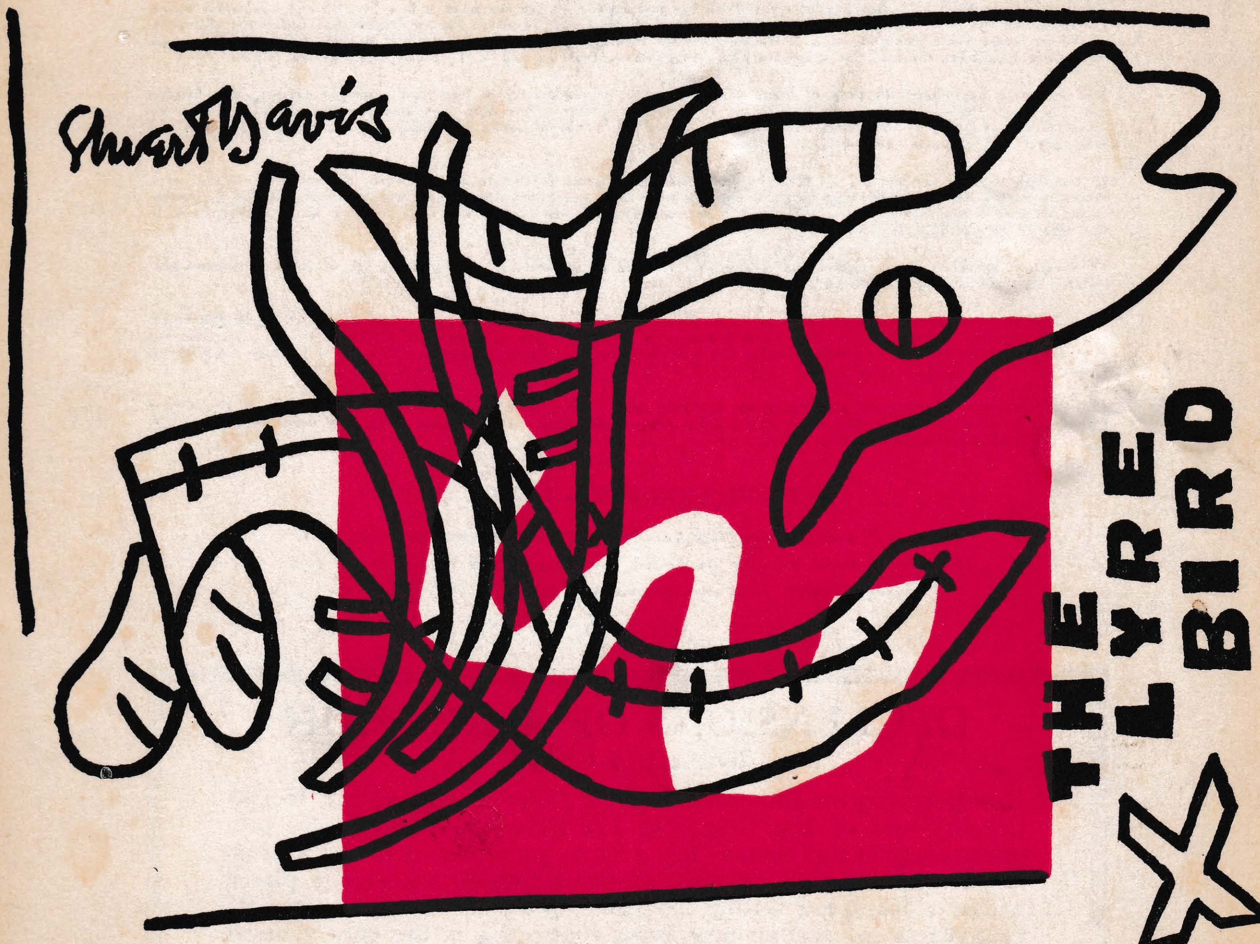
POETRY

LONDON—NEW YORK

EDITED BY TAMBIMUTTU



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NO. 2

PLNY

75 CENTS

The second number of this magazine was made possible by the following Benefactors: Mrs. Helen Burlin, Dr. and Mrs. Maurice Green, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Hadley, Mrs. Hazel McKinley, Mr. Ivan Obolensky, Mrs. Carleton Palmer, Dwight Ripley, Mr. Hy Sobiloff, Miss Emma Swan, Mr. Hugh van Valkenburgh, and the following Patrons: Mount Allison University Memorial Library, Mr. Melville Cane, Mrs. Mary Ballard Duryee, Mr. Louis S. Goldberg, Mrs. Alida Carey Gulick, Miss Ethel M. King, Mrs. Catherine Phillips, Mr. George Reavey, Dr. D. B. Steinman, Mr. Charles A. Wagner, Mr. Victor Weybright, Mrs. John J. Yellott.

We also acknowledge with many thanks the help given us by our friends with the office work: Evangeline Cohn, Patricia James, Joan Marter, Kay Johnson, Barbara Romney.

SOME COMMENTS ON NO. 1:

The number one issue of *Poetry London - New York* has just arrived and to our mind it is a hopeful and wholesome event. We remember the quite brilliant ten years of life. . . . that the parent magazine *Poetry London* had under the editorship of the Ceylonese poet, Tambimuttu. . . . We suppress the information that it (the lyrebird) doesn't fly very well because we believe Tambi has the talent to make the bird soar.—Harvey Breit in *The N. Y. Times Book Review.*

Modern poetry has played the game of ten little Indians with its readers for so long that in recent years neither London nor New York could claim a magazine devoted to first-class poetry. Now each may stake half a claim to a new bimonthly: *Poetry London - New York*. . . . The spur behind the would-be poetic renaissance is an unusual editor poet and long-time friend of poets and poetry. . . . *Time Magazine.*

In the dark days of the war . . . . Tambimuttu performed a great service to English verse through the medium of a magazine named *Poetry London* which, along with its associated publishing house, was largely responsible for the astonishing wartime boom in poetry. . . . Those who saw the first number . . . . will look forward, as in darker days, to the next—*Time and Tide,* London.

(The editor) has been mover, shaker and creator in the world of poetry. . . . he has been one of poetry's ambassadors-at-large on three continents.—*Harper's Bazaar.*

From 1939 to some years after World War II . . . . *Poetry London* was the best produced and most exciting British magazine of new verse. *Poetry London - New York* is similar in format but has an even more ambitious sweep. . . . promises both to be representative in its choice of verse and a lively forum for critical discussion.—*The Times Literary Supplement,* London.

I find no other magazine quite so exciting as this first issue. His (the editor's) publications, by some magic, always provide more exciting reading than those of any other comparable editor. This number of his new magazine is no exception.—Keidrych Rhys in *The People,* Wales.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR 6 ISSUES, $5

Published by Poetry London - New York Books, 513 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Distributed in the U. S. A. by The Eastern News Company, 301 W. 11th St., N. Y. C.

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DECLENSIONS OF A REFRAIN

by ARTHUR GREGOR

New poems by the author of *Octavian Shooting Targets*. Mr. Horace Gregory said of Mr. Gregor in *The Saturday Review:* "No poet under forty in this country has a better command of dramatic form in poetry; and in his poems, several of which are vividly placed within a European setting, no young poet, has shown greater inventiveness in creating new verse forms. He is the only younger poet that I know of who in spirit has the promise of a new and unpredictable avant-garde in America." $2.00.

PLNY

POETRY LONDON - NEW YORK BOOKS

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Plaistow
London E13 0AD

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Vol. 1, No. 2 Winter, 1956

Second Letter

There is always a clamor for new poets, but it has been my experience that the new poets are the ones we already know about. For instance, during the last war, the war poets were those one had known in peacetime. It depends, of course, on one's degree of interest in poetry, and the range of one's enquiry, whether we know the work of a certain poet, or not. For this reason, when a poet is new to the public, he may not be so to the specialist, whose task it has been to watch events in the field of poetry closely. Indeed, it is often the case that the hailed new poet (sometimes leader of a new movement if he is clever enough at literary politics) has been around for a long time.

The fact is there are few good poets, and it is the task of the specialist to know them all, at least by reputation. To him the genuine new poet is a rare event. Although some editors have published on the assumption that each new generation of students has produced its own brilliant group of performers (perhaps with their own 'new' movement) I have never done so, for the simple reason that I did not find the performance interesting. To give an example, after the launching of Auden-Spender-MacNeice from Oxford University, no event of a similar nature has ever happened there. Except for Keith Douglas, no poet in their category could be said to have come out of Oxford University since Auden's time.

The good poets or the promising ones are few and far between, which is the reason readers will see more established than new names in this issue. And this is perhaps being fair with our public who have a right to their money's worth, if the mere dishing up of new names is not what they expect from this magazine. The event of an interesting new poet, or poems from an established poet, is as exciting for us as it is for our readers. I remember with what feelings I first received for publication from New York the six sonnets of George Barker (the one to his mother has been much anthologized) and lately, poems from people who were comparatively new to me, Claire McAllister, Jean Garrigue, Arthur Gregor, W. S. Merwin. This magazine wants new poets, certainly, but it has to preserve a certain standard, and

although I have read through everything we have received, I have been able to find no more new names than are included here.

My experience in the past, with *Poetry London,* was not much different. I was able to publish no more than fifteen issues of the magazine in ten years, since the new poems and new poets that afford a proper 'magazine' function to a periodical were lacking. The publishing of books of poems by established and new authors occupied the time between the rare launchings of the magazine, and this, I believe, gave a more truthful picture of the poetry scene in Britain than would have been the case, had I been a more energetic compiler. A more realistic attitude to publishing, which interpreted the work 'periodical' literally, would not have resulted in a magazine that had quite as much of permanent interest. Except for the experimental No. 10 of *Poetry London* (264 pp.), which mostly featured poets who had never before appeared in print, it was my custom to publish only those newcomers who seemed to me really competent—at least so in the poems that were published. It sometimes happened that the entire output of a young poet was rejected, but for a single poem.

This approach to new work had advantages in that the public and the potential backers of poetry were never unclear as to who was worth watching. Of those poets who made their first London appearance in my magazine, six were published in Mr. T. S. Eliot's Faber list, and four edited books of poems for him (he once remarked, "It is only in *Poetry London* that I can consistently expect to find new poets who matter"), while many others received support from other publishers. Some poets who have come to be regarded as interesting only recently had but a single poem in *Poetry London,* fourteen or fifteen years ago.

Looking back, I am convinced that this magazine has been an accurate if somewhat austere and selective recording of the best poets since 1939. Attempting to do the same now for America, Britain and India, at a different time and a different place, I hope readers will bear with me if there are not as many new names as they may wish. In time, I shall hope to fill out some of the vacancies, and furnish the evidence of new vitality, and talent.

And finally, in view of the traditionalism and simplified language of easy communication which seems to be coming into fashion, I must state that this magazine believes in the validity of all that is best that has happened in modern verse. We have a healthy respect for the more traditional type of poet, and this magazine has always hoped for a forward movement in modern poetry through traditionalism. But in view of the wholesale abandoning of modern poetic values, which we have come to associate with literary counterfeiters, we believe this forward movement must come from real poets, from the body of modern verse itself, and not from academic sources, or the faked poetry of those who are by inclination and temperament outside the pale of modern verse. To my mind, the last poems of Dylan Thomas were a step in the right direction, and if we want a new orientation among the young poets, it is a similar shift in viewpoint that we might expect.

TAMBIMUTTU

ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF A FRIEND, PETER WATSON (obiit 1956)

(Draft of the opening lines of a long poem)

Dear scattered flesh, there was a moment
—This witnesses—when real light fell
Onto your features. They were. They sent
The image mirrors took for you along
Light-paths leading through an instrument.

In its black box, that snatched your opposite,
The sharp lens set you standing on your head.
A sensitivized surface remained white
Where no white reached it, from your eye sockets.
Dark it held your brow, touched by most light.

There in the camera's miniscule locked room
Your million-measured form changed into ghost
Negative in a microcosmic tomb.
Left-handed, soot-faced, values were reversed—
Blackness gleaming in a whited gloom.

Reverse of that reverse, this photograph
Through printed chiaroscura, looks up with
Your questioning ironic sad half-laugh.
Your gaze diagonal under grave lids,
Mouth still mocking—"This is all you have."

Yes. This is all we have. Yet like a beam
Patterning outspread leaves upon a wall
This harks back to the shoot from which it came.
You who are scattered now, were integral.
Proved, you once shining, and once whole and warm.

A galaxy of cells composed a system
Where one stood, in his kingly tower of bones,
His heart at his left hand: surrounding him,
The cycle of his tides of blood revolved.
Nerves, like antennae, pressed against a rim.

He moved, had density, occupied space.
Raised but his hand, and through the universe
Changed its relations there with every place.
Before his step, skies opened like a door.
Sleep took the seal of his intaglio face.

All this was you. And yet when you were there
I looked as with this camera's eye, you were
Print on my mind, as much as now you are,
Image reversed upon the retina,
Swivelled back by the brain, like the print here.

Shadows, I see, are all we've ever known.
Cabined in craniums our minds read upon
The instruments of senses objects shown,
Things turned to thoughts, that being thought are gone,
Across a screen where the brain waits alone.

All are hung round with gulfs and distances.
Loving, and being loved, is not to know
Each what the other's sole existence is.
The instant that has passed makes up our Now.
We are but present in our absences. . . .

STEPHEN SPENDER

Extracts from ORPHEUS
(For Gene Tunney)

Now in his ninth reincarnation
the rubbernecked, Hell-touring Thracian,
  whom swivelling his headlamps cost
    his gender and the dame he lorded,
by one jerk of his ball-and-socket
thrown out of heart and mind and pocket —
  came back to sing for all he'd lost,
    and this is what the disk recorded.

Where State-Police dared scarcely follow,
with other herdsmen of Apollo,
  by my own solar sire employed
    I ran a bareboned enterprise,
out in the great wide open spaces,
those yawns of boredom on the faces
  of continents, so vast and void
    they seem to swallow up the skies.

