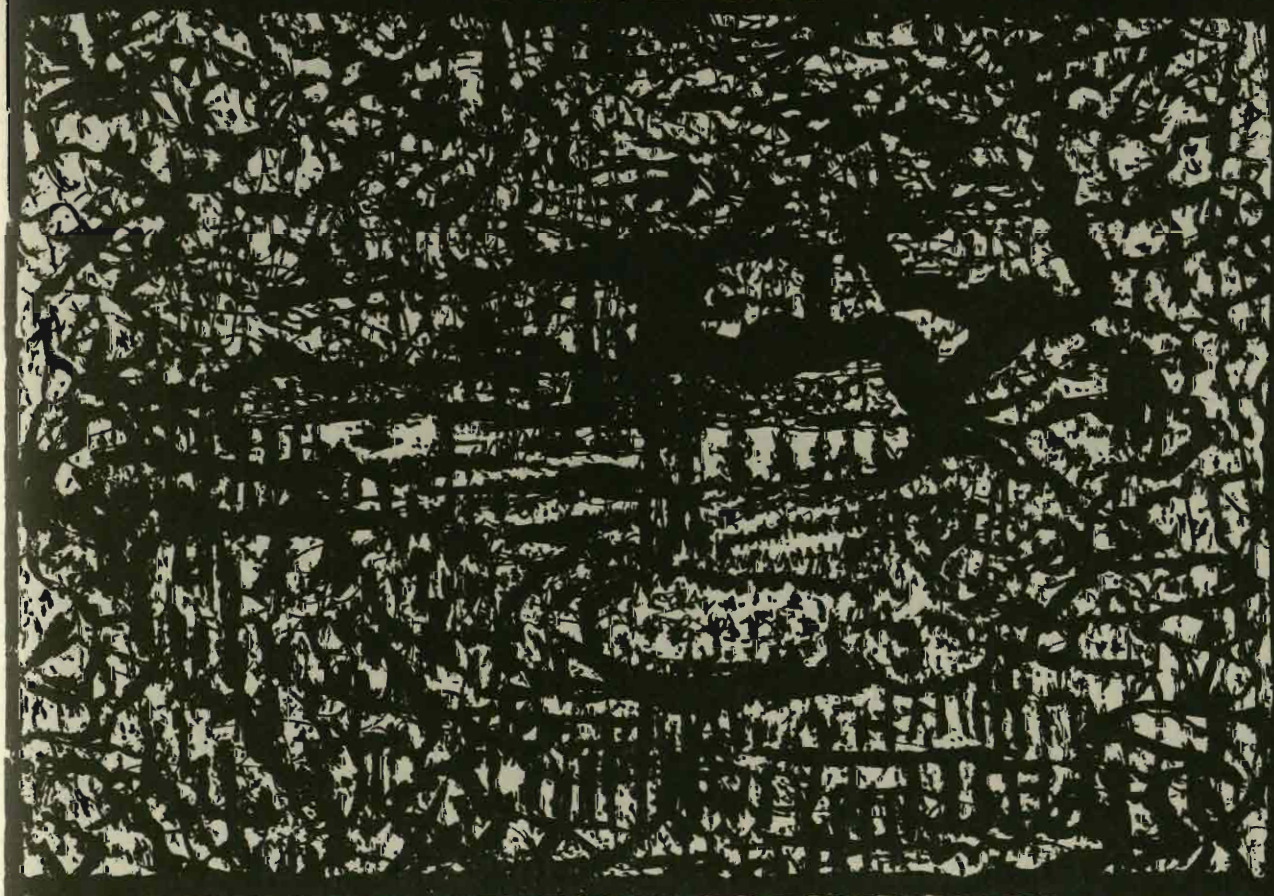
POETRY

LONDON



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POETRY

LONDON

Edited by RICHARD MARCH and NICHOLAS MOORE

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TO MAKE AND COUNTERFEIT

"A Poet," wrote the author of one of the first critical treatises on Poetry and Rhetoric in our language,* "is as much to say as a maker." Moreover, he continues somewhat blasphemously, like God the poet makes things out of nothing, he conjures them out of his own brain without copy or example, without mould or pattern. The emphasis here, we should add, is on *things*. In composing poetry the author makes an object which acquires an existence in its own right.

Of course a poem is about something, it must have a subject, and very often the subject is complex, elusive and blurred. But the complete poem itself, is or should be, a unique and definable thing, distinct and unrepeatable. Now we do not know precisely that God created the world out of nothing, without mould or example, save on the authority of the Book of Genesis. Still less can we assert that God has a brain to create anything out of. And on this point indeed our Elizabethan critic is a little confused, for he goes on to suggest that though the poet makes his poems out of nothing, their material should be an imitation of the world around him. But the analogy, even if impure, enables him to insist on the importance and dignity of the profession, and for that reason it is worth while recalling his argument at a time when poetry, and indeed the Art of Letters as a whole, are seriously threatened.

> "The premises considered, it giveth to the name and profession (of poet) no small dignity and preheminence, above all other artificers, Scientificke or Mechanicall. And neverthelesse without any repugnancie at all, a Poet may in some sort be said a follower or imitator, because he can expresse the true and lively of everything is set before him, and which he taketh in hand: and so in that respect is both a maker and a counterfaitor: and Poesie an art not only of making, but also of imitation."

Therefore, to counterfeit in a true and lively manner that which is set before him, in other words, what he sees around him, and make out of it something new, whole, complete, a thing in itself, that, it would seem, is the business of the poet.

We are prompted to recur to this premiss after noting that much of the poetry that comes our way, and a great deal of what appears in print nowadays, has not been *made* in this sense. It is nothing in itself, it is merely about something or other. The subject is very often transmuted into poetic expression, wholly or in part, but it rarely achieves complete objectification. The poet seems to be uncertain how, or even what, to imitate in a true and lively manner, and in consequence the counterfeit lacks conviction and significance.

* The Arte of English Poesie (1589)

What is to be the characteristic accent of the poetry of the nineteen-fifties? Or are we to have no new poetry in this decade, but will continue to draw our inspiration from the work of the major performers of fifteen or twenty years ago? It is not the business of the critic, still less of magazine editors, to tell the poet how or what to write. He can only observe what is happening, compare, analyse and evaluate. The weakness of much contemporary verse may not be unconnected with the fact that it does not attempt to imitate accurately, and that to do this the poet must be a master of artifice. Many of our poets rely too much on vague subjectivity, on the description of emotional states that may be intense or subtle or commonplace, in words that have little or no resilience, colour, emotive quality or wit. It does not really matter how "artificial" the means so long as the words exercise a magical spell:

"Where the pale children of the feeble sun
In search of gold through every climate run,
From burning heat to freezing torments go,
And live in all vicissitudes of woe."

Insofar as these lines imitate an action they are effective counterfeit, though the substance and the means employed to give expression to it, are artificial in the highest degree.

"Under the trees the summer bands were playing;
'Dear boy, be brave as these roots,' he heard them saying:
Carries the good news gladly to a world in danger,
Is ready to argue, he smiles, with any stranger."

Quite apart from the banal tone, the deliberate gaucherie of a poet intent on posturing as a permanent adolescent, incapable of mature thought or emotion, the counterfeit here is false, though an obvious attempt has been made to lend a freshness to the flat words by the special manner of their employment.

* * *

A considerable proportion of the poetry that is written now or at any time, and certainly much sent in to magazines for inspection, is poetry that revolves round or originates in, sexual emotion. Such feelings are always of absorbing interest to those who experience them, and frequently to those who are asked to share them, but it is far from simple to make a poem out of them. The sincerity of the poet is rarely in question, but for the effectiveness of the counterfeit, it is neither here nor there. He may as well have imitated another's feelings rather than his own.

"A Poet, mounted on the Court-Clown's back,
Rode to the Princess swift with spurring heels,
And close into her face, with rhyming clack,
Began a Prothalamion;——"

This perhaps describes the process of making an erotic poem better than all the despairing sighs and groans of frustrated passion that escape the breast of the Romantic versifier.

The best counterfeit, the most "real" effect is often achieved by the use of extreme artifice, as Pope so often demonstrates.

Eloise, after having taken the veil, discovers that what she had supposed her religious devotion, was still the unquenchable emotion inspired by Abelard (now mutilated, separated from her and unattainable):

"What means this tumult in a Vestal's veins?
Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?
Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?
Yet, yet I love!"

At the mere thought of Abelard, however ineffectual and distant, passion begins to throb once more in her body no matter how she tries to resist the feeling. She recalls how their ardour overrode all interdictions:

"How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,
Curse on all laws but those which love has made?
Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,
Spreads his light wings and in a moment flies.
Let health, let honour——"

And overwhelmed suddenly by the realisation of the hollowness of the substitute by means of which she had endeavoured to subdue her passion, she gives herself up once more to the one experience that had been the vital principle of her existence :

" Yet then, to those dread altars as I drew,
Not on the Cross my eyes were fixed, but you :
Not grace, or zeal, love only was my call.
And if I lose thy love, I lose my all.
Come ! with thy looks, thy words relieve my woe ;
Those still at least are left me to bestow.
Still on that breast enamoured let me lie,
Still drink delicious poison from thine eye,
Pant on thy lip, and to thy heart be press'd ;
Give all thou canst—and let me dream the rest."

In that last cry of Eloise swooning at the memory of her lover, despair and ecstasy are mingled. It expresses the tragedy of all parted lovers. It is worth remarking that seldom in poetry has such a sexual experience been imitated by more unrealistic means, a fact which we recommend to the attention of the over-enthusiastic apostles of " living speech," " naturalism " and other dogmas of the hour. A close analysis of counterfeit, however, is beyond the scope of these notes, and could be more usefully examined in a new treatise on Rhetoric.

