



Conrad: disturbingly modern

is at the heart of Mr Watt's book. He establishes the use Conrad made of his own Congo experience, but much more importantly he places "Heart of Darkness" in the context of the ideological turbulence of the late nineteenth century: especially, in the growing awareness of the political and economic implications of the European scramble for Africa and in the disastrous contradictions of the Victorian religion of progress. Providing a sane, balanced, "fairly literal reading" (as he, a trifle disingenuously, calls it) Mr Watt rescues Conrad (and Marlow) from the charge of "admiring" Kurtz as some Nietzschean superman. Conrad, the ironic narrator, was well aware of the fatal attractions of atavistic repression: alas, lesser men, riding fashionable apocalyptic hobby-horses, have succumbed to the cult of irrationality which Marlow strove against.

After "Heart of Darkness", with its enduring indictment of western imperialism and its intensive inquisition into the bases of civilisation, "Lord Jim", the last of Conrad's nineteenth-century works, could seem something of an anti-climax. But in that novel Conrad is doing more than conduct an inquiry into the dubious conduct of an insignificant English seaman: he is examining the notions of honour and heroism, fidelity and solidarity; and he is exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the varieties of romanticism in nineteenth-century thinking. And through his deployment of Marlow's non-chronological, hesitant, questioning nar-

ration, Conrad gives full fictive expression to his "sense of the fragmentary and elusive quality of individual experience".

Mr Watt's book thus ends with a proper emphasis upon the rapidity of success with which Conrad had evolved his idiosyncratic narrative methods and had established himself, at the end of the Victorian era, as a writer of a disturbingly modern imagination.

The Englishness of the English

THE MOVEMENT: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s.

By Blake Morrison.
OUP. 326 pages. £8.50.

The very idea of "Englishness" is usually nowadays greeted with yawning indifference. Since the death of F. R. Leavis, no one person has the authority, or the audacity, to offer to shore up the crumbling dyke of Englishness against the rising tide of Americanisation. The very attempt smacks of crankiness and provinciality. To go by the eminently unmerited prestige of structuralism in the humanities and the remorseless rise of American studies within and without university English departments (to say nothing of the state of painting, sculpture and the cinema) perhaps English culture, like its beer, cuisine, hospitality, and so on, survives mainly as rather flat historical memories.

The Movement was the last—or at least the latest—cultural spasm of Englishness. Its principal writers (Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie) belonged to roughly similar backgrounds: English nonconformity, grammar schools, scholarships to Oxford or Cambridge and from there to lectureships in redbrick universities. Growing up in the 1930s, but too young to have more than a distant sense of the issues which were then agitating their literary older brothers in the Auden generation, the Movement writers came of age during and after the war against Hitler. They took their collective co-ordinates from Leavis and Empson in literature, and from Orwell (but late Orwell at that) in politics.

They came together over an intense dislike of the (momentarily) fashionable Apocalypticism of English poetry in the 1940s. When the Movement emerged into view in 1956, with John Wain's anthology "New Lines", it was already, as Blake Morrison acutely indicates, on the verge of losing its collective identity. The Movement was quickly swallowed up by another mood, the post-Suez anger of

John Braine and John Osborne, and as the writers went their own way there were frequent denials that the Movement existed at all. Mr Morrison reconstructs the whole range of social and literary attitudes which identify the Movement writers, and adds a needed chapter to the social history of contemporary culture. This book lacks the ideological edge of Francis Mulhern's "The Moment of Scrutiny", another recent distinguished contribution to cultural history, but Mr Morrison shares Mr Mulhern's exacting standard of research and astringent tone.

The Movement was stronger on prohibitions than on enthusiasms. Its writers were against Dylan Thomas, and, as a matter of principle, rejected romanticism. They were against modernism, and looked to Thomas Hardy and Robert Graves as poets upon whom an alternative tradition of English poetry might be based. They agreed that poetry which strayed too far towards transcendent, mystical or overtly political modes was to be avoided. (In later years Messrs Larkin, Amis and Davie have written powerful political poems, but they were right-wing poems and so were acceptable.) Philip Larkin wrote that "poetry is an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are". The tradition of the poet as seer, *voyant* or prophet was rejected; they sought a poet who was a responsible citizen. So much, then, for Blake, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Whitman.

Mr Morrison deftly situates the Movement within a literary context, but might have made more of the originality and narrowness of its members' conception of Englishness. To thriller writers between the wars, Englishness had virtually talismanic powers. A foreigner would give himself away by the tremor of a jaw, a hooded look about the eye, the cut of a jacket. However misguidedly dosing while malefactors were at work, that particular and popular form of Englishness was a fearsome giant when aroused. The Englishness of the Movement was more complacent, and, in a curious combination, more aggressive in its complacency than anything which Sapper or John Buchan would have recognised.

It is more than enjoyable to find the Movement's first serious historian regarding them as "older men" scornful of change. But what are the alternatives? Mr Morrison remains sceptical of the more hysterical outbursts of the Movement writers, but refrains from offering alternatives in either politics or in poetry. Such matters are quite properly left for another occasion, but the question remains. If the Movement is, for a wide variety of reasons, that part of the current literary situation which younger writers have to clear away, what is left of Eng-