POETRY

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LONDON

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QUESTIONS IN THE SILLY SEASON

With the appearance of this number *Poetry London* will have survived ten years. Everyone would agree that the spiritual climate during this decade has hardly been a congenial one for poets. On the other hand, no one can pretend that he has been bored. Like those enthusiasts who in dead of winter hack a hole in the ice on the Serpentine, and plunge shivering into the water while congratulating each other in gleeful voices on the severity of the season, we might even be grateful that we have been privileged to live in such stirring times! At least it gives everyone an opportunity to show his mettle (and, incidentally, to get on thoroughly familiar terms with his own and other people's anxiety compulsions).

So far as poets and the poetry reading public are concerned, however, a hot war seems to be preferable to a cold one. During the hot war, even at a time when it was very hot indeed, an impressive number of people (and not only G.I.s and the A.T.S.) actually bought and read poetry magazines, whereas now—we forbear to inquire what happens to those half-crowns to-day. Yet England is still to our knowledge the only country in the world in which at least four magazines solely devoted to the art of poetry flourish (more or less), and where a respectable amount of verse of a high quality is written and read. One need only travel anywhere on the Continent to-day and converse with people interested in literary affairs to realise that what English poets are up to, is regarded as highly significant for the general health of European Letters. This may be flattering, but it also confers on us a grave responsibility. Nor does it help very much to point out to Sir Stafford Cripps that the products of our poets have always been, and still may be, taking a long view, our best export line. If then our continued existence is a matter of such paramount importance as a sympathetic reviewer in *The New Statesman and Nation* recently asserted, then we would be justified in asking all those interested in poetry actively to support us, and not merely from a sense of duty, or because of the pricks of a bad conscience, but because to read us gives both pleasure and profit. Moreover, it costs a deal less than the weekly pilgrimage to the movies, which each time is more discouraging than the last.

This year being the bi-centenary of Goethe's birth (28th August, 1749), we are marking the occasion by printing in this number two characteristic poems in a new English version by Vernon Watkins. Goethe at any rate had no misgivings about the importance of poetry and the place of the poet in human society. He had, of course, the advantage over us in that he was born into an age when the peoples of Europe took it for granted that the world had finally emerged from barbarism into the brilliant sunshine of civilisation, *their civilisation*, needless to say (there was none other worth mentioning).

And this eighteenth-century European civilisation, which was still the civilisation of Christendom, extended from the Atlantic seaboard to the shores of the Volga, and would presently—could anyone doubt it?—encompass the whole globe. There still seems no reason, even in our temporarily truncated Europe of 1949, and in spite of persistent attack upon it from within and without, to abandon hope in the successful issue of this development.

At this point it may be worth recalling that in contrast to to-day the ten years that followed the First World War witnessed an extraordinary revival in all the arts. Exciting things were happening then, new techniques were being invented and fresh fields of aesthetic experience were explored. The more alive artists were conscious of an intense feeling of elation at their release from outworn modes of expression. However apathetic and even hostile the public—and the general public, not to mention officialdom, is always, and quite rightly, cautious and conservative in its appreciation of art—there could be no doubt that those artistic activities would produce, and did produce, works of lasting value. The spiritual climate may not have been any more congenial then than now, but no one could have dreamed that civilised society was moving into that *Univers Concentrationnaire*, to borrow the title of David Rousset's striking allegory, with which to-day we have become so painfully familiar. Because of this realisation, that in the universal concentration camp in which we are all entrapped, and from which one can barely catch a glimpse through the barbed wire of the open country beyond, there is scarcely any place left for the arts any more, one poet has recently been asking himself some searching questions. We hereby issue a challenge to all poets to ask themselves similar questions, and to attempt to find the answers.

What, in fact, this poet inquires, are you doing when you write poetry?* "Is making poetry not always the realisation of that which is absent? It is either memory: i.e. salvaging something that is past; or the attempt to grasp that which will soon be past; or it is a nostalgic voyaging into distant regions; or prayer, a cry across the chasm of the Transcendental." Living-in-Time always means living towards that which you are not yet, or towards that which you cannot have. Therefore it implies a want. Is Art not always a means of giving permanence to the moment of happiness by extending it in Time? Everything that is absent appears to us to be utterly lost. The poem tries to compensate for this. It wants to give an eternal quality to that which has been lost in order to make this loss impossible. And it tries to do this by the poorest of means, namely by *words*. But this poverty of means is also its strength. *The intensity of the poem is nourished by the fire of despair.* The words have to be spoken in a vacuum. One always makes poetry *in exile*. Indeed, Exile is the very country of poetry. That is how Gunther Anders feels about it.

Whether or not we agree with this view is not material for the moment. Perhaps there is more to it than that, but the important thing, at this juncture of the world's affairs, is to return with this intensely sincere self-examiner to the crucial question: Why do we still want to write poetry to-day? "Whom do we want to reach? Whom do you really have in mind? Someone who is lonely? But whom? Do you want him merely to read your poem? No. Then must he sing it? No. Do you want him to come under a spell? No. Is he to say it to himself like a prayer? No. Is he to dance to it? No. Do you want him to feel uplifted by it? Towards what? You, brother poet, what do you want to achieve with what you are making? Into what kind of a situation do you want to lead this other person with your product? To what end? Are you doing this to 'express' yourself, or just to make poetry about yourself? Anyway, what concern is it of others how things are with you?"

Such then are some of the questions we invite poets to ask themselves, and having asked them, to tell us what answers (if any) they arrive at. It may help the poet to introduce a greater sense of immediacy, of necessity into his poetry-making than we have been able to discover of late.

August, 1949.

* Gunther Anders : Dichten Heute, in *Die Wandlung*, Heidelbergh, January, 1949.

WALTER DE LA MARE

I AM

I am the World. Unveil this face!
Of brass it is, and cold, and hard;
It broods on the splendour of my disgrace,
Remorseless and unmarred.

I am the Flesh. With drooping lid
My eyes like sea-flowers drowse and shine
Unfathomably far. I bid
The lost all hope resign.

I am the Devil. H'sst, lean close;
The hatred in my vulture stare
Thy doubting, fainting soul will dose
With cordials rich and rare.

I am the World. Come, enter, feast!
Look not too closely—gilt, or gold?
Nor heed the wailing of man and beast,
The clamour of bought and sold!

I am the Flesh. Enormous, dim,
Dream doth invite thee, thick with fumes
Of burning gums. Faint visions gleam;
Sea's phosphor the vague illumes.

I am the Devil. Head askew,
And dwelling eye. See, how earth's straight
Distorted-crooked crocks. And through
Time's bars grins gibbering Fate.

MARTINS

"*Chelidon urbica urbica!*"
I cried on the little bird,
Meticulously enunciating each syllable of each word,
"*Chelidon urbica urbica!*"
Listen to me, I plead!
There are swallows all snug in the hayloft,
Come, build in my eaves and breed!

Fly high, my love! my love, fly low!
I watched the sweet pretty creatures go
Floating, skimming and wheeling, so
Swiftly and softly—like flakes of snow,
'Gainst the dark of the cedar-boughs, to and fro:
But no!
"*Chelidon urbica urbica!*"
None paid me the faintest heed!

KEITH DOUGLAS

ABSENCE

The long curtained french windows conceal
the company at dinner by candlelight.
I am the solitary person on the lawn,
dressed up silver by the moon.
The bush on my left sleeps, the tree on my right
is awake but stays motionless to feel,

as I and Cupid on his ornament stone,
how the whole evening here discourses
and the stars too lean nearer to the earth
for their traditional splendour pours forth
much more in such unpopulous places,
almost litters the trees like rain.

So the minutes assemble at first in silence
till here or there the speech of ghosts or leaves
is audible. And it appears each grieves,
the garden with its composite voice sighing:
She is not here and you who come instead
shew by your attitude she's dead.

Oxford, 1940.

GALLANTRY

The Colonel in a casual voice
spoke into the microphone a joke
which through a hundred earphones broke
into the ears of a doomed race.

Into the ears of the doomed boy, the fool
whose perfectly mannered flesh fell
in opening the door for a shell
as he had learnt to do at school.

