

other one smokescreen'. For Pound, genuine literary criticism consists in 'the examination and juxtaposition of particular specimens'—a strict attention to the *facts*, the words on the page '... to get at them despite the smokescreens erected by ... critics, ... despite the mass of dead matter that these people have heaped up and conserved round about them in the proportion: one barrel of sawdust to each half-bunch of grapes'. The reader seeking a genuine critique of the Cantos ought to be warned that Mr Watt's book contains eight brief quotations; eight grapes to a barrel of sawdust. Mr Watts has chosen to examine Pound's thought rather than his poetry, though Pound himself has warned that it is 'premature to mention my "philosophy", call it a disposition'. (*Letters*, p. 430.) Pound's 'disposition', then, is Mr Watts's subject, but I cannot see that he has anything new or illuminating to say. Those who have already read Hugh Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* or the collection of essays commemorating Pound's sixty-fifth birthday will find the present work superfluous.

Mr Watts's final judgment is that Pound has grotesquely exaggerated the importance of economics: 'No one can doubt that usury has contributed greatly to the inhumanity of the era in which we live; there are strong reasons for doubting that it is the only begetter of the evil which we know'. (p. 124.) This is well said, but it is implied that Pound's values are not sufficiently central, sufficiently human, to give his poetry universal appeal. This is not the case. Pound is following his poetic masters, Dante ('*Usura offende la divina bontade*') and Chaucer ('the cursedness of covetyse, that first our sorwe brought') in protesting against the rape of nature and degradation of humanity:

'Usura slayeth the child in the womb,  
It stayeth the young man's courting,  
It has brought palsy to the bed, lyeth  
between the young bride and her bridegroom.

*Contra Naturam.*

Every word here is *true*. The issues are not academic, they are poignantly human. It is a question whether Pound's poetry is not more fundamentally human, more religious even, than Eliot's. 'I am writing', he proclaims, 'for *humanity* in a world eaten by usury. I write for a cultural heritage that includes centuries of anti-usurious doctrine and results thereof in cathedral building. *Usura* was a moral issue, it was a religious issue. It is still an ethical issue, and religious wherever religion merits a name.' (*Polite Essays*, p. 55.)

J. V. CURRAN

THE MILLENNIUM OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH. Outlines of a new interpretation by Wilhelm Fränger, translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. (Faber and Faber; 42s.)

Illustrations apart (four in colour superb, twenty-three in mono-

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chrome excellent, eight figures in text sadly inferior), the interest in this volume is not aesthetic but hermeneutical: it belongs to the *marginalia* of social history in the late Middle Ages.

The author, ably seconded by his translators, ingeniously interprets, in terms of esoteric syncretism, the riddle of Bosch's Prado Triptych, usually known as *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. A wealth of curious lore, ranging from Pythagoras to the psycho-analysts, from the Veda to Novalis, is adduced to prove that the main subject is *The Millennium*, not in the chiliastic sense but as the way of life of a pantheistic Adamite sect, here, in the light of records of the trial for heresy of a friar at Cambrai in 1411, identified with the Brethren of the Free Spirit (pp. 16 sqq.).

There is nothing Christian in this altar-piece. Haloes are not worn; the Cross is conspicuous by its absence. The whole scheme fits loosely into the *Evangelium Aeternum* of Joachim da Fiore: 'the outside picture (pl. 5, the Third Day of Creation) represents the Kingdom of the Father that has already passed away' (p. 40); that of the Son, here identified with Adam, dawns with the creation of mankind (pl. A), while the Holy Ghost, symbolised under giant birds or a monstrous butterfly, vaguely animates the noonday realm of the central panel (pl. 14). Here 'at a first glance one is bewildered by the multiplicity of swarming figures . . . all apparently engaged in the ritual of a single strange erotic cult' (p. 103). In the middle distance a mad hymeneal cavalcade wheels around an oval pool, beyond which 'shapes voluptuous in their monstrosity' form and surround the Fountain of Life. Everywhere forms, mineral, vegetable and animal, blend and inter-penetrate, the one differentiation throughout being that of sex. Behind and above the fountain, itself hermaphrodite, other and more ethereal symbols, among which the ICHTHUS, melt into the empyrean in allusion to 'Origen's doctrine of the return of all things' (p. 23).

Hell (pl. 7 (b)) therefore, instead of a place of eternal torment, is the way of the uninitiated. While the men and women of the central panel have, with few exceptions, accepted nature as it is and rebirth through an Adamite secret, the single monster in the right-hand panel (p. 9) is the individual rebel who by withstanding the universal life-force cuts himself off from the stream of being. The tree he crouches under is a parody of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden on the opposite panel (pl. A; 4 (a)).

Except in the Creation, the part is always greater than the whole, and though an occasional detail rises to Blake-like felicity (cf. central motif, pl. 19), the general impression of the 'chemistry of love' is curiously inhuman, suggesting silkworms more than 'quiet plant-people'. Yet though the imagery is based primarily not on formal but

on expository considerations, the drawing is masterly and the interpretative power of the painter amazing.

The extension to the study of orthodoxy of the author's plea that even the oddest sect should receive unbiased attention would have saved him from such unwarranted solutions as the ascription to Catholic Moral Theology of 'the Adamite sexual secret' brought up in the Cambrai trial. Inaccuracies abound. The printer, possibly responsible for *eschatalogical* [sic] (p. 23) is unlikely to have invented *bene loquere* [sic] (p. 21) or to have altered the name of the author of the *Evangelium Aeternum* from *Gioacchino da Fiore* to *Giacomo di Fiore* (*passim*). An old woman hailed as 'the Diotima of the Sect' in 1411 can hardly be 'identical with the celebrated Sister Hadewijch', *floruit circa 1250* (p. 28).

The author's special pleading for the *gnosis* of an antinomian sect embraces everything down to the Life-Rune or secret sign of the initiates. We might follow him with greater confidence into the by-ways had we not seen him trip up so often on the high roads.

DESMOND CHUTE

ADVENTURES IN TWO WORLDS. By A. J. Cronin. (Gollancz; 16s.)

The autobiography of a best-selling novelist who is also a doctor might be expected to be readable, and Dr Cronin's book is certainly that. Here is the success-story of a Scottish boy who, after a varied medical career, at the first attempt reached the heights of popular esteem as the author of *Hatter's Castle*. But the title of *Adventures in Two Worlds* suggests Dr Cronin's double theme. The innumerable admirers of the novels will find the record of his own experiences which he turned to such advantage: the South Wales colliery disasters, the fashionable frauds of Harley Street consulting rooms, the personal problems of his patients. But the second world is that of the spirit, of the Catholic faith of his youth to which Dr Cronin has returned with a new—and, some will say, with a curiously eclectic—understanding. 'Of one thing I am convinced: nothing, no philosophy, no power on earth will restore our shocked and shattered world except the teaching of Him who bore to Golgotha the burden of all mankind.' This autobiography, generous in intention if somewhat guarded in its revelation of its author, will reach thousands who are indifferent to an ordered apologetic, and cannot fail to touch the hearts of those who are capable of sharing in its deep compassion.

I.E.