

the life of the mother and the health of the unborn child. In the face of such clear indications, further procreation seems to me to be an outrage against charity. Procreation is the first thing that God demands of any couple but it is certainly not the only thing.

It is possible that legitimate reasons will be misused, false ones created and an order of values developed which are so misguided that the Self with capital letters becomes the moral standard of conduct. If the refrigerator, the motor car, the continental holiday and full-time employment for the wife after marriage become the substitutes for children this is wrong and must be condemned. Far more often one is dealing with a conscientious Christian couple trying to know, love and serve God to the best of their ability. In this article it is suggested that given the right indications Christian marriage in these circumstances is compatible with the use of family limitation both temporarily and permanently as an end which is good in itself.

Dogmatism Without Authority

An examination of the critical method of

Yvor Winters

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This is the study of an anomaly, an inquiry into a paradox. It is an examination of how and why the apparently unexceptionable tenets and standards of one very distinguished literary critic can so often lead him to the most erroneous conclusions.

Yvor Winters is an American, a man who has had a formative influence on a number of young poets in the United States but who, until very recently, was almost unknown in this country save for a few of his stylish and fastidious poems which had appeared in anthologies of American verse. He is a great teacher, a teacher who has been honoured in a fine poem by Thom Gunn who has studied with him; he is also a self-appointed arbiter of taste who is spoken of by his devotees with an almost hushed reverence and awe.

Let us first examine Winters's credentials, his beliefs. In one very real sense, he is a Schoolman, a scholastic who rates human reason higher than every other faculty or function; but he is a Schoolman who pays homage to no Church, a man who gives allegiance to no established system but who creates his own fearlessly and sometimes defiantly. Winters is not afraid to be either didactic or dogmatic. Indeed, what first strikes the reader of his essays is, above all, the enormous assurance of the writer; there is no timidity, no demurring. The judgments are never tentative, the appraisals never ambiguous. And Winters is as confident and precise in his generalities as when he applies those generalities to particular poems or poets. Here is what he says about his own attitude to poetry, an attitude which he has never wanted to alter or annotate: 'According to my view, the artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience, by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other. The poet tries to understand his experience in rational terms, to state his understanding, and simultaneously to state, by means of the feelings which we attach to words, the kind and degree of emotion that should properly be motivated by this understanding. The artistic result differs from the crude experience mainly in its refinement of judgment: the difference in really good art is enormous, but the difference is of degree rather than of kind.'

The stress here on 'moral evaluation,' and on 'judgment' is modified by the inclusion of 'emotion' and, later in the same passage, of 'intensity.' We marvel, in fact, at the clarity and dexterity of this definition and our immediate response is 'Yes.' It is only when we examine Winters's application of his cardinal principle that we begin to hesitate, to ask ourselves either what has happened to the principle or when and where it was distorted or misapplied. For the truth is that Winters's bold, indeed almost noble, credo can lead him not only to the enthronement of literary nonentities but also to the following sort of comments on poets and poems whom we have rightly come to regard as very important if not actually great. Thus, of *The Waste Land* Winters declares, '... it betokens the death of the mind and of the sensibility alike ... being unaware of his own contradictions, he (Eliot) is able to make a virtue of what appears to be private spiritual laziness; he is able to enjoy at one and the same time the pleasures of indulgence and the dignity of disapproval.'

It is worth noting that in his study of Eliot, Winters is constantly playing off the critic against the poet, using Eliot's critical formulations