Conrad luckily survived the winter:
he wrote a letter to welcome
the suspicious spring: only his silken
intentions severed with a single splinter.

Was George fond of little boys?
we always suspected it,
but who will say: since George was hit
we never mention our surmise.

It was a brave thing the colonel said,
but the whole sky turned too hot
and the three heroes never heard what
It was, gone deaf with steel and lead.

But the bullets cried with laughter,
the shells were overcome with mirth,
plunging their heads in steel and earth—
(the air commented in a whisper).

El Ballah, General Hospital, 1943.

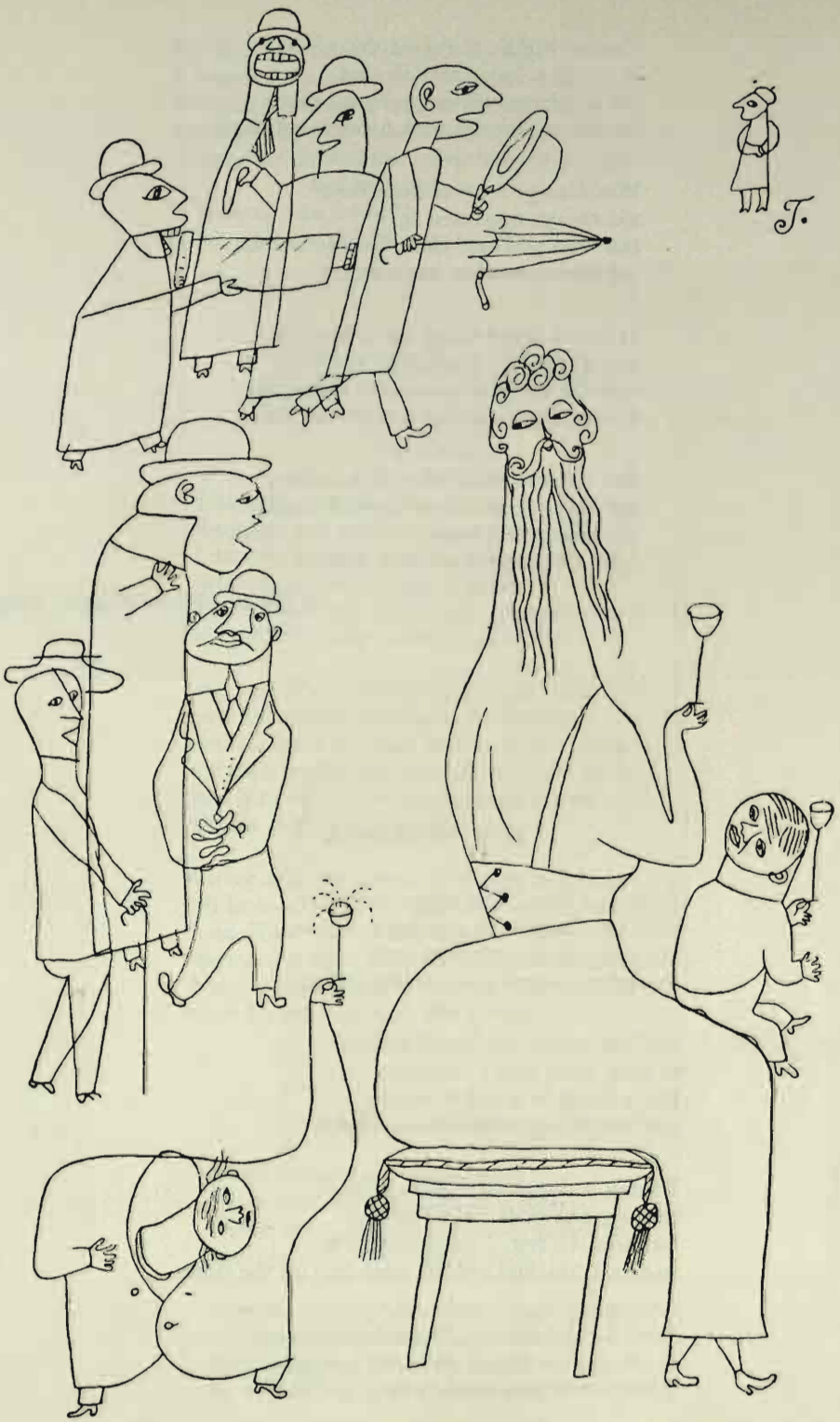
THE PRISONER

To-day, Cheng, I touched your face
with two fingers, as a gesture of love,
for I can never prove enough
by sight or sense your strange grace;

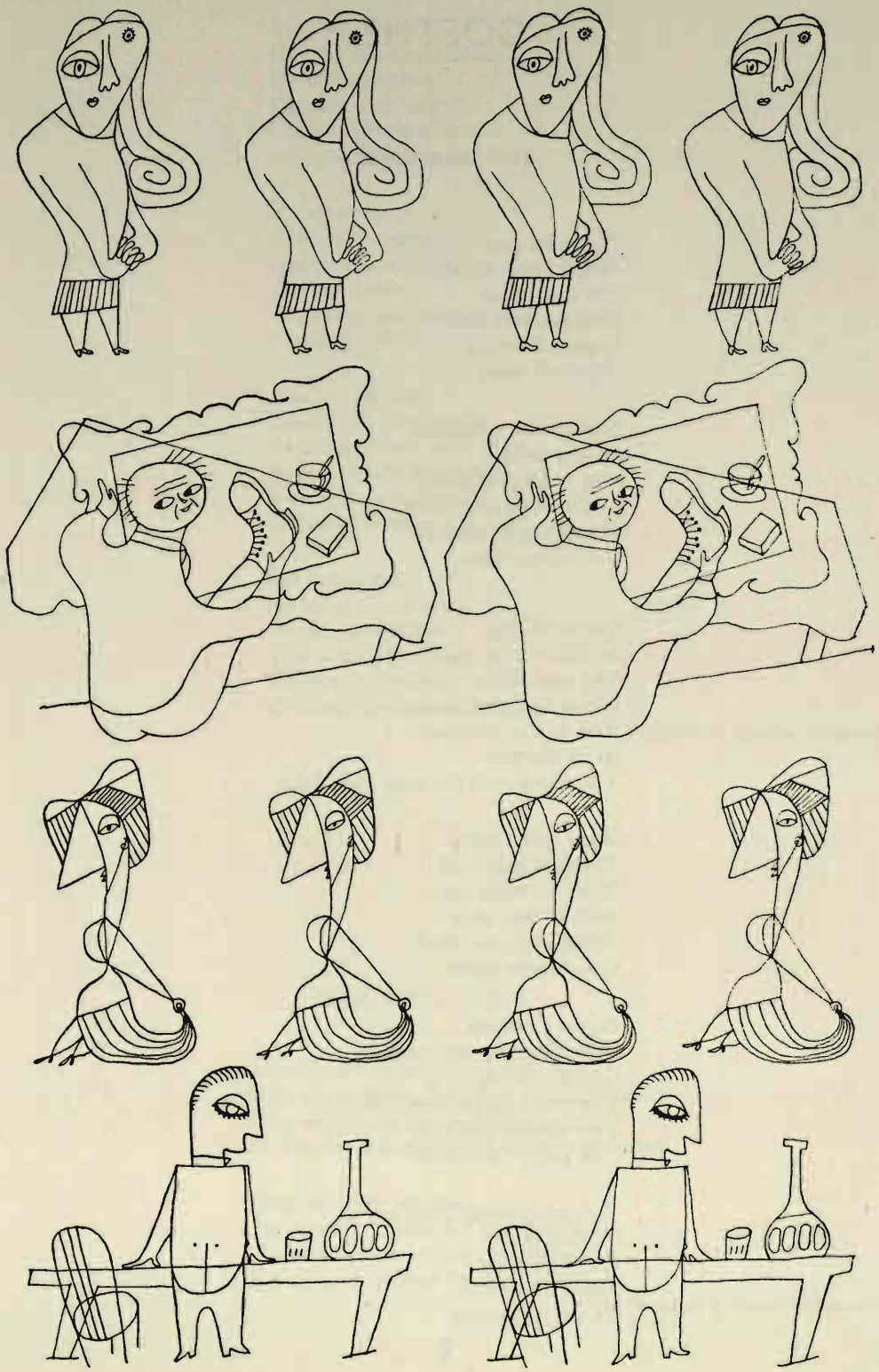
but like moths my hands return
to your skin, that's luminous
like a lamp in a paper house,
and touch, to teach love and learn.