Where Sirius in cypher flashes,
(a mitrailleur of dots and dashes),
  his morse of green and crimson fires
    whose messages must not be told —

decoding the forbidden words
I sang them to my starving herds,
   the stock of Seven Deadly Sires
      whom only harmony can hold.

The charm restrained each restive beast
whose red horns, sickled in the East,
   though in the future participle,
      are lunar to the pending flood
wherein they gaze, portending famine,
a Pharoah's nightmare to examine
   reflected in the last red ripple
      of daylight, as they drink its blood.

Astrologers of standard stars
(assassins of the blond guitars
   whose golden strings they snarled and tangled)
      spoke only of expected slaughters,
but when of mine I stroked the strings
the four blue halcyons spread their wings,
   upon the sky my score was spangled
      and taught me by the winds and waters.

Dire snakes their deadly inclination
and rills, renouncing gravitation,
   exchanged their wonted ways and wills
      to the persuasion of my lyre:
for rills, like serpents fair and fond
enchanted by the charmer's wand,
   and deadly snakes, like harmless rills,
      trundled their loops of liquid fire.

(Here follow eleven verses. This Orpheus tames horses, bulls and whales for a livelihood, is hunted by the State Police for stumbling on the truth on Guernica, Badajoz, Pearl Harbor and is condemned to live in Hell from where he may save Eurydice. He books a ticket to Hell from the Elephant and Castle subway station in London and manages, en route, to elude 'a gorgon sentry.)

The ace of mongrels, tierce of dogs,
one howl of three selenelogues,
   in triplicate of welfare-dentage,
      obscenely sharked a sheepish grin.
His civil pensioners, the frogs,
in free-verse from the Stygian bogs
   for a gratuity percentage
      of bullshine — croaked me gaily in.

With Charon's outboard grimly chugging,
the armless torso closely hugging
  of my guitar, I made the landing
    at Lambeth on the Lesbian shore:
and from that Hell of English whoredom,
dead vice, and dull provincial boredom,
  my former failures notwithstanding,
    the fond Eurydice I bore.

When on the bank we tried to land
and found that both of us were banned,
  the land to me became a lock
    to which the ocean was the key,
and, signing on before the mast,
why, surely I was not the last,
  when doubt had foundered on a rock,
    to found my faith upon the sea.

And so to beat their curst embargo
dovetailing Pegnod, Ark, and Argo,
  new world, gold fleece, and mystic whale,
    I made my faith one ship, quest, cargo,
course, compass, quadrant, guiding star,
and whatsoever doom avail
  the hazard of my questing sail —
    reef, solitude, or floating spar.

With hempen harpstrings tautly shrouded,
the oread sisters, thunderclouded
  with cumulus of straining cloth,
    sang to me with their souls of pine,
while harpers with the waves for strings
feathered them with their silver wings
  whose quills were oars, whose down was froth,
    to swan my Argoes through the brine.

The pines strode forward as I played,
whether in stately colonnade
  on slopes of Alp or Guadarrama
    or the sierras of the main
on decks as steep. Stampeding herds
taught me the impetus of words:
  and all I ever learned of drama
    was in the Catacombs of Spain.

There when I slew the Tcheka's warder
and sentry, in that brief disorder,
did I a second time from Hell come
escaping, too, the common char-pit,
but lost the crown of the elected
by my unworthiness rejected,
when guns, to bid the martyrs welcome,
spread for those kings a crimson carpet.

In me, with dextral whorl, the Mistral
and the Sirocco, with sinistral
volution, wrestling meet, to pull
from strife the absolute accord,
depending on antagonism
to dynamise my dancing rhythm,
as on the matador the bull
whose consummation is the sword.

I know all victories are vain
to that which I beheld in Spain
where with the eagle mates the dove
the might of armies to defy.
Since with Euridyce's recapture,
I crossed the Rubicon of rapture,
I'll ask no more of life, nor love.
It is my death for which I die —

A death of blood and tears as cruel
as could hydrate the blazing jewel
of faith from ashes reascendant
with which the victors rose resplendent,
when love with love fought out the duel
both as the fire and as the fuel,
son, father, ancestor, descendant,
and phoenix of its own renewal! . . .

Just here his voice was overheard
and he was taken at his word
which cut short the recording session:
and when the State Police had got him,
after the regulation season
of torture, when he lost his reason,
no autocritical confession
could be extracted. So they shot him.

ROY CAMPBELL

ROUNDS

1.

Tented against the glare
Of sunlight overhead,
The leaves screen the heat,
And what might devil air
Angelically is bred,
By coolness and by fleet
Shutters everywhere,
To summer's true bed:
The greenness of retreat.

We follow freshness where
The spring winds led,
And climb to heaven's seat
Up an endless stair
To green rooms just ahead
On persevering feet;
Opening each door,
We find, refurbished,
New worlds complete.

How meager was the spare
Landscape we have shed!
How rare the bird's sweet
Whistle, full and clear,
That sings of the unsaid
Above the green sheet
Spread to cover bare
Earth and the new dead!
Angelic and elite

Heiresses of air,
We feel you overhead,
And though we may not greet
You equally, our share
Is half the marriage bed
We come to on young feet
To wed you everywhere,
Our flesh no longer lead.
Lightly your wings beat.

2.

Fire and leaf are kin
When the leaves blow away
And the bitter season reigns.
The sky erases green
From one more tree each day
Till only the pale stains
Of summers that have been
Fade in the sun's ray.
We make of these remains

A fire for within:
Blade after blade of hay,
Deserts of dry grains
Are stored within the bin
Of the color-wheeling tree.
Astringent in our veins,
Thin life, a pricking pin,
Bleeds the summer lie
Only the blood retains.

Pinion and horizon
Rise on a changed day
When beasts of weathervanes,
Turning their burnt tin,
Spin against the sky.
Holding the long reins
That fire in the sun,
Flame, like a runaway,
Races the long rains

Whose seasonable din
Shatters the still day
Where false summer feigns
Old miracles of sun.
In mirrors of new gray,
The colorless remains
Of leaves, flame or green,
Hang or blow away
Till the kindling wanes.

3.

The season of Alas
Winters in the sky;
The ground is white with snow.

What archeries of glass
Blind the naked eye,
Illusionary arrow!
Its target is a guess:
We aim at the bull's eye,
Half light, half shadow.

Draughtsmanship is less
Than color to the eye
In love with summer's show.
A season of duress
Paints a rare, wry
Canvas. Eyes that know
Shun the obvious:
There is no subtlety
Like white and its dumb-show.

A museum of undress,
What costumes it could try
It's happy to forego.
It is not sounding brass:
The bony and the spry
Plucked arpeggio
Can nakedly compress
Music to one sigh,
Mocking the piano.

Everything made less
Itself is winter's way:
The lowest trees bow low
To let the wind pass,
Rummaging the dry
Snow that sifts below
Their naked likenesses,
Cold as the cold sky,
Blind with heavy snow.

4.

Black and white go down.
Spring's petals spring,
One by one, to life;
Pink, or vermilion,
Along the branch's sling
Is born and is brief.

A longing for the sun
Stretches along the limb
And hangs the shapely leaf.

A pink and green clown
Tumbles in the ring;
We see with disbelief
A comic in a gown
From sterile twigs wring
The greenest green sheaf
Of flowers under the sun,
And the sun itself strung
On flower and on leaf.

Now who can disown
The new-born changeling?
The woods and fields are rife
With grinning green;
And should the bee sting
Young flesh unsafe,
There's honey in the comb,
More honey coming
To tongues that have enough.

Angels, earth has shown
Its heart to be too big:
Standing in spring we sniff
A newness all our own,
And though its whirligig
Can spin us through one life,
And only one, on loan,
We dance a joyous jig
On limbs soon stiff.

HOWARD MOSS

A WINTER DAY IN THE MIDDLE WEST

I sit and think of aged elms,
Of lawn descending to the shore:
Flowers multiplying colour:
Calendars in a country store.

I close my eyes to sniff the sea
And feel the salt-air blowing spray:
The damp and sultry atmosphere
Assails me on this Winter day.

Yet when I rise to look around
The view is limited by wall;
The steam-heat gathers overhead;
There is no window in the hall.

There is no doorway back to Summer.
Opening a door upon the street,
I walk abroad with wakened eyes.
The seasons only seemed to meet.

And if the snow were not enough,
The air, the sidewalk slicked with ice,
Extend the sunlight at each step
But freeze the dazzled passer twice.

EMMA SWAN

PORTRAIT OF A MAN, WITH A BACKGROUND OF HOLDINGS
From TREE of RIVERS

Standing against the gorge, he sees the slides of light
Where lightning lay, they are building. The surfaces are lit.
The dam that is almost finished stands in seamless night
Declaring its form with a clear speaking.
The man leans on his railing. He thinks: I will listen.
Bulbs of violent light swing on their own wires,
Lines of the downstream face flow down the slope of dream,
Spillway of loyalties shining, the gate of fire.

He forgets the police on a hot summer night long past
Later finding the wound between his shoulderblades;
He thinks of the women opened before him, flowers of summer,
The first cry of his son at which all waterfalls
Waited like streams of wine bitter in Spain.
Riches of breathing, fantastic poverty.
The running of stones in this riverbed.

Corngreen and fields of thirst, he thinks. I know a woman

The river of whose mouth, whose sea of flowers
I saw in the hot fields of the past, at night.
Over all images a lightning stroke of law
Has been laid across, white structure on the river
To stop my profit's streams, to make a tree
Celebrating the years of growth and form.

The pacemaker image. A pulse and pattern of light.
The mirror image of my waste, in the ferocious cities
Whose roaring and giant fibres find my exultation
Outward in the shout, while what I stare at is
The dam I tried to murder for years; or sail
In a boat the color of violins among
A school of condoms floating in the Sound.
Beyond naming, waste! The legs of the withered man.
My summons from the great web and the woman
In glimpses accepted, for long forgot. I think
I am wheat dormant in the seedman's hands.

MURIEL RUKEYSER

THE DEMON

. . . Whose appearances are incalculable,
Through whom I fall distractedly in love,
Through whom I prophesy with crazed eyes.

Huddling pensive for weeks on end, he . . .
Gives only random hints of life, such as
Strokes of uncomfortable coincidence.

To eat heartily, dress warmly, lie snugly
And earn respect as a leading citizen
Granted long credit at all shops and inns —

How dangerous! So I feared this shag demon
Would not conform with my conformity
But in some leaner belly make his lair.

"All's well," I groan, and fumble for a light,
Brow bathed in sweat, heart pounding.
"The demon's here; that ugly dream was he."

ROBERT GRAVES

THE VISITATION

She had not held her secret long enough
To covet it but wished it shared as though
Telling would tame the terrifying moment
When she, most calm in her own afternoon,
   Felt the intrepid angel, heard
His beating wings, his voice across her prayer.

This was the thing she needed to impart,
The uncalm moment, the strange interruption,
The angel bringing pain disguised as joy,
But mixed with this was something she could share
   And not abandon, simply how
A child sprang in her like the first of seeds.

And in the silence of that other day
The afternoon exposed its emptiness,
Shadows adrift from light, the long road turning
In a dry sequence of the sun. And she
   No apprehensive figure seemed
Only a moving silence through the land.

And all her journeying was a caressing
Within her mind of secrets to be spoken.
The simple fact of birth soon overshadowed
The shadow of the angel. When she came
   Close to her cousin's house she kept
Only the message of her happiness.

And those two women in their quick embrace
Gazed at each other with looks undisturbed
By men or miracles. It was the child
Who laid his shadow on their afternoon
   By stirring suddenly, by bringing
Back the broad echoes of those beating wings.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

TRANSPLANTINGS ON A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

They planted peach slips all over our quadrangle,
January cuttings, to blossom by spring,
Angular switches — billiard cues, almost —
Knobbing welts of hope.

Meanwhile, scholarly lobes in the library,
Not a bone's throw from the baby trees,
Rattled off a source, noted a footnote,
Emended some dust.

In February it rained—coursing juice
Through earth's spermatic canals,
While penetrating intellect
Counted reduplicating verbs in Chaucer.

Arbor Day was useless: still sticks,
The cuttings passed the equinox,
Nonparallel rods for April,
Leafless, peachless.

We could use their shadows for sundials,
But they are bent in odd ways,
No true timepieces; and besides,
The library is full of clocks.

LARRY RUBIN

SEASON AND CIRCUMSTANCE:
Sentence and Reply

I

Prison of circumstance, a foolproof sky,
Till death deliver him, shall bound his day
Who, blessed with folly, sheltered prudently,

Forsook his joy, to feel the rivers flow,
Put sheep to graze in meadows lush and low,
Lazed on the banks and watched his flock decay

With fat and foot-rot. Leave him to regret
The bordering hills might save them from their plight
Or else in sudden transit decimate

His weight of wealth who loved to travel light—
Living by skill in losing his estate—
Scorned name, relation, number . . . and would yet,

Could he but move. Make wind and waterfall,

Wingbeat of birds returning, cuckoo's call,
Ever more distant, taunt his dwindled will

And though with melted snow the river swell,
Flooding his land, let it be winter still
For him alone who once was mutable

But, fearing death, turned traitor to the dead,
Bargained for time and shirked his proper trade,
Catastrophe, which now, discomfited,
He longs to brave but cannot, his choice made.

II

Love led me always. Love detains me now.
A one-way course, one river I follow,
Rushed with it shallow, deeper go slow.

That water feeds which brushed the rooted willow
To lay bare wood for the slow rain to kill
And with its rot replace eroded soil.

Restless in spring we travel, sooner to be still,
Dare out of fear what most we fear to know
And only plunge because afraid to fall;

More surely balanced, seem equivocal,
Past fear of falling, have no wish to climb,
Adept at nearly drowning, tempt no squall.

The sentence I approve, deny the crime:
Who serves a single season serves them all,
Serving the seasons never can serve time.

A pool I choose. It robs no waterfall,
Meshed with lush weeds would stop no rapid's flow.
I've crossed the hills that prove my pastures low

And here shall stay, unenvious of the swallow
Since moved or wintering always I have my will.
Spring wind and flood show best what stalks are hollow:

I'll cut no reeds and let the creepers grow.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER

FROM CH'U YUAN (340 BC)

Twined with anise,
The final autumn orchids grow
In clusters before the palace gate;
Their waxen fragrance loosens me.

