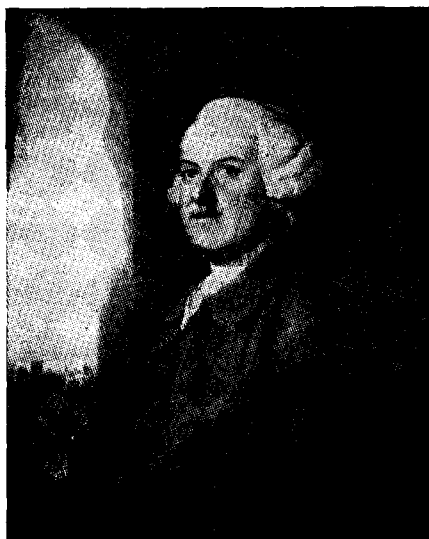


rival to the present work, and will certainly, as far as the period from 1750 goes, be superseded by it, had to guide him only a post-romantic impressionism and a general sense that liberation from neo-classic rules and the development of a critical relativism was a Good Thing; as a result, he found it impossible to keep his history from degenerating into a series of extended notes, some of them based on hasty and careless reading of the sources. Mr. Wellek knows better than that. Whenever one of the critics he is discussing shows signs of extending the meaning of poetry into some vague, all-inclusive amalgam of art and life, philosophy and religion, he is sternly reproved. Friedrich Schlegel's mystical generalizations about the nature of poetry are sharply censured; their influence was "detrimental to the establishment of a genuine theory of literature." Pre-romantic critics who use their historical sense as a way into historical relativism are even more sternly rebuked: Schlegel's successors in the nineteenth century "succumbed to completely amorphous, opinionless, and directionless relativism, to the total passive comprehension of everything ever written, which inevitably led later to mere factualism, to the indiscriminate accumulation of information about everything at any time anywhere." Dr. Johnson (among others) is rebuked for confusing art and life. Coleridge (whom Wellek rates less highly than most modern critics do) is reprimanded for not recognizing "meter itself as the distinguishing characteristic of poetry" and for the trite, moralizing element in his remarks on Shakespeare's characters. On the other side, Wordsworth is congratulated on having "understood that poetry is not merely an inculcation of moral truths" and for stressing ("in the inadequate vocabulary of the time") the importance of pleasure, and Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger is declared to be worth resurrection because of his view that irony is the principle of all art. This is the history of criticism written from a clearly defined standpoint: the author is continually assessing the degree to which a particular critic contributed to our mature modern view of literature, and he gives praise or blame according to whether his man points forward to or leads away from—shall we say Wellek and Warren?

SOMETIMES we feel that Wellek has not done a particular critic justice; that he is so concerned to relate him to the modern movement, either positively or negatively, or to place him in the context of "neo-classic" or

"romantic" thought, that he has not sufficiently considered what the critical position being discussed really amounts to. I cannot help feeling that he misunderstands Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" quite radically, because he is looking at it in a wrong context, and that he misses the significance of Wordsworth's having shifted critical attention from the relation of the work of art to the nature which it professes to imitate to the relation between the work of art and the state of mind of the artist who begets it. M. H. Abrams's careful study of the development of romantic critical theory, "The Mirror and the Lamp," is more searching on points such as this; but then, of course, Abrams deals with a more limited period at very great length. In brief compass, the brilliant sketch of eighteenth-century criticism that Ronald S. Crane wrote for the "Dictionary of World Literature" avoids treating the critics as precursors of or gropers towards a better modern method, and succeeds in making sense of them in their terms. Wellek deliberately avoids both the full intellectual analyses of Abrams and Crane's highly organized systematization. On the whole, he is discussing the views of critics, not the history of critical thought as such, which he would probably consider an abstraction.

One may make minor reservations, but there can be no doubt of the importance of this work. The combination of scholarly and critical apparatus is formidable. There is no other history of criticism like it, none which combines its scope with its sense of contemporary relevance. The next two volumes (which we are told are in active preparation) should be even more useful and interesting. We await them with eagerness.