I think a thousand hours are gone
that so, like gods, we'd occupy:
but alas, Cheng, I cannot tell why,
to-day I touched a mask stretched on the stone—

hard face of death. There was the urge
to escape the bright flesh and emerge
of the ambitious cruel bone.



"Drawings by Franciszka Themerson from BAYAMUS, a new satirical novel by Stefan Themerson"



GOETHE

THE GODLIKE

Noble let man be,
Helpful and good;
For that alone
Distinguishes him
From all beings
That we know.

Hail to the unknown
Loftier beings
Our souls prefigure!
Let man be like them,
His example teach us
To believe those.

For unfeeling
Is nature's heart;
The sun shines
Upon bad and good,
And to the criminal
As to the best
The moon and the stars lend light.

Wind and rivers,
Thunder and hail
Rush on their way
And as they race
Headlong, take hold
One on the other.

So, too, fortune
Fumbling through crowds
Quickly seizes
The boy's curled innocence,
And quickly likewise
The guilty bald-head.

Following great bronzen,
Ageless laws
All of us must
Fulfil the circles
Of our existence.

Yet only man
Can do the impossible;
He distinguishes,
Chooses and judges;
He can give lasting
Life to the moment.

He alone may
Reward the good,
Punish the wicked,
Heal and save,
All erring and wandering
Usefully gather.

And we honour
Them, the immortals,
As though they were men,
Achieving in great ways
What the best in little
Achieves or longs to.

Let noble man
Be helpful and good,
Create unwearied
The useful, the just;
Be to us a pattern
Of those prefigured beings.

(*Translated by* VERNON WATKINS)

HARPIST'S SONG

Who never ate his bread with tears,
Who never through night's troubled hours
Sat weeping on his bed of fears,
He knows you not, you heavenly powers.

Deep into life you lead us in,
The wretch's guilt you bring to birth,
Then yield him over to his pain;
For all guilt shrives itself on Earth.

(*Translated by* VERNON WATKINS)

IAIN FLETCHER

FATHER AND SON

What corrupt parable, or sophism rather,
Will teach the fatted Son
How to confront the prodigal Father?

It happened in the stories we were told
—Not at our Mother's knee—
The Son was crowned with regal guilt of old.

Sons had Passions then: Aleion, Son of Baal;
Their willing feet
Folded to meet the profile of the nail.

There were no auguries to urge my birth:
No sensuous thunderbolt
Revolted soft extremities of earth.

No giant star with antennæ aflame
Poured through the lintel then
By which the Magi to a Magus came.

The clumsy void of woman was not sealed
By some Uranian gust
By which the lusts of Generation healed.

Here the first problem is the lastly same:
How impotent, absented,
The Father who was gone before I came.

Seeing that light which is called day,
Distinguish, first therefore,
Your adversary as most you may:

The old demonic force lost for a while
In the long smell of world,
In autumn gods, the ripeness of a smile.

Now God is sickly in our growing earth;
And, if the Father comes,
This Father comes to shield a child from birth.

GWYN WILLIAMS

MEILYR OF CAERLEON

(From a story told by Gerald the Welshman.)

Now the thorn lanes are hung
with spring's new linen
whiter under Easter moon
than winter's ermine

and the latch raising sun
has softened tempers
pressing girls to grant a tryst
in warmer trusting

Meilyr from dripping eaves
the night's cold outlaw
has won a girl to the green grove
eager for loving

Hands to the tumbling mane
they lie together
gathering within eight limbs
the season's alms

Beyond the parents' ban
or the alarming
horn or harnessing of law
they're now allowing

two worlds to meet in mouths
to spin a new one
mutely on a moving knot
they near uniting

Molten on Meilyr's tongue
the honey's tested
where the ways of knowing now
are curving in

But he must look at her:
a hag has gripped him
luckless in her thin lips' lock
his pulses slacken

The lovely yellow hair
is now a horror
crimped is all the skein of silk
that lovers like

The dark eyes that grew soft
when Lent was over
harden into blackened holes
down to where hell is

He's mad leaving that place
less men than monsters
Meilyr shall in future see
in fair ones furies

evil things where were gay
grim things grow thickly
down all lonely daily roads
the devil rides

and where the Roman town
turns to remembering
Meilyr's staring eyes are for
the future fear.

September, '47.

"Drawing by Ceri Richards"

BERNARD GUTTERIDGE

DIANO CASTELLO

And now this olive-haunting moon
Searches the terraces, and lays
Softly before it, one by one,
The shadows of the silent trees.

The castellated hill town spreads
A like silhouette
Upon the eastern road
Where the outskirt houses meet

The long pull uphill for a traveller.
And as the shutters close
We stand by the church's iron door
And are above the hills and trees;

And see the creeping moonlight grey
The grey-green leaves;
And the sickle in the sea
Where the fishing fleet moves

Its linking lights across the bay.
Moon and probing light need substance
To lie their shadows by.
As we two stand, our shadows

Move run-like on the stone.
Yet no moon shows the dark
Difficult line that's always drawn
Between our hearts and talk.

NICHOLAS MOORE

PASTORAL

Watch how in the lazy air, the mist-filled air
The birds waver their autumn wings. Rooks,
Who are cold in the ice-laden air,
Sparrows and robins who spring and chirp;

And how the spiky chestnuts hang on trees,
Or fall for the small boys to find,
Red, burnished shapes, and marked like jewels!
And how the horses swish their tails!

And then remember the sly mind
Of Autumn, the last singing in the air
Of summer joys, of flowery hats and silk
Dresses, and how the Autumn holds them all

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.

LYNETTE ROBERTS

DEATH THAT MONSTER

Death that monster that takes us unawares
Whose sleep is as naked as the golden collar
Cowers lest the sky should fall on his back
And diminish his agricultural hoard.

He is the haughty warrior defiant of all mankind;
He is in particular the Keltic god
With all the spiral trappings of our race:
The embossed gold studded beneath the soil,

Emblazoner, and cause of its split spoil.
The armoured trumpeter who diminishes all flesh,
Whose urgent missile and invisible flight
Points with a sickle horn at his various deeds:

The unbending grass now grazed by the cows,
Chapel and Church, playground to death's cause.
I call to death, his tenebrous voice that incites us
To invent, cling to superstition; who in loss

Leads us dingily through paths of release.
Who steps like sullen summer over the tusked terrain
From sign of Pisces to the Water-Carriers glade:
And here death waited. Watched at the spring's source.

"And water-carrier I am" shouted the woman
As she downed the hill to fill her last can;
"That's him who shoves up our eyes and sweeps us
Into the hall of rocks . . . his watery foul box. . . .

Pushing us back into hills of moving green. . . .
Why stare through the leaves?" she muttered pouring
Water to her cattle. "And resurrection?" wailed
The woman now down on her knees as she caught

A glimpse of death chained to a yew. "Resurrection"
He replied, like hot breath rising from a ten cent store,
"Is what you leave behind."

JULES SUPERVIELLE

LA COLOMBE

à Denis Saurat

Viendra le jour où la colombe
Ayant en nous appareillé
Au plus obscur de notre monde
Se posera émerveillée
Devant nos yeux sur un grand cèdre
Pour y secouer nos ténèbres
Intimes, pendant un moment,
Comme quelqu'un qui a le temps,
Puis, requise de nostalgie,
Elle reviendra au logis
Par quelque secrète fenêtre
Où nous la verrons disparaitre
Pour la trouver dans notre cœur
Qui lui donne vie et chaleur.
Ainsi au loin tout nous échappe
Et quand nous y pensons le moins
Revient vers cette douce trappe
Où l'humain se change en divin,
Dieu allant à pas de géant
De l'un à l'autre tout le temps
Sans avoir besoin de bouger
Ni quitter son monde étagé.
Et pour répondre au grand soleil
Nous en avons un tout pareil
Qui, du dedans, donne à nos lévres
Leur couleur et leur saine fiévre.
Pour répondre à l'antique lune

Au fond de nous il en est une
Dont le très effilé croissant
Va jusqu'au cercle étincelant.
Dehors, dedans ce sont les mondes
Dont les silences se répondent
Ils forment les profonds miroirs
Echangeant jusqu'à leurs espoirs,
Et dans sa ruisselante grotte
Le ciel étoilé en chuchote.

