

AN APPRECIATING POUND

The Confucian Odes. The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius, translated by EZRA POUND. New Directions. 15s.

THE latest batch of Ezra Pound's Cantos, *Thrones*, brings the count up to one hundred and nine: Yeats once let drop that Pound had warned him of at least one hundred and twenty, so there is probably more in the old boy yet. Aside from his magnum opus, Pound has, incredibly enough, found time and strength for other pursuits. While he was in the pen in America he managed to come up with a truly excellent and eminently speakable *Trachinae*, and did much of the work for the Confucian Odes, which here reach us in a paperback most of us can afford to buy. The cost of the year-old Faber edition was, as often, prohibitive, and none of our bookshops stocked it.

Pound has long been under attack by sinologists for his dubious Chinese and particularly for his reliance on the Fenollosan idea that the Chinese written character is a hieroglyph. What the sinologists who continue the attack have ignored is the fact that nearly fifty years have passed since *Cathay* began to appear, and that Pound has done a lot of reading since. As *The Great Digest* and *The Unwobbling Pivot* appeared, together with the first glimmerings of the Odes, not a few sinologists moved over to his side. He was plainly doing more than anyone else to bring across into English the qualities which had made the Classic Anthology living literature for centuries.

Confucius selected the poems for his anthology according to the amount of truth they contained and how well they sounded when sung. He would have admired Pound's ear and industry, for there are countless poems in this book which ring as true as the stuff he was writing at the time of the Imagist movement, and the whole work is as carefully planned on the grand scale as was the *Propertius*. By any standards, it is a triumph.

The only obstacle in the way of instant acceptance of this new work is a use of language quite alien to what we now regard as proper translation from the Chinese. It is superbly ironical that this "proper" tone has been set by Pound himself, that since the publication of *Cathay* no translator has been able to escape its influence. Eliot called Pound the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time: inventors have their effect on all practitioners, and Pound's voice is echoed even by such literary light-weights as Lin Yutang.

It is startling to realise that the one hundred and sixty-seventh Ode is in fact a new rendering of what once gave rise to "The Song Of The Bowmen of Shu," the first poem in *Cathay*. The closing stanza ran like this—

When we set out, the willows were drooping with spring,
We come back in the snow,
We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief?

That was a soldier being stately, haughty in his nostalgia and privation. Nearly half a century later, Pound knows better—

Willows were green when we set out
it's blowin' an' snowin' as we go
down this road, muddy and slow,
hungry and thirsty and blue as doubt
(no one feels half of what we know)

This is a soldier being a soldier, slogging it.

The separation is complete. No one discernible tone pervades this new book: each song and ode has its own. In *Cathay* Pound showed he had learned well from Fenollosa that presentation was more important than commentary, that "explanation" only dulled the image: he was not yet in a position to realise that his tone of voice could do the same. Decades of practice with ideogram—in the Cantos and in a great deal of his prose—have now resulted in the ability virtually to lend the Chinese poet his voice, to be modulated as the material dictates. That has long been Pound's

ideal, and it seems to me to have been realised.

As early as the *Ta Hio* Pound was speaking of Confucius as a man careful of his words, getting his terms right before he launched an idea. That was thirty years ago: the same study has since reappeared as *The Great Digest*, and a comparison of the two quickly shows the improvement. The presentation of the teachings is consistent with what is taught: no words are wasted, and no needless evidence is adduced to give support to the doctrines. Confucius as Pound would have us think of him is a busy man, always advising people to read the Odes and not bother him with kindergarten questions. It is this Confucius who emerges from this new book, a man who knows, in Pound's phrase, "the news that stays news." Soldiers speak like soldiers, rules use the vocabulary of rules. Confucius has picked the poems that show the state in action. It is an authoritarian's handbook.

Aside from the usual witless quarrelling with Pound's renderings of individual ideographs, it seems unlikely that any real opposition will develop to this volume as it has to the Cantos. The Confucian Odes stands with his earlier books of lyrics as poetry fairly easily assimilable: it will probably be accepted along with *Maunderley* and the *Propertius* as a corpus of Pound's poetry on which a relative dullard can lecture and set examination questions. Whether the Cantos will ever meet a similar fate is quite another thing. Lacking the discussability of, say, Eliot's *Quartets*, they happily seem destined to be read only by those who seek them out.

CLIVE JAMES.

Bertrand Russell, Andersonian

BERTRAND RUSSELL: *Wisdom of the West*. Edited by Dr Paul Foulkes. Macdonald. 86s.

ALMOST half of each page of this extraordinary book is given over to illustrations. Most of them are photographs of originals—paintings, sculpture, mosaics, coins, etc—contemporary with the persons being discussed in the adjacent text. These are very good indeed, in fact the best thing about the book. There are also ten pointless original "compositions" by John Piper; and a large number of attempts to convey philosophical

ideas by diagrams. This innovation has probably tempted many students of philosophy at some time; but to me at any rate very few of the examples here seemed intuitively apt.

It sounds an odd "conspectus of philosophy from Thales to Wittgenstein" (Russell's foreword), and it is. The book was made by the editor submitting to Russell for comment his (the editor's) version of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*. The oddest thing about the book is that it bears the unmistakable impress of Professor John Anderson of the University of Sydney, under

whom Dr Foulkes took his first degree in philosophy. Perhaps Russell was nodding, or needed the money. Anyway, those who know will detect this influence, both in matters of overall emphasis (when before did Russell seize all possible and impossible opportunities to praise Plato?) and in a hundred points of detail. The most amazing example is the detailed treatment given to a few of the Socratic dialogues of Plato. Those who heard Anderson's lectures to first-year students on "Phaedo" and the rest will be gratified to learn how very large those lectures bulk in the wisdom of the west.

