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GEORGE BARKER

ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF MICHAEL ROBERTS

How dare the greatest die? For whom else daily
  Will water and wilderness come down to us with bread?
Where is the hole in the world proud enough to keep
  Him deep in the grave of the gravelled dead:
While about his skull, coiling, the unsaid poems vainly
  Mourn, and in his schoolroom the fooling
Truth ogles a mirror and forgets that eagled head?

So wasteful the world is with her few of best.
  O pinnacles where the elected princes die
With their dogstar boots on and a truth in hand,
  O tabernacles glittering to attest
So few have ever ascended so far or so high,
  O Michael's bone enshrined in altitude
Truth is meridian to tempt kings to try.

The proud ride past us on their hippogryphs
  To lazy empires opulent with trophies
Others caught up from the holocaust and the hazards
  At what a price. I saw you stride across
A Fitzroy room and leave, stamped on the boards,
  In the nailed image heroes and poems possess,
A symbol of spirit that did not call for words.

And skulled as aquiline as the two-headed Maximus
  You, Michael, also. Gazing towards the left
You leaned a shoulder against the ideal azimuth
  And theories shook their seven veils and laughed.
You turned your head to the principle of right
  And a principle came down to ground and performed:
So you were active a man and a teacher, formed
  Together, and the poem walked upright.

But can the harp shoot through its propellors? At heart
  There was an Orphic unicorn in his breast
Who, dying, drove the spindle through his chest
  And both of them died. O he unsung apart
The Siamese master who could daydream and act:
  He would not let his harpstrung fellow sing
And so the poet choked him with a fact.

He lolled against a mantelpiece, and a tree
  Of loving-kindness sprouted from the grate,
Catching all friends up in its talkative branches
  As the bright bird's-eye glittered behind glass.
Too seldom, I now know, I watched this face
  Talk through the truth like a ship through the sea,
With the nuomena tying roses on the anchors
  And the anchors conquering the great sea.

How dare the greatest die? They do not die.
  Over my writing shoulder, now, guiding
As many before he guided, head and master, with all
  The teaching fathers fit for such presiding,
He returns when the poem comes down from the sky
  With the truth in its claw. The best of all
Teach us that death is no place of hiding
  But an everest where, higher, the greater fall

EDWIN MUIR

FROM A POEM "THE JOURNEY BACK"

And I remember in the bright light's maze,
While poring on a red and rusted arrow,
How once I laid my body on the barrow,
Closed my blank eyes and smoothed my face,
And stood away, a third within that place,
And watched these two at their strange ritual,
And grieved for that day's deed so often done,

When the poor child of man, leaving the sun,
Walks out into the sun and goes his way,
Not knowing the resurrection and the life,
Shut in his simple recurring day,
Familiar happiness and ordinary pain.
And while he lives content with son and wife
A million leaves, a million destinies fall,
And over and over again
The red rose blooms and moulders by the wall.

And sometimes through the air descends a dust
Blown from the scentless desert of dead time,
That whispers, Do not put your trust
In the fed flesh or colour or sense or shape.
This that I am you cannot gather in rhyme,
For I was all
That you can name, a child, a woman, a flower,
And here escape
From all that was to all,
Lost beyond loss.
So in the air I toss
Remembrance and rememberer all confused
In a light fume, the last power used,
The last form found,
And child and woman and flower
Invisibly fall through the air on the living ground.

Yet in that journey back
If I should reach the end, if end there was
Before the ever-running roads began,
And race and track and runner all were there
Suddenly, always, the great revolving way
Deep in its trance; if there was ever a place
Where one might say, Here is the starting point,
And yet not say it, or say it as in a dream,
In idle speculation, imagination,
Reclined at ease, dreaming a life, a way,
And then awaken in the hurtling track,
The great race in full swing far from the start,
No memory of beginning, sign of the end,
And I the dreamer there, a frenzied runner;
If I could read that place, how could I come
To where I am but by that deafening road,
Life wide, world wide, by which all come to all,
The strong with the weak, the swift with the stationary,

For mountain and man, hunter and quarry there
In lingering do not linger, nor hastening hasten,
But all with no division strongly come
For ever to their constant mark, the moment,

And the tumultuous world slips softly home
To its perpetual end and flawless bourne.
How could we be if all were not in all?
Borne hither on all and carried hence with all,
We and the world and that unending thought
Which has elsewhere its end and is for us
Begotten in a dream deep in this dream,
Beyond the place of getting and of spending.
There's no prize in this race; the prize is elsewhere,
Here only to be run for. There's no harvest,
Though all around the fields are white with harvest.
There is our journey's ground; we pass unseeing.
But we have watched against the evening sky,
Tranquil and bright, the golden harvester.

GAVIN EWART

YOUNG BLONDES
(a religious poem)

Young blondes are tempting me by day and night,
Young blondes in dreams trouble my restless sight.

With curly heads they rampage through my thoughts,
Full-bosomed in their sweaters and their shorts.

Or lie sunbathing on an impossible beach
Naked, aloof, continually out of reach.

On the mind's promenade, above the rocks,
Young blondes go sauntering by in cotton frocks.

Or flatter cameras with their negligent poses
Or drenched in moonlight gather midnight roses.

While I am eating, smoking, working, talking
Through long romantic gardens they are walking.

Protect me, Lord, from these desires of flesh,
Keep me from evil, in Thy pastures fresh,

So that I may not fall, by lakes or ponds,
Into such sinful thoughts about young blondes!

BERNARD SPENCER

PINO

Pino, a hill top village, slanting street
and at the corner a wall where gossips sit
in a row at sunset, like migrating birds,
backed by the sky and forty miles of plain.

Buses heading for somewhere else; the words
cart wheels grind and jerk or a peasant cries
as the white oxen lift their swinging throats,
somnambulists with long Egyptian eyes.

The "National" inn, the sleepy, smiling maid,
the queenly, fat Madame in a dress of spots;
simple kindnesses like that harsh strong wine;
and two weeks blank of great events. In fine

A time of waiting. Most of our life is that.
But waiting sometimes vivid with the sign
of things amazingly connected; whether some
day of thunder or night with the Plough slung over
the road to the towns and what there was to come.

CHARLES MADGE

BALLOONS OVER GLASGOW

By observation from a later window
Can yet be found new bodies in the sky
Where under heaven a darkened populace
Raises its structures in the northern light.

Slope after slope, their houses toward sleep
Revolve. Sleeping or watching, their sky is measured
By the balloons. The sky is studded with them,
High over Clyde, buoys of the cloudy harbour.

The most remote are black, star points inverted
But, passing from the nearest, mark out by squares
The progress of the ordinating eye.
Each volume of the air contains its sign.

On the nocturnal edge of the colony,
The ceruleen atmosphere has coming shapes
Entering that solitude and registering it
With formal statement of the different space.

T. E. F. BLACKBURN

LAZARUS

Suddenly on that day the bread and the good water
Were black and stale. There was no more sun.
His landscape burst in flame and then went out,
And his great beasts crept from him one by one.
He fell into the choking water of his lungs;
Three times they let him scream and then they wound
Their dripping linen round his nose and mouth.
He fell into no time or place and drowned.
And he was taken from our touch. Flesh stained his shroud,
Seeped through and stank;
His flesh moved white and separate in its pools,
And he was nothing—Lazarus!
The worm and the fly—Lazarus!
Lazarus come forth. He loosed his bands
And came. The grave cloths heavy on his face and hands.

"Drawing by Ceri Richards"

DAVID GASCOYNE

SEPTEMBER SUN
(1947)

Magnificent strong sun! in these last days
So prodigally generous of pristine light
That's wasted only by men's sight who will not see
And by self-darkened spirits from whose night
Can rise no longer orison or praise:

Let me consume in flameless fire like yours
And may the quickened gold within me come
To mintage in due season, and not be
Transmuted to no better end than dumb
And self-sufficient usury. These days and years

May bring the sudden call to harvesting,
When if the earth of Man can only yield
Glitter and husks, then with a huger sun may He
Who first with His gold seed the sightless field
Of Chaos planted, all our trash to cinders bring.