R.M.

* * *

We regret to announce that after this number POETRY LONDON will be suspended for a period of twelve months. The continuing rise in production costs and other difficulties facing the publishing trade, (to which attention has frequently been drawn of late and more particularly by Mr. Geoffrey Faber in an ominous article in a recent issue of the *New Statesman & Nation*) press with special severity on a magazine such as ours. We can only hope that in the coming year conditions may gradually improve, so that a resumption of publication may once more be considered as a practical possibility.

The Editors take this opportunity of thanking contributors for their faith, their patience and their zeal, and our subscribers and readers for the unfailing support and encouragement they have given us throughout these difficult years.

JAMES REEVES

HAD I PASSION TO MATCH MY SKILL

Had I passion to match my skill,
I would not hear the worm complain,
The worm that frets and mumbles still
In the corridors of my brain.

The flames that burn inside my heart,
On what fuel do they feed?
I the secret would impart,
Had I skill to match my need.

Had I passion and skill
To match my daring will,
I would rise and seek
The stony path that scales the virgin peak.

Between my hands I hold my brain,
Between my ribs I nurse a fire;
Beyond my utmost step remain
The summits where the goats aspire.

Inside my brain the worm revolves,
The heart consumes inside my breast;
And so I sit, and nothing solves
The puzzles that are not expressed:

While at my feet old Faithful dwells,
Stretched out with one dull eye ajar,
A nose that forages for smells,
A tongue that moves from scar to scar.

FRAGMENTS OF A LANDSCAPE

The uninhabitable moon
Rejects her lifelong worshippers,
Who knelt upon the shore in times gone by
And raised their hands for pity and relief,
And who were long since turned to skeletons.

We walked together on the faultless strand
Eye in eye and hand in hand:
You could not see my mouth was full of sand,
Like a blind statue that could no more stand,
You could not hear the waves that beat
Tumultuous in the chambers of my heart,
Forcing their fragile walls apart,
Till I had no desire but to be
One with those kneeling bones
Among the sea-birds and the sea-worn stones.

GEORGE BARKER

POEM ON RETIRING INTO THE COUNTRY

To fly from the crying ghost
Here I have come to hide
A head and a heart that shake
In those tempests of memories
That living and loving evoke.
O wild winds of what was
Break through the breast and the bone
Crying remember, crying
Never remember never
For sirens sing on the rocks
Of the crystal recollection
And every human seaman
Smiling die to recapture
Those so utterly beloved
Utterly lost ones. All seas
Moan in a little shell
And all Time in a single
Memory. Here by a wood
With Aldworth over my head
I have laid down my board
And made my bed. The wind
Hums suddenly among
The ash and the sadder alder
Till I can hear again
Those day-breaking voices
Sing like swans out of every
Harp of the August tree
And every organ and leaf
Of body and mind. Cease,
Cease, aviary of loves,
And leave in the evening
The unlonely I alone.
O wilder worlds and wilder
Space fly crying from
That face behind the mask
Where all our griefs begin.
There is that universe
Evolving behind the eyes
That grinds its juggernaut gears
Through our remorse and over
The hundred shouting corpses
Whom no remorse revives.
Sweep, sweep across the sky
Red tempests of the heart;
Exact one lightning stroke
From the thunderhead of
Remembered love. The dogs

Howl at a farmyard gate
As the three-headed huntsman
Hounds us down. My love
Has hidden tomorrow among
The wood that I cannot see
And all that I can find
Is echoes, echoes. This stream
By which my old house stands
Like a cascade of faces
With a wringing of wrongs
Sings only to accuse.
The falling sky is mad
Over our kissing lives
As, brief in a butterfly
Of love we meet and die.
And so these eagles of peace
Rive, rend and destroy
The mnemonic demigod :
And all chains are limbs
And all nails are hands
And all locks are love
And all that we ever did
Is eagles at the heart.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

CAVE DRAWINGS

It is not the hunters who draw on the walls of caves,
But the old men, and the lame;
Not those who run in the sun,
But those on whose inner eyelids the die of the light
Has stamped a shape that in the night, the darkness,
Glows with stained-glass colours reflected from the brain.

A fire burns in a cleft, and no one knows
Whether the flames burrow into the shadow
Or the shadows flap about among the flame.
Frayed ropes of smoke
Chafe at a boy's throat,
Making him cough and choke,
But snatching a flint he scratches on the brand-bright rock
Two fore hooves and a lish, live mane,
And there in the crocketty light they seem to move.

NICHOLAS MOORE

ALTERATION

(" Love is not love which alteration finds ")

I

Poems are not the flowering of my wound;
My wound does not bear a blossom, it bleeds and festers,
A poor bud, nipped by the frost, and killed,
Remaining only to wither and fall away
When the sunlight laughs over the glistening leaves,
Like a withered hand or a brief tic,
Visible, though you conceal it as you may.
The beggar himself must know his wound's authentic.

Maimed, in the thoroughfare, draw bloodless pictures
Without a hand? How dare I shuffle the seed even
Of a minor poem to tell what flower I've willed
From the infirm heart, to grow without a sound,
In the mud and dirt to the flutterings of thieves,
To the pure and summer blooming of such lost heaven.

II

Tonight I am to be known by my lost power.
Tonight the past takes charge. Our love stood high,
O when our love stood high, in the dark pasture
The moving horses knew it in their shadows,
And the great tree moved his hands to greet the hour.
Clocks did not tick those dark and summer meadows
Away, as now when love's infirm and poor,
And each dim cheat goes hastening to her door.

Memory falters, tonight it's a weary sky
Who's watched such weakness loose the cleanest vows,
And the moon is old and wails for another task,
Like a spoilt child alone in a grown-up house
With the terrible fidgeting questions he dare not ask:
About truth, and whether both truth and the good may alter.

TERENCE HARDS

WORDS

That bird which was so cautious in the room
Flew down and followed quietly through the street.
Perched darkly at my shoulder he imposed on me
The weight and grievance of his own defeat.

I watched you less in sadness than in love,
Confused by so much to be said, but, caught
Within the sleepless seasons of your voice,
I knew this bird destroyed the words I sought.

Yet I had seen you hurry down the street,
The winds tormenting you with cries,
Hurrying away, always away,
With eyes averted from reflected eyes,

Meeting at each corner the same face,
Each time the same dark brow and bloodless cheek,
The echoed warning laughing through the night—
Then suddenly the bird flew off and I could speak.

Though dazed by wing beats close about our heads
I knew the city was alive with birds
But made no comment on their flight,
Foreseeing little welcome, then, for words.

BERNARD BERGONZI

METAPHYSICAL COUGH IN FOURTEEN LINES

. . . arte sarebbe uno specchio alla natura—ma uno specchio difformante.
Umberto Gilardoni

Life, like Art, the imposition of a certain form
upon the unrelated chaos;
the diverse and devious images of sense
must be connected and taught how to dance.

Pen in hand; a fog of catarrh in the head;
a pain in the side; love, potential
and unrealised, reclining in the heart;
and a modicum of worry infusing through the mind:

normal condition of growth; all's well.
I am yet I, still busy being; *L'Homme*
en Situation, with handkerchief to nose,
sliding the slender rope between Not Yet and Then.

But that is not enough to make a poem:
I have a cold, and cannot make a poem.

DAVID WRIGHT

A BALLAD FOR HARD TIMES

I may be no great shakes—but damn it all!
  Sometimes the Muse has turned her steps to me,
And I have listened to her dark footfall
  Where, quiet as a reed beneath a tree,
  I waited for her coming—sometimes she
Who is female and vagrant, in my ear
Sings what the public will not pay to hear.

Sometimes I think I ought to end it all,
  Because I cannot live by poetry,
Also because I know that people fall
  Like sacks of bricks for bards, when dead—and we,
  Esteemed, if unpaid, by society,
Are sure of not intoning from a bier
Words that the public does not like to hear.

Why don't I get a job that's cultural?
  The British Council, or the B.B.C.?
Or lecture blockheads in a county hall?
  Or write reviews or novels? T.S.E.
  Worked in a bank or something, didn't he?
I'll get a job, and find the time to spare
For words the public does not want to hear.

Sir, after office-hours I, like the clerk
  Who builds a fretwork model railway-station
Out of bus-tickets and old bits of cork,
  Hope to create a first-class piece of work,
And give it buckshee to the bloody nation.

A VISIT TO A POET

Recently I went to visit a poet in jail
(A place which, in two ways, reminded me of hell,
Being both hygienic and a dominion
Where everyone's responsibility has gone)
One who, justly imprisoned for injuring the State
By not joining the Army, preferring to try to write
Verses unlikely to sell, in abnormally good
Health, with a new suit of clothes, and with regular food,
Cut off from supplies of harmful alcoholic drink,
With paper and pen, with a room, and with time to think,
Everything, in fact, unnecessary to the Muse,
Suffers barren confinement on the outskirts of Lewes.

RICHARD CHASE

THE AMAZONS

Green and grey and gold
The eyes of the Amazons
Their long hair falls
About their bodies

Their breasts are round
And white and their arms
Encircle the rich pastures
Of the savage hills

They bathe in the streams
And wash their limbs
In the sunmasked waters
Under tumbling boughs

At night their voices
Sing into the morning
Shadows casting sound
Into the dark forest

Whom will they devour?
What rich prize carry
Into their loud caves
When autumn fades

A young man, a shepherd
Torn limb from limb
And cast in manhood
To the smothering wind

They dance at dawn
Upon the sunken sand
And breast to breast
Exalt in ecstasy

Is that a pipe at dusk
Of some lost herdsman?
The thickening woods
Reveal no footprint

Soft their lips apart
And their vast thighs
Conceal an older order
In the winding dance

The clouds close over
The slow moon rises
Wild eyes are covered
In the echoing dark

GAMEL WOOLSEY

ENDLESSLY ROCKING

The sea was shining and the swelling tide
Rose on the shingle and then fell away:
The liquid basin in a ceaseless sway.