Each mortal has his love;
Why should she, a Goddess, sit alone?
The young men mill about the palace gate,
But she comes and looks only at me
As soundless as jasmine
And leaves in a wind of faint silk.
Nothing is better than this,
My first love.

Wrapped in lotus she sleeps at dusk
Above the clouds, and wakes
To bathe in the waters of dawn.
She dries her hair in the sun,
Unaware of me watching and wanting
To cry out to her.

Peacock clouds! you strut
Your feathers in a comet's tail
Nine heavens higher
Than the morning sun . . .
Come down and whisper in her ear.

RICHARD PERREAU-SAUSSINE

STORM

Summer thunder sounds
The same as war
And almost wounds
As deep.

Far
Bursts and rumbling
Trouble the conscience
Of the sky, and rambling
Despairs of light
Disturb the universe.

Only patience

Has a weapon's weight
Against the abstract corpse
That horribly awakes
In a summer thunderstorm.

I have a cigarette and books
To keep me from harm.

RICHARD PERREAU-SAUSSINE

SEA SECRET

Into the curling ear-shaped shell
Whisper your sadness—it shan't tell.
Into the empty hum
Of the mock sea come
And let it mark your secret well.

Drop the silver cyclone from your hand
And see it sink into the sand.
Perhaps she'll pick it up,
Put ear to cup,
And hearing, someday understand.

RICHARD PERREAU-SAUSSINE

EVEN THE DEAD MUST SOMEDAY DIE

I try to hide death in the cut grass
But it keeps sticking out like panes of glass
Shattered into spiderwebs of air.
It's better to try to let suicide pass
With a minimum of ritual care
Than to murder with perfume the neutral smell
Of the mutilate body that silently fell
Four floors to die on the cobblestone street.
Incredible now how the odor of hell
Can emanate still from the rented sheet
That covered the corpse on the ride
To the morgue. I have it now and hide
It in a dresser, yes, and hidden weep
A cauldron of sickness to the wild-eyed
Witch who takes her life nightly in my sleep.

RICHARD PERREAU-SAUSSINE

R. Pathmanaba Iyer
27-B, High Street,
Plaistow
London E13 0AD

THREE POEMS

1

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E. E. CUMMINGS

CHICAGO BEACHHEAD: THE BATHERS

A lost child trailed them to a narrow beach:
Bathers were more than life-size against the water,
Clothes tossed aside, life to the body breathing
Quick wind and spray and the last flare of sunset
On the lake. They were like gods, their smiles
Antique, clasping each other, gliding through waves,
Calling at one another and pointing lakeward.

The child knew that was East, the miles of water
Beyond the bathers, unfolding like a map
Flowing farther, farther over plains and hills,
Water that poured to join the great gray ocean
Travelling green to ancient harbours, to elder cities
On river-circled islands, then blue and glancing
To shores of Italy and farther eastward,
The horned red moon above the Adriatic.

That was where they would take him: he felt
The water swirling at his feet. No, it was sand;

The bathers had returned. Could he follow them
Up the stone stairway back into the city?
Cloaks over shoulders, they grew small again
Leaning against each other, talking, laughing:
No, he would not drown. There would be someone
Who knew his name. The gods had vanished and up
The stairs was a familiar street, shop-windows lighted,
And if one turned the corner, the place was home.

HORACE GREGORY

HOMAGE TO UTOPIA

"If I had the time," said MacMurray O'Keefe,
"I would change this cold world
To perpetual summer:
The sun in the sky
And each flower in leaf,
Each tree a green shade
And the grasses grown wild
Where each human face
Is a happy newcomer."

"If I had the brains," and he emptied his glass,
"War would vanish away
Like the snow in the street,
Even Crime and Despair
Like their shadows would pass
Into light of noon-day
On the waves of the sea
And the Furies of Night
Would fly into retreat."

"If I had the heart," and he paid for his drink,
"Peace would flow from my veins
Like their rivers of blood
And no creature run mad
With the effort to think:
There'd be no breaks and sprains
In the flutter of brains—
But my friends would be gone
And myself would be dead."

Said MacMurray O'Keefe as he walked out the door,
"Nobody on earth
Would be here anymore
Which might not be a curse,
But a cosmic relief,"
Said MacMurray O'Keefe.

HORACE GREGORY

THE INVASION

Piazza Navona: and behind the rain of light
A fountain playing. Sit down where steps are near
In the narrow shadow.

Sleep like a dark hand falls across the forehead,
The shutters closing where the waters pour
To deeper shades of sleep.

In the narrow shadow one hears the moonlit waters;
One sees the changeable creatures of the fountain
Rise with green hair,

The clinging waters falling from their sides,
Their arms, their lips held in a white embrace
On shores of darkness.

The Piazza is empty: it is the waking moment
Of afternoon: the pale facades, towers, obelisk
Are swept away,

Only the fountain playing in golden light
As air sways open into endless sky
And from his chariot Young Saturn steps
To walk the plains of his invaded city.

HORACE GREGORY

MINOTAUR

From the hand of holiday an avid road
Snatches this boy that girl—a tribute for Detroit

As with dimensions of government, grass
Marches replacements into any field.

Remember also these permanent factors:
The February trees in mufti
At ease between performances
And rocks that come out of a mountain
To receive the sea.

WINTHROP PALMER

INCARNATION

The blue acrobats that hurtle into summer
Fall out of iron elegance in soft profusion
Arise, not angel, in the shapes of love
Requiring some body to know themselves flesh.

Slow Friday cranks the creaky carousel,
The official week ends making for the bar.
A forest is MY partner. Will you have the sea
Or the track? (breathless all the way there and back?)

WINTHROP PALMER

DECLENSIONS OF A REFRAIN: *LIGHT IS A QUALITY THE SENSES CANNOT BEHOLD*

(to Rajeshwar and Susheela Dayal)

I

More or less is a relative gesture,
as is gain or loss.
More or less, treacherous or bolder
was hardly in point or in plan.
We turned violators only
when what had ever been done
to affirm what is noble and true
was made nothing or little of,
and of such serviceable breaches
that leave course to conformity,
we have had more than enough,

did all that had to be done.
What have we not defied? State
and household rule, watched gladly
charred remnants, log and fabric
that once were yard and school,
disintegrate and smolder, watched
the cleansing flame give out.

II

In Bach I heard it, saw it
in Cézanne. I knew it
standing on the cliffs near Cannes.
What happened? Noise of some children,
the usual sunset, the foam
of the sea in my hair, a Hindu
blowing a horn, and women
rushing down to the bottom of rocks.
What happened to me nightly in dreams,
was no ancient saga, no succession
of symbols; the feeling was clear.
In dreams but a will-less recorder,
I had heard the driven crossing
a river and seen pursuers
crashing their own lungs and lances
in the onrush of a forbidding
ocean. I was on the ground,
but had known my body lifted.

III

That what must be done, be done,
matters, and not the assignment
of value. What has always mattered
is the reign of a presence, in the inner-
most sleep common to all
(representative men as its
shadow enrobed and anointed),
though places and races and legends
differ, and the method of attack
and the mode of delivery do not always
agree, and the sort of clearing
that had to be done by Asiatics,
the French, Turks, or the Hun,
or by those great women

and men whose status to be overcome
was mostly a situation within,
all spanning end and beginning,
did likewise differ.

IV

What can be said of greatness
but that — all levels transcended —
mental notations fail
where all expressions fade, and that,
that presence does not begin,
— out of where can it begin since nothing
is greater — but is reached. So in men
that were great as to what made them great.
And so in all men. An arm,
outstretched, pointing toward the sky,
across a land, across the sea,
men listen, respond, and vast
are the lines of the men that follow.
Animals gather, trees begin
to whisper, among cluster of corals
voices of bones surge to an echo,
and a total landscape, inner,
outer, begins to be transformed.

V

In us that ancient cry has cried.
What have we not defied?
Salomon, king, we too
a song of songs would sing.
David, goatherd, our lot
is the lot dreamers preferred.
We follow to the arena
where clansmen or triumphant
royalty have gathered.
What was it caused the upheaval,
boxes left in a hurry, the theatre
empty? the outcome that altered
a nation's developed ideal?
O king O king O king,
after assertion and bout,
how to assume reign of
the presence in us, else triumph

turn vain, and victory loss?

VI

Not in time was the journey long,
but in that it was continuous:
like in a dream wherein the process
is complicated, and each incident,
though seemingly unrelated,
aids the final resolution,
the logic not in the individual
scene, often contrary
to all my grain, though I
sponsored them, the pain
so strong and varied, to speak of it
is outlandish here: but in that
the various outbreaks brought me
there, from dream to dream
to a first calm that overcame me
in that distant harbor, the sun
at dawn more enormous and barbarous
than when it set in the Arabian sea.

VII

And not until I stood there, did I
for the first time know I *am* one
with what I had heard in Bach,
had seen in Cézanne: the command,
the flight, the fight, the search,
the knowledge clearest of all
below layers and layers
of personality and sleep,
in vaults of simple luxury.
They speak of such caves, merely
the entrances to deeper reaches,
where the light that fumes is a quality
the senses cannot behold;
for them men have lain at the feet
of sacred mountains, have dared
circumference, fiery cold and peaks,
for the caves that rest in them
and stir like a burning marvel.

ARTHUR GREGOR

THE SENTENTIOUS MAN

I

Spirit and nature beat in one breast-bone—
I saw a virgin writhing in the dirt—
The serpent's heart sustains the loveless stone:
My indirection found direction out.

Pride in fine lineaments precedes a fall;
True lechers love the flesh, and that is all.

II

We did not fly the flesh. Who does, when young?
A fire leaps on itself: I know that flame.
Some rages save us. Did I rage too long?
The spirit knows the flesh it must consume.

The dream's an instant that calls up her face.
She changed me ice to fire, and fire to ice.

III

Small waves repeat the mind's slow sensual play.
I stay alive, both in and out of time,
By listening to the spirit's smallest cry;
In the long night, I rest within her name—

As if a lion knelt to kiss a rose,
Astonished into passionate repose.

IV

Though all's in motion, who is passing by?
The after-image never stays the same.
There was a thicket where I went to die,
And there I thrashed, my thighs and face aflame.

But my least motion changed into a song,
And all dimensions quivered to one thing.

V

An exultation takes us outside life:
I can delight in my own hardihood;

I taste my sister when I kiss my wife;
I drink good liquor when my luck is good.

A drunkard drinks, and belches in his drink;
Such ardor tames eternity, I think.

VI

Is pain a promise? I was schooled in pain,
And found out all I could of all desire;
I weep for what I'm like when I'm alone
In the deep centre of the voice and fire.

I know the motion of the deepest stone.
Each one's himself, yet each one's everyone.

VII

I'm tired of brooding on my neighbor's soul;
My friends become more Christian, year by year.
Small waters run toward a miry hole—
That's not a thing I'm saying with a sneer—

For water moves until it's purified,
And the weak bridegroom strengthens in his bride.

THEODORE ROETHKE

POEM

I

I shall not marry you
Marry you
When the dawn hangs limp
Upon its Cross
Nor when the blooded cloak
Returns to dust.

II

The resurrection of my life
Is my finality;
The cross-bred trumpeting
Of a thousand angels on their wing

And the echoes of a cinder's blast
Is but a mutilation
Of a star-gazed past.

Out of the silence comes
A throb of fog-horns bleating
And the slivers of a reflected pane;
The clown becomes the jagged pieces
My face becomes the rain.

III

I am the Queen of solitude
In my monotonous Kingdom
I milk the dragon monster
And stain the walls of alabaster
My courtiers are my shadows
Who devour my apparition;
My halls retreat in monologues
To one pale lighted window.

I am beauty and the beast
A mask of self deceit
Wooing each the other
In quest of the absolute.

PATRICIA HUTSON

THE FIG THAT FLOATS

He was not quite serious with women. The fig
Of Denmark presented itself
   As a king of involuntary incandescence.

New York, London, Paris, Rome,
Bless my bed with many a tome.

   Purity of mind is an asphodel
   Strict, fragile, beautiful to tell.
The damage would be to the intellect.

   There would be a cessation of interest,
      Perhaps even a loss of intent
                                                            if the fig

Of the imagination
were not left always
Not to pluck.
She should have flowers
And know the often hours of scintillance,
But she should fade away if touched.

Such is the huge disdain
and the lordly claim
Of aesthetic dedication;
such is denial,
And such is aspiration,
when fogs of the prince,

Toils of delicate supervision intervene
Between the real
and the wealth of what seems,
And the mood and the moment is the matter.

RICHARD EBERHART

THE WHOLE VIEW

I

He has gone into oblivion, who reigned for shading years.
The notion of oblivion interests me. Comfort-kind.

When children are at the raging point,
When nerves are at the breaking point,

When the world shakes an asylum of affront,
Inhabitable best by strenuous minds in lust,

It is most pleasant to think of dry oblivion,
Think of a man without responsibility.

II

Or of the middle years when, graced by power,
Before the falling off, in the extravagant, able hour

He felt the worldly play, the gaudy game,
And tempted home the giant dualisms,

At ease among destructive speculations,

Hurling his defiant Ayes, his furious Yeas,

It is agreeable to consider this time well,
The man compact and the world unbreakable.

III

And of youth that wanted to win the chair,
The dare-all glance and the be-all will

In its swift realizations, swift changes,
Dauntless courage, despair as deep as death,

In the muscular glut, the mind's easy breath,
And running trips where the metaphysical ranges,

It was in that time for a life-time secretly came
Belief in the positive, subsumption of the sublime.

IV

Now to see it all together in one look,
The old, the going, and the young, one bound book

Held in one hand of the God of the Universe,
While other kingdoms and worlds He reads in verse

Of stones, ferns, and stars, discreet enlightenment
Blooming along the place, all used, nothing spent,

Man and nature single and whole in one clarity
Of real myth, in the hold of some divine charity.

