POETRY

LONDON

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COVER BY SEÁN JENNETT

MSS.

We welcome unsolicited MSS. but too many intending contributors still expect us to pay for returning those we cannot use. Will intending contributors please note that in future we will neither return nor engage in any correspondence about unsolicited MSS. which are not accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. Contributors from abroad can send International Reply Coupons, but from those in the United Kingdom we must ask for nothing less than a stamped addressed envelope. Unattached stamps, stamped addressed economy labels, etc., are not sufficient.

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN have announced that they are offering poetry prizes for THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN, 1951. The prizes are to be for poems in English and will be open to citizens of the British Commonwealth and the Irish Republic. The prizes so far announced will be :

(a) A prize of £500 for a single poem in English of not less than 300 lines; and

(b) Prizes totalling £600 divisible by the Judges among not more than twelve poets for a collection of between six and twelve short poems in English, no single poem to exceed fifty lines in length.

There is no limitation on subjects in either (a) or (b).

The following Panel of Judges has been appointed:

Sir Kenneth Clark (Chairman).
Professor C. M. Bowra.
Lord David Cecil.
Mr. John Hayward.
Mr. George Rylands.
Mr. Basil Willey.

The Judges' decision is final. No prizes will be awarded unless the poems submitted are of sufficiently high quality.

Entries should be sent to the Arts Council of Great Britain, 4 St. James's Square, London, S.W.1., not later than 31st December, 1950. Poets are asked to keep copies of the poems they submit.

Arrangements will be made for the prize poems to be printed by the Arts Council in a special commemorative programme, and for selections from them to be included in the programmes of public poetry readings to be held during the Festival of Britain in London and elsewhere.

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LONDON

Edited by RICHARD MARCH and NICHOLAS MOORE

Associate Editor: RONALD DUNCAN

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COMMENT

At the periodical festive gatherings held in the double monastery of Whitby, when it was presided over by the redoubtable Abbess Hilda, the harp was always handed round for anyone who felt so inclined to give of his best. A humble cowherd who used to sit listening silently on these occasions, would slip away unobserved when his turn came, as he was too shy to try his powers. One night, however, so the story goes, his unconscious (presumably) came to the rescue. As he was lying alone in his stable he heard someone asking him to sing. "Caedmon, sing me something." The youth replied very truthfully that he knew nothing to sing. But the questioner was insistent, and when Caedmon asked what in Heaven's name then he should sing, the reply came: "Sing the Creation." Whereupon Caedmon poured forth such a sweet song, not only then but many times afterwards, that people began to listen to him. Eventually the Abbess Hilda herself (who evidently knew a good thing when she heard it, a talent-spotter, so to speak) paid him a visit and prevailed on him to enter the monastery, where he remained for the rest of his life composing the most wonderful sacred poetry. We have never, we must hasten to add, read this poetry, nor has anyone else of our acquaintance, but it is generally agreed in spite of that, that Caedmon's poetry is very fine.

Now in these profane days when the harp has somewhat fallen into desuetude and stands in the corner of the garret covered in cobwebs, it is more than ever important to urge poets to *sing*. Perhaps Caedmon is in this respect an unfortunate example, probably we should not have mentioned him at all. For what is even more useful to the poet than listening to invisible voices and singing the Creation by the sheer light of nature, is that he should blow the cobwebs off his harp, examine very closely how it works and learn what combination of sounds are best suited to the quips, roundelays or broadsides that he intends to utter. He will then discover that with the proper mastery of his instrument even a nursery rhyme (which perhaps is all he is capable of humming) can sound moving and give pleasure. In other words, it is a *style* he must discover and develop, a style that will completely express the matter he means to communicate.

Now POETRY (LONDON), when it was founded by Anthony Dickins and Tambimuttu, addressed itself to a particular situation in poetry. In his first editorial letter Mr. Tambimuttu wrote:

> "Every man has poetry within him. Poetry is the awareness of the mind to the universe. It embraces everything in the world.
>
> Of poetry are born religions, philosophies, the sense of good and evil, the

desire to fight diseases and ignorance and the desire to better living conditions for humanity.

Poetry is the connection between mind and matter. Poetry is universal."

This approach undoubtedly provided a release for much poetic talent at the time, and during the war years, that might not otherwise have had the opportunity to gain public recognition. To-day, after four years of uneasy peace and with little prospect of a more comfortable to-morrow, the time has come to concentrate more on some of the positive qualities that make a poem. Poets should take stock of themselves, especially with a view to improving their technical equipment and sharpening their wits. We should like to see poets turn their attention more to satirical verse, or occasional poems with a bite and an edge to them. In this post-war decade, before a new pattern in the affairs of the world has crystallized, or a new mood in literature has had time to form itself, the "profound" stanzas full of high-flown, vague emotion and undigested philosophy are not likely to be the most successful ones. The Caedmon touch to-day is at a discount. What is needed is not so much the "inspired" poem as a renewal of *style*: first-class workmanship rather than the prophetic tone.

No magazine can be expected to print several great poems every three or four months. What it can try to do is to cultivate a sense of style. In its critical contributions it can seek to explain to the reader how a poem emerges from the way it is said, which is indeed its style. For a poem is nothing without this—however charged with "inspiration" it may be. Style in itself, if sufficiently formed, has interest, whereas nothing can be duller than other people's inspirations which they have failed to put across for want of a style. One may indeed demand something more than style, but one cannot achieve anything without it. We would certainly discourage a return to Georgianism, which even now, in spite of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound, is still only just round the corner. We have been upbraided by one correspondent, unjustly in our opinion, that a certain brand of Georgianism has latterly infiltrated into our pages. As the Georgians were technically as incompetent a group of poets as any that ever wrote, it is precisely this kind of verse that we would shun. That is not to say we would necessarily wish to depreciate the Romantic in poetry. But if we must have Romanticism, let the poem be unashamedly and uncompromisingly romantic in its very bones, like Mr. Jon Manchip White's "Count Orlo"—printed in this issue. Yet this is, we would claim, a poem with a style.

Demetrius, to whom in times of uncertainty it is worth while referring, remarks in his celebrated treatise: "For even poetry, with rare exceptions, is not written in measures of greater length than six feet, since it would be absurd that measure should be without measure, and that by the time the line has come to an end we should have forgotten when it began."

Demetrius, it has been suggested by some scholars, was sent to Britain on an educational mission by the Emperor Domitian. He probably occupied a secretarial post on Agricola's staff, and lectured on Philosophy and Rhetoric for the improvement of the natives, in order to give (according to Plutarch) "the sons of British princes a liberal education". However that may be, it is clearly necessary to remind the natives from time to time of the value of style in poetry.

RONALD BOTTRALL

MAY MORNING
(for Gino Magnani)

It is a long green that has no ending
In blood or bareness or seawrack or fire
Or the polite glances that need mending.

What blood travelling round the body's gyre
Does not need green to flare and repair it
And bring it coursing out of the day's mire?

What bareness is not better if we wear it
To the bone and flush our green chlorophyll
With the pain that we have tried to spare it?

What seawrack is not merrier if we frill
The green with white crisp rages that devour
Pilgrim or pirate in a boiling still?

What fire being green like a safe flower
Will not bristle red in an angry song
If blown and incited at its palest hour?

What polite glances, fickle, smooth and young
Do not shed blood, spill fire, cause wrecks at sea
Or give to bareness a forbidding tongue
If no green trill linnets the heart to burst free?

WALLACE STEVENS

ANGEL SURROUNDED BY PAYSANS

One of the countrymen:

There is
A welcome at the door to which no one comes?

The Angel:

I am the angel of reality,
Seen for a moment standing in the door.

I have neither ashen wing nor wear of ore
And live without a tepid aureole,

Or stars that follow me, not to attend,
But, of my being and its knowing, part.

I am one of you and being one of you
Is being and knowing what I am and know.

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set.
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash, like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings. Am I not,
Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in

Apparels of such lightest look, that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?

JOHN ARLOTT

A STRANGER STANDS ON O'CONNELL BRIDGE

O'Connell Bridge is *O'Connell's* bridge,
For this is a heroes' city
And on the statue-peopled streets
The soft rain falls like pity.

