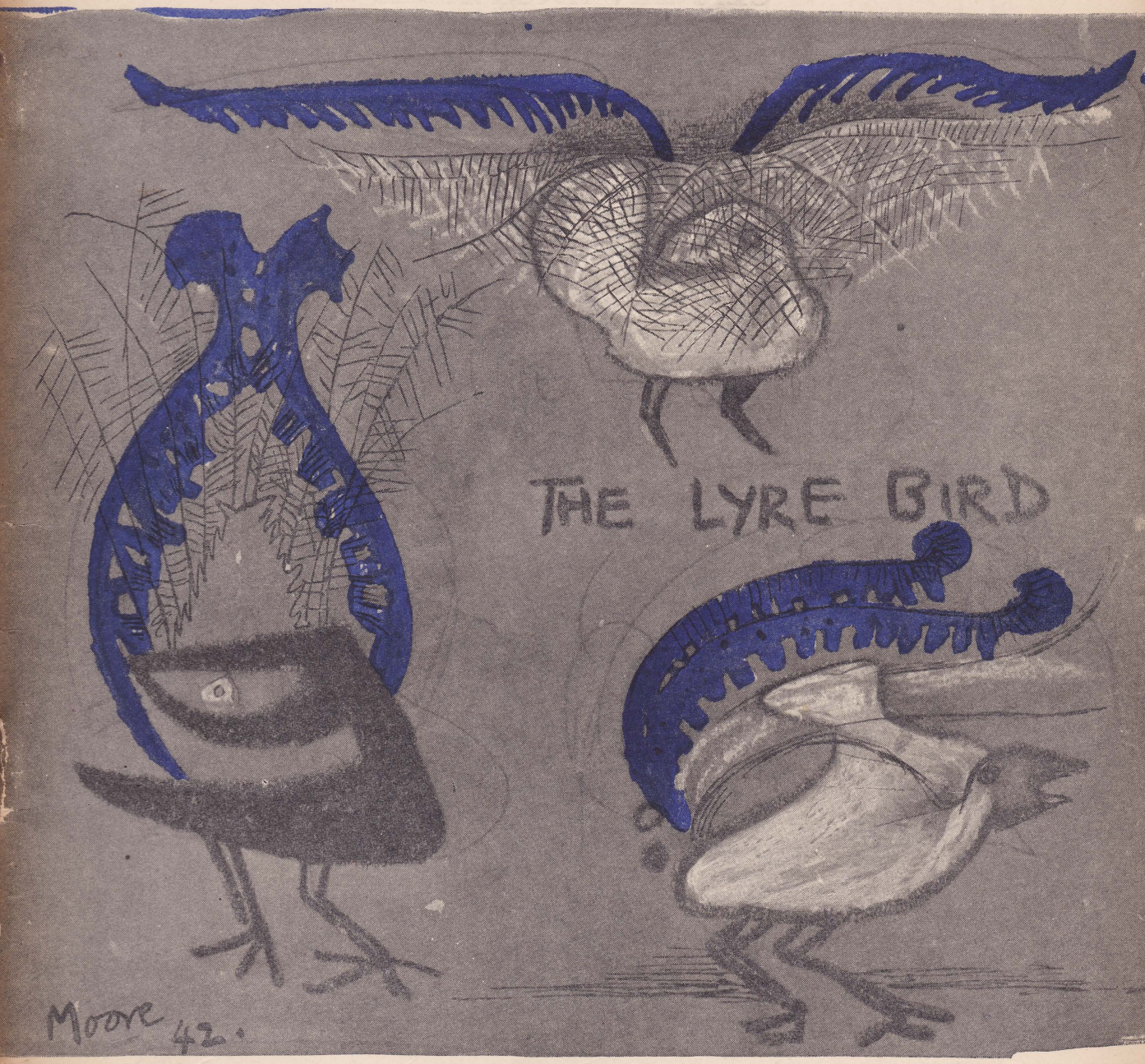
POETRY

(LONDON)



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COVER BY HENRY MOORE

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POETRY

LONDON

EDITOR: TAMBIMUTTU

VOLUME 3 November-December, 1947 NUMBER 12

KEITH DOUGLAS

WORDS

Words are my instruments but not my servants;
by the white pillar of a prince I lie in wait
for them. In what the hour or the minute invents,
in a web formally meshed or inchoate,
these fritilaries are come upon, trapped:
hot-coloured, or the cold scarabs a thousand years
old, found in cerements and unwrapped.
The catch and the ways of catching are diverse.
For instance this stooping man, the bones of whose face
are
like the hollow birds' bones, is a trap for words.
And the pockmarked house bleached by the glare
whose insides war has dried out like gourds
attracts words. There are those who capture them
in hundreds, keep them prisoners in black
bottles, release them at exercise and clap them back.
But I keep words only a breath of time
turning in the lightest of cages—uncover
and let them go: sometimes they escape for ever.

El Ballah, 1943

SONG

Do I venture away too far
from the hot coast of your love
Whose Southern virtues warmed me?
How long, how long shall I be safe
for the poisonous sea and a cruel star
the one by day and one at night have charmed me.

I am troubled by a fear
that I must be a seastruck lad
Or that the devil armed me
with a compass in my head
for the poisonous sea and a cruel star
the one by day and one at night have charmed me.

Often I see the hissing fire
when star and sea communicate—
it is this has alarmed me,
their interest and hate
for the poisonous sea and a cruel star
the one by day and one at night have charmed me.

Listening to the ship I hear
she sings all night a sailor's spell
for since the seagod claimed me
The sea does not wish the ship well,
the poisonous sea, and the cruel star
that one by day and one at night have charmed me.

So I believe I'm doomed my dear
That I have jilted myself and you
and when the sea's embalmed me
I'll fade into the deceitful blue
for the poisonous sea and a cruel star
the one by day and one at night have charmed me.

THE KNIFE

Can I explain this to you? Your eyes
are entrances, the mouths of caves—
I issue from wonderful interiors
upon a blessed sea and a fine day,
from inside these caves I look and dream.

Your hair explicable as a waterfall
in some black liquid cooled by legend
fell across my thought in a moment,
became a garment I am naked without,
lines drawn across through morning and evening.

And in your body each minute I died;
moving your thigh could disinter me
from a grave in a distant city:
your breasts deserted by cloth, clothed in twilight,
filled me with tears, sweet cups of flesh.

Yes, to touch two fingers made us worlds,
stars, waters, promontories, chaos,
swooning in elements without form or time,
come down through long seas among sea marvels
embracing like survivors on our islands.

This I think happened to us together
though now no shadow of it flickers in your hands,
your eyes look down the banal streets.
If I talk to you I might be a bird
with a message, a dead man, a photograph.

LEUKOTHEA

When you were alive, my Leukothea
your loveliness was puzzling
and only I knew the processes
by which my ornament lived and breathed.
And when you died
I was persuaded to store you in the earth
and I remember when they put you there

your too expressive living eye
being covered by the dark eyelash
and by its lid for a cerement.
At that moment those who looked at you
wondered I know how you could be made
in such exquisite material
and I would not explain for the world.
Even when they put the soil above you
they saw its unusual texture. The very grass
was a strange plant, precious as emeralds.

So all these years I have lived securely. I knew
I had only to uncover you
to see how the careful earth would have kept
all as it was, untouched. I trusted the ground.
I knew the worm and the beetle would go by
and never dare batten on your beauty.

Last night I dreamed and found my trust betrayed
only the little bones and the great bones, disarrayed.

Oxford, 1940.

KATHLEEN RAINE

SEEN IN A GLASS

Behind the tree, behind the house, behind the stars
Is the presence that I cannot see
Otherwise than as house and stars and tree.

Tree, house and stars
Extend to infinity within themselves
Into the mystery of the world.

Where whirl the wheels of power whose pulses beat
Out of nothing, out of night
Leaves, stones and fires,

The living tree whose maypole dance
Of chromosome and nucleus
Traces the shape of boughs and leaves

—And standing house of stone that poured
In molten torrent when was hurled
Out of chaos this great world

And suns whose furnaces begin anew
Or end the course that tree, house, world move through

Upheld by heaven that I cannot know
In other form than stars and stones and trees
Assume in nature's glass, in human eyes.

GEORGE BARKER

TO W. S. GRAHAM

Shuffle the empires and pacify their sons
But still toothed rage go sabring the lambs
Where they walk in a twilight of myrtle. Break
Her sleeping heart with an Ajax fist
And she, my longlife love, dovetongued, bright,
Sleep will with me, for I can patch her pitcher
Enfountain it, fold, hold and befriend it.
Jock, you with a golden fleece on your sleeve,
Where's the heart, man, for the egoed sea to shatter
Seas against rock of heart? She is the love
Whom with your five-fingered hammer you tear
To an anger of poems. In the straking night
The mermaid with immortality in her hair
Will rise to you the hour you sink to her.

PABLO NERUDA

CELERY

From this pure centre sounds
Could never penetrate, from unscraped wax,
Emerge clear lineal lightnings,
Doves with a spiral fate,
To shabby streets, of fish and shadow smelling.

These are the veins of celery, its spume, its smile,
And its sombrero!
Celery's insignia, its glow-worm taste,
Its maps, its saturated hue,
And its green angel head will fall,
Its crispest curls grow limp,
And celery's sore feet pad into the market
Of a scarred morning, with sighs.
As celery passes, doors will close
And well-bred horses kneel.

Its severed feet advance, its spilt green eyes
Advance, eyes in which certain drops and secrets
Are now for ever drowned:
The tunnels of the sea, from which
Emerge the ladders celery implies,
Shadows now sunk and, so, disconsolate,
Things with a definite locus in the air,
And kisses sealed in stones.

