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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

D. W. HARDING

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CONTENTS

THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES: A Postscript, by <i>L. C. Knights</i>	<i>page</i> 2
'CYMBELINE,' by <i>F. C. Tinkler</i>	5
THE APOTHEOSIS OF POST-IMPRESSIONISM, by <i>Richard March</i>	21
WORDSWORTH: A Preliminary Survey, by <i>James Smith</i>	33
WILLIAM DUNBAR, by <i>John Speirs</i>	56
CORRESPONDENCE: Exact Thought and Inexact Language	69
COMMENTS AND REVIEWS	73
GISSING AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL, review by Q. D. Leavis (p. 73). 'FEMINA-VIE HEUREUSE' PLEASE NOTE, <i>I'm Not Complaining</i> , reviewed by Q. D. Leavis (p. 81). KAFKA'S LIFE, review by René Wellek (p. 86). LEFT-WING ALLEGORIES, reviews by R. G. Cox (p. 89). THE POET AND HIS READERS, reviews by Geoffrey Walton (p. 93). THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS, review by Sylvia Legge (p. 97). THE ACADEMIC MIND ON THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, <i>Seventeenth Century Studies</i> , reviewed by L. C. Knights (p. 99). IN DEFENCE OF MILTON, <i>Milton and Wordsworth</i> and <i>The Miltonic Setting</i> , reviewed by F. R. Leavis (p. 104). <i>Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany</i> , reviewed by René Wellek (p. 115). MR. TURNER'S MOZART, review by W. H. Mellers (p. 117). BERLIOZ: A PROPHETIC ROMANTIC, review by W. H. Mellers (p. 119). NOTE ON GRAMOPHONE RECORDS, by W.H.M. (p. 128).	

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[More information](#)

2

THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES

POSTSCRIPT

THE article that appeared under this head in the last number of *Scrutiny* was mainly concerned with the obstacles in the way of any satisfactory programme of education at the modern universities. As an attempt to get the main problems recognized and to secure a basis for discussion it was necessarily critical in the common limited sense. Constructive criticism, it was pointed out, could only be the result of co-operation, and correspondence was invited to that end.

Such correspondence as there has been so far confirms the case that was presented: that at most of the modern universities it is the machinery of education which determines the kind of education given; that the essential questions—what are we educating for? what constitutes the function of a university to-day?—are lost sight of in the carrying out of a routine; that lectures (to come to specific symptoms) are governed by examination requirements, and that the number of lectures and the number of examinations are alike excessive. It may fairly be regarded as established that no satisfactory means have yet been found of overcoming the difficulties inherent in the position of the modern universities—difficulties such as the lack of any real centrality—which distinguish them from the older foundations.

Two of the letters received suggest that some repetition and underlining is called for. Correspondent A remarked that the present shortcomings of schools, universities and teachers' training departments form a single problem. Examination-crammed pupils, he said, enter the university simply to escape from badly paid drudgery in an office; a teachers' training grant temporarily solves their problems. The university merely continues the kind of examination routine they are familiar with at school and, still inert and without any lively conception of education, they pass through the training departments back to the schools where they instruct others to follow in their steps and pass examinations. Universities (particularly the 'modern' ones) are thus 'scholastic factories' and

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES*

3

university education nothing but 'a means of escaping the conflict with a chaotic world.' Correspondent B was more concerned with the effect on the pupil of any attempt to alter the customary routine:

'It can escape no effective teacher who makes some personal contact with his students that in so far as he has succeeded in changing the boy or girl who came from the Higher Certificate class at school, he has done something to unfit the resulting man or woman for the life they are most certainly going to lead. If he has 'trained taste' even a little, the effect will be to disgust the wage-earning graduate with his economically-necessary conditions: the teacher in an elementary school (where many go), for example, will only be irked at the sort of material that he has to teach, will find colleagues philistine or insipid, and will be thrown back on himself as a solitary and unhappy individual . . . Pending the arrival of a reformed world, he might (I fear) have been better off had he kept to the mediocre requirements of a mechanical memorizing and reproducing of opinion, rather than have let himself be beguiled into belief in the value of culture.'

