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- 1 This volume, superbly edited by one of the most eminent Eliot scholars of today, Jewel Brooker, is not just another casebook including scattered reviews of Eliot's poetry. It aims at being the most comprehensive collection of contemporary reviews of Eliot's work as it appeared and the editor's substantial Preface maps out the contours of this vast territory, thus enabling the reader to take his bearings. The book is made up of twenty-three sections and each section includes the reviews of a single book, arranged in chronological order of publication and followed by a checklist of additional reviews. All Eliot's poetic and prose works are examined, except a few brief pamphlets, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, late collections of previously published work (*On Poets and Poetry*, 1957; *To Criticize the Critic*, 1965) or works published posthumously (*The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, 1993; *Inventions of the March Hare*, 1996). Three criteria have guided Jewel Brooker's choices: she decided that the reviewers qualifying for selection were either people who played an important part in Eliot's career (Ezra Pound, Conrad Aiken), or people whose insights paved the way for future competent criticism (Edmund Wilson, Gilbert Seldes) or people important in scholarly assessment of Eliot's work (Cleanth Brooks, Helen Gardner). These reviews are expected "to provide a moving mirror reflecting the curve" (XIII) of Eliot's reputation, that is to say not only the ups and downs but also the changing nature of the latter: one can see that it took a certain time for the reviewers to swallow or digest the revolutionary innovations in poetic method of Eliot and it is only in 1925, with the publication of *Poems 1909-1925*, that the reviews of this volume reveal an increasingly positive consensus regarding Eliot's work. But there were still a few setbacks to come. At the time of Eliot's return to America in 1932, *Selected Essays* (1932) received mixed reviews (the non-literary essays on humanism were thought to dilute Eliot's greatness), and a still more negative note was struck when *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) was published, but the most lashing criticism was reserved for *After Strange Gods* (1934): Eliot is then taken to task for changing his notion of tradition, for mixing religion and literature, for the

harshness of his judgements about contemporary writers, but most of all for his notorious sentence about “free-thinking Jews” that will attach to him for decades to come the stigma of anti-Semitism until the publication in 2000 of *In Defence of Eliot* where Craig Raine as a witness for the defence gives evidence in favour of the poet, thus redressing the balance. But the curve of reputation turns upward with the publication of *Collected Poems 1909-1935* in 1936, and will remain on a high level with the production of such successful plays as *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party* and, most of all, with the publication of *Four Quartets* (1943). Yet in 1954, Richard Adlington suggested that Eliot/Pound Modernism was dead: the time had then come for some critics (K. Allott, for instance, in his Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse*) to question Eliot’s view of his own poetry as a “traditional” development of the poetic inheritance. The poetic innovations of Modernism might have been no more than a Franco-American body which English poetry, deviating from its “line”, had been made to absorb but was in the process of extruding.

- 2 As one goes along, one comes to realize that the reviewers found it difficult sometimes to reconcile the various aspects of Eliot’s activity and personality: we find side by side Eliot the critic shaped by classical ideals, Eliot the poet haunted by romantic longing, and thirdly Eliot the social analyst, the thinker quite uneasy with the tenets of humanism. Sometimes the different Eliots are contrasted (Douglas Goldring), sometimes they are seen as the reflection of one mind, one sensibility (Bonamy Dobrée). In a more provocative and humorous way, W.H. Auden distinguishes between three Eliots: “an archdeacon with cool manners, a violent and passionate old man who had witnessed the horrors of history, and a young boy who liked to play practical jokes”. One cannot help being fascinated by the changes, tensions and contradictions affecting Eliot’s public image, by the variety of *personae* (H. Kenner would say “masks”) that the poet was more or less unwillingly led to assume or that were thrust upon him: a revolutionary firebrand and a supporter of tradition; a Europeanized American (like Henry James) whose poetry is yet securely rooted in its native soil as “The Dry Salvages” amply demonstrates; an American writer shaped by the Puritan mind (like Hawthorne) who rallied to the Church of England in 1927, the very year when he took up British citizenship; a fastidious poets’ poet whose play, *The Cocktail Party* (1949), made a hit in both London and New York. Eliot was successively an unhappily-married and a happily-married man, or again first the champion and then the elder statesman of literary modernism. Or, to put it differently, the self-exiled expatriate who used a strategy of power to reach a place of eminence amongst British editors and publishers gradually merged into a polarizing figure in post-Second World War literary politics. After 1945, he enjoyed a considerable prestige which culminated in 1948 when he was awarded the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize. Together with the depiction of the many facets of Eliot’s personality, we find recurrent issues concerning his work: reviewers never lose an opportunity of speculating on the genealogy of Modernism and more precisely on Eliot’s literary forebears (the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, the French Symbolists, the Decadents). Another recurrent debate concerns the hiatus between the early (up to *Ash-Wednesday*) and the later poetry presumably underlain by the transformation of the author of “Prufrock”, “The Hippopotamus” and *The Waste Land* into a renegade, whose diasavowal of agnosticism was comparable with Wordsworth’s abandonment of his youthful revolutionary principles. Yet the more perceptive reviewers sensed that Eliot’s conversion to Christianity entailed no dramatic

reversal of his earlier beliefs and noted that “the surface discontinuity concealed a deeper continuity” (XXVI).

