

Štukavec, Libor

[Press, John. The Chequer'd Shade]

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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.