POETRY

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COVER BY SEÁN JENNETT

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Edited by RICHARD MARCH and NICHOLAS MOORE

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THE PLAIN OF PHARSALIA

On the morning following our successful break-through at Dyrrachium the Adjutant informed us that the Chief-of-Staff presented his compliments and had commended our conduct in the action. Naturally we were gratified by this unexpected news, for we had never, it must be admitted, entertained a very high opinion of our own qualities as soldiers. The Adjutant, who was a tall elegant man with a haughty manner and an enigmatic smile, evidently had leanings to culture. He hinted that, if we did as well in the next engagement, the Commander-in-Chief would probably reward us handsomely when the war was over. He might put us in charge of the Public Libraries throughout the State, and of other institutions for the promotion of the Arts and Learning which he intended to endow and develop.

That seems a long time ago. In the meantime the army of the hostile Party retreated to Thessaly, where its cunning Commander hoped to prevent our junction with the Forces of our Allies, a manoeuvre in which he signally failed. It is now the eleventh of May. We are encamped on a wide featureless plain near the town of Pharsalia. This evening we sat drinking wine in the Adjutant's tent where several unit officers had foregathered. They were all rather tipsy, impatient to come to grips with the enemy, and in the highest degree confident of success.

We sensed a tension in the air. Though no plan of campaign had yet been divulged we realised something important was impending. Another engagement? The last and decisive battle? For a fleeting moment we toyed with the absurd idea that some understanding between the two colossal adversaries was still possible, that a reconciliation might be effected that would bring about peace without more bitterness, carnage and destruction.

But the stakes are too high. The ideas, purposes and personalities of the rival Commanders are too antagonistic. They are too steeped in their own vanity, jealousies and self-righteousness, mounted too high on the scaffolding of their prestige, too thickly surrounded by ambitious and fanatical supporters for any relaxation or compromise to be in the least possible, or even desirable. In human affairs things do not happen like that, though indeed they always turn out differently from what we expect.

Now or never, said the Adjutant in his high-pitched voice. Whoever wins the coming battle will control the whole of the civilised world. Then there will be a long era of peace and you (he turned to us with a patronising air) can resume your literary pursuits. We will not have fought in vain, he added a trifle sententiously. To do their best work poets need a stable background, a secure social order and a philosophy of life shared by everyone. Look at Athens in the age of Pericles! shouted the Adjutant

and clapped a reeling captain on the back with such vigour that the poor man, who had only the vaguest notion of Pericles and none whatever of poetry, had to rush coughing and retching out of the tent.

Look at it indeed, we retorted. Certainly there were great writers. But don't imagine that society was then in such a happy condition! What about the revolt of Samos? Why was the Peloponnesian war not averted? Did it not frustrate most of the statesman's enlightened ideas for the improvement of society? Why was the sculptor Pheidias prosecuted on political charges so that eventually he died under arrest? And what about the scandalous imputations made against the mistress of Anaxagoras?

Wait a minute, said the Adjutant. No, we continued, it is easy to imagine Golden Ages in the Past, but if you look closer into it you will find that people in those days did not think of themselves as living in a particularly peaceful or stable period. Peace, in any case, is a very relative term. Strife and insecurity have always been the normal condition of Mankind; and poets and artists, if they have any stuffing in them, should take these in their stride, or else occupy themselves in more useful employment such as trimming the hedgerows.

You are adopting a very severe attitude all of a sudden, said the Adjutant. You can tell your poet friends that once we have settled accounts with that tyrant who has been turning the whole State upside down, they will have a wonderful time and be able to scribble their verses to their hearts' content.

Nostalgically we thought of the last evening we spent in the capital. We remembered how our friend Quintus Valerius read aloud to us some wonderful passages from a long work by the mad Lucretius, who not so long since committed suicide in a fit of melancholia. The opening passages of the second and third books had particularly impressed us. We can't recall the exact words but we refer to the lines in which the poet renounces success and power in this world. Scathingly he describes the strife of the wits, the fight for precedence, everybody labouring night and day to mount the pinnacle of riches and to lay hold of Power. O pitiable minds of Men! he cries, O blind Intelligences! In what shadows, in what great perils is all your poor span of life passed!

Who dare say that there are no true poets to-day! What of Quintus Valerius Catullus himself? Has anything more masterly been composed in our language than his *Peleus and Thetis*! Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new flowering of poetry. These are terrible days of confusion in the realm, of disorder and violence, but there is hope for our poets yet.

As the fumes of the wine with which the hospitable Adjutant had many times replenished our glasses took effect, we warmed to our argument. We told the prostrate company of the young man whom Quintus Valerius had invited to join us on that last evening. He was an engaging young man with a somewhat aggressive manner, who appeared to have an unbounded faith in himself and in his virtually untried powers as a poet. He had of course imbibed the Epicurean philosophy so fashionable these days, but he gave to this system of ideas a very practical colour. Always remain master of yourself, he argued. Use your gifts to the utmost; take every advantage of your opportunities, but part with whatever success you have achieved with equanimity. Above all, contemplate the end of life without anxiety. Without inner anxiety, he repeated solemnly, which is nevertheless the condition on which the individual existence breaks into the *All that which Is*. We could not quite follow him at this point, and Quintus Valerius began to look rather bored. He is after all a famous and established poet, and has little patience with abstract philosophy. Unlike our host, this young man, a mere youth of seventeen, was very ready to take up arms in the present struggle, and after a few drinks swaggered about with a very martial air. We wonder how he would conduct himself if it ever comes to the point? He was going to Athens to study, he told us, but we suspect he has already chosen on which side he will fight. We have a feeling that in spite of his martial airs he may not prove such a paragon on the battle field as he would have us believe. But what of it—we are certain he may yet become a very great poet, if the war does not finish him off. His name, if we remember right, was Quintus Horatius Flaccus.

Dawn was breaking when at last we left the Adjutant's tent. It was a peerless Spring morning, when the earth looked incomparably beautiful. At such a moment it is not easy for the spirit to contemplate parting from this life with resignation. There was a great stirring in the camp. In spite of everything we were thrilled by feelings of excitement and apprehension. Evidently the moment had come. Would the decisive action be fought to-day? We heard whispers on all sides that the Commander-in-Chief was going to address the troops in person. We crept into our tent and searched for a manuscript which young Horatius had given us before we parted. For the next hour we were engrossed and delighted by the most striking satirical verses we had read for many a day. We forgot all about the impending battle, and about our concern whether it would be really decisive for the future of the civilised world or not. In any case, we reflected, as the bugle sounded, whether we win or lose, our bearing at this point is what future generations will admire or contemn; and one day a poet will arise who will be inspired by the theme of these turbulent times, and who will write a great poem which will give form and meaning to our present trials.

KEITH DOUGLAS

ACTORS WAITING IN THE WINGS OF EUROPE

Actors waiting in the wings of Europe
we already watch the lights on the stage
and listen to the colossal overture begin.
For us entering at the height of the din
it will be hard to hear our thoughts, hard to gauge
how much our conduct owes to fear or fury.

Everyone, I suppose, will use these minutes
to look back, to hear music and recall
what we were doing and saying that year
during our last few months as people, near
the sucking mouth of the day that swallowed us all
into the stomach of a war. Now we are in it

and no more people, just little pieces of food
swirling in an uncomfortable digestive journey.
What we said and did then has a slightly
fairytale quality. There is an excitement
in seeing our ghosts wandering.

Unfinished fragment, 1944

FAREWELL POEM

Please, on a day falling in summer,
recall how being tired, you and I
among the idle branches by the river
and blind to propriety and passers-by,
where leaves like eyes turn sidelong to the river,
fell asleep embraced and let the shades run
half crossing us, and half the vigorous sun,
till he had almost climbed enough.

Because tired, what innocents we were
protected by sleep you see we had not thought,
like a footprint before we were aware,
that day was complete behind us and wiped out:
so watch us broken apart and not aware,
keep prisoner pain and talk wry stuff.

Who is it that is pleased now we are sad,
who is satisfied and thanks his stars,
has got and has the happiness we had?
Will he enjoy long, or will the sudden alas,
and sorrow the light-fingered fellow pick his heart?
of course: soon his misery will start,
for all delight is God's impermanent bluff.

In a minute he will come from the gold cloud,
the great black figure with a hideous laugh,
and hear the comfortable cry aloud:
the ethereal veil is cracked painted lath,
and he will be backed with fires and the red cloud.
We must never touch and start our story again;
for God is waiting with unexpended pain
and will not bless you my dark afflicted love.

