

as a poet of yet another impact upon him of Spain and of Spanish culture in one of its purest and most intense forms.

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INTRODUCTION TO PAUL CLAUDEL. By Mary Ryan. (Cork University Press; Oxford: B. H. Blackwell; 7s. 6d.)

Professor Mary Ryan has read and pondered every line of lyric verse that Claudel has written, as well as his plays and essays. She has the information needed to make him known to English-speaking readers, and there must be few thoughts and sentiments of his that are not to be found set down somewhere within her pages. Her book is the first general study of the poet to appear in English. Its title, however, is deceptive for it excludes direct consideration of his dramas and essays, confining itself to his life and lyric poetry.

It may be true that, for a comprehensive view of him as a thinker, as distinct from a poet and artist, his lyrical poems suffice; it is nevertheless an incomplete Claudel who is thus presented. This is all the more regrettable since some of his finest lyricism occurs in his plays; he has, for instance, no finer lyric sweep than Anne Vercors's speech at the beginning of the last scene in *L'Annonce faite à Marie*.

In her last chapter the author says:

'We have studied, and we hope we have inclined others to read and re-read, so many poems of Claudel that we know his familiar themes and something of his treatment of them.'

His themes, indeed, we know, but not his treatment. Professor Ryan tells us that she has dwelt less on his form than on his ideas since the readers who do not know French for whom she is writing would not be interested in that aspect of his work. Her method of exposition has been, after a chapter about his life and another devoted to commenting on the difficult *Art poétique*—a work of criticism which no one, in our opinion, has yet succeeded in making perfectly intelligible—to take the chief volumes of his poetry and to describe many of the poems in each one. The poems are presented through a mixture of summary and paraphrase, with liberal quotations in English and references to the favourable opinions of other critics. It is a method which quickly becomes tiresome and palls through its insistence on detail. The magnificence of Claudel slips through the meshes of Professor Ryan's net and she catches only what could have been said in prose. Her book is a repertory of what Claudel thinks and of the subjects that enter into his poems; she never grasps the essence of his art or makes us realise his greatness.

Throughout her study there is little change of emphasis. Everything is bathed in the same rather neutral light, which neither glows nor

warms. Everything that Claudel has written, everything said about him, is presented as equally important. Moreover, no one who read this book would ever guess that Claudel had been sometimes criticised. Yet even Catholic writers like Père de Tonquédec have found serious shortcomings in him. To recognise inequalities inevitable in the work of so fertile a writer would have made it easier to apprehend his output as a whole. Moreover, Professor Ryan keeps all the time very close to her subject, tracing her pen over it word by word, so to speak; she never steps back to see it from further away in its total bulk and shape. Yet Claudel's work is monumental, not because of the dimensions of any single poem or play, not even *Le Soulier de Satin*, but because of the coherence and fidelity with which the same great themes, the same great symbols of tree and season, sky and sea, recur throughout his fifty years and more of creation. Professor Ryan is certainly sensitive to this aspect of her hero and one regrets that she has not given more space to bringing it out, even if this meant the sacrifice of pages of uncritical descriptive summary and paraphrase. Her book, with its series of monotoned analyses of poem after poem, is like an interminable rosary of undifferentiated *Aves* without *Credo*, *Paters* or *Glorias*, without even a *Salve Regina* or *Sub tuum* at the end, since her last chapter, entitled *A summing-up*, consists merely in a few loosely linked remarks, variegated by quotations from the poet and his eulogists, and is not in any way a conclusion.

The professor makes little reference to what is outside Claudel and particularly to the non-Catholic world in which he, like all of us, has lived and in which his work is situated. One who knew him only through her pages would come away with the impression that he was a Catholic poet for Catholic readers, and for no others. He, who embraces so much of creation in his scope, is unwittingly reduced to the status of literature for the Catholic fireside. The author has said more than once that his themes are comprehensive and varied; yet the result of her method of presenting him is that one feels he can have no message for those outside the fold and that his work is just a nice-little-tight-little island. Though so encyclopaedically dissected, he is thus in the long run woefully diminished.

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WAR AND HUMAN PROGRESS: An Essay on the Rise of Industrial Civilisation. By John U. Nef. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 35s.)

'During the war of 1939-45 the tragedy of Lisbon [the earthquake of 1755] became almost a weekly occurrence. It was brought about, not by nature, but by man. . . . Fathers and mothers have always been reluctant to entrust their children with knives or guns. But