

a state of tension seeks to relieve itself, seems to us perfectly obvious, *an orderly arrangement, the natural result of such an effort. . . .* If this be intended as an account of the genesis of a poem (its similarity to the point of view of the *surréalistes* is striking) it would in large measure account for the obscurity of *The Orators*, for it amounts to proclaiming the absolute independence of the poetic impulse of any conscious intellectual direction. The poet's world, that is to say, is a system of arbitrary and private—Auden frequently insists upon privacy—values, to which the reader can only gain access by initiation. Failing that the poem must remain inchoate, to be enjoyed sporadically but not fully apprehended: but it should be emphasized that the resultant obscurity is different in kind and not merely in degree from the obscurity of *The Divine Comedy*, the 'great difficulty' of which Auden comments on, ostensibly to an audience of school-boys, but with one eye also, perhaps, on his readers.

DOUGLAS GARMAN.

MENCIUS ON THE MIND by I. A. Richards (Kegan Paul, International Library of Psychology, etc. Pp. xvi-132. Appendix Pp. 44. 10/6d.).

Dr. Richards continues in this book his study of the problems surrounding verbal communication. The first essential for accurate communication, one tends to suppose, is exact and unambiguous statement, but the central theme of this book is the necessity for flexible understanding and tolerant interpretation. Dr. Richards illustrates the principle in examining a passage of critical writing by Herbert Read, a passage whose meaning can be grasped from indirect clues although the wording will not stand ordinary critical inspection. Dr. Richards takes the keywords, Reasoning, Hypothesis, Fact, and Truth, and finds for these words senses that will render the whole passage self-consistent and acceptable in meaning. Reasoning for instance is to be taken 'not as inference from fixed explicit premises to a definite conclusion according to explicit rules; but as the placing of a number of observations in an intelligible order, a perceptible or rational structure.' The

value of such a method of interpretation is unquestionable: it treats communication as a serious undertaking that demands co-operative effort, and it turns its back on the flippantly competitive pastime of terminological dispute. It is a method that most decent-minded people follow already, more or less wittingly. Dr. Richards' contention is that the time has come to make it explicit. He suggests the need for a dictionary of 'Multiple Definitions' which should show the full range of meanings attached in Western and Eastern cultures to the more important terms in psychology, ethics, aesthetics, and so on. In illustration of the technique he himself gives multiple definitions of the terms Beautiful, Knowledge, Truth, and Order.

Dr. Richards seems to have left it to his readers' common sense to see that tolerance and flexibility of interpretation ought not to condone laxness of statement. I take it that future writers would, ideally, adhere to one sense for each term, and that the dictionary of multiple definitions would be used chiefly for the elucidation of earlier writers. The question is perhaps complicated by the fact that difficult thought is almost always uttered in poetic language where the control of understanding is not dependent on the narrow sense of the words, or in terminology invented *ad hoc* and seldom current beyond the writings of its originator. Explicit multiple definition would perhaps provide a bridge between the poetic and the scientific utterance of subtle intuitions. (One thinks of Trigrant Burrow, whose efforts to communicate it would be instructive to compare and contrast with Blake's, since several of their intuitions seem to have been similar). But when the thought is fairly manageable, as it is in the passage by Herbert Read, it points to a serious defect in the writer if we have to resort to multiple definition before his words will make sense. Dr. Richards does not comment on the fault but he can hardly mean to condone it.

His attitude to communication becomes of peculiar importance when one culture is to be interpreted to another, and *Mencius on the Mind* consists largely in the attempt to translate and explain a few psychological passages from the Chinese thinker without distorting their meaning. Part of Dr. Richards' purpose is to draw attention to the intrinsic worth of Mencius' views, particularly on questions that modern writers regard as being on

the borderline between psychology and ethics. It is largely because no such borderline existed for Mencius that his attitudes and assumptions are so attractive. But although Dr. Richards is extremely illuminating on Mencius' psychological conceptions, a large part of his purpose is to show that the task of interpretation is an almost impossible one. To stress the point he prints the passages in question in a very valuable Appendix, showing the Chinese characters and their literal translation. This Appendix gives a hint of the amount of 'smoothing' that must have been done by some translators from the Chinese. But apart from the difficulties of language structure the commentator meets more fundamental obstacles in the form of peculiarities in Mencius' habits of thought and speech. And, as Dr. Richards shows, analysis of such characteristics in a remote culture may give us more insight into similar peculiarities in our own.