At midnight, with soaked hands,
Someone from the fog is knocking on my door,
And I hear the voice of celery, a deep voice,
The harsh voice of an imprisoned wind,
Celery, grumbling of its water-wounds and root-wounds,
Sinks its embittered lightning in my bed
And with dishevelled scissors jabs my chest,
Seeking my drowned heart's lips.

What do you want from me, narrow-waisted guest,
In my funereal rooms?
What shattered space surrounds you?

Fibres of darkness and of weeping daylight,
Blind directions, curling energies,
River of life and elemental threads,
Green branches that the sun has been caressing,
Here, in the night, I lie listening
To secret and lonely cares,
And you keep coming, in the middle of a heavy fog,
Until you grow in me, until you grant me
The dark light here, and the terrestrial rose.

(*Translated by George Elliot and G. S. Fraser*)

BARCAROLLE

If only you would touch me on the heart,
If only on my heart you would place your mouth,
Your delicate mouth, your teeth,
If, like a red arrow, you would place your tongue
Where my dusty heart is beating,
If, by the sea, you would blow in my heart, weeping,
It would resonate with a dark noise, with a rumble
of sleepy trains,

Like hesitating waters,
Like the fall unleafing,
Like blood,
Like a noise of humid flames burning the sky,
Resonating like dreams or branches or raininess,
Or sirens of a sad port,
If you would blow in my heart, beside the sea
Like a white phantasm
Edging the spume,
In the wind's centre,
Like a phantasm loosed from its chains, by the sea's
verge, weeping,

Like an extended absence, like a sudden bell,
The sea diffuses the heart's resonance,
Rainy, darkening to evening, on a lonely littoral,
The indubitable night falls,
And its gloomy azure of a shipwrecked ensign
Peoples itself with planets of hoarse silver.

And the heart resounds like a bitter shell,
Calls out, oh sea, oh lament, oh melting horror,
Parcelled out in misfortunes and disjointed waves:
Accusing from the resonance of the sea
Its levelled shadows and its sea-green poppies.

If you would suddenly exist, on a gloomy coast,
Encircled by the dead day,
Confronting a new night,
Full of waves,
And if you would blow in my heart of cold fear,
Blow in my lonely heart's blood,
Blow in its flamelike movement of a dove,
Its black blood-syllables would resound also,
Its incessant black waters would increase,
And the heart would sound, the heart would resound in
the shadow
With a resonance like death,
Call like a tube full of wind or lamentation
Or a bottle from which horror gurgles out.

Thus it is, and the lightnings would cover your
tresses,
And the rain would enter through your open eyes
To prepare the lamentation you deafly hide,
And the black rags of the sea all around you
Would circle with great claws, hootings, flights.

Do you want to be this ghost that blows, solitary,
Beside the sea its sad and sterile trumpet?
If only you would call out with
Its prolongation of sound, its sinister whistle,
Its array of wounded waves,
Someone would come, maybe,
Someone would be coming,
From the crests of the islands, from the red depths
of the sea,
Someone would be coming, someone would be coming.

Someone may come indeed, so blow with fury
That it may hoot with the siren of a smashed ship,
Like a lament,
Like a high whinny among the spume and the blood,
Like a ferocious water biting itself and snarling.

In the marine season
His shell of shadow circulates like a cry,
The birds of the sea disesteem him and flee him,
His catalogues of resonance, his mournful prison-bars
Raise themselves up on the verge of the lone ocean.

(*Translated by G. S Fraser*)

IAIN FLETCHER

TWIN POEMS ON THE SINGLE THEME (T.T.)

I

Some months ago the wounds time taught to please
Were open like a channel
Through whose lewd orifice
Philosophies were pleased to dance.
New persons turn the world a new side up.
Nothing seems certain; only persons move
And wounds stay still, will grow like grubs
Whose fuller life is born where they consume.

Nor may the teased eye, the caught hand,
Though contour, volume and prerogative
Assume a fairer or more foul disguise,
Be thought to twitch that quiddity at all.
These wounds came calmly here;
Not from her jet of eye,
But from all contradictions,
Continuing now their serials of pain.
Read the next face and understand this text
As little and as loosely as the last.

II

Begin to count where time stands still;
Time for the poem, last murdered vocable,
Before its spreading circles are at full.

Full of that time whose pulse is yours;
Summer's reclining landscape out of doors,
Noises of pain between the instant floors;

At the sill, an echo world appears;
A woman in a garden walks for years,
Until her feet keep tune with nightly fears.

Then she'll surrender, arrested by your words,
Leaving the secondary adjectives of birds,
She hears, who would not hear, and fades.

Others use divination like a whip
Upon that earth whose whispers they would keep:
But this gives, at the last confusion, sleep.

METRO-DELPHIC INC.

Ask what you will: Dodona's bark is stripped;
The flaming tongues no more than Catherine wheels,
And all the Sybils too morosely-lipped.

Ask whom you will: Truth's station when
Cities had builders was beyond appeals
To men for reason, and for reasons men.

Say Truth's a person, and that lesson heals
Which tells us that the mortar was not time,
Not this dimension where the sigh congeals.

Our griefs succeed where falsehood's physic fails,
All elevation's accident of crime,
Smelt out a spear or buy an ounce of nails:

There are too many crags and spurs to climb;
Going about's a hesitating bliss;
There are few flats in prophecy or rhyme.

But Brother Guilt turns out to be a ham:
The whip is like a locum for the kiss,
And all the crucifixions were a sham.

Some of the boys may still applaud his gait
And sense it was in gesture that he shone;
The rivers of the Night are still in spate.

The sadlong eyes implore a thing to hate.
What can we say? The record's always on.
The pale boys in their plimsolls painfully wait.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

SONG AT NIGHT

"Music for a while"
Make audible the smile
That eyes no longer see;
With crying crayon write
Across the unhearing night
The shape of sighs for me.

Music for a time
Resolve the brawls of rhyme
That chord within my head;
Sweet as starlight, shine,
Illuminate the line,
Setting the word unsaid.

When Dryden's page is bare,
And silent Purcell's air,
And mute the singing sky,
Then let me pluck one name
And echo clear proclaim
Not I, my dear, not I.

RONALD BOTTRALL

PROSERPINE AT ENNA

When the black car came thundering from its pale
You, fairest flower, were gathering irises,
Marigold, toadflax, spurge, anemones,
In shades of prickly pear by the infernal well.
Gathered, too, his sinewy deft fingers
Dinting your nesh skin, you faintly fell
From morning uplands to the Stygian quays
And shed your virgin petals deep in hell.

Derelict in the iron gorgon's train
The lipless skull sings of Plutonic rapes.
With spring your laughing mother re-assumes
Trinacria; you burgeon green and green
Are the gangrenous bodies of our hopes
Composted in their fertile hecatombs.

PERAMBULATION

Taking a walk with reality one morning
I saw the night glow sensual through a fanlight
And screaming day crucified in a corner.

Stepping round the pillar ripe for kisses
My lips met ulcerous ape-jaws in cohesion
And gangrene claimed the hungry saw-boned trysting.

Footfalls are faint to resurrect the dawning
Of blue-bird wing, of wild-duck over the marshes,
Or verdure in the habitation of dragons.

When heart-beats move us into alien climates
Where moons hang dead and porous in abandon
Our walk is whither heart has struck for ever.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

THE SIXTH ELEGY

Fig-tree, for me it has so long been full of meaning
how you almost entirely neglect to flower
and drive, un-extolled, your pure secret
into timely resolute fruit.
Like the tube of a fountain, your twisted twigs
thrust downwards your sap, and up: and it leaps out of sleep,
almost not wakening, into the bliss of its sweetest achievement.
See: like into the swan the god.
. . . . . But we linger,

alas, it becomes us to flower; we enter,
betrayed, the belated core of our ultimate fruit.
In a few the pressure of action mounts with such force—
they already stand up and they glow in the fulness of heart
when temptation to flower, like softened night-air,
touches the youth of their mouths and their eye-lids:
heroes perhaps, and those who are destined to pass beyond early,
whose veins have been differently twisted by gardening Death.
These rush onwards: ahead of their own
smile, like the team of horses in mild
moulded reliefs at Karnak ahead of the conquering king.

The hero indeed is strangely akin to the youthfully dead.
Permanence does not concern him. His rise is existence; continuously,
he withdraws himself and enters the changed constellation
of his constant danger. There only few could find him. But Fate
—sombre in passing us over in silence—all of a sudden enraptured,
sings him into the storm of her up-surging world.
Not one do I hear as I hear him. His darkened tone
suddenly passes through me with the streaming air.

How *then* I should like to hide from longing: O would that I were,
would that I were a boy and were granted to come to it yet
and were sitting propped upon arms yet to be and were reading of Samson,
how his mother had first given birth to nothing and, later, to all.

Was he not hero already within you, O mother, and did not
there his imperious choice already begin, within you?
Thousands were brewing in the womb and wanting to be him,
but see: he seized and excluded, chose and was able.
And when he shattered columns it was when he broke
out of the world of your body and into the narrower world
where he still continued to choose and be able. O mothers of heroes,
O sources of ravaging streams! You, ravines into which,
high-up from the brink of the heart, lamenting,
maidens already had hurled themselves, victims-to-be for the son.
For the hero rushed onwards through resting-places of .love,
each single heart-beat that meant him raised him beyond it,
turning away already, he stood at the end of all smiles, different.

