# POETRY

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*Cover by John R. Biggs*

## POETS IN UNIFORM NUMBER

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Correspondence *from Nicholas Moore, Eric S. de Maré, H. John Edwards, and Peter J. Little.*

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POETRY
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# Letter on Poetry

(*The Fifth*)

DEAR TAMBIMUTTU,

You ask me to send you a letter "on poetry," but you know that on this subject, taken so largely, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, new to say: the whole truth about the art can be found in the dicta of four men—Plato, Milton, Vico and Wordsworth. As outriders to these paladins we might add four more names—Aristotle, Coleridge, Keats and Rilke. Germans would insist on adding Goethe and Schiller; the French, Baudelaire and Valéry; the English, Dryden and Arnold—but interesting as all these are as critics—as exponents of a particular style or commentators on a particular poet—none of them adds anything to the essential theory of poetry. Milton defines poetry; Plato describes the poet; Vico describes poetry; Wordsworth defines the poet. Definition is a psychological activity; description an historical activity. Plato and Vico revolve round a mythical prototype—Homer. Milton and Wordsworth delve into themselves.

Milton defines poetry as simple, sensuous and passionate. The epithets are exact, and exhaustive. They are exclusive of all other epithets. "Had these three words only been properly understood," said Coleridge, "and present in the minds of general readers, not only almost a library of false poetry would have been either precluded or still-born, but, what is of more consequence, works truly excellent, and capable of enlarging the understanding, warming and purifying the heart, and placing in the centre of the whole being the germs of noble and manlike actions, would have been the common diet of the intellect instead."*

But the definition of the poet needs many more words—indeed, most of the eight or nine thousand words of the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) though none of the eight or nine thousand words of the *Essay Supplementary to the Preface* (1815). The young Wordsworth was a brilliant psychologist. The recently discovered *Prefatory Note to the Borderers*, published by Professor de Selincourt in his notes to the new edition of the *Poetical Works*, is perhaps the best proof of it: as analysis it is as thorough as any modern case history. But it is to the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that we must return again and again, discovering in each word a significance which we had previously missed. It is our own problems, rising from year to year, which we find anticipated there. 1800—that was a time comparable to our own. Wordworth's crisis had come two years earlier in 1798—his final disillusionment with the French Revolution. The crisis for so many young poets of to-day

* *Coleridge's Shakesperean Criticism* (ed. Raysor), Vol. I, p. 165.

came two years ago with the signing of the pact between Germany and Russia. Their idealism was suddenly dead—betrayed by the gross politicians who had for too long deceived them. Poets, who now turn in on themselves, to discover the truth about the poet, will tread the same labyrinth as Wordsworth. They might save themselves much trouble by re-reading the *Preface* and examining it phrase by phrase.

Two particularly relevant phrases to which I would like to draw your attention are based on the words "pleasure" and "tranquillity." The second phrase is the more familiar, though it is nearly always distorted in quotation: "*poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.*" The second phrase has not caught the popular imagination so readily, though it is no less striking: "*We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure.*"

This second phrase, explains Wordsworth, refers to "the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which (man) knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. . . . We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone." Further, "wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure."

This statement is sufficiently remarkable as an anticipation of Freud's pleasure principle (cf. "We may put the question whether a main purpose is discernible in the operation of the mental apparatus; and our first approach to an answer is that this purpose is directed to the attainment of pleasure. It seems that our entire psychic activity is bent upon *procuring pleasure* and *avoiding pain*, that it is automatically regulated by the pleasure-principle"—*Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 298). But we are concerned now with the function which Wordsworth gives this pleasure-principle in the process of poetic activity, and we must refer to his famous description of that process. According to Wordsworth the following stages are involved:

(1) the origin of the process: emotion recollected in tranquillity;
(2) contemplation of this recollection continued until, "by a species of reaction," the tranquillity gradually disappears and is replaced by
(3) an emotion, *kindred* to that which was before the subject of contemplation.
(4) Composition may then occur, inducing
(5) a state of enjoyment, whatever the nature of the emotion that is being experienced by the poet.

Wordsworth does not define what he means by tranquillity, but his meaning is obvious enough if we remember his social behaviour and his practice in composition, as attested by his sister Dorothy and other witnesses. Tranquillity, for Wordsworth, meant literally a flight from society; and the actual moment of composition meant a flight from even those members of his household with whom he habitually dwelt.

The modern practice has, of course, been quite the contrary. We have been exhorted to go out into the streets, into the factories, even actually to become proletarians or workmen. We have been exhorted to fight in Spain, to sit under the bombs, to sleep in shelters, to join the Home Guard. None of these conditions ensure "tranquillity"—there is, in fact, no tranquillity in the modern world —least of all, perhaps, in New York or Hollywood.

Wordsworth's precept has been powerfully reinforced nearer our time by Rilke, in those *Letters to a Young Poet* which are so full of profound wisdom. "I can give you no other advice," said Rilke to his correspondent, "than this: retire into yourself and probe the

depths from which your life springs up. . . . For the creative artist must be a world unto himself and find everything in himself and in Nature, of which he is part and parcel." And again: "Love your loneliness, and endure the pain which it causes you with harmonious lamentations (schönklingender Klage)." The word *Einsamkeit* (loneliness, solitariness, tranquillity) recurs like a refrain through all these letters and indeed through all Rilke's work. It will be remembered that Milton also spoke movingly of "a calm and pleasing solitariness."

Rilke, it might be objected, was writing in 1903, when solitariness could be found, if not easily, at least possibly. But that artificial isolation, which I have called fortress-solitude, is not the same thing as Rilke's Einsamkeit or Wordsworth's tranquillity or Milton's solitariness. It is not, in Rilke's phrase, bound to Nature—by which he means a natural way of living. In such fast seclusion the poet cannot be, in Wordsworth's phrase, "a man speaking to men." It may seem unreasonable to non-poetic people, but what the poet nevertheless demands is a kind of society in which tranquillity, withdrawal, is a natural right. He must be able to go into the press and out of it, as easily as he passes from his own house into the street. The charge he makes against the modern world is that it has invaded his house of quiet, invaded it with cares and rumours, insistent politics and totalitarian wars. It has made the act of contemplation impossible.

The distinction here is subtle, but it must be made, and made clear. It is really a distinction between *contemplation* and *participation*; but contemplation, which must take place in tranquillity, demands a previous emotional (sympathetic) participation. Otherwise there is no material to be recollected. In relation to political or historical events, this distinction is drawn very clearly by Croce in his new book, *History as the Story of Liberty*. "Those intellectuals who see salvation in the withdrawal of the artist or thinker from the world around him, in his deliberate non-participation in vulgar practical contrasts—vulgar in so far as they are practical—do without knowing it compass the death of the intellect. In a paradisal state without work or struggle in which there were no obstacles to overcome, there could be no thought, because every motive for thought would have disappeared; neither any real contemplation, because active and poetic contemplation contains in itself a world of practical struggles and of affections." Incidentally, I would like to recall that this precisely was the theme or moral of *The Green Child*, the romance I published some five years ago. But to return to Croce: what he says of the historian's relation to contemporary events is true of the poet's relation to these same events (and you will remember that Croce draws no distinction between the historian and the philosopher): "It is not possible to remain immersed in events, taking part directly in their formation in the struggle of parties (even if this be a struggle of words or writings), nor is it possible to stand outside them and move as in a void. It is necessary to pass through them, to feel the impact and the agony which they generate in order to stand above them, rising from suffering to judgment and knowledge."

The poet does not *judge*: in that he differs from the historian. The poet liberates: he releases us from the actual. He allows us to pass from the real to the superreal, but he always has the real in view. True poetry, says Croce, is a dream with the eyes open, and poetry and history, intuition and judgment, are the two wings of the same breathing creature. But just because he must move in harmony with history, the poet has the right—indeed, the necessity—to guide or direct events. If the existing conditions hinder his flight, he must throw his bias against the prevailing course. In such circumstances—and they exist now—the poet is compelled to

demand, *for poetic reasons*, that the world shall be changed. It cannot be said that his demand is unreasonable: it is the first condition of his existence as a poet.

But the poet must realise that the changes promised by all the existing political parties are not valid for him. They do not guarantee his solitude. They all imply a more exacting social contract, a more complete surrender of individual liberty: surrender to the State, surrender to the curiosity of the Press, surrender to mass opinions and mass standards. The direction must be reversed—political power must be distributed among the counties, the cities, the villages and the parishes—distributed and broken into human, tangible units. Economic power must be distributed among voluntary organizations and workshops. Financial power must be altogether excluded from society.

That is why the poet must be an anarchist. He has no other choice. He may temporize with capitalism, with democratic socialism, with state socialism; and in peaceful times any of these political systems may be persuaded to patronize culture, including poetry. But they cannot inspire culture, they cannot guarantee the creative activity of the poet. For the last thing they can afford to guarantee is the solitude of the poet, which is a withdrawal from the social contract, a denial of the principle of collectivism. It is a bitter lesson to learn, for those poets who have put their faith in the non-poetic prophets—in Marx, in Lenin, in Hitler. Poets should not go outside their own ranks for a policy; for poetry has its own politics; and poets, as Shelley so proudly claimed, though unacknowledged as such, are still the supreme legislators of the world.

