

THE CASE OF MR. POUND

ACTIVE ANTHOLOGY. Edited by Ezra Pound (Faber and Faber, 7/6d.).

Serious discussion of this book must address itself rather to the compiler than to the contents. For Ezra Pound, at any rate, is a seriously representative phenomenon. How is it that the author of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, which is indubitably a great contemporary poem, can exhibit himself, in offering us a choice view of the significant contemporary developments in his art, as completely without critical intelligence or perception? *Active Anthology* does indeed contain Mr. Eliot's *Fragment of a Prologue*; but one good poem does not make a bad anthology better, nor do two or even three.

The explanation will have to be a potent one, for it is impossible to suppose that the author of *Mauberley* is, as a critic, congenitally impotent. Explanation would seem to fall under two main heads. Both, however, come within the inclusive formula: Mr. Pound was faced with doing for himself far more than even great genius can be fairly asked to do. In dedicating himself, as he so gallantly did, to English poetry at such a time and in such an environment, he might well find a certain swagger and a certain truculence helpful and even necessary. He might pardonably cultivate the conviction that he, championing his cause and his talent in a world of deaf, malignant and obstructive fools, could never be wrong. The need for some sense of a congenial world, some kind of group-solidarity, is irresistible, and he might be excused for choosing to associate with those who encouraged his belief in himself, even if it were by applauding and playing up to his more immature gestures and attitudes of self-encouragement.

A man who, being so placed, is also (and this is the second head) without an elementary apparatus of critical analysis, will be remarkable if he doesn't become to a damaging degree the slave of his confirmed immaturities and of his egotisms more and less subtle. It is no use pointing out to Mr. Pound any of the fundamental weaknesses of his critical positions: he will not listen or

look. Tell him what is wrong with his conception of technique—explain to him painstakingly, with simple illustrations, just how the inadequacies in analysis that are betrayed by his ‘Melopoeia, Phanopoeia, Logopoeia’ invalidate most of his subsequent critical offerings—and he will reply to the world at large that certain ‘young academes’ or ‘assistant professors’ carp pedantically at his lists of prescribed works or advocate the reading of books about books instead of (like Mr. Pound) the reading of poetry. He will never take any notice of the essential points. He cannot; he has become as incapable of disinterested re-orientation as the ‘bureaucrats’ whom he scorns, and the adolescent audacities of the public antics (and private ‘epistolary style’) with which he thinks to prove the contrary are as boring and as monotonous as the ‘bureaucratic’ decorum.

The contents of this anthology corroborate in a desolating way the criticisms one had to make of *How To Read*. The inadequate conception of ‘technique’ goes with a readiness to take general intentions (if the intentions are such as Mr. Pound approves of) for the achieved thing, however remote they may be from realization in particulars. This is the most charitable explanation of the inclusion, for instance, of so much nullity by Mr. Louis Zukofsky. The less charitable explanation is that Mr. Zukofsky is well known as an approved expositor of Mr. Pound. Anyone, it seems, however green and tender or hardened in wordy illiteracy, can become an approved expositor of the *Cantos*. We may expect Mr. Pound to find more poets whom he can expect to find interesting in ten years’ time.

Further, Mr. Pound’s notions of good general intentions are both inadequate and out-of-date. There might, for instance, have been some show of point in presenting William Carlos Williams to the British public fifteen years ago. But it isn’t the wordy debility of Georgianism that needs reacting against to-day. As for the inadequacies, they go with the inadequacy, exhibited in *How To Read*, of Mr. Pound’s notion of what a literature is.

Mr. Pound is paid the compliment of this attention because of his past services to literature (not that one can expect from him any but the routine response) and because he looks like becoming a serious nuisance. The difficulty of making a public for modern poetry is desperate enough in any case, and Mr. Pound’s encourage-

ment of the bogus will, now that the name of the *Cantos* is familiar to the Sunday papers, not tend to make things easier.

But the judgment of one who looks at the *Active Anthology* through bone-rimmed spectacles and over a stiff collar, preserving with academic fastidiousness the creases in his 'lecturer's pants' (see Mr. MacLeish in the current *Hound and Horn*), won't worry Mr. Pound.

F. R. LEAVIS.

LYTTON STRACHEY

CHARACTERS AND COMMENTARIES, by Lytton Strachey
(Chatto and Windus, 10/6d.).

This is a reprint of most of Lytton Strachey's journalism which has not already been collected. The essays and reviews which it contains date from 1905-1931. Most of them are literary (about Horace Walpole, Mrs. Inchbald, Fanny Burney, Voltaire); a few are biographical (about Lord Morley, Frederick the Great, the First Earl of Lytton). The Leslie Stephen Lecture on Pope is also included.

The whole book has considerable documentary value ; since it reveals clearly (almost naïvely) some of the fundamental characteristics of its author ; and, consequently, of contemporary belletrism.

First, for his style. This is, of course, 'impeccable.' It starts by echoing Browne. 'The end of Time is more favourable to epistolary immortality than its beginnings and its maturity: the barbarism of an early age and the unrest of a vigorous one are alike unpropitious to the preservation of letters.' Other peoples' cadences become less obvious as time goes on ; Gibbon is heard occasionally, and Johnson. Here is an example :

'His vehemence could be content with no ordinary moderation, either in the callous or the lachrymose ; and the same amazing force which made Prussia a Great Power created, in spite of incredible difficulties, in a foreign idiom, under the bondage of the harshest literary conventions ever known, that vast mass of