A RONDEL FOR THE FOURTH DECADE

The mind if not the heart turns cold
Seeing the calendar's leaves flying;
Yet dare not yet cease trying
To coax the heart to accept growing old.

However often heart's fortune be told
By skeptic mind, it beats on still relying
On consanguinity for help to hold
By against age's chill and sighing.

But when the last leaves are swept flying
From our life's tree, a stone is rolled
Over the hole where as they turn to mould
The heart's remains still lie denying
That mind can know the truth of dying.

KENNETH SLESSOR

OUT OF TIME

I

I saw Time flowing like the hundred yachts
That fly behind the daylight, foxed with air;
Or piercing, like the quince-bright, bitter slats
Of sun gone thrusting under Harbour's hair.

So Time, the wave, enfolds me in its bed,
Or Time, the bony knife, it runs me through.
"Skulker, take heart," I thought my own heart said,
"The flood, the blade, go by—Time flows, not you!"

Vilely, continuously, stupidly,
Time takes me, drills me, drives through bone and vein;
So water bends the seaweeds in the sea,
The tide goes over, but the weeds remain.

Time, you must cry farewell, take up the track,
And leave this lovely moment at your back!

II

Time leaves the lovely moment at his back,
Eager to quench and ripen, kiss or kill;
To-morrow begs him, breathless for his lack,
Or beauty dead entreats him to be still.

His fate pursues him; he must open doors,
Or close them, for that pale and faceless host
Without a flag, whose agony implores
Birth, to be flesh, or funeral, to be ghost.

Out of all reckoning, out of dark and light,
Over the edges of dead Nows and Heres,
Blindly and softly, as a mistress might,
He keeps appointments with a million years.

I and the moment laugh, and let him go,
Leaning against his golden undertow.

III

Leaning against the golden undertow,
Backward, I saw the birds begin to climb

With bodies hailstone-clear, and shadows flow,
Fixed in a sweet meniscus, out of Time,

Out of the torrent, like the fainter land
Lensed in a bubble's ghostly camera,
The lighted beach, the sharp and china sand,
Glitters and waters and peninsula—

The moment's world, it was; and I was part,
Fleshness and ageless, changeless and made free.
"Fool, would you leave this country?" cried my heart,
But I was taken by the suck of sea.

The gulls go down, the body dies and rots,
And Time flows past them like a hundred yachts.

EUGENIO MONTALE

(1948)

THE EEL

The eel the siren
of cold seas, who leaves the Baltic
to reach our shores
our estuaries and rivers
remounting them beneath the opposing current
from branch to branch and then
thinned out, from thread to thread
ever deeper ever further to the heart
of the sandstone rocks, filtering
through muddy backwaters until one day
a light shot from the chestnut trees
kindles her darting flicker in deadwater pools
in ditches joining up
Romagna to the overhanging Apennine:
the eel, torch, whip,
arrow of Love in earth
which only our ditches and the dried
Pirené brooks restore
making heavens of fecundation:
this new soul seeking life
where almost is biting thirst and desolation
this spark which says
that all begins when all seems
turned to ashes, buried wreckage,

this shortlived rainbow, twin
of the one you set between your brows
intact among the sons of man to glister,
and immerse in your mud, can you
refuse to call her sister?

(*Translated by* Bernard Wall)

NEWS FROM THE AMIATA

The fireworks of the storm
will be the buzz of beehives in late evening.
The room has wormeaten rafters and a smell
of melons through the partition. The smoke-puffs
which softly mount a valley
of elves and mushrooms towards the transparent cone
of the peak, have dimmed my windows,
and I write to you from here, from this far distant
table, from the honeycomb cell
of an orb hurled through space—
and covered lattices, the hearth
crackling with chestnuts, the saltpetre stains
and mould stains, are the picture frame
which you are soon to open. Life
which tells you fairytales is still too short
if it contains you! The lighted background
reveals your icon. Outside it is raining.

Suppose you too passed by the fragile buildings
blackened by time and charcoal
the square cortile's which have in the middle
a deep sunk well: suppose you followed
the nightbirds in their clumsy flight
and down in the ravine the scintillation
of the Milky Way, vesture of every torment.
But the long footstep echoing in the darkness
is of one who goes alone and can see nothing
save this fall of arches, of shadows and of curves.
The stars are threaded in too fine a point
the belltowers eye has stopped at two o'clock
the creepers too mount like darkness
and their scent adds bitterness to pain.
Wind from the north come chillier to-morrow
smash the sandstone's antique hands
upturn the books of hours in the attics,
and let all be the lens of peace, dominion, prison
of the sense which lacks despair. Blow back stronger
arctic wind, making dear the fetters

sealing the spore of all the possible!
The streets are close and narrow, the black asses
strike sparks with clattering hooves
from the hidden peak magnesium flashes answer.
Oh drops slow falling
from sombre hovels, time turned to water
long dialogue with the poor dead, ashes, wind
wind that delays, death, it is death that lives!

This Christian strife which only has
words of shadow and lament
what of me does it bring you? More
was stolen from you by the millrace buried
gently in its closure of cement.
A millwheel, a truncated ruin
are last frontiers of the world. A heap
of litter is dispersed: late coming out
to join my watching with your slumber
which welcomes them, the porcupines
drink deeply at a watercourse of pity.

(*Translated by* BERNARD WALL)

NICHOLAS MOORE

SUITABLE EMOTIONS

"...............It's only when they see nothing
That people can always show the suitable emotions—
And so far as they feel at all, their emotions are suitable."

T. S. ELIOT: *The Family Reunion.*

I, too, saw Nothing, standing by the door,
A sombre and hooded figure, Mr. X.,
Who seduced a schoolgirl once in Glory Park,
The sinister blackmailer, or the crafty spiv;
Nothing, who stood before the judge and lived,
Even after his death continued to live.

Everything ends in an X. There is nothing more.
You eat, you drink, you play around with sex,
Go through your personal rituals in the dark,
And wonder why your enjoyment passes with time,
That you know so poorly the mountains you have climbed,
Remembering little at all except the climb.

Gradually, gradually, it eats away,
The Thing with a spectral face and cunning eye,
Nothing, who points at you an ironic finger,
And whispers lies about you to your friends;
Who sits above you like God when all is ended,
Who never ends like your life when the story ends.

For he does not live or exist at all in a way,
This sinister X, this man of mystery.
He is you, your neighbour, or maybe a passing stranger,
And everything he does is familiar to you.
He is not abnormal or mad. Nor is he to be wooed
From his nothingness, however hard you may woo.

He is tall, he is straight, he is there by the garden gate,
He is there at your meeting which never does take place.
He is over your shoulder while you write to your aunt.
He has crimes in his heart of which you are capable.
He is the dark protagonist of a fable
Which you know in your heart is inescapable.

You know it's all happened already. And, as you wait,
Your darling appears. She has a smile on her face,
But alas! there is Nothing to stand behind her, gaunt
And crooked. She does not see, but waves and beckons
In a suitable fashion. It's just as you might have reckoned.
Yet there stands Nothing; it's with him you have to reckon.

To its will, with the last whistle of birds,
The long spikes of the goldenrod,
And the lashes of rain. How they fall!
And in the last hazy and wish-filled air

Men totter home to tea and warmth and buns,
After an afternoon at the end
Of summer, while in the mist revolve pale suns,
Lemon-yellow, and the fireside is a friend.

IAIN FLETCHER

VILLANELLE

The mirror cracks when death begins to show.
What is unsaid is always for the best.
Those last the longest knowing where they go.

