

ality. But more than the meaning of one poem is at stake. If "The Waste Land" is not a world-weary cry of despair or a sighing after the vanished glories of the past, then not only the popular interpretation of the poem will have to be altered but also the general interpretations of postwar poetry which begin with such a misinterpretation as a premise.

By exposing and explaining the Christian material which lies at the core of this famous poem, Mr. Brooks set the misguided faithful straight, possibly to the satisfaction of Mr. Eliot himself, who had complained in "Thoughts After Lambeth" that his intention in writing "The Waste Land" had been completely misunderstood; and it seems to me that the incident is worth noting here, because of the thoughts which it sets in motion regarding a kind of poetry which can be so misinterpreted for so many years by its most admiring readers, as well as its detractors, and a kind of criticism which can strike so wide of the mark at which a poet has aimed. Of all the dicta with which Mr. Eliot has impressed his followers, probably the most effective has been the statement that modern poetry must be "difficult." But Mr. Eliot's experience with "The Waste Land" suggests that when poetry surpasses a certain degree of difficulty it cannot safely be left, for interpretation, to even the most intelligent critics. This is a disturbing state of affairs, in the midst of which one must be prepared to learn, say ten years from now, from Mr. Eliot's own lips, that all that has been written about "Four Quartos" is—in his own word—"nonsense."

Meanwhile the critical effort continues valiantly—the effort to identify his symbols, explain the significance of their arrangements, describe his poetic structures, finger their textures, test their tensions, plot his strategy of expression, enumerate his ambiguities and ambivalences, and trace to their widely dispersed sources in many languages the quotations, paraphrases, and allusions which serve as such important strands in Mr. Eliot's webs of poetry. Most important of all, perhaps, is the continuing critical effort to discover an underlying order, and a developing body of thought and belief, beneath the original, eccentric, and often confusing verbal patterns which seem at first and even second glance to be expressions of disordered thinking and irresponsible linguistic caprice.

In Mr. Rajan's book the editor himself traces the spiritual journeys and examines the symbols of the "Quartets," and decides that "there is a common scheme which underlies the deployment of each symbol." But he

cautiously adds: "What this scheme is I should hesitate to specify, beyond suggesting that 'Burnt Norton' is concerned with constructing concepts, 'East Coker' and 'The Dry Salvages' with the application of those concepts to a steadily widening area of experience, and 'Little Gidding' with the transfiguration of the facts within that area, by the radiance and finality of a truth which lies beyond it." He is quite certain, however, despite admitted deficiencies of understanding, that the "Quartets" are the products of years of thought by a single, developing intelligence, which, "in some of the most moving poetry that English literature has known . . . speaks with the precision of an ultimate sincerity." This is an interesting example of the now fashionable critical practice, according to which one must not hesitate to deliver a final judg-

ment merely because one's comprehension of the artist's intention—perhaps even his achievement—is far from final.

HELEN L. GARDNER also deals with the increasingly famous "Quartets," while admitting that "the cross-references between the poems are now seen to be so various, subtle, and complex that formal interpretation seems more than ever clumsy and impertinent, and may even mislead readers, by appearing to impose a logical scheme on poems which continually escape from the logic of discourse into something nearer to the conditions of musical thought." With these candid misgivings, she goes bravely forward to discover that the structure of the "Quartets" is essentially the same as that of "The Waste Land," that each poem consists of five

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Alice G. Keane, of Cincinnati, knows the answer. Below are twenty questions involving the names of well-known writers which mean more than you'd imagine. Allowing five points for each correct answer, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers are on page 28.

1. Two American poets whose names are a breed of cattle and a place to graze.
2. Two English novelists whose names are ways to circumvent thieves.
3. An American novelist and an American woman writer (her style unique) whose names are a popular drink and its container.
4. Two English poets whose names describe "sweet sixteen" or "bobby-soxers."
5. An English writer of whimsical fiction and an Irish playwright whose names are what we hear many persons do at Christmas time.
6. An English poet with the name of a farm animal and an English philosopher and essayist whose name is a valuable part of that animal.
7. An English novelist whose name suggests places to quench thirst and an American novelist whose name is a place to swim.
8. An American clergyman-author and an English novelist whose names suggest a fine state of health.
9. Two English poets (one a Laureate) whose names are a stream and means of crossing it.
10. An American novelist with the name of a long-legged bird and an English novelist with the name of a tiny bird.
11. Two American novelists whose names are a much hunted animal and its chief characteristic.
12. Two English poets with ecclesiastical names.
13. Two American novelists, one name a means of communication, one a means of transportation.
14. A famous American journalist and an American poet whose combined names are what we see from our windows on cold mornings.
15. An American novelist and an English woman political writer whose names are points of the compass.
16. An American short-story writer and an American novelist whose names are members of the deer family.
17. An English poet and an English writer of letters whose names are warm articles of clothing.
18. An English writer of fantastic tales and an American poet. The first suggests the way we look when we are very sick, the second is the last necessity of mortals.
19. An American poet whose name describes Lincoln's appearance and an American detective-story writer whose full name fits Henry VIII.
20. An American poet and novelist whose name suggests quiet and serenity and an English poet whose name suggests tumult.

distinct movements, and that all four poems are variations on a single theme, which may be defined variously as "the relation of time to eternity, or the meaning of history, or the redemption of time and the world of men." The end towards which they all lead the poet and his readers is the assurance of resurrection and life everlasting, in the eternal presence of God's eternal love.

