

# POETRY

(LONDON)

A BI-MONTHLY OF VERSE AND CRITICISM



## ENLARGED FIRST ANNIVERSARY NUMBER

POEM BY **ANNE RIDLER** ● TROLL'S COURTSHIP BY **LOUIS MACNEICE** ● IN A GARDEN BY **STEPHEN SPENDER** ● A LETTER TO NICHOLAS MOORE BY **G. S. FRASER** ● LOVE IN THE ASYLUM BY **DYLAN THOMAS** ● ODE ABOVE WINCHESTER BY **J. C. HALL** ● BALLAD OF THE RANTING LAD BY **HENRY TREECE** ● TO EDWARD THOMAS BY **ALUN LEWIS** ● CHURCHILLIAN ODE BY **J. F. HENDRY** ● HERO BY **LAURENCE DURRELL** ● LINES WRITTEN IN AN AIR RAID BY **FRANCIS SCARFE** ● ALSO POEMS BY **VERNON WATKINS, JULIAN SYMONS, TOM SCOTT, D. S. SAVAGE, AUDREY BEECHAM, JAMES A. KIRKUP, FRED MARNAU, STEPHEN COATES, NORMAN NICHOLSON, PETER WELLS, ALAN HOOK, NICHOLAS MOORE, LYNETTE ROBERTS, CLIFFORD DYMENT.**

*Correspondence from Bertram Warr, R. Rolf, Robert Greacen, Mary Mair, Diana Gardner, Ladislav Fisch.*

No. 6

MAY-JUNE, 1941

ONE SHILLING

For Hemingway's new book "For Whom the Bell Tolls," Zwemmer's have devised a window display, which brings together an original grouping of art works to express the sombre Spanish spirit of the novel. Compounded of pages from Goya's "Horrors of the War," Picasso's outstanding etching "Minotauremachie" and stills from Eisenstein's epic film "Que Viva Mexico," this presentation uses vivid pictorial imagery to form a composition mirroring conflict and tragedy under a sultry sky. Reaching beyond the empirical beauty of the display the dialectical waves of the world conflict beat upon our eyes. At once the aggressive nature of the maguey plant, the wounding male principle, stands out overwhelming the soft, gentle, introverted figure of the girl searching for her lover amidst the fields. Then she finds the half buried body. As the petals of the flowers turn inwards when they are tired out so her passion creeps back to the lonely bedroom of her youth. Maria has become Martha: And the earth lies across her lips as a stone cold prison wall stretching into eternity pressing frustration and tears into her searching mouth. Her eyes drift away like strange, long forgotten skies. Personality and nature have merged into one. Picasso's "Minotauremachie," the pillar of intellectual and artistic fire which illuminates the entire window, contains the basic expression of the great psychological antagonism of our epoch, the conflict between Eros and Death Instinct. The bull-man, symbol of evil, seeks, unsuccessfully, to extinguish the light held aloft with calm serenity by the child, symbol of pure, conscious and potent love as opposed to the impotent perversions of our decadent epoch. The predatory fingers of the negation cannot penetrate the magic circle of life woven by the rays of the candle. And the Christ figure does not ascend his cross, recognising that the problem of our time is not to learn how to die. What was historic necessity is now neurosis. The modern task is to learn how to live and to find the way home to oneself.—In the words of the old magician Nietzsche, "Deeper than pain is joy."—Deeper than crucifixion is life. The creative European Eros Imago emerges triumphant.

Between the flowering of the instincts represented by the Minotaur and, the child and the achievement of their ethical sublimation in the Christ figure, in the background there lies nature, the healing expanse of the sea, the tender ever calling mother whose waves, in their recoil taking the individual out of himself into them, beckon us out of the twilight of our declining afternoon into the unending poem of regression.

R. FRIEDMANN.



*Ernest Hemingway*



ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S  
BEST WORK  
FOR WHOM  
THE BELL TOLLS  
Big boys death describes me  
because I am content to stand  
and fight for my country  
for whom the bell tolls.  
It tolls for thee.  
9¢



HEMINGWAY'S MASTERPIECE — FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

THE EDITORS OF  
**Partisan Review**

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A NEW ISSUE  
(March—April, 1941)

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# POETRY

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### Sixth Letter

Life has its two dimensions in biological and cultural or spiritual life. The biological embraces all those vital activities of secretion, digestion, breathing and so on which are essential for the existence of the organism. Culture or spirituality, however, is more difficult to define and would require many more words.

Biological life is spontaneous life in the sense that it exists without our willing it. But when we think, thought is not only a spontaneous emanation from the human organism, coming into being as a vital need of the individual, bound by the subjective law of vitality, but it is also an adaptation to the reality of outside phenomena, to what is really not ourselves; this adaptation is directed by the objective law of truth. Thought is meant to serve life and if we are to think usefully for our biological purposes we should think what is true. Otherwise our thoughts would present us with a false view of reality and the practical errors we would commit in behaviour would result in the extinction of human life.

The problem of thought has then two aspects: (1) It is a subjective fact within the organism and is governed by the law of subjective utility. (2) It is an adaptation to external phenomena and is directed by the objective law of truth.

All our volitions exhibit this double character. For example, an act of will starts as an impulse within the individual. But when we choose between two possible modes of behaviour "culture" demands that we choose the best, which implies our acceptance of an objective standard of what is good and the repression of our spontaneous inclination. Cultured behaviour then has a transcendental quality in that we adapt our acts to an objective standard of truth or goodness which exists beyond our own individuality, which transcends our own nature. This double character of intellectual and volitional phenomena is also to be found in aesthetic feeling and religious emotion. In fact a whole series of these Janus-like vital phenomena exist in all the spiritual orders which we imply when we use the word culture. They are, firstly, spontaneous secretions within the individual and have their origin and government within the organism itself; secondly, they are revised by laws which are objective.

We may now define culture: There are vital functions which obey objective laws, though they are, inasmuch as they are vital, subjective facts within the organism; they exist, too, on condition of complying with the dictates of a *régime* independent of life itself. These are culture. . . . Spiritual life is nothing more

nor less than the store of vital functions whose products possess a durability and importance independent of life.\*

We must bear in mind, however, that the double quality that characterises vital phenomena are inter-dependent and complementary. Without the one the other does not exist. But the theme of the "modern" age, which may be roughly stated to have begun with the Renaissance, has been the sole cultivation of the objective perspective of life, at the expense of life itself (spontaneous life), the subjective factor.

## II.

Since the Renaissance the main current in European philosophy, which is specifically "modern," has been "rationalism," the other being relativism. To take the question of truth because it has a direct bearing on the problem of modern poetry: To the relativist Truth does not exist and is not ascertainable, existing only "relative" to the frame of mind of the person considering the matter. Relativism cannot, of course, take itself seriously if truth does not exist. Without it life would be converted into an illusion and an absurdity.

But it is Rationalism that has been the deeper current in European philosophy, and its discussion is especially important for the understanding of the Objective Reporters movement (in poetry) of the 'Thirties. Truth being complete in itself and invariable cannot be attributed to our corruptible and mutable natures. We must therefore assume the existence of an abstract type which is perfect and invariable, common to all individuals, races and periods. The existence of this abstract type is symbolised in the *raison* of Descartes, "the rational entity" of Kant, the *mos geometricus* of Spinoza and the *Objective Reportage* of the poets of 1930-1940. "Pure intellection," the geometric mode of thought, is the only trustworthy one. The true world is

\* Ortega Y Gasset.

the quantitative, the geometrical. The other, the qualitative and immediate world that surrounds us is illusory. For instance, colour cannot be thought or defined. It is therefore irrational and illusory. Auden, one of the Objective Reporters, hates flowers in his room, we are informed in *New Verse*, Nos. 26-27. It may be that this rational distrust of colours is responsible for this original attitude.

The physics and philosophy of Descartes were the signs of a new spiritual state that soon suffused all forms of human life, and produced the sensibility which is specifically modern, which accepts all the constructions of "reason" and rejects with contempt all that is spontaneous and immediate. Our personalities consequently suffered a deep division. On the one hand we had everything vital and concrete in our being, our breathing, our historical reality, and on the other the rational entity that has no life of itself, but enables us to attain truth.

Rationality, the objective pole of life, postulated a more perfect world of reality, and men therefore declared that the mission of life was to substitute the rational for the spontaneous. We should suppress our spontaneous convictions, which were only "opinions" or *doxai* and substitute pure ideas or *logoi*, which are immutable beings, precise and perfect, in their place. Our natural desires and propensities should be kept in abeyance so that we may obey the precepts of rationality the more docilely. In art we should enjoy what objective or "culturalist" standards said was the best, in spite of the contrary opinion of our spontaneous convictions and the fact that we had not really enjoyed it. In other words, we were asked to lose our self-consistency.

Culture in the West was in this manner relegated to increasingly remote distances from the vitality that created it. It developed in the void, solely in contact with itself, governed by its own internal standards and spontaneous

life, consequently suffered a corresponding depreciation, and was regarded as antipathetic to culture. Only in the West have science and morals completely differentiated themselves from life. Oriental culture is founded on tradition which is in turn a form of spontaneity—science or morals do not enjoy in the Easterner's mind the objective reality of physical laws which *rule* life, as they do in the West. It is ridiculous that life should grant concessions to culture. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

The mission of our generation then is "the subjection of reason to vitality, its localisation within the biological scheme and its surrender to spontaneity. In a few years it would seem ridiculous to have exacted from life an acquiescence in the service of culture. The mission of the new age is, precisely, the conversion of that relation and the demonstration that it is culture, reason, art and ethics that must enter the service of life. . . . Pure reason has, then, to surrender its authority to vital reason.\*

### III

The reason for my belief that poetry has an important part to play in the fulfilment of this mission of our generation is that poetry has always been the storehouse of all the vital resources of the individual. The importance of poetry in our age, more than in any other age, derives from the fact that we should now view our culture through spontaneity or vitality. This is the inverse of what Socrates and the Cartesian man judged to be the duty of their generation. To me poetry has always been the asseveration of the splendid forces of life, the subjective as well as objective. In it a perfect balance of the two may be reached, the perception of which should enable us to feel and think correctly. These are, after all, the most important conditions of the survival of life.

\* Ortega Y Gasset.

We may thus evaluate the culture of an age, or analyse its features, from the characteristics of its poetry—from the relative positions taken in it by rationalist and spontaneous values. In a rational age, when culture is a-vital, being out of contact with life, the poetry that belongs to it historically would emphasise the subjective, emotional aspects of our natures. Thus, surrealism historically belongs to our generation whatever may have been the technical errors committed by its protagonists. On the other hand, the Objective Reporters movement, to which I shall return to later, was anti-historical in spirit because it was "culturalist" and rationalist in tendency, subduing the nature of poetry to the exactions of abstract principles, which reason or "objectivity" specified as the best. I do not, however, deny it the technical improvements that this movement brought us: condensation, careful observation of external phenomena, and the usage of everyday speech. It was not, however, in the main sensibility of the age which we have already defined. It was, therefore, anti-historical. Like any other biological science, history has, of course, a place for monstrosities.

My thesis that poetry is the storehouse of all the vital resources of man needs further elaboration. I realise as I go on that when I speak of poetry I am not only speaking of verse which we usually imply when we use the term. Poetry means to me the incarnation of all the spontaneous and vital resources of man, the living principle, that is immanent in human activity: in music, in verse, in painting, in cinema, in scientific research, in politics, in photography, in prose. I do not wish to substitute the word "verse" for poetry, but we use words imprecisely, and I would like to state what I mean exactly when I use the word. A more exact definition should be possible, with the aid of the discoveries of psychology, at a later date.

This conception of poetry seems to me valid because it does not attempt to explain it away by a narrowing down of its nature, or a narrowing down of terms which contradict the experiences and conceptions of other people. It is inclusive and not exclusive.