The beach was pretty in its little boats,
Its playing children, spots of blue and red,
The sea gulls diving for the far-cast bread.

Swimming upon the flood, we saw the shore
Tiny and safe, the small world of a dream,
Where the wet pebbles shine and wet arms gleam.

Endlessly rocking, rocking us to rest,
The cradle of the waves that lull to sleep
The thoughts that haunt us and the griefs they weep.

Down, down! Beneath that glassy, yielding wall
Lies the old world we long for—*Underwave:*
The world of sleep, of silence, of the grave.

Let the sky go. Let the bright surface rise.
Over our care and trouble heals the sea,
Endlessly rocking, rocking endlessly.

THE STORY BEING ENDED

The story, being ended, now is clear;
The tragedy concealed in littleness
Shows its sharp bone;
The long dull weariness
Is suddenly revealed for what it was—
The martyrdom.
Saints find the route to heaven
By devious paths;
Sinners can go that leafy road to hell—
Is there a third way through the wilderness?
A way to where the heart went,
Where the past
Is folded closely in a little space;
Back to the done, back to the failed and lost.
(Where was the turning that should not be taken,
What was the price to pay, and at whose cost?)

JON MANCHIP WHITE

THE LAMENT OF COUNT ORLO

Ended my going forth : my old wound burns,
  My body cannot last the autumn rains.
I feel its frivolous festoon of veins
  Weaken, and my spirit graveward turns.
Death coils around my heart and in my head,
  And I must soon resign my pride of birth
Beneath the glittering green skin of earth,
  And join the favourless and badgeless dead.

There comes a twilight whistle from the birds,
  A stag coughs where the matted uplands rise.
My thoughts are on dead men : their mackerel eyes,
  Their nervelessness, their utter loss of words.
My mind revolves obscure and ancient fears
  I have no courage or excuse to face
Nor any quick sensation of disgrace.
  The night is cold and all the stars are tears.

It was not always thus : Spring was my season,
  When yellow boughs would wave as I rode by,
Pelting with petal-kisses delicately
  Until I laughed and revelled without reason.
I was not made for dull, inactive winter
  When horsemen slop and flounder in the mire :
In gluttonous springtime, full of life and fire
  Would I fare forth to breathe warm air, and splinter

A lance or two with any that dared match
  His force with mine! Sometimes I lost my seat,
My head and harness broken in defeat,
  And seldom took the prize without a scratch;
But not for jousts alone I made my journey,
  Nor always was it fame for which I bled :
Often the coloured quilt and feathered bed
  Were spread behind the sharp jolts of the tourney,

For in those days my heart was a bank of roses.
  A terrace of steaming blossom, passionate, handsome,
A blaze of dazzling blooms, a riot of crimson,
  A sweet wild scarlet bonfire! Roses, oh roses,
Burnt to grey ash it shrivels now and closes,
  This great disconsolate heart of mine, insulted
By age where once in fierce youth it exulted :
  I mourn for the world, for the huge hot heart it loses!

Ah, once I knew the veiled persuasions of lust,
  And in the tawny impulse of desire
Toiled until night itself would pale and tire
  And dawn come faltering with a timid gust;
And day would bring me girls with jewelled hands
  Who offered strange meats decked with stranger roots
In tents where wineskins hung, and blocks of fruits.
  What wars and women I had, in many lands!

Yet was there one in that spring company
  Whose eyes were grey, whose mien was grave and grand,
Whose hands were pale, whose nunlike brows were bland:
  A creature choice and beautiful to see,
A special shape by Nature set apart,
  And fashioned certainly in pride and grace
To bear the ardours of a long embrace
  And solace the wandering fury of the heart;

And now toward her once again I turn,
  Aching with age and winter and the rain:
The stag coughs on the sodden moor again,
  The wet fox rustles in the dripping fern.
My love, I seek you in your little room.
  The night comes on. I shall not sleep alone.
I wait the infinite clasp of patient bone.
  Nor wounds nor memory burn within the tomb.

MARGARET SEATON

"MY LORDS, BE MERCIFUL TO A BROKEN REED."

So the ice-lipped philosopher,
he who called Love the child of Folly
and heard only the voice of reason,
in season, out of season,
till the sparrow that sang in the heart was dead
with Devereaux in the dust.

Thus the ice-lipped philosopher,
thrusting at melancholy:—
I carry within my head
a diamond smoother than bone,
as cold as a stone;
I would not betray that trust.

Out into the winter he must go
To stuff his heart with snow.

GAVIN EWART

BALLAD

A bedman to a bedgirl came
In the springtime of the year
Great solace was it then to them
To have each other there

For while the bellman beat his book
And politics ran wild
The bedman had another look
And she grew great with child

Sinister, sinister all without
And sinister all within
If a bedman's child has given a shout
And saved us all from Sin!

AFTER SYLVIE AND BRUNO

Little girls are loving
Lechers for a lark,
Dancing in the dark,
Going to the movies
With the smoothest smoothies,
Petting in the park.

Prostitutes are proving
Theorems in Greek,
Tap-dancing on teak,
Giving to the zealous
Hints that make them jealous
For another week.

Pederasts are panting,
Learning how to croon,
How to reach the moon,
Keener on forgetting
Than the bitter betting
Of an octaroon.

Bilious boys are banting
Wilfully to waste,
Teasing tongues with taste—
Vice is so inviting,
Eczema exciting
To the double-faced.

W. S. MERWIN

SUSPICOR SPECULUM

—to Sisyphus

Seeing, where the rock falls blind, this figure
At whispers swaying the drained countenance,
As might a shadow stand I have stayed an hour
To no sound but his persistent sibilance
Aghast, as should the populous dreaming head
See evils colder than the brain yet burn,
Or swift and tomorrow the enormous dead
Scatter their pose and, Sisyphus, return.
Patience betrays and the time speaks nothing. Come,
Pursed in the indigent small dark confess:
Is mine this shade that, to all hours the same,
Lurches and fails, marine and garrulous,
A vain myth in the winter of his sense,
Capable neither of song nor silence?

NEW YORK LETTER

It would be highly uplifting to report that what is going on here is a repetition of the orgy of creative activity in all the arts which marked the years immediately following the first World War. But in all truth this is not the case; we are in a period not of resurgence but of resuscitation. Among the novelists there are no new Hemingways, Faulkners, Fitzgeralds, or Wescotts. No young poets comparable to E. E. Cummings or Marianne Moore or Hart Crane. On the contrary the mood is precisely one of nostalgia for the epoch when these writers produced their first and most characteristic work. Is there any parallel in literary history for the prevailing craze about the Twenties? Usually a revival in the arts means a return to some more or less remote moment in the past—not to yesterday. And the cherished tradition has been for every "new" generation to kill off its fathers as quickly and painfully as can be arranged. Think of the blanket liquidation of the Nineties by Yeats, Joyce, and Eliot. It is quite disconcerting to those of us, now in the late forties or early fifties, who somehow managed to survive the era of Al Capone and "Rhapsody in Blue," of "The Waste Land" and Valentino's funeral, of Lindbergh's flight and bootleg gin. For having survived we are looked upon by *les jeunes* with the outraged incredulity of a paleontologist fishing an ichthyosaurus out of the Central Park lagoon. *Did you once see Fitzgerald plain?* Speaking for myself, antiquity bears down upon me with the spectacle of this acquaintance of my youth being elevated to nothing less than the status of culture-hero.

At the time of his death ten years ago not one of Scott Fitzgerald's books was in print,

and he was referred to by members of his own generation only as a figure of scandal. For reasons not fully to be understood he has become within the last year the subject of a best-selling novel ("The Disenchanted" by Budd Schulberg), a best-selling biography ("The Far Side of Paradise" by Arthur Mizner), and a collection of essays and reminiscences edited by Alfred Kazin. In addition all of his novels have been reissued and are being devoured in the colleges and universities. I participated recently at Columbia in a symposium on his work attended by two or three hundred wide-eyed students. What is all this about? Personally I am delighted that there is renewed interest in Fitzgerald, although regretting that it has taken on such excessive proportions. About half of it, I am afraid, is based on sensational and morbid aspects of his private life. At the same time there is no doubt that Fitzgerald rehearsed in his relatively brief career most of the contradictions of the American *mythos*: dissipation and remorse, shrewdness and naivety love of success and the sense of failure, the whoring after experience and disgust with its fruits. For our young people he is nearest to a scapegoat hero of anyone in recent times. He represents a glamorously terrifying reversal of the old American success-story. He points a lesson and adorns a tale.

But in saying this I should not give the impression that there is not a real basis for the Fitzgerald boom. For at his best he was a very good writer, in the strictest technical sense, deserving almost all of what is now being said about him. Even the confections whipped up for the trade are marked by a rare narrative cunning and an unseizable kind of charm. As Gertrude Stein sagely remarked, he was one of the few writers of his time who knew how to write sentences. He possessed an imperative and unfailing sense of style — which is not the same thing as merely having a style. And it is what I designate as the sense of style, without further help to the reader, which is most lacking in the younger people trying to write fiction and which attracts so many of them to Fitzgerald. If you skim through their products in the numerous little magazines and quarterlies now flooding the land, you will not find one out of a dozen of them suggesting that such a thing as style might exist. Instead the dead-pan of Kafka in translation droops on every page. Not to be unkind, but to illustrate the kind of thing which I have in mind, I offer the opening sentences of an item in one of our better literary organs:

"In a will made some years before he died; my father directed that his body was to be cremated and that there was to be no religious ceremonial of any kind at his funeral. A later will, drawn up during his final illness, did not mention these points; I suppose the imminent possibility of death may have made him reluctant to go into details.... In any case, it was readily decided to carry out the instructions of the earlier will in this respect. Any other course would have been the grossest absurdity..."