(*Translated by Ruth Speirs*)

THE SEVENTH ELEGY

Wooing no longer, not wooing, voice that outgrew it,
shall be the note of your cry; though you cried as pure as the bird
when the rising season uplifts him, almost forgetting
he is a sorrowful creature and not merely one single heart
which she flings to brightness, to intimate skies. Like him
you would woo, no less—to make her grow conscious of you,
invisible yet, your silent companion in whom a reply
gradually wakes and increases in warmth while she listens—
the fellow-feeling, aglow, for your own emboldened feeling.
O and spring would understand—, there is not a spot
that does not give voice to the note of annunciation. At first
that little, questioning pipe which a pure, an affirming day
in silence widely surrounds with magnifying stillness.

Then ascending the steps, ascending the call-steps up to the dreamt-of
temple of the future—; the trill then, the fountain
apprehending already the downward fall for the thrusting jet
in a promiseful play . . . And summer before it.
Not only all the mornings of summer—, not only
the way they change into day and shine with beginning.
Not only the days which are gentle round flowers and which,
above, are strong and powerful round the configured trees.
Not only the devotion of these unfolded forces,
not only the paths, not only the evening meadows,
not only, after late thunder, the breathing clarity,
not only approaching sleep and a vague surmise in the evening . . .
but the nights! But the lofty, the summer
nights, but the stars, the stars of the earth.
O to be dead once and have an infinite knowledge
of all of the stars: for how, how, how to forget them!

See, then I called the lover. But not only *she*
would come . . . There would come, from weak graves,
maidens, and stand there . . . For how can I limit,
how, the call that is called? Those who sank below
are still seeking earth.—You children, a thing
that has once been grasped here would be valid for many.
Do not think that Fate is more than what childhood was densely full of;
how often you outdistanced the loved one, panting,
panting after a blissful run, towards nothing, out into the open.
To be here is wonderful. You, maidens, knew it, you too
who, as it seemed, went without, sank under—, you, in the vilest
streets of the cities, festering, or open for refuse.
Because an hour was granted to each one, perhaps
not quite an hour, a span that could scarcely be measured
by measures of time, in between two whiles, when she had
an existence. Everything. Veins full of existence.
But it happens so easily that we forget what our laughing neighbour
does not confirm or envy us for. We want visibly
to hold it upwards, whereas the most visible bliss
reveals itself to us only when we transform it within.

Nowhere, beloved, will there be world but within. Our life
passes in transformation. And, ever diminishing,
there vanishes what is outside. Where there once had been
a lasting house, a thought-out construction slashes itself across it,
entirely belonging to thought as though it still stood in the brain.

The spirit of the time creates for himself capacious garners of power
as shapeless as is the straining urge which he gains from all things.
Temples he knows no longer. These, the lavish gifts of the heart,
we save up more secretly. Yes, where there still is a thing
that outlasts, a thing once prayed, served, knelt—, it already
holds itself out, as it is, into the Invisible.
Many perceive it no more, but without the advantage
of building it now *within*, with pillars and statues, *greater*!

Every dull turn of the world has such who are thus disinherited,
whose is not what has been and not yet what comes next.
For even the next is remote for man. This shall not bewilder us;
it shall strengthen in us our retaining the form
we still recognised. Once this *stood* among men,
it stood in the midst of destructive fate, in the midst
of not-knowing-whither it stood as though it existed, and bent
stars towards itself from secured heavens.
Angel, to you I will show it yet, *there*! in your gaze
it shall stand at last saved, now finally upright.
Columns, pylons, the Sphinx, the striving thrust,
grey, from a fading or foreign town, of the dome.

Was it not a miracle? Angel, O gaze in wonder for *we* are it,
we, O you great one, tell them that we have achieved this, my breath
is not sufficient for giving praise. Thus we have, nonetheless,
not neglected using the spaces, these generous spaces,
these, *our* spaces. (How frightfully large they must be
since thousands of years of our feeling do not overfill them).
But a tower was great, was it not? O Angel, it was—,
great, beside even you? Chartres was great—and music
reached up higher still and transcended us. But
even only a woman who loves, oh, alone in the night at her window ...
did she not reach to your knee—?

Do not think I am wooing.
Angel, and even if I were wooing you! You do not come.
For my call-of-appeal is always full of Away;
against such a powerful current you cannot stride.
My call is like an extended arm. And its hand,
open above for grasping, remains
open before you like warding off and like warning,
Inapprehensible one, high up there.

(*Translated by Ruth Speirs*)

THE EIGHTH ELEGY is in 'Personal Landscape' PL:1945

THE NINTH ELEGY

Why, when this set time of life may be spent
as laurel, a little darker than all other green,
with little waves on the border of every leaf
(like the smile of a wind)—: why then have
to do what is human—, and, shunning fate,
to be longing for fate? . . .
Oh, not because happiness *is*,
this precipitate profit of imminent loss.
Not from curiosity, nor to practise the heart
that would *be* in the laurel, too . . . .
But because being here is much, and because
all that is here, and is transient, apparently needs us
and strangely concerns us. Us, the most transient of all.
Everything *once*, only *once*. *Once*, and no more.
And we also *once*. And never again. But having been this
once, although only *once:* having been
of *this earth*, appears irrevocable.

And thus we press forward and want to accomplish it,
want to contain it within our simple hands, in the gaze
filled more to an overflow, and in the speechless heart,
Want to become it. Give it to whom? Would most of all like
keeping it all for ever . . . Ah, into that other relation, alas,
what is there one takes across? Not Seeing,
slowly learnt here, and no event of the Here. None.
Sufferings, then. Then, above all, the hardship of life,
the long experience of love, then,—that is,
everything that is un-sayable. But
later, what does it avail among stars: they are *better* un-sayable.
The wanderer, too, does not bring from the slope of the hill
a handful of earth, to us all un-sayable, down to the valley,
but a word he has won, a pure word, the yellow and blue
gentian. Are we, perhaps, *here* in order to say:
House, Bridge, Well, Gate, Jug, Fruit-tree, Window,—
at most: Column, Tower . . . but to *say*, do you grasp it,
oh to say them *thus* as things themselves had never
so ardently known to exist. Is it not the secret cunning of this
secretive earth, when it urges lovers onwards, to make
all things and everything rapturous in their emotion?

Threshold: how much for two
lovers to wear out a little their own, the older,
threshold, they too, after many before
and before those to come . . . , lightly.

Here is the time of the Sayable, *here* is its home.
Speak and confess. More than ever before,
things that can be experienced are falling away
for what, supplanting them, takes their place, is deed without image.
Deed under crusts that readily split when the action within
outgrows and adopts other outlines.
Between the hammers, our heart
lives on as, between the teeth,
the tongue which nevertheless,
which yet continues to praise.

Praise the world to the angel, not the un-sayable world, to him
you cannot boast with the splendour you felt; in the universe
where he feels with more feeling, you are a beginner. And therefore
show him a thing that is simple and, moulded by one generation
after the other, lives as our own, in our gaze and next to our hand.
Say the things to him. And he will stand in profounder wonder:
as you stood beside the roper in Rome or the potter in Egypt.
Show him how happy a thing can be, how guiltless and ours,
how even lamenting grief purely decides on adopting form,
serves as a thing or dies into a thing—, and, beyond,
it escapes, full of bliss, from the violin. These
things that live in passing away understand that you praise them.
Transient, they rely for salvation on us, the most transient of all.
Want us to change them entirely within our invisible hearts
into—O endlessly—into ourselves! no matter whoever we are.

Earth, is it not this that you want: *invisibly*
to arise within us?—Is it not your dream,
sometime to be invisible?—Earth! invisible!
What is your urgent command, if not transformation?
Earth, you dear one, I will. Oh believe me,
your springs are no longer required to win me for you,
one, ah one single spring, is already too much for my blood.
Since early beginning I have been ineffably yours.
You always were right, and your sacred
inspiration is: friendly death.
See, I live. Out of what? Neither childhood nor future
diminishes . . . Superabundant existence
wells up in my heart.

(*Translated by Ruth Speirs*)

THE TENTH ELEGY

May I once, at the end of this cruel insight,
burst into singing exultance and praise to assenting angels.
May not one of the clear-struck keys of the heart
fail in evoking response from slack,
doubting, or rending strings. May inconspicuous weeping
blossom. O nights of affliction, how dear you will then be to me.
Why did I not, inconsolable sisters, receive you
more intensely kneeling, and did not surrender myself
more loosened into your loosened hair. We, the wasters of sufferings.
How we gaze ahead of them, out into sad permanence,
to see if perhaps they might end. But they are
our foliage lasting through winter, our dark evergreen,
one of the inner year's seasons—, not only
season—, are place, settlement, camp, soil, dwelling.

How strange, though, alas, are the streets of the City of Suffering
where, in sham silence produced by sound out-sounded,
stoutly, the cast poured out from the mould of emptiness,
there swaggers the gilded noise, the bursting memorial.
O, how beyond a trace an angel would tread down their Market of Consolation
bordered upon by their church which they bought ready-made:
as clean, disillusioned and closed as a post-office is on a Sunday.
But, outside, the rims of the Fair are always in billowing motion.

Swings of Freedom! Divers and Jugglers of Zeal!
And the shooting-range figures of prettified Happiness,
targets jerking, and clanging with tin, whenever
hit by some better shot. From cheers to chance
he reels on; for booths of every kind of curiosity
appeal and bawl and beat drums. But there is in particular,
for adults, the breeding of money on view, anatomically,
not for amusement only: the sex part of money,
everything, the whole, the act—, instructive, and rendering
fertile . . . . .
. . . Oh but then just beyond it,
behind the last hoarding, plastered with placards for "Deathless,"
that bitter beer that seems sweet to its drinkers
when, with it, they always chew fresh distractions . . . ,
just at the back of the hoarding, there, just behind, it is *real.*
Children are playing, and lovers are holding each other,—aside,
gravely, in shabby grass, and dogs are following nature.

