

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,
Scrutiny,
Cambridge.

Sir,

In your issue of September last, which I have just received, Mr. Ronald Bottrall replies to Mr. Mason, who had made what to Mr. Bottrall (and I must say, to me also) seemed 'a very odd remark' to the effect that Mr. Bottrall should have appended, to a poem called *Freedom Lies in Adaptation*, a note stating either that the author had, or that he had not, read *Little Gidding*. Mr. Bottrall says: 'the lines were, in fact, drafted in the autumn of 1941 and finished in their final form in June/July, 1942'.

I should like to mention that *Little Gidding* was written in the latter part of 1942. It first appeared in *The New English Weekly* in October, 1942, and I had not shown the poem or any part of it to Mr. Bottrall before publication. Mr. Bottrall in June/July, 1942, was certainly unacquainted with any verse of mine later than *The Dry Salvages*. And I do not believe that he could have seen *The New English Weekly* in October of that year. In all probability he had no acquaintance with the poem until it was published separately by Faber & Faber. Perhaps I should, however, add a note to *Little Gidding* to say whether I had or had not read a draft of *Freedom Lies in Adaptation* before composing my poem.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

T. S. ELIOT.

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

APPROACHES TO T. S. ELIOT

T. S. ELIOT: A STUDY OF HIS WRITINGS BY SEVERAL HANDS. Edited by B. Rajan (Dennis Dobson, 7/6).

Here, edited by a Fellow of Trinity, and contributed to by members of the Cambridge English Faculty and other respectable academics, is a volume of essays on T. S. Eliot, all treating him as a classic and an accepted glory of our language. As one contributor, Miss Bradbrook, indicates, such a thing was, not so very long

ago, hardly conceivable; it means that a revolutionary change has been brought about. 'How was it done?' Miss Bradbrook doesn't answer her question; but, while she slights one main part of the answer, her essay seems to me to illustrate the other. Referring back to the Cambridge of the nineteen-twenties, she surmises (exemplifying a tone and an attitude characteristic of her essay—I find them, I had better say outright, very distasteful): '... Mr. Eliot may be relieved that the incense no longer fumes upon the local altars with quite its old intensity ...'. I can only comment that a pronounced fume, strongly suggesting incense, rises from Miss Bradbrook's own essay, and that it is of such a quality as to give us half the answer to her question. (I find her style, which suggests the influence, not of Mr. Eliot, but of another Anglican intellectual and dramatist, Miss Sayers, corroborative).

For it is certain that a marked change in Mr. Eliot's standing followed the appearance of *For Lancelot Andrewes* and *Ash-Wednesday*, and that if so difficult and disturbing a poet is so generally accepted as an established institution it is for the kind of reason that makes a great many people (including, one gathers, Miss Bradbrook—see a footnote to p. 21) suppose that *The Rock* and *The Murder in the Cathedral* inaugurated a revival of religious poetic drama. The part played by Mr. Eliot's association with religious orthodoxy is to be read plainly in at least three of the eight essays presented by Dr. Rajan.

Yet Mr. Eliot would not have been there for Anglo-Catholic intellectuals as a triumphantly acclaimable major poet, the great living master, nor would the critical apparatus for confidently appraising and elucidating him as such, if there had not been, in the years referred to by Miss Bradbrook, admirers capable of something more critical than burning incense. And, I must add, capable of something in the nature of courage that isn't necessary to-day—an aspect of that forgotten situation not done justice to by Miss Bradbrook, who says:

'When *The Sacred Wood* and *Homage to John Dryden* appeared Mr. Eliot was still the subject of frightened abuse in the weeklies, and also in some academic circles. But his views percolated downwards, and are now almost common form. How was it done?'