Oxford, 1940

I WATCH WITH INTEREST, FOR THEY ARE GHOSTS

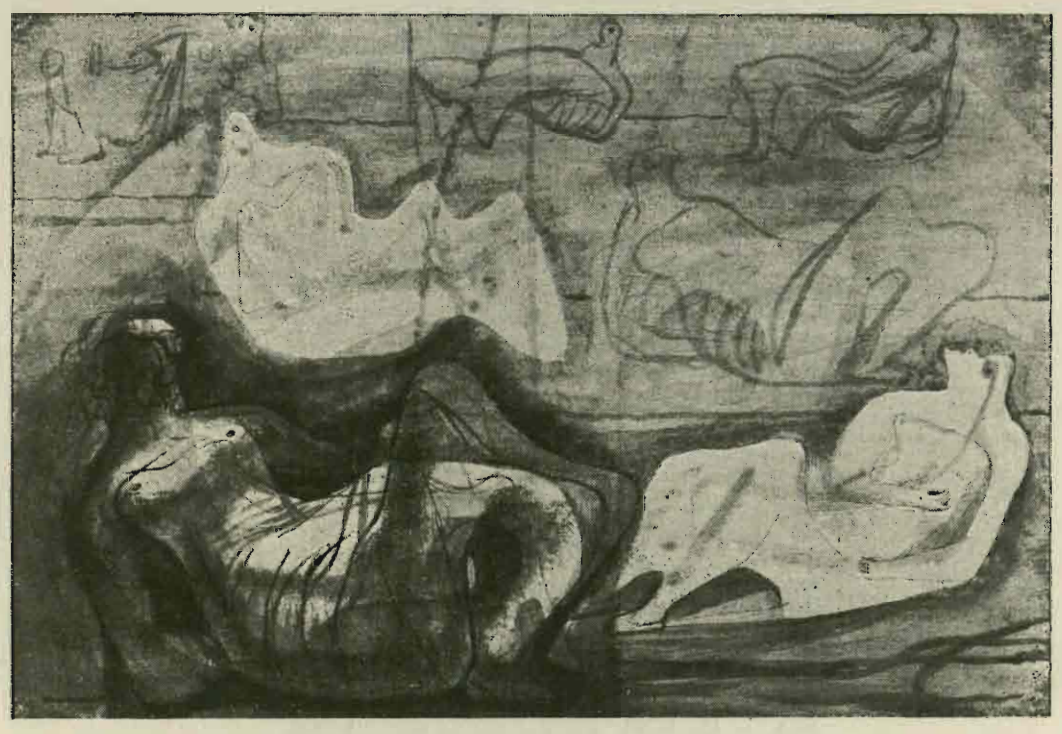
I

I watch with interest, for they are ghosts,
shaken by their fealty to the past
into a mood of sorrow and veneration
and with the hand of pity at my eyes
their gestures, those in their rich lifetime were
the mark of their nobility and merit.
Support and picture in their proper gear
these skeletons of conversation falling
from the lips of a nobleman or king
while still we recall what nobles and kings were.

II

As I watch each closely—for they are ghosts
and grow invisible before our eyes
I feel the hand of pity on my heart
shaken by their fealty to the past. Look,
their gestures. These in their rich lifetime bore
the mark of their nobility and pride.
Can you apparel in their proper gear
these skeletons of conversation falling
from the lips of a dead nobleman or king
while still we know what nobles and kings were.

Uncompleted fragment, London, 1944



HENRY MOORE: DRAWING FOR SCULPTURE

HAROLD PINTA

NEW YEAR IN THE MIDLANDS[1]

Now here again she blows, landlady of lumping
Fellows between the boards,
Singing "O Celestial Light." while
Like a T-square on the
Flood swings her wooden leg.
This is the shine, the powder and blood, and here am I,
Straddled, exile always in one Whitbread Ale town,
Or such.
Where we went to the yellow pub, cramped in an alley bin.
A shoot from the market,
And found the thin Luke of a queer, whose pale
Deliberate eyes, raincoat, Victorian,
Sap the answer in the palm.
All the crush, camp, burble and beer
Of this New Year's Night; the psalm derided;
The black little crab women with the long
Eyes, lisp and claw in a can of chockfull stuff.
I am rucked in the heat of treading; the well-rolled
Sailor boys soon rocked to sleep, whose ferret fig
So calms the coin of a day's fever.
Now in this quaver of a roisty bar, the wansome lady
I blust and stir,
Who pouts the bristle of a sprouting fag—
Sprinkled and diced in these Midland lights
Are Freda the whimping glassy bawd, and your spluttered guide,
Blessed with ambrosial bitter weed. — Watch
How luminous hands
Unpin the town's genitals—
Young men and old
With the beetle glance,
The crawing brass whores, the clamping
Red shirted boy, ragefull, thudding his cage.

RURAL IDYLL

A hay's dance and a stub of lighted carrion
Blind the hooded woman in the crocus acres,
Who grinding the crossing plat of a pig, stabs
The day's navel and begins her labours.
And the snatch of dark quills to the mardy
Pint, in the brook and the gill of her holy fish.

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[1] The Editors regret that owing to a typographical error which could not be corrected in time the concluding lines of Mr Harold Pinta's two poems, "New Year in the Midlands" and "Chandeliers and Shadows," printed in the last issue, became interchanged. We tender our apologies to the author, and re-print the first of these very interesting poems in its correct form.

What in her life's centred dilemma,
All nine whisking stars in a lumming echo,
In the fur of the sky and the creasing
Gold of foxsplit colour, shall give help
To the heart's masquerading searcher?
The web the well of her lover cries
As the bending raze of a hound on weed
Tells "never be found."

Who holds the nap of pity?
Slicing a story with a pen and lamp, at the
Rind of her stúnned thumb and untouch of a kiss
In the hump of a broken sea's calling,
In a bellsung corner.

EUROPEAN REVELS

Zendalover, the old Serbian claptrap,
Fleeing with her friend, the tortoiseshell cat,
Lacked the daisies for flowery coin,
So caught Adam's luck in a jar,
Dosed pickpockets and jawsharp comedians,
And came at summerweed, in mine of May,
Upset the seasons with her sleazy shocks.

She, selfbegetting, in that moment,
From adoration strangled her brother;
Left burnt on the ledge of midnight,
Fathomed by peeping condors.
His last breath is sped by hollyhocks,
His dead eyes crab the moonlight.
She's Dervish, castrated, does the crazy dance.

That sucking olive in the windboy's gauze
Spelt her locks to the suntrap,
Large and hopeless in lichen yards.
Hoar and rings belled in her ear's fox.
Grief broke in the numbed heart.
She had killed her mad brother,
Her men lovers plasterlads, who
Felled rich women in the moon's Zodiac.

The men, wasted in heart and breath,
Summerheavy on her blood's altar,
Gaze, sappy geezers, the upfanged trees,
Plumby hyacinths luring fishbones,
Cockles aped, the jawbone and joke.
Dribbling loonies jug Slav kinches,
Rip through their maidenheads,
Slum and stem the waxing blood.

IAIN FLETCHER

SONNET

(to R.S.)

All the mad angelologies of man
muzzle this calm-as-metal comb:
blond serpents hissing like winged foam,
gold waterfall which wounds the skin.
Twin antennæ now parchment thin—
the creeping history of touch—
tutor the stony mask as much
as that winged nuntius within.

(Wintry tiara of hair!) know
one panel of this horoscope—
born beneath sullen metals—

by stemlike fingers as they grope
under a white constraint of petals:
the moon's blue blush on snow.

ADOLESCENTS IN THE DUSK

About this time when dusk falls like a shutter
Upon the decomposition of the time,
Eliding eye and day and surfaces and shapes,
A whitening of faces like stoles in the twilight . . .
When the gardens between the houses are rose-
Encumbered with sidereal roses
And the roads like gorges grey in the tired light of falling . . .
They come then as birds in an irresponsible plumage
Moulting their childhood for always,
Half-predatory, half
Laughing . . .
Ripeness that dares not open, that fears its own
Promise, skin mercilessly
Alive with star-points of sensation, angel-
Senses aroused like petals outcurving
After the first prolongation of the look in impossible mirrors
With disquiet and admiration . . .
The daily evening descends then
And the air about them seems now
Crumpled with the great winged lover,
That absent lover whom their drifting gaze
Can never quite encounter . . .
They are aware
Of absence, as I am aware
Of the creeping essence of unsleeping presence,
And would refuse the engagement
Leaving their laughing to glide still farther and farther
(Like a flying away of doves . . .)
Ironic as shadows that mimic the conceptual pleasures of man.

D. G. BRIDSON

DALEHEAD

Nothing is angular about these fells,
  No sudden outcrop, crag or sagittate spur—
Only a crumple of curving parallels . . .

Road beats through them in a wary tack—
  Leftward, rightward, as the gradient has it—
Feeling its way up with a blind man's knack.

Drifts of a migratory cloudwrack draw
  Their shadows over the gusty grass . . . The wash
Of wintry sunshine scrubs a spotless floor.

Nothing utters. Ear strains after a sound
  Anywhere. No ghyll is musical. Even
The sheep go tiptoe over the sodden ground.

No noise follows the distant trains that pass
  From cutting to viaduct back there in the dale,
Trailing smoke-plumes whiter than cotton-grass.

Life has no meaning any more,
  Here on the perimeter. All is apart.
Mind lies open like a draughty door

Swinging at random . . . Thought is wry
  As any tumbling plover, thrown
To and fro down the unquiet sky . . .
  Mocking at birds of passage . . . Living alone . . .

PETER. C. JACKSON

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

(for Edward Greenfield)

Mention of virgin's milk inducing smiles,
the whitesmocked girl with prophylactic hands
mused upon bacilli. "Soil defiles:
these multiply." At once, the thing was sacred.
She bred fruit flies. Such apprehension stands

after the garden ruins and water lapse:
only, the bottle teat instead of paps.

We lose time by these metaphysics. (Trust
the clock that thinks to stop.) Eden alone,
now the unaided deaf and dumb, had just
perception. Though we make the very bone
we take the marrow of, we cannot spare

a second rib : as frankly to discuss
our sex is not to couple with less fuss.

