

https://dspace.org/

[Review of the book Science and human values, by Jacob Bronowski (Hutchinson, 1962)]

Rose, Brian Waldron

1961
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25180
Rose, B.W. (1961). [Review of the book Science and human values, by Jacob Bronowski (Hutchinson, 1962)]. Symposium: A Journal for Education in Southern Africa, pp. 147-148.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

BOOKS REVIEWED

sity, he has enabled wider audiences to share the pleasures and scholarship of his easily written views and, like the Romantic poets of whom he writes, add vastly to their experiences. The fact that this edition is a reprint appearing eleven years after its first publication is no drawback, since nothing has dated. Were it not for the paperback, there are many coveted works of literature that would never reach the student's own bookshelf.

One wonders if anyone today studies the Romantic Revival, or if it is just a memory of other-generation undergraduate days, spurned by the realities of the 'sixties and lost in the convolutions of the beatnik brain. If Keats appealed to the unsophisticated young men and women of twenty-five years ago, there must be a handful of people alive who can still be thrilled and charmed by the genius of his imagination and the craftwork of his imagery.

Sir Maurice deals with the work of the great Five representatives of the age, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, and adds their contemporaries or "familiars" in full measure, with essays — or lectures — on poems by Byron, Poe, Swinburne and Christina Rosetti.

In the introductory theme, which gives the volume its title, he brings home the power that the creative impulse, inspired by the unseen forces of imagination, nature, and the spirit of man impart to poetry. At the same time, he admits to the limitations of the Romantic Movement and, withstanding the temptation to become a complete votary of its poets, weighs up their achievements with an admiration tempered with sane reserve.

Professor Bowra's treatment of individual poems can help the teacher-interpreter of literature to a wider concept of appreciation and a richer understanding of what he is endeavouring to put across to his senior pupils. His analysis of "The Ancient Mariner" shows why it is Coleridge's greatest poem and not what he modestly regarded as an attempt to secure "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith."

For the student reader there is much more to be found. Whether he turns to the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" or "Intimations of Immortality," or to any of the other major poems that make up the chapters of this readable, scholarly collection, he will find the experience refreshing and amply rewarding.

R.F.W.

●



It would not be untoward in a review of **SCIENCE AND HUMAN VALUES**, by J. Bronowski, (Hutchinson), to take the opportunity of saluting one of the most distinguished Headmasters of the Commonwealth, Mr. A. J. Grant, of Jeppe High School for Boys, Johannesburg, who retires in 1962.

"My aim in this book," says the author, "is to show that the parts of civilisation make a whole; to display the links which give society its coherence, and more which give its life. I have had of all people, a historian tells me that science is a collection of facts, and his voice had not even the ironic rasp of one filing cabinet reproving another." Turning to Coleridge, Dr. Bronowski recalls the poet's definition of beauty as "unity in variety." That, says the author, is nothing more than "the search to discover unity in the wild variety of nature. What is a poetic image but the seizing and the exploration of a hidden likeness, in holding together two parts of a comparison which are to give depth to each other? The discoveries of science, the works of art are explorations — more, are explosions, of a hidden likeness. This is the act of creation in which an original thought is born, and it is the same act in original science and original art. The world which the human mind knows and explores does not survive if it is emptied of thought. And thought does not survive without symbolic concepts. The symbol and the metaphor are as necessary to science as to poetry."

Alan Grant was a scientist by training, a poet by inclination. In his own commonroom he would pause to discuss with the senior maths master some recent and abstruse theory of knots, and a little later would be discussing with appreciation and information the poetry of Eliot or John Wain. When one first picked up Dr. Bronowski's excellent book with its Greek sense of wholeness, one wondered whether it had not come too late. Do poets read Whitehead? Would Dr. Flemming enjoy John Wain? Or, as C. P. Snow put it in his Rede Lecture: "There seems then to be no place where the cultures meet. I am not going to waste time saying that this is a pity; it is much worse than that. This culture divide exists all over the western world. In fact the separation between the scientists and the non-scientists is much less bridgeable among the young today." If a bridge is to be built, then, it will be done by people of the calibre of Alan Grant. There is only one way out of all this, says C. P. Snow, "it is of course, by rethinking our education. A society holds together by the respect which man gives man," comments Dr. Bronowski. It fails in fact, it falls apart into groups of fear and power, when its concept of man is false." The influence of a great teacher over generations of boys growing into manhood is tremendous. Alan Grant gave many a boy a vision of human values, a love of science that was the more incisive because the same mind enjoyed Hopkins or Donne, because it saw in the discipline of science a way of handling a world in which human values survived. None of his pupils, some of whom occupy chairs in distinguished universities, seem to have fallen into the despair of the isolated scientist who denies the validity of value-judgements. "The problem of values arises only when men try to put together their need to be social animals with their need to be free men," says the author. "If truth is to be found, and not given, and if therefore it is to be tested in action, what other conditions grow of themselves from this?" Dr. Bronowski lists "independence in observation and in thought. From this follows dissent, the native activity of the scientist, which is the mark of freedom. And independence is safeguarded by free speech, free inquiry, free thought and tolerance."

