

# philippine studies

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## **Concrete Universal: The Verbal Icon** by **W. K. Wimsatt, Jr.**

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paradoxical effect of liberating thought. If rhyme and meter are set aside, one must find some other structural material that could achieve the same result. These poems, some without meter and most without rhyme, do not always find a substitute formula of control. And this is what we mean by a lack of form on the surface level of prosody.

But there seems to be a lack of form at an even profounder level, the level of organization of thought and of symbols. Most of these pieces are poems of statement — fragmentary, private little statements, charming at best, but never profoundly moving because never profound. Only one or two seem to approach that unity-in-complexity which seems essential to all good poetry, even of the lighter sort.

In an age when sophisticated writers pride themselves on their sophistication, it might seem paradoxical to say that the trouble with many of them is precisely that they are not sophisticated enough: for sophistication is form.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

## CONCRETE UNIVERSAL

THE VERBAL ICON. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. By W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. University of Kentucky Press. 1954. Pp. xviii-299. \$4.00.

Professor Wimsatt of Yale is a man of stature — in more senses than one. Physically, he is almost exactly seven feet tall, and his giant figure, as he walks or bicycles his way from building to building in the university, is a familiar sight in New Haven. Intellectually, he is a titan, as this book will amply prove.

It is a profound book: for Professor Wimsatt has the advantage of having been brought up in the classical and the scholastic tradition (at Georgetown University), and at the same time of being at home in the non-scholastic philosophical systems. It may well be that his best contribution to critical knowledge is his attempting (and to a degree achieving) a synthesis of scholastic and non-scholastic poetics.

Or more accurately, his best contribution to poetics is his approach to it, for he approaches it with an open mind, but with a thoroughly trained mind, a mind with a sense of both logic and history.

The first two essays in the book were written in collaboration with Professor M. C. Beardsley, at one time a member of the philosophy department at Yale. They refute the "intentional fallacy" on the one hand, and the "affective fallacy" on the other.

The intentional fallacy is the approach to poetry from the point of view of author psychology, a point of view embraced not only by the Freudians, but also by eminent critics with no Freudian bias, from Longinus in the first century to Croce in the twentieth. The affective fallacy on the other hand is an approach to poetry from the point of view of reader psychology, and it is the point of view not only of the absurd clinicians who seek to record a person's physiological reactions to art, but also of respectable theorists (like Richards) and of enthusiastic teachers or lecturers (like Saintsbury, or Quiller-Couch, or William Lyon Phelps, or A. E. Housman with his celebrated norm of poetry in the spine or the pit of the stomach).

Another essay in refutation (found later in the book) is the one on "The Domain of Criticism" which seeks to free the domain of poetry and poetics "from the encircling (if friendly) arm of the general aesthetician." Poetry is not precisely the same as painting or sculpture, and it is the general aesthetician's weakness that he approaches these arts as if they were the same.

The more positive aspects of Mr. Wimsatt's critical theory are discussed in several essays, of which the best known is that on the "concrete universal" —as good a definition of literature as one can find. Two essays in this volume will be of special interest to Catholics, whether or not they find Mr. Wimsatt's formulations thoroughly acceptable. One is the paper on "Poetry and Morals, a Relation Reargued." The other is on "Poetry and Christian Thinking." Both papers were first published in *Thought*, the quarterly publication of Fordham University.

If a disciple might venture to criticize the master, one might perhaps suggest the following:

First: this volume is a collection of sixteen essays previously published during a period of eleven years (1941-1952) and "largely without (the author's) planning that they should ever be put together to make a book." It is a valuable contribution to criticism to have collected these scattered essays into one volume, but it carries with it the defect inherent in all anthologies, viz. the book is not a perfectly articulated statement of the author's critical theory.

Second: short of this articulated statement, the essays could at least have been marshalled together more effectively. One regrets the order in which the essays are found in the book, although the author is at pains to explain the logic of this order. It seems to us that after the two brilliant refutations of the intentional and the affective fallacies, the third essay in the book should have been a positive statement of the author's own critical position. There are such statements in the book, but they are scattered; and the strategic third place is given instead to another essay in refutation (this time of the Chicago Critics) which, though an excellent piece of polemic in itself, might very well have been relegated to an appendix since it does little to advance a positive development of the author's theory of poetics.

Thirdly, one regrets the omission of the detailed bibliographical footnotes that these essays originally had in the journals or books where they were first published. Fortunately, however, such journals and books are not difficult of access.

Finally, one might perhaps venture (with some trepidation) to take exception to Professor Wimsatt's position on the question ("acutely posed by Eliot") of the allusiveness of modern poetry. Mr. Wimsatt seems somewhat rigorous in suggesting (if I do not misunderstand him) that allusions need not be traced to their sources.

The frequency and depth of literary allusion in the poetry of Eliot and others has driven so many in pursuit of full meanings to the *Golden Bough* and the Elizabethan drama that it has become a kind of commonplace that we do not know what a poet means unless we have traced him in his reading—a supposition redolent with intentional implications.

Such a supposition is indeed redolent with intentional implications in most cases (as Mr. Wimsatt illustrates, in another connection, by citing "the whole glittering parade of Professor Lowes' *Road to Xanadu*"). To trace every allusion to its source is a detective's, not a critic's work. Yet it seems to us that in some cases (notably in Eliot's poetry) an allusion cannot be understood unless recognized as an allusion, and unless its original meaning in its original context is understood. We have given instances of this in a paper on "Poetry by Allusion" (PHILIPPINE STUDIES I:223-235). In that paper we tried to explain the difference between the ordinary, traditional use of allusion and this new, extraordinary use of it, and we ventured to give this new technique a special name—"poetry by signpost"—because the whole function of the allusion seems to be to act precisely as a signpost, i.e. to point to some meaning in its original context which will throw light on the meaning of the new context. In that same paper we tried to justify the validity of this technique, although we questioned its fairness to the reader — for fairness is a moral issue, validity a rhetorical one. It may be that our theory on allusions, as presented in that paper, is itself invalid. If so, we have not seen a refutation of it—if indeed it is worth refuting.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

## MORALS FOR NEWSMEN

FUNDAMENTALS OF JOURNALISM. By Robert A. Kidera, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 1954. Pp. 129

This book, one of the few that attempt an introduction to the basic moral principles which should guide the journalist, reflects