

other new approach but a laying of foundations for our unfettered enjoyment of Wordsworth as a poet.

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LITERARY ESSAYS OF EZRA POUND. Edited with an Introduction by T. S. Eliot. (Faber, 30s.)

'Whatever Dante's symboligating propensities', we read on page 181 of this selection, 'he was a positivist in his craft, in this he was a *fabbro*, and one respecting the craft and the worker.' For 'Dante' we might fairly read 'Pound': his interest in other men's work (as T. S. Eliot explains in the Introduction) is always, when he is at his typical best, that of the contemporary 'craftsman'. 'Criticism', he observes (p. 4), 'is not a circumscription or set of prohibitions. It provides fixed points of departure. It may startle a dull reader into alertness. That little of it which is good is mostly in stray phrases, or if it be an older writer helping a younger it is in great measure but rules of thumb, cautions gained by experience.' Behind the eccentric dilettantism, the pervasive manner of Continental *grand maître* crossed with American professor, there is seriousness and devotion; they are very evident in the fine early piece *The Serious Artist* (1913), reprinted here.

Pound's 'symboligating propensities', which notoriously bring out the less attractive aspects of his personality, are not to the fore in this selection, which is designed rather to represent the scale and range of his achievement in literary criticism; perhaps it does so even too generously, for some of the minor items, such as the early review of D. H. Lawrence's poems, were not worth reprinting. Doubtless to remark that all the essays are very 'dated' is, in a way, to pay an incidental tribute to Pound; it could be a means of saying that what good work they could do has been done, their contribution is assimilated. But on that account alone it is not possible to agree with Mr Eliot (p. xiii) that they form 'the *least dispensable* body of critical writing in our time'; not in the sense in which he means it; their importance is historical only. And there are other, graver, reasons for dissenting. Is not Ezra Pound largely disqualified as a critic? Not so much by his irresponsibility; still less by his famous howlers; but by a failure at the centre, his conception of 'technique' in literature—external, and at times painfully naïve, as it is.

A Yeats or an Eliot perhaps could learn, and did learn, from Pound's criticism. But its influence on the humbler student of poetry, whether poet or not, might well only serve to confirm and consolidate misconceptions about 'form', 'style', 'content', etc.—which are quite active and mischievous enough already. Mr Eliot, defending Pound as a great critic, the compeer of Johnson and Coleridge, favourably contrasts his approach with the academic; but the academic

approach at its worst could find much warrant and backing in the volume Mr Eliot is introducing: not least in the tolerance of charlatanism which we see so often, and so significantly, extended in its pages.

However, those who agree with Mr Hugh Kenner that the *Cantos* is a great modern epic will not be convinced by this, nor will those (if they make up a different class) who agree with Pound that the only alternative to his method is the earnest pondering of 'Jojo's opinion of Jimjim's explanation of Shakespeare' (p. 66), to the neglect of poetry.

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THE NEW TOWER OF BABEL. By Dietrich von Hildebrand. (P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York; \$3.)

This is a very impressive defence of Christian humanism. The author sees the de-humanization of life as the great weakness of our civilization, and the root of this he finds in 'man's attempt to free himself from his condition as a created being, to deny his metaphysical situation, to disengage himself from all bonds with anything greater than himself. Man endeavours to build a new Tower of Babel.' The essence of this state is the loss of 'religio', that is the power which 'binds' man to something greater than himself. This is shown in the philosophical sphere in its extreme form in the existentialism of Sartre and in general in the rejection of metaphysics. For the rejection of metaphysics derives from the refusal to acknowledge the fundamental relation of the intellect with being, that 'naïve and immediate contact with being', which the author sees as the basis of all true philosophy. He writes as a Thomist, but as one who seeks not merely to impose a particular system of philosophy on the world, but to engage in 'an always renewed and continued exploration of being', 'to a full restoration of the "wondering" before the cosmos in its inexhaustible depth'. This involves not only a relation of the speculative intellect with being, but also a relation of the moral and aesthetic powers of the soul. It leads in other words to the fullness of personal being, to the discovery of all the riches of personal experience and relationship which belong to a fully human life. This flowering of the human personality, open to all the wonder of existence and deeply 'engaged' in its attitude to life, is seen finally to depend on the personal relationship of the soul with Christ.

The author's criticism of modern ways of life and habits of thought and his defence of Christian values is, as has been said, very impressive and deserves serious study. The only criticism which one is inclined to make is that the style is rather ponderous and uninspired, so that the thought tends to lack force and freshness of impact.

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