The youth is drawn on further still; it may be that he loves
a youthful Lament . . . Behind her, he walks into meadows. She says:
Far away. We are living out there . . . .
Where? And the youth
follows. Is touched by her bearing. Her shoulder, her neck—,
she perhaps is of excellent origin. But he leaves her, turns back,
faces round, and waves . . . What does it avail? She is a Lament.

Only the dead who are young, in their first condition
of timeless equanimity, that of becoming weaned,
follow her lovingly. Maidens
she waits for, befriends them. Shows them gently
what she wears on her person. The Pearls of Suffering,
the finely woven Veils of Endurance.—Youths
she walks with in silence.

But there, where they live, in the valley, one of the elder Laments
responds to the youth when he asks:—We were once,
she says, a great family, we, the Laments. Our fathers
worked the mines in that towering mountain-range: sometimes
you find, with humans, a piece of polished primeval Suffering
or drossy petrified Wrath, from an ancient volcano.
Yes, that had origin there. We were rich once.—

And lightly she leads him on through the spacious landscape of Laments,
shows him the columns of temples, or the ruins of those
strongholds from which the Lords of the House of Lament
had wisely governed the land once. Shows him the high
Tear Trees, the fields of blossoming Sadness
(known to the living only as gentle foliage);
shows him the pasturing Beasts of Grief,—and at times
a bird starts up and draws, flying flat through their lifted gaze,
the far-stretching scroll of its lonely cry.—
In the evening she leads him up to the graves of the Ancients
of the House of Lament, of the Sybils and Warners.
But night drawing near, they move more softly, and soon
it surges up, in the moon, the sepulchral stone
which keeps guard over everything. Brother to that on the Nile,
the lofty Sphinx—: the taciturn chamber's face.
And they marvel at the regal head which, in silence,
has for ever placed the face of man
upon the scale of the stars.

His glance does not grasp it, dizzy
with early death. But her gaze
frightens an owl from behind the rim of the Pshent.
And brushing, in slowly descending flight,
along the cheek of the ripest rondure,
it softly describes on the new
death-born hearing, across an open
double page, the indescribable outline.

And, higher, the stars. New ones. The Stars of the Land of Suffering.
The Lament slowly names them: "There,
see: the Horseman, the Staff, and that fuller constellation
they call the Fruit-Wreath. Then, further on, towards the Pole:
Cradle, Way, Burning Book, Doll, Window.
But in the southern sky, pure as within the palm
of a blesséd hand, the translucid M
standing for Mothers . . . ."

But he, the dead, must go on, and mutely the elder Lament
takes him as far as the gorge in the valley
where it gleams in the moonlight:
the Source of Joy. With awe, she names it,
says: "With humans, it is
a carrying stream."

They stand at the foot of the mountain-range.
And there she embraces him, weeping.

Lonely, he climbs to the hills of Primeval Suffering.
Not even his footstep resounds out of soundless fate.

But if they wakened in us, the infinitely dead, an image,
see, they perhaps would point at the catkins hanging
from the empty hazel, or else they would mean
the rain that falls on dark earth in the early spring.

And we who think of happiness *climbing*
would feel the touching emotion
that almost startles us when
what is happy, *falls*.

(*Translated by Ruth Speirs*)

BERNARD SPENCER

REGENT'S PARK TERRACE

The noises round my house. On cobbles bounding
Victorian fashioned drays laden with railway goods
and their hollow sound like stones in rolling barrels:
the stony hoofing of dray horses.

Further, the trains themselves; among them the violent,
screaming like frightened animals, clashing metal;
different the pompous, the heavy breathers, the aldermen,
or those again which speed with the declining
sadness of crying along the distant routes
knitting together weathers and dialects.

Between these noises the little teeth
of a London silence.

Finally the lions grumbling over the park,
angry in the night hours,
cavernous as though their throats were openings up
from the earth:
hooves, luggage, engines, tumbrils, lions,
hollow noises, noises of travel, hourly these unpick
the bricks of a London terrace, make the ear
their road, and have their audience in whatever
hearing the heart or the deep of the belly owns.

EITHNE WILKINS

PORTRAIT

This is to celebrate her exit from
clusters of widened rooms, the opal wit
loose in such lovely eye to melt in doom.
She is the waves, will have the drift of it
when the signature has faded and the crown
has tumbled into ruin from breasts once lit
by lifted sails, the stars half lost in space.
When the room moves out to sea and breaks apart,
when the ghostly vessel shivers at its base
and sweeps the unstable wharfside from her heart,
then short flags sing. And youth, a chandelier,
swings and is splintered from the port, or is
confetti thrown like tears upon the air
over unswept sea broken with promises.

EURYDIKE

And when she was dead, who had been all the luck
he knew, the very language that he spoke, in time
he hardly saw or heard the unveiled breezes mock
her clear lost face; how silence filled the hidden stream
behind those fading trees; how light was stripped away
from the steep highroad he forgot to recognise;
nor noticed how familiar landscape day by day
stepped back from him, the further that he walked. But those
dead letters that he never wrote were twist of autumn
flickering from his mind and, frostily, a leaf
might graze his sleeve, without his seeing it, at random.
It was so still, he did not even know himself
a ghost, and floated downstream in a ghostliness
she had already vanished from, a wandering loss.

A DISTURBED ENVIRONMENT

by PHILIP O'CONNOR

Homer Ellsen of Welwyn, Omaha, came down the stairs for breakfast. But when he looked out of the window he saw six beetles looking at him, as high as a man. So after breakfast he said to Esther the housekeeper: "I shall not be going out this morning." Esther shook her head and said: "No, Sir." He drew his chair up to the stove and put his feet up and went fast asleep. He dreamt he was very important.

He was awoken by a hard knocking at the door. He rose and looked everywhere round the room. He shook his head angrily, and opened the door. Under a tall stove-pipe hat was a short white face, very hard and bony. He carried a long stick. "I am Mr. Peetle," he said. "I have just moved into these parts. I guess the old countryside could do with a shake up? Irrigation, industry even, shops, a theatre, a church, what? I am making a neighbourly call. Nevertheless conditions are very disturbed outside. May I come in?"

"Yes Sir," said Homer, "I am glad to meet you. But as you say, conditions are disturbed. I think if we mount to the first floor, however, they may assume another appearance."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Peetle. They rose to the first floor, they drew up chairs to the fire and went fast asleep. Mr. Peetle dreamt he was in a primeval forest.

After an hour Mr. Peetle woke up and went to the window. He looked out bleakly, scratching his head, and saw six very tall caterpillars waving on their tails outside the window, looking in. He closed the window softly and looked about the room. Then he saw Homer. He approached him softly. "Mr. Ellsen," he said, "I fear conditions are still disturbed." Homer went to the window. "Mother of God," he murmured. At that moment a cunning knock came from the door. "Irma," shouted Homer, "Go, see who is at the door." Irma, the housekeeper of the second floor, said, "Gladly." She went down the stairs, but when she reached the groundfloor Esther, the housekeeper of the floor, was standing militantly in her way. "Come, Esther," said Irma, "You know very well the Master asked me to open the door." "I know that very well," replied Esther. "I know very well, as well, that it is my duty—as we both know, my privilege—to attend to the door on this floor. Merely because there is no front door on the first floor is no reason for you to step out of place and interfere with my office." So incensed was Irma at this firm speech that she struck Esther on the jowl. Esther clapped her hand to her jowl and shrieked with astonishment. She then knitted her brows and advanced upon the rival housekeeper. The other bent forward to avoid the blow; but it landed on her nose. Then she drew herself upright and attacked Esther's ear. But suddenly she stopped and a smile of understanding dawned in her face. "Look, Esther," she said, "while we are concentrating on our privileges we are forgetting totally the reason and purpose of our having any at all. It is to serve the Master we are here. Come, I say, rather than stick to what is largely, though not merely, a matter of form, I waive my rights. Darling—in order that the Master may receive his visitor—whoever he may be—no doubt an extremely busy gentleman whose conference with my master would increase the importance of our house—open the door!"

Esther stood mutely considering this proposal. But her eyes cleared and she said: "Yes, Irma, you are right in all but one respect. Retract the word 'rights' from your sentence, and I shall willingly comply." "Well—Madam!" shouted Irma, paralyzed with astonishment at the other's demand. And forthwith she hit Esther violently on the chin. Esther then saw red. She advanced like a windmill upon the slighter Irma, and without pity commenced to belabour her.

Homer then appeared at the top of the stairs. He frowned down into the gloom—the stairway was very dark—but discovered the struggling forms. "Ladies," he barked peremptorily, "I am astonished; I am overwhelmed with inexpressable amazement." He placed his spectacles on his nose and immediately saw the fierce expressions on the faces of the rival housekeepers. He clenched his teeth and held his arms stiffly by his side, hardly able to control himself. "Each of you," he said in a low voice, "has her duties assigned to her; their strict and exact statement, I had told myself upon appointing you—heavens, how this dry prairie wind is blowing up!—was a certain guarantee against any kind of disputation. Now what do I see, on a day when the house is garlanded with strange events, when circumstances are painfully disturbed and I await an important visitor to apprise me of their portent? I see the most disgraceful wangling it has yet been my lot to witness. Instantly, ladies, you will apologise to each other, and you will then decide which of you is to open the door."

