

judgment is that none of the other three romances Hawthorne wrote achieved anything like the richness of tragic feeling or the intensity of formal perfection which "The Scarlet Letter" achieved; quite untroubled by the fact that this is the conventional judgment, Mr. Van Doren recurs to it as the true one, and he is right. This does not keep him from doing very sensitive justice to the other three finished novels or from giving an extremely interesting account of the abortive romance—or was

it romances?—that Hawthorne left unfinished at his death. Criticism of this writer's beautiful—if undeniably wavering and variable—work may, as time goes on, be more laborious and more intensive than Mr. Van Doren's; it seems unlikely ever to be juster.

*Newton Arvin, professor of English at Smith College, is the author of "Hawthorne" and compiler of "The Heart of Hawthorne's Journals" and "Hawthorne's Short Stories."*

## For Every Learned Library

*THEORY OF LITERATURE.* By René Wellek and Austin Warren. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1949. 403 pp. \$4.50.

Reviewed by  
HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THE study and teaching of the modern languages (including English) and their literatures has become a minor industry in the United States. The Modern Language Association numbers 6,000 scholars. Innumerable other persons are found in the National Council of Teachers of English, various other pedagogical groups, and folk-lore, philological, and associated societies. All this arises mainly because, in American colleges, a beginning course in English is the only universally required course, with foreign languages a second; and the teachers of these courses have to rise in the professional world. In activity, therefore, American literary scholarship leads the universe. But its quality is more debatable.

In "Theory of Literature," Messrs. Wellek and Warren have produced an admirable *vade mecum* of academic scholarship. They have read, digested, and listed everything that has to do with the theory and practice of this mystery. Five chapters survey "definitions and distinctions." Five others analyze theories about literature and biography, psychology, society, ideas, and the other arts. Eight survey the "intrinsic" study of literature—how do you analyze form, style, meter, image, figure, genre? How do you write literary history? Finally there is a plea—the inevitable plea—for a reform of graduate instruction.

An astonishing amount of information is cleanly packed into this cyclopedia. I do not see how complex material can be more clearly organized, more succinctly put, or more objectively analyzed—up to the last chapter, which is a plea for change.

This book is going to be in every learned library.

If a layman, if a practising writer, if an ordinary reader opens its pages, however, such a one will be filled with astonishment. It is impossible, he will think, that the business of reading should produce this forest of technological processes, this accumulation of difficulties about poetry and prose. Books are for leisure, for escape, for simple pleasure. By and large, he will say, these scholarly arguments have nothing to do with my reading, or with the reading habits of most Americans. Before the scholar, irritated by philistinism, replies that scholarship is a normal human activity, before he loftily announces he is somehow improving taste, let me flatly observe that the ordinary reader is right. The pleasures of books, except for a small, self-conscious minority in the colleges, are mainly simple and direct.

But the business of scholarship ignores not only this fact, it ignores also the truth that scholars keep alive by teaching. The true dilemma is therefore not whether literature "reflects society," the problem is whether "scholarship" as admirably mirrored in this volume, is ever going to recognize the simple fact that these elaborate theories are in the main irrelevant to the total social demand. That demand is, briefly, to teach rather simple youngsters rather simple things. To this purpose the present volume is irrelevant. There is no reason why it should be relevant. But irrelevant it is.

The book, says its jacket, marks "an important milestone in the theory of graduate training." With all deference, it does nothing of the sort. What it does superbly is to sum up an epoch of concentration. But if democracy is to have any culture, we must now enter an epoch of diffusion, and for this epoch no *vade mecum* of any intellectual eminence has as yet appeared.

## Belles-Lettres Notes

*LECTURES IN CRITICISM*, by Blackmur, Croce, Peyre, Ransom, Read, Tate. [Bollingen Series XVI.] Pantheon. \$3.50. The six lectures in this volume were delivered at a symposium held at Johns Hopkins a year ago. In the introduction Huntington Cairns states its general problem: an inquiry into the bases of modern criticism. John Crowe Ransom's paper on Aristotle and Allen Tate's on Longinus reexamine the two great documents of classical criticism. Herbert Read, in a heavily annotated paper, traces the influence on Coleridge's criticism of his intense interest in philosophy and metaphysics. Henri Peyre's discursive paper looks ahead to the future, asking critics to devote themselves to writers of their own time, and Benedetto Croce's contribution, "The Condition of Criticism in Italy," looks to the past, really, for it is mostly about the forerunners to his own theory of esthetics. Finally, R. P. Blackmur's "A Burden for Critics" calls for modern criticism to enlarge its scope, and to add to analysis, elucidation, and comparison the important function of judgment based on rational standards. The level of these papers varies. At their best they flash with acute insights into critical matters at their worst they are exhibits of what is wrong with criticism today.

*IMMORTAL DIAMOND: STUDIES IN GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS*, edited by Norman Weyand, S.J. Sheed & Ward. \$5. These eleven studies are devoted to one of the most original and powerful "modern" poets, whose astonishing poems were published in 1918, thirty years after his death. The approach here is frankly partisan, sometimes parochial, for all the contributors are, like Hopkins, members of the Society of Jesus, and their exegesis bears the mark of their earnest calling. The best (and longest) study is that by Walter J. Ong, which traces with admirable clarity and objectivity the sources of the poet's elaborate technique in traditional English poetry. Martin C. Carroll's account of Hopkins as a practising Jesuit is useful too, as is Raymond V. Schoder's glossary of "difficult words." Three papers are explications of poems, one of them the famous "The Windhover." When F. R. Leavis wrote that "it expresses not religious exaltation, but inner debate," he was supported by the prior analyses of Richards and Empson. Fr. Schoder attempts to reverse that judgment, but he fails to convince, in spite of his ingenuity, because one feels that his

conclusions are too rigidly predetermined. Supplementary material in the volume includes a detailed bibliography and indexes.

