

—fortunately there are not many—can obscure the real purpose and weaken the authority of a study such as this.

Throughout her study Professor Potts has had frequent recourse to Aristotelian concepts. She concludes with an evaluation of *The Prelude* and of Wordsworth's theory of poetry in terms of Aristotle's *katharsis* and a genetic interpretation of "beginning, middle, and end." The result is a noble theory of poetry, true, I think to Wordsworth and as likely a reading of Aristotle's fragment on poetry as most modern interpretations. We must not, however, forget that Aristotle would never have been completely at home in *The Prelude*. Recall his ironical comment on Xenophanes, "Looking into the broad heavens, he exclaimed 'The One is God!'" And what would the father of European logic have had to say about the "meddling intellect" or the "false secondary power?" But that is another story.

In her preface, Professor Potts expresses the hope that her readers will turn from her pages to a fresh study of *The Prelude*. I can say from experience that those who do so will find their time well spent, and they will recognize a debt of gratitude to a critic who has widened their horizons and sharpened their insight.

Walter Kaufmann

EXISTENTIALISM TAMED

THE EXISTENTIALIST REVOLT. By *Kurt F. Reinhardt*. Bruce. \$3.50.

THE EXISTENTIALISTS. By *James Collins*. Henry Regnery. \$4.50.

THE MIND OF KIERKEGAARD. By *James Collins*. Henry Regnery.
\$4.50.

WE have now passed the second wave of books on existentialism. The first wave, during the late 'forties, was more froth than substance: a number of light-weight studies, ranging from brief essays to slight surveys, several of them obviously improvised to cash in on a fashion. One or two were more serious than the rest; but what attempt to outline and criticize the highly individual philosophies of four or more intense thinkers in a few pages could hope to do justice to any of them?

The two surveys by Collins and Reinhardt are as similar to each other as they are different from their predecessors. Published at the same time, they are of equal length (about 250 pages each, which is much longer than the studies of the forties), deal with the same four existentialists and the same three predecessors, and are written from the same, Thomistic, point of view. They are serious, substantial, scholarly, and somehow beside the point.

Collins begins with a chapter on "Existential Backgrounds: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl." Then he devotes one chapter each to Sartre, Jaspers, Marcel, and Heidegger, and concludes with "Five Existential Themes." Reinhardt gets started more slowly with an "Introduction: The Crisis of Human Existence" and a first chapter on "The Problem of Human Existence." Then he treats Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in one chapter each, divides the next chapter between Husserl and Heidegger, and takes up Sartre, Jaspers, and Marcel before offering his "Conclusion: The Thematic Structure of Existentialism." Both books contain many notes, a bibliography, and an index. And both are based on many years of study.

A critic could of course cavil at omissions, interpretations, and perspectives; and it goes without saying that an attempt to present Heidegger, for example, in some thirty or forty pages is bound to leave something to be desired. But the major fault of these two books is not a function of any lack of space and is almost equally evident in Collins' more recent monograph on Kierkegaard (300 pages). The inadequacy of these three books is due to the authors' approach.

What is the point of a book on a thinker? It can have mainly two valid purposes: to get people to read and understand him because he has something worthwhile to offer; or to combat him and to show that what he has to offer is unacceptable. These two aims are not mutually incompatible: some of the best historical studies combine criticism with an attempt to lend a voice to what is of permanent value.

The reason why Reinhardt and Collins have managed to write such unexciting books about such exciting writers is largely that it is all along one of the implicit premises of their studies that the thinkers whom they so carefully dissect lack any ultimate importance. Again and again we are told in so many words, "Had he known the texts, he would have agreed with Aquinas. . . ."

A polemic is generally much more exciting than a eulogy. But these books are not at all conceived as attacks: they are primarily offered as in-

formative expositions. Such expositions are in any case difficult to follow; but when you read Heidegger or Sartre, you sometimes have the sense that this is vital, that nothing else matters so much; if you read these second-hand accounts, you have the feeling that it really is not worth the trouble. The authors' attitude undercuts the exposition which makes up nine-tenths or more of their books.

The limited relevance of these studies is not due to Reinhardt's and Collins' point of view alone. The whole plane on which their expositions proceed is somehow wide of the mark of existentialism. Does anyone suppose that Heidegger exerted a spell over generations of students, and that he continues to fascinate millions of Germans, Frenchmen, and Spanish-speaking people, by virtue of the sort of thing that Reinhardt and Collins report so carefully?

When I read Heidegger's essay on Nietzsche, for example, I can disagree a hundred times and perhaps also demonstrate outright errors; but I am moved, excited, in suspense: he takes words, phrases, sentences which had seemed clear, and makes you feel the insufficiency of any previous understanding. He creates that wonder in which, according to Plato and Aristotle, philosophy begins.

Heidegger has used Hölderlin's line, "*wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*" as the theme for an essay on Rilke, and Karl Löwith has entitled a very fine little German book *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit*. Here indeed is a clue to Heidegger's fascination and, beyond that, a clue to existentialism. He is a thinker in paltry times. Those who respect him wonder what other philosopher is even that. And it may be significant that Collins somehow misses the point of this quotation when he translates it: "Of what use are poets in a time of need?" I should prefer: "Why be a poet in paltry times?"