"Esther," said Irma, "I do apologise and beg your pardon for any slight of rights I may have attempted." "Irma," said Esther, "I do the same, and moreover beg of you to assume the disputed privilege and open the door." "No Esther, it is I who insist upon your so doing." "Irma, I cannot possibly show myself in the painful light of one who enviously guards her privileges against estimable people. Pray open the door." "Esther, I have said I shall definitely not be so ungracious as to assume a privilege which is not truly mine."

"Mr. Peetle," said Homer quickly, "Pray do me the favour of opening the door." But before Mr. Peetle could comply, both housekeepers, the ribbons of their aprons streaming out behind them, their lips tense, had together rushed to the door, had opened it together, and had said, "Yes Sir?"

"My name," said a very soft looking gentleman at the door, extremely pale and round, with black hair smoothed over his forehead and a green-rimmed monocle, "Is Arthur Waterpillar. I have come to pay a neighbourly call upon the master of the House."

Homer had heard this from the top of the stairs. "Waterpillar!" cried Homer. "Why Homer Ellsen—the man back of the Sun Toilet Soap negotiations!" responded Waterpillar. He ran to grasp Homer's hand. He then lowered his voice, and put a curved hand around his lips when he muttered: "The truth is, Homer, conditions are very disturbed. I daresay you've looked out of the window. I believe we're all in it. God alone, in his great Mercy, will see to it that we emerge sound and whole from a great ordeal! Say little to servants. It doesn't do for the class to know too much. I don't think, so far, they have noticed much."

"Of course not. Well—did the Moon Shampoo Consolidated behave well, after all that talk? My, why a great bleak wind is blowing around these arid plantations. I think we had better all adjourn to the second floor. Conditions may be more favourable there. Meet Mr. Peetle," he continued, walking into the room, "This is Mr. Waterpillar, Mr. Peetle; a neighbour, and Mr. Waterpillar is an old business associate of man, who in the

most extraordinary circumstances has dug me up. Come, gentlemen—to the second floor." At that moment the alarm clock poised on the second floor-front's mantlepiece sounded shrilly. "Ah," said Homer, well satisfied, "I see it is time to sleep. Let us draw our chairs up to the fire, put our feet up and fall sound asleep." They did so. Mr. Waterpillar was the first to awake. He looked out of the window. An amazing sight awaited him. A profusion of mushrooms, with cranberries, raspberries and potatoes twined around them, and sundry notices, such as "the best of the few" and "one of the many" and "a chip of the old block" formed mounded supports for the short-breathed beetles to rise up on, the polished wings vibrating in the sunset. Slithering up the sides most cautiously the immensely long caterpillars were climbing on top of everything. They waved their heads towards the setting sun at the top, and then looked out of their dark, sorrowful eyes at Mr. Waterpillar. He ran, abruptly, to Homer and Mr. Peetle. "I er..." "I can guess," said Homer. He picked up a book at random. "The Good Book," he muttered. "Well; there's one more floor in this short house. Let us go to it, and see what happens. Whatever it is, I can say truthfully—Gentlemen —I believe we are prepared, with our Maker above us, for anything. I think the rain is coming. How acid the evening is!" In the green twilight they assayed the last climb. But when Homer had reached ten steps below the door which led into the third floor's solitary room a great gentleman clothed in black with golden eyes confronted him without noise. "I fear," he said softly, "conditions are very disturbed. But would you like to come in?"

POINTS OF VIEW

THREE EXILES

by HUGH GORDON PORTEUS

Alamein to Zem-Zem. KEITH DOUGLAS (P.L. 8/6).

Cities, Plains and People. LAWRENCE DURRELL. (FABER, 6s.).

Prospero's Cell. LAWRENCE DURRELL. (FABER, 10/6).

Aegean Islands. BERNARD SPENCER (P.L. 6s.).

Here are three poets who, moving from different beginnings to different ends, met for a year or so on the common ground of exile in Cairo. The curious lot of the exiled intellectual, against the background of that time and place, has been well drawn by Robin Fedden in his introduction to the P.L. anthology compiled from numbers of the wartime Cairo periodical *Personal Landscape*, to which all these poets were contributors. Isolation from England and Europe, isolation from the alien rich and the alien poor of the Middle East, combined with the normal sense of isolation that all intellectuals must sometimes feel, amounted to a sort of adversity. In London, in Paris, other kinds of adversity made strange bedfellows too. In ten years' time it may seem that people inadvertently drawn together, like displaced persons, into these local and temporary groupings, spoke in much the same voice. To disengage and define the nuances by which they differed from one another in their reactions to a common set of stimuli—(the creative impulse, activated by the nostalgias and novelties inseparable from exile, had nevertheless to overcome the lethargy induced by the physical and mental climate)—is therefore a task for criticism that should not be delayed.

The three poets under discussion had of course their small followings before the war. There is no doubt that the war, indirectly, did nourish and bring to fruition their various gifts. Keith Douglas, who might have been content to remain a minor name in the archives of Oxford poetry, had already before his tragic end in Normandy put himself firmly on the map as the most exciting and articulate poet of the war in Africa. Lawrence Durrell, one of the most brilliant prose writers since Joyce, had not, until the war took him to Greece and the Delta, been more than interesting and promising in his verse. Bernard Spencer, a pioneer standby and sometimes the mainstay of Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse*, might have remained interred in that niche, in the historical series: the Georgians, the Imagists, the post-Eliotolatus, the paulo-post Audenaries. But Spencer too, by a widening and deepening of experience, has unobtrusively moved into what is called the Front Rank of contemporary poets; though of the three, his presence there has been least noticed. To arrive at what is unique in these three poetries one would have to eliminate first the things they share. Douglas and Spencer begin with the advantages and the restraints associated with Oxford. Spencer and Durrell renewed an early love for the great and the common things of Greece: her past and present, scenes, peoples and tongues. Durrell and Douglas show a robust freedom and vigour of language, a dynamic of expression complementary to the static perfection, which neither quite achieves except in snatches, of the best of Spencer's poems. All three left coherent records of intelligent and sensitive

observation; and at one time or another all three observed common places and shared particular situations. Of Keith Douglas Tambimuttu has written so exhaustively in P.L.10 that one can add only marginal comment. He has well described Keith as a "strange mixture of æsthete and athlete"; and if I add here my opinion that he was first and last the man of action it is merely to point the contrast with Spencer and Durrell, and not to deny him sensibility. "He hated pretence and literariness," Tambimuttu has noted; and: "he seems to have decided to stick to facts as he saw them." Douglas had an extraordinary alert eye for significant detail and an insatiable appetite for "life"; but he seldom speculated, and he never exaggerated for effect. "My object," wrote Douglas himself, "is to write true and significant things in words which work for their keep." In this he triumphantly succeeded throughout the long prose account of his Libyan experiences and in the poems which follow it in *Alamein to Zem-Zem*. In an early letter he announced his hope that "one day cynic and lyric will meet and make me a balanced style." In such poems as "Cairo Jag"—too well known to need quoting,—perhaps this does happen. There is also a strain of deep compassion in such lines as those of *Vergissmeinicht*, and in that poignant picture of the bombed-out inhabitants of a Tunisian town, returning furtively to their homes to scout:

> like ants among the debris, finding in it
> a bed or piano, and carrying it out.—
> Who would not love them at this minute?

The battle scenes in this book must remain among the best things of their kind in recorded literature. It would be impertinent for one without tank-battle experience to comment further upon them. But the atmosphere of service life in the desert—that 99 per cent that is not danger so much as tedium—is for at least one reader most immediately and vividly recalled. And of the Libyan desert itself, only Antoine de St-Exupéry has written with such evocative mastery.

Douglas was as punctilious and honest in his records as Herbert Read, in the 1914-18 war. Only his language and imagery are emblazoned with sensous colour. "When I could order my thoughts," he wrote, "I looked for more significant things than their appearances; I looked . . . for something decorative, poetic or dramatic." It is again by contrast with the fanciful Durrell and the contemplative Spencer that one must emphasise how little Douglas in fact departed from what would in painting—and he was a good descriptive painter—be termed "representation." He was too straightforward to do otherwise; and the verdict of his batman might stand as his epitaph—"I like you, Sir," said the batman, (on learning that Captain Douglas had decided to take the forthright course of deserting to an honest field of action), "You're shit or bust, you are."

So, in his own way, is Lawrence Durrell. He takes poetic risks. There is no major figure in contemporary letters more adventurous in his exploitation of the potentialities of the English language. Nonsense poems, poems in basic English, even a poem in cablese, testify to his virtuosity. There is, besides, no living poet, who, retaining in every verse his characteristic identity, nevertheless contrives to command so many styles and such variety of tone and rhythm. To the less uncommon gifts of observation and sensibility he brings an inventiveness uncommon anywhere. He is never content, however, to record. All his material is converted, as in a surrealist or constructivist painting, into grotesque patterns of considerable impressiveness. To review the scope of Durrell's prose and verse would require a treatise. He advances not alone in

variety of style but in control of dramatic sequence—in architectonic. The title poem of his latest book of verse testifies to this mastery, which he has learnt from Eliot without allowing himself to mimic, as the brilliant Henry Reed mimics, Eliot's tone of voice. It is typical of his impudent originality that he should have reviewed his own first book of verse, *A Private Country*, in a 1944 issue of the magazine *Personal Landscape*, of which he was joint editor with Robin Fedden and Bernard Spencer.