It falls like The Word on O'Connell
Where the seagulls have whitened his head
And it falls upon Grattan and Nelson,
For the rain does not know they are dead.

The bar-door swings open at Mooney's
And belches out smoke and the voice
—On a Dublin stout-and-story note—
Of the taling Ulysses of Joyce.

And I turn to the wall by the river
Where the Guinness barges go
And the waters of the Liffey
Softly, peaty-browny, flow.

Now who built that girdered railway-bridge
To cover the sea in its flight?
And the houses under Nelson
To hide the round hills' height?

And whose devout hands decked these houses
In bright oblations of paint
To colour the line of the Liffey
Like a favourite plaster saint?

Are these Sean O'Casey's people
Or men with the world in the hand
Who stand with their stout or their porter
And lie as they sip as they stand?

And this Jesus they name, does He hear them
And turn a deaf ear for His sake?
And will He send rain for a keening
On each bowsy old man at his wake?

VALENTINE ACKLAND

BIRTHDAY POEM, 1948

I wait through the year's long days for a sign of your favour;
Through the usual hours and the punctual sunset and moonrise,
And the mapped stars agreeing exactly with the chart,
(It is simpler to read them direct than learn to transpose them
Awkwardly upwards from print to the curving sky).
The weeks form fours and march off as months, and a year
Is gone to the roll of drums and batter of trumpets.
I wait through the long review for a sign of your favour.

And then at the end, when the Royal Dais is empty,
When the crowd is gone and the light, disconsolate paper
Blows through the grandstands and bandstands and over the railings;
At the end, when the police have withdrawn and the long parade,
The review of the days is over, I climb up the scaffold—
Back to the barren square conjure the glory,
And fear that you found it tedious, ill-planned and empty.

I stood so, at year's end, to-day, and suddenly saw you,
Crossing the time-emptied square to bring me your favour.

GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI

FATEFUL TIBER, THOU TOO ART MY RIVER

(Mio fiume anche tu)

Fateful Tiber, thou too art my river,
Now that already turbid night flows on,
Now that persistently
And as in pain erupting from the stone
A bleating of lambs is multiplied
Astray in the terrified streets;
Now that the incessant waiting for evil,
The worst of evils,
Now that the waiting for unpredictable evil
Hinders spirit and footsteps;
And endless sobs, like long death-rattles,
Chill the houses, uncertain dens;
Now that night flows on, already racked
And every instant countless symbols
Like divine forms their shining-point reached
Through man's milleniary ascent,
Suddenly disintegrate, or fear offence;
Now that already, convulsed, the night flows on
And I learn how much a man may suffer;
Now, while enslaved
The world chokes in abysmal pain;
Now that the insupportable torment
Breaks out in deathly anger between brothers;
Now that my blasphemous lips dare say,
"Christ, breathless thought,
Why is Thy goodness
So far removed?"
Now that the sheep with their lambs
Disband perplexed, and through the streets
That once were urban wander desolate;
Now that a people feels
After the wrench of emigration
The senseless crime
Of deportations;
Now that in the ditches
With twisted fantasy
And shameless hands
Man strips from human features
The divine image,
And pity's shriek contracts to stone;
Now that innocence
Claims at least an echo
And groans even in the most hardened heart,
Now that other cries are vain,

I see now clearly in the sad night.

I see now in the sad night, I learn,
I know that hell is opening on earth
In measure as
Man evades, poor fool,
The pureness of Thy passion.

Wounds Thy heart
The sum of grief
That man is spilling over earth;
Thy heart is the impassioned see
Of love not vain.

Christ, breathless thought,
Star incarnate in the human darkness,
Brother who dost sacrifice Thyself
Eternally to build again
Humanely man,
Blessed, Blessed, Who dost suffer,
Master and Brother and God Who knowest we are weak,
Blessed, Blessed Who dost suffer
To free the dead from death
And raise to life us the unhappy living,
I weep no more with a plaint that is mine alone,
Behold, I call Thee, Blessed,
Blessed, Blessed Who dost suffer.

(1944)
(*translated by Margaret Bottrall*)

DAVID WRIGHT

IMAGES FOR A FOURTH SEPTENARY

I walk beneath a powerless moon
Where a sea creases like the face
Turned upwards to the morning sun;
A murderer from the barren park
Where the self-wounded grips his breast,
Waiting for the police. Who come
Into the daylight from the dark?
Four followers, and each "I am"
I shed at the septennium;
They hold the knife into my back,
And bend the neck I kneel upon.
My blood must follow from my thrust,

And this the hand that dealt the wound
Write "O assassin!" in the dust.

And my love with summer in her arm
Creeps through a sphincter avenue
Engrossed within her cloth of snow;
Who, pointing at a poisoned cup,
Accuses. In her grave I put
The good I have. The worm at last
May feast on what I hold so fast.
Yes, the sea edges over my
Sullen and crumbled beaches. Time
Bites at my foot; the princess is
Again a crowned and flying swan.
The wound I gave her is my own,
The wing that falters is my heart,
The feather fallen a poem.

But one has come to wipe the knife,
Whose fingers bear no phial, but
The bucket of my daily slop.
And I wake always by her side
In whom I find all women one,
Her love shall minister my need
Of love. Prodigal as a son,
My poverty accepts her board,
The comfort that she can afford.
She is the sentimental one
Shall keen upon my wake, and wash
The bloody lace from off the corpse,
Shall make and bake the funeral meat,
Say to the mourners, "Drink and eat."

My father's season crooks a hand
To shake the leaf from every tree;
The guilt he gave us, son by son,
Forgives him. The forgiven one
Is merciless. His winter sea
Furls round my death: the middle kiss
That he bestows me for my son.
His error was my trial. I
Must err to try him. My amen
Begs for the bread which is a stone;
O he surrounds me with a spiral
Cry, who folded round the bone
A city of the flesh, his Adam
To build Gomorrah and Sodom.

ELEGY

In Memoriam M. H. M.

Put seventy years of no
Wit or beauty in the grave,
These folded hands that have
Given love that cannot go
Further than divinity,
Fold on her virginity.
We have seen death invade
Auchlewan glens. Death like our
Dying power slowly burn
Lowland mountains, greens of Barr,
And the rowans hirpling down
The spate of Stinchar. Turn
The locked mill, Pinclanty, on your
Axle of poverty and song;
The learned and bloody hills of Ayr
Cover their heads with autumn.
The leg of bawling MacQuatter
Was lopped at Waterloo. The seven
Sons of Margaret who saw
Thirteen children to the tomb,
Clip the leagues of Carrick. John
The mason, cut the Corsehill stone,
Built the high Victorian pride
Of Galloway, and saw his father
Fall at Stranraer. The son
By a gothic transom heard
The final mercy of his breath
Die on a loch. His place of birth
A byre where the Stinchar calls.
Back to Scotland with these bones,
And to Dumfriesshire her daughter,
Where the Annan water foils
The red boulders of too great
Pride. The flood to Solway bears
Blood of Scotland to the flinching
Stallions whose beating hair
Dries on Ailsa, whips upon
The arm of Jura, and the tall
Anger of isles. The guilt that beetles
From those auguring halls receive
Grace of the whaups, and golden eagles
Burning Scotland with their stare.
As her son I stand beside
This unmonumental stone,
As her son no passion
But of mourning for the beauty

Of the covenanted days
That her barren arms relinquish.
For her sons I stand beside
The dead ground that shall receive her,
For her sons that in the seven
Miracles of heaven stand,
Turning grief and love towards her.
Margaret Murray was her name.

RUTHVEN TODD

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE HEART

(for Nicolette)

Though in the four-walled loneliness of my heart
The past lay dying and the long rays of evening
Could call no flicker from its eye, though years depart
While the vast pantechnicon of fear removed my song;
Yet love, as love, remained, and with me wept
Seeing in the empty bed, only the shadow slept.

The tides of bitterness can now, indeed, recede
Leaving my shore bare but for the neglected shell,
The stranded starfish and the coiled and withered weed,
Which, by a calligraphic chance, I know must spell
My future, writing in words I cannot understand
Its geomancy on my barren stretch of rippled sand.