That 'still' must appear very odd to anyone who recalls the chronology of Mr. Eliot's *œuvre*. *The Sacred Wood* came out in 1920 and *Homage to John Dryden* in 1924 (when in most academic circles Mr. Eliot's name would hardly have met with recognition). 'Still', I must testify, having the strongest of grounds for confident insistence, still in 1930 (and later), and in the academic circles that now receive Dr. Rajan's enterprise without a flutter, Mr. Eliot's mere name, however modestly mentioned, was as a red rag to a bull. I could tell Miss Bradbrook, privately, some piquant and true anecdotes in illustration. I will confine myself here to two

reminiscences of sufficiently public fact. When in 1929 an innocent young editor printed an article of mine on Mr. Eliot's criticism in *The Cambridge Review* (a reply to a contemptuous dismissal of him by a Cambridge 'English' don in Mr. Desmond McCarthy's *Life and Letters*) he very soon had cause to realize that he had committed a scandalous impropriety, and I myself was left in no doubt as to the unforgivableness of my offence. And when, in 1932, a book of mine came out that made a study of Mr. Eliot the centre of an attempt to define the distinctive aspects of significant contemporary poetry, so much worse than imprudent was it found to be that the advanced academic intellectual of the day declined (or so the gloating whisper ran) to have anything to do with it, and *The Cambridge Review* could find no reviewer for it in Cambridge. I remember, too, with some amusement, the embarrassed notes I received from correct friends who felt that some form of congratulation on the appearance of a book had to be gone through, but knew also that the offence was rank, disastrous and unpardonable. Yet the matter of that offensive book is seen, in Dr. Rajan's symposium, to be now 'common form'. How was it done?

I have thought this note on the development of a literary-critical orthodoxy worth making, not only because history will go on repeating itself and, though it undoubtedly in any case will, there is always some point in insisting on the moral as presented by the nearest striking instance, but because such an orthodoxy naturally tends to discourage true respect for the genius it offers to exalt—to substitute, that is, deference. True respect is inseparable from the concern to see the object as in itself it really is, to insist on the necessary discriminations, and so to make the essential achievement, with the special life and virtue it embodies, effective as influence. Of this respect Miss Bradbrook seems to me to fail.

She is not, among Dr. Rajan's contributors, alone in that. I read her first because so much, largely repetitive, had already been written about Mr. Eliot's poetry, and the opportunity, I told myself, still lay open for a first-hand attempt to appraise the criticism. My disappointment is the heavier because such an appraisal seems to me very much to be desired. It would involve some firm discriminating and delimiting, and until these are performed, the ambiguity that hangs about the nature and tendency of Mr. Eliot's influence must impede the recognition of our debt. It is a debt that I recognize for myself as immense. By some accident (it must have been—I had not come on Mr. Eliot's name before) I bought *The Sacred Wood* just after it came out, in 1920. For the next few years I read it through several times a year, pencil in hand. I got from it, of course, orientations, particular illuminations, and critical ideas of general instrumental value. But if I had to characterize the nature of the debt briefly I should say that it was a matter of having had incisively demonstrated, for pattern and incitement, what the disinterested and effective application of intelligence to literature looks like, what is the nature of purity of interest, and what is meant by the principle (as Mr. Eliot himself

states it) that 'when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not as another thing'.

There are few pieces of his criticism after *For Lancelot Andrewes* to which one would send the student of literature for such demonstration. 'When he stabilized his own style as a poet, some informing power departed from his critical writing. If for example the essay on *In Memoriam* be compared with that on Massinger, or the introduction to the volume of Kipling's verse with the essay on Dryden, it will be seen that Mr. Eliot has withdrawn from his subjects: he is no longer so closely engaged . . . ' Ah, if that were all. It seems to me, in fact, that Miss Bradbrook's handling of the change isn't free from disingenuousness:

'Mr. Eliot has apologized for the "pontifical solemnity" of some of his early writings. Nervous stiffness and defensive irony were inevitable in an age when "a complete severance between his poetry and all beliefs" could be imputed to him for righteousness. The later criticism exhibits rather a haughty humility—"The poem *Gethsemane* (by Kipling) which I do not think I understand . . . "; the implication being, "I expect you think it's simple, but that only shows how superficial your reading is" '.