One of the most serious obstacles in the way of interpretation is Mencius' use of blanket terms, each covering what to us are several different meanings. '*Ku*—with its senses of cause, reason, hold to, conviction, accepted of old, established, fact, datum, phenomenon—seems to stand for an idea which is none of these but out of which they may be developed through elaborated distinctions. Such a word as 'because' in ordinary unreflective English has a somewhat similar width and vagueness of reference. Or 'grounds,' if we let its metaphor come to life, may give us something like its undifferentiated seeming simplicity.' One tool for tackling the difficulty is multiple definition. Not even multiple definition can succeed completely, however, for we cannot assume that Mencius intends *one* sense of a word in one place and a different sense in another: what he intends is a more primitive notion, inclusive and undifferentiated. It would not be accurate even to say that he intended a 'blend' of our meanings. This difficulty Dr. Richards insists on throughout the book, but his success in revealing some markedly unfamiliar types of meaning shows that insistence on the difficulty is a way of partially solving it.

Formal praise of *Mencius on the Mind* should be unnecessary if these notes have suggested anything of its scope and its subtlety. The two aspects of the work—the technique of elucidation and the value of what is elucidated—are inseparable, and this of

course adds to the difficulty of the book by making explicit, simple statements next to impossible. Part of the difficulty that many readers will experience is due to Dr. Richards' rather cryptic way of writing—a device perhaps for demanding competent reading. At times it seems almost as if he were trying to provide non-mathematical people with a development of thought as impressive and recondite as relativity. Thus he suggests that we should be unwise if we overlooked 'the possibility that the structure and functioning of the minds (including his own) that Mencius was discussing might differ from our hypothetical standard Western mind. . . . Even though we refused to allow that differences between minds go very deep, we shall do well to ask ourselves just how we are estimating depth in this matter. And whether we are entitled (and if so, how) to take cognition, affection, conation, for example, for necessary co-ordinates in our comparisons as we take our three spatial co-ordinates in comparing boxes.' But the point is left too little developed to possess its full force even as speculation. The one example given, namely the possible absence of 'cognitive contemplation' or 'autonomous cognitive interest' among Chinese thinkers is of doubtful value, for it might be difficult to prove that such a mode of activity occurs even in Western minds. Further, although the absence of 'theoretical interest' in Mencius is undeniable, this is surely very different from an absence of cognition. It is an error of tactics not to have argued this speculation more explicitly and more fully, for the suggestion, in spite of being revolutionary, is at present too nebulous to be stimulating.

A final quotation may indicate not only the Intention of the book but its Tone too, both of which will probably irritate those whom Dr. Richards means to irritate. 'Most studies of the processes of abstraction have been made as incidental steps in ambitious metaphysical undertakings. A more modest sense of where we are in our effort to comprise the universe in our thought would turn more attention upon our intellectual instruments. their historical development and their possible extensions.'

DENYS W. HARDING.

CHAUCER by G. K. Chesterton (Faber and Faber, 12/6d.).

This book avowedly makes no claim to specialism of any sort in the field of Chaucerian scholarship. It does not profess to reconsider the subject in the light of recent research—rushlight or gas may still serve. 'A man' remarks Mr. Chesterton 'might learn more of the special spirit of Chaucer by looking at Daisies than by reading a good many annotations by Dons'—a characteristic gesture and suggestive of the method which he himself prefers to pursue, though it must not be supposed that he has never availed himself of the researches of dons in this book. The plain reader, however, requires more guidance than this to the understanding of Chaucer's sophisticated urbanity as it shows itself, for example, in the skilful pastiche of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

Mr. Chesterton, as might be expected, is more interested in the historical aspects of his subject than in those which are more purely literary, but the general question of Chaucer's relation to his sources is forcibly handled. 'In that vanished world of community of thoughts and themes, a tale or a topic was in some sense set up . . . to be told over and over again with variations by different storytellers . . . One author did not so much rob as enrich the other.' This 'free trade in stories,' as W. P. Ker once called it, did not preclude spontaneity and sincerity on the part of the translator. The claim that Chaucer's translations were often 'more original than the originals' is here supported by particular reference to the early translation known as the *A.B.C.*

The reader should be warned that Mr. Chesterton, like the Parson of the *Canterbury Tales*, is not always 'textual,' though, unlike the Parson, he does not submit his work to the correction of clerks. He writes from a full but unrefreshed memory which may confuse one poem or one speaker with another (e.g. *The House of Fame* with the Prologue to *L.G.W.*, or the words of the cock with the ironic comments of the Nun's Priest), or attribute the complimentary phrase 'my disciple and my poet' to Gower instead of to Venus. Such lapses may easily be corrected if the reader does what Mr. Chesterton has failed to do and looks up the text. It is a more serious matter when the poet's personal opinions on political, religious or other questions are arbi-