And yet, my darling, while the tide still flowed,
And the hate I feared knocked at the enormous door,
You gave me comfort, eased me of the sullen load
My pulse carried like a barge; you, O my dear,
Were precious, when so much was only trash—
When all my heart was wheat for the world to thresh.

Yours was the cool hand on the past's excited brow,
Who eased its agony to sorrow, to a fading pain;
Who taught the present that a new to-morrow
Would surely bring it loveliness and truth again;
Who in my heart's forsaken room could sing,
Tenderly, charms to banish the hatred and the wrong.

So, if my heart's joy should make me fool,
I ask your pardon; I am love's lonely clown,
Playing Pagliacci in a ring where much is cruel,
And only the light of love can neither jeer nor frown.
Forgive me, darling, my awkward and unwanted love;
This tattered heart I offer now I ask you to forgive.

JON MANCHIP WHITE

COUNT ORLO IN ENGLAND

This rain like silver corn, this northern rain
  That rushes inward through the arrow-slit,
Is fine and soft and comforting to feel
  And looks as cold and beautiful as steel.
I brood beside the damp grey stone: I sit
  And watch the shooting fall of shining grain.

To-day my narrow thoughts are full of sadness.
  I wish the dart and slant of rain would weave
The shift of fancies into tapestry,
  And catch the threads of thought and knit for me
Tissues of memory and make-believe
  Reminding me of times of youthful gladness.

Among the patterns of the plunging trees
  Bound by the heavy downpour's misty ropes,
I see dim battles that my squadrons fought,
  Campaign and siege and holocaust I wrought,
The whole ambitious skein of early hopes,
  The acrid plains and scented classic seas.

Ah, those cerulean waves where once I sailed
  And knew the almond breath of eastern winds,
Where with Duke Robert, that old grim Guiscard
  Who shook the purple empires into shard,
I voyaged to the Isle of Tamarinds
  Through fish-shoals emerald-eyed and ruby-tailed!

And I remember how the vessel drove
  Through odorous gales, until one dusk it came
To the pale coastline of an unknown land
  With lemon-trees upon its pleasant strand,
And how the young stars burned with clear green flame
  As we dropped anchor in the placid cove.

The last grey bird swung down the empty sky
  With ghostly pulse of wings. Beside a brook
I found asleep upon a mossy bed
  A girl whose limbs were painted white and red.
She woke to me with rapture in her look,
  She held her arms out with a savage cry.

Around her brow she wore a chain of coins,
  Her hair was bronze and tawny were her eyes.
Was she, I wonder, peri or princess,

Or merchant's errant wife or shepherdess?
No man need ask the question, who is wise.
I stooped and took the cestus from her loins.

I heard the stride and roar of leaves and waves,
The lunge of captive winds in lemon-trees,
The lurch of dappled water over stone.
I heard dark Nature swell and heave and groan
And lash the elements with winds and seas
That fled her quivering to boughs and caves.

Upon the bed of moss till dawn we lay;
First we made love, then afterwards we slept.
Time fluttered by me like a velvet moth
In dreams of red kings on a painted cloth;
And I awoke, and from her side I crept
Before the sharp and diamond light of day.

Oh! in the hungry North my rich blood freezes!
I sit in this great castle wet and cold
And watch the shimmering hawberk of the rain,
And all my one desire to go again
Beneath the tingling branches where the bold
And brown wench gave her flesh to pungent breezes.

The marrow in my bones runs weak and thin,
The Saxon women smell of bacon-fat,
The numb encounters of provincial skirmish
Have bruised my arms and made their strength diminish;
For ten years on my backside I have sat
And listened to a lean priest talk of sin.

And every dream is shrunk, and Guiscard dead,
And I grow old enduring crude assault
By sullen tribesmen sired by rain and swamp.
These chilling rains have caught me in a cramp.
Where is the fire in the heavenly vault,
The lemon-scented girl, the long green bed?

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

THE GREAT BEAR

(for David Wright)

Last night I dreamt I heard that great black bear
Who stalks through the northern sky, his fur
Grizzled with frost and starlight, speak; growling, he said;
"Where are the mushy and rank-flavoured toadstools,
My mess of cranberries, and the rancid butter,
With which you fattened me? Where the familiar bodies
Of hairy women, oiled, and with bleached tresses,
Who suckled and coddled me? The time draws on
To your midwinter sacrifice, when I must fall
Self-pierced in a hidden pit, or you will crush
My brains with two hard bits of wood, and blow
Tobacco-smoke's blue whiffs in my cold nose—
"Children" (he said, "O children!"—and prowled about,
Chained to the fixed pole, and rolled
His seven starry eyes. Then in my sleep
I saw the huge brutes with their heavy paws
Rousing themselves out of their somnolent caves,
Black, brown, and grey; and white bears, piloting,
Red-eyed, their ships of ice through winter seas.
And I thought of Hereward, and of Bothvar Bjarki,
Of Beowulf the bear-king who encountered him
In a spectral hall among the upturned benches . . .
It is time to feed that shaggy and physical beast.

MARGARET CROSLAND

VISION OF ISLANDS

(for Patricia Ledward)

The cold edge of autumn
turns a slow blade
between sky and sea,
bares a vision of islands
opalled in cloud.

Into huge windy suns
we strode there, small
among the animal rocks,
across loud solitude
heard the gulls' mystery.

From the green shallows
over glass-bright sand
the neat boats leave for
rose-rock shores, for legend
of saint and soldier.

Hollow now down
St. Mary's sound the bell
rings echo of wreck,
the pearls that were his eyes
and are grown stone.

The sentinel redjack
by the castle gate,
the shore's green drawbridge
to a keep of flowers
conceal the password.

Long lighthouse eyes
watching like Argus over
a hundred ships, blink
silence and testify
we are strangers here.

ALLEN CURNOW

TOMB OF AN ANCESTOR

(i) In Memoriam, R.L.M.G.

The oldest of us burst into tears and cried
Let me go home, but she stayed, watching
At her staircase window ship after ship ride
Like birds her grieving sunsets; there sat stitching

Grandchildren's things. She died by the same sea.
High over it she led us in the steepening heat
To the yellow grave; her clay
Chose that way home: dismissed, our feet

Were seen to have stopped, and turned again downhill;
The street fell like an ink-blue river
In the heat to the bay, the basking ships, this Isle
Of her oblivion, our broad day. Heaped over

So lightly, she stretched like time behind us, or
Graven in cloud, our farthest ancestor.

(ii) To Fanny Rose May

Great-aunt, surviving of that generation
Whose blood sweetens the embittered seas between
Fabulous old England and these innovations
My mountainous islands: in the bright sad scene

I praise with you your voyage, and hers who sleeps
A sister folded in the hill cemetery,
Sacrifice or seed lodged on those slopes
That seem barbaric, by the unworshipped sea

Toward which she would shade her eyes. I know the fires
That forged the harbour and the heights glow still,
A million years old memory, but there's
Neither memory nor world here but that hill

Where struck your voyaging sister seed, from whom
I grow, and this praise flows, this blood, this name.

Christchurch, New Zealand.

W. J. HARVEY

LENI RIEFENSTAHL'S OLYMPIAD 1936

Time's ten year film unwinds, creating
worlds in which anachronistic we
must greet our twice-dead ghosts, and wonder,
strangers ourselves, at this unnatural meeting.

What trick of light reanimates
these faces and these figures that we know
are only so much celluloid, yet seem
more real than we in their athletic poses?

For though time's made them two-dimensional
still they participate, while passive we
assume our role is to observe and comment
how this one, leaping now, will soon be sleeping,

and how this casual contest so becomes
the symbol of a less light-hearted quarrel,
when coiling roots through soil's arena writhe
to crown these graceful heads, now wreathed with laurel.

ELISABETH CLUER

IN MEMORY OF
KENNETH SPENCE OF SAWREY

Rough like Falernian
is the taste of winter
on Esthwaite and Tarn Hows;
the sheep-lipped tarns, the still
grass under frost, the bracken,
beech hedge and great beech boughs.

The stone is rough; pale walls
endlessly twist, and the road
swings like a careless lover
to mount the mare of the hills.

Hind and hind on the Gallop
crash to their hiding woods
and the sound is rough on the tongue
as the light gait is long
and the taste still harsh to the palate.

