

Book Reviews

Carl Dawson, ed. *Matthew Arnold, the Poetry*. The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. £6.50.

The Critical Heritage series is rendering Victorian studies an important service: it is documenting the fact that the Victorians were their own best critics. Many of the keenest minds of the times voiced their convictions year after year in the countless periodicals which flourished so vigorously in that golden age of the British press. Everyone knows that they shrewdly examined their own society. But the Critical Heritage is showing that they could be equally acute about literature. Our own century can no longer be patronizing about this criticism. Indeed, Carl Dawson declares in his excellent introduction that it is remarkable to what extent recent writing on Matthew Arnold develops — in fact, repeats — the criticism of the Victorians themselves. In this careful selection of appraisals of Arnold's poetry spanning the half-century, 1849-1900, we therefore welcome the perceptive essays and reviews of William Michael Rossetti, Arthur Hugh Clough, W. C. Roscoe, R. H. Hutton, Swinburne, Henry James, Lionel Johnson, Frederic Harrison, and many others, from whom modern critics have drawn so much.

Dawson's anthology should dispel any lingering belief that Arnold's poetry received little favourable criticism in his own day, or that his readership was narrowly select and exclusive. True, most of the criticism was published after the appearance of the two-volume *Poems* in 1869, but from the first Arnold was given a favourable reception. Even *Merope* was not received with hostility. (It was Arnold himself, his correspondence now tells us, who criticized his poetry most severely.) If we are puzzled today by the neglect of "Dover Beach" in the Nineteenth Century, we are pleased to hear of the attention then given to "Empedocles on Etna" and to learn that many Victorians did not reject it as Arnold did in 1853. By the 1880's most critics, including Henry James (who introduced the phrase) had come to see Arnold as "the poet of our modernity."

So there is no question that Dawson's volume is useful, is stimulating. But what the Critical Heritage series has lacked from the beginning is central editorial control. Some contributing editors have attempted to identify anonymous reviews; some have not. Some quote from contemporary letters and memoirs; some do not. Some terminate their anthologies with the death of the author under review; some do not. The general editor should have required greater rigour in proof-reading from some of his contributory editors. Fortunately, the present volume is fairly clean in this respect, but *Atalanta* is misspelled on p. xi; "1893" on p. 4 is a blunder for "1853;" and

on pp. ix, x, 137, W. C. Roscoe is misnamed W. R. Roscoe. Moreover, Hutton was co-editor of the *National Review* from 1855 to 1862, not 1858-1860 (cf. p. 211). The main defects, however, lie elsewhere.

For the first time in a Victorian volume in this series a bibliography of nineteenth-century criticism has been included, a valuable addition to the present anthology since Smart's eighty-year-old bibliography is defective and since a number of doctoral dissertations on the reception of Arnold's works have only recently been completed. But it is Dawson's own bibliography which is the most defective part of his book. To begin with, he says that for England and the United States it is relatively complete, but he omits some important essays and reviews in daily newspapers, such as those of E. R. Russell, editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post*. He omits other reviews, too; three early ones were published in the Unitarian weekly, the *Inquirer*, in 1853 and 1855; and R. H. Hutton's "Matthew Arnold's Charm," *Spectator*, December 7, 1895, pp. 814-815, is also missing. He disturbs the chronological order of his items on occasion: see No.'s 16-18, 74-75, and 83-84. He pointlessly includes Macmillan and Company's bibliographical catalogue of publications (item 249). His cross-referencing is sometimes faulty: No. 106 is a reprint of item 98, not 97. His dates are sometimes wrong: Roscoe's *Poems and Essays* was published in 1860, not 1859 (item 47); Hutton's *Literary Essays* in 1888, not 1877 (item 98) or 1887 (item 175). He assigns item 48 to W. C. Roscoe without citing any evidence whatever (cf. p. 17), and gives to W. J. Dawson the *Spectator* obituary of Arnold (item 188) which has long been known to be R. H. Hutton's. Since the editor calls Hutton one of Arnold's best critics (p. 25), and his "foremost apologist" (p. 121), he should have known Hutton's books better: item 91 was reprinted in Hutton's *Aspects of Religious Scientific Thought*; and he should have been aware that the Spring, 1960, number of *Victorian Newsletter* lists all the uncollected but identifiable *Spectator* articles on Arnold that Hutton wrote (items 108, 161, 188, 226, and 284). Nevertheless, Dawson's book deserves a second edition; hopefully these slips will then be put right.

ROBERT H. TENER

Philip Larkin, ed., *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973. pp. 641. \$11.75.

This anthology is already proving highly controversial. On one side of the battle-lines are its supporters, claiming that Philip Larkin has gone unerringly for all that is best in the British poetic tradition, ignoring the fashionable and the meretricious; sniping from the other side are those who feel strongly that he has shown a strong conservative bias and has ignored much poetry that is exciting and progressive. The opponents should not have been too surprised, bearing in mind Larkin's famous statement:

I write to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt
both for myself and others, though I feel that my

prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to preserve from oblivion for its own sake. I think the impulse to preserve is at the root of all art.

Certainly "the impulse to preserve" is evident in the editorial stance and in the particular tone and flavour of the anthology. What Mr. Larkin is trying to preserve is no less than a central English tradition of poetry (not British—the Scots, Welsh and Irish are rather badly under-represented) against the encroachment of American influences and any kind of extremism in form or content, and for this reason the anthology cannot help but draw strong reaction. For every reader who sees this book as an unashamedly biased and defiant elegy for a dying tradition, there will be another who will praise it as a superb justification of important and permanent values which have become eroded and unfashionable.

