

senses, is to-day a somewhat irrelevant figure.' However, for those who still like to think they're thinking, there's always this kind of thing: ' . . . all specifically modern awareness and most modern schemes of thought—in a tradition which speciously begins with Spinoza and finally casts off its own heresy in the self betrayal of Hegel—moves [*sic*] constantly to a breaking through of categories, to an affirmation of the continuity of all thought and at last to realization of the unity of thought and action in numerous variants of the marxian Praxis, enriched and made concrete by the implications of bergsonian Intuition and the universality of Jung's Libido.' Selah.

His refusal to tolerate the trammels of thinking makes this writer curiously (for he is a communist) like some of the fascists one meets. Like them too he shows how easily self-importance can feed on the idea of sacrificing self to movement (whether fascist or communist): ' But to the already articulate individual Marxism is also a technique for realizing in him the emergent values of the masses, for giving him a part in their historical function and at the same time making him a more potent instrument for the focusing of their historical will.' Perhaps this explains the self-satisfaction of the book and ought to prepare us for the author's discourteously aggressive manner. Here are his critical remarks on a poem by Stephen Spender: ' Titillation of entrails happily in the sun. The new innocence. Flatulent breezes playing on the tripes' æolian harp. But Narcissus was a pretty lad.' Movements against barren intellectualism should in themselves be healthy, but it seems only too evident that they may encourage the jettisoning of intelligence too and become simply a means by which the slothful can attain to pride and anger without having to discard their sloth.

D. W. HARDING.

MECHANISMS OF MISERY

TENDER IS THE NIGHT, by F. Scott Fitzgerald (*Chatto and Windus, 7/6 net.*).

Many of the features that go to making *The Great Gatsby* as fine as it is are also present in this latest novel of Scott Fitzgerald's. There is still his power of seeming to lose himself in

incident and letting the theme emerge by itself, there is his sensitiveness (occasionally touching sentimentality) and his awareness of the brutalities in civilized people's behaviour, and there is simultaneously his keen appreciation, not entirely ironic, of the superficialities of the same people's lives. This last is the feature that is most nearly lost in the new book. Here there is no more gusto, but right from the start an undercurrent of misery which draws away even the superficial vitality of the Euramerican life he depicts.

The story is the acutely unhappy one of a young psychiatrist, brilliant in every way, who gradually deteriorates. In place of plot there is a fine string of carefully graduated incidents to illustrate the stages of the descent. Rather than tragedy, however, the book appears to me to be one variety of the harrowing, if this can be taken to mean that as we read it our feelings are of misery and protest, and that, unlike tragedy, it can give no satisfactions to those who wish to go on living. On the other hand, it is so effectively and sincerely harrowing that its mechanisms deserve close examination.

In the first place the doomed hero is offered as the most admirable kind of modern man we can reasonably ask for, and throughout the novel he is made to stand out as superior to all the other personæ. This being so we look for some explanation of his collapse, and the first mechanism of misery appears in the ambiguity here. Various possible explanations are hinted at but none is allowed to stand. His wife's wealth, with its heavy burden of smart leisure, Dick deals with like a disciplined artist ; he shows himself heroically adequate to the strain of her recurrent mental trouble ; and he has as full an insight into himself and the strains his work imposes as he has into his patients. Everything that we could hope to do he is shown doing better, and—apparently as a consequence—he cracks up. The gloomy generalization is made by Dick himself in commenting on a man who precedes him to ruin: 'Smart men play close to the line because they have to—some of them can't stand it, so they quit.' But the pessimistic conviction of the book goes deeper than that, and its puritan roots are suggested by Dick's misgivings over his good fortunes and achievements in his heigh-day. He soliloquises: '—And Lucky Dick can't be one of these clever men ; he must be less intact, even faintly destroyed. If life won't do it for him, it's not a

substitute to get a disease, or a broken heart, or an inferiority complex, though it'd be nice to build out some broken side till it was better than the original structure.' Scott Fitzgerald sees to it that life *will* do it for him.

But in addition to the puritan conviction, there is also present a curious mingling of a childish fantasy with an adult's attempt to correct it, and much of the harrowing effect of the book depends on this. On the one hand, Dick is the tragic fantasy hero who is so great and fine that everyone else expects to go on taking and taking from him and never give back ; and so he gets tired, so tired ; and he breaks under the strain with no one big enough to help him, and it's terribly pathetic and admirable. The vital point of this childish fantasy is that he should remain admirable and (posthumously) win everyone's remorseful respect. But the story is too obviously sentimental in those terms. To try ruthlessly to tear out the sentimentality, Scott Fitzgerald brings in a much more mature bit of knowledge: that people who disintegrate in the adult world don't at all win our respect and can hardly retain even our pity. He gets his intense painfulness by inviting our hearts to go out to the hero of the childish fantasy and then checking them with the embarrassment which everyone nearest him in the story, especially Nicole his wife, feels for the failure.

