

Henry Lüdeke, *Geschichte der amerikanischen Literatur*. (Zweite, neubearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage. Francke Verlag, Bern—München 1963, 544 S.)

This revised and enlarged edition of Henry Lüdeke's *History of American Literature* (originally published in 1952), was completed shortly before the author's death. Perhaps for this reason the *Epilogue*, dealing with the most prominent writers of the more recent years, does not offer the same exhaustive survey of the whole field of literature which we find in the main body of the work. We miss, for example, any reference to such important writers as Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac — or indeed to any of the Beat Generation — nor is there mention of such a typical figure in contemporary journalistic criticism as, say, Mary McCarthy. This objection, however, it must be emphasized, applies in general only to the conclusion of the book. The main body of the work provides a solid and reliable introduction not only to the principal figures of American literature but also to the many minor writers who make up the sum of the specific American national tradition in literature.

The author's wide reading, in fiction, poetry, criticism and history, has resulted in a book which is much more than a text-book of literary history, and not unworthy of that American tradition of a wide-ranging historical approach which sees literature as the product and reflection of a particular way of life. Lüdeke's main debt is to the fine tradition of American literary scholarship represented by Parrington, and in fact we may say that he takes his stand on the side of Parrington's thorough, socially and sociologically based analytical method as against the more colourful but less accurate impressionism of the later Van Wyck Brooks (p. 392).

The fruit of extensive reading and intimate knowledge of American literature and life — the author spent much of his youth in the USA — is shown admirably in his masterly summing-up of Edgar Allan Poe, who has remained for so many critics and historians a problematical, if not incomprehensible figure. "The amalgamation of Beauty and Truth, which forms the basis of romantic aesthetics, was dissolved by Poe, and he pronounced Beauty alone to be the aim of art", is an example of the keen and clear insights which make the present work much more than a compilation of generally known facts. An especially interesting feature of the chapter on New England and Transcendentalism is the clarification of the debt of mid-19th-century American thought to German academic culture. The formulation of the difference between Poe and Hawthorne suggests a satisfactory explanation of the increasing respect paid by modern critics to the artistry of the latter. To many readers, however, the assessment of *The Marble Faun* as Hawthorne's greatest work will seem a strange and questionable critical opinion. On the other hand, the placing of writers such as Longfellow or Howells shows a fine sense of proportion. Perhaps the bias towards a sociological, socially oriented standard of criticism rather than one emphasizing aesthetic analysis is indicated in Lüdeke's pronouncement on Henry James to the effect that James remained a stranger to both American and English society, and felt completely at home "only in a fantastic region between and above these realities" (p. 256). Nevertheless he pays full tribute to the masterly technique of James and makes the excellent observation that the degree of attention required from the reader is one which was hitherto demanded by only the highest poetry. Generally speaking, the more specific analysis of some of the most significant works of literature would have been an appropriate counterbalance to the broad survey of social tendencies and attitudes which is the main feature of Lüdeke's work. One feels, for example, that a closer analysis of *Huckleberry Finn* would have added depth to the pages on Mark Twain and shown that the structure of the novel is not as "weak" as Lüdeke thinks (p. 274).

The author's comprehension of the part played in American life and literature by the ruthless expansion of American capitalism is sound, but his picture of John Pierpont Morgan as a full-blooded but benevolent millionaire is surely somewhat sentimental. This is one detail which confirms the impression that in the latter part of the book Lüdeke's analysis of the later development of American literature tends more to the generally accepted, "official" and less profound judgments than in the earlier sections, where he had the support of the trenchant social analysis of Parrington and others. No mention, for example, is made of such a significant figure as John Reed, and the otherwise full survey of periodicals ignores *Mainstream*, certainly not the least valuable of the "little reviews".

In spite of certain inadequacies of coverage and limitations of outlook, this book is an eloquent survey and characterization of the main trends in the development of American literature and succeeds well in conveying to the reader what it is that constitutes the

individual, independent literary of the United States. At times the authors is particularly happy in hitting on illuminating formulations.