Hastily I should add that not all the prose being written here at present is as bad as that; there are many heartening exceptions. For reasons unknown to me the return to language has been especially conspicuous among the women writers—Eudora Welty, Jean Safford, Eleanor Clark, and Shirley Jackson. All of these "know how to write sentences." This winter has seen a tender and marvellously muted composition by James Agee, "The Morning Watch," which is about the finest thing of its kind which I have come upon over here in the last decade.

I don't mean this to sound like a left-handed compliment; it is simply a way of making a transition to the current state of poetry on these shores. For the Agee story depends largely on the poetic texture of its language; it is a kind of exfoliated lyric, striving towards a rendition of ecstasy. As poetry it is superior to most of what is now being offered us in the name of poetry. If Agee's story suffers in narrative movement through the density of its imagery and its rhythmical pace, most recent verse lets one down by a corresponding emptiness and laxity. The current fashion here is a cultivated sloppiness of every kind; the final effect is of an unearned facility. I much fear that the influences of Auden and the later Eliot, both unassimilated, have been among the causes. Except in the writing of

Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, and a few others there has been no truly distinctive accent in American verse lately. My own advice is that the poets systematically look for some unquarried literary deposits of the past, the more distant past, and avoid reading any verse written after 1900.

Let us end with a dim but well-meaning note of cheerfulness. Ever since the close of the war it has been my agreeable lot to discourse on Hopkins and Yeats and Joyce and Eliot and the others at an unorthodox educational institute in downtown New York. Many of my listeners have been veterans on government subsidy, less concerned with credits or degrees than with finding answers to their questions. Nearly all of them have been unusually intelligent and responsive, some of them passionate in their search of a vocation. But what they all have in common is a predilection for blue dungarees—turned-up high at the cuffs, the more faded and dishevelled the better. Up and down the length of Manhattan, even in the cushier boroughs, they prowl in the official uniform of their generation. It is no matter of economy, for men's clothes are not too dear in New York. What deep social or aesthetic need is so appeased I do not pretend to fathom but suspect that there is something symbolical at work. May it be that in their refusal to don more conventional trappings they regster the desire not to appear *committed*—to anyone or anything? Having taken off army or navy uniforms, they prefer the bleached anonymity of their disguise to any of the more available alternatives. Or, better still, it may be the outward and invisible sign of their own inner availability. I do think that almost anything may be expected from such a generation—the dungaree generation.

WILLIAM TROY.

LETTER FROM SPAIN

I think that it is now possible, twelve years after war ended in Spain, to contribute a few notes towards the new generation of poets that have manifested themselves since 1939. Also, that it will be convenient to clarify a little the position of poetry in Spain in those twelve years, during which, it has hardly had the opportunity of becoming known beyond our frontiers. Such a situation was anything but satisfactory when peace came in April, 1939. War had mortally wounded and painfully mutilated the "body" of our poetry itself. Not only had Spain lost three great poets—Unamuno, Antonio Machado, Garcia Lorca—but many had emigrated to America, France or England from those who survived from the pre-war generations. Such was the case with Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, Rafael Alberti, Luis Cernuda, Leon Felipe, Manuel Altolaguirre, Juan Larrea, Juan José Domenchina, Pedro Garfias and Emilio Prados. Whilst Vicente Aleixandre, Dámaso Alonso and Gerardo Diego—apart from Antonio's brother Manuel Machado, who died a few years later—remained in Spain. A group of poets who became known shortly before the Spanish war, was that formed by Luis Rosales, Dionisio Ridruejo, Leopoldo Panero, Luis Felipe Vivanco, Ildefonso M. Gil and had not left Spain either. With them, Germán Bleiberg and Miguel Hernández—the only one who could have filled the enormous gap left by Garcia Lorca—died from a cruel illness. Meanwhile, the war put an end to the few poetical journals published in 1936 and the "Héroe" collection directed by the poet Manuel Altolaguirre had to suspend its publication.

It would, nevertheless, be a stupid error to believe that poetry's life was interrupted in Spain either in 1936 or 1939. Not all poets gave up writing verse when handling a rifle during our war and in any case, when fighting ended in 1939, poetry battled after such difficult years to find new voices in substitution of those lost. The years following the war showed an ardent search for poetry, an almost painful need of poetry felt by youth, a youth whose first experience of the world, war amongst brothers, had dabbed their souls with blood. Youth always needs poetry but

there are times when that necessity is felt more intensely than others. It was then that the tragic and painful experiences of war had driven many adolescents towards poetry with unusual ardour. But those youths who poured their souls in their verses for the first time, sang not the recent victory, glory or heroism, but the eternal feelings which all poets have always sung: above all, Love, then solitude, the scenery, nostalgia, nature, wealth . . . And it was not without seeking with emotion their contact with poets already sanctified who had remained in Spain: Dámaso Alonso, Vicente Aleixandre and Gerardo Diego. This personal contact reassured the new poets and more than once portrayed that magic discovery which, all of a sudden, reveals a poet's personality or awakens an ardourous vocation. 1940 and 1941 were years of search and uncertainty and were mainly characterised by those personal meetings and the tremulous encouragement of new juvenile voices. But at last in the years following came the sudden flourishing of poetical journals: "CORCEL," "GARCILASO," "ESPADANA" etc. Three collections of poetry "ADONAIS," "HALCON" and "PROEL" — began publishing books of young poets. "ADONAIS," which even now continues to be published and has just issued its 75th volume, revealed the majority of young poets who at present enjoy prestige in Spain, by granting an annual reward for poetry, but the masters had not remained idle in the meantime. Vicente Aleixandre published "Sombra del Paraiso" and the complete edition of a previous book "Pasión de la Tierra" in 1944 and in 1945, there was a second edition of "La Destrucción o El Amor" which won him the National Literary Prize in 1934. Aleixandre published a new book "Mundo a Solas" in 1950, with sketches by Gregorio Prieto, the painter. Dámaso Alonso on the other hand, published two books: "Oscura Noticia" and "Hijos de la Ira" after 20 years without publishing any poetry. And Gerardo Diego was producing a book almost yearly: "Poemas Adreda," "Angeles de Compostela," "Alondre de Verdad," "La Sorpresa," "Soria" etc. But the influence of Vicente Aleixandre has, above all, been decisive in the Spanish Poetical Movement of the post-war. Aleixandre has turned out to be the indisputable friend and master of Spanish poetical youth. The poet's home, situated in the Metropolitan Park of Madrid, facing the snow-covered peaks of the Guadarrama, has been a place of pilgrimage for young poets from all Spain. And there is no young poet coming over to Spain from Latin America who does not call to meet the author of "Sombra del Paraiso."

In so far as it concerns poets of the previous generation, that is, that which became known shortly before the Spanish war—I refer to the group formed by Leopoldo Panero, Dionisio Ridruejo, Luis Felipe Vivanco, Luis Rosales, Ildefonso Manuel Gil—their prestige has increased in these last years, during which, they have published books of real interest, the most influential of which is actually Panero. A younger poet very intimately linked with this group, José-Maria Valverde, revealed himself in one single book which came to renew our religious lyric in 1945, "Hombre de Dios." Another young poet, Carlos Bousoño, has written two books authentical in value: "Subida al Amor" and "Primavera de la Muerte."

Apart from Aleixandre's influence growing deeper each time, one must point out in regard to inclinations, the absolute decadence of the neo-classical movement which predominated during the first post-war years, whose mouthpiece of opinion was "Garcilaso," a periodical directed by the poet José Garcia Nieto. Young poets have fortunately given up the refined cult of the form to return once more to poetry more human in volume. A movement which opposed the "Garcilasistas" and acquired numerous followers, was that called *Tremendismo* which exhibited a violent reaction against the neo-classicism of "Garcilaso's" group. "*Tremendismo*" was characterised by the immeasurable use of words and the violence — often unreal — of poetical feeling surrounding love themes, whether these were religious or human, solitude, or the anguish and despair of the man of to-day. Existential emotion was not foreign to these poets who clustered around "Espadaña," the periodical directed by Victoriano Crémer and Eugenio de Nora, both interesting poets.

Both "Neogarcilacism" and "Tremen-

dism" are now out of fashion but the return of human poetry comes without violent and desperate gestures, to a poetry soothed down by hope and remembrance, just like the poets of the generation 1936, Panero, Rosales, Vivanco, etc. Antonio Machado's influence, together with Aleixandre's has been intense during these last years in which the influence of another great poet, Luis Cernuda, now in the United States of America, has been felt.

JOSE LUIS CANO.

POINTS OF VIEW

POUND

The Letters of Ezra Pound. Edited by D. D. PAIGE. (FABER & FABER, 25/-)

The influence of Ezra Pound upon the course of English poetry is a theme which will be discussed increasingly on the Anglo-American literary campus. For seldom—if ever—can one man's ideas have caused such a shift in the scale of established literary values, or one man's literary practice have influenced—at first or second hand—so wide a circle of writers. The influence of *Lyrical Ballads* came more from the Preface than from the poems themselves—neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge really having the courage of Wordsworth's declared convictions. But the influence of Ezra Pound comes infinitely less from his *Few Don'ts by an Imagist* than from a lifetime's achievement in literary sponsorship and literary friendship. The story of that lifetime is gathered together in the present handsome collection of Pound's letters, chosen and edited by D. D. Paige.