To find the difference between the earlier and the later criticism in the disappearance or diminution of nervousness—that is to me an extremely odd achievement. Mr. Eliot's best criticism is remarkable for its directness, its concentrated purity of interest, its intense and rigorous concern to convey the essential perception and the bearing of this as realized by the critic. It exhibits the reverse of hesitation and diffidence; its qualities are intimately related to courage. I don't find these qualities in the Kipling introduction referred to by Miss Bradbrook. On the contrary, in that too characteristic specimen of the later writing the critic seems to me to have misapplied his dangerous gift of subtle statement to the development of a manner (it is surprisingly suggestive in places of G. K. Chesterton) that gainsays the very purpose of criticism, and to have done so because of a radical uncertainty about his intention and its validity. And is what we have here (from *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*) 'haughty humility'?—

'Mr. Housman has given us an account of his own experience in writing poetry which is important evidence. Observation leads me to believe that different poets may compose in very different ways; my experience (for what it is worth) leads me to believe that Mr. Housman is recounting the authentic process of a real poet. "I have seldom" he says, "written poetry unless I was rather out of health". I believe that I understand that sentence. If I do, it is a guarantee—if any guarantee of that nature is wanted—of the quality of Mr. Housman's poetry'.

It seems to me also that in Mr. Eliot's critical writing from *For Lancelot Andrewes* onwards a limitation that is (on a pondered appraisal) to be predicated of his earlier work asserts itself as a major weakness—a weakness of a kind that might seem to be disqualifying where claims to status as a great critic are in question. That the author of *Selected Essays* is (if not, where shall we find one?) a great critic I don't for a moment doubt. But if he is, it is in spite of lacking a qualification that, sketching the 'idea', one would have postulated as perhaps the prime essential in a great critic. It is a qualification possessed pre-eminently by D. H. Lawrence, though he, clearly, is not to be accounted anything like as important in literary criticism as T. S. Eliot: a sure rightness in what, if one holds any serious view of the relation between literature and life, must appear to be the most radical and important kind of judgment.

As Miss Bradbrook intimates, Mr. Eliot's best criticism was related in the closest of ways to his own problems as a poet—a practitioner who has rejected current conventions and modes as inadequate to his needs and so is committed to a labour of thorough-going technical innovation. Questions of technique—versification, convention, relation of diction to the spoken language, and so on—cannot be isolated from considerations of fundamental purpose, essential ethos, and quality of life. That is, one can hardly say where technical questions turn into questions that one wouldn't ordinarily call technical. 'The important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art, and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear on the solution of these problems'. The attention that Mr. Eliot's highly selective kind of interest (the definition just quoted is his own) directs upon Donne, Marvell, Dryden, Jonson, Marlowe, and the others, entails value-judgments. But it doesn't commit him to attempting any comprehensive evaluation or definitive placing. So that, by way of countering one's protests that he over-rates Dryden, one can adduce the very special interest with which he approaches and the strictly limiting end he has in view—one can adduce these, I must add, while deploring both the over-valuation of Dryden that he has certainly helped to establish as a fashion, and the attendant slighting of the incomparably greater Pope (without an appreciation of whom there can't be any but the most incomplete perception of Mr. Eliot's seventeenth century—the seventeenth century of Jonson, Donne and Marvell).

