

mind by giving it more facts, but by helping it to judge *relevance*. Moreover, on page 51 he suggests that an important preliminary for this is 'responsive immersion in the actual, in its full concreteness, before, during and after the abstractive processes which yield perception'. It becomes clear that his main concern is to realize the full potentialities of language, as a means of comprehending experience, and as an organ of the developing self-consciousness of human beings. He is aware that the reality of words is in things, and in the mind's apprehension of things; and that the value of words is in ordering and communicating these inner realities.

Thus he has grounds for his claim that in these studies he is seeking *instruments* for 'the endless arch-enquiry: what are we, and what are we trying to become?'. In so far as we can find an answer by taking thought, Professor Richards has offered some useful, and sane and well-argued, suggestions as to how we might go about it. For this reason this is a book for educationalists, even more than for linguistic scientists.

A. D. MOODY

THE TIGHT-ROPE WALKERS (Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature). By Giorgio Melchiori. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 25s.)

Many collections of literary essays appear for which the claim is made that the various individual studies illumine a central theme, but more often than not, the collection remains stubbornly a series of individual essays held together only by their common authorship. Signor Melchiori's book is not one of these collections. Although the essays which go to make up this book were written over a number of years and have been published separately in various journals, they do, when brought together, genuinely illuminate one another and the result is a book, not a piece of book-making.

In spite of the rather arch title, there is nothing precious about *The Tight-rope Walkers*, and Signor Melchiori conducts his enquiry into modern literature with thoughtful ease and, in spite of a weakness for that irritatingly vague term 'baroque', a refreshing absence of jargon. His purpose is to find out 'by subjecting to different critical methods some major and minor writers, the common characteristics of the style of an age apparently so full of contradiction and uncertainty'. He finds the common characteristic to lie in 'funambulism'—a term which describes the sense of danger and precariousness so markedly present in some of the great works of modern literature. Such a precariousness implies the constant effort to maintain a balance and 'the achievement of the true artist in our age is like the successful acrobat who succeeds in keeping step by step, moment by moment, his balance, while being

aware of the void or the turmoil around him'. It is to Signor Melchiori's credit that the chapters which follow these general statements shear away the metaphorical trimmings and leave us with a smoothly defined critical judgement. The chapters are concerned with Henry James and Hopkins, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Fry, Virginia Woolf, Henry Green and Dylan Thomas. A curious omission is Auden, and although Signor Melchiori notes its importance, I would have thought that 'The Age of Anxiety' would have been a key text in the development of his theme.

Among the studies in the book, two are notably good and require special attention. 'The Lotos and the Rose' is an examination of Eliot's 'rose' imagery, particularly as it is presented in the first part of 'Burnt Norton'. Beside this passage Signor Melchiori sets some paragraphs from the Preface to Lawrence's *New Poems* (1920) (later reprinted in *Phoenix*), and Eliot's 'source' is strikingly revealed. To anyone in the least familiar with Eliot's later poetry the importance of 'the rose garden'—the objective correlative of Eliot's moment of revelation—will need no stressing, and Signor Melchiori's essay is far more than a pedantic note on 'literary indebtedness'. He shows how an artist as inveterately opposed as Eliot is to Lawrence can, nevertheless, feel artistically the power of his work to such an extent that he can draw on it and make it part of his own most serious utterance. If Signor Melchiori can write as perceptively and fruitfully as this on Eliot, where the dust raised by the traffic of commentators never settles, it is hardly surprising that he should be equally perceptive when he turns to an area rather further away from the madding crowd. The first individual study in the book is on James and Hopkins and their relationship with Walter Pater. If by the end of the essay Signor Melchiori has made us begin to wonder if the author of *Marius the Epicurean* is not indeed the father of modern literature, the force and originality of the essay can be gauged. It is certainly an essay which anyone considering the genesis of modern literature ought to know of, and those lecturers who for years have opened their modern courses with 'The Reaction Against the 'Nineties: The Yellow Book, etc.' may have to insert a new carbon next session. Yeats, certainly, had little doubt about the significance of Pater; for him *Marius* was 'the only great prose in modern English . . . and yet I began to wonder if it had not caused the disaster of my friends. It taught us to walk upon a rope stretched through serene air, and we were left to keep our feet upon a swaying rope in a storm.' It is this 'swaying rope' which has caught Signor Melchiori's attention, and he holds it still long enough to point out to us the tightrope walkers and make us understand the nature of their achievement more deeply.

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