They can afford the teasing arpeggio,
The little gesture, broken vowels. The rest
The mirror cracks when death begins to show.

Playing at forfeits, not pay what they owe,
The Ausonian Rose unwithered at the breast:
Those last the longest knowing where they go.

In haste and luxury of "told you so"
We hope to drown the image of the pest:
The mirror cracks when death begins to show.

And this at last shows how the ledgers flow
In rigid streams to compound interest:
The mirror cracks when death begins to show.
Those last the longest knowing where they go.

A PHOTOGRAPH OF ANN

This is the face which I have always lost;
The cluster of a sound not one bereaves.
Time clots an instant to the squeaking ghost,

Torrents of whose meaning pleading sheer—
Not being what the man of mean believes—
Rise up in healing, but lie down on fear.

For torrents have this property almost:
Alive all right—Who wittily perceives
Identity of parasite or host?

She whose chameleon splendours daze the view,
Who died in syncope, woke in leaves;
This is the nitrate moment far and few:

When look! the mouth is blooming in my ear,
Through whose soft orifice a song still grieves,
But now the eye-pearls of her griefs grow near

A rich contusion, and the wall of hair
—To which all Egypt was but sick in sheaves—
Leans on me—O, regalia of despair!

I will not look—though eyes are all her due:
This face is found forever and deceives;
And it was loss which finally was true.

So much a thinking heart may justly bear
—This slender promise no occasion thieves—
Before a vegetable death is there.

HANNO VAN WAGENVOORDE

THE SOLDIER

I have conquered rivers and mountains,
Abandoned throwns and crowns,
The damaged stores and shipyards
And the cheap women of harbour towns.

And have known what movement is,
The blind movement that devours
The time and the past where we lingered
In the progress of blessed rippling hours.

I have conquered scorched towns and ruins,
Horizons that silently enclose
The quivering fields of the triumph
With the stiffened bodies of those

Who have known that life is a warcry,
A slogan for the sake of death,
But that the end only is genuine
Where the eyes have recognised their myth.

I have conquered millions of widows,
Children with empty hearts and eyes,
The arsenals of blinded nations,
Sultry with ideology and lies.

And have known that in victory is no profit,
In movement and hour no release,
And in my decorated chest no pride
Where the myth of the living shall cease.

FRANK RICHARDS

BRIGGS MAJOR SARCASTIC
On the Value of a Classical Education

The case of Charlie Grigson was a sad one,
  His fate was hard, as you may well believe,
He slacked and ragged—his record was a bad one
  From when he came, until he had to leave.
With every lesson hammered into Charlie,
'Twas practically ave atque vale.

At Barcroft School a classic education
  Befits a man to play his part in life,
Sound knowledge of a Latin conjugation
  Girds up his loins for keen commercial strife,
And I suppose that I need hardly mention
The business-value of a Greek declension.

But poor old Grigson never had a look-in,
  Of scholars Barcroft never had a worse,
So very little learning Grigson took in
  He scarcely could compose a Latin verse,
And knew but little more than any sparrow
Of all the works of P. Vergilius Maro.

Indeed, he found Eutropius a teaser,
  For him, alas! *all* Livy's books were lost,
I fear he could not construe even Cæsar,
  And knew not when the Rubicon was crossed,
So little Greek was knocked into his napper
That Mu or Nu he hardly knew from Kappa.

His years at Barcroft School were wholly wasted,
  He ragged in class, and assed about in prep,
Delights of classic lore he never tasted,
  Nor wanted to advance a single step.
Homer he thought a bore, and Virgil rotten,
And all he had to learn was soon forgotten.

Thus wholly unequipped for Life's stern battle,
  He quitted Barcroft School, and went his way,
Nor Greek nor Latin could the poor chap prattle,
  He went all unprepared into the fray.
He tried at first for something in the City,
But soon found that put nothing in the kitty.

No one would give the simplest situation,
To push a quill, or sit upon a stool,
To one who'd missed his chance of education,
And brought no classic knowledge from his school!
No office chair poor Grigson ever sat in,
For want of just a spot of Greek or Latin.

After long months of unemployed inaction
At length he got a job as office-boy,
He hoped to give his guv'nor satisfaction
Though knowing little of the Siege of Troy.
Poor chap! They found that he could not read Plato,
And so they dropped him, like a hot potato.

Poor Charlie Grigson! Life grew sere and yellow,
From year to year things went from bad to worse,
But what could be expected by a fellow
Who couldn't write a Greek or Latin verse?
Thucydides he knew not, nor Plutarchus,
What hope, then, to keep life within his carcase?

He might have been a Company Director,
A Chairman's chair he might have sat upon,
Could he have but construed a speech of Hector,
Or told them all about Laocoön.
He might have made a million, or a milliard,
With just a little knowledge of the Iliad.

Had he but known the fragments of Menander
He might have been the chairman of a bank,
Some knowledge of the battles of Lysander
Must have secured a high commercial rank,
However high the prize, he might have won it,
Hard study while at Barcroft would have done it.

But, as the matter stood, it was no wonder
He found no opportunities to seize,
How could a fellow fail to go right under
Who couldn't quote a verse of Sophocles?
Even a stoker's job was barred, though grimy,
to one inapt at conjugating *ειμι*

The years passed Grigson by, no money earning,
Then he became conductor of a tram,
He hoped to hide his lack of classic learning,
Though feeling like a humbug or a sham,
It booted not—the manager who hired him
Discovered how the matter stood, and fired him.

Then once again poor Grigson was a loafer,
  Job-hunting day by day, and week by week,
He nearly got employment as a chauffeur,
  But failed to pass a simple test in Greek.
That did it—cutting short all further parley,
They showed the garage door to poor old Charlie.

Again he tried—and this time as a carter,
  They offered him a trial for the job,
Had he worked harder at his Alma Mater,
  He might have earned a weekly fifty bob.
Alas! he found that only classic scholars
Were trusted to adjust the horses' collars!

One day he passed a navvies' gang, stone-cracking,
  He paused: "Is there a chance," he sadly said,
"For one whose classic lore is somewhat lacking?"
  The ganger stared at him, and shook his head,
And answered, "Not a hope! They always sack us
Unless we know our Q. Horatius Flaccus!"

Poor Charlie Grigson's life was dark and dismal,
  Lodged in a poor precarious abode,
Out of a job, in poverty abysmal,
  Barred ev'n from cracking stones upon the road,
A chap so ignorant of Latin grammar
Could not be safely trusted with a hammer.

Alas! poor Grigson! Old and worn and weary,
  Far from the reach of Learning's rich rewards,
He eked out at the last a living dreary
  In London streets, between two sandwich-boards,
Employed by some old unsuspicious geezer,
Who knew not that he couldn't construe Cæsar.

The fate of poor old Grigson, sad and muddy,
  Should be a warning to all chaps who slack,
Who loathe their prep, and jib at earnest study,
  And when they can on lessons turn their back.
His sad, sad fate down to disaster brought him,
For want of all that Barcroft could have taught him.

POINTS OF VIEW

THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND

Even those of us who take the dimmest view of contemporary criticism might have expected that the publication of Pound's Cantos* would have occasioned some comment. It is not every day that a major work by a major poet appears—it is not every day, it is not twice a century. However, this conspiracy of silence, which has surrounded Pound for twenty years was, by this omission, made complete.

It would seem that the Cantos have not yet sailed into *Horizon's* vision. Has its editor got his telescope the wrong way up as well as to his blind eye? As for our more frivolous papers, such as *The New Statesman*, it would appear that it has now sunk to the level of the *Nation*; and, no doubt, *Time* has now finally missed the *Tide*. . . .