So with the rival claimants to our care.
One of a crowd, all art is found at fault,
such hennypenny happenings portends,
the springer's fall, the uncompleted vault :
the soaring airy ones are what it fends.

* * * * *

Whatever current myth takes as its flow
the vulgar hope of life is in the swim.
I like the "sea of life" in this. Also
it fits particular myths. An aquatic whim
might drown a cowed princess who had no caul

to swim : nor is it wise to wax on wings.
Like metaphors describe a state of things

(Poetic angles) with cloth ships or corn :
death is a trade in our vocabulary.
Our feud is earth, not easy to be born,
beneath whose rule we mill, in common ground,
all that succeeds the warp, but then are wary.

There is this general trend towards an "act
of God," the stomach's need to make compact,

in settlement by sacrifice (the foreskin)
and other prescribed tablets of the law.
Early mosaics built up Christ. The sin
has fogged our broader field before the raw
rare spirit in the grain we hope to still

becomes our creature : since the moral urge
to recommend the poison as the purge

permits us yet to go on feeling ill.

Fear that a second coming might develop
incites to a material repair :
our new control (this gives an added fillip)
makes chances of a birth seem somewhat rare.

* * * * *

I would not be accused of fencing round
this thing with winks and hints, although the style
must bear the stigma. Used thus as a foil
it aims to make a few conceptions sound :
and like our knowledge frantic in its guile

it backs upon itself to show a fear.
It seems the place to speak of "traitors" here

and what we ought to feel. So Keats' view
upon the codpiece seems to me (I think
I understand) a wile: something in lieu
of an escape. His verse provides a link.
You meet it often in the men who make

knowledge a trade; one professor I hear
holds to a similar view on hops in beer.

The taboo habit being hard to break
it is not third day soreness pays the price
(which I'll not offer now) but the whole hog.
In Africa two scenes are set. That vice
concomitant with poetry portrays

the villain in the one does not disturb
us as it should, despite a catholic taste.
The symbols of the other are superb:
two strangers in the jungle talk of Joyce.
I know the place. I feel it should be faced.

JON MANCHIP WHITE

THE GARDEN

Perhaps my forbears with their golden eyes,
  With many bloody charges on their shields,
Forsook their questing for these gentler skies,
  Finding the peace a quiet spirit yields
Upon the green turf in a private walk,
  Far from the crimson-furrowed battlefields.

They terrified their womenfolk with talk
  Of escapades and wonders without count:
How through the drear Hercynian forests stalk
  The dreadful pard and fatal catamount,
How in the Summer Country to the east
  Flows the clear water of the Youthful Fount.

From their adventurings awhile released,
  Homeward from black seas and pelagic strife
And white fires in the north, they came to feast
  And feel the fond embracements of a wife,
To watch the frail birds dart with feathered flight
  Or cut the rowan with a hunting-knife.

Perhaps they sought a paramount delight,
  After the shuffling days upon the slot,
Within the blue-and-silver cave of night;
  Perhaps the women, when their scent was hot,
Tracked in their turn beasts of a perfumed blood,
  Willing their sons by rough pursuits begot.

But chiefly would these men of haughty brood
  Wander a level stretch of peaceful lawn,
And see how mild the scarlet rosebud stood
  Armed with the modest protest of a thorn,
And how the staunch trees whispered each to each
  By friendly sympathies together drawn.

Here with their ladies would they try fair speech
  Beneath white clouds like birds, and petal-showers,
And painted butterflies; here would they teach
  Patience and love to their unruly powers,
And pacing gravely, spend soft-footed hours
  In formal gardens with their candid flowers.

HUBERT NICHOLSON

GOING SOUTH

Going, going at last south
travelling light to the warm, the easy zone
the garden of the vegetable rich
whose furs crouch and jewels glitter
miasmic in Greek fire over the hot Thames swamp
and the classic arts are lolling like old mistresses
under equivocal arcades round many a Mediterranean basin
south to the places long dreamed of
figurines, best sellers and young girls pussies spread on lazy sand
to a metropolis where the smoke is ring velvet, the poverty Promethean in revolt
the towers sinister and the crime barbaric
to the south of nightingales and frail white suburbs
of stucco and bandanas, hot water and open sandals
the easy lands.
Leaving, leaving at last the north
the cold wide estuaries the east wind harries
and the gritty-eyed men, the men with doubled fists
shoving each other through the trenched streets to the ships.
Leaving, leaving the grey salt plain, the featureless low land,
the plain of conscience and childhood, the bleak haunt of guilt
the slag-fired countryside of wonderful work
the sly honesty under the greengold slime
my own land of obedient derricks bare against morning,

land early-risen, well-reasoned, unbending, puritan,
distilling a high octane of thought for flights to the empyrean
out of a bitter sludge of uric acid and bile.
O crowsnest lookout, O keeper of Flamborough lighthouse
O steeplejack on Joseph Rank's mill chimney,
O coastguard of Sunk Island and of Spurn
O watchmen over my world, farewell, farewell,
I am leaving my true love for a drunkard's dream
full of dry rot where the floor gives way in the morning
and I'll find the old sickness hiding without its name
yon side the guarded gate of northern lights.

H. B. MALLALIEU

INTRODUCTION, POEM, FOOTNOTE

When the war was over I continued my studies,
intended to present only the classical models :
musical accompaniment to your singing voice
delicate flamingoes in the pink evening
in the suburbs of Parnassus
trains leaving at frequent intervals
for known termini.
I had gathered roses and myrtle
studied the nomenclature of stars
opened the window—
Forgive me.
The petals fell in disorder upon the paper.
And the stars rained confusedly out of the sky,
when the wind blew through the open window
all my paraphernalia were swept away.

L
O
V
E Less familiar
break up the syllable unravel LO
VE that falls sweetly from lips
cloying the sense isolate
love
I have heard what I have heard
words in old contexts deaf men whispering
the blind appraising colours
Loveless familiar love
the circle round you.

There are six of us in this room,
their cousins from the east who have lost everything
(the father died in a cattle truck coming from Poland
in the age of enlightenment in the time of victory).

How should we live hungry among the ruins
walking in woods without a myth?
In winter we steal coal
with the archbishop's blessing—
there is no longer anything to confess; do you understand?
Only at evening in the *kammersaal*
Can music awake her slumbering desire.
Ja, wenn die Musik nicht wäre.
Where is your music singer where your faith?
Are the swans asleep upon the lily-covered lake
And the nightingale departed from the glade?
For the twisted iron is rusted and the spilled blood dry
And the earth grieves . . .
I have given you an answer and an implication
Break through the circle. There is a word.
Its context is in the heart. Examine it and
Break, break from your isolation. Break.

BERNARD BERGONZI

BALLADE

(for Victor Kelly)

Dasein ist Sorge—Heidegger

Feelin' tomorrow just like I feel today—St. Louis Blues

So much that's worse is sure to come,
  exploring this bizarre design
where Being's frail motors hum
  beneath Becoming's roar and whine.
  The gaudy music's sound is fine
(no other harmony is taught),
  the bright notes rise and then decline;
yet life becomes so very fraught . . .

We try so hard to solve the sum
  by adding figures line on line;
working it by rule of thumb
  without the cabalistic shine
  of strange stars like the dim Cosine;
but still the answer works out short;
  each failure a more telling sign
that life becomes so very fraught . . .

A few are smart, but most are dumb
  and only likely to repine
for the quick, insistent drum
  to galvanize the jaded spine,
  the one and certain anodyne
for all the ailments daily caught.
  So bring the dancing girls and wine,
for life becomes so very fraught . . .

  O Prince, now that we both recline,
regarding daily battles fought,
  could you but join your voice with mine—
since life becomes so very fraught. . . .

NORMAN LEVINE

LETTER FROM ENGLAND

Beginning on a wet London morning, Saturday the trees;
I thought of you fencing and of your face,
But Canada called from Trafalgar Square.
    An empty room filled with provincial papers
    Telling me home-spun news
Pulled the magnet in all directions,
And this day became the same as that day
Wobbling along amputated stilts.

Behind you left a long river,
With the only Saint you believed in;
(But Lawrence had his limitations),
In your blue-shirt standing hot on that June day
Underneath the bridge where once you went passing
To Richelieu's river; swam, sailed and loved,
And in autumn watched frogs being killed by thousands.
Wondering as you stood on that freighter's smelled-deck,
Watching the big knife cut that water until
Bleeding white the sea became the colour of two gulls:
Would you return to parchment summers and merchant-eyes?

Once you did return,
With banners and speeches and *Lilli Marlene.*
You and the train water-waited in a New Brunswick somewhere
While she approached with her accent telling
When by Piccadilly Circus she stood and wept.
But her exodus discovered no Babylon.
She wished you well and kissed you, then touched you
That from her England had come.

Now you had a few prizes collected,
And an M.A. gown,
And a frown that was becoming to a cynic in his twenties.
So that Lilliput in the morning became Newcastle,

And the fugal noise of rails and train woke villages,
That washed, put on colours, and went to sleep again
Until Cornwall, where rocks, water and gulls
Were all we had to believe in.
Or else to watch old men with tide-drawn faces sit.
Behind our ears a child's-voice laughed.
A small mouse became autumn, then a dried leaf
That broke our bread in fields,
And the wind in spasms shook symbols.
But the roots you needed were not there.