HERBERT READ

24.ii.1941.

## *Notes on Contributors in uniform*

G. S. FRASER : is somewhere in Africa ; the review of Empson published in this issue was written on board a troopship.

ALUN LEWIS : 25, is a Sapper in the Royal Engineers ; poems in *Horizon*, *Life & Letters Today*, etc. ; Stories in *Manchester Guardian*, *Penguin Books*, *New Writing*, *Best British Short Stories* and elsewhere ; Says, "Haven't written what I want to write yet—neither about Wales nor Humanity."

ALAN ROOK : a Captain in the Royal Artillery ; Poems in *Kingdom Come*, *The Cherwell*, etc. Author of " Songs from a Cherry Tree " (Hall's, Oxford).

HERBERT CORBY : we know nothing about him except that he is in the R.A.F.

TOM SCOTT : like his friend G. S. Fraser is also *en partant pour Syrie* . . .

DAVID GASCOYNE : is a ship's cook in H.M. Examination service.

GEORGE SCURFIELD : a selection of his verse will be published in the PL PAMPHLETS series that we are issuing in May ; is interested in folk-song.

JOHN WALLER : in the R.A.M.C. ; Editor of *Kingdom Come* ; has appeared in *Now*, *Wales*, etc.

LAWRENCE DURRELL : when last heard of was in the Government Service in Greece.

J. F. HENDRY : is in an Anti-Aircraft unit ; has appeared in numerous English and American magazines ; Edited *The New Apocalypse* in collaboration with Henry Treece.

## A CHILDHOOD

I am glad I met you on the edge
Of your barbarous childhood.

In what purity of pleasure
You danced alone like a peasant
For the stamping joy's own sake!

How, set in their sandy sockets,
Your clear, truthful, transparent eyes
Shone out of the black frozen landscape
Of those gray-clothed schoolboys!

How your shy hand offered
The total generosity
Of original unforewarned fearful trust,
In a world grown old in iron hatred!

I am glad to set down
The first and ultimate you,
Your inescapable soul. Although
It fade like a fading smile
Or light falling from faces
Which some grimmer preoccupation replaces.

This happens everywhere at every time:
Joy lacks the cause for joy,
Love the answering love,
And truth the objectless persistent loneliness,
As they grow older,
To become later what they were
In childhood earlier,—
In a world of cheating compromise.

Childhood, its own flower,
Flushes from the grasses with no reason
Except the sky of that season.
But the grown desires need objects
And taste of these corrupts the tongue
And the natural need is scattered
In satisfactions which satisfy
A debased need.

Yet all prayers are on the side of
Giving strength to naturalness,
So I pray for nothing new,
I pray only, after such knowledge,
That you may have the strength to be you.

And I shall remember
You who, being younger,
Will probably forget.

STEPHEN SPENDER

## A LETTER TO ANNE RIDLER

A bird flies and I gum it to a concept,
You trim your concept to the flying bird,
Your round words plopping open out in rings.
May your love's dreams be innocent and absurd
For dreaming of your verses while he slept
You mastered these oblique and tricky things. . . .

But I was a reporter on a paper
And saw death ticked out in a telegram
On grey and shabby sheets with pallid print
So often, that it seemed an evening dram
Of solace for the murderer and the raper
Whose love has grown monstrous through stint.

I was a poet of this century
Pursued by poster-strident images
And headlines as spectacular as a dream
Full of cartoonists' dolls with paper visages;
I had no spare time over for reality,
I took things largely to be what they seem.

I had a headache from the endless drum,
The orator drumming on his private anger,
And the starved young in their accusing group
When I had written and could write no longer
Over my shoulder seemed to peer and stoop.
The adequate perspectives would not come.

It was not real, the news I got from London,
But made the immediate avenue unreal
And sapped my habits of their privilege:
Dreamy the granite in the evening sun
And like a vision, in their swoop and wheel,
The pigeons fluttering at Union Bridge.

The Communists were always playing darts,
The Spanish War survivor would not talk,
The Tory member only talked of peace.
In spring, the ash-buds blossomed in our hearts,
The tangle blossomed on the slimy rock,
The private impulse sought its vain release. . . .

And in December on the ballroom floor
The girls in flowering dresses swayed and whirled,
And no girl leant on my protective arm.
From all the height of speculation hurled,
I stood and hesitated by the door;
I felt the pathos and I felt the charm. . . .

Oh, I had hardly any will or shape,
Or any motive, but a sort of guilt
That half attracted them and half repelled;
My hand shook, and my glass of sherry spilt,
I wore a sort of silence like a cape.
The old historic constant pattern held.

And when at midnight in my lonely room
I tried to integrate it all in verse
The headlines seemed as distant as the girls.
If sex was useless, history was worse.
A terrible remoteness seemed my doom
Whether I wrote of bayonets or curls. . . .

So the stiff stanzas and the prosy lines
Accumulated on my dusty shelf,
A family joke, like any secret vice:
Dud bombs, damp rockets, unexploded mines.
"This sort of writing isn't really nice.
Oh, George, my darling, can't you be yourself?"

You can; and I would praise your studied art,
Dry and stiff-fingered, but more accurate
Than all my brilliant angers and my blind,
Hot, hurt perceptions, energized with hate:
Would praise your calm perspectives of the mind
So coloured with the pathos of the heart.

For my slack words were awkwardly heroic,
Your noble mood assumes no airs at all:
A rock of anger in this world unstable,
Me other people's sufferings made a stoic,
But you, a hostess at our hungry table,
Are kind; your atmosphere is germinal.

Loving the charity of women's love,
Too much a household pet, I see in you
The gentle nurture that now curbs my grief
As I grow tall, beyond that budding grove
Of all the beautiful beyond belief
Within whose shade my windflower passions blew.

Private to me, their shy and secret sun:
Who now with other private suns compete
And seek in man's inverted mode such love
As nerves the will to enter and complete
Its terrible initiation of
Man to these virtues that from pain are won.

And the sick novice whimpers for his home
Who shall be hurt and horribly alone
Before the historic vigil lets him sleep.
Yet for such hurt, such pity might atone
And such an Ithaca for those who roam
Far, that they may at last return and weep.

Why do the towers of Troy for ever burn?
Perhaps that old Jew told us, or perhaps
Since women suffer much in bearing us
We also must show courage in our turn,
Among these forks and dreaded thunder-claps,
Against an endless dialectic tearing us. . . .

Or freedom, say, from family love and strife
And all the female mystery of a room
That half supports and half imprisons us
May tear a man from mother, sister, wife,
And every soft reminder of the womb.
Dead Freud in lost Vienna argued thus.

I hardly know! But Fritz, who's now interned,
(Sober and well-informed like his race)
Told me this war might last, say, seven years;
But right would triumph then, the tide be turned,
Unless indeed (the night fell on his face)
Our hopes are just illusions like our fears.

Perhaps in London, say, in seven years,
We'll meet, and we will talk of poetry,
And of the piety of homely things,
A common past, the flowering library
In which the awkward spirit perseveres
Until a world of letters shines and sings. . . .

Unless the vigilant years have numbed my face,
The long humiliation soured my heart,
The madman's silence boxed my veering mood:
Let time forgive me, if I fall apart,
And fall, as many souls have fallen from grace,
Through just and necessary servitude.

Or if we never meet, remember me
As one voice speaking calmly in the north
Among the muslin veils of northern light;
I bore the seed of poetry from my birth
To flower in rocky ground, sporadically,
Until I sleep in the unlaurelled night.

G. S. FRASER

## THE RETREAT

Faint now behind the secret eyes of these
The sleepers, the dreamers, the exact and delicate
Flowering of our age, dusk steals. And over

The trees and rivers, over the golden meadows and vines the glow
Of death is spreading. I one with them
Feel the pulse stir strangely. Now

Evening introduces her sudden crisis
Of vermilion and shadows. Silence falls
Over the cultivated secrecy of these faces.

I too with these have suffered. I too have felt
The richness pass and the inexplicable beauty
Of memory fading—lost in the present. Defeat,

Humiliation, and the dreaded tremendous excitement
Of movement and change were ours, in our blood, our fever.
Not alone in the aeroplane or the shell, not confined

To the trickery and lies, the treacherous bullet. No,
But even in fellowship, the touch of hand, in the quiet
Word, in the eyes of a daisy or the timelessness of trees
Lies fear. Death haunts the flowers and cities.

So now, leaning against my gun, in these fields and
Plains of Belgium, conscious of the warp and fret
Of spring on the hedges and forests, I accept! I accept!

For there lies all our power; the power of the young and the lonely.
I know that the past is lies, and the present only
Important. I see in life service, and in dying an end

Of loving. I know that the evil in our nature
Is our fear of history, our incapacity to suffer,
And our poor cold dread of the crises of the future.

