# POETRY

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*COVER BY SEÁN JENNETT*

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## LONDON

Edited by RICHARD MARCH and NICHOLAS MOORE

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# RONALD DUNCAN

## *from* OUR LADY'S TUMBLER*

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The theme of the play is freely drawn from the legend contained in the anonymous French XII Century poem, "Del Tumbeor Nostre Dame." For dramatic purposes I have adapted the legend as follows. It is believed that the statue of The Blessed Virgin Mary which stands in a chapel, will give a sign when a perfect offering is made to it. It is the Abbot's, Father Marcellus, custom at each celebration of Our Lady's Feastday to choose three persons to make offerings. One year the privilege is given to three monks, Brother Justin, a composer, who composes an anthem, Brother Gregory, a gardener, who presents a rose, and Brother Sebastian, a poet, who composes a canzone as a prayer for Intercession. However, none of these offerings move the statue. Then an old novice who has been excluded from making an offering because he could do nothing, waits till the chapel is empty. Removing his habit he reveals his clown's smock beneath. He tries to please the Virgin Mary by doing his circus tricks. But he finds he is too clumsy to somersault, too awkward to dance and he even forgets the words of the ballad which he attempts to sing. Finally he collapses as he tumbles and dies at the foot of the statue, which, moved to pity, drops the rose upon his body.*)

*Father Marcellus*

Where music failed how could poetry succeed,
When it is lamed with words,
Words that are worn with our complaint?
And all our complaint is pride.
Perhaps poetry lies only in pity
and perhaps the spirit is articulate only in its tears.
The statue has made no sign; and that is just.
For we cannot expect to move God by our achievements;
It is only when man is humble
That he is worthy of God's pride.
Let us pray that Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin,
Who has graciously received these offerings,

*This play was commissioned by THE SALISBURY AND DISTRICT SOCIETY OF ARTS as part of the celebrations for the FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN. It is to be performed in Salisbury Cathedral on 6th June, 1951. The music for the play has been composed by Arthur Oldham. The décor is by Cecil Beaton.

May intercede for us who are not worthy. (*He kneels*)

Amor, Amor, Amor propera
Ubique imperia
In terris ut super sidera
*(He rises and leads the recession down the aisle to the accompaniment of the "Hymn for a Festival" sung by the full choir. Only Brother Andrew is left. He snuffs the candles. Then turns and looks down the church to make sure he is alone and unobserved. Then, whilst the following song is sung off, Brother Andrew removes his habit to reveal a clown's smock beneath.)*

*Tenor Solo* (off)

Love that is passion
And all compulsion
devours me.

Love that is treason
Betraying reason
deceives me.

Love that is mercy
Tender as Mary
evades me.

Love that is gracious,
Gentle as Jesus,
Awaits me.

*(Brother Andrew, now dressed as a clown, kneels before the statue of the Virgin.)*

*Brother Andrew*

Ave Maria, gratia plena,
Dominus tecum, Benedicta tu in mulieris . . .
I mean "in mulieris," no, "in mulierorum"
Dear me, that's not right either . . .
You see, I cannot even pray to you as the others do.
Though I've learned your prayers by heart,
They will not stay within my head
But come and go; in one ear and out the other
With nothing to stay them in between.
The only phrase I know
Is " quia amore langueo"—
Anyhow, Latin's no language to talk to a young woman in—
begging your pardon, O Holy Mother. . . .
(*He rises*)
Sweet Lady, I mean no disrespect;
You see me as I am.
I put this on specially for you.
It's five years if it's a day, since I wore them—
But I daresay you've guessed all along
that they call me Brother Andrew

Only because I was once Merry Andrew,
the circus clown, juggler and tumbler
known half the world over—
well, in this part of the country.
And now that we're alone, I've a surprise for you:
A special treat for your Feastday.
Father Marcellus told me himself only this morning
That you, in your graciousness, would receive
any offering I made, however humble.
I can't write poetry; nor compose a song
(never having had much time for either)
But tumble, juggle and vault I can do
(though self-praise is no recommendation
as we say in the Ring).
I can stand on my head till the cows come home.
I can balance a chair on the end of my nose.
As for juggling, I can keep five balls in the air
with one hand tied behind me back—
(though between you and me there's nothing in it,
merely a knack and ten years' practice).
But it was for the Roman vault
that I used to be called again and again.
I can do the Roman vault, the Spanish vault
and the French double turn.
I can somersault forwards,
I can somersault backwards
and clap me hands in mid-air
and land where I left the ground.
All this I'll do for you.
It'll be your own Gala performance,
"By Special Command," as they say—
I hope you like it, for there's nothing else I can do.
And, O Sweet Lady, how I love you
after my own fashion, how I love you.
Though others may worship you with words,
See, Mary, I adore you with my heart
and with my hands,
and with my feet.

*(He begins to tumble energetically but clumsily. The more he tries, the more he fails. He attempts every kind of somersault and botches each. Finally, he kneels, breathless and dishevelled, before the statue.)*

# LUIGI BARTOLINI

## THE GARDEN

From my window which looks out on to the garden next door I can see the girl who used to come to me to have her portrait painted. She was beautiful in those days and as she walked along the street where I had my studio, at Signora Bellalancia's, I used to say to myself: "Here comes the girl of my heart!" The street was usually empty. One day I called out: "Come and see my studio. I won't bite you, and if you don't trust me, bring a friend of yours. Come together and I'll paint your portrait."

"Paint my portrait? And for how much?" she replied naively.

"Nothing, it won't cost anything, just a little effort for me and I'll enjoy it as much as you enjoy your dreams—I mean the dreams you have about walking beside your lover in the country along hidden paths."

She protested that she didn't do that sort of thing, and in fact had no intention of marrying. She didn't want to get married because the man you marry is never the man you love. She'd live alone, she said, and work hard as a dressmaker to earn just enough for her food and clothing. Modest as they were, these intentions were admirable and I'm sure that at the time, as she stood there in front of me, she really meant them.

But she did come to the studio. Signora Bellalancia sometimes—in fact, always—pretended that she didn't notice her coming. For several hours she would stay with me, but as I have a genuine love for art and place that above all else, I would insist that for more than half the time she should stay quite still and hold an expression which I would capture on her face as we talked.

Whilst drawing I would study her face and beneath this mask discover all the tender feelings of a girl in love. For instance, when I observed and admired her lips with their soft texture and little vertical lines, moist with desire, I knew for certain she was thinking of joining those lips to mine. Or again I would watch the pulsing of the vein running down the muscles of her neck: it would beat faster or slower as her desires quickened or died away.

To look her straight in the eyes was like a game of cat and mouse for me. And when, for we sometimes went down into Signora Bellalancia's garden, I made her smell a rose with huge petals, it was like joining the flower's cheek to her own: her cheek became rosy with joy and looked just like a petal.

But she was shy and cautious and honest. I'm sure it wasn't only for the simple pleasure of being painted that she came to me, but to make me fall in love with her and marry her without giving herself to me first.

In those days I used to think that she was one of those simple girls who prefer to marry a painter, of the kind you see in films, and live on plain bread, rather than marry, let's say, a seed-oil merchant—who'll get up at five and come home at night tired and smeared with oil, his cap dusty, his tie dishevelled and tattered.

This is the kind of thing women dream about, but in time they become bored by the painter and no longer love him as a creator of art. Before marriage many of them assumed that art was easy work and fame a little butterfly to be caught in flight while walking in the country on a fine spring morning. Few women can endure hardship and being cut off from the everyday world, which is so essential for artists.

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I don't know what happened in the soul of this girl after I left S — —, but I can imagine it. They say that real love only happens once, and it is true that at the second or third time one accepts what one finds and takes one face to be as good as another and that men and women are all the same.

And when a woman decides to marry, her ideas are strictly practical. She overlooks a few grey hairs and decayed teeth and sees instead the man's wages, his ability to make a good home. Men are more generous when they are thinking of getting married. But all this can't be discussed. Everyone has his own ideas. . . .

Besides, I may be mistaken, but:

From my window I see in the next-door garden the girl who used to come to my studio to be painted.

She is married now and by chance she's moved into the house next door. Their garden is better than mine. Mine is small and black. It looks like a well in the corner of the houses on the left. My flowers don't grow well, they wither away. I once had a laburnum tree planted so as to trail a vine round it, just as my neighbours do. Nothing came up. I hoped it would take root and I put little pieces of glass round it so the cats wouldn't come and piss on it. I made a tiny hedge round it, but that wasn't any use. Next year, when I went to have a look at it, the laburnum tree was dead. I tore it up. There was only a rotten stump and, stuck to that, a red worm that squirmed and looked as ugly as death.

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But their garden is lovely. They've got fine lusty plants. Some look like stuffed boas propped up on cane sticks, others like bombs, and others look like old green shoes, I mean the cactus plants with the yellow and red plumage of the flower itself. Then there's morning glory, bluish white and mauve, trained up wire netting. It makes the garden look like a huge cage where the bride lives happily.

And all around the iron railing on the top of the scarp of the Town Walls, they've got vases: big ones and medium ones and little ones with every possible kind of flower. Pansies that look like fine ladies dressed in deep purple velvet and others in colours ranging from ruby red to orange; double field mushrooms with lacy edges, and wall-flowers with curly blue stalks and flowers in every shade of red, from the flat red of blotting-paper to the red of canons and cardinals. And they've even got rue against worms, for the time when their baby arrives. Then there's dittany, too, which I love to roll between my thumb and forefinger and smell.

In the evening, on these fine summer nights, they eat out of doors, in this garden. A great patch of electric light pierces the darkness of the weak stars. They've got a lovely new table of the kind that has extra leaves that one pulls out when laying the table. Before they sit down to their meals I can watch the young wife spreading the white tablecloth, oh so carefully: she even takes the trouble to see that the ends hang down evenly on the sides. She rinses out the water jug three times and covers the decanter with a piece of embroidered cloth. The decanter is made of majolica—imitation antique.