RICHARD EBERHART

AT THE LONG BAR

Bowed like a foetus at the long bar sit,
You common artist whose uncommon ends
Deflower the secret contours of a mind
And all around you pitying find
Like severed veins your earthly friends . . .

(*The sickness of the oyster is the pearl*)

Dead bottles all around infect
Stale air the exploding corks bewitch—
O member of this outlawed sect,
Only the intolerable itch,
Skirt-fever, keeps the anthropoid erect.

Husband or wife or child condemn—
This chain-gang which we all inherit:
Or those bleak ladders to despair
Miscalled, high place and merit.
Dear if these knotted words could wake
The dead boy and the buried girl . . .

(*The sickness of the oyster is the pearl*)

LAWRENCE DURRELL

MESSIAS

Alone in the darkling apartment the boy
Was reading poetry when the doorbell rang;
The sound sped to his ear and winged his joy,
The book leaped from his lap on broken wing.

Down the gilt stairwell then he peered
Where an old man of patriarchal race
Climbed in an eastern language with his beard
A black halo around his paper face.

His glasses spun with vision and his hat
Was thick with fur in the August afternoon;
His silk suit crackled heavily with light
And in his hand a rattling canister shone.

Bigger he grew and softer the root words
Of the hieratic language of his heart,
And faced the boy, who flung the entrance wide
And fled in terror from the nameless hurt.

Past every door like a dead thing he swam,
Past the entablatures of the kitchen walls,
Down the red ringing of the fire escape
Singing with sun, to the green grass he came,

Sickeningly green, leaving the man to lurch
Bewildered through the house and seat himself
In the sacrificial kitchen after his march,
To study the strange boxes on the shelf.

There mother found him mountainous and alone,
Mumbling some singsong in a monotone,
Crumbling breadcrumbs in his scholar's hand
That wanted a donation for the Holy Land.

KARL SHAPIRO

THE SOUL'S RICH IDLENESS

There is no image to expound this
Opulence of taut ease, the soul's rich idleness,
Though it partakes of the qualities
Of empire and flower: the hushed vastness
Whose splendor and doom grow both from its size,

And the unique blossom born of repetitive nature,
Burning cool between a passion for
Beauty, and a complete indifference towards the beholder,
Its shape and colour which one could never
Describe but could no more mistake than restore.

But the motion of this fervid repose
Is by no means the unstirring ease
Told of eaters of lotus flowers, but more like the ways
The lotus itself takes, floating open and precarious
On the ugly flood's slow life-giving eddies.

For what seems patience in it is no more
To be credited than the calm masking tidal water
On a still night with no moon, when one might wish to compare
Even the sea, as this seething langour,
To a scallop shell: so silent, shallow and sure.

Yet it needs neither moon nor the least breeze
To change more than any sea-face;
Conversely, even Time's rush it defies
Like a patch of sea that will be suddenly waveless
In a storm. Oh like no passage nor stance it is;

It grows neither as Solomon nor as lilies;
Deep as the relaxing of the racked pelvis
Before birth, though both its coming and its promise
Are less certain, it unfolds when its own time is
Into its own glory, by its own light which even to its lidless
Vacant eyes must seem much like a darkness.

W. S. MERWIN

NORTHEAST OCTOBER

Where in every bush there is burning, and
The lucidity of heaven is farther than ever
Above the wordless flames and the fields
Of hushed fire there are birds rising, drifting,
Instead of cries, every one of them blackened
Without smoke, there is clarity, painful,
Without understanding, there are graves
Everywhere, ready for the dancing, and
Behind every tree there is the end
Of the world. I make your fire be tongues
But can find them no syllable. I make your trees
Be anguish, and your leaves be hands that have
Snatched at the edge of the glass turning, I make
Your light, fathomless, where the birds fish,
Be blood, and the birds be your fright. Here be martyrs,
I say, there must be a faith for. I sit in the dumb
Light of your burning, and am your grief.

W. S. MERWIN

VENUS

When the words of the wise have subsided at last
When the rules of the aged are fully rehearsed
And the advice of the no longer tempted has passed
And the solemn old elders dispersed,
Then I come and I steal all the treasures of truth
And I plead that each bothering conscience be stilled
I release and unsaddle impetuous youth
And I ride till my fancy is filled.
So if then I feel kind I relinquish my steed
In a stable where comfort and shelter abound
Where the wearying charger may peacefully feed
Till the trammels of life are unwound.
But at times if I weary I leave my mount lost

In the bleak winter hills of the barewooded stone
Where he cools from his heat to be singed by the frost
And to wander forever alone.

JOHN KING-FARLOW

CONEY ISLAND

With magic breath you untie the colored knot, Friend Clown;
But greater craft is there when in drifting silken cloud
The viewless breezes loosen the lighted golden moments,
Not charging beauty's fee: in the sky the magician's tent.

Taking off your hat, you set free a dozen pigeons;
But look! there free on turrets, white and black and many
The pigeons fly already, enter the dovecotes cooing,
Flashing and scraping high air beyond the reach of scrapers.

They seek miracles, the Refusers, in realms beyond the world:
Mystery more is here in the life we live on earth,
Things that are and be, the law in flower and seed,
In the moth that sheds its sheath and sails a butterfly.

Jasmine on the bower, from nowhere a scented moon,
Heaves the Atlantic in whiteness, dazzling magic tide,
Miracle the child's cry, "Mother", miracle the blood of youth,
Where in wondrous shores more miracles than here?

Deaf to muted heart, we seek the medium's voice.
Not knowing God in Man, we play with gods in amber,
O Wizard, my Yankee friend, reap dollars with righteous heart—
Your tricks are fairer far than tricks and trades called holy.

AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY
(translated from his original Bengali
poem by the author)

A SONG FOR LOVE

When I slept till I was twelve
By the face of the round-head moon,
I learned a thing or two, I thought,
Of the long legends of love.

And swore through passing years
No legends could be dying
For all my blood prayed to
That moon when she stopped and sat
By my window, big as night.

I said to the moon in my third quarter
I danced and sang for some such thing
As no tears would give away,
For a dancing horse in a skin of sweat,
A silken skin frothed white
With properly shimmering neck.

As I climbed the coil of the stair
By the moon that had its storey,
I said let a waif of song declare
Whatever it is we vow:

Whatever it is we vow and know
The passing lie has honored not,
For the heart is wild on words
That the deed would forget.

Numb wasps wake in the winter house
The spider trots up its thread,
A brook drowns leaves and buries them,
And a dying star goes in.

Heart, heart, tell me true
What it was I had to do. . . .

JEAN GARRIGUE

SO FRESH! THE BOUNTY OF HIS PARADISE STOCKED IN FISH AND FLIES

There is a loud moon constantly hurting the heart
But the cat, constantly clacking his jaws
Leaping, draws down a fly with his paws
With which he plays and finally chews.
Miewing again, he climbs up a chair,
The fool would climb up the wall, he is tantalized
Half out of his fur,
Doubling and leaping as if he were ill.
Is it the moon, my cat, or the kill?

For now she plays a late September tune
And for such artfulness the wild boys battle.
Is it that my fly-catcher cat, who crawls the wall fly-wise
His eyes outgrowing his face in size
Like his bumping heart from his coat
Rears on his legs to biff the fly fly-wise
Because the wild enjambment of a tune now plays
For which he'd eat each living piece alive?

And chatterers left over from the summer mark
With arrant unexpectedness a song
Whose heavy accents at the season's break
Somehow informs a mystic thing
As if it were not heard before
Attempting now to enter in my door. . . .

JEAN GARRIGUE

DAPHNE

From a hillslope I look on the wet fields flattening before me,
Mud holding mirrors, the withered twigs alive with rain;
I would feel my way through the darkness and straining bramble
But I'd only be stumbling on that weather-rotten tomb, my name —

A name never in men's mouths, that to no man I'd answer.
And what paths would I touch, but the small dank ways down my ear?
Since the day that I fled them along the fields of my pride,
Every tree says, Stand, tall in your silence, till blood return from fear.

But O Lord if I stand so I feel my human limbs taking root,
And the glint on the ground from a twig's decay might stare me blind,
And the Apollo of my Imagination pursuing, his arms,
O his arms almost about me,
Would he leave me there forever, with my love branched stiff
from the spine?

Yet a form has walked, in the broken sun of the wood,
Has hunted with arrows of prayer where the wild boars drip red.
O let me see him, if only mistaking a birch for his gesture;
His hands could transform my sad flesh, which make Body from Bread.

Or the terrible secret, is it lodged in the rings of a tree?
That I, slowed to Laurel, had as else been happier than most
Did I not know He walked, my Christ, sounding all depths from his eyes,
Cry why should he so please my soul? Half blessed is half cursed.

That out of the corner of my eye, only, dare I now look.
To have followed a love to its lonely throne in the wood
Sees me struck clutching earth, slow leaves of my brain brought to light,
Speechless with rustling: God becomes Body and Blood.

If the wood I rambled was my own empty loving, he pitied.
Lord, now among these leaves, O let Your sun toss a few coins.
See a thing stilled, staring into distances, reflecting Christ in his eyes;
Lord, unless You breathe on me now, let rot take my loins. . . .

CLAIRE MCALLISTER

HONEYCREEK

In the long-agos I was christened in creeks;
Eyes of violets, frogs, wild nuts,
Bend, O bend you your light once more on me
That my mind's eye may breach unbreachable gulfs.
Logs sleek with moss, ancient leaves no wind blew,
The gay ghostly lands seen in hoof-prints of deer:
Realm where the eye reigns; here, to see is to do,
But the creek flows so gently, I should not be here.

Hush, or the grass and the turtledove
Are cast in the oven. Let the small wing soar,
Recovering a corner no devils love,
Immemorial moments gazing by muddy floors.
As in the death-still center of his gale
Chardin observed how a plum took the light
I would store up such love, till all the colors pale,
Till the bracken about my limbs grow tight.

O beetle, watercress, sweet moist earth:
Bitter years in cities still stare from a ditch
But the light from a running creek, snatched from the mouth
Of time, can lend me the heart of a witch.
The flesh allowing no broomstick has lied.
Jump, creek! talk, minnow! cling, hair, to burr!
At heel, nostalgia! O pain at my side
Walk with me by the muddy creeks: be my heart's spur!

CLAIRE MCALLISTER

ON A SUMMER LAWN

Sprawled on grass I am my cult,
My oracle; the heavens shine

Complacently while thought on thought
That crushed the berries, robbed the vine,
Drinks its drop. Above, clouds drift;
The spouting whale grows serpentine.
Summer lays at my feet a gift
Of vibrant grass. Now, sweet-pea, climb.

This is a draft too good to be mixed
With the sweet of love or sour of hate.
I who try to swim betwixt
Like an underwater shape,
Suspect this gold is counterfeit.
A thistle shakes its bearded head:
Daylight wants not faith, but wit;
At night the sails begin to spread.

Tonight Tomorrow shall wind the clock;
Tomorrow the Yesterdays were best.
The luckless other days awoke;
What care I for races lost?
He who dares follow his nose
Is led down lonely lanes to find
The conjured oracle disclose
What the heart wants to teach the mind.

Sprawled on grass now the pain relents;
Not for the loved one or unloved world
Here is saved some last few cents,
Something vanity withheld
For days like today; the heart knows a place
To let the anchor down.
When near to its ridiculous
Truth, stop; lie down on the lawn.

CLAIRE MCALLISTER

TWO CLERIHEWS

1.

Nietsche
Was a cruel
Tietsche
But Goethe
Wouldn't
Hoethe
Fly.

2.

Rousseau
Etait dousseau
Jolies dames
Mais Pizarro
Etait bizarro
Point de vue des femmes.

DIANA MENUHIN

YOUR GENUS IS WORLDWIDE YOUR SPACEST SUBLIME

But, Holy Saltmartin, why can't you keep time?
Even the vultures are singing in rime.
The gadgets go clickety clackety click
And whatever we're kicking against is a prick.
In the name of St. Stevenson and Holywood
I never knew everything being so good,
Why, even Almighty Gawd's understood.
The apples are gospelling up in the trees
Such sermons as to bring worms to their knees
And far in the wilderness of the West
What's declining is either the worst or the best:
But don't you worry, no, not in the least,
It's the sun rising, not the East.
(Is that the sun setting with so little fuss?
No, that's not the sun, my son. It's us.)
The ogres sit smiling like old photographs
And they're chewing up children—but strictly for laughs.
And down in the depths of the featherbrained sea
Jonah's daughter is calling for you and me.
So roses, oh roses, sew roses around
If we can't lie above we'll lie under the ground
And daisies will chain us so close to each other
You'll think that your wife is really your mother.
O what could be better than crying out loud
So the Holy Father will know that you're proud
And lean out of heaven with a buck in his fist
To pay us for filling his mill up with grist?
O up and down the gold-plated street
The shoes are looking around for cold feet
And in the bright garden paths of Eros
We're all of us strolling around like heroes.
Hear that music? It's not bop.
It's the razzmatazz stars that'll never stop.

What, never? I got a flea in my ear.
It's the only damn thing I ever hear.
O don't you believe what the doctors say
It was an apple got us this way.
Put the garbage to bed. Throw us away.
So my love, O my love, do as I say.