The sun bows. And now the earth, the mother,
Is cold. The patient suffering of these my friends, their
Lucid sorrow, is my burden and my song.

ALAN ROOK

## CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY

Big-uddered piebald cattle low
The shivering chestnut stallion dozes
The fat wife sleeps in her chair
Her lap is filled with paper roses
The poacher sleeps in the goose-girl's arms
Incurious after too much eating
All human beings are replete.

But the cock upon the dunghill feels
God's needle quiver in his brain
And thrice he crows: and at the sound
The sober and the tipsy men
With one accord leap out of bed
And start the war again.

The fat wife comfortably sleeping
Sighs and licks her lips and smiles

But the goose-girl is weeping.

ALUN LEWIS

## EASTER IN CHRISTMAS

*What dark and terrible shadow is swaying in the wind?*

Beautiful are thy dwellings, Lord of Hosts,
The choir-boys in white go softly singing;
The world is full of pale frustrated ghosts.

Lovers cannot reach each other;
Stars are burnt by an insane fire;
The night is red and loud; the choir-boys
Sing softly ghostly vespers of desire.

*What dark and terrible shadow is swaying in the wind?*

An agitator and two thieves are swaying in the wind.

ALUN LEWIS

## THE PUBLIC GARDENS

Only a few top-heavy holly-hocks, wilting in arid beds,
Frayed lawns,
Twin sycamores storing the darkness massively under balconies of leaf,
And an empty rococo bandstand—strangely unpopular
Saturday evening in the public gardens.

But wait: These take their places:—
A thin little woman in black stockings and a straw hat with wax flowers,
Holding a varnished cane with both hands against her spent knees
As she sits alone on the bench, ah oddly
Alone and at rest:

An older wealthier lady, gesticulating and overdressed,
Puffily reciting the liturgy of vexations
To her beautiful companion,
The remote and attractive demi-Parnassian
Whose dark hair catches the sunlight as she listens
With averted face and apparent understanding:

A boy with his crutches laid against the wall
Pale in the shadow where the hops hang over
In light green bundles;—is he, too, waiting
For one who perhaps
Prefers another?

And I, forgetting my khaki, my crude trade,
And the longing that has vexed and silenced me all the day,
Now simply consider the quiet people,
How their pattern emerges as the evening kindles
Till the park is a maze of diagonal lines, ah far
Too fine to catch the sun like the glittering webs
The spiders have folded and flung from the fading privet.

*Only the children, passionately,*
*Snap my drifting lines with laughter*
*As they chase each other among the benches*
*In and out of the dreaming gardens.*

ALUN LEWIS

# SIX POEMS FROM AMERICA

## TO MY MOTHER

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,
Under the window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,—
She is a procession no one can follow after
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain
Whom only faith can move, and so I send
O all my faith and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

GEORGE BARKER

## TO MY BROTHER

And you, my shy one with a pin in your eye
Where I affixed the agony-badge, my brother,
You as gentle as water and simple as oxygen,
Shunning the compromise and the clever shadows,
Now, like a singing sheep dragged out to die,
O sing, sing up out of the fiery abbatoir:
And only to hear your voice, your voice again
I'll come down to join you in the sorrows.

No, let not this one, O let not this one
Clutching the tooth of Hitler in his chest
See the red spittle of my own blood ooze
Between his fingers: for this one is one
Whom wombs cannot restore, or time redress,
Nor I or the whole world recover if we lose.

GEORGE BARKER

## TO DAVID GILL

Or, you, new father of a blonde daughter, born
Between a gutted Warsaw and an Oslo sold,
With your knee-riding son, and nose for weather,
Subscriber to liberal papers and the Sailors' Fund,
The monument of the tremendous normal,
O where are you now, not wandering on the wold
Between Godalming and the sea-blossoming heather,
Or spitting half-crowns in the goldfish pond:

But mad as a mechanic with a broken spanner
Stand pointing an empty rifle at the East;
Or like the Spring embedded in November
Lie hoping for resurrection in Stavanger
Under the stone and snow. Or now you rest,
With oh so many ordinary things to remember.

GEORGE BARKER

## TO T. S. ELIOT

Expecting a bomb or angel through the roof,
Cold as a saint in Canterbury Cathedral,
This gentleman with Adam on his mind
Sits writing verses on cats that speak: lives
By the prolonged accident of divine proof,
A living martyr to the biological.
Hell spreads its horrors on his window blind
And fills his room with interrogatives.

St. Thomas doubting and not doubting,
Confident of God, but dubious of human,
I render my tongue as merely minor flame
To glorify this inglorious martyrdom:
And when the bomb or angel breaks the vaulting
Trust he remembers, among the others, my name.

GEORGE BARKER

## TO STEPHEN SPENDER

This poet with his soul upon his shoulder
Trudging up a world's steps to bring to those
Who shiver by the embers of their optimism
The hundredweight of his pity, now to him
I wave a word as the times grow colder
And our tears freeze to giant stars and close
The eye of love with death's bleeding prism.
Will war make blind vision wrong could not dim?

Let me see now not the irregular fountain
Whence poems rose like crystals, glittering truth,
But the tall chap with a leg like a flying buttress,
A hand for a saw or bow, a face worth a fortune
But for the distorted torture of the mouth
Which to his words of truth bore such a witness.

GEORGE BARKER

## TO C. B.

When the mask, when the mask, my darling, my darling,
Rots on your cheek bone and the imperial pimpernel
Rewards your memorial with insignificant insignia,
And against your head the world like a ball is bursted
Where the bullet abused it, then, then the dandy
Life out of your feathered hand hopped and fell
Still as a dropped doll forgotten in the syringa,
My dear, my darling, this, this is not the worst:

The worst is love that whips me with your smiles
Nine-tailed with tears that cut me to the quick,
And against all my thoughts turning a saw of pain
Strips my glory to the bone. Let whatever will
Ransack my scarecrow of its great intrinsics
If only, oh my darling, you inhabit me again.

GEORGE BARKER

## THIS GARDEN

This garden, sheen of lawn,
Rooks stooping on the cypress,
Texture of minute sound
Woven in sunlight.

Or walking at evening
After warbler's shivering
And other song, talking
To talk out the day.

These voices, day and failing,
Falling are autumn fruit,
Seed-bag and generous hoard,
Kind to our memory.

This too will be spectral,
The big house empty;
A compact with ruin,
A dusty conclusion.

And this bears. Burgeons
In a far autumnal
Bud of our blood,
And bone's blossom.

But far and late
And not for our picking;
O far and far,
No end to beginning.

Pecked by the proud birds,
Small fruit, rotten,
Golden or windfall,
Fruit of this garden?

DESMOND HAWKINS

## DAPHNIS AND CHLOË

(*For V.*)

### I

This boy is the good shepherd Daphnis.
He paces the impartial horizons,
Forty days in the land of tombs,
Waterless wilderness, seeking waterholes.
Knows the sound of the golden eagle, knows
The algebraic flute blue under Jupiter:
Supine in myrtle, lamb between his knees,
Has been a musical lion upon the midnight.

This boy was the good shepherd.
Time's ante-room by the Aegean tooth,
Curled like an umber snake above the spray,
Mumbling arbutus among the chalk-snags,
The Grecian molars where the blue sea spins.
Suffered a pastoral decay.

### II

This girl, Chloë, is the milk and honey.
Under the eaves the dark figs ripen,
The leaf's nine medicines, a climbing wine.
Under the tongue the bee-sting,
Under the breast the adder at the lung
Like feathered child at wing.

Life's honey is distilled simplicity.
The icy crystal pendant from the rock,
The turtle's scorching ambush for its egg,
The cypress and the cicada,
The wine-dark blue and curious, then,
The metaphoric sea.

This girl was the milk and honey,
Carved a prodigious atlas in the rock,
A skeleton chiselled in chalk
For Time's Nigerian brown to study on.
From the disease of life took the pure way,
Declined into the cliffs, the European waters,
Suffered a pastoral decay.

LAWRENCE DURRELL, *Corfu*, 1936

## *From* "4 SEASONS OF WAR"

Flood is upon us. Furies illimitable cast
Chaos of green blades, florid with mud, across
My thumbnail landscape, where the ground and grass
—Two giants in tunic of khaki and green gaiters—
Scissor and blind the eyes that have beheld.
See this wrinkled tree, faith floating drowned
In the welter and clash of heedless, head-on waters,
Just as dead as any seasoned soldier.
Never is destruction enough to halt the hunger of war's wintering wind.
Nor shall time's end unravel, spaced like stars, its wreck and holocaust.

Watery visions, the guilt of statesman and rabble,
Rob us of mind, breath, body and blood to mint
This ruthless purity, this camouflage of world, where
Futility multifold breathes fog over all rock.
O Charlie, fond friend, and web of awareness; quick
Limbs like lilies skirting the lips of trenches; or
Pupils, like the nuts of autumn, hanging ripe with melancholy,
On some beach of suffering his face is shaken like pebbles.
And that deception of all fire is his thought smudged, whorled and bludgeoned; wholly
Betrayed; as he is beaten lifeless back upon all our own four elements.