But the major instance of the limiting approach, the instance where the limitation is most clearly seen to entail unfortunate consequences, is what we have in Mr. Eliot's treatment of Jacobean drama. No one, I think, admires more than I do his contribution in that field, or can be more grateful for it. To appreciate it one needs to have started reading the Jacobean when the Lamb-Swinburne tradition was unchallenged, and no better critical equipment for dealing with poetic drama was to hand than that which has its classical exponent in Bradley. No doubt, had one

been put on to them, one might have found a tip or two, here and there, in scholarly sources. But only a fine and powerful critical intelligence, informed with the insight got in dealing with its own creative problems, could have brought effective aid, and it was Mr. Eliot who brought it. He supplied the equipment of ideas about drama, the enlightenment about convention and verse, that made all the difference. What he did not, however, do, was to attempt any radical valuation of the Jacobeans. The very marked tendency of his work, in fact (in spite of his admirable asides on Beaumont and Fletcher), has been to endorse the traditional valuations. (It seems to me highly significant that he has gone on reprinting that very unsatisfactory essay on Middleton). What he hasn't done, no one else has had the courage or the perception to do. So that, though he insisted on the need to distinguish conventions from faults (see 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists'), scholars who, stimulated by him, have undertaken to investigate the conventions have tended to repeat, in inverted form, the failing he notes in Archer: that is, to make everything convention, thus emptying the term of its force. To have acted seriously on Mr. Eliot's tip, and taken proper cognizance of faults, would have been to face the need for drastic revision of some consecrated valuations.

Here, then, is an unfortunate consequence of the special restricted approach. But restricted approach and special interest are not the whole of the story—this is what we are made to realize when we come to the later criticism. When the critic's technical preoccupations cease to exercise a close direction over his criticism, he gives himself a great deal more to comprehensive and radical value-judgments, and it is then that we have to recognize a fundamental defect. I myself see it in the essay on Tourneur, where he makes what is to me an astonishing reference to Swift: 'We may think as we read Swift, "how loathsome human beings are"; in reading Tourneur we can only think "how horrible to loathe human beings so much as that"'. The phrase used here of Tourneur is precisely what I should have found fitting as applied to Swift. It was D. H. Lawrence who diagnosed Swift's case so well, and who was so quick to perceive, and sure in placing, the signs of such malady as Swift exhibits in that terribly extreme form. And it is Lawrence himself who, as subject, provides the capital instance of Mr. Eliot's defect as a great critic. (Mr. Eliot himself, in *After Strange Gods*, concedes enough to place the matter above the level of mere difference of judgment). 'Against the living death of modern material civilization he spoke again and again, and even if these dead could speak, what he said is unanswerable'. Lawrence stood for life, and shows, in his criticism, tossed off as it was, for the most part, in the most marginal way, an extraordinarily quick and sure sense for the difference between that which makes for life and that which makes against it. He exhibits a profound, and for those who come to the criticism knowing only the fiction, perhaps surprising, centrality.

I myself think Lawrence sounder in judgment about the Joyce of *Work in Progress* than Mr. Eliot, whose ascription of importance to it doesn't seem to imply importance as representative disintegration-phenomenon. (That the inventor of Basic English should take a keen interest in the *Work* always seemed to me appropriate). However that may be, I am sure that so distinguished a mind as Mr. Eliot's ought not to have been able to take Wyndham Lewis so seriously, or find him so sympathetic. Then there is Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*: it deals, of course, with Evil—but surely Mr. Eliot's estimate of it will stand as one of the curiosities of literature. And to be able to refer favourably to Henry Miller—when I try to believe that some perversity of my imagination has invented this I recall, in detail, an unquestionable fact: the paragraph that finds promise for the future of English fiction in Lawrence Durrell's *Black Book*. The inspiration of these works, in so far as they have any, seems to me to be the desire, in Laurentian idiom, to 'do dirt' on life. And I have to record the conviction that the reaction against 'liberalism', or the world of William Clissold, represented by Mr. Eliot's critical writings is, at any rate largely, of the wrong kind. I put it naively no doubt, and I will go on to suggest that Lawrence's reaction against the same world (see his review in *Phoenix* of H. G. Wells and relate it to the *Fantasia of the Unconscious*) has much more of health and rightness in it.