Beyond the Hows the Pikes
in cruel and clear light
muster their steel ranks;
these are the vanguards.

Ice on Dunmail, on Kings'
Barrow and wolves', on Striding
Edge and on Helvellyn
whets the appetite
and the steel blade for skating
and rings the lakes with patterns
of pace, of rough voices,
of stilled water waiting.

Upon the tops the crackle
of foot on frozen bog
chills the spine; and by crackling
of heather and gorse in the night
in ranged battalions
in ridge on ridge of flame
we are companioned.

Even the sand of the House,
rough to the feet, has the flavour;
the touch of the scree, of the iron grey
phalanx of Wastwater;
even the winch on the ferry
black in the snowdrift, creaking;
even the flail of the chain
pursuing the ear in the taxi.

The wine glass is empty, is frosted,
gone is the host
the fume of wine ghostly
rough and cool on the tongue,
the deer's pace long
on the haunted Gallop;
the true Falernian
touches the haunted mind
still with the exact texture
of Esthwaite in winter,
the Hows, and snow on the wind.

POINTS OF VIEW

A HONEYED VIEW

"Everything will be so sunny,
Honey, when I—I'm with you."
popular song.

Many Occasions by W. B. HONEY
(FABER, 18/-)

This is, as a reviewer says of another of Mr. Honey's books, "a very sensible and perceptive book". Yet the weaknesses in Mr. Honey's aesthetic are legion. He might be described as a romantic materialist: he believes in a kind of divine inspiration without believing in the Divinity: and, while in his materialism he is extremely sensible and logical—the passage in which he rejects the idea "that all such beauty is the work of God" is admirable—he never, never, never manages to adduce any reasonable explanation of what it is. Moreover, although he considers that even the beauty of natural objects shows evidence of "design"—he opposes the purely functional view—he makes an odd distinction between the beauty of a landscape and that of a single object, claiming that the beauty of the landscape only exists in the sight of the viewer, and is not there when no one is looking at it or when someone incapable of appreciating it is looking at it. But, if an individual plant, or even a stone, has its own beauty—he even inclines to the theory that these things design themselves—why not a landscape, which is after all only an arrangement of these things? Similarly, when he comes to poetry, although he is extremely persuasive in his arguments and writes with an appearance of judgment and cool reason, he again rejects the functional and rational view and is left with nothing but a kind of mysticism he can't explain. Things all, so to speak, design themselves; and the inspiration of a poet, that gives his poetry its fire and beauty, remains for Mr. Honey as mystifying a thing, and as mystical, as if it were an act of God. In a sense he is a formalist: "We can care as deeply for the beauty of Milton's *Paradise Lost* without the least acceptance of his theology or sympathy with his purpose in writing it. That this is so is surely proof that the poetic essence resides in the qualities I have called formal." Yet having stated this, he is still puzzled enough to destroy his own theory in his perfectly sensible rejection of "pure poetry". So it's not form. "Poetry is thus a state to which language may attain, and no one part or aspect of a poem—neither a special kind of subject-matter in its content, nor imagery alone, nor any particular sort of words—can be claimed as its essence. Attempts at definition on these terms must always fail. It is like light, which must needs be coloured by some transmitting medium, or reflected from some object not itself on which it strikes before we can ever become aware of it. "Pure poetry" can no more exist for us apart, than life can be made known to us without a material embodiment. And its recognition is a direct act of the intuition or "imaginative reason", never a matter of taking thought. It is "felt in the blood, and felt along the heart", or as Housman more bluntly put it, "you recognise it by a sensation in the pit of the stomach which can never be mistaken by one who has experienced it".

There is, of course, a horrible weakness to this view—simply, who is to say who recognises poetry correctly? It does, in fact, ultimately destroy all critical standards; for, it is quite possible—indeed as any editor knows it is abominably common—for something to be recognised intuitively, to be "felt in the blood" as something which to any critical mind it is clearly not. And finally the argument is bound to devolve on the idea that only people of exquisite taste and sensibility are capable of judging

poetry—only presumably those who are capable of getting in the pit of their stomachs the right feeling at the right time to the right thing. But it begs entirely the question of how and why even the most cultivated differ in their responses. One is left finally as with his viewer of the landscape, with a dependence solely on personal taste, personal "vision". Yet it seems to me that undoubtedly, just as the landscape is what it is, some poems are good and others are not, whether Mr. Honey and his friends of great sensibility agree on them or not.

Mr. Honey's views are nevertheless valuable, and with many of them I agree very strongly. I think he is quite correct to point out the confusion that so often exists in the minds of critics and public alike "between the art and its occasion". The form of a work is certainly the most important single item towards its success, and though the Marxist critic would be right in objecting to Mr. Honey's sudden slide into mysticism to explain what he cannot explain, there is certainly a prevalent fashion among materialist critics to ignore form too much. A proper regard for form is not a symptom of formalism—though I think it might be fairly held against Mr. Honey that *he is* a formalist, though a very worried one. For even when it comes to natural life, his theory of design is a formalist one—it is a matter of forms creating forms with no functional purpose; yet, though I think the form is all-important, (and the form is the result of the artist's skill and technique, of his learning and of the quality of his mind, of the knowledge he has built up for himself and which, when he is a practising artist, he uses almost automatically—as an ordinary person uses a pen to write with, using the technique and materials he has acquired—he will probably always be acquiring more) when it comes to the final, perfected work of art, this form is functional. I think bad works of art are usually the result of a lack in this quality of mind—which is not an inexplicable and mystical inspiration, but which has been built up, consciously or unconsciously, by hard work and undivided attention; though I would not deny that some people see more in, say, a landscape than others, and such a natural propensity for looking at things in such a way would obviously be of assistance to an artist or an appreciator of art. At the same time I do not believe this cannot be learnt by those to whom it does not come naturally. The difference, I believe, between an artist and one who is not is a matter not of inspiration but of interest. The artist is interested in being an artist, the other is not, and what will make the artist successful or not will be the degree of intensity and thoroughness with which he applies himself to his interest. If his interest wavers and he suffers from too many distracting influences, he will simply not acquire the right techniques in a sufficient degree. I need hardly say, the same would be true of a work in any other medium. To achieve the best results one must know and be really interested in one's job.

Thus, too, the appreciation of art seems to me to be largely a matter of familiarity. If you are familiar with it, as a normal part of your leisure occupation, and are really interested in it, you will automatically be able to form deeper and sounder judgments than those who are not. As Picasso has said, he would not expect his butcher to understand or appreciate his pictures. Why? Simply, because the butcher has no interest in them or any real familiarity with art. (But one *would* expect one's butcher to be able to produce a valuable opinion on the quality and uses of his various cuts of meat.) Of course, there is no reason why he should not acquire such an interest—but, unless and until it has been acquired and he has become reasonably familiar with the kind of thing he is being asked to admire, it is not at all likely he will admire it. Here one might refer to primitive peoples among whom art is familiar and who regard without any surprise symbolic and even unrepresentational objects of art which would seem "queer" to our own working-class. Yet they do not think it queer to fill their houses with a great deal of trashy and quite useless ornamentation, including mass-produced representational articles, whose nearness to what they seek to represent is

no more than vestigial—composition dogs barely recognisable as dogs, and so on. It is easy to see, too, how new art forms gradually win acceptance, if not among the masses, at least among wider and wider circles of the public as familiarity grows. The fact is that this "useless" ornamentation is not useless—it has its function. At its lowest it may be a quite undiscriminating desire for "something pretty"—but it is remarkable that a number of people have, if not uniform good taste in everything, a superb taste in some one thing—namely, what really interests them. If the interest is sufficient, and the attitude towards it thorough enough—i.e. if the interest is genuine, and not an interest acquired merely for the sake of showing-off or having something it is thought proper to have, it seems that good taste will grow naturally. One has only to consider the clothes of many quite ordinary working girls, who often dress much better than those with greater means at their command, and whose taste and judgment is excellent in this particular field with which they are familiar.