J. F. HENDRY

## THE CONSTANT NORTH

Encompass me, my lover,
With your eyes' wide calm.
Though noonday shadows are assembling doom,
The sun remains when I remember them;
And death, if it should come,
Must fall like quiet snow from such clear skies.

Minutes we snatched from the unkind winds
Are grown into daffodils by the sea's
Edge, mocking its green miseries;
Yet I seek you hourly still, over
A new Atlantis loneliness, blind
As a restless needle held by the constant north we always have in mind.

J. F. HENDRY

## "YESTERDAY'S CONQUERORS SHALL PERISH"

*"Front de fer front de singe*
*Ils perdront de vue la mer."*

1

A sheep lies rotting on the slag
The trees lend hue and freshness to the hanged
The day's rough diamonds polish the hard blood

2

Their dreams were not of filling up their grave
Of going down in mud

3

In the land of masters nothing grows but fire

4

A bitter face
Of blue milk and black honey
Gathered in fever
Conserved in misery
A face that's unashamed
With widely opening eyes
As living as a race of men
And sure to keep watch come what may

5

In those unhappy eyes grows only fire

6

Keeping close watch, arousing fear
Causing to give up, winning more warmth for the heart

7

But our desires are not so ardent in the night
My brothers, as this bright red star
Which gains ground on the horror despite all.

*April the* 14*th*, 1938.

PAUL ELUARD

(*Translated by David Gascoyne*).

(NOTE.—This poem was written by Eluard after the defeat of democracy in Spain. A comment on the tragic fate of the Spanish people, it may be considered almost more appropriate, if possible, as a comment on the present fate of the people of Eluard's own country, and as such it now appears, indeed, remarkably prophetic.—D. E. G.)

## SEA-DIRGE

I found him drowned on the rock that night
And the wind high; moonlight it was
And the hungry sucking of the sea
At my feet, stretching away in front of me;
Never a lover was laid on the braes that night
Nor any living soul I'm thinking, unless they were mad
And drawn to the moon; I found him there
In the rocks that night and the wind was high;
Bare he was as the sea and the rock on either side,
With a rag of silk in his hand
And sand in his nose; moonlight it was
And the sea before me; my hair dragged at my eyes,
I couldn't see, but a hand of ice was plunged
Deep in my womb; I found him lying
Drowned on the rock that night and
The wind was high; moonlight it was
And the sea sucked at my feet;
Then I heard from the cave behind
The skirl of the piper who died on rocks
The wail of the pipes and then the cry of his soul;
I upped and screamed at the wind and the sea,
I stripped my forsaken breasts to the moon
And I kissed the frost of his mouth and the sand;
I found him drowned on the rock that night
And the wind high; moonlight it was
And the hungry sucking of the sea
At my feet and his clammy head in my breasts
That were bare as the rock and the sea and the sand.

DEC. 1940 TOM SCOTT

## SONG

*(To Nicholas)*

I remember, I remember
the house where I was born
and the party where we all
danced naked on the lawn.

And the gardens where the children
could paddle in the sun,
most the whore of one dimension
eating her expensive bun.

And the household where my father
ruled us with his rod of iron,
how he used to tell my sister
not to read the works of Byron.

And the trees of different colour
In whose shade we used to sport,
on whose roots we used to piddle,
making moats around a fort.

In the evening how we gathered
round the fireplace in the hall,
then my mother used to tell us
Bible stories about Saul.

In the night time how we slumbered,
dreaming dreams of Santa Fe,
and of single breasted women
dancing tangoes on a tray.

I'm forgetting, I'm forgetting
The house where I was born,
Uncle William wouldn't like it
and he's watching all the time.

GEORGE SCURFIELD

## SONNET, AUGUST 1940

If, when I'm dead and dust, some miracle
stirs in my heart and sets the dead dream yearning,
and dream, released, walks on the glittering hill,
and down where water glowed, where bloom was burning,
most I'd regret the pavements by the river
lost to my eyes, and all the historic Thames
from rural springs where silver poplars quiver
down through its spires and little glancing streams:
—I'll go, my gloomy ghost, to Westminster
and there recall sad days of this success,
when heart was drab, when faith was as a stranger:
and by the Thames I love that day I'd swear
life had ended with luck, and loveliness
died with the easy view, the loss of danger.

HERBERT CORBY

## NIGEL

Nigel drowning in summer has heart's treasure,
Sun joy on flesh, sorrow surging of sea,
Sand loose below free body, pale brown
The skin rippling with long loosing
Of city breath, sea swell
Brave in the ear, all well
In this dear kingdom.

Enough for a day? Enough, Nigel, for life.
Sun bears deep over sorrow, over the trench
Dawn shows still skin, grey mould over carrion.
Sun rises with no gladness
For no breath. Poor ghost
Thin in the wind, all lost
In this dear kingdom.

JOHN WALLER

## AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

No sighs are lost to-day but for this other,
The dream child slain by his unkind enchantment;
Brown curling hair, firm hands, soft grace, and smile,
Hid comfortless in darkness all this while.

O you are good and no more good could temper
The virtue of your limbs, your pride of thought.
You are in hope Apollo, but make heaven
A world for me to give and be forgiven.

Sitting in these long galleries it seems
Each picture is a grief for you. Alone
I watch with crowds whose sole sincerity
Is a false faith in their own constancy.

Happy at heart is still the enigma,
This question our deceptive destiny.
For time or a play's length? Heart yet uncertain
I fear for the end of the act, the fall of the curtain.

JOHN WALLER

## POEM IN TIME OF SEARCH

*(For G. S. Fraser)*

The bomber drones over my shoulder
On the hill's top, and I welcome it.
For out there across the sky the moon
And Time and Space unite
In the image of Infinity; I fear
And fearing, love and revere.

The glorious cloud redolent of death
Edges towards me like my fate
And below me the town like a lake
Enwrapped with mist, dies:
I am torn by the Earth and Sky
And the wind and the world in a hollow bone are me.

See how this stone table
Draws my length to its level,
That the crouching eyes forget men
Their poverty, reproaches and governing,
To know the alive and tongueless truth
Of the secret trees and lesson of the alone and weeping cloud.

I have ignored, O God, too long
The everlasting secrets binding the stars,
Earth, and the sun, womb and tomb,
And you and me, you simple inscrutable monster:
Man gives nothing but this conflict
Which I accept; but what are you hiding, oceanic hills?

Let me believe! Too long have I doubted,
Everything doubted, the flare in my gut with a girl:
Let me believe! Give me the message,
You arrogant stones, and show me the rock
Beneath Europe's maelstrom; ring me, Time!
Toll me the deep remoteness, sky centre, and turn me then on men.

Give me my gift and my shift of canvas,
Set my staff in my hand
And point me over the tumble to my goal.
Make me alone and give me midnight
To be my nucleus as I near the sun;
And give me the sinews of Earth.

TOM SCOTT

## POEM FOR M. G.

These nervous and golden evenings, under the lamp
You will turn strict and pale to another smile,
And other hands will help you off with your coat,
And other voices will praise and qualify
Discussing a mood or a style
And raised as your sentences die with a jerk in your throat.
And outside at night it will be dark and damp
And against the raw damp sky
Your medallion will offer a scare to the sidling glance.
Oh, perhaps in some house you pass there will be music,
Perhaps people will dance.

Here I am soothed by the sad, the satiable sea,
Here I ride with a trident the blue imperial wave,
Here I am drowned by the hands, voices, and faces,
That move, sound, and behave,
Here I am smiling to think it is not you,
My dear, or your sort that intermit the wars
To root us from our vegetating places,
It's not for you the towers of Troy shall burn;
But you are like that patient Ithaca
To which, from all the headaches of the sea,
After ten years of labouring at their oars,
Some few, the luckier voyagers, return.

G. S. FRASER

## THE MOTHS

*After Pierre Jean Jouve.*

There are moths shut-in below
Moths pink and black and plump
Such moths are warm with an inhuman glow
Their wings are faults of memory
These creatures have the accent of two faces marked by fate
When they are hanging strictly folded-up below.

When the moths of the flesh below are called
Up from the shadows where they wait
They rise up pink and plump
They rise up but they flap
They flap but soon are swollen tight
With odour, blindness, nudity and weight.

DAVID GASCOYNE

## LONDON, 1940

Lonely now this unreal city of
desperate hopes and slow insidious
will to continue living, and broken the pavement
where our young desires went courting.

Low and determined the voices, like rain
on the splintered window, heavy as these
iron shutters the faces of those seeking
an end to the chain, the vision.

For those the strong, the powerful, not
realizing as yet their power, and also
for these, the impotent, let mastery be given
and the will to act, that out

of this, the Indescribable, treading
the path of promises, hope shall fuse,
resolve spring as ears to reaper, sharper
than this, fertile as those.

