THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor: Michael Scott

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FURTHER TITLES ARE IN PREPARATION

THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

Donald Mackenzie

M
MACMILLAN

To my mother and to the memory of my father

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General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh, calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross-currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second

part the authors provide their own appraisals of the text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therefore hopes to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation in the critical debate.

Michael Scot

Note on Texts

Carew's Elegy on Donne is quoted from *The Cavalier Poets*, ed. T. Clayton. Donne, Vaughan and Marvell are quoted from the respective Penguin editions (see References); Crashaw is quoted from the *Complete Poetry*, ed. G. Williams and Herbert from the *Works*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson.

The Penguin editions modernise spelling: those of Herbert and Crashaw do not. Readers should note that this may have the effect of making the latter, and especially Crashaw, seem more exotic than, in their seventeenth-century context, they are.

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