On Porthmeor beach lying caked in salt
You discovered your hands. But Canada still called
Across that sea-weed,
A horn fogged in the night.
You added new things, but in translation
They dissolved into provinces:
Into Montreals, Torontos and Ottawas.
Sitting alone you sometimes wondered
Where it was that the frown frequented.

Then London and the cocktail parties,
And the clever young men and the clever young women,
And the loveliest of fogs made you forget that contentment
Of grey merchandise spawning in parchment summers.
An exile you were then,
As you are now,
Wanting roots and living on an island.

BARRY HARMER

ELSINORE: 6 p.m.

The bell cries snip, cries snap, and every dog
Makes muzzle for the Great Dane (a tergo);
Downstream the blonde Ophelia woos a log
(O Tannenbaum!) the wind pines "Vale Virgo":

Polonius, of course, is gabbling lies,
While the Queen Gertrude meditates the weather;
Her King by the window saunters, timing flies,
And aching for the hour when they're together.

He asks himself the word we'd all forget—
"Can this be love, now, with my whiskers grey?
She vows I am the only one as yet
To prove that sex is more than a one-act play."
Silent, the Prince glares from the palace walls,
Dreading the night in which he falters, falls.

LETTER FROM PARIS

There was a time, not so long ago, when, in Paris, the exercise of thought had a special grace of its own. Charming women poets would lean over the shoulder of M. Gaston Gallimard and say cheerfully: "I will think, and you will publish me"; as a result we had, only too rarely, some perfectly written and readable books. Publisher-guided thinking nowadays, loses in charm what it gains in depth. Madame Lise Deharme, after presenting us with her charming book "Pot de Mousse" declares herself (why?) to be an *essentialist;* so does M. Jean Paulhan, certainly after less reflection, and rather more by inclination. The war of the "isms" has been declared, and so essentialism and existentialism meet in this fine firm which we knew already to be a tilt-yard.

It would need something more than this to upset M. Jean-Paul Sartre, who is in great form. Let us judge for ourselves: "For the Other, is the Other than the One, it is the relative; the absolute Other signifies the absolutely relative, the being that finds its being in letting itself sink to the depths of its relativity." This came to him—after the third volume of his novel and after his sensational essay "What is Literature?" which appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*—among several other things, wonderfully intelligent by the way, at Tamanrasset, on the outskirts of the Ahaggar, as M. Jean Genet would say. For M. Jean Genet—danger, men at work—is going to replace the women poets leaning over the publisher's shoulder.

And he has the advantage over the women of playing the saint! Poor dear things, who could not see beyond their own mascara, did you not know that posteriority and the future belong to those who use the resources of rhetoric, this elixir of youth, for Fleurs de Tarbes, and agree with Messieurs Jean Genet, Marcel Jouhandeau, Georges Bataille and various others in saying "Placed between sanctity and dissipation, sanctity and masochism, sanctity and abasement, I live the sanctity of dissipation, the sanctity of masochism."

That's that, and the author of the "Pompes Funèbres" will have his niche, like any saint, at the N.R.F. This reminds me of a story: When I was somewhere in Gaboon my lorry driver stopped to talk to a black woman who was obviously pregnant. *Enceinte.* A moment later he got back into his seat and said "My sister." "Oh, she's your sister?" "Yes, chief . . ." and he added, with a laugh, "You see, she has caught the saint." Clearly, even in Paris, you catch the saint as well as you can; but it's a far cry from there to seeing the Angel Gabriel coupled, as M. Genet would say, with Jean-Paul Sartre. . . .

It is very difficult to apply the Nietzschean word "superman" to these writers. *They take unto themselves the heroic substance* of others according to the figurative euphemism of J-P.S. This kindles the sense of greatness in them and allows them to keep up a perpetual tension in order to get themselves into position, taking up a posture favourable to consecration through abjection. They succeed.

So M. Jean Genet, who was discovered by M. Jean Cocteau and pardoned by the President of the Republic, has found his incense-bearer, or rather his undresser in the person of the author of *Les Mains Sales.* M. François Mauriac was moved by it, he who had said in the *Figaro* that all this was just bad seed, tares among the wheat! Tares just the same, now that, after the work of Madame Simone de Beauvoir on "Le Deuxième Sexe" (a brave, excellent, rather sad book), M. Jean-Paul Sartre, who had been left behind, has caught up with the field of amazons again to serve up to us—on a plate—an astonishing demonstration of psychoanalysis under the horsewhip.

* * *

If M. Jean Genet is proving himself, as is in fact the case, a very clever writer (in the same way as one talks of a first-class chemist or a qualified architect), if after the too brief *Caves du Vatican,* he looks rather like a blood-stained Gide, spivvish and tattooed, what can we think of his future when we remember the finesse, intelligence and far-sightedness of M. Paul Claudel when talking, precisely, of Gide: "The opinion of Paris is better dis-

guised, but it is even more pitiless than that of London." You will not count any more! (9-3-14). The recent poems of M. Paul Claudel, published to beg funds for the Basilica of Lisieux, had shown him mounting so high in our time that he almost seemed to go through the ceiling. Leaving Gide out of it, the Gide-Claudel correspondence, which has just been published, thanks to M. Robert Mallet, gives us further proof of how far the poet can surpass himself, when intuition and prophecy turn him into a seer: oh, he knew what he was saying, the saintly man, when he wrote in 1914: *"It is my great joy to think that we are witnessing the twilight of 19th century knowledge. At last we can take deep breaths of the holy night, of blissful ignorance."*

* * *

He left life as an old man leaves it. . . . I don't know why that memorable line came back to me as I read, in the last great work of M. André Malraux, a sentence which made my hair stand on end: *I take up Art as people take up religion.* What sort of religion? After the sanctity of M. Genet, the apostleship of M. Jean-Paul Sartre and the parish collecting box of M. Paul Claudel, now we have the conversion of M. Malraux! Is it because he has lost faith in revolution that he takes up art like a monk? A great stylist who died recently, André Saurès, wrote, *Lovely falsehood of art, and yet you may really be the only truth.* He chose art as a refuge, but never pretended to be anything outside the official anterooms beyond an isolated anarchist, aesthetic and vituperative.

When one knows the prominent rôle played by the author of "La Condition Humaine" in the sideshows of French politics, it is impossible to think that he has abandoned the post. I know a girl who left the Carmel convent after being there five years. She still keeps her head bowed. I know M. L'Abbé Boulier, who has just been frowned upon by the ecclesiastical authorities; he is the author of "A priest takes sides." He does not belong to the party of bowed heads. It is a fine thing to take up religion. But nowadays it is most of all important to know for whom, when, and in what state you hope to get out of it.

* * *

But history belongs to those who know how to take it. On his Pipecleaner rock, like a new Magnifico, M. Malcolm de Chazal defies literary men and politicians, with or without a ministry, with or without an art gallery. From Mauritius his airmail letters fall on Messieurs Jean Paulhan, André Breton, and Jean Ballard (of the *Cahiers du Sud*) like tolite bombs: *"I have reduced Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry and Rimbaud to the state of pygmies"* . . . His correspondents, who do not really appreciate the comparison, find themselves turned into dust again, the result of which was the total desertion which was rapidly shown to the author of "Sens Plastique" by Messieurs Jean Paulhan and André Breton. In Paris, and in the back streets of literary life, M. Malcolm Chazal was the fashion, for a few weeks. He is a clever writer (in parenthesis, see above).

Fashion demands more tact. The wise "Advice to Young Writers" by Baudelaire is still valid, underlining as it does the importance of keeping the hinges oiled. As for M. de C., the door has got jammed. Why did he not follow the example of M. Francis Ponge, who is still very young, and who remains inside it; he is developing there thanks to a technique of behaviour and handwriting which places him, as the snobbish poet of shingle, fish-baskets and wash-tubs, on the right hand of the Master, between *" And you, dear subscriber to the Guilde"* . . . included in his last work published in Switzerland, and the unsurpassable *"but it is enough to be nothing else than oneself"* . . .

Self-sufficiency? Or lack of it? Not at all. After "Sapates" and "Proèmes" we must find a word which evokes the glow-worm verse, the fire-cracker and the exhaust pipe for M. Francis Ponge. I suggest "Poétapart."

* * *

People have become unkind. The most venomous amongst them appears to be, without any doubt, M. Maurice Saillet, Locuste in the *Mercure de France.* He has written shocking things about M. André Breton: *Like a druid whose sickle has neither handle nor blade (like the famous knife of Lichtenberg) he walks straight ahead, with fixed gaze, and performs indefatigably the ceremony of the mistletoe.* However, M. André Breton sees justice done to him by M. Jean Louis

Bedouin, at the same time that he writes programme notes for the ballets of Katherine Dunham. From the *Ode to Fourier* to black magic, there is only a chassé-croisé step which wins applause from the young surrealist school, which is neither post nor neo.