as ammunition to injure, if not actually to destroy, the poet's achievement. This fact gives us, I believe, an important clue to what is erroneous and misleading in Yvor Winters's own critical procedure; he is not only the supporter but also the victim of his own generalisations. He examines a given poem always in the light of his own preconceived definition of what a valid work of art should be like. He uses argument from the general to the particular, the method of the scientist and philosopher, in a sphere where such a method does not always apply, where the particular often stubbornly resists the general. This, Winters will never admit, and his own ease among universals is perhaps one of the causes of his reluctance. But let me take some more examples of what I personally take to be the faultiness of his approach. Of Wallace Stevens, he says, 'If Stevens's career had stopped with this poem (*Sunday Morning*), or a few years thereafter, it might seem an unnecessary unkindness to insist upon the limitations of understanding which the poem discloses; but those limitations appear very obviously in a few later poems, and they seem to me to be very clearly related to the rapid and tragic decay of the poet's style.' Winters has the wisdom and generosity to admit that *Sunday Morning* is not only 'probably the greatest American poem of the twentieth century' but also 'certainly one of the greatest contemplative poems in English'; what he is unable to do, or what his critical axioms will not allow him to do, is to see the development and deepening of understanding in Stevens's later immensely rich and mature work. Winters has decided that Stevens is a hedonist, a poet who is fundamentally frivolous, and nothing, it appears, can move him from the obstinacy of this appraisal. It seems almost as if he is unable to give himself to a poem but must always set some part of his response to one side, defining, appraising, often finally demolishing. Against a certain amount of evidence to the contrary, one is forced to conclude that Winters is fundamentally a destructive critic; he lacks entirely the sensitive integrity, the sheer love of literature which we find in, for example, F. R. Leavis, another critic whose emphasis on moral worth is quite as adamant as Winters's. In this matter, it is illuminating to compare what the two critics have to say about Hopkins. Here is Winters: ' . . . it would appear that the most nearly successful poems are the following: *The Habit of Perfection*, *The Valley of the Elwy*, *Inversnaid*, *St Alphonsus Rodriguez*, and *To him who ever thought with love of me* . . . I believe that Hopkins is a poet who will find his most devout admirers among the young; at the age of eighteen I myself was among his most devout admirers, but my opinion has changed with the passage of time.' Hopkins

is dismissed, in a tone that smacks both of condescension and of insensitivity, as a poet for adolescents, almost as a poet *manqué*; with a quite extraordinary wrong-headedness, Winters ignores the great sonnets, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and a large number of other poems which surely have more real claim on our attention than those which he cites. And does he really believe that Hopkin's complex and tormented mind can best be understood by those who are still in their teens?

How very different is Leavis's response to Hopkins, we can see from a glance at his essay on the poet which was originally published nearly thirty years ago in *New Bearings in English Poetry*. It should, I think, be emphasized that Leavis's close technical analysis of the poems is quite as searching as that of Winters; the chief difference between the two critics seems to lie both in Leavis's willingness to lay himself completely open to a given poem and also in his refusal to be dominated by his own generalities. Of Hopkins, he says, 'This poem (*The Wreck of the Deutschland*) was his first ambitious experiment, and it is the more interesting in that his technical resources are deployed in it at great length: the association of inner, spiritual, emotional stress with physical reverberations, nervous and muscular tensions that characterizes his best verse is here explicitly elaborated in an account of the storm which is at the same time an account of an inner drama. The wreck he describes is both occasion and symbol.'

Such criticism is both assured and tentative; we are able to see the critic in the very act of discovering and evaluating. We are given not simply the conclusions drawn from a particular literary experience but all the stages which led to those conclusions. This seems to me to be criticism of the very highest order—informative, appreciative and, above all, creative.

So far, we have seen in Winters's criticism the dangers of being too respectful to one's own literary preconceptions; we have not yet done much to indicate the cause of these dangers. It is not, after all, enough simply to say that Winters is applying a scientific or philosophic method to an order of things which is usually remorselessly unyielding to such a method. It is extremely difficult to find the weaknesses in his approach for the very reason that his prime generalisation about the purpose of poetry is, *in itself*, so exemplary. If we are to reveal the flaws in Winters's procedure, we need to examine his mind with a very searching scrutiny.