In general where contemporary letters have been concerned Mr. Eliot's judgment has, it seems to me, been very much out—deflected by pulls and disturbances of various kinds. Yet in spite of this, and in spite of the radical nature of the major weakness that has been indicated, he remains a great critic. It is not only that he has re-orientated criticism and poetic practice, effecting a profound change in the operative current idea of the English tradition, and that in this achievement his critical writings have played an indispensable part. It is also that the best of those writings represent more powerfully and incisively the idea of literary criticism as a discipline—a special discipline of intelligence—than the work of any other critic in the language (or any in French that I know).

To this high distinction in criticism Miss Bradbrook's intentness on advancing unsustainable claims makes her incapable of doing justice. Thus she writes:

'His purely destructive work has sometimes been the result of some temperamental aversion. Milton has survived the attack of Mr. Eliot and the Battle of the Critics which it provoked. (Yet how strange that a taste for Landor should accompany a distaste for Milton).'

The taste for Landor always seemed to me strange. I could explain it only as a minor snobbism—one that was peculiarly unfortunate when it led to Landor's being adduced in illustration of impersonality. Landor's impersonality is that of the stiff suit of style that

stands up empty—impersonal because there is nothing there. For Miss Bradbrook, however, it is not the taste for Landor, but the critical attitude towards Milton that has to be deplored. Yet to talk in that way of an 'attack on Milton' ('purely destructive') that Milton has survived is to expose an inappreciation of what Miss Bradbrook admits to be Mr. Eliot's most vital criticism, to miss its force, and to deny the essence of that poetic achievement with which the criticism is so closely bound up. For poetry is made of words—words and rhythms, and 'sensitivity alters from generation to generation in everyone . . . but expression is only altered by a man of genius'. It was the informing presence everywhere, in the criticism, of the practitioner's preoccupation with his problem of putting words together—of inventing the ways of using words, the rhythms, and the versification, demanded by his essential interests—that gave his brief asides on Milton their potency. Milton is indeed still there, an impressive figure (in spite of some of his defenders), but if you can't see what is meant by saying that he was a prepotent influence in taste and poetic practice until Mr. Eliot's work had its effect, and has since ceased to be, then you are not really appreciating Mr. Eliot's genius or its achievement. And you make no real restitution by coming with this kind of offering:

'But in general, Eliot's destructive criticism has also anticipated the more general verdict, even as in the poems *Triumphal March* and *Difficulties of a Statesman* (1932) he anticipated the spirit of Nazi Germany and the spirit of Munich with prophetic accuracy'.

It is because I admire those poems so immensely, and think they have not had due recognition, that I feel obliged to say that this account of them seems to me deplorable nonsense—or mere incense.

I have concentrated on Miss Bradbrook's essay because, while it offers a representative opportunity for underlining what, for the reader who has lived through the history of Mr. Eliot's reputation must be the significance and the moral, there was still, it seemed to me, something that needed to be said on the criticism. All the other essays are on the poetry. The best of these are by the two American contributors, Mr. Cleanth Brooks and Mr. Philip Wheelwright, together with those by Miss Gardner and Mr. Mankowitz. I was interested by Mr. Brooks' argument against my view that *The Waste Land* 'exhibits no progression' (and touched, I must confess, by his generous acknowledgments to that pioneer book, written nearly twenty years ago—which has been honoured with more pillaging than acknowledging). But it still remains to inquire whether the intention noted by Mr. Brooks (see pp. 129-30) is anything more: is it operative poetically, does it become something realized in the poem? This kind of question is, in general, not asked by the contributors to the symposium. They build on the antecedent work of criticism.

