insight than we had before.

Norman Holmes Pearson, a member of the English department of Yale University, is co-editor of the "Oxford Anthology of American Literature."

Stage Directions for 29 Pilgrims



—Frontispiece of the book.

A COMMENTARY ON THE GENERAL PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES. By Muriel Bowden. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 316 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

CHAUCER'S extraordinary microfilm of human espionage (hidden too often in the hollow pumpkin of the graduate school) was accomplished in 858 lines. The seraphim are always brief. It requires by now some 300 pages of dense and highly intelligent text to sum up the corpus of pertinent comment on the Prologue alone. But it has never been done before in such convenient compass. Dr. Muriel Bowden's devotion was laborious and valuable. She takes the Prologue, as it were by television, one shot at a time, and appends historical stage direction for each of the twenty-nine pilgrims. Like Chaucer's Cook, she boils the chicken and the marrowbones together; the savory marrow of Chaucer gets sometimes a little soupified in a chicken broth of commentators. Geoffrey would cackle, I think, at the footnote quoted from saintly old Skeat explaining that "a pulled hen" was "of little value." It would be delightful to argue some of the traditional translations of Chaucer's hard lines: "a fair for the maistrerie," for instance, means to me a good bet for promotion; and "the droghte of March" perhaps akin to the French droguer, viz. tedium, weariness, the long drag toward April, and the green light of the year.

But Dr. Bowden, bless her, has taken the duty and discipline of graduate schools in stride. She knows that the infantry of footnotes often have to take by hard fighting strongpoints that would have yielded without struggle, a little later, to strategic pressure on the flank. But the devo-

tees of Chaucer, letterpunctual in text, know little of his temperament. To relish his mischievous tenderness they would have had to live and observe as variously as Geoffrey himself. They would have to wear scarlet breeks, know Cecilia de Champagne, attend trade conventions, travel the Hokinson Circuit of women's clubs, eavesdrop in State Departments and theological seminaries, pubcrawl with Robert Burns, and bed with Grosse Margot. They would have to fall on their knees and climb their high horses with equal sincerity. Chaucer was an artist, and we must be cautious not to falsen his mateere with too much apparatus.

The noble and desolate hope of scholars is always that by multiplying memoranda (and obliviscenda) "the late fourteenth century will take on the colours of actuality." I think that unlikely. I prefer to think that Chaucer's 858 lines of Prologue, diluted with only a few sips of lexicon, can make our own twentieth century more actual. I joined up with Harry Bailly's cavalcade about forty years ago, under the spell of a great teacher both colloquial and astringent (the late F. B. Gummere). Like many of the pilgrims themselves I went along just for the ride, and found myself riding with them for life. What I admire most in Dr. Bowden's book is that she also shows that sense of green April enjoyment. She knows everything the dull men have noted and counter-noted, and still her eyes dazzle. In so far as any woman of breeding can possibly comment on Old Mischief, she keeps her lip as clean as the Prioress. With what joy she must have escaped from Brearley and St. Agatha's to deal with students at Columbia and Hunter, where one could at least talk textual turkey about Chaucer. She rises into that very small group of women competent to associate with so shy a man. She is on the beam; she rides astride, like the Wife of Bath; not sidesaddle, like Lady Eglantyne.

It is odd (suddenly occurs) how few commentators on Chaucer have themselves been poets. I think of J. R. Lowell (who also had a forked beard), but most of Kipling, whom Dr. Bowden does not seem to have mentioned. More subtle indeed than Skeat or even Keats. In one of his most famous early stories ("The King's Ankus") and one of his unnoticed late stories ("Dayspring Mishandled") Kipling took over straight from G. C. . . . But I take Chaucer very seriously, much more so than most professors, and have to restrain.

Attuned to the Cadence of Quality

OTHER MEN'S MINDS: *The Critical Writings of Jay Lewis. Selected and Edited by Phyllis Hanson. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1948. 172 pp. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by SHAEMAS O'SHEEL

THOSE incredibly learned and industrious men who for the transient daily press write five or six book reviews or literary essays a week—they go to heaven surely, but they are seldom remembered on earth after their passing. The late Jay Lewis will be remembered for a while because, as an unusually felicitous blurb-writer says on the jacket of this book, he was “respected for his learning, honored for his courage and integrity, beloved for his felicity of expression, followed for his enthusiasm.”

Of an old Virginian family on the paternal side, one of his ancestors having been Meriwether Lewis, Jay Lewis was born, in 1881, in Nova Scotia. Like all good Nova Scotians, presently he turned up in Boston, where he entered newspaper work. Doubtless from the first he was headed for his ancestral state, for he served on New York and Washington papers before joining the staff of the *Richmond Virginian* and the *News Leader* of the same city in 1910. Nine years later he began that association with the *Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch* which continued until his final illness in 1947.