Naturally I've only got about three plates to eat on. But I did, one day when I went to Muccia to do an etching, give way to an antiquarian urge. When I'd finished drawing I walked up a little street—it reminded me of a hen-coop—and I asked the old gossips: "Have you any antique plates, old plates, or old cooking utensils you don't use any more? . . . You haven't? How curious? Can I come in? Let me see. Yes, I'd like one rather like this, but with more of a design, with a flower or a cupid painted on it."

So they brought me one, a good plate which came from the old potteries of Esanatoglia. very very old, and finely worked. On it there was painted a bird with a tail much longer than that of a bird of paradise and with shining greeny-blue wings like the wings of a kingfisher. And the bird is pecking away at something like a woodpecker. Funny, one can't make out what it is, it's some fantasy or other.

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I even eat out of this beautiful plate with my hands sometimes, like Richard the Lion Heart.

But the bride has a complete service of plates from Ginori's rejects, chipped, discoloured and badly decorated: third-rate stuff. And the same could be said of about their other household things, their pots and pans, fixtures and furniture. But they have everything.

In the evening they gather together, they eat and drink and laugh and raise their voices. It would get on my nerves if I didn't consider that every human activity was a fine art.

One of them plays the know-all and lays down the law. There are three men: the father, the husband and the husband's brother, a strapping young man.

They've even got a guitar, that inevitable

scraping of guitar-strings on summer nights. The father has a bald patch on his head and bags under his eyes. His stomach fills a pair of check cotton trousers, and when he pays the coal man, I've noticed, he slowly pulls out his money and counts it like someone who's afraid of parting with anything sacredly earned from his shop.

They are sheepskin dealers, as a matter of fact. They get up at four, to harness their white horse; then with a cracking of the whip in a neighbourhood still in darkness, off they go to the country! They do the rounds of the peasants' houses in the villages near by, and they also venture further afield. They come home at twilight on a throne of skins they've bought and which stink even as far as my own flat.

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This girl is no longer the girl I used to paint. In her womb she is bearing the butcher's son. She has become strong and fat and ribald. She has a gold tooth now. Her fat wobbles on her hips when she walks and now her arms are like cold sausages. She lives like an oyster round the pearl of her happiness and she thinks there is nothing more for her to want: which is true. She has no further to go as regards wants.

People of little worth grow lazy and come to a standstill, lucky fools. Commonsense tames them and household cares take up all their time.

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But I'll never come to a standstill, I shall always go on looking for bigger and better things.

She has come to a standstill and I can see from the shadow of my window how she laughs when she listens to a bawdy story, one of those salacious and silly stories told by her bald-headed father.

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The air is good tonight. If you went for a walk along the Town Walls the fireflies would settle on your hat. The air is warm and smells like the skin of a sleeping girl.

These evenings are almost too long. They end up by giving one a sort of orgasm. A man like me starts to think about the road ahead. He can't see it clearly and never reaches it . . . and anyway what is the use of achievement? What does "getting beyond the human" mean? Nothing at all. You think of your friends, usually of one or two at a time, and then you forget about them too. Then I think of the people who think I'm not what I am, who think I'm unpleasant and useless, just one more wastrel dropped from some other planet, a queer inhabitant.

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The nights are too fine. They end by frightening one and deep down one repeats the old "What shall I do?"

In the moonlight the landscape is clear and clean as by day and as though seen through green bottle-glass. The moon is the sun, a gentle sun. Summer nights are better than daytime.

---

The wife of Checcuccio, the baker, tells me that my neighbours even have a nuptial bed-room, my goodness, and she hits her stomach and says: "Gracious me, it's paradise, they've even got paper roses in little vases made of mirror-glass!"

But what a row they're making down there in the garden. They're banging their glasses down on the table and, good heavens, how hideously they laugh.

From the darkness of my window I watch them and I don't give a fig for that world of theirs. I feel like the owl up there in the belfry of a village steeple, all huddled up and watching the stars.

LUIGI BARTOLINI.

*(Translated by Baptista Gilliat-Smith)*

# KATHLEEN NOTT

## A STRANGER HERE MYSELF

*(To Julia)*

The periwinkle child,
however, on the quay,
roars to go to sea,
though her eyes stream so wild
she only feels the fair
sun struggle with her hair

and the light streamer smoke
and white wings outwit her : and
dead calm her mother's hand
bind her : and great tuns choke
the light lost deep water
whose sole daughter

is she : if she could do,
she would, only to assuage
her glass-bright Spring rage,
utilise shrill blue,
her spark of power
in that vast weak flower

forcing the breaking-slow
storeys to topple, the hill
of the tomb-town to fill—
when brought to her blue eye low—
still deeper the sea,
with its basalt : for she

rages against hard land
and blind stone that grow
squarely, although
slowly dryly, and
too, to her haven-refuge
would send, to be huge

the broadcloth captains, there
to hide their flashy smile
in a vague sea-mile
and latitude of blue air,
where only a sharp wing
signals.
She sprang when Spring

void raw black
flowed with the wind, and white
sky could still be snow or light,
and love was an angry lack
of the maw womb. And would free
now murder from amity.

Look! Do not shout, shut-eye,
so roundly for fields of blue.
I speak, a stranger like you,
my mumness or cry.
Look, child—if not towards me,
there is a toy to see—

monstrous enormous starling
who blackly on this brink
weighing with never a wink,
while still land's darling,
the profits of Fall-Flight,
will stay till all is white.

His matt coat and his wing
clipped like an accent, in
keep council, seed and sin.
His heart is black with Spring.
Let us thus darkling, child,
be sharp shrewd and still wild.

## ELIZABETH CLUER

### WING PATTERN

Mounting eagle and swan
small tit's cry and loud
triumphant owl are all
symbol'd in wings: the word
that covers the moth-soft flight
of barn owl, and the light
hawk's hover, the wild blind dove
and raucous gull, the heavy
heron, the homing goose.
and lark the ecstatic lover.

### LIKE THE NIGHT CEREUS

Like the night cereus, blowing
in darkness, breathes the rose
whose thorns are stars
to lighten our darkness, crown our bitterness.

Out of the daylight earth
we move from dark to dark
walking with confidence
on thorns that in the sun would tear our feet.

And sweet O sweet she blows
the strange blossom growing
out of our heart
and into the starlit darkness beyond our knowledge.

Leave then the sun unknown
my lonely heart, and bear
travail of thorn and root
the strange sowing, the stranger fruit of love
that is still, not passionate,
cold, not glowing,
and yet contains the sun and the stars in darkness
and the blossoming thorny rose.

## MARJORIE BOULTON

### THE FISH

I dragged my importunate flesh
Down to the water's edge
And a silver convulsive fish
Slid down a curling ridge
And I cried, "O fish in the water,
Silver and free to move
Like mercury or laughter,
Swim to my absent love;
Cover four thousand miles
With a ring on your fin from my finger,
Between great rays and whales
And greet my eternal stranger
With a curved silver leap
And a spinning ring on the shore
And bid my beloved sleep
And grieve for me no more
For my love has set me free
With remembered hands on my hair
And I walk by the wide sea
On wet pleated sand; I hear
Winds and oracular voices
And music under my feet
Where the lost heart rejoices
And earth and water meet."

### TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Examiner whose Alphas and Omegas
Combine chemically in a fluid of love,
Whose pencil poises above my limited life,
Find me some kind of compensated pass,
A problem child or a borderline case,
O examiner with thunder and anathemas!

Borderline cases are increasingly common
And the questions asked me at the end of phases
Were never prepared ones and never very easy.
When I come soon enough to the fearful finals
And stab on the bed of the last bridal,
Remember: I did not ask to be woman and human.

## CHARLES TOMLINSON

### THE DEAD

The dead are always with us, and their hands
Deplore our grave, yet weigh our lightest acts,
Which, if we tally with their laws' demands,
Take scale and form from death's approved abstracts.

Furtive as rats who make their progress under
Or force the lath, the scantling and the board,
They split the knotted grain and—swoopstake—wonder
Is pared and parted, splintered on a word.

Men have dulled their eyes to opaque balls
That scarcely gaze where they should glow intent,
Yet glaze with joy at those hypnotic dolls,
The pimping usury of advertisement——

Wish-dream in a world where woman fails
Who lays the pack before her, one life's span,
Muses on Woman Pope, and eyes her nails'
Tapering magenta, smiles at the Hanging Man.

We are effete with form and formulæ
For each occasion that might rock the pulse;
So soul may hammock on its hair-oiled sea,
Sleep out its long, dark night, supreme and false.

# LYNETTE ROBERTS

## OUT OF THE PAW OF NIGHT

Out of the paw of night
And out of my sodden self
A cry like the whining of the wind:
A filter of salt covers my eyes
Banks of sand rise in my throat
On hearing the foul news of his death.
Death so finite; so unacceptable.
I would use grief to some purpose
Allow it to harness my will
And strengthen my undermined health,
I would turn grief into victory
Black into white.
I would, I said to myself
Become twice as strong,
Twice set on my objective
Along the black road of life.
And then at the turn of the road
Caught sight of a tremulous pool
Towards which a fisherman might creep
With folded breath and much reverence.
Then downcast, without reserve
My will broke as the pool stretched
Into the memory of him who loved
Such coveted brooks.
My sorrow burst forth like a stream
And over the sharp boulders
Rushed unheeding along.
My resolve had been forgotten
Laid waste in the powerful
Currents of this wretched tide.
My tears stiffened and turned to glass
And my son said "Don't cry you can have
Father Christmas." I turned.
I felt sour within.
So, my beloved Father, the blight that rested
On your heart like the marked pestilence on an
Autumn leaf, caved in. And I received tidings
Of your dispersal into dust in an Argentine cable:
*"Passed away."* But never passed for me
Who holds you in the very fibres of my being
Who will live as long as I live—
As all people live who are dead
In the breasts and minds of others—
Such is their resurrection:
And of these, the Saints wear the longest life:
The devil the most erratic, since he fluctuates
Within the frailty of man's estate
Whether he is absorbed in their nature,
Or scattered in fragments on the planet's rockface.