And this is the point at which to mention the general tendency

in the literary-academic world to-day to substitute, the cue having been given, elucidation for criticism. Mr. Brooks's kind of elucidation has, I can see, a function, though I can also see dangers in it. The dangers are illustrated by that phrase 'death-in-life' and the part it plays in Mr. Brooks's exposition. By the grateful follower of the exposition such a phrase is readily taken as doing more than it does, while, in his sense of having grasped the 'meaning' of the poetry, he has grasped nothing but a phrase. At the risk of seeming egotistic I will say that, for unequivocal aid, one can't, I think, do much more than I tried to do in my own account of *The Waste Land*: commit oneself in clear and challenging terms to the necessary critical judgments, and indicate the nature of the essential organization.

It is when the elucidatory approach is Anglo-Catholic (or made from the point of view of doctrinal acceptance) that the dangers are greatest. They are apparent even in Miss Gardner's scrupulous and sensitive commentary on the *Four Quartets*. There is a clear tendency to frustrate the enormous labour expended by the poet in undercutting mere acceptance, inhibiting inert acquiescence, and circumventing, at every level, what may be called *cliché*; a tendency, that is, to abet the reader's desire to arrive without having travelled. And the separation from criticism is apparent in the references to *Family Reunion*.

Miss Gardner's essay, however, could for the right reader perform a useful function. But Mrs. Duncan Jones's commentary on *Ash-Wednesday* seems to me to do little but justify one's apprehensions about Anglo-Catholic elucidation. Starting with acceptance, it turns the poetry into something like illustrations of acceptances, poetical formulations of antecedently defined attitudes and beliefs. That is, it denies the poet's genius and deprives his poetry of its astonishing (and disturbing) life and its profound general interest and validity. She can say for instance of *Salutation* (as it was first called), a poem I intensely admire: 'The second poem ends on a note of absolute assurance and content'. To be able to say that of it you must, I am convinced, have missed something—something essential. And in general it is as if Mrs. Duncan Jones were saying what Dr. Rajan does actually say (p. 88): 'Mr. Eliot means what is meant by any Christian'.

Dr. Rajan does not, one gathers, himself write as an Anglo-Catholic. In fact, he intimates that he could, given room, correct Mr. Eliot authoritatively about Krishna. And one suspects that the qualification which enables him to do so may be attended with a disadvantage; for after all, the *Four Quartets* are extremely subtle and difficult, and demand for their critical appreciation not only good analytic powers, but as complete an inwardness with the English language as any poetry that was ever written. However that may be, in his essay we have the extreme instance of the divorce of elucidation from criticism. This divorce is not the less apparent for his offering a good deal in the guise of critical and appreciative comment. It is mostly of this kind:

'The confidence of the poetry is superb. It disdains analogies. It will have nothing to do with snapshot imagery. The resonant pride of those polysyllables summons all fact to a defining judgment and then, as the sibilants slow its clash and recoil, the open vowels hush it to repose. Against that liberating assurance the verse speaks again melodious and human . . .'

Surely this kind of commentary is sufficiently placed by Dr. Rajan himself when he says:

'Of the tremendous rhymed lyric of section four there is nothing I can say which would not be redundant. People to whom it is not immediately impressive are unlikely to be convinced by a description of its subtleties'.

When he does offer comments of a kind that can be checked as tests of sensibility they are usually of this kind:

'The "fiery rain" which falls here falls also on burning London. Here Mr. Eliot, fire-watcher and wanderer in Hades, meets his "familiar compound ghost" which will provide the backbone for one hundred American theses and which as far as present knowledge can tell is Dante, Mallarmé, and Arnaut Daniel together. The ghost promises Mr. Eliot a suitably grisly future, but all that he can say, however terrible, is turned into sweetness by Eliot's *terza rima* .

This passage in '*terza rima*' is the one about which D. W. Harding (reviewing *Little Gidding* in *Scrutiny*, XI, 3) says:

'The verse in this passage, with its regular measure and insistent alliteration, so effective for combining the macabre with the urbane and the dreary, is a way to indicate and a way to control the pressure of urgent misery and self-disgust. The motive power of this passage . . . is repulsion'.