I think the particular function of art is closely bound up with the peculiar aspirations of mankind—of man as a thinking animal. Art is a symbolic representation of his desire to better himself, his desire for perfection; and it is therefore very closely bound up with his social and political activities, and it is not surprising that it is so apt to be confused with them—especially when a verbal art like poetry is in question. Nor is it surprising that, at the other extreme, one should find an excessively personal view of art, bound up with the idea of man's perfecting himself as an individual—perhaps most obvious in a religious context, when it is possible for art to appear as a substitute for religion. (I am not at all sure that Mr. Honey's Godless theory of form creating form, of creatures and even stones gradually designing themselves, not with an eye to function, but with an eye to beauty, is not itself a mild case of this; though it is belied by his extremely common-sense and practical attitude in particulars.)

Art is neither an escape from life nor an imitation of it. It is a symbolic representation of it. And there is nothing at all mystical or mystifying about its function or its source, though it may in some cases be mystical in its representation. But that is something which merely reflects the mystical attitude towards life of its actual author, and does not make the work itself a mystical or mystifying object. There is room, as Mr. Honey ably and agreeably suggests, for art of a great variety of kinds; the occasion may be purely personal or social or religious or political, and there may still be a recognisable virtue in the final product, irrespective of the reader's personal interest in the occasion. This is something that Mr. Honey finds difficult to explain. In writing of poetry the best he can do is to speak of "the sacred fire", "inspiration", "creative passion", "fire-new" and so on—emotive phrases, no doubt, but phrases which themselves lack definition, and do, as he himself obviously recognises, postulate a mystery. But I think there is no difficulty at all, if one regards a work of art, however realistic it may be in representation or however unrepresentational, as in fact a symbolic representation of life—life which includes everything, including the landscape which ceases to exist when Mr. Honey isn't looking at it, the thoughts of many different types of men, and the social and political climate of our day and time; life both personal and social. For it is impossible for a man really to deny either his society or his personality, though there is in this rather broken period of history a lot of neurotic striving to do both. What remains in art, when you take away its occasion, is a symbolic truth, and symbols continue to hold a meaning and a fascination for mankind long after the occasion has ceased to be of interest to him. This is no mystery. It is precisely because they are symbols that the do so. If they were mere representations or imitations, they would not. Even the trashy ornaments on the mantelpiece have a symbolic value to their possessors, but, since they *are* trash, that value will not be lasting, and, as fashions change, they will no

longer be of any symbolic value to succeeding generations. But, where the symbols are contained in a sufficiently perfected form, it is likely they will retain their value, until man ceases to be interested in improving the condition of his life. The most telling symbolic representations will probably contain elements of both personal and public representation in a high degree, but there will also be works of art of lasting value whose symbols strike the mind and feeling only in one or the other and not in both; for they cover the whole field of human aspiration, from the small to the large. And this, I think, is true even of music, which Mr. Honey tries to separate from the other arts, as being clearly non-representational.

It is only fair to say that Mr. Honey does share this view of the symbolic nature of art, but for him it is wrapped in an errant mysticism—for him the arts are "the visionary creation of symbols, of awe-inspiring images wholly irrational"; "What we call the beauty of those images, and the liberation it brings, are to me evidence that they proceed from some ultimate reality." [*sic!*]: "The artist is a creator, and his vision and sensibility rank with those of the saint and mystic among the most precious faculties of the human mind." I believe that art works in an altogether more practical and functional manner, and any mysteries that attach to it are not specifically to do with its nature or "inspiration" but with as yet undiscovered facts about the mental equipment of mankind in general, facts which the young science of psychoanalysis has not yet explored to the full.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

RAINE

The Pythoness and other poems by KATHLEEN RAINE. (HAMISH HAMILTON, 6/–)

Collected Poems by EDWARD THOMAS. (FABER & FABER, 8/6)

Kathleen Raine's book reveals an important new phase in her poetry, in which her position shifts from that of orthodox Catholicism to that of a Blakean Christianity, or, as I would prefer to call it, quasi-Gnosticism. How much this may matter ultimately it is hard to judge. Miss Raine took what she needed from Catholicism and she may take what she needs from Blake and then pass on to another phase, but in the meantime it will help us to appreciate her new poems if we consider the intellectual structure behind them.

Briefly, Miss Raine may be called an Idealist, in the philosophical sense of the term. Like Blake, she believes in the Creative Imagination, claiming that it gives to Nature the form which man sees there. She expresses this belief quite adequately in a rather dry little poem called *Optical Illusion*:

"The twinkling of an eye, and the boxes on the floor
Hang from the ceiling. Really they are not boxes,
But only certain black lines on white paper . . .
And, but for the eye, not even black on white,
But a vast molecular configuration,
A tremor in the void, discord in silence."

This, however, is not just a point of view to be expressed with cold exactness; it is also a deeply-felt belief, a thing for wonder and gratitude:

"Who am I, who for the sun fears
The demon dark,
In order holds
Atom and chaos?
Who out of nothingness has gazed
On the beloved face?"

This Idealism may, I have suggested, be related to Gnosticism because it seems to imply the denial of true reality of matter; but Gnosticism also holds that matter is evil, and here Miss Raine departs from it. If, like Blake, she sometimes writes as if the world did not really exist, yet, again like Blake, she loves that world and sees it shining with glory. But she is unlike Blake in that she is by training a scientist, and is able to look at the world with a minute knowledge of its physical construction. Indeed, much of the attraction of her new poetry depends on the fact that it seems to be built on the paradox (or perhaps only the seeming paradox)—that the imagination which gives form to Nature may at times resort to an objective analysis, of the very form it has given. As a result many of her poems have a sort of controlled ambiguity of intention; it is not so much that they say one thing in order to mean another (like allegories) as that they exist simultaneously on several planes of meaning.

"Mine is the gaze that knows
Eyebright, asphodel, and briar rose.
I have seen the rainbow open, the sun close.

A wind that blows about the land
I have raised temples of snow, castles of sand
And left them empty as a dead hand.

A winged ephemerid I am born
With myriad eyes and glittering wings
That flames must wither or waters drown."

Now this is not just an interpretation of the work of the Creative Imagination nor a pantheist experience of the one-ness of Nature, though it is both of these. It is also a quite factual and (in the popular sense) scientific statement of the mutations of matter within the geological and evolutionary process. Like all true myth, her work can be accepted at one and the same time as fact and as prophecy.

To express this new precise ambiguity she has gone back for instruction to the master both of precision and of ambiguity:

"Young spiders weave at first their perfect webs,
Later, less certain, they weave worse.
Old age spins tattered cobwebs, rags and shreds."

The influence of Empson is not elsewhere as obtrusive as this, but it may help to account for the new firmness and clarity in these poems. Moreover, the lyricism is not lost; it is more intense, more highly charged, for being kept in check. It has become almost a commonplace to compare Miss Raine's work to a crystal, and if we really consider the nature of a crystal, the analogy seems very appropriate. For the crystal, with its conciseness, its certainty of form, and its many facets, is the prime ambiguity of nature—an inorganic organism, a mineral that grows.

It is good to have Edward Thomas's poems available once again. His virtues are well known—reticence, honesty, a deep, inherited knowledge of the countryside. There was also, in a few poems, a more elusive quality, reminding us often of de la Mare and even, in the strange poem about the man who follows his own double, of Kafka:

"And now I dare not follow after
Too close. I try to keep in sight,
Dreading his frown and worse his laughter.
I steal out of the wood to light;
I see the swift shoot from the rafter
By the inn door: ere I alight
I wait and hear the starlings wheeze
And nibble like ducks: I wait his flight.
He goes: I follow: no release
Until he ceases. Then I also shall cease."

But what is perhaps most worth remembering to-day is how little he played the Georgian parlour game of words. His voice sounds

beside us, the words still current and serviceable. The true English speech is heard in his poetry, and though he may have been less adventurous than some of his contemporaries, such as Lawrence, yet he has much to teach us about the adjustment of traditional metres to the dialect of to-day.

NORMAN NICHOLSON.

A HUMAN DOCUMENTATION OF JOHN KEATS

A Life of John Keats by DOROTHY HEWLETT. (HURST & BLACKETT 25/-)

Of any distinguished literary figure two types of biography can be written, the "Life" of Inspiration and the "Life" of Documentation. If I suggest that Miss Hewlett's "Life of John Keats" belongs to the latter category rather than to the former I intend her no disparagement, for her type of biography, involving essential scholastic research, is perhaps to-day the more necessary to us, leaving as it does those who may wish to do so to supplement it with their own reading of the poems, with their own appreciation. And concerning a figure like John Keats who has in his time been grossly over-romanticised facts are more valid than airy nonsense.