DONALD DAVIE

LANDFALL AMONG FRIENDS

At that time, two friends stood
On that dissentient coast, like lights that would,
Compared, pin-point me in the darkling sea.

One stood for (or, in life and blood,
Engrossed) whole tracts, saying, "This church, that wood
Stand so, behind, or else oblique to me."

The sentimental counties he implied
Were those called "Style", lying along one side
Of that small estuary where I was bound.

The other tower, on a spit of land
Continually clouded, rose on my other hand,
And grave and sober forests hedged it round.

Through sober and magnificent, between
The gay and insolent flash, the charitable gleam,
I nose her now. The lights are high above.

Between the assertive "I", the tender "They",
What little town winks in the close of day?
A needful pride, an equal, fluent love.

CONDOLENCE

When he came back from saying good-bye
For the last time in that foreign town
To his foreign woman, was it I
    Who was suddenly drawn
To touch him and say "My dear"?

Of passionate comradely men, and their ways
Of mutual comfort, I had learned
Nothing at all Yet the warmest phrase
    I suddenly turned,
And the only acceptable movement made.

No tongue's sufficient. There is none
So noble and so intimate;
Unless that ancient stilted one,
    With its Delphic beat,
Could act condolence through the hand.

There was the tact in it! Brush of a wing,
The touching was the happy ruse,
A quiet and time-honoured thing,
    Quite out of use,
Articulation by the bone.

I never did so. Never I
Pulled down the wild head to the nest
In one quick warmth of arm and eye,
    And the moment's rest
Of a flickering hand, and a word.

But it was I, resuming then
The usual day, who rejoicing went
At the ease and grace of comradely men,
    And full of content
At my hand that lay light like a wing.

RUTH TENNEY

SONG FOR DESIRE

The hill-head challenges;
But though you cannot attain it, do not be sad!
Has your desire not topped it?

The supple road invites;
But though you cannot explore it, do not be sad!
Has your desire not spanned it?

The virtuous girl provokes;
But though you may not possess her, do not be sad!
Does your desire not know her?

Praise then to the sorcerer Desire,
Who, in spite of all, delivered to you
The hill too high for you,
The road too long for you,
And brings to your arms wherever, whenever you will,
The virtuous girl.

E. B. CHAMPKIN

Return with me, Cypriano, to the Villa Resina
Above the Bay. I think the foliage is speaking
And a scent waits at the foot of the steps
Down the path, down to the sea through
Stucco'd arches, down
To the murmuring sea.

Walk in the garden, Cypriano, carefully nurtured
By many hands from the Roman, who also heard
The chant of cicada and those other noises
In this place. Who saw, too,
This gaiety of coloured brick
And heard women's voices

From the beach below. Cypriano, I love trees.
The quiet conversation of their branches.
Cypriano, this is the place for conspired love,
The heat of the day over, and
A white moon and no dust.
No dust nor sun.

From the terrace, Cypriano, you shall see old
Blue water unhorizoned; an orange stall on the
Jetty. You shall see much, watching
Like those still lizards who
Break a pose to recede
To other sunshine.

Did I wish to forget, Cypriano, I could not forget
The azure of Castellamare, and Ischia's
Blue beauty, the song of Naples' sea:
And, mountain of shaped delight, Vesuvius,
Seen from Resina and
For ever remembered.

Naples, 1945.

MARGARET CROSLAND

AMSTERDAM

Water shall still be silence there
and houses with careful mirrors
reflect our absence. Here
where the purple glass has a white light
and bridges lead ever more closely
into history, the boats
move slowly, the bicycles fast,
towers are delicate unexpected
and Oriental beyond
the red narrow houses and the trees.
Rustle of gold and brocade
is an echo on steep stairs
and here always the blue bowls
standing with pewter and darkness.
Unchanging the portraits, the blue-eyed faces;
green velvet light on the careful water
moves always more slowly over a stone ocean
slowly and deeply into history.

"Drawing by Ceri Richards"

BASIL TOMLINSON

LEGEND

Lost on the passage home, so we suppose,
though there was no real certainty about his death,
we could never know just how or why he fell
or exactly when he drew his last breath

but a look-out noted a splash
off the starboard quarter well past midnight
and assumed a dolphin or some other fish,
never thinking . . . of course, the light

was bad and the horned moon
fitful, hidden by scudding clouds,
otherwise . . . in any case the sailor
was not to be blamed; up in the shrouds

all night without relief, half frozen,
with orders to keep his eyes on the skyline
—straight below was not his concern—
and, well, was the fall accident or design?

No one aboard could tell, of course,
but certain things were said
that perhaps might lead one to believe . . .
frankly, was he quite right in the head

when he fell? Not that we thought him mad,
far from it, but just a little—queer,
cracked, as one would say;
and, then, perhaps the fear

of what he might find when he reached home . . .
well, there's many a man gone the same way
and he was by no means so tough.
We thought it might have started while sailing through the Bay

in the stormy season when the waves ran high
and the lightning played all round
and the old hands said something about
coffin candles; then we found

him in his cabin at the storm's height
staring at strange markings on a great sheet
of parchment, and laughing. Anyway he brought him round
but after that he could never meet

us about the ship but he would say something
in a language we couldn't understand.
Yes, he was definitely getting queer—
the men noticed it, too, and

began to talk. There were some
curious accidents aboard that trip,
lamps falling, ropes snapping, fires in the hold,
two men killed. There was a rumour round the ship

that he was the cause of these things.
Mere stupid superstition, of course,
but such notions can get quite ugly at sea
and if the men were tempted to use force

we were bound in honour to defend him
So, altogether, it was quite a relief
to find him off our hands
in such a way and, to the best of our belief,

no blame attached to anyone.
Yes, quite the best way
it could have happened. So we said prayers for him
and ordered all hands to belay

work while we observed the usual funeral rites.
Then we took his poems—he wrote
quite a few on the voyage—his papers
and all his belongings, put them in a small boat

and set it loose, burning, on the sea.
It burnt merrily for a while and then sank
leaving debris and a black ash on the surface
which soon cleared, making the sea again a blank

of water. His confidential papers
we also burnt, unopened with the rest. Though
the owners grumbled a bit at this we thought it best
—he was unhinged towards the end and you never know

POINTS OF VIEW

1749 GOETHE 1832

Since the days of George Henry Lewes and Carlyle little critical attention has been focussed on Goethe in this country. The greatest literary figure that Germany has produced has of late been strangely out of fashion here. Even in 1932 at the time of the centenary of his death, which called forth a spate of literature in most civilised countries, English criticism, with the exception of some notable studies by Professors Willoughby, Butler and Barker Fairly, managed to preserve a not particularly dignified silence. There was, it is true, a Government reception at Fishmongers Hall; but poets and critics did not display much interest in the occasion. This situation was not improved by some singular observations from Mr. T. S. Eliot (to whom Goethe's literary personality is apparently unsympathetic). Goethe, it seems, dabbled in philosophy and poetry but did not make much success of either. Goethe's 'parochialism', Mr. Eliot felt, prevented his work from exercising a decisive influence on European literature.

