

Book Reviews

Kristian Smidt, *The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T. S. Eliot*. Tromsø. 1973. 95 pp.

This volume is a collection of lectures and articles. Despite the somewhat disparate origins of these chapters, they are united by a common concern for what Professor Smidt terms "recognition," that is the arrival at something deeper and more significant than mere mechanical understanding, the discovery of the basic pattern or form underlying the literary work. For instance, the author sees one of the main principles informing *The Waste Land* as that of a dialogue of the sexes, all of the characters of the poem combining not into Tiresias, as T. S. Eliot maintains, but into two, one male and one female. Partly as a result of the revision of the originally much longer poem under Pound's guidance, these two voices then gradually acquire "mythic dimensions." This is only one example of the author's judicious independent treatment of Eliot's poetry. Professor Smidt does not claim to change our understanding of Eliot's poems and plays in a drastic way, but his thorough knowledge of the subject enables him to stress aspects that critics too often overlook. Thus, in a refreshing way, he draws attention to the strong autobiographical constituent in supposedly objective impersonal poems like *The Waste Land* and the *Four Quartets* and to the secular element in a religious poem like *Ash-Wednesday*.

While Professor Smidt's criticism of Eliot's poetry is consistently of a high quality, he is more uneven as a critic of the plays. His comparison of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *John Gabriel Borkman* with *The Family Reunion* is illuminating, but his hypothesis that Ibsen's *The Pretenders* influenced the writing of *Murder in the Cathedral* decisively does not carry conviction. The internal evidence is slender, and external evidence is lacking altogether. But my criticism on this score does not seriously impair the value of this book. It is a contribution to our understanding of Eliot as it stands and would have been even better if the author had taken the trouble to expand and elaborate his insights further. Excessive length is the bane of much scholarship, but that does not mean that brevity always is the soul of wit.

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