So death goes forward into the mind of men :
Death reinforces life : Death boldly held
Is rebirth of life. To succumb
Is to find grief foundered : loss ill-used :
Worse, it is an insult to the noble mind dispersed.

# ENID MADOC-JONES

## THE BÂL-TÂN FIRE*

**Bâl-tân Fire kindled by Druids by means of a lens at Spring Festival*

When Spring comes
To Mona's Island where once groves of oak,
Descending to the shores, cast starless shade,
Where he, the Druid chief with upraised hand,
Severed the sacred plant with thin-edged blade,

It whispers mingling with the straying winds.
Tempered by ocean tides and fanning air,
Singing as echoes sing, or rainbows speak
Murmuring enchantments, till the Past is summoned there;

Till he, the Druid chief, in linen robe,
Bordered with purple, on his fingers rings,
Walks to the unhewn altar stone, and stands,
Waiting with lifted face the Noon of Spring,
With trembling hand he takes the sacred lens
And kneeling kindles there the surging fire,
The Heaven-given Bâl-tân, and his priestlings shout
To see the fire tongues mounting higher, higher!
From the awed watching crowd, the fleet youths leap
With unlit brands, to dip them in the flame,
And with each golden torch held high they run
With holy fire, each hearth to light again.

There is no Bâl-tân now, no mystic rite!
But I remember when the Spring
Came to these quiet places by the sea,
Beneath the hedge-rows, celandines,
New-budded, green, half hidden by soft leaves
Feeling the sun's new warmth would turn
Each to a golden flame, and by the hedge,
Their fire, unchecked would leap and spread
Far, far, till in the solemn woods,
Under the lofty trees, with shadowed hills beyond,
The first pale light of daffodils would come
Swaying to faint wind-gusts as candles sway,
Spreading their "bâl-tân splendour" on and on.

And I remember in the grey-spired church,
Close to the fields where massive Dolmens stand
To mark the points of solstice and equinox,
Of May-time sunrise, how at Easter festival,
Or so it seemed, the mystic bâl-tân fire
Thrice purified from blood and pagan rites,
Burns still before the altar, where the flowers
Of Spring-time, newly gathered join their light.

Primrose and wind-flowers from the sheltered lanes
Pale slender jonquils, lilies from the woods,
Rising about the grey stoned walls, at chalice, font,
Where once the groves of Druid oak-trees stood.

And I remember how when noon was come,
Walking from Churchyard shadows, down the solemn path,
Our faces Southwards turned to sun and home
A joyfulness came stealing in our hearts,
Drawing its virtue from the mounting sun,
Primal as age-old rock and sap-filled tree,
Old as the Bâl-tân fire, and like those mystic priests,
We knew, as they had known, a wordless ecstacy.

# MADGE HALES

## DARK LANDSCAPE

Shake my harsh bones, be rain in my aridity,
Take out my eyes of blindness, make them see
The landscape yielding to its living sun,
Take off my gloom that my dark flesh be free.

For it is dust by being hid perpetually,
By the bare increase of my secret years,
(Flesh is the Devil we were told when young
Dark is the flesh tormented by its fears).

Then let these bitter shadows stand apart,
Let flesh unfold and my long night oppose,
And every star articulate the truth
That out of darkness grows the lovely rose.

# THE COLLECTED POEMS OF KEITH DOUGLAS[1]

## Biographical Introduction

Keith Castellain Douglas was born at Garden Road, Tunbridge Wells, on January 24, 1920. Most of his early life he lived with his mother, Mrs. Marie Douglas, in Tunbridge Wells and elsewhere. His father left the household when the boy was eight years old and took up residence in Wales; Douglas never saw his father again after this, nor had any contact with him.

Owing to the fact that his mother had to support herself and her son mostly by her own efforts Douglas' early youth was beset with great difficulties, and he soon learned the necessity of making himself as independent as possible in order not to be a burden on his mother, and to provide for his education.

His first boarding school was Edgeborough, Guildford, to which he went at the age of six. He could then read and write fluently. He enjoyed myths, fairy tales, historical anecdotes, and an old *History of the Boer War.* He also showed an early interest in model-making and drawing, arts in which he later acquired considerable proficiency.

At eleven he proceeded to Christ's Hospital. His mother writes of him at this period :

"He had too much individuality to be popular with many of the Powers—but there were those who appreciated him despite the headaches he sometimes caused. He was impatient of most people's opinions till he had tested them personally. He loved an argument and would cheerfully argue against his own opinions and (theoretically) prove them wrong, rather than have no basis of argument. He did this so convincingly that people who did not know him well sometimes believed his views to be the exact opposite to what they were.

"He was accused by the Headmaster of being constitutionally lazy. The truth was he had unbounded energy and perseverance in anything he considered really worth while. He was keen on rugger and swimming, on riding, on dancing and acting. He was intensely interested in people and the reasons for their behaviour.

"As a boy he was violent over things and people he disliked; bitter and sarcastic in his criticisms but, even when onesided, often with a degree of truth not easy to refute. That naturally did not help his popularity at school. Later he could be just as trenchant, but with a humour that tempered the bitterness.

"Few people knew of the difficulties he had to contend with in his private life as a boy and the final characteristics which triumphed were largely due to H. R. Hornsby, David Roberts, and Sir Reginald Spence, all of whom he valued as friends. I think early recognition of his literary ability was due to Mr. Stokoe of Edgeborough, now dead. Keith had a great capacity for making—and keeping—friends."

These early "difficulties," to which reference has already been made, were sometimes so acute that every possession of value had to be sold, and but for the generosity of his Headmaster, who gave him free schooling, Douglas would have been obliged to leave his preparatory school. From the age of eleven, however, when Keith Douglas entered Christ's Hospital on the Nomination Exam., he won all his own education by scholarships; and as he grew older earned what he could to contribute towards his holidays. He rarely had any place he could call home. Ironically—as his mother comments—his death provided her with the home she could never quite achieve for him.

He went up to Merton College, Oxford, on a scholarship in October, 1938. He wrote many poems during his terms there and rewrote others whose originals dated back to his childhood. (It is worth noting that he appeared in *New Verse* at the age of sixteen while still a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital.) At Merton Edmund Blunden was his tutor and helped him to get many of these early poems published. Before he finally left Oxford he had edited *Augury,* an Oxford Miscellany, for Basil Blackwell, and become a wartime Editor of *The Cherwell,* at that time the only undergraduate university weekly. He

[1] *The Collected Poems of Keith Douglas,* edited by John Waller and G. S. Fraser, will be published in April, 1951, by Editions Poetry London Ltd.

was, I imagine, the senior of those included in *Eight Oxford Poets* (Routledge), an anthology which also contained Sidney Keyes and John Heath-Stubbs, who came up to Oxford about a year after Douglas.

Having joined the Oxford O.T.C., largely because of the free riding it offered, Douglas was liable for active service as soon as war was declared. As in the case of many others, however, his calling-up was delayed, and this gave him the year 1939-40 at Oxford, a year whose flavour he catches perfectly in the poem "Canoe," and elsewhere.

Once in the army he was posted about between Edinburgh, Weedon, Sandhurst and Lulworth Cove. After having been commissioned he was eventually selected for special duties with the Indian Army, and accordingly sent on a short course away from his unit. The Indian plan was then cancelled and Douglas—in default of any particular instructions—went out to the Middle East with the unit with which he had done this special course. He sailed in June, 1941, and on arrival in the Middle East was transferred to the Notts Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry.

Douglas' experiences in Egypt, the desert, and North Africa generally are fully described in his own diary, *Alamein to Zem Zem* (*Edtions Poetry London Ltd.,* 1947), so need no retelling here. In fact, he ran away from a staff job at base H.Q. to rejoin his regiment in the desert, and fought in a Crusader tank from Alamein through to Wadi Zem Zem in Tunisia—with the exception of a short period spent in a hospital in Palestine after being blown up by a mine. Essentially a poet's diary, his account takes the reader into that "looking glass world which touches a man entering a battle." His finest poems, which were nearly all written during this time, have taken their place among the few significant poems that were produced about the war in the desert. Like that of Wilfred Owen, Douglas' was the poetry of pity; but there is also contained in it a sad and detached irony, and a sense of tremendous silence. As he wrote in his diary: "The most impressive thing about the dead is their triumphant silence, proof against anything in the world."

It is interesting to note that while in Cairo, Douglas for the first time met the poets, Bernard Spencer, Lawrence Durrell, and G. S. Fraser, and appeared in the two former's magazine *Personal Landscape.*

Douglas returned from the East just before Christmas, 1943, to train for "D" Day in Europe. In London he met M. J. Tambimuttu, who first undertook to publish his poetry in book form. He had of course already shared a book of *Selected Poems* with John Hall and Norman Nicholson (John Bale and Staples Ltd.). "I can't afford to wait," he now said in a letter to Tambimuttu, "because of military engagements which may be the end of me." Too soon was this premonition realized. He was killed on his third day in Normandy, on June 9, 1944, at the age of twenty-four, three days after the beginning of the Second Front, after getting information from behind the enemy lines for which he was mentioned in despatches. A graphic account of this action and of the poet's death can be found in the book *Green Beaches* by Lt. John Bethell-Fox, M.C., a friend of Douglas' in the regiment. So, as no further complete poems were found among his kit, Keith Douglas' work virtually ends with "On a Return from Egypt."

His mother writes of his character:

"He was happy by nature, but the futile suffering of the world and the inability of such a large proportion to appreciate beauty in any form depressed him heavily at times. He did not have a conventional artistic temperament because he understood and appreciated the ordinary man too well. But he had the extreme sensitivity of the artist and I think there was no sensation of fear, pity, misery, hate, pain, love, and exhilaration which he had not felt to the full. He seemed able to achieve a complete absorption in his full pursuit of any given moment to the exclusion of all else; and he had the faculty of looking on himself from a distance, as it were—seeing his faults and assets as though he were judging another person."