Miss Hewlett's "Life" is valuable because, while partisan, she disposes effectively of many myths which have for one reason or another become part of the Keats legend, a legend fostered originally for political reasons by Hunt and others and kept alive to our own day largely by the "inspirational" type of biography, or by those who have done no real research on Keats at all.

Keats was not, for instance, a great friend of Shelley, in fact he tended to spurn Shelley's advances. Nor did he get on with Wordsworth or with any of the real poets of his day, his intimacy with Coleridge being limited to one conversation—though it did inspire the "Ode to a Nightingale". Keats's own choice of friends was particularly unfortunate so far as the literary and artistic worlds were concerned—being limited mainly to Leigh Hunt whose support—though generously given—did more harm than good, a now forgotten poet, John Hamilton Reynolds, and that eccentric mediocrity, the painter Haydon. It was largely through Keats's own choice of friends and literary grouping that he got so badly mauled in the influential Tory press, though it is worth noting that his own false pride prevented him from accepting an invitation from Blackwood when he passed through Edinburgh on his walking tour with Charles Brown in 1818. It is sufficiently well known to-day that Keats was not "killed" by the reviews in the *Quarterly* and *Blackwoods*, but Miss Hewlett helps us towards a sense of perspective by quoting liberally from *all* the reviews of the poet's three books that appeared in his own lifetime, some of them highly favourable. They were, as was to be expected, aligned politically, in so far as they were written by Hunt and the liberals or by the Editor of the *Examiner's* enemies. Poetry has rarely at any time been reviewed on its own merits or even upon its apparent merits.

It will come as a surprise to many of Keats's admirers to find that he was considerably better off financially than most of to-day's poets, particularly allowing for the difference in the value of money. He inherited a considerable sum from his grandfather—though it is true that some of this was lost by the dishonesty or incompetence of his trustee, Richard Abbey. Apart from his medical apprenticeship he rarely worked at anything as distinct from poetry, and at his death—whether he knew it or not—£700 was still lying unclaimed to his account in the Court of Chancery.

Had Keats taken any interest at all in his own financial affairs he would never have been in want. But like many other poets, the majority of whom have inherited nothing at a time when it could be useful to them, he was inclined to be a spendthrift and haphazard in management, lending overgenerously from what he had made his own deficiency.

Finally, Miss Hewlett clears up many of the aspersions that have been cast on Fanny Brawne. So far from this young woman being an unscrupulous trollop, she was on the contrary sincerely devoted to her poet as her letters to Fanny Keats after his death now prove. When John Keats died her hair faded, she lost her colouring and she wore to the grave the ring he had given her. Reading between the lines of Miss Hewlett's partisanship one cannot help feeling that Keats, though excused to some extent by his illness, treated this poor girl abominably, cutting himself off from her during his last months in England and writing her jealous, cruel letters. "You must be mine," he once said, "to die upon the rack if I want you."

Where Miss Hewlett's "Life" fails is in an effective appreciation of Keats's poetry, but for those who are capable of reading for themselves this is not important. What is valuable in her book is the mass of exact detail she records—she is particularly good in her account of Keats's early days as a medical student at Guy's Hospital—and in her explosion of legends. We have too many legends nowadays and that of "the lily-white boy" is a particularly nauseating one. Poets are usually cruel, conceited, selfish, careless, and human, or else drunkards or perverts. And the Romantic Movement is now sufficiently far behind us for all to be able to accept, without any artificial stimulus, the fact that a complete change of heart and of outlook were involved in it.

JOHN WALLER.

POUND AND MACNEICE

The Pisan Cantos by EZRA POUND.
(FABER AND FABER, 12/6.)

Collected Poems by LOUIS MACNEICE.
(FABER AND FABER, 12/6.)

The difficulty of reviewing these two books together is the difficulty of finding common ground, and fair ground, for comparison. *The Pisan Cantos* represent the penultimate parts merely, or Cantos LXXIV to LXXXIV of a major epic; whereas the *Collected Poems* (1925-48) do not include that recent work of Mr. MacNeice in which he has made such signal advances. So that to play the one off against the other just isn't cricket. Yet here are two figures of such standing in the contemporary field that by any test they would secure a place in the first eleven. Each stands high in reputation by virtue of the quality, the quantity, the fluency and, one might add, the influence of his total *oeuvre*. It may seem that they have little else in common. Certainly it would be easy to exploit their many points of difference. They belong to different generations. They have been written off, by interested parties, on opposite sides of the political fence. In fact, though they may deny it, both are anarchists. Mr. Pound, who was promoted Fascist Beast before any poet except that great warrior minstrel Mr. Roy Campbell, has been a *rash* anarchist. Mr. MacNeice, a more consistent figure than Mr. Auden, Mr. Spender, or Mr. Day Lewis, has been a *cautious* anarchist. But who cares now about the civil war in which Leonardo and Michelangelo fought so fiercely, on opposite sides, for justice? At moments when Progress

rears its barbarous head, what ultimately matters is the kind of courage and honesty with which the issues are faced. Neither Mr. Pound nor Mr. MacNeice has *shirked* current issues. Even though the spectacles through which they view events are so different, there is much upon which they can see eye to eye. They both saw long ago that there was something radically wrong with the economic background and with the political façade. Mr. MacNeice saw all around him the privileged few enjoying a

> System that gives at fancy prices their fancy lives
> While ninety-nine in the hundred who never attend the banquet
> Must wash the grease off the knives.

This was elementary stuff in the 'thirties, when Mr. Pound had already discovered that usury was the root of all evil. He sees that "if theft be the main principle in government, there will be larceny on a minor pattern: a few camions, a stray packet of sugar"; and also that:

> Similar things occurred in Dalmatia
> lacking the treasure of honesty
> which is the treasure of states
> for the dog-damn wop is not, save by exception, honest in administration any more than the briton is truthful.

Meanwhile, politics aside, Mr. Pound and Mr. MacNeice still have much in common on the technical plane. Both are professional poets, loyal to their craft first and last. Both are visuels. Both are fond of repeating the dictum that "poetry is made with *words*". And both have made substantial contributions to English life and letters. Other poets have enriched the language in other ways; but perhaps no two poets have done more in our time to develop the medium of poetry; by demonstrating how it can accommodate natural, unforced colloquial speech. Neither is, in the narrow sense, English: both are exiles. And it isn't just that the one left Buffalo for Rapallo, and the other Belfast for Birmingham. They exile themselves in Time, too. Mr. Pound togs up in the tatters of the past as a troubadour, and eyes the present through the Chinks. Mr. MacNeice turns his backside on the past to team up with the machine-agers and the future-fans. But both are ancient Greeks: both have heard the *barbitos*, and had commerce with the gods. And they are not deceived. Their Romance, whether of the past or of the future, is used to wearing a classical mask, of appropriate severity. Aware of the whole cultural heritage as well as of the contemporary dilemma, they can see the one through the other. "Athens," says Mr. MacNeice

> became a mere university city. . . .
> And for a thousand years they went on talking
> Making such apt remarks,
> A race no longer of heroes but of professors
> And crooked business men and secretaries and clerks
> Who turned out dapper little elegiac verses
> On the ironies of fate, the transience of all
> Affections, carefully shunning an overstatement
> But working a dying fall.

Mr. Pound has his own quarrels with the past, and with professors, and with the young. In one place echoing Aristotle he remarks:

> philosophy is not for young men
> their *katholou* cannot be
> sufficiently derived from
> their *hekasta*
> their generalities cannot be born
> from a sufficient phalanx of particulars.