For the spectator, poetic and literary life in Paris offers in fact a charming spectacle. M. Henri Michaux, like a blue fish, can be seen silently swimming round in an aquarium-like town and asking himself: *I really would like to know why I am always the horse that I am leading by the bridle?* Or he disappears under water where he opposes his own naughtiness to that of his fishermen (*if there are more than a hundred readers, I think there must be a misunderstanding*), and circles round in language: *Repeated indefinitely, liable to wear out the most indefatigable ear, a melody to hum between ourselves . . . Like a call to suicide, like a half-begun suicide, like a return always to the only recourse: suicide, a melody.*

The scene is enacted in words and words are in men like worms in rotten wood. Solitary and sombre, M. Paul Reverdy mutters in his hermitage at Solesmes: *besides, we do not need words any more . . .* and *Nothing belongs to substance and form. . . .* M. Brice-Parain informs M. Francis Ponge that he does not belong any longer to the group who are backward in speech; and as for M. Henri Pichette, it is said that the excellent "Epiphanies" were unique and that after *Le Drame de l'Air* there would be water in the gas-pipes for this author.

The dance, classical of course, and well conducted, finishes on the christerotic and well-known turn of M. Pierre Jean Jouve, in which language becomes a wrought-iron lance and carries a banner. Heaven, secrecy, substance, space, essence, existence and sleep are all attacked. The patient can let himself be stupefied further, indoctrinated and anaesthetised as he is, between suicide, mysticism, annihilation and greatness.

* * *

But there is also the simple life of everyday, the bitter grating humour, the derision, the uncertainty, the entanglement of men in ambiguity, and the careful work of the poet who wants to achieve the best, the extra-special hidden things, the "poems beneath the floorboards." André Frénaud, who with René Char is one of the most representative poets of the generation which is bitten by the devouring evil of Research, has published *La Noce Noire,* a long poem full of nostalgia for real and actual life. (It could be placed, as far as its importance goes, between *Les Pâques à New York* by Blaise Cendrars and *"Pluies"* by St. John Perse). *The betrothed who is bruised by wine and blows,* the being who has perhaps disappeared, or who still dances amongst us, is it ourself or the other, the woman who is sought in vain? The next book of André Frénaud, *Source Entière,* illustrated by Fernand Léger, will give the answer.

The darkness of this poetry, the ivory-blackness which recalls the pencil sketches of Rouault, is rubbed out by love. It colours, for Paul Eluard, his introduction to the "Poèmes Politiques," *Poets must die first.* In *Une Leçon de Morale* after "Corps Memorable," the political appeal of Eluard takes on all its meaning and value, and explains itself because it does not only express the outlook of a partisan but of a man who has chosen, for all time, the side of love. *Proud of loving nothing and no one,* wrote his friend Aragon, some years ago. It would still be an illusion to be taken in by this emphatic statement: He who paints over "Les Communistes" of the future could not possibly be a dry sort of man.

But alongside those who fight in the midst of a collective group—I mean Aragon, Eluard and many young writers with the same convictions, an important and significant poetic movement in France, there are however some poets concerned with the social problem, who appear irrepressible. *Libertarian vagabonds* according to the phrase of René Char, to whom speaks the poet of the "Feuillets d'Hypnos" and of "Seuls demeurent," declaring, in one of his most recent works, "Les Transparents": *"Let us renew the assurance of our sincere solidarity with these poet-comrades."*

This will apply first of all to Blaise Cendrars, who has come back to Paris again after ten years of absence and who remains one of the most lively and considerable writers of our time.

* * *

And what about St.-Germain-des-Prés, you ask? What are you doing about this cross-road centre of literature? I am coming to it now. Saint-Germain-des-Prés is becoming a legend (a charming illustrated book has just appeared, entitled, precisely, "The Legend of Saint-Germain-des-Prés"). Ever since existentialism appeared on the cover of "La Semaine de Paris" along with the French "Can-can" as an attraction for visitors from the outside world, philosophy has faded into the background, before be-bop, and the literary cafés have become tourist places. . . .

All the same, in a Saint-Germain cellar you can still hear and appreciate some real poets of today. I am thinking of Jean Tardieu and particularly of "Barbara" and "Feuilles Mortes" by Jacques Prévert, of "Ça ne peut pas durer toujours" by Raymond Queneau, these three poems set to unforgettable music by Joseph Kosma. Juliette Gréco alone, an interpreter of poets at the "Rose Rouge" as beautiful as she is excellent, is enough to justify the boom of Saint Germain.

And so, at the crossroads where you can find the most thoughtful and cultured exchanges anywhere, and in spite of darkening skies, life in Paris is still good. On the Quai de l'Oise, at the "Château Tremblant" (the new rendezvous of the poets), Raymond Queneau is the star. Meeting Monsieur Sally Mara, the mysterious Irish author of the "Journal Intime," over a whisky, he was asked: "Queneau, why did you make my heroine say that she had phallucinations?" As though to excuse himself, the leading poet of the day, a good hearty type, still starry from his Little Portable Cosmogony (a terrific poem, naturally), replied with the same defect of speech: "Oh, you know, it was phallusive, phallusive." . . .

PIERRE SEGHERS.

(Translated by Margaret Crosland.)

POINTS OF VIEW

THE APOLLINAIRE MYTH

Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire. Translated with a Critical Introduction by Roger Shattuck.
(THE HARVILL PRESS, 12/6)

Les Épiphanies de Henri Pichette.
(K. EDITEUR)

Mr. Shattuck tells us that there is a literary "heresy" which lies in the separation of "the three lives or persons of the poet: his biography, his myth, and his verse." It seems to me on the contrary that one of the tasks of the critic must be to separate the poet from his myth and, indeed, to satisfy himself that there is a poet behind the myth. Apollinaire was clearly something of a "character," but he was a character in whom there was a good deal of the clown. In spite of his clowning, he took his verses and his rather muddled speculations about poetry and painting extremely seriously. He invented and sedulously propagated the Apollinaire myth. His perseverance was richly rewarded during his lifetime and after his death. It is the weakness of his admirers—most of them scarcely deserve the title of critics—to have accepted him at his own valuation and to have mistaken the myth for a poet. He is commonly acclaimed in his own country as a great poet and English writers have in the main subscribed to the French estimate. It is not surprising that his verse should appeal to admirers of Macspender and to elderly dons, but it is disconcerting to find a writer in *The Times* declaring that "it will hardly be contested that France has produced five major poets in the last hundred years" and including Apollinaire among them.

Mr. Shattuck's long, serious, painstaking essay appears at first to be an improvement on the writings of his predecessors, and his restrained comments on "La Chanson du Mal-Aimé" compare favourably with Professor Bowra's reckless description of it as "a consummate masterpiece"; but his air of restraint and his careful exegesis are both deceptive. Nothing could be more reasonable than his statement that "The amazing reputation of Apollinaire—and its frequent inaccuracy and one-sidedness—require that any evaluation of him as a poet should be very carefully made." Nothing, however, could be much less reasonable than the next sentence in which we are told that "He is probably the first truly European poet since Goethe." His solemn parade of the full apparatus of American advanced literary criticism adds to the confusion. The innocent reader—particularly the innocent American—may feel vaguely impressed when he is told that "If Apollinaire's treatment of the self in time was occasionally weak, his manner of investigating his identity in space was far more powerful." But it must be hoped that even the most innocent reader will appreciate the ludicrous side of this approach when he finds that the lines:

> Et tu bois cet alcool brûlant comme ta vie
> Ta vie que tu bois comme une eau-de-vie

are followed by this comment: "So intricate a geographical location leads to vertigo." This gap between slabs of totally undistinguished verse and pompous comment is, unhappily, characteristic of Mr. Shattuck's critical method. "In his later work," we are told in another place, "he shows an increasing tendency to use images of disturbing vividness. These figures hover somewhere between gross humour and astonishing effectiveness; the range of experience they embrace is tremendous." As an example of Apollinaire's "disturbing vividness" and his "tremendous" range of experience, we are presented with this:

> Et moi j'ai le coeur aussi gros
> Qu'un cul de dame damascène . . .

If these quotations make us doubt whether there is a poet behind the myth at all, the comments convince us that Apollinaire's admirers have never really asked themselves the question. According to the usual accounts of his work he excelled in two styles—the

simple style which is supposed to have affinities with Villon and the complex modern style in which he anticipates the surrealists. "Le Pont Mirabeau" is often cited as an example of the simple style :

Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine
Et nos amours
Faut-il qu'il m'en souvienne
La joie venait toujours après la peine

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

. . .

L'amour s'en va comme cette eau courante
L'amour s'en va
Comme la vie est lente
Et comme l'Espérance est violente

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

All we can say of this little piece is that the style and the sentiments are very much those of a music-hall ditty and that no amount of praise for the arrangements of vowel-sounds, rhyme-patterns and so on can make it anything else. It is no doubt preferable to Aragon, but Verlaine could give Apollinaire a very long start at this sort of thing and beat him hollow.

We may agree that a poet tries to discover fresh relations between things and expresses his discoveries in new images or in the novel use of words. Certain periods like the seventeenth century in England and the second half of the nineteenth century in France have been remarkable for their poetic experiment. When Donne speaks of

The spider love, which transubstantiates
all . . .

we seem to have a genuine "perception of similarity in dissimilars." While there can be no question of "influence," we find the same kind of experiments in the French Symbolists. The danger in both periods was preciosity and pretentiousness. Laforgue's *Derniers vers* provide two interesting examples :

Un soleil blanc comme un crachat
d'estaminet

. . .

La rouille ronge en leurs spleens
kilométriques
Les fils télégraphiques des grandes routes
où nul ne passe.