GEORGE BARKER

Notes on Contributors

ROY CAMPBELL: Probably the finest satirical poet of the century. Lives in Portugal.
HOWARD MOSS: An editor of *The New Yorker.* His third book of poems will be published next year.
LARRY RUBIN: An English instructor at Georgia Tech. First publication.
JEAN GARRIGUE: Two books of poems with New Directions and Noonday Press. Recently won a poetry award from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*
CLAIRE MCALLISTER: Young American with a growing reputation, has also published in *Partisan Review* and *Atlantic Monthly.*
ELIZABETH JENNINGS: First book of poems, *A Way of Looking,* was recently published by Rinehart. English. Won Arts Council Prize in '53 and Maugham Award in '56.
RICHARD PERREAU-SAUSSINE: Eighteen; native of Hollywood. This is his first appearance in print.
ARTHUR GREGOR: One of the most interesting of younger Americans. His second book of poems will be published by us early next year.
LAWRENCE DURRELL: A regular contributor to *Poetry London* starting with the first issue. Now on Cyprus with the British Information Service.
W. S. MERWIN: A noted young American poet, his third volume *Green with Beasts* appeared recently.
JOHN KING-FARLOW: A recent graduate of Oxford, is now with the RAF. Has previously published in *Oxford Poetry.*
AMIYA CHAKRAVARTY: One of the most prominent poets of Bengal. Currently professor of Oriental Religions and Literature at Boston University.
WINTHROP PALMER: One of the editors of PLNY. Her second book, *Fables and Ceremonies,* appeared recently.
MICHAEL HAMBURGER: English. Editions Poetry London published his *Poems of Hölderlin* and *Twenty Prose Poems of Baudelaire.*
PATRICIA HUTSON: A twenty-two year old Floridian. She has not previously appeared in print.
ROBIN SKELTON: Lecturer in English at Manchester University. One book of poems.
DIANA MENUHIN: Regular contributor. Wife of Yehudi Menuhin.

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ALAN SWALLOW
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Contemporary Portrait No. 2: Wallace Stevens

There is a fishing village where the town crier occasionally still goes down and up the half-paved streets. When the sound of his bell reached me one day early in August, I thought he should be crying: "Wallace Stevens is dead. Long live Wallace Stevens!"

Gratitude for the body of his poetry and for my few brief interchanges with the poet tempered too faintly the sense of loss. It was no less acute for not being wholly selfish. How accept the fact that this man with the capacious appetite for reality, the all but incomparable faculty for transforming, using, enjoying it, has been banished from the world's table?

Yet he celebrated the particulars of "being, that gross universe", with such elegance, energy and acuity that for us his poems refresh life as before. Partly, perhaps, because he did not try to speak above a mortal mouth, mortality has claimed him without hushing the sparkle of his "beau language". His candor is a kindling thing today. Stevens is dead, but we go on living upon his bounty: "the bread of faithful speech".

In a paper that he delivered more than a dozen years ago he denied that there could be poetry "without the personality of the poet. . ." He was, of course, himself almost excessively reticent. Nevertheless, his personality shines out of even the least of his letters. "A week ago we discovered a snow-drop under the hemlock cover of one of our flower beds," he wrote me in mid-February. "Even in zero weather this has now increased to three. Let that bit of news do you good in return for your *Letter*." The reference was to a poem of mine called "Letter to Wallace Stevens" which, I like to remember, pleased him. He could find fun in a more trivial kind of flower than the first snow-drop: one of his friends made a point of sending him candied violets from Paris at Christmastime, "and what a kick he got from it!" William Carlos Williams recalls. The anecdote occurs in his contribution to the *Trinity Review's* "Celebration for Wallace Stevens." This, the celebrated one wrote me, was "like a very rich chocolate cake. It would have been quite possible for me to sit down and devour the whole thing but I took a little of it here and there and then put it away. I don't suppose," he added, "that you will believe that either, but so help me God." The refusal to devour the very rich chocolate cake at a sitting was a tribute perhaps less to the puritanic strain in the man than to his epicureanism.

He once observed that the diction of poetry should be big and gay. This big man with the quiet manner and the gentle voice, for all his restraint, had the gift of gaiety. And when the business world and its surrounding Oxidia (which he defined as "the typical industrial suburb, stained and grim") proved too much for him, he would take off for the "venereal soil" of Florida or the liberating exoticism and simplicity of some more remote locale. Commenting on "The Blue Guitar, XX", he wrote to his Italian translator, Renato Poggioli: "I apostrophize the air and call it friend, my only friend. But it is only air. What I need is a true belief, a true brother, friendlier than the air. The imagination (poor pale guitar) is not that. But the air, the mere *joie de vivre,* may be."

It seems characteristic that late in life he should have visited the quondam home

of his maternal grandfather, John Zeller, in Tulpehocken, Pennsylvania, the old Lutheran church and the graveyard there, and that when he followed his pious excursion with a visit to an exhibition of books at the Morgan Library, he found that the "brilliant pages from Poland, France, Finland, and so on, books of tales, of poetry, of folk-lore" lent color and vitality to his experiences at the home of his austere forebears. It is also characteristic that in describing the Tulpehocken scenes and people with loving detail he omitted to mention that the family of religious refugees who came here in 1709 and finally settled in Pennsylvania *were* his forebears. The reserve that they bequeathed him is attested to by his close contemporaries and friends.

Stevens' attachments to his own roots is plain in his poetry. There is further evidence of it in passages from his letters to his Italian translator. "People think of ai-yi-yi as Spanish but it is equally Pennsylvania Dutch," he asserts. As for "this-a-way" and "that-a-way", they are "Pennsylvania Dutch idioms", which he relates to *"dieser Weg"*. Again, he points out that "Gesu is a perfectly good English word just as it stands", and remembers "looking it up because it was just a word with that particular spelling that I wanted. That particular spelling is, of course, obselete." He admits that his "thin men of Haddam are entirely fictitious", but he likes the name. "In any case," he concludes, "it has a completely Yankee sound." No regionalist poet, Stevens was nonetheless immensely concerned with the indigenous and the local. It is worth noting that he offered Professor Poggioli "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" especially for the Italian edition of his poems.

If, as he kept insisting, a man is what is around him, and a poem is of the poet's soil, then his own work has roots in eighteenth century Pennsylvania as well as in twentieth century Cambridge and Connecticut, and, of course, for this attentive reader of Mallarmé, Laforgue *et Cie.*, in nineteenth century Paris. He respected his past, as he respected and appreciated his father—"quite a good egg; agreeable, active," Stevens is reported as saying—who used to spend his Sunday afternoons in the family library reading 500-page novels (were those afternoons prelude to "Sunday Morning", one wonders), and his mother, who "just kept house and ran the family" and whom he believed responsible for his imaginative gift. That gift enabled him to be a mental as well as a physical traveler, and, in the midst of his hatred of a cheap mediocrity, to pity those submerged by it. Compassion swelled his estimate of what he chiefly prized: "Of what value is anything to the solitary and those that live in misery and terror," he asked, "except the imagination?"

He responded to experience too warily to say much of death until he could speak, with an aging man's authority, of the approaches to it. There is, of course, the salutation to "The Emperor of Ice-Cream", which Stevens himself liked for its gaudiness. In other relatively early poems he maintains the objectivity of one who, knowing he will reach a certain port, need not yet prepare for its foreign exigencies. In "Sunday Morning" he calls death "the mother of beauty", while regarding that dread genetrix from a distance that permits him to be at ease with her. Although this poem revolves the idea of death, it deals with a more inclusive metaphysic, and is remarkable

not only for its technical excellences but also as a triumph of the secular spirit. The brilliance, the musical hullaballoo of HARMONIUM are apt to outshine and outsing the tone of those poems in which he sets forth the "Domination of Black" (another of his own favorites among his poems), composes an elegiac "Sonatina for Hans Christian", walks the paths of the cemetery. He treats the theme more resonantly years later, considering "Two forms that move among the dead, high sleep" and "high peace":

> Two brothers. And a third form,
> she that says
> Good-by in the darkness, speak-
> ing quietly there,
> To those that cannot say good-by
> themselves.

But it is in the recent poem, "Madame la Fleurie", that death takes on peculiar intimacy for one who, after many years of living voluptuously in the world of the body and that of the mind, confronts his dying. The poem demands to be read as a whole but the conclusion must suffice here:

> He does not lie there remember-
> ing the blue-jay, say the
> jay,
> His grief is that his mother should
> feed on him, himself and
> what he saw,
> In that distant chamber, a bearded
> queen, wicked in her dead
> light.

The opening line is an instance of Stevens' way of ordering vocables. In his poems the auditory and the visual imagination play together as they should. His gift was to get them to play with such contagious verve. One could compile a poetic handbook merely of the names he invented. Not alone his anthology pieces, but page after page diversely asserts the feeling for pure sound which helps to make him a poets' poet. An example is that medley of bleakness and jubilation, "The Man on the Dump", with its final question as to the solace he finds there:

> Is it to sit among the mattresses
> of the dead,
> Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and
> murmur *aptest eve:*
> Is it to hear the blatter of grackles
> and say
> *Invisible priest;* is it to eject,
> to pull
> The day to pieces and cry *stanza*
> *my stone?*
> Where was it one first heard of
> the truth? The the.

A popular author once observed that wealth is a sixth sense which enables one to enjoy the other five more fully. Stevens' wealth was two-fold: the financial security of the vice-president of an insurance company, the irreducible treasure of an imaginative man. He differs from Eliot, his acknowledged master, in important respects: in his delighted apprehension of being, his secularism, not least in the nature of his poetic capital. Reading Eliot, one is increasingly conscious of the number and variety of other writers whom he has cleverly looted. Reading Stevens, one admires his use of an independent fortune. His learning is so unobtrusive as to be irrelevant. Thus, his note on the circumstances under which rationalists in square hats might take to sombreros entertains readers ignorant of Pascal. These pages give

off many odors: the scent of flowers and of soap, of fruits domestic and outlandish, the stinks of the dump, whiffs of paint on clapboard or canvas, the pungence of sea and forest, every smell but that of lamp-oil. Here is a poet who writes by the light of his own mind.

The luminosity of Stevens' poems is emphasized by his concern with physical light, which resembles that of a painter, and by his dazzling evocation of it. Even when he is not poking fun at dullards, he likes a radiant palette. Some of his most sombre themes occur in poems as alive with color as a composition by Renoir or Matisse. Nor is it only in such clearly symbolic pieces as "The Blue Guitar" that the color takes on a particular significance. His titles suggest paintings: "The Load of Sugar-Cane", "Study of Two Pears", "Large Red Man Reading", "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers". In this poem, as elsewhere, the imagery appeals to eye and ear at once: "It was as if thunder took form upon/The piano, that time: the time when the crude/And jealous grandeurs of sun and sky/Scattered themselves in the garden, like/The wind dissolving into birds,/The clouds becoming braided girls. /It was like the sea poured out again/In east wind beating the shutters at night." Although his first requirement in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is that *"It Must Be Abstract"*, he insists that "the greatest poverty is not to live in a physical world" as often as he insists on the destitution of those who live nowhere else. He concludes an abstruse meditation with the simile: "Like rubies reddened by rubies reddening." He begins another: "It was something to see that their white was different,/Sharp as white paint in the January sun."

Like his Professor Eucalyptus, he knew that "The search/For reality is as momentous as/The search for god." He made it his intense, enduring, happy concern. The harmonizing of opposites which was fundamental for Yeats was equally so for Stevens, but he was less apt to see it as a conflict than as a lovers' game. If his closest approach to religion was poetry, it was never a melancholy substitute. Rather, it was a means of "Contriving balance to contrive a whole." The balance is between the imagined and the real, the abstracting mind and "The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone", between "The wind of Iceland and/The wind of Ceylon", between music and silence. His own poems have that amplitude. They include a hymn to the sun almost as simple as an Amerindian chant and the insouciant sophistication of an Americanized Apollinaire. They balance magnificent metaphor against bare statement, breathe the icy air on the peaks of metaphysics or an atmosphere thick with the mundane, refuse to reject either the dump or the ivory tower.

He illustrates his conviction that poetry must not only be abstract, but that *"It Must Change"* and *"It Must Give Pleasure"*. The changes, the pleasure, are less a matter of subject than of technique: rhythm, imagery, and structure. Sometimes he makes a notation in free verse. More often he plays a number of short variations on a theme or composes long elaborate poems such as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction". This is in three parts, each of ten sections, made up in turn of seven three line stanzas, and has both prologue and epilogue. But the formality of such structures is less evident than the conversational ease achieved by his phrasing, his use of en-

jambment, his manipulation of the pause. Thereby his metrics escape monotony, though they do not astonish by their richness as does his vocabulary, enlarged as it is by witty neologisms. "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" is one of the first and happiest instances of Stevens' use of the three line stanza in a loose blank verse, enhanced by internal off-rhymes and assonances. It is also an example of his skill at turning exhilarating metaphor into resounding symbol.

As they should, his symbols recur and expand and alter. Some, like the color blue, associated with distance and the play of the imagination, or green, that belongs to his "fluent mundo", are as familiar as they are frequent. Others, like the sea and the rock, though they appear in various poems, have been less noticed. No contemporary, unless perhaps the author of "The Dry Salvages", has written of the sea with equal resonance. As might be expected, Stevens has fewer references to the rock, though that, too, is a recurrent and powerful symbol for him. In "Credences of Summer", a poem of festive particulars and large serenity, he asserts: "The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth." And goes on, in opulent imagery, to equate that truth with summer and its sustaining verities. In the piece that gives its title to the last section of his COLLECTED POEMS, the rock takes on a more various and a larger meaning. Finally the poem, which bears repeated readings, shows the rock as that reality which it was the poet's labor, as it was his joy, to seek and to declare.

The image of the rock occurs also in "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain", which appeared in a review with a few other late pieces. When I expressed my admiration for it, Stevens replied that his own favorite was "Vacancy in the Park". The briefest and least ambitious poem in the group, this remains a notable example of what he asked of modern poetry.

> It has to be living, to learn the
> speech of the place.
> It has to face the men of the
> time and to meet
> The women of the time. It has
> to think about war
> And it has to find what will suffice.
>
> ..... It must
> Be the finding of a satisfaction,
> and may
> Be of a man skating, a woman
> dancing, a woman
> Combing. The poem of the act
> of the mind.

Again, one must read the poem in its entirety to appreciate its sufficiency. Indeed, one should read the whole body of his work to understand how truly it satisfies the mind. This confectioner of tinsel toys, this master of artifice, this fellow with the blue guitar, was preoccupied, from first to last, with "The essential poem" that, as he says, "begets the others", the world that begets the other worlds. He kept coming closer to it, bringing us closer, from the liaisons gaily noted in HARMONIUM until he was on the verge of knowing

> how it would feel, released
> from destruction,
> To be a bronze man breathing
> under archaic lapis,
>
> Without the oscillations of the

> planetary pass-pass,
> Breathing his bronzen breath at
> the azury centre of time.