It is, in fact, an extremely able piece of critical reviewing. "Excess of virtuosity . . . a special irony . . . . a technique in which romantic elements predominate . . . . prolixity, over-richness, mordant Browningesque larkiness . . . . worth watching despite irritating off-moments." A poet with so acute a sense of his own gifts and limitations can be relied upon to enhance the future with more than promises. Durrell has, like Eliot, a complete private mythology and what he calls an "heraldic universe." Conon takes the place of Sweeney; his Copts, his Levantines, even his Byrons and Nelsons and Horaces, exist on a new plane of the most intense reality, completely objectified and as accessible as sculpture. In reading Durrell's prose or verse, changes are rung not only on sound, but on all the senses: all the senses are fully engaged. In *Prospero's Cell*, mainly through the medium of a highly synthetic diary, we have an idealised picture of that island which Lear thought the "loveliest place in the world" and which Mr. Harold Nicholson deplores for what he calls its "lush shabby gentility." If Keith Douglas's journal is factual, then this is pure romancing: it is indeed rather Prospero's Cell than Corfu. Early in the diary he confesses: "If I wrote a book about Corcyra it would not be a history but a poem." And so it is. There is a sense in which the descriptions are more true, as well as more beautiful, than the actualities described. Three of the "real people" (to whom the book, which employs them as *dramatis personae*, is dedicated) are personally known to me, the likenesses are perfect, though I guess many of the incidents to have been fabricated. Similarly these landscapes and seascapes, with their village types and customs, at once recreated for me, other parts of the Mediterranean Seaboard—Italy, Syria, the Lebanon. The prose here is under heavy contribution to *South Wind:* the types, the pagan background, underline the loan. Yet the imitation actually caricatures, criticises, and improves upon the model. Under all this urbanity, this mock-pompous and erudite façade, there is a quality of childlike eagerness in Durrel's utterance, something "simple and pure as water in a spoon." But it is overlaid with arch sophistication, and with the excesses of one who never howled and purled himself out as an undergraduate. In this he recalls D. H. Lawrence and George Barker. A random example will serve to show how he piles up coloured words to storm the senses:

> Light, damned up by the obtuse
> walls, bursts fiercely through
> the great porches and explodes
> like butter (etc.)

The simile is absurd, but achieves its effect by its sheer impact on the ear. Durrell's poems, too, start as often from an abstract aural pattern as from an observation or a thought:

> Sing quiet, quite quiet, there.

The poem *Water Music* is almost fugal, with its refrain:

> Wrap your sulky beauty up . . .
> Out of the swing of the
> Swing of the sea.

Here the poem has grown up around the device. When Bernard Spencer employs a similar device, it is simply as a minor element in a poem built up from tasellae, a mosaic, whose

> circular patterns spin with the
> rush of
> The impetus and fling of waves.

Durrell and Spencer have each written a poem on *Delos*. For Durrell such a title is no more than the name painted on a ship, an excuse to launch a piece of music, a piece of metaphysical speculation, a pattern of images. For Spencer it announces footnotes to history and topography, with illustrations clear and candid as a Kit Wood canvas:

> The simple beach and the sea;
> and separate things
> Lie on this openness as on a hand;
> Sea-coloured tents, a boat upon its side,
> Scarlet of flags, a children's see-saw, swings,

whereas Durrell's work exhilarates by its very incompleteness, its asperities and excesses, its hints of further deeps and heights, Spencer's compels admiration by its deliberately limited excellence, its air of effortless perfection. Every poem is neat and compact, without flash or slickness, but completed without loose ends. It is a poetry that shines with the gentler English graces: modesty, honesty, good humour, an even temper, an inconspicuous elegance, and the reserve of one who seldom *chooses* to dig beneath the sunlit surface of the earth. The play of syllables in these poems has the beauty of the music of Greek verse:

> and perhaps the gold of their oil
> is mild with dreams of healing.

The vowel, the stress, the pause, are the primary elements. Ideas and images snap into place within this seductively euphonious framework, whose weakness is only that it is sometimes too accommodating. Ships, for example, "can be so lucid and so brave"; though elsewhere: "terrible their perfection." The epithets there have no inevitability: prosody beckoned them in. But for the rest:

> Poet nor painter find one jot to add,
> not the hairbreadth of a line . . . .
> No wonder mind should find
> this scenery bland
> As lotions are to eyes;
> Our loves being mostly natives of a land
> Mountainous, hung with forests,
> loud with storms . . . .

GOING WEST!

by NICHOLAS MOORE

Westward Look, poems by ROBERT HERRING (McLELLAN 6s.).

The Haunted Garden by HENRY TREECE (FABER, 7/6).

Poems of Deliverance by A. L. ROWSE (FABER, 7/6).

The Planet in My Hand by RUTHVEN TODD (GREY WALLS PRESS, 6s.).

These four books provide something of an object lesson in the poetic activity of the last few years, and give some indication of why the interest in contemporary poetry which grew considerably during the war years has suffered so great a decline. All these writers have their adherents, and have had their meed of success, except possibly Mr. Todd, who is the most deserving and serious of them. Mr. Herring is a successful editor, Mr. Treece is a successful poet and the leader of a new literary movement, Mr. Rowse is a successful historian and a poet on whom the reviewers have lavished their praise, Mr. Todd is well known as an authority on Blake and for his scholarly researches into certain periods of our poetry and painting. Yet the quality of the creative work in these four volumes is disappointing, and the reader must wonder how it is that any of these writers has managed to achieve a position of comparative eminence among contemporary poets. One feels in each case —always with the possible exception of Mr. Todd—that the success has been attained not on the merits of the poems so much as by a kind of elision from their undoubtedly

distinguished work in other fields. For Mr. Herring's success is real as an editor, as is Mr. Rowse's as an historian and Mr. Todd's in literary scholarship; and Mr. Treece's peripheral activities—for he more than the others is first and foremost a poet—have truly put him in the forefront as the leader of a new æsthetic. It is sad, therefore, to find that under examination the poems of not one of them save Mr. Todd approach in any way the professional standards one might expect from their successful work in other spheres. Mr. Todd's do show in their craftsmanship the same scrupulousness he shows in his research, and, if you accept their limitations, they are readable and pleasant enough: those of the others, though often more ambitious, always fail to convince.

"Westward Look" is, I think, without exception the worst book of poetry published by any serious publisher during the last few years. Yet is is significant both because it is the work of one of our best and most respected editors and because it exemplifies in a most extreme form so many of our current vices in poetry. Some of its unconsciously funny lines are almost on a par with Alfred Austin's cuckoo-flowers turning mauver and mauver and the other choice pieces collected by Mr. Michael Roberts in The Faber Book of Comic Verse. Mr. Herring's love of the Elizabethans and the Restoration dramatists causes him to write in a style most appallingly hybridized between mock-Elizabethan gallantries and the inversions and foreshortenings of modern poetical colloquialism, the results of which are almost beyond belief:

> "You find my winding-sheet
> not winning,
> lady, to your bed?
> Pray, what gayer than my
> grinning,
> since at Death, death's-head?"

is a comparatively mild example. In addition to this, although he favours mock-Elizabethan rhyme-schemes and stanza forms, he uses alliteration and half-rhyme (where rhyme fails him?) with mad enthusiasm. This results in lines like these:—

> " . . . . . Now, hand on heart,
> my turn to bow, face other friends, and
> fight
> with feeling faultless, fealty failing none."

Mr. Herring also has an extremely irritating habit of leaving out the article in all kinds of places for no reason that I can see beyond the mere exigencies of scansion, so that you get such effects as

> "So I nor goal nor goader—only guide"

and

> "Go on your way! Be rover!"

instead of "Be a rover" which would spoil the scansion. And these prize lines:—

> "Then Soul escapes by chimney-pot?
> And so for ever strays,
> a milky wayward wandering Jew,
> dehumanized in haze?"

But there are more and more incredible things to be found in this book. It is not that Mr. Herring is out of touch with life exactly. In "To Any Town" he writes actually about bombing raids. But the way he writes leaves one speechless.

> "As they go droning
> above
> we send zoning
> our love"

What is one to say in the face of such a conclusive stanza?

Mr. Treece is in little better case than Mr. Herring. It is to his credit that his verses run smoothly, and are clearly more competent than Mr. Herring's, but in bathos he runs him pretty close. His first-published poems had a certain rugged power and vigour, and, though they were plainly very near to pastiche of Mr. Dylan Thomas, they seemed to exhibit a genuine affinity; in spite of the dangers of

taking so near and so individual a contemporary as a model, there seemed to be a genuine feeling behind them, and a promise of better things to come. But Mr. Treece has merely gone from pastiche to pastiche, with the difference that he seems to have no real affinity with his later models. The ingredients of his verse remain the same, but the style shifts through Elizabethan rant to echoes of Housman, de la Mare, and the Georgians. And he shares with Mr. Herring the devasting trick of leaving out the "the"s and "a"s as the fit moves him or the metre demands. Thus you get:—

"How could it hurt me, love, if Death
Should take me from your very arms;
If what my heart speaks is the truth
How can I fear sword's quick alarms?"

or:—

"But lion in his rocky folly roars
Rage and repentance over the dead hills;"

which is followed by the lines:

"The quick snake, brilliant in his masquerade
Shudders among the trailing vines, and halts."

Indeed in this poem "lion" is the only fellow who does escape his article—quite arbitrarily—though later on we get

"This is the end of all things, end of time
And end of all the mind's green escapades,"

in which the first "end" gets its "the" while the other's don't. One can imagine, too, that if it hadn't scanned as it stood, we should have had "mind's green escapades" instead of "the mind's . . " Sometimes, perhaps, such trickery is not of much importance, but at others this unscrupulous kow-towing to the exigencies of rhyme and metre help to make bathetic statements such as this which, even without the bathos, are hardly very revealing:—

"We all know treachery, as maker or unmade,
And each has fingered blade to lay friend low."