ALAN ROOK

## NADA

*After Pierre Jean Jouve.*

The most beautiful most naked and most tragic splendours
The oppositions between suns and darknesses
In night's forever black protective space
The deepest ecstasy in unknown arms.

All things that are no more
And yet are born in agony at dawn
See thee and lift thee up ineffable uproar
Innumerably flaming fireless sex of stars.

Love's flame too flaming and too crucified
Upon the intimate blackness of our eyes
Desert of love
Organ of God.

DAVID GASCOYNE

# SASSOON

*Rhymed Ruminations.* Poems by SIEGFRIED SASSOON. (Faber & Faber, Ltd.) 5*s*.

It was, perhaps, a little unfair to ask me to review these poems. I belong to a generation brought up between two wars, involved in the present one. Mr. Sassoon, on the other hand, has already experienced one war, and is now facing a second; much that for me is strange, for him must be old and unhappy. I am therefore anxious to make no hasty judgment which the course of the next few years will teach me to regret.

Caught up in this war as I am, these poems seem curiously remote. The questions that besiege me remain unrecognized, the difficulties unexplained. I can find in this book no experience which I also can label "*mine*."

Instead, we are presented with a picture of

> A mind, matured in wearying bones, *returning slowly*
> *Toward years revisioned richly*, while fruitions fail him,—
> A mind, renouncing hopes and finding lost loves holy.

The emphasis is on the past, which is revealed to us as a tranquil and golden age where change was rare and the sense of security abundant. The picture is of a man in his "unambitious mid-maturity," reaching out for the simple unchanging things, which make his

> world seem safer; homlier, sure to be
> The same tomorrow; the same, one hopes, next year.

Of one thing Mr. Sassoon is sure:

> I know
> How safe and sound life struck me thirty years ago.

The restlessness and change of to-day leave him merely lonely, merely feeling, not understanding.

> In 1909 the future was a thing desired. . . .
> Will someone tell me where I am—in '39?

So far I have no just complaint. There are many, by no means confined to Mr. Sassoon's generation, who feel equally nonplussed, equally regretful of a more slow-moving past. It is not my own attitude, but I am not foolish enough to condemn it for that reason.

But the trouble goes deeper. There is the present of aeroplanes, with their dimly-sensed menace, Germany with her "creed of crime," and the "cultural crusade of Teuton tanks." All very vague, never seen clearly, a half-felt apprehension of danger, but very disturbing Mr. Sassoon finds it, in spite of, perhaps even because of, the lack of clear understanding. So he writes:

> O heaven of music, absolve us *from this hell*
> Unto unmechanized mastery over life,

and the new-born son is "*doomed* to live"—a conception which fills me with dismay.

There is, however, very little of this deeper hopelessness. Generally, it is the mild *welt-anschauung* for a past age:

> That simpler world from which we've been evicted,
> For me, it shines far, far—too far—away,

to use the poet's own words; a world still reminiscent of the "well-ordered, distant, mid-Victorian time," where clouds are like "safe investments," and the future secure.

I can neither agree with this reading of the past, nor find it easy to forgive the lack of understanding of the present—a present seen through the eyes of a man who tries to live content in a world of books. In his novels Mr. Sassoon showed that he was capable of vision. To a limited degree (and God knows, we all have limitations) he saw quite clearly. Only if the poetry itself were pleasing, as apart from the content (for this book attempts to do no more than please), could I overlook the author's lack of understanding.

The title of the book makes only a modest claim, with no suggestion of instruction, nor of high-seriousness. The level of the writing is one of gentle discursiveness which, unfortunately, is too frequently abused.

> Alone, in silence, *at a certain time of night*
> Cows in his foreground *grazed and strolled and stood*

are two examples of the merest verbiage, and sometimes the tone is so discursive as to be strongly aggravating:

> Young people now—they don't know what the past was like.

The diction, too, is loose. I suppose each generation tries to cut back to a diction near to the spoken language: Wordsworth was no innovator in this respect. I could never understand why "unto" was preferable to " to," and there are here expressions like *bowery*, *glooming*, *mysterious glooms*, *unholpen*, *moth-winged gloom*, *secret stirrings* which are too reminiscent of the early mistakes of Keats. Propaganda has effected its insidious infiltration;

> None are exempt from service in this hour

might have been taken straight from the front page of the *Daily Mail*, and the inadequacy of the one reference to the war of 1914–18 as

> that four year's *friction*

is ridiculous.

What have I of praise? Two things, at least. Just once Mr. Sassoon sees clearly into the future; just once I found something which made me catch my breath. Writing of aeroplanes:

> In years to come
> Poor panic-stricken hordes will hear that hum,
> And Fear will be synonymous with Flight.

Whatever one thinks of that as poetry, as a prophecy (it was written in 1932) it is startlingly exact. Those who in France experienced low-flying attacks by the guns of the enemy air-force will realize how closely the two words may on occasion be related.

Finally, the best of these poems, *Antiquities*, *Blunden's Beech* and, especially, *November Dusk*, have a tranquillity and a gentle charm which this restless, destructive age of ours can ill afford to ignore.

ALAN ROOK

## THE WESTERN MIND

*The Gathering Storm.* By WILLIAM EMPSON. (Faber.) 6*s*.

Empson is a liberal, in several senses of that controversial word. He has generosity, a disinterested curiosity, a certain sympathetic detachment from positive religious disciplines (his interest in neat technical problems is an indication that practical science is the one discipline he has a naïve belief in: his standard is double, like an engineer's—an idea has to be neat, coherent, logical; he also has to be able to work it out in practice).

He is Liberal in other senses—inheriting that nineteenth-century puritan humanitarianism, which, filtering through Cambridge, carried a certain stringency and conscientiousness even into the Bloomsbury of Fry and Mrs. Woolf. About politics, he feels it unnecessary to express himself, since he reacts more or less automatically in the same way as the *News Chronicle* ("the thing has answered like a gong"). About political *philosophy*, on the other hand, he has the rather terrifying Liberal scepticism. He thinks it might all be explained by economics, but not any economics devised so far. "It is too weak to speak of right and wrong"—all social conventions, especially those with most style and vitality, involve cruelties: he "loves while abhorring" the style and vitality of the Japanese. (About foreigners, he is friendly and intelligent—in a way that reminds you, every now and again, with a little twinge of surprise, of Empire-builders in *Blackwood's:* government, "the one thing the Chinese aren't good at.") About religion and sex, he has that nineteenth-century stringency: Christian morals are all right, but "Christ stinks of torture": he has a love affair, but gets worried and sniffy about the sex subconscious—"Love rules the world, but is it rude, or slime?" Be kind, be gentle, keep the subconscious in its place. . . .

It throws light, all this, on the best type of mind among our ruling classes (Empson reminds me of my sister, an economist, my cousin, a naval officer and an engineer). His political reflections have a sort of heavy sagacity, like a more weary and better-informed Dryden. About fear,

> As to be hurt is petty and to be hard
> Stupidity; as the economists raise
> Bafflement to a boast we all take as a guard;
>
> As the wise patience of England is a gaze
> Over the drop, and "high" policy means clinging:
> There is not much else that we dare to praise. . . .

This sagacity is dry, and the dryness is typical: e.g. a poem about death, where after intelligently cataloguing various attitudes to death (Christian, Buddhistic, Communistic)—after observing (very British) that there is "something about" a man who will die for something—he concludes, "Otherwise I feel very blank upon this topic." He always feels blank, or at least detached—he speaks of two traditions in European literature, "Christ" and "the magnificent milord," sympathetically, but he doesn't quite "believe in" either (not to the extent of wanting to revive them). He is quite sure he has nothing to say to, or about, the proletariat. He feels, however, he may have a useful naivety, or be a useful safety valve. . . .

With this very detached, balanced, reasonable attitude (and with its touch of painful stringency), go, very naturally, fits of despair and melancholy: life asserting itself against these neat surface patterns—asserting itself as despair and death. . . .

> Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.
> It is not the effort nor the failure lives,
> The waste remains, the waste remains and kills. . . .

Western civilization has been run, so far, on effort and failure, on tremendous assimilative impulses like Empson's. It does seem now to be running down, clogged with waste: it is strange, certainly, that this humane and liberal man should write most movingly in rage and despair, as in the magnificent *Aubade* (about a night in Tokio with a Japanese woman, unfortunately interrupted by an earthquake):—

> Tell me again about Europe and her pains,
> Who's tortured by the drought, who by the rains,
> Glut me with floods where only the swine can row
> Who cuts his throat, and let him count his gains.
> It seemed the best thing to be up and go. . . .

Even here, Empson moves from the accidental, personal frustration (it is never a case, with this terribly efficient man, of personal *failure*) to the general issue:

> But as to risings, I can tell you why
> It is on contradictions that they grow.
> It seemed the best thing to be up and go.
> Up was the heartening and the strong reply,
> The heart of standing is we cannot fly.

However moved he is, Empson strives to be detached and accurate, and (since all issues are very complicated) to avoid over-emphasis, and to qualify. This makes his occasional simplicities somehow all the more trustworthy. The lines I have quoted move me more than a great deal of vaguer rhetoric about the Chinese or Spanish wars.