The idea that poetry may be written in prose is now too well known to bear repetition; two examples of the younger poets who practice it are George Barker and Lawrence Durrell. Wordsworth said in a footnote to the Preface of the *Lyrical Ballads*: "I here use the word 'Poetry' (though against my own judgment) as opposed to the word Prose, and synonymous with metrical composition. But much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre: nor is this, in truth, a *strict* antithesis, because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable," which seems to support my definition of Poetry. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre, but metrical language alone does not constitute Poetry: we are given a further lead in the idea that Poetry is opposed to Matter of Fact or Science.

#### IV

Now the idea popularly held in England by the young avant-garde poets (before the reaction in Poetry (London) took place; the reaction had, of course, already occurred in the minds of poets) was the intellectual one that poetry should be ordinary reportage, in the language of everyday speech, of the external world of objects and events. It was held that this attitude represented a "commonsense" view of poetry and was an antidote to "poetic inflation." From Wordsworth's definition, and

on their own admission they wanted a Matter of Fact or Scientific language for the objective reportage of the external world of objects and events. The writing of verse was more or a surgical or intellectual process. The poet was asked to excise his individual make-up of emotions lest they coloured his clear perception. In other words, he should sacrifice the realities of his subjective life to culture: to take the case of spiritual life, he should board up the adjective "spiritual" and cut the cables that join it to the substantive "life."

Any art, of course, even though it is predominantly the result of intellectual activity, has its emotional components. But the art produced by the Objective Reporters was distinctly lacking in appeal and validity since it failed to convince the reader, owing to its lack of vitality and emotional content, the strong forces that derive from our subjective natures. The dearth of vitality was, of course, due to not living deeply enough. The poet had escaped experience behind a smoke-screen of intellectual concepts which were not founded on the realities of experience and life and were therefore false values for living and writing. This state of the 'Thirties was a hangover of the rational age in philosophy which is in essence inimical to the spirit of our own, in which the Cartesian or machine man must eventually be replaced by the human man.

It is easy to narrow down an art to one of its aspects or one function, but more difficult to see it in its entirety, in its various branchings and allotropisms. The Objective Reporters rationalistically narrowed down their conception of verse to the factual reportage of the external world of objects and events, which savours of the attitude of the nineteenth century biologist who refused to consider as vital phenomena those which do not possess corporeal character. This attitude of the

*Continued on page 195.*



## POEM

Since we through war awhile must part  
Sweetheart, and learn to lose  
Daily use  
Of all that satisfied our heart:  
Lay up those secrets and those powers  
Wherewith you pleased and cherished me these two years:

Now we must draw, as plants would,  
On tubers stored in a better season,  
Our honey and heaven;  
Only our love can store such food.  
Is this to make a god of absence?  
A new-born monster to steal our sustenance?

We cannot quite cast out lack and pain.  
Let him remain—what he may devour  
We can well spare:  
He never can tap this, the true vein.  
I have no words to tell you what you were,  
But when you are sad, think, Heaven could give no more.

ANNE RIDLER

## A LETTER TO NICHOLAS MOORE

So few are lucky in the natural mode  
And I was always an unlucky one,  
With greed's shy gaze for the expensive treat  
Of beauty, excellent in bone and blood,  
Responsive to the same considering sun  
That soured the grapes I never dared to eat.

Mine was the bitter gaze to pore upon  
A profile or the modelling of an ear  
Or the dry waxy pallor of two hands.  
Mine was the pillow for the midnight tear  
For all the deeds which could not be undone  
For all the seeds wherewith I'd sown the sands.

Mine was the coward's humble insolence  
That warms itself at an unheeding fire  
And writes a poem to the kindly blaze,  
Mine was the nibbling mouth without defence  
Against the hook of any stray desire  
That fractured the dead water of my days. . . .

And thus, incompetent to speak of love,  
I learned affection's humbler discipline,  
And could be plain and easy with my friends  
But yet stood still, where suns and planets move  
Through love that turns their ellipses in,  
For I had not their purposes and ends. . . .

Or if I had, my density was such  
That as another's star I could not move  
Or I was tied to black and secret suns,  
Lost memories, that held my heart too much,  
A child's desire for universal love,  
Or some blind, blank devotion like the nun's,

2

Or my own face in someone's flattering glass  
That now my hateful mirror would not show,  
Fixed to a pallor with a squinting eye,  
Sir Death, expectant in the narrow pass,  
A lame explorer nursing wastes of snow  
That in his summer nightmares flower and die,

Or say, like that diseased great Baudelaire,  
Sipping his small black coffee in the sun  
And licking with his tongue at rotting teeth  
And keeping up a poised and public air  
While at his skull the endless headaches run,  
And round his cane imagined worms wreath.

I was the man, for poetry and not love,  
To whom disaster is a kind of show,  
His mind an emblem of the shattering world.  
A pose? I could not hold it, say! I move  
From that high tower of private pathos hurled  
On the same street where all the others go,

But if I love, my love is general,  
To all suns tied, but not to any sun;  
My mind is still an emblem, but of man  
Weary at midday, but still standing tall  
To do whatever he has left undone,  
And then at night to find what peace he can. . . .

There's still a kind of headache, there is still  
A sort of setness in my walk and air,  
There's still sad hunger on my lonely lips.  
There's still the lonely poised considering will  
Watching those faces with their floating hair  
That pass from my horizon, like lost ships.

3

All this is egoism, as I know.  
Let me be sane and sensible and flat.  
Perhaps the healthy impulse will persist,  
Although it interrupts the lyric flow.  
All I have written might boil down to that—  
Well, nobody can love an egoist!

But you, my friend, I think, were always loved,  
Were always lucky in the natural mode  
And now your luck has turned to certainty:  
That was the impulse by which I was moved  
Before the horse ran that I thought I rode—  
To offer flowers to your felicity.

Lord, what a growler at a marriage feast!  
The grunts of a disgruntled bachelor,  
The envy of a wintry old maid!  
Accept our conscious courtesy at least  
Now we remember what the gathering's for  
And feel compunction for the parts we've played.

May you know all love's honey-sweet delights,  
May all your friends be happy as I am  
That new enrichment brings your gifts increase.  
May you walk happy on these summer nights  
By dappled willows on the quiet Cam  
And may the warm arches bless your peace.

G. S. FRASER

## ODE ABOVE WINCHESTER

Is it a year now since our bodies lay  
in Hampshire under the dark uncorniced sky,  
lapped in the fume and humour of the earth?  
Hours like pulses ticked our history by,  
a sleepless fever burned the dews away.

Flung on those grassy prongs of joy and grief,  
nomads of the roofless tempestuous steppe,  
we were the agony our future was,  
the hope, love, fear, and the blood's quick leap  
up the prophetic vein to chart our death.

Living and loving there we had good cause.  
Though over the water from Southampton's shore  
a national order fell and the last bomb  
crushed out an army, our hearts were sure  
in that interminable night of sterner laws.

O government of grass, green parliament,  
tree, tongue of bird, wood, tragic wind,  
in your democracy we filled our lung,  
learnt political passion, were first kind,  
spun the whole world in the brain's firmament.

Yours was the universe we waited for,  
brilliant sunlight and a thousand birds  
swinging their pinions over Dorsetshire.  
From time's historical most bitter words  
we built the poetry we suffer for.

So in this ode is an incredible year,  
the whole agony our future was, the song  
the bird whistled over the French pasture.  
At dawn's danger we rose from the grassy prong  
and rode down with Alfred into Winchester.

*May, 1941*

J. C. HALL

## TROLL'S COURTSHIP

I am a lonely Troll after my gala night;  
I have knocked down houses and stamped my feet on the people's heart,  
I have trundled round the sky with the executioner's heart  
And dropped my bait for corpses, watched them bite,  
But I am a lonely Troll—nothing in the end comes right.

In a smoking and tinkling dawn with fires and broken glass  
I am a lonely Troll; my tributes are in vain  
To Her to whom if I had even a human brain  
I might have reached but, as it is, the epochs pass  
And leave me unfulfilled, no further than I was.

Because I cannot accurately conceive  
Any ideal, even ideal Death,  
My curses and my boasts are merely a waste of breath,  
My lusts and lonelinesses grunt and heave  
And blunder round among the ruins that I leave.

Yet from the lubber depths of my unbeing I  
Aspire to Her who was my Final Cause but who  
Is always somewhere else and not to be spoken to,  
Is always nowhere: which is in the long run why  
I make for nowhere, make a shambles of the sky.

Nostalgia for the breasts that never gave nor could  
Give milk or even warmth has desolated me,  
Clutching at shadows of my nullity  
That slink and mutter through the leafless wood  
Which thanks to me is dead, is dead for good.

A cone of ice enclosing liquid fire,  
Utter negation in a positive form,  
That would be how She is, the nadir and the norm  
Of dissolution and the constant pyre  
Of all desirable things—that is what I desire

And therefore cry to Her with the voice of broken bells  
To come, visible and palpable to come,  
Gluing my ear to gutted walls but walls are dumb,  
All I can catch is a gurgle as of the sea in shells  
But not Her voice—for She is always somewhere else.

LOUIS MACNEICE

## AUTUMN SONG

Sycamores must fade,  
Yellow acorns be lost,  
Before this ghost be laid  
In earth, in frost.

Then will this Jack of green  
With mouth of leaves, this mummer  
Be no more seen,  
Sunk with the Summer.

Though now the stops he shuts  
With minstrelsy  
Slant eyes of buried nuts  
Can hardly see,

Then shall his hands be taught.  
Hush, he'll forget  
How the blue sloes were caught  
In grasses wet.

And here, where meet  
The lines of heart and head,  
Where softest words are sweet,  
Words for the dead,

His cap of light, his bells  
Shall faded play  
Among the broken shells  
In disarray.

VERNON WATKINS

## WHITSUN, 1940

The world remains on the other side of the fence.  
A thousand miles away pain is intense.  
We look with one eye through the shuttered lens.

People in London crawl into their cells.  
The bird-watchers move homeward on the fells.  
The doctor measures an uneven pulse.

Lovers and gamblers make their usual play.  
In a backroom a docker says "To-day."  
Men dressed in black are praying for a war.

Sleepless and furious, scorbutic boys  
Turn the old pages. *Do you hear the noise  
The mouse makes in the cupboard while it gnaws?*

*Whose is the voice that says to you Consent?  
What was the stranger's name, the way he went?  
Why does this house move in a mortal wind?*

*What is your present hope and childhood fear?  
Whose quick eye bled, the blood became a tear?  
Why from the cut hand issues blood, not fire?*

Too many questions without answers which  
Make the hand flutter or the eyelid twitch.  
Our compensation is the sense of touch,

Convincing tyros that the real is real,  
The absolute is pain we do not feel;  
So count this night the silly stars until

Those stars are fallen in the minutes' grip,  
The clock's stroke falls and makes the senses slip,  
The world and body turn, and fall asleep.

JULIAN SYMONS

#### DUNKIRK PIER

Deeply across the waves of our darkness fear  
like the silent octopus feeling, groping, clear  
as a star's reflection, nervous and cold as a bird,  
tells us that pain, tells us that death is near.

Why should a woman telling above her fire  
incantations of evening, thoughts that are  
older and paler than history, why should this lark  
exploring extinction and oneness of self and air

remind us that, lonely and lost as flowers in deserted  
weed-mastered gardens, each faint face averted  
from the inescapable confusion, for each of us slowly  
death on his last, most hideous journey has started?

What was our sin?—that heartless to the end  
falls now the heavy sickle on foe, on friend,  
and those that we love, value and regret  
surrender quickest to death's empty hand.

Failure to suffer? We who in years past  
have suffered, yes, in this or that, but in the last  
irrevocable act of suffering, as a dog suffers deeply,  
blindly, completely, are not versed.

What hope for the future? Can we who see the tide  
ebbing along the shore, the greedy, lined  
with shadows, dare with puny words support  
a future which belongs to others? Dare we bind

now, at this last moment of sunshine above  
the crests of oncoming events, like waves which move  
remorselessly nearer, future generations  
with sacrifice? *We* who taught hate, expect them to love?