- 3 One of the chief interests of the book is to enhance the capability of Eliot’s poetry of exciting, within a significant sampling of reviews related to the *same* work, a considerable variety of responses from different readers. It is also interesting, indeed thrilling, to see what could be the reactions of reviewers unprepared for that kind of poetry and therefore nonplussed and perplexed by it. It inevitably took them a certain time to comprehend fully Eliot’s extension of the field of subject-matter available for poetic treatment (the modern industrial city, the background of European history and culture), his lavish use of various forms of intertextuality (allusions, parodies, quotations), his rapid changes of tone and tempo, his juxtaposition of what is disparate in style or scene, his partial replacement of logical and narrative continuity by “dislocated discourse”, his fragmentation of form or rather his use of a structure that will eventually appear in terms of something analogous to *musical form*, and last but not least the self-reflexivity of his writing.

- 4 We could distinguish between three kinds of reviewers. We first have the negative reviewers who were blind to these innovations. They objected to *The Waste Land* on account of its allusiveness (its learning needing “Notes” for the reader), its tone (its pessimism, not to say nihilism), and its form (its incoherence and fragmentation): Louis Untermeyer’s review is a significant instance of this attitude (93-95). Some reviewers are well-known writers who bring the whole weight of their beliefs and commitments to bear upon the text: their mental makeup or the very bias of their strong personality may lead them astray but they may also be the source of fruitful error and put the poem in a strange but revealing light: so “The Dry Salvages” is the occasion of a stimulating dialogue between George Orwell and Kathleen Raine who confront their “Points of View” in the same issue of *Poetry* (October-November 1942) (452-58). A third category would include the reviewers (Conrad Aiken, Gilbert Seldes, I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, etc.) whose sureness of insight was immediate. As early as 1916, in his review of E. Pound’s *Catholic Anthology*, Conrad Aiken recognized from the first “Prufrock” and “Portrait of a Lady” as “psychological character-studies, subtle to the point of insoluble idiosyncrasy, introspective, self-gnawing” (3) and did not fail to connect them with Shakespeare’s soliloquies and Browning’s dramatic monologues. In the same way, Edmund Wilson, in his review of *The Waste Land* (“The Poetry of Drouth,” *Dial* 73, December 1922) well perceived the workings of Eliot’s complex mind which, in this palimpsest-like poem, “loves to make its oracles as deep as the experience of the race itself by piling up stratum of reference, as the Italian painters used to paint over one another” (84). And if we turn to the later poetry, we see that the reviewers are up to facing the novelty and coming to grips with the difficulties of the *Quartets* (433-494): one of the reasons why the resulting studies of this poetic testament are so substantial is that they include an awareness of the historical context (the war, the deaths of Yeats and Joyce) and of Eliot’s early poetry. As regards the *Quartets*, one should specially mention the contributions of Hogan, Leavis, Harding, Matthiessen, Sweeney and Storman, without forgetting the two reviews by M.C. Bradbrook. She writes memorably of “Little Gidding” that it is “symbolic in this fundamental sense: not through complication of overlaid meanings, but through a refinement of discipline issuing in consummation”(462).

- 5 The inexhaustible richness of this anthology lies in the observation of the gropings of the first reviewers sometimes at a loss towards an understanding of Eliot's poetry, of their eagerness to pounce upon all grist that would come to their mill or of their impatience to throw a network of significance over the poems: hence the rather surprisingly extensive use of references to painting in connection with *Prufrock and Other Observations* (Hogarth, Whistler, Edward Munch, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism!). But the chief merit of the anthology lies in its progressive building up of a complex view of Eliot's personality and work based on a series of couples of opposites: modern/Modernist, Anglo-American/European, personal/impersonal, subjective/objective, psychological/realistic, Expressionistic/Post-Impressionistic or Cubistic, classical/avant-garde. Conrad Aiken is mainly responsible for the elaboration of the first series of concepts, Ezra Pound for the second. Jewel Brooker is quite right to emphasize the fact that "entire schools of commentary have formed themselves around this basic polarity" (XVI). Indeed those seminal concepts have fertilized the field of all subsequent criticism of Eliot.
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