The equation of this *wozu*, this "why," with "*of what use*" symbolizes the failure of these three books. For in a way they are very good books, very useful books. But it is of the very essence of existentialism that it does not consider such usefulness an adequate justification. And while existentialism undervalues, I think, the realm in which usefulness is relevant and important, books on existentialists should not remain in that realm.

Collins discusses "Five Existential Themes": "1. The Venture of Philosophizing"; "2. Descriptive Metaphysics"; "3. Man in the World"; "4. Man and Fellow Man"; and "5. Man and God." Reinhardt lists nine "major themes of existentialism" at the end of his book, beginning with "Subjective

Truth" and ending with "Existence and God." But though such catalogues are useful, they miss the central theme and mistake the accidents for the essence. What makes Heidegger Heidegger, and Kierkegaard Kierkegaard, is not a matter of five views, or nine, or seventeen, but their pathos, their passionate intensity, and their revolt against the kind of philosophy to which they are here reduced.

Jaspers scorns those who find positions in Nietzsche and considers it Nietzsche's significance that he demonstrated the inadequacy of all positions and thus the need for Jaspers' "philosophizing." This is doubly wrong: in the first place, Nietzsche's spirited conclusions are spirited away to make room for Jaspers; and in the second place, even the existentialists (if less than Nietzsche) offer us philosophies and not only existential pathos. But Jaspers' excess might have guarded Reinhardt and Collins against the opposite excess: spiriting away the spirit itself and passing off sundry opinions as existentialism.

In a section entitled "Don Juan: Sensual Immediacy," Collins praises Kierkegaard's discussion of *Don Giovanni* as "among the finest passages in musical criticism" and "a model for sane, philosophical treatment in the field of art." I recall Stefan Zweig's section on the "Homo Eroticus" in his brilliant essay on Casanova: "What could be more stupid than to represent Don Juan, the archenemy of the female sex, as *amoroso*, as a friend of women, as a lover. . . . In every individual this sadistic soul always wants to humiliate, shame, and insult all femininity." Nor does Kierkegaard understand Goethe's *Faust*. Or Hegel. Nor are his three stages convincing: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious life. On that whole level of discussion Kierkegaard does not strike me as at all important. But his voice carries as an incarnate protest against the adequacy of systems and compendia. And I cannot for one moment believe that "Kierkegaard was ripe for reception of a realistic metaphysics." The importance of temperament in philosophy can be overemphasized. But I cannot recall where it has been so grossly underemphasized.

In the great philosophies of the past, careful analyses of problems went hand in hand with some conception of a life different from the everyday existence of most men. All the philosophers who had come under Socrates' spell, from Plato and Antisthenes to the Stoics and Epicureans, combined a strong theoretical interest with the notion which Rilke found implicit in an "Archaic Torso of Apollo": "You must change your life." It is no different from Spinoza and Nietzsche. In our time, however, a dissociation

of sensibility has split philosophy into two camps: the linguistic and the existentialist. Both are movements of revolt against traditional philosophy, and to understand the existentialist revolt, attention must be given to Heidegger's concern with Hölderlin and Rilke and to Sartre's recourse to the novel and drama. Most of the opinions of the so-called existentialists are of relatively secondary importance, and it should be noted that Heidegger not only spurns the label of "existentialism" but also the opinions that go with it, and claims that all interpretations of *Sein und Zeit* have misinterpreted his opinions. It may be less significant that Marcel too has rejected the label after the Papal encyclical *Humani generis* condemned existentialism on August 12, 1950.

What matters far more than most of the opinions of our so-called existentialists, not to speak of their remarkable personalities, is not their relation to God and Aquinas but that they pose the problem of the future of philosophy. That is what these three books do not bring out sufficiently. F. H. Heinemann's yet more recent *Existentialism and The Modern Predicament* (London, Adam & Charles Black) is far superior in this respect and communicates something of the turbulence which is of the essence of existentialism. Surely, our age is paltry in a thousand ways. It also has a magnificence of its own. One might reverse Hölderlin's and Heidegger's query: "Why be paltry in such a time?"

Thomas H. Carter

EZRA POUND THE CRITIC

THE LITERARY ESSAYS OF EZRA POUND. Edited with an Introduction by *T. S. Eliot*. New Directions, 1954. \$6.00.

FIVE YEARS AGO, in 1949, Ezra Pound received the Bollingen Prize for the *Pisan Cantos*. The resultant furor, in some quarters almost hysterical, has not been allowed to pass into our more-than-literary history, but is still fitfully revived and rehearsed by both the popular and literary presses, and is even yet capable of furnishing a whipping-post for Mr. Peter Viereck and others. There is evident irony, to say the least, in the fact that a man who has devoted his career to, among other things, a search for *precise definition* should have the real nature of his endeavor obscured by