ALAN ROOK

#### IN A GARDEN

Had I pen, ink and paper,  
I think that they could carry  
The weight of all these roses,  
These rocks and massive trees.  
The hills weigh quietly on my mind  
And the caved skull encloses  
Shifting shadows and lights.  
Soft on the flesh all the green scene reposes  
But that the singing of those birds  
Pressed to the hot wall of the sky,  
Rends through the listening eye  
To a space beyond words.

STEPHEN SPENDER



## HERO

hero went down as naked as a nail,  
storm-bound under the isles his hairy spar,  
to probe with a paddle and a needle  
to westward and westward, this was his curse,  
forgetting the gulls and the barking star,  
the holy syrup-tree outside his house,  
for legend moved in him her dark luggage—  
the widow was left like a bell-tongued harp.

now let the philosopher tease the mouse.  
this dead stone island and continual spray!  
boils the soft commotion of the waters!  
we consider at night Orion's diagram  
now when Sirius the dog barks in his kennel.  
O who forgives our man his olive and hunger?  
the lashes of him like tar of Lesbos.  
O render him to the chair, the family urn.

Render him, sea-green women, forgive,  
one that was suckled of the mulberry-twigg.  
give like the personal signal of the body  
to she who scents him like the compass-pin.  
the times have small tune to them now,  
and memory's fig-tree grows in the rock,  
crawls from the womb, her only patron.  
the thought of him stiffens no tall twig.

now this is matrimony for the worm,  
when snow burks the beautiful bud,  
the sea's great axle on the groaning sponge,  
his deep-sea fruit in the fig's womb.  
vinegar is the memory and lances  
that hero went as small as a mouse's foot  
to the chart's end in a pinewood coffin,  
where no man kisses his stone or sips his blood.

1936

LAURENCE DURRELL

## TO EDWARD THOMAS

*(On visiting the memorial stone above Steep)*

On the way up from Sheet I met some children  
Filling a pram with brushwood; higher still,  
Beside Steep church, an old man pointed out  
A small white stone upon a flinty spur  
Projecting from the high autumnal woods. . .  
I doubt if much has changed since you came here  
On your last leave; except the stone; it bears  
Your name and trade: "To Edward Thomas, Poet."

### II

Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew  
My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift  
Much less, my hope  
No more than yours,  
And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,  
Lonely and exalted with the friendship of the wind  
And the silent afternoon enfolding  
The dangerous future and the smile.

### III

I sat and watched the dusky berried ridge  
Of yew trees, deepened by oblique dark shafts,  
Throw back the flame of red and gold and russet  
That leapt from beech and ash to birch and chestnut  
Along the downward arc of the hill's shoulder,  
And sunlight streaming from the wind-blown branches  
Softly explore the distant wooded acres  
And plotted tilth, and with discerning fingers  
Touch the white farmsteads one by one with lightness  
Until it reached the Downs, whose soft green pastures  
Went slanting sea- and sky-wards to the edge  
Where sight surrenders and the mind alone  
Can find the sheeps' tracks and the grazing.  
And for that moment Life appeared  
As lovely as the view I gazed upon.

### III

Later, a whole day later, I remembered  
This war and yours and your weary  
Circle of failure and your striving  
To make articulate the groping voices  
Of snow and rain and dripping branches  
And love that ailing in itself cried out  
About the straggling eaves and ringed the candle  
With shadows slouching round your buried head;  
And in the waiting room there was no ease  
For you, or Helen, or those small perplexed  
Children of yours who only wished to please. . . .

### V

Divining this, I knew the voice that called you  
Was soft and neutral as the sky's  
Arc or the grey horizon, stronger  
Than Night's immediate grasp, the limbs of mercy  
Oblivious as the blood, and growing sharper,  
More urgent as all else dissolved away—  
Projected books, half-thoughts, the children's birthdays  
And wedding anniversaries as cold  
As dates in history—the dream  
Emerging from the fact, and farther still,  
The fact beyond that dream,  
The endless rides of stormy-branched dark  
Whose fibres are a thread within the hand—

Till suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land.

ALUN LEWIS

## THRENODY FOR A STARRY NIGHT

White frost; intricate bare branches  
Glittering with distant candles,  
Glowworms in the frozen hair  
Of dead soldiers;  
And on the broken arch of night  
The Babylonian planets tell  
The unromantic death of Keats.

The woman from the Egyptian rock-tomb  
With the hawk's head and the chaste body  
Has taken the frozen soldiers into her silence.  
Her mood is Pity; from the ice-bound poles  
Of cynical Eternity she turns  
Her head and weeps.  
The dew is falling over Europe.  
The diplomats wear astrakhan.

Beauty is hardness, ice.  
All sons, all lovers  
Death divides for ever, ever . . .  
Only the lilies of the field  
And this glittering tree endure  
This silence ever. . . .

## II

The boy who climbed the creaking stair  
And floated on a couch at last  
In that sordid attic found  
His soul was rifled. Stumbling down,  
Sobbing into the street he fled  
Familiar things. His body  
Is penitent in khaki.

He disapproved Christ's chastity,  
Chose warmth  
Of loins, afraid to burn  
Obedient martyr to a rigid creed;  
Yet found  
Christ crucified bequeathed  
His agony to us.

### III

Polish girls singing, in the wind's southing:  
We cannot go back. We dare not meet  
The strangeness of our friendly street  
Whose ruins lack  
The clean porch, the shoe-scraper,  
The Jewboy selling the evening paper,  
The bow-window with the canary,  
The house with a new baby,  
The corner where our sweethearts waited  
While we combed our hair.  
We cannot return there.

By the mutilated smile,  
By milkteeth smashed,  
Love is outcast.  
We choose the vast  
Of dereliction which we fill  
With grey affliction that shall spill  
Out of our private parts like sawdust  
From broken dolls.

### IV

Socrates on the frozen lake  
Sat awhile and heard, disconsolate,  
The blind unnerving harmonies of fate.  
And always in Shakespearean tragedy  
The foils are poisoned that the good may die.

### V

Now only beggars still go singing  
And birds in forests.  
We who are about  
A mass rearming for mass-martyrdom  
Are punctual and silent.

Where sweet eyes were  
Now are hollow craters.  
Love's torn head in lassitude  
Lies on the pillow,  
And sister Ophelia, over-worked,  
Sings willow, green willow.

VI

Sweet Mother Church, beleagured on the hill  
Of hesitation half accepts  
The amorous Protestant, but waits  
A Balkan revelation. For the rest  
She fits her soul to sacrifice  
Countless humble peasant Christs.  
And hobnailed soldiers smash the cracked mosaics  
Of cross and crescent in the ravished fane.

VII

Lovers who among the grasses  
Found the soul's sweet fernseed on their bodies,  
Cross themselves now in superstition  
Beneath the grinning and exalted gargoyles.

Perplexed with histories they wander  
And seek in Palestinian lanes  
The vast immortal Love of Other,  
Till from the stone there grows a cross,  
And dark conflicting shadows lengthening out  
Like evening on the turbid centuries.

VIII

This stunted pine whose knotted roots  
Suck water from the arid path,  
Which drops its cones in season, breeding new,  
More simply speaks the truth of it than we.

For we maintained  
The state must wither in the end  
And soon forget  
That fire withers most  
Armies as flowers, frail as summer cities;  
Our passions scattered, yellow wasted leaves  
Among the valleys suave with evening ease.

We were the daylight and we could not see.

Yet now at last in shelter tube and street  
Communal anguish banishes  
Individual defeat.  
Now in the crowded deadly places  
Indifferent profiles have become  
Beautiful tormented faces.

IX

The white brain crossing  
The frontiers of darkness  
To darkness and always  
Darkness pursuing,  
Finds asylum in a timeless  
Traumatic anguish where the planets  
Stay at the stations where they gathered  
In darkness of Creation,  
Imperishable stars, the points of song,  
Night's orchard budding in a lonely girl  
Who sings in the throat of the thrush.

And in the dark the sensitive blind hands  
Fashion the burning pitch of night  
In lovely images of dawn.  
The soldiers' frozen sightless eyes  
End the mad feud. The worm is love.

ALUN LEWIS

POST-SCRIPT: FOR GWENO

If I should go away,  
Beloved, do not say  
"He has forgotten me."  
For you abide,  
A singing rib within my dreaming side;  
*You always stay.*  
And in the mad tormented valley  
Where blood and hunger rally  
And Death the wild beast is uncaught, untamed,  
Our soul withstands the terror  
And has its quiet honour  
Among the glittering stars your voices named.

ALUN LEWIS

POEM FROM LLANYBRI

IF YOU COME MY WAY THAT IS. . . .

Between now and then, I will offer you  
A fist full of rock cress fresh from the bank  
The valley tips of garlic red with dew  
Cooler than shallots, a breath you can swank

In the village when you come! At noon-day  
I will offer you a choice bowl of cowl  
Served with a "lover's" spoon and a chopped spray  
Of leeks or savori fach, not used now

In the old way you'll understand! The din  
Of children singing through the eyelet sheds  
Ringing 'smith hoops, chasing the butt of hens;  
Or I can offer you Cwmcelyn spread

With quartz stones, from the wild scratchings of men;  
You will have to go carefully with clogs  
Or thick shoes for its treacherous the fen,  
The East and West Marshes also have bogs.

Then I'll do the lights, fill the lamp with oil  
Get coal from the shed, water from the well;  
Pluck and draw pigeon with crop of green foil  
This your good supper from the lime-tree fells.

A sit by the hearth with blue flames rising,  
No talk. Just a stare at "Time" gathering  
Healed thoughts, pool insight, like a swan sailing  
Peace and sound around the home, offering

You a night's rest and my day's energy.  
You must come Alun start this pilgrimage,  
Can you come?—send an ode or elegy  
In the old way and raise our Heritage.

LYNETTE ROBERTS

NOTE.—Cwmcelyn: pronounced Coom-kel-in.



“Es Gibt nur eine Einsamkeit, und die  
schwer zu tragen. . . .”--*Rilke*

There is but one loneliness,  
no more, no less, and it  
is hard to bear.

We live in loneliness, broken bridge of death  
to which our caterpillar motions cling  
feeling outwards, so, so,  
we have taught our souls to sing, and learned  
the weariness of waiting  
for the ripened fruit, the flower.

We have learned at last to love the flame  
that banishes propinquity of thought and deed, snaps  
the shrill stem of laughter.

We live in separation, broken bridge of death,  
to which our caterpillar motions cling,  
feeling, outwards, so, so,  
with a small madness,  
feeling round the rim of what is not,  
that is but a little space, dividing leaf and leaf,  
and seems eternity.

JAMES H. KIRKUP

### MOORLAND

Here black-skulled sheep  
fix wild honeyed eyes,  
copulate with mask-like gaze  
on rosy-rooted rainbow grass.

From their steamy sleep  
among high stones where water  
once rolled away and made the hillsides,  
they gallop on black-booted legs

into white-spined articulate roads;  
or on hillsides, with chugging grouse,  
collect dubiously, cough like men:  
shudder, hiding their bright red sores.

JAMES H. KIRKUP

## LINES WRITTEN IN AN AIR-RAID

Look, friend, how the hostile day  
Raffles reality about our love.  
Say to me all you never meant to say,  
For I know, now, all you were ever thinking of.  
Look in my eyes, and not the other way  
To the sky, where the clouds are set as gigantic chess  
And the planes between, as a player's fingers, move.  
Kiss me, before all breaks. Let me touch your dress.  
If we must die, then let it be of love,  
And set the whole world trembling as we kiss.

FRANCIS SCARFE

## TRAWLERS

Red sail on tan sail and black sail by white  
Swell and swing out of the banking green river  
Heeling the squattest of Tyne trawlers over.  
Set south-east by east on a moonlit night  
Veer, haul and tack, trim canvas trim deck,  
Till you gather the silver nets, pack the catch tight  
And ride home with the dawn and the wind at your back.

1941.

FRANCIS SCARFE

## GENTLY NOW IN MY GARDEN

*For Tambimuttu*

Gently now in my garden the flowers are waving  
Like dancers to my heartbeat, and the wind is gentle.  
Flowers that sprang from nowhere, why should I worry,  
You who are bound to the soil and wasted on the air  
On the vast air that spoils you like a lover,  
Why am I sorry for you, flowers, why should I care  
That you are dancing now from birth to death?  
You remind me of a friend I have always had  
But never met till yesterday, and to-day left,  
And whose heart beats, far away, with the rhythm of mine.