Science and Human Values is the sort of book that Alan Grant would read and enjoy. And were that all, one might have dropped a private note to this end and omitted a personal reference on a public occasion. But one believes that men like this distinguished Headmaster do not stand monumentally alone. Generations of intelligent lads growing up in the Grant regime will find this book stimulating and useful.

Whilst the intention of this book is admirable, not all his readers will accept the assertion that the bridge between science and literature, especially poetry, is the search for likenesses. "The discoveries of science, the works of art are explorations . . . of hidden likeness

BOOKS REVIEWED

. . . Modern science . . . grows from a comparison. It has seized a likeness between two unlike appearances; for the apple in the summer garden and the grave moon overhead are surely as unlike in their movements as two things can be. Newton traced in them two expressions of a single concept, gravitation." This line of thought is not without its dangers. The whole of sympathetic magic rests on the misconstructions placed on likenesses. The similarity between rain and water passed through a sieve, for instance led to the untenable idea that one could induce rain by the sieve. Much homeopathic medicine is built on the same slender deduction. Dr. Bronowski might well reconsider his thinking at this point. What is in common between the real scientist and the real poet, one might hazard, is firstly a capacity to observe acutely, secondly a capacity to bring observed details into a functional relationship, and thirdly a capacity to make working postulates. Metaphorical language truly involves, in its more obvious manifestations, comparisons. But the value surely lies in the implied interpretation or postulate of detail . . . this new patterning of relationship ?

The value of any book lies not in its assertion, but in its capacity to suggest a re-arrangement of thought. This book most certainly succeeds.

B.W.R.

●

SHORT STORY STUDY — A Critical Anthology. Compiled by A. J. Smith and W. H. Mason. (Edward Arnold).



At our present stage of fossilisation it is not easy to create a text book so out of line with tradition that by its newness of approach it startles us into a detailed examination of its intention and method. In many disciplines such a break would be anarchistic rather than original, but there is a growing feeling among the Teachers of English that a reconsideration of directions and methods is overdue; there is a growing awareness of an increasing dislocation between the theory of the schools and the practice of intelligent men and women handling the realities — whether these be a Director's Report on structural steel or a poem on pessimism in Western Europe.

This new Short Story Study is, one must admit, an intelligently planned book designed — as the compilers say — to fulfil four main intentions. They are :

(1) to provide a bridge between school or university and the world outside; a bridge between youth and maturity;

(2) to stimulate close and intelligent reading;

(3) to afford some understanding of the ground of such literary attitudes as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, pathos, and sentimentality;

(4) to inculcate sound critical approaches and to impart familiarity with vocabulary, tools and methods.

The book consists of ten short stories: Paste, by Henry James; A Rhinocerous, Some Ladies and a Horse, by James Stephens; Be This Her Memorial, by Cardoc Evans; Tickets Please, by D. H. Lawrence; Shooting an Elephant, by George Orwell; In the Train, by Frank O'Connor; The Mower, by H. E. Bates; Of This Time, Of That Place, by Lionel Trilling; and The Followers, by Dylan Thomas.

The format is arranged in this way: First of all there is a biographical survey of the author. From this certain critical comments are derived, when these appear to have a bearing on the story. The story follows. After this there is a commentary. It is chiefly through this that the compilers direct the pupil or student to a closer and more intelligent examination of the reading. This method can be good or bad according to the way it is handled, of course. Much of the directive in these commentaries is done by way of unanswered questions; but these undoubtedly have the effect of drawing the attention of inexperienced readers to the profundities and subtleties of the writing. The effect even on a reviewer was to send him back to the stories themselves in pleased agreement or in furious disagreement, and all this resulted in a very pleasureable couple of hours stolen from the routines.

This is the sort of book one would put in the hands of the matriculation group of superior intelligence who are not mentally contained by normal matriculation work. It would also make an admirable book of working material for first-year university students, and possibly would be a useful and happy basis for students from non-Arts faculties reading a year's work in English in order to comply with University regulations.

But everyone interested in the Short Story as a literary form should obtain a copy of this book, for it will be found most stimulating.

B.W.R.

For Better Banking

The

STANDARD

BANK

of South Africa Limited

(Registered Commercial Bank)

South Africa's most Experienced Banking Service

Grant 214/3045-2