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CIARDI, JOHN. *From Time to Time*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1951. 84 pp. \$2.50.

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F. Cudworth Flint

WORDS IN LITERATURE

MR. EMPSON and Professor Brower deal with what, broadly speaking, may be regarded as the same material—the use of words in literature—and aim at much the same goal—an increase in readers of the adequacy of their response to literary organizations of language. But the tactics pursued in these two books¹ are nearly opposite: Mr. Empson uses

¹ *The Structure of Complex Words*, by William Empson. New Directions, n.d. *The Fields of Light*, by Reuben Arthur Brower. Oxford University Press, 1951.

contexts to build up a manifoldness of meaning in key words, whereas Professor Brower educes as economically as possible from words the sequences and patterns which carry the main import of whole compositions. Both books are interesting and valuable.

It must be confessed that some of those who embark on the reading of Mr. Empson's book may query the appraisal "interesting," and not a few, indeed, may desert the voyage short of achieving the first eighty pages. And for this discouragement, Mr. Empson's way with language is partly responsible. Although he everywhere displays an almost preternatural acuity—which is, indeed, his special distinction among critics, and which confers on this book its exceptional importance—he displays very little sense of ordonnance. Presumably, he has so much meditated his subject matter in its least details that the whole is etched on his memory; the mental pointer we call attention can in a flash find the detail or indicate the connection he wishes. This inward celerity few readers will share; and Mr. Empson's habit of underpunctuating, his habit of using "this" to refer to some remote or diffused referent as if it were concentrated or near at hand, and his failure to dispose the sentences in a paragraph with sufficiently marked reference to the central statement of the paragraph, are so many additional impediments to the progress of a reader through considerations which because of their inwardness and subtlety are difficult at best.

Subtlety does not here connote secondariness. Indeed, what Mr. Empson is doing in this book is so important, and has so many varied applications, that it is rather surprising nobody else has already gone about the job he has undertaken, with a comparable singlemindedness. Setting out from an initial dissatisfaction with Professor I. A. Richards' early view of literature as characterized by an "emotive" view of language—a view which has been parodied into the version that "literature consists of soothingly stimulating untruths"—Mr. Empson here investigates

the operations of language, primarily as recorded in literature, as these operations are evident in the behavior of various key words when used in contexts felt as nonmetaphorical. Sundry chapter titles suggest his tactic: " 'Wit' in the *Essay on Criticism*"; " 'All' in *Paradise Lost*"; " 'Fool' in *Lear*"; "Timon's 'Dog' "; " 'Honest' in *Othello*"; " 'Sense' in *Measure for Measure*"; and " 'Sense' in *The Prelude*." He develops for the conduct of these analyses a machinery partly of typographical signs and partly of such words as "sense," "implication," "emotion," and "mood"—these four in their varieties and transactions subsuming the import for the mind that a word in a linguistically sufficient context carries. But here I am guilty of a fault with which I charged Mr. Empson, for I have unobtrusively slipped into the discussion what is perhaps the most notable contribution of his book: the demonstration that a word does not bring its senses, implications, or what-not along with it as so much inert baggage. On the contrary, it is characteristic of key words that a single use represents an equation, a relation, or, as I have just termed it, a transaction, between two or more of its senses, and possibly an implication, emotion, or mood as well. Moreover, these equations are of various types: Mr. Empson distinguishes five of these. All this apparatus is difficult to accustom oneself to, and never becomes exactly easy to manage; but on the whole, it justifies itself.

In such chapters as those I have cited, and others more general in their themes, Mr. Empson achieves at least four ends. For one thing, he succeeds in transferring to the interplay of senses and implications much that Professor Richards had labeled "emotive"; as a consequence, literature seems more reliable—less a mere pastime, or at best, a therapeutic dodge. For another, he has clarified and enriched our responses to the literary works mentioned in his chapter titles. (In particular, his analysis of "honest" enables him to deal more successfully with the traditional "enigma" of Iago than has anyone else I know of.) Third—and this next achievement may be of greatest importance if and when

it is applied by dictionary makers—in a chapter entitled “Dictionaries” he has demonstrated the wasteful and obfuscating extent to which the presumed definitions in our dictionaries fail to define, and are padded with illogically assembled lists of thesaurus-synonyms; and he has exemplified by a few brilliantly concise examples how great savings of wordage and great gains in precision and informativeness might be achieved simultaneously. Lastly—and this mostly in several appendices—he has effectively called in question the presumption, maintained in such books as Charles Morris’ *Signs, Language, and Behavior* and Leonard Bloomfield’s *Language*, that only a positivistic or mechanist or behaviorist theory and tactic are capable of arriving at trustworthy results from the study of language. These appendices should not be overlooked; for it is in them that the wit veiled in deprecation which is a pleasant subordinate tone throughout Mr. Empson’s book begins to shed its veils.