Winters abhors chaos and applauds order. For him, right reason is the final court of appeal, in art as in life. He is, in many ways, a Thomist

born out of his time. Much of his reasoning could be found in parts of the *Summa*. Yet Winters is also eclectic; he takes what he wants, what fits his system, from several sources. Thus, beneath the imperious and impersonal judgment, the cool, recording intellect, is a response which is quite as idiosyncratic and subjective as that which we find in much of the 'appreciative essay' type of criticism of the last forty years. Briefly, Winters is by no means so untouched by personal emotions and 'drives' as a superficial reading of his criticism might lead one to suppose. This would not, of course, matter very much if Winters were himself aware of his motivations and limitations. It is *because* he is such a master of the unagitated disguise, the voice that speaks without a hint of inordinate passion, that his criticism can be not only so persuasive but also so dangerous. The personal pretending to be impersonal (*and not knowing it is doing so*) can as easily be the cause of literary heresies and schisms as of theological ones.

Indications that Yvor Winters's literary criterion is not always so inflexible as it might appear can be seen if we note some of the forgotten poets to whom he elects to give special praise. For example, he compares Pound with T. Sturge Moore to the marked disadvantage of the former: 'But whatever the faults of Moore's poem, it is not a poem of revery; it is, like other and better poems by Moore and other men, a poem of meditation. Pound's *Cantos* are poems of revery and so likewise are most of Eliot's poems: revery proceeds by the random association of daydream, and possesses a minimum of rational coherence.'

This is typical of Winters's critical exposition and procedure. Note how one poet is played off against another, how one (Eliot) is castigated because he does not obey, according to Winters, certain obligatory rules for the making of a poem. Winters builds up a formidable edifice of argument and refutation which is all the more powerful for having a genuine philosophical basis. But his aim, ultimately, is to deflate. His critical apparatus turns out to be a rigid measuring-rod; nothing is itself but only what the critic wants it to be. If the particular poem does not have the required measurements, then it is rejected without any hesitation or reconsideration. Thus, although in one sense Winters submits poems to a rigorous analysis, in another sense he does not consider them at all. In other words, he never looks at a work of literature *on its own terms*; he observes always through the lens of his own preconceived generalisation about what literature ought to be. In this, he is reactionary and conservative and is not likely, therefore, to be one of those critics who will discern the merit in a piece of experimental writing or in any

other kind of literary innovation.

These are the limitations of Yvor Winters's critical method. It is only fair to point out, however, that such a method can, on occasion, yield useful and illuminating results. Winters is not always at the mercy of his own caprice. For example, when he comes upon a writer whose work does indeed suffer either from the lack of a living literary tradition or from the breakdown of reason (Winters's overriding obsessions), then he can pass value judgments which are not simply minatory but also fruitful; briefly, he can, in such a case, be of real assistance towards the understanding of particular poems or poets. I am thinking now of his essay on Hart Crane; the key sentences in this study are, 'Crane . . . had the absolute seriousness which goes with genius and with sanctity; one might describe him as the saint of the wrong religion,' and 'He was able to present the anarchic and anti-moral doctrines of European Romanticism in a language which for two hundred years had been capable of arousing the most intense and the most obscure emotions of the American people. He could speak of matter as if it were God; of the flesh as if it were spirit; of emotion as if it were Divine Grace; of impulse as if it were conscience; and of automatism as if it were the mystical experience.'

Here, Winters's ease with generalities is brought down to the level of particular instances—the only level, it might be added, at which literary criticism can usefully operate. It is true, of course, that in Crane he is fortunate to find a poet who happens to exemplify a general twentieth century malaise; but it is also true that what Winters has to say in detail about Crane's poetic approach is completely accurate. In a very real sense, the poet in question here fits the case and Winters's diagnosis of Crane is, consequently, both profound and sympathetic.

To say this may seem to be saying only that all critics have their preferences and predilections, that no critic can be 'good' on every poet. This however, in Winters's case, is not quite true. The grave disadvantage of his method is that he uses dogma as a damaging weapon against those writers whom he does not personally admire. As I have suggested already, he dresses personal prejudices in, as it were, impersonal clothes. And since he has a glittering intellect and a highly developed gift for polemic, he can be a treacherous guide for the unwary reader of poetry. His dogmas are, I think, more often snares than springboards. This can be explained by the undoubted fact that though Winters pays continual tribute to right reason, his frame of reference is incomplete; he is like a scholastic who only has access to fragments of the *Summa*. He twists the

thoughts and method of Aquinas to suit his own purposes and, at the same time, gains from association with Aquinas a didacticism that he has himself neither worked for nor justified.