As the editor points out, Pound's correspondence was exclusively literary. His subject was one and the same, whether he wrote from London, Paris or Rapallo: it was the one subject that interested him—the craft of writing. And the principles upon which his own poetry was written stand out as true and significant to-day as they did when first he propounded them: "Poetry must be *as well written as prose*. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity). There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions. It must be as simple as De Maupassant's prose, and as hard as Stendhal's . . .Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act *by* the writer."

The London to which Pound had gravitated in 1908 was certainly an exciting place for any young writer to be. Ford Madox Hueffer in charge of *The English Review*, Orage in charge of *The New Age*, *The Egoist* emerging as Imagism faded, Yeats a friendly impressionable elder, Henry James and Hardy round the corner as elder statesmen . . . In such a circle, Pound moved easily and assertively. European Correspondent of *Poetry, Chicago*, his care was to send back home and get published all that was new and most vital among contemporary work. Always provided, of course, that it came up to his own high standard. As he wrote to Harriet Monroe in 1913: "Until 'we' accept what I've been insisting on for a decade, i.e., a universal standard which pays no attention to time or country—a Weltlitteratur standard—there is no hope. And England hasn't yet accepted such a standard, so we've plenty of chance to do it first." Any failure on the editor's part to abide by such a standard herself provoked storms of abuse, letters of resignation and every degree of impassioned pleading. "I want the files of this periodical to be prized and vendible in 1999. Quixotic of me! And very impractical?"

No—apparently neither Quixotic *nor* impractical! It was due to Pound's own efforts

that Robert Frost, H.D. and T. S. Eliot found their way into the pages of *Poetry*. "I was jolly well right about Eliot. He has sent in the best poem I have yet heard or seen from an American... He is the only American I know of who has made what I can call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself *and* modernised himself *on his own*. The rest of the *promising young* have done one or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither). It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calender."

Reading through those earlier letters, in fact, one is amazed at the number of them devoted to the interests of those in whom Pound believed. His instruction to Harriet Monroe to print this or that new writer, his abuse of her because she failed to give a suitable prize to Eliot, injunctions to Harriet Shaw Weaver to print Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* complete and "damn the censors," pleas to John Quinn to buy Gaudier-Brzeska sculptures and Wyndham Lewis paintings — nobody could have wished for a more disinterested advocate. But the years which Pound spent in London were soon overshadowed by the First World War. Ford Madox Hueffer and Harold Monro vanished into the army, as also did Wyndham Lewis—leaving Pound to preside over the publication of *Tarr*. Gaudier-Brzeska went out to die; so did T. E. Hulme, whose influence over his poetry Pound was never tired of acknowledging. There was much in the wastage and conduct of World War I to depress a neutral observer, and Pound refused to accept war values as ultimate values. He had said in 1914: "This war is possibly a conflict between two forces almost equally detestable. Atavism and the loathsome spirit of mediocrity cloaked in graft...But, but, but, civilisation after the battle is over..."

It was Pound's tragedy that he ultimately let the spirit of mediocrity and graft drive him into defensive exile at Rapallo. Graft, for him, was the kindest name for "usury" and the economics of Depression. Mediocrity was another name for the commercial publishing standards of London and New York. In so far as both were responsible for a lowering of cultural standards, both were to be furiously attacked. "What little life has been kept in American letters," he wrote to Felix E. Schelling in 1934, "has been largely due to a few men getting out of the muck and keeping the poor devils who couldn't at least informed. And then when one did hand the American publishing world the chance to take over the lead from dying England, the bastard wouldn't take it."

Anyone who was lucky enough to correspound with Pound during the thirties will know the corruscating and utterly outrageous style in which his later letters were couched. Even his interests and enthusiasms were stated in language which must be unique in the annals of literary correspondence. Wildly punning, mock-phonetic, mid-Western colloquialism, utter disregard of all normal punctuation, orthography and syntax, gibing, ribbing, needling and snook-cocking—his typescrawls (headed by Gaudier-Brzeska's challenging profile) showered down on their recipients like so many cultural block-busters. "Wal, I heerd the *Murder in the Cafedrawl* on the radio lass' night. Oh them cawkney woices, My Krissz, them cawkney woices. Mzzr Shakzpeer still retains his posishun. I stuck it fer a while, wot wiff the weepin' and wailin'. And Mr. Joyce the greatest forcemeat since Gertie. And wot iz bekum of Wyndham! My Krrize them cawkney voyces!" His critical acumen, in fact, however coyly concealed in the onion-skins of his prose style, remained shrewd and utterly impervious to outside suggestion. He mocked and derided all forms of pretentiousness (and could even apostrophize Eliot as "Eminent Udder") but he never once lost his almost pathological urge to win recognition for work in which he believed. His letters to Laurence Binyon on translating Dante and to W. H. D. Rouse on translating Homer are astonishing no less for their critical sense than for their eager disinterestedness. Most of all things on earth, however, Pound was concerned about the increasing neglect of the writer and the consequent decay of cultural standards on which he increasingly insisted. That the causes of all such decay were economic, Pound was passionately convinced. And all who refused to accept his own—or Major Douglas's—diagnosis of the economic

sickness were liable to excoriating abuse and denunciation. Equally so were the critics whose sense of economics induced them to favour standards that Pound considered unworthy—as witness his refusal to contribute to an anthology sponsored by the *Saturday Review of Literature:* Yr. weekly never opens up to what I consider decent opinion or sound criticism. You accept the worst infamies of American imbecility and superstitions without a murmur, or without any persistent effort to clean up the mess. Yr. proposed anth. is merely another effort (however delicate) to shove over more god damn'd sob stuff, personal touch, anything, absolutely anything, to shield yr. booblik from fact, what is printed on page . . . How the deuce do you expect me to swallow all that for the sake of a small sum of money?"

Reading through the crackling, sizzling pages of this correspondence, continually arrested by the originality and critical insight to which they bear witness, remembering all that Pound has meant, by art and advocacy, to contemporary poetry — it is a melancholy thought that his last creative years should be wasting away as they now are. Whatever errors he may have been guilty of, he is hardly the first great poet to be guilty of excessive zeal in political causes. If Charles II had chosen to indict John Milton as a regicide, the world would have gone without *Paradise Lost*—whatever Pound might think about that! Surely it is rather depressing to find our own times falling so far behind the example and forbearance of the seventeenth century. Cultural standards must have declined indeed if the world can now afford to watch one of its leading poets languishing in a madhouse.

D. G. Bridson.

AMERICAN POETRY

The Oxford Book of American Verse: Selected and with introduction by F. O. Matthiessen. (New York, The Oxford University Press, $5.00)

The Collected Poems of Robert Frost. (Jonathan Cape, 18/-)

Mr. Matthiessen's selection from American poetry of the last three hundred years, with its long, judicious and enthusiastic introduction, is as useful and representative as one could wish. Apart from one or two doubtful points, any objections to this collection are likely to be personal and reflect only unarguable differences of taste. Mr. Matthiessen is an eminent American scholar, whose judgment commands wide respect; his views and his selection are successful because they somehow combine the personal and the general in carrying out what must have been a very difficult task. The first question one cannot help asking is why Mr. Eliot (naturalised British in 1927) should be represented more by the poems of his British than his American phase, and why some of the best work of the latter should be omitted. Surely any representative selection should contain *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady.*

Mr. Auden might surely have been represented by some of the better work of his English days rather than the inferior compositions of the war years. And was it difficulties of copyright that excluded Miss Laura Riding, the best American-born poet of this century? On the other hand, how gratful we should be for the ample selections from Emily Dickinson, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Frost and E. E. Cummings.

These observations on Mr. Eliot and Mr. Auden are indications of how useless it is, and how even more useless it is likely to be in the future, to think of English and American poetry separately. If it means anything, the word 'English' means a language. An 'Englishman,' as Defoe discovered long ago, is a racial anomaly—one ruled over by Frenchmen, Welshmen, Scotchmen, Dutchmen and Germans; amused by Irishmen; not even allowed to call himself 'English' in

official documents. But the word is imperishable because it means the greatest poetry the world has ever known. If, therefore, one contrasts American with English poetry to its disadvantage, one means only that the transatlantic contribution (which began not very auspiciously 300 years after the birth of Chaucer) is so far not great; but that America has produced a handful of poets in the front rank; moreover, so incalculable is the incidence of poetic genius that any generation may produce more great poets on the other side. A rather serious comment on this last speculation, however, is Mr. Matthiessen's own statement that all but a handful of the best living American poets are over 50 years old.

Is there a specifically American contribution to English poetry? Reading these pages from the beginning, I cannot help feeling that the first great American was Whitman. In spite of all critical opinion, Poe's poems seem to me very poor: surely his immense influence came from the prose. But from the time of Whitman there have been two main strains in American poetry. The first, begun by Whitman himself, is loud-voiced, crude, raw, uninhibited and copious. It reappears later in poets such as Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, Stephen Vincent Benét and Allen Tate. The other strain appears first in the astonishingly original genius of Emily Dickinson, a poet not, I think, adequately published, and certainly not adequately appreciated in England. This strain appears again in John Crowe Ransom and E. E. Cummings. It is precise, fastidious, scholarly, compressed, metaphysical, the very opposite of the Whitman strain. Its meanings are elusive and tantalising. It is a poetry to dwell on and search into. One can scarcely forget that Whitman is an American; Emily Dickinson and Crowe Ransom, however, except where the subject is local, are recognisably of the finest English tradition. Cummings alone is at once mature, sophisticated and fully American; but, as one would expect, there is a considerable element of satire in his work.