The first image, with its comparison between the pale sun and spittle on the floor of a sordid tavern, is merely grotesque. In the second, the *spleens kilométriques* does convey the corrosive effect of urban life on the emotions, rotting them as the rust rots the telegraph wires. We can turn from this to some of Apollinaire's images which Mr. Shattuck singles out for commendation :

Et les obus en tombant sont des chiens
qui jettent de la terre avec leurs pattes
après avoir fait leurs besoins

. . .

Cette dame a le nez comme un ver
solitaire

. . .

Le troupeau de ponts bêle ce matin

Apollinaire's images—I agree that they are characteristic—fail for the same reason as Laforgue's *crachat d'estaminet*. They are no more than a grotesque juggling with words which fail to establish any sort of "similarity in dissimilars." What we find in him is an elaborate clowning which either conceals or reveals (according to one's taste) a thoroughly commonplace sentimentality. One fears that it is the sentimentality which accounts for the exaggerated estimates of his work precisely because it satisfies the baser "stock responses" while creating the illusion that one is enjoying really "modern poetry."

"The pages become a literary score," writes Mr. Shattuck of *Un Coup de dés,* "in which the interrelationships of the phrases are expressed by rests and notations of value." It may be legitimate for the poet to use typography as an additional aid in expressing himself. It seems to me very doubtful whether Mallarmé succeeded in his attempt and I am glad to find myself on the same side as Mme Noulet—probably the greatest living authority on Mallarmé—in thinking that *Un Coup de dés* is a failure. Whatever we think of Mallarmé's poem, its typographical experiments look old-fashioned and conservative in comparison with M. Pichette's. He uses the word *épiphanies* in the Joycean sense of a form of *rêverie*. His work is a sort of "cosmic drama"—it was performed at the Noctambules in Paris in 1947—which is divided into five parts : "La Genèse," "L'Amour," "La Guerre," "Le Délire" and "L'Etat." The players are the Poet and a collection of

mysterious figures known as "le fébrile," "l'impératif," "l'index," "l'ome" and so on. The section called "La Guerre" contains some black circles of varying circumferences on a white ground which presumably represent shells or bombs and a good deal else which is still less intelligible. The author's experiments are not confined to typography; he tries his hand at every kind of verbal juggling which has become common in advanced French writing since Rimbaud and the surrealists. No one can doubt the greatness of Rimbaud or the liberating influence of his impact on European poetry. Nor can we doubt his disastrous influence on the minor figures who have aped and exaggerated his experiments to conceal an absence of talent. A great deal of *Les Épiphanies* seems to me to be mere incoherence and I can find nothing particularly impressive about its more lucid pages. It does, however, contain one very good joke which is by no means unintelligible: "J'énuclée L'OEIL GRAS des ministresses du seul Intérieur qui compte : le Vagin."

MARTIN TURNELL.

TEACHING POETRY

Phases of English Poetry by HERBERT READ. (FABER AND FABER, 10/6)
Approach to Poetry by JOHN F. DANBY. (HEINEMANN, 5/-)

Dr. Herbert Read's *Phases of English Poetry* was first published in the Hogarth Lectures in 1928. It had

> the special aim of addressing in an easy manner what the educationists call "an extra-mural audience."

The new edition, though it leaves the six original chapters more or less unchanged, includes two additional chapters entitled "Poetry and Love" and "Poetry and Sentiment."

The first of these chapters enables Dr. Read to do justice to Wyatt and Donne, though it is arguable that he is less than fair to Blake and Yeats. He complains that Blake sang "a little abstractly," though there is nothing abstract about *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and the best of his poetry, though symbolical, is superbly concrete. Dr. Read stresses the romantic, regretful symbolism of Yeats's poetry; but this description should have been qualified in the light of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*.

The other new chapter is notable for a fine passage on Samuel Daniel, and for some unexpected praise of Browning, who, Dr. Read tells us,

> by making the depth of his thought the dialectical counterpart of his imagery and linguistic sensibility . . . recovered for the poetry of sentiment the philosophic dignity it had so long forfeited.

Dr. Read has developed and matured as a critic during the past twenty years, and this book displays none of the knowledge of psychology which proved so valuable a critical tool in his book on Wordsworth. The original chapters lean rather heavily on academic critics, as though Dr. Read had not yet developed the courage of his own originality. The chapter on "Pure Poetry" wisely rejects Bremond's mystical phraseology in favour of Coleridge's theory of the imagination, though not all will agree that Racine's line—

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë

is empty of content. It expresses, surely, and not merely by its verbal music, the hereditary situation in which Phèdre found herself.

The final chapter, on Modern Poetry, useful enough in its day, and interesting now as an historical document, now reads rather oddly.

> The modern poet is before all things honest. . . . He merely writes to vent his own spleen, his own bitterness, his own sense of the disparity between the ugliness of the world that is and the beauty of the world

that might be. He is trapped in a mechanical civilisation. Everywhere about him are steel cages, and the grinning futile faces of slaves. . . . There is no beauty in anything rational—only, at the best, the harmony of numbers.

This is, perhaps, an *apologia* for Herbert Read's own poetry; but it does not seem applicable to the later Yeats, or even to the best of Eliot's poetry. Dr. Read quotes Cowley's remark on his own age that "a warlike, various, and a tragical age is best to *write of*, but worst to *write in*." Yet it may be said that the closing years of Elizabeth's reign, in which *Hamlet* and (according to the latest chronology) *Othello* were written, was certainly warlike, various, and tragical; and so also was the period of Blake and Wordsworth. On the other hand, the century following the publication of *Paradise Lost* was, Dr. Read would himself admit, a comparatively barren period from the poetic standpoint; yet it was a stable age, certainly not a tragic one, and if it was a period of wars they had little effect on the life of society.

Mr. John F. Danby's book was first published ten years ago, before he turned his attention to criticism proper. It is a sensible book on the teaching of poetry, useful mainly to teachers, and mediating to them the critical attitude of such critics as Richards, Eliot and Leavis, though Mr. Danby is probably less austere in his views. He gives admirable analyses of a number of poems, and hints on such things as choric speaking. He advocates choric speaking for some poems which some would think unsuitable for the purpose; and here and there he is a trifle eccentric in his views. He quotes, for example, a speech from *Antony and Cleopatra* to illustrate his point that some poetry is "much better read than said." But, surely, all Shakespeare's dramatic verse demands to be spoken on the stage; and that it is often spoken so that the subtleties are concealed is no reason for banishing it to the study.

KENNETH MUIR.

THE SPOKEN WORD

"Poems for Speaking." An Anthology, with an Essay on Reading Aloud, by RICHARD CHURCH. (DENT, 7/6)

"Poets of the Pacific." Second Series, edited by Yvor Winters.
(STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1949)

When W. B. Yeats was experimenting with verse-speaking to the psaltery, Wilfrid Blunt commented on the practice that "it reduced the verse to the position it holds in an opera libretto." Something of this may have been in the mind of Ezra Pound when he introduced into Canto LXXXI a short lyric which he headed "libretto." That lovely piece of writing demonstrates the beautiful and surely valuable effects that can be obtained from verse written in this way. And it is not hard to think of other famous pieces which could be described as "libretti" in the same way—"Alexander's Feast," for example, or "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo." And more candidates are provided by Mr. Church in his anthology, especially in his first section, headed "Ballad," and his last, headed "Ceremonial or Choral Speaking." In such poetry, it seems that the poet's experience is so simple or so simplified that he can allow the speaking voice to exploit his words as a libretto while running no risk that attention will thus be diverted from what he has to say.

Poems which deal with more complicated experience require the speaking voice no less than the "libretti" but in a different way. Examples of such poetry are, on the one hand, the sonnets of Shakespeare and Donne; on the other, those "pure" lyrics of which Mr. Church writes :

"A story to tell always means a more obvious basic structure. Where a poem is built of pure air and fire, out of the mood of the human spirit, or maybe from something even more impersonal, some momentary visitation of spiritual insight, then the rhythm of this strange impulse is likely to be difficult to anatomize. To speak such a poem is comparable to the task of a surgeon operating on the brain or the eye. Delicately does it, with a hand as light as the air after which it is reaching. . . ."

Plainly, Mr. Church is not concerned only with poems as excuses for displaying the speaker's repertoire of tone and pitch and volume. And he reprobates that attitude in his remarks on the old-fashioned "elocutionist." He makes sufficient room for poems in which "the music" is not openly called for or imposed by the poet, but can only be derived from a strenuous understanding. Part IV (Sonnet) and Part V (Lyric) are devoted to these other sorts of verse.

Nevertheless, the attitude required of the verse-speaker by verse of this sort is so different from that required of him by the "libretti" that we may well wonder how there can be framed any notion of verse-speaking which will embrace two such different kinds of activity. Mr. Church goes far towards framing such a notion. He sees clearly that the danger lies in regarding verse-speaking merely as a technique, however expert and arduous; and so, in an urgent and eloquent essay, he argues for proper speaking of verse as in some sort a spiritual discipline, an activity of the whole being which can heal the human sensibility of the conflict between ear and eye brought about by the invention of the printing-press. When Mr. Church sees in the speaking of verse, something so momentous as this, he disarms our suspicions. And yet—

"I believe that every poem should be composed to be heard. It should therefore aim at such simplicity of expression that its meaning, however profound or subtle, can be instantly and in some degree apprehended. Its phrasing should admit neither of confusion of meanings nor clumsiness of sounds. And the meaning and the sound should live together like man and wife."

