

scholar, obliged to do this) he will find that Walter Langton, after searching investigations conducted both at the Curia and in England by commissioners not at all favourably disposed to him, during which he was suspended from all priestly and episcopal functions, was found entirely guiltless of the many charges brought against him by an enemy who seems to have been mentally deranged. One must end as one began: readers who allow themselves to be put off by nonsense of this sort will miss much of great value in this book: the present writer can only say that Speirs's articles in *Scrutiny*, reproduced here, on *Sir Gawain*, convinced him that he had never before really understood the significance of this mysterious and fascinating poem. *Medieval English Poetry* has already been greeted with delight by those who believe along with Professor Trevor-Roper that professional scholars may kill the subjects which they profess: but amateurism can be no less deadly, when it leads to neglect or misinterpretation of relevant evidence. If Mr Speirs would master the techniques which now he merely despises, he might well end by putting them to better use than most of us who employ them, he might display that 'totality' to which we may think that we still can bring each his own humble mite of comprehension.

ERIC COLLEGE

ON POETRY AND POETS. By T. S. Eliot. (Faber; 21s.)

Any new essay from Mr Eliot is to be received with interest and gratitude. The sixteen essays in this latest volume, though not all brand new, are, with one exception, subsequent to *Selected Essays*. In two other respects this volume differs from *Selected Essays*: while the earlier volume touched many other subjects besides poetry, this one, as the title indicates, is exclusively concerned with poetry (seven essays) and poets (nine essays); where the earlier essays were mostly written for publication, most of the present set were originally conceived for delivery to an audience, though all except three, that on Johnson, on Goethe and the second essay on Milton, also subsequently appeared in print. So we can observe how well Mr Eliot's prose speaks or reads; there is little or no difference between the two. While we shall welcome the reappearance here in permanent form of some fairly old friends, such as *What is a Classic?* (1944) and *Rudyard Kipling* (1941), we naturally also look to see if Mr Eliot has changed his mind or offered any further observations on old themes. It is particularly valuable to have the two essays on Milton (1936 and 1947) side by side, and some, no doubt, will be gratified with what they might call a mellowing of view. One of the most interesting and helpful essays is

*Poetry and Drama* (1951). Here much of what was left half-enunciated in *Rhetoric and Poetic Drama* (1919) and *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* (1928) is stated clearly, or at least as clearly as one can expect with such a delicate matter. The examples illuminate brilliantly, and I know of no other work, short or long, which so clearly explains how dramatic poetry does not 'interrupt but intensifies the dramatic situation'. For this and much like it we fall still deeper into Mr Eliot's debt.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

AN APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE. By D. A. Traversi. (Sands; 8s. 6d.)

Mr Traversi's study of Shakespeare, which has already appeared in the United States in a slightly shorter version, is very welcome in England. Mr Traversi adheres to that school of Shakespearean interpreters which has been called 'Poetic'. They are represented in their most extreme form by George Wilson Knight, and in a more moderate and methodical manner by Monsignor Kolbe. They have been sometimes criticized for over-emphasizing the poetic character of the plays and have been accused of ignoring the fact that they were written to be performed before a nutcracking, orange-sucking audience. In no instance could Mr Traversi be accused of such one-sidedness. On the contrary it is his sensitiveness to the poetic values of the plays that carries him into the heart of them as they are acted on the stage; we do not have to withdraw quietly to study the text in order to appreciate his point. I know of no one, except S. L. Bethell who only approaches the question, who has so satisfactorily answered the ultimate questions which the works of Shakespeare raise. If the answers are not exhaustive, that is because it is beyond their nature to be so. It is never agreeable, nor is it possible, to sum up briefly Shakespeare's mind. If it must be done one would say that his mind was a limbec in which were poised a number of cardinal thoughts: he was equally conscious of man as a sinner and as redeemed; he was aware of the battle between spirit and flesh, the struggle between nature and grace, the contrast between time and eternity. Yet, without ever awkwardly invoking religious criteria, he saw these things in resolution and not for ever in conflict. His view was synthetic, not, that is to say, *ersatz* as we were taught to think of the word synthetic during the war, but a view founded on hope. If Shakespeare is an optimist his hope is founded on the nature of things and not on any spurious millennial belief. It is in this sense that he does not drag in religious criteria, though of course they were there in the formation of his mind. But once we grant the religious beliefs, and, Catholic or not, Shakespeare would certainly have been brought