—By Benjamin Wilson, from "Thomas Gray."
Thomas Gray—"unquiet depths."

Celibate Singer

"Thomas Gray: A Biography," by R. W. Ketton-Cremer (Cambridge University Press. 310 pp. \$4.75), is the first full-length life of the eighteenth-century British poet whose "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" is known to most American schoolboys. It is reviewed below by Professor Robert Halsband of Hunter College.

By Robert Halsband

THE story of Thomas Gray's life must be too tame for a modern biographer's imagination. How else can one explain why it is only now that the poet of the universal "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" and the great Pindaric "Odes" steps forth in a full-length biography? Soon after his death he was honored (in 1775) by his friend William Mason's pious memoir, composed mainly of his letters garbled. More than a century later he was enshrined as an English Man of Letters by Edmund Gosse, in a generally unreliable book. Recently Lord David Cecil devoted a mellifluous biographical essay to him in a volume significantly entitled "Two Quiet Lives." While on its surface Gray's existence seemed placid, it covered unquiet depths. In 1934 the French scholar Roger Martin published a still untranslated "Essai," which probed more deeply into Gray's personality and temperament, and took advantage of a psychoanalytic interpretation. He could not take advantage of the superb three-volume edition of Gray's correspondence published the next year by Clarendon, in which an indefatigable editor gathered all his surviving letters, annotated them, and added appendices (from A to Z).

Mr. Ketton-Cremer, Gray's present biographer, has had the use of that edition as well as its editor's unpublished notes; and he has drawn on the varied riches, both in print and in progress, of W. S. Lewis's collection of Horace Walpole. These are only two of the assets he has brought to his book; it contains many more, including his own skill as a scholar who disguises his scholarship with a style and perception of the most cultivated urbanity. The biography is particularly happy in sketching Gray's cloistered life at Cambridge, where he spent most of his fussy, celibate life. He escaped its parochialism by his many friendships, kept alive through his lively, varied letters; by his visits

to London, where he once stayed for more than two years to read in the newly opened British Museum; and by his sightseeing tours through the landscapes and monuments of the English countryside. In all these aspects, Mr. Ketton-Cremer follows his subject with easy erudition and judicious objectivity. (Too little objectivity would cloy, and too much would project a Strachey-like irony.)

IN DEALING with Gray's emotional life the biographer faces a particularly delicate problem, for the truth seems to be that the poet was susceptible of deep emotional attachments only to others of his own sex. Naturally enough, the evidence for this side of his nature is tentative and fragmentary. His boyhood friendship with Richard West, which was cut short by West's early death, is so mixed with other elements, mainly literary, that it does not emerge in as clear an outline as his infatuation, when he was fifty-two, with a charming and volatile young Swiss. To David Cecil, whose mandarin style sometimes falls into the scented clichés of true-romance prose, Bonstetten's attractiveness was like a burst of

sunshine that melted the film of ice around Gray's shivering heart. Mr. Ketton-Cremer's analysis is more subtle for suggesting Gray's own view: "All his defenses were swept away. . . . He was filled with disquiet, for he understood the secrets of his own nature; he knew the existence of temptations which could not for one moment be contemplated by one who had been, all his life long, a strict observer of the laws of God and the laws of man. At the same time the very presence of Bonstetten brought him unimagined happiness. For a few short weeks he enjoyed once more what he had never known since his childhood days, 'the sunshine of the breast'."

As the story of Gray's life, then, the biography is in the first rank. If it does not satisfy those who look for a thorough study of the poetry that is not the biographer's fault; he does not claim to have written a critical biography. His comments on the poems are more in the nature of biographical episodes and literary appreciations than exhaustive critiques; and he always treats them with a discriminating intelligence, and in general has used all the relevant

materials. (He has for some reason ignored Gray's annotated copy of the 1757 odes, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library.) Gray's output of poetry so slight that it does not even fill a single volume of the Oxford standard poets, has a many-faceted importance, both intrinsically as poem and extrinsically as landmarks in the history of English poetry. Cleanth Brooks's essay "Gray's Storied Urn" proves to what extent an intensive analysis can illuminate and freshen a poem dimmed by time and exhausted by overuse; Gray's other poems await criticism as penetrating, even if for a less stringent approach. The future critic, when he does tackle all the challenging poems, will find his job far easier and pleasanter because of this excellent new biography.

