

It's hard to imagine a less Vendleresque critic (or Dickinsonian poet) than Ezra Pound. Too jokey, too impatient for close readings, he always leaped unpredictably from the detail to the big picture. In 1917–18 he published a series of twenty articles, "Studies in Contemporary Mentality," that took on the giant subject of the British periodical, all the way from stuffy old *Blackwood's* to middle-class women's magazines like *Quiver* to the lowbrow *Family Herald*. Pound took a special interest in the *Herald's* medical-advice column, "Helps to Health":

Archie has perhaps "an excess of natural waxy secretion in the ears"; white curd soap is recommended. Exercise, air, washing of various parts are suggested to other correspondents. The family physician seems possessed of good sense. The column is doubtless useful, and other weeklies might profit by similar methods.

As an indication of stratum note that the "Family Herald" is the first paper in which I have found ads. relative to "nits and vermins in the hair," and the ad. beginning "IF YOUR CHILD has nits or head pests." It is arguable, by these portents, that the "Family Herald" reaches, or at least approaches, the verminous level, but still it is a cut above "Punch."

Sociologists, semioticians, the Frankfurt School—in his slapdash way Pound anticipates them all. In *MODERNISM IN THE MAGAZINES: AN INTRODUCTION* (Yale, \$40), Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman claim Pound as the father of a more specific discipline: the study of magazines. The ones that interest them most are the Poundian "little magazines," such as *Poetry*, *Rhythm*, and *Blast*, that did so much to promote modern movements in literature and art.

Scholes, a former president of the Modern Language Association, and Wulfman, a digital librarian, intend their book as a primer for academics who want to figure out how magazines in the early twentieth century actually worked.

They give hints on how to compare contributor lists, how to interpret circulation figures, how to relate advertising to editorial content. They decry the old archival practice of tearing out ad pages. Magazines, they argue, need to be studied and digitized intact.

Having recently woken up the editor of a literary magazine, I found myself riveted by this book. Here was a page from a 1920 issue of *Poetry* with what we call a "house" ad (for Harriet Monroe's lectures on the new trends in verse) directly below an ad for Horlicks malted milk. How on earth did she land Horlicks? The question may be of narrow interest, but I suspect even nonprofessionals will enjoy Pound's original articles, which Scholes and Wulfman reprint in their entirety—and will be charmed by the author's unabashed pleasure in old ephemera:



Long ago John Stuart Mill suggested that poetry was "overheard"—not directly addressed to the reader—and later I. A. Richards picked up that notion and incorporated it into his own poetics. The transformation in magazine advertising that takes place as a magazine recedes from us in time moves it in this very direction. We—contemporary readers of old magazine advertising—are not being directly addressed either. We have been put in the position of the audience for poetry.

It is a melancholy truth that most ads age better than most poems. Scholes and Wulfman embrace that truth without holding it against either kind of communication. They don't make us choose between loving the moderns and understanding how they paid the bills.

In the United States, the Chilean Roberto Bolaño is best known as the author of two sprawling novels written late in his short life: *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. But in his lifetime he made his name as a writer of short stories and novellas. The best of them,

like "Clara," "Last Evenings on Earth," and *By Night in Chile*, are perfect in a way the longer works never tried to be.

Someone is telling a story he or she doesn't understand and yet needs to get right: that is the basic dilemma in Bolaño's fiction. His narrators second-guess themselves: "I heard some youngsters saying, Pepe the Cop, Pepe the Cop, then laughing, as if my nickname were the funniest joke in the world. Or maybe they were laughing for some other reason." They embellish movies, conversations, books, and songs with the meanings they *should* have had: "The song was about a pier and mist, and faithless lovers (as all lovers are in the end, he thought indulgently) and places that remain steadfastly faithful." His stories have none of the fake intimacy, and presuming friendliness, of most American short fiction. They are more like depositions or religious testimonials. Often his stories involve writers: Bolaño found writers inherently absurd and touching. They are to him what priests are to J. F. Powers, quixotic heroes trapped in a twilight faith.

THE INSUFFERABLE GAUCHO (New Directions, \$22.95) reminds us how many kinds of story Bolaño could write on his favorite themes.² The title story—a parody of Borges and other Argentine worshipers of the gaucho—is Bolaño at his most purely comical. Set during the currency crisis of 2001, it involves a lawyer who retires to the pampas only to find the cattle replaced by feral rabbits. The disparate collection also includes an homage to Kafka ("Police Rat") and the

famous essay "Literature + Illness = Illness." In my favorite story, "Álvaro Rousselot's Journey," an Argentine writer makes a pilgrimage to the French moviemaker who has plagiarized his novels. This

shaggy-dog tale, full of ironic respect for the trade of the pulp writer and wry disdain for the vagaries of literary fashion, makes an ideal introduction to the Bolaño *imaginaire*. ■

² *In the interest of full disclosure—and future scholarship!*—an advertisement for *The Insufferable Gaucho* appears in the most recent issue of *The Paris Review*.