Robert Frost, the 'grand old man' of modern American poetry, is widely known in England. We must be grateful for this new edition of his complete poems, since he needs to be read in fairly large quantities. More than most poets, he needs a long poem for his gifts to be fully deployed. He is difficult to criticise. His poems are, in the first place, extremely readable, as an intelligently written novel is readable. This, of course, is partly because his characteristic form is the narrative. Perhaps he owes his commanding position to the fact that he combines the Whitman strain and the other. He has none of Whitman's loud effusiveness, but something of his copious and conversational informality. He has something of the metaphysical compression and suggestiveness of the other school. He is both scholar and farmer, naive and shrewd, a student of people and something of a hermit. These contradictions in his poetic temperament make analysis difficult. He is undoubtedly fascinating and always something of a mystery. Like Hardy, he moves among simple people, and, after they have gone to bed, he sits up and watches the stars and wonders what life is all about. There is a certain wistful incomprehension about his most characteristic work. Sometimes the reader feels that he records his experiences among country neighbours with the idea that by skilful reconstructing them and investing them with as much as possible of his own feeling about them he will stumble upon their significance. That the significance is often unapparent does not make the poems less fascinating. One feels that if only he could have gone a little further round the corner, the meaning would have become plain. His curiosity, his shy questioning, never tighten, as Hardy's sometimes did, into passion or rebellion. He remains something of a puzzled individualist, sensitive to the abnormality of normal life, protesting—perhaps unconsciously—against the tendency to the collectivisation of thought and feeling apparent in some aspetcs of American culture. Just as one is beginning to doubt whether Frost is really aware of depths below the level of his usual observation, one comes upon a poem such as this:

TOO ANXIOUS FOR RIVERS

Look down the long valley and there stands a mountain
That someone has said is the end of the world.
Then what of this river that having arisen
Must find where to pour itself into and empty?
I never saw so much swift water run cloudless.

Oh, I have been often too anxious for rivers
To leave it to them to get out of their valleys.
The truth is the river flows into the canyon
Of Ceasing to Question What Doesn't Concern Us,
As sooner or later we have to cease somewhere.
No place to get lost like too far in the distance.
It may be a mercy the dark closes round us
So broodingly soon in every direction.
The world as we know is an elephant's howdah;
The elephant stands on the back of a turtle;
The turtle in turn on rock in the ocean.
And how much longer a story has science
Before she must put out the light on the children
And tell them the rest of the story is dreaming?
You children may dream it and tell it tomorrow.'
Time was we were molten, time was we were vapour.
What set us on fire and what set us revolving
Lucretius the Epicurean might tell us
'Twas something we knew all about to begin with
And needn't have fared into space like his master
To find 'twas the effort, the essay of love.'

It is then that one realises that almost anything one can say about him is subject to qualification and second thoughts.

JAMES REEVES

A RELIGIOUS POET

One is One by P. D. CUMMINS. (MACMILLAN, 7/6)
The Submerged Village by JAMES KIRKUP. (GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 7/6)

Mrs. Cummins is a religious poet of considerable force and her new book should appeal to many readers. At times her images have an immediacy which touches the nerves. They are disciplined by and further the single mood or theme of her poems, never bubbling up from the unconscious in happy but undirected streams. She is, in fact, a writer with something to say and her gifts serve this intention.

She understands also, in her more successful poems, that spiritual experience becomes most fully alive if it is expressed in words which are both concrete and carnal. Thus in a short poem called "It is not death I fear" she images the destruction of spirit by unredeemed animality.

"Until the star falls sickeningly through space,
The side, clawed open, bleeds without surcease."

Here the force lies in the words "clawed open" and "bleeds" which bring the event home to our physical sensibility. Again in a fine poem "The Ferret," which deals with the resolution of opposities, killer and victim, by a law which embraces both their natures, she writes—

"And in his hot red eye he saw
A dangling carcass skinned and raw,
A cup beneath a bloody snout—
Oh, in his wild bright eye he saw
A white doe litter in the straw,
And cruciform, a pelt pegged out."

The power lies in the blunt, everyday words; for whatever strange worlds are tangent to us, we are rooted here in animality.

I feel Mrs. Cummins is happiest when she uses a fairly strict form and keeps close to her own personal experience. At times, in pieces like "The Circle" or the very didactic "Epithalamium," she seems to write from a more shallow level of experience, not truly a part of her poetic nature. There is a tendency to cliché and self parody by overwriting, a self-righteous air which is a great pitfall to religious poets. In the "Sequence for J.A." there is a somewhat timid preservation of the self, and lack of charity to the carnal, which may be an enemy of the imagination.

"As you desired me, so I was
Who might have been the unflawed glass
Holding for ever time regained."

Perhaps the solution is the fracture of this glass; but on the whole these poems are a very welcome addition to our experience.

Where Mr. Kirkup's art touches me most it resembles the spiritualist Séance. There are no floating trumpets or tambourines, but the introductory music is often both dreamlike and sweet. There are rich flowers and diaphonous figures arranged in a texture which at first sight appears to be cheese-cloth, but is a more genuine manifestation of the occult.

He embroiders his fabric with images so conventionally beautiful, one might imagine they had lost all poetic force. In a single poem, "The Blessed Received in Paradise," we have; " a dark and radiant glade . . . immortal grace . . . human tenderness . . . anemone and wild ranunculus . . . crowns that do not fade . . . the animals of childhood . . . the miracle of our green spring . . . a drowned sailor . . . and a mother's kiss " all in the compass of sixteen lines.

But it becomes apparent something is happening beneath this fabric; a movement, raps, some genuine apparition of the other dimension. This mystery which appears in many of his best poems is very rewarding; it amply compensates us for the " Letter to a Poet " with the arch simplicity of its ending—

" If I am well, here's hoping that this finds yourself the same."

THOMAS BLACKBURN

THE CELTIC MUSE

Gods with Stainless Ears by LYNETTE ROBERTS. (FABER & FABER, 8/6)
Reservations by VALENTIN IREMONGER. (MACMILLAN, 6/-)

This is not at all what one thinks of as an ' heroic age.' Miss Lynette Roberts ' long poem, *Gods with Stainless Ears,* has for its all too universal theme the common experiences of modern war — death and loss, frustration, emptiness. Yet she is clearly justified in calling her poem a heroic poem : it is so for several reasons. Coleridge said that a promise of genius was ' the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. Miss Roberts' subject is not remote in this sense, but it becomes so with her treatment of it. She keeps at a distance, without losing passion or pity. For mose readers her scene is sufficiently remote to be unfamiliar—a Welsh-speaking village fronting an esturine bay which she present with precise yet maginative detail :

This is Saint Cadoc's Day. All this Saint Cadoc's
Estuary : and the bell tolling, Abbey paddock.
Sunk.—Sad as ancient monument of stone.
Trees vail, exhale cyprine shade, widowing
Homeric hills, green pinnacles of bone.

In the first few stanzas of the poem, Miss Roberts gives us a landscape that is not particularly of our time, or of any time; but rather of all time. Against this background of rock, sea, river, bird, hill, the anonymous gunner whose tragedy, and that of his girl, the poem relates, does take on a heroic quality : this is strengthened by the fact that Miss Roberts writes from her Welsh roots; for even today Celtic cultures and communities show far more of the primitive than our own.

' When I wrote this poem,' Miss Roberts says, ' the scenes and visions ran before me like a newsreel.' Fortunately, the poem

itself has no kinship with any kind of news-reel: but it *is* packed with sharp, visual images: there is a kind of patient accumulation of realistic detail; whether the poet describes the people in a landscape:

And red rock, throwing out a shower of
birds,
Woodcutters, and harrowing of gulls.
Where
Women titans are weathervanes who fetch
In the cows who wander the valley prints
Greening the squares of their eyes.

or writes of the uselessness of the soldiers' jobs. Out of this closely knit, strongly visual poetry, and infrequent climaxes, the sudden outbreaks of emotion, come in what seems a different language; cries from the heart; as when the gunner's girl writes to him that their child is expected:

'... This is no prodigal,
There is no madrigal but my 'word'
cleaved
To your flesh. And you know it so need
not fear.'

Briefly, the poem tells of the birth of the gunner's child, the gunner's neurosis and rejection of his girl and her love, the death of the child through poverty, the girl's humiliation at the double loss of lover and child, the return of the gunner from overseas, and their final ascent together, reconciled, to a fourth dimensional state—a symbol of escape and peace, from which the world demands their return. The last part of the poem, the rise and descent, is very successful in suggesting a world beyond our familiar one.

Gods with Stainless Ears, with its moving tones of compassion and despair, has a universal quality that makes its people larger than life: the soldiers emptying latrine buckets in the rain are symbols of greatness and courage:

O my people here
With labour ill-used and minds deranged...
Through rivets of light; *Here are your*
Heroes.

There is a short prose *Argument* at the beginning of each of the five parts of this poem: this allows Miss Roberts to write obliquely and with concentration. If it is not clear from the quotations given, it should be said that Miss Roberts' poetic technique is more than interesting, it is exciting and extremely good; the variations in tone, texture, cadence, and weight of line throughout some 700 lines cast in five line stanzas, are very many. This is not the least important reason why *Gods with Stainless Ears* is, altogether, a remarkable poem.

Mr. Iremonger is the reverse of Miss Roberts: he is a personal poet. His poetry is not rooted in Ireland as Miss Roberts' poetry is rooted in Wales; although some of his poems, like *Backward Look,* and *Cross Guns Bridge* which is very good in its evocation of Dublin outskirts, do spring from an Irish background. *Reservations* shows this poet's development: the later poems in the book are the best. A certain stiffness of language and rhythm that is apparant in the earlier poems, disappears; the poems are no longer packed with too many different images; they are, on the whole, simpler and barer, as is *The Choice,* a poem on Swift's madness; or *Well, I Declare,* in which these lines summarise Mr. Iremonger's attitude (shown also in a recurrent theme of his—the individual against the 'toughness' of society):

Let us resolve, then, each, not to be put
upon,
To have no truck wth anger or apathy, to
accept.
No man's word for anything...