Now, apart from the interest in a bi-centenary to do homage to a great man, the important question a modern reader might well ask is, what value Goethe's work and activities have for us to-day? This is the question which pre-occupied Dr. Albert Schweitzer in an address he delivered in Frankfort-on-Main in 1932 at the celebration commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the poet's death, and which Messrs. Adam & Charles Black have reprinted this year together with two other essays on Goethe.* In order to demonstrate Goethe's "universality", Dr. Schweitzer emphasises the peculiar circumstances of Goethe's life (" . . . he found in Weimar rare conditions for the life of the spirit, such as could only be offered by the courts of princes . . ."), and the extraordinary range of his activities and interests. It is hard to realise to-day, when the poet and man-of-letters is an almost extinct species, not only that Goethe's literary output was enormous, more than enough to fill the writing lives of a dozen or so contemporary poets, but that he expended a very considerable part of his time and energy in practical affairs. Apart from his work as director of the Weimar State Theatre, Goethe was for more than ten years busy with such matters as road-making, recruiting for the army, mining, the control of rivers, the improvement of agriculture and forestry, municipal affairs and the condition of the principality's finances. On top of all this there are the results of his extensive and by no means negligible scientific studies, his researches in botany, mineralogy, geology, comparative anatomy, physics and chemistry. To all these activities he applied himself with a quite exceptional conscientiousness and devotion. Dr. Schweitzer believes that Goethe's "message for our time" can be derived from his conception of "the thinker" as someone who devotes himself to the study of Man as such and of Man as an individual, and who does not merely turn his attention to the social conditions of a particular era. Man is always Man, whereas society is for ever changing. Certainly Goethe, although he was very much concerned with social progress, would have had little sympathy with the socialistic religions of to-day. It is especially important for us, says Dr. Schweitzer, to remember these aspects of Goethe's thought and work, at a time when Man is ceasing to be a being who belongs to Nature and to himself, and is more and more subjected to the organisation in which he lives. And the worst of it is that no matter to what school of social witchcraft a person belongs, it is always the individual who has to surrender his material and spiritual existence, and is only suffered to live if he belongs "body and soul to a plurality which controls him absolutely".

**Goethe* by Albert Schweitzer, A. & C. Black, 6/–.

In marked contrast to Dr. Schweitzer, Professor Barker Fairly, who contributes the introductory essay ("Goethe and the World To-day") to Dr. Rose's volume,* suggests that the value for us of Goethe's work, Goethe's so-called modernity, consists in his efforts to integrate science and poetry. "What we can learn from poetry at this point," declares Professor Barker Fairly, "is that both science and poetry if they are to become part of a common discipline, must change from what they were when they were separate. Poetry so conditioned (!) changes in so far as it tends increasingly to express what is completely experienced rather than what is only partially so, *much as the scientist tries to finish his researches before publishing his results* (my italics). It changes also in that it tries ultimately to say what is true rather than what is conceived imaginatively." This, presumably, is what is known as Socialist Realism. Professor Barker Fairly appears to be interpreting the edicts of that learned patron and critic of the Arts, the late Mr. Zhdanov! Accordingly, Goethe's reputation as a scientist stands higher to-day than it did fifty years ago, and fifty years from now will stand higher still. If the non-Marxist, writes Professor Fairly, *de haut en bas*, doesn't see the cogency of this, the Marxist certainly will. "For it is only in Marxism to-day that we find the close integration of science and art on a philosophical plane that we find in Goethe." The fact remains that the poor reactionary dolt of a non-Marxist not only doesn't see this, but feels quite strongly that Professor Barker Fairly's critical approach is a menace to the Arts. Incidentally, he is quite certain too, that, on this showing, the professor has not the foggiest understanding of the nature of Man, of society, and of literature, *as these things have been understood and developed in the Western world.* Still, to have turned Goethe, if not into a fully-fledged Marxist, at least into a sort of Marxist uncle, is no mean feat! It takes a bit of doing. Undoubtedly one needs a special kind of organ to absorb this kind of thing, like the old time sword-swallower at the fair, who grew an extra windpipe right down to his coccyx in order to accommodate his armoury.

Nevertheless, the reader should not be deterred from reading on. He will be amply rewarded by two extremely perspicacious and valuable studies, among other good things, one by Ronald Peacock on "Goethe as a Lyric Poet", the other, "Goethe as a Novelist", by E. L. Stahl. No doubt Mr. Stahl's was the more difficult task, but he accomplishes it with authority and skill. Mr. Peacock knows how important it is to-day to insist once more on some of the fundamental reasons why Goethe is still read and valued, namely, because of his *originality* as a poet, and his extraordinary technical mastery of practically all verse forms (the metrical ingenuity and variety of Faust alone demands a full-time study). Goethe's work, in fact, transformed the German language as a literary medium of expression. The simple colloquial speech form which he used so effectively in his lyrics (*Mailied, Willkommen und Abschied, Neues Liebe Neues Leben*, etc., are sufficiently famous; but it is well worth while digging among the lesser known ones for striking examples of his method) was employed in a different fashion, but with equal brilliance in his dramatic work, especially in Faust. But whereas the style of his lyric poetry was developed in the Strasbourg period under the influence of Herder, who had resuscitated folk poetry (and Herder in turn had been much impressed by Percy's *Reliques*), the freshness and dramatic impact of the Faustian dialogue was something altogether new in European poetry. Small wonder that Faust II on its publication bewildered Goethe's contemporaries, and few people at the time knew what to make of it. Goethe, of course, had an enormous admiration for Byron. Euphorion, the child of Faust and Helen, symbolises the Byronic spirit, but no trace of Byron's influence can be discovered in the classical Interlude. Only when we come to the scenes in the Emperor's Palace do we catch something of the Byronic style, not indeed because of any romantic flavour, but in their satirical passages. I have not seen it remarked before,

**Essays on Goethe*, edited by William Rose, Cassell & Co., 16/-.

but it may well be that the casual conversational tone of the heroic couplet and the Alexandrine as handled by Goethe, their satirical edge and verbal wit, owe something to *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. Goethe, it is often complained, had little sense of humour. Perhaps. But if he had little sense of humour, the quality of his verbal wit is second to none. Whatever other "message" Goethe has for us to-day, he can teach our modern poets a great deal about how to make their verses *sing*, a quality which is all but absent in contemporary poetry, and without which it inevitably declines in vigour. They can further study with advantage the directness and spontaneity of his lyric poetry, his ballads and his achievement in the epigrammatic and elegiac styles. That for the moment should be enough to go on with without bothering too much about "Goethe as a thinker", "Goethe's attitude to Religion", etc.; and it should satisfy those English critics who entertain quaint notions about Goethe having only dabbled in poetry. In this connection two other essays in Dr. Rose's volume, *Goethe's reputation in England during his Lifetime* by Dr. Rose himself, and *Goethe's reputation in England since* 1932 by W. H. Bruford, are highly instructive. Both are written with scholarship and discrimination, and reveal the profound influence Goethe has had on English poetry, and quite possibly may have again.

RICHARD MARCH.

VICTORIAN EROS

The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore by DEREK PATMORE. (CONSTABLE, 15/-.)

The Poems of Coventry Patmore. Introduction by FREDERICK PAGE.
(OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 8/6.)

"A knowledge of his private life is essential to an understanding of his poetry," writes Mr Patmore of his great-grandfather. He explains that when his biography first appeared in 1935 under the title of *Portrait of My Family*, he was unable for family reasons to include certain letters or to speak as freely as he wished of Coventry Patmore's third wife. We had long known that the somewhat rigid figure who emerges from Champney's official life concealed a more curious and a more interesting person. Mr. Patmore lifts a corner of the veil here and there, but we may suspect that a natural reticence prevented him from following up his own clues. His agreeable, well-written book fills in one or two small gaps, but it is in no sense a startlingly new portrait. We learn, for example, that Patmore possessed a complete set of the privately printed volumes of the Eroticon Biblion Society which were discreetly kept behind the shelves in the library at Heron's Ghyll. Mr. Patmore is severe on the poet's third wife. "There was a hardness," he writes, "under the well staged charm"; and he accuses her roundly of "supplanting" the second Mrs. Patmore in her husband's affections before the lady was dead. Finally, we are told that when Patmore was nearly seventy he fell "physically in love" with Alice Meynell.