But Winters does not accept the religious system from which the Thomist philosophy both flowered and derived its sanctions. He is, as a result, obliged to be his own absolute, his own authority. This feeling of absolute authority is very evident in the imperious, not to say arrogant, tone of much of his writing and it is interesting to compare this tone with that of Aquinas himself. Thus, in a lengthy attack on John Crowe Ransom, Winters makes the following observation—‘Of the inner life of cattle, we have, I presume, an imperfect knowledge, but Ransom is more or less plausible in assuming that they see greenery, for example, generically and vaguely, as something to be consumed. And yet *generically* would hardly seem to be the word if the cow lacks reason.’ And here is Aquinas doing much the same thing—namely, refuting the beliefs of a man he holds to be a heretic: ‘Apollinaris began by agreeing with Arius in holding that there was no other soul in Christ save the Word of God. Since, however, he did not subscribe to the doctrine of Arius that the Son of God was a creature, and since he recognized that many traits of Christ are proper neither to the Creator nor to the human body alone, he was compelled . . . to postulate a soul, non-rational and non-intellectual, which sensitively quickened the body and was the seat of the emotions.’

There is no ridicule, no proud scoring-off here; Aquinas is concerned less with refuting somebody than with arriving at the truth. He comments on the views of Apollinaris in great detail and with complete respect, and he presents his opposing arguments with humility as well as with infinite care. He worked from a system, certainly, but it was neither an autonomous nor a personal one; his philosophical procedure was related to, and indeed depended on, an external authority; thus Aquinas never felt the need to protest too much, to assert his own sanctions. With Winters, it is quite a different matter; he has taken from Aquinas everything that suits his adamant belief in the supremacy of human reason but he has, as it were, cut off the roots of that belief. Hence his continual asseverations, his endless self-justifications which take the form of attack and repudiation. If a poet or a poem does not fit his system, then *they* are at fault, not the system. If, on the other hand, Winters’s critical apparatus were set within a wider scheme of things, no such dogmatism would be necessary. In other words, he feels obliged to use poetry to prove his system. The poems, and the poets, must ad-

just themselves to fit the system and if they refuse, they are rejected absolutely. Winters is an Aristotelian, certainly, but he often behaves as Plato did when he cast poets out of his Republic.

Ecumenical Survey

ANGLO-CATHOLIC HOPES

Last year's Conference for the discussion of Ecumenical Questions was held at Gazzada near Milan from September 19 to 23. Over seventy representatives were present, among them many names well known in ecumenical work, including two English priests, a Dominican and a Jesuit. The general theme of the Conference was 'differences compatible with Catholic unity.' It met under the presidency of Cardinal Bea, and Mgr J. G. Willibrandts was in the chair. The discussions and conclusions of this Conference are not at present for publication, but it may be said that there was much scope at it for the frank expression of opinion, and the chief point that emerged was that under the unity of the Church's *de fide* teaching there is room for differing points of view and complementary traditions in both theological thinking and liturgical practice, not only as between East and West but also within the Latin rite itself. Cardinal Montini, Archbishop of Milan, visited the Conference, and Cardinal Alpink was also present at it.

Following up our promise, given in the Ecumenical Survey in the January number, we print here a communication from an Anglo-Catholic deeply interested in work for unity between her own members within the Church of England; and especially between Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals.

A letter addressed to Abbé Couturier of Lyons, and printed by his executor, makes clear that the resolve of one Anglican religious community to engage in conversations with their evangelical brethren was a by-product of his eirenic visit to that community in 1937. His interest in our Church was by no means exclusively focused on those of our tradition whom he charmingly christened 'Anglicans of the strict observance.' We had doubtless heard of the Abbé's own circle of priests and pastors which met, and after his death continues to meet, alternately on Catholic and protestant ground. Later one of us from time to time attended this. Any Anglican who did so could not but feel ashamed of our own failure to use the great opportunity that is providentially ours, of showing in our common life the deep harmony that should exist between Evangelical and Catholic Christianity. This harmony the Church of England finds, enacted