The past is not really dead for Mr. MacNeice: but for Mr. Pound it is vividly alive. Where Mr. Pound *feels* the continuity, the sap moving up from the roots, Mr. MacNeice seems almost to *will* himself to be *deraciné*, as he slickly and not unjustly rationalises the fashionable progressive line:

> Things were different when men felt their programme
> In the bones and pulse, not only in the brain,

Born to a trade, a belief, a set of affections;
That instinct for belief may sprout again:
There are some who have never lost it—

and I think it must be acknowledged that Mr. Pound is one of the "some". He sees "the enormous dream in the peasant's bent shoulders". He observes, without being scandalised about it, like Mr. MacNeice, that agricultural pursuits persist in an industrial age. He even goes so far as to speak of "Chesterton's England of has been *and why not?*" Mr. MacNeice is troubled about all sorts of anachronisms to which he feels a guilty semi-attachment, while Mr. Pound blandly burns his boats for the hell of it. It should be noted that behind all the sub-tropical or exotic scenery in these two books of poems the Christian background is palpably felt: indeed, it is all the more solidly there, for so seldom revealing itself to the naked eye. Both poets, disowning most of the outward trappings of the Church, reaffirm implicitly those major Christian values which at some points tally with communist or Confucian virtues. As Mr. Pound observes:

"mi-hine eyes hev"
well yes they *have*
seen a good deal of it
there is a good deal to be seen
fairly tough and unblastable
and the hymn. . . .
well in contrast to the god-damned croon-
ing
put me down for temporis acti.

These things are not unimportant. Other things may seem more urgent.

Mr. Pound is the grandfather of modern poetry and the godfather (if it may be said without blasphemy) of Mr. Eliot. His value as an animator, over the last three decades, it would be impossible to over-estimate. It is possible that his influence as a poet has never been greater than it is to-day. If his *Cantos* and his prose are not yet so widely appreciated as his occasional verse, the losses are not only his.

Mr. MacNeice is widely read and admired because he puts into lucid and attractive form many of the thoughts, feelings and opinions of the more literate part of his own generation: where Mr. Pound supplies only "difficult" pictures, he provides flattering mirrors for our common perplexities. He offers an amicable running commentary on the scene, where Mr. Pound is apt either to take the reader by the scruff of the neck and rub his nose in some offensive matter, or else fling out a handful of Chinese crackers.

There may be admirers of Mr. MacNeice's poems who would dismiss Mr. Pound's *Cantos* as an incoherent jumble of old man's mumbling. There may be addicts of Mr. Pound for whom Mr. MacNeice is no more than a smart political copywriter, yet another "William Hickey" with a turn for verse with some Punch in it. And it may be that their poetry, taken in bulk, gives the effect of a series of clever but tentative exercises, a mere tuning-up for those rare brief moments of complete achievement. As their grateful reader for twenty years I would not subscribe to such superficial judgments. I would rather try to distinguish some of the kinds of satisfaction, and dissastisfaction, to be derived from each.

Mr. Eliot has made the point before, that poetry can be appreciated before it is fully understood. Many others must have had the experience, on first looking into the *Divina Commedia*, of a shock of delight over the discovery of the Arnaud passage in the Purgatorio, without extracting a meaning from some of the unfamiliar Provencale words. Only with the greatest orders of music and painting and poetry is it possible to feel quite without doubt that one is indeed in the presence of something immortal. It may be shrouded in forms and idioms with which one is not at home, and which one may hardly understand, but there is an immediate apprehension of greatness. And what matters about the *Cantos* is that, where the clouds do part, one is rewarded with passages of clear celestial blue, portions of Eternity. For the *very* plain reader, these rifts in the general obscurity may not be many. The keys will come, and people will peer into the dark places as they now peer into the holy smokes of Blake's prophetic books: indeed, I think

with greater profit. Certainly a good deal of rather specialised literary and other cultural knowledge is assumed. And, as with Mr. Eliot's poetry, a word is often burdened with as great a load of meaning as the ideograph in a Chinese or Japanese poem. For example, out of that famous Arnaud passage (from the opening phrase of which Mr. Eliot derived the title of his book *Ara Vos Prec*; and to which his *Ash Wednesday* owes one of its most telling lines: *sovegna vos*) Mr. Pound here quotes the single word: *consiros*. The rest is left to the reader. This is all very well where the plums of European literature are concerned, but he also uses Chinese. All I can say here is that I do not think the Chinese references seriously interfere with the *Cantos* as a whole: they add a little, if you recognise them; but if you do not, it doesn't matter. Canto Seventy-seven is provided with a Chinese glossary, so the reader may test the point. Again, does it make any difference to realise that the passage at the top of page 21, in the opening Canto of this volume, happens to be a brilliant paraphrase of the first four chapters of the Confucian Analects? Maybe not; though I think there is small excuse for the very general ignorance, in otherwise educated circles, of the principal Chinese classics. Other obscurities in the *Cantos* are less easily defended. There are references to obscure personages, erstwhile cronies of Mr. Pound's days in Kensington and less frequented quarters, often very private, and often hedged with hesitant comment. On page after page we find parenthetical *intime* apologies for aphasia—excruciating anxiety, of pathological intensity, to get the date or the spelling accurate in detail; e.g. on p. 91 we have "unless memory trick me" (this is reference to famous tag from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*); Rimini "where is, or was, the arch of Augustus"; and someone else "whose name, be it not Innes, escapes me". But these minor irritations do, nevertheless, help to give variety to the rhythm, perspective and veracity to the scene.

One cannot acquit Mr. Pound of the suspicion that on occasion he takes a wilful and mischievous delight in mystification for its own sake; and this helps nobody. (I am not concerned to defend those who ask: who are these guys, Lawes, Jenkyns, Paquin & Co.?) It might also be objected that Mr. Pound's knowledge of history, literature, politics, economics, although undoubtedly intensive, is, widely as it may range, not quite extensive enough. But he does rescue and revivify whole tracts of kulchur which would otherwise lie barren and unexplored; for the reader responsive to his poetry as poetry is inevitably lured to press inquiry into these areas. Mr. Pound's own blanks are really beside the point. If he had a great sinologue's knowledge of Chinese language and literature, what might he not do with it! Yes, but a wise man doesn't depend too much on knowledge in order to dispense wisdom. A surfeit of factual information is indeed the chief bugbear of the arts to-day. Mr. Pound, like the great sages of the past, takes things as they come, and accepts people as he meets them. Providence cleverly arranged that he should encounter such august personages as Eliot, Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, to say nothing of Mussolini, Major Douglas, and others whom it is perhaps not easy to imagine together. No doubt he exercised *some* choice in the matter of his acquaintance, in literature as in life? No doubt. Yet China has other poets than Li Po, other teachers than Mencius and Confucius. Mr. Pound was content to transmute them, and leave the rest.

If Mr. Pound appears to make up his *Cantos* as he goes along, letting his typewriter splash down any odd reminiscence that comes into his head, together with the buzz of a wasp, the creak of a cricket, the smell of fresh mint under the tent flaps, the banter of a passing negro, etc., it must be recognised that the larger design is there, and that the new elements, trivial as they may seem, are all worked in *contrapuntally*, until they assume another dimension and become charged with dramatic significance. Every line is freshly minted. As an Imagist Mr. Pound integrates all the sensuously apprehended components of his vision into something as closely knit and finely wrought as may be. This most mature technique, coming by way of *Cathay* and *Mauberley*, is here adapted to informal autobiographical reminiscence. It should not be

forgotten that Mr. Pound did the cutting on *The Waste Land*. And it is, of course, always a privilege to be able to eavesdrop on the workings of a mind so richly stored, so finely poised, tapping so deep a source of human experience, and so subtle in its motions.

One can easily exaggerate the significance of the crossword puzzle aspect of the *Cantos*. There is poetry enough there to speak up for itself, for anyone not stone blind and stone deaf to the promptings of the inner eye and ear.

The obscurity of Mr. MacNeice is quite another matter. I would hesitate to use the word "obscurity", except that he has himself quite recently given us what is tantamount to a confession that even his critics do not understand him. In a most admirable article in *The New Statesman* (8th October, 1949). Mr. MacNeice showed that his reviewers ("and I am confining myself to more or less favourable reviews") were apt to frame diametrically opposed views of his work: "I am a writer they can place quite simply: I am a surprisingly feminine, essentially masculine poet, whose gift is primarily lyrical but basically satirical, swayed by and immune to politics, with and without a religious sense, technically slapdash and meticulous," etc. But the explanation is fairly simple. So far as the *Collected Poems* are concerned, one can find all these opposite qualities represented. And behind them is the fundamental dilemma which Mr. MacNeice has been dramatising in dialogues for years; ancient versus modern, town against country. He feels a strong attachment to both, and tries to force himself along the road of progress. He is as concerned as Lucretius or Donne about this fixed and yet changing world, in all its complexity, in which the flesh must consort with science and the absolutes. But except for avoiding gross extremes and gross self-delusion, in this volume Mr. MacNeice seems still to be feeling his way, both technically and politically. Through most of the earlier poems one feels that technique plays a negative role: that rhyme and metre are the twin blades of his propagandist scissors, trimming his neat documentaries. The metaphor is his own, from a poem entitled *News Reel*:

> Since Munich, what? a tangle of black film
> Squirming like bait upon the floor of my mind
> And scissors clicking daily.