Notes

GULLIVER'S CREATOR: Jonathan Swift, writer whose style seems to be so cool and objective, still puzzles reader and stimulates scholars. It is not easy to explain the genius of England's greatest comic writer and satirist. T
(Continued on page 51)



LADY OF LETTERS:

At the age of sixty-two Eleanor L. Turnbull, a Baltimore lady who had spent years tending her garden, practicing the piano, and dabbling in

French, became one of the country's most serious students of Spanish. That was back in 1937. She bought a big Spanish-English dictionary. She enrolled in the Summer Language School at Middlebury College in Vt., where she exchanged pleasantries in Spanish with boys and girls a third her age. She did her homework. Since then Miss Turnbull and Spanish have ripened into one of the most productive love affairs in the history of translation. Every couple of years or so a book of Spanish poetry converted into English has appeared. Altogether she has translated seven books, her best seller being "Contemporary Spanish Poetry," which came out in 1945 and has since sold 6,000 copies, which is nice going for any kind of poetry. Her latest book is "Ten Centuries of Spanish Poetry" (Johns Hopkins Press, \$5), edited by her with an introduction by the late Dr. Pedro Salinas.

It was Dr. Salinas—"Don Pedro," Miss Turnbull called him—who was responsible for properly introducing

Miss Turnbull to Spanish, and vice versa. He arrived in the United States in 1937 to give the Turnbull Poetry Lectures at Johns Hopkins University—her family, which had helped catalyze Baltimore's literary and cultural life for generations, had endowed the lectures back in the 1880s—and in order to appreciate his poetry to the last syllable Miss Turnbull translated half a dozen of his poems. Her command of Spanish wasn't exactly overwhelming then: back in 1922 she had taken a Berlitz kind of course in Spanish just before departing on her first, and only, trip to Spain. She had bought a pocket-size Spanish-English dictionary at the time, and she dusted it off fifteen years later for the Salinas translations. Anyway, when Don Pedro at last reached Baltimore she bashfully showed him her translations. He was flabbergasted by the exquisite accuracy of her work. "Magnífico!" he cried, little realizing that he was launching a career that has since prompted professors of Spanish from campus to campus to shout "Magnífico!"s of their own whenever a new book of hers has appeared. It was Dr. Salinas's praise that sent Miss Turnbull rushing out into the street to buy the shelf-size Spanish-English dictionary. It was then, too, that she enrolled in Middlebury's language school, to which she has returned just about every summer. In 1942 Middle-

bury honored her for her devotion to Spanish and to translation by conferring upon her an honorary Master of Arts. It was her first degree; she had been educated by private tutor. Over the years her Spanish has picked up nicely, and she has single-handedly acquainted thousands of Americans with Spanish poetry of the last ten centuries. Her new book—45 pages long—contains 156 examples of "the finest examples of Spanish poetry," ranging from the recently discovered eleventh-century Mozarabic songs to the works of Miguel de Unamuno. Besides her own, translations by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Lord Byron, and John Masefield are included in the book.

Having handsomely anthologized a millennium's worth of Spanish poetry Miss Turnbull is now getting ready for this year's trip to Middlebury and her classes in Spanish. "I go up there to get in the Spanish atmosphere," she said the other day, "to meet professors who come from all parts of the Spanish world. As for my future plans—well, I hope I may get to Spain again. It's not really too easy when you are eighty. Also I have another project in the works, but maybe I better not say anything about that just now. Anyway, I guess I better get on with my packing. I have to be in Middlebury by Monday."

—BERNARD KALB.