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| Wilson, Edmund (1895-1972) |
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| American literary critic, editor, playwright, novelist and journalist Edmund Wilson’s key critical texts trace the development of twentieth-century Anglo-American writing. Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1931), through which a ‘generation discovered modern literature’ (Dabney 158), was the culmination of his first and most influential period as an arbiter of cultural taste. Charting its authors’ absorption of Symbolist technique, particularly their privileging of image and the formal properties of music, and its consequent impact on readership, Wilson found aesthetic unity in writing which eschewed the narrative connectives readers of prose and poetry had come to expect. Thus he grounded his survey of Proust, Joyce, Stein, Yeats and others via portraits of each author: portraits established within the cultural and historical determinants of the author’s experience and career-long development. Taking a leftward turn from literary to social criticism, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (1940) marked the second stage of his cultural – and political – influence. With its verbal portraits of Jules Michelet, Anatole France, Marx and Engels, it too is very much of its historical moment, passionately advocating a humane and lasting social revolution in September 1940, even as events in Europe argued against its imminent realization. His editing of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s posthumous manuscript for *The Last Tycoon* witnessed the increasing international academic recognition of Wilson’s role in shaping critical opinion of individual authors. |
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| Further reading:  (Collini)  (Dabney) |