The question is whether the situation could in fact occur. Not whether the main events could be paralleled in real life, but whether all the elements of action and feeling could co-exist in the way they are presented here, whether we are not being trapped into incompatible attitudes towards the same events. In short, is an emotional trick being played on us?

There seem to me to be several tricks, though without extensive quotation they are hard to demonstrate. Chief among them is the social isolation of the hero, isolation in the sense that no one gives him any help and he has no genuinely reciprocal social relationships ; he remains the tragic child hero whom no one is great enough to help. Even towards the end he is made to seem superior to the others so that they are inhibited from approaching him with help. That this should be so is made plausible by the continual returns of his old self amongst the wreckage, returns of self-discipline and willingness to shoulder responsibility that

amount almost to alternations of personality. He explains it himself: 'The manner remains intact for some time after the morale cracks.' But it seems highly doubtful whether anyone could remain so formidable spiritually during a process of spiritual disintegration, especially to someone who had been as close to him as Nicole had been. But here another trick appears in the interests of plausibility: the patient-physician relationship between the two of them is now emphasized, and Nicole's abandonment of Dick is interpreted as an emergence from fixation, whereas much of the misery of the collapse springs from its wrecking what has earlier been made to seem a genuine and complete marriage.

Once achieved, Dick's isolation permits of the further device of making his suffering dumb. Reading the aquaplane episode in particular is like watching a rabbit in a trap. The story begins to become less harrowing and more like tragedy when, once or twice, Dick is articulate about himself. This happens momentarily when he comments on the manner remaining intact after the morale has cracked: but no other persona is allowed to be big enough to hear more, and ' "Do you practise on the Riviera?" Rosemary demanded hastily.' At one point the cloud of dumb misery lifts again for a moment, when he thinks he is unobserved and Nicole sees from his face that he is going back over his whole story, and actually feels sympathy for him; but this episode only introduces the final harrowing isolation. His position at the end is the apotheosis of the hurt child saying 'Nobody loves me,' but the child's self-pity and reproaches against the grown-ups have largely been rooted out and in their place is a fluctuation between self-disgust and a fatalistic conviction that this is bound to happen to the nicest children.

The difficulty of making a convincing analysis of the painful quality of this novel, and the conviction that it was worth while trying to, are evidence of Scott Fitzgerald's skill and effectiveness. Personal peculiarities may of course make one reader react more intensely than another to a book of this kind, and I am prepared to be told that this attempt at analysis is itself childish—an attempt to assure myself that the magician didn't really cut the lady's head off, did he? I still believe there was a trick in it.

D. W. HARDING.

A HOPE FOR POETRY, by C. Day Lewis (*Basil Blackwell*, 6/-).

This book is not what it is stated to be by the author—‘an examination of post-war poetry.’ That is to say, the poems of the writers in question are not critically weighed, the good is not sifted from the bad, and the quality of their success or failure is not determined. On the contrary, the author starts from the conviction that at least two of his subjects are ‘true poets’ and goes on to discuss where the various dodges (assonance, elliptic construction, etc.) to be found in their verse were first used. This involves him in a sketch of literary history since the Romantic movement and an account of the contemporary situation from a political as well as a literary point of view. The information he offers is not (as the author himself admits) new to those already interested in contemporary poetry and familiar with current criticism. The book is aimed deliberately at a different audience.

‘Similarly, with post-war verse, the intelligent but untutored reader is apt to admit himself quite baffled at the start: at the same time he is often interested and excited by individual images, and feels that, if only he had one clue, he would be able to make his way quite easily through the labyrinth. The object of this book being largely to persuade the prospective reader, and not to freeze him with assumptions of his mental inadequacy, I hope later to indicate some general clues which may be of assistance. He may feel reassured to know that poets are doing their best now to bridge the gulf from their side, and he does not need to be told that true poetry, however it may appear on the surface, accumulates meaning every time it is read.’

In the effort to bridge this gulf and respect at the same time the level of his audience, the author found himself compelled to write passages like the following:

‘Unfortunately, Prufrock, as we have seen, became posh. And this did not do his children any good: and they were irritated at being flattered by their father’s virtues, and they did not care for basking in the arc-light of his publicity. There is little wonder that, in consequence, although they retained their respect for him and certain of his characteristics and mannerisms, they began to make up a private language of their own in self-defence, to become hearty, to play practical jokes, to hob-nob with social revolution-