I quote Harding by way of emphasizing that it is not just a case of *one* judgment against another. My response corroborates his account very forcibly, and it is a response that is contradicted violently by the description 'sweet'. I can only say that Dr. Rajan's account seems to me to betray a striking defect of sensibility. And I can't help associating that defect with the failure in tone and touch (characteristic, I think) represented by such phrases in the commentary as 'The ghost promises Mr. Eliot a suitably grisly future'.

Further, I do not think that Dr. Rajan could have permitted himself the indulgence of that easy superiority about 'one hundred American theses' (two of the best contributors to his symposium are by Americans) if he had been really responding to the quality of what was in front of him—it is the passage in which (in Harding's words) 'the humanist's ghost sees in his life . . . futility, isolation and guilt on account of his self-assertive prowess', and one would have thought it, for the reader exposed to it, destructive of all easy complacencies:

' . . . the laceration
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
 Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
 Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
 Of things ill done and done to others' harm
 Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
 Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.
 From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
 Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
 Where you must move in measure, like a dancer'.

Almost always where Dr. Rajan commits himself to judgments which can be challenged he seems to me to confirm the suspected defect of sensibility.

His title is *The Unity of the Quartets*, but I cannot see that he adds anything to the extant accounts of the organization of that work. When, for instance, he says, 'What his scheme is I should hesitate to specify, beyond suggesting that *Burnt Norton* is concerned with constructing concepts' we can see that this is D. W. Harding's 'creation of concepts'. But Dr. Rajan, as he indeed intimates, does nothing to extend Harding's account, or to explain the borrowed phrase, or to justify in any way the (unacknowledged) borrowing. His presumptive intention of explaining organization doesn't sufficiently control his commentary, as the large proportion of this which is devoted to a kind of Sitwellian quasi-creative pseudo-analysis betrays. And too often, in the guise of analytic guidance we have such passages as this:

'The words in *Little Gidding* are points of intersection. They join, in the tolerance of a convening insight, the worlds which in common experience are divided and distinguished. Always they bring us back to what is known, but it is the familiar made different by exploration, the "intimate yet identifiable", the every day alchemized into abiding strangeness'.

Does this kind of gloss add anything to anyone's understanding or appreciation of the text? It is true that Dr. Rajan goes on to say:

'It is most difficult to do justice to *Little Gidding*. You have to do the impossible, to say four things at once; and if you try to say them successively you end up by saying something different'.

The moral is that you should be very clear with yourself as to precisely what function you are undertaking to perform. It will hardly be that of 'doing justice'—an aim which would most likely result in the commentator's producing (as Miss Bradbrook puts it) a 'debilitating rehash of what his author may be supposed to "mean"'. What *can* reasonably be undertaken is to point out the nature of the organization, and that task, it should be recognized,

is one for a disciplined effort of intelligence. But it cannot be satisfactorily performed except by an analyst with a good sensibility. That is, it demands a critic, capable of first-hand response and independent judgment.

It must be said that Miss Anne Ridler, in her chosen mode of commentary, shows herself very much at home. She gives as her subject, 'A Question of Speech', and approaches it as herself an English poet. 'For myself, I should say, it was Eliot who first made me despair of becoming a poet; Auden (with, of course, dead poets, notably Sir Thomas Wyatt) who first made me think I saw how to become one'. She discusses (among other things) the relation between poetry and music, and thinks

'the differences more suggestive than the similarities. The elementary fact that poetry has no sustained notes is a big one; "duration in time" is therefore quite a different thing for her, and she cannot mingle her themes in the way that music does. To compensate for her inability to keep several voices going at once, she has her hidden dimension of memory and association: this is the "Invisible Knight" that is her constant companion'.

