

## CORRESPONDENCE

DEAR SIR,

I have a high respect for *Scrutiny's* reviews; the one on Aragon, for example, was admirable as a corrective to recent uncritical adulation. I would however like to question the estimate of Apollinaire by G. D. Klingopulos in the last issue. I am sure your reviewer is right about Professor Bowra's preface and the biography by André Rouveyre, but you will agree that a poet should not be judged by the excesses of his friends. I have not read the complete works of Apollinaire, but one book of his, *Alcools*, I have had for fifteen years and have re-read at intervals. After Mr. Klingopulos, I went back to *Alcools* to see if after all I had been deluded as to their quality. But I seem to detect that in this case Apollinaire has been used as a whipping-horse for 'modish gallo-phills'.

Mr. Klingopulos compares certain images in Apollinaire with the 'patient etherized upon a table'. Eliot's image, on the first page of *Poems* 1909-1925, is curiously unlike any other in his work that I can recall. It has indeed few parallels but oddly enough there is one in *Alcools*, in a poem dated 1909. (*Poème Lu au Mariage d'André Salmon*):

Nous nous sommes rencontrés dans un caveau maudit  
 Au temps de notre jeunesse  
 Fumant tous deux et mal vêtus attendant l'aube  
 Épris épris des mêmes paroles dont il faudra changer le sens  
 Trompés trompés pauvres petits et ne sachant pas encore rire  
 La table et les deux verres devinrent un mourant qui nous  
 jeta le dernier regard d'Orphée.

The last line has been quoted in France about as often as the 'patient etherized' in England. It dates from the same period and has had rather the same function. It seems to satisfy Mr. Klingopulos' requirements in a 'surprising image'.

I would not claim that Apollinaire is as substantial a poet as Eliot, but he is certainly on a par with such writers as Verhaeren and Laforgue, who directly influenced both Eliot and Pound. All were engaged in inventing a poetry consistent with modern urban life. This involved experiment both in style and content. When Apollinaire referred, *e.g.*, to aeroplanes, he was still writing in the dawn of twentieth-century technology. The Futurist school had yet to appear, and the 'future' which it hailed had yet to unfold. The references to modernity in Apollinaire are not (in spite of Mr. Klingopulos) strictly comparable in tone with those of Stephen Spender to pylons. They have admittedly something in common with Walt Whitman, whose rugged and peculiar example had a big effect in France and of whom Pound himself admitted: 'We have one sap and one root'. The Whitmanesque effusiveness was modified in transit, but the rhapsodic form, the strings of images,

are to be found in Apollinaire (and indeed in Eliot) with a more melancholy inflection and without Whitman's whole-hearted optimistic acceptance. Apollinaire is nearer to Whitman in being more cheerful than Eliot about the new phenomena. He can write about a street in Paris 'J'aime la grâce de cette rue industrielle' though when he wrote about London (in 1903) it sounds more like Eliot's 'vision of the street':

Au tournant d'une rue brûlant  
De tous les feux de ses façades  
Plaies du brouillard sanguinolent.

Perhaps no poet of this century has yet come off unhurt in the struggle over style and content. In Eliot's case the imagery of the London street, so dominant in all his poetry up to and including 'The Waste Land', has latterly receded, leaving, to my mind, a singularly beautiful style unsupported by an adequate content. Apollinaire on his side has a diffuseness of style which makes it easy to quote weak passages. There are similar weaknesses even in Baudelaire, and even in his best poems—'Le Cygne' for example. It needed the efforts of Mallarmé in French, as of Pound in English, to eliminate stylistic weakness, and it was done at the price of over-condensation and an increasingly esoteric content. It has not so far been possible to combine in one poet the dual capacity for enlarged experience and verbal precision which would meet contemporary exigencies. Apollinaire made a contribution to the enlarging of the poetic 'lebensraum' which does not deserve to be dismissed as 'puerile', 'ingenuous' or 'commonplace'. I think, perhaps, that in Mr. Klingopulos' assessment it is his sense of period that is at fault. He should reserve his strictures for those who have failed to learn the lessons of Pound and Eliot, of Mallarmé and Valéry, rather than apply them to those who helped to break new ground.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES MADGE.

*Our reviewer comments:*

Bad poetry has, of course, a period interest (*e.g.*, poésie de la résistance—Aragon). I'm glad Mr. Madge agrees with me about some things, though we should differ about the 'content' of Mr. Eliot's later poems. But his letter would have been even more interesting had he, equipped with a 'sense of period', offered another reading of my long quotations which included one complete poem; in relation to which, my adjectives 'puerile', 'lurid' and 'commonplace', have, I think, some meaning. As it is, *his* grounds for dismissing Professor Bowra's valuation are difficult to understand.

G.D.K.

Another letter, criticizing *Scrutiny*, has been held over for lack of space.

# COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

## REHABILITATING IBSEN

*IBSEN, THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND*, by Brian W. Downs (Cambridge University Press, 10/6).

*IBSEN THE NORWEGIAN, A REVALUATION*, by M. C. Bradbrook (Chatto and Windus, 10/6).

There are signs of a general revival of interest in Ibsen. One hears rumours of a new translation on the way, and there seems to be a growing feeling that we need a more adequate critical account than that provided by Shaw and Archer, with their emphasis on social and moral problems, or even by Mr. Janko Lavrin. The two books under review are very differently placed in relation to this movement of opinion, and their aims are as diverse as their methods.

For Mr. Downs it is not a question of rehabilitating Ibsen. He shows no recognition—perhaps chooses to ignore the possibility—that anything of the kind may be needed. Assuming general agreement that Ibsen is ‘a very great author, one of the supreme dramatists of all time’, he makes it clear that he is offering neither literary criticism nor biography, but only a study of the historical, social and cultural background of the plays. The result is a piece of painstaking and solid scholarship which will be of interest mainly to those who share the initial assumption. These accounts of Ibsen’s literary education, his contacts with public life, his relation to Scandinavianism and Norwegian nationalism, the influence upon him of Kierkegaard, Bjornson and Brandes, and his attitude to the typical nineteenth-century problems of evolution, heredity, sex, feminism and the early psychology of the unconscious, may be of use to the critic who has made his own approach to the dramas as literature. Mr. Downs says that Ibsen’s development is not fully comprehensible without a knowledge of his background; it may be so, but knowledge of this kind must subserve, and cannot replace, criticism. In itself it cannot help to answer the prior question why at this date Ibsen’s work is important to us at all. There is nothing in this book to help the unconverted who ask for some demonstration that Ibsen’s ideas have been successfully translated into art. Its interest lies therefore within very narrow limits and its conscientious thoroughness is not helped by a rather dull and heavy style.

Even a study so exclusively concerned with background, however, is liable on the one hand to betray critical preconceptions, and on the other to suggest critical observations. The implied