In another letter she adds:

"Keith was always a great one for making future plans—the unlikelihood of fulfilling them was no deterrent. On his first voyage to the Middle East he wrote that he would go and work in South African mines to earn some money and then buy a South Sea Island where we could live most of the time and he would write. The latest he made, I think,

were to return to Oxford for two years, then take a British Council job in the Middle East and take me on a North African trip to meet his various friends in Sousse, Cairo, Tel-a-viv, and Alexandria. But on his return to England he had ceased to see a future. The futility of making plans overwhelmed him. He saw no future after 'D' Day. Not that he was morbid about it. He made the best of the last of his leave."

Shortly after Douglas' death appeared a long and interesting memoir on him in *Poetry London Ten* (1944) by M. J. Tambimuttu, who sums him up thus:

"I can say without any hesitation that Douglas' view of life and his actions were the most sound and realistic that any man of our generation can come to. He accepted the greatest gifts of this life and lived with passionate sincerity. His conclusions about life in action are the most mature any poet has arrived at in this war . . . Douglas lived the poetry he believed in."

I myself was privileged to know Keith Douglas both in Oxford, where he struck me as slightly sombre and reserved, though with dark expressive eyes; and again in Cairo, in September, 1943; after he had returned from his desert campaigns and was kicking his heels in boredom at a base camp outside the city. He visited me at my office and later we had a lunch with G. S. Fraser at the Anglo-Egyptian Union in the garden and spent an evening or two in the glaring Egyptian bars. He seemed to me then an unaffected person and a natural poet, modest sometimes to the point of seeming shy, but shrewd in judgment and understanding. Perhaps in those last meetings I felt him also to be a little depressed and cynical. "Once you have been in one battle, you have been in all," I remember him saying. He disapproved of what he considered to be the pseudo heroics exhibited by a number of war writers; his fundamental sense of realism prevented him from indulging in attitudes of this kind, and moreover he hated anything that could be used as propaganda. Our last meeting (though of course we did not realize at the time it was to be our last), I remember, was in the bar of *Gamache,* the Taverne Francais, in the Sharia Elfi Bey, a well-known cosmopolitan rendezvous during the first half of the war. G. S. Fraser was also with us. But, as we had exhausted our money and the evening was late, we parted gloomily after a few drinks, instead of dining together to mark the occasion as we had planned. Shortly afterwards I heard that his unit had moved away and Douglas with it; as I later discovered, it had returned to England to prepare for the Second Front.

JOHN WALLER.

# LYRIC POETRY IN GERMANY

Six years have passed since the last swarms of planes droned across the German skies. The country lay in darkness and the cities in ruins; the last remnants of the German army were rounded up, and made to lay down their arms. People's eyes were peeled to reality. It was time for the final reckoning and for examining the causes.

What had been a paralyzing horror then turned into horrific realization. Those who had been misled saw what they had come to. The wounded felt themselves and became aware of their wounds. The unconscious struggled for breath and those who had breath struggled for words. The conscious grew alert and those who could think became helpers and healers. Their deepest sorrow was, and still is, the harm the soul had suffered. Physical wounds are more readily recognized and cured: one can set fractures, but moral wounds are difficult to diagnose or even to recognize. Outside help is of little use if there is no help from within. The symptom is the word which the mind prepares and the spirit finds.

It grows and spreads in several stages. Realization becomes acknowledgment, confession the cry of pain. In illness, the cry of pain is the mirror and the measure of the pain itself. There is no healing without pain. The meaning of pain is a subject the greatest minds have tried to fathom. Ernst Jünger, in his essay, *" Uber die Linie,"* dedicated to Martin Heidegger, defined pain as the " hall-

mark of our time." That pain is the touchstone of the present age and one of the real remedies against Nihilism was already recognized by Dostoievsky. Pain may be measured by its cry. Through the cry the doctor receives the message from the depths he is sounding, the echo from the soul striving to express itself.

The poets are the voice of the people; their word reveals the peoples' soul. These words blossom in song, ripen to fruit in the epic, break open in drama and sow their seed in poetry. Their seeds are like the sands of the seashore. Through its boundless possibilities the species is preserved and prepared for the extraordinary. Poetry, the seed of words, lies between the end and the beginning. between the fall of the fruit and the new blossom. Poetry is the most immediate expression, just as song is the most spontaneous. Song rings out at dawn, poetry lightens up the evening of the people. Both are closely interwoven and seem, to many, to be identical. But ages lie between them (even when they appear side by side).

Many people have wondered, not least the Germans themselves, why so much poetry is written, especially in Germany. The Germans are by nature a lyrical people. But that they were a young people was one of the great errors of those who tried to found the Millenium Reich. The songs of the German people spring from a remote past. Their bent for poetry marks their place in time, and their age. It also bears the imprint of their sorrow as Hermann Hesse said in the dark months of 1946, when he pointed out that the Germans must be the wisest men on earth because they have been the most tried by suffering.

Immediately after the First World War expressionist poetry was born in Germany and flourished for more than thirty years. It revealed the agony of the contemporary generation of creative writers and their newly born faith in mankind which rose out of the chaos of their inner and outer collapse; it expressed a new hope triumphing over all pain and all despair. Since then a period has passed—in former days it would have been called "a generation." Today mankind stands, as it were, on the grave of that hope and of that belief, and faces the Void as helplessly as ever. With acute penetration the finest minds are turned towards this Void before which and in which human existence must preserve and prove itself. Its attraction is overwhelming and what man can say that he has not felt it or that he can resist it without a struggle?

In those years the Germans' clearest and most moving lyric poetry became a song of triumph over their salvation from the gaping Void. Perhaps the finest lyric poetry was never anything but this. Yet today it speaks with shrinking horror: the agonizing vision of "overwhelming infinity" and the certainty of the "Void, whose relentless claws clutch the memory and confound each new day with all the days that have passed." (Günter Eich, *"Abgelegene Gehöfte,"* 1948.)

There is a very pronounced Nature symbolism in contemporary German lyric poetry. It can be seen in the work of the North German poet, Wilhelm Lehmann. Under the spell of Nature, there flows in him the dark blood of a mythical melancholy as it does too in the poetry of the Austrian, Georg Trakl, who belonged to the spiritual victims of the First World War ("Who can he have been?" wondered Rilke when he read Trakl's heavy, yet lofty poetry).

These pantheistic lyric writers include: Günter Eich, Peter Hückel, Horst Lange, Oda Schäfer, Elizabeth Langgässer (a highly gifted poetess who died prematurely), Karl Krolow, and also, to some degree, the Hanoverian poet, Friedrich Rasche. In their poetry the elementary spirits of the Plant World and Lower Fauna were raised to poetical force. Side by side with the rose and the lily, thrived the lesser plants: wormwood, fern, cinquefoil, gourds, parsley, cock's foot grass, goutweed, bugle, wild peas, flax, everlastings, nettles, spurge, sorrel, plantain, burdock, dandelions, broom and thyme, a list compiled from only a few verses of one of Elizabeth Langgässer's poems, called, significantly: *"Der Laubmann und die Rose."* This list could be added to at will, especially from a catalogue of weeds. *"Laubmann,"* the Leafman, is a sort of fairytale Pan, who beckons Jorinde and Goringel, the loving brother and sister of the sad fairytale. Around the spirits under Pan's sway thrives the wilderness; Man, who is affected only by the

Void, lays a finger on his lips and whispers magic formulæ. The botanical vocabulary serves the same purpose as monks' Latin did during the Middle Ages: partly mystical and partly prosaic, it spins a web of naturalistic appearances sheltering one from the glimpse into "overwhelming infinity." Just as Adam and Eve, after tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge, became aware of their nakedness and covered themselves, so these later men need nettles to shield and save themselves from the gaze of a sullied world.

This group of poets is one of the three large identifiable ones in present-day Germany. Their poetry never ceases to appeal to a circle of people with a similar sensibility. It is generally printed in slim volumes. What is characteristic of the group is a sort of urge, savouring of a secret society, to possess a pass-word, binding them together. The gout-weed must be produced, or the field-hemp-nettle ("useless for any other purpose") if anyone wishes to enter into the conversation or to count for anything. But there is a magnificent seriousness and a compelling humour in this garden of weeds and herbs where the winding path leads back, through Arnim, Brentano and Novalis, to the German Romantics. In Elizabeth Langgässer's poems magical banquets take place whose guests are the affinities: Orpheus and Oberon, Shakespeare and Novalis, Hermes and Klingsor.

In the broad field covered on the one hand by the Nature Symbolists, who love complicating their poems with a tangle of rambling undergrowth, and on the other, a phenomenon like Gottfried Benn (who was for poetry what Ernst Jünger was for prose) the values of an achieved tradition are safeguarded; and the vivid language they use flows from recent sources. Rilke, Hofmannsthal, and George, thinker, critic and creator are the guardians of the way. Close to them and almost of the same generation, though still living, stand Rudolf Alexander Schröder and Hans Carossa. The latter's collected poems, a new cycle called *"Stern über Lichtung"* (Insel-Verlag, 1947), contains the most relaxed, the most mature and the wisest lyrical poetry of contemporary Germany. It is marked with painful stillness and restraint. With Schröder, it is his capacity for suffering and resignation that gives his endlessly flowing stanzas their cherubic radiance.