This lack of sensitivity for language is carried to further lengths in other directions. Everything is grist to Mr. Treece's mill, but it is not so much what he uses as the way he uses it that is so fatal. Thus in the middle of a perfectly serious "Elegy" for dead airmen in the war, he can write:—

"Do not lay him a place, dear,
For you will eat alone;
Nor put you on that pretty dress,
The need for that is gone.
Just go into your room, lass,
And make yourself a prayer,
For that will be your strength now
This many and many a year."

and in an appallingly whimsical poem:—

"Little green frog in the strawberry leaves,
Don't be afraid.
My boots and hedging knives
Were never made
To take the life from friends like you;
You and the robin and the tiny shrew."

These both express impeccable sentiments, no doubt; but how trite, how sentimental, how little they mean! It is as though Mr. Treece were trying to get back to the simplicity of nature via the fairies of William Allingham and the politest drawing-room ballads. Except that Mr. Treece's world is still full of skulls, knives, swords, etc., and, as he writes himself with aplomb, but not, I think, much skill;—

"Laughter breaks into salt tears
And grave is never far away."

"Sea Poem" is worth quoting in full for the glorious bathetic thump of its last two lines:—

"A kingdom swirls beneath the weed
That knows no mortal eye,
A silent midnight heaven
Where coloured creatures fly
Through clouds of iridescence
And forests of pure jade,
Among the skulls of sailors
Whose jaws are opened wide
In last nostalgic pain.
Those lonely men of Spain,
They will not dance again."

Indeed the whole poem is an instructive example in miniature of Mr. Treece's poetic methods and materials. Another revealing example is *Two Versions of One Poem.* The first is an atmospheric description of wild life (and death) in a wood, concluding:—

"Through the green graveyard of leaves
Where the stoat rehearses his kill
And the white skull grins in the fern."

In the second version the simple description, which has some merits—"Where the bent stick moves like a snake" is effective—has been hotted up into a bright ballad metre,

"And where the nimble stoats rehearse
Their ballet of the kill,
Half-hidden by a century's moss
There grins a human skull.

It has been home for beetle
And shelter for the snake,
And half the woodland people
Have heard its dry lips speak," etc.

and all kinds of extraneous and falsifying elements have been added, even to a good example of the missing article before "beetle." It never was a good poem; but in Poem 1 at least the elements are left relatively plain; in Poem 2 they are all dressed up in a quite fictitious simplicity. And this seems to be Mr. Treece's general method. In his earlier poems the materials were decked out in Elizabethan rant and Dylan Thomas stream-of-flesh imagery; now they tend rather to lads and lasses, Allingham, de la Mare, Housman, and ye simple ballads. In a poem towards the end of the book, "Galway," he attempts a natural, unadorned description, in loose unrhyming lines, perhaps in a Patrick Kavanagh manner, a thing which, as far as I know, he hasn't done before:—

"Out of a heart of stone
Grey Galway speaks with a brogue
Of peat-smoke and sea-weed
And the scream of wheeling gulls.
Looking towards the weir one sees
The salmon thick in the shallows,
The white swans lording the green stream
And a solitary cormorant
Diving for eels."

I don't think this is particularly fine verse, but it is interesting in that it shows a spareness that Mr. Treece's verse has hitherto lacked. But is Mr. Treece any more than an adept adaptor of other people's manners, with his sense of Death and the properties he associates with it thrown in? It is difficult to see much of Mr. Treece's own certain contribution in this book beyond the jackdaw-like accumulation of these properties within borrowed clothes and the irritating habit of leaving out "a"s and "the"s. It is clear that he is striving for simplicity, but it is not at all clear that he has achieved it; nor is it clear that there will be anything of value left if he does.

Mr. Rowse is in a different category altogether from Messrs. Treece and Herring, but he is not much the better for it. He is a kind of belated Georgian. His observation is apt enough, but it is not precise, and his poems, almost without exception, read like stray notes and jottings. He has no form, and no style, notwithstanding the ingenuous remarks of one reviewer that "The poems flow every one into a definite channel of form, regular or irregular." All this means is that they are very loose indeed. Most of them are written in straggling lines of varying length, what one can only call "free verse," a form of formlessness for which there seems no reason other than that they are, in effect, merely jotted notes. When he essays a more formal metre, he is no more successful; there is nothing that specifically jars, but nor is there anything especially exciting or felicitous, and again the choice of metre, the "channel of form, regular or irregular" seems quite arbitrary. Moreover he is largely a catalogue poet. He has been compared with Edward Thomas, perhaps

inevitably as he dwells so much on nature, but he has much more affinity with Rupert Brooke. His poems are made up mostly of catalogues of sights and sounds, of place names, of "impressions," but none of these things seem to exist in his poems except as a mirror of himself or of his own moods. Plants and flowers come and go in great variety, but never in detail, always merely as a background, so that the landscape is always general and diffused.

> "Evening and the shadows fall
> over the level plains of Berkshire;
> the chalk hills and the charlock
> mingle in the golden haze that lights
> hedges and furrows from the west.
> Spring is declared
> in the ripening forms of the chestnuts."

or:—

> "The mingled oats and barley in the field,
> The feathery grasses at my feet,
> The varied movement of wind in corn,
> The night-wind blowing in the trees,
> The melancholy ashes that speak of rain,
> The church-clock of my childhood
> Speaks yet again over the hillside,
> Knocks at my unrepentant heart,
> Touches the waiting mood to tears."

and so on. They are harmless enough, and, as far as generalised landscapes go, pleasant enough, except for the occasional touches of sentimentality, but what do they all amount to more than a mood of gentle, rather insipid nostalgia? It is true that they are free from the more blatant vices to which Mr. Herring and Mr. Treece are prone; yet in the last analysis they, too, are no more than pastiche, a pastiche of the Georgian pastoral tradition. And as in so much Georgian poetry, Nature, or whatever the scene may be, is used vaguely and diffusely as a background to rather banal and obvious observations and ruminations, as a sort of setting for the nostalgically ruminating "I" of the poems, yet the "I" is nevertheless devoid of personality. So that both the landscape and the thinker in the landscape remain undefined, both part of an insufficiently defined mood. So Mr. Rowse's poems fail, too. They are loose, and devoid of any coherent imagery. As far as they hold together at all, they are held only by catalogues and reiterative statements of mood. Though they are free in their wording from the most obvious cliches, the actual total effect is one of banality. And it is an essential weakness of all descriptive catalogue poetry that this must be so. It is all the more so in this case where the actual technique is so loose and redolent of pastiche:—

> "Your image makes these places live,
> Waitwith Bank and Holly Hill;
> Though far away from them and you,
> I see them still, I see them still."

or:—

> "Only a wind stirs the laden branches
> sadly, echoing my question in the lovely
> light
> punctuating the emptiness of so much
> beauty without love."

But there is one poem "The Parting" in which Mr. Rowse shows a firmer grasp of his materials: it is more personal than most, more deeply felt and shows greater powers of construction. It is spoilt by some incidental banalities, but is does show what Mr. Rowse could do if he did not let his moods become too vague or his jottings too trivial. What is above all wrong with him is that he lets his eye and his thought, both of which are sensitive enough, wander and that he doesn't take the trouble (or doesn't know how) to construct really satisfactory poems out of his perceptions. "The Parting" in which more of his personality is engaged, and which does have a theme, shows possibilities of achievement to which he never reaches.

Mr. Todd on the other hand has control of his medium. He is not a big poet, and does not try to be, but within the narrow compass he has chosen he is an excellent craftsman.

He has no great imaginative flights, nor any world-shaking message to give, and perhaps some of his sonnet character-studies are a little too mechanical and a little too much after-Auden, but they *are* readable. One feels that Mr. Todd has made the sort of poetry he wants to make, whereas in the work of Messrs. Treece, Herring and Rowse one feels that shoddy workmanship (or in the latter case lack of workmanship) has prevented them from getting sufficiently near to achieving what they set out to. Mr. Todd is not very exciting, but he does own the virtues of form and precision:—

"Coming in September, through the thin
streets,
I thought back to another year I knew,
Autumn, lifting potatoes and stacking peats
On Mull, while the Atlantic's murky blue
Swung sluggishly in past Jura, and the hills
Were brown lions, crouched to meet the
autumn gales."

The imagery is seldom highly imaginative, but it is often quietly telling as in the last of these lines. Even where what he is saying is perhaps trite, he turns his lines nicely and gives them point by the care of his construction so that even

"A million light-years would not be enough
For me to love you as I long to do,
To weave my dreams of that immortal stuff
Which makes of hell more heaven than I
knew."

almost escapes the banality of its sentiment by the neatness of its phrasing. These are the virtues of the good occasional poet who can make a workmanlike job of summing-up any occasion. They result not in great poems or exciting originality, but in very pleasant ones. And that is much to be grateful for. There is a tendency to ignore minor poetry in the search for a great and universal poetry (inevitably this is usually a vain search, and the critics' candidates fall as the years go by); yet it is the good minor poet, with his exacting craftsmanship, who is the key to the poetry of any age; and it is no accident that the age which produced Shakespeare had the solidest foundation of good minor poetry that we know. We should learn to give due honour to the poet who does well what he can rather than to those who attempt more than they are equal to without bothering to perfect their technique. Craftsmanship isn't everything; but without it only a very rare and special sort of genius can succeed. For lack of it many of our best hopes have gone west.