FRANCIS SCARFE

## POEM

The seat in the park  
Is the arc of a bleak mountain  
Where a voice speaks, crying:  
Life was anguish,  
This knife my meat.

O remember me  
When snows tangle  
The frigid tree.

Love me become  
The fickle falling to loam,  
When your children in the sun  
Sing that the birds are calling  
You home where you never will come.

All I rooted  
In the hard mountain  
The crystal blackened  
With sorrow for its fate.

In the longtime of waiting  
For birth I died  
With this knife biting pride  
Between my teeth.

AUDREY BEECHAM

## BALLAD OF THE RANTING LAD

He built him a home, the rascalion lad,  
In a turned-up boat on a lonely shore,  
And peopled it with a prince's dream,  
Was happy in rags if the fire burned clear.

He took him a wife, this bright-eyed boy,  
With snowy breast and golden hair,  
And they laughed the length of a summer's day  
If pear-tree bore and the fish leaped fair.

He got him a boy, young devil-may-care,  
To talk to and dangle upon his knee,  
And gave him a name and a cloak of wool,  
And gospels heard in the words he would say.

Then wild waves broke and broke the home,  
And fever came for the golden child.  
When grey dawn knocked, in her workhouse shift,  
The girl lay stiff as a stone with cold.

But the rollicking boy, the rapscallion lad,  
Took up his stick, made a fool of his pain,  
And walked on the hills with a dream in his sack,  
Of a house and a wife and a twittering bairn.

HENRY TREECE

#### PILGRIM

I step from a land no eye has seen  
To a land no hand may ever hold:  
My name with sea's cold tears is green,  
My words are the wind's words graved in gold.

This scrip upon my back holds hearts  
That saw their hero in a dream:  
This staff is ward against the darts  
That stiffen trout in silver stream.

So, pilgrim, continents I tread,  
The cross-bones in my heart for rood,  
Breaking the shepherd's dusty bread,  
The brittle beech-leaves in the wood.

HENRY TREECE

## POEM

Out here on the sea I hear the wind and the night  
Ruffle the hair of the dead, the beat  
Of black wings among the stars  
Hearing the dirl of ship and wave  
Only hearing, hearing the snore of the sea  
The gurgle of ocean in drowned women is it, I hear  
The wind or the wave or the night or the dead  
The dead who suck at my ears with the wind  
The eyeless priest and the gored nun  
Sleeping deep in the slime of the tomb  
Or the wail of a hanged monk  
Over the rumble of wheels  
In the bowels of the sea, the spiked  
And spitted souls of children crying through the fog?  
But here I am hearing the storm-wind sing in my bones  
Meaning business, and I am glad, I'm listening, listening.

*December, 1940*

TOM SCOTT

## CHURCHILLIAN ODE

The years grew tares, for we did not tend them.  
Time was eaten by moths in an age of gold  
And the sun eclipsed in a cloud of ignorance.  
The hours sprang holes as we stared, until now, the last,  
We clasp in our hands a sheaf of bluebells in place  
Of the rifle, and all our moments of laughter are frozen  
Amid flaming towns, their echoes chill as the shadow of soul's vengeance.

I bring you no song, no troubadour, but a hymn  
Of embattled fury and anthems of fortitude to beat back  
Piebald panic, calculation's treachery, lunacy's assault,  
The seven fretful seas of disloyalty and abdication in high places.  
I offer you inspiration in crates of munitions. My poems are  
Cool water to drink in bomb-craters. I erect wires of barbed  
Speech in action to cripple the deliberate hunter of human freedom.

You will pardon us, Hitler, if perhaps our laughter is red.  
If your soldiers, laughing with us, choke, and halt  
As the blood bubbles trumpets in their throats. You will  
Certainly pardon the laughter you launched as slaughter.  
We still have a mind toward sun and essential joy, although  
Giants carouse and skirl on our reeling horizon's fire.  
You will pardon this soldier's Belgian doll, and those who fought in flowers.

I might recite the names of cities with the culture of the tongues  
Of centuries: Wien: Praha: Warszawa: Rotterdam: towns murdered  
Like fair women by a cut-purse snuffing the crumbs of ruin,  
Recite to no purpose. For Amiens burns to-day and Paris to-morrow.  
Time is afire with terror in the forest of our streets and  
Eloquence marshals clearings arresting death's advance,  
Cuts channels, floods dykes, builds a citadel for a people in arms.

Though all the air is calamitous with weeping, O Hitler,  
Silt of your wreckage, an ambition's debacle, and the debris  
Piles inanity upon insanity too torn for the mind to understand—  
Yet I hear our horns at sea blare troopships.  
I listen where whispers of victory drown the sirens of anguish,  
And through the fog of murderous dreams,  
Drifting up, acrid and brown, I see the merciful,  
Miraculous dissolution of bombast and lust in an elemental Marlborough.

J. F. HENDRY

*May, 1940*

#### VIEW

Though the leaves crowd, in galaxies of shaken stars,  
Driving towards my window like a clipper-ship,  
I turn away. In our society  
Men demand surfeit of food, a place to sleep.  
We cannot learn from leaves to live on air.

Though flowers are without desire, and all fruit falls soon after  
Fellowed, we live fearfully, hoard ourselves in lovers.  
Our societies are not trees,  
Nor have we joy like these tempestuous shivering leaves, or  
Their collaboration of bells in untold laughter.

J. F. HENDRY

#### LOVE IN THE ASYLUM

A stranger has come  
To share my room in the house not right in the head,  
A girl mad as birds  
  
Bolting the night of the door with her arm her plume.  
Strait in the mad bed  
She deludes the heaven-proof house with entering clouds.

Yet she deludes with walking the nightmarish room,  
At large as the dead,  
Or rides the imagined oceans of the male wards.

She has come possessed  
Who admits the delusive light through the bouncing wall,  
Possessed by the skies

She sleeps in the narrow trough yet she walks the dust  
Yet raves at her will  
On the madhouse boards worn thin by my walking tears.

And taken by light in her arms at long and dear last  
I may without fail  
Suffer the first vision that set fire to the stars.

DYLAN THOMAS

#### POEM

We never can have enough of what is given  
For the moment will not hold, there is no place or manner  
Of keeping the sky in the place where the cloud-gap is a sword  
And even the stars are moving to less satisfactory positions.

There is the moment when the window is opened and orange air,  
Crinkled softly with the blackbird's song, water-still,  
Saunters quietly round the new leaves and dead branches;  
When the finger-eyes clutch and piano-ears grapple.

And the search would be long if the cold did not push back  
Or fear of the time draw away from the green-streaked and  
Water-colour sky; this night's bombers sounding small and silly  
And no longer ominous against a new backcloth.

But the heart creaks and plans ahead, planning  
For fairer futures, not daring to accept the present,  
When the shout is too loud and wishes drowned  
In too many seas and conditioning responses.

STEPHEN COATES

## POEM

I hold your face in my hands like a precious bubble  
With my wrists close together under your chin  
And the tips of my fingers on the tips of your eyes  
And your face comes off in your delicate grasp.

I carry this precious bubble in the box of my hands  
Like the metal moon couched in its wet tissue paper  
And brings it away with me, not sent in advance,  
So that here I may unpack it to remain with me.

How to protect this precious bubble when my guarding hands  
Are busy twittering among the tea-cups and cigarette talk  
Troubles the centres of my palms and worries  
The bend of my wrists under your chin.

But because I have held in my hands this precious bubble  
So that between my hands still lingers a round memory  
The pin and rough touch of this further wandering  
Can do no harm, can not break this steel-bound framework.

STEPHEN COATES

## NOW MORE AND MORE THAT THOUGHTS OF ARMS OPPRESS

*(For Tambimuttu)*

Now more and more that thoughts of arms oppress,  
    The tin-hat and the tommy-gun,  
Men moved up secretly behind the trees  
And soldiers in their ruins scrubbing floors,  
The child has entered into army lorries  
    From his mother's lap that cries,  
    And has sought more enemies  
    In the circle of her eyes.  
Now more and more the victory is won  
    By the unlucky one.



Hitler has come like nightmares to her bed,  
Naked and cold with war,  
His look upon her that she cannot bear,  
Nor can he bear to look: for in her heart  
The blood is pumping out a river red  
That means his death. He will not live  
More than his merry days of grief,  
Dying man, who cannot love.  
Now more and more the victory is won  
By the inconstant one.

O world that turns upon an axis, look  
And love your luckless one.  
The men that move behind the trunks of fire  
Are instrument but not intent of war.  
The soldier in his ruin scrubs the floors,  
Birth is close, when death is near,  
And her darling does not fear.  
Her peoples rising everywhere  
Show more and more that victory is won  
By the persistent one.

NICHOLAS MOORE

### BROTHER ASS

“He began to scourge himself with a cord, saying, Ah, brother ass,  
thus must thou be led, thus must thou submit unto the lash.”

The elm's loose limbs sway in the sun,  
And the luminous life of leaves is heard  
To offer a man the gift of sin  
In the small rejoicings of a bird.

Gay girls lie where the stripes of trees  
Cut the grass with whips of shade:  
With the holy blood upon my hands  
I swing the pure and bitter blade.

Oh, for a press of sour fruit  
To spoil the tongue in sweet surprise!  
I cry for a silence in my cars,  
And a cruel mountain for my eyes!

CLIFFORD DYMENT

## INSCRIPTION FOR A CALENDAR

On the world's Medusa-skull  
I see the snakey ringlets curl,  
And from each ear's peninsula  
The coiled plaits hiss across the brow.  
I feel the cloud-light fall like rain  
On lips and nostrils turned to stone,  
And words which once my tongue could speak  
Grow like lichen on my cheek.  
But still some pity trickles through  
The brittle mica of my eye,  
And, as they fall, the pebbly tears  
Slither through the shale of years.

Behind my spine I know that time  
Like sexton prises up the tomb,  
On a sarcophagus of frost  
He jigsaws with the bony past,  
Puts shoulder against rib again  
And builds tomorrow's skeleton.  
And in my heart my hands my head  
I know that bones will bud with blood,  
And flesh upon the gristle grow  
Like rings of new wood on a tree.  
Then my freestone face will crack  
For no Medusa-stare can check  
The blood that gushes through the veins  
Like acid, and dissolves the stones.  
Pain is realler on the cheeks  
Than devil's-tail-like tongues of snakes,  
And only Christ unfleshed atones  
In that re-fleshing of the bones.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

## SONNET

Endlessly falling the failing sands of my hours  
Drain shuddering to the unfathomable abyss,  
Through fingers filtering with a stealthy hiss  
They cannot catch or clasp for all their powers.  
I watch my life-glass, and the level lowers,  
Still the thin drifting of its purpose hastes,  
My sifted cities sloughed to desert wastes  
Which, stanchless still, Infinity devours.

O, had I certainty that Time's devouring  
Drained not all living through a bottomless glass,  
But in that process of incessant pouring  
Life poured within itself with no dispersal—  
That through these timeless hands might nothing pass  
That was not subject to a hand's reversal!

D. S. SAVAGE

### POEM

this field of sorrow, like the root of oak,  
is centred in the crystal of my loin  
so that the day, each moment, barking at the wood,  
is the swift strength of beauty in the sun,  
and all I feel is scattered on the soil,  
twisting with straw the pregnant nerves of mood.  
hours pass: stones can fall broken from a fist,  
anger be godly in its stern demand  
for sudden miracles; and the heathen good  
can like an absolute stand rooted in the rock:  
only my flesh, flayed, snaking in the sand,  
is weak, a wish for water-wounds, and blood,  
the sacrifice, and the potential end.  
so the moons rise about the emerald worlds,  
the crazy horse stamps with his horny feet;  
so the gentle shepherd paints his crook  
with sheep-drawn blood, and thrusts it in the night.