Miss Ridler doesn't, however, try to give force to these observations (or any others she makes) by any detailed analysis of particular poems or passages. Of Mr. Eliot she remarks that 'As a critic, he has kept his preferences while shedding his prejudices', and gives as illustration (among others—one concerns Milton) the difference between his early essay, *The Function of Criticism*, and 'the much less acid *What is a Classic?*'—A classic is what, of its kind, I should myself call *The Function of Criticism*; on the other hand, I couldn't disagree when I heard the 'less acid' performance described as being more like an exercise in tight-rope-walking than a feat of critical thinking. But Miss Ridler has a poise of her own that is in its own way impressive: I suspect it to be very much an Oxford way, and I think I suggest the interest and significance of her essay rightly when I recommend it for study as an Oxford product. I can't, however, see what part it has in a book planned (that is the claim) 'in such a way as to make the consecutive study of the poems possible'.

Mr. Mankowitz does a close analysis of that very fine early poem, *Gerontion*. But the contribution I read with marked pleasure and stimulus was Philip Wheelwright's on *Eliot's Philosophical Themes*, which, it will be noted, doesn't offer a point-by-point elucidation of any poem, and won't, I think, be among the aids most resorted to.

It will be gathered, then, that I shouldn't like to think of this book's being accepted (it very well may be) as a standard introduction and guide-book to Eliot. It contains some respectable things, but it seems to me calculated in sum to promote, not the impact of Eliot's genius—a disturbing force and therefore capable of ministering to life—but his establishment as a safe academic classic.

F. R. LEAVIS.

THE INSTITUTION OF HENRY JAMES

THE QUESTION OF HENRY JAMES, edited by F. W. Dupee
(Allan Wingate, 18/-).

This is a very welcome edition of an American book that appeared a year or two ago, an anthology of critical articles on Henry James collected from periodicals and of chapters culled from books. Perhaps it is not so well done as it might have been—its interest is less intrinsic than historical. We are given as a start an essay of 1879 ('Henry James, Jr.'), a fine specimen of complacent provincialism, and can see the various phases of James's reputation to date and the evolution of a serious critical approach to his art. In 1898, we are told, he was virtually unknown in America. In 1918 Mr. Eliot began his memorial notice '... James will probably continue to be regarded as the extraordinarily clever but negligible curiosity'. Whereas in 1943 Mr. William Troy ends his essay '... no great wonder that more and more people are turning to Henry James'. Between the nadir of '98 and the zenith of the last decade journalistic criticism exposes itself more shamefully than over any other great writer. In 1912 intellectual brilliance was represented by Sir Max Beerbohm's 'parody',¹ reprinted from *A Christmas Garland*—this is the period when the idiosyncrasies of James's late style stuck in the public throat and any journalist could get a laugh by making gestures of crude intention behind James's back. The viciousness of such a 'parody' lies in its endorsing the vulgar account of James as unreadable, unprofitable and preposterous. Mr. Dupee regrets that Wells's attack (in *Boon*, 1915) could not be reprinted too; contemporary with Beerbohm's piece, this illustrates the malice that the successful writers of the Wells-Bennett-Maugham era felt for the novelist who had devoted his life to his art, exercising incredible industry with no material reward (unless we reckon the O.M. bestowed on his death-bed). On top of this he had to face vulgar unprovoked attacks in his old age by journalists like Wells. He minded deeply. No one can read unmoved his letters to Wells about *Boon*. [Mr. Percy Lubbock comments with desolating fatuity, in his notes to *The Letters of Henry James*, 'H.J. was always inclined to be impatient of the art of parody']. The letters to Howells in 1888 and '95, to Howard Sturgis in '99, and to Gosse just before his death about the failure of the collected edition of

¹This alone should suffice to explode the 'incomparable Max' myth—an ideal of elegant triviality, the cult of which is historically explicable as a result of Oscar Wilde's impact on Oxford and the higher journalism; though Oxford, King's College Cambridge, and their Bloomsbury affiliations appear to be still culturally in the Wilde phase, the rest of England isn't, and 'Max' should have been politely pigeon-holed long ago instead of being sponsored by the B.B.C. as the G.O.M. of English letters.