And now I should like to mention the poems of Manfred Hausmann. His severe imagery is the immediate expression of emotions he has experienced to the full and considered at length. Maria Luisa Kaschnitz's poems of confession have a beautiful rhythm often reminiscent of Riccarda Huch's poetry; the *"Gedichte zur Zeit"* express purely and movingly the experience of millions of women uprooted by the war:

"Ich lag im Bunker mit vielen,
keiner kam zur Ruh,
Und eine Hand bestahl mich,
Und die andere deckte mich zu.
Und ich ging auf der Strasse mit vielen,
Weil es wieder zu wandern hiess,
Und eine Hand schob mir den Karren,
Während die andre mich stiess.
Und ich wusste nicht zu sagen,
Was Art mein Nächster war,
Es war nach den alten Begriffen
Nichts mehr berechenbar.
Und es war auch nicht mehr die Rede
Vom Wohlgefallen,
Nur das elende, herriche Leben
War in uns allen."

I lay in a shelter beside many others; no-one was able to rest. And one hand cheated me and the other covered me. And I walked on the roads with many others, because we were bidden to wander; and one hand pushed my cart for me while the other hand struck me. And I never knew what sort of person my neighbour was. One could no longer judge by old values and nothing was predictable any more. And there was no longer any talk of satisfaction, only the terrible, wonderful pleasure of the life still in us all.

With her hymnlike, religious poetry, Gertrud von Lefort captured the powerful monotony of liturgical Latin for the German language. Friedrich Georg Jünger (Ernst Jünger's brother) whose short stanzas ripple like springs from an inexhaustible fountain, gave rise, with his poetry, to the idea of a "New Anacreontic" poetry. But there is more to it than a mere delight in eight-syllable trochees and erotic forms of expression. This is only the mask: behind it the gay Anacreontic poet conceals a deep consciousness of halcyon sorrow. The light feet of his verse resemble the feet of doves, on which, as Nietzsche said, all truths are borne.

Rudolf Hagelstange's *"Venezianischen Credo,"* illicitly published during the war, stirred his contemporaries with its magnificent pathos. His simple rhetoric continues to echo through his new collection of poems, *"Strom der Zeit"* (Insel-Verlag) and through his vast elegies, one of which, *"Beschwörung der Europa,"* was awarded the prize for lyric poetry by the Südverlag of Constance.

The publication by Insel-Verlag of Rilke's posthumous works brought to light a moving little masterpiece of poetry which is just beginning to bear fruit, namely the *"Briefwechsel in Gedichten mit Erika Mitterer."* At the age of eighteen, Erika Mitterer, an Austrian poetess, expressed her admiration for the dying poet so movingly in a poem that she received a reply from him in the same form. This correspondence in verse lasted two years, until shortly before Rilke's death, and ran to almost fifty poems. Since then Erika Mitterer has published volumes of poetry and prose. As far as one is able to surmise, her virginal grace has won her a place in the history of literature. When making a study of Rilke one should also take into account a cycle of poems which came to him as if "dictated from the beyond" when he was in Switzerland in 1920: *"Aus dem Nachlass dem Grafen C.W."* Rilke took such things very seriously. The Austrian poet, Max Mell, throws a lot of light on this in a little book entitled *"Gabe und Dank"* (Scientia-Verlag, Zürich).

Georg Britting, a strongly individual poet from old Bavarian stock, recently published a sonnet-cycle: *"Die Begegnung"* (Nymphenburger Verlaghandlung). These sonnets describe encounters with Death. In the first Death is represented as the eagle to whose might all birds are subject. Then come the six closing lines of the sonnet, and the arrow, drawn in the first stanzas, is released from the skilfully taughtened bowstring:

So uns der Tod! Wer wollte ihm entfliehen?
Den Rücken zeigen? Stell dich seinem Blick!
Er schiesst den Pfeil dir sonst in das Genick!
Es gab schon Männer, welche hell auf shrien,
Wenn er sie traf. Du musst dich überwinden,
Damit sie dich mit offnem Mund nicht finden."

Thus death comes to us. Who would flee him? Or turn his back on him? Remain steadfast before his glance, or he will shoot his arrow in the nape of your neck. There have been men who have screamed out when face to face with death. You must overcome yourself, so as not to be caught with an open mouth.

If I were asked what contemporary German poems I should recommend to be translated into English, I should definitely mention Britting's sonnets. (This is the only time in his life that Britting has written sonnets. He usually loves freedom in metre and the wildest rhymes.) Along with Britting it would be difficult not to think of Carl Zuckmayer. As a dramatist he has already made a mark on the world, but his success as a dramatist owes a great deal to his strong lyrical talent. How forceful this is can be seen from his volume of collected poems, *"Gedichte* 1916-48," published by the Suhrkamp Verlag in conjunction with S. Fischer. Zuckmayer returned to Germany after his emigration, and his plays have been the salvation of many a German theatre. His forerunner, the doctor Martin Gumpert, is another emigrant and he is now a specialist in Diseases of the Aged in New York. But in Germany he is remembered as a lyric poet. His *"Berichte aus der Fremde,"* hard and passionately tempered stanzas of meditation and denunciation, received the 1948 prize for Lyric Poetry awarded by the Südverlag (who were responsible for publishing this work, jointly with the Verlag der Arche, Zürich). These poems revive the stirring parallelism of the archaic *Hymnik* in the German language.

Gumpert's keen lyrical insight into his own life and the life of his time gives me a pretext for passing on to the third group of poets of whom I spoke in my introductory paragraph. But in this group there is only one outstanding figure, Gottfried Benn, who is also a doctor and who lives in Berlin. His poetry recalls Bert Brecht (*Lyrische Hauspostille*), who loves clear, incisive expression but who remains within the strict bounds of what is lyrical, though in the most modern sense. Or again Benn's poetry reminds me of the hymns, elegies and odes of the Austrian

poet, Lernet-Holenia, who himself pointed to Benn as the greatest lyric poet of our decade. (Alexander Lernet-Holenia: *"Die Trophae,"* Scientia-Verlag, Zürich.) But whereas Lernet-Holenia's keenly sensitive poetry is literary, Benn's poetry is immediate and unliterary, or at least unliterary in effect, especially in the passages which can hardly be understood without the help of explanatory notes. His poems often seem like sloughs that have been shed, torn and tearing images of a speech refined as though by fire, of which the metaphors, like the hardened lava of feeling, are learning encrusted in the abyss of human existence. I shall quote the first and last stanzas of his poem *"Verse"* (from the *"Statische Gedichte,"* Verlag der Archen, Zürich):

Wenn je die Gottheit, tief und unerkenntlich
in einem Wesen auferstand und sprach,
so sind es Verse, da unendlich
in ihnen sich die Qual der Herzen brach;
die Herzen treiben längst im Strom der Weite,
die Strophe aber streift von Mund zu Mund,
sie übersteht die Völkerstreite
und überdauert Macht und Mörderbund.

* * *

Zwei Welten stehn in Spiel und Widerstreben,
allein der Mensch ist nieder, wenn er schwankt,
er kann vom Augenblick nicht leben,
obwohl er sich dem Augenblicke dankt;
die Macht vergeht in Abschaum ihrer Tücken,
indes ein Vers der Völker Träume baut,
die sie der Niedrigkeit entrücken,
Unsterblichkeit im Worte und im Laut."

If ever God, deep and hidden, spoke through one of his creatures, then what he said was verse, in which the heart is endlessly consoled.
But men's hearts have long drifted in the distant stream, while poetry is passed from mouth to mouth, above the struggle of the people and outliving might and murder.
Two worlds stand in interplay and conflict; man is weak only when he wavers. He cannot subsist on the moment although he is indebted to it. Might passes away in the dregs of cunning, whilst verse builds the dreams of the people, through which they are lifted above their wretchedness. Verse is immortality expressed in word and song.

Gottfried Benn is often held to be the representative of Nihilism in contemporary German poetry. (In *"Uber die Linie,"* Ernst Jünger maintains that Rilke is also a Nihilist.) But the very fact that a man writes poetry would mean that he is not a Nihilist. Nevertheless, of all living poets, including Heideggar, the poetising philosopher and Sartre, the pholosophising poet, Benn stands nearest to the philosophy of Nothingness. It lends to his expression a nakedness which gives the mind a kind of electric shock. In his sorrow, where he reveals it—and he does reveal it—tremble the tears of a whole generation of Lyric poets.

The present, I mean contemporary Germany, is expressed in the works of all the lyric poets I have mentioned in this sketchy survey. All the works and poets I have talked about seem to bear an influence on the development of the literature of the German people. Obviously they are only the most conspicuous blossoms; they have emerged from the chaos of anonymity and out of the nursery garden of the lyrical process. This nursery garden contains the efforts of thousands and thousands of people. They are never heard of outside their own narrow circle but they sacrifice to poetry all their leisure hours and in return they receive a kind of magic, something which consoles them and gives them a foretaste of the lyrical process. Whether this mass of anonymous poets exercises any influence on the spiritual life of the German people of today remains to be decided. That they have a significance is something which is constantly asserted especially by well-wishers outside Germany. And perhaps a German, least of all, is able to know whether this is so. But there is no doubt that there is and must be some connection between the finest achievements the great German poets have contributed to European lyrical poetry and the present, as it were, subterranean and fermenting intensity of effort. Anyone like myself who in the course of many years has come across thousands and thousands of the works of this "Unrecognised Literature" knows that its shapeless mass of work is the necessary forcing house for the finest achievements both of the species and of its most treasured flowers.

L. E. REINDL.

*(Translated by Baptista Gilliat-Smith)*

# POINTS OF VIEW

## SENSE AND SENSUOUSNESS

*Selected Poems of John Keats, edited by Laurence Whistler.*
(GREY WALLS PRESS, 3/6)
*Swinburne Selected Poems, edited by Humphrey Hare.* (HEINEMANN, 12/6)

The passions and emotions aroused by the lives of poets, by their views, by "what they stood for," continue to obscure the critical appraisal of their work. The present review is a plea for sound criticism. It is true, as Mr. Hare maintains in the preface to his Swinburne selection, that a poet's life and work are inseparable. The most valuable thing in this latter volume is, indeed, Mr. Hare's attempt to show the inter-relation of Swinburne's life and work. This does not mean, however, that we must make allowances for a poet's poems on account of his circumstances. It is not true in that world where poetic values alone count, that *"tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner."* Biography is of immense interest—human, that is, not poetic interest. The exhumation of Annette Vallon, for instance, is of immense interest in puzzling about the why of Wordsworth's inspiration and its decline. But it makes the poems themselves no better and no worse; nor does it help us to judge the poems. Of course, if one is not concerned with critical judgment—and nowadays it appears to be slightly priggish to be so concerned—one may interpret poems in terms of love-affairs, achievement in terms of illness, and so on. But this will not satisfy those who care for the health of poetry.