The Rajan symposium also includes E. E. Duncan Jones's close study of "Ash Wednesday" (which the critic describes as "a poem full of connections which are too subtle for the intellect," and therefore, possibly, beyond the range of intelligent criticism); Philip Wheelwright's investigations of Eliot's philosophical themes ("The primary theme which stirs Eliot's poetry into intellectual movement is the barrenness of man's contemporary spiritual estate."); Anne Ridler's examination of Eliot's influence on younger poets ("the perfection of his form at every stage . . . has caused imitations of Eliot to remain imitations merely"); Wolf Mankowitz's notes on "Gerontion" (which, as F. R. Leavis has said, "has neither narrative nor logical continuity"); and M. C. Bradbrook's perceptive remarks on Mr. Eliot's critical method: "He starts off a process. Either the reader obtains very little from the criticism or he is himself precipitated into activity. Mr. Eliot employs criticism not to the communication of truths but to the cooperative delineation of the poetic experience."

This brief summary, with its snippets of quotation, obviously does not do justice to the labors of Mr. Rajan and his collaborators; but it is almost enough to glance at the table of contents of such a volume as theirs to realize what wide fields, and fertile depths, open themselves when serious and determined critics set about the business of dealing thoroughly with a living classic.

Miss Drew goes it alone, and her subject is nothing less than T. S. Eliot's poetry as a whole, or, more specifically, the "design" of that whole. Always interesting, sometimes brilliant, generally persuasive, she has studied the canon, from "Prufrock" to the "Quartets," in the light of certain theories of Jung concerning the primordial images and archetypes of the "collective unconscious"; particularly the process or experience which he calls "the archetype of transformation," or the Integration of the Personality,—a process which always involves "the death of an old life and the birth of a new"; a process which Jung describes as "occurring to those who have reached a dead end in the field

(Continued on page 30)

Fiction. This week is marked by the publication of Sinclair Lewis's first historical novel, "The God-Seeker," a long jump from his previous book, "Kingsblood Royal." From "Elmer Gantry" to "Kingsblood Royal," Sinclair Lewis has attacked through the years America's bigotry and intolerance. "The God-Seeker" is the story of the founding of a Minnesota settlement by heroic Calvinist missionaries of New England, as narrow-minded and as effective as the blade of a pioneer axe. It is a stirring book, somewhat marred by the author's admiration for their heroism and a dislike of their fire and brimstone qualities. Ernest Poole's "The Nancy Flyer" is a novel of the same period, with a background of New Hampshire in the great stage coach days. Alexander Baron's "From the City, From the Plow" is the story of the creation and death of a British battalion, and is reported to be one of World War II's best novels.

Mission in Minnesota

THE GOD-SEEKER. By Sinclair Lewis. New York: Random House. 1949. 422 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by
HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

This novel has bounce and energy, as if Sinclair Lewis had a good time writing it, an energy that carries the reader through the ups and downs of a curiously uneven book. It is a tale of early Minnesota. Aaron Gadd, a young man from Massachusetts, persuaded by a revivalist to go West, joins a religious settlement somewhere beyond St. Paul, comes to distrust it, marries a rather improbable "Indian princess," and gives up the missionaries to become one of the founders of the Twin Cities. There the book should stop. But Mr. Lewis, burning what formerly he adored and

adoring what formerly he burned, now sees the state which produced Gopher Prairie as the historical heart of democracy; he goes into a tailspin of sentimentality about a labor union and a fugitive slave that, had anybody else written it, he would scoff at.

The novel proper comes in a series of layers. The opening quarter is as good as anything Lewis has written, particularly the first chapter. If it be complained that the rigid quality of the elder Gadd's Calvinism is a stereotype or that the seamy sexuality of the small town is no revelation, one must nevertheless admire the vividness with which Mr. Lewis presents the Gadd family, its neighbors, its relatives, and its community. Comes then the revival meeting in which young Gadd has his conviction of sin, but this is less firmly set in an historical matrix and might be any revival meeting satirically seen. For the westward journey of his hero, Lewis has rightfully plundered the travel accounts, and perhaps for that reason he has amusingly caught the general flavor of Mr. Jefferson Brick appropriate to his purpose.

It is when Gadd gets to his frontier missionary settlement that ambiguity sets in. Nothing is more reminiscent of the frayed historical romance of 1900 than are Selene Lanark, the "Indian princess," her cultured, cynical, fur-trading father, Black Wolf, the proud, embittered, cultivated redskin, or Gadd's discovery that Indians are human beings. All this takes one back half a century in American literature.

The tight, abnormal life of the missionary settlement is written in still another key, admirable in its kind but not easily fused with the Indian episodes. Harge, the giant missionary, is convincing and, despite his preposterous language, rather pathetic. So are some of the others. The trouble here



Sinclair Lewis—"burning what formerly he adored and adoring what formerly he burned."