Many of these poems are concerned with the passing of time and the experience, private and public, of England, and, often, with what the passing of time has done to England and to the experience of living there. In an important way this anthology may be read as a moving social history of the nation in peace and war, where the quality of life is declining and the search for real value is becoming more urgent and desperate.

For those who know Mr. Larkin's own poetry, this concern will be familiar. So will the predominant tone of the anthology. It seems that the kind of poem he likes best is a poem of elegiac, or at least wistful tone, dealing with the passing of time and its effect on health and beauty. The characteristic form is traditional, lyrical with a grave falling cadence, complexity lying in the feeling rather than in surface texture. This is, of course, a generalisation, but the imagery drawn from the English countryside, the overwhelming sense of diminution and loss, the lyric-elegiac tone are clearly predominant. These lines from *Drinkwater*

Theirs was the bitterness we know
Because the clouds of hawthorn keep
So short a state, and kisses go
To tombs unfathomably deep . . .

or the choice from T. E. Hulme:

Old houses were scaffolding once
and workmen whistling

may serve as examples of the characteristic tone and preoccupation.

The simple moving treatment of the poignancy of time's passing is, of course, at the heart of the English lyric tradition. Larkin is trying to demonstrate that this same tradition continues to run through the twentieth century however battered and threatened it might be by trendy innovations. Larkin's own poetry, of course, is centrally within this tradition and his ear for this kind of lyric is faultless.

This concern explains why Hardy, Kipling and Betjeman are so heavily emphasised. They dominate the anthology almost as touchstones. And the choices from such poets as Graves, Watkins, Day Lewis, and Bunting show a clear impulse towards gravity, quietness, the elegiac, as does the editor's interesting selection from his own work.

The choice of contemporary poets, too, reflects the anti-experimental leaning. It is in this area that many readers may find themselves somewhat puzzled. It is strange to find that David Jones, Seamus Heaney, Dom Moraes, Ted Walker, George Mackay Brown, John Fuller, Ian Hamilton, Norman Nicholson and John Smith are not included when we find represented Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, Philip Hobsbaum, Barry Cole and others. Geoffrey Hill, P. J. Kavanagh, and Iain Crichton Smith seem to be seriously underestimated. And so on. Perhaps Mr. Larkin should have included either more or considerably fewer contemporary poets, and been a little more adventurous in his choice.

One more mild grumble. Couldn't the date of publication of each poem have been included? This would often be more useful than dates of birth and death of the poet.

But this is a magnificent anthology and it is difficult to imagine a more interesting and concerned editorial hand. The leading English poet of his generation has compiled a tribute to a tradition which is more robust and vital than is often admitted. If this anthology demands that the reader take sides that is all to the good; this reviewer, for one, finds himself behind Mr. Larkin, a little surprised, but very grateful.

CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN

Books Received

- ARMSTRONG, ROBERT, *The Poetic Vision*. London: The Mitre Press, 1973. pp. 133. £1.50.
- BERMEL, ALBERT, *Contradictory Characters*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973. pp. 298. \$5.95.
- BOWERS, FREDSON, ed., *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, Vols. I and II. London: The Cambridge University Press, Toronto: Macmillan of Canada. pp. 417, 542. Vol. I \$40.00, Vol. II \$44.00.
- BROWN, LLOYD W., *The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1973. pp. 229. \$9.50 cl. \$4.95 pb.
- BYATT, A. S., *Wordsworth and Coleridge in their time*. New York: Crane, Russak & Company Inc., 1973. pp. 288. \$5.95.

- CHAMISH, BARRY, *Keep Stillman — A Pun*. Winnipeg: Split Level, 1973. pp. 95. \$2.00.
- CHAMISH, BARRY, *The Devil Wore An Angel's Suit*. Winnipeg: Split Level, 1973. pp. 138.
- COWLEY, ABRAHAM, *The Civil War*, Allan Pritchard ed. Buffalo and Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973. pp. 196. \$10.00.
- CRACKANTHORPE, HUBERT, *Collected Stories (1893-1897)*. Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969. pp. 839. \$25.00.
- HOLMES, THEODORE, *Poems from Donegal*. London: The Mitre Press, 1973. pp. 111. £1.20.
- HUXLEY, ELSPETH, *The Kingsleys: A Biographical Anthology*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973. pp. 346. £5.50.
- MANN, JILL, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Toronto: Macmillan of Canada. pp. 331. \$18.95 cl. \$7.75 pb.
- MILES, ROBERT L., *Shadows of Penumbra*. New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1973. pp. 62. \$4.75.
- MOODY, CHRISTOPHER, *Solzhenitsyn*, The Modern Writers Series. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1973. pp. 184. 75 p. \$2.85 pb. \$5.50 cl.
- ROWSE, A. L., *Shakespeare The Man*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan London Ltd., Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973. pp. 284. \$12.50.
- SPAIN, MARY, *An Ever Fixed Mark*. London: The Mitre Press, 1973. pp. 32. £1.15.
- SISTER THEKLA, *The Disinterested Heart: The Philosophy of John Keats*. Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire: Green Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, 1973. pp. 200. £1.50.
- THUMBOO, EDWIN, *Seven Poets: Singapore and Malaysia*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973. pp. 226. \$7.50.
- TODD, JANET M., *In Adam's Garden: A Study of John Clare's Pre-Asylum Poetry*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973. pp. 83. \$2.00 pb.
- UNTERMEYER, LOUIS, *50 Modern American & British Poets, 1920-1970*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1973. pp. 358. \$3.95.
- WARD, DAVID, *Jonathan Swift: An Introductory Essay*. London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973. pp. 216. £2.50 cl; £1.00 pb.