The motives behind this conspiracy to ignore Pound are, unfortunately, only too easily understood. Lenin said somewhere or other, "That it was the business of small men to reduce mountains to molehills in order to increase their own stature—by comparison."

Pound has two claims on our interest: for his own work *per se*; and for the considerable influence he has had on that of other writers. I doubt if any other person has affected the current of verse and prose since 1914 as much as he has done. The evidence is incontestable. People of substance acknowledge their debts; Eliot was the first to do so.

It is now NOT a question of Eliot *or* Pound, any more than it is a question of beef or mutton. Both have nutritious value.

Pound will survive his self-imposed exile and subsequent neglect; whereas Eliot has done even more, he has survived public acclamation.

That the Cantos were not reviewed is probably just as well: for who amongst us has adequate critical equipment? But that this publication, which included the hitherto unprinted Pisan Cantos, was not mentioned or even listed amongst the "Books received", is a matter for some comment. It would seem that we are living in a Dark Age, but it is not the darkness of a shadow but the darkness of a searchlight; we do not suffer from lack of communication, but from too much; we know the ignorance of mob literacy; and the inarticulation of a voice that is never quiet and a Press that is never still.

In spite of the existence of innumerable literary quarterlies, and professional hacks and critics, a book of value is more likely to go entirely unnoticed to-day than in the days before Caxton.

It is a pity that Dr. Leavis, who had the considerable astuteness to applaud Hugh Selwyn Mauberley twenty years ago, should not yet have realised that the Cantos are an extension of the technique developed in that poem.

Mauberley is almost an unconscious preface to the Cantos, not only marking out their scope but suggesting their technique and even their ultimate reception too. Both poems have the same concision, the same use of counterpoint between apparently dissimilar ideas. To my mind, Dr. Leavis' position in approving the early poem and ignoring the latter is untenable, for the merits of Mauberley are not only contained but developed in the Cantos.

One has, in urging people to read Pound, very little serious criticism to counter. There has been none. Indeed, contemporary literary nitwits have been content to cry wolf (in a falsetto voice) at Pound's very name. The basis for these prejudices is, in the main,

* The Cantos of Ezra Pound published by New Directions, N.Y.C. 5 dollars.

not a question of taste in literature, but taste in underwear—a tale of a shirt. However, those who know Pound, know that these accusations are based on spiteful inaccuracies. Before one dismisses the Cantos because of Pound's politics, it might first be expedient to discover precisely what they are: and how can we know anything of the man unless we first read this poem?

But even assuming that Pound's politics do not fit the current fashion, does that warrant our neglect? Were we thirteenth century Florentines would we approve of Dante? Do we close the Divine Comedy because Dante was not a good democrat? Do we ignore the Dunciad because it was written by a Catholic or refuse to read *Paradise Lost* because it was written by a Protestant? Mozart was an enthusiastic Mason, but how relevant is this? If I were to read only those poets with whom I was in political accord, then I should probably not read any at all. But at this level of prejudice, serious discussion is quite impossible.

I remember, when Pound was still imprisoned in the cage at Pisa, receiving the typescript of Canto LXXIV from him. It begins:

> "The enormous tragedy of the dream in
> the peasant's bent shoulders
> Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed,
> Thus Ben and La Clara a Milano
> by the heels at Milano
> That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock
> DIGENES, διγενές but the twice crucified
> where in history will you find it?"

The merits of this description exist outside and beyond the object or one's opinions about the object. It is in the "bent shoulders".

One must conclude that great poetry has, of necessity, only a small appeal; in spite of the silly left, right and centre movements which pretend that Vox Populi has anything to do with literature, poetry remains for the minority. Consequently, no age recognises a masterpiece until it has weathered a couple of centuries. The time lag is unavoidable—for to-day there are not more than one hundred people in this country who are seriously interested in reading poetry as opposed to chattering about it. On the other hand, I sometimes think there are as many thousands trying to write poetry. But the interest in self-expression and an interest in art are not the same thing. This is because art is *not* self-expression but self-suppression.

As I say, few of us have the equipment to criticise the Cantos, it is difficult to see the whole of a thing of which one is part. Much of them appears to us difficult, but is that because their references are obscure or we are ignorant? It is an open question. They represent twenty years' mental digestion and creative secretion: can we expect to appreciate them at one sitting whilst listening to the wireless? I admit there are passages which I cannot make head or tail of, but that is because I am comparatively ill-read and such difficult passages grow less as one grows up.

Perhaps one gets a clue to the seriousness of the Cantos from the fact that in order to compare them with a poem of a similar weight one finds one is turning to the Purgatorio. Pound does not achieve Dante's cohesion, sense of order, or lucidity, but that is because the Cantos are a contemporary epic and, of necessity, reflect the limitations and the complexities of this age. One regrets that Pound had not the liberty of Dante's form, the liberty of that discipline; but to blame Pound for that lack is to blame him for the Thirty Years War.

We would do well to read the Cantos before we form opinions about them. If such passages as the following are not great poetry, then it is plain that I know nothing about that subject.

> "Yet
> Ere the season died a-cold
> Borne upon a zephyr's shoulder
> I rose through the aureate sky
> *Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest*
> *Dolmestch ever be thy guest,*
> Has he tempered the viol's wood
> To enforce both the grave and the acute?
> Has he curved us the bowl of the lute?
> *Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest*
> *Dolmestch ever be thy guest*

Hast 'ou fashioned so airy a mood
To draw up leaf from the root?
Hast 'ou found a cloud so light
As seemed neither mist nor shade?

Then resolve me, tell me aright
If Waller sang or Dowland played.

Your eyen two wol sleye me sodenly
I may the beauté of hem nat susteyne

And for 180 years almost nothing.

Ed ascoltando al leggier mormorio
there came new sublety of eyes into my tent,
whether of spirit or hypostasis,
but what the blindfold hides
or at carneval
nor any pair showed anger
Saw but the eyes and stance between the eyes,
colour, diastasis,
careless or unaware it had not the
whole tent's room
nor was place for the full Εἰδὼς
interpass, penetrate
casting but shade beyond the other lights
sky's clear
night's sea
green of the mountain pool
shone from the unmasked eyes in half-
mask's space.
What thou lovest well remains,
the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage
Whose world, or mine or theirs
or is it of none?
First came the seen, then thus palable
Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell,
What thou lovest well is thy true heritage.

The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
Learn of the green world what can be thy place
In scaled invention or true artistry,
Pull down thy vanity,
Paquin pull down!
The green casque has outdone your elegance.

'Master thyself, then others shall thee beare'
Pull down thy vanity
Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,
A swollen magpie in a fitful sun,
Half black half white
Nor knowst' ou wing from tail
Pull down thy vanity
How mean thy hates
Fostered in falsity,
Pull down thy vanity,
Rathe to destroy, niggard in charity,
Pull down thy vanity,
I say pull down.

But to have done instead of not doing
this is not vanity
To have, with decency, knocked
That a Blunt should open
To have gathered from the air a live tradition
or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame
This is not vanity.
Here error is all in the not done,
all in the diffidence that faltered,
(Pisan Cantos, No. LXXI, libretto.)

And there are many such passages in this contemporary epic and there are probably more varieties of metre, of technique in this poem than in any other written this century. It is a poem that poets should read even if no one else will take the trouble.

RONALD DUNCAN

THE FROZEN HEART

(The Age of Anxiety; A Baroque Eclogue),
by W. H. Auden (Faber, 8/6.)

"Lacrimosa dies illa" is quoted as a motto to Mr. Auden's latest book, and it is indeed a sad day. Not that the book is without merit—it is very pretty indeed, like a ship in a bottle, or like Snow-drop (or, if you prefer, Snow White) asleep in a glass case. It is still, in a world of its own, frozen, like one of those little glass balls which you shake to make a snow-storm, perfect and fascinating. It is baroque as you could wish, or more, it is rococco, "meaningless decoration", "free from utilitarian purpose". It is an astonishing feat of the imagination, and it is no surprise to find it dedicated to John Betjeman, for, though there is nothing naturalistic about it, it is an astounding landscape of the heart and mind of our time.

