

Writing

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worth's pilgrimage into the poem finally known as "The Prelude." In the course of her essay she has confirmed discoveries of her scholarly predecessors, made many discoveries of her own, and presented possibilities for consideration.

It was Pope, she tells us, from whom Wordsworth learned his earliest poetic vocabulary; "Pope was the first poet to teach him English composition," and "the generic form of Pope's writing, as distinguished from its metrical form, so prevailed upon his own mode of expression that never for long did he abandon the habit of personal address." With Beattie's "Minstrel" he was in warm sympathy; he profited by Beattie's design, and as a young man he identified himself with the hero of Beattie's now little-read poem. Goldsmith was Wordsworth's literary guide through Europe. His kinship with Thomson was close, and with him he shared thoughts, images, and phrases. He owed a heavy debt to Young's "Night Thoughts," and debts to Gray, Akenside, and Habington. Cowper taught him how "to deal with homely and humorous matters in blank verse, and to sharpen and refine the diction of his ironic and critical passages." "Pilgrim's Progress" was "reverberating in his thought" while he was writing his third Book. And then, of course, there were the "four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. These I must study, and equal if I could; and I need not think of the rest."

The tracing of literary influences and affiliations is a notoriously tricky business. In the heat of the quest the hunter is apt to persist in drawing coverts that hold no game, and to ride hallooing after imaginary foxes. Professor Potts is chary of such follies,

and it is a privilege to read with her a great poem that has both "a long ancestry" and "fresh power"; a poem that is at once an autobiography—with much to say to a generation that has known revolutionary enthusiasm—"a song, a vision, and a mode of culture . . . a call to action," and a "discipline."

Notes

GEORGE ELIOT RE-EXAMINED: George Eliot's work occupies a position today similar to that of the antimagassar: it is remembered, often with affection, but rarely seen. For of the seven novels she wrote, few, besides "Silas Marner" and "The Mill on the Floss," are now read in or out of school and college. One reason for this may be that the critics, who have been lavishly peppering and salting everybody around George Eliot—Melville, Dickens, James, Hardy, and even Meredith—have remained curiously mum about her. (There has been a gradual

resurgence of interest in the past fifteen years, however, with the publication of several biographies and critical studies by Gerald Bullett, F. R. Leavis, Lord David Cecil, Laurence and Elisabeth Hanson, and Gordon Haight, and, now that a substantial George Eliot collection resides at Yale, a critical biography and a new edition of her letters will eventually be forthcoming from Professor Haight.) Another reason may be that the modern reader, who likes his prose either in glutinous lumps (James Jones), or in clear, carefully measured spoonfuls (J. P. Marquand), is repelled by the consistent spaciousness of her novels, by their grand swellings and subsidings, and by the fact that she sometimes takes twenty chapters to make a single point. And, finally, George Eliot was a naked moralist, who persisted in writing with a religious intensity and high seriousness that make most of our popular contemporary novelists seem like secular bums.

Well, all this by way of saying that the English Novelists Series has brought out a 126-page "literary bi-

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LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. "A Farewell to Arms"—"Arms and the Man." 2. "The Moon Is Down"—"The Moon and Sixpence." 3. "Dragon's Teeth"—"The Skin of Our Teeth." 4. "South Wind"—"The Wind in the Willows." 5. "Tobacco Road"—"The Royal Road to Romance." 6. "In Abraham's Bosom"—"Lamb in His Bosom." 7. "Return to Paradise"—"This Side of Paradise." 8. "Desire Under the Elms"—"A Streetcar Named Desire." 9. "A Bell of Adano"—"Bell, Book, and Candle." 10. "Rage in Heaven"—"Leave Her to Heaven."

ography," "George Eliot," by Robert Speaight (Roy, \$2). As it turns out, it is not really a literary biography at all, but a somewhat muddled critical essay that employs the interior critical methods of F. R. Leavis, a critic whom Mr. Speaight pays frequent homage to, with unfortunate results—where Mr. Leavis invariably crackles and pops, Mr. Speaight has a tendency to sputter and phht. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaight's book is a good introductory pill, provided one goes right on to "Daniel Deronda," or "Felix Holt," or "Middlemarch," which was, some think, the most powerful, rewarding novel written in English in the last century.

—WHITNEY BALLIETT.

MORE TEXAS TALES: By virtue of its vast and border geography, its rugged history, and its wild-cat economic life, Texas offers rich deposits for the prospecting folklorist. The Texas Folklore Society has encouraged this study, and in its latest publication "Folk Travelers: Ballads, Tales, and Talk" (Southern Methodist University Press, \$4) brings together nineteen pieces, widely assorted in subject matter, treatment, and interest. "The Traveling Anecdote," by J. Frank Dobie—who has carried Texas culture into the quadrangles of Oxford—opens the collection with a pleasantly informal string of peripatetic anecdotes. Other lively pieces deal with material from the Texas-Mexican border (love tragedy, black-and-white magic), devil lore, nostalgic reminiscences of Bear Creek, and folklore motifs in natural history and in the oil industry.