Technically, there is not much to say about this volume. At his best, Empson is neat, clear, Drydenic: he uses refrain skilfully to link up scattered instances. There is occasional awkwardness, owing to too great concreteness, e.g.:

> Not busting now before the fish away,
> I would not make such murders of my teens. . . .

Where the first line means, I take it, something like:

> With patience now to sit the dinner through. . . .

This concretness is sometimes rather charming, as in the lines about poetic attitudes:

> Assume what answers any wits have found
> In evening dress in rafts upon the main
> Not therefore uneventful or soon drowned.

His attempts at multiple apprehension through puns, as in *Bacchus*, do not, for me, come off, because the puns are too conscious, and the associations and ideas too personal. This expert on ambiguity is most successful as a poet when he is most plain, blunt, and unambiguous. A long prosy poem dosn't quite come off either, because, for the sort of thing he wants to say in it, his verse is a crude medium compared to his very beautiful prose.

G. S. FRASER

## GLYN JONES

*Poems*. By GLYN JONES. (The Fortune Press.) 4*s*. 6*d*.

It is perhaps a little unnecessary to celebrate Glyn Jones's poetic virtues in *Wales**: his vast patience, his mastery of arresting phrase and stunning imagery, his almost shy-making earnestness. These are, seriously, great gifts. These are the virtues which Mr. Jones himself regards as eminently poetic. And so, having begun by conceding all that Mr. Jones might be tempted to claim, I hope I may be permitted, as a special favour, to devote this review of his first book of poems to the demolition of that regrettable poetic theory of his, which if preserved intact will prevent his next book of poems from being perhaps the finest blossom of our burgeoning Anglo-Welsh literature. He should be glad to know that when I praise his book it will not be because he is a catholic or a socialist or a contemporary man or has been killed in Spain; he should also be glad to know that when I praise him it will be in spite of the fact that I dissent completely and irreconcilably from the theory on which he writes.

This book is, I think, of a prodigious representative importance here in Wales. It is deeply dyed in that neo-Arthurian idealism which Welsh religious specialization was bound sooner or later to produce. It is, in fact, an instance of *l'art substitué à Dieu* in a rather Welsh manner. Here am I, it says, the man of Art, and there is the "world," unregenerate and as iniquitous as ever, driving me by its cheerful indifference to my evangel of beauty into the exclusive and picturesque monasticism in which you now behold me. Mr. Jones will forgive the caricature, because his greatest shortcoming, if I may put it bluntly, is his modesty, and because (although I am obviously not one of the "simpler readers" for whom the poems are published, nor one of those "who have enjoyed pictures and words in poetry, and poems built up solid out of concrete nouns") I remain an excited admirer.

Time and the war have not rendered more acceptable that familiar distinction on which Mr. Jones rears his theory, the distinction between the "ideas" and "statements" of prose and the "pictures" and "words" of poetry. He puts the question thus:

> Keats, say, is a good poet. Let us agree about that for a moment. But because he wrote a line like "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," the sort of saying you might see in a book on philosophy, or even in a volume of sermons? Or because he wrote the "Bright star" poem and used the word "gluts" in the third line of his sonnet on the sea? To me obviously the latter.

And to me, obviously, neither and both. If Keats is a good poet, it is because I like him, and that is because he is what he is, and thinks what he thinks, and says what he says in his own way. The distinctions between imagery and style and form and idea are simply unusable—not invalid but simply unusable—for the purpose of assessing organic expression. A man has a skeletal framework, a system of endocrine glands, a philosophy of life, a place in society, and many other things, and whether

* This review was written for *Wales* and is printed here because of the war-time non-publication of that paper.

he is a great man or a good man or a charming man at any given moment depends on all these things as well as on all the corresponding factors in the man who is *deciding* whether he is great or good or charming. . . . A man for whom I have a high regard has been told by a doctor that he has a perfect duodenum. Good. But it is not for that that I have the high regard, though it may for all I know have contributed to his admirable serenity. I simply do not know. . . . And the same careless ignorance accompanies me when I go to enjoy such poetry as I find enjoyable. No doubt "effects" to some extent can be "analysed," and dissecting organisms is a pretty pastime up to a point. But it is impossible to say that such and such a poet is "good" in spite of his "philosophy" or his "pose" or his "point of view" and because of his use of this "word" or that "image" in this line of that ode. Quite impossible, except now and again for rhetorical purposes.

After all, if poetry *were* simply a matter of building an edifice of word-bricks and phrase-bricks and picture-bricks, it would be merely one of the less important of luxury hobbies, and I would suggest that Mr. Jones should betake himself elsewhere, bricklaying being no job for a master architect. It really will not do to hallow so trifling an amusement with all the technicolour glamour of Genius, as Mr. Jones, *chware teg*, does his best to do. No. The Poet-as-Magician is in every sense an impossible creature. A poet may do some things you particularly like, and in a special mood may behave in a way that will attract you when *you* are in a special mood. But so does everybody else. And that is all there is to it. The only magic the poet uses is the magic that constitutes his individuality as a living thing—and what makes one poet stronger than another is simply that moral vigour and integrity which Mr. Jones has come to believe is so essentially unpoetic!

See what happens when Mr. Jones applies his theory:

> . . . I once heard a lecturer deliver a speech on brotherhood which was exactly what we might suppose Whitman to have been capable of had he not been a poet. In other words, Whitman and the speaker both held precisely the same philosophy.

To this I must say No, gently but very firmly. The speaker could not have held Whitman's philosophy without also having his peculiar egoism and his sexual eccentricity and his remarkable interest in phrenology—not to mention all his heart and mind and soul and strength, and that alleged mother of his children in New Orleans!—without, in fact, *being* Whitman. Whitman was not a Lecturer on Brotherhood plus a Poet: he was simply Whitman. And in the same way Lawrence was Lawrence, and how Mr. Jones managed to remain "entirely indifferent to the Lawrence doctrine" while being deeply affected by his "*vocabulary* and *imagery*" remains to me an unfathomable mystery. But I find it profoundly interesting that Mr. Jones names Whitman and Lawrence of all people—men who were nothing if not prophets and propagandists and perhaps would not have been heard of if they were anything else. It is quite as suggestive as the correlated fact that even those who praise Mr. Dylan Thomas for the wrong reasons have the habit of quoting the *right* passages—passages that would perhaps belie all that Mr. Thomas stood for, if his reticence did not prevent us from being quite sure whether, critically, he stands for anything!

I believe that Mr. Jones will not resent being described as, in his latest phase, Mr. Thomas's disciple (though perhaps never so doggy a young dog!), especially if I add that if one *were* to accept Mr. Jones's distinction between a poet's "philosophy" and his "poetry," one would have to own that, while Mr. Thomas remains the more promising philosopher, Mr. Jones seems as likely as not

to out-do him as a poet! Fortunately (for us who should like to see our Welsh literary anarchy reduced to some semblance of order) he is not so reticent as his master. In fact, while claiming that "only poetic ideas are really valuable in a poem," he dares to admit that "a poem without, or apparently without, a central theme or plot is likely to be a failure." But why, a thousand times why? An unexplained reservation like that does not leave much of the theory behind. And it surely leaves Mr. Jones open to the challenge: Name the central themes or plots of Mr. Thomas's poems, as you have done with some of your own, or, as an alternative, explain why the themeless or plotless ones, if successful, manage to escape their expected destiny of failure. We are told that a poem need not say more than "What a nice evening" or "I wouldn't mind courting that girl" and yet can be "so loaded with *poetic* ideas that it achieves greatness." But the burning questions are: Can a poem say *less* than "What a nice evening" and get away with it? And is a poem that says merely "What a nice evening"—however poetically—as good as a poem that says "What a world we might make of it if we could get rid of the squalid little men who push us around and the cussed little men who stand for it. . . . ."? To me—and who else matters in my particular microcosm?—the answers are, emphatically, No.

Now Mr. Jones has experimented in what he calls "the poetization of the masses" and has pronounced himself a failure. "The workers," he explains, "work eight hours, have had a three R's education, and care nothing for poetry." Is this the truth, the whole and nothing but? Has Beavermerism, after all, *nothing* to do with the matter? I recommend, to the Anglo-Welsh as to the Cymro-Welsh, a course in Hugh MacDiarmid, militant highbrow and convinced believer in the intelligence and taste of the common people: he will tell you, with much else of great interest, how that intelligence and that taste have been corrupted by interests that find an uncritical mob a readier victim than an illiterate peasantry. . . . I will refrain from pressing the moral home. Instead, I will counsel Mr. Jones not to despair. Having just tried a couple of his "workers' poems" on two fairly representative specimens of the eight-hours, three-R's class and heard them say "There's nice now" and "Them are reely good poetries," I hope that he can be induced to reconsider his decision to retire in the second round.