Like Mr. Pound, Mr. MacNeice has been affected, too much affected, by his immediate ambience and entourage. Some superficial future historian may say MacNeice was a Thirties type, and Pound a Nineties type. Certainly their differences in outlook are reflected in the characteristic *tempo* of their verse. If you compare *Autumn Journal* with the *Cantos*, this is clear. Technically, the difference is one of rhythm. Mr. Pound, in the Oriental tradition, remains conscious even in his most informal moments of the precise weight of his lines: of the cadence as it falls on the ear, of the pattern as it falls on the page, and of the succession of image by image. All is weighed out in pennyweights and fitted into the whole with a jeweller's precision. With Mr. Pound the pause is important, and white typographical space has the integral significance that it occupies in a Cézanne aquarelle; and the *eidola* unfold as the pattern unfolds in some intensive piece of chamber music. In Mr. MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* the structural scaffolding is mechanical, the metric and rhyme super-imposed. It might have been written in prose, except that verse evidently comes as easily as prose to Mr. MacNeice; and certainly the poem is throughout as readable as any prose journal (cf. Mr. Spender's *September Journal*). In his *Iceland Letter* Mr. MacNeice took a heady draught of Byron. The loosening up that ensued was useful, but led him to fall easily into impressionism and cataloguing. Prose lines, topped with the whipped cream of an image, are slung out neatly packaged in rhyme, with an air of coy cavalier insouciance. *Autumn Journal* is a journalistic *tour-de-force*, but its poetic value hops up and down in intensity in a manner that bears little relation to the subject matter. At its best Mr. MacNeice's language has still the toughness of one determined not to let tenderness get the better of his very real feeling for the things and the words that matter. But in this volume we have a collection of museum

specimens of the vices of poetic diction over the *New Verse* period. There are the Audenary imperatives; the dear darling vocatives; the "minatory" gestures detected recently by Mr. E. M. Forster; and the Definite Articles which no poet who has read Mr. Rostrevor Hamilton's devastating exposé will ever dare to use so lavishly again. How far Mr. MacNeice made use of these modes and attitudes ironically or satirically is not always clear. In a poem like *Les Neiges d'Antan* it looks as if he is enjoying a sly dig at Mr. Eliot's *Triumphal March*, and at the same time taking just a smack at Auden. But he seems to enjoy the indulgence too much, and one thinks inevitably of the analogy of the Dyer's Hand. Politically, too, Mr. MacNeice gives away his motives quite frankly on occasion. Here he is, caught in a hot riposte to the Tempter's gibes:

> "What you want is not a world of the free in function
> But a niche at the top, the skimmings of the cream";
> And I answer that this is largely so. . . .
> And now I relapse to sleep, to dreams perhaps and reaction
> Where I shall play the Gangster or the Sheikh,
> Kill for the love of killing, make the world my sofa,
> Unzip the women and insult the meek.

And then follows a digest of the familiar period philosophy of "in the destructive element immerse", etc. What is nice about Mr. MacNeice, aside from the fact that his high intelligence is always on duty even in moments of total immersion, is his modesty. Where other poets (not excluding Mr. Pound) are apt to shout and issue intolerant orders, Mr. MacNeice breaks off from stating facts to murmur publicly a private prayer: "May my feet follow my wider glance." Mr. Pound from his further exile takes a slightly different view of the Power problem: he again paraphrases the political realism of Confucius:

> "and having got 'em (advantages, privileges) there is nothing, italics *nothing*, they will not do to retain 'em"
> yrs truly Kungfutseu.

In conclusion, I should like to offer some suggestions on the relation between a poet and his audience and his rhythms; a relation that is brought out into relief by a close comparison of the texture of the verse of Mr. Pound and Mr. MacNeice. Briefly, Mr. Pound appears to be afraid of saying anything *obvious*; and Mr. MacNeice appears to be afraid of saying anything too *definite*. And out of these pudeurs and hesitations come their characteristically jerky, but quite different, rhythmical utterances. Mr. Pound, perhaps forced to make a virtue of necessity, would like to delimit his *chosen* audience still further. Mr. MacNeice betrays a constant anxiety not to offend so many different kinds of people (for he is a pacific and amiable man), that he is forced to compromise all along the line. It is *because* they are intellectually conscious of their limitations, and of the big appreciative and critical public they face, that their verse takes the forms it does. It is this awareness that causes Mr. Pound to perpetrate private jokes, guffaw behind his paw, lift a doggy leg at every corner and trot off with a sidling buttock-swagger; and that causes Mr. MacNeice to cock his pink tammy at a jaunty angle, and shoot out his lines like squirts of baccy juice from the quid in his left cheek, with *apache cafard*. Mr. Pound guys his outlandish fragments of erudition. Mr. MacNeice guys his classical poetical political learning. The clipped speech of the conscience-stricken upper middle classes (if they can be mentioned under a democratic régime) is the diffident self-reproach of the privileged, mocking their own pretensions and feverishly rubbing the guilt off the gingerbread of birth and education. A whole Empsonian tome is to be written on this subject, which would find symptomatic of our age such phenomena as the rhythm of the clerihew (anti-romantic epigrams for lowbrows) and the freak limerick (the old man of Japan who fills in the last line with as many words as he possibly can). It is at least worth noticing, though it is a matter outside the scope of this review, that some of the best contemporary verse has been translation, where their ties were quite different. Mr. MacNeice has

reached the height of his talents in his versions of Aeschylus, and Faust; just as Mr. Pound is at his most superb in pastiche-paraphrase of Propertius or Li T'ai-Peh. In their more ambitious works both Mr. Pound and Mr. MacNeice have been more tied by other things than they have been tied to texts in their translations. They have been tied to their milieus, to the Zeitgeist, to public expectation or to private heresy. And one cannot help thinking, in view of the nature of their pudeurs, and hence obscurities and stylistic eccentricities, that Mr. Pound would benefit from a *wider* acquaintance with the world (it has no defect in depth), and that Mr. MacNeice would benefit from a spell of comparative solitude. Voluntary exile is one thing. Mr. Pound's exile is no longer voluntary. One thinks inevitably of Mr. Pound in re-reading some old lines of Mr. MacNeice:

> And free speech gagged, and free
> Energy scrapped and dropped like surplus herring
> Back into the barren sea;
> Brains and beauty festering in exile,
> The shadow of bars
> Falling across each page, each field, each raddled sunset,
> The alien lawn and the pool of nenuphars.

As Mr. Pound himself says:

> No one who has passed a month in the death cells believes in cages for beasts.

That is not to say that Mr. Pound has not made magnificent use of the painful experiences of his incarceration. The pathos that informs his *Pisan Cantos* with a new depth might easily have been self-pity, but is here magically transmuted into a pantheistic compassion, of Russian intensity, for all small defenceless creatures; for the lone lynx, for the lone ant of the broken anthill, for the small spider "che mi porta fortuna", for the negro orderly, for the *grillo*, for the tenacity of *la vespa* constructing tiny mud-flask for infant wasplet. But how shocking it is that such a talent should be deprived of all other material—in an atmosphere of Trappism by *force majeure*. And equally, how good it would be if Mr. MacNeice could be given a break from his daily grind, and get away for a spell from the inhibiting proximity of friends and colleagues. So far, these two major poets have expanded little upon those lines in which each has expressed his whole philosophy in a nutshell. Mr. Pound: "What thou lovest well remains . . ."; and Mr. MacNeice: "But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather."

HUGH GORDON PORTEUS.

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