It is still difficult for us to be completely fair to the Victorians. We can scarcely avoid the feeling not merely that life was altogether too easy for them, but that they made poor use of their opportunities. Yet when all allowances have been made for this bias, Patmore remains singularly unsympathetic as a man. There is something intolerable about his arrogance, his rigid Conservatism, his curious dabbling in religion and sex. Nor can we admire the company he kept. They were so pleased with themselves, so wrapped up in their mutual admiration, so busy puffing one another's wares in the Press. Mr. Patmore speaks of "the cold brilliance" of Alice Meynell's intellect, but I suspect that like the rest of them she was soft underneath. Her fulsome praise of Patmore was no doubt excusable at the time and understandable on human grounds, but she was even more gushing about Alfred Noyes's *Torchbearers*.

Attempts to rehabilitate Patmore as a poet have been going on in somewhat desultory fashion since the early 'thirties. The initial difficulty was certainly increased by Gosse whose championship would be a liability to any poet. His book on Patmore appeared in 1905, but the vanity and pretentiousness of that writer seem to have left a permanent mark on Patmore studies. Mr. Page's introduction to the Oxford edition of the poems is a curious performance. He observes, with an arrogance which comes altogether too easily to his generation, that Patmore's conversion to Catholicism "is of no relevance to Poetry" (we note the capital letter). He goes on:

> "Poetry knows only the catholic religion of Aeschylus, of Sophocles, of Dante, of Shakespeare, of Wordsworth, of Goethe, of Meredith, of Hardy . . . Poets are graded by their intellect, and Patmore was with Wordsworth and far above Herrick, who yet is essential to the idea of poetry . . . Thus no view of Patmore has any value for criticism but that which sees him as a son of Wordsworth, a cousin of Herrick, and (in his wit and satire) a half-brother of Pope."

One feels inclined to retort that critics, too, are graded by their intellect and that the sort of intellect displayed here is unlikely to further Mr. Page's cause.

Fifteen years ago thoughtful readers sometimes took the view that though *The Angel in the House* was a Victorian curiosity, there might be something to be said for *The Unknown Eros*. Patmore's admirers appear to have grown bolder with the passing of time. We are now invited to regard the early poetry as well as the later as part of a single *oeuvre*. I open *The Angel in the House* at random and come upon the conversation between Felix and his future father-in-law where I read:

> He gave
> His glad consent, if I could get
> Her love. A dear, good Girl! she'd have
> Only three thousand pounds as yet;
> More bye and bye.

"His writing is never dull," observes Mr. Page. Perhaps not, but this is hardly the sort of brightness that we expect of a "half-brother of Pope". "It has become and will remain a literary curiosity, not justified by any remarkable beauties even of texture or expression," said Mr. Herbert Read of *The Angel in the House* in 1932. I can see no appeal against this judgment, but I do not feel able to share the same writer's high opinion of the later work. What strikes me on re-reading it is not the great advance on *The Angel*, but the weaknesses which are common to them both. Lines like

> My Darling, know
> Your spotless fairness is not match'd in snow

might well have been written by the young Patmore or by a good many other Victorian verse-writers, though in fact they come from the greatly admired *Eros and Psyche*. The similarities are not confined to occasional lines or occasional lapses. Superficially, the versification of *To the Unknown Eros* appears more sinewy than that of the early work—

> I, singularly moved
> To love the lovely that are not beloved

But when we look into it, we find that the appearance of tautness, which is seldom maintained, really depends on an awkward syntax and irritating habits of inversion and elision. *To the Unknown Eros* reveals the same prolixity that we find in nearly all Victorian verse and the same poetic clichés. Nor am I impressed by the alleged profundity of its exploration of the psychology of love. When we come to the end of an ode, we cannot help remarking how very little has in fact been said. And nothing can compensate for the ugly gritty syntax which reminds us of sand in the machine.

In *Eros and Psyche* we read:

> O, heavenly Lover true,
> Is this thy mouth upon my forehead press'd?
> Are these thine arms about my bosom link'd?

Are these thy hands that tremble near my heart,
Where join two hearts, for juncture more distinct?
By thee and by my maiden zone caress'd,
What dim, waste tracts of life shine sudden, like moonbeams
On windless ocean shaken by sweet dreams!

The construction of the last three lines defeats me, but I am in no doubt about the significance of "my maiden zone caress'd" or of the "juncture more distinct". What is curious is the mixture of these crudely sexual images and the tiresome poetic jargon of the time—the "bosom", "moonbeams", "sweet dreams" and the rest. The poem goes on:

Ah, stir not to depart!
Kiss me again, thy Wife and Virgin too!
O love, that, like a rose,
Deckest my breast with beautiful repose,
Kiss me again, and clasp me round the heart,
Till filled with thee am I
As the cocoon is with the butterfly!

We know that Patmore purported to establish some sort of parallel or connection between the union of God with the soul and the union of man and woman in marriage. His theory is proudly produced by his apologists with suitably fulsome commendation. Clearly the odes can be read in this way, but the crucial point is where the emphasis lies. For myself, I can only say that Patmore's religious allegory has a very sexual underneath. His "Virgin' is singularly out of place with that very phallic "rose" and the still more phallic "butterfly".

The author of a review of Mr. Patmore's *Life*, which appeared some weeks ago in the columns of a religious weekly, told his readers that they would learn with sorrow of the poet's trafficking in erotic books. That seems to me to miss the point completely. What is deplorable about the Eroticon Biblion story is the furtiveness and concealment. If we are to have erotic poetry, let us have good erotic poetry like Donne's splendid *To his Mistress Going to Bed*. And let us read and enjoy it openly instead of turning it into a dirty secret. And if we are to have religious poetry then let us have religious poetry and not copulation disguised as contemplation.

In *Auras of Delight* Patmore wrote:

I, with heart-quake
Dreaming or thinking of that realm of Love
See, oft, a dove
Tangled in frightful nuptials with a snake . . .

This throws an essential light on Patmore's failure and the failure of his age. Underneath the tiresome clichés and the conventional sentiments there was both ability and vision. But there was something badly wrong with their minds, and the result was not poetry but a mess. For the "frightful nuptials with a snake" and "the tortured knot" of the next line belong to the Victorian nightmare. It was a very Freudian nightmare, but it seems best to recognise it for what it was instead of trying to hide poetic failure by fanciful theories of divine and human love.

MARTIN TURNELL.

HONEST AND PROFESSIONAL

Holes in the Sky by LOUIS MACNEICE
(FABER, 7/6.)

Of those poets who first came to prominence in the early 'thirties, few have maintained their younger excellence (such, in some cases, as it was) and fewer still have steadily improved. Many have relapsed into virtual and blessed silence; one has grown progressively softer and more piteous; one has suffered prematurely from old-gentleman's hardening of the brain-cells, and has had himself stuffed in a petulant and sterile attitude; one or two, like David Gascoyne and Bernard Spencer, have produced a thin but on the whole a steady trickle of first-rate verse without, however, either improving much or much needing to improve; Auden has, in my opinion, written nothing since *Another Time* which is as good as that was; Day Lewis, I feel, while still an excellent poet, has lost some of his early lyrical impulse. Dylan Thomas and Louis MacNeice, almost alone and in their different ways, have maintained a high minimum and a sharply rising maximum of excellence.

Mr. MacNeice himself writes of minor poets with a tolerance that I cannot command:

> Who were lost in many ways, through comfort, lack of knowledge,
> Or between women's breasts, who thought too little, too much,
> Who were the world's best talkers, in tone and rhythm
> Superb, yet as writers lacked a sense of touch,
> So either gave up or just went on and on—
> Let us salute them now their chance is gone.

He is in a different class from all this. He at least is a professional; he knows what to *do* with verse, and has the touch to use that knowledge: there can be no question of his mastery of his medium, or of the quality of the mind which he has brought to that medium.

It is a sign of poetic health when a writer is less interested in himself than in people and things. A poet is not his own private heliograph; he is a lens or a prism. And his stature as poet is determined by the quality of the glass—by the first-rate or the tenth-rate mind he brings to his functioning. There is no point in being a "thoughtful" poet if one has only an inefficient instrument to be thoughtful with. What Mr. MacNeice says is worth listening to for its own sake. The value of a dagger-thrust (to change my metaphor) lies not only in its precision but also in its depth. *Holes in the Sky* looks like being a lethal weapon in any critic's hands, against the shabbiness and incompetence of poets less fastidious and less gifted than its author.