PETER WELLS

### No. 1 of LONDON ELEGIES

How could it help to say: rains never end—  
more colourless the word than it can mean.  
How could it help to say: the lads they put  
in battledress their arms will later on  
be severed from the shoulder, from the knee their foot, or else:  
that some will not return.  
(Thus on its playground can a child be lost)  
Who can weigh it all?

Did no tree ever break wild from the earth  
with whom you were one—like fire and smith—  
and would not leave you? So perhaps it does no good  
to stand in silence by the field and watch,  
stand like that sailboat in the Thames below  
Westminster where its mast tops touch embankment trees  
and closed to it are all the lower bridges.  
Only when autumn fog obliterates  
the features of all things, gives them new meaning,  
the goblins hoist their crimson sails. But fog remains.  
The ship goes home. And surely it can do no good  
to stand in silence by the homeland and to watch.

FRED MARNAU  
(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)

1939, OCTOBER

The land is freezing, soldiers line the station  
who have forgotten where their country is.  
The girls are dreaming of heroic actions  
and they know more of Death and Victories.

You stand at the station, waving your tears.  
The train leaves, now smoke is all you can see.  
No angels now, to go down on their knee  
and love: they also know fear.

Horror is knocking at every door  
and through our window throws its grudge.  
The blind man must be led over the bridge,  
but we are tired and cannot see any more.  
The grass grows yellow and the seas are weary,  
tonight the night is filled with jazzy blare.  
On the dark waters swims the moon, the ferry  
taking with it the fear and the war.

FRED MARNAU  
(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)

## LOVESONG

Southwinds blow, lover.  
I bring you cherries, tender fruit and mellow wine.  
I slept in the heather—snow chased me off.  
I love hot lips and cool hands.

Southwinds blow. I stagger drunkenly, lover!  
Yes, I am drunk, too fresh in these stormy fields  
and heavy still like driftwood in autumnal waters,  
for I come from the North, from the land  
of the shouting songs and the white men who are ashamed  
of sin and sadly wander about in their desolate towns.

Southwinds blow.  
Milder stars drift to the frigid zones  
Do not be cold, lover—southwinds are like warm breath.  
Lead me, lover, for my breast is glowing sand,  
desert sand.  
My gait is heavy, I am ill and broken.

I will keep wine in cool cellars,  
I will learn to smile and to sin,  
I will bring flowers from the slopes;  
I will kiss the dew off your lips.

Heal me, lover, for I am tired,  
I came ailing from the North  
into southerly winds.

Lover with her little mouth of sun  
and her loins like swaying palm-trees:  
I will call you Peter, Black Peter!  
and slowly darken in your sun,  
in your heavy, half-closed eyes.

FRED MARNAU

*(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)*

## HOUSE IN CARPATHO-RUSSIA

The dead are bathing in the air,  
the table steals, sucks in all warmth,  
like a white grave stone stands the bed:  
and only you, your mouth, remains

and no-one gives a smile, alas,  
somewhere a silent carriage waits.  
The wind throws rags up on the roof,  
the window looks at you: friend, stay awake!  
for death has won you in a game of dice.

FRED MARNAU

*(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)*

## MARY

Mary, straw in the stable was your bed  
and now with the kings you are well acquainted.  
But sometimes still you are blazing red  
and through the dark with which our lives are painted  
you see all, see them raw and naked.

And everything has fallen from God's hands.  
When he began the world he gave his blood.  
He can no longer understand his ends.  
Alas, how he spoke proudly then: the work is good!  
and bade the angels squandering commence!

Death lurked about in the beginning,  
sat in the garden's grasses killing time  
and thought the poppies' sultry red most pleasing.  
But God was in love, he had a dream  
and could not hear the voices' scornful grinning.

Mary, let him sleep now, let the old man lie.  
A storm has devastated world and bliss.  
Drunken the boats out of the harbour sway,  
Death is a big man now, he owns a horse,  
his coat's aflame, God will be punished cruelly.

And he will cover Heaven with his coat  
and put his hand upon God's mouth and eyes,  
drive like a lord the angels off the road—  
Mary, lips of God, of no more use,  
O give no kiss! Give rain and endless night.

FRED MARNAU

*(Translated by E. O. SIGLER)*

Objective Reporters was pseudo-scientific because it did not take into account the individuality of the poet which comprises conscious and unconscious factors whose exact nature we do not as yet know. Human activities are regulated by a double series of imperatives which may be tabulated conveniently as follows:

ACTIVITIES		IMPERATIVES
Thought	Cultural	{ Truth Goodness Beauty
Will		
Sentiment		
		Vital
		{ Sincerity Emotional Drive Enjoyment

Cultural standards or objectivity is therefore not enough, and it should be completed by *self-consistency*, which comprises the whole series of vital imperatives. A work of art may be beautiful for geometrical reasons, and may be objectively of great value, but it must also induce enjoyment in us. Similarly in politics or poetry, a concept may seem true for geometrical or cultural reasons, but it must also inspire absolute faith in us, which is the best ground for its existence. This was where the

Objective Reporters erred. They lost their self-consistency and created their works according to objective laws of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, which rationally seemed the best. In other words, they sacrificed their spontaneous convictions to the demands of culture. The poetry of these machine-men was therefore lacking in those spontaneous and traditional qualities in verse which result from a recognition of the Vital Imperatives. You can neither live nor write according to formula that is not first related to life and consistent with it.

The mission, then, of the living poets is the shouldering of this problem and the demonstration that culture, reason, art are biological functions also, and as such cannot be solely directed by objective laws or laws independent of life, but must be subject to the laws of life; in poetry we should find that Objective standards of Beauty are not enough and that these should conform to vitality, localised within the biological scheme, and surrendered to spontaneity.

5.vi.1941.

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*The Seventh Letter will be written*  
by FRANCIS SCARFE

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## Corkscrew or Footrule?

*Some Notes on the Poetry of Dylan Thomas*

"The poetry of Dylan Thomas induces a great number of images in my mind. Sometimes it is the rotting flower held in the claw of a grave-breaking madman whose head swims with the goatish clangour of iron bells and the sugared voices of Welsh cherubim. Sometimes it is the musing of a pompous old gentleman, who still remembers the fervour of his early love for the Elizabethan poets and the Ballads.

"Then, again, it is the terror-stricken nightmare of a young boy, whose horrid dream chains him to a hard Nonconformist bed, while an ogre, disguised as a Wesleyan preacher, bellows unhallowed gospels in his ear. . . .

"It is the baby found in the death-bed, the corpse in the cradle, love dripping from the edge of a sword, hate in a kiss, alpha and omega, never-ending—and never really beginning."

(From an Essay by myself in *The Tramp*, U.S.A.)

During the last few years a deal of nonsense has been written about Dylan Thomas, and, as I am aware, I have been responsible for some of it. When, in 1937, I printed an essay on the poetry of Thomas, Mr. Philip Mairet, in whose paper this work appeared, said to me kindly, "But really, it's early days yet to be assessing Dylan." In my enthusiasm I faintly resented the good sense of that comment—yet with a resentment in no way comparable to that which I felt when, two years later, I was called a *pre-natal clinic* by *New Verse*, which had just got to hear that I had written a whole book on the poetry of Dylan Thomas!

And now, in 1941, I realise, in a vaguely amusing sort of way, that I actually had spoken out of my turn. I also realise, with an equal amusement, that I am not the only one to have done so. For example, there was Edith Sitwell, who spoke of the "huge scale" of Thomas' early poems, just as tritely as those lesser creatures who think of architecture as frozen music; there was Stephen Spender, who believed that Thomas' poems dripped,

like water out of a tap; Julian Symons, who complimented Thomas on his ability to twist his words to the shape of the readers' tears; Porteus, who found that these same words reminded him of "an uncondemned tour of Bedlam, or a night out in the land of gibbering highbrows"; and last, James Agate, whose criticism took the form of very weak parodies, which he professed to be the work of "a young modern poet."

Even the best-intentioned of us have been beaten in our attempts to assess Thomas, and he, characteristically, has done little to help. True, he has stated his Freudian delight in revealing hidden causes, and he once told me: "I hold a beast, an angel and a madman in me, and my enquiry is as to their working, and my problem is their subjugation and victory, and my effort is their self-expression." Not a bad start, until he says, "The poem is its own question and answer, its own contradiction, its own agreement. I ask only that my poetry should be taken *literally*. A poem moves only towards its own end, which is the last line."

"I ask only that my poetry should be taken *literally*," he says. The test is only too easily applicable—and the result finds the reader back at his starting-point, with a head full of fine sounds and a private symbolism unknown previously to literature.

No, that won't do; it's just another urchin snook cocked at the Parson; it's the naughty word, the *Llareggub* written oh so neatly on the rectory wall; a spring to catch woodcocks, a gin for the teetotal critical fatbottoms.

What then is his achievement so far; what has he done?

Take away the romantic myth—the Chattertonian five years to live—the magnificent



Irving voice, the Celtic double-talk and the self-dramatising bohemianism, and what have we left? What are the elements which may objectively be isolated in his poetry?

First, there is the debt to Hopkins, a source suspected by few in the early days of *Eighteen Poems*, and even in the later days of *Twenty-five Poems*, but an indispensable one all the same. Generally, the two poets have a common attitude, and Charles Williams' words on Hopkins apply equally well to Thomas. There is, he says, "a passionate intellect which is striving at once to recognise and explain both the singleness and the division of the accepted universe." "A passionate emotion which seems to try to utter all its words in one." And, to these must be added, "a passionate sense of the details of the world without and the world within, a passionate consciousness of all kinds of experience."

Now this melopœia, this rush of fine words to the head, and more especially to the tongue, this paradoxical cosmic anarchism are the obvious mainsprings of Thomas' work, his recognition of which would have come ultimately had Hopkins never written a word. But, his manner of treating this recognition, this tension which externalises itself in verbal warfare,\* could not have been achieved, but for the experiments of the Jesuit priest. It is not hard to find convincing examples of this debt, especially in Thomas' first two books:

Hopkins: "manshape, womb-life, heartsore, re-winded, uncumbered, star-eyed, Jackself, manwolf, bonehouse."

Thomas: "manshape, womb-eyed, heartbore, re-suffered, unsucked, star-gestured, Jack Christ, man-iron, bonerail."

There are also such similar phrases and images as these:

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\* "A poem of mine is a water-tight section of the stream which is flowing all ways; all *warring* images within it should be reconciled for a small stop of time."  
(Dylan Thomas, in a letter to me.)

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me. (Hopkins)

Sewn to me by nerve and brain,  
Had stringed my flask of matter on his rib.—(Thomas)

And all the time there is the same "terror of expectation," the same race of words, "as the line hurries on our emotion," while "our minds are left behind."

There are even the same poetic blind-spots: "Stirred for a bird," says Hopkins. "Grief thief of time," answers Thomas.

What then has Hopkins got that Thomas hasn't? First, a mysticism which derives from the outside world of objects accessible to all, fused by the religious intensity of his saintly nature; in place of a sense of mystery which springs from a personal and private horror fired by the exultation of the introvert. Secondly, and dependent on the external world of God's birds, beasts and men, "The rise, the roll, the carol, the creation," a form of pure lyricism which Thomas' explorations of the Interior must ever forbid.

The next important element in Thomas' work is, I believe, his use of Welsh metrical forms—and it is even possible that he learnt them secondhand from Hopkins, who was notoriously attracted by them. In the form called *cynganedd sain*, the poet is required to divide his lines into three parts, making first and second parts rhyme, and second and third parts alliterate:

Na merch *bach*/na *gwraeb*/na *gwraig*.

which appears in Hopkins as:

The down-*dugged*/ground *hugged*/grey.

and in Thomas as:

Let her inhale her *dead*/through *seed*/and solid.

There is yet another form of *cynganedd*, in which the consonants used in the first half of the line shall be repeated in the second:

Dros fy *mhl*/ar draws fy *mhlwyf*.

which is in Hopkins:

blood-gush/blade gash.

and in Thomas, in an inverted form:

sigh long, clay/cold, lie shown.