A POLARITY

by JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Living in Time by KATHLEEN RAINE. (EDITIONS POETRY LONDON, 6s.).

Poems 1933-45 by RAYNER HEPPENSTALL. (SECKER AND WARBURG, 7/6).

In the case of both these writers, the chief factor which has moulded their poetry has been religious experience—or rather, should one say, experience of religion. But from this point of experience poetic feeling has for each of them flowed in opposite directions. This is evidenced by the nature of their poetry, and the different attitude to words it reveals in each case. Both are, in the true sense of the word, metaphysical poets. But in neither of them, it seems to me, though for opposite reasons, is metaphysical intuition permitted so wholly to incarnate itself in words as to reach the fullest potentialities of poetry.

In Miss Raine, a feminine writer, poetry is, so to speak, centripetal. Words cluster or nestle around the primary intuition, as if to shelter it, maternally, from the chaos that lies without. The Stone and Flower which gave the title to her first collection of poems were fitting symbols. Her verse seems to be moulded according to the inevitable and natural principles which govern the growth of plants, or the formation of rock-crystals —the symmetrical unfolding of their shape from a central point. And her subject, likewise, is the growth of faith in the integrated spirit—like the Golden Flower of that Chinese treatise on which Jung has given us a commentary. Take for example, the closing lines of her poem, "Heaven's Immanence:"

> Into the vine, into the vein, into the heart
> Where Venus, mother of the perfect form
> The ever-desiring goddess, reigns no more,
> And Mary who has no longing, in her arms
> Holds all heaven in earth's unfolded rose.

Miss Raine's way of writing produces poetry which is always distinguished, and sometimes, especially when it gives expression to a more personal note, deeply moving:

> Now by the spring I stand alone
> Still are its singing waters flowing;
> Oh, never thought I here to greet
> Shadowy death who comes this way
> Where hope's waters rise and play!

Her weakness, where the emotional impulse is less intense, is to fall into a manner a little too reminiscent of the sentimental and yet frigid elegance of Alice Mynell. Personally, I feel something of this in her poem on the bombed Carmelite Church in Kensington, with its slightly arch reference to

> The little saint of Lisieux, who felt the cold and its

As for St. John of the Cross, poets are at home everywhere—

but to judge of the intimacies of piety, perhaps, does not lie within the critic's province.

The poetry of Mr. Heppenstall, on the other hand, is eminently masculine, centrifugal. Ideas jostle and clash in it; they refuse to be reconciled with each other. Nor will they be circumscribed by words, and the verse is often clumsy in diction, awkward in form, harsh to the ear. One is reminded of the little-read (and perhaps underrated) later poems of Browning. He has, too, something of Browning's exuberance in the grotesque, and some of his most successful poems are those which are purely heraldic in their use of imagery. Such is the series of poems which

takes the traditional astrological doctrine of correspondences as its basis—as, for example the Moon:

> . . . It is her nature
> Upon this powerful invocation to give you
> Silver the blood of the poor in a ring of rain,
> And she has friends, beside a few minds of her quality,
> Land-snail and shell-fish as well as fish and the frog
> As well as the hare, the swan and the nightingale.

I have spoken of his poetry as arising from an experience of religion; but he is one to whom what Charles Williams called "the quality of unbelief" is all-important. From his frequently obscure and tortured verse there emerges the record of a conflict between faith and doubt. But the battle is not fought out on the same terms as it was for Browning or the other Victorians, and from it finally emerges a rejection of faith which seems to be made with a kind of wry cheerfulness. And yet this rejection remains as ambiguous as, one feels, acceptance would also have done:

> . . . . it is known among men
> That all winter I rebelled against the law
> And against love all the summer and again
> Propose to the reaping moon my field of straw.

These are, perhaps, imperfect poems. But they are the product of an eminently original, courageous and honest mind. They will re-pay reading and re-reading when many others, with more obvious formal virtues, will have been laid aside.

TOUT AUX TAVERNES ET AUX FILLES

by RICHARD MARCH

The Poems of François Villon, translated by H. B. MCCASKIE (THE CRESSET PRESS, 21s.).

François de Montcorbier, otherwise Villon, disappeared in the year 1463, at the age of 32, after he had been sentenced to death by hanging for his participation in a street brawl. The sentence was afterwards annulled, but Villon was banished for ten years from the city and precincts of Paris. Before that he had already been at one time and another a homicide, a thief and a beggar, and seen the inside of the prison of Meung-sur-Loire. The ten years of his life with which posterity has become acquainted through the autobiographical details embedded in his poems, and the laborious researches of scholars such as Marcel Schwob, Lognon and Champion, present a picture of unrelieved squalor. The vagabond poet of the Romantic imagination is none other than the drunken pimp who mulcts poor fat Margot of her scanty earnings.

Villon began life, apparently, as a respectable clerk in a lawyer's office. Then, one fatal evening in June 1455 he accidentally killed a priest in a quarrel in the cloister of St. Benoit, and was forced to flee Paris. For a time he lived the life of a tramp, got into bad company, and remained a marked man till the day of his banishment. It was a misfortune from which he never recovered; and though in his poems he often inveighs against his fate, his evil ways weighed heavily on his conscience, and he was only too painfully aware of the sordidness of his disreputable existence.

Villon was a poet who exercised an absolute command of his medium. His sheer virtuosity is astounding. But the poetry was in his blood and marrow, together with his

suffering, his hunger and his unsatisfied desires. At the same time it is worth remarking that the material of two-thirds of his verse consists of gossip about day-to-day trivialities, about his friends and enemies and personalities long since dead and forgotten; of vivacious descriptive scenes depicting the life of the streets and taverns. In substance it is very often occasional verse, and differs little in form and manner from the balladry, the broad-sheet poems, quips and satires that were handed round or read aloud in lively company by other versifiers of his day. Villon's originality resides in the fact that he stamped his personality on every line he wrote, and gave an altogether new depth and range to the ballad as a medium of expression.

It is sometimes remarked with astonishment that Villon is such a *modern* poet, for the reason presumably that his hard-boiled attitude to life, love and suffering strike a sympathetic chord in certain contemporary readers' breasts. But if Villon is modern, then many of our most up-to-date and publicised poets wear a decidedly antique look. And it may be argued that the feebleness of much fashionable verse is due to the fact that our poets do not sufficiently practice writing occasional verse, but instead strain their talent by applying it to subjects of apparently profound and universal significance, but which they do not really understand, for which they have not suffered in any real and intimate sense, and which probably matter very little anyway. The poverty of their personal experience is measured by the grandiloquence of their ideas on the world and society.

Since Villon was re-discovered in the late nineteenth century a number of translators got to work on him. But, ignoring a rather disastrous Mr. Payne in the 1870's, Dr. McCaskie is the first who has attempted the formidable undertaking of translating the whole Villon canon, save a few of the thieves' jargon poems, into the English language. The publishers in a modest blurb say that they believe that, taking it all-round, Dr. McCaskie's is the best English version of Villon that has yet appeared. They are right. It is not only the best, it is extraordinarily felicitous and accurate, and does indeed give us the freshness, the wonderful cadences, the pungency, the haunting refrains in a form and manner that really are Villon. And Dr. McCaskie translates. He does not merely produce a spirited imitation like W. E. Henley, who gave for the line heading this review:

"Booze and the blowens cop the lot."

McCaskie has

"Taverns and wenches get the lot."

which is nearer to the original.

The ground-bass of many of Villon's finest poems is a terrible heart-ache, regret for the past ("Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan"), a tender and unbearable nostalgia for lost youth, beauty and pleasures (Les Regrets de la belle Heaulmiere), and it is astonishing to observe with what skill Dr. McCaskie gives us an English equivalent for the flexible rhythms and subtle music. When he does fail, as for example in the incomparable opening stanza of "Ballade des Dames du Temps jadis:"

Dictes moy, n'en quel pays
Est Flora, la belle Romaine,"

it is still a near thing, and never, unlike Rosetti's attempt, becomes pastiche.

Swinburne, in general an unhappy translator of Villon, has his one success with The Ballad of the Hanged.

"Bit by bit eaten and rotten, rent and shed,
And we the bones grow dust and ash withal
Let no man laugh at us discomfitted,
But pray to God that He forgive us all."

McCaskie renders this:

"Long since devoured and rotted to a shred
While we, the bones, to ash and dust decay;
Let no man mock us, us so sore bestead,
But pray that God will wipe or sins away."

in which the rhythm is close to Villon, but the phrasing is a little clumsy. These lapses, however, are few in such a large body of work. To give a fair sample of Dr. McCaskie's powers it is only necessary to quote the first few lines of the Prayer to Our Lady, one of the most wonderful poems in the French language:

"Regent of earth and mistress of the sky,
Queen of the swamps of Hell, take me, even me
Who to serve Christ always so humbly try,
That I among your chosen ones may be"—

which is now also a very fine poem in English.

It should be added that Dr. McCaskie's footnotes are scholarly and useful to the student, and that the book is excellently produced and printed. There are tasteful, if not very incisive, illustrations by Edward Ardizzone.

POÉSIE 39-45

edited by

PIERRE SEGHERS

Poésie was the magazine of the younger generation of French poets, and its editor, Pierre Seghers, kept it alive throughout the occupation of France by the Nazis. This anthology of prose and verse has been gathered from the pages of the magazine and contains work by André Gide, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, as well as by new authors. The French text of the poems is included, and translations have been made by various English poets.

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Jack Lindsay in *Daily Worker.*

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