Then he died. The last page in his stout book is about nothing more than a bird's cry heard near daylight toward the end of winter. To the poet's ear it "was like/A new knowledge of reality." Wallace Stevens gives us no less.

BABETTE DEUTSCH

Edwin Muir

One Foot in Eden, by Edwin Muir. Grove Press, 1956. $1.00.

The poems in this new volume by Edwin Muir are powerful and sombre, concerned with certain themes that are approached again and again from varying points of view. Essentially they are poems cleaving most strictly to their animating concepts with few "irrelevancies," as it were, extensions of the metaphor to embellish or underline, and few or no distractions within the poem for the sake of augmenting some effect of sensibility. Metaphor, rhythm, meter, diction, all work tightly, toward their aims. This can be said of many other poets, no doubt. But there is a difference and the difference lies in the voice. Muir is a philosophical poet, working with the grand themes of poetry—time, death, the sense of the immense past in which, looked at from afar, man seems to move like a mythological monster-angel. Essentially a "moral" poet, Muir is concerned with the myths of our genesis—our Eden, irretrievably lost, that puzzling complexity, the moral nature of things, the meaning of our evil, our guilt, our innocence, that which is menial and that which is free.

Many of his poems deal with certain archetypal figures and situations . . . Adam, Prometheus, Orpheus, Abraham. . . . There is that very beautiful poem, *The Annunciation,* which recalls Rilke's poem on the same subject—and others on the Christian theme. Beyond this, or because of this, he is a poet not lightly, or ironically, or remotely concerned with the crisis of our twentieth century. And much of the impact of his work depends on his complex sensitivity to the menace and significance of our local contretemps. "Into thirty centuries born/At home in them all but the very last." In *Prometheus* there are these lines:

> The shrines are emptying and the
> peoples changing.
> It may be I should find Olympus
> vacant
> If I should return. For I have
> heard a wonder:
> Lands without gods; nothing but
> earth and water;
> Words without mystery; and the
> only creed
> An iron text to beat the round
> skulls flat
> And fit them for the cap of a
> buried master.

But against this poem set another, called *The Horses.* They, the horses, come back sometime after the "seven days war that put the world to sleep" when all the radios are stilled, and the tractors, rust heaps, and the rest of macadam civilization has been shot to hell. They come back, sent by an "old command to find our whereabouts/And that long-lost archaic companionship." Muir's long view of time allows him to "fore-

cast" this, perhaps. In this way he is a poet of faith: the world is, he would say, somewhere at least, indestructible. And faith out of "simple and equivocal" despair, form building its bastion in chaos, are themes of many poems. This real world is an intellectual thing, an act of mind over and against circumstance. And based on an invisible order in the universe? In *The Young Princes* we might think so. The soul remembering from whence it came. . . .

> Where was a time: we were young princelings then
> In artless state, with brows as bright and clear
> As morning light on a new morning land.
> We gave and took with innocent hands, not knowing
> If we were rich or poor, or thinking at all
> Of yours or mine; we were newcomers still . . .

This poem, like *The Emblem,* moving with a beautiful and ceremonial formality celebrates an ordained order and degree enduring in man, beyond man.

Writing his oftentimes moral or metaphysical parables, Muir maintains a surface of objective clarity. In terms of diction he is neither obscure nor "difficult", nor is he interested in projecting a "subject matter" that is essentially elusive and obscure at its center, nor misty and fleeting at the edges. He usually arrives at a poem at its most probably dramatic moment and from there on unswervingly adheres to the dramatic development of the concept that launched it. This makes for a forceful immediacy. And more times than not, immediacy seems to equal inevitability. His poems do not disappear into their own sensibility, nor are they overwrought, as it were, by their own detail. They are ordered actions of the imagination based on firm, cohesive concepts. Highly defined poems, held in a hard, clear focus, they are saved by that from being devoured by their own inwardness. Likewise, poems dealing with such "universals and eternals" could be dull. A re-hash of wise-saws. Or, awed by their own troubling import, they could be too leaden and too solemn. These poems are, on the contrary, both moving and haunting.

Going back to diction, one might well call Muir traditional, if not conservative, keeping that is, to the large main trunk of the English language, with a few exotic words or daring ones, little or no wrenchings of syntax, no turning of adverbial phrases into noun phrases, etc. It is all honest kersey. It is even linsey-woolsey when so commonplace a cliché as "treasure trove" turns up. And yet, and yet, that phrase is perfectly acceptable within its setting, sheds, in fact, a tenderly ironical light upon what precedes and follows. Above all, Muir's language seems to be of the very grain of his thought. One may feel with certain poets that they assume language, they put it on as a mask, or a cloth of gold. It is Muir's power that one feels at all times the close working of intelligence and emotion with the words that express it. Such "responsibility" or such honesty is hard to come by. And is it not a part of the secret of the poet's voice?

One obtains an aesthetic pleasure from these poems different in kind than from the poems of other poets. Muir is not so carefree nor so playful, nor so evidently delighting, as many. He offers few fire-

works. He is not particularly suave. He does not specialize in the eye. He is not out to make a new kind of ear music. Nor is he out to investigate a "reality" that no one else knows about. He does not particularly startle us, nor dazzle us. Nor does he seek for prodigious effects. One thinks first and last of a briny truthfulness. . . . The insights and the perceptions springing from ideas ring with that kind of purity one calls truth-telling. They are hard-won, hard-fought-for, hard-thought-out, mined from substance rich and deep, with feeling that is never facile or extravagant, feeling uncompromising. . . . And the poems emerge as if they had been thought upon a lifetime.

JEAN GARRIGUE

A Grammarian of Motives:

A POET IN WHAT HE SAYS AND IN KNOWING HOW WHAT IS SAID HAS BEEN SAID

Book of Moments: Poems 1915-1954 by Kenneth Burke. Hermes Publications, 1955

Kenneth Burke is a philosopher and a satirist—a humorist of the somatic kind, whose self-styled "flat tire of satire" has been indispensable to the lingual, political, moral and poetic apparatus which has carried him to an enviable destination —the expert's. He feels that "eye, hand, and mental keenness" should be "busied for the good of the many". (*Plea of the People,* p. 58). "We would be men of good will," he says.

> To be strong in hate or to rot
> in wretchedness—
> Do not force us to this choice
> that is no choice:

In his *Neo-Hippocratic Oath,* although he "cannot offer cures for stony hearts," he "swears that he will try not to belittle the work of those who would," and if he "comes upon unsavory private matters," he "will keep them to himself except insofar as he noises them abroad to everyone/ as observations about everyone". (*Moments,* p. 8) In his technique of persuasion, he is a philosopher of opposites. He is not "launching an attack; nor does he suffer a sense of defeat." "Each principle advocated is matched by an opposite principle." "The connoisseur will be will-less": (*Counter-Statement*) The artist "must recognize the validity of contraries", he says. On the title-page of his *Moments,* he quotes Emerson's statement, "Our moods do not believe in each other." He is in agreement with Thomas Mann that "the problematical is the proper sphere of art." Concur and one "will find moral indignation impossible."

His *Moments* "treat of love, politics, and kindred conundrums," he says, and as if to match his philosophy of opposites, he says they "are somewhat irresponsible in their way of cancelling out one another." Whatever else they do, they illustrate Plato's antithesis that if we think in universals, we feel in particulars. They are records of experience— "Delight, Promise, Victory, Regret, Apprehension, Arrival, Crossing, Departure, Loneliness, Sorrow, Despair, etc." and are reinforced at the back of the book by several pages of "Flowerishes"—dicta "which emerge these days somewhat diz-

zily", Mr. Burke says, and as print, flower in circles, serpentines, comet-tails, dotted lines, back to back and turning corners; some in light and some in dark-face. Here are two: "Must it always be wishful thinking? Can't it sometimes be thoughtful wishing?" "Draw out the time—and one part of an eddy going downstream might seem all your life to be going upstream."

In *Counter-Statement,* — 1931 — discussing form "emotional and technical", "a work has form", Mr. Burke said, "insofar as one part leads a reader to anticipate another part and be gratified by the sequence." "Neglect organic progression and our emotions remain static." Alluding to virtues and diseases of form, he mentioned hypertrophy of information as a disease of form, said of Proust that whereas "a single page is astonishing, he becomes wearisome after extended reading"; noted also, that "Shakespeare's style approaches mannerism in so far as it over-emphasizes metaphor." Eloquence, he said, consists in "matching the important with the important" and "by innovation is not meant something new but an emphasis to which the public is not accustomed." "A rhythm," he said, "is a promise which the poet makes the reader and in proportion as the reader comes to rely upon this promise, he falls into a state of general surrender which makes him more likely to accept without resistance, the rest of the poet's material." His to me master-maxim is this: "Truth in art is not discovery of facts or addition to knowledge, it is the exercise of propriety."

With the foregoing aids to composition in mind, how does Mr. Burke come off poetically? He has in his *Problem of Moments* — if I am reliable — a masterpiece:

I knew a man who would be
wonder-wise,
Having been born with both
myopic eyes
Scratched in again.
—a symbol of "the motionless
pursuit of us by pain",
this man.

Note squirrel on log, how pert,
now in, now out—
But classicists find either too
much drought
Or too much rain.

(Wise, eyes, again
Absolute, pursuit, pain
Out drought, rain)

Here we have balance, compression, crescendo, and neatly articulated, impeccably accelerated rhyme, with each stanza punctuated by a rhymeword, the same words grouped in the same order, as climax of the final stanza. *Star-Fire* is expert counterpoint: "Fly-things sing-sit/ On grow-things. . . . Halló-la héllaló!" There are many phases of Joyce inter-crossings: "As I lurk look from Look-Out." Mr. Burke is a master of the mellow-sardonic enforced by alliteration, as in his salute to alcohol: "ALKY, ME LOVE . . . Always there was something or other/ Just couldn't stand it;" not of the mellow-sardonic only but of the mellow: as "Dozing" then "awaking to the cosmic roar"

Of the sea
(The onrushing, perpetual sea),

He never saw the sea so
jammed with water.

Is not this "exposition", this picture of *Jack's Bandbox?*

> The cover of this box is made
> secure
> By a small catch of wire which,
> when released,
> Permits the lid to open with a snap

And this an intrinsic pearl?

> Beat the devil, beat the devil,
> beat the devil,
> Beat the devil, beat the devil,
> beat the . . .
>
> (Hear the train
> Drive steadily on
> Towards nowhere)

Alert to the practice of others, moreover, Mr. Burke reveals a strong liking for William Carlos Williams, (*The Wrens Are Back*); pleasure in E. E. Cummings (*Frigate Jones*) "With hands like feet, and feet in turn like legs/ It was his job to lightly step on eggs./; in Wallace Stevens (*From Outside*):

> He could have called this place
> a bog; quaking
> With life, made cheap by
> multitude, . . .

and in the rhetoric of the Bible.

Complaints? With Rabelais and Joyce to brother him, Mr. Burke is sometimes coarse. Might he not recall that "the reader has certain categorical expectations that crave propriety? that "self-expression of the artist is not distinguished by the uttering of emotion but by the evocation of emotion"? The theology in Mr. Burke's suggestions for a *Modernist Sermon,* as in his *Lines in the Spirit of Negative Theology,* is certainly negative. Led to expect some kind of counter-statement, we find "prayer", a mere figure of speech (*Invective and Prayer, Dialectician's Prayer, Industrialist's Prayer*). Looking elsewhere, we can say that solemnity and humility dominate *Night Piece;* in which Mr. Burke says:

> I have stood on the edge of the
> jumping-off place
>
> Waiting
> Have looked down
>
> To see still stars at the bottom
> of a lake
> Looked out
> Upon a dark riddle within;

and in *Faustkunde,* nowhere implies a somewhere—a constancy at least:

> In bed, one thinks of fearsome
> things.

"When up, one laughs and calls himself a devil." Here, one seems to have both shells of the clam, the seeker for truth, the self-misled — and something alive within. Eternity is made the focus of these reflections,

> Während in dem Wogen, der
> Ewigkeit er wiegt.

Well; if it is not faith, it is poetry: "in dem wogen er wiegt".

"A capacity is a command to act in a certain way," Mr. Burke says; and fortunately for us, he has been impelled to think and to teach. A philosopher, a grammarian of motives, a methodologist

and precisionist, an authority on language who "uses logic not merely to convince but because he loves logic," he has "felt as opportunity what others feel as a menace" and "taken a professional interest in his difficulties"; is an artist. His "new precisions offer new possibilities of development" and his original theorems do not stale. A poet in what he says and in knowing how what is said has been said, he has — Coleridge-fashion — doubled roles and planted two harvests so that in each we have the best strengths of both.

MARIANNE MOORE

Defender of the Romantic

Moon's Farm and other poems by Herbert Read. Horizon Press. $3.

Too often we have put to us — by others, or worse by ourselves—the question "do you think that A is a good (or an important) poet?" The question makes for insincerity, by a sort of intimidation: can we defend our opinion, ought we to praise or blame on the basis of rhetorical devices that we feel we are bound to admire because we have been taught to recognize their structure? To the more real question "Does the work of A give you that kind of imaginative delight that you can experience but not define?" the answer is likely to be difficult. I do not know how Herbert Read is to be judged by the first standard —at best his output is fragmentary, the work of a poet who writes too seldom to have developed the ease of mastery, or the scope of a major poet—but he remains one of the few—the very few—living poets whose poems give me imaginative pleasure in kind and degree comparable to the pleasure I enjoy in looking intently at a flower or a leaf or a stone—all, thank God, objects beyond the destroying grasp of the critical faculty. Is a pebble on a beach a good or a bad pebble? Who knows? If we look at it we will see beauty in it, unfolding infinitely. Then we can throw it into the sea and forget it. In Herbert Read's poems I find this quality. They are without literary self-importance; they make no assault upon our feelings or upon our sense of our own cleverness; they bear little apparent relation to those difficult works on aesthetics that we associate with Sir Herbert as a critic. But in fact they are exactly the kind of poetry that we ought to expect from the defender of the Romantic philosophy of poetry, Coleridge or Shelley's view that art should imitate nature not in its external appearances, but in its operation, as an organic form created from within; from the author of *Icon and Idea,* where Sir Herbert has fully stated his long consistently held belief that the purpose of all works of art is an expansion of consciousness, an advance of the growing-point of human sensibility into an unknown, uncharted world, without us or within.