Mr. Auden has a sure hand, and his ornamentation is always of an appropriate kind; if he intends to be baroque, indeed he is, and if the critics don't like it, it is not to be wondered at. Do they appreciate baroque? Ornamentation and elegance are at a premium nowadays, and particularly they meet with dislike when the purpose is obscure. I suggest that if I had been able to entitle this review *The Frozen Lake*, if the poem had been a landscape as we know it, and not a landscape of the spirit (I use "spirit" as a convenient symbol for heart and mind together), the ornamentation might have been acceptable; as indeed Mr. Betjeman's poems are acceptable to Mr. Sparrow, and more acceptable the worse they are; that is to say the more serious and sentimental, the less "in fun" that they are. For many of our critics to-day are in love with *natural* ornamentation, provided it is unself-critical: they will enjoy a landscape the chief features of which are things of "meaningless decoration", provided the approach to it is purely nostalgic without hint of mockery. And this is the case in Mr. Betjeman's least successful poems, in which the delightful and indeed integral hints of mockery and "fun" have been ironed out—the eagle with his wings clipped to the delight of the sparrows. This is, I think, germane to the cold reception received by Mr. Auden's latest work. It is—to this kind of mind—baroque in the wrong place, "meaningless decoration" applied to something for which it seems most inappropriate. And it is unrelieved by humour in any real sense of the word. We like our landscapes ornamental, so to speak, but we do not like our anxieties ornamented.

Mr. Auden for all the curiosities in his psychology, again hits the nails on the head, ping-ping. His brazenness is magnificent. And indeed only he could possibly have envisaged a poem of this nature, or, having envisaged it, have carried it out with such undeviating skill. As a *tour de force* it is the most amazing thing he has yet accomplished. But I think it has a value beyond that. Mr. Auden has an extremely acute mind; and here, as before, he has hit the prevailing mental climate with consummate accuracy. The only trouble is that he is inclined to be a bit dressy. If he has a situation, he likes to dress it up. In his earlier poems, in *Paid on Both Sides*, or *The Orators*, in *Miss Gee* or his much over-rated biographical sonnets, the baroque element has always been there, but it has been playful and ironic. By the time we get to *The Age of Anxiety*, the fun has to a certain extent escaped him. After all, is it something we can still afford to be funny about?

Mr. Auden's virtues are legion; and many of them are present here. The curiosity of this poem is that though it is a poem of meaningless elaboration, and "free from utilitarian purpose" it is, as ever with Mr. Auden, as close to life and as realistic as could be wished; and the characters and

problems he has chosen to elaborate so thoroughly are painfully near to the bone. And here it is that the old personal heresy bobs its nasty head up again; and because Mr. Auden has written an ornamental poem about futility and anxiety, the critics begin growling about the futility of Mr. Auden, and his waning powers.

The Age of Anxiety seems to me a very subtle and rewarding poem. It has in a new guise many of the properties which made Mr. Auden's early poems famous, and indeed I think it is the most characteristic work he has produced for a long time. If people don't like it, I suggest that it is because they have left Auden behind in their admiration for those infamous little sonnets and other cute anthology pieces which, for some reason, always seem to have impressed people more than his truly characteristic poems. Mr. Auden was at his worst when he was hitting off portraits of famous contemporaries; but it seems generally to have been accepted that he was then in his heyday, and has since gone into a general decline.

In *The Age of Anxiety* a group of very ordinary people meet in a pub on All Souls' Night during the war, and they are all inflicted with anxiety, though they are all ordinary, easy-going people, moderately unhappy. They are all ruminating in a loose way on the state of the world and their own state in it. And here, I think, Auden achieves most successfully through his formal and ornate verse the kind of loose, drifting state of mind of people bemused by their anxieties, memories and the numbing properties of a few drinks. They are all wrapped in their own worlds of drifting thoughts. He makes no very strong attempt to distinguish between their characters. In each case some biography and background is supplied, but, though the precise nature of their drifting thoughts—the choice of images and memories, for instance—is decided by their past life and present situation, the general drift is the same. I imagine this is intentional, and indeed it is very acute. I think it is entirely wrong to criticise Mr. Auden on the grounds that these characters have no characters of their own, but only mouth his thoughts. The thoughts that afflict them all are the thoughts common to all ordinary people in an age of anxiety. Here perhaps I should define what I mean by ordinary people. I do not mean the masses, in a communist sense of the word; I mean the people who are distinctly not leaders, who are distinctly not in the van of anything, not the working-class struggle, nor the attempt to bolster up a decaying capitalism; the people who are lost and confused, and dismayed by the ineffectuality of their own personalities. These people are the ordinary people of this age, and they flounder in Auden's eclogue as they flounder in the life about us. It may not be so elsewhere to any so great extent, but it is certainly so in the Western World, and Auden is acute enough to see it. Psychologically, then, his poem is timely and excellent. I think his especial excellence does, in fact, lie in this that he invariably, more than any other contemporary poet, gets so close to the heart of the matter:

> "Man has no mean; his mirrors distort;
> His greenest arcadias have ghosts too;
> His Utopias tempt to eternal youth
> Or self-slaughter."

The most tempting criticism to make of this is, of course, its futility and hopelessness, the failure to attempt any solution of the problems postulated; but Auden has cleverly evaded any liability to this charge by the form he has chosen. It is in a sense a sort of puppet-play, like *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, but it is more human and less funny. For it is a tragic situation he is delineating, and all the embroidery in the world does not alter the tearfulness of the day. The poem has to be read as an ornamental picture of the situation—a drawing of the mental climate of the age—and as such I think it is eminently successful. The ornamentation is superb; the psychology accurate. And of a baroque eclogue you cannot expect more. It is a very great deal that we do have a poet who can see so clearly the torments of the age, that is to say chiefly the torments of his particular generation, and it is not really his business to solve them. His business is to

write about them. It is the business of politics to solve; of the poet to see and write. If the politicians were to do their business as well as Mr. Auden does his what a beautiful world we would live in—"gloriosa dies illa", in fact.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

"Drawing by Ceri Richards"

BETJEMAN

Selected Poems by JOHN BETJEMAN. Chosen with a Preface by JOHN SPARROW.
(JOHN MURRAY, 8/6.)

When is a pastiche not a pastiche? When is a satire apt to turn into an idyll and a giggle into a prayer? When does a jumble of bric-à-brac assume both significance and symmetry? When does an outmoded prosody ring once more true—and new? The answer in every case is: when it is Betjeman. Those who miss the point will find Mr. Betjeman's poems at one moment sentimental and at the next mere undergraduate fun—and so they sometimes are when Betjeman himself has missed his target. But when they come off (and Mr. Sparrow in this selection has excluded most of those that don't), the result is something original, finished, self-contained —and a poem. For make no mistake: Betjeman is a poet, not just a versifier. He has more than his share of humour and wit but he also has imagination; unlike the authors of mere verse or light verse proper, such as is found in *Punch*, he has *lived himself into* these poems.

Mr. Sparrow in his sensitive and sensible Preface treats John Betjeman—and about

time too—not as a high priest of Eccentricity or a mere specialist in "period" but as someone who can "contribute something new to poetry". And indeed in these post-war days when there is a premium on the woozy, the subjective, the apocalyptic, the abdominal, we should welcome a poet who can see and hear a detail and who uses his medium with precision. What Betjeman deals with is part of the world we live in (in which after all the periods overlap); it is only a *part*, certainly, but a part which poets have neglected. Take the suburbs: many poets have sneered at them but few have really put them over. Betjeman, who may giggle or guffaw or speak with his tongue in his cheek but who now hardly ever sneers (and that perhaps is his secret), does put them over. And vividly.