"Keats' magic is enhanced," Mr. Whistler truly remarks, "by his early death." It is still almost unchivalrous to say anything against "poor Keats." But the essence of Mr. Whistler's view of Keats, which is very little but hero-worship and adds nothing to the view current for the last hundred years, is really that Keats' achievement was marvellous *considering everything.* This is perfectly true. Any poet's achievement is marvellous, considering everything. But it has made criticism of Keats impossible. But was Keats—and I mean Keats the poet, in the company of the other poets before and after him, not Keats the consumptive son of a London ostler—was Keats so unlucky? According to Mr. Whistler, he was hailed by Crabbe Robinson just before he, Keats, died at the age of 26, as perhaps the leading poet of the coming generation. Not bad for a poet of 26. He was violently attacked by the critical pundits of his day, and this aroused the chivalrous sympathy of other poets. What good fortune! The really blighting thing to be suffered by young poets is neglect, not opprobrium. It is because they may have hastened Keats' death that we revile the Blackwood's reviewers. If Keats had lived to fulfil his promise, we should have forgotten about them. In any case, they have been exaggerated by the hero-worshippers who have always been as assiduous in gushing over a young and tragic poet as they have been ready to accept his poems uncritically and withhold their sympathy from the less romantic living. In a sense, Coleridge's life was much more tragic than Keats'. When I recently published in these pages an unfavourable criticism of some poems by a contemporary, he was immediately able to draw a, let us hope, substantial fee from another journal by publishing an article on how sensitive he has always been to adverse criticism. At least he has never known, like many young poets struggling to get their first poems accepted, the stings of neglect. I think it is possible to be too sorry for Keats.

It is possible that a reader of my generation, brought up to revere the Romantics, and later rejecting them for the poets of the seventeenth century, is incapable of forming an objective judgment of Keats. Yet such a judgment would be of great interest and value. To me it seems that Keats was a poet of unusually acute senses, with an exceptionally sensitive ear; his poems express a desire to indulge in sensuous experience for its own sake; this experience is more or less uncontrolled, uncoordinated, unorganised. There are continual echoes from the poets of the past whom he admired—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and others. Keats does not succeed in impressing

upon his sensuous and literary experience the stamp of a personal style. He is, in short, a minor poet of great promise, achieving sometimes a felicity of phrase and a faithfulness to natural impressions which are almost Shakespearean, or at least Wordsworthian. But as soon as one begins to use the word "promise," one is departing from objective standards. So much is often admitted in the case of the *Endymion* volume, but many feel the Odes to be exceptional—to have placed Keats in the highest rank on their own merit. In the Odes the impressions are more strongly conveyed, there is greater economy of expression, an even greater felicity of phrase. But I cannot help feeling conscious throughout of the confusion, even poverty, of thought. Thought, such as it is, and description do not fuse. In the *Grecian Urn* the thought is tacked on, it does not grow out of the poem. In the *Nightingale* Ode, the thought is no more than a lyric impulse, the expression of a desire to escape. Moreover there is the attempt to hide imprecision of thought under beautiful and emotive phrases which do not express the thought. No one has ever explained to me why the first four lines of the *Nightingale* are not palpable nonsense. The state described is either anæsthesia or hyperæsthesia, it cannot be both at the same time; and this is what Keats seems to be conveying. "A drowsy numbness pains my sense"—either this is meaningless or I am very obtuse. The same method is used in opening the *Grecian Urn* Ode. "Thou still unravished bride of quietness"—a succession of beautiful and emotive words, but what do they mean? An "unravished bride" is an interesting phenomenon, but it has nothing to do with a Grecian Urn; when the urn is addressed as the bride "of quietness," the absurdity becomes worse. But because of his dropping of this idea immediately, Keats makes it plain that it is of no interest to him except for its disconnected emotive value.

Swinburne strikes me also as a poet of unbridled sensuous effort coupled with very thin or trivial thought. He says so little and uses so many words to say it. He has a fluency which many might envy today, in the present age of verbal constipation, but I think they would be wrong—unless, that is, they had a great deal to say. Swinburne's relentless and mechanical rhythm must have been intoxicating to the Victorian adolescent of all ages, but its insensitive crudity can only revolt a subtler ear. Mr. Hare's long and interesting preface helps one to understand Swinburne, but it does not, to my mind, dispose a modern reader to think any better of his poems.

JAMES REEVES.

# MEANING AND EMOTION

*News of the World by* GEORGE BARKER.
(FABER AND FABER, 8/6)
*Poems* 1938-1949 *by* ROBERT LOWELL.
(FABER AND FABER, 9/6)

Nowadays it is almost bad form to say "I don't understand this poem"; the folly of having expected to understand it marks one a Philistine. Yet, with whatever psychological or metaphysical justification, we continue in ordinary discourse so to use words as to imply a common set of notions relating to a real and knowable world; we at least give one another the impression of communicating an intellectual meaning. So that, when the poet abandons this universal habit of discourse, he severely limits the effectiveness of his poetry. Verse which conveys no intellectual meaning necessarily leaves an important part of the reader's mind unsatisfied. Furthermore, since the conscious intellect cannot be quiescent, it either seeks an intellectual meaning when it should not or (if

better trained) focuses conscious attention upon the attaining of unconscious communication. Such concentration is naturally apt to defeat its own end.

There are, I believe, various causes of obscurity illustrated in Mr. George Barker's *News of the World* and in the *Poems* 1938-1949 of Mr. Robert Lowell. There is the modest reluctance to particularise a situation; we are given the emotion without the cause of emotion. This is a habit of Mr. Barker:

I rage against the pricks that drive
Me and my guardian out of house.
I hear the worm and ghost connive
Coldly against me. I survive
By fathering monsters I abuse.

The last sentence is admirably compressed and aphoristic. The only trouble is that it might mean anything and so means nothing. We are unable to judge the propriety of the emotion, since we don't know what all this feeling is *for*. The same passage illustrates the use of private imagery. Who or what is the guardian? The worm is a public symbol and therefore accessible; it is the more teasing to meet an inaccessible image in the same passage. To set up an expectation of meaning and disappoint it in this way is hardly playing the game. Frequently, as here, we feel that the writer *has* a precise meaning but has suppressed the clues; at other times it seems rather that he is developing a symbolic situation with emotional coherence but without himself giving it a rational content. The development may proceed by the expansion of a single image, as in Mr. Barker's *The Bridal Nightmare I,* or by free association as perhaps in *The Bridal Nightmare III* and certainly in the dream poems of Mr. Lowell, *Falling Asleep over the Aeneid* and *Thanksgiving's Over.*

I have laboured this question of overt and accessible meaning because it is fundamental to what I have to say about these two poets. The suppression of direct meaning is a new thing in poetic history; it was never practised before the French Symbolists. The Elizabethans and Jacobeans have images in plenty, but we are never left in doubt as to their significance:

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death —

the purport is clear through the substantives, which are not images but direct referents. If I rewrite:

A troop of candlebearers
Plunge the cap and bells to dust.

I have a purely symbolic construction. I have rid myself of the non-symbolic and consequently of all precise meaning. It is of course claimed that a "purer" poetry is the result; by banishing prose meaning only poetic communication is left. But one might counter by saying that a modicum of prose meaning is essential to allow poetic communication to take place, as some chemical reactions will happen only in the presence of another material which itself remains unaffected.

Mr. Barker's poetry strikes me as an excellent example of talents too frequently thrown away. For Mr. Barker has very considerable talents; he has mastery of language and subtlety of rhythm, together with a careful technical adroitness in the management of internal rhyme and assonance, aphoristic compression and even a sort of wit:

Lie lifelong here at my left side,
Unspeaking and unspoken bride
For every side we lie beside
Satisfies and is satisfied.

There is intellectual control here, but it is purely technical. The subtlety is wasted when we don't know what it is about. Indeed, it is only an impression of subtlety, for we cannot weigh true subtlety except in relation to an ascertained meaning. Mr. Barker is especially irritating because he gives ample evidence of an ability to write what we might call "metaphysical poetry", but he refuses to write it—unless, of course, he hasn't any ideas. We are constantly led to expect a poetry that will yield its meaning to close analysis, but analysis is baffled by the absence of what I have termed direct referents. The sort of stuff he habitually writes is too easy for his undoubted poetic abilities. He is a master of "great phrases"—"And westward a memory carries all love away"—but great phrases lose

most of their significance when they are not placed in an understandable context; all they can exact is a generalised "stock response" instead of precise appreciation. Some poems in this collection certainly do yield a meaning to close analysis: *The Five Faces of Pity* (especially number 4), the *Verses for the 60th Birthday of Thomas Stearns Eliot* (which make a pleasant and serious use of parody), and *On the Approaching Birth of a Child to Friends*. These are among the best poems because they have a certain intellectual coherence, though the best phrases probably occur elsewhere. If Mr. Barker would cultivate intellectual clarity without discarding his lyric impulse and virtuosity of image and phrase, he would produce truly memorable poetry. Probably this will come with a more positive attitude to life itself. The present collection is monotonous in content; so far as I can judge, it is an extended complaint against life; the imagery, though varied, is not varied enough; and we are never permitted to reach out beyond the closed circle of the writer's mind—there is no objective presentation of the outside world. None the less this is an interesting volume, and, because it is as good as it is, I am anxious to insist that Mr. Barker would do better still with a clearer vision and a firmer grasp of the nature of poetic communication.