One of the most amusing pieces is James Howard's "Tales of Neiman-Marcus," with its anecdotes of that elegant emporium (no advt.). A woman once appeared in the store barefooted and in a sunbonnet, according to one mild tale, and bought a mink coat on the spot, paying for it in cash. Sensing an exceptional opportunity, the sales force also sold her a pair of shoes. Like other folklorists, Mr. Howard is not always able to tell which of his tales are tall and which are true. Altogether the pieces in the collection should have great appeal beyond the borders of its state and its subject.

—ROBERT HALSBAND.



NEW EDITIONS

A Few Metaphysicalizers

MUCH thought and ink, and many wise and foolish words, have been spent on Donne and the fellows of his so-called school since Joan Bennett first published her "Four Metaphysical Poets" in 1934; but in this little book she said more that was worthwhile than most of her successors in the field have said, and the Cambridge University Press deserves our thanks for having issued it in a revised edition (\$3). Her four poets are Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw. She considers them individually and in their relationships to one another. Grouped though they are—and despite Donne's primary influence, and Herbert's effect on Vaughan—they could hardly be more unlike. Donne's rigorous logic and Crashaw's sensationalism are antipodal; the one uses his images "to define the emotional experience by an intellectual parallel," while the other wallows in "a succession of emotional scenes," and enjoys a "mercilessly minute dwelling on sensations, unrelated to thought." Donne's wide range of personal experience and secular knowledge found expression in complex verse; Herbert's faith and limited experience voiced themselves with beautiful simplicity, in perfect form. Herbert taught Vaughan how to be a true poet—not an imitator. Vaughan found himself when, listening to "The great Chime/ And Symphony of nature," he began to read nature as the book of religious revelation. Mrs. Bennett, writing of Donne in particular and the metaphysical school in general, makes a sound point when she declares: "The real difficulty is not to discern what might be described as the 'prose meaning,' but to allow an image, which must first be seized intellectually, subsequently to affect one's whole sensibility." And those who practise the major critical perversion of our day—the effort to translate the fault of ambiguity into a virtue—should ponder another statement: "Modern critics often encourage us to look in poetry for fragments of meaning not wholly intended by the poet nor within his control. But the metaphysical poet knew what he meant; though rhythm and imagery enhance his meaning, they do not make it ambiguous."

In Peacock's "Crotchet Castle," the Reverend Dr. Folliott, speaking disparagingly of Scott's novels, remarks: "A book that furnishes no quotations is, *me judice*, no book—it is a play-

thing." The good doctor would, I am sure, have been delighted by the revised edition of "The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations" (Oxford, \$8.50), pleasantly introduced by Bernard Darwin. As the compilers told us in 1941, this "work is primarily intended to be a dictionary of *familiar* quotations." That the old school ties have not changed their stripes, even though House of Commons orators are less fond than they once were of Latin tags, is proved by the fact that Horace fills seven large pages of this dictionary, and Virgil four. But Shakespeare, with no less than sixty-five pages, makes all his competitors in the quotation field look like amateurs, while Wordsworth rates ten, Johnson nine plus, Shelley eight, and Pope and Dickens six apiece.

AS AN editor of Shakespeare, John Dover Wilson has never lacked the courage of his corrections, and his sensitive nostrils have smelled out corruption where noses less sensitive have passed by unsuspiciously. In "Richard III" (\$2.75), the latest of The New Shakespeare volumes to come from the Cambridge University Press, he takes his stand on the basis of Greg's statement "that readings in which the folio and the quartos agree are those 'most vulnerable to criticism and open to emendation'."—and he enjoys an emendator's field day.

Knopf has reissued Ouspensky's "The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution" (\$2.50), an introduction to the methods by which Ouspensky and Gurdjieff sought to make their disciples rise in the scale of consciousness. Whatever one may think of the pair, it is almost impossible not to be jarred into at least one moment of comparative wakefulness by the statement that most of us spend our lives in a state of "waking sleep."

Recent best-sellers now in paper covers include John Hersey's "The Wall" (Pocket Books, 50¢), and Rachel L. Carson's "The Sea Around Us" (Mentor, 35¢). And Pocket Books have plucked Thorne Smith's "Topper" (25¢) out of the era of beautiful nonsense. I wonder what a new generation of readers will make of it, and of "The Glorious Pool" (25¢) by the same author. But why am I wondering? I see the publishers' answer—"12,250,206 copies of Thorne Smith's novels have been sold to date in their Pocket Book editions alone!"

—BEN RAY REDMAN.