In hospital, at the urging of friends, Jay Lewis made this selection from his thousands of articles, and the day before he died sent the manuscript to the most steadfast of those friends, the Norfolk poet Phyllis Hanson, who has completed the editorial work on the book and has contributed a tender and discriminating introduction. Reticent, elusive, Jay Lewis lived, says Miss Hanson, in the world of books, watching with “sardonic amusement, surpassing interest, and overwhelming compassion,” the comedies and tragedies of American literature. He was

“a reformer, a challenger, and a radical with a fervent social consciousness.”

Harry Hansen, who can evaluate if any man can the achievement of a fellow craftsman, in his appreciative foreword calls Jay Lewis “a literary journalist who could stop people in their tracks,” and who accordingly “stirred many to new experiences in reading.” And Alice Dixon Bond, writing of Lewis in *The Boston Herald*, noted that “he sought truth in all that he did and said and thought,” and that “his ear was attuned to the cadence of quality.”

But that phrase—“the cadence of quality”—was one of Jay Lewis's own. His comment is often memorable, fre-

quently by virtue of barbed wit, as when he calls a philosopher “one who has tried and failed and consoles himself with wise maxims,” or notes that political and religious intolerance are “manifestations of the immediate ferocity always aroused by new and alien ideas.” His learning was encyclopedic; his re-evaluations of great writers and revivals of the fame of worthy but forgotten authors, were, as Harry Hansen has noted, a truly educational activity. Jay Lewis's style curiously lacked all pomp or conscious finish. It was an effortless style, homely as good conversation. That is why he had such an army of truly devoted readers, and why this little book, with its comments ranging from the Bible to Shakespeare to Sholem Asch and Sinclair Lewis, can be recommended.

Assessing the English Great

HENRY FIELDING. *English Novelist Series. By Elizabeth Jenkins. Denver: Alan Swallow. 1948. 101 pp. \$2.*

THE BRONTËS. *By Phyllis Bentley. 114 pp. The same.*

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON. *By Lettice Cooper. 110 pp. The same.*

SAMUEL BUTLER. *By G. D. H. Cole. 118 pp. The same.*

SAMUEL BUTLER. *By P. N. Furbank. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 113 pp. \$1.75.*

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

THE first four volumes of the English Novelists Series competently carry out, each in its own way, the publisher's announced intention of presenting, “in compact form, biographical and critical assessments of the great English novelists from the vantage point of the new generation.” This is a good start for a publishing enterprise that already has twenty-nine more titles on the stocks. The critical biographers heard from so far, dealing with subjects of very different weights and densities, have all managed to put a considerable amount of informative matter into the comparatively few pages at their disposal, and have in each case subjected the works under consideration to as close an inspection as was congruous with the purpose and popular destination of the series as a whole. One should not look in these little books for revolutionary judgments or startling insights, or for the ingenious employment of recently developed critical techniques. These slim volumes are quite simply and success-

fully what they were meant to be: helpful introductions and intelligent surveys, to which a reader may turn with profit when either taking up or putting down one of these authors.

Miss Jenkins, dealing with a novelist regarding whose achievement criticism has pretty well stabilized itself, gives a straightforward account of both the man and his work. She lays emphasis on Fielding's innovating genius, his masterly craftsmanship, his united endowment of “great imagination and great critical power,” his compassion based on a personal knowledge of human frailty that was both wide and deep, and the enlightened humanitarianism, so far in advance of his age, which found expression not only in his novels, but also in his career as a Bow Street magistrate. It would be hard to quarrel with anything Miss Jenkins has said about the novelist whose “Jonathan Wilde” is, according to Austin Dobson, “a model of sustained and sleepless irony,” and whose masterpiece was saluted by Gibbon as destined to “outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of the house of Austria.”

Turning from Harry Fielding to the Brontës, we turn from sunlight to shadow, from clarity to mystery. Of course, genius can never be wholly free of mystery; and Fielding was a genius. But in the case of the Brontës, mystery seems to be triply and darkly compounded. Never has there been another such family of astonishing children; never another such communal upsurge of creative talent as that which gave birth to the Glass Town confederacy and the kingdom

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 774)

C. MORLEY:

POWDER OF SYMPATHY

No writer has ever attempted to analyze the shimmering tissue of inchoate excitement and foreboding that fills the spirit of the juvenile Rhodes scholar as he first enters Oxford College . . . Sheboygan indeed seems far away!