

the real thing in modern poetry have welcomed this pamphlet as making it safe for them to be quite explicit about the state of their taste. There has been a good deal of amusing explicitness.

Mr. Humbert Wolfe is certainly no professor, but his pamphlet on *Romantic and Unromantic Poetry* was delivered as a lecture at the University of Bristol. It would be profitless to display the opinions decked out in Mr. Wolfe's sprightly and whipped-up style ; it is less fatiguing to enjoy this artless artfulness, this innocently opulent development of the schoolboy's fine writing, for its own sake. After rushing us on an admiring Cook's Tour through the Georgian poets, Mr. Wolfe turns to make timorous and unrelated attacks on the modern 'unromantics.' He achieves some bizarre couplings—Allen Tate, T. S. Eliot and Marianne Moore are dismissed with the same robust curttness. There is a final conciliatory gesture to Mr. Eliot when Mr. Wolfe stoops to 'claim the best of the unromantic poets for the romantic.' He takes his leave with a poem of his own composition which he hopes will clinch his argument. It does.

GORLEY PUTT.

THE CHRISTIAN RENAISSANCE, by G. Wilson Knight
(Macmillan, 12/6d.).

As reviewer of *The Christian Renaissance* I am disqualified, if what Professor Knight says of a part applies to the whole and the book does not 'aim to convince the unsympathetic.' I confess to have approached with strong prejudices against the whole undertaking ; and my prejudices were confirmed by the assemblage of influences acknowledged in the Preface : Mr. T. S. Eliot, Mr. Aldous Huxley, Mr. Middleton Murry, M. Henri Bergson, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, William James, Mr. Max Plowman, Canon Streeter, Oscar Wilde and others. Mr. Eliot, I imagine, wonders how he got into this company. I am further disqualified by being no theologian, though a theological equipment is clearly indispensable if Professor Knight's enterprise is to be properly judged. On the other hand, I think it likely that a trained theologian would be no more sympathetic than myself, and unlikely that he would have the competence in literary criticism that is in any case also necessary.

So, pretending only to this last, and writing from the point of view of one who is grateful to Professor Knight for his services to literary criticism, I ask: How can so much original talent, energy and rare disinterestedness be prevented from spending themselves—as more and more since *The Wheel of Fire* they seem to me to have been doing—to no commensurate end? And I find the answer in a dictum of Professor Knight's own: 'To the true adept and initiate, nothing about poetry will appear more important than poetry itself.' He has spent a large part of his book endeavouring to forestall the criticisms that his method of interpretation might seem to invite, but he never squarely faces the important one: that is, that he has preposterously underrated the difficulty of relevance; indeed, that relevance might be—and in such an enterprise as his, must be—a matter of difficult achievement never seems to have occurred to him. 'Therefore the poet's sources or supposed intentions must never be allowed to interrupt or modify our interpretations'—this is a characteristic defence, but it does not meet the charge, which is, to adapt to him one that he himself brings, that what he 'will not do is to face the literary product.' So when he complains that 'we go on refusing to face the creative visions of poetry,' we reply that it is a question, rather, of asking who, in this kind of interpretation, the predominating poet is—the original, or the interpreter?

He explicitly exempts himself from critical discipline, the plea being that to analyse and check scrupulously would baulk and hamper the swift play of intuition, the immediate sensitive response, on which the virtue of his work depends. And one must admit that, in *The Wheel of Fire*, all qualifications being made, he is justified. But the plea is a dangerous one. Shakespeare's text he knows intimately, and it is a text potent enough to keep the interpreter's 'romantic consciousness' under some control. But with other texts he pays little heed to the 'poetry itself': it becomes quickly plain that the 'creative vision' we are most concerned with is rarely to be that of the poet specified.

It is significant that he should not question his ability to approach Dante and Goethe on the same easy terms as Shakespeare. Something of them, of course, will get through in translation, but Professor Knight shows not the least sign of uneasiness at having to rely on Cary's *Divine Comedy* and Professor Latham's *Faust*.