**OSCAR WILDE**, by *André Gide*. Translated by *Bernard Frechtman*. *Philosophical Library*. \$2.75. This slight book contains a short essay by Gide published in 1905 in "L'Hermitage" and a two-page "In Memoriam" (1901) published in his "Prétextes." They are written with his customary economy and expressiveness, and are important for presenting at first hand impressions and conversations of Wilde. Yet they seem familiar, *réchauffés*. The reason for this is that Wilde repeated himself, so that the *dicta* appear also in his own writings; and the impressions have been used by his biographers or similarly noted by other friends. Besides, Gide uses these materials elsewhere, in his "Journals" and in his autobiographical "If It Die . . ." (where he relates more candidly their association in Biskra). If this sensitive translation does not add much to our comprehension of Wilde, it serves to remind us that Gide shared some of his ideas; that Gide is, in fact, the only living writer of importance whose roots are in the same soil of the *fin de siècle* that nourished the author of "Dorian Gray."

**THE COWDEN CLARKES**, by *Richard D. Altick*. *Oxford*. \$4.50. It is easy to understand why two lives so intimately entwined as those of Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke should be treated in one biography. In their long literary and marital partnership they knew many important writers, including Keats, Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Dickens. Their own prolific and popular writings cover a wide range, but Mrs. Clarke is remembered today as the first compiler of a Shakespeare concordance and as a great popularizer of "the Bard," whom she converted into an admirable Victorian gentleman with heroines as proper as seminary misses.

Professor Altick's book is first rate in every respect. He treats his subjects with a neat proportion of affection, humor, and objectivity, and his chapters on their Bardolatry—Mrs. Clarke even dreamed about Shakespeare—are soundly hilarious. He has carefully utilized masses of printed and unpublished source material, and provided notes, bibliographies, and an index. It is a valuable study, demonstrating perhaps that the "form and pressure" of an age—the *pax Victoriana* in this case—can be clearly felt in its minor figures.

—ROBERT HALSBAND.

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**Fiction.** *It has been a long time since we have been able to read the translation of a modern Russian novel that did not seem to be stilted or a clumsy vehicle for propaganda. Vera Panova's "The Train" is free of excrescences. It is a good book to read while the propaganda battle still rages. Three other books this week may give pleasure to the reader. There is Arthur Meeker's "Prairie Avenue," a story of two generations of Chicago exuberance in the fabulous days of the Nineties. "The Husband," by Natalie Anderson Scott, is a psychological masterpiece of morbid obsession and spiritual debasement in Puritan New England two centuries ago. Joyce Cary, the author of "To Be a Pilgrim," is too little known to this country. His novel tells of two generations of English country life as seen through the eyes of an old man.*

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## Scene: Chicago, 1885-96

**PRAIRIE AVENUE.** By *Arthur Meeker*. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.* 1949. 325 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by **EDMUND FULLER**

**P**OLISHED craftsmanship and a meticulous attention to detail characterize Arthur Meeker's new novel, "Prairie Avenue." It has a muted quality, is oblique and generally understated. A certain portion of the Chicago scene between 1885 and 1896, the most important of the years the book spans, is recreated with intense life and authenticity.

Prairie Avenue, in the Nineties, was the grand street of the Chicago rich. They were a set of great wealth, but lacking a tradition or culture deep rooted enough to set up a reliable canon of taste. All were rather newly rich: a class of great merchants, meat kings, wheat kings. Their wealth was bound to the factors that had made the huge, crude city flourish from an unpromising railroad.



—Maurice Seymour.

Arthur Meeker—"His is the polish. Dreiser's was the depth."

The architecture of the street was its own commentary. "A balconied Venetian palazzo stood next a German gingerbread house with gargoyles on the roof, while a red brick Queen Anne mansion, a Byzantine fortress, and a Renaissance castle (all fancy gray stone embroidery) made an oddly assorted trio over the way." The inhabitants of these dwellings looked to the East as the social arbiter; sometimes still further beyond to England and Europe, where money could buy titled marriages for a generation scarcely one remove from the raw frontier.

The boy Ned Ramsay, twelve years old when the book begins, had grown up in the fluctuating fortunes of a speculator's family. Periods of lavish and princely living, in Europe and America, alternated with times of penury and occasional discreet, hasty removals from one place to another.

As the result of a particularly abrupt setback he was left to live for several years in the home of his Uncle Hiram and Aunt Lydia Stack on Prairie Avenue. This family, parents and children alike, took him to its bosom with genuine affection.

Ned, happy though he was, possessed a sensitivity and perception that led him to increasing awareness of the odd factors in the marriage of his uncle and aunt. The Stack lumber fortune was massive enough to overcome any social sniping; nevertheless, some of the sharp-tongued went to the length of whispering that Hiram Stack had found his regal and beautiful wife in a "house."

Such details were lost on the boy. But he was not blind to the implications of things he saw pass between Aunt Lydia and the merchant Abner Kennerley, rival to the Fields, whose house looked like the Paris Opera. And Ned, alone, knew the secret that