Mr. Sparrow, following his author's lead in the preface to *Old Lights for New Chancels*, stresses Betjeman's "topographical predilection". He might have added that Betjeman is a peculiarly *English* writer. It is hard to think of any poet since the Georgians so unaffected by foreign influences; for Betjeman, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Rilke, Lorca *et al.* might just as well not have existed. And his English (or Irish) literary influences are mainly nineteenth century. But after all England is where he lives and much of England (not only in an architectural sense) still *is* nineteenth century. Many of our poetic props are either Elizabethan or strictly contemporary; we leave it to Betjeman to commemorate the flowering currant, "plant of an age of railways". Going with this is his constant concern for the literally or symbolically immature and for the literally or symbolically senile. But here again these two categories (*pace* the acolytes of Progress) cover at least half our population.

The topographical element anyhow is easily acceptable; trolley bus and golf course are given their due and the human beings fall naturally into place as parts of the set. It is when the human beings come down stage that certain questions arise. Are the "amatory" poems just burlesque? Are the poems of childhood sentimental? Take *Indoor Games at Newbury*, a child's rhapsody on a children's party—

"Good-bye Wendy! Send the fairies, pine-
wood elf and larch tree gnome. . . ."

Are we here back with Peter Pan and Winnie the Pooh—or are we codding Peter Pan and Winnie the Pooh? Neither, I think. Betjeman, with extraordinary plasticity, has squeezed himself into the mind of a child brought up on Peter Pan and Winnie the Pooh. But, having a strong sense of theatre, he has contrived, in presenting this reality, to group it and light it with a sort of comic irony; he has got into that child but has also, paradoxically, kept it at more than arm's length—it is on the stage and he is not. The same simultaneous entering into and standing away from is achieved, still more daringly, in *Love in a Valley*, *A Subaltern's Love-Song*, and *Pot-Pourri in a Surrey Garden*. The result once more is not farce but comedy—and a comedy capable of pathos. Betjeman is as aware as anyone of the horrors of Surrey but he does know that young people, living among those horrors and perhaps to be included among them, can still fall in love just as much as artists or Negroes.

Technically, these poems are masterly. Betjeman can pick out the right physical detail, the close-up that carries a climate, and it is usually a detail that nobody else would mention—the rashes of vetch on a putting-green, the "Electoral Roll still flapping in the porch", the "ginger-beery surf" of the seaside resort, the "flattened pattern" of the grass after a picnic; for him too there may be a Johnsonian "effulgence" in the sky, but down below "The toothbrush too is airing in this new North Oxford air" or (italics mine) "The *warm-handled* racket is back in its press". His *sounds* are also most carefully chosen—not for him those bespittled cat's cradles of sibilants, those harsh coagulations of denture-shaking consonants—while his metrical schemes, borrowed often from the minor Victorians, are brilliantly exploited and get him where he wants himself. "His tunes," says Mr. Sparrow, are "always appropriate to his subject" (*nearly* always, I would say—see below); granted this, his metres cannot be dismissed as mimicry but are one essential aspect of an original whole.

There remains the most perplexing ques-

tion of this strange poet's religion. He has recently described himself as belonging to "the dear old rumbling Church of England", which, he goes on, is "*the* Catholic Church of this country". His religion indeed might be deduced from his insularity, from his "topographical predilections". But his topography does not always click with the divine element as surely as with the human. A poem in this selection which strikes me as *not* a unity and as therefore sentimental and embarrassing is *St. Saviour's, Aberdeen Park;* here even the metre seems wrong and the Sacrament appears to be lumped in anyhow along with the period props. But turn to the most moving of his poems, *Before the Anaesthetic*, which, if below religion, is certainly beyond mere churchiness. This poem, which centres round church bells, is expressing something universal. For whether we believe or not in a Christian God or in any God, and whatever our views on immortality, church bells must always remind us of mortality and of the lack of God (this latter being equally a fact whether God exists or not):

> " 'But still you go from here alone'
> Say all the bells about the Throne."

LOUIS MACNEICE.

GEORGE SEFERIS

The King of Asine and other poems. With an introduction by REX WARNER.
(JOHN LEHMANN LTD., 7/6.)

In the poetry of George Seferis the archetypes of the Greek racial memory stir in their sleep. Never have we the sense of the poet's mind being fully focused on the present—or rather, perhaps, the present is included in a field of vision so wide that we are never certain, in these poems, whether we are in the company of the living, the dead, or even, possibly—though these less so, for the sense of the poetry is rather of an end than of a beginning—the unborn. "There is nothing mystical", Rex Warner writes in his introduction, "in Seferis' approach to his problems, and here he differs profoundly from Eliot. Yet perhaps, after all, he is affected by something which might be described as a different form of mysticism, a mysticism of history and tradition rather than of philosophy or religion." Mr. Warner's opinion that there is a mystical element in Eliot's poetry, although he constantly refers to the writings of mystics and to a religious tradition, might be questioned. But the difference between Seferis' and Eliot's approach to tradition—and both are, in different ways, traditional poets—is interesting. Tradition, in Seferis, seems to be an anonymous racial memory, in which fragments of history float, as do memories of waking life in our dreams. Eliot's heap of broken images, his fragments shored against his ruins, are ruins of the waking world of history above all. Seferis' broken images are the images of dreams, or of a memory akin to dreams:

> "I woke with this marble head in my hands
> Which tires my elbows and I do not know where to put it;
> It was falling into the dream as I was rising from the dream
> Thus our lives joined and it will be hard for them to disentangle."

This unfortunately is not one of the best translated poems in the book, but in spite of the clumsiness of the last line, the image is an impressive one, and typical. Its affinity with Eliot's *Coriolanus* is obvious, as indeed is Seferis' debt to Eliot as almost every page.

As in dreams we see ourselves sometimes as many people, so Seferis writes often of "we"; the crew of a ship, or comrades voyaging together on the same Odyssey. Sometimes the crew of the one or the many, rows on the inexhaustible sea with broken oars; sometimes the men are lost and buried on islands; sometimes they open the bag of the winds, or, again, the poet is left alone in a deserted harbour, his being fragmented among companions who have sailed away. Or the self has perhaps never known the many selves who seek to live through it.

> "Perhaps we never saw them, perhaps
> We met them when sleep
> Was still leading us near the breathing wave
> Perhaps we seek them because we seek the other life
> Beyond the statues."

Or, as so often in the past, all are dead, and the Aegean flowers with corpses. In all these instances, Seferis speaks, as it were, for the soul of Greece; whether experienced in one person, or in many, is unimportant. The individual is lost in the race, the race lives in the individual.

Love, too, is legion, or fragmented, as we choose to regard the multiplication or division of the single self:

> "Sleep removed you and made fragments of you
> Around me, near me, never touching the whole,
> Joined to your silence:
> Seeing grown larger or smaller your shadow
> Losing itself among the other shadows, in the other
> World which grasped and released you."

By such devices as these, Seferis seems to bring back, for the latest gyre of Plato's spindle, the old Greek souls to their old earth. Sun, sea, islands, caves, laurels and Lydian platane trees are as they always were. Sun and blackness, blood and stone, hot wind from the south, caves and valleys, are still the same as when Odysseus and the Argonauts set sail among them. But Seferis' myth is essentially a tragic one. Broken oars, deserted harbours, rotting ships; man dwindling back into the stone and sea whence he sprang; human houses and lives cracking, rotting, breaking up. Seferis' racial dream is not very different from Mr. Eliot's reading of history. The signs of the times are the same—a waste land. Seferis' fig-trees drop their unripe figs. His crew of souls is

> "Committed unwillingly to vain pilgrimages,
> Whispering broken thoughts from foreign tongues"

the country is "no longer ours, no longer yours", and what is remembered is better than what is experienced:

> "We knew that the islands were beautiful
> Somewhere around where we are groping
> A little higher or a little lower
> A tiny distance".