If not, if the situation is really as utterly desperate as Mr. Jones' literary biography implies, then the sooner we all shut up the better—or if not shut up, at the very least give up publishing. I suppose it *is* barely possible to distinguish between verse written in complete disregard of the reader—in which Mr. Jones, following the example of "a famous young poet," a countryman of his, has been most recently employing his poetic leisure—and verse published in complete disregard of the purchaser!

I am sorry to have written a review which reads, in patches, a little like war-time Wyndham Lewis; but *Wales* is not the organ of a literary Royal Academy. And I am discussing an important document, the first considerable critical utterance of the most conspicuous Anglo-Welsh poetic school. For I suspect that Mr. Jones's essay in criticism represents, in part at least, the theory that lies behind the work of men as variously gifted as (reading, very non-politically speaking, from Left to Right) Mr. Dylan Thomas, Mr. Vernon Watkins and Mr. Ken Etheridge. If I am wrong, I am sorry—and concede, in any case, that Mr. Jones, being a proselyte, perhaps expresses himself more emphatically than they would. I concede more. These are some of the most "gifted" men in Anglo-Wales. Mr. Jones himself is a man of immense resources:

read his "History" and "Biography" and "I kept neat my virginity" in this book of poems. But if any poet takes up a monastic theory and a hobby of poem-ornamentation, he must not expect to be considered in the same class as Whitman and Lawrence—or even as Keats and Yeats—to whom literature was not a substitute for prayer and fretwork but an expression of the whole man. And privately, I am pretty sure that a man, in Wales as everywhere else, will not become big enough to be worth expressing until he declares unequivocally for the culture-society as against the money-state. In the meantime, it seems that the future of this interesting and very temporary phenomenon, a Welsh literature in English, is in the hands not of the monastic school but of strenuous individuals like Mr. Keidrych Rhys, Mr. Nigel Heseltine and Mr. H. L. R. Edwards.

DAVIES ABERPENNAR

## CORRESPONDENCE

*(Contributions are invited for this "free-for-all" feature.)*

### I SING OF MONTAGU NORMAN

DEAR TAMBI,—As one of your contributors perhaps I may be allowed to answer Mr. de Maré. He seems to expect altogether too much from "young poets," and at the same time he does not seem quite clear what he does want. He seems to want them to display a kind of buoyancy and *joie de vivre* that is quite unfitting in a world of bombed cities and lost friends and liberties. He seems to expect young poets are looking to Hitler or Montagu Norman for release, and with the air of a magician tells them that these people won't give it them. Yet the fact is that these people are in power, and that they control the source of what Mr. de Maré calls primitive necessities: it is all very well to sing bravely of the New World that is coming, but to do so in a spirit of pure and unadulterated rejoicing is surely rather premature: it has not come yet, and Montagu Norman and Hitler are still there to sing of. He seems to recognize this, when he says "Politics deal with food in your belly without which you would not even have the vitality to tap at your typewriter." Quite so, Mr. de Maré. And that is precisely why the young poets are aware of the importance of Mr. Montagu Norman, Herr Hitler, Mr. Morrison and others, and do not sing in blithe ignorance to the lark, while the sirens are singing to them. That is why those who see in politics nothing other than visions of monstrous Montagu Normans are inclined to be rather depressed, and it is why those who see further to the way out of this quandary concentrate on what they see to be the truth about politics and "the food in their belly" as well as the truth about larks and trees and dawn. Mr. de Maré, by way of illustrating our "weary moaning," "sterile onanism," and "defeated cries of Death," among others things, quotes several lines from a poem of mine, beginning "Do I make my disasters clear?" It is quite clear that he never read to the end of it, because, as those who have will see, it ends by singing of just that "New World that is coming" which Mr. de Maré professes to want. If it also paints a somewhat dismal picture of the present, surely there is nothing wrong in that: I believe such a picture of disaster to be the truth. But I also believe, to quote the end of the poem:

> The disaster is here and clear.
> The tree in the wind sings differently. I see
> The young man of evening lift his face to the sun,
> Out of Europe's ruin Love come to everyone.

It is necessary to see clearly the disaster which one is in to take the right steps to get out of it. Mr. de Maré, though in one part of his letter he implies this, in another implies the opposite

in his wish that poets should sing of the brilliant future "Then to com in spight of sorrow." But for this future to come, it is certainly necessary to get rid of Herr Hitler, Mr. Norman and all others who are responsible for the present that is so distasteful to Mr. de Maré, and this can certainly not be done by merely ignoring them. He talks about young poets "pretending a 'parlor pink,' 'vaguely left' conviction," and makes them say 'We aren't interested in politics'." But they are his words, not theirs, not, anyway, mine—and he quoted me as an example earlier on in his letter. The poet, anyway, is surely to be allowed to express a personal mood of sorrow, if he wishes. There is plenty to be sorry about, and to be sad does not mean that one is unaware of the bright future coming. It only shows a rather more realistic and interested awareness of the present. For there is bound to be personal sorrow before the revolution that Mr. de Maré desires. It is no use sitting and waiting for the future to come beautifully like the dawn from the sky. If you do, it's liable to be a pretty dirty dawn, when it does come. Mr. de Maré would be disappointed. The future of poetry is, it is true, very closely bound up with politics, but politics does not mean an admiration for Mr. Montagu Norman, nor an exclusive interests in larks and dawns. To me it means working for the overthrow of that system and those people that, by lasting too long, have been responsible for the chaos in which we, poets and all, now find ourselves. The movement for a people's government with a truly progressive programme which was begun by the People's Convention meeting on 12th January, seems to me to be the movement which all artists, or writers, as all other workers, should in their own interests support. That is a practical "political" way of achieving that New World for which Mr. de Maré wants us to sing. It would certainly never be achieved, if we did nothing but sing of it: and if we do write about it, as to a certain extent I do in my poems, it will not help to paint a glowing picture of the future and ignore the shady present. Sir Thomas More's Utopia is yet to be realized. Mr. de Maré if he had his way would have his young songsters warbling incessantly of a pretty world that would never come. No doubt they would meet a sticky end still singing of it, at the hands of those very Hitlers he asked them to ignore. The capitalists' power is great and the poets' power is small. But the revolutionary power of the workers is also great, and as one of them the poet, with less power than Mr. Norman as an individual, suddenly has more: he will then be able to fight to some purpose for conditions in which he can "live as splendidly as he knows how." At the moment he is crippled by his conditions, not to speak of the war.

This, I'm afraid, is a long and wordy answer, Tambi, but I think the point is important. Such a struggle to live is the background to any poetry being written to-day, and necessarily affects it in some way. Obviously a poet will not always be thinking of this political background while he is writing, but its influence will be there—even if only in that it accounts for his mood of depression. In suggesting that it is possible for poets to work together politically in support of the People's Convention programme, I am not of course saying that a poet should not write love-poems or poems divorced from the political situation. Of course he will, and they may be very good. I am only trying to convince him that he should take part in this struggle in his own interests to ensure conditions in which he can really write what he wants. For only in this struggle will Mr. de Maré's New World be achieved, and it would be dangerous, since every individual in it counts, to sit and wait for its happy conclusion, even if you do sing meanwhile. They can also starve who only sit and wait.

Yours, with best wishes,

NICHOLAS MOORE

## —AND MR. DE MARÉ REPLIES

DEAR EDITOR,—Let's get this clear. Mr. Moore accuses me of the following:

(1) Of stating that young poets are looking to Hitler and Montagu Norman for release.
(2) Of asking young poets to sing of the New World that is coming in a spirit of pure and unadulterated rejoicing.
(3) Of deprecating their dismal pictures of the present.
(4) Of asking them merely to warble incessantly of a pretty world that would never come.
(5) Of not knowing clearly what I want.

In answer to the above:

(1) I did not state this but implied that if they did not fight this filthy system but merely "wallowed in the vomit of self-pity" the Hitlers and the Normans would remain on top and the poets would not get what they want.

(2) Nor did I state this. Nevertheless there *is* joy in battle *if* you have something to fight for.

(3) Nor this. It is barely possible to paint too vile a picture of the present. Make your pictures as vile and dramatic as possible but paint also, by way of contrast, your vision of that "New and Better World"—if you have one. Don't revel in the filth merely for the perverted pleasure of it. (I am not personally attacking Mr. Moore here for he has obviously firm political opinions, and is not therefore, I think, typical of the "young poets.")

(4) I said nothing about a "pretty" world.

(5) I know quite clearly what I want, and Mr. Moore's letter now gives me an opportunity to state it.

Mr. Moore largely supports my argument in different words—that love won't come to everyone merely by lifting your face to the sun. But in our political method of obtaining the New World we are in strong opposition, for I take it that Mr. Moore is an active Communist. This is a pity, for I have little doubt that, broadly speaking, our objective is the same—freedom (i.e. *economic* freedom, the only kind that matters) to live our own lives in our own way in a world in which the individual has been liberated from any kind of regimentation whatsoever. As a Green Shirt I oppose anyone who stands for the Totalitarianism, the State worship and the mass slavery of either Left or Right. A plague on both your houses. I cannot imagine that Mr. Moore really wants the kind of life people live in Russia, a country described by Professor Hogben, as a result of first-hand experience, as "one vast slum,"—a country where true poets can find release only in suicide.