Now this second letter is, if we may say so, very much beside the point. There is no doubt that a good many people who have been awakened at the university to a perception of finer values find the milieu in which they have to earn their living extremely uncongenial. But this is no reason at all why the university teacher should *not* attempt to make his pupils less at home in their world. As Denys Thompson has pointed out in these pages¹ the aim of education to-day must be to turn out 'misfits' rather than spare parts. It is precisely by unfitting his pupils for the environment—the modern environment being what it is—that the educator can hope to change it, and to change it more radically than if he concentrates on 'political' issues only. As for the vicious circle commented on by the first correspondent, we can appropriately, if not modestly, quote from the article 'Will Training Colleges Bear Scrutiny?' which we published in December, 1932:

¹See 'Advertising God,' December, 1932, and 'What Shall We Teach?' March, 1934.

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[More information](#)

‘ Obviously to break it at one point [the same vicious circle was in question] would be an inadequate aim. But we must begin somewhere. And we intend, in subsequent numbers of *Scrutiny*, to attack at other points: an inquiry into the examination system is already in progress . . . Moreover *Scrutiny*, as we hardly need to remind our readers, directs itself in the exercise of its general function upon the cultural conditions that make the educational scandal possible.’

The ‘ *Scrutiny of Examinations*,’ an article on ‘ *Why Universities?*’ and various articles on general and particular aspects of education have, since that was written, appeared.

The purpose of referring to these articles is not simply to advertise a good cause. The two correspondents who have been quoted are not the only ones who think it necessary to remind us that the problems raised concerning the modern universities are intimately connected with very much wider problems, and that the discussion of *any* aspect of contemporary education involves the discussion of the whole educational system, and the characteristics of contemporary civilization. *Scrutiny’s* achievement so far, including the articles directed to specific issues named above, is sufficient proof that we are fully aware of this ; we thought we had ourselves made the point with monotonous insistence, and certainly our educational programme has been conceived from the first in terms of a radical criticism of existing society, including, we may say, its economic and social ordering. What we have also insisted is that the scope and intricacy of the major problems—educational and other—should not prevent us from taking every opportunity that offers itself here and now or from urging specific and limited reforms, such as, in the case of the modern universities, the abolition of terminal examinations and a reduction in the number of mass-production lectures. How far the time and energy thus liberated might be used in the interests of essential education is a subject which will be returned to. Co-operation, we may repeat, will be welcomed, for it is plain that if the part of the modern universities in the modern world is not to be confined to supplying the needs of industry their problems must be threshed out in detail, and (this also was insisted) threshed out in relation to a coherent ideal of education for living.

L. C. KNIGHTS.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

5

‘CYMBELINE’

‘no bolts for the dead’—Posthumus.

IN some respects, one must admit, *Cymbeline* is a very neat bit of work. And the insolence of such a casual remark may possibly find its justification, for some, in the almost comic efficiency with which ‘matters are cleared up’ in most productions of this play, where the last scene runs off with the clockwork efficiency of a police-court, presided over by an appropriately passive, magisterial Cymbeline. And having seen such a production it is easy to talk glibly of Shakespeare’s ‘failing vitality’ of his successful, or unsuccessful—for that seems to depend on the accidents of the day’s business, or the drinks in the intervals—attempt to write a romance, a remarkable play of the month.

But if the play is read carefully—and a great number of people confess to a single, hurried reading—these productions and pseudo-critical ‘explanations’ fail to satisfy. Even the most obtuse reader would fail to account for a great deal in the play judging by the accepted standards. It might be suggested that Shakespeare found that the lightheartedly chosen material proved to have an essential interest for him when he was already engaged in the writing. But the play offers such strong resemblances to other plays, notably *The Winter’s Tale* (which has an almost identical plot), that one is forced to the conclusion that not only was the plot seriously and deliberately chosen, but it was chosen because of its possibilities as the medium for exploring and refining material which had already an essential interest for the poet. It should be considered, not as a fashionable romance, but as a play which continues the achievement of the great tragedies in another form, in one which defies an arbitrary classification much as *Measure for Measure* does.

In examining the implications of these necessarily vague statements, it is obvious that a start must be made in examining the texture of the verse itself. (Just how obvious that is may be judged from the fashionable attitudes to the play, which in order to leave it as a kind of superior best-seller have to forget, conveniently enough, the major part of the verse which forms this play).

