

Miss Sackville-West also has been reading Eliot, and she too has feelings of superiority about him, in expressing which she archly contemplates an assault on laws less optional than the unwritten ones.

Would that my pen like a blue bayonet  
Might skewer all such cats'-meat of defeat;  
No buttoned foil, but killing blade in hand.  
The land and not the waste land celebrate.

Her credo is equally atavistic.

Though I must die, the only thing I know,  
My only certainty so far ahead  
Or just around the corner as I go,  
Not knowing what the dangerous turn will bring,  
Only that some one day I must be dead.  
—I still will sing with credence and with passion  
In a new fashion  
That I will believe in April while I live.  
I will believe in Spring . . .

The misuse of language could not go further.

G. D. KLINGOPULOS.

## MODERN POETIC DRAMA

*THE POET IN THE THEATRE*, by Ronald Peacock (Routledge, 10/6).

In this book Professor Peacock offers us a series of essays dealing with the relations between poetry and drama in the last hundred years or so. He has not attempted a comprehensive historical survey, nor does he restrict himself to drama in verse, and he is therefore free to concentrate on the significant figures. The authors discussed are chosen for their relation to the central questions: 'What, in the nature of dramatic poetry, accounts for its scarcity in certain conditions? Why did poetry come to terms with the theatre only in occasional flashes, and with the greatest difficulty, and in unorthodox ways, in the period under review?' The work of T. S. Eliot is taken as a point of departure, together with a consideration of Henry James and the Drama. This looks like an intelligent approach, and the reader's interest is further stimulated by a straightforward and authoritative style comparatively free from academic clichés and by the author's disinterested concentration on the subject under discussion. He makes first-hand judgments, takes for granted the importance of criticism, and seems to have no extra-literary axes to grind. These merits, though elementary, are not common, and they imply further that Professor Peacock raises a number of interesting questions in a way inviting serious consideration.

The most fundamental criticism seems to be that he has concentrated too narrowly on drama, not relating it closely enough to poetry as a whole or to the general state of literature and civilization during the period. It is, for example, an over-simplification to say that it was the prosaic realism derived from Ibsen, harmful as his influence may have been, which 'dried up poetry and style at the roots' so that the price paid for intellectual freedom was 'poetic life'. In English drama of the late nineteenth century there was no poetic life to be lost: its absence and the prosaic realism of the social problem plays are alike symptoms of more fundamental cultural disorders. I don't think Professor Peacock means to imply any such over-simplified view as this passage suggests, but a closer critical approach to the poetry of the period, non-dramatic as well as dramatic, would have helped him to bring out the deeper underlying causes. Similarly, the reason why he can see Eliot's changed style in the plays as 'a proper development and adaptation of his verse for the conditions of the theatre' is, I think, that he considers the dramatic element in the earlier poems mainly in terms of the creation of characters: 'After creating the "characters" of Sweeney and Prufrock and The Lady, it is but a step to Archbishop Becket and Harry Lord Monchensey'. But the most significant criticism of the verse of the dramas has been that it lacks the dramatic life of the verse of *Portrait of a Lady*, *Gerontion* and *The Waste Land*. This may be connected with the divergent development of Eliot's later poetry outside the theatre: re-reading *The Family Reunion* I feel that one reason for the unsatisfactory impression it leaves is its unsuccessful combination of a style which attempts to carry on from *Sweeney Agonistes* with one related to the very different method of *Four Quartets*. The inadequacy of Professor Peacock's critical treatment of poetry is seen again in his essay on Yeats, whose comparative failure as a dramatist is to be explained rather in terms of the undramatic nature of his verse than from any unpopularity of his symbolic technique or from 'the degree to which he sometimes refines away the material world in too many directions at once'. The objection to a passage of dialogue from *The Dreaming of the Bones* that here 'the poet flies too much in the face of the conditions of a spoken form' almost makes the point, but not quite. And a closer attention to the verse would, I think, have qualified the degree of superiority to Synge claimed for Yeats in his handling of the Deirdre legend.