There are no failures in this collection, though there are a few poems with which I do not greatly sympathise on grounds other than those chosen by Mr. MacNeice. The important point is agreement with what he is trying to do with poetry, not whether he has entirely succeeded in any given poem: *this* is the way poems are written, and eighty per cent. of this volume is poetry cleaner and more skilful—and more moving—than anything eighty per cent. of his contemporaries could do. The other twenty per cent. of this volume? For me it consists of a few poems slightly below the standard set by the rest. The lyrical impulse is never faked, the thought is never scamped; but there are some individual images which seem to me a little more muffled or a little more strident than perfection would demand. For example—respectively—"let the young decant the spring for us" and "when barrows of daffodils butter the pavement". Such images, representatives of two very tiny classes, are I believe the result of an occasional tendency to think on the scale of the individual and effective phrase—to accept a "good way of saying" something rather than the thing itself; but only an occasional tendency, for as a rule Mr. MacNeice's way of saying something *is* the thing itself. There is an

unbridgeable gap between him and the writers who think that a striking phrase is a thing imagined; he might sometimes write nearly as badly as they do, but they can never approach such complete poems as *Carrick Revisited*, *Hands and Eyes*, or *Bluebells*—from which I must quote at least one stanza:

Sun is too bright and brittle, wheat is too quick,
She turns from them to the wood where the slow thick
Shade is becalmed and chill as a glacial stream
Meeting the sea inlays and weaves a milky gleam
Through the dark waste, so here the bluebells flow
Athwart the undergrowth, a merger of blue snow.

The danger of this kind of writing is that the spontaneous beauty will clash with, but never combine with, the "clever". Now, Mr. MacNeice is seldom merely "clever", in that sense. He is subtle and ingenious, he is scholarly, but he never fails to be also honest. He brings off, in fact, one of the hardest feats a poet can be called on to perform, the combination of hard precise imagery, sustained thought of an equally adamant quality, and the emotionally lovely or imaginatively revealing. The poem in which this combination is seen at its best is *The Stygian Banks*, which is also the longest and most important poem in this collection. Even Mr. MacNeice's slightest lyric is toughened and braced by the intellectual background which was also its parent. The existence of an intellectual as well as an emotional parent makes all the difference between a poem and a warm wet effusion—between the Saracen jalousie of *Holes in the Sky* and the Thermogene doyley of writers whom only the libel law protects from me.

Overpraise is eventual dispraise, and I must be careful not to do Mr. MacNeice that injustice. But I shall feel no sympathy, nor even pity, for those who cannot recognise in this book the symbol, though assuredly not the final fruition, of the *kind* of writing in which alone English poetry can find hope.

TERENCE TILLER.

IT'S A CONTRARY SON HE'S OF

The White Threshold by W. S. GRAHAM. (FABER, 8/6.)

Contemporary Irish Poetry. Edited by ROBERT GREACEN and VALENTIN IREMONGER. (FABER, 8/6.)

In his fourth volume since *The Parton Press* produced *Cage Without Grievance* in 1942, the Scottish poet, Mr. W. S. Graham, again establishes the fact that he is the first considerable poet, with the exception of Mr. Vernon Watkins, to trouble the imagination since the appearance in print (and incidentally under the aegis of that same publishing house) of the poems of Mr. Dylan Thomas, Mr. George Barker, and Mr. David Gascoyne in the early nineteen-thirties. Mr. Graham ought not to be dismissed as a Scotch version of Mr. Dylan Thomas for phrases like "sun-stroked bible waters" or "pacing white-haired kingdoms of the sea" (which curtseys to Mr. Thomas' "pacing, famous sea"). Mr. Graham's mentor is properly James Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. The difficulty that most people find when they begin to read Mr. Thomas' poems comes from his use of images rather than of language. With Mr. Graham, it is chiefly his use of language that makes for trouble. His debt to Joyce is widespread. He is having a love affair with language, like all poets, and in love, they say, there is one who kisses and one who turns the cheek; but in Mr. Graham's case the two parties meet head on and the noise of kissing almost drowns the conversation.

"It's a contrary son I'm of," he says in *Definition of My Brother*. He is spectator of

the contradictions that enable him to walk the earth. In *The Lost Other* he is the poet.

out within
The walls I endlessly shoulder down

and in *The Search By A Town* the poet is the seeker who

turns
His worshipping eyes on prophetic patterns
Of shape arising from all men
He changes through, he shall remain

Continually stripped and clothed again.

His Muse is

that seastrolling voice in waves and states
Not mine but what one another contrary creates.
(*Definition of My Brother*).

She is his alter ego, Saint Other, The Lost Other, The One Liberty:

And let us not turn her glance away
That we'll be work of her womanly
Possibilities of The One Liberty.
(*The Lost Other*).

The city and the sea, images which have haunted poets of this century, the City because it symbolises the modern world, and the Sea, which may be said to represent the subconscious, plus the impersonal forces with which the individual is surrounded, recur constantly. Clydeside, with its industrial landscapes, its sugar-docks, derricks, tenements, shipyards, and

The poorhouse close upon
The public heartbeat

is the background of his poems. But it is Mr. Graham's preoccupation with the sea, and images of drowning, which are significant. As Mr. John Heath-Stubbs points out, the image of the Drowned Man, from T. S. Eliot's *Phlebas the Phoenician* onwards, is repeatedly found in modern poetry because to-day "the task of preserving his integrity is rendered difficult for the individual; and the temptation to give up the struggle, to allow the waters to go over his head, is powerful." So Mr. Graham:

Now, prince in the seacircling tower,
Emigrant to grief, furious seafarer swept over

The seven wounds and multiple five
Senses of drowning . . .

. . . Sheltering
In sea he breathes dry land, dry grave and dwelling.
(*At Whose Sheltering Shall The Day Sea*).

Or again:

Float me face up, made into words, towards
My perfect hunger's daily changing bread.
(*My Final Bread*).

Mr. Graham's virtue and peril is that he knows a poem to be, as he once defined it, "a successful construction of words". It is his fortune because it is the natural and mutual affection between Mr. Graham and the English language, no less than his stiff self-discipline and diligent experiments with metre and the combinations of rhyme, which give him the stature to lift his head and shoulders out of the ruck of contemporary poets. Mr. Graham may not have so many or such intelligent things to say as a good number who court the Muse with less success. The philosophy, which may be a part, is not the function of a poem; and those who read poetry for the sake of philosophy alone might just as well drink water for its hydrogen. And although Mr. Graham sometimes pawns the ears God gave him to produce a line like

Bomb drunkard hero herded by hammer-headed elements

the other end of his pen is probably writing

She in a listening shape stood still

or

> I walk as a lonely energy at large through my host

which are the kind of thing that literary criticism stands, or ought to stand, dumb in front of.

The new anthology, *Contemporary Irish Poetry*, edited by Messrs. Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger, is the latest addition to the Faber survey of regional poetry. It's a contrary son they're of, as Mr. Graham might say of the editors, who announce their intention of continuing where the *Golden Treasury of Irish Verse* (1928) left off, but contradicting themselves declare that they are only going to present a cross-section of Irish poetry since the death of Yeats (1939). After a bit more vacillation they explain that the single poem by Mr. Robert Graves is admitted on the ground that he wrote it in County Limerick! I can see fascinating possibilities in this system. As the anthology is restricted to living poets, I should like to give the editors my personal assurance that Mr. George Barker* is not yet a corpse, and that I have heard rumours of the continued existence of Mr. Patrick Kavanagh.† However, Messrs. Greacen and Iremonger have not overlooked Mr. W. R. Rodgers, well represented in this book, Mr. Louis MacNeice, Mr. Day Lewis, or most of the younger Irish poets.

Apart from the curious omission of Mr. Barker, and the eccentric treatment of Mr. Robert Graves, this anthology can certainly claim to be representative and not without its plums. There are good poems by Mr. Austin Clarke, Mr. Leslie Daiken, Mr. Denis Devlin and others, but the shadow of Yeats falls heavily across the page.

DAVID WRIGHT.