Jessie Kocmanová

John P r e s s, **The Chequer'd Shade**. Reflections on Obscurity in Poetry. (Oxford University Press, London 1963, 229 pp.)

Modern poetry makes heavy demands on its readers and it is, therefore, often characterized as obscure. Some think this is sufficient reason for completely refusing it, while others suppose that obscurity is one of the features necessary for its being; consequently, it is not to be wondered at that the distance between the poet and his readers has increased so much during this century. Mr. Press is right in finding both of these views unacceptable and he tries to explain what the real meaning of obscurity in poetry is and how to understand it. Using the vast material taken from the history of English poetry, Mr. Press shows that no significant and at present widely read English poet was considered to be clear in his time. Consequently, the first step to the understanding of poetry must be made by the reader, who by his own mental alertness must get into the linguistic peculiarities of the poet, into the world of his thought with its background, in short, the reader must bring his mind as near to that of the poet as possible. But even the reader coping with these obstacles will always find poetry to same extent obscure. In this case, the obscurity has its roots in the poet's mind, in the unique world of his unique experience and thought. Moreover, this uniqueness is very closely connected with the complexity of the modern world in which the situation of man is neither simple nor unambiguous. A poem that wants to tell something about this situation, therefore, cannot be simple either. But the main reason for obscurity in poetry is the fact that poetry has both intellectual and emotional components the latter of which admits the illogicality. The relative obscurity of poetry is to be considered its indispensable feature.

In the face of some contemporary poetic experiments (recently summed up in the two special numbers of The Times Literary Supplement) and theoretical work (Mr. Leonhard's *Moderne Lyrik* published in 1963 etc.) it may seem that the views Mr. Press expresses in his book are, more or less, conservative in character. This opinion would be rather superficial. Mr. Press is very well aware of the fact that for poetry experiments are necessary. But he also knows that the poetic experiment does not form the substance of poetry, that it is only an attribute devoid of meaning unless it leads to poetry. In addition to this, even in poetry the specialization has its limits. In saying so, Pr. Press refers to the over-emphasis of the imaginative compound of poetic expression, so fashionable in contemporary poetry. In this connection, he quotes Stéphane Mallarmé's description of his own poetry: "Mon art est une impasse." The late T. S. Eliot expressed a similar attitude when he wrote: "The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be... to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog." Undoubtedly, the chapter Themes and Images is to be regarded as the most important contribution to the discussion of the nature of modern poetry, although Mr. Press' views on poetry are exposed in the last chapter of the book.

According to Mr. Press, poetry is neither the reader's land of *dolce far niente*, nor the poet's means of expressing various irrelevant impressions, not to speak about the deliberate playing with words. He considers poetry to be a deep and intensive knowledge of reality which has both known and unknown regions; this particular feature makes it attractive for thinking men. For all these reasons Mr. Press' book is not only a reliable introduction to the reading of modern poetry, but also a keen analysis of its most serious problems.

Libor Štukavec

Søren Kierkegaard, International Bibliografi. Udgivet af Dr. Jens Himmelstrup under Medvirken af Kjeld Birket-Smith. (København, Nyt Nordisk Forlag 1962, 216 stran.)

Dánský myslitel a spisovatel Søren Kierkegaard není u nás náležitě zhodnocen z hlediska literárního ani filosofického a od doby, kdy se u nás vydával, uplynulo už půlstoletí, třebaže aktuálně studia jeho díla zdůraznilo v poslední době i UNESCO symposium k uctění 150. výročí Kierkegaardova narození. O to více proto vítáme Himmelstrupovu bibliografii, která chce být přehledem vydání Kierkegaardových děl a literatury o něm ve světovém měřítku a zároveň pomůckou pro široký okruh kierkegaardovských badatelů.