

really, autobiographical, too. MacCarthy was a civilised man, and fundamentally a critic, a critic of life: a critic of literature, certainly, but of literature as an expression of life. He was, too, a classical critic, argues Lord David Cecil, in contradistinction to the romantic T. S. Eliot: "He examined literature always in relation to important and permanent aspects of man's experience, and estimated it by rational and timeless standards deeply grounded in the European tradition of culture, and not biased by the prejudice of any school or period."

That was how he examined life, too, but with added humour and tolerance for those things that were not absolutely unforgivable; and it is significant that he called one of his earlier books of essays (mixed, like this one) simply *Experience*. He writes with warmth, subtlety, sometimes an almost casual individuality, but all his casual words tell. He was a masterly reviewer, analytical, percipient: see, in this book (as Katherine Mansfield is so much in the air) the essay from 1921, entitled "A New Writer."

He writes with wit and with grace, with a play of light; passion infrequently spills over, but obviously he was a man of deep feeling. He was half Irish, half German-French, he could be engaged and yet detached. Here is a taste of his descriptive quality (it is towards the end of a Labour Party conference that he was "observing," in 1917, and pandemonium has broken out): "I perceived, as in the end did the chairman, who was as busy as a conductor at a Wagnerian climax, that Mr. Ben Tillett was anxious about an amendment of his. One of the small impressions I carry away with me is the picture of him advancing up the gangway, in a neat grey suit of remarkably smart cut, bawling to the point of congestion and with both hands round his mouth: 'Point of Order.' Suddenly he sat down, with the repose, I thought, of a man who has made a great speech." If you don't like that, read him on Ibsen or Shelley or the early history of the *New Statesman*. As a title for the book, *Humanities* could not be bettered.

—J.C.B.

#### SEX AS GRIEVANCE

*ADAM'S RIB*, by Josephine Langstaff; Allen and Unwin, English price 10/6.

THIS American book is subtitled "A Defence of Women's Sexuality"; it is far more a frontal assault on the male. While, on the one hand, any girl who does not *thoroughly* enjoy herself is in for a frightful wiggling from headmistress Langstaff, on the other, men are in any case the targets for an invective whose psychological origins are labelled plainly enough by the author herself. Her thesis is that it is only because of education and social pressure (in a man's world) that women are the passive partners. "No greater danger to satisfactory adjustment for women exists than the pervasive social view that women are automatically dependent on the motor activities of men." If women had their rights, every day would

(continued on next page)

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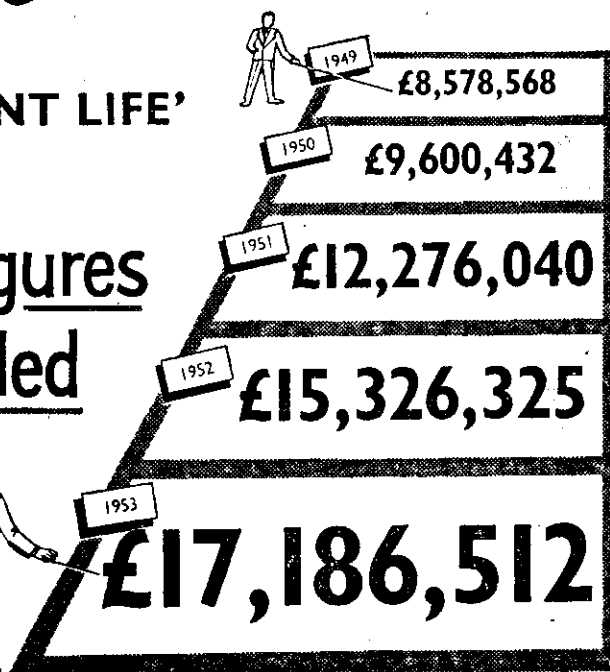
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