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With certain obvious exceptions—and it is these which have been persistently admired as characteristic of the play—the verse has a hard, corrugated texture differing from that of, say, *Coriolanus* or *The Winter's Tale*, in that this harshness proceeds from the persistent recreation of feelings of a particular kind of physical pain. A large number of the images involve ideas of muscular tension and strain:

. . . crush him together rather than unfold
His measure duly . . .

. . . And I shall here abide the hourly shot
Of angry eyes . . .

I would have broke my eyestrings, cracked them, but
To look upon him, till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle.

. . . rivetted, screw'd to my memory.

There is an insistent feeling of brutal strain; the contours of the verse in which these images occur suggest a strong compression—words are strained together to such an extent in this 'fierce abridgment,' that frequently they telescope. 'Underpeep,' 'nothing-gift,' 'after-eye' readily suggest themselves as examples of this tendency. The corollary of this is a tendency of the words to *separate*. Here there is no suggestion of the fluid sap-creation of the great tragedies; the words seem more sharply defined, more separate, the rhythm is, as it were, more fearful, delicately hesitant even. So the life in the verse proceeds from the tension between this tendency and the strong compressive force exerted, as it were, from the outside. Obviously, technique of this kind, in its development away from the characteristic *fusion* of the earlier verse, does not represent an approximation to the verse of the lesser dramatists, the Beaumont and Fletchers writing 'superior' romances. Rather, one suggests, the tendency is towards a kind of verse somewhat like that achieved by Jonson in his best work. In such images as

that tub
Both filled and running

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[More information](#)

'CYMBELINE'

7

the vigorous, destructive vivacity of the homely metaphor completely refutes the charges implied in the academic attitudes towards this play.

The reference to Jonson once made, the suggestion of a subtle exaggeration which pervades this play gains in significance. At once it is seen to be intimately connected with the sense of strain we have noticed. Consider the following passage, selected almost at random:

Had I this cheek
 To bathe my lips upon ; this hand, whose touch,
 Whose every touch, would force the feeling soul
 To the oath of loyalty ; this object, which
 Takes prisoner the wild motion of my eye,
 Fixing it only here ;—should I—damned then—
 Slaver with lips as common as the stairs
 That mount the Capitol ; join gripes with hands
 Made hard with hourly falsehood—falsehood, as
 With labour ; then, by peeping in an eye
 Base and illustrious as the smoky light
 That's fed with stinking tallow ;—it were fit
 That all the plagues of hell should at one time
 Encounter such revolt.

The exaggeration is obvious. The gusto of the dramatic gestures and inflated emotions—one remembers that Iachimo is playing a part—with the head thrown back and the arm upraised in

Should I—damned then—

and the raised voice sweeping out into the next lines in an exaggerated theatricality—all this is superbly realized, and naturally it draws attention to itself, demanding a more critical attention. The exaggeration is 'placed' by a continual reference to a solid matter-of-factness. The inflation, built up on 'bathe' and the general theatricality, is subtly controlled by such images as that in the seventh and eighth lines ; the heightened disgust of the kissing, with its suggestions of servility, of old men and children dribbling on chins, and of the dirty hard steps of a public building trodden by unwashed crowds, is modified by the very concreteness of the image, by the *pettiness* of the suggestions. Moreover

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'Capitol' still has some dignity, and the lips could only sustain such comparison where the attention is focussed not so much in the propriety of the image as such, as in its reference to the general context, to the unreal theatrical world which yet exists only in concrete, real particulars. This air of unreality, this inflation, reaches bursting-point as it extends into the concentrated disgust of the 'stinking tallow,' and here it becomes obvious that the disgust envelopes the familiar work-a-day world, that both worlds, the unreal melodramatic one and the solid here-and-now, mutually interact in an unresolved tension; or, if you like, while there is a need to escape the disgusting sordidness of the familiar, so that even disgust is exaggerated, yet on the other hand there is a vital need to remain in close contact with the 'local' life.

Put crudely there is a 'conflict' between the tendencies to escape and to remain and the resultant poise is intensely critical. What we have to examine are the bases and implications of these tendencies, so surely expressed in the verse, and the means by which the balance between them is preserved.

II.