If Professor Brower’s book seems a less signal achievement, this is partly because of its smaller dimensions—218 pages, each of which is about two thirds the size of one of Mr. Empson’s 450 pages—and partly because his kind of exploration has more examples for it in other books. In the first part of Professor Brower’s book, he discusses the nature and effects of those among the possible kinds of sequences connecting words which are of most importance for the apprehension of literature: dramatic (in which he includes narrative) sequence (or sequence of situational relationships), sequence of images, sequence of metaphors, sequence of attitudes or tones, sequence of rhythms, and sequence of sounds. He develops the idea, with illustrations from lyric poems of brief compass, that in literature these several sorts of sequence parallel or assist one another, and, typically, at some climactic point assemble themselves to illustrate a key design or metaphor or symbol in which the significance and value of the literary work of art as a whole are pre-eminently embodied. The second and slightly longer part of the book applies this idea to

the elucidation in turn of *The Tempest*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Pope's "Epistle IV: To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, Of the Use of Riches," *Pride and Prejudice*, and *A Passage to India*.

Throughout the book, Professor Brower writes clearly and equably (equableness is getting rare in critical writing these days). From the passages of general theory in the first part of the book the reader may indeed get the impression that this book is designed for an audience less practiced in reading than in fact is the case. Perhaps the phrase "some Proustian vase of memory" casually tossed into a sentence no farther along than page 10 is intended as a warning to the unwary. Be that as it may, the quality of the analyses will soon show the reader that a considerable maturity of interests and of capacity is expected of him. The analysis of Pope's poem seems to me admirable in an alertness responsive to the least hints of the text; but even more outstanding are the analyses of the three novels. For here, to a degree seldom achieved within the same brief compass, from materials discursive and even distracting in the leads offered for investigation, Professor Brower has educed key metaphors or designs which suffuse these novels with a richer significance and at the same time render the reader's memory more able to control that significance. On only one point—and that a minor one, coming early in the book²—do I dissent from Professor Brower; elsewhere, he seems to me completely convincing.

If Mr. Empson's book is a more notable contribution to the resources of persons who are already seasoned adepts in literary

² Professor Brower on pp. 46-7 of his book seems to take the first line of the third stanza of Herbert's "The Windows" as containing a simple parallelism of phrase: "Doctrine and life, colours and light . . ." I on the contrary take the phrases as a chiasmus. This reading seems to me required by the two preceding stanzas, in which "doctrine"—the repeating of a message—is equated with a colorless "watrish" light which merely passes through the glass without acquiring any enrichment from it. On the other hand, "life" is symbolized by colored figures in the glass, which do enrich the quality of the "doctrine" which passes through the human medium. I think that any reader of Professor Brower will find that my interpretation obviates the slight confusions in his analysis and diagram (on p. 46) of the symbolical relationships in this poem.

study, Professor Brower's book more suitably fills the rôle of an excellent incentive for advanced college classes in literary criticism and for the thoughtful general reader.

Vernon Young

MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH...

PANTHEON Books' presentation of such a figure as Paracelsus is another welcome curiosity to the lay reader, for it brings into focus a feature of Western thought usually neglected in even the better histories of ideas at present available. The Swiss Theophrastus Bombastus (etc.), called Paracelsus, belonged, in his own intransigent fashion, to that revolt against Classical and Medieval Humanism which Hiram Haydn has exhaustively charted and pertinently named—the Counter-Renaissance. This broad and radical movement of revision included naturalists and romantics, cynics and idealists, scientists and mystics; it was negatively united in its separate revolts by universal opposition to, above all, the authority of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and to any theory of the condition of man based on assumptions untested either by direct experience (variously interpreted) or by the emerging sciences of verifiable data.

In a side-channel of this current, Paracelsus the physician, alchemist, mystic, heretical vagabond, went his valorous and crotchety way. The selections from his life-long pronouncements here decocted by Jolande Jacobi in a seemingly excellent translation by Norbert Guterman¹ reveal a spirited, fervent, non-conformist mentality, carrying on a Reformation all his own in

¹ *Paracelsus*. Bollingen Series XXVIII. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1951. 347 pp. \$4.50.