The islands themselves sink into the sea;

> "In a land that crumbled enduring no longer
> In a land that once we possessed
> The islands are sinking ashes and rust."

Essentially tragic, despairing of the present in the pagan mode of the past, "The ship which journeys onward is called AGONY 937". In reading Seferis, we have, indeed, the sense not of reading a foreign or a new poet, but of taking up Greek poetry wherever it was that we last laid it down.

KATHLEEN RAINE.

POETRY IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND

Apollinaire to Aragon. Thirty Modern French Poets Translated with Introductory Essay by W. J. STRACHAN. (METHUEN, 7/6.)

Anthologie de la Poésie Anglaise. Choix, traduction et commentaires par LOUIS CAZAMIAN. (STOCK, 1946.)

Mr. Strachan warns us in his Introduction that as the translation of poetry is "largely a matter of personal taste, it would be unreasonable to expect that a collection of translations from one pen should be equally representative of all kinds of poetry". His translations are very much above the average and in so far as it is possible to transpose French verse into English verse it is achieved here. In spite of the translator's warning, however, the same praise cannot be extended to his choice of material. The thirty years covered by his selections do not appear to me to be as rich in poetry as he is inclined to suggest and compare unfavourably with the corresponding period in England. France only produced one major figure—I'd better explain that for me this means Valéry and not Claudel—and a number of amusing minor talents. The same period in England gave us two undeniably great poets in Yeats and Eliot, two more in Isaac Rosenberg and Pound who have claims to be regarded as great poets, and several very good poets like Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas and the early Auden. My lack of enthusiasm for Péguy and Claudel may be due to some blind spot of my own, but though the lesser figures in France are a good deal more accomplished and sophisticated than the Georgians and the English poets of the 'thirties, they do not seem to me to be comparable to the English writers whom I have named.

Mr. Strachan tells us that some names are absent "unavoidably"—this presumably explains why there is no Valéry—but this is scarcely sufficient to justify some of the names which are there. For his tendency to exaggerate the importance of the period extends to individual poets. There are fifty-seven poems by thirty different poets. Apollinaire is represented by ten pieces, Aragon by nine, Eluard by five, Carco and Emmanuel by three each and most of the others by a single specimen. Apollinaire is a controversial figure. He is a legend in his own country, but an English critic recently described him as a "clown in verse". This is, perhaps, a hard saying. There are good clowns and bad clowns, amusing clowns and sad clowns. Apollinaire is all these in turn, but it seems to me to be pure exaggeration to claim, as Mr. Strachan does, that "with Apollinaire a new period began in French poetry", that he was "the greatest single influence on French poetry since Baudelaire" and that "he might be said to have created a new vision"—claims which might with far more justice have been made for the great Rimbaud. For underneath his slickness, Apollinaire was a sentimentalist. His sentimentality may have been derived from Laforgue and some of the lesser Symbolists; but in spite of his faults Laforgue possessed an exquisite sensibility and his technical innovations were of a different order from Apollinaire's. Apollinaire's vaunted technical originality, indeed, is little more than a surface manœuvring which is fairly represented by this

> La religion seule est restée toute neuve la religion
> Est restée simple comme les hangars de Port-Aviation

or this

> C'est Dieu qui meurt le vendredi et ressuscite le dimanche
> C'est le Christ qui monte au ciel mieux que les aviateurs
> Il détient le record du monde pour la hauteur

There is less excuse still for the inclusion of nine poems by Aragon. This writer became known in England at a moment when it was practically impossible to judge French verse with any sort of detachment at all and most of us were guilty of overrating him. Although a few poems from *le Crève-Coeur* still seem to possess a facile charm, with each year that passes it becomes harder to understand our former enthusiasm and even the Editor of *Horizon* must regret the Introduction that he wrote for the English edition of that work.

Professor Legouis' volume is a bilingual anthology of English poetry from the author of *The Seafarer* to Ruth Pitter. His taste is very much that of the average English academic. The book contains a number of really bad poems, but the proportion is probably no higher than in compilations like the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. The modern section, as one would expect, is by far the weakest. There is no Hopkins. Yeats is represented by two very early pieces and Eliot by a solitary chorus from *The Rock*. The Georgians like the lesser Victorians are there in force. You will find Day Lewis but not Auden.

With few exceptions, the Professor has translated all the poems himself. His method of translation is somewhat peculiar. He has aimed at reproducing the verse-form of the original poems—an undertaking that might have taxed the powers of a considerable poet —and to this end he has cheerfully sacrificed accuracy and a good deal more besides. In a Shakespearean sonnet he translates the word "journey" by *journee* which is scarcely happy in its context; but it is not until he comes to Donne's *Extasie* that he really shows us what he can do.

> Where, like a pillow on a bed,
> A pregnant bank swell'd up, to rest
> The violet's reclining head,
> Sat we two, one another's best.

becomes

> Oû, comme un oreiller sur un lit,
> Un talus s'enflait, soutenant
> Le front penché des violettes,
> Nous étions assis, l'un à l'autre.

The "pregnant" is awkward and could only have been rendered by a paraphrase, but it is essential to the poem and to omit it without so much as a footnote is fantastic. I pass in charitable silence over the translator's tussle with "Our eye-beams twisted" and the "double thread" and do not stop until I come to the very famous, but very easy

> Else a great Prince in prison lies.

This becomes

> Sinon, un Prince est prisonnier.

Perhaps the twentieth-century professor is less impressed by princes and souls than the seventeenth-century courtier, or perhaps he thinks that all princes are great and that it isn't worth mentioning. But Donne thought it was. I think Donne was right and the professor might have got that one right, too, if he had been more modest and stuck to "the other harmony of prose".

MARTIN TURNELL.

RANSOM

Selected Poems by JOHN CROWE RANSOM.
(EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE, 9/-.)

Every reader of new poetry, whether he is unfortunate enough to have to read it as a profession or not, probably keeps in his head a touchstone against which to test it, so that the quickest of trials will tell him if a poet's acquaintance is worth pursuing. He cannot rationalise the test, and it may be unfair to certain types of poet, but its efficacy is sure in the case of John Crowe Ransom: there is hardly a poem of his, early or late, which will not yield lines of the true colour.

> Dear love, these fingers that had known your touch,
> And tied our separate forces first together,
> Were ten poor idiot fingers not worth much,
> Ten frozen parsnips hanging in the weather.
>
> . . . .
>
> The great beast had spilled there his little brain,
> And the little groin of the knight was spilled by a stone.
>
> . . . .
>
> And Lar who invalided lies . . .

I shall never forget the impact of these poems when I first read them, about fourteen years ago, nor my surprise at finding that this true and individual voice belonged to a poet who did all the things which we had been learning not to do: who used archaic words like *wight* and *fardel*, and words of poetic diction like *dolorous* and *fabulous*, and uncolloquial inversions, and rhymed *Ovid* with *gravid* and *peon* with *ruin*, and could write such a vile line as "What uproar tall towers concumbent make" (Ransom has now altered *towers* to *trees*, but that doesn't make it much better). It was puzzling. But no more puzzling than in the case of Hardy, who similarly combined clumsiness with a most varied skill in metrical forms, and with whose attitude as a poet Ransom seemed to have something in common. A closer affinity, which struck me strongly, was with Robert Graves, and as I first made acquaintance with Ransom's poems through the American editions,* I did not discover until later that it was Graves who had introduced his work into England, in a selection published by the

* *Chills and Fever* and *Two Gentlemen in Bonds*, Knopf, 1924 and 1927.