That Thomas does not observe the purest canons of Welsh prosody will surprise no-one who has observed the liberties which he has so often taken with the English sonnet form; nor, in one so individual, is this necessarily a fault.

What may surprise some enthusiasts, however, is the third element which I shall isolate in Thomas' poetry—the influence of Hart Crane, who has alone provided Thomas with what used to be looked on as the Welsh writer's personal vocabulary. None of the following examples would be in the least way out of place in either of Thomas' first books:

"Twin-shadowed halves: the breaking second holds . . ."  
 "Brother in the half . . ."  
 "the plummet heart . . . like Absalom, no stream."  
 "blown blood and vine . . ."  
 "O brother thief of time" (Grief thief of time!)

Thomas insists that the similarity is fortuitous, thus leaving another problem to be solved by any interested critic.

And, finally, before I proceed to the generalities of Thomas' poetry, there is the undoubted influence of Henry Miller's prose. This is an element to which no-one has paid any attention previously, and which I can scarcely approach in an article on poetry. I will be content to state that any who are able to examine Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* will find in it the same apocalyptic chaos, resolving itself frequently into a startling but almost unbearably true imagery, the same cumulative rhetoric, the same search after a totality of experience, and the same consecration to those phases of sex, disease and death which characterise both Thomas' poetry and his prose.

Elsewhere there are Biblical echoes:

And death shall have no dominion . . .

In the beginning was the three-pointed star . . .

allusions to Gabriel, Aaron, Jordan and Jacob: there are classical names: Caesar, Venus, Medusa, Triton, Neptune, Virgil; geographical

notes on Cairo, Asia, the Nile, the Dead Sea, and Capricorn; a few "ghosts," of Shakespeare—

Time shall not murder you . . .  
 Nor the green nought be dead.

(Age shall not wither her, nor custome stale. . . .)  
 some ballad semblances:

In Spring we cross our foreheads with the holly,  
 Heigh ho the blood and the berry,  
 And nail the merry squires to the trees. . . .

reminiscences of Swinburne—

In the snuffed and poured snow on the tip of the  
 tongue of the year.

odd scraps of Anglo-Saxon metres:

No man more magical/clawed out the crocodile.  
 bits of Blake (including "Mnetha"), and a host of snippets of half-remembered folk-lore, mythology, science (Davy's lamp), domestic plumbing, adventure stories, children's tales, magic and religion. In fact, the whole glorious rag-tag-and-bobtail of a liberal, but early-discontinued, secondary school training, pepped up with a shot or two of gangster talk, school-room wit ("Cockerel's egg"), onanistic naughtiness ("rehearsing heat upon the raw-edged nerve"), sexual puns ("the muscling-in of love") . . . the "living language of the streets, the pullulating life which is absent from the thin wisps of sophistication which serve for higher culture," as Harold Nicolson wrote on James Joyce . . . the whole being held together and even elevated by a sense of sheer horror equal to anything that Bosch or Breughel could ever have known.

## II.

What then is Thomas' independent contribution to literature? It is, first of all the gift of a new poetic kingdom—that of the pre-natal world, a territory previously unexplored, in all its majesty and terror. And here I would quote Edith Sitwell, though the words were written to describe her own poetry; it is "about the beginning of things and their

relationships, and a girl whose blood has the pulses and instincts of the earth. . . . If my images appear strange, it is because I have senses like those of primitive peoples, and because I try to pierce down to the essence of the thing seen. . . .”

Secondly, it is a pathos and a gusto, a horror of and a delight in suffering, the tang of which has been lost to English letters since the roaring days of Webster and Ford.

And finally, it is the delicate clarity, the simple poignant insight, redolent to me of the Bartok arrangements of Purcell, with which Thomas can pull out of his Merlin’s hat such surprises as:

Paper and sticks and shovel and match  
Why won’t the news of the old world catch  
And the fire in a temper start

Once I had a rich boy for myself  
I loved his body and his navy blue wealth  
And I lived in his purse and his heart

When in our bed I was tossing and turning  
All I could see were his brown eyes burning  
By the green of a one-pound note

I talk to him as I clean the grate.  
O my dear it’s never too late  
To take me away as you whispered and wrote

I had a handsome and well-off boy  
I’ll share my money and we’ll run for joy  
With a bouncing and silver-spooned kid

## POLES OF POETRY

*Plant and Phantom.* Poems by LOUIS MAC-NEICE. (Faber.) 6s.

*Out of This War.* By TAMBIMUTTU. With a drawing of the author by Augustus John. (The Fortune Press.) 3s. 6d.

It is a mystic conception of the poet, and a half-truth, which asserts that “Poets are born, not made.” On a simpler plane, as all

Sharp and shrill my silly tongue scratches  
Words on the air as the fire catches.  
You never did and he never did.

(first printed in *Seven*)

Or that finely balanced, “The hand that signed the paper”; or the painfully clear “Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes,” with its only too pathetic last lines:

In the final direction of the elementary town  
I advance for as long as forever is.

Such an end, I hope, would be impossible to Thomas’ wide-eyed vigour; and such a style would be equally impossible as a regular poetic medium. For Dylan Thomas, “the Straight Poet,” is a necessary complement to Dylan Thomas, “the Welsh Wizard”; these are just two sides of the one medal, and I have no fear—despite his theory that it is necessary for him to strip his soul of darkness as a daily exercise—that all his conflicts will resolve themselves into something merely simple, or simply silly.

He is too aware of the various world, too emotional, too anti-social, ever to “settle-down” and produce straightforward propaganda of any sort. And that used to seem his deficiency when a red shirt was the only wear; it is a suit of double-proof armour now.

No, the future cannot hurt Dylan Thomas. He can only hurt himself—but I know him to be shrewd enough not to do that.

HENRY TREECE

men are both born and made, so it is with poets. And as they are born with different potentialities, develop different vocabularies and faces, so the scope of poetry is limited only by the multiple natures of poets. That is why, in calling the work of MacNeice and Tambimuttu *Poles of Poetry* no exclusion or prejudice is implied.

The poet’s (varyingly) intense and necessary apprenticeship is a long preparation for

spontaneity. The child dares not be fully spontaneous, and its first education is to learn its physical limitations. The poet's first stage is to learn his limitations; his second, to learn how to overcome them; and his third, to act freely and spontaneously. As the athlete in training must suffer and deny himself, all in preparation for one brief but perfect gesture, so the poet consciously or unconsciously prepares for a future gesture which is greater than his present self. The artist must be prepared not only to portray and analyse man, or himself, but to surpass him. Those poets who fail to develop lack the athlete's disinterestedness, or (granting their endowments are such as make them potential poets) remain inhibited.

Bergson said that a man *thinks with his muscles*. This is no materialist conception, as at first it appears. It denies the artificial and illogical separation of mind and body, thought and emotion, education and instinct, which has poisoned modern civilisation. In opposition to the idea of poetry as an intellectual pursuit, a cerebral gesture, we must reply that such a gesture gives no idea of the complexity of man. We turn, rather, to the poetry of an Eluard, or even a Valéry, and show how thought must be inextricably wedded (if it is genuine thought) to sensation and feeling. If Algebra is the ghost of thought, Poetry is its throbbing flesh and blood. There cannot be poetry without feeling or, to use a better word, sentiment. Sentiment is perception through the senses, that is to say thinking with the entire body. Poetry is the most complete of human gestures, involving the inner and outer body.

Assuming that such considerations are not irrelevant to criticism, it is interesting to set together two poets who hold such widely different points of view. It will be seen that though they differ in their "thoughts," they

meet together in poetry, because poetry is more than opinion.

MacNeice's conception of the poet is largely social, and perhaps too external. "I would have a poet able-bodied, fond of talking, a reader of the newspapers, capable of pity and laughter, interested in economics, appreciative of women, involved in personal relationships, actively interested in politics, susceptible to physical impressions." Any of us can think of at least a dozen poets of merit and repute whom such a conception excludes. That is because most of its elements have absolutely nothing to do with poetry. Nor has a desire to be an Elizabethan, a Metaphysical or an Augustan much to do with the real nature of a man's poetry.

Tambimuttu, on the other hand, has written "A good poem is seldom a conscious product. Poets of the wit, though they are interesting, do not seem to us to show an understanding of the real nature of poetry. Poetry emphasises living values, and to be wholly alive has to reckon with all the units of the hidden, sub-conscious world, which is not achieved consciously, but automatically, by inducing a special state in one. I suppose that is what is implied in the idea of inspiration." These quotations are far from covering all the subtleties of these two poets' outlook, but it should be obvious that a complete conception of poetry should include both. If there is anything to choose between the two, I should say the first is the less satisfactory because it views the poet from outside. The poet cannot be viewed thus from the outside, while there is much less danger in considering him from the inside and neglecting his social personality. The intellectual conception of MacNeice and the emotional one of Tambimuttu complete one another as Aristotle's views on poetry complete Plato's, or Browning's complete Shelley's. Why, after all, choose between them? In poetry there is room for all. No,

not quite, there is room for all that is best. Tambimuttu has said, "We believe that every man is a poet." He is right. But not every man is a good poet.

MacNeice's new volume shows him increasing in stature as a poet. He is sensitive, has an astute, critical mind, is capable of sensuality, though so far he reveals himself as a *kind* of poet rather than a major type: he is above all reflective, analytical and a little repressed. To criticise him by adapting his own words I should say: "MacNeice's whole personality does not emerge through his poetry, and he is unhealthy in so far as his mind is bigger than his body. I don't think he would be a good listener. Probably despises newspapers: at any rate he prefers philosophers, I should say, to journalists. Reserved in his expression of emotion, and therefore I should think a difficult lover. I shouldn't think, from these poems, that he is very actively interested or engaged in politics."

To be less personal (though the valuation of what can be seen of character in a man's works is not irrelevant to one's final judgment) instances of MacNeice's powerful critical faculty are to be seen in such poems as "Cushenden" (a deliberate opposition of sensual perception and intellectual comment), or in "Suicide," or the cruelly critical "Death of an Actress"; in his witty "Octets" or, to take a line or two, in the skilful contrast of two methods of life in "Stylite":

The saint on the pillar stands,  
The pillars are two,  
A young man opposite  
Stands in the blue,  
A white Greek god,  
Confident, with curled  
Hair above the groin  
And his eyes on the world.

MacNeice is weakest when his images and language become exclusively "intellectual," as in "Summer in a porter's cap punches our

tickets" or "A land without a meaning unless we mean it." The poems in "Trilogy for X" are sensual and critical at once, in his best manner, and it is noticeable that these poems confirm him as an "urban" poet, as his early work had suggested.

That is not all, though. MacNeice's imagery is human, and therefore genuine. He can write, when he wants, in what Vico assures us is the most primitive and satisfying type of poetic language, that in which the world is interpreted in physical terms:

The distance opens like a mouth to meet us  
Wantonly tongue to tongue  
Consummating our dreams by night, defeating  
The daily thoughts which day by day defeat us.

Here again, in the last two lines, we notice MacNeice's usual intellectual reaction (comment) after sensual perception. It is this mania for comment which leads us to call him a sophisticated poet, which is almost a contradiction in terms. His fullest natural powers come into play in one of the richest and finest poems in this book, *Plant and Phantom*. Here the subject is vast, the poet uncertain, and because he is less cocksure he goes deeper than he usually allows himself into the reservoir of imagery which provides the life-blood of poetry. He throws all his artificial rhyme-schemes to the wind and writes intuitively

Man: a flutter of pages,  
Leaves in the Sibyl's cave,  
Shadow changing from dawn to twilight,  
Murmuration of corn in the wind,  
A shaking of hands with hallucinations,  
Hobnobbing with ghosts, a pump of blood,  
Mirage, a spider dangling  
Over chaos and man a chaos.

