

Editorial

THIS NEW QUARTERLY succeeds *A Review of English Literature*: its scope is larger, for the former journal dealt only with English literature, produced in the British Isles and the Commonwealth. *ARIEL*, as its sub-title — A Review of International English Literature — indicates, will include discussion not only of English Literature in the older meaning of the term but of the literature written in English throughout the world.

This first issue is designed to indicate some of the journal's interests. Critics, writing from Britain, Belgium, Canada, France and Italy, consider such subjects as the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible as Englished in the seventeenth century; the moral problems posed by a contemporary Canadian novelist; the effect of Anatole France upon Joseph Conrad; and Conrad's own attitude to politico-historical situations. Other topics include the influence of the exotic in Coleridge's creation of *Kubla Khan* on Jane Austen's view of Lyme Regis; the poems of Christopher Caudwell; the relationship between individual and national identity in Wilson Harris's *Guiana Quartet*; and a curious element in some of D. H. Lawrence's novels. There are poems written in Britain, Singapore and the United States, translations of French and Italian poems, and work in progress by Wilson Harris.

Such cross-currents, such diversity of view point, are part and parcel of a world where travel for the writer or academic has become easier, where less insular or less continental views prevail, where the splitting of hairs in defining Commonwealth literature, or searching for Australian or Canadian or American identity is less important than the assessment of work on a detached basis. The criterion must be: is it good writing?

Many readers will define 'good' differently, and that is excellent, for literature ought, in its inception and its reception, to emphasize the preciousness of the individual. Simone Weil's remark that 'belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love' reminds us that human beings *are* different, and that the

preservation of their uniqueness rests more upon writers, especially in our age where pressures of overcrowding, of mass media, indeed of mass education (subject so much to pressures of population and fashion and the 'teaching' which so often becomes mere instruction and thence indoctrination) make the preservation of individual freedom both more difficult and infinitely more precious and desirable. When the spoken word becomes increasingly important — telephone replacing letter, and poetry — happily — recited aloud rather than merely read inwardly — we may need the more to cherish the written word as something set down, to which the reader can return: something set down with skill rather than a multiplicity of vague 'you know's'. Reading offers opportunity for reflection, can promote detachment and involvement both; and the sensibility of a critic can extend meanings, provide parallels, comparisons, and insights, assert their importance, and affirm the writer's perceptions.

English literature has for centuries provided a storehouse of language and imagery, phrase and concept upon which the colonial writers — seeking romantic exoticism overseas and reporting back on it — drew heavily. Then the Whitmans created their America, vast, energetic, democratic, and other areas of settlement or colonization moved in their own ways to similar self-expression. At present Africa and the Caribbean blend their new urban societies with older traditions and enrich the common stock. Others write in English, as many wrote in classical languages earlier, because of the attraction of the language and its flexibility and richness. Narayan's novels of South India are a good example of this. More readers exist for writing in English (a reason why this journal will from time to time occupy itself with discussion of translations); through it they can enjoy the presentation of differing human experiences.

Criticism serves the need of man for individual freedom by recognizing, respecting and praising the writer who asserts and serves this human aspiration. Not only does the literature of the past, major and minor, need to be preserved in this present age, but the literature of the present needs encouragement and support; the best way of supporting and encouraging it is to enjoy it; and the critic's role is to help us to do so.

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