Much of what I have said of Mr. Barker applies also to Mr. Lowell, though the flavour of their writing is very different. Mr. Lowell lacks the aphoristic compression, the witty turns, of Mr. Barker, but his imagery is more varied. His rhythms suggest strength rather than delicacy; he has a much greater range of material and, in spite of a prevailing tone of savage disgust, there is more variety of feeling than in Mr. Barker. Above all, there are poems where he breaks out of his mental enclosure and for a few moments brings the real world to us. This is especially so when he deals with the sea and sea-coast: it is Mr. Eliot's region and the verse has a faintly Eliotic tang:

> Sailor, can you hear
> The Pequod's sea wings, beating landward, fall
> Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall
> Off 'Sconset, where the yawing S-boats splash
> The bellbuoy, with ballooning spinnakers,
> As the entangled. screeching mainsheet clears
> The blocks . . .
> The winds' wings beat upon the stones,
> Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush
> At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush
> Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones
> Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast
> Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East.

Rhythm and "word music" excellently reinforce the meaning. Mr. Lowell is American and a few topographical and historical notes would assist the English reader. With these, the earlier poems (as I presume they are, since they come first in the book) would be fairly comprehensible. But Mr. Lowell appears to have declined in ten years from a sensitive, strong and at times original writer into the familiar psycho-analytical would-be sophisticate, whose nonsense verses are ten-a-penny in any journal:

> It was her toy's
> Fragments: her cockatoo. She yelled.
> The whisky tumbler in her hand
> Became a brand.
> Her pigtails that her Aunt had belled
> To tell us she was coming, flashed and tinkled.

This is from the last, presumably latest, poem. Mr. Lowell should meditate on his own rather distinguished achievement in *The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket* and then re-assume the disciplined responsibility of his earlier style. Presumably he is a Roman Catholic, and religious experience adds a dimension to his poetic range. If I am right in this assumption, then consistency would demand from him a respect for reason, and therefore for reasoned communication in his poetry. Mr. Lowell has so much of the raw material and of the craft of poetry—he is potentially a more important writer than Mr. Barker—that it is sad to contemplate the futile nightmare verses of his latest phase. Perhaps, however, he is young enough to recover.

S. L. Bethell.

# CURTAIN RAISERS

*Sappho:* A Play in verse *by* LAWRENCE DURRELL. (FABER, 10/6)

*Deus Loci:* A Poem *by* LAWRENCE DURRELL. (DI MAIO VITO, Forio, Ischia)

*Poems From China:* Translated by WONG MAN. (Hongkong: CREATION BOOKS. London: HIRSCHFELD BROS., 7/6)

Mr. Durrell, covertly one of the most influential of contemporary poets, suffers from overt neglect. His special tone of voice, his special irony and his special rhetoric have been cropping up or creeping out, unacknowledged, lately, in the work of several poets who deserve less publicity. Mr. Durrell has been throughout his career an almost permanent exile. Thus, while he has been unfairly overlooked, he has been able to develop a highly individual style. Like Mr. Barker (in other respects a very different poet) Mr. Durrell seldom writes a poem unmarred by some aberration of taste (the poetry is always much greater than the poems). *Sappho* is the first full-length dramatic essay of this essentially dramatic poet. It is not wholly satisfactory as a play, even as a play for reading. It is too long. It is uneven. There are times when the verse becomes stiffly pedestrian or runs flat. Sometimes Mr. Durrell seems to be in too much of a hurry; sometimes he seems to tire. But there are lines and whole passages of great power. As a gloss on a fragment of history, as a piece of imaginative biography, *Sappho* is of considerable interest. Sappho herself does not appear to advantage here as a poet; and as a personality she is overshadowed by other characters. Mr. Durrell has enjoyed himself more, and so written more convincingly, in depicting the buffoonery of Diomedes and the fatalism of Pittakos. Undoubtedly a most stageable play could be cut out of this overloaded volume. Read as verse, this book, and the privately-printed ten stanzas of *Deus Loci,* add disappointingly little to an achievement already pitched very high by the author of *Cities, Plains and People.* If these are time-marking works, they are still evidence of uncommon experience and sensibility and of much, though not quite enough, hard technical work. Those readers who meet Durrell here for the first time will find either of these works an eye-opener. I can think of few poets of Mr. Durrell's generation who show, still, greater promise; or those whose works are better worth collecting, and re-reading.

Here, one would say, is something simply made to the hand of Mr. Paul Jennings—("Oddly Enough," in the *Observer*)—whose light touch on matters of national gravity weekly confirms and blesses that innocence which so many lettered persons affect, in our age of specialisation, towards things outside the orbit of their métier. Scarcely a page of this anthology could not be made to yield its quota of baffling, superreal, side-splitting imbecilities. The kind of laughter termed "helpless" is guaranteed. It is a wow! But the affairs of "Chinamen" are, alas, no longer laughing matter. Even jokes of the "Chink-in-the-Iron-Curtain" order must for some time remain taboo. A pity; because if this little book cannot attain a *succès fou,* it seems unlikely that it will receive any serious notice. And in intent it is quite serious. There is a sensible introduction. With a hopelessly inadequate mastery of English, the author has made a sincere attempt to "illustrate the course of evolution of Chinese verse through tribal, feudal, and imperial to the present revolutionary phases." Like Mr. Payne's *White Pony* it covers the millennia which separate the *Shih Ching* from Mao tse Tung. In most of his versions Mr. Wong Man has tried to reproduce not only the concision but even the tone-patterns of the originals:

*Weed grass weed root.*
*Spuds clinking true*

Anyone who has ever tried to translate Chinese poetry will be aware of the impossibility of combining such ambitions with verbal accuracy. The one must suffer at the expense of the other. In other poems the author has sought out archaic poeticisms:

*O cousin and near one,*
*Companion in poesies,*
*Erst helpmate of more tender years . . .*

I would suggest, however, that this tragi-comic volume is matter for rather more than ribaldry or commiseration. It provides, for those interested in translation problems, original texts of many deservedly well-known —and some undeservedly unknown—Chinese poems. And for the plain reader there are (aside from the unconscious fun, and the fascinating biographical footnotes) distinctly new flavours :

Oft would I stay up nights to admire
Plum blossoms or write rhymes to please
the fair :
Delicate rouge scribed I on bridal scarves
For a return sparkling vintage rare.

(Who among us could reproduce the English classics in Chinese?) This endearing curiosity among anthologies is, of course, not likely to be everybody's pidgin.

HUGH GORDON PORTEUS.

# AMERICAN, IRISH AND DUTCH

*Celebration at Dark by* WILLIAM JAY SMITH. (HAMISH HAMILTON, 6/-)

*The Season's Pause by* W. J. STRACHAN. (SECKER AND WARBURG, 7/6)

*Job: The Man of the Rubble by* H. VAN WAGENVOORDE. (FORTUNE PRESS, 6/-)

"Celebration at Dark" is Mr. Smith's second book of poems; his first was published in the United States in 1947, and examples of his work have appeared since then in some English publications. This volume will leave English readers in no doubt of his considerable talent.

His verse obvously derives in large measure from 17th-century models. One is struck first of all by the poise and technical assurance of his work, its conscious grace and urbanity. With this go a purity of diction and an awareness of implication that confirm the influence of Marvell, probably through Mr. Eliot, of whom there are echoes here and there. These influences are blended with a naturally subtle rhythmic sense to produce poetry of style and clarity, such as this :

On the islands which are Solomon's I sometimes see
A swift, black bird which on wild pepper feeds;
And having reached a mild satiety,
Casts off its song like a merry widow's weeds.

The quality of wit in "mild satiety" is characteristic and to be expected in a poet whose sources are such as I have suggested. It permeates Mr. Smith's imagery, and is given full scope in the sophistication of "Divine Comedy" :

The rhododendrons in the garden are
Clowns, not flowers : those colours were
Meant for circuses; the sky's a tent
Which cannot long hold out against the rain.

Stress and pause are skilfully handled here, and the provocative conceit does, I think, succeed.

Mr. Smith, however, is occasionally too clever, choosing images which display more ingenuity than relevance. Chrysanthemums are "like the heads of shaven Danes"; falling leaves "gather there Like China's universities before the gate"; a zebra is "like a convict cutting corners." In a poem called "Roses," beginning rather facetiously :

Accustomed as I am to certain flowers,
I cannot quite make out what roses say . . .

we find the second verse toppling into something like affectation :

I heard them with a cock-a-doodle-doo,
And when I saw the sun, a cruiser, sink,
The Red Sea parted : we were cut in two.

Apart from these occasional lapses, however, Mr. Smith exhibits an unusual degree of discipline and accuracy of perception. He has a vivid visual sense, particularly for colour

and light. Sometimes this finds romantic expression :

Galileo, Galilei,
In a flowing scarlet robe,
While the stars go down the river
With the turning, turning globe . . .

Sometimes it carries satiric implications :

In an aquarium above the bar, the fish,
In their nefarious necktie colours,
Ancestral, swim.

One cannot say that Mr. Smith is original in the sense of being an innovator : one can easily point to the archetypes on which his technical skill and deliberate poise are modelled. Nevertheless, he has mastered his medium thoroughly, and informs it with an interesting irony, precision of observation and expression, and often a gaiety refreshing to encounter.

"The Season's Pause" contains fifty-four poems, pleasant enough in a limited way. Mr. Strachan's main preoccupation is with the external world of nature. He is perceptive, with a naturalist's eye for detail, but his perception is rarely illumined by any strong personal vision. There is a good deal of accurate and sometimes vivid description, but no communication of intense experience or revealed significance. Mr. Strachan observes and describes, and that, on the whole, is that.