The meaning we note, should be only *"in some degree* apprehended" at a first hearing; and what is in question is not ambiguity but "confusion of meanings." It may be true that many of the "ambiguities" beloved of Mr. Empson and his American adherents should properly be called "confusions." On the other hand it may be that some of what Mr. Church sees as "confusions" could be justified as "ambiguities." At any rate, it is on points such as these that many readers will fall out over Mr. Church, in interpreting the excellent principles he puts forward.

And such disagreements will become sharper when the readers turn to the selection of poems, to see how Mr. Church interprets his own principles in practice. It may surprise some, for example, to find Donne represented by two sonnets, and not by any of the love-songs, such as "Aire and Angells," which might seem to present to the verse-speaker some most challenging but also most rewarding problems; for these are the poems which seem full of "clumsiness of sounds" until the speaker, by strenuous understanding, can draw out the melody only revealed when he grasps fully the sense of what is said. A sonnet, even a sonnet by Donne, is a relatively easy undertaking, since the reader has, from the first, the guidance of what Mr. Church calls the "architecture" of the sonnet-form. Again, it might seem to some that nothing is to be gained, for verse-speaking or anything else, by placing "Sailing to Byzantium" and Cory's "Heraclitus" in the same section of the same anthology. If the speaker must enter into the spirit of each poem he reads, it could be argued that the speaker who can enter into Cory's world of vulgar emotion will be so much less able to "enter into" the world of Yeats.

In the end, it is always pointless to disagree with the selection of poems for anthologies. And yet Mr. Church's book, being designedly provocative, deserves to be argued about. Perhaps one criticizes it most sharply by saying that it will not be argued about enough. For the selection of poems is so catholic that there is something to please every taste. From one point of view that is a back-handed compliment, and yet it is hard not to be disappointed at finding such an orthodox and catholic selection, after a stirring introduction which seemed to promise a new perspective and a new departure.

A special case is presented to the speaker of verse by poems in which the movement imposed upon the reader seems at variance with the sense of what is said. Some have argued that the rhythm in some of Milton's verse-paragraphs is of this sort, not following and reflecting the sense, but hiding and gliding over inconsistencies in what is said. I find such a poem in Mr. MacNeice's "Streets of Laredo," included by Mr. Church, where a jaunty emphatic rhythm seems, especially at the end, to impose a false simplification on the complex issues raised by theme and diction. This, I suppose, is the besetting sin of most Georgian verse, in which one feels that the movement, whether regular or cunningly various, and the rhyming, whether in echoing chimes or cunningly imperfect, are contrived for their own sake and not under pressure from what is to be conveyed.

From time to time, in "Poets of the Pacific," the British reader may be offended by evidence of this Georgian trick. And the poets represented do in fact belong to a group which holds that certain Georgian poets, notably T. Sturge Moore and Robert Bridges, are today under-rated. But this is by no means the guiding principle of the school, and they are not to be regarded as in any way neo-Georgian nor as related to such American "traditionalists" as the late William Rose Benet. The group, centred upon the Californian University of Stanford, differs from the poets and critics of the Eastern States in believing that a poem is none the worse for being built about a structure of rational discourse, and that a poet's intelligence can be brought into play as effectively when he follows a rational argument as when he has recourse to witty metaphor or juxtaposition. These poets are not afraid, when convenient, to distinguish between what a poet says and the way he says it. There is all the more reason, in their view, for supposing that a poet cannot write in a void; and that, other things being equal, he will write better poetry if he has philosophical training, and if his philosophical standpoint is rationally sound. They recognise the achievement of French symbolists, and of post-symbolists and experimentalists such as Eliot, Pound, Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane; but they think that this vein is now worked out and that healthy poetry today must find again a basis in rational philosophy. In general they eschew free verse and write in strict metre and in rhyme.

The British poet today is so nearly insulated from his American colleagues that he hardly knows the work of such established poets as Stevens, Ransom, Tate, Williams, even Hart Crane. Still less does he know the work of these Western poets. Yet this Western school has already passed, as it were, through one generation, and some of those older poets, notably J. V. Cunningham, Howard Baker and Yvor Winters, are regarded in some quarters as among the most important American poets of the day. It is high time some of this work was made available to the British public. Meanwhile it seems worthwhile to take notice of this American publication, for it presents a shift of direction in American poetry analogous in some ways to certain tentative movements over here.

The "Georgianism" is an issue which must be faced. I find it here:

"Green growing bush, compounded elements,
The clean excrescence of the earth, the first
To rift the stony desert face and burst
The rigid outline with a foliage dense,
Your latest leaf against my garden fence
Is older than the silent man you nursed;
But silent too with only mortal thirst—
Is younger than the man whom man
invents."

The notions here are sufficiently difficult, especially in the last three lines. And the rhymes, I find, do not help the reader to grapple with the difficulty; they only distract him. Thus the second and third lines, which lean forward breathlessly over their rhymes (perhaps *to get* the rhymes) do not reflect, as they might in Donne, a strenuous urgency of thought and feeling. On the other hand, when, in the sixth and seventh lines, some such effort is called for, the emphatic rhymes thump home as if the difficult sense they carry were self-evident. And once we begin to suspect that the rhymes dictate the arrangement, we notice and dislike the inversion, "foliage dense." We are right, I think, to call this "Georgian" and dislike it. Yet this is the poet, Helen Pinkerton, who contributes what are perhaps the most distinguished poems in the whole collection, her two sonnets, "To a Spiritual Entity."

The Georgian manner (if that is what it is) crops up in her poems and in others to spoil them. A better convention, which they use, I should tend to identify with the example of some other neglected poets who have been admired by Yvor Winters. These are the Elizabethan epigrammatists, Turberville, Gascoigne, and Googe; and theirs may be the influence behind such a poem as the following by W. Wesley Trimpi:

Phlegm

"The body is not spent;
The mind is complement
To but a little lust:
We do but what we must.
Our only will is want,
And it is sheathed in gaunt
Complacent gauze of flesh,
Alive nor full nor fresh.
The mind is but a waste
Of thought, inert, defaced;
And doubt, the slow dissembling
Loss of intent, the trembling
Choice without willing choice,
Echoes illusion's voice."

This tough, taut verse gives nothing away. And it is difficult. From his other poems here, notably "Affliction" and "Contingency," it seems that, for this poet, "will," "thought," "intent," "doubt" are recurrent terms in an argument which is carried on in more than one poem. At any rate it is hard not to feel that this is an important achievement in a convention which may be less restricted than it seems. From the same hand comes a sonnet, "The Glass Swan," which is beautifully managed up to a baffling final couplet.

This poetry, like Helen Pinkerton's, aims at major status. So does that of Pearce Young, who achieves that status precariously in "The Winter Flood," and triumphantly in "October Garden." And so does Edgar Bowers, notably in the first of "Two Poems on the Catholic Bavarians," "The Mountain Cemetery," and in "The Stoic," the last of which contains the beautiful image,

"Eternal Venice sinking by degrees
Into the very water that she lights . . . "

It is natural to talk of Mr. Bowers' poetry in terms of "images"; for it is richer in texture than Mr. Trimpi's, richer and yet looser, more what we are used to. Nevertheless, a different discipline sustains it. The poet does not care if what he has to say about Catholic Bavaria can be paraphrased, without total loss, into prose; he does care that such a paraphrase should be logical and accurate, as observation and analysis. This is a poetry no longer worried about securing a territory free from the encroachments of science; plainly poetry must do things science cannot do—otherwise it need not exist—but there can be fruitful and unflurried interchange between the two, at least on some levels. Indeed, it could be argued that thus to draw upon scientific or philosophical discipline would give to poetry a framework to stop it sprawling, the sort of frame which some have argued is to be contrived by the poet only out of a galvanized mythology such as that of Yeats.

Not that there isn't sprawling here—Donald F. Drummond seems a poet of talent who still spreads himself unduly; that is a phenomenon common to all schools of poetry. In Mr. Drummond's best pieces—"The Froward Gull," "On a Book by John Milton, Annotated"—the sprawl is controlled and he achieves a minor distinction. In others, such as "Epitaph for a Reno Woman," the matter is allowed to dissipate itself, not being tightened into the form of epigram. There are other excellent minor pieces by L. F. Gerlach ("Death of a Teacher") and Ann Louise Hayes ("Desolation").

For the young English poet resentful of the tyranny of the "image" in the restricted sense of "metaphor" (whether inflated into symbols, worried into conceits, or compressed into "striking" epithets), this American anthology points in a direction which may provide a wholesome alternative, i.e. it points to a renewed poetry of statement, openly didactic but saved by a sedulously noble diction, from prosiness. Mr. Church's book, while it claims to provide some such alternative, seems rather to point in too many directions at once.

DONALD DAVIE.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Poetry and Humanism by M. M. MAHOOD. (CAPE, 16/-)

The studies contained in Miss Mahood's book represent an attempt to trace the process of reintegration by which the conflict between Renaissance humanism and religious belief is solved in the work of the Metaphysical poets and of Milton. Miss Mahood bases her thesis on Maritain's distinction between anthropocentric and theocentric humanism. She believes, with Berdyaev, that the former type, by flinging human nature upon its own quickly exhausted resources, gives rise to a "self-destructive dialectic": this principle manifested itself in Jacobean pessimism in literature and Mannerist frigidity in art. Theocentric humanism, however, recognizes that man exists in a state of tension between being and becoming, and accepts this tension; it acknowledges his dependence on God, and finds no incompatibility between this dependence and the full use of natural gifts, since those gifts are bestowed by God.