Sir Herbert's works on aesthetics are difficult, closely argued, abstract, abstruse. But applied to the writing of poetry, the one quality his theories demand is entire innocence, truth to the vision. Nothing is more tender, delicate and tentative than the reaching out of the imagination, the living mind, into the chaos that surrounds our known

world. Such advances will resemble the imperceptible expansion of the buds of a tree rather than the overnight erection of a pylon. Strip from much contemporary verse all that is not in truth so experienced, and much less will be left of many showy poems than these fragmentary but truthful records of moments of vision of the beautiful. (I use without apology that unfashionable Platonic word of which the modern world is so afraid because it knows nothing of the order of intelligibles to which it is properly applied.)

The Stag is a good example:

> Seven are the forests where he
> ranges
> Browsing the scant oriels of
> herbage
> If he has a haste he has no fear
> There is no panther to ravage
> The mystical solitudes of the
> oaks.
>
> Maugre the antlers that impede
> his flight
> He advances with indifferent step
> Hoary perspectives
> Meet and dissolve in his punctual
> eye.
>
> He will rest where the waters break
> Into a white and moist cascade
> Frail are the blossoms there
> In that perpetual shade.

There is an element of imagism—the perfectly observed image of the last four lines is no more a literary invention, no less experienced, than the image that forms and vanishes in the retina of the stag's "punctual eye". But other elements in the poem seem to belong to a landscape as allegorical as that of Spenser. The "seven" forests suggest a world in which the natural woods are at the same time symbolic—though of what, it would be hard to say. *Oriels, panther,* the archaic *maugre* proclaim the landscape a fairy landscape, while at the same time the finely observed secret delicate darkness of some mountain burn proclaims the stag who observes it as living a beast as Rilke's panther. It is a poem full of the magic of Northern art; for one might say the same of Spenser's Faery—it is at once a natural and a magical landscape—or, even more, of the forests of Arthurian legend, or of the Mabinogion, where a huntsman in a real wood may start a stag that is brought down by the magic hounds of Annwn—so easily is the border crossed between the natural and the magical world. So Herbert Read can set his stag in a setting like that of the Unicorn in the Cluny tapestries, half of this world, half of another. Two women draw water from the well of life while real rooks croak in the elms. After all, it is the separation of the two worlds, not their coincidence, that is unnatural. The test of each poem is that it shall be a net in which a lived experience—natural or magical—is captured.

Predominantly the experiences are of an imagist order:

> .... falling house-reek
> Scatters against the fallow fields
> Or drifts into furry woods which
> break
> The sky like black buffaloes bent
> To assail the burnished-bellied
> clouds.

or:

> I watch the light seep through
> the clouds

And sun establish day:
The hills across the bay drink in
The liquid edge of night.

In these poems the observer is absent from the picture because totally absorbed in it, in the total selflessness that one finds in Chinese Zen landscape-paintings; for such is the paradox that when the poet is most fully conscious, experiencing most intensely, he no longer is aware of himself at all, only of his vision. Poets who tell us what they feel are in a condition of imperfect awareness in comparison with those who lose themselves in the vision. Yet the poet is very much there. One can sense the breathless stillness of body and mind in the delicate organic rhythm of the last four lines of *The Stag,* the poet's total absorption into the experience.

Moon's Farm, originally written for broadcasting, is called *A Dialogue for Three Voices.* The only certainly identifiable person is the human—the man who visits his native valley and its superhuman presences. There he encounters an old woman who is perhaps the *genius loci,* perhaps the Great Mother herself; and an old man, perhaps the archetypal Father, perhaps Death — some spirit whose range of knowledge extends beyond the seen into the humanly unknowable. The diction is a reflective free verse, for the most part, and the imagery might be Wordsworth's, not so much by imitation as because it is from the same world. The themes discussed are those of human consciousness, suspended as it is between remembered past and the chaos of the unknowable—one can recognize, for all the differences of style, the essential subject-matter of the author's Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, the boundaries of human experience, the exploration of human consciousness with its "bright images" by which it can hold and realize the world ". . . man should hold on to tangible things"—even to the point of death, such is the poet's conclusion. But by tangible, Sir Herbert means an experience of those bright images contoured upon the Orphic Night by a process whose metaphysical nature is more nearly akin to the Buddhist concept of *Maya,* or the Zen realization that the true Buddha is three pounds of flax, than it is to the crude pragmatism of Western materialism. To have come to visible reality full circle round is a very different thing from never having left it. Berkeley's immaterialism is an account of a world as real as that of Descartes or Locke.

Perhaps I am reading into *Moon's Farm* more, or other thought than it contains. Its quality, in any case is philosophic rather than dramatic, or even lyrical; it is poetry that sets the reader reflecting on these themes that have occupied a Boddhidarma, a Plato, or a Coleridge. Poetry that tends to awaken such trains of thought may lack realization tion but it is of a quality rarely found today. It is a quality of integrity, of truth to the living experience that we can be sure of finding in Herbert Read's poems. Because he will not go beyond his experience, he may at times allow us to see an experience that is fragmentary, where a less honest poet would cover his traces by virtuosity. I cannot imagine why it is that so many young men seem to suppose that rhetorical virtuosity is difficult to learn. It is far harder to learn to resist its temptations to deviate from absolute truth—as Herbert Read has done. One finds work of comparable humility and

innocence in the stone-carvings of Lincoln or Southwell, the wooden *misericordes* of Christchurch Priory, the pottery of Mexico or Japan, the poetic spells of the Gaelic race. The truth of such works is the foundation upon which human culture has in the past reposed; Babel is more impressive but it does not stand so well. Herbert Read's poetic output, slight, all too fragmentary, possesses something of the same enduring quality.

KATHLEEN RAINE

A Poet of Stature

W. S. Graham, *The Nightfishing,* Grove Press $2.50.

W. S. Graham's new book is not a collection of poems whose only common factor is their authorship, but a work of art in itself. It is so arranged that, as one reads, one perceives a continually developing and self-elucidating system of symbolic structures. The title poem, a magnificent account of a night voyage for herring that is also an account of the creative night of myth and of the poet's relationship with his history and his words, is followed by *Seven Letters* to a girl who is also the Muse, each of which gives the reader new perspectives upon already glimpsed symbols and attitudes, and presents new situations and relates them to the central images of sea, dark, death, and creation which animate and subserve all the poems in this book. The *Seven Letters* are followed by two ballads—vigorous, bawdy, salty ballads—with the same sort of relationship to all that has gone before. The second of these, *Baldy Bane,* is sung by the poet to his Muse; he treats her with a rarer irreverence, allows her to have no literary airs or graces, and tells her only,

Lie over to me from the wall or else
Get up and clean the grate.

This is the hard definite language of a man prepared to deal honestly with the physical fundamentals of experience. Harsh, vigorous, and masculine, it has the disciplined economy of the man to whom words are things to be used thriftily and to the maximum advantage. It is often used to express the chaotic richness of experience in such a way as to give an overwhelming impression of the dynamic tensions inherent in the creative act: the words are forced into shape as we listen; we observe the maker at his making.

It is us no more moving, only the
mere
Maintaining levels as they
mingle together.
Now round the boat, drifting its
drowning curtains
A grey of light begins. These
words take place.
The petrel dips at the water-
fats. And quietly
The stillness makes its way to
its ultimate home.
The bilges slap. Gulls wail and
settle.
It is us still.

That verse from the third part of *The Nightfishing* leads into a passage in which the levels of meaning do indeed "mingle together". The particular is

caught up in the universal experience.

The whole east breaks and leans
at last to us,
Ancient overhead. Yet not a
break of light
But mingles into

The whole memory of light, and
will not cease
Contributing its exiled quality.

We cannot allegorize. We can only observe, as the levels mingle, and the symbols shift and change, that we are presented with a structure of experiences and intuitions that operates continually in many dimensions.

The poem that moves simultaneously upon several levels, and that is at once vigorously realistic and profoundly introspective is rare in English poetry. *The Wreck of the Deutchland* is as boldly alliterative, as vividly descriptive and dramatic as *The Nightfishing,* but Hopkins had not the sailor's eye that Graham has, and the drama is almost entirely spiritual. We do not know the texture of his spars, but the cords burn our fingers as we haul in the loaded nets of *The Nightfishing*. Dylan Thomas could describe both scene and action, but what he described was the interior drama, the mental landscape. Graham, no less introspective and philosophically more profound gives us also almost photographic impressions of the external world—*The hard slow haul of a net white with herring,* and *The white net flashing under the watched water.* He allows himself to use the vivid coinage and the vertiginous metaphor beloved of both Hopkins and Thomas, but he is never far from the world we can touch, smell, and knock our shins against.

This is not to say that he lacks that grandeur of statement of which both the other poets are capable; indeed, the short, boldly alliterative lines of his *Letters* with their colloquial off-beat rhythm, have a dignity they might well have envied. Their grandeur is that of simplicity, not panoply, however. There is a stripped, athletic certainty, a hewn calm.

Bear these words in mind
As they bear me soundly
Beyond my reach. Through you
They love. But they in time
Do murder in that name.
Yet quick forget. It's all
Only a tale. Slowly
The great dialogues darken
Upon me and all voices
Between us move towards
Their end in this. Silence
Shapes before I draw breath.
Stay still. Listen so still.

Form and content are fused here in a new fashion. The poet sees the world and the events of the world as a language. Each act is a word made, each word made is a death, making a birth, a new word, inevitable. The world is *this huge*

Utterance in which we lie
Homelessly face to face.

Consequently no distinction can properly be made between the practice of language and the practice of living. We may use our huge vocabulary to make poems or children, and comment upon the one is comment upon the other. We are all makers, all words of the language, and all strive more and more to understand

and wield those words. The poet knows that *He dies*

> *Word by each word into*
> *Myself now at this last*
> *Word I die in. This last.*

And he asks himself, as:

> *The great verbs of the sea*
> *Come down on us in a roar.*
> *What shall I answer for?*

Such a vision could become abstract and arid; syntax would appear to make a poor myth. But Graham uses the language, and does not merely talk about it. The words we are, are many. We are our dead selves shoaling the dark sea of our past and of material existence, primal unconscious flux; we voyage through night to net our dead, and we are ourselves the dark sea, the plunging riding keel, and the voyage. No facile allegory detracts from the power of these symbols, and no self-conscious intellectualization destroys the physical immediacy of the narratives. This vision is as profound and moving as that of any poet of our time. The craftsmanship is admirable, the control constant. Obscurities and difficulties disappear at the second reading, and the few blemishes that remain are insignificant. With *The Nightfishing* W. S. Graham has stepped from the category of good poets where he has been listed for some time, into the much smaller category of poets of stature.

ROBIN SKELTON

Fables and Ceremonies

by Winthrop Palmer (New York, 1955)

In *The New Barbarian,* the first collection of her poetry published five years ago, Winthrop Palmer sounded a fresh note in the neo-romantic wilderness. It was a gay, clear sound, drawing on deep resources of humour and morality, those twin qualities we like to claim for truly grass-roots American sensibility. But significantly the brisk, almost breezy, voice was modulated, and the exuberance controlled by an exact discipline, an Olympian detachment of vision that must be credited to a stern and knowing classicism. The commitment was a conscious one and Mrs. Palmer could describe it: "I have tried honestly to regard the contemporary world without nostalgia, to discover its heroes, its gods, its rites and games, its triumphs and defeats."

Fables and Ceremonies, as the title implies, is a continuation of that search and a celebration of what is discovered. Ceremonies and fables are the two points of reference about which the poems of the present collection cluster, although, as might be suspected, every now and then a poem proposes a ritual which embraces both functions. The collection is an advance in sureness, precision, and technical variety over *The New Barbarian.* Mrs. Palmer's grasp of the lyric-didactic mode, a category of poetic statement favored by two poets I take to be her masters, Hardy and Yeats, is firm and vigorous. It is a convention, whether patterned as ballad, epigram or dramatic monologue (to name only a few of the formal possibilities it offers), which aptly accommodates the vivid American speech,

the persuasive idiomatic syntax which distinguishes these poems.

It is strange that two iconoclastic figures, so recently in the public consciousness as H. L. Mencken and Ezra Pound should, in spite of their vast intellectual differences, to say nothing of differences in talent, alike propound the uses and benefits of the American language for serious literature. It is less strange that William Carlos Williams, accepting America as he does, should have made it his first principle of poetic diction. It is noteworthy that Mrs. Palmer, adhering to a more traditional scheme of metrics than Williams, more deeply indebted than he to literary and even scholarly stimuli, should, nevertheless, have pushed Williams' premise even more consistently into demonstration. For it is an unmistakeably American voice that addresses us in these poems and almost always peculiarly American themes are isolated with surprising shrewdness from the seeming chaos of American living. A small Hardyesque image of contemporary experience that is not small is "World Order":

> Who orders the world unpacks
> his uniform.
> A shutter clicks, the village slides
> away
> Post office, store, red barn,
> Mill Pond road and Harrity's café
>
> On summer evenings he took his
> girl up that hill,
> Sumac and mullein mounted the
> lagging wall.
> He lies on his gun now, the
> valley is still,
> And his eyes, and his muddy
> mouth, at the roll call.

Often the American theme is seen with great complexity as implicated with a vast historic pastness, and with particular societies, notably the Greek and the Roman. A fine example of this approach, although somewhat more overt in classical reference than other poems too long to quote here is "U.S.A.":

> Under your roads, mechanic,
> under your flourish of wheels
> What giants sleep.
> Indifferent to such
> hierglyph
> As Delos or Mycenae to the school-
> boy's greasy thumb.
> But get you under a mountain's
> skin mechanic,
> Empty her dark veins, be lover
> and child—
> What natural cover, what a
> mineral bride!