The second main criticism of these essays is that they show no adequate realization of the nature of poetic drama in earlier periods. Not that Professor Peacock's approach is that of Bradley and William Archer: what I mean is perhaps most clearly shown in the following paragraph, which occurs in a defence of Yeats against criticism from the realistic angle:

'Drama had always depended on an action that took a natural form as it is observed in life. It seems almost to be a rudimentary condition of an art that is made up of impersonation,

of presenting a picture of body and speech and behaviour. The logic of appearances; the close analytical plan with its explanation of relationships; the exposition of character and motive within a coherent moral order; the observation of time and space as they are accepted by common sense—all this is the foundation of Sophocles and Shakespeare, of Calderon and Corneille, of Molière and Congreve . . . Here, moreover, lies the common ground between drama in verse and drama in prose'.

The implications of this passage are brought out a little later when he says that in Yeats 'action is not an end in itself flowing from and dependent on what we call "character"', and that with the special technique of the *Plays for Dancers* 'it is not only a question of stylization, of beautiful verse and design, supported by formal elements of chorus and ballet, ennobling an action from life'. One's comment is that this ennobling function hardly seems an adequate account of the 'stylization' of Greek drama, and that in Shakespeare at least there are several instances of action not 'an end in itself flowing from and dependent on . . . character'. Professor Peacock's remark on Yeats: 'The coherent action-sequence that illustrates essentially the *moral* nature of life gives place to a complex pattern communicating a spiritual insight' might be equally well applied to *The Winter's Tale*, and a recognition of Shakespeare's concern with 'symbolism' and his embodiment of 'spiritual insight' would have suggested standards by which to place Yeats. At the same time Professor Peacock is clearly not committed to 'realistic' notions in the narrow sense: in the essay on Eliot he applauds the restoration of conventions in general and that of verse in particular, though on the grounds that by their use Eliot has recovered for drama 'inwardness and detail in psychological portraiture'. In fact, one thing that this book illustrates is how far you can go in intelligent discussion of drama without taking into account the recent re-orientation in Shakespeare criticism; but there is a point where the limitation becomes obvious.

Most of the individual essays contain useful and relevant comments even where one disagrees with the general valuation. Professor Peacock overrates Eliot's dramatic achievement, but he gives a fair account of what was attempted in the plays. The essay on Henry James shows an adequate appreciation of the 'dramatic' element in the novels which appeared after his attempt on the theatre, but it follows the conventional over-estimate of the last three long works (can it really be said that as they get longer and longer they are 'more and more dramatic in conception and more and more concentrated'?) and the equivalent under-valuing of *The Awkward Age*. The relevance of the essay to the main theme lies in the fact that a sense of drama for which there was no room in the contemporary theatre found its outlet in the novel.

Professor Peacock then turns back to Grillparzer, as a survival of the last living school of poetic drama in Europe (that of Goethe and Schiller) and claims that he added to that tradition a new

psychological realism. He goes on to consider Hebbel's anticipation of Ibsen in *Maria Magdalena*, remarking pertinently: 'To begin to make tragedy relative is to begin eliminating it. The knowledge that "tragic" circumstances were fifty or a hundred years later no longer so neutralizes them'. The discussion of the 'Effects of Ibsen' is admirably direct in its placing of the whole problem-play tradition<sup>1</sup>—'a very powerful writer had a very wrong influence': what is not quite so convincing is the statement that the plays of Ibsen's middle period owe their extraordinary influence to the power of a technique built up in less limited forms of drama. Professor Peacock does not discuss *Brand*, *Peer Gynt* or the late plays in detail, contenting himself with the mere assertion that in them Ibsen is 'most dramatic and most poetic at one and the same time'. The short essay on Shaw is a fairly good appraisal of his methods and limitations, making quite clear the imaginative inferiority which invalidates any comparison (still not unusual) with Jonson or Molière.

