

Editorial

SEVERAL of our articles discuss aspects of the work of Jane Austen. In the modern climate of levelling her work is sometimes regarded with suspicion by the doctrinaire student: here is a circumscribed world, here is social hierarchy — sometimes at its worst —, here are servants, here is no commitment to anything but the normalcy of accepted social and moral standards. It is a relief to read examination papers written by African students writing of what are to them classical authors, discussing the calm cool world of Jane Austen in, say, the steamy swampiness of Lagos or in the warm afternoon breeze on Legon hill in Ghana. They understand better the nexus of family arrangements, the need for sensible marriages, the range of social life within a rural community, the visits to distant relatives. And so their writing has an instinctive sympathy, a less inhibited response to Jane Austen's world than that of many a levelling rancorous eye. But they are fortunate in not having to make as large an historical adjustment to their assessments as some of their contemporaries in, say, Britain or the United States. This particular classic has distinctly contemporary overtones for them.

There is, however, a new life stirring in scholars' treatment of the ancient classics. The pedants have left *hōti oun* and *dee* and moved nearer the coffee table; some have felt the lure of archaeology; others are writing critically about the historical problems of the past (Peter Green's *Salamis* is an admirable example of the *genre*); and many are now writing about the literary values of the ancients rather than quarrying syntactical or grammatical fragments from outworn shafts.

All of this, along with the admirable availability of excellent translations, gives the reader an opportunity to enrich his imaginative experience of the past and of lasting literature.

One aspect of the classical tradition, however, which we seem to shun is rhetoric. Consider our politicians' speeches and search them in vain for the kind of oratory that made (whatever one's views of its arguments) Carson's speech on the Irish Treaty so

brilliant; or read Housman's lectures and weigh up a lack of similar brilliance in our present academic wit and skill. There are joyous exceptions. Perhaps Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is, intermittently, one of the better examples of rhetoric in recent times. But there is, generally, a dimension lacking which some young writer may well wish to fill, braving the present general distrust of oratory to bring us into a new awareness of the precision that successful rhetoric requires, precision in choosing the right word for the right place.

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