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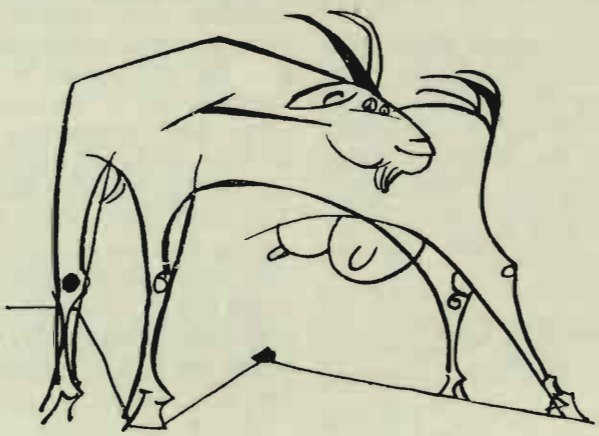
* Although Mr. Barker was born in England he comes, like Mr. Robert Graves, of an old Irish family, and has, again like Mr. Graves, written poems in various provinces of Ireland.

†Since this was written, I have learnt that Mr. Kavanagh is not represented because he refused to appear in the anthology. In justice to Mr. Kavanagh, if not to themselves, the editors should have explained this in their preface.



"Drawing by John Craxton."

ROMANCE POETRY

Fifty Romance Lyric Poems, chosen and translated by RICHARD ALDINGTON. Pp. 199. London, 1948.
(ALLAN WINGATE, 10/6 net.)

Philip Ayres' volume of *Lyric Poems, made in imitation of the Italians, of which many are Translations from Other Languages*, published in London in 1687, can be considered the last tribute to an outgoing fashion. Ayres was harking back to the taste of the Caroline period, whereas poets of his generation were under the spell of the new critical theories from France. The Italian poets represented in Ayres' selection were chiefly Marino and his school, together with a handful of Spanish poets, and a retrospective homage to Petrarch. But Italian lyric poetry had long ceased by then to appeal to the English, and for nearly a century ahead few traces can be found in English literature of what had been one of its paramount moulding influences. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth that attention turned again to Petrarch, but not so much on the part of great poets (although, for instance, Gray knew his Petrarch and had recourse to an expression of the Italian poet, "paventosa speme", to round off his *Elegy* which is akin in spirit to the meditative strain of the singer of Laura), as on the part of gifted dilettanti and translators, such as the anonymous author of *Sonnets and Odes translated from the Italian of Petrarch*, London, 1777, or Thomas Le Mesurier (*Translations chiefly from the Italian of Petrarch and Metastasio*, Oxford, 1795), C. F. Nott (*Petrarch translated in a Selection of his Sonnets and Odes*, London, 1808), Francis Wrangham (*A Few Sonnets attempted from Petrarch in early Life*, Kent, 1817), James, late Earl of Charlemont (*Select Sonnets of Petrarch*, Dublin, 1822), Barbarina Lady Dacre (*Translations from the Italian*, London, 1836). More translations from Petrarch (by Susan Wollaston, 1841, by R. G. Macgregor, 1854, by Thomas Campbell, 1859) followed in the mid-century, but it was not until Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri* (1861) that Italian poets of the early centuries achieved a kind of revival in England. Then J. A. Symonds translated eight sonnets of Petrarch (1874) and the sonnets of Michael Angelo (1878), and at the beginning of the present century Ezra Pound, through his book on *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) and still more through his table-talk, made the young poets, first of all T. S. Eliot, aware of the greatness of Provençal lyric poetry and of Dante and Cavalcanti. Richard Aldington's book, first published in 1928, is a new witness to this reawakened interest in early romance poetry. The book is meant for the general reader: Aldington's translations, written in a terse prose, do not intend to be more than a help to English readers to make out the meaning of the original texts printed in the opposite pages: "The translations may be looked upon as a small collection of picture-postcards of works of art, such as most of us bring back from a trip on the Continent of Europe: but luckily, in this case, I can supply you with the originals as well as with my picture-postcards." Occasionally his prose attains a rhythm very close to verse: "then may Death darken my serenest day" provides the translation of one of Louise Labé's sonnets with a very harmonious close, and a passage like "Without a Vulcan to excuse your ardour, without Adonis' beauty to accuse, may, if he will, make you more amorous" is liable to scansion.

The texts are, on the whole, carefully printed, although, this being a second edition, a few errors might have been corrected. Thus in Boccaccio's "Io mi son giovinetta" we find *leggiri* instead of *leggieri*; in Lorenzo de' Medici's *Trionfo di Bacco e Arianna* we read *se non può sta ritto* where it ought to be *star ritto*, in della Casa's famous sonnet on Sleep *o notte acerbe* has to be corrected into *o notti acerbe*, in Gaspara Stampa's sonnet "Chi mi darà soccorso" the third line is marred by a misplaced comma (*tosto dopo, l'acerba dipartita* instead of the correct

tosto, dopo l'acerba dipartita), and consequently the translation is wrong ("ah! bitter parting", instead of "after his (the lover's) bitter departure"); the punctuation at the end of the second stanza of the other sonnet of Gaspara, "Mesta e pentita", should be a comma, not a full stop; in Louise Labé's sonnet "Tout aussi tot que is commence à prendre" we find *mae poure ame* for *ma poure ame*, in Ronsard's ode "Puis que tost je doy reposer" we find *ventre* misprinted for *vendre*, in Tasso's canzone "O bel colle, onde lite", the line *E di fama non vana* ought to have a stress on the *E* in order to make sense; a word (*testa*) has dropped out of the line "Da l'aurea[testa] infino ai piedi eburni" in Acquaviva's sonnet; a more obvious misprint is *it* for *ti* in Leonardo Quirini's *Serenade*; in Marcello Macedonio's *Disfida delle acque e delle aure* a misprint in the text (*V'adornam molti fregi*, instead of *V'adornan molti fregi*) has led astray the translator who has "We adorn you with many ornaments" instead of "Many ornaments adorn you". My list is not complete, and though it would look ominous enough as it is should Aldington intend to supply critical texts, it is to be looked on with leniency considering that the book aims only at stimulating the general reader.

For the same reason it would perhaps be beside the mark to criticise the general Introduction as well as the short notices appended to each single poet. Italian, we may observe, is not the "lingua di sì", but the "lingua del sì"; a sweeping statement such as "the domination of the Christian Church rendered the new literatures weak and contemptible in the sciences and in rational philosophic thought" is clumsily worded (science is no part of literature) and possibly inaccurate in the light of modern research; another statement: "Of course poetry did not die, has not died and will not die; but it is no longer triumphant, fertile and *progressive*" is open to the question as to what the author means by speaking of "progressive poetry": the idea of progress, correct when applied to science, has little to do with poetry; any Italian man in the street, having read, or heard of, Croce's principles of Aesthetics, knows this. And is it right to say that nowadays "what is left of the Romantic movement sinks even deeper into senility, is marked by affectation, wilful ignorance and feebleness, and is held in growing contempt; while efforts to escape from it and to create a new poetry have so far failed"? Unless Aldington explains what phenomena are at the back of his mind, we are at a loss to understand. Is T. S. Eliot's poetry, which has had such a large following, to be considered a failure? Is *The Waste Land*, are the *Four Quartets*, is *Le cimetière marin* a failure?

As for the brief informative notes on the authors, we miss for della Casa a mention of the peculiar character of his sonnet-form and its influence on Milton and the English sonnet, we come across, in the note on Gaspara Stampa, a "Collatino di Collato" for "Collaltino dei Collalto", we fail to understand why Marino should be said "exceedingly difficult to translate", and we are unable to see "a touch of Shelley's fancy in Macedonio's strings of jewelled words".

There would be little point in criticising the selection: no Spanish or Portuguese poet is included, some of the poems (such as Antonio Allegretti's *Canzonetta*) are harping on themes which had become commonplace, and Richard Aldington could have easily filled their place with more original compositions, but on the whole he succeeds in conveying to the reader his own impression of romance poetry as of a world of young love against a background of fabulous springtide, expressed in fresh, crystalline verse. He gives very few specimens from the better known poets, and dedicates his cares to the less known ones. His is a personal more than a representative selection, and more could and should be added to it in a future edition.

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