Any book that might arouse an

interest in philosophy or the history of ideas is a good thing. It is hard to know just what books might do that. This one seems to fall pretty heavily among a number of stools. It holds nothing for the professional philosopher or the advanced student, except the pictures. The ordinary university student of philosophy could not possibly find it detailed enough in exposition, except in a few cases, or thorough enough in argument. Presumably then it was meant to be a "popular" work. Yet for the absolute layman, or a beginner of philosophy, it is pitched at a hopelessly high level.

D. STOVE.

Bill Harney, Anthropologist

W. E. (BILL) HARNEY: *Tales from the Aborigines*. Robert Hale, 22s. 6d.

THE Northern Territory blacks of more than a generation ago told me about an unusual man named *Bil 'ani*. At least that was approximately the way they pronounced it. For some time I supposed it—since there was not the slightest suggestion to the contrary—to be the name of a blackfellow. Perhaps the name puzzled me a little; it did not have quite the right sort of ring for the localities in which I heard it; but I do not recall having given the matter much thought since I was bent on other things. However, it kept on cropping up, always in circumstances which made clear that *Bil 'ani* was held in warm liking by many tribes. The picture I built up was one of a muscular, blocky man, a wanderer, a wonderful storyteller, full of jokes and laughter, and with friends everywhere. Eventually I began to look more closely into his identity. I cannot recall, after so many years, the exact circumstances in which I learned that I must change the name to *Bill Harney*, that he was a European, and a man of remarkable personality, but I know that the blacks were captivated by him as by nobody else I have known.

This was at a time when Harney had not revealed himself, as he has now done, to a wider world, as a man of gifts, both of mind and spirit. It was because of those gifts that he had been able to become the dear acquaintance of "a laughing carefree people full of humour and a curious custom, in that they were only too happy to share their female companions with their friends." His race, and the differences of the life from which he had come, had ceased to signify, at least to the extent that no mention was made of them in the many con-

his race, but they made nothing of it. The omission remains unique in my experience, and there is a kind of measure of his gifts.

The publication in more recent years of his many interesting books and articles—together with some excellent broadcasts—has enabled a public by no means limited to Australia to take pleasure in a true if rough-hewn talent. Mr Harney's work has that most fundamental of qualities, authenticity.

Tales from the Aborigines is an odd but charming mixture. It is true to title in that it contains more than a score of Aboriginal tales, all of them very well told if rather freely handled. But it has much more. There are about a dozen of the author's poems, many reminiscences of a wandering life, some well-informed comments on the associations of black and white, and some wise sayings by the Aborigines. A mixture, but put together with gusto, humour and feeling (and with a blessed absence of the sentimentality that disfigures so much that is written about the Aborigines). In many ways it is the best thing he has written.

The tales—23 in all—are divided into four groups. Some are tales of "fantasy," some of "imagination," some of "caution and observation," and some of "contact" (a horrible word which Mr Harney ill-advisedly took over from anthropologists, who borrowed it—from aeroplane mech-

anics?—at a time when much unprofitable, inelegant imagery was fastened on the discipline). Portions of a rich mythology, having to do with the cosmology of many tribes, are mingled with lesser folk-tales, narratives of contemporary times, and the general commentary. The total effect is pleasing; an excellent impression is given of the manner and circumstances in which the tales are told in real life; and the reader will acquire a good sense of the cast of Aboriginal mind and personality. By writing simply and with candour of things with which he is intimately familiar the author is able to invest the book with a marked true-to-life character.

Mr Harney uses verse to try to sum up Aboriginal conceptions of Europeans, their mentality and style of life. I doubt if verse is his metier. His fund of knowledge, insight and sympathy needs something better than jingly rhyme to do it justice. But a very good impression of Aboriginal ideas manages, nevertheless, to come through. The pawky, sardonic tone is very Aboriginal; so too are the lack of respect for Europeanism and the philosophic acceptance of a toppling tradition. The sketches of Europeans harried by work, greed and time are amusing and uncomfortably accurate. I should think it not unlikely that one or two will find a place in the anthologies.

Among the best though briefest things in the book are the "sayings of Aboriginal philosophy," but they are given in too aphoristic a form to bring out their real significance. An absorbing book might be written on this topic, and I should much like Mr Harney to write it. The saying "death (is) just like nothing" is quite consistent with certain Aboriginal conceptions, but the conceptions have to be stated if misunderstanding is to be avoided; after all, much of the most violent uproar in Aboriginal life comes from grief over untimely death. Again, a saying like "by faith we live, by force we perish" (on ritual faith) is, thought not untrue to Aboriginal viewpoints, less convincing as stated than some of the others e.g. "if want . . . can't help . . . must have" (on restraint in sex), and "mouth one way . . . belly nother way" (on two-facedness).

Some remarks made here and there in the book suggest that Mr Harney is sensitive—in my opinion, quite needlessly so—to the differences between his treatment of his subject and the way an anthropologist might handle it. The scholarly studies of course have somewhat different objects to serve and other rules to keep. For just those reasons many fail to do what this wise and kindly study does extremely well, and that is to make the reader feel a warm intimacy with