KENNETH GEE.

JOHN DONNE

The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne by J. B. LEISHMAN.
(HUTCHINSON'S UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, 16/-)

A new book on Donne, after all that has been written about him during the last thirty years, inevitably arouses curiosity. One wonders if anything can remain to be said. Mr. Leishman's 'analytical and comparative study' contains, in fact, little that has not been said before, being primarily intended, one gathers, as a survey of Donne's work which may be prescribed for the use of students, rather than as a radical reassessment. Mr. Leishman discusses Donne in relation to Ben Jonson and in relation to other poets of the 'metaphysical' school. He spends (and one feels he finds this most congenial) a good deal of time in deciding which of the poems can be regarded as personal or autobiographical, showing, incidentally, a tendency to dismiss those poems that hint at dissoluteness or cynicism as based on imaginative rather than actual experience. He discusses the aptness of the term 'metaphysical' to Donne and concludes, not without precedent, that it is inappropriate. His comments on Donne's technique are adequate, if unoriginal, with the exception that he gives no really satisfactory account of Donne's use of imagery.

One aspect of the book, however, may provoke discussion. This is Mr. Leishman's preoccupation with the question of how much of Donne's poetry can be regarded as the expression of a 'unified sensibility.' This phrase, of course, derives from the 'dissociation of sensibility' theory outlined by T. S. Eliot in his essay *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921), and Mr. Leishman, it appears, disapproves of it.

He is concerned, in the first place, to point out that the phrase does not apply to all of Donne's poetry. Many of the poems, he says, are 'fundamentally unserious.' He instances the Ninth Elegy, *The Autumnall,* which he asserts was written for Mrs. Herbert. Izaak Walton tells us that many 'sacred endearments' passed between Donne and Mrs. Herbert; yet, says Mr. Leishman, the poem is characterised by 'sheer intellect, sheer ingeniousness.' Its 'sheer wit greatly predominates over feeling' and Donne fails to 'keep his eye upon his object' (i.e. Mrs. Herbert). Argal, the poem proceeds from 'a strangely *dis*unified sensibility.' In all this, one might say, it suffers from defects to which encomiastic verse is prone, and the last count would apply neatly to *Lycidas* (one of the reasons for Mr. Leishman's dislike of the 'dissociation of sensibility' theory is that it was applied to the detraction of Milton). It it quite true, of course, that Donne was often more concerned with exercising his ingenuity than with communicating profound feeling, and that therefore some of his poems might be called 'over-intellectual.' As Mr. Eliot, however, was avowedly concerned, in his essay, with the metaphysical poets *at their best,* it is difficult to see what Mr. Leishman is trying to establish.

Mr. Leishman, however, goes another way to work, by maintaining that Mr. Eliot has been inconsistent in his application of the theory to Donne. In an essay which Mr. Eliot contributed in 1931 to a volume entitled *A Garland for John Donne* appeared the words, "In Donne there is a manifest fissure between thought and sensibility." This, Mr. Leishman surmises, constitutes 'a kind of oblique confession, or recantation' on Mr. Eliot's part, since it 'would seem to mean, in the terminology of 1921, that Donne's sensibility was dissociated.' I find this a curious conclusion, since in Mr. Eliot's theory the 'sensibility' *contains* the two elements, thought and feeling, and is not itself a component of the association as Mr. Leishman appears to think. The cause of Mr. Leishman's confusion, I imagine, is that he has misunderstood the word 'thought' in Mr. Eliot's remark. It means, surely, a system of belief, a philosophy, or something of the sort. This view is supported by the evidence of Mr. Eliot's essay on *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (1927), in which he says:

"The end of the sixteenth century is an epoch when it is particularly difficult to associate poetry with *systems of thought* or *reasoned views of life.* In making some very

commonplace investigations of the 'thought' of Donne, I found it quite impossible to come to the conclusion that Donne believed anything." (My italics.)

'Thought' here, and, I suggest, in the first quotation, quite evidently means a body of beliefs, a 'reasoned view of life.' It does not mean merely the process of thinking, which, in the 'unified sensibility,' operates in a special harmony with the process of feeling. In fact, surely, Mr. Eliot is referring, in both quotations, to the fact that Donne was not a 'metaphysical' poet in the sense that, say, Lucretius was: a poet who sees the whole of human experience as unified and given significance by a certain system of philosophy —or, as in Dante's case, a certain system of theology.

Whether, indeed, Mr. Eliot does still hold to the theory he propounded in 1921, he himself best knows; and whether the theory is assailable or not, it is not my business to discuss here. But Mr. Leishman's observations appear to be offered as a critical 'find' of importance, and there is certainly little else of novelty in his book. In any case, his attitude is interesting, though there is something equivocal about it. At times he seems to deny the validity of the 'unified sensibility' theory altogether. At others, his attitude is that there is some truth in it, but that it applies to only a small part of Donne's work. Ultimately one concludes that, while he cannot help feeling there is some truth in the idea, he does not like it. He dislikes it because acceptance of it, he feels, implies derogation of Milton and of those Romantic and Victorian poets who wrote under Milton's influence. He objects to the questioning of nineteenth century attitudes to these poets which this and other theories of Mr. Eliot and his 'disciples' (as Mr. Leishman calls them) have resulted in. It is not altogether surprising, then, to encounter in Mr. Leishman's book such remarks as this:

"After all, admirable as Donne may be at his best, the *Ode to the West Wind* is a much better, a much more poetical poem than either *The Autumnall* or the Epistle to the Countess of Huntingdon."

I am not concerned with this as a judgment of value. What I find significant is the rather grudging 'may' and the equation of 'better' with 'more poetical.' If 'poetical' —surely a question-begging term—has any meaning at all here, it is the meaning the nineteenth century gave it, and is not entirely unrelated to the formula, 'simple, sensuous, and passionate.' Mr. Leishman appears to be applying nineteenth century standards—indeed, he later adduces Arnold's distinction between poetry conceived in the wits and poetry conceived in the soul—and this, perhaps, accounts for the impression I received that Mr. Leishman finds a good deal of Donne (his wit, his intellectuality, his tendency to be 'fundamentally unserious') uncongenial.

All this, then, explains why Mr. Leishman finds the 'dissociation of sensibility' concept unpalatable, and why he attacks it. He is fully entitled, of course, to do so: it is always a good thing that critical formulae should be examined, and not accepted inertly so that what was originally a revealing and stimulating judgment becomes merely the sanction and basis of a new set of stock responses. But this theory and other critical values associated with it have been questioned before from Mr. Leishman's standpoint, and I do not think it can be said that they have yet been effectively demolished.

As Mr. Leishman himself observes, in an oddly accusatory tone, these ideas were formulated and became current because Mr. Eliot and others, 'bringing the forces of the past to bear upon the problems of the present,' were incorporating them into a new sort of poetry. Like all important new critical ideas, they were ancillary to important new creative ideas. If they are to be found inadequate and to lose their hold, it will be, I think, as a result of a similar process—a development in which they will be superseded by new preoccupations. Mr. Leishman's dislike of the 'dissociation of sensibility' concept is, on the other hand, regressive in impulse; and his attack on it is essentially a rearguard action.

JACK DALGLISH.

THE SEA AND MR. AUDEN

The Enchafèd Flood by W. H. AUDEN.

(FABER & FABER 10/6)

There are many ways in which one can consider Auden's new book. To get the most odious comparison over at once, it is possible to think of it as a lineal descendant of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess,* the first of what is no doubt going to be an exceedingly numerous and healthy family. This is an inaccurate comparison, and will not get one very far. Then again, ostensibly the book is a sort of cunningly arranged anthology, with a running commentary. It is also, of course, a set of lectures delivered a couple of years ago at the University of Virginia. Auden himself calls it an essay on *the Romantic Iconography of the Sea..* None of these definitions are, I think, quite adequate.

Auden's starting-point is a dream described in Wordsworth's *The Prelude.* The narrator is in a sea-side cave, reading *Don Quixote* and musing on Poetry and Geometry, when he falls asleep. In his dream he finds himself in the desert: enter a Bedouin, carrying a Shell and a Stone. The Stone is Geometry, it is explained, the Shell is Poetry, and it emits an Ode prophesying the deluge. The Bedouin rides on, and the dreamer sees the approach of the foretold rising of the seas against the earth. Auden's analysis — or rather exposition—of this falls into three parts: the first deals with the sea and the desert, the second with the stone and the shell, the third with the figure of the Arab. All are examined in terms of an introductory statement that Romanticism represented "a revolutionary change in sensibility or style," and that this book is "an attempt to understand the nature of Romanticism through an examination of its treatment of a single theme, the sea."

As one would expect, Auden traces his lines back with enormous intelligence and catholicity of choice in his material. He backs up his contentions as he goes with quotations, or, perhaps, takes quotations and then draws his conclusions from them. This gives his progress an air of logic which it does not altogether earn. It is an air enhanced by the layout of his book, which is split up into fairly short subsections and laid out schematically. The main flaw in his prose is its unsparing use of i.e's and e.g.'s, with which he peppers his pages horribly—five or six to the page here and there. (One might also think twice about his use of the word "absolutization.") Apart from this it is beautiful, concise without being brittle, and not in the least like the Jamesian convolutions of the speeches in his latest long poems. Incidentally it makes it possible now to see those speeches more clearly not as erratic flowers, sports, but as herculean if rather muscle-bound efforts to solve the problem of how to write a prose which will be a unity with the poetry among which it is set.