Much more interesting than the stuff about economics and newspapers. When completely absorbed, rules and precepts can be forgotten and the poet emerges as himself. MacNeice fundamentally realises that man can only be intuitively understood, and that is how, by

this shaking of shackles, he joins hands with Blake or Tambimuttu or all non-good-fellows and non-Augustans. This possibility was already noticeable in MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*, when, loosening his form, his thought and feeling also loosened up and became personal and urgent. Too many poems in this book are a return, in their artificially imposed form, to the pre-*Autumn Journal* period, but they do show MacNeice is ripe for some larger work. A hint of the direction of that larger work is to be seen in "Plurality," which almost reads like a continuation of the *Autumn Journal*. The poem starts pedantically and awkwardly, then opens into something warmer and vital. Nothing could better reveal the futility of trying to be an Augustan in the twentieth century than the manner and argument of the closing lines of this poem, lines which, I think, show that MacNeice has enough imagination and feeling to develop into a very important poet:

Man is surely mad with discontent, he is hurled  
 By lovely hopes and bad dreams against the world,  
 Raising a frail scaffold in never-ending flux,  
 Stumbling when baffled fumbling the stubborn crux  
 And so he must continue, raiding the abyss  
 With aching bone and sinew, conscious of things  
 amiss,  
 Conscious of guilt and vast inadequacy and the sick  
 Ego and the broken past and the clock that goes too  
 quick . . .  
 Conscious of sunlight, conscious of death's inveigh-  
 ing touch,  
 Not completely conscious but partly—and that is  
 much.

In other words MacNeice is conscious of more than were the Augustans. And, capable of such a sensual embodiment of thought as this, it is evident that MacNeice is on the threshold of a wider and deeper poetry than during his New Verse days. There are only two things we hope he will avoid. The first is, talking too much about how Irish he is, and the second, trying to be another Yeats. There can be only one Yeats. *Plant and Phantom*

is a significant moment in MacNeice's development, as it might yet prove to be also in one line of modern poetry.

Tambimuttu has other virtues. Among them are the important facts that he is neither class, race, period, group, or mind-conscious. He is alarmingly himself. His "form" is no handbook abstraction of rhyme-arrangement and syllable-counting, but is as organic as, say, Blake's. His shorter poems have that free and universal form of folk-poetry:

The rains will come with the stinging thorn  
 And the ninth-month wave  
 Hurl'd to the heart.

Of the mud-house. Wet, dry, round  
 We shall be washed  
 With the morning.

And cockburst. Weep Mother into the lake  
 Into the pool, the sound, the flowers  
 The chaos of hours.

Bind us in the pool of tears  
 With the splendid rose  
 Of the morning. . . .

(*Invocation to Luksbmi.*)

I doubt whether a poet who can write like this needs more formal training, unless it be in the same way as a player, in order to kick a ball better, learns to skip. The appeal of his poetry is as swift and convincing as MacNeice's; his intuitive judgments are as satisfying, his organic form is logical enough.

This is borne out by a reading of his long poem, in six parts, "Out of this War." It is interesting to note that while MacNeice leaves the war to return to it, Tambimuttu plunges into the war in order to pass beyond it. That his poetry is not merely exotic is shown by his control of a fairly regular rhythmic pattern in the first two parts of the poem:

O to hold this terrifying vision in the mind,  
 Roll the hills and grooves, like a well-known bead.  
 Half this battle and the murder over;  
 The hero stirring in the common weed and seed.

This his fond task, to ride the sky  
Between his knees the iron time gripped and curled.  
The chart of cause and effect unfurled before him,  
This his creation he swings on the shoulder of the  
world. (The Hero.)

I would go so far as to say that I prefer those parts of the poem in which the rhythms are completely spontaneous and uncontrolled. Here are the rhythms of an unspoiled poetic talent, flowing with the easy gesture of a man who has something urgent to say and worth saying, in

This iron moment stretches over Europe  
Like the clang of a deep bell.  
The vacant squares, staring stony-eyed to the moon  
Will never stir or tell  
How soon, ah how soon  
Will the thunder drop  
On our sad heads. . . .

or

The time is harvested and hung  
Dying, that brings love and growth snowing its  
fingers.  
This is the time of bombs and white nightmare  
Soaking red through faces. This is time that lingers  
To touch the brain with madness. Does it care, O  
does it care  
If the slow bells of desolation are rung  
Over the dead land. . . .

There should be little need, after these extracts, to analyse the argument of Tambimuttu's poem or judge his attitude to the war. What is remarkable is that this eminently lyrical poet should have been able to sustain in this sequence of poems which has an essential general form and unity, this high pitch and quality of feeling, and at the same time to weave through it a logical train of thought. He has also preserved enough sense of balance, even when carried into overtones by passionate emotion, to avoid those commonplaces which beset any poet as soon as he writes about the war. Speaking of it, for the moment, as a "war-poem," it is one of the completest poetic statements on the war that have yet appeared, as well as one of the most concentrated. But I believe that there should be no essential difference between "war-

poetry" and "peace-poetry." The essential problems of the poet in war-time are the same as in peace-time, to feel life passionately and to express in memorably. Tambimuttu writes a war-lyric as well as he wrote love-lyrics, though I should add that, at any time, I prefer the latter, not only from him but from all poets.

Tambimuttu is less sophisticated, more natural than MacNeice. But where do they meet? I think it is in their very method of persuasion, in that physical, metaphorical argument which is a fundamental of all poetry:

Where, where will we find us after wreck,  
Deep river, sand or shallow?  
After the city is slain and the thin laughter  
Of mouldy bone echoing in corners; after swallow  
And stick and stone are mixed in slaughter;  
After the memories, memorials—and after  
Where will we find us after wreck?

(IV. *The Spreading Cross*)

If MacNeice had a word to say about this poem, he might call it uneconomical. But this impression is also corrected within the poem itself, in the fifth part (Statements) which I like less than the other parts, and in the moving "Elegy for the Dead" with which the poem closes. Evidence of a power of concentration are to be found in individual lines such as "We have no hands to hold, no eyes to weep," or in passages like

Ghost of my disaster, regard these faces  
Banging their hollowness loud, in Underground.  
Not in the Dornier doom you see them wound  
But their own emptiness and lying lives.

These two poets ought to read each other. The sensitive reader will do well to read them both.

FRANCIS SCARFE

## A WISH IN SEASON

*A Wish in Season.* Poems by NICHOLAS MOORE. (The Fortune Press.) 4s. 6d.

This is Nicholas Moore's first book. It is alive, confident, and more than usually

promising. Yet his achievement lies more in his ease of manner than in assurance of technique or originality of expression. This is partly explained, I think, by the fact that he is attracted by two distinct influences, neither of which he has yet assimilated. Certain superficial traits—looseness of rhythm, quaintness of phrase, and the like—have crept into his work, and under their influence his poems are made to appear more mature than they actually are.

What is particularly noticeable is that Moore derives more from Auden than from the New Apocalypse school with which he has allied himself. When Moore attempts the Blakean style of Dylan Thomas he writes badly and monotonously, and his words sound hollow and isolated. This is what Moore should guard against, for much of his less spectacular poetry is delightfully lyrical and spontaneous. He has a real gift for the simple statement, as

You look like fable, myth, and the fairy tale,  
But you are real as the boy was in the stable.

What agony is to suffer will still be true,  
Though the future open out like a flower in you.

This is a valuable gift, and rare nowadays.

The weaknesses of Moore's poetry point a moral which many of our younger poets ignore—that publication is not enough nor a prolific talent necessarily a sign of success and genius. And Moore himself has, I think, divided his forces too much, and his good lines are invariably offset by feeble ones. So he bolsters up his lines with such expressions as "my darling" and interpolates vague political enthusiasms, in much the same way as Hopkins tends to fill out his poems with religious platitudes. This has a deadening effect and is a serious weakness.

*A Wish in Season* contains some poems which their author's better judgment should have excluded, and many of his better poems do not appear at all. Occasionally, however, his work is really exciting, and with greater discipline and experience his strong lyrical gift should produce some poems of importance.

J. C. HALL

## NEWS NOTES

The International Arts Centre has now begun its activities at 22, St. Petersburg Place, Bayswater, W.2. It aims at providing an international background for artists and their friends covering art in all its aspects (literature, painting, music, ballet, etc.). Lectures, recitals, and an opportunity for display of member's work are on the Centre's curriculum, which is open every day from 4 to 10 p.m., while on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. (following coffee and sandwiches) a musical recital is arranged. The membership fee is one guinea a year, payable quarterly in special cases. Membership covers free attendance at all the Centre's functions, whereas only Saturday lectures and Tuesday recitals (admission 1s.) will be open to non-members. All those interested in the Centre and the attractive residential accommodation in con-

nection with it should write to the above address.

We have received a copy of *The Confessions of Peter Pan*, a long autobiographical poem by John Waller published in a limited edition. Copies may be obtained for a shilling from 175, Banbury Road, Oxford.

Keidrych Rhys is collecting an anthology of poetry from the Forces for Messrs. Routledge. Contributions should be sent to Ty Gwyn, Llanybry, Carmarthenshire. Keidrych Rhys is a Gunner in the London Welsh.

The Little Man Press, 3747, Hutton Street, Cincinnati, Ohio, announce Charles Henri Ford's *Overtured Lake* for early publication. This is Mr. Ford's first book of poems since *The Garden of Disorder* which New Directions



published in 1938. When asked "Why do you write poetry?" Mr. Ford replied, "To arouse the image to apocalyptic flow, to throw the opal shadows of its blood with disquieting rhythm on the marvellous and melancholy sound-screen of the heart's desire: this, to me, is the extreme and the supreme of pleasure," says the publisher's "blurb" of this book.

We are glad to see that the "Resurgam" Younger Poets Broad-sheets (price 1s. 1d., post paid), published by The Favil Press, 152, Kensington Church Street, W.8, are proving to be a success. The two latest broad-sheets are *Song in Storm* by Douglas Gibson, and *I, Gerontius* by Paul Scott.

The pacifist magazine *Now* has now established itself at 66, Huntingdon Road, Cambridge. Only three numbers were issued during the past year, but a bi-monthly issue is promised for the future. The Editor hopes that its transportation to the banks of the Cam would give it a dual system of roots, in the

general world of literature and in "the potent microcosm of the university's intellectual life." The current issue (Easter, 1941) contains articles and reviews by D. S. Savage, J. Middleton Murry, George Woodcock, Alexander Comfort, and eight pages of poems.

The latest arrival to our desk is *The New Norrthman* (Student publication of Belfast University). In an article Mr. St. John Ervine urges the students to become more politically conscious and to start bothering about their futures. It prints some adolescent verse (inevitable); Robert Greacen and Alexander Comfort have two interesting poems.

We have printed 2,200 copies of this issue of POETRY (London). But this is only half the circulation we should achieve in order to make the magazine self-supporting. Would our readers therefore help us achieve this figure by recommending the magazine to their friends?

## CORRESPONDENCE

*(If you have anything to say about poets and poetry, that might be of interest to our readers, write us a short letter for inclusion in this free-for-all feature.)*

### A READER PROTESTS

DEAR SIR,—It is good, as it was expected, to see the gloves come off in the Moore *v.* De Maré word-battle. Only it is not to be understood why they must carry on their political discussion between the covers of a magazine named POETRY. Admittedly, the basis of their argument is the social problem and its amelioration; and a world view of some kind, serves as the inspiration of most of the work of the poets of this age. It is inevitable that poets be influenced greatly by this intrusive environment. But I resent and protest against this employment of space in your magazine, in petty, and rather spiteful political polemics, more blatantly by the disciple of Hargrave, The Man, striving so fiercely to attain greatness.

How can Mr. Moore and Mr. de Maré expect to influence each other? One is a

Marxist with a historical conception, the other is a Green Shirt. That is their point of departure from the common aim, and the aim of poetry, the betterment of society. Mr. de Maré feels disagreeably towards Communism, Mr. Moore, no doubt, smiles at Social Credit. Let them, when writing of the connection of poetry to all this, confine themselves to their philosophies, the analysis of human relations and human nature. Party platform may be the design of their unmasked propaganda, but I object to their joining battle on party dogma in your magazine.

