

Mr Brennan, thank God, is not the man to be unaware of that.

EDWARD SARMIENTO

THOUGHT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY. By Raymond Tschumi. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 18s.)

The author's analysis of the works of five contemporary poets has a two-fold theme; the first strand is the difference between poetical and philosophical thought, the second is the kinship of the thought in their poetry with the positions of corresponding philosophies. The proper investigation of each would require a separate book, and the present one suffers from this fluctuation of interest. But there are other more serious criticisms. The terminology is often too loose; for example, in the following quotation, the use of the word 'thought' is awkward and ambiguous:—

'Poetical thought is neither an unnecessary ornament of philosophy nor an impure element of poetry, but a balance between thought and image . . .' (p. 18.)

A similar uncertainty appears also in the use of the word 'idea'. It seems to betray an uncertainty in the author's own mind as to the true ground of difference between poetical and philosophical thought and ideas. 'Although some ideas find no place in poetry, while other ideas are not philosophical, the difference between philosophical and poetical thought is a difference of quality rather than of medium'; for this difference of quality is due to the fact that 'certain ideas stir the imagination and the feelings, others are neutral'. (p. 15.)

There are several things to be said to this. First, the question of medium is not unimportant, for the first obvious difference between poetry and philosophy is that in the former the words, their sound and their ordering have an independent value; in the latter they are mere instruments. This is noted by the author on the first page of the Introduction, in a very significant quotation from Eliot; but it seems from then on to be disregarded, and it would, in addition, make unnecessary the consideration of Herbert Read. Secondly, the ideas of which the author speaks, abstract ideas, are differentiated as suitable for poetry or philosophy by their ability or inability to stir the imagination and the feelings. But this is the outlook of the orator; the poet is not dealing with ideas but with images; in poetry it is the stirring of the imagination which draws in the ideas. Thirdly therefore, though it is not the same thing to distinguish poetry from philosophy and to distinguish poetical thought from philosophical, even in distinguishing the latter the difference of medium is an indication of the true ground of difference which is that the thought of the poet is subordinated to the primary imaginative drive.

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What, then, are we to understand by poetical thought? One can only say that in both poetry and philosophy the same elements may be present materially: the sound of the words, their ordering, imagery and an intellectual content given in and through the lower strata. In philosophy all is ordered to the intellectual content; in poetry all is ordered, even the intellectual element, to the imaginative conception, itself partly a thing of the inward ear, partly of the imagination proper. The two questions which require further discussion are, first, the nature of this intellectual element as it occurs in a poem, and, secondly, whether, if we understand 'thought' of what is intelligible, it is right to speak of poetical thought at all. Does the poet in seeking to express an imaginative conception convey an intelligible meaning which cannot be conveyed through philosophy, the proper medium? The author thinks so, and it is a widely held position today; but it needs a fuller and clearer discussion than he gives it.

The larger part of the book is devoted to individual poets, Yeats, Edwin Muir, Eliot, Herbert Read, and C. Day Lewis, and here the author is more at home. It would perhaps have been better not to have tried to give an outline of all the philosophical poetry of each, but to have discussed more thoroughly, beginning in each case with the physical medium, one or two of the more typical and successful poems of each. But in the course of his investigation he has many interesting and stimulating things to say; it is good to see the 'metaphysical parables' of Edwin Muir receiving attention.

B.W.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE. By Hugh Braun. (Faber and Faber; 42s.)

The origins of the medieval architecture of Western Europe have been extensively explored in the last half-century, and various scholars, notably Lethaby and Strzygowski, have demonstrated the importance of Eastern influences. One result of these researches has been a gradual change in the terms generally used to distinguish the different phases of development. But the very nature of such development, dependent as it is upon so many and various cultural influences, makes impossible any precision in the choice and use of these terms; and no useful purpose can be served by an attempt to impose new and alternative ones, particularly on the evidence of unsupported opinions such as those expressed by Mr Braun in his latest book. Few historians will, for instance, agree that the 'piratical' Norman invader contributed nothing to the development of our architecture, or that the architecture of Western Europe is entirely derived from Byzantine influence.

In the first five chapters the author gives some account of the origins