Ultimately, one is not convinced that Auden really understands to what extent we have had our revolution too, and that it is still taking its course—a course which is not altogether unhappy, and whose outcome need not be ignoble. When Baudelaire said that "Belief in Progress is a doctrine of idlers and Belgians . . . True civilisation is not to be found in gas and steam and table turning. It consists in the diminution of original sin," he was talking sound sense, but only if one believes in the doctrine of original sin. Again when Auden writes "the necessity of dogma is once more recognised, not as the contradiction of reason and feeling but as their ground and foundation," he is probably right. He still, however, leaves unanswered the question, What dogma? to which the answer is not likely to be Christianity. And if we are doubtful about original sin, we will probably not find so very questionable, as Baudelaire did, the idea of Progress and the effects of gas, steam, electricity, anaesthetics, universal education, social services and some other items on the human nature.

Auden defines the artist now as "the less exciting figure of the builder, who renews the ruined walls of the city." But why less exciting? Any artist today who is conscious of his historical position would be humbled indeed who found his place obscure and his task undramatic.

DOUGLAS NEWTON.

TRUE POETS AND SOME OTHERS

"Light and Dark" by PETER YATES.
(CHATTO AND WINDUS, 6/-)
"The Clay Verge" by JACK CLEMO.
(CHATTO AND WINDUS, 4/6)
"The Cliff's Edge": "Songs of a Psychotic" by EITHNE TABOR.
"Skylight One" by CONRAD AIKEN.
((JOHN LEHMANN, 7/6)
"The Sun among the Ruins" by LOUIS JOHNSON. (PEGASUS PRESS, CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND, 12/6)
"The Summer Dance" by J. C. HALL.
(JOHN LEHMANN, 8/6)

I could not help being amused the other day by the following odd little scene at a literary party. During the course of an argument on poetry one of those who during the thirties and forties had occasionally preached brotherhood and love now found these virtues clearly insufficient on Parnassus, so without further ado terminated the discussion with his fists. No doubt the *fôlie* of the moment was partly responsible, but it was sad and ironical that his opponent on this occasion should have been an ex-bomber pilot now turned pacifist, who was actually engaged (as he thought) in drawing inspiration from the fountain head. No doubt they will both in consequence understand how wars happen .... Or should we be thankful that poetry is not yet on the agenda of the Security Council?

The moral, of course, is that words are not enough. Where poetry is not lived, is not sincere, then it had better not be written, whatever the merits of language or technique. "I tawt I taw a puddy cat" runs a popular song. Well, your pussy cat may have glossier fur, brighter eyes, sharper claws, but if it's stuffed and in a case for show I'd rather have the common cat of the alley. Sincerity alone can give life to poetry and make it natural .... Horace himself became a sham when he left the poetry of his own comfort and amusement for that of a state patriotism he did not really feel. Let's have genuine life, as this particular thirties poet—at his best—was so able to give us, life with the bare fists if need be, and the black eyes and the hangover...

The above remarks enable me to dispense quickly with most of the present volumes under review. In most cases they lack the sincerity of having been lived and appear to be poetry written for the sake of writing.

Peter Yates' work strikes me as little more than words. Significantly his poet is described as:

> "Loving the inward voice, the unsayable
> Word, torturing the body for mystery..."

I can find no feeling in him. His poems are like elegant churches, to be looked at only from the outside; within there is no altar-piece, no organ, no choir.

Jack Clemo is too intimate with God. In "The Burnt Bush" he and his girl climb up a dump (sic), set fire like Nero to the scenery, and then apparently have sexual intercourse. So far so good. But the conclusion:

> "now in God's ken
> I stand unsoiled again."

I find peculiarly revolting. But this is very dull work.

> "Our clay dumps are converging on the land.
> Each day a few more flowers are killed
> A few more mossy hollows filled
> With gravel...."

And so on. Stuffed.

Eithne Tabor at her best writes like this:

> "Kiss me once and kiss me twice—
> It's been a long long time,
> And you'd be so nice to come home to—
> (But I would prefer you
> With shoes on and a Toni.)
>
> Hey Momma
> I got a trauma—
> SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME!"

This may be preferable to Mr. Yates and Mr. Clemo, but her publishers should know

that the fact that Miss Tabor is only eighteen and in a madhouse already does not really qualify her for publication—though I should be the last to discourage her from writing. If we are to have "Songs of a Psychotic," why not also at some later date "Ditties of a Drunkard," "Hymns of a Homosexual," or "Bugle-blasts from a Burglar."

Conrad Aiken has a considerable reputation as an elder poet in the U.S.A., which suggests his work should be treated with respect. Nevertheless I regret to find the present volume dull, despite lines of quality like:

"O if we cannot live or love, let us forgive:
evil is the palindrome of live.'

and:

"Morning is blue as a child's globe
on which no map has been drawn."

The long poem "Everlasting" (from which the title "Skylight One" has been taken) I rather dislike. Elder poets living at Cape Cod are perfectly entitled to write about the Atomic Bomb from their own age and standpoint, but in "Everlasting" Mr. Aiken presumes to write as from and for a different generation altogether.

"Yes, and we with it, godlike, everywhere,
the regicide, the Kilroy, always there."

The point is that *Kilroy* was there; Mr. Aiken never was and never now will be. Such a poem can only irritate the generation on whom it is being fostered.

Louis Johnson, a young New Zealand poet, deserves to be encouraged, for he has a freshness of style and approach that brings its own sincerity. Also he writes naturally, so that there is nothing to resent in what he says and nothing tedious. For instance, in "Thoughts on my Schoolbooks" he ends:

"Something is dead in them all who were
ruthless, resourceful;
meeting their adult mornings with eyes
remorseful
of where the bus will take them, and where
the books led
into the granite lusts of streets from a
deceiving childhood."

Some of his more lyrical pieces, "A Young Girl seen on a Tram" and "The Girls of Summer" are frankly sensual and welcomely so, but the writing in these two is also very fine.

"The girls of summer in their crimson
dresses
are my wild wanting, my uneasiness
in the set streets. A grievous dream
caresses
the bandages of fate, and is the nervous
laugh like a mote in the eye. The girls
of summer are their own sweet madness..."

"On the Road," "Pygmalion," "The Giant Self," "Circe," and "Christmas Widow" are also poems of a high or moving quality.

Apart from Mr. Johnson the only other of these poets that I find readable is J. C. Hall. Sincerity is indeed his most considerable virtue, though he is also an accomplished craftsman deploying from emotion rather than from intellect. In the final poem "Thirty Years" he says:

"All these long years I've pondered how
to make
A poetry I could truly call my own,
Not the mere echo of another's voice..."

Well, I'd agree that he now has a voice of his own; not perhaps a loud voice but one with a simplicity and directness of expression rarely to be found in modern verse. It's main weaknesses are an occasional flatness and lack of depth—both of which may be remedied with experience. At least, he imitates nobody.

The poems in "The Summer Dance" are divided into two groups, 1939-43 and 1947-51, no poems being written in the interval. The first group includes many of the more pleasing poems, like "Elegy on a Hill," commencing elegiacally:

"Floating in summer his body lies
In state, like a great prince among the
lilies
And roses of death."

On the other hand the later poems show a more considerable awareness. "The Fault"

for instance and "Suicides" are genuine poems of pity, the most difficult of all poems to write without producing an air of falsehood.

Hall is a pacifist whose creed is based on the intellect (or perhaps more truly emotion) rather than religion. He objects to "the dull principles that slay my brother" for "Love is the worm that lights me by." Yet his pacifism is never obtrusive nor belligerent; his character as a poet is too calm and remote for that. Let us hope that he never resorts to force, never becomes dull....

JOHN WALLER.

CAVAFY

"The Poems of C. P. Cavafy" translated by JOHN MAVROGORDATO
(THE HOGARTH PRESS, 12/6)

The Greek poet, C. P. Cavafy, died in Alexandria in 1933 at the age of seventy, having written poetry only for the last twenty-seven years of his life. It was as if, his own youth having gone, he had then set out to make himself a legend on the lips of the young.

The present translation by John Mavrogordato presents all of his 154 poems. It has rightly been described by E. M. Forster as "the most valuable book of the year." Personally — even in translation — I find Cavafy a titan; he makes most other poets of this half century read like ninnies.

The poems fall into three categories, historical, introspective and erotic. Odd incidents in the Greek world—though mainly outside Greece itself—fascinated Cavafy. He can write a great, a truly splendid poem like "The God Abandons Antony" or describe "Ithaca" as the goal in life which will never in the end repay you by itself for attaining it. But:

"Ithaca has given you your lovely journey.
Without Ithaca you would not have set out.
Ithaca has no more to give you now."

Erotically Cavafy's tastes were hellenic. He never forgot the boys he had mingled with in his youth and later came to identify them with Lanes, Marylos, Myres, Iasis, Cleitos, and others from early Alexandrian history. He pictures Cæsarion (the son of Cleopatra by Julius Caesar) appearing to him in the night:

"Pale and tired, idealistic in your grief,
Still hoping that they would have mercy on you,
The baser sort — chattering their "Too many Caesars."

Or in "Days of 1909, 1910 and 1911" he relates the history of a sailor's son who "was destroyed by suffering and cheap debauchery."

Cavafy strikes no moral attitudes; he is not interested in ultimate problems or codes of behaviour. He aimed to write fine poetry, truly based upon life, about which he comments ironically, sensibly, or sensually.

An English poet, Christopher Scaife, has written for his epitaph:

"Do not bring laurel here or tears
But if you have some beauty turn
And greet your lover—
This is Cavafy's urn."

Cavafy was a natural poet and human being; he was not—like so many—afraid of beauty and the dark.

JOHN WALLER.