The critical interaction of a contrasting dualism which has been noted in the foregoing section is typical of the whole play; throughout there is no 'positive' which is not modified by the intense irony, not even an assured, transcendent vision of Evil or Death, as in the great tragedies; nor is there on the other hand sufficient energy in the negative emotions themselves which might in itself constitute a 'positive.' The acute disgust which finds expression in such phrases as 'partnered with tomboys' 'vaulting variable ramps' and 'crackt of kitchen trulls,' is itself so conditioned, critically, that it too is made to appear petty. This critical element is not, however, merely the ironic detachment of the sophisticated sensibility pricking extravagant bubbles; it is too fierce, too extravagant itself for just that. It seems to emerge at the point of tension between the violent negative emotions which envelop *all* experience and the need to create some positive. In this tension feelings are exaggerated into a condition of nervous susceptibility, and 'exposedness,' which is tauter than that of *The Winter's Tale* where the critical element, in this special sense, being absent, there is a more resolved, if also more convulsive,

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[More information](#)

'CYMBELINE'

9

reaction. Comparison with this latter play shows how different the disgust-feelings are in these two plays. In the verse of their speeches one immediately notices the greater violence of Leontes' disgust ('no barricado for a belly') the more convulsive movement, as if the disgust, almost hatred, has a definite direction, whereas Posthumus is not sure, he is swayed between the recognition of the appearance of virtue and of the lust beneath.

my mother seemed
The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
The non-pareil of this.

The emotions behind Leontes are more direct—or, as Coleridge put it, there is 'something like hatred'; those behind Posthumus are ironically conceived:

I'll write against them,
Detest them, curse them.

It is hopelessly inadequate after the violent theatricality of his disgust-motions. The disgust itself is restrained, held up as it were by the taut critical irony, which when relaxed as in the later play, allows the negative emotions a looser, more violent expression. But when both are compared with Othello's speeches a wide difference is observed. With him it is a purely personal matter—in one speech he even seeks reasons for her unfaithfulness. There is no disgust, no violent hatred against all women, but only the self-conscious reference of everything to his own feelings and then, the self-dramatization. There is hardly any of this self-dramatization in *The Winter's Tale* but in *Cymbeline* it persists throughout, both in the theatricality of the emotions expressed and the trick of making the individual characters play parts, consciously or unconsciously. In this play this ironic detachment is partly *protective*—I mean that what in *Othello* was, shall we say, a tragic theme, becomes in *Cymbeline* a means of distancing the emotions, of protecting the creative sensibility from experience too painful. The artist refuses to give universal valency to these negative emotions though he must recognize their potency. Notice how the third 'O' is introduced in the following passage:

O vengeance, vengeance!
Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained,

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[More information](#)

And prayed me oft forbearance: did it with
 A pudency so rosy, the sweet view on't
 Might well have warmed old Saturn; that I thought her
 As chaste as unsunned snow:—O all the devils!—
 This yellow Iachimo, in an hour—wast not?—
 Or less—at first?—perchance he spoke not, but,
 Like a full acorned boar, a German one,
 Cried 'O' and mounted.

The dominant note in the first lines is a kind of angry sensuality, which is somewhat like that characteristic of *Othello*—later there is the same 'association of strong sensuality with ugly vindictive jealousy' which Mr. Leavis notes in the earlier play.¹ But the stress has been shifted in the later play—a different element is introduced. Posthumus, in his frenzied excitement, lets his imagination get to work and seems to enjoy the spectacle, elaborating for his own benefit the nationality of the boar, until one is brought to that

Cried 'O' and mounted

—the climax of a fine declamation; an anti-climax rather, for one's earlier suspicions are confirmed in that comic detail. That is the element of differentiation from *Othello*. It is almost a kind of understatement placed immediately after a blustering speech, again as in

I'll write against them . . .

But it is not just comic, never falls into bathos. Beneath the words can be felt the strong disgust reaction from the heavy oppressive sluggishness ('German boar') of the gross, common life, from all that does not realize a particular, egotistic (the persistent irony is operative here) and completely *selfish* ideal—but the general impression is that it's overdone: the convulsive movement of the description here is completely out of accord with the intensely static quality of the actual bedroom scene. Not only are the negative emotions inflated, but also there is a recognition of the 'impossibility' of the ideal, upon which they depend, in

¹*Scrutiny*, Vol. VI, No. 3.