Miss Mahood's examination shows Donne passing from a false humanism in his early poems, through a state of anti-humanist pessimism and a despairing sense of disintegration wrought by the New Philosophy:

> "'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
> All just supply, and all Relation"

until he is finally able to see in the Redemption the reconciliation between man and God, and accepts man's occupation of "a house in two shires."

This process by which Donne and his followers restored the balance of a true humanism was, the author believes, a largely conscious one, involving the enlargement of medieval notions of correspondence between the natural and spiritual worlds to accommodate every new discovery. In this, she finds, lies the real affinity between seventeenth-century poetry and the Baroque mode in the visual arts which, by wresting a final harmony from the seeming contradiction of the spiritual and temporal, represents at its best a spiritualized humanism. This leads her to an extremely interesting account of Donne's sermons, which she considers the supreme English example of the Baroque in literature.

The perfect balance to which the acceptance of the tension implicit in man's middle state gives rise is exemplified in the religious poetry of Herbert. Miss Mahood compares it with that of Christina Rossetti which, by its rejection of life and craving for death, reveals the failure of the nineteenth-century religious revival to achieve the perfect theocentric assurance of the seventeenth century. In proving her point, however, the author sometimes appears unaware of the existence of other and perhaps more obvious reasons for Herbert's superiority as a poet.

This tendency to subordinate everything to the central thesis appears again in the chapter on Marlowe, whose plays, it is suggested, present the most complete record of the Elizabethan experience of anthropocentric humanism's self-destructive nature. The account of the plays is full of interest, but one constantly feels the absence of considerations which might conflict with the argument. Similarly, the long and erudite discussion of Milton leaves one with a certain lack of conviction. It is difficult to feel that Milton is humanist in temper, and one feels that too much is made of superficial resemblances to the mode of the Metaphysicals, leaving entirely out of account the fundamental difference between their use of their medium and Milton's. There is little to quarrel with, however, in the chapters on Vaughan and Traherne.

As a contribution to criticism the value of the book is limited by the author's tendency to let her theory dominate her critical judgment. It remains, however, a stimulating, intelligent, and learned work; and an important addition to commentary on the seventeenth-century background of thought.

JACK DALGLISH.

CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC

The Swarming of the Bees by JOHN HEATH-STUBBS. (EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, 7/6)

The Glassblowers by MERVYN PEAKE. (EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, 7/6)

These two books were issued by the same publisher on the same day in the same format; this means that however little they have in common they are probably fated to be seen as travelling companions in the pages of the literary reviews for many months to come. Actually, this arbitrary association is not without significance, for in their dissimilarity these books are roughly representative of the two kinds of English poetry now being written—the poetry that makes statements, that tries to be objective, that takes as its material the contemporary world; and the poetry that does not state, but suggests, the poetry that delights in decorative verbal effects, that—in the manner of what is called "pure poetry"—is concerned with simply and tremendously communicating *itself*. Furthermore, considered together, the two books have another interest: they show how ill-fitting now are the still-used utility uniforms labelled "romantic" and "classical." The publishers, for instance, state that Mr. Heath-Stubbs's poems are classical in *manner*. Now, classical in *content* they certainly are, but only classical in manner in so far as the author's attitude is expressed through a traditional rather than a personal mythology. The effect made by the poems is romantic and not classical, because Mr. Heath-Stubbs uses his traditional symbols as a symbolist. Mr. Mervyn Peake, too, is romantic and classical at the same time—though the other way round. If one wanted to be neat and crude about it, one could say that Mr. Heath-Stubbs is classical in content and romantic in manner, whereas Mr. Peake is classical in manner and romantic in content.

Mr. Heath-Stubbs has already distinguished himself with three books of poems and the present volume will certainly add to his distinction. With more justification than is usually the case he can be called a poet's poet, for the delicacy of his craftsmanship can probably be appreciated fully only by admiring fellow-artists. Mr. Heath-Stubbs is learned in the antiquities and his work abounds in allusion: his poems, however, are never brought to a standstill under a load of erudition, but have the forward movement of a fluid polyphonic texture.

"The Swarming of the Bees" contains much observation; not observation of the phenomenal world, but of the landscapes of a deeply imaginative mind. These are landscapes of temples and sacred groves, landscapes where centaurs run and nymphs play with shells and ivory, landscapes of hyacinth bushes where nightingales sing. Such topography is "eternal," and Mr. Heath-Stubbs's poems have the compelling timeless quality of figures in a fourth-century Greek marble, figures opulent but disciplined, figures for whom mortality is no condition of abundant life.

He uses proper names and scientific terms to good effect:

> For the sea, too, has its roads:
> Beneath the swell, the restless whelm, her womb,
> Flanked by those skeleton forests, where
> Polyp and holothurian trail their tentacles.
>
> Carry me to those feet
> That tread unharvested Genesaret's
> Whitening wave-tops like the mountain dawn—
> Above this monstrous world of squid and skate,
> Sea-anemone, echinus and crinoid!

Their use is, however, sometimes not too happy:

> Dh'ul Kharnein, from white Macedon,
> Who with his ordered phalanx overthrows
> Magian Babylon and Ecbatana,
> With upland Fars of the lion and the gold sun,
> And dark-eyed Indians on Hydaspes bank—

The danger in evocative writing of this kind is that it can become a bad sort of poetic diction. Mr. Heath-Stubbs does not altogether avoid this danger. The conduits are of fine beaten gold, but where—we sometimes ask—is the bloody ichor? All we get, occasionally, is chlorinated tap water. Ships sail across "a

whispering sea," children laugh through "the golden air," the sun is "the lord of day," girls are like flowers, and music "melts" sternness. These, however, are small blemishes—indeed, the only blemishes on work of a high order.

"The Glassblowers" is the only book of Mr. Peake's that I have read. It will not, however, be the last, for it has turned me into a Mervyn Peake fan. There is a certain rightness about this for Mr. Peake is an alchemist, an alchemist who with a little bit of Dylan Thomas and a little bit of Robert Graves and a good deal of himself turns unnoticeable ordinariness into extraordinary spectacle. But, not knowing his work, only knowing about it (*Titus Groane*) I at first opened his book of poems with misgiving, expecting to find it chock full of the paraphernalia of Victor and Cazire romanticism. I found no such things. What I did find was a number of poems that are the most exciting I have come across for years.

Mr. Peake was a war artist. These poems had their origin when he was commissioned to record the work of a Birmingham glass-blowing factory. Only one poem is directly concerned with the factory; the others are about almost everything *but* factory life, though the collection has a unity because many of the poems continue, outside the actual factory, the theme of light and darkness suggested by the roaring fires and monstrous shadows.

His poems come from life and not, like too much poetry today, from books. This is because, being a painter, he has trained himself to look where he is going. His poems, however, remind me not so much of a draughtsman but of a photographer. Mr. Peake is like one of the visitors from overseas one sees about in the summer season. His eye roves with wide and searching curiosity, and his poetic Leica is ever-ready to get the startling intimate shot. Startling because, remember, the overseas visitor has eyes unaccustomed to the sights of our country: they don't slide over the people and buildings on the oil of familiarity, but, unlubricated, travel slowly and so notice things. Mr. Peake, therefore, is no mere operator of a mechanical instrument (no good photographer is): the composition of his picture is determined by memories of the land he has temporarily left. That land is a place of warlocks and devils and Freudian primitives, as well of juvenile delinquents.

> His head and hands were built for sin,
> As though predestined from the womb
> They had no choice: an earthish doom
> Has dogged him from his fortieth gloom
>
> Back to where glooms begin.
> That skull, those eyes, that lip-less mouth,
> That frozen jaw, that ruthless palm
> Leave him no option but to harm
> His fellows and be harmed by them:
> The beast his marrow feeds must wander forth.

His ability to focus imagination into a sharp brilliant image is seen remarkably in the following excerpt from a poem addressed to a mother after the birth of her child:

> Grottoed beneath your ribs no longer, he,
> Like madagascar broken from its mother,
> Must feel the tides divide an africa
> Of love from his clay island, that the sighs
> Of the seas encircle with chill ancientry;
> And though your ruthful breast allays his cries,
> How vulnerable
> He is when you release him, and how terrible
> Is that wild strait which separates your bodies.

Of course, Mr. Peake has faults. The precision of his style (*Poetry London* will be glad to know that he is a very stylish poet) is often carried over into his subjects, so that some themes are so exact, so complete, that they expire in the moment of consummation. Everything is stated, all inferences drawn. To use the photographic analogy again, the focus in such poems is not only sharp but deep; instead of delineating brilliantly the *significant* element the picture delineates everything; no background keeps its ambiguity for the mind to speculate in. Another fault of Mr. Peake is that he is sometimes too anxious to instruct, to offer rather trite reflections in gnomic form. ("Life itself is miracle enough" for instance.) But we should evaluate artists by their excellences, rather than by their shortcomings. Mr. Peake's excellences would fill a longish essay.

CLIFFORD DYMENT.

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