I was myself at the so-called People's Convention of 12th January. Mr. Pritt and Co. seem to have become very good Nazis. I certainly would not trust them to give me anything better than Prof. Skinner. Doubtless, they would find it no more difficult than Stalin to come to a working arrangement with Hitler—or the "Professor." The drabness, confusion and dishonesty of that meeting symbolised the venality and intellectual muddle of the whole Communist Party and their supporters. Lenin must have leaped up in anger in his tomb on that dreary January Sunday. Even his brain, pickled as it is, could do better than all the brains of the present Communist leaders throughout the world put together.

I do not agree that the poets' power is small. The war against Hitlerism—at home and abroad—is largely a psychological war in which words play a vital part. As Emerson said: "There is no calamity which right words will not begin to redress." The power of an idea expressed in words can be terrific. "Is not my word like as a fire? and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" I ask the poet to use his powers to fight for what he really wants, and that must surely be "the creation of a Leisure State in a Power Age of Plenty"—the avowed objective of the Social Credit Party. Alone of all parties we possess the correct financial technique, and the right organisational structure, for bringing that State into being.

Yours sincerely,

ERIC S. DE MARÉ

## MR. EDWARDS SITS ON THE FENCE

DEAR SIR,—I wish to assure the "young poets" that Mr. Eric de Maré, whose acquaintance I have had the pleasure of making, is not as fierce as his letter; and because, without some explanation such as I shall give, probably neither party would understand the other's point of view, I should be glad of a few inches of your space.

To Mr. de Maré, it should be pointed out that the young poets are pessimistic because the world in which they live creates pessimism as naturally and as surely as a blow-lamp under a block of ice creates water. Death by fire and explosives (with poison gas in the offing) as a regular feature of national life, personal separations, the decline of truth—in short, all the characteristics of "total" war, provide precisely that environment which makes for

sadness and introspection in poets and plumbers alike. It is unreasonable to expect poets to sing "hopeful songs of reality" when "reality" is as it is; and as for "the new debt-free world" —which is Mr. de Maré's equivalent for "a world fit for heroes"—the young poets evidently do not regard its advent as likely. This scepticism is a good sign, for it indicates a maturity of mind which is incredulous of the fairy castles and brave new worlds which exist only in the minds of misguided idealists and on the tongues of persuasive politicians.

On the other hand, the poets should know that Mr. de Maré is an able and important official of a movement for economic reform. Obviously, he could not discharge his duties properly were he not convinced of the value of his remedy for social ills, enthusiastic as to its application and convinced of its ultimate success. The vigour of his letter is a measure of his enthusiasm; it is also, unfortunately, a measure of his impatience with those who are unconverted to his views and who do not, consequently, share his certitude that a sane and healthy Europe will soon appear.

Mr. de Maré's letter is too discontinuous and raises far too many points to be answered in the space you would allow me: I leave it to the poets themselves to answer his charges relating to Hitler, simple primitive realities and the playing of Chopin in the firelight. I cannot refrain from adding, however, that "rich and virile paganism" is not the philosophical horse to which I should trust my shirt, whatever its colour.

Yours faithfully,

H. JOHN EDWARDS

## MR. LITTLE EXPLAINS

DEAR SIR,—Of recent years there has manifested itself a feeling of vague dissatisfaction with contemporary verse; it has shown itself in the attitude of the "intelligentsia," the critics, the young poets themselves. This is what is significant; the ordinary reader, the man who enjoys the better novels, the more accomplished biographies, who is always a potential audience for the poet, long ago abandoned contemporary poetry. Ever since the rotting Muse of Georgian verse finally disintegrated within her grave too long left open, he has felt that modern poetry has become an obscure jig-saw puzzle, the work of freaks and charlatans, fantastically devised to prevent public comprehension. And, for good or evil, the poet retaliated by abandoning the ordinary reader; he no longer wrote with any hope or intention of general appreciation but for the approbation of a small inner-circle of initiates. There was much to justify this isolation—the revolutionary technical developments of poetry, the influx of strange new influences (notably Imagism and Surrealism) and the necessity of new knowledge (especially of psycho-analytical psychology) forced upon the poet a limited audience. Yet in thus abandoning the ordinary reader the poet was cutting himself off from the audience which had given ear to Chaucer, to Shakespeare, to Milton, to Dryden and Pope, to Wordsworth, to the great Victorians. Never before has the great body of the Nation's poets turned so completely away from the Nation, never before has English verse been read by so few Englishmen. Is there not justification for wondering if this is not an unnatural state of affairs?

And now even the inner-circle is doubtful about contemporary poetry, and the question asked by Mr. de Maré in the correspondence section of *Poetry*, *No.* 4, is on every tongue: "What is the matter with our young poets?" I feel that Mr. de Maré's own reply, that modern poets "have lost contact with the feeling for primitive realities" is both inadequate and inaccurate. It is not true to suggest that contemporary poets have "lost touch" with reality; on the contrary, their striving towards reality is (apart from technical developments) the main advance they have made on their Victorian and Georgian predecessors: for the "horns of Elfland" they have substituted railway engines and cantilever bridges, the "wanderers by lone sea-breakers" have been replaced by men who live and move in an actual world of slums and motor-buses and dirty street corners, more recently, of camouflage, barbed wire and black-out curtains. It is true that these are superficial realities, the concrete surfaces of life rather than the underlying spiritual electrons which give them shape, but at least it is a movement in the right direction. And Mr. de Maré's "simple realities" of eating, drinking, procreation and fighting are only simple if

considered as abstractions rather than realities. Surely in these days of realisation of the involuted complexity of Man's instincts, repressions, complexes and phobias, it is strange to talk of these primitive, basic activities as 'simple'." To take but one example, what man, conscious that more than half his life is but the surface undulation produced by the subterranean volcanic fires of sex, that beneath the quietest, most regular pulse of existence beats continuously the eternal "Will I?" "Won't I?" "Dare I?" of coitus, could consider procreation simple? No, simplicity is no longer possible for the poet. With every century the world has grown more strange and complicated as man's knowledge of its nature and knowledge of his own ignorance has grown: contemporary poetry, to be faithful to contemporary life and awareness of life, must of necessity be complex. But to compensate for this complexity of subject-matter the poet should strive for simplicity of form; because his thought is difficult his expression should be austere and lucid. It is failure to achieve this needful clarity that is the failure of modern poetry. The prime error of the new poets was to imagine that because the experiences from which their works arose were involved and nebulous, their form should match them in obscurity, so that poetry became locked in chains of twisted grammar, tortuous inversions and fantastic conceits more binding than the essential rhyme, regular metre and poetic diction of the Victorians and Georgians. A poet's first duty is to express his experience, and any device of style which stands between him and his reader is an excrescence. Only Yeats and Eliot have been great enough to triumph over this fashion of formal obscurity; chronologically considered, their work shows a progressive simplification and clarification of style which is most significant.

Developing from those modern poets who found they were forced into writing obscurely because their thought was obscure, come those versifiers who found it necessary to be obscure in order to prove they were poets. Scrape away the obscurity and there is no poem left. This undermines all faith in the poet and the obscure immediately becomes suspect. Thus all modern verse written in the new fashion becomes suspect. That is why the ordinary reader no longer shows any interest in the contemporary poet; he suspects him of talking nonsense and, as always, the rain falls alike on the just and the unjust. Many modern versifiers do write nonsense; there are many passages in contemporary verse (I would not be so cruel as to quote) which I am convinced are mere arbitrary juxtapositioning of unconnected words or phrases, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." And even apart from such charlatans, the tendency of genuine poets, with genuine poetic experiences to express, to use the same devices of obscurity that the impostors employ, reduces our feeling of confidence in their poems.

A special branch of this cult of the obscure has been the practice of writing for increasingly narrowed audiences until we get poems by Auden and Empson which outside a small circle of initiates are completely unintelligible. This is intolerable. Every man is a poet in the sense that to every man comes poetic experience, and some may find a need within themselves to express this experience. This they are, of course, at liberty to do by any means at their disposal, and may employ as many private symbols and personal allusions as they wish—that is a matter for the individual only. But, in Pope's phrase, "Why publish?" Of what value to me are some young man's peculiar and private experiences expressed in his own peculiar and private manner if the resultant piece of writing is unintelligible to me? Poetry must be universal to be of any importance to anybody except its author, and possibly a few intimates of the author. And only universal poetry has any right to publication. To present to the public poetry which ostentatiously excludes the public, is a monstrous impertinence.

This then is my solution for the problems of modern poetry:—Let the poet keep a firm grasp of spiritual reality, eschew hypocrisy and charlatanism and free expression from the fashionable fog of deliberate obscurity and conscious mystification; let the poems of private worlds be kept for private enjoyment. Let him strive not after a false simplicity of subject-matter but a true simplicity of style, let the touchstones of expression be sincerity, austerity, accuracy and lucidity.

PETER J. LITTLE

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