One could wish to quote indefinitely from the swift, gnomic statements which *Fables and Ceremonies* makes about American politics, industry, sports, people and the qualities of these. Mrs. Palmer manages the epigram with especial deftness and this currently ill-used poetic form comes alive in the best of her ventures notably "Caesar," "Retreat", and "Los Angeles". The satiric impulse can, of course, take over a larger theme, a fuller statement, and sometimes when compounded with the primary lyric-didactic aim, fashion a poem as crisply authoritative as "Week End" which ends:

> A bather takes live water in his
> arms.
> Boy, make the most of that physical
> embrace.

You will sacrifice Sunday when it rains
To a movie or a television face.

But Mrs. Palmer is not parochial in her interests even though American experience dictates so much of the subject matter and tone. She has a wider and freer range of responsiveness than my emphasis on her uniquely American voice may suggest. She can sing of other places, climes and people with the same intensity and ardor than she can of her own. There is nothing "local" in a poem like the sacramental, darkly celebratory "Hymn" to man, "two-legged, hairy, a proper beast" who is both "mortal and divine." There is warm insight and a thoroughly untouristic empathy in the lovely lyric "Ireland" which evokes so swiftly that paradoxical land:

Her cathedral is a monument to God,
The cut and polished stone correcting nature
All blue and green and singing here and there.
Rain is her small thing,
And grey the champion hunter of her night.

To sight one's goal with clarity, to recognize humbly the obligations of craft and the limits of one's powers, is a sign of maturity and intelligence. *Fables and Ceremonies,* radiating these qualities, is a luminous contribution to contemporary letters.

VIVIENNE KOCH

Poetry in A Gray Flannel Suit

A Word Carved on a Sill, Poems by John Wain, St. Martin's Press, $2.50

The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse, ed. by John Heath-Stubbs and David Wright, Faber, 12. 6d.

Whenever I have tried to find out what the new poets have been writing in England since *Poetry London* ceased publication, the invariable answer has been: "There is nothing new, except for 'the Wain-Amis gang', but there are others like Christopher Logue or Robin Skelton whom you might care to print." It is for this reason I have chosen Mr. Wain's book for special notice. Mr. Amis' collection has yet to appear in the United States.

Mr. Wain's poetry is typical of what is being encouraged in Britain today, and even in America (if we keep in mind Mr. Richard Wilbur's latest book). It is a derivative poetry, which is archaic in tone, and 'literary' to the point of boredom. Traditional metres and an obvious verbal felicity, not the evocation of the experience and ideas of the twentieth century, seem to be the sole aim. The poems are easily 'communicable' since everything is made immediately apparent. Little is plucked raw from the dark mysterious heart of poetry (as in Dylan Thomas, or Empson in his *Aubade*); there are no overtones that suggest hidden poetic meanings, no poetic tension. Nor are fresh interpretations possible when the poems are reread. There is never the sense of urgency or inevitability, which is but natural with the poetry of literary pastiche. I, personally, have no objection to a few writers of this sort, but what is dangerous is that their example will corrupt taste, which it seems to have done already.

Strangely enough Mr. T. S. Eliot has been their most recent victim. *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse,* edited by John Heath-Stubbs and David Wright, and published by Mr. Eliot's company, is the very antithesis of that natural taste for the contemporary he has shown throughout his writing and publishing career. Although the compilers state: "In the case of the present, unanimity between the two editors has frequently proved impossible; there are poets, and also poems, who owe their inclusion here to the insistence of one editor only, in the teeth of protests from his collaborator . . . ," both seem to have agreed remarkably well on an undetermined, nebulous objective, which has resulted in the utter misrepresentation of modern poetry. All that is best in the work of our contemporaries has been ignored, and the slight, casual pieces substituted, in deference to the neo-Georgianism which both these editors have always favored (under the aegis of Mr. Edmund Blunden at Oxford) and which is being encouraged today in the poetry of writers like John Wain and Richard Wilbur. For the latter, at least, Mr. Eliot has surprisingly gone on record as being full of admiration.

Mr. Wain, Mr. Wilbur and *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse* are the end products of the disappearance of critical standards for the assessment of what is truly significant in modern verse and what it is that has made certain poets more important than others. At present, it seems to me, many of the gains made through the Imagists, Eliot, the Objective Reporters, and, lastly, Dylan Thomas, have been shelved in preference for the easily grasped, counterfeit poetry of mere fabrication which has suddenly come to the fore through the reactionary, conventional tastes of certain editors.

The following lines are typical extracts from the book. The poet's individual tone of voice and distinctiveness in choice of words have been lost in the selection. All of these might have been written by the same traditional, neo-Georgian* poet:

Tudor indeed is gone and every
    rose,
Blood-red, blanch-white that in
    the sunset glows
Cries: 'Blood, Blood, Blood!'
    against the gothic stone
Of England, as the Howard or
    Boleyn knows.
(Ezra Pound)

When I lay bare the tooth of wit
The hissing over the arched tongue
Is more affectionate than hate,
And inaccessible by the young.
Reflected from my golden eye
The dullard knows that he is mad.
Tell me if I am not glad!
(T. S. Eliot)

At Dirty Dick's and Sloppy Joe's
We drank our liquor straight,
Some went upstairs with Margery,
    And some, alas, with Kate;
And two by two like cat and mouse
The homeless played at keeping
    house.
(W. H. Auden)

I sent a letter to my love
    In an envelope of stone,

*The adjective 'Georgian' applies to the reign of George V, but more specifically, here, to the Georgian anthologies edited by Sir Edward Marsh.

And in between the letters ran
A crying torrent that began
To grow till it was bigger than
Nyanza or the heart of man.
I sent a letter to my love
In an envelope of stone.

(George Barker)

Ears in this island hear
The wind pass like a fire,
Eyes in this island see
Ships anchor off the bay.
Shall I run to the ships
With the wind in my hair,
Or stay till the day I die
And welcome no sailor?

(Dylan Thomas)

It is not that this magazine has been against the more traditional type of verse (Editions Poetry London published Mr. Wright's first collection), but it never used tradition as a criterion to dilute and misrepresent, to choose the ordinary and usual instead of the daringly individual, and the casual and slight instead of the most significant poems of our times.

II

The fact that Messrs. Wain and Amis are called new poets puzzles me since I have known their work from 1947, when Mr. Wain was the co-editor of the Oxford magazine, *Mandrake,* and Mr. Amis' poems were first printed in it.

It was in the *Mandrake* that the undergraduate gaffe of masculinity being a more desirable state than that of being merely female first gained prominence, an idea which has percolated into criticism and poetry today. The cover of the magazine sported a mandrake root (of the traditional, articulate variety, I feel sure), while Mr. Amis wrote:

> for life, too femine, always insists on smiling when we want to be serious, has no sense of the cinema...

"The New Criticism is male" Mr. Wain wrote quite recently in *The London Magazine* (April, 1955), while the publishers claim in the 'blurb' of his book: "his poems display a masculine tautness of intellect".

Since intellectual tautness ('acuity' is meant) may be either male or female, I assume the publishers have mistaken the simplicity of these poems for masculinity and strength. But simplicity is by itself no aesthetic criterion. It is only natural and proper when it is inevitable within the framework of a poem's intention and mode of development, and Mr. Wain's simplicity is by no means inevitable. It is here the concomitant of dullness — a restricted use of poetic forms, a monotony in language and tone (he has written a poem in words of one syllable), and his predilection towards accepting experience and language second hand.

In spite of Mr. Wain's 'masculine' approach to poetry, all he has produced, I think, is a little watered down William Empson, without Empson's variety in mood and metrical forms. Whenever the poems are not prosaic:

Birds, to get enough
to eat, would have to peck — with
no defense
against the bully conscience —
worms they were
sorry for. Dear me! And cats
would shed
very hot tears for little mice,
quite dead . . .

Yes, if they had hearts (in
the ordinary sense) and yet still
had to eat
and copulate, despite their sense
of sin,
they'd be human, just like us,
wouldn't they?

or mere undergraduate joking:

Capital I gave a party
Capital U came along
Capital O stepped in between
and threw the reckoning wrong.
Capital G went walking
with capitals O and D
Dodging the traffic, they got
reversed
spelt out the contrary . . .

they are in forms derived from the Empsonian villanelle, even in poems where this is not so obvious. The unifying elements in a villanelle are the two lines that are repeated alternately at the end of each tercet and which, together, end the poem. Although Mr. Wain often repeats only one, I believe he is writing a villanelle even when he writes in couplets, as in *Pedagogue Arraigned,* where he has repeated a line but once. In fact, anyone who has read *Missing Dates* and *Aubade* by Empson will know almost the entirety of Mr. Wain's moods and technique:

Slowly the poison the whole
blood stream fills.
It is not the effort nor the failure
tires.
The waste remains, the waste
remains and kills.
(Empson)

When love as germ invades the
purple stream
It splashes round the veins and
multiplies
Till objects of desire are what
they seem.
(Wain)

Although the villanelle form looks simple (and there are many variations possible), it demands a perfect ear, which Empson has, and Mr. Wain has not. This is the first verse of the only villanelle proper in the book:

True oracles say more than they
suppose.
Your very dumbness makes your
message clear.
The clown may speak what silent
Hamlet knows.

The first and third lines, which are the ones repeated, and, together, make up almost half the poem, are poorly constructed, wrecking the poem at the start. They may have passed muster in any other poem, but not within the exacting figure of a villanelle.

Mr. Wain has neither Mr. Empson's scientific training nor accuracy:

This mildewed island,
Rained on and beaten flat by
bombs and water,
Seems ready now to crack like
any other
Proud organism drugged with
praise and torture.

History rolls
His heavy tide of insolence and
wonder
Scarring her surface with as many
holes

As her moth-eaten sky where
fighters thunder.

Yet from the cauldron
Where her hard bones are formed
by time and anguish
Rises the living breath of all her
children. . . .

(*Patriotic Poem*)

It does not seem physically possible for the land to be "beaten flat by bombs and water"; and though an organism might burst or shrivel (compare Empson's 'Not to have fire is to be a skin that shrills' which states an idea accurately) it is impossible to think of an organism *cracking* — in the context of the poem 'crack up' may have been Mr. Wain's solution. A rolling tide 'scarring' the land with holes is again unconvincing, although a *retreating* tide does leave rock-pools behind. And can one believe that hard bones are formed in a cauldron? What Mr. Wain means is discernible, but he has got his metaphors mixed up. As for the "moth-eaten sky", I do not understand it, except that he has based it on T. E. Hulme's "Oh, God, make small/ The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,/That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie".

Nor is his use of simple words accurate enough—"His mien was a mask" (mien=air, bearing of person, *Concise Oxford Dictionary*)—"They . . . more slick, more *photographic,* more proud." Photogenic? His language is not modern: "From one so thickly smeared with wisdom's balm", "gently as the wingbeats of a dove", "as pure as nuns", "They hide in snow their huge heads hard and coy" are examples. Indeed, Mr. Wain may be writing in the 19th century:

Its slime the vapoured dew, its
worst the best,
Its sickness health, its depth the
clearest sky;
What is it? Ah, you never would
have guessed. . . .

This is a poetry of low respiration, and no blood pressure. There is never any change in mood except in two of the undergraduate jokes, *Letter to Santa Claus* and *Confusions of the Alphabet.* "I missed my chance of you, and you were love" is a typical Wain line, while many others that can be taken at random are merely the facile post-Empson mannerism he has cultivated.

The most interesting piece is, perhaps, *The Last Time,* though I suspect the title is based on Empson's *The Last Pain,* and the whole poem is an imitation of Empson's *Aubade*:

But as to rising, I can tell you why.
(*Aubade*)

The lesson is that breaking hearts
must break.
(*The Last Time*)

It seemed the best thing to be up
and go.
(*Aubade*)

The morning when we pack and
go away.
(*The Last Time*)

The language problem, but you
have to try.
(*Aubade*)

'The last time' are the hardest
words to say.
(*The Last Time*)

I slept, and blank as that I would
yet lie.
(*Aubade*)
The heart floods over when we
thought it dry.
(*The Last Time*)

The heart of a standing is you
cannot fly.
(*Aubade*)
It is not only for escape we fly.
(*The Last Time*)

It seemed the best thing to be up
and go.
(*Aubade*)
Is the best logic, though we learn
it late.
(*The Last Time*)

The one poem in this collection which may be wholly credited to Mr. Wain is *Poem Feigned to have been Written by an Electronic Brain*. It is the blustering and bragging kind of poem which naively states at the start "I am a poet" and proceeds to belabour the reader:

My valves rage hot — look out,
here comes the poem!
You call me part of you. You lie.
I am Myself.

The braggadocio, invective and desire to shock are part and parcel of a type of adolescence one usually associates with undergraduate magazines:

My masters run from truth. Come,
milk it out
Cowards, from my tense dugs of
glass and wire!
Drink it down quickly, gasping
at the taste!
It is sharp medicine, but it cures
all ills.

Mr. Wain (and some other young writers in England) do not seem to realize that shouting or a mere swaggering manner is not convincing and that poetic ideas are of a different order to those which are best stated in prose. As for the 'masculinity' and dandyism (Empson, who was bored with the poetry scene once jestingly wrote to me from Peking "Why don't you persuade the poets to write long epics on what to do between the bed-sheets?") I think that the use of certain usually unmentionable words is by itself no virtue and that masculinity does not necessarily mean one must ride rough-shod. Nor does it mean the use of a simple rough-hewn tongue proves virility.

It is rumored these writers imagine themselves to be neo-Elizabethans (neo-Edwardians?)*, but the Elizabethans were never naive and simple, nor was their language so threadbare. Their dandyism was not mere posturing and immaturity, but the full-blooded lust for life that was a characteristic of the age. They expressed the whole man. Their self-assurance was very real. But in this instance all we have besides 'literary' over-simplified language and strong formal rhythms is the uneasy aggressiveness of an overwrought youth who pretends to a lifetime of experience, and is therefore embarrassing and unconvincing; where there is no aggressiveness, I think, the poems are merely stale and bookish.

TAMBIMUTTU

* The Edwardian period was that of Edward VII. (1900-1910).

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