The account of Tchekhov gives a useful analysis of his technique and a fair description of his effects, but the high value assigned to his work hardly seems to follow as a logical consequence. For me at least this essay does not remove the suspicion that Tchekhov's blend of satire and wistful pathos was a trick for having it both ways, masking a failure to reach a balanced attitude, an inability to resolve the emotional confusions of the ordinary sensitive person in the modern world. The presentation of him as 'a great idealist' is not convincing: 'Yet in the midst of frustration, even of comicality, these people are for the most part noble. Flat, bored, sterile, helpless, they never cease to break out in impulses towards universal love, happiness, the ideal, beauty in nature and beauty in man'. Lawrence, we remember, had a different word for it. Of Synge Professor Peacock rightly says that his art works within narrow limits and that it had little to offer to the development of drama in England: if he seems to under-estimate Synge's actual achievement it is rather by contrast with his high relative valuation of Yeats. The last dramatist considered is Hofmannsthal, whose most significant work is seen in *Jedermann* and *Das Grosse Welttheater*, where he takes up the popular traditions of morality-play and religious festival to express in poetry and ritual his religious and metaphysical conceptions.

The concluding discussion of Tragedy, Comedy and Civilization asserts that both tragedy and comedy have moral implications and that each is an element of civilized consciousness. It insists especially that 'moral assumptions are at the centre of tragedy', and that 'the tragic values are created by the philosophy and

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<sup>1</sup>Looking back now on the period that produced [Shaw, Galsworthy and the typical modern successes] it is incredible that it should ever have been called great'. The reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* seems to have thought that this was going a little too far.

religion of society'. A poet attempting to create original tragic values sacrifices 'cohesion and emotional unity' in his audience, and all pathological or exceptional cases lose their tragic power. The dearth of tragic poetry in our age is 'a failure of civilized consciousness'. There are a number of illuminating remarks in this essay and it will be found more useful than most academic discussions of tragedy, but less than justice is done to the religious element in the tragic experience, the 'breaking of the dykes which separate man from man', the vindication of life at a profound impersonal level.

It can hardly be said that these essays offer a convincing answer to the questions raised in the preface and quoted at the beginning of this review, but at least they make a number of relevant points and suggest possible directions for further critical enquiry.

R. G. Cox.

## GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

*APOLLINAIRE. CHOIX DE POÉSIES*, edited by C. M. Bowra (*Horizon*, 10/6).

*APOLLINAIRE*, by André Rouveyre (*Gallimard*, 120 francs).

Apollinaire's work is not so well known in England nor his reputation so established in France as to render superfluous a longer commentary than Professor Bowra's brief prefatory remarks to this first English edition. Nor are those remarks sufficiently cogent to answer any of the questions that arise from a perusal of this selection: 'songs which have all the ease and grace of the sixteenth century', 'alexandrines that will stand comparison with those of any French poet', 'the new nature of his material', 'his brilliant intellect', 'being quite free from any metaphysical or ethical prepossessions . . . Apollinaire relied above all on his sensibility', 'he wrote in a kind of ecstasy which made everything significant and exciting', 'the inexhaustible delight of living'—these are some of the things which suggest that Professor Bowra did not trouble himself greatly with definition in writing his preface. M. Rouveyre's long study might have supplied a need, but proved to be a tedious and uncritical hagiography. The portrait of Apollinaire (alias Wilhelm Apollinaris Kostrowitsky) as seen by M. Rouveyre and in the evidence of Apollinaire's letters, is not an interesting one, although he appears to have been something of a 'character' to his friends. 'Je ne prétends pas donner la clef de son être', writes M. Rouveyre. 'Il faudrait réfléchir longuement et prudemment pour en approcher. Encore y parviendrait-on sans assurance, car il était un homme mystérieux et inconnaisable. Il était aussi un dieu . . . La terre craquait sous la pression de son imagination. Nous avons craqué, parfois, tous deux, sous la pulsation de notre mutuelle action idéo-magnétique. Avec lui on