In the poetry of his own language his procedure is truly shocking: any text will do so long as it yields a congenial or convenient explicit 'content'; 'exactly the same experience,' he will say, quoting from *Paradise Lost*, 'is being transmitted,' when the passage he quotes (p. 132) proves, to anyone concerned with *poetry*, that Milton was incapable of the kind of experience in question. Worse than that, he seems to rely entirely on the conventional valuations, and will cap Dante and Shakespeare not merely with Shelley, but with the Browning of *Abt Vogler* and the Tennyson of *In Memoriam*—worse, he actually quotes for the sake of the 'content' some stanzas from the disastrously bad part of *The Palace of Art*.

He seems, in fact, completely indifferent about quality—realized value: the general paraphrasable meaning, if it fits the argument, is good enough. On page 40 we read, incredulously, ' . . . Kent in *Lear*, Horatio in *Hamlet*, Osborne in *Journey's End*.' On page 115 he speaks of 'Webster, who reached a poetic intensity and sombre magic comparable with Shakespeare's.' On page 116 we find: 'The Augustan period is, as a whole, clearly less intense, the imagination here is more relaxed: and its finest works in Dryden, Pope, or Swift tend toward satire, *a mode which* [my italics] . . . But when intensity returns, we have Gray meditating on a Country Graveyard . . .' Wordsworth's Immortality Ode is repeatedly appealed to, though the factitiousness betrayed in the style disqualifies the document as evidence.

I do not adduce all this for fun, but in shocked exasperation, for even in this book Professor Knight shows that he is potentially a fine critic of the kind that all along he has refused to be. Refused? I venture to ask him if it has ever occurred to him that there is not a paragraph of criticism in all the six volumes of Dr. Elton's *Survey of English Literature*. And myself I remind that the age of Professor Whitehead, Canon Streeter and Mr. Middleton Murry is an age unfavourable to the development of critics, as it is of poets. *The Christian Renaissance* is neither criticism nor poetry—Professor Knight, I suspect, will say it is some third thing, combining them, perhaps, and I can only reply that it has the disadvantages of abstract writing without the virtues. One cannot miss the genuine excitement that thrills in it, but, however intensely Professor Knight may feel, there is little that is intense in the book. One guesses that in another age he might have been a poet; but to be

a poet he would have to make himself more of a critic. In his Preface he invokes Mr. T. S. Eliot: let him read the essay in *The Sacred Wood* on Mr. Arthur Symons.

Yet there is something admirable about the very extravagance of Professor Knight's ambition. One cannot imagine Mr. Symons proposing to regard 'the whole New Testament as a single art-form of Shakespearian quality' or prophesying the 'advent of a newly Christianized literature and a newly poetic Christianity.' The courage and the energy are magnificent: is refusal of discipline their essential condition?

F. R. LEAVIS.

FILM, by Rudolf Arnheim (Faber and Faber, 15/-).

Film sets out avowedly to show that film is art; and the author concludes in the conviction that this is satisfactorily proved. It ends by convincing us that film might be (and occasionally has been) put to intelligent and expressive uses.

When he talks of 'the great American pictures of society life with their tremendously refined direction and photography,' we wonder. Our doubts have increased by the time we reach his chapter on Greta Garbo. (It is interesting in showing to what lengths the 'intellectual' cult of cinema will go, and the kind of psychological smoke-screen the highbrow will throw out to justify his own surrender to the onanistic flesh-and-underclothing motifs).

There is the customary failure to distinguish between technique and expression. When he is talking of (for example) 'the apparent alterations in size' (distortion, etc.) 'which might be used to achieve artistic effect,' he is worth reading; he is illuminating too in his discussion of the limitations of the montage theory; but when—to take a gross example—he discusses as 'art' how much more beautiful Garbo is under American arc-lights than under Pabst, there is an obvious confusion. He praises films which he should ignore if he is to be taken critically—*i.e.* he is talking about science (technique) when he imagines himself to be talking about art (expression). He seems reluctant to admit the power, æsthetic or anæsthetic, of sound. To say of the spoken word that 'all that can be said about it does not apply only to talkies but also to theatre' is, as I have shown in *Scrutiny of Cinema*, an elementary