The prevailing lack of pressure behind the verse is reflected in the medium itself. Traditional forms are handled in a conscientious but undistinguished manner. In this, for example :

Up on this moor above the Zennor road
I, as you once were, a stranger trod,
Casting about among the granite boulders,
That knew your lean limbs, the caped shoulders,
The birdlike eyes through which we saw so much
As we see more stirred by a poet's touch . . .

the movement is nerveless to the point of monotony, and the rhymes dull, rather than stimulate and control, the reader's response. Mr. Strachan's free verse, moreover, frequently betrays a striking lack of organisation. Here is an example from "Winter Close-up" :

tits exploit their parachutist tricks
and a resplendent missel-thrush
stationed on a branch,
more calmly desperate,
with non-committal eye
watches his moment . . .

It is difficult to see why this should not have been written as prose.

By no means all of the verse in this volume is of this order. I like this, for example, from "Battersea, 1948" :

Three sculptured forms among the pillared trees,
Timelessly anxious in their prison of stone,
The heavy drapery about their knees
Echoing the burden kindred to each one . . .

And the first poem in the book, "The Dream," has an urgency of impulse and a close-knit quality that give it distinction; to quote it in part would not do it justice, and space precludes quoting the whole.

I think Mr. Strachan's book would have been better had it been smaller. He is very much an occasional poet—the ballet, a play, a Hopkins poem : all these receive due celebration—and he finds occasions too readily. When he has something urgent to say, however, he says it effectively enough.

Mr. Van Wagenvoorde's portentously titled book contains nine poems prefaced by an essay on existentialism. The main point of the latter I gather to be this :

"Where Impressionism was based on receptive susceptibility, Expressionism on active explosion, Existentialism aims to include both in a polar order."

Thus enlightened, I went on to consider the poetry, and found that a great deal of it was, as I had feared it might be, turgid, self-conscious and obscure. The main theme of the verse appears to be this :

Ripeness is in the hands of the losers,
From ruins of a lost world the thought
Bursts free in atomic rapture,
Climbing the mystic spirals to God.

These four lines are representative of the best work in this volume and show, I think, evidence of talent. The crudity of the

following is, however, unfortunately characteristic of a great deal more :

The minutes' reality
Is throbbing fertility,
The rhythm of the rains,
The seed in the veins :
Electricity in cells
Where protoplasm swells
Charged and stewed
By magnetic fluid.

The final rhyme, one presumes, is due to the fact that Mr. Van Wagenvoorde is a Dutchman and not entirely familiar with English. But though this may explain, I cannot feel it justifies the offence to the ear. Moreover, the author appears to have a wide knowledge of, at any rate, the less frequented sections of our vocabulary, as witness this :

I speak to souls in phosphoric sheets
Their breath smells ash and sulpher,
My wounds are with theirs in osmotic balance,
My lips taste with theirs commemorative pulver.

Whether the spelling of "sulpher" is the author's or the printer's responsibility I don't know. If it is deliberate, for the sake of the rhyme with "pulver," I can only say what I feel of the book as a whole : that while I admire the author's industry, I rather regret the result.

JACK DALGLISH.

# FROM RED TO BLACK

*Actfive*, ARCHIBALD MACLEISH (BODLEY HEAD, 7/6); *The Red Heart*, JAMES REANEY (MCLELLAND AND STEWART LTD., Toronto); *Diamond Cut Diamond*, EWART MILNE (BODLEY HEAD, 7/6); *Mountains Beneath the Horizon*, WILLIAM BELL (FABER AND FABER, 8/6, edited with an introduction by John Heath-Stubbs); *Seventy Cantos*, EZRA POUND (FABER AND FABER, 25/-).

*The Red Heart* is not a Communist plot nor the *Seventy Cantos* a subtle piece of Fascist propaganda, though certainly they are the "newest" of these books. Mr. MacLeish, the American Liberal, having overcome his period of Public Speech and official pronouncements, has returned to his privacy and his loneliness—a feeling of man engulfed by history and time, which he purveys very well if a little hopelessly. He is perceptive, scrupulous, neat, and, in his more private poems, even unexpectedly simple, as in *Poem in Prose*. (His titles are not good.) Nor does his public conduct seem to square very well with his private utterances, *The Spanish Lie* and *Brave New World* being, surely, enough to have him jettisoned among the boos and hisses.

"Freedom that was a thing to use
They've made a thing to save
And staked it in and fenced it round
Like a dead man's grave."

A dangerous book! Yet, perhaps, the best of those here as poetry.

Mr. Milne is, comparatively, a rough diamond. The unofficialised MacLeish of Ireland, perhaps, known for an equally brazen tongue. Yet in this selection the diamond's been polished up, and the real MacLeish is both the redder and the subtler. Mr. Milne is always a disappointing poet. He lacks Mr. MacLeish's delicacy of touch and finesse. (And there is too much Yeats.)

Mr. Bell's muse rings with a meticulous and classically swathed clapper in muffled and formal tones. He rings in not the new, but the old; and yet at times his language and use of metaphor is both more modern and

sharper than that of his elders and betters. If Mr. MacLeish's verse drifts sinuously and dexterously towards its point almost unnoticed, Mr. Bell's makes itself known in no uncertain manner by its proud and deliberate gait. Both make a good deal of use of echoes.

As for the "master of decadence," Mr. Pound rings out his mad pæan on all the bells. Larded with private references and Chinese script, the Cantos are certainly difficult to read; they are certainly rewarding, too, in small snatches; yet only alas! in small snatches. (Often, small snatches of somebody else or of paraphrase.) Like Mr. MacLeish, he too is obsessed by history—like, perhaps, all thinking Americans. They have so little of their own. (The unthinking are possessed by power—and they have too much!) Mr. Pound certainly has in this mammoth poem a grand design, but it is, uncomfortably, in its whole like Christopher Smart's—a design which rewards one with snatches of inspiration among intolerably lengthy lists. Our bureaucrats should be pleased to find that their mania for filing systems has spread so far (much more so than the terrible red propaganda) among the reaches of higher thought. (Or is it the other way round?)

Mr. Reaney's red heart is no doubt in the right place, but his verse shows more earnestness than accomplishment. He has some wit, he shares the modern attitude of his contemporaries (this, it would seem from the publisher's claims, must be new to Canada), his dominant theme is "alienation," "Man is unwillingly conceived . . ." etc., and he has an occasional sharpness of image. But his verse is often raw, often imitative, and seldom well-finished. (The endings of his poems are often notably bathetic.) It does show some promise.

It can be seen, even from this brief sketch, that all these very dissimilar books share a great deal—what the savage would call the "decadence of our culture" or "the disease of our times"—both a malaise and a habit, little bits picked up here and there, jackdaw-like, stored, mulled over, and disgorged as symptomatic symbols of our civilization or as illustrations, woven into a poetic structure, of history and the theory of civilization. Mr. Pound gains majesty of design by having more bits in store and a genius for paraphrase and near-translation; the younger men merely imitate; and Mr. MacLeish has evolved a technique of echoing at remove which, if not quite honest, is often the most effective. But the savage is, of course, unfair. The problem and truth, which can never be evaded or got round, is that the poetry of any time must, one way or another, reflect its times; and the better it does so the better it is likely to be. That is what makes *Actfive* such a dangerous book and in its minor way quite a good one. It is what makes criticism of contemporary poets for the crimes of their times irrelevant and silly. It is what shows up the limitations of the over-compendious Cantos. And it is what, above all, makes Mr. Heath-Stubbs' introduction to Mr. Bell's poems so deliciously —though, I feel, not at all intentionally— funny.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

# CURRENT PERIODICALS

*The Hudson Review*

The bulk and appearance of this American quarterly are so impressive as to overawe the humble English reader accustomed to see one modest native literary periodical after another fold up for lack of support (or is it for lack of really lively and original material?). The English literary scene, in its public and social manifestations at any rate (we do not know what masterpieces may still lie stuffed in the bottom drawers of some writers' desks), looks pretty drab, and would be drabber still but for such bright gleams as the long-overdue recognition of Mr. Roy Campbell as a major poet, the recent productions of Mr. George Barker and the deflation of some of the more bogus reputations of the dismal thirties. Nevertheless, the autumn number of this review is occupied for the most part with an examination of English writers (Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence), which suggests that what really matters in literature, still begins

and grows on this side of the Atlantic. And this impression is by no means destroyed by an article carrying the intriguing title, "Brazilian Modernism"; for it turns out that what looks fearfully "modern" in sunny Rio is already a bit tatty in old-fashioned "Yirrup."

*Nine*

"We merely say that a critic should think a long time before he presumes to condemn an author whom a great many generations have admired for a great many reasons," writes one of the Editors of this enterprising journal in a recent number. And with this judicious attitude no one will surely quarrel, though the subsequent argument does not altogether make clear why the sentence did not stop after the word "author." The task of our generation, it appears, is to establish a new relation to the past; and, moreover, "until this relation is established we cannot even understand the present." The Editors, bent on re-drawing the literary map, are nothing if not ambitious. They announce for the re-education of their readers in 1951 "2,000 years of Latin" and in 1952 "3,000 years of Greek," all designed to show the continuity of a great tradition. One cannot but admire the fresh and vigorous attitude apparent in the pages of this magazine even if one views the execution of such a programme with some anxiety.

*The Cornish Review*

Compared to the bustle and combative tone of *Nine,* this journal wears a subdued air of rural serenity. For all that, it frequently contains valuable and interesting contributions ("Cornish Wrestling," "My Life and Work with Wrought Iron," in which the author describes how from the humble apprenticeship of general smithing and shoeing horses he developed into a first-class craftsman handling a difficult medium), which if they have only an indirect bearing on the modish hullabaloos in Bohemia, can nevertheless be recommended to the attention of our scribes. These "regional" magazines, *Poetry Ireland, Poetry Scotland, Poetry Commonwealth, Arena,* an intelligent New Zealand production, *Outposts, Bim,* a cultural journal from the West Indies, are other examples, all of which have a special importance these days of levelling-down and the rule of the semi-literate masses. They assist the process of decentralisation, which is important in literary no less than in political matters.

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