"Drawing by Ceri Richards"

Hogarth Press in 1924.* The two poets have much in common both in their technique and in their habit of mind: a calculated roughness and informality which disguises a strictly-kept form; a natural gift of fancy checked more and more as time goes on by a savage and satiric view of the world; an early habit of blaming God, later outgrown; and a liking for telling stories in verse which is not common now, though notable in another poet with whom Ransom is sometimes compared, Robert Frost.

Ransom has said in a book of prose, published in 1938;† "An art never possesses the 'sincerity' that consists in speaking one's mind, that is, in expressing one's first impression before it has time to grow cold. This sincerity is spontaneity, the most characteristic quality in modern poetry . . . we have grown too impatient to relish more than the first motions towards poetic effect. The English and American Imagists exploited and consolidated this temper. . . ." It strikes me that in his own verse he has been at pains to achieve this appearance of spontaneity, while practising poetry as a strict and difficult art. What first intoxicated me, and set me imitating, was his delicate use of ambiguity in rhythm, of which Yeats and Wyatt are masters, and which Ransom still commands, as a quotation from one of his latest poems will show. (Note that the last line of the stanza is of four beats in the chosen pattern.)

> Ducks require no ship and sail
> Bellied on the foamy skies,
> Who scud north. Male and female
> Make a slight nest to arise
> Where they overtake the spring,
> Which clogs with muddy going.

It is shameful to realise that since Graves's selection of 1924, none of this poetry has been available in English editions (except in anthologies) until this volume. I had rather have seen a collected edition than a selection, even though this is made by the author himself, for some of the poems omitted are just as good as those included, and none are given from his earliest book (of which Graves's selection, now out of print, included some). But this is excellent as far as it goes. Ransom admits to having "trimmed and revised" a little, and it is always interesting to see the results of this risky practice. I do not think that he has improved the poems much, though he has shortened one to advantage, and I am glad that he has left "Captain Carpenter" strictly alone. One of the lines which was among my early favourites—"Love . . . must not go the way of the hot rose dying"—has fallen to the scissors. The book contains five recent poems not previously printed except in periodicals, which show that the poetic impulse, however rare, is as strong as ever.

ANNE RIDLER.

COPIOUS AND INTRICATE

Orisons, Picaresque and Metaphysical by IAIN FLETCHER. (POETRY, London, 7/6.)

If, following Mr. Auden's lead, we all find ourselves taking up the baroque, Iain Fletcher may find himself a modish figure. The whole notion, at least, of the rococo might be deduced from such lines of his as these,

> All that smooth wilderness of hair
> And peacock-pleasantry of eyes
> No more retract me to despair;
> No more I fornicate with sighs—
> These shadows I despise,

and of the baroque in its more grandiose sense from such as these,

* *Grace after Meat.*

† *The World's Body*, Scribner.

These are the soldiers whom the base restrains.
A starched life wakes among the melancholic walls,
The strangled voice of gutters where it rains.

The soldiers whose heroic vacancy appals:
The flaccid cigarette that crowns the face;
The moon-blank eyes in eyeless urinals.

In the first of these passages, the theme is not so much a passing fancy for some girl as the whimsical ornaments with which the mind can deck that; a mood is detached from a situation and made much of in itself. In the second passage, a heroic aura is cast over something in itself drab and boring. In real life, we would notice a flabby fag-end hanging from the soldier's lip rather than "the flaccid cigarette that crowns the face"; and at the end of the little poem the lonely soldiers have become statuesque figures in an ominously empty landscape,

In every place
They hug their deserts, and through deserts grope.

Fletcher, in fact, is often interested not so much in the situation in itself as in what verse can transform it into; in front of life's shoddy structures, he erects gay or gloomy verbal façades. The gloom of life stirs Fletcher to grotesque or grandiose constructions; its gaiety to whimsically elaborate ornament.

There is thus a certain divorce between mood and situation in much of his poetry. He often chooses the more remote and dignified of two available words, *flaccid*, *pallid*, *fluid*, rather than *flabby*, *pale*, *flowing*: he is fond of epithets and nouns that are emotive rather than informative, *grave*, *quiet*, *pure*, *sad*, *vague*, *tenuous*, *contrapuntal*, and *bitter; purity*, *chastity*, *clarity*, *immediacy*, *immanence*, *distance*, *nearness*, *pattern* and *aura.* The use of such a vocabulary, especially in his love poems—where elaborate verbal designs are built up, one feels, from rather slight situations—enables him to make certain almost impalpable distinctions, defining, as it were, the shades of twilight and importing a flavour of geometry into a realm of mist: as who would say, "Notice the tenuous pattern, indeed the dark and bitter aura, of that grave purity." Perhaps one could notice it, if one stared long enough, and I am not attacking him for this. Such lines as these,

So you're a pattern that no pen conforms to:
Soft as a distance nurturing flutes
And fluid as the slow caress of light,

are in their way very effective. But it is in the way of poets of the 'nineties, poets predominantly of mood, like Lionel Johnson, rather than in the way of Fletcher's favourite metaphysicals. Fletcher's air of dry, precise intellectualism is therefore often deceptive; many of his poems, though utterly different in tone and manner, would be as hard to translate into a prose equivalent as those of Dylan Thomas or George Barker; they convey a mood very subtly, but when one attempts to abstract the statements they make, these seem to crumble away.

At a time like this, when none of us know quite what to say, it may be appropriate for a poet to concentrate on his manner of saying. But if Iain Fletcher were merely a baroque poet, one would not be greeting this as the most interesting first volume that has come out this year. The ordinary reader should, I think, at a first reading of this book, skip the love poems, the translations, the purely ornamental verbal exercises. He should read carefully the sections "The Agony of Dying Houses" and "Illnesses of War". These are more solid, their moods less divorced from situation, than the rest of the book. They deal with two great maladies of our time: the decay of tradition, of which Fletcher's example is the sense of melancholy decline in English middle-class families; and individual uprootedness, of which his example is the empty and useless life of the exiled private soldier. Both themes have been handled often enough, and it is easy to handle them with a

false brightness or toughness, or, on the other hand, with a weak defeatism. Fletcher handles them with an unaffected pathos:

> I have been drowned in the disquiet of mirrors.
> The rain has been like a cry; the streets
> Have been weeping for the idea of dead to-morrows;
> The sky has been like a face one never meets,

Or with a wry and stubborn humour:

> Here Pat would flush th' academic kidney,
> Lurching next door to whisky down the pan—
> Although he left my mother on her beam-ends
> He was a frank and placid sort of man,
> And he and she were quite the best of friends.

I like that, and I also like the passages in which Fletcher gets away from conceits (a game of verbal hide-and-seek with the reader, and sometimes with himself) to composed vision (by which I mean something at once more and less than exact visual detail):

> And I noticed her by her not moving in the sad boat,
> And I noticed her by her not moving when the rowers sang . . .
> And her eye was ashen like the saddest of days
> When we celebrate the sad august religions,
> When women weep behind dark walls:
> And about her hung an aura of weeping.

Such passages are not exactly typical of this volume, which is full of copious and intricate verbal patterning, but they suggest the most hopeful lines of Fletcher's future development. He has a passion for the riddling style, and since this volume was assembled he has become obsessed with Mr. Empson: which may, in his case, be a mistake. For his obscurities are often shifty and evasive, his oddly individual irony—a kind of sneering respectfulness—is often ineffective because self-defensive. One would like him to expose himself more nakedly, and express himself more simply, as he does in the poems in this volume that have the widest appeal. For behind all his poses, there is a very solid human attitude, that of the irritable, frustrated man, who yet stubbornly sees things through. The very word "humanism" stinks, or used to stink, in Iain Fletcher's nostrils, yet it is as a poet of human perceptions (rather than religious insights and metaphysical subtleties) that one admires him and believes he has a future.

G. S. Fraser.

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