Yours,

BERTRAM WARR

### FROM AN ANARCHIST

DEAR SIR,—I was excited to receive the latest copy of POETRY (London) forwarded to

me from Northumberland; please note the new address. If I feel the poetry content is not quite up to the standard of previous issues, at least I find the controversial criticism more absorbing than ever. The opposing political camps of Messrs. de Maré and Moore in relation to Poetry is disarming to the detached reader, but I prefer to identify myself with the anarchism of Herbert Read. I would suggest that Mr. Nicholas Moore should read Kurt London's *The Seven Soviet Arts and Art in the U.S.S.R.*, a Studio annual publication of 1935, before he convinces himself that the political formula behind the People's Convention is "the movement which all artists, or writers, as all other workers, should in their own interests support." Mr. de Maré makes a good point when he quotes the U.S.S.R. as being "a country where true poets can find release only in suicide." Mayakovsky and Yesserin were only two examples. The last poem by Yesserin as translated in *The Seven Soviet Arts* is a truly impressive indictment and rejection of the People's State in its bureaucratic dictatorship attitude to the Arts. As for the Social Credit Party for which Mr. de Maré seems to be such an enthusiastic advocate, I offer no gratuitous comment. Though for two years I called myself a Communist, till my growing appreciation of the paucity of official U.S.S.R. creative effort caused me to probe the reasons, with the result that I've adopted the individualist's attitude, or anarchism; the Social Credit Party has not intruded itself on my notice. It would be folly, therefore, for me to presume to say anything about it.

Yours sincerely,

R. ROLF.

#### A VOICE FROM IRELAND

DEAR SIR,—The word "propaganda" frightens me, since it so often means sickly, honey-smearing, sarcastic untruthfulness or plain British lying; and, in poetry (or perhaps I should say "verse") it is not only frightening, but dangerous, to use the word at all. No one will deny that in the derivative sense, all art is "propaganda"—"propaganda" for Truth

and Beauty and Love—though, of course, the reverse is demonstrably untrue.

Now I object to the labelling of poetry as "socialist" or "liberal" or "bourgeois." Poetry is poetry, as an Irishman may be allowed to say with impunity. That is, if I may show narrowness by tentative definition, it is largely experience expressed in emotional terms, imagination that is *true*, but not necessarily accurate.

But, since European society is engaged at present on a crusade of self-destruction, there is a danger to poets if not to poetry—the concentration camp, castration, castor oil, as well as ostracisation, B.B.C. intolerance, public apathy and H.E. bombs circumscribe our horizon. Therefore, as *poets*—that is, as people who require certain conditions for writing poetry, so admirably explained by Mr. Moore—we must be concerned with what is happening, however much we prefer sitting on the fence looking at the sunset and listening to nightingales. Anyhow, the Louis MacNeice fence has been bombed to hell long ago: and, if our backsides haven't been hit by shrapnel, we may consider ourselves lucky even to get sitting on the grass.

Obviously, Mr. de Maré is grinding the Social Credit axe in order to cut down the capitalist forest. It seems to me, though, that he is even *more* interested in chopping Mr. Moore's Communism, than with getting on with his own self-set political job. It's the old, old problem of means and ends that is the real red herring.

Of all your correspondents, Mr. Peter J. Little best represents my own view. Deliberate obscurity, clique-ish allusion, personal puzzles and moribund symbolism, during the past couple of decades, have succeeded in choking much of the vitality that poetry must necessarily possess: certainly, poetry now has less appeal for the ordinary cultured person than music or art or prose writing. Poets can—and must—return to poetry that is simple, sensuous and passionate, if it is to occupy the position in literature and life that it should: and I believe that POETRY (London) is leading us out from the wasteland.

ROBERT GREACEN

(*The Moore v. De Maré discussion is now closed.*)

## LADY SPEAKS HER MIND

DEAR SIR,—Why do you publish poems like "Song" by George Scurfield? They contradict flatly the precepts laid down in the admirable letter from Peter J. Little that distinguishes your March-April issue. Fervently, after reading "Song," I echo Mr. Little's pertinent question: "Of what value to me are some young man's peculiar and private experiences expressed in his own peculiar and private manner if the resultant piece of writing is unintelligible to me?"

Surely it is time that this pretentious cult of the obscure was shown up for the shoddy inferior thing it is? There must be a happy mean between Mr. Scurfield's "Song" (which is typical of the mass of modern verse) and the banal simplicity of "I'm to be Queen of the May, mother, I'm to be Queen of the May." It is not necessary to return to the nursery in order to write good poetry; but neither is it advisable to borrow the meaningless or perverted language of lunatics. Poetry has never been in such bad repute as it is to-day—largely because modern poetry is *not understood* by the average reader. I consider myself as intelligent as the next woman; yet I am utterly befogged by Mr. Scurfield's poem (for example) and what I do not understand I naturally cannot enjoy. Lines like

"most the whore of one dimension  
eating her expensive bun"

are a pain in the neck to one brought up on Adonais and "magic casements" and Juliet's verbal felicities. To fly arrogantly in the face of tradition is to court disaster. Chaucer and Shakespeare, Keats and even Tennyson are too great to be ignored.

Tradition apart, sincerity allied to lucidity is a far more powerful combination than sincerity plus obscurity. The latter is, in my opinion, an irritating adolescent form of "showing off" which must be uprooted like a weed before poetry can once again blossom as the rose.

MARY MAIR

*(We agree with what you say in your last paragraph. But Scurfield's poem is not at all obscure—in fact it is simple straight-forward narrative, and you should read it again. As for the lines you quote you apparently do not like his fantastic type of humour.—ED.)*

## THE FIFTH LETTER

DEAR TAMBI,—In the very interesting *Fifth Letter*, Herbert Read writes: "The poet must realise that all the changes promised by the existing political parties are not valid for him. They do not guarantee his solitude. They all imply a more exacting social contract, a more complete surrender of individual liberty . . . surrender to mass opinions and mass standards. . . . The last thing they can guarantee is the solitude of the poet, which is a withdrawal from the social contract, a denial of the principle of collectivism." I do not feel this need be true of the "right kind" of planned economy. If men are freed from hunger, want and insecurity, a greater period can be set aside for contemplation, and the poet, having the same human needs, will also benefit. Surely in a planned society it will be possible for some to take long holidays without pay if they so desire it, as well as to arrange lower paid jobs for those who want plenty of free time.

Earlier in the *Letter*, Herbert Read made it quite clear that the poet's "recollection in tranquillity" must follow participation on society. All the poet requires is the right to withdraw at certain times into his own tranquillity. Again I think that a planned economy—provided, as I said before, it is of the "right kind"—could make this possible. The danger to poets, and all creative thinkers, lies in that form of collectivism which attempts to overstep its function as the supplier of men's physical needs, and demands spiritual obedience.

A planned economy means a *planned economy*—not a planned spirituality.

One of the reasons why a planned spirituality has come to light in Germany is because the poets and creative thinkers forgot that their job is to be poets and creative thinkers and not political propagandists. And the reason why in the 1930's poetry seemed to have "lost touch with the people" was because the poets, in Herbert Read's own phrase, "put their faith in the non-poetic prophets—in Marx, in Lenin, in Hitler," and not in themselves.

If with the greater chance of leisure, and therefore of withdrawal and tranquillity, to be reaped from a planned economy, the mass

of people is not able to be more contemplative I feel that a large part of the blame will lie with the poets.

DIANA GARDNER

SIR,—I am enclosing a postal order for 7s. as the annual subscription.

As a Czechoslovakian staying now in this country, as a political refugee, I appreciate

extraordinarily the possibility of having a periodical as POETRY, since after leaving my country I lost all connections with the poetical movement in which I took part, and was interested. I found these connections through POETRY again, and I am glad that I discovered that there is such an edition.

LADISLAV FISCH

## Notes on Contributors

ALAN ROOK: was in France and Belgium. *The Retreat*, published in our last number, was written during the retreat to Dunkirk. The poem in this issue was written at *Dunkirk Pier*, whence the title.

FRED MARNAU: twenty-two-years-old Czech refugee poet, now in England. Writes in German. First volume published in Czechoslovakia when he was 16. First appearance in England. E. O. Sigler, his translator, also a refugee, with an imperfect knowledge of English, wishes to meet a collaborator with a knowledge of German.

TOM SCOTT and G. S. FRASER are now somewhere in Africa. The latter's *Poem for M.G.* in our last number was written on board a troopship, which fact gives it an added interest and elucidates some of the allusions in the poem. Tom Scott was for many years a stone-mason by profession.

LAWRENCE DURRELL: we are glad to hear from a newspaper report that the youngest Briton to be evacuated from Greece was ten months' old Penelope, daughter of Lawrence Durrell. We hope this means that Durrell and his family have been evacuated to more tranquil surroundings.

VERNON WATKINS: 33, Welsh poet who contributes mostly to *Life and Letters Today*. Has translated Laforgue, Paul Fort, Rilke, Hölderlin and others. Had a masque, *The Influences*, produced at Swansea's Little Theatre.

ANNE RIDLER: was for some time Secretary to Mr. T. S. Eliot. One published book of verse. One child.

JAMES H. KIRKUP: 21, works with the Jervaulx forestry unit. Is a keen student of Modern French Literature. First publication.

J. C. HALL: has contributed to Nos. 3 and 4. Social worker.

NORMAN NICHOLSON: we know nothing about him except that we like his poetry.

D. S. SAVAGE: postman at Dry Drayton, Cambs. European Editor of *The Phoenix*, American pacifist magazine.

PETER WELLS: war-time farm labourer. First appearance.

CLIFFORD DYMENT: two books of poems published by Dent's. Contributed a group of poems to No. 2.

JULIAN SYMONS: Editor of *Twentieth Century Verse*; has contributed to several periodicals, including *Poetry* (Chicago) and *Life and Letters Today*. His first book of poems, *Confusions about X*, was published in 1939 by The Fortune Press.

J. F. HENDRY, ALUN LEWIS and NICHOLAS MOORE: cf. Nos. 4 and 5.

LYNETTE ROBERTS: is married to Keidrych Rhys and lives in Carmarthenshire. Is writing a book on Indian painting; has a knowledge of Indian dancing and a published book on *mudras*.

FRANCIS SCARFE: young don at Glasgow University. Has contributed to *New Verse* and *Horizon*. First book of poems, *Inscapes*, was published recently by The Fortune Press.

HENRY TREECE: is working at present on a symposium of views on *War and Writing*. "Now is the time for the long poem," he writes to tell us. "My dislike is not for the lyric *per se*, but rather of the short poem which has no relation to any other short poem that the poet may have written, which pretends daintily to stand upon its own two slender legs, an entity, proud and without any reason for being." We are inclined to agree with this. But how many poets write short poems that have no relation to other poems that they have written? And how many people have the leisure nowadays to write or read long poems? But we agree that every poet's work should have the sense of continuity that a long poem affords, especially in these times of dissolution and uncertainty.

STEPHEN COATES: Has appeared in *Poets of To-morrow* (Hogarth Press). Writes much poetry but considers most of it too personal to be published.

# LIFE AND LETTERS TO-DAY

*continuing*

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## POETRY

WILL those subscribers whose subscriptions run out with this issue remember to renew them? The Editor is collecting an **Anthology of Poetry in Wartime** for Autumn publication by Messrs. Faber & Faber and would be pleased to receive verse of a high standard for possible inclusion in it. This request is made equally to known and unknown poets, civilians as well as those in the Forces.

**The Song of a Red Turtle: PL Pamphlet No. 1** of Poems by **George Scurfield** is now on sale. Price 1s. 3d., post paid. Further titles are in preparation. No. 2 will be ready in July.

No. 7 will contain an article by Francis Scarfe on **The Poetry of Stephen Spender**. No. 8 is a **George Barker Number** and will contain a group of new poems by George Barker.

*London*

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Numbers already issued include articles by Lascelles Abercrombie, Edmund Blunden, F. S. Boas, Guy Boas, Bernard Darwin, Alpha of the Plough, Lord Ponsonby, Dorothy L. Sayers, D. M. Stuart, Sean O'Casey, T. Sturge Moore, Una Ellis-Fermor, and poems by Laurence Binyon, John Drinkwater, Wilfred Gibson, Walter de la Mare, Humbert Wolfe, and others.

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